DILEMMAS IN AN ONLINE ACADEMIC DISCUSSION

by

JENNY JIN YING GALLANT
B.A., Liaoning University, 1986
B. Ed., Vancouver Island University, 2002

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS
in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Language and Literacy Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)
December 2009

©JENNY JIN YING GALLANT, 2009
ABSTRACT

Since the application of Web-based templates in distance education, the threaded discussion forum is regarded as one of the most effective tools for promoting interaction in a virtual learning community (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2003). However, as interactions are being encouraged, facilitated, and evaluated in the discussion online forum, what do students do when they interact with each other, with course content, and with their instructors? What problems do they face as they ‘talk’ with each other? What strategies do they use to balance and negotiate the embedded institutional discourse, course objectives and requirements, personal ideals and goals?

This qualitative case study investigated some of the complexities of different aspects of the online threaded discussion in a Canadian university graduate online course. The data was collected from an asynchronous graduate seminar. The goal of the study was to examine the tensions and conflicts that pertain to the interactions in the online community in order to better understand the nature of the interaction in an online learning community and to provide insights for more effective online learning environment.

The findings suggest that a major challenge for establishing a successful online academic community is the recognition and better understanding of the complex nature of the online discussion. The issues of academic versus interpersonal, freedom versus constraints, vulnerability versus the need to socialize underpin students’ engagement in academic learning and satisfaction. The finding also indicates that the notion of ‘academic community’ unfolded in discussion forum needs to recognize the legitimacy of and to include and facilitate a space for social/interpersonal interactions in addition to academic content learning.

The study indicated that the perceptions of the functions of online academic discussion needed to be considered in the context of personal education ideologies and learning goals.
Students’ ideologies of education play a role in their perceptions of the functions of the learning environment. Their perceptions affect their participation and satisfaction of their online experience. Knowledge of their perceptions helps the instructor adjust to allow variations of styles and degrees of interactions.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................ ii
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ iv
List of Tables ............................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ........................................................................................................... vii
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Background ......................................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Research Questions ........................................................................................... 4
  1.3 Background to the Study: Researcher as Participant ....................................... 5
  1.4 Definition of Terms ........................................................................................... 7

CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF
  LITERATURE ....................................................................................................... 9
  2.1 Theoretical Framework ..................................................................................... 9
    2.1.1 The interconnectedness of the linguistic and social ......................... 9
    2.1.2 Context of situation and context of culture ...................................... 10
    2.1.3 Realization: culture, meaning and wording .................................... 11
    2.1.4 Dilemmatic perspective ................................................................. 12
    2.1.5 The role of language ........................................................................... 13
    2.1.6 Dilemmatic approach in research ................................................. 14
    2.1.7 Multiple goals in discussion ............................................................ 16
    2.1.8 Educational ideologies: content learning versus social
        relationship building ................................................................. 17
  2.2 Literature on CMC: Online Learning Communities ................................. 17
    2.2.1 Computer-mediated learning communities .................................. 17
    2.2.2 Interactions in an online learning community ................................ 19
    2.2.3 Asynchronous discussion forum: problems encountered .......... 20
    2.2.4 CMC discourse analysis: referencing as a strategy ................... 24
  2.3 Summary .......................................................................................................... 25
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHOD .......................................................... 27

3.1 A Qualitative Case Study Approach ........................................... 27
3.2 Research Site and Participants ................................................... 28
3.3 The Researcher and the Researched ............................................ 31
3.4 Data Collection and Data Analysis ............................................. 32
3.5 The Limitations ........................................................................... 35

CHAPTER 4 DILEMMAS IN REFLECTION: WHAT STUDENTS SAY .......... 36

4.1 Course Asian Pacific Narratives ................................................ 37
4.2 Dilemmas of Interactions in Online Discussion:

Reflection in and on Action ......................................................... 41
4.3 Summary and Discussion ............................................................. 49

CHAPTER 5 NEGOTIATION IN ACTION: BUILDING RELATIONSHIP

THROUGH ATTRIBUTION ................................................................. 55

5.1 Functions of Attribution in Asynchronous Discussion ................. 56
5.2 Weaving the Content Learning and Community Building

with Attribution ............................................................................... 57
5.3 Summary and Discussion ............................................................. 68

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION .................................................................. 72

REFERENCES ..................................................................................... 77

APPENDIX A  Overview and Course Approaches ................................. 85

APPENDIX B  Ethical Review Certificate of Approval ............................ 90
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Information of the participants under study ........................................... 31
Table 3.2 Mohan’s model of social practice ................................................................. 33
Table 4.1 Course schedule posted on the course site ................................................. 38
Table 4.2 Course schedule for activities and assignments ........................................ 40
Table 5.1 Most frequent used processes in data ...................................................... 67
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1 Categories of reporting verbs .................................................. 67
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who supported me in this endeavor – my family and friends. My husband has helped me through all these years of university in Canada: first, to get a B. Ed, then a Master’s. His patience and all of the grammar checking have been greatly appreciated, as have the breakfasts he has prepared all these years. Thanks to our daughter Johanna for her question, “Did you get a lot done today?” Thank you Stephane for those chats, and the weeds you pulled out in the garden – giving me extra time to do other things.

A special thank-you goes to my supervisors Dr. Carey and Dr. Mohan who have helped me whenever I needed their guidance, suggestions, and comments. Without their unfailing support I might have stopped somewhere along the way. I have benefited greatly from participating in the SFL study group that was sponsored by Dr. Mohan, who pointed at the direction of the dilemmatic perspective for this study. I am also in debt to the fellow classmates who allowed this study to be conducted. Without that class and its discussion forum, this study would not have been possible.

I am also grateful to all of my fellow students at LLED for their friendship and kindness during my learning journey at UBC.
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background
Since the application of Web-based templates in distance education, the threaded discussion in an online forum has been considered a ‘ubiquitous feature’, and one of the most effective tools in distance education (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2003). It provides the medium for potential text-based social interaction that facilitates the formation and development of online learning environments. Such learning environments make it possible to mediate the separation between the learner and many aspects of social interactions deemed essential for personal engagement in learning (Rheingold, 1993). Research in online learning has been focused on effective teaching and learning, particularly how to provide information, interaction, social support and community (Chadwick, S. A. & Russo, T. C. 2002). Interaction among students and between students and instructors is an essential part of the learning process. In an online learning community this interaction process is done through different communicative media that makes the interactions different from the face–to-face classroom. This new mode of learning presents opportunities as well as challenges to educators in terms of understanding the new learning process in order to provide an effective learning environment.

Social interactions among students and students with instructor have an important role in education. It is “when people with different goals, roles, and resources interact, the differences in interpretation provide occasions for the constructions of new knowledge (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989, p. 46). Furthermore, it is commonly agreed that social interaction determines students’ satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Anderson & Garrison, 1995). Social interaction in an online learning community is not automatic as some communication theorists predict (Galepher, Sproull, & Kiesler, 1998). The medium has the capacity to facilitate learning but not the ability to provide support for interpersonal and group interaction.
Since the beginning of CMC history, community building or the lack of community has been one of the major concerns (Rheingold, 1994). The online learning environment is bounded by the materiality of the medium, but how the virtual learning environment is constructed is not determined by the medium, but rather negotiated dynamically by the ‘culture of use’ (Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2003, p. 251). As many educational researchers from different disciplines recognize the importance of dialogue and social interaction in the learning process (Wertsch, 1985; Lemke 1989), it is deemed central to the development of the instructional process (Schrire, 2006). Gunawardena and Zittle (1997) pointed out the importance of the social interaction with practical implications for online course designers/instructors. The research suggests that CMC has increasingly complexified and problematized current notions of meaning negotiation. The medium changes communication dynamics so that online meaning negotiation does not correspond in all respects with face-to-face negotiation (Smith, 2003). Further, these communication dynamics are likely to be altered even more as the medium itself changes to include aural and visual resources. (Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2003, p247).

In spite of the characteristics of the medium, student perception of the social and human qualities of CMC will depend on both social presence\(^1\) and cognitive presence\(^2\) created by the instructors/moderators and the students in an online community (Carey & Morgan, 2005). Characteristics often associated with CMC-interactivity, collaboration, and reflectivity- are not inherent within the medium but can result based on design, moderator roles, participation patterns, and involvement. It is these skills and techniques, rather than the medium that will ultimately impact student perception of interaction and social presence. Decades of CMC research have shown it is not the technology itself alone that dictates the social interaction in an

---

\(^1\) The participants’ ability to project themselves socially and emotionally in a community of inquiry through the medium of communication being used (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p.49).

\(^2\) Cognitive presence is the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2001).
online learning community, rather a mix of human factors including instructors’ role and
dynamics, instructional design, activity frame, and students’ perception of online learning.

Although researchers have been examining many aspects of the interaction process in the
computer-mediated communication (CMC) environment, particularly in asynchronous threaded
discussion forum in higher education contexts (Newman et al, 1995; Gunawardena and
Zittle, 1997; Rourke et al, 1999), there is still “substantial gap exist in our understanding of
online interaction” (Fahy et al. 2001). The increasing student population in online education and
particularly the increasing application of CMC as a part or sole medium for some academic
courses demand a better understanding of the academic online discourse. On the one hand, to
know what makes an effective social interaction is crucial to online learning (Kreijins et al.,
2004), particularly what tension and contrary issues students encounter in their interaction in
online discussion, and how students negotiate those issues in their interaction process. On the
other hand, how the institution and instructors adjust so the interaction is more effective toward
achieving the learning goals is just as important. Some issues may appear in harmony, but are in
conflict when placed under scrutiny, such as ‘community building’ and ‘construction of
knowledge’, ‘student-centered’ and ‘teacher-centered’, and issues of communicative styles,
evaluation, and vulnerability, of educational ideologies. Moreover, students enter the online
course with their prior knowledge, personal learning goals, objective, which encounter the
institutional regulations, norms, course objectives, and the pedagogy of the instructor. These
multiple goals from different levels, perspectives, and for different purposes reflect the
complexity of the online education, and the needs to better understand the online learning
process.

Despite the mounting research on asynchronous online community building and
knowledge construction (Moller et al, 2005), few studies have focused on students’ perspectives
(Biesenbach-lucas, 2003) or focused on the tensions and contrary ideas and actions students encounter and how students negotiate those issues in their interaction process when interacting in an asynchronous threaded discussion in a text-based only academic course.

1.2 Research Questions

My main purpose of this study is to better understand the nature of the interaction process in an asynchronous online academic course. The academic discussion forums are the central and critical component in most asynchronous text-based courses. So what happens in an academic discussion forum is essential for academic engagement and community building in any given course. This study examines the tensions and dilemmas through the Systemic Functional Linguistic view of text and context, and using dilemmatic perspective (Billig et al., 1988) as an approach, and social practice framework (Mohan, 1986) as a discourse analysis unit to see ‘what students do’ and ‘what students reflect upon what they do’. My claim is that Bulletin Board asynchronous discussion can be conceived as containing dilemmas in its text-based interactions. By using a dilemmatic frame, the seemingly trivial interactive actions ‘become recognizable as strategic moves to accomplish interpersonal and group goals’ (Tracy, 1997, p.5).

My assumption is that text-based asynchronous online learning is a complicated process with conflicting goals, tensions, and transformations of identities and this process involves community building, knowledge construction, and negotiation of identity and power. In all of these assumptions, this study attempts to examine the following questions:

1. What are the dilemmas that graduate students encounter as they participate in a communicative situation such as in an online academic discussion? More specifically, I will examine the following aspects:

   a. Social relational topics versus content learning

   b. Academic versus informal writing styles
c. Freedom/ flexibility and constraints/consequences

d. The enjoyment of socializing/ concerns over the sense of community versus the feeling of vulnerability and insecurity

e. Whether or not to evaluate an online discussion forum

2. How do students negotiate among those contrary themes in their discursive community?
What are the strategies used to achieve their social and academic goals? How do students use referencing as a linguistic strategy to open up dialogic possibilities to promote interaction in asynchronous academic discussion?

Referencing is the “reporting or attributing propositional content to another source” (Hyland, 2000, p. 20). My hypothesis is that referencing as a coherence device is shaped by the medium and the social contexts; referencing performs textual and interpersonal functions in maintaining topics and aligning the community members. It is affected by the elements established in the environment prior to the written text. The focus is to provide insight into how the students interact in the online community: the linguistic strategies and evidence.

To put the study in a larger context, it focuses its attention on students’ learning experience, attempting to explain some of the dilemmas they face in the online learning community. By examining the conflicting/contrary themes and their active linguistic negotiation in their discourse, the study addresses the complexity of the online learning process. The significance of this study is to bring attention to the contradicting themes in the online learning community in order to raise the general awareness and understanding of the underpinning ideology/theory and practice. In addition, this study can contribute to the computer-mediated discourse (CMD) research in term of examining the unique linguistic features in the discourse.
1.3 Background to the Study: Researcher as Participant

Although I have taken a course on instructional design with technology in my B. Ed program, which was delivered as a traditional face-to-face course on campus (basically about updating our technology skills), I had not given much thought to online learning. Prior to my first online course in the summer of 2004, I took a 300-level linguistics course through UBC distance learning. It was paper-based, and I was alone with course materials. There was no interaction with anyone in the course except the marker/instructor who marked my assignments, which I mailed in pre-packaged envelopes and were returned in the mail. There were moments that I wished someone were there to discuss questions with or just to socialize. This learning experience didn’t deter me from taking another distance course in 2004. I chose to do an online course out of the convenience it provided me when I could not come to the university campus because of parenting two youngsters at home. I was also curious to see what happens in an online classroom: is it different from a paper-based course? My engagement with the online summer course with its instructor Dr. Philips quickly evolved into an intense and fascinating learning experience. The experience was indeed concentrated since the course lasted for only about three weeks. The learning happened in multiple dimensions. At the basic level, there was the course content. On another level, we were engaged in a reflection upon our own life experience, with a particular focus on language learning experience. At the same time, we were all interacting in the bulletin board (BB) forum—a medium and unique context that was completely new to me. I felt like an alien being parachuted to Earth, trying to adapt into a new culture. Following the course requirements, I plowed along with other classmates, some of whom had previously taken online courses. As an ESL learner, I did not feel at ease writing the posting messages. It is very time-consuming to read and write the discussions on BB. I remember that summer I was stressed and glued to the computer. It took me some time and a lot
of practice to get used to conversing online. On one level, we were learning the course content, and adjusting to the BB technically. On another level, we were socially connecting through writings on BB. We got to know each other as people. Among all these, we encountered different problems from negotiation of the norm in writing style to the legitimacy of topics in BB. The problems that emerged from this course eventually formed the basic direction for this study.

I was both a student doing the course and an ESL student with no previous online learning experience. So the data and analysis should be read as my personal interpretation as I see it through my own perspective and theoretical lenses.

1.4 Definition of Terms

There are some terms that will appear consistently in this study I would like to clarify their operational definitions.

Asynchronous communication – communication through medium of internet occurs at different time and space. For example, email or bulletin board forum (BB) interaction.

Bulletin Board (BB) – a designed platform in a computer program for interactions through Internet. The messages are stored in a hierarchical chronological order, which can be retrieved and responded by users.

CMC – Computer Mediated Communication, coined by Hiltz and Turoff (1978) in their study of computer conferencing, CMC can include email, conferencing, chat rooms, desktop videoconferencing, and bulletin board forum (Murray, 2000). Herring (1996) defines CMC as “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers”.

Discourse analysis – This study uses discourse analysis as one of the research methods seeking insights into the linguistic and discursive strategies used by students in the online discourse.

Discourse analysis, according to Bavelas, Kenwood, and Phillips (2002), “is the systematic study
of naturally occurring communication in the broadest sense, at the level of meaning (rather than as physical acts or features)” (p.102). In this study, the data used in the analysis was produced during the course duration in the discussion forum.

**Online learning community** - For the specific purpose of this study, online learning community is a group of learners who come together with instructors to share resources and participate in discussions exclusively online. Rovai (2002) has suggested that geographical closeness is not an essential characteristic of communities; he emphasizes the ‘mutual interdependence’, ‘connectedness, interactivity’ and common expectations (p.42).

**Interaction** – As Hillman *et al.* state, ‘interaction is engagement in learning’ (1994). It can be categorized into three dimensions: students and learning material, students and students, students and instructor/experts (Moore, 1989). Another approach classifies interaction into content or social interaction (Gilbert & Moore, 1998). Content interaction includes all activities aiming at achieving specific learning outcomes while social interaction is among peers for non-task conversations.

**Dilemma** – Tracy (1997) defines dilemma as ‘a communicative occasion involving tensions and contradiction (p. 4). My claim is that Bulletin Board asynchronous discussion can be seen as containing dilemmas in its text-based interactions. It includes inconsistencies, contradictions and other problems encountered by students in an online learning context. By using a dilemmatic frame, the seemingly trivial interactive actions online ‘become recognizable as strategic moves to accomplish interpersonal and group goals’ (p.5).
Chapter 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A researcher’s theoretical framework inevitably shapes the research questions and guides the interpretive process (Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y., 1994), it is important to review some of the main theoretical perspectives that relate to the present study. A brief introduction of Systemic Functional Linguistics offers a different perspective of language and its social context. Next, I explain a dilemmatic view as an approach for academic discussion followed by a literature review. The second part of this chapter provides a review of the research on asynchronous academic discussion.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 The interconnectedness of the linguistic and social

One of the main theoretical perspectives that has informed this study is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Martin, 1993, Eggins, 2004) theories developed by Halliday and his colleagues. The Functional approach to language and its premise of the ‘complete interconnectedness of the linguistic and the social’ (Christie & Unsworth, 2000) underpin the perspective and approach in this study. SFL views language as a resource for meaning making, and as being inseparable from sociocultural context. The theoretic assumption of this study is when people use language in different social contexts, it carries different meaning through their linguistic choices. According to Halliday (1982), “Text is the process of meaning; and a text is the product of that process” (p. 209). The most importance issue for a text linguist is that given the product, how does she/he go about ‘breaking’ it into its constitutive units, or that in making text, what meaning processes does she/he go through. The implication of ‘text is the process of meaning’ must guide our methodology for making or breaking texts. It comprises the operations of the three metafunctions in any language, the ‘ideational’, the ‘interpersonal’, and
the ‘textual’ (Halliday, 1994). Language-constitutive social processes are enacted wholly through language. This interconnectedness between social life and language provides a way to see how language is used, and for what purposes. Halliday (1994) points out, “meanings are realized through wording; and without a theory of wordings – that is, a grammar – there is no way of making explicit one’s interpretation of the meaning of a text” (p. xvii). Systemic functional linguistics fills in the gap between text and its interpretation, between discourse and ideology. It is this interconnectedness between the text and its social contexts that provides the theoretic perspective for this study. As Martin and Rose (2003) explained that each text is produced interactively between speakers, and between readers and writers, it manifests the interaction (p. 1). Because of the text-based nature of the online learning community, to study the interactions of the community, we can take each text as an instance of the community culture to interpret aspects of the culture it delineates.

### 2.1.2 Context of situation and context of culture

SFL considers social context as “two inter-related levels: context of situation and context of culture (Unsworth, 2000. p.3). Text is the instantiation of both its context of situation and context of culture (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). The social meaning represented in the text has the functions contextualized simultaneously (Ventola, 1987, p. 15). Halliday defines the context of culture as a system or “a matrix of social practices governed by cultural norms and values”, and context of situation as instance, or regular lessons, repetitive instances of the processes of teaching and learning (Halliday, 1999, p. 9). Culture unfolds through series of situations. For example, a text starts like “The teacher read ‘The Night before Christmas’ to her kindergarten students. Then the students started to do Christmas cards while the recorder was playing Christmas carols”. This is a situation in a kindergarten class in New York elementary school at Christmas season, and in North American mainstream culture.
2.1.3 Realization: culture, meaning and wording

Martin and Rose (2003) in *Working with Discourse: Meaning beyond the Clause* illustrates the relation between grammar, discourse and social context. They point out that social activity, discourse, and grammar are different phenomena, and have different levels of abstraction. That means culture is more abstract than a text, and meaning is more abstract than the wording (p. 5). In SFL the relation between text and its social context is called realization: social context are realized as texts that are realized as sequences of clauses (p. 5). So text in social context has three general functions:

- Tenor: the **interpersonal** metafunction to enact relationships
- Field: the **ideational** metafunction to represent experience
- Mode: the **textual** metafunction to organize text (p. 6. emphasis in original)

These three aspects of language functions interweave simultaneously into text that manifests meaning and its culture. From SFL perspective, everyday social interaction is negotiated with text including written and spoken language; text delivers a message with content, concerns with interpersonal relationships and text serves a function in a social context.

The analysis of the discourse for linguistic features that both construct knowledge and maintain social relationships in the community—the relationship of the two functions, degree, and co-occurrence has been called upon by Davis & Brewer (1997, p. 34-35). Researches on text-only online learning primarily based on the text data collected through the computer medium. Social contexts rather than texts have decontextualized structural entities in their own right (Halliday & Martin, 1993, p. 22). Language as a resource for meaning making means every choice made or implied in a text “carries meaning in terms of the potential choices not made” (Christie & Unsworth, 2000, p. 2). The analysis of the collected discourse will demonstrate the connection between students‘ online text and their social context in the online community.
2.1.4 Dilemmatic perspective

While drawing from a Functional perspective provides us with a connected view of the text and its social context, another theoretical perspective that has informed this study is M. Billig’s dilemmatic perspective (Billig, 1987, 1991). Billig’s analysis of everyday thinking shows that people’s daily reflections about what they believe and what they think appropriate contain contrary ideological values (1988, p. 8-9). This contradicting aspect of thinking is termed as ‘dilemmatic aspects of thinking’. It is not about the preconditions of decision-making but about the commonly shared beliefs that cause dilemmatic thinking of individuals. He pointed out that researchers ought to look for the “conflicting themes within shared social images, beliefs, norms and above all values” (p. 21).

In his Ideological Dilemmas (Billig et al, 1988), Billig illustrates people’s conceptions of the educational process: of what education is, of how people learn, of how they should be taught, and how this educational ideology has dilemmatic aspect in it. Since education is organized by the society and carries with it societal values on these issues, people assume that our belief in education has a consistent and coherent character. On the contrary, there are, for example, ‘traditional’ versus ‘progressive’ education or ‘child-centered versus ‘teacher-centered’. These different beliefs coexist and each position is not exclusive to the other (p. 45). A close examination of what teachers say and what they do in the classroom show that distinction between traditional transmissive education and progressive, child-centered education is not as clear-cut in practice as it may appear in theory (p. 54). In Billig’s study, a teacher interviewed felt that there is a place for both philosophies. It is a matter of finding what to do in practice; teaching practice is, by and large, a traditional chalk-and-talk style (p. 47). Rather than looking at the philosophies as “two distinct and opposed” ideologies, they may be “alternative expressions of a single, though dilemmatic, ideology” (p. 54).
2.1.5 The role of language

Billig (1991) views human minds as being socially created, thinking as both being historically/culturally influenced and at the same time influencing and creating culture/history (p. 12). He points out the role of language is crucial in the proposition that human mental states are themselves socially created (p. 14). The paradoxical nature of language-use suggests that theoretical attempts to dissolve, or resolve, the paradox will be less convincing than accounts which express the paradox itself. “What is true of the language-use is also true of thinking; the thinker can be presented as the slave of the previous thoughts or the heroic formulator of thinking” (p. 9). This is the theoretic foundation of our approach for this study, how I perceive the data from the text-only online learning community. The identification of language and consciousness is made by those influenced by Vygotsky’s work. The shift of focus in social psychology foregrounded the role of language. Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue that people, in using language, are not merely saying things, but they are in practice doing things (p.14). By examining the use of language, discourse analysts have shown that people don’t have a single ‘attitude’. Instead, people use complex, and frequently contradictory patterns of talk; they will use different ‘interpretative repertoires’ to accomplish different functions (Potter & Wetherell, 1988). In different interactions, and at different junctures within the same interaction, speakers will be using different forms of talk to accomplish different sorts of task. Billig points out that what rhetorical approach differs from conversation analysis is that conversation analysis emphasize the linguistic details, missing the critical issues of ideology. The interactions of individuals happen in a broader historical and cultural context, which Billig calls ‘social patterning’ (p. 18). The language reflects this framework of ideology and at the same time is being shaped by the language user. The ideas and values are being enacted, and continued in the discussion observed through analysis of the language use. “The slide beneath the microscope is
filled with movement; it contains speakers, combining and recombining to form new patterns of discourse, as they jostle with their opinions and counter-opinions (p. 20).

In order to understand the ideological significance of the texts, it is necessary to go beyond the texts themselves: to examine the social historical context for the ideas in text (Billig, 1988, p. 38). Billig demonstrates that the ideological heritage is not a simple one. The intellectual ideology may not donate a series of solved problems to common sense. Instead, it may provide the conflicting themes of theoretical dilemmas to common sense, where dilemmas can be re-created, and experienced in practical terms.

2.1.6 Dilemmatic approach in research

Dilemmatic perspective is an approach to inquiries in diverse research disciplines areas, particularly in cognitive psychology, discursive psychology, and social psychology (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Pelz & Andrews, 1976; Tannen, 1984; Tracy, 1984, 1991, 1997). The notion of ‘ideological dilemmas’ is delineated through identifying other approaches to the study of social life, which overlooks the social nature and the content of individual’s thinking (Billig, ed al. 1988, p. 2). It stresses the ideological nature of thinking and thoughtful nature of ideology by stressing the dilemmatic aspects of ideology and thinking generally. People don’t usually perform isolated tasks alone like what they are asked to do in a lab. They live in a community, imagined and/or real, facing and receiving/working with different ideological influences, and making decisions among the contrary thoughts and multiple goals. If we conceive online learning community as a discourse community, the nature of the community is thought to involve inherited competing discourses, and conflicts and tensions in its practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Dilemmatic perspectives used in this study, which is an uncommon approach in CMC research, have informed academic research in diverse areas, particularly in cognitive psychology,
discursive psychology, and social psychology (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Pelz & Andrews, 1976; Tannen, 1984; Tracy, 1984, 1997). Dilemmatic perspectives recognize that not only the immediate living environment affects the nature of people’s thinking, but “the very contents of the everyday thinking—the maxims, values and opinions…are themselves cultural products”, and contains dilemmatic themes (Billig, 1991, p. 1). The dilemmas are caused by conflict of social values, revealed in social images, representations and values that can be seen in conflict.

Common sense, which quite literally, is the sense commonly shared by a community (Billig et al, 1988, p. 13). It is this conflict that produces the difficulty of the dilemma. Without the conflict of values the dilemma could not occur in social life (p. 14). Stanley and Billig (2004) identify the underlining power relations in their study of a conversation between doctoral students. In particular, they examine the details of the discourse, such as the word choices to reveal the ideological tension between “autonomy” and “dependency” in the doctoral student-supervisor relationship that appears to be “naturalized” (p. 169). In an ideological dilemma, two sets of commonly shared values will appear to be in rhetorical conflict. However, speakers will try to manage both sets rather than siding with one or the other. The point about such dilemmas is that they are not resolvable, because they are framed within a wider, contradictory ideology (p.160).

Tracy (1997) has investigated intellectual discussion seminars involving academic faculty members and graduate students by using a dilemmatic framework to better understand the communicative occasions involving tensions and contradictions (p. 4). The study examines (1) the character of the problem participants face; (2) how a dilemmatic frame can shape understanding of the conversation action; (3) suitable situational ideals (p.4-5). As an approach to inquiry of the tensions and conflicting communicative ideals, multiple interactional goals, and interpersonal concerns (p.5) in academic discourse, dilemmatic perspective reveal the
participants concerns about their identity, topical expertise, equality and incompatible community beliefs.

2.1.7 Multiple goals in discussion

Multiple goals refer to people’s “specific designs, ambitions, wishes” when they are in any social situation (Tracy & Coupland, 1990. p. 2). People in daily life situations rarely have only one goal at any given point (Griffin, Cole & Newman, 1982, p.114). Discourse analysis provides an opportunity to explore “what actual concerns and goals people orient to in specific communicative encounters” (Tracy & Coupland. 1990, p. 4). The notion of task goals seen as the purpose of interaction concerns how people present themselves, and their concerns for relationships. Most likely the instrumental goals are combined with identity goals to construct the goal of interaction. This goal of interaction could be expected to have some conflicts and compromise at some level. The issue then is how these goals relate to each other, and how the discourse consequently results in different kinds of relationships (p.8). The students in a higher educational context usually interact with the institution, instructors and other students motivated by multiple goals. They can have interaction goals that are at odds with each other. The significance of multiple goals in discussion is that it provides a way of examining the complexity of the online community interaction.

There are studies carried out on student learning experience (Prosser & Trigwell 1999; Ramsden, 2002) that demonstrate the correlation between their conception of goals in higher education and the approaches they adopt in their learning. This perspective has recently been applied in online learning (Roberts G. 2003; Ellis et al. 2006). Through their investigation into students’ experience of both online and face-to-face, Ellis et al. (2006) find cohesive conception of goals correlate positively to their approaches and better course grades (p. 244)
Students typically enter online learning with their particular multiple goals in mind. The institutes that provide the services have their own goals in ideological aspects and academic outcomes. While students are constantly encountering the dilemma between their beliefs and practical needs and online community culture, how they pursue those goals online simultaneously can be challenging.

2.1.8 Educational ideologies – content learning versus social relationship building

The predominant view in the dilemma of knowledge construction versus social community building is that the focus should be on content and knowledge construction versus social relational building. The problem is not that this view is right or wrong. The problem is at the binary view of the world and way of thinking. It is deeply rooted in the ideologies that traditionally emphasize rational thinking and the transmission of information/knowledge. The root of the dilemmas goes back to the epistemology of knowledge and knowing. The traditional philosophies believed that there is absolute truth and knowledge independent of a human’s knowledge. Postmodernism promotes the belief that relativism emphasizes the subjectivity and social construction of knowledge.

2.2 Literature on CMC: Online Learning Communities

2.2.1 Computer-mediated learning communities

The shift of learning theory from the focus on individual’s cognitive development to conceptualizing learning as a socially and culturally situated process underpins much of the current educational theory and practice. This learning theory views learning not as the simple transmission of knowledge from an expert to a learner, but as doing and participating in a social and cultural setting. It is largely influenced by Vygotskian social constructivism and socialcultural theory (Lantolf, 2000). According to Vygotsky (1978), “Any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane
and then it appears on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category” (p. 57). This theory highlights the social construction nature of the learning process. It has been an increasingly influential theory in online educational theory and practice. Another important notion that has been largely discussed is “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In their view, learning is situated in communities of practice and involves a process of different degrees of participation and issues of power and access to resources (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). This useful perspective of knowing and learning has drawn attention to the community as the sites where people are doing activities in certain socialcultural contexts. This conceptual shift in theory of learning enables researchers to examine knowledge as a lived experience and as contextualized in sociopolitical and socialcultural spaces (Luppicini, 2002).

The fast development of online learning in Higher Education (HE) has led to the rise of the notion of online community (Harasim, 1993). An online learning community can be narrowly defined as a group of learners who come together with facilitators and/or instructors to share resources, achieve some learning goals, and participate in discussions exclusively, or predominately, online (Bradshaw, P., Powell, S. & Terrell, I., 2005). The current research in computer-mediated learning communities recognizes that the nature of those learning communities are characterized by active engagement, learning inquiries, and co-construction of knowledge (Luppicini, 2002), and social interaction. Among the many aspects that are commonly studied are knowledge construction, participation, satisfaction, engagement and interaction process.

2.2.2 Interactions in an online learning community

Interaction has been researched and proven an essential component of online learning communities (Gunawardena, 1995; Tu & Corry, 2003). It is not only an important aspect in
students’ overall satisfaction, but also a strategic instrument in designing activities toward certain learning outcomes (Northrup, 2002, p. 222). There are different perspectives on how to classify interaction. From a conceptual and sociological perspective, Moore (1989) suggested there were three types of interaction essential for a successful distance education: learner-content interaction, learner-instructor interaction, learner-learner interaction. More generally, interaction can be classified as content or social interactions (Gilbert & Moore, 1998), which are important components in building online learning community (Northrup, 2002). What motivates participation, is it information sharing in a virtual community, or satisfying social needs?

The question of what motivates participation and, in particular, knowledge sharing in a virtual community has been studied by Wasko and Faraj (2000). They found that participation is motivated by perceptions of community interest, generalized reciprocity, and pro-social behavior. Examining Usenet groups, they concluded: “Members are not simply interested in a forum for questions and answers, but appreciate the online dialog, debate, and discussion around topics of interest. People feel that the community provides access to knowledge construction rather than just information, that it becomes a valuable forum to received feedback on ideas and solutions” (Wasko & Faraj, 2000, p. 170). The virtual community, then, provides hard information but much more - knowledge, wisdom, experience, and a place to thrash things out and come to new solutions. This outcome is more than just information, but also more than just community spirit and chitchat. Research has suggested that social interaction should be defined and integrated into the instruction (Tu & Corry, 2003) at the beginning stage of the online learning community. The social interaction will evolve along with the content interaction in an online learning community (Northrup, 2002, p.220).

A constructivist view of learning is conceived as a social construction process. Research on learning in asynchronous text-based environment has shown that knowledge is mutually built
through active participation, collaboration, social interaction and dialogue. Researchers in CMC have been focused on the relationship between social interaction and knowledge construction. Zhu (1996) reported on a 16-week graduate distance learning course study with illustration pattern of knowledge construction in the electronic discussion. He noted that when students post their notes, exchange experiences, comment and reflect, plan, monitor, and regulate their own learning, they are either at a level of ‘individual construction of knowledge motivated, influenced and facilitated by the discussion and interaction with peers’, or at the level of ‘assimilation of information proposed by other with some individual editing’ (p. 840). More active students are more likely to go through the first process. Another study done by Schrire (2006) at a doctoral level computer conference exploring the knowledge building process finds that student-student interaction contributes to higher phases of critical thinking compared with the instructor-centered interaction. The research on CMC in the past decades has established the positive relationship between social interaction and cognition engagement (Schrire, 2006; Carey, 1999). “The development of community, then, becomes a parallel stream to the content being explored. It is given its own equal status and is not seen as something that… interferes with the learning process.” (Palloff & Pratt, 2001, p. 30) Without active effort from every member of the group, the learning community—in which knowledge is constructed collectively and individually through group interaction—cannot be established.

2.2.3 Asynchronous discussion forum: problems encountered

The studies done on the application of asynchronous discussion report that asynchronous discussion support the teaching-learning process (Carey, 1999; Ellis et al., 2006; Biesenbach-Lucas, S. 2003). However, there are problems encountered by both instructors and students. Though limited, there is some research done on the learners’ experiences and their learning process in CMC research (Song et al, 2004). In the online discussions, which are regarded as
‘critical’ components in text-based online education (Bradshaw, et al, 2005), one of the challenges that come up is the lack of community. In Rovai’s (2002) study, in which 314 students were involved, results indicated a significant relationship between students’ perceived sense of community and perceived cognitive learning. Related to the students’ social needs is the issue of the social space in a web-based academic course. Is the social space necessary? Or should it be a separate component of the discussion forum? In her critical reflection on web-based learning experience, Bishop (2002) laments in her online learning experience the need of “an unsuviilliant\(^3\) space that students can complain anonymously” (p. 233). In the review of Bishop’s article, Conrad (2003) emphasizes that a social space for socially active students will be beneficial to meet their needs (p. 124). It is generally agreed that in order to promote community building, it is useful to have a separate forum where students can meet and chat on some mutually interested topics for relationship development (Rovai, 2007). In a summary (Moore, 2002) called “What does research say about the learners using computer-mediated communication in distance learning?” both social presence and cognitive presence are found to be an influential factor to learner satisfaction and to the quality of cognitive learning outcomes respectively. However, ‘off-task’ related activities are found important as the communicative community is being established (p.62).

Luo’s (2004) study on fourteen graduate students participating in online discussion demonstrate through discourse analysis using Systemic Functional Linguistic theory the tension between social and academic tasks. In Luo’s register analysis (Luo, 2004, p.163), she found that there was tension between ‘academic topic’ and ‘personal/nonacademic topic’ among the students and contrary thoughts within the same individual student. Luo’s study has revealed the problems expressed by students’ own opinions on this issue. If one of the students posts

\(^{3}\) In Bishop’s (2002) article it means no institutional supervision for this space, e. g. no instructors or teaching staff have access to this space.
something unrelated to the course content, one opinion is that it should not be posted in an academic discussion. One interview of her classmates shows conflicting feelings over this issue of academic and nonacademic topics in the online forum (p. 166). Should non-academic topics be allowed in this academic discussion? Some draw a clear-cut line between academic and social interaction consider social interaction illegitimate; while some express the needs for a more personal and social space. Yet one student reveals contradictory opinions on the same issue (p. 166).

Another dilemma that keeps coming up including how to write/respond, essay like style or discussion-like is also found in some studies (Scarce, 1997; Luo, 2004; Yim, 2005). In the study of non-native speakers’ participation in computer-mediated discussion, Yim (2005) compares two paralleled courses with two different instructors, their online interaction and concerns focusing on what factors inhibit or facilitate students’ participation and satisfaction. Although both instructors set different minimal requirements of the participation in the online discussion, the discourse the students produce reveals different perceptions and attitude toward their instructors’ rules (p108). Despite the fact that first-time users of WebCT and online forums experience uncertainty about the appropriate register to use in the discussion forum (p.108), one instructor’s emphasis on the “academic” quality creates “tension and anxiety” in the discussion forum, which results in a different discourse produced, and different students’ reactions toward the online discussion. Course B instructor sets up the grading criteria for the quality of the postings emphasizing on “academic” quality of their postings. The students in Course B feel constraint by the instructor’s these criteria (p.109). One student being interviewed from Yim’s study reveals that she does not feel comfortable expressing her views or asking questions for fear that some ideas and topics are not welcomed in the discussion (p.101). Yim reported that the
instructor’s constraints on writing styles and content in the online discussion affected some students’ level of satisfaction and degree of participation negatively.

Researchers have examined the instructional design aspects and try to provide students with structures to the discussion activities (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2003). Biesenbach-Lucas argues that although the learners need a framework to work with in order to reduce the learners’ uncertainty, which may affect participation and motivation level, criteria and structure do not always contribute to social and knowledge development in the learning community (p.34). In Biesenbach-Lucas’s study (2003), the instructor’s rules on students’ postings “explicitly” being linked to previous postings cause students feeling to be constrained to limited topics and the discussion being “unnatural/inauthentic” (p.33). The instructor’s weekly evaluation of students’ postings cause students’ to be more concerned with ‘form and correct response’ rather than ‘original thought’. Both native and non-native speaker students are preoccupied by the instructor’s evaluation criteria and try to meet them (p.34). On the one hand the instructor believes in providing “unambiguous expectations”(Rovai, 2002) in order to provide the structure students need, on the other hand, students prefer more constructive feedback and assignment on a “done/not done” bases (p. 35).

Another issue is grading discussion to encourage participation in dialogue. Rovai (2002) suggests that grading increases the number of messages and consequently increase the sense of community when discussion counts 10-20 % in the course grade; but not additional benefits when the weight is increased to 25-30 % of the course grade. The finding shows that grading course discussion can motivate students’ to greater participation in online discussion.

2.2.4 CMC discourse analysis: referencing as a strategy

Since the early research on CMC discourse features (Herring, 1999), it was noted that the features are evolving to suits the demands of the users’ social and academic needs. Impacted by
the medium, the discourse tends to blur the distinction between written and oral (Crystal, 2001), academic and conversational discourse. It is commonly recognized that the medium alone cannot produce an enhanced learning outcome such as increased motivation and a deeper level of engagement (Thomas, 2002). To facilitate a productive discussion forum, one of the essential aspects that researchers have been devoted to is the interactional coherence that would produce the type of interaction serving students’ multiple goals. The ideal forum discourse would support active learning when students articulate and negotiate their academic and social needs.

Research examining social interaction in discourses can be very insightful in looking at CMD. The study in Hyland’s *Academic attribution: interaction through citation* in different academic disciplines (2000) provides some insights for academic writing discourse, which is relevant in this study of CMD. He points out that citation plays an important role in mediating the relationship between a writer’s argument and her or his discourse community. He finds that the choice of reporting verbs is a community-based preference reflecting the ‘epistemological and social understandings of the writers’ and his/her social context (p.37).

Previous studies focused on strategies and techniques in the instructional design in order to overcome the problematic aspects of online discussion to improve the interactional coherence. Topcu (2008) experimented on the relationship between ‘intentional repetition’ and learning style. He finds that learning style did not have a significant effect on the interaction; but repetition might be promising in promoting meaningful and more efficient interaction. It was found to help students’ grasp main idea of the repeated message, get more involved in the discussion, and reduce the incoherence.

Earlier researches on computer-mediated discourse (CMD) mostly focused on the different characteristics between CMD and spoken conversation. Claims about CMD such as

---

4 A reference made in the text to a source of information. This can be in the form of a direct quotation, summarizing or paraphrasing. In this study, referencing is used to denote a wider range of strategies used including citation and referential tracking.
‘fragmented and internationally incoherent’ (Herring, 1999) could be potentially medium related problems. Herring pointed out that later research of CMD reveals to ‘be sensitive to a variety of technical and situational factors’ (p. 2). It was found that referential tracking such as linking and quoting (Baym, 1996) are used as strategies to alleviate the coherence problem. Linking is the practice of referring explicitly to the content of a previous message in one’s response (p. 320). Researchers point out that citing the work of others is not simply an issue of accurate attribution, but also a significant means of constructing an authorial self (Scollon, 1994). This phenomenon in CMD is an important feature worthy of a closer examination.

2.3 Summary

I situated this study in the literature by presenting the theoretical framework and the relevant research studies. The SFL view of language as a resource to construct meaning and text as part of its context provide the theoretical perspective for this study. Through Billig’s theory of dilemmatic aspect of thinking, it allows us to look beyond the seemingly trivial problems to a deeper and more complex level. By conceiving the online discussion forum as a learning community, I view the interaction in the community as a process of negotiating discourses among ideology, identity, and institutional and personal goals. A review of the CMC literature has suggested that community development and content learning are two paralleled themes that are equally important in an online learning community (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2003; Zhu, 1996; Northrup, 2002; Schrire, 2006). It also reveals that criteria and structures for students’ activities do not always work to the best for students’ participation and satisfaction. Issues of writing styles, topic choice, and evaluation are part of the interaction process, reflecting the social contexts at different level (Baym, 1996; Topcu, 2008; Rovai, 2003). The linguistic features from the research literature show how language is used in computer-mediated context to serve the multifaceted functions in the community. The negotiation of the discourse is revealed in the
analysis of the discourse features (Herring, 1999; Topcu, 2008; Baym, 1996). A close examination of the CMD referencing strategies, e.g. quoting, reporting, copy-paste reveals that they are not only coherence promoting devices, but also a way of socializing, and negotiating identity.
3.1 A Qualitative Case Study Approach

This study is primarily an investigation into the interaction process in an online asynchronous academic discussion in an online WebCT forum. By examining the conflicts or tensions students encountered in their online learning experience, I attempt to find out what students encounter and how they negotiate in the text-based community, and discuss the good implications for teaching and learning in computer-mediated learning communities.

This study is a qualitative case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994) of an asynchronous online learning community. The course on Asia-Pacific Narratives as Inquiry on Intercultural Aspects of Language Education was the course under this study and I was just one of the participants when it was held in the summer of 2004. Considering the place and time it lends itself more naturally to be studied using a case study approach. Merriam (1998) suggests that case study is appropriate for the consideration of ‘how” and why” questions, where there is little control over the phenomenon and the goal is a description of the problem under study rather than a statement of cause/effect relationships. Yin (1994) states that the case study meets a particular need to understand ‘complex social phenomena,” and in doing so retaining the ‘holistic and meaningful characteristics’ of the event. My original motivation was to obtain a deeper understanding of the students’ online learning experience. This study examines the phenomenon in its natural setting as it is without any interference from the researcher. It involves an in depth and careful examination of a single case in its natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In order to study a social phenomenon in a natural setting, the study adopts a qualitative approach that emphasizes holistic inquiry, human characteristics, social processes and the meanings that participants attribute to social situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative paradigms assume that individuals construct reality, that multiple realities exist in any given
situation, and that the construction of reality is context-bound (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In a social and planned setting, the text-only exchange within the organized activities can be considered as “the material practice” (Denzin, 1997, p. 23). This study considers various theories and larger contexts including the connectedness of text and context, educational ideologies, constructivist perspective and learning as a social practice point of view to gain a holistic understanding of the online learning process. Therefore, a qualitative research approach is the appropriate methodology to better understand the nature of this online learning community where students are interacting, sharing ideas and experience, building up their sense of community, and constructing knowledge.

3.2 Research Site and Participants

The study was carried out in Canadian Coast University located in an urban city on the West Coast of Canada. Because of its Asian Pacific orientation in its geography and culture, the university attracts large groups of international students. Like many other classes on campus, Asian-Pacific Narrative Inquiry, the online course under study consisted of both Canadian and international students. It was offered by the Faculty of Education, which lasts 4 weeks in the summer session, unlike the 13-week long winter semester courses. It was very intense in terms of content covered and time frame. The course was delivered entirely online through the WebCT, which is a course management system and has an asynchronous discussion forum component used by the course instructor since 1997. Although the course was designed for students in language education, it attracted students from diverse backgrounds. Many students in this summer course who were mostly teachers in the public school system were registered in the Master of Education Technology (MET) degree. Some international students taking this course were considering job promotion or potential employment when they immigrate to Canada.

5 Pseudonyms are used for all the names of research locations and participants.
In this course called Asia-Pacific Narratives as Inquiry on Intercultural Aspects of Language Education, as stated in the course outline, the students engaged in structured discussions through the duration of the course. The investigation of the interaction happened during the course duration from July to August 2004. However, the larger context of the social and institutional environment influenced and interacted with the students and their interactions in the online community. The context of culture for this online course is not unlike most other online courses in higher education (HE). It has the institutional structure and constraints, and students of various background, and experiences of taking online courses.

The course was formatted as a graduate online seminar. The purpose of the discussions was to provide students with a cyber learning community where they meet and socialize while learning the content of the course. They were required to make postings that were part of the final evaluation mark. They had a choice of starting their own discussion thread, or alternatively they could reply to a posting made by another student. The instructor organized a schedule for each student to be responsible for a chapter including a summary, and 2-3 questions for discussion. The following are the evaluation criteria for the course outlined in the course website.

- 20% Write a language and culture autobiography and post it on the bulletin board at the beginning of the course
- 20% Summarize and critique an assigned chapter and post this summary with three questions to stimulate discussion
- 20% discuss the constructivist approach to language/culture/content learning and develop a personal SLA theory
20% Evaluate the effectiveness of online discussion and online learning as compared with conventional face to face learning

20% Online participation in discussions throughout the course

The course overview and approach stated, “It is of overriding importance to encourage participation, interaction, cooperative learning and above all to encourage dialogue which is interesting to each participant. Consequently such a philosophy requires that participants receive credit for their participation.” (Appendix A)

There were 12 participants in the course. Two of them were exempt from the study: one was a researcher-participant, and the other was participating in the online discussion while doing the same course offered on campus. At the end of the course, all the participants gave permission for their online contribution and assignments to be used in this study. Out of 10 students 7 were female and 3 male, 3 non-native speakers (NNS) and 7 native English speakers (NS). One student was living in Taiwan and one in Hong Kong and the rest were located in different part of Canada at the time of the course. The students varied in term of their experience in distance education. Some students were very experienced in taking online courses, as they were in MET, a master’s program that was almost entirely done through online. Some were first time users like me trying to wade through the unknown water. Two of the NSs had years of teaching ESL experience in Japan and South Korea. Five were schoolteachers. One student who was taking the course from Hong Kong was a research associate in a large Hong Kong university.

The course instructor Dr. Philips is a university professor and a seasoned online instructor using WebCT as an online discussion component in his graduate courses. His classes usually have a mix of Canadian and international students. This was his first time to offer this online only summer course that has no face-to-face component. He has been deeply involved
with the research on all aspects of using CMC technologies in teaching and learning. Dr. Philips is innovative in creating activities that enhance students’ interaction in the online forum.

Their background related to L1 and cultural ethnicity, language learning and online experience.

Table 3.1 Information of the participants under study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender/first language</th>
<th>Online course experience</th>
<th>Professional experience</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jana</td>
<td>Female/Mandarin</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>University TEFL instructor in Beijing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>Female/Mandarin</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ph. D student Researcher-participant on online learning</td>
<td>Planning to immigrate to Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shu-yi</td>
<td>Female/Mandarin</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Technology sector</td>
<td>Experienced 2002 started online learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>Female/English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>School teacher MET student experienced</td>
<td>Chinese-Canadian growing up in Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>Female/English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>ESL teaching in Korea</td>
<td>Working on ME Experienced online,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawny</td>
<td>Female/English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>ESL teacher in Japan and Korea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trish</td>
<td>Female/English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>School principal</td>
<td>MIT experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Female/English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dustin</td>
<td>Male/English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Teacher MET student</td>
<td>MIT experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Male/Cantonese</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>H. K. research associates</td>
<td>8th UBC online courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Male/English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Teacher MET student</td>
<td>MET very experienced, final stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willy</td>
<td>Male/Mandarin</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Civil servant</td>
<td>Just immigrated to Canada from Taiwan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 The Researcher and the Researched

During the summer of 2004, I was glued to the computer with my first online course, at home with two kids running around. In this online learning community, which lasted only for 4 weeks, amazing social interactions and learning happened. I was one of the community members, deeply involved in the learning process. My cultural and learning experience, in addition to my insider perspective definitely shaped the study in some ways. All the NNSs are Chinese speakers from Taiwan or Hong Kong. By sharing similar linguistic and cultural knowledge and being in the same position as a student, I believe that my insider status is beneficial to my understanding of the perspectives and concerns expressed by my fellow classmates during the course. Although the majority of the students are English speaking we share different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, with my experiences of living in Canada for a decade and completing a Bachelor of Education in a Canadian university, I can relate culturally to those NSs, too.

It is not my purpose in doing the study to pursue an objective truth or generalizability of the finding. By recognizing my research-participant position and the subjectivity of my position and by explaining my theoretical framework, I view this study as a way to better understanding a phenomenon and to contextually interpret the multiple perspectives of the participants.

3.4 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Since the Asia-Pacific Narrative as Inquiry on Intercultural Aspects of Language Education was an online course, all the postings and contributions of the students and instructor were able to be retrieved at the end of the course. I was one of the students who were taking the course. The collection of the data came before this study being considered and the application of the approach and it was part of another research project. The use of the data was permitted by
UBC ethics. The database for this study includes the online forum postings by the students and instructor. It also includes students’ hand-in/submitted assignments for the course evaluation requirement. The course documents and reflections of the research-participant are also part of the data for this study. The data on the setting includes the course focus, and content, duration, patterns of interaction, number of participants, and their brief professional identity, the number of messages posted, instructors’ number of messages.

The analysis of the data follows the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 2. The interconnectedness between language and its context in which it is being used provides the theoretical foundation for the analysis of text collected in this study. Consistent with systemic functional linguistics, in Mohan’s social practice theory (2003), one social situation is called a social practice, which has two components: theory and practice. Mohan uses the game of Bridge to illustrate the relationship between theory and practice (see table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Mohan’s model of social practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>“Say “I bid three clubs””</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advice on how to play the game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Playing the game</td>
<td>Dealer: ‘I bid three clubs.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A social practice is a unit of culture that involves cultural knowledge and cultural action (Spradley, 1980) in a theory–practice, or reflection–action relation. Online discussion, as ‘a socially constituted and interpreted activity’, is considered as social practice (Mohan & Luo, 2005). Thus it can be used as a conceptual model applicable to communicative situations. In Ellis, Goodyear, Prosser and O’Hara (2006) how and what university students learn through online and face-to-face (f2f) discussion, the approach is designed to examine what the students
thought they are learning (referential) as well as how they go about their learning (structural) (p.245). This social practice theory provides a conceptual unit for analyzing the online discourse. This can be done by identifying the action and reflection discourse to see what students do and how they think about what they do. When examining individuals and their interaction with their social environment when individual engages in activities, the individual’s action is considered as a unit of analysis. Wertsch (1991) explain his notion of individual action as the unit of analysis in sociocultural research:

When action is given analytic priority, human beings are viewed as coming into contact with, and creating, their surroundings as well as themselves through the actions in which they engage. Thus, action, rather than human beings or the environment considered in isolation, provides the entry point into the analysis. (p. 8)

The analysis of the data focuses on students’ action and reflection on the activities they were engaged in treating the social practice as the basic unit of analysis.

The purpose of this study is to examine contrary/dilemmatic themes in the online discourse. The analysis involves coding and selecting certain aspects of the data for detailed analysis. Fairclough (1992) used “moments of crisis” to describe occurrences in the discourse where there is a misunderstanding or a need to clarification.

Such moments of crisis make visible aspects of practices which might normally be naturalized, and therefore difficult to notice; but they also show change in process, the actual ways in which people deal with the problematization of practices (p. 230)

This study therefore describes what dilemmas confront students as they participated in a communicative situation. As this online academic discussion was text–only based, how students used language to manage and negotiate their learning and community building goals are analyzed.

This study examines the tensions and contradictions in the interaction process in an asynchronous text-only online graduate level course. Through qualitative analysis by using both
social practice theory and Systemic Functional tools for analysis, I attempt to describe the characters of the dilemmatic problems, and reveal the irresolvable underpinning ideologies that shape the contexts of situations. Lastly I demonstrate the discursive evidence of how students negotiated their balance between the academic learning objectives and interpersonal goals.

3.5 The Limitation of the study

In brief, my research method reflects the characteristics of a case study and qualitative research. My participants are my classmates who were part of this exploring and learning process. In examining and analyzing the activities and events that happened during the course of study, I provide rich, detailed descriptions supported by quotes from my data sets collected under the codes of an ethical review. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the limitations in this study. It would have strengthened the study if I have collected interview data. On the other hand, it is with a unique perspective of researcher-participant that the context-rich and interpretive analysis that allows us a view on the dilemmas in this academic learning community. There are other constraints in this study that should be noted. There is no control group to compare to or any before-and-after data collected from the students who participated in the class. The issue of being ‘objective’: since analysis of texts as part of social science, the philosophy of social science distinguishes reality (the potential and actual) cannot be reduced to our knowledge of reality, which is contingent, shifting and partial. This also applies to texts: we should not assume that the reality of texts is exhausted by our knowledge about texts. There is no such thing as a complete and definitive analysis of a text. It is always selective with a different focus point and motivation behind the choice of focus (Fairclough, 2003. p14).
Chapter 4
DILEMMAS IN REFLECTION: WHAT STUDENTS SAY

Introduction

The result of the study is organized into chapters 4 and 5 with two different foci: dilemmas reflected in students’ discussion data; discursive behavior for social and academic purposes. Different versions of discussion platforms in a web-based course, as designed for academic purposes, also provides the potential space for social interaction, which is one of the critical components in online learning process (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). The class discussions on the Bulletin Board (BB) are the main medium that different educational processes are being negotiated and realized. To answer my research question on what dilemmas students encounter in their online learning environment, this chapter reports the related themes in the data, and how the theory of social practice constructs the structure of the report of the research results.

As illustrated in chapter 3 the theoretical structure of analysis proposes that online discourse is perceived as social practice which is a “combination of doing and knowing, of action and meaning mediated by culture (Mohan and Luo, 2005). During their discussion and in their assignments, students talked/reflected on what they did/posted. Chapter 4 reports what students reflected on and in what they were doing in the online discussion forum. Chapter 5 presents a discourse analysis to demonstrate how students negotiate their identity, learning goals, and social needs in their online action.

The following results are themes that surfaced in the data. In the first part of this chapter, I’ll introduce the flow of the course to penetrate how the course was carried out in context; then I examine what problems, tensions, or contrary ideas students faced in the online forum from the discussion protocol and their assignments. From dilemmatic perspectives introduced in chapter 2, the focus is on tensions and contrary themes emerged from their
discussion and in their assignments. However, not every student raised the same issue or responded at the same time. The representation and interpretation should be read as examples. The data used are from the course protocol and hand-in assignments. Following the tradition in qualitative research, the analysis is largely inductive. First I describe the course context including the general characteristics of the course and activities students participated in; then I present the dilemmas that surfaced in the data in this chapter.

4.1 Course Asian Pacific Narratives

The Asia-Pacific Narratives course was a 3-credit, elective course on issues in language education offered by the Department of Language Education designed for the Master’ and Ph. D Education students. The instructor Dr. Philips was an experienced professor who had been teaching at Canadian Coast University for over a decade. He started to use WebCT at its conception as an online component of face-to-face courses. The Asian Pacific Narratives Course was the first course he taught as an exclusive online course. Offered in a format of graduate seminar, it aimed at studying intercultural narratives and their role in the pedagogy of culture, ethnicity and identity as they pertain to language literacy education (See Course Asia-Pacific Narratives’ Overview and Approach in Appendix A).

The following are part of the Course Overview and Approach. It is important for the study because it provides the guideline for the students’ learning and interaction, and it also provides the backdrop for examining the process of an online learning community building.

This course, which is a three-week summer program, is very intensive in readings and the interactive discussions on-line. Students must do the required readings for each day and are expected to actively participate in discussing, critiquing and reflecting on each reading on that day. Each student will be assigned a chapter to summarize and critique and to post this summary/critique on the BB on the scheduled day. Your chapter summary/critique posting will count for 20% of your course grade.

Students will be required to develop their personal theory of the optimal situation for language learning based on their reflections on their autobiography, reflections on the
assigned chapters and related reflections on the BB. The posting of this personal theory will be worth 20%.

In the first part (the initial week of the course), we will seek to understand the theoretical foundations of research methods used in narrative approaches to language education. We will approach this understanding through an intensive reading of Riessman's text on narrative methodologies. During the first days of the course, students will be required to post their autobiography regarding language learning and teaching on the Bulletin Board forum (written). The online discussion will comprise a major part of the course participation for evaluation. After the first week, we will then proceed with the assigned chapters from Daiute, Colette & Lightfoot Cynthia (2004) following the schedule below.

**Online chapter Presentation:**
After the third class, each student will make an individual online presentation which will lead to further discussion online. Each student will be expected to:

- summarize an assigned chapter and prepare a presentation of this assigned chapter and post this on the bulletin board.
- post three questions to initiate discussion of the chapter and be ready to lead a discussion and to answer questions by the members of the class or the instructor. (Course Asia-Pacific Narratives’ Overview and Approach).

The course started on July 26 and ended August 13 for the course content, though the Bulletin forum was open with a welcome message from the instructor on the 20th July, and was kept open after that end date. Participants continued to visit and write to one another until August 23. There were 12 students who participated in the online discussion, one of them was a Ph. D student observing the discussion; another student was taking part of this course as an addition to the same course but offered concurrently in a face-to-face version by the same instructor on university campus.

**Table 4.1 Course schedule posted on the course site**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>July 26</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Posting autobiography as soon as possible and on-line discussion of Riessman's introduction &amp; ch. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>July 27</td>
<td>Riessman, introduction &amp; ch. 1</td>
<td>On-line discussion of posted autobiography and Riessman, ch. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>July 28</td>
<td>Riessman, ch. 3</td>
<td>On-line discussion on autobiography and the chapter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students will be expected to read the assigned readings, generate questions, and be prepared to discuss each session in detail in online seminars.

Students will be required to post a minimum of 2 thoughtful messages on the Bulletin Board forum each day and a maximum number of postings for any student each day shouldn’t be over 5 messages for a balanced and well-formed discussion. (Course Asia-Pacific Narratives’ Overview and Approach)

Below were what and when the participants were doing in the online discussion forum.
Table 4.2 Course schedule for activities and assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Participants’ response to the activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 20 – 29</td>
<td>• Welcome message from Instructor</td>
<td>Participants’ response to the autobiographies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Posting autobiographies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 27- 31</td>
<td>• Riessman, chapter one summarized by Instructor</td>
<td>• All participants chose a chapter for summary and discussion questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Imagined communities and imaginary classes</td>
<td>• Jana did chapter 3 summary and discussion questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 29 – August 12</td>
<td>• Starting Daiute &amp; Lightfoot book</td>
<td>July 29 - 1.1 - Debbie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>July 30 - 1.2 - Trish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 3 - 1.3 - Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 4 - 1.4 - Nina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 5 - 2.1 - Dustin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 6 - 2.2 - Shawny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 9 - 2.3 - Mona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 10 - 2.4 – Shi-yi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 11 - 3.1 - Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 12 - 3.4 – Willy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Bulletin Board forum opened sooner than the official course starting date and participants started to post their greetings and questions regarding to their course assignments. They also started to post their autobiographies on their own language and culture experience. By 29 July, the students in the course already got to know each other through reading the posted narratives. To a certain degree, their knowing of each other was instant and in depth in terms of the time frame and content. For example, in the autobiographies, information such as family background, childhood environment, school experience, history of language learning, working experiences, traveling experiences, and personal information on family, job, cultural heritage, and so on. The activity of writing an autobiography and sharing it at the beginning of the course presented an intriguing phenomenon for building up relationships, establishing social presence and identity in the online learning community all within days. Its effect on the social presence in this course, though not the focus of this study, will be part of the results and the analysis.
While some students were yet to post their biographies, on July 27, the instructor did the summary and questions for discussion for chapter one of Riessman’s book, which served as an example for the class. Students organized and constructed together a timetable for each individual assignment on summary and questions through posting their choice of time and content. The total number of messages students posted for the course was 1094. The least number of messages a student posted was 35 while the most was 127. (The main reason for the student who posted significantly fewer than others was that he was doing the face-to-face version of the same course at the same time, and this online version was voluntary.) It is important to point out that the instructor posted 274 messages during the four-week period. That was 23% of the total messages posted in the course. The general pattern of how the students and instructor interacted and collaborated was that initially the instructor did a summary and some questions, and then each student would do a summary and post a few questions for discussion, and the other students including the instructor would respond with comments, answers, and/or raise related questions of their own. More often than not, the instructor would post a question and ask everyone to take part in the discussion. However, students could ask questions or write something of their choice that was more personally related to them. They were having a “social talk” (Luo, 2005), which in this case related remotely to the course content.

4.2 Dilemmas of Interactions in Online Discussion: Reflection in and on Action

The students were in constant reflection during the course discussion on what they did/were doing since language teaching and learning was the general content of the course. There were times when a student raised an issue or made a comment that described or inferred a dilemmatic situation. The following themes are presented in this section:

- Content: social or academic
- Style: formal or informal

41
- Learner-centeredness: freedom or constraint
- Vulnerability: privacy and the need to socialize
- Evaluation: How/should the discussion forum be evaluated?

**Dilemma of content: Social or academic**

The commonly held assumption about an academic community is that an academic community discusses knowledge and develop/maintaining social relations. If we look at the academic community from an SFL perspective, the discourse will reveal ideational and interpersonal metafunctions as well as textual metafunctions simultaneously. The relative emphasis of these functions is the issues in the study. The balance of these functions, however, could pose a potential problem that affects student’s participation and engagement in the course. Although community building is one of the legitimate goals in the course outline, dominantly what was deemed as academic or course-related is more legitimate than social/relational interactions. Students voiced their concerns about what the academic discussion should be like. There is no official guideline or examples for it in the larger institutional context. It is usually up to the instructor of each course to set the ‘tone’, which reflects the instructor’s pedagogical approach to the course. At the same time, each student brings her/his own perceptions of the online discussion, which influence and shape the process of interactions in the community. Some students regard the discussion forum solely for academic/content learning.

My experience so far with on line is that it is far superior to f2f. …In a f2f, people tend to group; they sit in the same place, with the same people, and moving is very threatening. I find our discussions focussed and on topic. F2f dialogues between students can easily spin off into tangents unrelated to the content. I think that with clear expectations about how dialogue is conducted in an on-line community, this form of learning is exactly what I want and need right now. (Trish, #5813,)

---

6 All the messages are original.
Trish, a very experienced educator in the public school system, was working toward her Master’s degree. Having taken previous online courses, she pointed out the potential problematic scene in which students’ discussion ‘spin off into tangents unrelated to the content’ in a f2f classroom. Students bring their situated ideals to the forum. The message shows that Trish regards ‘focus on topic/content-related’ as a norm/ideal: important criteria for her satisfaction. She also expressed her ideal that an online community should have ‘clear expectations about how dialogue is conducted’, though how dialogue should be conducted did not become explicit in her discussion. She might be indicating that there should be, but there were not concrete criteria in the course guideline.

Some students felt the need to socialize but with the dominant notion that only academic content was legitimate. When they did socialize, they felt awkward, ashamed, or embarrassed to do so. Although in this course academic or social/relational legitimacy was never explicitly discussed, the instructor’s modeling and the community norm showed positive attitudes towards a wide range of topics, and encouragement toward community building. Still, when students did ‘social talk’ (Luo, 2005), they sometimes felt that it did not belong in the discussion space, and felt apologetic to the other fellow students in the community. The following message was posted towards the end of course. Dustin started by commenting on another student’s PowerPoint presentation. Then he wrote:

First off I am kinda bursting at the seams today because yesterday was a pivotal moment in my life that I would like to share. When my first child was born I …[He continued with his telling of his story].
Well yesterday at the ultrasound we found out that our baby to come is in fact a girl. I am still floating because of the news because now I feel I am complete as a husband father and person.
Sorry to put this here but I feel that I know you all so well and I could share.
Ok back to business [He returns to the discussion topic.] (Dustin, #6610. Note: explanation added and shaded.)
Dunstin obviously felt comfortable and compelled to share the ‘pivotal moment’ in his life with his fellow online classmates, but his uneasiness is evident, too. In his mind, the story was not
appropriate for the discussion space, plus he might have concerns of wasting others’ time if they were not interested in his story. His action of telling his story and his immediate reflection of his own action indicated that this is a dilemma between what conceived to be ‘right and legitimate’ and what is socially needed. Yet, he felt that he must tell the ‘online community’, because “I feel I know you so well…”

Negative terms are used to refer to other interactions than academic content-related. This indicates that social/relational interaction is not legitimate and is not valued as much. In the following example, Mona explicitly evaluated the important social functions of the ‘digressions’ played.

People seemed more willing to express emotions towards discussion topics, ideas, and towards each others. For example, Shi-yi expressed her feelings of encouragement at my comments on her name. Others related amusing narratives or jokes which the postings of others had triggered. While these “digressions” do not contribute to the content development of our course, they greatly added to the social climate of our community. (Mona, assignment #3)

This term ‘digressions’ was used by Mona to point out that it was those interactions unrelated to the course content ‘greatly added to the social climate of our community’. The fact that she was aware that this term was used to refer the social and non-academic interactions indicates that although the social aspects in the online discussion forum were caste in a negative light. Yet, the students obviously enjoyed the socializing aspects of the discussion, and knowing that it was the ‘social talk’ that fundamentally built the connectedness among them, and provided the sense of community in the online course. The following posting represents how most of the students felt about their online community.

Hi Everyone -
I really enjoyed working with you over the last three weeks. Thanks for being so supportive and encouraging. I really felt part of a community. I hope we "meet" again soon!
Warm wishes,
Nina
(Nina, #6629)

This posting demonstrated that Nina’s perceived ideal online environment is ‘supportive and encouraging’, and being ‘part of the community’, which she felt comfortable to work within.

**Dilemma of style: Formal or informal**

In the culture of higher education, it is a commonly held value that academic writing should conform to certain standards. Academic writing is theoretical and formal. It is a constant concern for the students how their writing is evaluated by the instructor, or viewed by other students (Tracy, 1997, Spiliotopoulos & Carey, 2005). Explicit in this posting is the sense of longing for the lack of interpersonal communication, and unmarked guilt for using ‘unacademic’ emoticons. Implicitly, the message contains a negative and devalued meaning of the emoticons. Mona expressed a contrary feeling of a need to use something more interpersonal and a need to explain the reasons to justify her using them.

I find that non-verbal communication in the forms looks, gestures, stances, and even tone of voice are all absent online. Often, I feel that my comments are so sterile that I put a lot of "unacademic" happy faces at the end of them just to soften them. :) (Mona, #5803)

Debbie wrote to the instructor about her concern for her writing style.

I hope it is acceptable that the first assignment I will submit will be a rather rambling discussion with myself, very colloquial, and very conversational in nature as I debate the pros and cons with myself of online versus face to face courses. Secondly, the SLA theory paper will be a little more formal and a little more grounded in theory. (Debbie, #6660)

Debbie’s message illustrated the typical concern about the style of writing: is it academic enough so that marks would not be taken off in the evaluation. Although the instructor never commented or explicitly provided certain criteria, it took some time for students to establish a community norm, with the instructor’s frequent posting and examples of summary and comments. I, new to the online learning, was concerned that my writing has to be formal, essay-
like with theory and depth. But I noticed that it lacks the features of being interactive, such as open-ended questions. It took some time for the students to settle on some community social norms partly co-established by the instructor’s examples.

**Freedom/ flexibility and constraints/consequences**

Social constructivism as a learning theory has many implications in teaching. One of them is a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered. This change brings a shift of teacher’s and learner’s role. The course instructor promoted a student-centered atmosphere as stated in the course overview and approach. Online discussion forum provides some kind of vacuum, particularly at the onset stage of the course, and allowed the process of establishing the online learning community in terms of choice of topic, research interests, community norms, and communicative styles. Some people find this shift of responsibility both challenging and beneficial to their learning. But this may not be seen as such by everyone in the course. Students have feelings of uncertainty at times, frustration at others. There could be many possibilities for the ‘freedom’ regarding to what one can do, as well as the possible unpredictable consequences.

On a personal level, I find the virtual environment for learning far more satisfying than synchronous f2f methods. I have more autonomy as a learner in this environment. I find it challenging. Given a point of inquiry I don’t have to wait for the right answer to be delivered, I can explore it myself, ad I have the flexibility to relate it my particular interest areas. I feel less confined by content.” (Trish, # 6199)

Trish points out that being comparatively autonomous presents challenge as well as the freedom to suit her interest. Debbie, as a first time online learner, was uncertain if the ‘freedom’ is a good thing.

As for comparison with face to face, I think we are given much more responsibility for our learning, and much more freedom in where the "class" discussions will go online, for better or for worse. (Debbie, #6511)
Nina commented that when “instruction and learning is not entirely structured and controlled by the instructor, I feel I'm more likely to take responsibility for my own learning' (Nina, #6518). Dustin found the unpredictability of the social behaviour in an online community hard to live with. But he obviously enjoyed the freedom of sharing.

Online participating in discussions was probably the worst and best part of my online community experience. From the positive side it was an opportunity to share learn and create things together with a larger educational community. You could post many things related or unrelated to the coursework and feel like everyone was there with you. From a negative standpoint you could post messages that went unanswered and feel like you didn’t belong and no one was listening. (Dustin, assignment#3)

The freedom of autonomy and responsibility underpins the importance of motivation and engagement. If the student is intrinsically motivated, the learning community may not be as important; however, if a student is not motivated to learn, then the learning environment needs to be supportive and engaging to ‘attract’ them to learning. The students were keenly aware of the responsibility that came with the ‘freedom’- constructivist approach as student-centered structure. This implies that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is needed to engage the students in the interactions socially and academically.

**Vulnerability and the need to socialize**

The issue about vulnerability was explicitly expressed as a concern in the online discussion. On the surface, it can be seen as a medium related advantage as discussed in the following.

You are simply free to explore your thoughts and let others respond to them, or not. This freedom allows for more vulnerability, as you can be free to explore different ways of representing yourself with words, without the intimidating feedback of being cut off, or being talked over, or simply not being noticed…

I regret (in a way) the fact that I portrayed myself from an outside point of view when writing my autobiography, as I felt I threw all my fears and insecurities in front of everyone in the first few days. I wrote how I was afraid others saw me, and how I assume others see me because of past experiences. I realized how heavily my image has
influenced my reflection and projection of myself, and how I really don’t know how to project myself or my intelligence any other way. (Debbie, assignment #4)

Debbie talked at length about this new medium related freedom and her feeling vulnerable because of revealing her personal life to ‘strangers’, and how this freedom of projection oneself can be seen as both advantageous and/or not so.

During the discussion, Mona observed that this class ‘seemed more willing to reveal themselves’. She wrote, “I felt that the members of this class seemed more willing to reveal themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, because environment was so nurturing” (#6644). Here Mona was saying that because of the community was nurturing the classmates were more open to sharing their life stories. It is human nature to seek the sense of belonging. The students wanted to socialize and to belong; yet they worry to certain degree about their insecurity of identity and privacy. Social boundaries sometimes seem to restrict us from delving too deeply into a person’s background and personality too quickly, for fear of infringing upon their privacy.

Hi Dustin, hi Mona,
Interesting to know about the procedure of audition. I think it is a good idea. I agree too that in cyberspace we tend to be more truthful and honest about who we are. I think also because BB provides a forum that is different from inclass discussion. Partly it is because of the content and nature of this course that we have come to know each other better and more. Although at times, I felt abit uncertain about letting invisible people know me this much. I felt a bit vulnerable. This is my first time writing a bio. Maybe I could share it with my kids, and see what they say.
Jana (#6611)

Here Jana reflected upon the content and nature of the course that may have contributed to the narratives on personal experiences, and to this feeling of being vulnerable, and she revealed her dilemma on this issue: course goal and her willingness of letting ‘invisible people know’ her that much. The next message from Mona illustrated the dilemma from a different perspective. Since construction of knowledge is a collective social activity and could not be done without students’ investment, should we be honest and get involved?
Online, since the emphasis is on communication, there are much greater opportunities to learn more about others. Nevertheless, this is only true if learners are active and honest participants within the community. Otherwise, we can also end up knowing nothing about each other…Needless to say, the learning environment is far richer and more valuable when the members of the learning community are invested, academically, socially and emotionally. Learning is greatly facilitated when class members work as a team to build up their knowledge together. (Mona #5803)

Mona expressed the contrary themes in her thinking: it is important to be ‘active and honest’, but one runs into a risk of insecurity; or one can keep uninvolved, resulting ‘knowing nothing about each other’ or no sense of community developed.

**Evaluation: Should discussion be evaluated and by what criteria?**

As part of the course evaluation criteria, participation was counted as 20% of the course mark. Some students expressed that the forum discussion as a piece of collaborative work should be evaluated, as it was in the course. Then the question is how it should be evaluated, and based on what criteria. Bill was doing his very last course required for his MET program. In his narrative chronicle of his online courses experiences, he reflected on his courses done before the present one, wondering how exactly evaluations were done, and what the criteria were.

What were they looking for? How would I know if I was on track? These unknowns made every online course experience for me a nightmare. I would finish a course and pray I posted enough and that what I posted was considered valid.

In addition to feeling alone I was always stressed about the evaluation part of the discussion forum. How much presence was enough? How was it possible to know what a good posting was? How would this affect my mark? (Bill, assignment #4)

Evaluation is a primary concern for most students: grades are still one, sometimes the only one measure for credits. Bill was concerned about the quantity and the quality standard of the discussion forum. Although the course overview and approach (Appendix A) outlined that “20% general quality and quantity of your online participation in discussions throughout the course”,

49
Bill seemed to need more specific criteria for the evaluation of the discussion forum, such as the quantity of the social presence, and the criteria of a good posting.

4.3 Summary and Discussion

In this chapter I have presented the immediate context that the Asian-Pacific Narrative Course was situated, and the contrary and dilemmatic themes that surfaced in students’ reflections in their online discussion and course assignments. From the instructional design to the approaches used in the course, it demonstrated that the instructor Dr. Philips promoted student-centered learning and community building. First, Dr. Philips scheduled the activity of writing autobiography at the beginning of the course so that students would have a chance to get to know each other within a very tight time frame. Paralleling with the community building, he also promoted collaboration and social interaction by assigning each student a leading role for one part of the reading material. He also provided students with summary examples and different roles in the learning community. There was neither specific requirement nor criteria for the writing style or topic choice though the instructor posted a high percentage of messages to guide the directions of the discussion. This learning environment generated motivation, facilitated community building and provided opportunities for authentic content-oriented discussions (Rovai, 2007, p. 79).

Based on the dilemmatic themes appeared in students’ reflections and its immediate course context, there are some conflicting phenomenon that needed some scrutiny. The discussion will relate to the research questions, results and the literature review. For dilemma of content: social or academic, there were nowhere in the course documents or discussion data that showed any constraint on topic choice or policing the content being discussed in the forum. That means the immediate course context did not pose any of the limits on this aspect. Where does the tension between academic and social come from?
The dichotomy of emotion and abstract intelligence is deeply rooted in the Western civilization. Plato’s view of knowledge and intelligence, and that abstract knowledge is epistemic and intelligence means the ability to manipulate abstract ideas (Eisner, 1998, p. 39) have been dominating the mainstream educational ideology. From Billig’s dilemmatic perspective, students’ reflections about what they believe and what they think appropriate contain contrary ideological values (Billig, 1988, p. 8-9). Dustin’s posting #6610 indicated that only academic/content related discussion are deemed legitimate while social/emotional expressions are not appropriate for the academic forum. Dustin’s posting clearly illustrated this dilemma. On one hand, he wants to share his important moment in life and he feels that this is appropriate since the classmates know each other very well; on the other hand, he believes that the academic discussion forum is not a place for this talk that is unrelated to course content. The preoccupation of the larger ideology, which values academic more and tends to regard social as ‘the other’, interacts with natural human social need. Thus Dustin tells his story anyway knowing that his “friends” understand, and then he apologizes for his ‘inappropriateness’ in the posting.

The dilemma of writing styles has been a constant concern in several studies (Luo, 2005; Yim, 2006), especially for new online learners. They face more challenges than others: not just the course content, but issues of identity and social needs. Spiliotopoulos and Carey (2005) in their study of students’ writing and their development of identities in WebCT bulletin board argue that there is a positive connection between asynchronous discussion writing and students’ participation, motivation and their identity development. Although issues of what the writing styles to use are not totally new to students who have the experience of f2f classrooms, they are in a different process/context in an online course. The first time online learner Debbie’s posting reveals her concerns about who she is, her status as a student, and what she knows as a ‘standard
academic writing’, which consist of certain linguistic and generic features that can be recognized as ‘academic writing’. In this course there is no requirement regarding to the writing style in the discussion forum, and the course instructor’s example was somewhere in between academic—email style with occasional typo. Still, Debbie feels embarrassed and nervous about her lack of theory and features of academic writing because she is influenced by her knowledge in the high education context and her experience of taking other courses in the institution.

The nature of writing style is not only students conform to the standard academic writing norm, but the students’ attempt to negotiate a style that meets their social and academic needs. Mona laments the absence of all the non-verbal dimensions in human interaction online. Out of her desperately need to mend the lack of other social dimensions; she makes them up by using what she terms as ‘unacademic’ emoticons. This linguistic phenomenon can be regarded as an online users’ strategy to accommodate their needs. Obviously they enjoy the socializing aspects of the discussion, and knowing that it is the ‘social talk’ that fundamentally built the connectedness among them, and provided the sense of community in the online course. This process of negotiation in discourse will be analyzed and discussed further in chapter 5.

To a certain degree, the issue of vulnerability in this course can be seen as a course related phenomenon because of the required assignment of autobiography. The activity is designed to enhance the learning of course content, and at the same time provides a better way to establish the sense of community. The discussion of this issue reveals the conflicting of multiple goals: institutional, personal, academic and social. For instance, Mona expresses her academic ideal for construction of knowledge that requires community of learners’ active involvement and contribution. The academic goal and its ideals are in conflict with the cultural constraint and personal feelings on privacy - the uneasiness resulting from some students’ disclosure more than what they feel comfortable with.
Another aspect of this issue concerns the construction of online identity. Debbie is more concerned about how her projection of herself in her autobiography. Students’ concern of their identity and privacy interacts with the activity goals in the institutional context and personal cultural and/or personal constraints cause this dilemma. Research has shown that disclosure is a concern expressed by students in online discussion. The issue of privacy and disclosure was explored in Liang’s study (2006) on how narrative online affects social presence. It is found that students are aware of this issue but not overly concerned (p. 132). She finds that the degree of disclosure is positively related to the degree of social presence in her study. It was noticed that disclosure in a community signifies the level of sense of social presence and sense of belonging. Although social presence is not the focus of this study, the evidence in the data was consistent with the results in Liang’s study. Self-disclosure (Gunawardena, Nolla Wilson, Lopez-Islas, Ramirez-Angel, & Megchun –Alpizar, 2001) constitutes members’ social presence, which is vital for the creation of a learning community. Reflection on personal life experience promoted further self-disclosure, critical reflection and social relationship building.

Grading the discussion is generally recognized as a way of motivating students to interact. However, there are other considerations regarding to this issue. Bradshaw et al (2005, p. 210) in their study of the development of online communities for the students on Master’s-level report tension in assessing the learning and contributions in the discussions. They consider giving students marks for their contributions in the asynchronous discussion, yet they are concerned with the authenticity of the discussion being affected (p. 211). In this course, the evaluation on the discussion participation weights 20%, which is in the range for an effective extrinsic motivation according to the findings of the study by Rovai (2003), in which students responded well to the requirement of 2-5 postings daily. Another related issue is the criteria for discussion expectations. Bill expressed a need to know the criteria for what was considered a
good posting. Rovai suggests that the course should provide students with clear expectations of what is expected (p. 79). Yet, in the Biesenbach-Lucas’s (2003) and Yim’s (2005) studies, some specific expectations were provided such as number of words per posting and content restrictions, they hindered rather than facilitated the interaction. The problem indicated that the criteria should be more analytic that ‘help students become more thoughtful judges of the quality of their work’. He provides a sample of scoring rubric including aspects of quantity, content, questions, collaboration, tone, and mechanics (Rovai, 2007). In this course, there were no clear written criteria for the discussion forum: no words limit, or content restrictions. Dr. Philips provided ample examples of his postings\(^7\) that served as samples or standards for students. The overall reflections in the data indicated that the contrary themes and dilemmatic issues were to a larger extent affected by the negotiation process of the different discourses from the social and cultural context.

\(^7\) Dr. Philips posted 247 postings, 23% of all postings in the BB for Course Asian Pacific Narrative.
Chapter 5
NEGOTIATION IN ACTION: BUILDING RELATIONSHIP THROUGH
ATTRIBUTION

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the students’ negotiation processes in online discussion focusing on the research question ‘How do the students negotiate and manage a balance between ‘construction of knowledge’ and ‘community building’ in their discursive community? What are the strategies used to achieve their social and academic goals?’ This part of the analysis focuses on one of the resources for evaluation – attribution\(^8\) (White, 2003). The analysis attempts to provide discursive perspective on how students negotiated their social/relational needs as well as academic goals. One of the strategies used in students discourse negotiation stood out: the use of attribution. It describes how one of the interpersonal resources – attribution was used and its specific functions in the online discussion forum. I present the interactions in action - what students do in online discussion forum, focusing on how they negotiate content learning and relational interactions through attribution.

In chapter 2 the theoretical framework, I introduced SFL and its essence of how language constitutes social processes and what is enacted wholly through language. This interconnectedness between social life and language provides a way to see how language is used, and for what purposes. In examining the text produced in this course, one of the major strategies used to maintain coherence in the online discussion is by asking questions, and presenting issues; seeking response, and offering opinions (looking at the questions and answers). The turn taking is not important here in asynchronous discussion, rather following the ideas in the discussion is

\(^8\) Attribution is part of the Appraisal Theory, which, within the systemic framework, has been developed by Martin, White, and colleagues.
more important to keep the discourse coherent (Herring, 1999). In this chapter, I’ll introduce the functions of the attribution followed by findings and a discussion.

5.1 Functions of Attribution in Asynchronous Discussion

Martin (2004) categorizes Appraisal Theory into three interacting domains: attitude, engagement, and graduation. The three domains provide a functional perspective for better understanding towards ways people use language to evaluate and negotiate in their social interactions. Engagement, coined by White (2003) as intersubjective stance, is a grammatically diverse grouping that “provides the means for speakers/writers to take a stance towards the various points-of-view or social positionings being referenced by the text and thereby to position themselves with respect to the other social subjects who hold those positions.” (p. 529). Engagement is based on Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia, which means “all verbal communication…is ‘dialogic’ in that to speak or write is always to refer to…what has been said or written before and simultaneously to anticipate the responses of actual, potential or imagined readers/listeners” (p. 261). White then divides this grammatical group into two distinctive categories: utterances that engage with dialogic alternatives - heteroglossic engagement; those that do not - heteroglossic disengagement (p. 262). Further, heteroglossic engagement has two sub-types: ‘dialogic expansion’, alternative positions as possible or likely; or ‘dialogic contraction’, those tend to close down or contract dialogic alternatives.

This interpersonal resource has also been studied by another group of scholars in the field called English for Specific Purposes. Referencing or citation is considered to be part of the interactional rhetorical elements, which include citation, reporting verbs, praise and blame, promotion, hedging and metadiscourse (Swales, 2001). Hyland (2000) categorizes attribution
into three features: integral and non-integral\textsuperscript{9} structures, and the role of different reporting verbs (p.22). Those elements reflected in the writing styles indicate the intertextual knowledge and social relationship in its context.

The patterns of attribution are closely related to the social activities and community context. Attribution is one of the ways of introducing other voices into the discourse and is the intersection linking between content learning and interpersonal meanings in the discourse. In other words, I’lI be discussing how the sense of community is construed in text, and how the students’ use language to open up dialogic possibilities in promoting interaction in asynchronous academic discussion.

5.2 Weaving the Content Learning and Community Building with Attribution

Based on the categories and characteristics from White (2003) and Hyland (2000), the interaction through attribution can be illustrated in the following aspects:

1. Overt reference to specific other texts/postings by using names and possessive noun phrase
2. Copying part of previous postings as a message linkage cue/direct quotations of others’ posting
3. Integral or non-integral forms of citation
4. Characteristics of the processes used

The following are examples from the data and their analysis to show how the students’ use these devices to negotiate and meet their social and academic needs.

1. Overt reference: address names and possessive noun phrases

The most obvious way of introducing other voices into the discourse is to explicitly refer to what others say or think about the topic under discussion. Strategies used such as explicit

\textsuperscript{9} Integral structure means the name of being cited author is in the citing sentence; in non-integral form the name appears in parentheses (Swales, 1990, p. 148).
reference includes quotation, copy and paste from the previous postings, the mentioning of author/writer names. During this course, it became normal in the online community to mention classmates' name both as address name at the beginning of the postings and/or in the middle of the postings as reference cues to questions, ideas, or comments under discussion. The community member address names, possessive pronouns and/or noun phrases were commonly used. Below are a few examples to demonstrate these strategies. Notice the first names, possessive pronoun phrases and possessive noun phrases were shaded.

Hi Jana,
I agree with Debbie: we tend to be more transparent in an online community. Our autobiographies, however, may have been more unique and unusual if we were able to create something more tangible, or perhaps more visual. (Nina#5783)

in response to Jana's questions

Could the issues of power be avoided by being neutral and objective?

I don't believe we are ever able to remove our perspective from anything we touch. Whatever you study you also change. How we interpret the words of others will be based on the vision we possess about the topic influencing the narrative. (Justin#5831. Font style and format are original; the font color for the question was red.)

In these two examples above, first names appeared in the address, in citing sentences, before copying the question. Possessive pronoun ‘our’ was used to refer to the course activity and unspecified entity: our perspective. The social function of using ‘our’ to refer to the online learning community is to align the reader as one of ‘us’, an insider. This inclusive strategy is used to strengthen the sense of belonging and social togetherness.

Hi Debbie,
when we open our experiences to others, we have to be prepared for their interpretations of those experiences (Mona # 5728)

When I read this, I was concerned that I might be stuck in adolescence, because I am not sure if a birth has occurred from my struggle or not. I was so moved by reading about Ming's struggle with language, Mona's struggle with identity, and their (I think) heroic endings to their autobiographies. I don't know if I could ever come to a conclusion with an autobiography of mine, as I feel like I am in a constant struggle and
face constant loss (in the sense of the text). I kind of like it that way too. (Debbie#6050)

In the examples student summarizes other’s postings or generalized previous postings’ ideas into noun phrases like ‘their interpretations’, ‘Ming’s struggle with language’, ‘their heroic endings’ and so on. Summary and generalization can be explicit but mostly implicit. The following examples contain the specific ideas and general reference.

hi,

your comments on music are very interesting. My husband's family is very musical although neither of us are. My son began guitar lessons when he was five. He is now 14 and math is his favorite subject, and he loves to play chess. He is currently enrolled in three music classes; last year he began learning the French horn, and this year he is taking Band, Strings, and Jazz Band. Interestingly, he has had speech difficulties over the course of his young life - if he is excited he is still difficult to understand. (Patty #5977)

As I have been reading the many discussions on this site, I realize that I have to start being a much more active participant...by the time I've mulled over what I might want to say, I see that so many more messages have already been posted! (Shawny#5794)

I'm really enjoying reading everyone's comments. (Shawny#5794)

Patty’s response to the previous discussion on music and its effect on people’s intelligence was linked by this possessive pronoun phrase ‘your comments on music’. It is very specific about which/whose posting and what idea she was talking about. While Shawny’s reference of ‘everyone’s comments’ and ‘the many discussions on this site’ are not explicit in either what ideas, or whose postings, it referred to a plural group of comments by member of the learning community in this discussion forum. Socially the more specific reference indicated a closer social relationship than vague reference that doesn’t provide either the author or specific material.

In WebCT, the platform used in this course, each topic was in a different thread. The postings on each topic resemble something similar to turn-taking when first names are almost always used first, and content is consistent with the immediate previous postings in each thread.
The posting were coherent and very personal: the knowledge from the community bounces around among the community members.

2. Copying discussion questions or quoting others’ postings

In a threaded discussion system, in order to keep the flow of the topic, students commonly used a copy and paste strategy to inform the reader that they were ‘talking’ about this question or something related to this posting. Often these copied parts were displayed by different font color and/or in a separated paragraph. These visual cues resemble question and answer format in a test. They were easily recognized at the first glance and readers knew right away what was discussed in this posting. For example,

Language is uncommunicative of anything other than itself. Without words the experience cease to exist. (is this really true?)

Not all languages come with words. What I mean is that a language is not equal to words. Language can let us express the feeling or experience as real as possible; therefore, I would think without words the experience still can be existed. We can see that ancient people didn’t have words but they drew on the wall or on the slate to express something. Even though some experiences are extremely difficult to speak about (Riessman, 1993, p.3), there are many ways of expressing experience; for example, when we travel a place, we can use camcorder or use drawing to record/present our experiences. Such as, many psychologists like to ask patients to draw a picture instead of answering questions-sheets in words. (Shu-yi #5714. The font color of the quoted question was originally red.)

Having taken online courses before, some of the participants in this course were familiar with the online learning environment. They brought with them some commonly used strategies or norms from other online forum experiences. In this posting, Shu-yi, as a seasoned computer user in her job and had taken some online courses for two years prior to this one, used a different font color and a separate paragraph to distinguish the copied question from her own discussion on this topic. In this way, readers can tell the different ownership of the two parts, and what to expect in terms of content under discussion. In the example below, the cue of separate paragraph was used.
Jana,
I think you did a great job of summarizing this chapter for us. I’m a little late getting in on the discussion, but here are my thoughts anyway.

Could the issues of power be avoided by being neutral and objective? Is it necessary in Riessman view that these issues open up for readers to see? Why?

I think that issues of power can never be avoided in our research, especially if we tend towards qualitative methods in general, and narrative in particular. We cannot be wholly neutral and objective as researchers because we too are human subjects that bring our pasts to the fore with whatever it is that we are approaching for analysis. While this can be certainly problematic, if we are upfront as to our agendas and biases in our research, then we are showing how our interpretations (though well-grounded) are connected inextricably to who we are as a human subject, and not the distant unknown researcher. I believe, and I’m sure many would agree, that it is just as important to know about the investigator as about the subject being studied. (Shawny #6007)

In this posting, Shawny started with a positive appraisal of Jana’s summary. Then she copied one of Jana’s questions for discussion in a stand-alone paragraph to signal the content of discussion in her posting. Another commonly used strategy is to quote directly, not to summarize or paraphrase, from a previous posting to support the idea under discussion.

Hi Debbie,

You mention the idea of advantage and motivation for learning a second language.

"I didn't have a lot invested in learning a new language; I am an ESL teacher and can do my job well ... I also have legitimacy as an ESL teacher simply because I have blonde hair and blue eyes... I am no more of a legitimate ESL teacher (or typical Canadian) than she; we both come from immigrant families and were both born with English as our native language, but I would probably be awarded more legitimacy as a teacher by the students and parents in most foreign contexts . Fair nor not fair, it is often the way it is."

I think it was I who was referring to the question of my "true" nationality... :) I think that you're right in that your legitimacy as an ESL teacher would not be questioned whereas mine may be...
(Mona#5879)

Mona shared her thoughts on what Debbie previously posted by inserting Debbie’s writing in between her own writing: it made clearly who was writing to whom; what Mona was commenting about. This example has a quality of conversation’s turn-taking. This inserted quotation, serving as a coherent cue, like two people’s exchange in a conversation. This strategy
of copy and paste type of quoting attributing ideas and keep discussion coherent became one of
the dominating strategies in this learning community. It not only served as coherence device by
providing visual attribution, but also was highly dialogic and interpersonal.

3. **Integral or non-integral forms of citation**

According to the definition by Swales (1990), integral forms of citation use the author’s
name in the citing sentence, which gives greater importance to the cited author than a non-
integral form where authors names appear in parentheses (Hyland, 2000). Explicit names in
integral structure were used for quoting the classmates or community members, rather than
authors in areas of studies under discussion. The non-integral form was found sparingly in the
data and was used more to demonstrate the source of the citing than following any restrictions
from the course requirement; when the publishing date was missing, it might be that the students
not having it handy, did not check it out because of the degree of formality for the discussion
was relatively lower than academic essay writing.

Examples of integral form used:

In the book, *The Millionaire Next Door*, authors Thomas Stanley and William Danko look
at correlates that unite all millionaires. The average millionaire in America does not have
British ancestry - despite the fact that just before the American Revolution, most of
America's wealth was owned by people who either were born in England or who were the
offspring of English parents. (Nina#6058)

Another example:

The challenge that Lightfoot’s examination of adolescents seems to indicate that any
group of people need to be viewed from the perspective of what they bring to the table
(experiences and psychological). Adolescents are going through both an inner and
exterior battle with the development of their self. In the case of many other groups of
tellers and listeners we must examine the perspectives and the histories that have
impacted their personal development of self. (Bill#6038)

In the first example, Nina was introducing a book by Stanley and Danko in discussing the
question of nature versus nurture. Instead of using the conventional APA style of citation for an
academic paper, Nina used a sentence including the names of the book and author. Lightfoot is
the author of the textbook used in this course. In this context, the name was used in the citing sentence without any parentheses for any other information because the readers in the community would know who the author was. The example below shows that the student was connecting her experience with theory in education. Since Vygotsky and his theory of ZPD were commonly shared knowledge in this learning community, Shawny didn’t show the source or date for the information.

Maybe as a child, I absorbed what seemed evident based on the above, however, as I matured and lived my life I had cause to consciously learn about my culture, particularly as it differed from others. I suppose interaction outside of my culture was as important is interaction within my culture in understanding myself and where I come from. Vygotsky’s ZPD and ideas of apprenticeship learning and scaffolding information are very applicable, I wonder though if apprenticeship and scaffolding have to come through interaction with people who are physically present? can we not interact within ourselves and scaffold ourselves as new experiences layer upon older experiences? (Shawny, #6030)

Some students seemed to adapt a way of citing that is both integral and non-integral. The example by Trish was unique in the way that she introduced the book with author’s name and date for publishing in parentheses, which is more formal than just author’s name. In addition to the citing, at the end of the posting, she listed the full information for a formal list of reference. This is one the few cases that full reference information were given in the same posting. Trish was one of the few who provided a reference list after a discussion in this course.

I found an interesting book a few years ago, Born to Rebel by Frank J. Sulloway, (1996). He has an interesting proposition regarding birth order. He posits that eldest children identify with power and authority, they like to boss, and they tend to conform to the social order. Youngest born tend to question the status quo and in some cases develop a ‘revolutionary’ personality. He says that factors such as gender, temperament, parent-offspring conflict, and parental loss (among other things) shape ‘sibling strategies’ that are aimed at maximizing parental investment. It is an interesting read and provides an alternative to the notion that youngest children are needy and dependent upon others. He uses a historical context and draws upon his study of Darwin to examine the revolutionary’ mind set and origon.

Sulloway, F. (1996). Born to rebel: Birth order, family dynamics, and creative
Below is another non-integral form of citation. It didn’t follow the APA style requirement: the name of the book appeared in the parenthesis.

The online medium has been referred to by some as "the great equalizer" (Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace, Pratt, 1999). "We can create, cultivate, and maintain social relationships with anyone who has access to a computer. Connections are made through the sharing of ideas and thoughts. How people look or what their cultural, ethnic, or social background is become irrelevant factors in this medium..." (Pratt, 1999)

More often, students use the author’s name in the citing sentence with the source, which is usually a name of an article or book, shown in the example below. Although the discussion forum postings were not academic essays, which require reference with APA style, students felt that there was a need to refer some source or scholarly context to situate their writing. They adopted this form of referencing by putting the author’s name in the sentence with the source like the one below.

Ryuko Kubota talks about that issue in her article "Critical multiculturalism and second language education" in the text Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning by edited Norton and Toohey. She talks about liberal multiculturalism and pluralist multiculturalism, one which tries to point out our universality, one which points out our differences, both of which she sees as racial stereotyping or oversimplifying the concept of race. (Debbie#6111)

The most commonly used form of attribution is an integral form in the data. The first name, specific postings, or certain ideas are used in the citing sentence to reference community members and contextual knowledge in the learning community. Here are some examples:

Debbie’s response reveals a couple of interesting issues here. We feel less uncomfortable when making ourselves vulnerable to strangers. Both online and face to face can be the case: people one never meet or know before. In this sense, online or not does not make a difference. (Jana#5793)

When Bill mentioned his teaching about salmon, I cannot help recalling a video clip
that I received from a friend. (please see the attachment) 
(Shu-yi #6159)

I also agree that affect can elicit stimulus responses, but I guess it may depend upon the person whether or not it works the other way around. Like Dustin mentioned, distraction works better on one of his children more than the other. Similarly, my baby cousin is notorious for being able to laugh and cry at the same time. She cries A LOT because she is quite sensitive and is easily upset. However, when her mother laughs at her crying, she gets confused, and starts laughing and crying at the same time. What is her affect then? (Mona#6233)

However, in reflection, I see that I was not taking into account the issues of power, authority, and the backgrounds and contexts of the students. My assumptions about the children actually realizing their authority on their culture may be incorrect. Also, as Dr. Philip mentioned, I was not taking into the account the wide differences within the African American culture itself. (Mona#6237)

My opinion on the aboriginals sits more on the outside of Chandler and al. article. Although the colonial process has been very destructive to their life and culture, like Patty pointed out, their cultures are still distinctively different Euro-Americans. They may have a different way of looking at the persistence of self, though not really illustrated in the article. (Jana#6595)

In these messages, Debbie, Bill, Dustin, and Dr. Philip were members of the learning community. They were cited by other community members for their previous contributions in the forum. Jana found some issues in Debbie’s response and extended the point under discussion. Bill’s recount of his teaching experience prompted Shu-yi to recall a video which she attached for the whole class to view; Mona found her support for the theory from Dustin’s example; Mona also agreed with Dr. Philip at her missing one important factor for the divergence of African American culture. The data shows that the integral is used in almost all the explicit references of the classmates; non-integral structure is limited to course materials and authors. Weaving the postings and community members in the form of integral reference made the inner-connection in both knowledge and relationship. Below is an example of how motivation for inquiry was propelled into motion in the discussion forum. Patty expressed this
kind of knowledge connection and her interpersonal closeness in her posting. She was prompted to read Bakhtin because of Jana’s comment on post-modernism at the beginning of the course; and now after reading Bakhtin’s essay Patty realized that it was connected to the issues discussed at the beginning of the course and textbook of the course. The use of an emoticon after the address name added visual expression that is missing in text-only medium. The conversational casual way to start the posting showed the interpersonal relationship in the community: sounded like friends chatting, about academic topics.

Thank-you Jana :) 

Isn't it funny, because I was prompted to read the essay on Bakhtin because of your initial posting on post-modernism. Reading this essay pulled me back to the beginning of the course and the Reissman book. (Patty#6606)

4. Characteristics of the processes used

Reporting and quoting processes are important aspects of attribution. Holliday (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004, p.260) identifies six major categories of processes: material, mental, verbal, behavioural, relational and existential. Among them, two of the processes are more commonly used in this data collection: verbal and mental processes. Mental process refers to thinking, sensing, wanting, and feeling processes. And verbal process gives voice to our thoughts such as ‘say’, or ‘remark’. The mental and verbal processes are reporting or quoting.

There are other theories about how to categorize the processes. According to Thompson and Ye (1991), reporting verbs can be categorized by writers’ personal stance or attributing a position to the original author. So the writer may represent the reported information in one of the three ways: as true (acknowledge, point out, establish); as false (fail, overlook, ignore); or non-factively, giving no clear signal. The third position potentially
provides the writer with a possibility to ascribe a view to the source author, reporting the author as positive, neutral, tentative or critical (Hyland, 2000, p. 28).

![Evaluation of reporting verbs](image)

**Figure 5.1 Categories of reporting verbs**

The data shows that there was a lack of using processes. Students predominately used possessive noun phrases, possessive pronoun, and copy-paste type of attribution strategies. This led to fewer processes used in the discussion forum. Within the limited collection of the processes, the most used processes found in the postings are verbal processes, which were *say, mention, state, point out*. They are organized in the table 5.1.

**Table 5.1 Most frequent used processes in data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental process</th>
<th>emphasize, see</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal process</td>
<td>State, say, talk, explain, mention, question, report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural</td>
<td>post, write, refer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following are some examples to demonstrate the most typical use of processes.

You said, "Now, I think it doesn't matter whether it's dual or more identities I perceive myself because I am a global/international citizen. I don't want to draw the imaginary boundaries." I think that is an interesting insight. (Mona#5658)

Riessman explains that Bell's participants interpreted their experiences together with the listener through narration (p. 34). (#5856)

We both reported (#5808)
Say, explain, report, and mention are verbal process; emphasize is a mental process; post is a behavioral process. Verbal process was favored in this forum because of its neutral stance for the writers when referencing other members of the community. Since the attribution of knowledge was mostly focused on the community members’ contribution, the processes used were mostly factive; if non-factive, they tended to be neutral or positive rather than critical. In their attempt to be polite and supportive, students chose to be more objective than subjective as shown in their choice of the processes. Students tended to position themselves away from the ideas they were promoting, presenting, agreeing with. Shu-yi quoted Shawnee’s previous posting on this topic by using the verbal process that is neutral though Shu-yi used Shawnee’s posting as a support to her own experience. Debbie cited Shawnee to support her claim on the narrative analysis as a legitimate approach in research. The process used was verbal and non-factively neutral.

Face to face meeting could be an additional advantage for this type of imaginary class; especially for those who are not get used to this completely text-based seminar, they should be given the opportunity to meet their colleagues. I remembered my 1st online course in 2002; I was very timid to post my thoughts on the forum, even though I am a talkative personal in real life. Like Shawny stated, “there is no evidence of my presence on-line. Sometimes I wish to simply "take in", but then the other members of the community cannot sense my presence.” I was hoping I could have occasional meetings with some other classmates at that time. (Shu-yi #5816)

I think narrative analysis will be as legitimate as any other scientific analysis in its own time, I think it was Shawny that mentioned that as well, and about Riesmann being a good example. (Debbie#6218)

5.3 Summary and Discussion

This chapter demonstrates the students’ discursive examples of their usage of attribution in the discussion data. It examines the aspects of referencing strategies including overt reference with first names, copy and paste with color font and spatial cues, different forms of citation, and characteristics of processes used. I analyzed the students’ examples by focusing on their linguistic choices, discourse strategies and the social functions. It attempts to answer the second
part of the research questions: how students negotiate to meet their learning and social needs; and what strategies were used to achieve their goals with a focus on providing how the students interact in the online community—linguistic and discursive strategies.

The community members addressing each other by first names and the popular use of possessive pronouns pattern show that the interaction was highly interpersonal, and they are important devices in keeping the discourse coherent, more importantly, in the establishment of the community, where the writers’ ideas were recognized and valued by being mentioned, or copied and discussed in the community forum. It is recognized that naming is generally used to create alignment (Baym, 1996, p. 335); possessive pronouns have spoken language quality, informal, and highly conversational and interactive (Jeong A., 2006). Through attributing community members’ names and their ideas that can enhance reciprocal responses, students promoted their social presence and building their relationships.

The characteristics shown in the data echoed the results from some studies (Rourke et al., 1999; Baym, 1996; Topcu 2008, Robertson, 2000), in which they found addressing students by name and using the reply feature were the most frequent strategies; the use of referential tracking such as linking, quoting, and copy-paste helps to keep the discourse coherent. The feature of addressing fellow students by their first name has more significance than just keeping the discourse coherent. The high rate of addressing by first name, possessive noun phrases, and possessive pronoun phrases positively co-relates to a high social presence and student agency (Rourke, 2000). Using first names in the postings provides more opportunities for personal interaction and helps to establish and enhance the interpersonal relationships in the learning community (Luo, 2005, p. 183).

Contrary to the academic writing conventions in which referenced messages are mostly presented as summaries, not as direct quotation (Hyland, 2000, p. 26), the data contains large
amounts of direct quotations, copied and pasted questions and comments. This may be evidence of the norms of formality in this online community, and/or a medium-related phenomenon.

Copy and paste type of quoting is highly dialogic and interactive because it resembles the turn-taking in a conversation (Davis and Brewer, 1997). When the questions were being copied and discussed in the community, it recognized the role of the student in leading the discussion; furthermore, it gave the credit to the student’s effort of providing the questions for discussion. The discussion itself validates the knowledge/content of the question.

Although there are well-established rules and conventions in academic writing (e.g. APA style manual), the data shows that there are many different ways of referencing in the asynchronous online discussion, which carry different rhetorical and social meanings. Hyland (2000) points out that citation helps to define a specific context of knowledge or problem to which the current work is a contribution, and it also helps to situate the discussion in the context of the community (p. 22). When students were introducing the field of knowledge and perspectives, they place the reader into the context of the discourse. When they were referencing other students in the discussion forum, they form a knowledge and relationship network that plays an important role in community building.

The dominant use of the integral form of citation and frequent referencing community members indicated that the knowledge construction was highly contextualized within the course community. Non-integral form’s rare occurrence in the data indicates that the defined specific context of knowledge such as the course content and related discussion in the forum was more community centred and commonly shared. It may also due to the lower formality of the writing style in the forum.

The lower frequency in the use of reporting verbs and fewer formal citation patterns demonstrates that the knowledge is focused on the immediate reading material, topics and issues
at hand. Writers did not need to elaborate a context through referencing as authors do in a research articles (Hyland, 2000, p.31). The fact that the verbal and behavioral processes were favored indicated students further distance themselves with their citations and ideas presented. More distance provided students with the room needed if there was a disagreement, or misinterpretation. This finding is reflected in the result from the study by Rourke (2000), in which it is noted that most students prefer the online community to be ‘professional’ and ‘somewhat distant’ (p. 87). The data contains mostly supportive responses and agreements, some disagreements. Debbie at one point lamented the lack of debate in the forum. She wrote,

“What I wish is that people would challenge each other more on-line, ask for explanation when you think something is strange or unsupported, but that could get pretty heated I guess. Might be fun though!” (# 5897).

The attribution strategies involve multiple and interrelated aspects of the online forum. The data analysis on the referencing strategies used in this course indicated that the course context was facilitated toward community and knowledge building for the students had the freedom to write the way that was acceptable in the community, and the norms were shaped by community members, not dictated by the instructor’s regulations, although it was guided by the examples provided by the instructor. Another factor that contributed to the formation of the community norms were the learnt behavior from other online contexts, particularly from other academic courses taken by the students in their previous experiences.
Chapter 6
CONCLUSION

My central purpose of this study was to investigate how the tensions and conflicts pertain to the interactions and learning in the online learning community and to illustrate some linguistic and discursive features of the online academic discussion. By examining the discursive data, and by looking “beyond the texts of interaction to the broader contextual dynamics that shape and are shaped by those texts” (Warschauer & Kern, 2000, p. 15), this qualitative case study explored two aspects of the online discourse: the dilemmas in the students’ reflections, and their negotiation by using attribution. The study aimed to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the dilemmas, if any, that graduate students encounter as they participate in a communicative situation such as in an online academic discussion?
   a. Social relational topics versus content learning
   b. Academic versus informal writing styles
   c. Freedom/ flexibility and constraints/consequences
   d. The enjoyment of socializing/ concerns over the sense of community versus the feeling of vulnerability and insecurity
   e. Whether or not to evaluate an online discussion forum

2. How do students negotiate among those contrary themes in their discursive community?
   What are the strategies used to achieve their social and academic goals? How do students use referencing as a linguistic strategy to open up dialogic possibilities to promote interaction in asynchronous academic discussion?

   This study was approached through Systemic Functional Linguistics, which views language and its context used as socially situated and functionally interconnected. Thus the
analysis of the asynchronous learning discourse was focused on the function as a learning community in reaching the students’, the instructor’s and the institutional goals. Through qualitative analyses I demonstrate evidence that support the notion that there are dilemmatic elements in students’ reflection and action concerning the issue of content/cognitive learning and social/relational needs. The data suggests that the configuration of the discourse involved both action and reflection processes as social practice, and discursively ranging on the continuum between the ‘interpersonal’ and ‘academic’. The students’ use of attribution strategies suggested that this online asynchronous forum was very successful in terms of engaging students in establishing the sense of community and knowledge construction.

The dilemmas in students’ reflections indicated that there were many factors that influenced their learning process including:

(1) The contrary values in educational ideologies influence students’ opinions on issues of content/cognitive learning and social/relational needs.

(2) The dilemma of academic or informal writing styles went beyond the issue of confirmation to the standard of academic writing norm. It involved students’ concern of their identity and their negotiation of a style that could meet their multiple needs.

From students’ reflections, we see that there are different layers of discourses that interacting simultaneously. The students entered the discourse of the academic institute with their own learning goals and social needs. They brought with them the online experience, personal dynamics and beliefs. The complex interplay of ideologies in education, program context, and students’ agency demonstrated that the text produced by students on the discussion forum needs to be considered as a process rather than products.

This study suggested that online learning community is a dynamic and complicated process. As the findings shown, the larger context of culture influenced how the students
responded to the issues of social versus academic topics and the choice of writing styles. The immediate institutional culture including the time frame for the course, the evaluation criteria, course activities and the instructor’s input directly affected students’ motivation and negotiation of their identity, community norms, social presence and other factors in the learning community. One thing worthy of mention is that in this forum, the students did enjoyed much freedom and control. They decided whom and which topic they would respond to. They also chose how much to write in those postings from one line to pages, as well as what questions they would pursue. The threaded system in the computer was a helpful feature in the way that enabled the students to trace the topic and to form turn-taking structure.

The dilemmatic aspects revealed in the students’ reflections also indicated that any given learning community contains individuals who have competing discourses and interests within themselves. This makes the community a dynamic and ever-involving process. For example, some students expressed very different expectations and ideological opinions regarding the content of the forum: pure academic versus social-academic. For some students, an academic forum should be academic only; while for others it could allow social relational content along with the academic because it aids learning according to the socio-cultural theory (Wertsch, 1985). The dilemmatic aspects could be a cause for some misunderstandings and tensions in an online learning community.

The second part of the study examined the referencing strategies in the online discourse. The referencing strategies served the following functions:

- The citation features defined a specific context of knowledge such as the course content and related discussion in the forum.
- They demonstrate the relevance and importance of the embedded community-generated literature.
The copy and paste and address names used showed that students were constantly engaged in making the discourse coherent.

They demonstrate students’ agency and their strong social presence.

The variety of strategies used in this forum indicated that the course context allowed the choice and space for the community to negotiate its norms.

Those functions and features used in this forum reveal that students had a wide range of freedom to use the linguistic and discourse strategies to support their learning and social goals. They chose the time, place and topic to engage in the online discussion. They used what they had learnt from their previous experience, adapted to the present community to open up dialogic possibilities in promoting interaction in asynchronous academic discussion. The characteristics of the linguistic and discursive strategies showed that the interaction was highly interpersonal to create alignment and enhance reciprocal responses. The features shown in the analysis not only served as a coherence device but promoted students’ social presence in the learning community. Together the students and the instructor shaped the community discourse and the learning environment. The findings on the research questions demonstrated that the discourse community should be viewed as a complicated process of negotiation.

Through the examining of the online learning process, particularly focusing on looking at the social interaction and course environment as “knowledge is created within, and determined by, the social environment in which it is experienced” (Anderson & Garrison, 1995, p. 184), this study indicated that affective and social aspects may play as large as a role as critical thinking and other cognitive aspects in sustaining interaction and promoting deep learning (Biggs 1990). The analysis conducted through this study provides some insight into the process of establishing an online academic learning community in the higher education context and a better
understanding of the online discussion discourse as learners negotiate a common ground of linguistic and social norm in establishing their online learning community.
References


Bishop, A. (2002). Come into my parlour said the spider to the fly: Critical reflections on web-based education from A student's perspective. Distance Education, 23(2), 231-236.


Scarece, R. (1997). Using electronic mail discussion groups to enhance students' critical thinking skills. The Technology Source,


Appendix A

Overview and course approach

Course description: The study of Asia-Pacific intercultural narratives and their role in the pedagogy of culture, ethnicity and identity as they pertain to language and literacy education.

This course examines the emergence of narrative story construction as an increasingly influential and integrating paradigm in language education. Participants will get hands-on experience with narrative methodologies by writing autobiographies, by analyzing them, and by participating in online discussions with partners. The field of narrative as inquiry has developed rapidly in the last decade and now subsumes a multitude of orientations. In this course we will delimit this field to a consideration of narratives which may include interview material, ethnographies, autobiographies, and literary works such as novels, poetry, plays, film and other media including multi-media. Particular attention will be paid to autobiographical memory, self-narrative and identity development and construction as well as the “Narrative Turn” and interpretations of language learning and teaching experience. Recent advances in narrative research methodologies will be examined, particularly those qualitative approaches which focus upon interviews and other autobiographical sources of data. Each student will be expected to:

1. 20% Write an autobiography and post it on the bulletin board as soon as possible.
2. 20% Summarize and critique an assigned chapter and post this summary on the bulletin board along with 3 questions to stimulate discussion of the article with other students. All students are encouraged to participate in the discussion of each assigned chapter summary.
3. 20% Discuss the constructivist approach to language/culture/content learning and develop a personal theory of SLA based on your autobiography, prior and present readings and experience.
4. 20% Evaluate the effectiveness of online discussions and learning as compared with conventional face to face seminars for language/content teaching.
5. 20% General quality and quantity of your online participation in discussions throughout the course.

Course Objectives:
This graduate seminar will encourage you to:

- develop an appreciation and understanding of diverse methodologies for conducting narrative inquiry.
- consider intercultural narratives as effective resources for teaching courses in language education.
• become familiar with qualitative methods of data analysis associated with language education.
• develop a critical understanding of the concepts of inter-culturalism and multiculturalism.
• develop your appreciation of narratives and their role in expressing language and cultural identities.
• learn how narratives on online interaction can be used as pedagogical tools to promote intercultural appreciation.
• familiarize students with the theories and methods used in studying computer mediated communication (CMC).
• Develop a personal theory of how languages/cultures are acquired.

This course requires minimal computer literacy. The computer support for this course is through an electronic bulletin board incorporated into WebCT’s courseware. Many of the readings are deposited or linked to this site http://www.webct.ubc.ca. A more detailed explanation of how to access and post messages will be provided online.

Course approach:
This course begins with your writing an autobiography with a major emphasis on your language education. Your autobiography should start with your first memories of language(s) spoken by your parents and other relatives in your home and neighborhood and with family friends and relatives. These earliest memories may also include language delivered by technologies such as radio, TV, or including musical recordings and church services and choirs. Although initial memories about these early childhood and pre-school language experiences may be sparse, as you begin to write about your kindergarten and primary grades other pre-school language memories may come to mind. As you proceed to write about your language education during elementary and secondary schooling you should try to remember and evaluate first or other language experiences that were most salient and led to your development and appreciation of languages and cultures. As your autobiography proceeds through school years, relate and evaluate experiences from school, home, play, vacations, family travels and any other exposures you had to languages and cultures. In particular, try to remember which courses in first or other languages at school were productive in your learning and appreciating languages. You should describe which language experiences throughout your education (whether formal courses or other opportunities) were the most productive in your acquiring your first or other language. As you proceed with this autobiography of your languages experiences you should also develop an interpretation of which experiences were productive for your language learning and which language approaches in your opinion have been the most productive in terms of teaching languages. From this you should develop your personal philosophy of how languages should be learned and taught in the most productive way. This personal theory of how languages can be taught/acquired should take into account which courses or language exposure were most unproductive and which approaches were productive whether or not they were within schooling or outside of schooling.
This course, which is a three-week summer program, is very intensive in the readings and the interactive discussions on-line. Students must do the required readings for each day and are expected to actively participate in discussing, critiquing and reflecting on each reading on that day. Each student will be assigned a chapter to summarize and critique and to post this summary/critique on the BB on the scheduled day. Your chapter summary/critique posting will count for 20% of your course grade.

Students will be required to develop their personal theory of the optimal situation for language learning based on their reflections on their autobiography, reflections on the assigned chapters and related reflections on the BB. The posting of this personal theory will be worth 20%.

In the first part (the initial week of the course), we will seek to understand the theoretical foundations of research methods used in narrative approaches to language education. We will approach this understanding through an intensive reading of Riessman's text on narrative methodologies. During the first days of the course, students will be required to post their autobiography regarding language learning and teaching on the Bulletin Board forum (written). The online discussion will comprise a major part of the course participation for evaluation. After the first week, we will then proceed with the assigned chapters from Daiute, Colette & Lightfoot Cynthia (2004) following the schedule below.

**Online chapter Presentation:**
After the third class, each student will make an individual online presentation which will lead to further discussion online. Each student will be expected to:

- summarize an assigned chapter and prepare a presentation of this assigned chapter and post this on the bulletin board.
- Post three questions to initiate discussion of the chapter and be ready to lead a discussion and to answer questions by the members of the class or the instructor.

**Course activities and grading**

Grades in this course will be determined as a weighted average calculated from the performance on the following criteria:

- Posted autobiography: 20%
- Posted chapter summary: 20%
- Posted reflection on personal theory of learning: 20%
- Evaluation of online learning compared to face to face learning: 20%
- General quality and quantity of your online participation: 20%

In this online seminar, it is of overriding importance to encourage participation, interaction, cooperative learning and above all to encourage dialogue which is interesting to each participant. Consequently such a philosophy requires that participants receive credit for their participation. Unlike conventional seminars, there is a record of the participation of each student. It is possible to defensibly grade this on-line narrative. This participation will be analyzed both quantitatively by such measures as
the number of participations, the diversity of topics and qualitatively in terms of creativity, depth of knowledge, insights and further dialogue stimulated by the intervention. This will account for 20% of your final mark.

**Schedule of classes and assignments**

- Students will be expected to read the assigned readings, generate questions, and be prepared to discuss each session in detail in online seminars.
- Students will be required to post a minimum of 2 thoughtful messages on the Bulletin Board forum each day and a maximum number of postings for any student each day shouldn’t be over 5 messages for a balanced and well-formed discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>July 26</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Posting autobiography as soon as possible and on-line discussion of Riessman's introduction &amp; ch. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>July 27</td>
<td>Riessman, introduction &amp; ch. 1</td>
<td>On-line discussion of posted autobiography and Riessman, ch. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>July 28</td>
<td>Riessman, ch. 3</td>
<td>On-line discussion on autobiography and the chapter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>July 29</td>
<td>Daiute, Colette &amp; Lightfoot Cynthia (2004)</td>
<td>On-line discussion on autobiography and the chapter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Editor’s introduction (p. vii – xviii)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1. The role of imagination in narrative construction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2. Fantastic self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>August 2</td>
<td>BC Day</td>
<td>On-line discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3. Cultural modeling as a frame for narrative analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>August 4</td>
<td>1.4. Data for everywhere</td>
<td>On-line discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>August 5</td>
<td>2.1. Construction of the cultural self in early narratives</td>
<td>On-line discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>August 6</td>
<td>2.2. Creative uses of cultural genres</td>
<td>On-line discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Schedule of classes and assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>August 9</td>
<td>2.3. Positioning with Davie Hogan: stories, tellings, and identities</td>
<td>On-line discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>August 10</td>
<td>2.4. Dilemmas of storytelling and identity</td>
<td>On-line discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>August 11</td>
<td>3.1. Narrating and counternarrating illegality as an identity</td>
<td>On-line discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>August 12</td>
<td>3.4. Culture, continuity, and the limits of narrativity</td>
<td>On-line discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>August 13</td>
<td>Wrap-up and evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services and Administration
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</th>
<th>DEPARTMENT</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carey, S.</td>
<td>Language and Literacy Educ</td>
<td>B04-0386</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT

UBC Campus

CO-INVESTIGATORS:

Gallant, Jenny, Language and Literacy Educ; Liang, Kristy, Language and Literacy Educ; Morgan, Tannis Luise, Educational Studies

SPONSORING AGENCIES

TITLE:

Interviewing Online Students

APPROVAL DATE

04-07-16

TERM (YEARS):

1

AMENDMENT:

Nov. 9, 2005, Co-PIs

AMENDMENT APPROVED:

NOV 17 2005

CERTIFICATION:

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
by one of the four

Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair,
Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.
**Amendments:** (Complete items 9, 10, 11, or 12 only if different from the previously approved application)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9. New Co-Investigator or Student:</th>
<th>10. New Co-Investigator or Student:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surname: <strong>MORGAN</strong></td>
<td>Surname: <strong>GALLANT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given Name(s): <strong>Tannis</strong></td>
<td>Given Name(s): <strong>Jenny</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Rank: Ph.D. student</td>
<td>Academic Rank: M.A. Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBC Faculty / Department: Education/LLED</td>
<td>UBC Faculty / Department: Education/LLED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone number: 6047651729</td>
<td>Telephone number: 2507512573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email address: <a href="mailto:tannis_morgan@yahoo.com">tannis_morgan@yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>Email address: <a href="mailto:jenny_gallant@hotmail.com">jenny_gallant@hotmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. New Title:

12. New Funding Agency or Company: Grant application number (if available):

13. Describe any changes to the study.

Do not use this form if the research described in the original application has been completed. Similar research must be submitted as a new proposal on a new Application for Ethical Review.

Do not use this form to change the Principal Investigator. Submit a new application with appropriate original signatures.

**Full Board Review of an Amendment:** If the amendment involves new procedures that do not meet the ‘Minimal Risk’ criteria, this form and a copy of the original application must be prepared for full board review and received prior to the meeting deadline. New procedures that must have full board review include those that involve: a sensitive topic, action research, deception, initial contact by telephone, database linkage with identifiers, oral or passive consent, minors (less than 19 years of age), those unable to be fully informed, and videotaping.

Co-investigators will code existing data.
Annual Renewal or Declaration of Completion

14. Number of Subjects Admitted to the Study to date:

15. Progress report: Provide a brief summary of the progress of the study. (Note the Tri Council Policy Statement indicates in Article 1.13 that, "Continuing review should consist of at least the submission of a succinct annual status report to the REB. The REB shall be promptly notified when the project concludes.")

A Request for Annual review should be submitted before the anniversary date of the original approval.

Declaration of Completion: Annual renewal is not required if the researcher will have no further contact with subjects for the purpose of data collection or research (e.g. for follow-up or verification). Renewal is not required to analyze data or write a paper. Before the Certificate's Expiry date declare to the REB, in writing (by letter, email or this form), that the remaining research no longer requires certification because all data collection procedures described in the previously approved project have been completed.

Please note that the researcher is obligated to continue to adhere to all stipulations regarding the use of and confidentiality of the data described in the original application and, will not use the data for other research purposes without application to and approval by the UBC Research Ethics Board.