



Humor and disagreement: Identity construction and cross-cultural enrichment

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Abstract

In this study, disagreement and humor intertwine to enrich pragmatic and cultural knowledge and display personal identity among near-native users of English in cross-cultural communication. The study adopts ethnography of communication approach to data collection and analysis. My original data consist of three hours of audio-taped interactions among a group of four female friends who come from different countries and are engaged in ordinary social conversations, reflecting on the world through language socialization. The emphasis lies on their use of teasing and disagreement as educational tools rather than conflict indicators and the implementation of these tools to maintain a strong relationship, raise cultural awareness, and gain knowledge of the world. The data show that teasing and disagreement can be used jointly not only to establish relational identity display and development but also to reaffirm a preexisting one and to elaborate on topics that lead to scope expansion and acquisition of new notions that have not been encountered previously. These conversations create an atmosphere for scaffolding and learning, not only about language but also about other cultures and other peoples' behavior and pragmatics. Out of such socializations, new norms may evolve and new identities may emerge. Therefore, this study intends to encourage teaching L₂ in natural settings where students can communicate their ideas freely without any limitations.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the intersection of two quite disparate speech behaviors, disagreement and humor, in naturalistic settings to enrich pragmatic and cultural

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knowledge and display personal identity among L₂ users of English in cross-cultural communication. At their near-native L₂ level, language is no longer the focal point of acquisition, rather content knowledge that is discovered, discussed (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 2000) and perceived. The data consist of three hours of audio-taped interactions among a group of four female friends who come from different countries: Syria, Portugal, Greece, and the United States (US), and are engaged in ordinary social conversations as they meet once a week for a Greek lesson. My analysis focuses on how the group talk represents a way of reflecting on the world and the various cultures through language socialization (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986), which is considered a major learning environment that should be encouraged in the classroom among learners regardless of the level they reach in the L₂. The emphasis lies particularly on their use of humor (particularly teasing) and disagreement as an educational tool rather than conflict indicators and the implementation of this tool to maintain a strong relationship, raise cultural awareness, and gain knowledge of the world.

The data show that teasing and disagreement can be used jointly not only to establish relational identity display and development (RID)¹ (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997, 2000) but also to reaffirm a previously existing one and a bond they already have. These two speech acts can also be used to elaborate on topics and issues that lead to expansion of the scope of knowledge and acquisition of new notions that may not have been encountered by the listeners previously or have been misperceived, e.g. artistic, historical, or linguistic knowledge; or notions that pertain to the field of study or practices of some of the participants. These conversations, in the light of Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Lantolf, 2000, 2002), create an atmosphere for scaffolding and learning, not only language but also about other cultures and how the behavior of people differ from one country to another. In this sense, some knowledge is negotiated among the group and the expert in that specific field scaffolds the others. At the same time, the speakers are trying to absorb some of the pragmatics of the L₂ and share their own pragmatics with the rest of the world. Out of such socializations, new norms may evolve and new identities may emerge. Therefore, this study is intended to encourage teaching L₂ in a friendly atmosphere and natural settings where students can communicate their ideas freely without any restrictions or limitations. This gives support to immersion programs where L₂ learning involves cross-cultural conversations across various domains of interaction.

2. Background

Suggestions about how to approach cross-cultural communication and pragmatics from an ethnographic point of view have been implemented and explained by many researchers (e.g. Boxer, 1996; Davis and Henze, 1998). In addition, the use of natural settings has been encouraged and supported by a number of scholars (Davis and Henze, 1998; Hamilton, 2004). Touching on cohesion (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000) and cohesiveness and (in)congruence (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990) as social variables of the L₂ group (Schumman, 1978, 1986) is important to show how the group's conversation form a unit. Coherence, in this study, is apparent in the group's communications and is part of the RID (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997, 2000) they are building and reaffirming throughout their interactions. It also highlights how

¹ RID, in both studies, is a bridge between individual and social identity, in that, it is co-constructed among particular individuals based on past, present and future encounters, which becomes a base for further interactions. It is specific to a specific group and does not belong to any particular individual within the group. It becomes a characteristic of that group, which is displayed and developed.

the interactional becomes transactional (Brown and Yule, 1983), i.e. participants become information transmitters.

Language socialization (LS), as a field of studying language and cultural development, started with Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) who stress that LS is a lifetime process that does not stop at a particular point and is used to negotiate meaning. We will see how the group uses LS to negotiate meaning and develop their cultural knowledge as well as an insider identity (Boxer, 2004; Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 2000; Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). Kasper and Rose (2002), on the other hand, show how LS overlaps with developmental pragmatics, in that, both deal with acquisition of knowledge that is necessary for the appropriate employment of speech in interpersonal situations. Boxer (2004:19), likewise, asserts, “[o]nce we have knowledge of what members of discourse communities successfully do in spontaneous spoken discourse, we can then apply these findings to situations in which novice language users are acquiring and employing an L₂ in any domain and in variously configured communities and interactions”. From a SCT point of view (Lantolf, 2000, 2002), language is a mediating tool between social interaction and the individual’s own mental processes, and scaffolding is the building block for the Zone of Proximal Development. Very few studies have examined scaffolded performance in spontaneous speech (one example is Ohta, 2001) or interaction among advanced non-native speakers in a second language outside the classroom (e.g. Shea, 1994).

Disagreement has been touched upon by many researchers from different perspectives (e.g. Barsony, 2003; Clayman, 2002; Edstrom, 2004; Heritage, 2002; Jefferson, 2002; Kakava, 2002; Kangasharju, 2002; Kaufmann, 2002; Yaeger-Dror, 2002). However, most of these studies focused on comparing the use of disagreement among two or more languages or within the same language; or the type of oppositional expressions used. Furthermore, the subject of oppositional talk has been the locus of many scholars (e.g. Georgakapoulou, 2001; Golato, 2002; Grimshaw, 1990; Gruber, 2001; Muntigl and Turnbull, 1998; Rees-Miller, 2000). Yet, none of these studies dealt with cross-cultural disagreement; they mostly focused on speech among native speakers (NSs). Bardovi-Harlig and Salsbury (2004:199) show that oppositional talk, in American English, can include, in addition to “disagreements, challenges, denials, accusations, threats, and insults”, expressing an opposite point of view, which the data will reveal. They show that there are two types of disagreement – strong and weak (Pomerantz, 1984) – where strong disagreement is usually implemented by beginning L₂ learners, but it develops to become more refined and mitigated as students advance in the L₂. This may not be the case among close friends; strong unmitigated disagreement emerges as salient in my data, yet at the same time it is not perceived as offensive or rude, rather as facilitator of learning and acquisition. The use of unmitigated disagreement does not eliminate the use of “the agree-before-disagree strategy” (Bardovi-Harlig and Salsbury, 2004:210), which may suggest that the performance of non-native speakers and NSs is quite the same.

An abundance of research has been done on humor (e.g. Antonopoulou and Sifianou, 2003; Attardo, 2001; Crawford, 2003; Eisterhold et al., 2000; Hay, 2001; Holmes et al., 2001; Jorgensen, 1996; Zajdman, 1995). Norrick (2003), for example, studied the effect of joking in terms of power and rapport. Davies (2003) investigated cross-cultural conversation groups to show how beginning learners collaborate in constructing conversational joking discourse with NSs of English and how learners, while scaffolded by NSs, focus on their own culture. Nonetheless, teasing, as a form of humor, has gained interest over the years (e.g. Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997). Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997:275) make a “distinction between conversational joking (CJ), or situational humor, and joke telling (JT)”. CJ includes teasing and self-denigration that can be a form of “bonding” rather than “biting” (Boxer and Cortés-Conde,

1997:279). It can play a role in establishing a relational identity among speakers, which is in comparison with individual identity, negotiated “with others and through others” (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997:282). With reference to RID and how it is displayed, Boxer (2004:292) asserts, “[t]his relationship built between interlocutors leads naturally to further interaction and consequently, increased opportunities for scaffolding and thus language development.” This kind of relational bonding is common among friends and acquaintances, where teasing can nip or even bite. Yet, one cannot ignore the bonds that are built through CJ using certain topics that might be acceptable cross-culturally. In this study, we will see how teasing functions as a way of identity forming across “cultural boundaries” (Boxer, 2004:292) and how it is more of the binding kind than the biting one. It serves as a conflict diffuser and a facilitator of learning. One still has to emphasize that no single study has implemented such ambivalent behaviors – disagreement and teasing – to show how they work together to establish RID, gain knowledge, and share personal and cultural information.

In addition to RID, identity has been a controversial topic in the literature (e.g. Coupland, 2000; DeCapua and Boxer, 1999; Eggins and Slade, 1997; Norrick, 1994; Norton, 1997; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000; Tannen, 1993; Troemel-Ploetz, 1994). Norton (1997:410) asserts “every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are, in other words, engaged in identity construction and negotiation.” She adds that “[a]n investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, which changes across time and space” (p. 411). This is not to mention the abundant literature on NS/NS interaction and maintaining or taking a new identity and establishing rapport (e.g. Coates, 1996; Tannen, 1984). DeCapua, Berkowiz and Boxer (2006), for example, talk about narratives that establish rapport and solidarity.

It is thus of interest to examine how disagreement and humor contribute to pragmatic and cultural learning in cross-cultural communication. Although many have investigated these two speech acts, yet from different angles, no single study has looked at humor and disagreement as a form of gaining knowledge—general, cultural, artistic, and linguistic. These two speech acts have been mostly studied for the sake of indicating the level of advancement in an L₂ or the kind of disagreement expressions or humor used. A further reason for this study is to find out how identity is displayed, asserted and developed through the use of humor and disagreement. It is hoped that this study will bring interest in further research about possible commonalities across cultures regarding teasing and disagreeing and how they affect identity development. It is also hoped that it will add to previous research on the influence of natural settings on the acquisition of L₂ pragmatics.

3. Research questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do disagreement and humor contribute to pragmatic and cultural learning in cross-cultural communication?
2. How is identity displayed and asserted through the use of humor and disagreement?

4. Methodology

This study adopts ethnography of communication approach to data collection and analysis (Hymes, 1972) combined with interactional sociolinguistic and conversation analysis

(Markee, 2000). The use of conversation analysis transcription along the ethnographic approach is intended to show how certain speech behaviors, such as overlapping and simultaneous speech are an indication of seeking alignment (Gumperz, 1982) and intimacy (Kotthoff, 1996; Tannen and Kakava, 1992). It is also intended to show the coherence of the conversations and to draw on what is acquired throughout the conversation. The study is descriptive, in that, its main focus is the analysis of spontaneous speech acts among a group of friends. The data are comprised of sequences of audio-taped spontaneous cross-cultural conversations among a group of friends who were meeting once a week for a Greek lesson given by one of the participants who herself is Greek. The settings of these conversations were the houses of the various participants. The data were collected over a period of six weeks. Due to uncontrollable circumstances, the group was unable to meet on weekly bases; thus, sometimes few weeks passed by before the next lesson took place. Each recorded tape was 90 min long, which not only covered the Greek lesson but also some conversations that took place before, during and after the lesson. In addition to being interrupted by many conversations and discussions, the lesson was usually followed by a meal prepared by the host at the time, leading to further discussions. The conversations were totally in English except for the pronunciation of some letters of the Greek alphabet and some examples on them. Although there was an abundance of talk outside the lesson, the conversations within the lesson also shed light on the speech behaviors of the study and the relevant L₂ identity construction.

Consistent with ethnography of speaking, the data were not collected with any specific research topic in mind; they were intended to observe cross-cultural spontaneous speech to draw comparisons across cultures and to see if cross-cultural communication can lead to any form of learning. Disagreement and teasing emerged from the data as salient speech acts. As a participant in the interaction and from my personal and previous knowledge of the participants, I was able to locate a great number of humorous situations and disagreements. Forty-two sequences were gleaned from the data to represent the kind of humor and disagreement that can take place cross-culturally and result in pragmatic acquisition and cultural development.

The participants are four female friends who come from different backgrounds and are given pseudonyms. Three of them are Fulbright students who got to know each other and became good friends through their international adviser, Dee, who is the fourth participant in the study. She is a 58-year-old American female with a master's degree in race, gender and culture and a native speaker of English. The other three, Annabelle, Beatriz, and Altina, are students at the University of Florida completely fluent in English and can be considered near-native speakers in their competency in English. Their age ranges between 26 and 33 years. Annabelle is Syrian and a master's student in Linguistics and has lived in the US for a year and a half. Beatriz is an artist who is doing a master's in fine art with emphasis on painting at the School of Art and Art History; she is Portuguese and has lived in the US for over two years. Altina is Greek and has been in the US for over four years; she finished her master's in wetland ecology and she is currently resuming her Ph.D. at the Department of Environmental Engineering and Sciences. Dee is the international students' coordinator and the person responsible for the Fulbright students at the University of Florida International Center. She has helped many international students upon their arrival to the US, offering her home for many to stay until they find their own housing. However, her relationship with this group has grown stronger over time to the point that they do a lot of activities together: walking, outings, etc.

Status may play a role in the data. The three students have great respect for Dee for being their international adviser and older in age. In addition, she represents a mother figure in the absence of their mothers. On the other hand, her closeness to the other women eliminates that distance and

she becomes one of them; she jokes, laughs and shares personal stories with them and they do the same in return. This is a revelation of the strong bond this group maintains.

According to SCT, acquisition not only includes acquiring a language but also acquiring knowledge of the world (Lantolf, 2000, 2002). Language becomes the mediator between the outside world and ourselves and regulates our relationships with others. Listening to the various experiences that other speakers talk about or the continuous reference to one's own culture is a strong indication of how language socialization using disagreement and teasing contributes to the process of learning about life and the world in general.

5. Data, analysis and findings

The conversations are natural and casual, although recorded during inner-group Greek lessons. Upon asking the participants, they indicated that they were totally oblivious of the tape recorder. The recordings are full of shouting, loud laughter and personal topics, stories or narratives that were uttered spontaneously. There is no indication of embarrassment or request to stop the recorder. For example, personal disclosures, boasting and bragging are evident in the data; self-denigration is also attested to mitigate bragging and reestablish modesty. The data abound in other speech acts, such as (dis)agreeing, teasing, joking, explaining, suggesting, complimenting, complaining and self-defense. Yet, from closer examination of the data, the following themes emerged: disagreement and teasing and identity construction—building RID and identity preservation; coherence and collaborative construction of the dialogue using disagreement and teasing; disagreement and teasing that provoke self-defense; disagreement and teasing as educational tools for gaining artistic, linguistic, general and cultural knowledge; and negotiation of meaning using disagreement and teasing. However, it is worth noting that these themes do not act independently from each other as will be revealed in the given examples. As a matter of fact, they are tightly connected to each other; they intersect to establish rapport and solidarity, project identity, and share and develop cultural knowledge among the speakers.

5.1. *Disagreement and teasing and identity construction*

The diverse cultural background of the participants and living in the US make their identity construction more complex because in addition to negotiating their native cultures, they are also negotiating American culture in which they live and interact. Consequently, one can observe various types of identity construction: building RID, acknowledging and preserving the identity of the other, and reverting to one's own cultural identity.

5.1.1. *Building RID*

The recorded conversations show how disagreement and teasing intertwine to build RID. In excerpt 1, for example, Beatriz responds in line 1 to a teasing comment for pronouncing a Greek word incorrectly, elaborating on the teases that were directed at her much earlier in the conversation. Altina accelerates the teasing, using strong disagreement and other funny terms to describe Beatriz in line 2. The fun also lies in considering herself polite for not using the word “shepherd”. A little later in the same conversation, Beatriz was able to pronounce the sound she was struggling with correctly, which evoked another teasing expression, “gypsy”, from Altina. In her reply, “I'm so diverse”, Beatriz is also making fun of herself. This shows that the teasing is not of the biting type; rather it is bonding and a tool for establishing RID and reaffirming an

already existing one among the interlocutors. It is noteworthy that this teasing in relation to “mountains” and “farmers” was elaborated on even in another setting.

Excerpt 1:

1. **Beatriz:** I am a farmer.
2. **Altina:** No, no. This is not a farmer thing; it’s-it’s a sheep attendant ()²
3. **Beatriz:** It’s what?
4. **Altina:** You are a sheep attendant, Ok?
5. **Beatriz:** Sheep attendant? ((Laughs)) No, no. I’m-I’m not going to speak Greek.
6. **Dee:** She means a shepherd.
7. **Altina:** Yes. No. I am polite here ((Laughs))
8. **Dee:** You’re polite! You said sheep attendant, so she could figure out what ()

Excerpt 2 is another example of the use of funny expressions and laughter to establish and develop a distinctive RID that distinguishes this community of practice from other communities of practice. In this excerpt, the use of the word “abusive teacher” is intended for teasing and creating a fun atmosphere. Later on in the same conversation, Altina tries to mitigate her way of teaching to prove she is not abusive. Yet, she continues to shout aloud with reference to the Greek diphthongs “THEY SLASH” in a funny manner, preparing to comment in her next turn on the criticism that was directed at her earlier, “I don’t want to be an abusive teacher” and laughs. Altina clearly has not forgotten about being accused of being an “abusive teacher”. The whole dialogue is imbued with teasing and humor; it is not really meant as serious description of the speakers. The elaboration on certain humorous points is also an indication of the collaborative construction of the conversation.

Excerpt 2:

1. **Altina:** Smile!
2. **Beatriz:** Oh.
3. **Dee:** How do you say it with a smile?
4. **Beatriz:** This is an abusive teacher.
((Laughter))
5. **Dee:** = =but fun
6. **Altina:** ((crying sound))

² See Appendix A for definition of the notations used in the transcription.

The participants also manifest personal disclosures (DeCapua et al., 2006), which are kind of stories that present who they are and where they come from. Dee, in excerpt 3, starts with a personal disclosure to defend her late arrival. As the story goes on, the participants show interest and immersion in the events. They show concern and willingness to offer suggestions that might help.

Excerpt 3:

1. **Dee:**I am sorry to unload this on you all.
2. **Beatriz:** No, wait a minute.
(4-second Pause)
3. **Altina:** Well, it is not that I'm sorry to unload because if you do not tell your mother, what are you going to say? I mean, I am sorry. This is in my culture.
4. **Beatriz:** well, as a mother you should (Christine) the lease.
5. **Dee:** Well, I just told him, I would give him the twenty-six hundred....
6. **Beatriz:** ((Laughs lightly)) Ohh! That is put into reasoning, but that is what, basically, you want to do ((Laughs lightly)).

One can see in excerpt 3 the number of disagreements uttered by Beatriz and Altina. Both disagreements are strong, starting with “No” and “not” in turns 2 and 3, respectively. Altina not only disagrees but also expresses that it is part of her culture to tell a mother about personal problems. Beatriz gives a suggestion, which is a disagreement in the form of expressing opposite view with what was mentioned in the conversation. The final sentence by Beatriz is intended to tease Dee. These interactions show the great familiarity between the participants and the amount of disagreement, suggestions and teasing that interact to form a strong relationship and build an RID specific to this group. At the same time, reverting to “my culture” in turn 3 mirrors the individual identity that each participant continues to cling to.

5.1.2. Identity preservation

The recorded conversations also convey how individuals try to preserve the interlocutor's identity as well as revert to one's own identity. For example, in excerpt 4, Altina disagrees in line 2 with Dee this time by giving her reassurance that to forget is fine. Thus, disagreement is used as a comforting element; it is emotionally supportive rather than antithetical. It is not direct or obvious; rather it is conceptual in essence. Its purpose is to raise the spirits of the other person through providing an opposing positive concept to that individual's negative perception of the self. There is embedded humor in Altina's expression, as indicated in Dee's reply in turn 3. After discussing with Dee her son's situation, asking questions and giving suggestion, turn 4 would not be expected from Altina, or rather it is not called for. This evoked strong disagreement in turn 5 from Dee, followed by strong disagreement from the others. The directness (Iino, 1996) and straightforwardness that are characteristic of Americans can be observed in the direct refusal of

the offer by Dee in turn 10 and the explicitness of the disagreement in turn 5. On the other hand, Altina's expression in turn 4 shows that she knows a fact about Americans that they are individualistic and like their privacy and is trying to generalize it to her international adviser. She might be also trying to acknowledge the difference in status and maintain respect of her adviser's upper status. Uttering turn 4, Altina is trying to convey this knowledge of the other and to preserve that identity in the other. She feels an urge not to delve into other people's life, although this is not characteristic of Greek culture, which, as I understand from my discussions with her, is a very imposing culture, in the sense, that people do interfere in other people's business and ask personal questions. This Greek characteristic is revealed in excerpt 5.

Excerpt 4:

1. **Dee:** I forgot my father in law's birthday on the 28th, my sister's birthday on the 9th of August.
2. **Altina:** I think you are doing fine.
3. **Dee:** about wasting () ((Dee and Altina laugh)).....
4. **Altina:** Dee, if you don't feel like talking to us about it, I mean, it is your family business, I mean, you know.
5. **Dee:** No, no, if you do not feel like listening to it you have to tell me.
6. **Annabelle:** No, ()
7. **Altina:** No, we care about everybody's trouble.
8. **Dee:** ((Laughs)) (unclear, more than one person talking)
9. **Beatriz:** No, no, no, no. (). Do you want a-do you want a glass of wine?
10. **Dee:** No, I think not ((Laughter from more than one person)).

While Altina tries to negotiate, in turn 4 of excerpt 4, a cultural difference between American culture and Greek culture by presenting a point of view different from her own, she reverts to her own cultural identity shortly after attempting to preserve her own identity. Altina's reverting to her own identity is exemplified in excerpt 5, where one can clearly observe the imposing characteristic of Greek culture. After receiving confirmation from Dee that she is the one willing to talk about her own business, Altina proceeds to ask Dee personal questions, which indicates her need to revert to her cultural or individual identity that involves delving sometimes into other people's lives. The mixed humor is obvious in excerpt 5, particularly in line 9; Altina is teasing Dee about the money she is supposed to support her son with. At the same time, it is a kind of self-directed humor because as a student, that is all she can afford to assist with—ten dollars. By directing humor at herself, she is creating fun of the situation, and thus, generating laughter.

Excerpt 5:

1. **Altina:** Since you are so willing to give them the money, why, I mean, don't you give them the money?
2. **Dee:** ()
3. **Altina:** that's, that's much better; I mean, why don't you give them the money to buy the house instead of giving them the money not to buy the house. () renovation. They would save a lot of money.
4. **Dee:** () renovation () twenty five thousand dollars.
5. **Altina:** and the money they're losing if they don't buy.
6. **Dee:** two thousand five hundred.
7. **Altina:** Ok. Because I thought they would lose twenty six thousand between
8. **Dee:** No.
9. **Altina:** Ok. Two thousand five hundred. I can give ten of it ((Laughs)).
10. **Dee:** ((Laughs))

5.2. Coherence and collaborative construction of the dialogue using disagreement and teasing

The strong relationship and bond that are built among the interlocutors through disagreement and teasing help in developing a coherent conversation and a collaborative dialogue. Within Dee's personal narrative, the other interlocutors, in excerpt 6, offer suggestions and ask questions to show their involvement in the story and express their concern and solidarity with their international adviser. Altina and Beatriz offer suggestions in turns 2 and 3, respectively. Both suggestions involve eliciting information in the form of disagreement of what they have heard so far. Disagreement is salient here and is used in the form of expressing opposing views. After Dee clarifies the matter in turn 4, Altina continues to show strong disagreement by repeating "not" three times in turn 7, yet her disagreement serves a negotiation of meaning purpose and reveals a profound involvement in the conversation, mirroring the cohesion of the conversation and the constructive collaboration among speakers. In line 8, Beatriz offers an alternative opinion to Altina's who continues to disagree with force. The various instances of overlap, interruption and continuation of the other's speech confirm the collaborative construction of the dialogue. The cultural information delivered by Dee in line 10 serves to add cultural knowledge to the international women about the US. One can see in this excerpt the profound involvement in the topic and how disagreement is used to expand the scope of knowledge and thought of the interlocutors. This theme will be examined in depth later in the paper.

Excerpt 6:

1. **Dee:**.... I said. Well, I said if you decide not to do this, I'll give you the twenty hundred dollars.....You know, I mean the level of stress is. Natalie is just like Stan, everything is negative and everything is stressful and.
2. **Altina:** = =but why don't they get the house, I mean (continues to say something which is unclear because of the overlap)
3. **Beatriz:** [why does it have to be so expensive or so big or?
4. **Dee:** () the family well they have to reinvest.
5. **Annabelle:** That is th-the family.
((3-second pause))
6. **Beatriz:** It is the expectation of ()
7. **Altina:** [It is not only that; it is not only the family; it's that once you get out of your house, you need to go to do something bigger because you don't have, I mean, why did you get out of your house if you are not to do something ()?]
8. **Beatriz:** ((interrupts)) necessarily not bigger ((1-second pause)); sometimes you may not need more space, but I mean.
9. **Altina:** ((interrupts)) But upgrade that is ()
10. **Dee:** It's-it's definitely. In this country, sometimes it's not so much what you bought
11. **Beatriz:** [investment
12. **Dee:** [Yeh, yes.
Sometimes it's not so much what you buy but where you buy, so they're moving into a better community and, you know, and of course, Tony and he works for a real estate agency, so he is in investment. So you can understand...right now land is a better investment.

Excerpt 7 is another example of collaborative construction of the conversation. It shows how the conversation flows as one story leads to another and how each participant mirrors similar experiences. Altina relates a funny story that reflects part of the Greek culture that encourages marriage at an early stage of one's life. Altina's white-skirt story ends with talking about staining it. This leads to Beatriz's humorous story about how she stained her white skirt. Then, the word "credit" evokes another story by Altina. Altina's and Beatriz's personal stories involve their mothers too. The constant reference to family members shows not only the strong attachment and strings that still connect them to their own cultural identity but also the pride they feel toward and the strength they exhibit in their relationship with their families, which is also a characteristic of Greek and Portuguese culture. In turn 11, Altina's strong disagreement with Beatriz mainly serves a competitive goal and indicates Altina's collaborative effort to create humor of the situation. The topic of competition is self-denigrating, indicating how clumsy she usually is and how this makes the difference, generating a humorous situation and evoking laughter. This type of self-denigration is of the "binding" rather the "biting" type because it is intended to strengthen their relationship and to show their similarity to each other and the solid bond they maintain. This solid bond is further elaborated in Beatriz's turn 14. After being interrupted in turn 10, she uses the word "No" in turn 14 as a filler of the disagreement type not only to have the opportunity to continue her story and to show that with her the matter was different, but also to continue in turn 16 with the humor that was initiated by Altina earlier. Beatriz elaborates on the competition topic of spilling on white skirts, referring to her own clumsiness as a child and how her mother must have felt washing her dirty clothes so frequently. Thus, humor intertwines with disagreement to construct a coherent and elaborate conversation.

Excerpt 7:

1. **Altina:** I got-got another one...and I am not going back.....Oh! I did not show the best thing of all. Oh! I did not show you my white skirt.....
2. **Dee:** ()
3. **Altina:** I bought one skirt and my mom want to saw it. Before communicating. I am going to wear it. Mom said, Ok. Now you bought the skirt, it needs a groom?
4. **Dee:** ((Laughs))
5. **Altina:** Ok. Now, I mean, mom, we are going to wear it because we have a skirt. Obbah!
(Greek expression). I mean, my mom is this kind of person () you do not need to see this reason
6. **Beatriz:** ()
7. **Altina:** you do not need to see this reason to get married. I mean

8. **Dee:** = =it is a white skirt though.
9. **Altina:** it is white, but it is very nice, I have to say, but it is very formal, no matter, I mean if I wear it everywhere I would be afraid to stain it
10. **Beatriz:** Well, that is what happened to me the other day. I got
11. **Altina:** (interruption) No, with me it happens every single day, not the other day.
(Laughter))
12. **Altina:** It is a difference, please, please continue.
(Laughter))
13. **Dee:** () some on yours too. ((Laughs))
14. **Beatriz:** Well, No, I went to Rose thing, I spilled red wine.
15. **Dee:** Oh, No! ()
16. **Beatriz:** it's a white-it's a white tight skirt, but I was very patient, I got here, I washed by hand ().....I said to her, mother (Laughter) () red wine () on my skirt. She was like, Ok, good, ((Laughter)) yeah () Has she any idea, she must be thinking that-that I washed all her clothes as she was growing, getting everything dirty, and I never had no credit for it.
(Laughter))
17. **Altina:** Talking about credit, I am going to give my sister credit and show you my new ring, which is, you know, my dear ring, present from my sister. It's half, well.

5.3. Disagreement and teasing that provoke self-defense

Throughout the conversations, some interlocutors felt compelled to defend themselves against funny comments and teasing intermingled with disagreement. Excerpt 8, for instance, was a response to heavy teasing directed at Beatriz who was pronouncing some Greek sound incorrectly, in a manner similar to the Greek people who come from the mountains and are stigmatized by the general Greek public for their odd pronunciation. The entire excerpt is teasing and humor mixed with forceful disagreements that are intended for self-defense against the

humorous accusations. The elaboration on previous teasing acts further supports the idea that the conversation is cohesive and forms a unit.

Excerpt 8:

1. **Beatriz:** Well, I'm, you know; you can go, I can, you know, talk like a peasant girl in Greek.
2. **Altina:** yes, but still I, I don't talk like intell-intell-intell-intellectual in English. I mean. I have problems. I mean, we have, we have ()
3. **Beatriz:** (interruption) Oh. That's a dirty joke.
4. **Altina:** No, why?
5. **Beatriz:** ((Laughs))
6. **Dee:** What an intellectual means?
7. **Beatriz:** See. This is dirty joke. You wheezele.
8. **Altina:** No, I didn't say it as a joke
9. **Beatriz:** If you have something to tell me, just tell me in the face.
10. **Altina:** I didn't say
11. **Beatriz:** ((Laughs))
12. **Altina:** I didn't say that. I was only trying to say that, you know, I have an accent in English.
13. **Beatriz:** I am not an intellectual; I am an artist, you know.
14. **Altina:** I didn't say. Who-why did you think you are an intellectual? I mean ((Laughs loudly))
15. **Annabelle:** Yeh. That is true. What made you think you are an intellectual? ((Laughs))
16. **Altina:** I'm kidding ((Laughs)).
17. **Beatriz:** I thought-I thought that was a correspondence. You know with ()
18. **Altina:** ((Laughs)) You know what. You were-you were knocking for a joke. ((Laughs))
19. **Beatriz:** but not only that because we discussed before like you know, ah, the

According to Schieffelin and Ochs (1986:180), “teasing reveals the high value placed on interpersonal and verbal skills of self-assertion and self defense, especially in situations of threat and conflict”. In turn 1, Beatriz picks on the previous teasing that was directed at her and uses it to self-denigrate herself. In turn 2, Altina tries to self-denigrate herself, using the agree-before-disagree strategy of disagreement (Bardovi-Harlig and Salsbury, 2004) in order to mitigate her previous teasing of Beatriz and make Beatriz feel better about herself. This is understood by Beatriz to be a “dirty joke” because “intellectual”, despite its wonderful meaning, sometimes is used with negative connotations in the sphere of teasing. This entails turns of strong disagreements and self-defense. The coherence of the discourse leads Beatriz to think towards the end of the dialogue that the joke corresponds to the other jokes and teasing that were previously directed at her. This is not to mention the negotiation of meaning that is taking place throughout the conversation. For examples, Dee tries to find out in turn 6 what Altina really meant with “intellectual”, and Altina tries in turn 4 to elicit the reason that Beatriz thinks that her joke is “dirty”. The proceeding turns take the form of explanation of what each person meant and further questions to be answered. Altina insists that she did not mean “intellectual” in a negative way. Annabelle and Altina further question Beatriz jokingly about why she would think herself to be intellectual, trying to deflate her ego, although they do not really mean to say that she is not an intellectual. Altina immediately mentions in turn 16 that she was “kidding” when she asked her question, meaning that Beatriz is an intellectual in a good sense and that all the previous turns were just for fun, but the situation calls for a joke (turn 8). Finally, Beatriz disagrees to indicate her understanding and to explain that this whole communication is related to previous conversations and previous teasing aimed at her. Thus, the whole conversation is a reflection of the continuation and cohesion of the conversation and a mirror of how this group of friends not only builds an RID but also develops and reaffirms a preexisting one.

5.4. *Disagreement and teasing as educational tools*

5.4.1. *Artistic knowledge*

In most of the dialogues, disagreement is observed to be tightly interwoven into the conversation; it acts as a facilitator for sharing information and knowledge among the speakers. Disagreeing on the topic of pronunciation leads to a complete educational session about sounds and delivering sounds. Beatriz was facing problems in pronouncing some Greek sounds due to talking through the nose and not opening her mouth enough to utter the sound correctly. Since Beatriz was training to sing on stage at the time and Altina was previously a theater actress in Greece, the topic of sound and delivering a sound is common to both of them. Thus, excerpt 9 is a good example of how disagreement could be educational rather than oppositional, although the interlocutors might be using it to express oppositional views. The excerpt also involves the disclosure of personal stories that are interactional but at the same time they become transactional. Returning in this excerpt to the same topic that was tackled earlier on in the conversation may reflect on some showing off on the part of Beatriz. Altina’s elaboration on the topic is also an indication of trying to sound knowledgeable and capable of helping in the singing practice.

Excerpt 9:

1. **Altina:** The thing is, don’t expect to find, you know, to; it’s like-like French or any other language. You cannot pronounce, you cannot pronounce, you go on; ()

2. **Beatriz:** (interruption) no, it is not about pronunciation;
3. **Altina:** there is a point where you can pronounce
4. **Beatriz:** No. It is about delivering a sound.
5. **Altina:** I can. I used to do it; I'm not an expert you know.
6. **Beatriz:** I remember that there are things that I had, doing these singing lesson and it was like five months only
7. **Altina:** I ()
8. **Beatriz:** you know, we were talking, and there were things like this and I knew I reached high notes that I never thought I could reach after specific number of exercises. It is unbelievable; it is like
9. **Altina:** Yeh. I know
10. **Beatriz:** sometimes-sometimes you do not even need to have a good voice as long as you discipline the voice.
11. **Altina:** Well, a good voice is a good voice
12. **Beatriz:** how to, anyway
13. **Altina:** but a good disciplined voice
14. **Beatriz:** exactly, I think he is expecting too much. He-he's telling me you know I'm giving this song ()
15. **Altina:** Yeh.
((Some turns with Beatriz continuing to relate her story))
16. **Beatriz:** But before he tried a particular exercise, and he said do this and that and distracted me, do this pronunciation and open and this. Get up. I was singing (Spanish). Get up. Nee ((singing sound)) and I did something. He said you can do it you; see; you tricked me because you can (). You catch up very-very fast because you have no other resorts, so you catch up fast.

17. **Altina:** Do you know what we can do to ()?
18. **Beatriz:** and he said but you don't have to. You can catch up, but you can do this.
19. **Altina:** You know what you need to do because I can see your mouth. We can do practice (), but you know because with the acting, the theater, so you can learn to open your mouth because unless you open your mouth, you can't. You can hear it-you can hear it, but once you open the mouth, you can send it wherever you want. I mean, this is how I speak to crowds or because what we learn there by using this
20. **Beatriz:** yeh.
21. **Altina:** with the same effort I could talk to five people or to five hundred.
22. **Beatriz:** Exactly.
23. **Altina:** It is the same thing but it is about opening. The first thing, you know, because if you don't open the mouth it's not only about ge-getting out on the-on the right-on the right, how loud it goes or how clear it goes because to go there you have to be very clear and you can go clear only if you really open the mouth, and this one of the problems they have in the States in the dance theater () the US team, the department they do not open their mouth because if I talk like that in five hundred people, although you understand, it seems like I am talking into my teeth
24. **Dee:** ahum
25. **Altina:** I can practice to do that
26. **Beatriz:** because you know I have to do a particular tone, I can do-I can do like
27. **Altina:** I learned to do that
28. **Beatriz:** can do so.
Ooooh ((singing sound))

29. **Altina:** because I practiced to do it in groups, I mean, if you practice here, and one thing my professor in Gainesville is saying is like-is like forget you have neighbors. You are going, I mean, neighbors are going to think that you are singing. You want to be, you know, even actors or singers because they are going to listen. There is no way, no way

30. **Beatriz:** ((hymns))

31. **Dee:** ()

32. **Altina:**..... and what it's called-it's called location-location of the voice

While excerpt 9 shows disagreement as an enhancing tool of the interlocutors' artistic knowledge of music and singing, excerpt 10 is an example of disagreement as a learning tool of historical artistic knowledge. In turn 6, Altina uses a face-value disagreement as she disagrees with Beatriz in order to correct some misconception; the disagreement is direct and obvious. The excerpt also reflects the amount of scaffolding that takes place among the interlocutors, which is at the core of SCT.

Excerpt 10:

1. **Beatriz:** Well, oh! They come from the Greek. Yes. The Greek vases.

2. **Altina:** but they are beautiful, aren't they? ((1-second pause))

((Some turns))

3. **Beatriz:** and this is the most characteristic color of the vases unless they're black

4. **Altina:** there are-there are two signs, I think; this is the most early stage. These are called black vases and these are called red because

5. **Beatriz:** Exactly. They are the black vases of the beginning. This is the bi-Hellenistic stage

6. **Altina:** Not Hellenistic; it's the classic-it's the classic.

7. **Beatriz:** Yeh, but we have-we've nominated it into low beginning into low time, high time

8. **Altina:** yeh

9. **Beatriz:** sophistication

10. **Altina:** yes, because in history, the long time is archaic. This is classic, and Hellenistic is Alexander the Great. This is why it is earlierthis is, by far.....

5.4.2. Linguistic knowledge

Another form of knowledge that disagreement through LS can lead to is linguistic knowledge. Excerpt 11, for example, clearly shows how strong disagreement is well implemented for educational purposes, in this case, learning about different articulatory places. Annabelle, as a linguist, tries to correct the others' knowledge about alveolar and velar. It is through so many turns of negotiation and disagreement that information is conveyed, and the interlocutors are learning something new they do not know much about or have wrong conception of. While all the "No" words in turns 6, 7, and 8 are intended to correct some misconception, the "No" in turn 10 is more of the meta-disagreement type, as it serves a transformational function when Altina tries to explain that what she really meant to ask about is something different.

Excerpt 11:

1. **Altina:** when-when you have-when you have your tongue, the tongue goes to. How do we call the upper part here?
2. **Annabelle:** the alveolar
3. **Dee:** [[()]]
4. **Altina:** the roof, how do you say it?
5. **Annabelle:** alveolar
6. **Dee:** No. That is back there.
7. **Annabelle:** No, alveolar is here.
8. **Dee:** Where-where ()?
9. **Annabelle:** No, alveolar above the teeth, above the teeth is the alveolar.
10. **Altina:** No, I'm talking about the bone that separates the nose from the-the roof because
11. **Annabelle:** [[it's the alveolar.

Velars-velars are the back of the

Excerpt 12 is another example of strong disagreement from which the participants learn about a linguistic issue: the difference between [y] and [γ]. Even Altina admits later that she did not know this fact about her language previously. Annabelle, in line 1, expresses a very strong and perhaps offensive disagreement. She felt that her intelligence has been belittled. As an expert on the subject, she felt she needed to interfere to fix the mistake that was done by Altina. This reminds us of SCT in which there is an expert that participates in the scaffolding process during interaction. This incident was a strong reply to some other issues that were not explained in the right way during Altina's teaching process; thus, the reply came too harsh. The argument persisted until Annabelle was able to convince Altina with her point of view. Therefore, this is a further confirmation of our hypothesis that disagreement could have relational

identity functions as well as learning effect. In the turns that follow those included in excerpt 12, Altina admits that she did not know this fact and expresses appreciation for learning something new about her language. This elicited a teasing and bragging reply from Annabelle, “Yeh. You need the linguist.”

Excerpt 12:

1. **Annabelle:** No. This is the wrong way of teaching. From a linguist point of view, maybe, when it comes at the beginning of a word you pronounce it a little bit
2. **Altina:** You know what?
3. **Annabelle:** but when you pronounce it, it is not close to [y]
4. **Altina:** Can I say something?
5. **Annabelle:** the other one
6. **Altina:** CAN I SAY SOMETHING? In this word, it is palatal.
7. **Annabelle:** It is palatal so when it comes at the beginning, maybe the word
8. **Altina:** because both at the beginning
9. **Annabelle:** but this is the palatal, it’s close to [y] but when it is pronounced [ɣ] it is pharyngeal, and don’t say it’s close to [y]!
10. **Altina:** I can see what you are talking about
11. **Annabelle:** yes
12. **Altina:** because you know once here
13. **Annabelle:** because I can see it is followed by [i, e, and] these. Only when it’s followed by these, it’s palatal, so when it is not followed by these, then it is pharyngeal and it is closer to the [R] the French [R].
14. **Altina:** Yes. Ok. You see because we have a linguistic, I’m going to revise. When it’s followed by an [e] sound or for an [i] sound it is a [y]; it is [yelo] when it is-it is followed by an [a], everything else an [a, o, and u], it is from back it’s a [ɣ].
15. **Annabelle:** it is [ɣ]

5.4.3. General and cultural knowledge

Other forms of knowledge are generated by humor and disagreement, transforming the setting to a learning experience. In excerpt 13, for instance, health and cooking information is delivered through turns of disagreement and the narration of a funny incident by Beatriz, which can be viewed as self-denigration. Strong disagreement and oppositional views, in lines 4, 12, and 26, show Altina's dissatisfaction with the methods used for cooking.

Excerpt 13:

1. **Beatriz:** and-and for example because I had a very interesting experience, I mean, I had () once wanted to boil some lentils ()
2. **Altina:** ()
3. **Beatriz:** So, I left them-I left them to sock one day to the other. The next day I came, you know, the lentils have been all over ((chuckles)) the kitchen, they have exploded and socked all the water and they ()
4. **Altina:** No, no, no, no.
5. **Beatriz:** You just boil them fifteen minutes.
6. **Altina:** I mean, if they are harder, sometimes they are harder, they are older or something, you just need to boil them more
7. **Annabelle:** yeh, maybe ()
8. **Altina:** because lentils
9. **Annabelle:** fifteen-fifteen to thirty
10. **Altina:** ()
11. **Beatriz:** () and I said, oh! My God. Well, I had them over day () looked at me like ().
12. **Altina:** No, no, no. For my soup, I boil them more. I boil them about-about an hour...If you do not want to have the gas effect
13. **Beatriz:** Ah!
14. **Altina:** ((chuckles))
15. **Annabelle:** Actually, lentils are very good for the stomach

3. **Dee:** You taking home a doggy bag ((chuckling)).
4. **Annabelle:** No, it's not bad manners.
5. **Altina:** ()
6. **Annabelle:** In my culture, actually, if you-if you have a lot of food, usually, when they leave, you can give them some food.
7. **Altina:** Yeh. It's not that. In my culture, whatever gets left in the plate goes to the dustbin, () so
8. **Beatriz:** Oh! No. In my country, they will use it again, and they give it to the next guest.
9. **Dee:** ((Laughs))
10. **Altina:** So, I don't want it in the bin; it's a good food and I don't want myself to have it all

5.5. *Negotiation of meaning*

Moreover, disagreement is used as a tool for negotiating the meaning of some uttered words. It thus has a learning function and advances the learning process. For example, in excerpt 15, the participants negotiate the meaning of a Greek word in English through disagreement. In this excerpt, disagreement is not expressed strongly with negative words like “no” and “not”; it is more like oppositional talk where each one suggests a meaning for the Greek word in English. In turn 9, Altina uses “not” to oppose the definitions given by Annabelle, “infidel” (turn 6) and “not believing” (turn 8). Annabelle, in turn 14, continues to insist that the word could mean “infidel”, but Altina expresses in turn 16 with frustration an implicit disagreement with all the definitions that were offered. She contends that the Greek word [vevelos] cannot be explained in plain English and refuses to use a specific English term to define it. In Altina's opinion, the word has more meaning to it than meets the eye, and this is confirmed in turn 24 after Beatriz's attempt to offer a further definition of the Greek term in turn 17.

Excerpt 15:

1. **Altina:** [vevelos]-[vevelos] is when you insult the gods
2. **Beatriz:** ()
3. **Altina:** [vevelos]-[vevelos] is special, is interesting. It's-it's as you are insulting eeh the-the sacred things
4. **Beatriz:** It's then like Elsie.
5. **Dee:** Elsie, she is talking about
6. **Annabelle:** like infidel

7. **Altina:** I don't know about, I mean, it is very specific [vevelos] it's like you are insulting something very sacred it is about God or, you know, and everything
8. **Annabelle:** Yeh. It is like some one who believes who doesn't believe like
9. **Altina:** It's not only about not believing, I mean
10. **Beatriz:** ()
11. **Altina:** I mean, it's-it's if you go and destroy a church
12. **Annabelle:** ()
13. **Altina:** [[()
14. **Annabelle:** Infidel is when you not only believe; infidel is like you also
15. **Beatriz:** but it is very because
16. **Altina:** You know what, I don't want to put, I do-don't want to put, you know, an exact word on it; it is a very good word, but I think it's something; it's one of the ancient words.
17. **Beatriz:** Probably, you know, erratic-erratic because it
18. **Altina:** I think
19. **Beatriz:** can work for any religion
20. **Altina:** Erratic, in Greek, it means to-to deviate the eeh from the original-deviate from the original eeh
21. **Dee:** philosophy or
22. **Altina:** =either philosophy or religion, but this is an insult.
23. **Beatriz:** It's an active word.
24. **Altina:** Yes. I mean,
25. **Beatriz:** ()
26. **Altina:** Yes-yes. I mean, it's an insult, I mean, it is about destroying, it's about verbal; but it's a nice word I mean it's very interesting with cultural whatever.

6. Discussion

It is obvious, in the data, the abundance of strong disagreement, such as the use of “No”, “not”, and serial “No, no, no, no,” which are usually expected among family members and friends. It appears that the level of proficiency in English does not have an impact on the disagreement pattern, which is, according to Bardovi-Harlig and Salsbury (2004), delayed and mitigated as time passes by and as learners become more advanced in the L₂. Here, we find the opposite; disagreement is strong, direct and unmitigated with qualifiers and the like. The fear of developing conflicts is also expected to limit the exuberance of teasing, but one witnesses the contrary. In fact, all these strong disagreements and heavy teasing serve a binding purpose and RID building as well as reaffirmation of an already existing one.

Thus, disagreement and teasing seem to function as a rapport and binding tool among close friends who have already established initial bonds. They strengthen these bonds through acceptance and absorption of the other’s strong disagreements and teasing, which may appear offensive to an outsider, in a humorous and juvenile manner. For example, Altina’s strong disagreements are accepted by her friends who already know about her Greek cultural background that favors impulsive reactions. A similar behavior from a stranger may be construed and reacted to differently by the same group of friends. In addition, Altina’s continuous teasing of Beatriz is carried throughout the conversations and elaborated on by Beatriz herself. This mirrors the existence of a double bond (Zajdman, 1992) among the participants, i.e. after the initial bonds have been established, disagreement and teasing create further bonds and proceed in a circular manner to affect and strengthen those bonds. The double bond is realized when both parties – the transmitter and the recipient – acknowledge the humorous act initiated by the transmitter and switched to by the recipient, as was observed in excerpt 8 where Beatriz carries on with Altina’s teasing idea of peasantry and farmers from excerpt 1 and other references to this idea in the various conversations. This double bond, according to Zajdman (1992:361), “partly explain[s] why humor is often considered to reinforce intragroup cohesiveness or strengthen personal ties.” In this study, not only humor reaffirms this strong bond among the participants, but also disagreement. Despite the various kinds of disagreement encountered in the conversations, the four women continued to exhibit strong connection to each other and profound, unshaken friendship. In addition to strong, weak, direct and indirect disagreement, other types of disagreement emerged in the data. First, disagreement, although it may be unobvious, could be a comforting element that provides emotional support to the interlocutor, as was seen in excerpt 4. Second, disagreement could be of the face-value type that is corrective, direct and obvious but not offensive within the context of scaffolding, as was observed in excerpt 10. Third, there is the meta-disagreement type that could be transformational or transitional in nature despite its directness, as was the case in excerpts 11 and 7, respectively. In the same way that disagreement and teasing coincide to establish rapport and solidarity in constructing RID among the speakers, they play a major educational role. This is apparent in the scaffolding that is carried throughout the interaction, touching on topics of interest and leading to acquisition of new cultural or general knowledge. The variety of the discussed topics reveals the diversity of knowledge shared and negotiated and highlights the interactional and transactional characteristic of the conversations.

Back channeling cues, overlapping and simultaneous speech are also used to express rapport, alignment, solidarity and commonality and are indicators that the discourse is coherent and collaboratively constructed (DeCapua et al., 2006). The participants mirror each other, in that, when one participant reflects on her experience or culture, there is always a reflective response from the others about their experiences and cultures. Sharing their experiences with each other is

a way of maintaining part of their cultural or individual identity. At the same time, sharing contributes to the development and reaffirmation of their RID and reveals their close friendship and shared schemata. Despite their differences, the participants seem to keep track of what was said throughout the conversation and elaborate on it later on or make fun of it. The laughter and elaboration on each other's topics also reveal their strong connection and reflect the coherence of the conversation, which is another indication of their existence as a cohesive group.

Although the four friends are well adjusted to the new culture, they still feel that it is important to assert their cultural identity by reverting to their backgrounds even if it is only through talking about it. These straightforward strong disagreements, which are mostly unmitigated, show the familiarity among those friends, the strong bond they have, and the freedom they obtain in expressing themselves and their personalities without the fear of being perceived as rude or uncouth. Despite the harshness of the humor, they continue to have control of the situation and maintain a good and strong relationship. Negative expressions are conveyed humorously, thus, attenuating the coarseness and the strong impact that it may have had if it was directed at a stranger. While they might be highly immersed into the new culture that promotes individualism, they may still feel connected to each other as a group. They feel that they want to deviate from the idea of individualism towards collectiveness, although, at the same time, they feel the need to preserve it in the other.

Hence, while the general view is that teasing and disagreement could be offensive among friends, the data show that they could be educational and a way of acquiring knowledge: pragmatic or cultural. The data have strong implications of SCT and language socialization in acquiring cultural and general knowledge. Exchanging views and opinions through teasing and disagreement could facilitate scope and knowledge expansion. This finding accords with Schieffelin and Ochs (1986:165) theory of LS "every interaction is potentially a socializing experience in that members of a social group are socializing each other into their particular world views as they negotiate situated meaning." This leads us to believe that establishing rapport among students can create a friendly atmosphere for learning, which entails the importance of second language acquisition in naturalistic setting and the necessity to create such fruitful atmosphere for L₂ learners to experience the language, pragmatics and culture of the L₂. Although the study might be limited to a specific group, a specific gender and a specific relationship (friendship), one cannot deny or ignore the significance of the findings.

7. Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the role played by teasing and disagreement through language socialization in enriching cultural and pragmatic knowledge and projecting identity. The data analysis has shown that these two speech acts can be positively functional in conversations. First, they can establish and develop relational identity among speakers from different cultures as well as reaffirm a preexisting RID. Second, they can project the L₁ identity through reflecting on one's own culture and experiences and mirroring these experiences in comparison with others. Thus, expressing opposing views might be a way of asserting one's own identity; it might be the fear of losing that identity. Hence, they cling to it, but at the same time, they feel the urge to shed some of it and polish it to keep up with the surrounding environment. Third, disagreement and teasing could serve as educational instruments that facilitate the learning process despite the level of advancement that an L₂ speaker possesses. What seems to be interactional becomes more transactional. This is revealed by the amount of knowledge and cultural awareness that are interchanged and scaffolded throughout the conversations.

Furthermore, the findings have shown that disagreement and teasing are related to each other, despite being counter-intuitive. Although harsh at times, they are not necessarily damaging; they might actually be used to express solidarity and strengthen the preexisting bonds among friends. The elaboration on topics of interest and the mirroring of each other's experiences as well as the constant overlapping exhibit the development and reaffirmation of an RID that is distinct among this group. These same issues project the coherence and collaborative construction of the conversations.

Finally, what makes this study of interest is its focus on spontaneous cross-cultural communication among highly advanced speakers of English. Supplementary to this study could be studies of the functions of humor and disagreement in the classroom. In addition, the study could be implemented on various groups from different gender, age groups, social status, and relationships to see whether we would achieve similar results. It would be of interest to see whether different groups, engaging in different relationships, such as the work place, behave differently and apply humor and disagreement for similar or different purposes.

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Appendix A. Transcription notations

()	Incomprehensible word or phrase.
(Some word)	A word or phrase within parentheses indicates that there is uncertainty about whether the phrase or the word have been heard correctly.
= =	(Latches): means the utterance on one line continues without pause (no overlap).
((Laugh))	Nonlinguistic occurrences such as laughter, cries, singing sounds, and interruption are enclosed within double parentheses.
<u>No</u>	Underlining a word or phrase indicates that it was said loudly and with force.
CAPITAL	Capital letters indicate that a word or phrase is said with even more force and loudness.
[Indicates overlapping.
[pat]	A letter or word within brackets indicates phonetic transcription.
.	A sequence of dots indicate that some speech is omitted from the transcription either because it is irrelevant or to shorten the excerpts.
-	A hyphen indicates a false start, repetition, or stuttering.
	Indentation indicates overlapping turns.
[[Double brackets indicate simultaneous speech.

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