

Micro-Paper 56: *Language Exchange*



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Defining the Term

Language exchange describes the negotiation (possibility to create a relation of mutual correspondence, whether physically or virtually) among people using two or more languages. There may be multiple purposes for language exchange moments: to learn about other characters or cultures, to improve one's language skills, or just to trade knowledge.

A related term that comes to mind is *Tandem Language Learning*. This refers to organized meanings where two learners with different native languages want to learn or improve each other's native language. This term has two principles. On the one hand, reciprocity, as all participants equally distribute speaking time in the native language and the target language. On the other hand, autonomy, as each person is responsible for their learning.

However, we understand Language Exchange as a much wider concept. In the case of language exchange, we are talking about meetings between two or more people (e.g. conversation clubs) that happen in places such as restaurants, hostels, coffee shops and even dance club, as opposed to institutionalized practices promoted by schools and language centers. In addition, language exchange refers to practice in one or several target languages, where speaking time may not follow set rules of distribution or timing.

Connecting it to LSLP

LSLP's Urban Literacies Team, currently on the third stage of our research on [second language literacies in Medellín](#), is searching for natural spaces that have appeared in Medellín with the purpose of promoting language exchanges. This unofficial and informal

language learning (physical or virtual) spaces are the ones that our current research team seeks to understand.

The language exchange route is exploring what kinds of spaces have surfaced in Medellín for the participation of different languages and people. We also inquiring about how these spaces influence the culture of [second languages](#) across the city.

Expanding Second Language Research

Language learning has been traditionally linked to the idea of attending to classes to learn, especially in regions such as Latin America. However, cities are creating underground physical and virtual spaces to let citizens meet with international people, usually by the affinity they found between themselves.

Future research should begin to inquire about the possibilities for teachers to take advantage of these informal, non-academic spaces. Literature reveals that extended conversation, especially with advanced speakers of the target language, improves grammar, pronunciation and, most importantly, cultural awareness. This way the learning that students get can be more significant and the process more enjoyable.

References

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