SECOND LANGUAGE SPEAKERS' PARTICIPATION IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED DISCUSSIONS IN GRADUATE SEMINARS

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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant trends in higher education in recent decades is the growing interest in online education. Considering second language (L2) speakers' reticence in academic oral discourse, which has been a recurring theme in the field of second language acquisition, examining L2 students' socialization into academic online discourse has particular urgency. In exploring how different forms of instruction shape L2 students' class participation in academic courses, I examined: (a) how students understood their participation in online forums as revealed by interviews and an examination of their online discourse; (b) how various factors constructed their identities in face-to-face and online learning communities; and (c) how L2 students assumed participant roles in online discussion activities. Two online graduate courses were examined for a semester in a large Canadian university, using qualitative case study methodology. Data included written questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, online Bulletin Board (BB) texts, and course documents. Using activity theory as a conceptual framework, I analyzed L2 students' participation. The results, in turn, helped me identify the framework's inadequacies, such as downplaying the role of students' agency in appropriating academic discourse. A unique contribution to educational research, furthermore, is the method developed here for analyzing participant roles on the BBs.

Two online courses, seemingly similar to each other in the way that they both used the online BB as a means to discuss course reading materials, fostered differing levels of register, engagement with other participants, comfort, and participant roles among students. The BBs in the two courses were a mediating tool with which students

could exercise agency in their learning process, and L2 students, in particular, could gain more power over course-related discourse than the face-to-face setting allowed. The findings from academic online discourse also suggested that educators can apply some of the key lessons learned from online education to conventional face-to-face classes and vice versa.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As always, I send thanks to my dear family, friends and colleagues at UBC. And a special thanks to Andrew Jackson, a good friend in Australia, who has patiently observed my lonely journey, believed in me more than I did and encouraged me to continue.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Universities in North America have become more cosmopolitan, and the presence

of second language (L2) speaking students in academic classes is no longer an exception,

but the norm (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002; Mohan, 2001).[1] As part of the admission

requirements, L2 students who enter universities must demonstrate their language

competence by achieving high TOEFL scores. Nevertheless, as an L2 student, I have

experienced difficulties and frustrations in actively participating in academic oral

discourse. Speaking to other L2 students over the years, they have mentioned to me

similar difficulties and frustrations. What seems to be most disconcerting to these L2

speakers (including myself) is articulated by Hofstede (2001) as follows: "Native

speakers of English, especially when they are themselves monolingual, are tempted by

the fallacious assumption that what foreign speakers can express in English words is all

that the foreigners have on their minds" (p. 425). This study addresses issues and

concerns about these L2 students' participation in higher education classes.

A major change in higher education in recent decades is that views of learning

have changed from learning as *passive reception of knowledge* to learning as *social*

practice and *participation* (Johnson, 1995; Lave and Wenger, 1991; van Lier, 2001;

Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Sfard, 1998; Wenger, 1998). This new view emphasizes

learning as *doing* in instructional activities rather than the simple transmission of

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[1] L2 students include both international and immigrant students. Even though L2 speakers can include speakers of any other languages as second languages, in this study I use the terms L1 students and L2 students to refer to students who speak English as a first language and second language, respectively. The terms, native and non native speaking students have been used occasionally for L1 and L2 students when I refer to other studies that used these terms.

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knowledge from one party (i.e., instructor as an expert) to another (i.e., the student as novice). When learning is viewed as the process of becoming a competent member of a community in order to effectively participate in various activities, *mutual engagement* is an integral part of the practice (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997; Sfard, 1998; Wells, 1999; Wenger, 1998). In other words, social interaction and a relationship between members of a community become the fundamental source of learning (Smith, 2001).

The emphasis on learners as social beings has been adopted by the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) as well, and a growing literature explains language learning in terms of the learner's relationship with the social context rather than the individual learner's abilities and aptitude (e.g., Duff, 2001; Mitchell & Myles, 2001; Morita, 2002; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; van Lier, 2001). This study tries to explore L2 students' socialization into academic discourse by relating it to the current trend in higher education described above. SLA literature has extensively documented L2 students' challenges in academic courses (Casanave, 1995; Duff, 2002; Harklau, 2000; Jones, 1999; Leki, 2001; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Mason, 1994; Miller, 2000; Morita, 2002; Morita, 2004; Prior, 1995; Toohey, 1998; Toohey & Day, 1998). Those studies discuss how L2 students, particularly from East Asian countries, have difficulty participating orally in academic courses. Successful participation in academic discourse requires not only linguistic ability but also the adoption of sociocultural and academic norms in the target culture (Duff, 2001; Mohan, 2001). As Kramsch (1993) puts it, "Even if they have mastered the form of the new language, they might still have difficulty in meeting the social expectations of speakers from the new speech community" (p. 43).

Another significant trend in higher education is the growth of online education, and instructors increasingly turn to the Internet to supplement or replace conventional face-to-face instruction (Boer & Collis, 2002; Fenwick & Parsons, 2000; Gabriel, 2004; Goldberg, 1997; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Russo & Campbell, 2004).[2] This transition of the learning environment has triggered much research into the effects of online education on students' outcomes. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to how online education accommodates the needs and concerns of linguistic and cultural minorities in academic classes.

This study explores how the use of different communication tools shapes L2 students' class participation in academic online courses, specifically their engagement in the asynchronous online discussion space known as bulletin boards (BBs). A bulletin board is a Web-based system by which users can view postings, download desired items, and post messages or notices of their own. Another commonly used term is electronic (or online) discussion forums, which will be used in this dissertation interchangeably with BBs to refer to the "interactive" communication space in Web-based courses.[3] Although I acknowledge Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998) use of *participation* as a broad concept to cover not only activities but the process of learning in general, this study focuses on participation as learners' verbal engagement (either written or spoken) in discussion activities of conventional face-to-face classroom and online learning settings.

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[2] *Conventional face-to-face classrooms* include classes where instructors use a variety of instructional methods or styles which may look "unconventional" to some eyes. Conventional face-to-face classrooms in this study refers to classrooms where a major channel of communication is face-to-face and oral based, as opposed to computer mediated.

[3] The term *interactive* here refers to the aspect of *interactivity* that involves verbal or nonverbal communication between entities who recognize each other and does not necessarily indicate the degree of interactivity.

This study explores the characteristics and conventions of the online learning environment, how L2 students interpret tasks of online communication and how their interpretation is manifested in their activity on the BBs. *Conventions* refer to implicit/ explicit rules or expectations of practice. According to Ochs (1993), membership in a community "depends on members' knowledge of local conventions for building social identities through act and stance displays" (p. 289).[4] Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate how discourse communities make use of BB and (re)create local conventions, and how these conventions are shared and transformed. I also explore factors that either inhibit or facilitate L2 students' participation.

As an extension of this inquiry, I examine the participants' roles as manifested by the perceptions of the participants and observation of the online text of the class discussions. Participant roles in this study encompass rights, responsibilities or acts of participants that shape the discourse during discussions (Gremmo, Holec, & Riley, 1977). As Gutierrez and Stone (1997) argue, developing academic competence involves developing various social roles and increasing access to discourse practices needed for knowledge building and full participation in learning events. Expectations of the instructor and concerns of the learners around the participatory system and the differing roles both learners and instructors play in discourse communities constitute the main focus of the investigation in this study.

1.2 Researcher's Assumptions

My assumptions as a researcher were influenced by my personal experience as an L2 student and the language socialization I went through in both face-to-face and online

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[4] Ochs (1993) defines *act* or *social act* as "any socially recognized, goal-directed behavior, such as making a request, contradicting another person, or interrupting someone" (p. 288), and *stance* as "a display of a socially recognized point of view or attitude" (p. 288).

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courses in Canadian and American universities. In many Asian cultures, silence and reticence are considered good etiquette, and students are expected to show respect toward the teacher by being quietly attentive and talking only when asked to. Consequently, there is little interaction between students and the teacher in a classroom, and students are not likely to challenge the teacher's academic authority (Chen, 2003; Jones, 1999; Liu & Littlewood, 1997). As a product of this kind of cultural background, in my first graduate seminar in a Western university, I was bewildered by American students' repeated interruptions of the instructor, which to me seemed abrupt and impolite. It took me a long time to understand the dynamics of oral participation and learn how to engage in the fast flow of class discussions.

However, I did not completely give up my "reserved" attitude because I have always valued such statements as, "A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly" (Pr. 13: 23, New International Version), and "A man of knowledge uses words with restraint – Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue" (Pr. 17:27-28, New International Version). These kinds of maxims have influenced my participation not only in social life but also in academic settings. I limited my oral discourse in classes to seeking clarifications or more information rather than trying to contribute my experience or perspectives to ongoing discussions. Before asking a question in whole-class discussions, I always evaluated whether only I needed to know the answer, or the question could be beneficial to the rest of audience as well. Even with this evaluation and careful preparation prior to speaking, I often felt embarrassed for having expressed my question in a manner that I feared was not clear, logically or linguistically. In spite of my reticence, I slowly gained confidence

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to speak in academic classes, and later in my doctoral programs I noticed a major change in my attitude in academic discussions. When my communication with native English speakers was not understood, I started to blame others' comprehension ability rather than my incomplete linguistic ability.

My first course in my doctoral program happened to have a Web component and used a BB as an extension of class discussion. I appreciated the BB for the way it helped me become more expressive by allowing me more time to organize my thoughts prior to expressing them. I learned a lot from other people's insights and ideas, but I suspect it took longer for me than for other L1 colleagues to digest the posted messages and compose replies. The online discussion activities counted for 50% of the course final grade, but there was no set number of postings required for full marks for online participation. I refused to attempt to get participation marks by simply responding with insignificant remarks to messages posted by others, which I thought some students were doing in that course. As a result, even though I thought I contributed to the BB with quality messages and as a competent member of the community, and received high marks on my final paper, my final grade was compromised by my lower number of posted messages compared with the rest of the students. I could not simply give up my reticent personality even on the BB.

In addition to my personal history in academia, the study's overall research design, including the research questions, was influenced by the following theoretical assumptions:

First, this study is grounded upon an assumption that learning is not merely a product of an individual's given cognitive competence or unidirectional transmission of

skills or information, but involves the participant's ongoing interpretation of tasks and activities within a sociocultural-historical context (Barab, Evans, & Baek, 2003; Doehler, 2002; Wenger, 1998).[5] Second, rules of practice limit individual reaction to tools, community, and roles of participants, and the interpretation of rules or conventions can create tension between these components. Third, dialogue reflects the roles of the interlocutors, and roles change depending on context.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions are explored in this study:

1. How is students' understanding of participation in online forums reflected in both their online discourse and their own accounts in two courses?

2. What factors inhibit or facilitate L2 students' participation in face-to-face classrooms and online forums, and do they shape students' identities differently in these settings?

3. What participant roles do L2 students assume in online discussions in comparison with their observed and reported roles in the face-to-face classroom in the same course?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Most of all, the aim of this study is to bring attention to students in the cultural and linguistic minority in academic classes by examining issues around their participation and presenting their own voices. Even though the shift in education toward online learning is well recognized, little attention has been paid by researchers in either distance education or SLA to its impact on, and implications for, L2 students in academic classes.

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[5] *Context* can be broadly defined as social organization or task environment.

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This study can contribute to SLA and distance education in terms of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Drawing on perspectives from activity theory, this study approaches online learning and discussion activities with a holistic, ecological view by conceptualizing them as a participatory unit of analysis, identifying various components of social practice and examining the relationship between components of the unit. This compartmentalization does not treat each component as an isolated, invariant property but widens the range of investigation of the participatory unit to ask whether (and how) these components come into play generally, and re-situates them in relation to each other in a given context (Barab et al., 2003). As will be shown in the later chapters, however, this study takes a new look at activity theory by emphasizing the agentive nature of individuals in learning, which was overlooked by many followers of activity theory.

Methodologically, this study can contribute to the methods for analyzing CMC texts by proposing a new systematic analytical framework – that is, I examined participant roles on the BBs by associating two levels: the level of *message topics* and the level of *speech functions* (Chapter 6). Looking at discourse as social practice is a newly developed trend in education (Rogers, 2004; Lemke, 1995). In exploring students' participation in computer-mediated discussions, this study analyzed the participation pattern beyond the level of merely counting the total number of postings or average word production. Resorting to quantitative measures of participation such as course grades or the amount of messages limits understanding of what participants are actually doing online and how they perceive their participation and learning. By exploring L2 students' socialization into academic online discourse through a qualitative approach and a

discourse analysis in addition to a quantitative analysis, I try to provide analytic depth to understanding the complexities of learning and the educational context.

I hope that the findings of this study will help administrators or educators in higher education increase their awareness of integrating language minority students and incorporate new understanding into their teaching and assessment practices.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework underlying this study and provides an overview of literature relevant to L2 students' class participation in online education. Current examples of relevant research spanning a range of disciplines, including distance education, educational technology and SLA, are presented.

2.1   Sociocultural Activity Theory

This study draws on sociocultural activity theory as a conceptual framework to examine L2 students' participation in BBs. Sociocultural activity theory provides a conceptual tool to describe the complexities of learning environments and explain the relationship between its various components and also learning outcomes (Barab et al., 2003; Engestrom, 2001; Roebuck, 2000). Choosing sociocultural theory is grounded in the assumption that L2 students bring different cultural, institutional and historical backgrounds to their classroom. The basic idea of the sociocultural approach is to view both the individual and the social environment as "mutually constitutive elements of a single, interacting system" (Cole, 1985, p. 148). Socioculturalists claim that human mental functioning is inherently situated in social, institutional and cultural contexts and determined by historically developed activity (Davydov & Radzikhovski, 1985; Roebuck, 2000). The intimate relationship between individual and social environment is central to both sociocultural theory and activity theory, and they treat the concept of activity as an organizing principle of human behavior (Cole, 1985; Leont'ev, 1978; Roebuck, 2000; Wertsch, 1981; 1991).

Activity theory has its historical origins in Russian psychologists such as Vygotsky (1978; 1986) and Leont'ev (1978). Vygotsky explained activity in the triadic relationship between subject (individual), object (goal) and mediating tools (artifacts, signs, language) as illustrated in Figure 2.1. Vygotsky (1986) emphasized, in particular, language as a mediator of mental and social activity, which is tied to his zone of proximal development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p. 86). Vygotsky (1986) states:

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition. (p. 163)

The above statement conveys two key aspects in learning: One is the mediating function of speech that connects the social level with the individual level. Through social interaction the child's external language becomes internalized and transformed to self-directed mental activity (Wells, 1999). The other is the role of social interaction in the development of cognition, which constitutes the basic idea of sociocultural theory. Vygotsky has been criticized by some socioculturalists for overemphasizing the individual and individual action as the unit of analysis and, no doubt, by others for overemphasizing the social aspect (Barab et al., 2003; Engestrom, 1999; Engestrom, 2001; Wells, 1999).

Figure 2.1: The Basic Model of Mediated Activity Developed by Vygotsky (1978)

Tool

Subject   Object
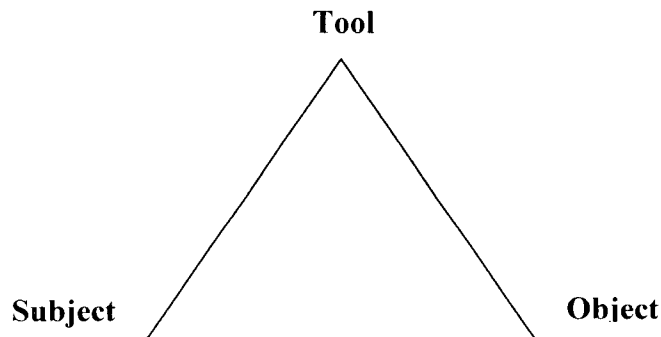
Leont'ev (1978) conceptualized activity as the unit of analysis by categorizing it into three components of a hierarchical system, that is, *activity, action* and *operation.*[6] *Activities* are at the highest level, having goals and being carried out through goal-directed actions at group level. *Action* occurs more at the individual level and is achieved through routinized operations. *Operations* are habitual routines. Applied to one of the courses investigated in this study (educational technology course), it can be said that the *activity* is to understand socio-cultural theory, examples of *actions* are participating in lectures, presentations and class discussions, reading textbooks, composing messages on the BB, etc. and *operations* include typing, expressing knowledge or opinions, manipulating computers, etc.

Engestrom expanded Leont'ev's concept of activity and Vygotsky's triangular schema of mediated activity into a model of a collective activity system (1987, 1990, 1999, 2001). His significant contribution is that he took the model a step further and articulated complex interrelations between the subject and his/her relationship with the larger cultural, historical context of *activities* by adding the components of *rules,*

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[6] The terms *activity* and *action* when not italicized can be understood as general terms without any technical meaning in activity theory.

community, division of labor and *outcome*. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, an activity

system is composed of subject (individual or group), object (or objective, goals of

activity) and tools (signs or artifacts) represented by the top portion of the triangle (the

individual level) and rules, community, division of labor and outcome, which constitute

the bottom part of the triangle (the group level). *Rules* are the explicit or implicit

regulations, norms, and conventions that regulate actions within the activity system. A

community is comprised of "multiple individuals and/or sub-groups who share the same

general object" (Engestrom, 1990, p. 79). *Division of labor* refers to social relations,

roles or object-oriented actions among members of the community, and *outcome* refers to

implications or product of activity.

Figure 2.2: Engestrom's (1999) Activity System Model
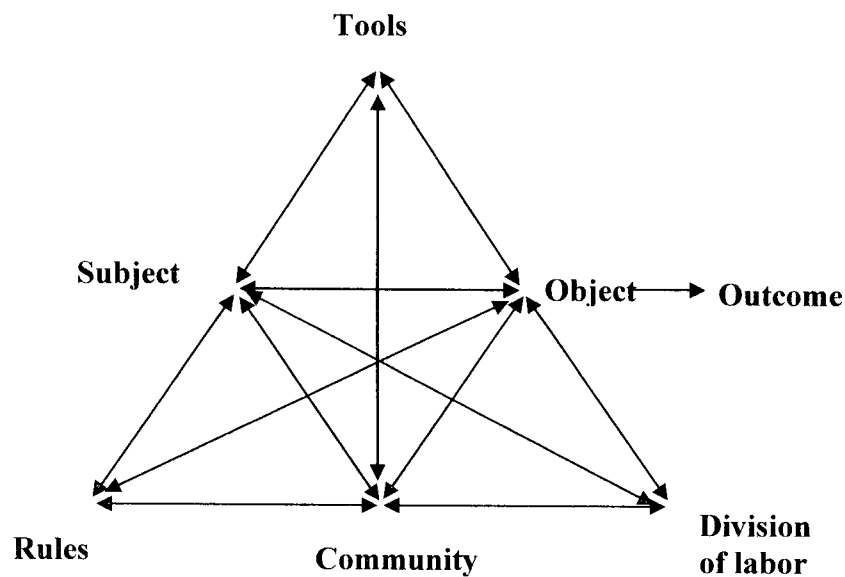
The basic principle of this framework is that the subject's relationship to the

object is mediated by tools, rules, community and division of labor. At the same time,

the components of activity systems are not isolated but interact with each other. To be more specific, an individual is connected to the community, whose relationship is mediated by rules and mediating tools. Additionally, the relationship between the community and object is mediated by the responsibilities and roles the individuals take on in the activity. That is, in order for the common objectives to be achieved, there should be a series of actions and responsibilities distributed among the members of the community (Bellamy, 1996).

Caution needs to be exercised, however, in applying Engestrom's activity system model to learning. In emphasizing the relationship among various components within an activity system, he downplays individual learners' inherent cognition, the relationship between the individual and other member(s), and the transformation they may go through in the learning process. In order to explain the relationship between an individual and other individuals, I suggest we extend the boundary of the community to embrace other member(s) who bring their own personal or cultural background to the community. In spite of these weaknesses, activity theory allows us to systematically understand the complexities of, and the dynamic relationship between, the various components of the CMC learning environment that shape L2 students' participation in the BB. For this reason, and because I conceptualize BBs as communities of practice, I found activity theory a useful analytical lens to describe and analyze BB activity.

2.2   Learning as Participation in Communities of Practice

2.2.1   Defining Practice, Communities and Participation

The concept of communities of practice is taken from the notion of situated learning proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), who viewed learning in terms of social

practice. The concept of *practice* denotes "doing [activities] in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do" (Wenger, 1998, p. 47). *Community*, within sociocultural theory, is a context in which "participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives" (Lave & Wenger,1991, p. 98). According to Wenger, what maintains a community is mutual engagement and joint enterprise by the members who share communal resources such as tools, documents, routines and vocabulary. In a community of practice, members are expected to be involved in a collective process of creation, which entails communal responses to situations. In communities of practice the members interact, negotiate new meanings and share experiences, and therefore practice is a social and interactional process.[7] As Wenger states, communities of practice are "an integral part of our daily lives" (1998, p. 7).

Participation, according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, is defined as "taking part" or "the state of being related to a larger whole" (2002). In her book *Communities of Practice*, Wenger (1998) uses participation to refer to "the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises" (p. 55). Following the same line of thought, Sfard (1998) explains learning in terms of a participation metaphor (PM) versus an acquisition metaphor (AM). Whereas AM focuses on the individual mind and learning as passive reception (acquisition) of knowledge, PM is more concerned with learning as participation. In PM, learning is viewed as participating in certain kinds of activities and a process of becoming a member of the community by taking part and contributing to

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[7] *Negotiation of meaning* here is not merely connected to language but includes social relations achieved through continuous interaction (Wenger, 1998).

"the existence and functioning of a community of practitioners" (Sfard, 1998, p. 6).

Sfard argues that these two metaphors, however, are not mutually exclusive but interdependent in the sense that "the act of acquisition is often tantamount to the act of becoming a participant" (1998, p. 6).

When learning is viewed not simply as the acquisition of skills or information but as a process of gaining a membership in a community or shaping who we are, relations among people becomes an essential part of activity. It is assumed that identity is formed in the process of learning, when a participant makes connections with various parts of activities including other members in their particular community, as summed up by Wenger (1998):

> Participation here refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities (p. 4).

Identity can be understood as "the way a person understands and views himself, and is viewed by others, a perception of self which is fairly constant" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 51). Identity is slightly different from *roles* (something I will discuss further in Chapter 6) in that "one can design roles, but one cannot design the identities that will be constructed through these roles" (Wenger, 1998, p. 229). Speakers can establish identities of themselves and others through verbally performing certain social roles. Due to this entwined relation between learning, participation and identity, it becomes an essential goal of the investigation in this study to address how participants view themselves and how they interpret what they do in class.

To summarize, what sociocultural activity theory and the notion of community of practice have in common is that both emphasize the context and cultural embeddedness

in learning. In addition, learning is regarded as *activity*, the social interaction and process of not only gaining access to intellectual resources but also increasing one's sense of identity as an expert practitioner through mutual recognition in the learning community.

2.2.2 Conceptualizing Communities of Online Academic Discourse Participants

As stated in Chapter 1, this study conceptualizes academic online communities by examining BB activities. The activity system of these online courses are two graduate courses composed of a community of students and instructors, with tools including the BB and written texts and rules regarding how to participate in the BB to achieve common course objectives. It is not easy to describe what distinguishes online discourse communities from conventional discourse communities because there are philosophical and pedagogical aspects involved in these two settings besides physical aspects. In terms of physical aspects, the difference may be reduced to the channel and mode of communication, that is, face-to-face oral communication versus text-based communication mediated by computers with the BB system in it. Bulletin boards are mediating tools that mediate dialogue (mainly academic dialogue) between the students and the instructor or among the students in a course. At the same time, the BB text is a product that the participants of the course create as an outcome of dialogue. Additionally, BBs are community settings which the participants can enter to initiate dialogue, and find and share information and resources.

To become a competent member of an academic community requires learning the conventions of the community, communicating in the language of this community and acting according to its particular norms (Flowerdew, 2000; Mohan, 2001; Sfard, 1998). It may be indexed by "the degree to which students have access to the various social

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roles, discourse practices, and forms of knowledge necessary for full participation in learning events" (Gutierrez and Stone, 1997, p. 124). Swales (1990) uses the term "discourse community" to refer to a group of people who share common public goals and discursive conventions and who operate in participatory mechanisms through the members' interactions. Successful participation in academic discourse for L2 learners is closely tied to the notion of *language socialization* in that it involves a process of negotiating and ideally mastering the sociocultural rules, disciplinary subcultures and discourse conventions that are embedded in and transmitted through language (Schieffelin & Ochs,1986; Schnedier & Fujishima, 1995).

If we assume that social interaction (including interaction in an academic setting) is, as Roebuck (2000) says, "discursive practice through which persons create, express, and position themselves, according to their own sociocultural histories, needs, and expectations" (p. 90), what happens when individuals' values and norms collide with the unfamiliar practices of the new community? Who is included in and excluded from this community when these histories, needs, and expectations of individuals are in conflict with the conventions of the present communities (Pavenko & Lantolf, 2000)? For example, both the L1 and L2 students in my study, who were participating in online academic discourse reported to have experienced confusion and conflict to various degrees. They were swinging from the position of "novice" to "expert" in one course as a result of the discrepancy between their interpretation of tasks and the expected rules and between personal assets they could manipulate and situational constraints that were disadvantageous for them.

There have been two different approaches to the concept of a discourse community and its conventions.[8] One approach assumes that there are a set of rules and conventions that students have to follow, and those rules are mostly generated by the course developers or instructors. The other approach regards the discourse community as highly complex and continuously changing according to local and historical factors, including the relationship between the current members of the community.

Ferris and Taggs's (1996) survey research is a good example of the former type of approach. They surveyed subject matter instructors at different types of institutions across disciplines to ask what the academic oral/aural requirements of college students are. Even though their study provides direct insight into what the instructors' expectations are in a classroom, it raises a question about what they claim as needs analysis or "the needs of L2 students." This question arises because the study was conducted with a large assumption that students' needs are equal to instructors' sets of rules and expectations. Rather than representing students' voices, the researchers tended to treat the L2 students as one homogeneous group without considering the individual L2 students' personal backgrounds or unique situations.

The latter view is well represented by Casanave's (1995) study on L2 students' academic writing. In her ethnographic study of first year doctoral students, Casanave demonstrates how students who are involved in the same kind of writing tasks (re)construct the writing context differently. She attributes these different reactions to

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[8] In her dissertation, Morita (2002) compares these two approaches in terms respectively of a "product" versus a "process" oriented approach. According to her, the productive-oriented approach regards academic learning as the acquisition of disciplinary conventions and skills, treats academic learning as a static or monolithic phenomenon, and therefore focuses on identifying the norms and conventions that L2 learners need to acquire to participate competently in a given academic discourse. She contrasts this with the process-oriented approach which emphasizes exploring L2 students' academic socialization as a multi-dimensional, "complex process of negotiating identities, cultures, or power relations" (p. 4).

"local, historical, interactional aspects of the contexts that writers in academic settings construct for themselves" (p. 88). According to Casanave, these local, historical aspects include the people surrounding the student, the settings in which the student learns, the student's intentions and interest, the intellectual and personal history of the student, and the student's relations with other students. Casanave suggests that we add to the existing discourse community a locally changing dimension that captures its complexity and situatedness in a social context (see also Flowerdew, 2000; Prior, 1998).

In this study, I view rules and conventions of a discourse community not necessarily as a fixed, monolithic set but rather as the source of resistance and change in the process of making sense of tasks and constructing the relationship between individuals and other members of the community. This study addresses how the rules of academic discourse communities are interpreted and how they shape these communities by exploring two online courses. I also examine how the students in these courses interpret the rules of participation and developed discourse communities accordingly over the course term (Chapter 4).

2.2.3 Research on L2 Students in Academic Discourse

According to Cummins (1984a; 1984b), L2 students' language development can be explained in terms of a framework contrasting *basic interpersonal communicative skills* (BICS) and *cognitive/academic language proficiency* (CALP). Basic interpersonal communicative skills refers to "the manifestation of language proficiency in everyday communicative contexts" (Cummins, 1984a, p. 137), whereas CALP has to do with "manipulation of language in decontextualized academic situations" (p. 137). Cummins suggests that language proficiency can be conceptualized along these two continua of

communication depending on the degree of contextual support and cognitive

involvement. According to this model, writing academic articles is highly context-

reduced and a cognitively demanding activity. Cummins makes the point that "it takes

language minority students considerably longer to attain grade/age-appropriate level in

English academic skills than it does in English face-to-face communication skills"

(1984b, pp. 11-12).

As Canale (1983, 1984) indicates, however, Cummins' model does not clarify

whether there is a difference between oral and writing skills in terms of developmental

sequence and level of difficulty. For example, it is not clear whether the writing task is

more cognitively demanding than the oral task in an academic setting. From studies of

L2 students' language socialization, it seems clear that L2 students often have difficulty

in exercising an active role in oral academic practices such as class presentations (e.g.,

Duff, 2001; Morita, 2000; Morita, 2004; Zappa-Hollman, 2002). Duff (2001) provides

evidence that some L2 students may have less difficulty in carrying out academic written

tasks than participating in oral discussions.

The focal students in my study were also more confident in carrying out written

tasks such as BB writing or writing term papers. This may be partly explained by the fact

that these students tended to spend more time reading and writing academic material

compared to the time they spent on oral practice. It is not clear whether their reticence in

oral discussions in class was due to their lack of linguistic ability or other psychological

or sociocultural factors. The answer may be more properly explained by collecting the

participants' voices through interviews and corroborating them with the researcher's

observations of their communication behavior in both face-to-face and online communication settings.

Literature has noted that L2 students, particularly those from East Asian countries, tend to be reticent in taking an active role in academic oral discourse. The major factors noted by the literature to explain this reticence include, insufficient language proficiency, high anxiety, cultural/ educational background and unbalanced power relations (e.g., Casanave, 1995; Duff, 2002; Harklau, 2000; Jone, 1999; Leki, 2001; Liu & Kuo, 1996; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Mason, 1994; Miller, 2000; Morita, 2002; Prior, 1995; Toohey, 1998; Toohey & Day, 1998). Duff (2001), for example, reports that L2 students' challenges are not limited to academic language ability and content knowledge. According to her study of ESL high school students in "mainstream" classes, ESL students demonstrated even higher academic performance than the L1 group with respect to written assignments. What those L2 high school students lacked was knowledge of popular North American culture, current events, interaction skills, and their identities as competent and legitimate participants. As Duff states:

> Therefore, to learn effectively in this context and to become an active member of the classroom discourse community, students' 'social' communication, interaction skills, and cultural knowledge seemed to be as important as their 'academic' proficiency. (p. 118)

Leki's (2001) five-year case study is an example that illustrates how unbalanced power relations between L1 and L2 students can marginalize L2 students in academic courses. Through interviews with a focal group of six L2 students and class observations of academic content courses, she revealed that L1 peers in group activities, consciously or unconsciously, exerted their power over L2 peers, suppressed their voices and

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minimized their roles in group activities, which resulted in blocking L2 students' full participation in the academic discourse.

With regard to L2 students' participation in oral activities at the graduate level, Morita's (2004) ethnographic study is noteworthy. Through the voices of six Japanese female students, Morita captures the complex issues around identity, culture and power. Embracing the locally and socioculturally constructed nature of participation and identity, she emphasizes that L2 students' silence should be looked at not only within their linguistic and cognitive context but in sociocultural and interpersonal contexts of a given discourse community.[9]

Researchers such as Toohey (1998) and Harklau (2000), on the other hand, provide evidence to indicate that the community's stereotyping and lack of understanding of L2 learners may affect their classroom behavior and identity. Harklau, for example, demonstrates how long-term U.S. resident L2 students, who were once labeled as "hardworking" and "highly-motivated" in their high school, become frustrated and even resistant in a college level ESL program through lack of proper support from the institutions. Harklau followed three U.S. immigrant students from their secondary to college education to investigate how their identification and class behavior changed in their new setting. Drawing on data from interviews, classroom observations, and written documents, she argues that those immigrant students were mis-labeled as "L2 students" along with other L2 newcomers and marginalized as a result of a lack of proper adjustment by the institution.

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[9] Identity formation at workplaces that change over time, place and one's relationship with others is well documented in Norton's (2000) ethnographic study.

2.3 Literature on CMC

In order to understand L2 students' participation in CMC, it is important to examine the characteristics of CMC (asynchronous CMC, in particular). After reviewing the attributes of asynchronous CMC, I introduce two case studies by Burge (1994) and Bullen (1998) respectively. In spite of the two studies being dated, I find them particularly helpful in understanding a broader picture of the CMC environment, the potential effects of CMC on learners and the factors that affect students' participation in academic courses. I then review several studies on CMC that are particularly relevant to L2 learners to gain some ideas with regard to implications of CMC on L2 learners in academic courses. Finally, I review some studies which offer a variety of methods to analyze interaction or participation structure in online discourse.

2.3.1 Attributes of Asynchronous CMC

The general attributes of CMC can be described with reference to three major areas: physical setting, tools of communication and mode of communication, as summarized in Table 2.1. These characteristics of CMC are drawn from a body of literature which compares CMC with the conditions of the conventional face-to-face instructional setting (e.g., Collis & Meeuwsen, 1999; Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, & Turoff, 1995; Relan & Gillani, 1997).

Physical Setting

Conventional face-to-face classes take place at a certain time and in a designated place (a classroom) whereas asynchronous CMC is flexible with respect to time and place. Technically, participants have 24-hour access to class discussions and course materials provided on the course Web site. The students can also participate in discussion forums

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in a classroom, at home or at their work place, as long as they can access the Internet. In addition, previous research suggests that the space-independence factor helps reduce the anxiety of learners who may find speaking up in the presence of others intimidating (Chun, 1994; Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Kern, 1995). Research shows that the time- and space-independent nature of online learning provides learners with more time to think about their responses and flexibility in participating in class discussions at their own pace (Bullen, 1998; Kern, 1995; Moller, Harvery, Downs, & Godshalk, 2000). However, it has also been pointed out that the time- and space-independent nature of CMC makes it less engaging than real-time discussions due to lack of personal contact and feelings of isolation (Bullen, 1997). In addition, flexibility in time may result in students' procrastinating about logging-on to the online courses, and therefore CMC has been said to work well only with learners with self-discipline and good time-management skills (Bullen, 1997).

Table 2.1: Summary of the Characteristics of Face-to-face and CMC

Domain	Characteristics	
	Face-to-face Learning Setting	CMC (BB) Setting
Physical setting	Time-specific & space-bound	Time- and space-independence to a large degree
Tools of communication	Mostly one-to-one or one-to-many interaction, may use visual/audio aide, etc	Computer-mediated communication (with Internet access), many-to-many interaction
Communication Mode	Real-time oral-based communication	Asynchronous written-based communication

Tools of Communication

Another characteristic of CMC is communication-mediated activity with access to the Internet. In conventional face-to-face discourse, speakers' turns follow one another sequentially, whereas in CMC participants can exchange messages simultaneously

without interruptions or competing for turns. With CMC, therefore, it is possible for participants to be engaged in "many-to-many communication." Researchers claim that many-to-many communication can provide students with more control over discourse management than in a face-to-face communication setting, where they lack turn-taking strategies or find it difficult to compete with verbally monopolizing students (Kern, 1995; Carey, 1999). As a result, it has been claimed that online communication increases equality through "a more democratic distribution of conversational power" (Kern, 1995, p. 461).

This multiple engagement, however, can cause information overload and possibly lead to redundant information being posted by different group members. In addition, Warschauer (1997) points out that it is more difficult to reach consensus in electronic discussion than in face-to-face discussion, because students tend to generate message after message with the relative absence of regulations or control.

Another unique feature of CMC is its capability for data retrieval. Harasim et al. (1995) emphasized this point, saying that it allows students to review and reread what has been posted as is needed for understanding and retention.

Mode of Communication

Perhaps the most salient difference between face-to-face discussions and CMC is the mode of communication: oral/aural- versus text-based communication. Even though online participants may integrate a variety of audio-visual components to their communication such as graphics or audio, the written text is mostly used as a tool for discussions. Written communication usually requires more explicit and logical presentation of thoughts than speaking. Chafe (1982) states that spoken language tends

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to be more fragmented, whereas writing requires the formulation of ideas into more complex sentences. Unlike speaking, in which one can signal understanding or ask for clarification, writing lacks paralinguistic conventions (e.g., tones of voice, intonation, etc.) or nonlinguistic cues (e.g., gestures, facial expressions, body posture, etc.) (Chafe, 1982; Olson, 1977). Effective written discourse, therefore, as Martlew (1983) argues, requires "operations which require more conscious awareness and complex integration than those needed for spoken discourse" (p. 297).

Researchers who study online text, however, do not seem to agree with each other on whether one should view CMC text as following speech or writing patterns (Ko, 1996; Yates, 1993). Ko (1996), for example, analyzed written samples of university students' synchronous computer-mediated discussions and compared it with prototypical spoken and written data to determine the structural characteristics of computer-mediated language. After analyzing the linguistic features of computer-mediated writing such as use of first/second person pronouns, word length, morpho-syntactic variations such as contractions or "wh-clauses," he concludes that synchronous CMC is more similar to spoken language than written language. However, he adds that to designate computer-mediated language either as speaking or writing has to do with "whether the electronic discourse takes place in non-real time or real time, with the latter being more 'speech-like' than the former" (p. 20). *Non-real time* refers to a situation of asynchronous communication where participants can read and post messages at their convenience such as BB or emails, whereas *real time* refers to a situation of synchronous communication where participants usually discuss through computer at the same time as in *chatting.* Even though the degree of formality can vary depending on individual preference,

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researchers emphasize the informal nature of CMC and argue that written discourse in online communication should be viewed as so-called, "talking with one's finger" (Harasim et al., 1995, p. 213).

In a face-to-face classroom, texts are used primarily for obtaining information such as reading textbooks (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992) or demonstrating one's academic knowledge through written assignments or term papers. Lotman (1988) argues that all texts have two functions: univocal and dialogic function. A univocal function is simply concerned with conveying meanings adequately whereas a dialogic function focuses on generating new meanings out of previous utterance. In other words, when a dialogic function is emphasized, as Wertsch and Bivens (1992) write, "utterances produced by the discourse participants are treated as starting points for conversation, as being capable of generating new meanings, as thinking devices" (p. 41). Some online researchers extended this concept of "thinking devices" to online text-based communication, which maximizes the dialogic function of text through exchanging ideas among discourse participants (e.g., Harasim, 1990; Warschauer, 1997; Wells and Chang-Wells, 1992). Warshauer highlights this aspect when he says, "the interaction between reflection and interaction is of critical importance in education and the historical divide between speech and writing has been overcome with the interactional and reflective aspects of language merged in a single medium" (p. 472).

According to Harasim et al. (1995), those who benefit the most from text-based communication are L2 students, because they can "read items several times in order to understand them, consult dictionaries, and then draft, edit, and upload replies" (p. 195). The asynchronous aspect (time delay) of CMC may lessen L2 students' pressure of

talking with both fluency and accuracy in discussions, since they can take time before they post their messages.

2.3.2 Effects of CMC on Learners: Two Empirical Studies

Among research studies in online education, Burge's (1994) case study provides an overview of what it is like to participate in computer conferencing (CC). She examined how adult students perceive and participate in an environment that enables group communication only by CC. The study specifically asked: (a) what students say they learned in CC; (b) what, in their opinion, are the salient features of CC; (c) what, if any, are the effects of those features on their learning; and (d) if the students' descriptions of how they learned relate to learning strategies as found in cognitive psychology literature. The research was based on interviews with 21 M.Ed. students and the instructors of two courses in educational computer conferencing and models of adult education evaluation. Burge's findings show the conflicting perspectives of CC learners on asynchronous online communication. Advantages were pointed out, such as the flexibility of time and location of access, and the freedom to reflect on the subject before composing a message to peers and instructors. Peer interaction was also brought up as a strength of CC. Disadvantages were that the students constantly felt the pressure of logging-on to keep up with class discussions and information overload. Burge's study, however, tends to place a lot of responsibility on individual learners to learn behavioral norms and foster community with peers. She leaves open questions related to other aspects such as course designers' or instructors' roles.

Bullen's (1998) case study provides insights into factors that affect students' participation in online courses. He classified the factors identified by students as

affecting their participation according to three domains: the attributes of computer conferencing, the design and facilitation of computer conferencing activities, and students' dispositional and situational factors. He reports that the factors most frequently identified by students as affecting their participation and critical thinking in online discussions were related to the key attributes of computer conferencing: time-independence, text-based communication and many-to-many communication. From pedagogical design perspectives, mandatory participation (grading students' participation) seemed to force students to participate to a certain degree, but this did not necessarily increase participation and resulted in some superficial participation by some students simply restating what other students had said. Regarding students' dispositional factors, Bullen (1997) found that self-disciplined and cognitively more mature students seem to benefit from online discussions.

Contrary to other research reports, Bullen said introverted or shy students expressed conflicting perceptions of online participation: some students felt more comfort and freedom "from the competition of more verbally adept students" (p. 14) while one student took it as an overwhelming experience which required constant contact online. In spite of their overall passivity in online discussions in his study, Bullen summarizes that the students thought the online discussion was "a more interactive, participatory, interesting, and engaging learning experience than many face-to-face courses they had taken previously" (p. 12). Bullen concludes that the attributes of computer conferencing alone do not ensure an effective online course. To be effective, an online course must also be appropriately designed and incorporate appropriate facilitation techniques. Both

Burge and Bullen's studies help provide an understanding of the attributes of CMC and participants' various perspectives of these attributes.

2.3.3 Research Related to L2 Learners

Most empirical studies on participation patterns of L2 students in the online learning environment have focused on their linguistic performance in language learning classrooms (either foreign language or ESL classrooms) rather than in mainstream academic content courses. Among those, Chun (1994), Kern (1995) and Warschauer (1996) are probably the most frequently cited researchers in online education specific to L2 learners.

Chun (1994) examined first-year German students' discourse skills and interactive competence in computer-assisted class discussion (CACD) in terms of the quantity of the language (e.g., the number of entries), syntactic complexity (based on speech acts) and discourse structure (e.g., initiation of a new topic or negotiation of meaning). She claims that CACD provides language learners with the opportunity to acquire and practice more varied communicative proficiency than conventional in-class discussion, as evidenced by learners' taking the initiative, expanding on topics, giving feedback to others, etc.

Kern (1995) examined French language students' participation in real-time electronic communication (*Daedalus InterChange*) in terms of the quantity (i.e. the number and the length of messages), grammatical complexity (e.g., coordination, subordination or negation) and discourse functions (e.g., greetings, assertions, questions, or commands). What makes his study different from Chun's is that Kern examined students' language behavior in two settings, that is online and face-to-face discussions, by

randomly assigning them in two settings and having them discuss the same topic in each session. Data from 40 foreign language students showed that communication using networked computers produced a greater amount and a more sophisticated level of language output than oral discussions. Student perceptions obtained from questionnaires indicated that electronic communication enhanced their motivation to participate in discussions and allowed more time to compose messages. Kern attributes increased language output in CMC to the informal atmosphere and decreased rate of instructor participation.

Warschauer (1996) conducted a similar study to the previous two researchers', but this time he examined ESL students and their participation in small group discussion. His research methods included calculation of the participation percentages, analyzing language complexity, surveying student attitudes and reviewing turn-taking and the formality of face-to-face and synchronous discussion. He suggests that electronic discussion promotes more balanced participation by lowering the anxiety of culturally reticent students, and it features more complex and formal language, which can help language learners develop more sophisticated communicative skills.

These three researchers provide a clear indication that electronic communication helps foreign language and ESL learners increase language output and develop various discourse skills in computer-mediated class discussions in language class. Since these studies deal with students in language classrooms, it is still questionable if the findings of those studies can be transferable to students in mainstream academic classes. As discussed by Duff (2001), the learning context of disciplinary content courses is different from that of foreign language classes in terms of the complexity of content, students'

confidence levels, etc. In academic content courses, students need to demonstrate not only linguistic proficiency but also academic knowledge, which appears to be more cognitively demanding. According to Miller (2000), who observed Chinese immigrant students' transition from their ESL classes through high school mainstream classes, students in ESL programs tend to have more opportunities to use English in their ESL classes than in their academic classes.

In addition, unlike in ESL classes whose members are non-native speaking peers, academic content classrooms have a mix of L1 and L2 English speaking students. According to Duff (2001), L2 students appear to have increased anxiety of communicating in academic classes where L1 speaking peers are dominant. Other studies also suggest that who they are speaking to has an effect on L2 learners' participation in class discussions or their involvement in English-dominant society in general (e.g., Liu & Kuo, 1996; Norton, 2000; Wong-Fillmore, 1982). Liu and Kuo (1996), for example, report that more than 57% of their L2 graduate participants say they feel more comfortable talking with non-native speakers in English. Due to the different member composition and atmosphere of academic classes, it is arguably tenuous to assume that L2 students' participation in CMC in those classes will result in the same pattern of participation as in ESL classes. Unfortunately, there are few studies that have examined L2 students' use of CMC in academic courses where dominant members are speakers of English as a first language.

The studies that are particularly relevant to L2 students in CMC are Belcher's (1999) and Kamhi-Stein's (2000). Both examined L2 graduate students participating in asynchronous computer-mediated discussions in academic courses. Belcher claims that

L2 students whose voices were unheard in the face-to-face classroom gained an increased voice in the asynchronous newsgroup she taught in her graduate seminar. Her analysis, however, was drawn only from her anecdotal observations of the face-to-face class and an electronic message board.

Another empirical study that provides a view of L2 students' participation in the BBs in academic courses is Kamhi-Stein's (2000). She used both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine L2 students' participation in a BB in her graduate course. As a quantitative measure, she examined the transcripts of the face-to-face and BB discussions for differences in (a) the instructor's and the students' turns and (b) in L1 and L2 students' turns of initiations, responses and evaluations. For her qualitative analysis, she identified the (a) Initiation-Response-Evaluation (I-R-E) structure in both face-to-face and BB settings; (b) the direction of the interaction (instructor to student, student to student or other); and (c) salient themes from the interviews with 12 selected students. [10] Her findings suggest that in contrast to face-to-face discussions with the I-R-E structure, BB discussions lead to more student initiations and responses, which indicates "a high degree of peer support and collaboration" (p. 439). Additionally, she concludes that Web-based discussions lower L2 students' inhibitions and reduce cultural and linguistic barriers.

The literature I reviewed in this section conveys the recurring theme that online discussion is more interactive, engaging and motivating than traditional face-to-face discussion. However, it also shows some inconsistencies in findings across studies. For

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[10] The I-R-E structure is what Mehan (1978; 1985) claims as a typical exchange structure of conventional classroom discourse, where one person initiates communication (usually in the form of questions or directions by the teacher), the students respond to it, and the other member gives feedback or comments on it.

example, Kamhi-Stein's quantitative measure of participation revealed that L1 and L2 students did not demonstrate statistical differences in their contributions relative to one another in either the face-to-face or Web-based discussions, which was not concordant with the images of "passive" L2 students portrayed in other literature (e.g., Jones,1999; Liu & Kuo, 1996; Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Additionally, both Bullen's (1998) and Kamhi-Stein's (2000) research yielded incongruent results from many other CMC studies in that the use of CMC did not "significantly" increase students' participation in their studies. Nevertheless, along with Bullen, Kamhi-Stein values using CMC tools as a way of enhancing participation of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

It is not the goal of qualitative research to generalize the findings from a single research site to other situations. However, as Merriam (1998) argues, we can transfer or generalize what we learn from a particular situation to our own or similar situations we encounter. Therefore, it may be the role of future researchers to make a connection between these studies by investigating multiple research sites that have similar conditions (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994).

2.3.4 Literature on Analysis of CMC Texts

Researchers have used diverse approaches with varying recording units to analyze the patterns of participation in CMC. *Recording units* in this study refer to the segments of the transcript to be recorded and categorized (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 2001).[11] Some used sentences as the units of analysis (e.g., Hillman, 1999), some used messages (e.g., Gunawadena, Charlotte, Lowe, & Anderson, 1998), and others, thematic categories (e.g., Bullen, 1998; Henri, 1991; Zhu, 1996).

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[11] In this study, I use the term *the recording unit* differently from *the unit* of analysis, which, in this study, is the participation activity on the BBs.

Analyzing the content of CMC texts, using the sentence, paragraph or message as a unit is problematic because one sentence, paragraph or message may contain multiple constructs, and a single construct may span multiple sentences or paragraphs (Rourke et. al, 2000). Another way of unitizing is the use of a thematic unit, which is also called a "unit of meaning." A thematic unit conveys "a single item of information extracted from a segment of content" (Rourke et. al, 2001, p. 13) within a single unit regardless of the number of words or phrases.

Zhu's (1996) study is an example that used the thematic unit in examining patterns of discussion and knowledge construction practices on an electronic conference in a graduate distance learning course. She identified participation roles, participant categories, types of interaction and note categories as is summarized in Table 2.2. The participant roles were designed by the instructor and categorized into a starter, a wrapper and a weekly participant. The participant categories were identified according to "the nature and the content of the notes" (p. 826) students had produced and classified into contributor, wanderer, seeker and mentor. Notes were classified into question, reflection, comments, discussions/information-sharing, answers and scaffolding. With regard to participant categories, Zhu identifies *contributors* with any messages that were produced, *wanderers* with messages that usually discuss teaching and learning in general, *seekers* with messages that seek information in order to gain a better understanding of the issue, and finally *mentors* with those who guide other participants "in their reading or help them defend and develop their own ideas and understanding of issues" (p. 827).

Table 2.2: Summary of Zhu's (1996) Coding Scheme of Online Participation

	Themes	Categories
1	Participation Roles	starter, wrapper, weekly participant
2	Participant Categories	contributor, wanderer, seeker, mentor
3	Types of Interaction	vertical, horizontal
4	Note Categories	question, reflection, comments, discussions / information-sharing, answers, scaffolding

Using thematic units is helpful in that it allows the researcher to understand the process of learning by focusing on *meaning units* and *idea units* of the content instead of simply the quantity of messages transmitted. Some researchers, however, point to problems with using thematic units saying that it has a danger of creating "inconsistency in identifying the ill-defined 'unit of meaning'" (Howell-Richardson & Mellar, 1996, p 51) due to subjective ratings and accordingly results in low-reliability (Rourke et. al, 2000). In this respect, Zhu's categorization seems to suffer from this problem by lacking consistency. For example, one might argue that if a student posts an information seeking question that can initiate an insightful discussion but may not necessarily refer to specific issues in class readings, it creates confusion whether this message should be categorized as contributor, wanderer, seeker or mentor.

To avoid this kind of problem, some researchers followed certain theoretical frameworks such as the I-R-E format (Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Kern, 1995; Levin, Kim, & Riel, 1990; Warschauer, 1997) or Speech Act Theory (e.g., Chun, 1994; Howell-Richardson & Mellar, 1996) in analyzing participant patterns in CMC. While the I-R-E format seems to reflect classroom discourse as identified in many studies (e.g., Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Kern, 1995; Kubota, 2001), there is doubt whether it accurately represents all Western graduate classes today, due to its oversimplification of the exchange structure in academic discourse (Wells, 1999). Dillon (1994) also argues that many classrooms

today often make students dominate the discussions mixing statements and questions as much as their teacher does.

Some researchers examined interaction patterns of CMC by drawing on Speech Act Theory (e.g., Chun, 1994; Howell-Richardson & Mellar, 1996; Levin et al., 1990; Liaw,1996). Also called illocutionary acts, speech acts are the reflection of the actor's intention in performing particular acts such as informing, ordering, warning and so on (Austin, 1962; Gremmo et al., 1977; Searle, 1969). In other words, illocutionary acts are what one means or intends in making utterances. Searle (1996) proposes five basic categories of illocutionary acts as follows:

1. Assertives: to commit the speaker to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition (e.g., suggesting, complaining; "I conclude that A is true.")

2. Directives: to attempt (by the speaker) to get the hearer to do something (e.g., asking, inviting, insisting; "Please answer this question.")

3. Commisives: to commit the speaker to some future course of action (e.g., shall, intend; "I will attend the conference tomorrow.")

4. Expressives: to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content (e.g., thank, congratulate, apologize; "Thanks for paying me the money.")

5. Declarations: The successful performance that guarantees the propositional content and reality (e.g., declare, appoint; I declare: "Your employment is hereby terminated.")

As briefly reviewed earlier in this chapter, Chun (1994) adopted speech act categories to examine how synchronous Computer-assisted class discussion (CACD) helps to develop sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence in German foreign language students. She classified sentences by function of discourse such as questions or answers, statements or imperatives, and discourse management (i.e., requests for clarification, giving feedback and social formulas). Chun reports that the students performed a variety of interactive speech acts by exchanging more questions and statements with each other than with the instructor, which indicates that students took more initiative and active roles in discourse management in electronic discussions than they typically would in conventional classroom discussions.

As Chun's research illustrates, Speech Act Theory seems to provide a cohesive means to examine CMC discourse by attending to grammatical form and its manifested relations to meanings (discourse function). What one should be careful of, however, in applying Speech Act Theory is the aspect of "incongruent realizations of speech functions" (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 183) that occur in communication. As Eggins and Slade argue, speech function is not always realized by the predicted grammatical form (mood type) nor is the speaker's intention delivered in *congruent typical mood types.*[12] To be more specific, a statement is not necessarily realized by a declarative nor is a question by an interrogative only. For example, the statement, "I am not sure if I understood your second question," is the *modulated declarative* of a question, "Would you explain your second question again?" For this reason, I found it unreliable to count the number of questions and statements in analyzing academic online discourse.

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[12] *Mood* refers to "patterns of clause type, such as interrogative, imperative and declarative" (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 74).

Moreover, the speech act categories such as assertives, commissives and declaratives can be collapsed into a statement of facts or ideas in academic discourse.

Keeping this in mind, I developed categories of participant roles by identifying *speech functions* and *message topics*, which are largely evidenced by certain grammatical or word choices. I found Eggins and Slade's (1997) speech functions particularly relevant to what I have developed. In their words: "The social role that participants are occupying in an interaction will contain the speech functions they have access to when interacting with specific others" (p. 182). Details of data analysis regarding participant roles will be discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6.

2.4   Summary and the Direction of the Present Study

This chapter presented a review of the literature that helped formulate the theoretical framework of this study and the relevant research studies that addressed the issues and concerns related to L2 students' class participation in the online learning environment. The present study incorporates into its framework sociocultural activity theory and Lave and Wenger's notion of community of practice to explore L2 students' learning experience in a sociocultual context. These theories support the view that the purpose of learning is to become a competent member of a community and that this requires changing participation in various learning activities.

Adopting this view, this study places computer-mediated discussion settings, so called BBs, under investigation to reconceptualize it from a *discourse community* perspective. Engestrom's activity theory model helps conceptualize learners' participation in online academic discourse. Given the explicit rules and expectations of

participation, I will examine how online discourse is shaped and how students' participation is situated in relation to other constituents of the activity system.

This chapter also reviewed previous literature relevant to L2 students' participation in academic courses. Most studies agree that the challenges facing L2 students in academic classes include not only attaining the ability to use academic language and content knowledge but also dealing with the issues of power relations and cultural adjustment, etc.

Participating in class discussions through CMC is different from participating in a conventional face-to-face classroom on several levels: (a) the place and time to participate is more independent through CMC; (b) there is no need to take turns taking the floor in the CMC environment because multiple discussants can post their messages at the same time; (c) computers are used as a means of communication in CMC mode; and (d) CMC is mainly text-based communication whereas face-to-face discussions are mainly oral-based. Most research claims that CMC increases quantity and intensity of interaction because students can participate at their own pace and without worrying about competing for turns. In addition, CMC has been regarded as lowering the anxiety of students who are afraid of making linguistic errors in public, by allowing them to edit messages before they post. Online researchers also agree that CMC promotes the exchange of multiple perspectives and peer support among students, which leads to the reduction of linguistic and cultural barriers. Convenience of access and increased motivation were also pointed out. Most online researchers seem to agree that the benefits of CMC outstrip its disadvantages in that it can allow L2 students more control over the

discourse management and more opportunities to participate in discussions at an equal level with other more verbal L1 students and the instructor.

Unfortunately, most online research is concerned with students in general, and very few studies address issues of integration of second language speakers in academic classes. As researchers agree (Duff, 2001; Miller, 2000), the context of academic classes and ESL or foreign language classrooms are different in terms of interaction opportunities, complexity of content, and interlocutors in the class (native vs. non-native peers). There is a lack of research that probes L2 students' account of participation in the online discourse of academic classes. This study seeks to address that gap.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Overall Design: A Qualitative Multiple Case Study

This study was conducted in two graduate courses offered in *mixed mode* at a

large Canadian university (LCU) in Winter, 2003.[13] Both of these graduate courses,

which I shall call "Course A" and "Course B," used Web Course Tools (WebCT), each of

which allows participating students to access the course syllabus and readings, email and

the chat function. The two courses also allowed them to use the online discussion board

as a major channel of activity. The particular reason I chose to investigate mixed-mode

courses instead of solely online-mode ones, which wholly replace in-class meetings with

online communication, is that this study seeks to compare a participant's account in two

parallel learning environments: online and face-to-face.[14]

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, for two principal reasons.

First, the focus of this study is not quantitative measurement of students' academic

performance, such as course grades or mere frequencies of participation, but how

students are socialized into online discourse and the possible explanations for certain

patterns of behavior or outcomes. A case study provides a methodological lens to

investigate the contextualized nature of participation and multiple variables around it

(Merriam, 1998). I tried to explore the relationship among multiple variables and the

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[13] Pseudonyms are used for the names of the research institute and participants.

[14] Mixed-mode courses usually combine Web delivery and face-to-face lectures or seminars where the Web-based instruction substitutes for face-to-face class time. Strictly speaking, Course B was not a mixed-mode course from the emic perspective in that the BB activity took place without reduction in face-to-face class time, as in Course A. However, the instructor of Course B, having long been engaged in technology and media research, referred to her course as mixed-mode in that her emphasis on the use of the Web-based activities in this course did not make her course structurally different from mixed-mode ones. Therefore, I will keep the term mixed-mode to refer to the structure of both courses.

cases in their context and sought to highlight the profiles and complexities of individuals (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

Second, the aim of this study is to understand second language students' class participation not only through observing participants' behavior but also through giving the participants their own voice and integrating their interpretations. I endeavored to accomplish this aim by observing and recording what happened in the instructional setting (classrooms and online discussion forums), on one hand, and, on the other, by corroborating my observations with students' own reflections on their experience. During my data collection, I constantly contrasted and compared tentative findings across the data. This process helped me to reevaluate my research design and refine research procedures.

Three strengths of my study design are that, (a) I examined the class participation of L2 students in comparison to that of L1 students, (b) I studied both online and face-to-face learning environments, and (c) I studied different research sites. Even though this study focused on L2 students, their perceptions and messages in isolation would make it difficult to draw out pertinent information. Through comparing findings between L1 and L2 students, I hoped to reveal issues specific to L2 students and clarify some assumptions – my own as a researcher and also of ones these two groups may have about each other. Comparing the online and face-to-face discussions helped me identify problems or issues created by different instructional modes. Lastly, investigating multiple sites is valuable even if the number of cases or sites is not big enough to be "validated" statistically. In this study, I tried to overcome that constraint through detailed and extensive description

of participants' experiences by juxtaposing two graduate online courses that employed the BB similarly.

3.2   Sites and Participants

The two courses under investigation were graduate seminars in the Faculty of Education. The two instructors invited me to visit their classes at the beginning of the semester to introduce my research plans and solicit volunteers for the research. I informed the students that there were two levels of participation for this study: as general participants and as both general and focal participants. I explained that those who volunteered as general participants would not be asked to do anything but give permission to the researcher to access their course Web site, analyze their online text, and report the findings with their names kept confidential. Then I explained that those who volunteered as both general and focal participants would be invited to complete a brief questionnaire, followed by two interviews at their convenience. I also added that each interview would take about 30 minute to one hour (see Appendices A and B for the consent forms for students and instructors, respectively). By the following week, all students handed me consent forms allowing me to observe and use their online discussion data.

In terms of the number of focal students, I had originally judged that selecting two L1 and two L2 students from each course would do justice to the research purpose as long as I provided an in-depth and rich description of the cases and the context. However, I decided to include a few extra participants in my research to guard against an unexpected drop-out of the initial participants or other shortfall in obtaining sufficient data for analysis. Out of 14 volunteering focal students, 12 completed all the steps

necessary for data collection procedures: written questionnaire, two sets of interviews, and BB participation. This study will report findings obtained mainly from these 12 focal students and their two instructors. The following is the general description of each course and participants.

3.2.1 Course A: Children's Language and Literacy

The class had 14 female students, who were mostly M.Ed. students, with some M.A. students and one Ph.D. student in the Faculty of Education. Among these students, 11 students were L1 students and three were L2 speakers. Except for two students, the students in this course were teachers of kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers.

Seven students in this course volunteered to participate as focal participants and stayed through the research period for this study: four L1 and the three L2 speakers. Two L2 speakers came from mainland China, and one from Taiwan.

3.2.2 Course B: Educational Technology

Course B focused on theories and the application of technology in education. The subject of the course covered, in particular, constructivist and sociocultural theories of education, the educational implications of digital tools and various types of information technologies. The class had nine male and seven female students. Half of the students were enrolled in full-time studies and the other half were full-time teachers. Most of the full-time students also had many years of experience teaching in their home countries. All the students were studying in the M.A. or M.Ed. program, except for two Ph.D. students from China. Four students were L2 speakers, from either China or Korea. Among seven students who agreed to participate in the research as the focal participants,

five completed all the procedures necessary to provide enough data for analysis. Those focal participants were two L1 and three L2 students (two from Korea and one from China).

3.3   Researcher's Roles

In both Course A and Course B, I was a quiet observer in the classes through the semester. Most of the time I sat at the back or a corner of the classroom and made notes of what took place. The students and instructors in both classes were friendly to this outsider to their group. The instructor in Course A even said at the beginning of the semester that I could participate in class discussions if I liked to, and occasionally called my name in class, all of which may have made my presence in their classroom more natural and comfortable. Still, most of the time I stayed silent in the classroom, partly because of my Asian shyness, but more because I thought it was courteous for an outsider not to take the floor during their class. During small group discussions, however, I occasionally made comments on the issues being discussed after gaining permission from the group members. Some of the L2 students were doing a class project on a similar topic as my study, and we had some chances to share ideas about it outside the class.

In the online discussion boards, I was a complete "lurker" in the sense that I gained access to their course Web site and navigated through their online space including the online discussion forums, but never made myself visible to the participants by posting a message. I logged on to the two course Web sites every week through the semester to keep track of the participants' interaction on the BB.

My invisibility as a researcher in both face-to-face and online environments seemed to work well in the sense that the status of being researched did not appear to

skew the results. This was confirmed by the focal participants' responses to my question in the interview whether they thought their status as focal participant in this research influenced their perceptions, attitudes or behavior in any way in terms of their class participation in either face-to-face or online discussions. All the participants said it did not affect how they would normally have behaved if they were not in this study.

3.4 Data Collection

Coincidentally, Course B met on the same day and the same time as Course A, except that Course A met only every other week. It limited my visits to class meetings of Course B, because I could not attend Course B during the alternate weeks when Course A met. However, my alternate visits to Course B meetings apparently did not prevent me from obtaining significant and consistent information about the course, and I managed to collect missing information from the focal participants in the interviews.

In collecting data, I used multiple sources and multiple methods. This was accomplished by employing six data collection strategies: (a) written questionnaires, (b) interviews with students, (c) interviews with instructors, (d) observations of face-to-face classrooms, (e) examination of the course Web sites and Bulletin Boards and (f) examination of course documents (syllabi, handouts, students' online participation records, etc.). The major purpose of using diverse approaches was to obtain a balanced data set that represents what participants were actually doing corroborated by their reflection of it (Mohan, 2003). Data collection began with the start of the courses in January 2003, and continued for the duration of each course, until late April 2003. The courses ended at Week 14 (mid-April) of the academic term. The procedures of each data collection strategy for this study are described in detail below.

3.4.1 Written Questionnaires

Upon obtaining consent from the desired number of focal participants, I sent a brief written questionnaire (Appendix C) to each by email. The participants sent back their completed responses to me by email between the third and the fourth week of the semester. The main purpose of this questionnaire was to gather basic background information about the participants, such as their educational history, level of comfort with technology, their self-evaluated English proficiency levels (for L2 students) and their general perceptions of online courses and participation itself. This helped me make connections with the information obtained from the subsequent interviews and the students' communication behavior in their course. Another purpose of the questionnaire was to reduce the following interview hours by allocating some questions to written form. The questionnaire had 12 questions for L1 students and 16 for L2 students. Follow-up questions and clarifications of unclear questionnaire answers were made at the first interview.

3.4.2 Interviews with Students

Individual interviews with the focal students took place twice, early in the semester (between Week 5 and Week 8) and at its end (between Week 14 and a few weeks after the end of the semester). The purpose of student interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of class participation in both face-to-face and online learning environments.

The participants were interviewed face-to-face, one-on-one in an empty classroom, or at the participant's office or house if it was quiet enough to tape-record the interview. The participants appeared to be quite comfortable with tape-recording, and

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many of them communicated with me as if talking with a friend or a colleague without overtly being conscious of tape-recording. Audio-taping and transcribing the entire interview was essential for accurate and detailed analysis and interpretation of the data. To identify and understand the informants' main points, for example, I often had to re-read the transcribed texts of the interviews several times. Only with the transcriptions was I able to compare and contrast between informants' accounts, identify and organize interpretive categories. In addition, some comments by informants that seem trivial or irrelevant at first listening can nevertheless provide essential information to the study (Riessman, 1993).

All interviews used semi-structured questions. Questions focused on the informants' interpretation of the tasks in the course and their participation in discussions face-to-face and online. The interview followed the main protocol of questions I had prepared, but I also pursued new issues that arose during the interview. Each interview took approximately 40 minutes on average (see Appendix D for the guide for interviews with students).

The second interview had additional questions suggested by the first interview data. Questions were similar to the ones at the first interview, but the second interview served a somewhat different purpose. First, the participants were asked to identify any changes in their own behavior or perceptions of their participation since the beginning of the semester. This was done by explicitly asking if they felt their participation in either face-to-face class or online forums had changed, or by repeating the questions asked at the first interview. Second, it was to probe deeper into issues that surfaced from the previous interview with the informant, with other informants, or from my observations

in-class or of online discussion forums. Third, it was to clarify or confirm information gathered at the first interview, and to check with the informant my interpretation of their answers to the first interview questions.

Interviews with all the participants were done in English except with Daehan. Daehan preferred his native Korean because he thought he could give a more accurate description and more detailed information in his native tongue. Indeed, he offered many insightful views and interpretations of his experience in precise, sophisticated terms, which might have been a little difficult in English. I transcribed and translated his Korean interview data into English.

3.4.3 Interviews with Instructors

Interviews with the focal students' instructors were another important source of data. The interviews with the instructors were conducted only once in their office at the end of the semester. The interviews served the following main purposes: (a) to explore the instructors' reasons for using a BB in the course and to see how their reasons matched with students' perceptions of the BB, (b) to see how the instructors perceived their roles in the online discussion forums, (c) to hear the instructors' observations and perceptions of their students' participation in the BB, and (d) to explore the extent to which the instructors felt that students' online participation in these two courses was similar to that in other courses they had taught. The interviews with instructors were transcribed into text for the same reason as the student interviews (see Appendix E for the guide for interviews with instructors).

3.4.4 Class Observations

The general purposes of classroom observation were to document how the class functioned, what was being discussed, who was talking about what topics, etc. In particular, I paid attention to the following questions:

1. What kinds of activities are taking place and what is being discussed?

2. What are the overall interaction patterns of class discussions? (e.g., Who tends to dominate class discussions?, Who speaks on what kinds of topics?, What is the general distribution of speaking turns among participants? and What does the instructor do during class discussions?)

3. How often do L2 students participate in discussions and in what context?

In addition, I took the opportunity of visiting the classroom to cross-check issues arising from my observations of online discussions or the course Web sites. It was not essential to audio-tape or video-tape the classroom discussions, which I thought could be intrusive to both the students and the instructor. Instead, I described the class activities in great detail and recorded every turn with the time in my field notes. I tried to record what the instructors and the students were saying as much as possible during the discussions, and added my observation of their behavior in my field notes.

3.4.5 Examination of the Course Web Sites

Examination of online discussions started by gaining access to the Web site of each course a few weeks after the courses began. I was able to navigate all online menus available to the students, such as the course calendar, the BB, the course readings and other resources (e.g., online journal articles, external Web sites related to course subjects, the instructor's PowerPoint presentations).

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The BB texts provided information such as subjects of discussions, characteristics of texts (e.g., length and register) and participant roles. The content of BB interactions were often a good source of new questions and issues to discuss with the focal participants in the interviews, and suggested new ways of interpreting the communication behavior showed by students in the face-to-face environment. Comparison of BB interactions with in-class observations or answers during interviews also suggested interesting direction for my analysis. One great benefit of using online discussion data is that the researcher does not have to record or transcribe the students' verbal exchanges for analysis. I could simply save and print the transcript of the online discussions.

3.4.6 Documents

I collected and studied course documents such as course syllabi and hand-outs distributed to the students. In addition, I was able to obtain from the focal students in Course B a copy of interim written feedback they had received from the instructor on their online postings, which helped me get a better sense of the instructor's expectations for the students' postings. After the courses ended, each instructor gave me a summary showing each student's (a) date of first access to the course site, (b) the number of visits to the site, (c) the number of postings read, and (d) the number of postings contributed. Table 3.1 presents a summary of the data collection strategies.

Table 3.1: Summary of Data Collection Strategies

Methods	Time line (Week[a])	Description of Data	Target Participants
A written questionnaire	Week 3 ~ Week 4	12 responses to questionnaire asking background information	12 focal students
Interviews with students	- Interview I: Week 5 ~ Week 8 - Interview II: Week 14 ~ Week 17	24 interviews audio-taped and transcribed (Interview hours: 40 minutes on average)	12 focal students
Interviews with the instructors	Week 15 ~ Week 17	2 interviews audio-taped and transcribed (Interview hours: approximately 40 minutes for each)	Two instructors in Course A and Course B
In-class observations	Week 2 ~ Week 14	The researcher's field notes on 13 lessons	All students in two courses {Course A (14 students & the instructor) + Course B (16 students & the instructor)}
On-line observations	Week 2 ~ Week 14	Total postings: 653 messages (Course A: 367 + Course B: 286 messages) in the BB and other online materials	All students in two courses
Documents	Week 2 ~ Week 17	Course syllabi, hand-outs, interim written feedback on student postings (the focal students in Course B only), summary of students' online participation	All students in two courses

[a] The semester was 14 week long. Week 1 indicates the first week of the semester, and therefore Week 17 is three weeks after the semester's end.

3.5   Data Analysis

3.5.1   Questionnaires and Interviews

Students' written responses to the questionnaire (except for open-ended questions) were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to be analyzed and displayed in a matrix. With the students' interview data I made two sets of matrices displaying major questions and responses (shortened to keywords) in columns above rows of focal participant pseudonyms. Table 3.2 illustrates a matrix frame of the students' first interview data set.

In analyzing interviews, I followed in general the inductive logic of qualitative method proposed by Patton (1990; 2002). Inductive analysis seeks to find patterns, themes and categories that emerge from data without imposing pre-formed categories or hypotheses. As I read through my interviews, I highlighted quotes and comments in different colors according to the research questions, made notes in the margins of the printed copies of the interview data, and constructed an index of key words, which I either directly quoted from the informants' comments or simplified in my own words.

After multiple readings of the interview data, I created a matrix of the student interviews according to these key words, which Miles and Huberman (1994) illustrate as a useful strategy for cross-case analysis. Within the matrix I tried to locate salient themes that cut across L1/L2 status, courses and time. Using Mohan's (2003) notion of *action-reflection*, I compared and contrasted key concepts and themes that surfaced from students' interview data with the instructors' responses, the findings from online text analysis and classroom observation. I sought intersections between instructors' specifications of tasks (reflection), students' interpretation of them as revealed in

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interviews (reflection), and how both the students and the instructors' reflection unfolded in the online discourse (action).

Table 3.2: A Matrix Frame of Students' Interview Data

Sites	Language Status ⬇	Questions➡ Focal Participants ⬇	Perceptions of required elements	Challenges of completing the course	Challenges in face-to-face discussions	...etc.
Course A	L2	Ping				
		Mei				
		Sunny				
	L1	Dana				
		Michelle				
		Chris				
		Hilary				
Course B	L2	Sohee				
		Daehan				
		Chang				
	L1	Kathy				
		Rory				

3.5.2 Online Discussion

The online discussion text, on the other hand, served a somewhat different purpose from interview data. While the interview data provided participants' reflection on their participation in the classroom and the BB, the online discussion text provided a lens through which to observe participant roles (both students' and instructors') on the BB. The first step of analysis was to identify and generate *indices* of participant roles. *Participant roles* are indicated by what the participants do with their speech (functions of speech) and what they talk about (message topics).[15]

This is related to Eggins and Slade's (1997) functional approach to language. According to them, choices of speech functions are associated with the social role a

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[15] The term *speech functions* has been used widely in literature often to analyze oral text but without excluding written text.

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participant assumes and his or her relationship with other interactants. I borrowed Eggins and Slade's terms in part, but the analytical scheme used in this study is different from theirs in the following ways.

First, Eggins and Slade mainly studied casual conservation, that is, informal interaction of everyday social life. I used somewhat different terms, more appropriate and specific to online academic discourse.

Second, Eggins and Slade established a comprehensive set of techniques for analyzing casual conversation. As is illustrated in Figure 3.1, they classified the conversational moves into *open* and *sustain*. Opening moves begin new exchanges of conversation, and sustaining moves are meant to extend exchanges. These two moves branch out to subsequent categories of speech functions. Opening moves, for example, are broken down into *attend* (attention seeking to set the scene for an interaction) and *initiate* (getting the interaction under way), and the *initiate* moves are further subclassified into *give, demand, goods and services, information* and so on. The *sustain* moves, on the other hand, are subcategorized into the continuing speech function and the reacting speech function, and these subcategories are again further branched out into 25 more subcategories (see Eggins and Slade, 1997, Chap. 5 for details).

Compared to Eggins and Slade's, the categories in this study may look quite general and inclusive (e.g., expressing knowledge/opinion, making a request, and social formula). I did not neglect the diversity of speech functions they outlined, but a simpler category set served the objectives of this study while also allowing me to focus on the most relevant categories. For example, Eggins and Slade place *initiate* and *react* at the start of every conversational move. In this study, however, I united *initiate* and *react* into

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the function of expressing knowledge/opinion. This does not mean that only the domain

of expressing knowledge/opinion contains initiate and react moves. Subcategories were

determined based on the research purpose (analysis of academic discourse) on one hand

and on the other by the salient characteristics of each function (the importance of

initiation and reaction in expressing knowledge/opinion in academic discourse).

Figure 3.1: Eggins and Slade's (1997) Overview of Speech Function Network (adopted)

```
                              ┌── attend
                              │                     ┌── give
                   ┌── open   │                ┌────┤
                   │          │                │    └── demand
                   │          └── initiate ────┤
                   │                           │    ┌── goods and services
                   │                           └────┤
move ──────────────┤                                └── information
                   │
                   │                           ┌── monitor
                   │          ┌── continue ────┤── prolong
                   │          │                └── append
                   └── sustain┤
                              │                    ┌── respond
                              └── react ───────────┤
                                                   └── rejoinder
```
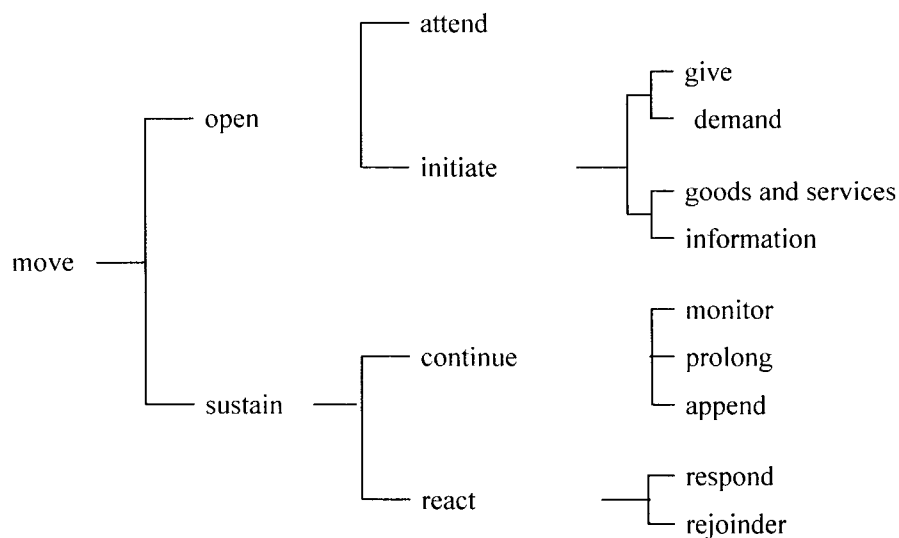
More importantly, I intend to explain participant roles in terms of message topics

as well as speech functions. The speech functions are related to Mohan's (2003) *action*

whereas the concept of message topics in my study can be applied to his *reflection*. I

found that these two aspects (speech functions and message topics) describe participant

roles well because they complement each other.

Despite the obvious differences, Eggins and Slade's approach has been the most

influential to the analysis of online discourse in this study. Their analytical framework of

casual conversation can be extended to explain other types of discourse (even formal

academic discourse) because it deals fundamentally with the functional aspect of

language. This functional aspect of language is associated with the interpersonal aspect of language use, something Eggins and Slade demonstrated by showing how interlocutors continually construct their social roles and interpersonal relations through conversation.

Patton (1990) and Krippendorff (1980) provide basic principles for this study in establishing categories of speech functions and message topics. Patton suggests that the analyst can either use ones previously developed and articulated by others, or develop new terms to describe categories that emerge from data analysis. I found it more efficient to combine these two approaches in the following way. Following the inductive logic of qualitative research, I derived categories from the corpus of the data, which I found the most relevant and the best suited to my data. Then I compared the emergent categories with the ones already established by other linguists or researchers. As explained above, I found Eggins and Slade's (1997) speech functions particularly similar to what I developed and therefore adjusted my categories to fit and link with theirs.

Krippendorff (1980), on the other hand, cautions that "categories must be exhaustive and mutually exclusive" (p.75). *Exhaustive* means generating terms that represent all the sampling units, whereas *mutually exclusive* means clear and unequivocal division among the categories. A major reason I chose to develop a new set of participant categories instead of adopting existing coding schemes is that none of the existing schemes were exhaustive nor mutually exclusive to make sense of the online texts.

The sampling units in this study are BB messages posted by all students in the two courses. Coding started by assigning descriptive labels (as opposed to numeric ones) to the margins of the written text according to the functions and topics of information.

The codes were assigned to clauses, groups of clauses or paragraphs, and new codes were assigned wherever there was a shift in either speech functions or message topics. Therefore, one message could manifest multiple speech functions or topics, and the author of the message could play multiple roles. This was the major reason that, unlike some previous studies, I did not use the message as the recording unit.

After I decided on a reasonable coding scheme, I selected two weeks of text for detailed analysis. I selected 165 messages posted by 30 students and their instructors during Week 3 and Week 11. The first data set (Week 3) was the messages from each course posted between 3rd and 4th week of the semester, when the BB started to take shape after most of the students had had a chance to become familiar with the course Web site. The second data set (Week 11) was the messages posted between 11th week and 12th week for Course A and postings between 10th and 11th week for Course B. The reason that I collected data from two weeks with intervals was mainly because I intended to examine if there had been a change in patterns of online participation over the course of the semester. I chose not to use messages from the last week of the semester, because at that time, students were focusing mostly on their final papers or projects, which resulted in scant and irregular online participation. In addition, collecting more than one data set allowed me to obtain a significant amount of data that would be more likely to be representative of the online discussion activities in each course.

After the initial coding, I had an extra coder involved to pretest the coding scheme. In doing so, I gave him instructions and had him review the same transcript independently using my category set. Disagreements between two coders were reviewed, and the coding system went through a few more revisions until I obtained a set of

categories that I judged to be sufficiently robust. This new coding scheme was tested against other sets of data (other than the focal BB texts) in the same courses to examine consistency of the scheme. This was an important step particularly because Course A had forums that dealt with radically different foci than its regular forums on weekly readings. For example, at one point the instructor opened a new forum for expressing congratulations to one class member's delivering a baby. There were also forums that exclusively accommodated the instructor's announcement of interests (e.g., course updates), instructor's feedback on the students' final papers, etc. Yet, no matter how different the forums, the messages could be classified within this newly developed coding scheme.

Then I gave the extra coder the same data set (used for the first analysis) with the tables explaining the category set and had him review them again to determine the functions and topics of speech. Making a distinction between each category is not always a clear-cut process and there were several borderline cases. However, the coding system I developed in terms of functions of language was quite useful to locate indices of participant roles as revealed by the texts. Disagreements between the two coders were described and counted as a measure of *inter-rater reliability* (out of 287 total units coded we agreed 96% of the time).

I particularly focused on whether use of speech functions and message topics were different within and across L1 students, L2 students and instructors, and if so, which categories dominated in the use of BB for each group. This was done by tallying the various speech functions and message topics for each focal participant. In addition, I

generated participant role categories by associating (crossing) speech functions and message topics. More details of participant roles are given in Chapter 6.

3.5.3   Other Documents

Course documents served as important supplements to the other data. Review of course syllabi and hand-outs helped understand the course goals and structure. I reviewed each copy of the interim written feedback and asked the focal students to provide me with their interpretation of the tasks and instructors' feedback to their postings. I compared this information with other data and incorporated it into findings in a narrative form in my report.

Lastly, a quantitative summary of each student's records of participation in the course Web site from each instructor provided useful information on the students' and the instructors' frequency of contribution to the BB in general. As stated in the previous chapters, there are risks of depending solely on such quantitative measurement or course grades of students in assessing participation in the online discussions. For example, some very active students can skew the perception of relative participation by others. Even though students may feel like they have been participating fully, they may be penalized when compared to more outgoing students. Furthermore, as Bullen (1998) recognizes, if students are measured on the number of postings alone, it could result in lowering the quality of discussions in class because students' messages may just restate messages posted by others in an attempt to generate more postings. Measuring the length of messages is also problematic because it is not necessarily an indicator of insightful communication. Yet this does not mean that quantitative measures should not form part

of the method of inquiry. Rather, quantitative measures of online communication should be used to crosscheck other data.

3.6   Trustworthiness of Research

I intended to strengthen trustworthiness of this research by drawing on approaches proposed by qualitative researchers, such as Merriam (1998), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (1990; 2002). They suggest various practical strategies to increase research quality, which guided me throughout the study.

Miles and Huberman, in particular, have provided useful strategies regarding how to design, maintain the research processes and write up the final report. I found three of their dimensions particularly relevant to my research: dependability, credibility, and transferability. These are alternative terms for reliability, internal validity, and external validity, which are usually discussed by quantitative researchers. Since I draw on their approaches to a major extent, I found it appropriate to follow their terminology.

Dependability refers to the extent to which a research design is consistent and reasonably stable over time and across researchers. To achieve this, I tried to make my study as transparent as possible to readers by explaining detailed procedures of the research and clarifying the researcher's roles in the research sites. Using multiple coders to check the agreement was another way of increasing dependability.

Credibility is a question of whether the findings of the study are congruent with reality. As Merriam (1998) suggests, it was necessary to check with the informants throughout the study if my initial interpretations were consistent with their meaning.

Transferability is concerned with whether the conclusions of a study can be generalized to other contexts. It was not the aim of this study to generalize the findings

to populations, as is the case with most qualitative research. Instead, I emphasized providing readers with an explicit and detailed description of the study setting, the participants' backgrounds, the inquiry process and findings. This will provide readers with more room for meaningful discussions and potential application of the study to other situations.

In order to increase dependability, credibility and transferability, one of the approaches I found particularly useful and relevant was the triangulation method. Triangulation, to put it simply, is a way of using multiple methods to confirm findings. It is critical in a study design to be able to secure consistent results and coherent conclusions. The researchers stated above recommend Denzin's (1978) four basic types of triangulation in conducting research: (a) data triangulation – the used of multiple data sources; (b) method triangulation – the used of multiple methods to study a single problem; (c) researcher triangulation – the use of several different investigators; (d) theory triangulation – the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data. Triangulation includes also using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, which Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as "data type" triangulation.

Regarding data triangulation, I investigated two research sites and multiple cases (six L1, six L2 students and two instructors as focal participants) within these sites. Data from interviews and online texts were collected at different times during the semester to be compared across different cases.

On securing multiple data sources, I used various data analysis methods: (a) questionnaire and quantitative and qualitative analysis of the responses, (b) interview transcripts and inductive analysis of its texts, (c) discourse analysis of the online BB

messages posted by all students and the instructors in both courses, (d) reviewing course documents and quantitative measure of students' online postings, and (e) my field notes of class observation. Throughout the whole period of data collection and analysis, I tried to draw meaningful parallels across the data and findings by comparing findings between these different sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I was the only investigator who conducted the study design and data collection. At the early stage of analyzing the online BB messages, however, I involved an extra coder, who played an important role in developing a reliable coding system and establishing the degree of consensus and stability in the online text analysis.

In terms of theory triangulation, Miles and Huberman (1994) caution against expecting to generate the same findings from the starting points of incompatible theories. This study uses the term *theory* mainly in relation to perspectives and interpretation of different groups of research participants, such as L1, L2 students, their course instructors and myself as the researcher. However, I would also like to add that various theories and perspectives (e.g., language socialization, socioculturalism, activity theory, etc.) from different disciplines guided me through research design and ways in which I interpreted findings to verify its consistency as explained in Chapter 2.

While the nature of my research questions and overall aims of the inquiry have confined the study mainly to the qualitative realm, I incorporated quantitative measures to a certain degree. They include analyzing students' self-report on a part of the questionnaire items, students' participation in their course Web sites and quantification of participants' discourse analysis.

CHAPTER 4

STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE FORUMS

In this chapter I explore how students in two graduate courses understood their participation in online forums, as revealed through interviews and by examination of their online discourse. In both courses, the instructors set out some rules at the beginning of the semester about how to participate in the BBs. I would like to explore how the online discourse evolved from this point, how the contextual components are related to each other and what the participating students' views are in this process.

I set out below my findings for each course in two different sections. In presenting these findings, I provide (a) general descriptions of each course in terms of class activities, stated rules of participation, and the focal participants; and (b) general characteristics of online discussion texts produced by BB participants in parallel with both students' and the instructors' accounts of BB writing tasks. In the last section of this chapter, I provide a summary and discussion of the findings by comparing and contrasting the major findings across the two courses.

To answer the research questions above, I draw on my observations of face-to-face meetings, a general overview of the course Web sites (focusing on the BB), course syllabi, questionnaire responses from the focal students, and the interviews with the focal students and the instructors. Table 4.1 provides a brief summary of the general characteristics of the two courses. It should be noted that the general descriptions of the courses and the focal participants are intended to serve as contextual information to be referred to in the following chapters as well.

Table 4.1: Summary of the Research Sites (Two Graduate-level Courses)

	Course A	Course B
Subject	Children's Language & Literacy	Educational Technology
Instructor	Dr. Tim Taylor	Dr. Debbie Wall
Students	14 (all females)	16 (7 females + 9 males)
Focal students	7 (3 L2 from China and Taiwan & 4 L1 speakers)	5 (2 male, 1 female L2 speakers from China and Korea + 2 female L1 speakers)
F-2-f class meetings	Every other week, for 2.5 hrs., 8 times during 14 weeks	Once a week, for 2.5 hrs, 14 wks.
Assignments	Major paper (75%) & BB participation (25% - minimum one posting to each forum[a])	Major project (40%), BB participation (20% - two postings a week), in-class discussion facilitation & participation (20%) & presenting a tech workshop (20%)
Main activities in class	Instructor's lecture, discussions, videos (sometimes), small group discussions	Discussion of readings facilitated by 1~2 presenters, small group discussions, technology workshop by one student

[a] Each forum opened every other week and closed after a week.

4.1 Course A

4.1.1 General description of the course

The subject matter of Course A related to curricular and instructional applications of theory and research in child language and literacy development. The instructor, Dr. Tim Taylor, was a full professor who had been working in higher education for 25 years. This was the third time he had run a course in mixed-mode and the second time with a discussion board. One unique part of this course that distinguished it from other regular graduate courses and distance learning courses was the truly mixed format of the course structure. That is, the students attended face-to-face classes every other week and took part in online discussion forums on the course Web site when there was no regularly-scheduled class.

Each regular class was 2.5 hours long throughout the 14-week semester. Activities in the face-to-face classes varied from week to week, but class time was usually spent on group organization, a short presentation from the instructor, and the students' small group discussions for their final projects. Group organization included assigning discussants to upcoming online forums on the BB or forming groups for the final project according to the students' interests.[16] The instructor's presentation usually took the first quarter of the class, but sometimes the students were engaged in long discussions arising from the presentation. At the beginning of each class, the instructor asked the students if they had any comments on the weekly readings. However, most of the discussion relating to the weekly readings was done on the BB. There was no participation grade for the face-to-face meetings.

Another unique aspect about this course was that the instructor allocated a quarter to a half of each class for the students to work on their final project with their project partners or with the whole class throughout the semester. In doing so, the instructor divided the final project into several components which the students were expected to complete at different stages and to report their progress both online and in class. Those components were: determining the topics and guiding questions, planning the methodology for the research, collecting and analyzing data, reporting on findings and finally writing up the final paper.

On the first week of the semester, the students were given an opportunity to spend about half an hour learning how to navigate the course Web site and to post a message on the BB. There were 17 forums opened on the BB throughout the semester. These forums

[16] The latter one took place in the fourth week of the semester after the students exchanged on the BB their interests in term paper topics.

can be classified into two general categories: main forums and subsidiary forums. The purpose of the main forums was to have the students reflect on weekly assigned readings by posting a message per forum. Each forum opened every other week and continued for a week throughout the semester. In total there were seven main forums opened during the semester. As part of operating the BB, the students were asked to take turns to serve as a discussion leader to post an initial posting on each main forum. Discussion in these forums was started with a couple of guiding questions posted by one or two discussants. The minimum requirement for the students was to respond to the discussion leader's posting once on the BB. As long as students completed this minimal posting on each major forum regardless of quantity and quality of the message, they received the full participation marks, which constituted 25% of the total grade. Another 75% of the grade was assigned to the final term paper. Alongside the main forums the instructor opened other forums at various stages related to the final project. The purpose of the subsidiary forums was to have the students post their draft work for each component of the final paper and to get feedback from other students. The subsidiary forums were entitled: "Term Paper Draft Topics," "Term Paper Guiding Question(s)," "Plan for Participants and Collecting Data," "Our Term Paper's Transcript," "Our Term Paper's Analysis of Findings" and "The Term Paper Final Report." In addition, there were three other forums, which were intended respectively for posting the instructor's announcements to the class, messages of congratulation for one classmate having had a baby and the instructor's feedback on the students' final paper. Table 4.2 summarizes the titles and purposes of each BB forum in this course.

Table 4.2: The Title and Description of Each Forum in Course A

Forum	Title	Time line	Description
1	Forum 1	Between Week 1 and Week 2	Reflection on the readings for the week by responding to the instructor's discussion starter question
2	Forum 2	Between Week 3 and Week 4	Reflection on the readings for the week by responding to the discussion leader's starter question
3	Forum 3	Between Week 3 and Week 4	Reflection on the readings for the week by responding to the discussion leader's starter question
4	Forum 4	Between Week 5 and Week 6	Reflection on the readings for the week by responding to the discussion leader's starter question
5	Forum 5	Between Week 7 and Week 8	Reflection on the readings for the week by responding to the discussion leader's starter question
6	Forum 6	Between Week 9 and Week 10	Reflection on the readings for the week by responding to the discussion leader's starter question
7	Forum 7	Between Week 11 and Week 12	Reflection on the readings for the week by responding to the discussion leader's starter question
8	Term Paper Draft Topics	Between Week 2 and Week 3	Posting tentative final project topics and offering feedback to colleagues
9	Term Paper Guiding Questions	Between Week 4 and Week 6	Posting each group's guiding questions for final projects
10	Plan for Participants and Collecting Data	Between Week 7 and Week 8	Posting each group's plan for recruiting participants and data collection for their final project
11	Our Term Paper's Transcript	Between Week 8 and Week 10	Posting each group's shortened version of transcript of their final project
12	Our Term Paper's Analysis of Findings	Between Week 11 and Week12	Posting each group's analysis of findings of their final project
13	The Term Paper Final Report	Between Week 12 and Week 14	Posting each group's final term paper
14	Post Your Evaluation of this Experience	Between Week 13 and Week 14	Posting each student's reflection of learning experience (working processes) from the assignment and evaluation of their own success working in a team.
15	Add Your Congratulations to Mary Here!	Between Week 13 and a week after the course ended	Posting messages of congratulation to Mary, a class member, who had a baby at the end of the course
16	Announcements of Interest	Between Week 2 and the 4th week after the course ended	Instructor's announcements related to course
17	Feedback on Papers	On the 2nd week after the course ended	Instructor's feedback on students' (as a group) final paper

Forum 1 was initiated by the instructor, and commencing with Forum 2, designated students took over the position of the discussion leader and posted starter questions to the online forums. The instructor divided the students into two groups, and each group was allocated to a separate forum to post messages. That is, two concurrent forums (e.g., Forum 2A and Forum 2B) took place with each group of students replying to different starter questions. According to the instructor, the purpose of using two concurrent forums was to make the discussion forums manageable, but the instructor encouraged the students to freely visit and contribute to the other concurrent forum as well. Most of the students, however, remained throughout the semester within the forum they had originally been allocated to.

4.1.2   Focal Students

The focal students in this course were three L2 speakers (Ping, Mei, and Sunny) and four L1 speakers (Dana, Michelle, Chris and Hilary) in the Faculty of Education. Ping and Mei came from mainland China, and Sunny came from Taiwan.

Ping studied Teaching Mandarin as a Second Language at a university in China and had experience of teaching Mandarin to foreign students at her home university. Ping had completed her Master's program in Linguistics at another Canadian university and started her Ph.D. program four months before the commencement of this course.

Mei had immigrated from China two years ago with her husband and son to study Early Childhood Education in the M.Ed. program. Her undergraduate degree was in Engineering, but she said she did not like the engineer's life in the lab. After her son was born, she became interested in children's education and decided to move to Canada to study this subject. For Mei, Course A was the seventh course she had taken.

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Sunny was also in the M.Ed. program. She had already had an M.A. degree in English language and literature, and had been teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Taiwan for 11 years. She came to Canada two years before, completed her diploma program, and when I met her for this research, she was completing her M.Ed. program that she had started a year ago. After she completed this course, she went back to Taiwan to continue teaching English.

In the questionnaire, I asked L2 students to rate their own English proficiency level along a five point scale (5-excellent, 4-very good, 3-good, 2-poor, and 1-very poor) in terms of their *daily oral communication, academic reading, listening comprehension of academic content, degree of participation in academic discussions,* and *a holistic (overall) rating of English proficiency.* Ping assessed herself highest (4.00), followed by Mei (2.83), and Sunny (2.33). I matched the average score of their self assessment with their TOEFL scores to check the comparability between these two scores. Both Ping's and Mei's scores were 620, and Sunny's was 580. The rank of their TOEFL scores did not exactly correspond to the rank of their self-assessed ratings. However, their self-ratings of holistic English proficiency correlated with the average scores of their self-ratings in five areas listed above.

The L1 participants, Dana, Michelle, Chris and Hilary were from Canada. They were all teachers, and Dana and Hilary were taking a year off from teaching to work on their M.A. program at the time of the data collection. Except for Sunny and Hilary, none of the students had previously undertaken a CMC course. Sunny had taken a mixed-mode course a few semesters before from another instructor in the same graduate program, and Hilary had taken one distance learning course at a university in the United

States. Ping had not taken an online course herself, but she did research on WebCT for her Master's thesis and was quite familiar with the format of the course. Table 4.3 shows a summary of selected demographic information of focal students in Course A and B.

Table 4.3: Summary of Demographic Information of Focal Students in Two Courses

	Course	Name	English Lang	Nationality	Gender	Age	Area of study	Degree	No of online courses taken before
1	A	Ping	L2	China	female	26-30	language education	PhD	0
2	A	Mei	L2	China	female	31-35	language education	Med	0
3	A	Sunny	L2	Taiwan	female	40-	language education	Med	1
4	A	Dana	L1	Canada	female	31-35	language education	MA	0
5	A	Michelle	L1	Canada	female	26-30	language education	Med	0
6	A	Chris	L1	Canada	female	40-	language education	Med	0
7	A	Hilary	L1	Canada	female	40-	language education	MA	1
8	B	Sohee	L2	Korea	female	36-40	computing studies	MA	0
9	B	Daehan	L2	Korea	male	40-	special education	Med	0
10	B	Chang	L2	China	male	40-	curriculum studies	PhD	1
11	B	Kathy	L1	America	female	26-30	special education	MA	0
12	B	Rory	L1	Canada	female	18-25	educational psychology	MA	0
Total N	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12

4.1.3 Expected Conventions vs. Created Online Discourse

The instructor made it clear in class that the students should keep their messages to the BB brief, approximately 100 words per message, so that it was easy for others to read the messages. He also made it clear that he would not be an active participant on the BB. He said to the students in class in the second week of the semester, "I don't take an active role in the discussion forum. If you have questions or issues to discuss, use the email or the special message board" (Dr. Taylor, 1/15/ 2003, in class).

In his interview, the instructor explained that the purpose of offering the course in mixed-mode was to increase the quantity and quality of student participation. He stated as follows:

> My hope was the opportunity to write on a bulletin board would increase both the quantity and the quality of the student participation. The quantity would be enhanced by the relative ease of participating on the bulletin board. It's simple, it's ubiquitous, it's at home, it's convenient. But the quality, I thought, would be enhanced in the course, because it is essentially written reflection on the course readings and on the main course assignment, not strictly spoken. So I thought that was an opportunity for increased reflective work on the course topics. *(Dr. Taylor; Interview; 4/15/200)*[17]

The total number of messages the students in Course A posted during the semester was 281 with the mean of 20 (n=14). The distribution of the number of postings per student is summarized in Figure 4.1. The student who posted the minimum number of postings (7 postings) in this course turned out to be Mei, an L2 student, and the two students who posted the maximum number of postings (35~36 postings) turned out to be Hilary and Dana, two L1 speakers. Hilary and Dana were also two of the students who most actively expressed their opinions during whole-class discussions in face-to-face meetings.

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[17] See Appendix F for the conventions of transcription.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of the Students' Total Number of Postings for the Whole Course (Course A)

The number of posted messages
(Mean= 20, n = 14)
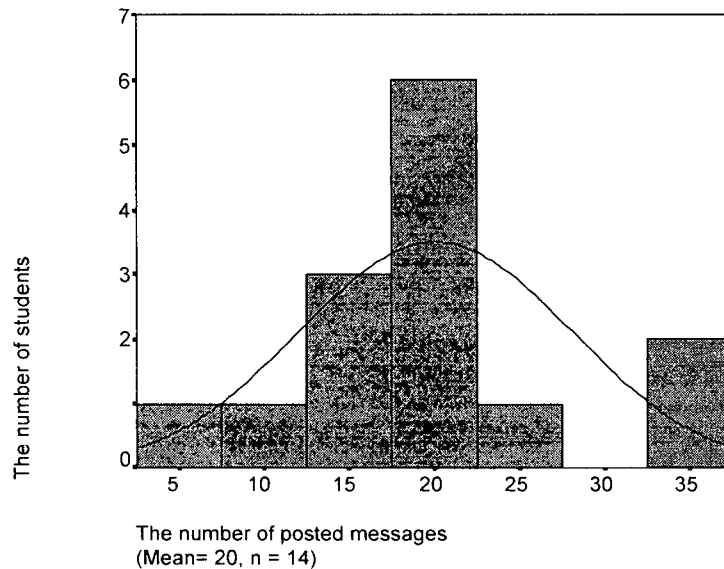
The discussion starter for the first forum was posted by the instructor, and the students were expected to respond to the following question on the BB:

Message no. 334

Posted by **Tim Taylor** (Course A) on Mon Dec 16, 2002 16:23
Subject Starter question for us all.

Gleason begins her chapter with the question "Why do we study language development?" I'd like to pose a more specific question to all of you: "Why do educators study language development?"
-Tim
(Dr. Taylor, Forum 1)

Except for one student, every student was able to log-on and respond to this question with approximately 100 words as the instructor had advised at the beginning of the course. Most of the students' postings in Forum 1 reflected the formal nature of written text in that their language tended to be more condensed, edited, and information-loaded with low redundancy compared to spoken language. Using mostly declaratives, the students in Forum 1 stated their positions in formal academic tone. The following is an example of a student's message in Forum 1:

Message no. 354

Posted by **Dana** on Sat Jan 11, 2003 22:30
Subject Why Educators Study Language Development

Educators study language development to better understand the nature of the path that the child before them has taken. Awareness and understanding of language development provide valuable input into developing and implementing teaching and learning activities. Such study provides a focus for planning pedagogical activities to better meet age-appropriate language needs.

Overall, educators are better able to meet the language learning needs of students if they have a thorough understanding of the span and patterns of language development - where their student has been, where he/she is likely at, and where he/she is going.
(Dana, Forum 1)

It should be noted that most of the students (except for Sunny and Hilary) were

first-time users of WebCT and online forums. These newcomers seemed to have

difficulty at the beginning trying to figure out the appropriate register to compose on the

BB. [18] As Dana said in her interview:

At first I wasn't sure how formal the tone should be. So I spent more time in the beginning thinking, "okay, how detailed, how long should this be." [...] initially it was very formal, and it was something new. I guess I was trying to figure out, okay, it's not the same as talking, but at the same times it's not like writing a formal paper. *(Dana; Interview II; 4/25/2003)*

Another first-time user, Mei expressed a similar concern. Her concern was, however,

increased by the challenge she had to face as the newcomer not only to online forums but

also to the course subject that dealt with linguistics. In addition, unlike other students in

this course, she had no teaching experience and had been exposed to Western formal

education only for a year. She reflected on her first few weeks of participating on the BB

as follows:

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[18] A conventional definition of *register* in linguistics is a communicative style that is associated with a particular social context (e.g., formal or informal register and academic or non-academic register).

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Posting messages on the BB is not like you writing articles. Because writing articles is formal, and after one year studying at LCU, I know the rules, how to write articles. In online, this is my first time, so I didn't know how to write at first, formal or informal? I learned from other people's messages gradually. *(Mei; Interview II; 4/14/2003)*

From Forum 2 to Forum 7, the students took turns in leading discussions by one or two students taking responsibility for posting the discussion starter questions in each forum. In their starter questions, the discussion leaders usually highlighted a couple of the main points made by the author of the relevant readings as background before they posed the starter questions. The following message is an example of a typical starter question posed by students:

Message no. 384

Posted by **Jenny** on Mon Jan 20, 2003 08:09
Subject Discussion Question

Happy Monday Everyone! In our reading of chapter 3, Menn and Stoel-Gammon state that, "overt correction by adults plays no role in the acquisition of language." While acknowledging this statement, at what point in language acquisition do you feel that overt correction could play a role, if ever? As educators, what part of language acquisition should be corrected? For example, I taught a kindergarten student who still used toddler talk such as "puter" for "computer". At this point is correction necessary? Jenny
(Jenny, Forum 2B)

The first student who posted a message in response to Jenny's guiding question was Hilary. She wrote:

Message no. 394 [Branch from no. 384]

Posted by **Hilary** on Mon Jan 20, 2003 19:59
Subject Re: Discussion Question

I am so glad you asked this question, Jenny!! I agree with the logic behind Stoel-Gammon and Menn's statement, but experience has shown me that there are also critical points in a child's development where overt correction has had an immediate effect. This may be a long story but it is illustrative – apologies in advance! In her early linguistic development my daughter had always substituted

/t/ for /k/. We never corrected her, believing it would eventually straighten itself
out. [...]
(Hilary, Forum 2B)

As the course proceeded, students' messages responding to the discussion starter

questions started to take a shape that was different from Forum 1 responses in various

aspects. First, in terms of formality of message, the message tone started to sound more

relaxed than it was in Forum 1, in that most students inserted in their messages social

formulas such as greetings, apologies or thanks. These social formulas ranged from "Hi,

everyone," to "Hope you are all having a good weekend," or "Thank you for the starter

question Mary," etc. The formality of the message content varied between students

depending on personal choice. Because all the students (except for Mei) were teachers or

had a teaching background to some degree or other, they often drew on their various

experiences as language teachers in addressing discussion starter questions and

incorporated personal anecdotes or personal examples into their discussion. As one

student wrote:

> **Message no. 498** [Branch from no. 470]
>
> Posted by **Mindy** on Sun Feb 9, 2003 17:31
> **Subject Re: Chris's Discussion Starter for 4B**
>
> I found the Karmiloff-Smith article very interesting because I teach five year olds.
> At this age (as I'm sure there can be with other ages as well) there is such a wide
> range of developmental abilities. Some children are able to carry on quite
> fascinating conversations with adults while others are still at a 'Baby talk' stage
> and speak in one or two word sentences. When children are speaking like adults
> and using more complex words, it's hard to know sometimes if the child actually
> understands what it is that they are saying. Is it just that the children who have
> better recall use the words they hear adults around them saying? *(Mindy, Forum
> 4B)*

As the students were going through several forums, most students' writing

seemed to settle at the middle point between being like personal emails and a formal

academic paper. In general, most students' postings remained as refined as in academic essays, and there was no occurrence of abbreviations that one may come across in casual chat rooms or emails (e.g., BTW for by the way; CUL for See you later, etc.). Most of the focal students (both L1 and L2 speakers) stated in the interview that their composing process was similar to the process they used when writing academic research papers or essays. The comments from a couple of focal students at an interview will sum up how the students in this course approached the BB writing in the main forums:

> I usually try to get a key point to answer the question. I always would like to refer to literature and things like that so that I am not talking from no where. I write in a way like a research paper should be like, although it should be very short. *(Ping, L2 speaker; Interview II; 4/23/2003)*

> Even though I would see what people were saying I had to have time to think it all through to be able to make the statement. So it was more like writing for me like composing a mini essay into that rather than just chatting away. *(Chris, L1 speaker; Interview I; 4/9/2003I)*

In part, this seemed to be because the discussion starter questions on the main forums mostly dealt with theory and its application in a teaching context. The depth and the number of the questions appeared to be cognitively demanding compared to topics in casual conversation. Dana touched upon this aspect at an interview:

> Some of the discussion starter questions, I know it was a very rich question, but it consists of about 8 or 9, 10 questions within a paragraph (laugh). So that was also interesting because we were told to keep our response short. So I found that very difficult. Because some of the questions had, you may have noticed, about 8, 9, 10 questions in the paragraph. And I think, "Oh, my goodness, how can I provide a short response to this. This is like a paper!" (laugh) So then I thought just go on a few times instead of providing an extra long response. *(Dana; Interview II; 4/25/2003)*

As revealed in Dana's comments above, the students were very concerned that they were supposed to keep to the approximate 100-word limit for messages, as the instructor had requested. The instructor's intention behind this "shorter message" request

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was to make online discussions more manageable, which would allow students to "get more chances to interact with each other." This regulation received conflicting responses from the students. At one level, students thought it made their messages more concise. One L2 student, Sunny perceived unusually long messages as "stressful to read" as she commented:

> Instead of seeing it as communicating with somebody online, I see it as, "Okay I have another paper to read." So I don't tend to respond to that kind of long messages. *(Sunny; Interview I; 2/18/2003)*

Sunny addressed her discomfort of reading long messages politely when she communicated with a student who had posted a long message as follows:

> **Message no. 461** [Branch from no. 432]
>
> Posted by **Sunny** on Mon Jan 27, 2003 18:06
> **Subject Re: Discussion Question 3B (Chapter 4)**
>
> Dear Dana, It takes me a long time to read and digest your posting, but I really enjoy your ideas. It seems you are so experienced and so creative. My problem is that though sometimes the language acquisition devices do work both for L1 and L2, still some devices do not. So what should I consider when I design the program? Any ideas? Thanks. Sunny
> *(Sunny, Forum 3B)*

At another level, this limit on the length of messages increased the difficulty of writing for students. A few L1 students made similar comments in the interviews as Michelle did as follows:

> Sometimes I felt I could not write as much as I wanted to. Because as soon as you put one idea down and maybe 250 words, and Tim wanted us to put it in around 100 words. So sometimes you couldn't say everything you wanted to say. *(Michelle; 4/8/2003; Interview II)*

To the instructor, however, these shorter messages appealed more as being "quality" messages. In comparison with the ones from the previous year, he observed the students' postings as follows:

Certainly this year, I think the discussions have been more focused. I do not have extremely long rambling postings. They seem to be more concise, focused on the topic. I think quite productive. *(Dr. Taylor; 4/15/2003; Interview)*

In spite of the instructor's request regarding length limit, the length of each message varied at the beginning, and some students' messages were often twice as long as other students' messages. Except for one individual, who wrote quite lengthy messages, most of the students kept their messages with the size of one screen (100~250 words limit). Toward the end of the semester (by the sixth forum), unusually long messages disappeared. Students who had more to say in their message employed a strategy of splitting their message into smaller pieces and posting multiple messages. Therefore, it was observed that some students' messages appeared in a row as separate messages with their second message starting with a little note saying something like, "Hi again everyone, I had more to say to the discussion question, but I didn't want you to have to keep scrolling down!! Anyway, the last item I wanted to address was...." (Michelle; 2/9/2003; Forum 4A)

Another salient aspect in the student-led forums was that there were frequent appearances of positive appraisal expressions used in reference to other members or their own messages. *Appraisal* refers to the attitudinal coloring of talk, according to Eggins and Slade (1997), which includes appreciation (speakers' reactions to, and descriptive evaluations of, reality), affect (speakers' expression of emotional states), judgment (speakers' judgments about people's behavior in terms of ethics, morality, or social values) and amplification (grading speakers' attitudes towards people, things, or events). Such words and phrases had been used exclusively by the instructor in Forum 1 and

commonly appeared in his messages throughout the semester, as in the underlined part of the following example:

Message no. 364

Posted by **Tim Taylor** (Course A) on Sun Jan 12, 2003 20:19
Subject Congratulations to Discussion Forum participants!

<u>Good</u> work, everyone. <u>I'm delighted</u> that so many have managed to learn the system involved in posting responses on the WebCT bulletin board system. [...]
(Dr. Taylor, Excerpt, Forum 1)

The students' use of appraisal, however, was a common occurrence during the weeks when the students were in charge of facilitating discussions. Some examples of positive appraisal used by students are:

"Chris, I think that this is an <u>excellent</u> question." - appreciation
"<u>I'm glad</u> you asked this question, Jenny<u>!!</u>" - affect/ amplification
"<u>What a great</u> starter, Jenny<u>!</u>" – appreciation / amplification
"I think you made a <u>good</u> choice using these two different age groups"- judgment

This made a contrast to the whole-class discussion situation in face-to-face class meetings, where appraisal was used almost exclusively by the instructor only. In addition, the number of appraisal expressions in reference to other members' messages used by students in Course A was much higher than in Course B (35 in Course A and 8 in Course B during two weeks).

Except for the length of messages there were no explicitly stated rules made by the instructor. After the instructor made the first entry on the first forum to post a discussion starter question, he handed the role of facilitator to his students and had only limited presence while the students were discussing readings on the major forums. In the interview, Dr. Taylor made his intentions clear as he commented on his expectations of BB participation:

I suspect that the students, at least in the BB approach that I take in the course, need to be prepared to address one another. That is, they need to be prepared to be engaged in more student-to-student discourse than student-to-professor discourse. That's partly because I intentionally stay out of the discussions, particularly from a substantive point of view. Once in a while I break my rule – if I'm directly asked a question I'll try to answer it helpfully. But I do try not to steer the discussion, and I try not to be too present. I'm always afraid that then the students will be interacting with me and not each other, which I think is more valuable. It's just not one of the course goals to have 15 people interacting with me online. First of all, I'm not capable of doing that properly and giving it the proper attention it deserves. And I think less is learned by my students when they interact only with one voice. Though I like the one-to-many discussion if that occurs. *(Dr. Tim Taylor; Interview; 4/15/2003)*

Throughout the semester the instructor posted 86 messages, which was 23% of the total number of messages (367 messages) posted on the BB. Figure 4.2 summarizes the number of postings that students and the instructor contributed to each forum on the BB.

Figure 4.2: The Comparison of the Number of Postings between Students and the Instructor (Course A)
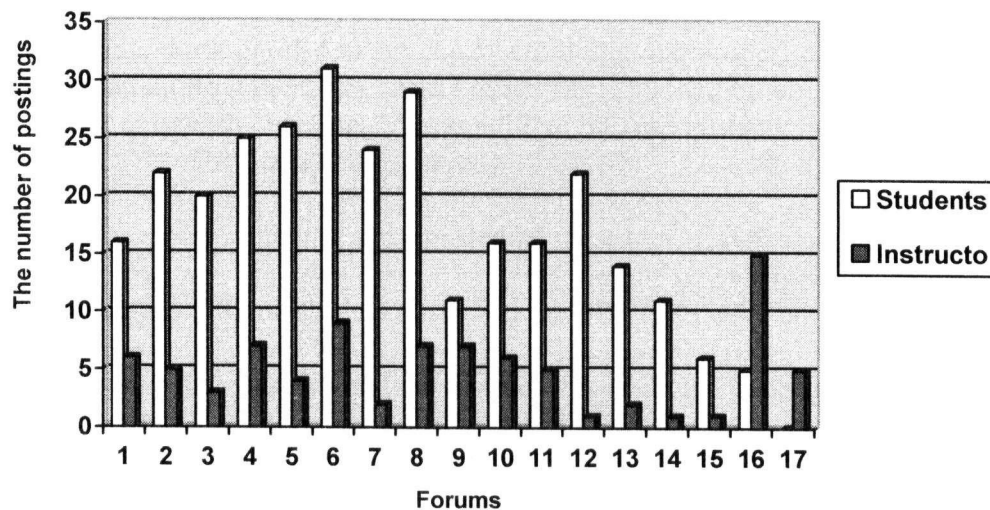
Note. For the title and description of each forum indicated by numbers (1~17) on X-axis, refer to Table 4.2.

This made a contrast with the face-to-face classroom, where the instructor was the facilitator of the whole-group discussions throughout the semester. During PowerPoint

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presentations in class, the students sometimes jumped in to ask questions or make comments. Occasionally, the instructor solicited comments from the students. It was mostly Dana, Chris, Hilary and sometimes Mary, Sunny and Jenny who dominated the whole-class discussions. The rest of the students spoke occasionally when they were asked to report on their project as a part of their group or to give a short answer.

Most of the instructor's messages on the BB dealt with the logistics of WebCT. In Forum 1, for example, only one of the six messages posted by the instructor gave guidance on a particular subject. He occasionally intervened in the students' discussions in order to give advice related to the course content. He did it in a very careful manner as can be seen in the following message:

> **Message no. 577** [Branch from no. 570]
>
> Posted by **Tim Taylor** (Course A) on Fri Mar 7, 2003 08:51
> **Subject Re: Decontextualized Language**
>
> I'm going to jump in at this point, something I promised myself to do only rarely, in order to let everyone feel very free to contribute without any sense of being monitored. However, given the maturity of our discussions to date, this is not a big risk!
>
> I want to ask you Hilary about the term decontextualized. As a researcher who studies the development of pragmatic language ability in preschool and primary age children, I have often wondered about whether the concept is a valid one. My sense is that no language can be created or understood outside of some context of use, even literary or reflective language of the sort that Wells and Snow consider in their two papers. [...]
> *(Dr. Taylor, Excerpt, Forum 6B)*

Most of the instructor's messages on the BB were marked by an informal and sociable tone of phrase such as, "Hi, Hilary, Everyone's working on a Sunday night! What has become of us?" or "Simple, no? Keep up the good discussion, everyone." It was observed that his postings were intended to put a more friendly and social atmosphere

into the online forum and deal with the logistics of utilizing WebCT so as to encourage students' participation in discussions.

The instructor's lack of presence on the BB seemed to have given the students ownership of their discussions and more opportunities to learn from each other. Most of the students, however, expressed the desire of having more presence by the instructor on the BB in such a way that they could get more direction and input. Even though they were aware of the instructor's intention of taking a step back from the BB and therefore valued their ownership of discussions, the students wanted him "more to be a part of the discussion group." This kind of need was stronger at the beginning of the course. In an effort to involve the instructor and obtain help, some students tried to call in the instructor in their messages such as, "Any thoughts? Tim?" or addressing messages directly to the instructor such as, "Dear Tim." In doing this, students were trying to do on the BB what they needed in face-to-face classes, that is, take advantage of an opportunity to clarify and synthesize their questions or topics with both the instructor and the other students.

As I was reviewing the online discourse texts, I noticed that most of the discussion leaders seemed to have used the first entry made by the instructor for Forum 1 as a model to follow when they facilitated the discussions. In doing so, they provided a brief summary of the points made by the author of the week's readings in presenting questions, and frequently wrote feedback in response to other members' messages and closed the forums with a note of thanks, etc. Dana, for example, recollected at an interview her experience as facilitator as follows:

> When I was leading it, what I tried to do was that I remembered what he [the instructor] did for the first discussion. I gave the question out to everybody. And then I allowed the people to answer. I didn't jump in right away. And then I put my answers as well, what I thought. And then perhaps I would comment or add

to what other people would have said. So I tried to emulate what he had done with us. Because it was the first one, so I wasn't sure what I should be doing after posting the question. Because you're not just posting a question. You're supposed to facilitate it. So I tried to emulate what he had done earlier. *(Dana; Interview I; 2/7/2003)*

One of the most interesting points that emerged from the interviews was that students felt that their writing was influenced mostly by other members of the class on the BB. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the students expressed insecurity at the beginning of composing on the BB due to lack of prior experience of mixed-mode courses. As Michelle commented:

And I just wanted to be more academic in it. In the beginning, I was actually a little concerned because, when I first read everybody's, I thought, oh my gosh, mine is not academic enough! And everybody else's was so academic in the way they were writing and seemed more serious. So that's why I tried to stop writing the way I was writing. *(Michelle; 4/8/2003; Interview II)*

She recollected that her writing on the BB had changed from being informal with personal notes to being "very businesslike" over time. Interestingly, Dana, who also found it difficult to figure out the register at the beginning showed a contrast to Michelle's message, as she said:

I noticed in myself, at first my answers were very formal, very similar to term papers, very academic. Now it's becoming more conversational. Because, I think, I saw other people. Their writing was more conversational. So then I didn't want to appear unfriendly or cold. And I thought it's true, because we're communicating. It's not live, however it is to your colleagues and everything. So, I think it's become more casual now. But at first, it was academic, because I didn't know these people (laughs). Also I wasn't comfortable with using online. *(Dana; Interview I; 2/7/2003)*

After all, as stated earlier in this chapter, the students seemed to have met in the middle by observing other people's writing styles and adjusting theirs to one another.

In addition, the students responded much more frequently to each other than in Forum 1, where they were almost strictly responding to the instructor's general

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discussion starter. Students were also helping each other forming threaded questions and responses. Figure 4.3 is an example of the threads of messages formed by the students in Group B on Week 2 and Group A on Week 11 respectively. The threads formed irregular shapes depending on the forums, but show evidence of some messages branching out as the participants responded to each other.

Figure 4.3: Samples of Interaction Patterns on the BB (Course A)

Forum 2B (Week 3) 8 participants	Forum 7A (Week 11) 8 participants
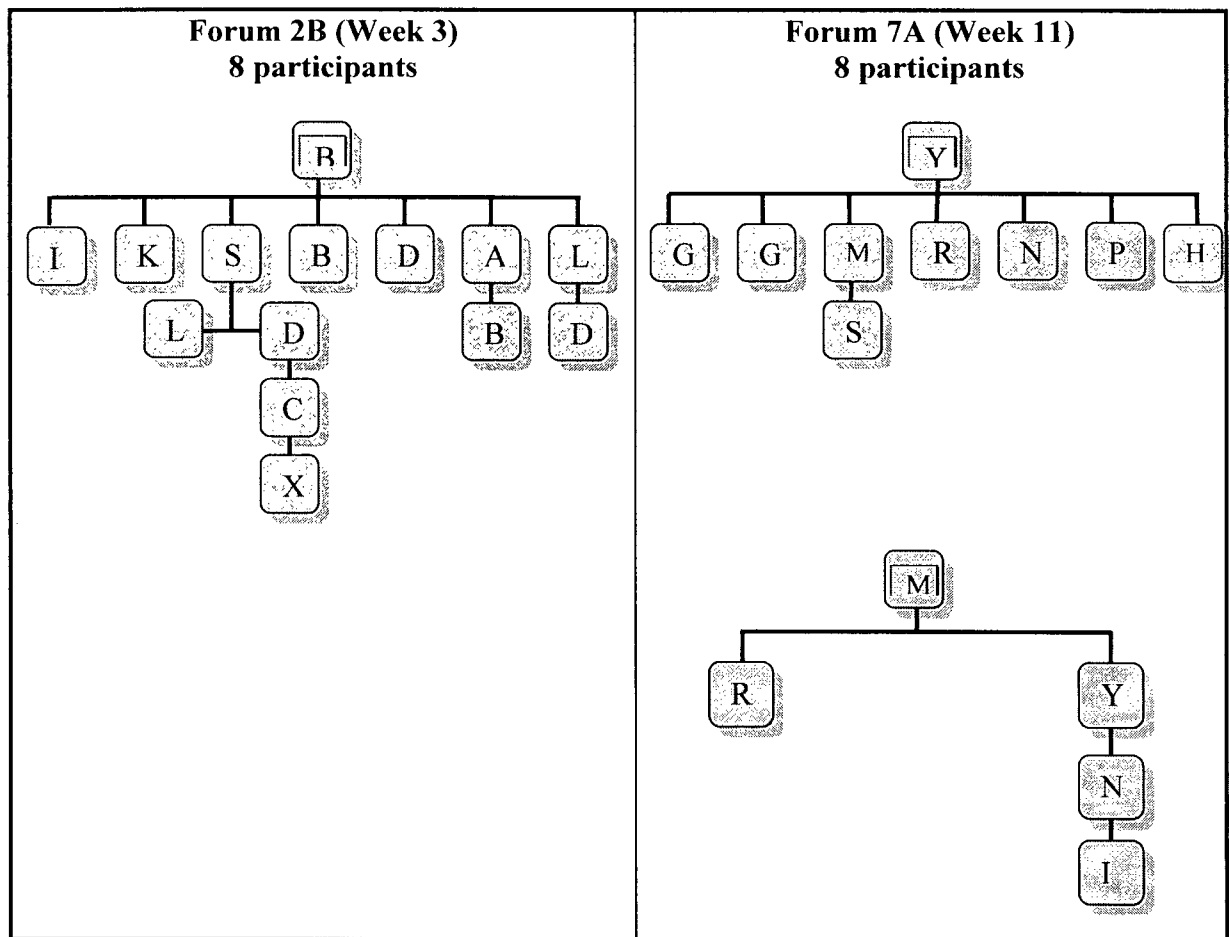
Note. Each box represents a posted message in the Forum, and each row indicates the connection between postings. Each letter identifies an individual participant. The initial posting is at the top of the diagram, and responses to this and subsequent postings are shown underneath the initial posting. The class was divided into two groups of eight (8) participants each. So in the second line of Forum 2B, there are seven (7) postings, which were required of the students. The third posting in the second row (posted by S) prompts four (4) responses as shown by the row between the second and the fifth row of postings. Forum 7A had two discussion starter questions, initiated by Y and M respectively.

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4.2 Course B

4.2.1 General Description of the Course

Course B was a graduate seminar in educational technology offered by the Faculty of Education. The instructor, Dr. Debbie Wall, had been teaching in higher education for 15 years. She had taught a variety of courses in mixed-mode, but it was the first time she taught this particular course. Course B used the BB of WebCT as Course A did. The participation in the BB in Course B, however, was required in addition to (as opposed to as a replacement of) the regular weekly class meetings. Students attended a 2.5 hours face-to-face class once a week through the semester. In order to meet the course requirements, students were expected to complete four major assignments: a final project (40%), participation in and facilitation of discussions in face-to-face class (20%), leading a technology workshop (20%) and contribution to the online discussion board (20%).

The final project was to produce "an educational tool" that demonstrated an understanding of relevant issues dealt with in the course in the form of media, such as a digital video, Web site, and/or and multi-media artifact. Students were allowed to work on the final project either alone or in groups. The final project was assessed based on the degree to which it demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the issues dealt with in the course, its innovative and informative quality and the extent it reflected an appropriate use of medium (such as with respect to design quality). Attainment of computer skills was not a pre-requisite of this course, and students' computer technology skills varied to a great degree.

In the face-to-face seminars, class was usually started by one or two students who were responsible for leading a discussion on the week's topic. The instructor made it clear that these discussion facilitators were expected to present "a brief summary of the main ideas and a critical analysis of the major themes in that week's readings, noting points of agreement, disagreement and the like." In addition, the following was stated in the course syllabus:

- Each facilitator will discuss the significance of the conceptual framework used by the authors of one or more readings, and generate a critical analysis of both theoretical and conceptual strengths and shortcomings.

- Each facilitator should prepare about 15 minutes of material. Most presenters benefit from using overheads, and distributing a short summary.

- The facilitator/s will animate an open discussion.

Therefore, at the end of the presentation, the facilitator(s) formed small groups to have the students discuss question(s) they had prepared. The small group discussions took place for approximately five to 10 minutes, and the representative of each small group summarized briefly what they had discussed in their group. The discussion facilitation took up almost two thirds of the whole class time. The discussion facilitation was marked on a Pass/Fail basis.

Following a short break the class then moved onto a technology workshop. Each week a student was given responsibility for presenting a workshop on a media skill of their choice. The purpose of this workshop was to have each student demonstrate an available technology and share how to make use of it with other classmates. This was mostly done in the format of a presentation rather than hands-on activity. Areas that

students presented on included using digital video and creating an iMovie, computer graphics, Dreamweaver, creating and downloading music onto computer, exploring Chat worlds, etc.

The BB of Course B had five types of forums that were available to the participants: *Reflections on Readings, Messages from the Instructor, Posts Not Directly on Readings, Discussions of Project and Posting Technical Difficulties.* Regarding requirements for online participation, each student was asked to post two types of messages on the online discussion board per week: reflections in response to the readings of the week and a response to a message posted by a fellow student. The students in this course were not given separate instructions on how to explore the course Web site and how to use the BB. The instructor, however, allowed a week or so to the students to post a testing message on the BB for practice with their user name and password.

4.2.2 Focal Students

As stated in Chapter 3, this course had 16 students (7 females and 9 males). Four students were speakers of English as a second language. The five focal students who participated in interviews were Chang, Daehan, Sohee, Kathy and Rory. All five students were in the second semester of their program at the time of data collection. Sohee and Daehan came from Korea, and both had started their Master's program three months prior to the course.

Chang was a Ph.D. student who came from China and had taught EFL there for 15 years. He had completed his Master's in Interdisciplinary Studies in the United States and had lived in North America for five years. He had been involved in several computer-related projects, so he was quite familiar with various computer applications,

programming languages, database management and Web page design, etc. Chang had taken an online course once before and also had an experience of running a WebCT course himself.

Daehan came to Canada six months before the commencement of this course to study gifted education. He had been teaching English in a high school in Korea for about 10 years and was selected and funded by the Korea Ministry of Education (KMOE) to pursue his degree. He had gone through an extremely competitive selection process for the KMOE grant, and the qualification criteria were based largely on his score on a standardized English proficiency test (mainly reading and listening skills) and the years of teaching experience. Like Daehan, Sohee had been an English teacher in a secondary school in Korea for several years. She came to Canada with her 11 year-old son six months before the course started. She was in the same department as Chang, who was studying Computing Studies in Education.

With regard to the language proficiency levels of each L2 student, the same self-assessment strategies were applied as for the students in Course A. Using these self-assessment strategies, Chang had the highest overall language proficiency (very good-average score 3.83), followed by Sohee (good- average score 2.33) and then Daehan (poor- 2.17). In terms of recent TOEFL scores, however, Sohee's score was highest (610), followed by Daehan (600) and Chang (580).

Two L1 focal students, Kathy and Rory, came from the United States and Canada respectively, and were working on a Master's program in Special Education and Educational Psychology respectively. Kathy had a BA in speech language pathology and

B. Ed in elementary education. Rory studied Psychology as an undergraduate. Both Kathy and Rory were young MA students without any teaching experience.

Except for Chang, none of the four students had taken any online courses before. As was the case for the rest of the students in this class, the focal students' level of comfort in using computer technology varied. However, all the focal students were competent enough to create PowerPoint slides for class presentation. Except for Kathy, every student reported that they were quite comfortable using computer technology for various purposes.

4.2.3 Expected Conventions vs. Created Online Discourse

The instructor told the students that the messages students posted would be assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. For measuring quantity, the instructor counted the number of required postings whereas for quality the course syllabus indicated the following criteria:

- Appropriate and accurate summary of key constructs/themes
- Analysis of constructs that reveals an advance in the writer's knowledge and/or contributes to an advance in collective knowledge and or, an attempt to advance knowledge.

Based on the above criteria, the instructor marked the students' postings as either *Pass* or *Fail*. The instructor also stated in the course syllabus, "The bulletin board can also be used to communicate with the class about any appropriate topic; e.g., an interesting WWW (World Wide Web) site, an upcoming lecture, scholarship information, etc."

According to the instructor, the overall purpose of offering her course in mixed-mode can be summarized in two major points: (a) she wanted the students to access "a rich array of resources"; and (b) she wanted the students to populate the course Web space with their own voices. In a way, she had hoped to achieve the philosophically and pedagogically best environment for the students as she stated:

> [...] this was a course that specifically dealing with education, culture, and technology. And so in every way, I structured the course so that it would embody the pedagogical and philosophical beliefs that structure the course that are all about students' constructing knowledge as opposed to blah-blah-blah, digital tools, decentering expertise from me to a more distributed notion of expertise. *(Dr. Wall; Interview; 4/29/2003)*

The first round of the online forum started in the third week of the semester, and thirteen of 16 students managed to post their messages on the BB. The total postings students contributed to the BB were 271 with the mean of 17 messages per person through the semester. The total number of messages posted by the instructor was 15. The students' entries were almost exclusively made to "Reflections on Readings" (259 entries), and there were six messages that posted on the forum, "Posts Not Directly on Readings." No one made entries to the forum for discussing the project, and "Posting Technical Difficulties" had only one entry throughout the semester. As is seen on Figure 4.4, the lowest number of postings was nine (by Iva, L1 student) and the highest two numbers of postings were 31 and 26 respectively (by Harold, L1 student and Kathy, L1 student).

Figure 4.4: Distribution of the Students' Total Number of Postings for the Whole Course (Course B)

The number of posted messages
(Mean= 17, n = 16)
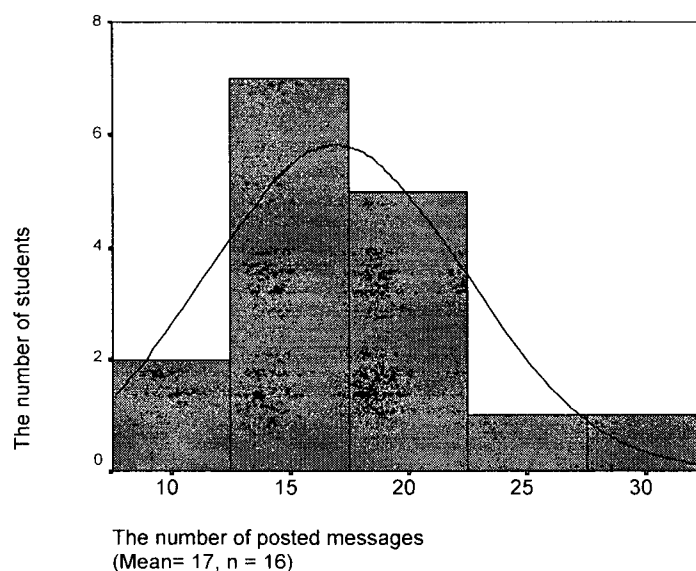
Students' messages in Course B were characterized by their lengthy and formal writing style. The length of messages became steadily longer as the course proceeded, and by Week 11 messages that exceeded 1,000 words appeared a few times. The messages in response to the weekly readings tended to be much longer than the ones in response to messages posted by colleagues. For example, the average number of words of a message posted in response to weekly readings in Week 3 was **257** words (44 words minimum ~ 430 words maximum), while the average length of messages in response to other people's messages was **167** words (72 min. to 323 words max.). In Week 11, the average was **615** words (250 min. ~ 1434 words max.) for postings in response to weekly readings and **283** words (116 min. ~ 646 words max.) for the ones in response to other people's messages. As is shown in Figure 4.5, the number of postings for each week was relatively consistent throughout the semester. The weeks that show a sudden drop in the number of postings (Week 7, 9 & 13) had no weekly reading assignments.

Figure 4.5: The Comparison of the Number of Postings between Students and the Instructor (Course B)
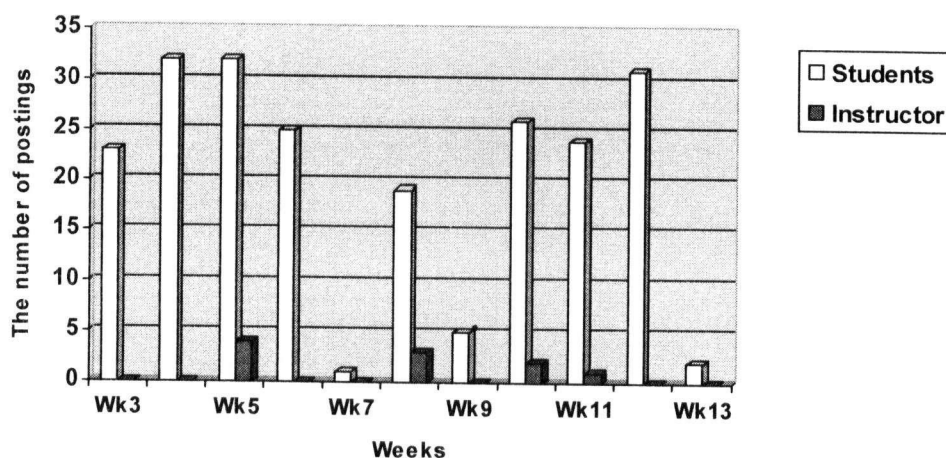
Note. Week 7 was Reading Week

The message format used by each student was quite similar to what is called, "reader responses." That is, most students developed their message content by retrieving the main points of the readings, applying the given information to their personal learning experience, teaching context or the State/government situation and analyzing and/or evaluating the readings. The following excerpt is a typical example that represents most students' writing on the BB:

Message no. 238

Posted by **Harold** on Tue Mar 18, 2003 11:52
Subject Digital Divide - regional commitment for transformation

The digital divide can be separated into two distinct issues: regional and global. Regional issues are the ones that I'd like to present here. Regional issues occur within our schools, school districts, provinces, and our country. They are the areas where we have the potential to make the greatest impact. Infrastructure (the hardware, wiring etc.) is important. Build it and they will come. What happens when they arrive? Do they stay, what do they do? Clearly having the infrastructure is not sufficient. […]
(Harold, Excerpt, Week 11)

As stated earlier in this chapter, the number of appraisal expressions in reference

to other members' messages was much fewer in Course B than in Course A. Most of

appraisal expressions that appeared in the BB text of Course B were used in reference to

the authors of their readings, which were usually negative ones as illustrated in the

following example:

Message no. 235

Posted by **Kathy** on Tue Mar 18, 2003 09:39
Subject The Big Divide

In the first reading, I have to say right off the bat, I found the author to be kind of
wishy-washy. Is access enough or isn't it? On pg. 129 he states, "While access is
critical for universialtiy [university], it is also inadequate." He goes on to devote
a section to access, naming it "Access Is Not Enough in the Schools Either." Yet,
he sums up his entire chapter with the phrase, "Give them (children) access to
good technology and they will find a way – not to just assimilate but to change
their life circumstances." Am I missing something? I mean it, I could have
misinterpreted it or just not understood it – did I miss something? [...]
(Kathy, Excerpt, Week 11)

The major concerns for both L1 and L2 focal students in participating in this

course were completing heavy weekly readings and posting two messages on the BB

every week. All the focal students pointed out that the weakly readings were heavy in

terms of both the amount and the difficulty of the content. Moreover, most students

expressed difficulty in coping with the instructor's expectations of BB postings as made

explicit by her at the beginning of the semester. In the interview, I specifically asked Dr.

Wall what she had meant by "advancing knowledge" stated in her assessment criteria.

She responded as follows:

There's an idea in a chapter that they read or in one of their fellow students' posts.
I want them to take that idea, and I want them to push it forward. So it's not
enough for them to say, "I don't like what you wrote because one, two, and
three." What I want them to do is to say something more like, the concept of
whatever it is, is interesting, and here's why it's interesting, and the way that I
think that this is significant that goes beyond what is in the text is A, B, C, and D.

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(long pause) Building on the knowledge in the text, or knowledge in other students' email, and engaging in a constructive dialog with that knowledge, because a lot of graduate students learn in other courses, that if they can say something critical about an article or a chapter, then they've done a good thing. I think that's completely useless, because there's always something that you can say that's critical about any study, any book, any chapter. You haven't advanced a dialog at all. So I really tried to move students away from that particular way of reading toward some kind of intellectual agenda of their own whether actively building something, a knowledge framework. *(Dr. Wall; Interview; 4/29/2003)*

For this reason, she emphasized to students the quality of the BB messages that was "academic" and "appropriate for the graduate level."

However, these instructor's expectations of BB postings made the writing tasks "uncomfortable" and "restricted" for the participating students. I asked Daehan what he thought of messages posted on the BB. He said he did not get much out of the BB activities. He added:

> Daehan: I think if students are allowed to talk about their thoughts more freely, it would invigorate discussions.
>
> Kecia: Can't you write freely on the BB?
>
> Daehan: No, we can't. The instructor requires an academic format. "Do this way when you compose, do that way when you respond." She told us not to write in colloquial style. She emphasized that we compose in a way that is appropriate for the graduate-level. If we were allowed to write in free style, it would be easier for me, too. Even though I don't have good English skills, I would've been able to compose more often freely.
>
> Kecia: So you're saying that since you have to be concerned about the quality of the message, it becomes burdensome to compose?
>
> Daehan: Right. There are many teachers in this class. There must be a lot of common interests we could share. I have things I'd sometimes like to share with them as a teacher, too.
>
> Kecia: Can you just talk about those if you want?
>
> Daehan: If I post a message, the professor will count it as part of my responding messages.

Kecia: Can you complete two required postings and then post those messages as extras?

Daehan: I'm not sure about that part. What if the professor happens to pick the messages that I write as extras and grade them only? That's why the discussion board hasn't been invigorated. Its assignment and the format of composing is restricted. I don't think the discussion board is that lively, and it doesn't help me much. *(Daehan; Interview I; 2/4/2003)*

Apparently, Daehan was not fully communicating, let alone negotiating, with the instructor to clarify course requirements. In an interview, he mentioned that there was one occasion that he asked the instructor during the break to clarify an assignment. While the instructor was explaining to him, another student intervened, and the topic was changed before she finished answering his question. His question remained unanswered when the instructor left. Daehan said he could not go after her to ask about it again. He was clearly frustrated when he said in the interview, "Because of the language problem, it is inconvenient in many ways" (Interview II; 2/4/2003).

Although Kathy was L1-speaking, she shared similar sentiments to Daehan's in that she felt "kind of constricted" in both face-to-face and on the BB. She showed me in her notebook what the instructor had said in class with regard to "the standard of writing":

She [the instructor] says that "make sure that messages aren't snap judgement, um, I have to put what I judge to be significant ideas. It is NOT what I like or what I didn't like. And we can't, online, we CAN'T have a dialog that ends the conversation.... You have to post things that continue a dialog." So, you have to be, in my opinion, really vague. You can't put exactly what you want to put.

Let me see if she had.... (Kathy looks for more of her notes) Yeah, she likes us to generate a critical analysis of both theoretical and methodological strengths and shortcomings. So, really, what she says a lot is we have to read with an idea of what the author is saying, what are the points, what are the strengths of his argument and weaknesses, instead of saying, "Oh, you know, this is how I teach, and these are my philosophies, and I don't think that will work, blah-blah." She doesn't like us to talk about things like that. So that's why I feel like I can never

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get into a discussion, because all these ideas in my head, opinions, and you know, I'm DYING to get them out. But she says it's not academic. *(Kathy; Interview I; 2/10/2003)*

Kathy had asked the instructor at the beginning of the semester to provide them with interim feedback on their postings so that the students would make sure that they were on the right track. The instructor complied with this request and gave interim feedback on students' postings in a written sheet of paper. In doing this, the instructor printed what she considered to be the best posting of each student, gave her comments in the margin and notified the student on which category his or her assignment belonged to along the four scales: "Pass that Exceeds Expectations," "Pass that Meets Expectations," "Pass that barely Meets Expectations" and "Fails to Meet Expectations." This was also intended as a notice to those students who might be at risk of "failing" and to help students make sure of whether their postings were within the Pass zone.

Kathy received a slightly above average that equals to "Pass that Meets Expectations" for analysis and "Average" on summary of readings. Showing her written feedback from the instructor Kathy added:

> She [the instructor] said, "That is not quite accurate analysis and advancing your knowledge. More the latter will be truthful," which I have the problem with figuring out exactly how you have to write about advancing your knowledge? You know, I understand she means take the philosophy and theory, and think about it, you know, and write about it. But it's very abstract, very vague, very kind of up in the air. And if it's not what she wants to advance our knowledge, when we start to try to put our own insight into it, then she said we were getting too opinionated. So you know, when I type, it takes me two days to put it out, we edit it, it's just a big mess, yeah. *(Kathy; Interview I; 2/10/2003)*

Face-to-face class meetings, on the other hand, followed a set of routines that started with the instructor's brief announcements, the whole-class discussions led by student facilitators of the week and then the Technology workshop. As the instructor

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indicated both on the BB and in course syllabus, student facilitators made a summary of the main points of the week's readings, presented a couple of questions to think about and organized the students in small groups to discuss and report to the whole class.

One of the things I noticed consistently during the in-class discussions was that when students asked either questions or stated their opinions, it was often the instructor who clarified the questions or provided detailed information or additional resources. Even when the facilitator answered the students' questions, it appeared that some of the students and even the facilitator themselves often searched for the instructor's responses as if the instructor held the answer key and she would correct the statements. Except for the facilitating students of the week and the instructor, those who showed consistency in speaking actively during the whole class discussions were a few L1 male students (Harold, Jim and Tony).

For the first several weeks, I had also observed Kathy as one of those active participants. It was clear that she understood the weekly reading material and she made a lot of contributions to class discussions. In the interview with Kathy, however, she revealed a fact that I had not taken note of in the classroom. She said:

> Kathy: The major challenges are that, when we have class discussions, I don't feel that other ideas are welcomed. I feel that if you think one way and somebody else thinks another way, you know, whatever the prof. thinks is the correct way of kind of work goes. It's not a conducive environment for talking and discussing. I don't find at all. Um, I feel very, um, yeah, I just don't feel comfortable expressing my view point or asking questions. I feel like shut down all the time.
>
> Kecia: By the instructor or by others?
>
> Kathy: Both, both pretty much. But more, just, it's not a very, I don't find it very friendly environment. *(Kathy: Interview I; 2/10/2003)*

She explained a main reason of her inhibition of speaking up in class as follows:

> I think it was the constant reminder of it being an academic, graduate seminar, and the need to ensure that personal thoughts and feelings were justified by text we've read or previous studies. And I kind of felt that we weren't allowed to be human in that sense. We had to just robotically discuss what we've read. It's not that we weren't allowed, but we were definitely discouraged from trying to figure it out within ourselves. *(Kathy; Interview II; 4/30/2003)*

I observed a few instances of what my participants called "uncomfortable" moments during the in-class discussions. One example is from Week 6, when Tony (a male, L1 student) was in charge of facilitating in-class discussion. Even though he stressed at the beginning of his presentation that it was "very difficult to understand" the readings, he summarized those difficult concepts very well. After a five minute summary of the content, he presented one of the questions he had prepared to the students: "Can a Bakhtinian approach be merged with a transmission approach in an inclusive way?" The class divided into five groups of three people for small discussion to be rejoined after 10 minutes.

No sooner did Tony resume the class and had a representative of the first group report a summary of their discussions than he was stopped by the instructor. She said, "How can you bring two abstract accounts together? They are not examples of the model. They are examples of a classroom theory. I'm not sure if you can talk about merging. What is the motivation of merging? What does it mean to merge two theories?" Tony tried to defend himself, but ended up having to drop his question. He presented his second question for discussion, and his second question was also criticized by the instructor, who responded, "The idea of 'positive' or 'negative' doesn't exist." Interestingly, the main topic of his presentation was about *authoritative discourse* in sociocultural theory. While citing a text from the textbook, Tony moved on with the rest of his slides on "the teacher as an authoritative figure" saying, "I have a teacher who said

my question was not good." Tony smoothed out the awkward atmosphere with a sense of humour in his closing remarks, "A good question is a question that raises more questions and debate."

On the day Tony presented, Daehan was also in charge of facilitated discussions. They split their work by presenting on different readings. The earlier week, when I was having an interview with him, I had asked him how he was doing with the preparation of his part of the discussion facilitation. He seemed to be quite confident about his plans for the facilitation. He gave me a brief summary of the reading he was in charge of and added that there were a few things he did not quite fully understand. I asked:

> Kecia: How are you going to handle the part that you don't understand?
>
> Daehan: I might have to just read the part that I don't understand. I will have to write things down what I am going to say, and for the part I don't understand, I might have to just read to the students.
>
> Kecia: What do you have to do for facilitation? To summarize the article?
>
> Daehan: Not quite. Yeah, kind of summary. Summarize and present one question.
>
> Kecia: I thought you have to analytically criticize the article, too.
>
> Daehan: No, it's alright just to summarize and then present one question. That is all expected. Summarize, give a question, and then have students discuss on that question to report it. *(Daehan; Interview I; 2/4/2003)*

After Tony stepped down, discussion facilitation was handed over to Daehan, who carried on his presentation with PowerPoint slides as Tony did. The pace of his speech was relatively slower compared to the fluent previous presenter, Tony. However, except for slight grammatical mistakes (e.g., subject-verb agreement as in "He read" or switching *she* with *he*), I found him very calm and articulate with little foreign accent while he was presenting the material. Still it took him longer to summarize the reading

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material than Tony had done, and finally the instructor interjected to redirect the

presentation:

> Dr. Wall: Could you explain this focusing on the Fifth Dimension? That might
> be more practical than talking about abstract theory.
>
> Daehan: (In apologetic tone) That's a hard point for me.
>
> Dr. Wall: Or, you could move on to the next one.
> *(In-class observation; 2/12/2003)*

At the last slide, he apologized to class, "I'm sorry. It's hard to make myself

understood in English." In closing, he said to the class, "Sorry, very boring."

For the rest of the class until the Tech Workshop, the instructor facilitated discussions

and the main participants were only four students (Harold, Tony, Barbara, and one L2

female student, Susan). None of my focal participants (both L1 and L2) said a word

during the whole-class discussions on this day.

On the BB, in general, the students tried to strictly fit into the frame that the

instructor had constructed even though their beliefs did not necessarily match the

instructor's. As Daehan said:

> When the professor said at the first class regarding how we supposed to write, I
> understood what she meant. There are two kinds of writing. A colloquial style as
> we write in Chatting and formal style as we write a paper. I understood it as
> writing a paper and continued with the same style. Some people wrote in a
> colloquial style sometimes, and the professor reminded and clarified that to
> students in class.
>
> [...] I'm not sure if that [formal writing] is the objective of online education, but I
> think being colloquial is closer to the objectives of the online communication.
> Since the professor expected it to be academic, I tried to fit myself to her
> expectations by academically criticizing the readings. *(Daehan; Interview II;
> 4/12/2003)*

Daehan shared with me the instructor's interim feedback on his posts to the BB, and he received the highest marks a student could receive for his postings with the following encouraging comments from the instructor:

> Daehan, Great Job!
> Your posts are well constructed and thoughtful and your responses dialogue with your colleagues' posts, and in so doing, create community and knowledge advance. *(Instructor's written feedback on the postings; 2/24/2003)*

Nevertheless, as illustrated in Figure 4.6, the interaction pattern of Course B shows rather simple layers of threads in that the students picked one message to respond to as required, and the threaded messages rarely moved beyond the second level.

Figure 4.6: Samples of Interaction Patterns on the BB (Course B)
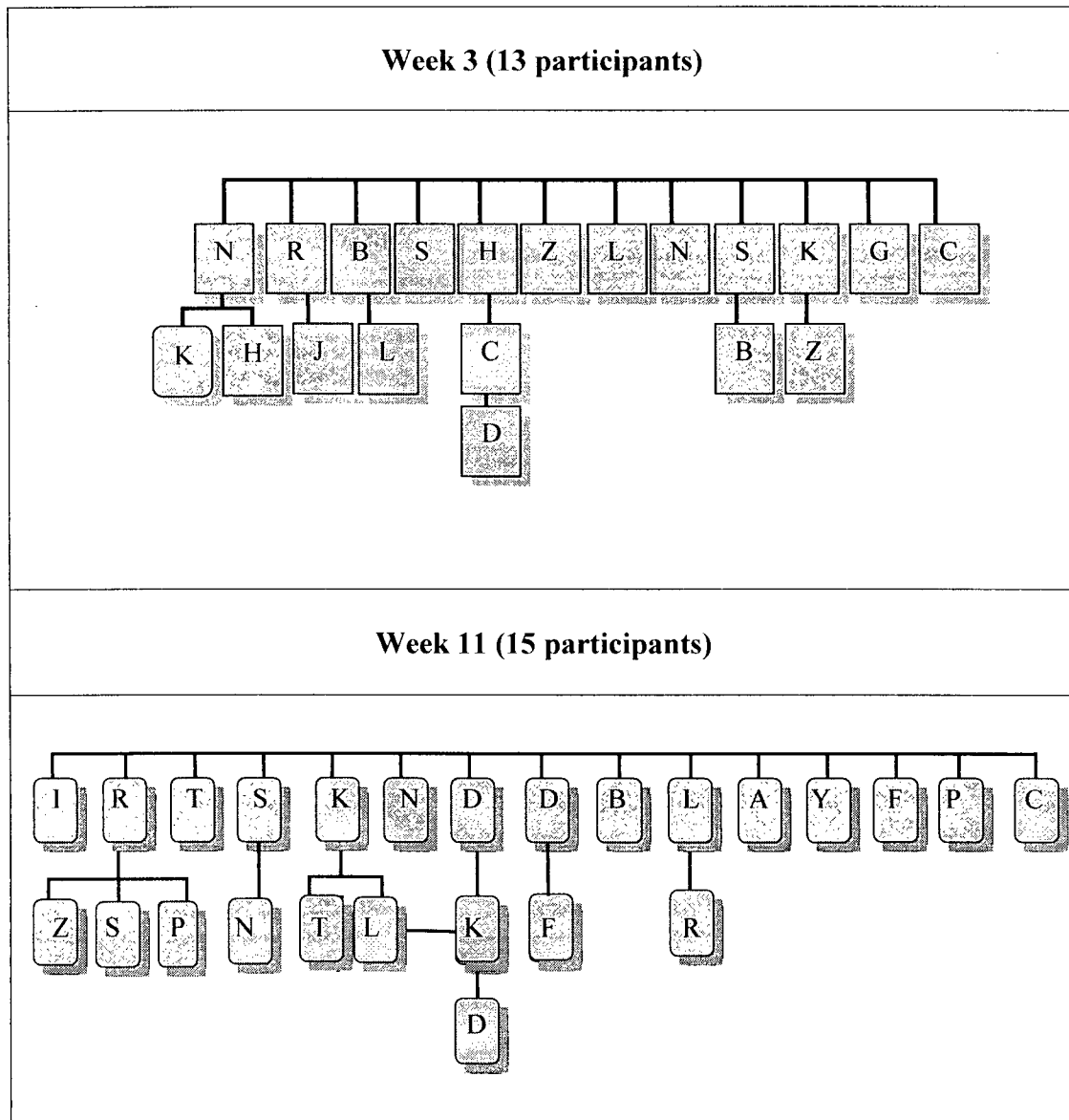
Note. Initial postings are at the top of the diagram, and responses to these and subsequent postings are shown underneath those initial postings. Each box represents a posted message on their readings of the week. Each letter identifies an individual participant. It can be seen that as compared to the postings described in Figure 4.5, the postings described in this diagram did not lead to as many responses as initial postings in Course A.

4.3   Summary and Discussion

This chapter has demonstrated two mixed-mode courses seemingly similar to each

other in the way that they both used the online BB as a means to discuss reading

materials of the course developing differing register, levels of engagement with other participants and comfort.

The instructors in each course had set the minimum requirement for the BB participation as one posting per forum (major forums only) in Course A and two postings per week in Course B. Additionally, the instructor in Course A placed a regulation on the length of a message as approximately 100 words, whereas in Course B the instructor explicitly emphasized quality of messages by setting up conditions and standards, and grading the messages accordingly. Interviews with the focal students revealed that the outcome of online discourse closely reflects the instructor's rules and the students' interpretation of the context in each course. Students in Course A, for example, went through a careful editing process to fit their message into approximately 100 words, and according to the instructor, the students' messages were "concise, focused on the topic," and "achieved better quality of participation."

The online discussion texts generated in both courses reflected to a large extent the given context, and displayed similarities and differences accordingly. Both courses were similar in that the online texts produced by students reflected an academic written discourse as opposed to casual spoken one as marked by lexically dense, edited and information-loaded messages. The students in both classes often used explanatory and expository genres of writing. In Course B, in particular, the students provided summaries of the main points of the readings and elaborated on their points or other people's messages by applying, analyzing, and evaluating the content at a much greater length. The archives of the BB texts and the instructors' evaluations of the student outcome as revealed in the interviews showed that all students produced the quality and quantity of

BB discourse that the instructors expected. As I have mentioned, everyone in these two courses received the full marks possible for BB participation.

What differed in these two courses was the register of discourse and the students' perceptions and attitudes of participation. It was apparent that the students in Course A tried to build a more supportive and friendly environment, as evidenced by frequent appearances of positive appraisal. In spite of a lower posting requirement, the BB in Course A produced more messages than Course B. In addition, the two courses differed in terms of the extent to which the students were able to exercise agency in shaping BB discourse.[19] The BB discourse in both courses reflected the given rules of participation in the BB. More importantly my data strongly suggest that the individual students were (re)constructing knowledge of discourse conventions based on their needs as well as the discourse produced by other members of this online community. In other words, the BB discourse in two courses went through a process of negotiation between given rules, adjustment to the discourse of other members of their community, and the students' individual perspectives. The BB discourse and the interview data suggest that the students in Course A were able to exercise more agency than their counterparts in Course B.

In Course B, on the other hand, the instructor's rules created tension and anxiety among participating students on the online BB. As mostly newcomers in the online discourse community, the students experienced a range of discomfort, from confusion to constraint regardless of L1 and L2 status. The interview data revealed that it was due to the disparity between their prior knowledge of online communication or needs and

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[19] *Agency* refers to the ability to take an action in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world (Giddens, 1993).

imposed rules and expectations from the instructor. It was apparent that to be a competent participant in the online discourse of community in this course a student needed to have not so much familiarity with CMC than comprehension of the instructor's expectations, and in particular her rule that students were to use the BB to appropriately analyze the reading material by using academic language in postings. The instructor's emphasis on the "academic" quality of messages confused some students and increased their anxiety of communication on the BB.

As part of the "negotiation" that resulted from this rule, students requested interim feedback on their postings, but the instructor's feedback created more confusion among students. The instructor once posted a message on the BB evaluating the overall students' postings. Daehan said in the interview that he had no clue whether the instructor was complimenting or criticizing their messages. The online BB in Course B, which had been intended as a place to be filled with "students' own voices" was taken by the students as a place where they could not voice "their opinion" but instead struggled to provide the voice that the instructor would want to hear. This resulted in students' writing task being, in Daehan's words, "constrained" and "unnatural."

In general, the students' messages in Course B were influenced mostly by the instructor's rules whereas the ones in Course A seemed to be shaped by other students as they adjusted their messages through the process of observing other colleagues' messages. It seems that the sense of ownership in constructing the register of the BB discourse was much stronger in Course A than Course B. In addition, according to my data, exercising agency seemed to be more related to individual differences rather than to L1 and L2 status. Evidence of their strategies for exercising agency was somewhat anecdotal and

not consistent across the students from different language backgrounds. Therefore, it is difficult to make any general claims about this issue.

As has been discussed above, students' learning or learning outcomes in an activity system cannot be explained only by one aspect but must be understood in relation to a number of contextual aspects such as other members in the community (e.g., instructors and colleagues), medium, personal goals, etc. In the following chapter, I examine factors that affect students' use of CMC in academic courses and explore how learners' identities are co-constructed by those factors in both the face-to-face and online communities.

CHAPTER 5

FACTORS RELATED TO STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN FACE-TO-FACE AND ONLINE FORUMS

In this chapter I discuss salient factors that inhibited or facilitated L2 students' participation in mixed mode courses in comparison with their experience in face-to-face settings. I also try to explore how learners' identities were constructed by those factors in both the face-to-face and online communities. In addressing these aspects, I used student interview data as the major source of investigation and also referred to the written questionnaires, interviews with the instructors, field notes of the face-to-face class observations and examination of online BB texts.

I will present overall findings from the two courses regarding challenges and benefits of participation in face-to-face classrooms and then the online environment. I compared L2 students' perceptions with those of their L1 counterparts' in the two courses to understand what is uniquely significant about CMC to L2 learners.

5.1   In the Face-to-Face Classrooms

5.1.1   "I Would Rather Listen Than Speak"

The focal L2 students' English ability was quite high, as reflected by their TOEFL scores (ranged from 580 ~ 620). When I asked the instructor in Course A about L2 students' class participation, he spoke highly of his L2 students as valuable additions to the class. He said their language and content knowledge was as fluent and able as any L1 student in the class. The L2 focal students themselves, however, pointed out their language ability as the major block to freely participating in the whole class discussions. They expressed great concerns and insecurity about their English ability in the interviews

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and questionnaires. They also expressed, to varying degrees, the difficulty of understanding in-class discussions due to the fast flow of communication.

The first thing required of the students to properly participate in both face-to-face and online discussions was to complete weekly readings, which was not an easy task for L2 students. Even the Ph.D. students, Ping and Chang, who had completed Master's degrees in one of the North American universities, commented that they found it challenging to keep up with the weekly readings and to understand the content. It not only applied to these specific courses. As Ping said:

> Actually, not specifically for this course, for courses in general, the most challenging thing has always been the language. I'm a second language student in a class and I am slow reader comparing with the native speaker. So reading materials for me always seem quite a lot. So it takes time for me to digest. *(Ping in Course A; Interview I; 2/4/2003)*

However, comprehension of readings was also a challenge for L1 students, particularly in Course B. Both of the L1 focal students in Course B stressed the difficulty of understanding the course readings. As Rory said:

> Um, the readings are pretty heavy. We have a lot to read. And it's not an easy read. A lot of times, I have to re-read again to try to understand what's going on. I think the hardest part of this course would be completing the readings. Not only are they a lot, but it's not easy to read. *(Rory in Course B; Interview I; 2/12/2003)*

Nevertheless, the challenges for L2 students with respect to class participation seemed to be increased by their more limited speaking and comprehension ability in English. Sohee, for example, with a sociable and outgoing personality, said that she used to be outspoken and active both in educational and informal settings in Korea. What made her silent in Course B classroom was the difficulty of the subject being discussed, which was compounded by her lack of confidence in English. All the focal L2 students

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found it difficult to keep pace with the fast flow of discussions, even after they gained the content knowledge from the reading material. Ping in Course A said that she did not respond to or ask questions of other students during class discussions because she did not want to embarrass herself if she had either missed or misunderstood other students' comments.

Daehan and Sohee in Course B also expressed consistently in the interviews their difficulty in understanding and speaking English during the whole-class discussions. It was also evident that the quick pace of in-class discussion did not allow L2 students enough time to formulate proper sentences to make comments or questions. Even though both of them thought that participating in class would help them integrate into a North American culture and the school system, they felt that they needed more time to participate with more confidence. At one point Mei said that she learned more by just listening than speaking. She clarified later that it had much to do with her challenge to process information during discussions:

> If I speak, I need to organize them [my thoughts]. So while I am thinking, I am not concentrating on other people's talking. *(Mei in Course A; Interview II; 4/14/2003)*

Since it took a lot of energy, courage, and time to plan her thoughts and speak accurately in English, she chose not to speak so that she would not risk missing part of the discussions.

In spite of this problem, none of these L2 participants asked for repetition or clarification of what other people said during my observation of whole class discussions. In fact, through my whole exposure in graduate studies in the West for many years, I have never known East Asian students to ask for repetitions or clarifications during large

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class discussions, which L1 students would do occasionally. Although many students, whether L1 or L2 speakers, may find it difficult to ask for clarification during in-class discussions, it is obvious that L2 students are much more inhibited in making this kind of request in general. Interviews in my study have revealed that the L2 students usually assumed they were the only ones in class who did not understand due to their insufficient language ability, and so they did not ask for either repetition or *modified input* out of embarrassment or politeness (this was also true of how I felt in my first couple of years of graduate studies).

None of the L2 focal participants sought clarification or negotiated their needs in the classrooms. As was reported in Chapter 4, Daehan was apologetic about his English when he was presenting in front of the class. They would rather choose to stay on the periphery waiting for their English skills to improve someday so that they could participate more competently in class, as one interview conversation with Sohee indicates:

> Sohee: If I have something to ask or to make comments to somebody or the instructor, I will. But, actually you know the most problem is that I still don't understand many parts of the whole class discussions. I cannot raise my hand to clarify, "What did you say?" like that.
>
> Kecia: Why?
>
> Sohee: It's not helpful to the other students. Because there are only a few ESL students, and I think the others understand, and I'm the only person who don't understand the question, comments or the part of the lecture. So, if I really wanted to know that part, I can just ask the instructor or the person after class. Actually I am waiting for my English is more improving.
>
> Kecia: Do you want to be more involved in discussions in class?
>
> Sohee: Later when my English is better. *(Sohee; Interview I; 2/7/2003)*

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5.1.2 Situated Anxiety: "Anxiety Goes Up When I Speak with L2 Students"

The findings of this study resonate the claim that there is a close relationship between anxiety and speaking up in class (Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Morita, 2002). Ping, Mei and Sohee expressed their discomfort in speaking English particularly in a large group of students, marked by phrases that came up in the interviews such as, "not comfortable," "discouraged," "intimidated to talk," "afraid of speaking out in class," etc.

Anxiety was complicated by students' confidence in language ability, low risk-taking tendency and ethnic culture as existing literature has revealed (Brown, 2000). Mei in Course A, for example, explained that the reason that she did not participate actively in face-to-face class discussions was not only the language barrier but also her personality and cultural background. She shared with me her school experience in China, which explains, to a certain degree, her inhibition in speaking out in class:

> [...] because, you know, in China, from my school experience I learned one thing. If you didn't have something you are very sure, you didn't speak. You just didn't speak it out. Otherwise the teacher wouldn't feel that happy about that. So, in my school experience, if I said something, and the teacher didn't like it, I could get the message from their expressions. So next time, I would shut. *(Mei; Interview II; 4/14/2003)*

She explained that when she had some thoughts or questions during the class discussions, she tried to organize them in her mind, asking herself whether her questions would make sense or be worth mentioning. Then she would drop the question if she assessed it was not good enough. Mei's previous cultural/educational experience in China and introverted personality were intertwined with the anxiety of high performance, which inhibited her active face-to-face communication, as she described, "Because if you don't speak, you will not make mistake" (Interview II; 4/14/2003).

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Another major finding in this study is that students' anxiety was often experienced at a situational level. Even though small group activities are commonly used in academic communities as a way to lower anxiety and allow shy students a more active role, Daehan's experience was still frustrating. It was the group formation that inhibited Daehan's participation in small-group discussions in Course B. He happened to sit with the other L2 students in his first class of the semester and ended up in the same seat throughout the semester. It was the instructor's request to the students to keep the same seat so that she could remember the students' names easily. As a result, they were often paired up as the same group whenever small group discussions were conducted. Daehan recalled his participation in small group discussions as "uncomfortable" and "not productive." As he said:

> Daehan: Speaking with Koreans is different from speaking with foreigners. So I didn't participate much in Ms. Kim's [Sohee's] discussion group. When I was paired up with a Canadian, I spoke English freely without caring much about using right or wrong grammar. With Ms. Kim, however, it's very easy to recognize each other's level of English, because the way we structure sentences in English is quite similar to each other. It didn't work well in her group because I was trying consciously not to make errors in front of her.
>
> Kecia: You were trying not to make errors?
>
> Daehan: Absolutely. With Koreans, there is more, more....
>
> Kecia: Does your anxiety increase more?
>
> Daehan: Right! My anxiety increases more for sure, wouldn't it? A Canadian would understand what I am saying even if I said it roughly, and it wouldn't become a subject of judgment between us. When I speak with Koreans, however, it is somewhat different. So I wasn't able to do well in the discussion with her. I was better in writing on BB discussions, and even better when I was paired up with Canadians. I would have done better if I had been assigned to a different group. The pair-up of the group was the problem. *(Daehan; Interview II; 4/12/2003)*

Daehan also added that he thought L2 students might have more difficulty understanding him if he did not use language correctly. Therefore, he had to make an extra effort to use correct grammar, which was a difficult task for him as an L2 speaker. Furthermore, Daehan's increased anxiety of communicating with other L2 students (especially a Korean student) was also mixed with his motivation. He commented that his motivation to speak decreased when he was paired up with other L2 students because of the reasons stated above.

Some L1 students, on the other hand, brought up their anxiety of participation in terms of their relationship with another member of the discourse community, particularly the instructor. Earlier in Chapter 4, I reported students' accounts of being overpowered by the instructor in Course B. Kathy, for example, who had appeared to be an active participant in the whole-class discussions for the first several weeks became less expressive toward the end of the semester. According to Kathy, she was outspoken and willing to talk, ask questions and discuss at the beginning of Course B as she was in other courses. However she said she withheld a lot in Course B and did not participate to the extent that she would normally do in other courses. She said:

> Honestly, it was because, um, I would think of all of these [comments] in my head, raise my hand, and say something, and then the prof. would disagree. Even though I had so many questions, I was afraid that I was gonna sound stupid, I mean, I didn't want to expose myself again, so, yeah. *(Kathy; Interview I; 2/10/2003)*

As a consequence, she said she became inhibited to talk in this class and abstained herself from speaking quite a few times.

Another L1 student with Asian ethnic background, Rory was also very open and engaging when she was facilitating class discussions or participating in small group

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activities in class. During the whole-class discussions, however, I had not encountered her speaking out. According to the instructor, Dr. Wall, it might be related to her ethnic background as Asian. In the interview, Dr. Wall made her observation of Asian students' class participation in terms of "a gender by L1/ L2 interaction." She explained that female students tend to participate less frequently than male students in face-to-face classroom dialog regardless of race or ethnicity. As she said:

> It seems to me that this gender difference is intensified in the group of Asian students. And I haven't really noticed the difference whether or not the students are Asian Canadian or Asian. The Asian male student will speak up first, take up more airspace and airtime in the classroom, be the initiators on projects, take over the technological part of the project more readily than if you made the comparison in a group of non-Asian graduate students. The gender differences to me seem to be augmented in the Asian students. I think, although I haven't looked, but I think that it's much more evident in the classroom than it is in online. *(Dr. Wall; Interview; 4/29/2003)*

Dr. Wall's observation was somewhat validated in this class, where the most voluble participants were a few male L1 speakers, including Tony, an L1 speaker with an Asian ethnic background. All the focal participants commented on the instructor's strong image as a chief knowledge provider in the interviews. It is apparent that the unequal distribution of power between the instructor and the students created a sense of intimidation among students. This increased students' anxiety of speaking up in Course B and made the two outgoing L1 female students reluctant to speak up in this class. As Rory said:

> Her [Dr. Wall's] teaching style is very different from what I am used to. And, sometimes I feel like she's correcting our ideas. I don't know if I like that she's correcting our ideas. In other classes, everyone gets a chance to voice their idea. But there's no right idea or wrong idea. We just tell everyone our idea and we show support for it. And then we all talk about it. But in this class, I'm a little bit scared to voice my ideas, just because especially in face-to-face, I feel like, she will say that I'm wrong. And not to say I'm always right, but these are my ideas.

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> If someone always put down your ideas, or say your ideas are wrong, you are likely to not want to speak up. *(Rory; Interview I; 2/12/2003)*

As a consequence, Rory mentioned that she spoke up less in face-to-face discussions in Course B than she did in her other classes.

5.1.3 Additional Complication: Cultural Conventions and Cultural Knowledge

In explaining L2 students' reticence of speaking up in class, it was not easy to draw a line between personality, ethnic culture and educational background. I use the term culture as Scollon and Scollon (1995) define it in an anthropological sense as "any aspect of the ideas, communications, or behaviors of a group of people which gives to them a distinctive identity and which is used to organize their internal sense of cohesion and membership" (p. 140). Since culture reflects daily practice, it is predictable, to some degree, to find certain personal traits in certain ethnic group and such traits seem to be carried over to their performance in education settings as well. Koreans, for example, who are educated under the Confucian culture will usually observe speaking etiquette by saving words rather than being verbose (Chen, 2003). In a Confucian society, reserved behavior is considered to be a virtue and regarded as reliable or respectable.

Daehan was a good example of a student, who carried his home culture attitude to a Western classroom. In spite of having been a teacher for 10 years and being quite knowledgeable in educational psychology through extensive reading in that field, he still remained silent during the whole-class discussions throughout the semester. When I asked him why he did not speak out in whole-class discussions even though he might have a lot to contribute to the discussions, he said that it was partly his personality that he preferred listening to talking unless he was asked in class. He also attributed his

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reservation in class partly to his Korean culture, which rates modesty and reticence highly

in their scheme of values:

> Yes, I know the content. But, basically we Asian students do not talk much. Even when we know the answer, as long as we understand, we rarely say it in class. If we are asked, we will talk, but we don't speak much voluntarily. Not being fluent in English is one reason, but it is more because of my cultural background. *(Daehan; Interview II; 4/12/2003)*

Chang also seemed to have his own frame of reference with regard to participation in that

he believed that listening is also participation, as he said:

> Even though you didn't say a word in class, if you are concentrating on what others' saying, you are still participating. *(Change; Interview II; 4/18/2003)*

However, due to this different frame of reference regarding class participation,

Daehan was unexpectedly penalized by another instructor in the course that he was taking

during the same semester. He shared with me this story during the interview as follows:

> For this reason [cultural difference], I had a problem in another course. There was a "class participation mark" in that course, which was 15 points of the total marks. Usually professors give full marks for participation if you don't miss the class, don't they? That's what I understood. In that course, I got 97 out of 100 points for the written assignments. I submitted 10 written assignments and I got almost 9.5 or 10 points, while other Canadian students got 8 or 9. So I had assumed that I would get 97 for the overall course grade. But he gave me 12 out of 15 for the participation mark. (pause) I was shocked. It means I did not talk in class. I could have talked. But if I had talked, it would have cut the flow of the class. Even though I knew the course content well enough and had experiences to share, speaking in English was not easy for me first of all. Moreover I didn't want to intervene and slow down the pace of the class. *(Daehan; Interview II; 1/12/2003)*

Furthermore, cultural or ethnic background seemed to be complicated by other

aspects, such as years of formal education in English speaking countries, language

ability, anxiety, etc. For example, among the three L2 students, Chang, Daehan and

Sohee, who were often paired up in the same group for small group discussions, it was

always Chang who spoke up for their group when they were called in to summarize the

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discussions of their group. A Ph.D. student, Chang, who had studied in a North American university for several years seemed to feel more comfortable speaking up in class than the other two students. Another L2 Ph.D. student, Susan, (who was not the focal participant in this study) spoke the most among the four L2 students during the whole-class discussions.

Another aspect that inhibited L2 students' participation was a lack of cultural knowledge that was specific to the Canadian context. This resonates with the findings of Duff (2001; 2002) and Morita (2002), who reported how L2 students were often marginalized in academic classes due to a lack of familiarity with local references or pop culture including "headlines in the news, including the English names of people, places, and events" (Duff, 2001, p. 116). The L2 participants in my study commented that when contemporary issues or events were brought up during class discussions, they often lost the discussion context, which made it more difficult to be engaged in discussions. Even an active L2 participant, Sunny, said that when discussion topics changed to Canadian-specific ones, she had to "keep silent and the L1 students dominated the class." Chang, who was a fluent speaker of English also shared the same frustration in that he definitely felt marginalized during class discussions when students talked about current events specific to Canada, certain provinces or a school district. He said:

> As an L2 student, language itself is not the one that gives you limitation to participate. It's cultural background. I remember there were times, they [L1 students] were talking about sports players or some politicians, which I had never heard of. If they are talking about something you don't know, then what can you say? *(Chang; Interview I; 2/7/2003)*

5.1.4   Here and Now: "I Prefer the Interpersonal, Live Face-to-Face Discussion"

In spite of inhibitions that L2 students experienced in face-to-face classrooms, most students still expressed preference for face-to-face learning over online learning in both courses. This was the same for L1 students. Overall, the strengths of face-to-face discussions were pointed out in the interviews as the weaknesses of the BB communications in the interviews, and the examples were "spontaneous," "immediate" and "interpersonal" aspects of communication in the face-to-face setting. Both L1 and L2 students pointed out that it was easier to clarify things or reach a conclusion face-to-face. As Hilary (L1 student, Course A) said in reference to BB communication:

> In the classroom when you are face-to-face, you have a better chance of staying on topic, because your questions can go back and forth that way. In the online discussion, I think when someone writes something, and someone writes something else, it just has a tendency to go off topic very quickly. You had a better chance in the classroom of getting an answer to your question, or trying to work out a problem. Whereas on the online it seemed to take a lot longer to get to it. *(Hilary; Interview II; 4/24/2003)*

Dana in the same class pointed out her challenges in this course by referring to an online activity, in which the students were engaged with posting tentative final project topics in order to seek feedback from their colleagues and form a working group with others who shared the same interest. This particular forum was open for two weeks, and seemed to provide the participants a chance to express their interests, negotiate adjustments, and compare their interests with their colleagues. It generated multiple responses. It did not, however, lead to the final formation of groups. That happened only when the class met on the following week face-to-face, and it took five minutes for the instructor to organize the whole group of students into small groups of the similar or

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same interests. Dana recollected it as challenging to coordinate the selection of partners online:

> [...] initially it was challenging, um, because we had to post our interests online and um, people were posting, you know, their own ideas, topics and everything. I think it took longer than it normally would have if we were meeting face-to-face to talk about it. I think that was challenging. *(Dana; Interview I; 2/7/2003)*

Ping also shared her experience in the interview with regard to this issue of "spontaneity" as follows:

> In face-to-face, it's more spontaneous. You can respond to the question immediately, you can do a lot of discussions whether agree or disagree and find agreement later. But it's hard to do it online, because the frequency is not that fast. So you don't really solve specific problems by online discussions. For example, in our project, I had to talk to another student about what our conclusion should be, and we had different ideas, and we talked A LOT. But that cannot be done in the BB. Maybe in chat-room, but not in the BB. *(Ping; Interview I; 4/23/2003)*

Because the regular class meetings in Course A were held every other week, the students seemed to try to make the best use of face-to-face meetings to get some answers to questions they had covered online, discuss and synthesize the course readings, get the instructor's guidance and discuss their final project in groups. Both L1 and L2 students in both courses commented in the interview that they often brought their questions or comments regarding messages on the BB to the face-to-face class meetings and asked their colleagues personally such as, "What were you saying?", "That was an interesting point." While many focal students expressed dissatisfaction toward the undue distribution of conversational power between the instructor and themselves, students still took face-to-face classes as an opportunity to take in the instructor's knowledge and scaffoldings and listen to other students' perspectives on the course topics.

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Participating in face-to-face discussions had another meaning to L2 students. Face-to-face class meetings gave them an opportunity to practice English through communicating with others. Mei and Daehan, in particular, who lived with their families and had few occasions to speak English outside class, regarded class time as one of their few opportunities to practice English and to learn to understand the culture of Canadians better. Therefore, to practice speaking English in class was as important, or even more important, a goal than to discuss the subject matter. As Daehan said:

> When I go to class, I think to myself, "Now I'm going to have some opportunities to practice English." I am more concerned with having opportunities to speak English, to be honest, because I don't have many opportunities to practice English. I don't think too much of discussing the course content in class. *(Daehan; Interview II; 4/12/2003)*

Mei made a very similar comment as Daehan, and like Daehan she believed that face-to-face interaction (as opposed to online) would help improve her English skills. Mei said:

> Because I'm L2, I wanted classroom discussions. I thought it will help me more in terms of language learning. You know, I'm not good at speaking in public, so I wanted to have more opportunity to speak in public. *(Mei; Interview II; 4/14/2003)*

When I asked Mei at the end of the interview whether she would like to take another online course if she had the chance, she answered:

> I'm not sure about that. (laughs) I do think it helped me in some way, but I still think I will get more help from the face-to-face. *(Mei; Interview II; 4/14/2003)*

5.2   On the Bulletin Boards

5.2.1 Asynchronous Written Communication

The major characteristics of BB communication are time and space independency, and the use of written text in place of oral conversation. Some potential benefits of asynchronous CMC claimed by the previous literature (e.g., Harasim et al., 1995; Hiltz,

1993) were borne out in this study as well. For example, the participants (both L1 and L2) in my study pointed out as advantages of participating in the BB flexibility in time and place of posting messages, and time gained for reflective writing, editing and rewriting the messages before posting. As some literature claims (e.g., Bullen, 1997; Carey, 1999; Harasim et al., 1995; Kern, 1995), the BBs seemed to particularly benefit L2 students and L1 students with high anxiety of speaking in a large group. The L1 student, Rory, for example, whom I rarely encountered speaking during the whole-class discussion in the face-to-face classroom said that she felt more "comfortable communicating online":

> I thought more at ease participating online just because, first because I felt comfortable communicating online, and it's less intimidating, um, and I get a chance to think about what I want to say to properly articulate what I want to say and communicate it in an understandable manner. So I have time to do that online. Whereas face-to-face it's more tentative because you're talking in front of everybody and you are almost processing on the spot. You don't really have time to think about it how you're gonna say things. *(Rory; Interview II; 4/15/2003)*

Asynchronous text-based communication seemed to be particularly beneficial to the L2 participants. As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, the speed of L1 students' speaking and the flow of the in-class discussions increased the difficulty for the L2 students for fully comprehending and participating in oral discussions. Asynchronous text-based communication seemed to have eased to a certain degree the face-to-face pressure of attending to the linguistic form and processing their thoughts at the same time. As Mei said:

> [...] during the online discussion, I can catch up their meaning very clearly. But during the course [in the classroom], sometimes they speak very quickly. I couldn't catch up. In the classroom, sometimes I'd like to participate in discussions, but I had to organize my thinking, because it's very abstract thinking. But, you know, other students talk very quickly. So when I'm ready, they jump to another topic. So sometimes it's difficult to participate in the discussions in the

classroom, because my thinking and speaking is not proceeding at the same time. But online, they will wait for you. *(Mei; Interview II; 4/14/2003)*

Ping also reported that she participated more in the online setting, which made her feel more comfortable, as she said:

> Because in a classroom… it's harder to understand somebody's real opinion? Especially after a long talk, I really got lost. I feel inappropriate to respond, because it might not be the person's purpose to say that I might understand it wrongly. If I don't understand it, I usually don't interrupt in class. So I participate fewer. However, in online I can read and read, and read again until I understand. So I'm sure what I'm responding. So I'm more confident in that way. Yeah. *(Ping; Interview I; 2/4/2003)*

In the questionnaire, I had asked the L2 focal students to rate their own language skills in terms of five different skill areas: oral communication on daily affairs, reading comprehension of academic journal articles, listening comprehension of lectures or seminars, oral skills in academic or professional discussions and writing academic essays or papers. All the L2 focal participants assessed their academic reading and writing skills as stronger than their academic speaking skills. Many of them added in the interviews that they usually felt more comfortable and confident with reading and writing than listening and oral skills. It was evident that their higher competency in reading and writing made it easier for them to understand what was being discussed on the BB and to respond accordingly. As Daehan said:

> Face-to-face, I usually take a listening role only. In online discussions, I respond to people who share similar thoughts with me. Since I cannot speak English well, I tend to communicate in writing, and I feel more comfortable that way. *(Daehan; Interview I; 2/4/2003)*

With the increased confidence on the BB, the L2 students often projected strikingly different images from face-to-face settings. Sohee, for example, who remained silent during the face-to-face discussions in class throughout the semester appeared to be

much more confident in articulating her opinions on the BB. She seemed to be much more assertive in adding evaluative remarks regarding other students' messages, which was largely done only by Dr. Wall in the face-to-face classes. The following excerpt of the BB messages is one example:

> **Message no. 234** [Branch from no. 232]
> Posted by **Sohee** on Tue Mar 18, 2003 08:59
> **Subject Re: Divide and Gender Difference**
>
> I was impressed with your well organized summary, analysis, and integrated opinion, Mr. Ku. I agree on your insist that government should be in charge of equity problem of 'digital divide' with stable budget collected from "imposing universal service taxes on every selling computer and its items." I think governments are doing those policies now. […] *(Sohee, excerpt, Week 11)*

She assessed herself as a much more active and confident member on the BB:

> In face-to-face, I was not confident to express my own opinion, so I struggled from that. I just tried to listen to other opinion. In that respect, I was more successful in the Web discussions. I tried to understand the reading material first, and then I read others' opinion before I started to write. Even after I finished my writing, I read mine again and again to figure out my conclusions and theories are okay. *(Sohee; Interview II; 4/11/2003)*

In contrast, the written communication on the BB disadvantaged some L1 students who reported that they could learn better by discussion through listening and speaking than reading and writing. Michelle was an example of this case, as she said:

> I found online limiting, because you're very conscious of a grammatical thing, "Is it sounding right?", "Is it written right?" You're more conscious of the written rather than just getting your idea out. *(Michelle; Interview I; 2/26/2003)*

The above excerpt conveys a difficulty of writing tasks in that writing seems to make greater demands on people's time and effort, as they attend to syntax, correct usage and planning (Martlew, 1983). Out of insecurity of communicating effectively online, Michelle was often observed to monitor her communication online as indicated in her message:

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All children come with a mouth, tongue, and brain (native), but they need parental support and encouragement (behavior) in combination with their own problem solving skills (cognitive) to make language meaningful. Does this make sense? I think the native and cognitive theories may be more important in phonological development. *(Michelle, Excerpt, Forum 2A)*

The instructor's comments on the students' BB participation in Course B somewhat addresses this issue:

You can see people for whom English is not their first language, but who have high capacity for academic discourse, who can engage really successfully in online contexts, like BBs, because they have the basic sociocultural discourse capabilities to be able to do that. Then another student where English might be their first language, but academic discourse is definitely not part of their first language in terms of their cognitive, whatever he called them, BICS [basic interpersonal communicative skills] and CALP [cognitive/academic language proficiency] or something? (laugh) Their CALP is working class, which really has- People have talked about in the area of literacy and writing, and writing in the university, is that students need to learn a whole new language, even students for whom English is their first language because it's not English. It's university English. And I think it's very concentrated in something like online environment. *(Dr. Wall; Interview; 4/29/2003)*

The favorably received attributes of online communication did not completely relieve the pressure of composing tasks from the L2 students, either. All the L2 students commented that having L1 status would have made the BB participation much easier and they would have contributed much more to the BB discussions. Ping from Course A said:

I'm not still confident about my writing. You know what I mean? So, even if I'm posting my message, I checked and checked it again. And I rewrited and rewrited again, because I don't know whether, if I speak it in this way, others will understand it or not. So, it's kind of an intimidating process. For example, if you want to respond to one's message, for a native speaker, it maybe take her like ONE MINUTE, and mine would take five to TEN minutes or even more. So I cannot afford to participate too much. *(Ping; Interview I; 2/4/2003)*

As a consequence, she said she had to delete many messages she had composed, assuming they were not good enough or might not be received correctly by her colleagues.

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Even Sunny, who was the most communicative on the BB among her L2 colleagues in Course A, said she constantly worried about her linguistic errors, communicating her meanings correctly and meeting a proper academic level of English on the BBs.

Interestingly, my interview data did not bear out the common claims made by many CMC researchers (e.g., Gunawardena, Lowe, & Anderson, 1998; Kern, 1995; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994) that CMC promotes interactive learning, negotiation of meaning, increased motivation or quicker paced interaction. Most L1 students (and some L2 students) reported that the BB was not as interactive as face-to-face meetings. Instead, students commented that they could not get immediate responses and often did not get a response at all through CMC. The students in both courses were required to post their messages by a certain day. Students in Course A and Course B were given approximately a week to read weekly readings and post messages. However, since they had to complete the weekly readings prior to posting, the students tended to post messages during the last four days before the weekly meeting day. As a result, it was often the case that once students posted a required number of messages on the BB (one posting for Course A and two for Course B), many of them did not get online again. Students' questions to other students' messages often remained unanswered once the forum of the week closed, when the messages from the previous forums became as outdated as old newspapers.

In addition, one L1 student in Course A, Chris, pointed out that online communication was not as dynamic as face-to-face communication partly because she could not "interject" in the middle of reading messages as she could do in face-to-face discussions. When I asked her how she dealt with it, she said:

Chris: (Clarifying my question) If you thought you wanted to say something there? You either put it in the discussion, but it's sort of, "Well, is it really important anymore?" You know, you start to think, "Well, maybe it's not that important, so maybe it doesn't matter any way." But if you were in CLASS, I would say, "But, just a minute! I don't agree with that!" I think you start to get more ...

Kecia: Dynamic?

Chris: Yeah! And agreements and disagreements in class. "No, I don't! I didn't see that happen," "Yes, I saw that happen." But on the Web, you say, "Okay, that's what she thinks? Okay, fine." "This is what I would think. Okay, fine." *(Chris; Interview 1; 2/12/2003)*

5.2.2 Computer-Mediated Activity

Another major characteristic of the BBs was computer-mediated activity. The use of computers as tools to communicate include attributes such as Internet access (to the course Web site), having the archives of discussions stored and printed out, the editing functions (e.g., copy and paste), attaching documents on the BB, etc. In addition, communication is done without the physical presence of the interlocutors. Students with prior experience of online courses (e.g., Hilary and Sunny) showed more comfort of participating in the BB at the beginning. However, it was evident that knowledge in computers was not the crucial criteria for determining increased participation, because all the focal students commented that the WebCT was quite easy to learn.

Nevertheless, some of the attributes of computer had both beneficial and detrimental effects on participating students. On a positive side, the BBs seemed to provide the L2 students, in particular, with chances to voice needs that they usually would not under the face-to-face classroom setting due to time-constraints, anxiety, etc. For instance, when I logged on to the course Web site to read the BB messages, I spotted a mysterious message posted by Sohee (L2) as follows:

Message no. 191

Posted by **Sohee** on Thu Feb 27, 2003 12:13
Subject DEAR CLASSMATES,

I would like to make the experience of yesterday's (Feb.26) presentation as a stepping stone for studying here in LCU. It would be really appreciated if you spare your precious time to give me some frank and friendly comments, tips and advices as a colleague. Thank you.

Sohee Kim e-mail : shkim@msn.com

Since I was not able to attend Course B that week (I was observing Course A at that time), I had no clue of what was behind this message except that Sohee had her presentation that week. When I went to say hello to Sohee and Daehan before class (they were sitting adjacent to each other) the week following her presentation, Daehan said to me half jokingly in Korean, "We both got *awfully humiliated* [*kemangshin*]." Sohee briefly shared with me what had happened: Week 8 was Sohee's turn to facilitate the whole-class discussions. According to her, Dr. Wall cut her presentation after about five minutes and requested her to move on to the discussion questions, which was the last part of the facilitation. It was speculated that Dr. Wall thought it was not necessary to summarize the readings of the week during the in-class discussion facilitation.

Sohee told me to ask other L1 students how they perceived what had happened with regards to her presentation. So I asked Kathy at the second interview what had happened with Sohee's presentation, and she said:

> Kathy: When she [Dr. Wall] did that, honestly, it was really awful! I looked around. You could see everyone around were just like this (making a gesture of covering her head with arms). We can't believe she [Dr. Wall] was doing that. We just wanted to hide our face and not watch because it would have been so embarrassing to any of us out there. We all knew that. And you could see it in other students' face as well.

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[...] And she [Sohee] obviously worked hard on her presentation. You could tell that she had a lot of thought. I think she was doing really well. The thing I thought about it the most was that, first of all, she was doing exactly the same thing that everybody else had done up to that point. I didn't know she [Dr. Wall] didn't like what everybody else had done. And then she lost it with her because she [Sohee] was just building up or what.

Kecia: So you didn't understand why she [Dr. Wall] did it?

Kathy: I understood what she [Dr. Wall] was saying. I knew that everyone had that summarizing, and she kept saying, "Don't summarize!" But, you know, I kept thinking, "I think it's good that people summarize somewhat because some of the chapters were really hard to understand." If you don't summarize, and if we start going right into it, sometimes, it is sort of like, "Where is this coming from," you know. I could understand her at the end saying, "Don't forget, next time, don't summarize," because she did it to other people, I don't know, if you remember this. But cutting her up like that was basically finishing it up without giving her a half a chance.

[...] I don't know, this is just the personal thing, but I feel like she [Dr. Wall] was not as patient with her as she could have been. And I think she [Dr. Wall] was less patient because she [Sohee] was ESL and taking longer to say things a little bit. And I could see her [Dr. Wall] losing patience. I don't know that's why. But if that is why, it makes it even worse. Oh, God, it was awful. *(Kathy; Interview II; 4/30/2003)*

This cutting-off of her presentation embarrassed and upset Sohee, and she used the BB as a channel to ask her colleagues for feedback on her presentation. Sohee said she received some kind and encouraging words from her colleagues after she had sent out the message on the BB.

For Sunny, the provision of the BB was a valuable opportunity to foster language learning and voice her needs as an L2 student to the instructor. Her messages indicated how actively she was engaging herself in the discussion of the course topics as an experienced EFL teacher, negotiating her needs with her instructor as an L2 learner and seeking assistance either from her colleagues or the instructor.

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Message no. 592 [Branch from no. 577]

Posted by **Sunny** on Sun Mar 9, 2003 16:45
Subject Re: Decontextualized Language

Dear Tim, Thank you for raising the question. Actually I am quite confused by this term. Being a L2 graduate student, I feel frustrated when I cannot find the terms in my dictionaries. Sometimes even when I find the Chinese meaning, I still cannot understand it. I am wondering if I can find some tools to help me understand those jargon.

After she posted this message, the instructor complied with her request by creating a

special menu on the course Web site, called "Jargon Busters" and providing a few more

references in response to her message on the BB.

Message no. 665 [Branch from no. 592]

Posted by Tim Taylor (Course A) on Tue Mar 25, 2003 11:35
Subject Re: Decontextualized Language and Terminology

Hi Sunny, I can empathize with your frustration about technical and professional jargon! We all face it in our own reading. I'll post this reply on the public bulletin board, since others might be interested in a couple of resources I'm going to suggest below. [...] *(Dr. Taylor, excerpt, Forum 6)*

However, the computer-mediated activity created some difficulty of participation

among students for whom ease of access was a problem because of Internet connection

speed or weak typing skills. Michelle in Course A, for example, stressed that her seven-

year-old computer with dial-up connection hindered her online participation. She said:

It was just being frustrated sometimes with having a slow computer. That was probably the biggest frustration. I know some people's computers are constantly online, and they can just go sit down, you know, and zap, zap, zap, and they're in. For me it was a big process. Pull out the big phone card, plug it in. Check and make sure you have no messages. [...] I will check twice a week, and that's it. Because honestly it takes so much time to check. If my connection was faster, I think I would be on more frequently. *(Michelle; Interview II; 4/8/2003)*

Consequently, it was not always the case that those who actively participated in face-to-

face did so online as well. Besides, as was discussed in this chapter, the relatively

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impersonal nature and delayed feedback of communication by computer was pointed out as weaknesses. For example, Hilary said:

> If you don't understand exactly what they're [other students are] asking or saying [on the BB], then you are answering in certain way that may not be what they were saying at all or may not be the direction they were taking. So you can't clarify that right away with them. You have to wait for their response or for them to come back on. Often nobody does. So it's difficult to get the full understanding of what somebody is saying. Maybe because you can't see the face, or I talk with hands- those kinds of things make it difficult [to participate in online discussions]. *(Hilary; Interview I; 2/11/2003)*

5.2.3 Other Important Issues

In this section I discuss other issues that, during their interviews, the focal students indicated as important factors in shaping their participation. Some important factors were rules of participation, the relationship with other members (i.e., the instructor or the colleagues), and the roles of the instructor.

Issues relating to the discussion rules set by the instructors for the BB have been discussed above in Chapter 4 (and will be further discussed below in Chapter 6). According to the students from Course B, for example, the instructor emphasized the academic quality of the BB messages and that they should be suitable for "the graduate student level." Her demand on "the graduate level of writing" was reported as restricting their free participation in the BB because the students had to constantly self-monitor whether their postings were good enough to meet her standards. Daehan in Course B, for example, commented that he had to participate in online discussions as if he were writing a formal paper, which made composing "monotonous." The discrepancy between what he believed BB writing should be and what the instructor requested caused him to perceive online communication as "strict" and "awkward." As a result, he said he wrote much less than he could have and did not write about his professional experience as a

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teacher, even though he thought it might be interesting to share with the many teachers in his class. Daehan's feeling of being "constrained" was not exclusive to him. Kathy, an L1 student in the same class, expressed even stronger frustration than Daehan:

> I think the biggest thing was that you knew Debbie was reading them, marking you on them, judging you on them. And that made it the most difficult, because I wasn't writing for me, or the class. I was writing for her. When I wrote, I would pretend she was sitting right next to me and how she would respond to everything I was writing. So in that way, I was quite inhibited. *(Kathy; Interview II; 4/30/2003)*

Kathy added that, after she received the interim written feedback from the instructor, she "completely changed" her writing style on the BB:

> It wasn't even my writing style the way I wrote on my - That wasn't me. I was just writing exactly what I thought she would want to hear, which I haven't really done since undergraduate courses. In a sense I found it ironic, because she was constantly saying, "this is a graduate seminar, blah-blah-blah." Yet, I wasn't able to really write in the- I love writing. I think myself as a writer. I couldn't write like I normally write. I was writing for her to try to pull off the best mark as I could. *(Kathy; Interview II; 4/30/2003)*

For this reason, in spite of the fact that the total number of messages Kathy posted was far more than the course average, she said there were a lot of messages she composed but deleted without posting them.

For many L2 students, participating in class discussions meant more than simply gaining knowledge or enhancing their learning experiences. It was a way to be integrated into Western culture and register themselves to others as equally competent members of the community. An L2 student, Sunny, once shared with me her "frustrating" experience with some other professors at LCU, who did not show patience with her English and made her feel "invisible" when she raised her hand to participate in class. However, she used her past experience as a springboard to find her way to succeed in academic courses. She sounded firm and determined as she said:

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Maybe my responses were kind of stupid, I don't know. But at least he (the instructor in the other course) should've clarified, "Do you mean this, or do you mean that," right? So actually I had a bad experience in participating in class. But my opinion is that I don't care what you think about my participation, or what you think about my questions or my responses. I think the most important thing is I have to express my opinion, I have to express myself in class. I think that's very important. Also maybe because of the bad experience, that made me be brave enough to participate instead of being frustrated. *(Sunny; Interview I; 2/18/2003)*

Even though her TOEFL score and the self-assessment of her English skills were the lowest among other L2 students in this class, she was the most communicative L2 student during in-class discussions. Participation in discussions was a way to demonstrate herself as a competent learner to other colleagues. She said the following:

I try to participate in every class. I think it's important. I cannot just be there without saying anything. It means that I don't exist in class. I don't know why, but I need to participate. Also I hope that people can know me. I'd like to make friends at the same time, and I hope, you know, I can impress them. I'm not sure if it's kind of...how to say that, uh, people will think that ESL students cannot speak well. Some Canadian students will lose patience to listen to you, right? So I try to impress them to make them feel that we can't speak maybe 100% correct, but we'd like to participate, we would like to learn, we would like to speak, right? *(Sunny; Interview I; 2/18/2003)*

On the BB, Sunny participated more actively and made the third highest number of postings (next to Dana and Hilary) in this course. Sunny attributed it to the friendly atmosphere that the instructor created in this class by showing respect to everyone's opinion and providing scaffolding to the students, which made her feel comfortable participating in both the face-to-face and online class.

The equal distribution of contributions on the BB can be attributed partly to the required aspect of participation. The students in both courses were not penalized by not speaking up during in-class discussions whereas online the students' contributions were graded. All the students in both courses met the required minimum number of postings even though there was a wide range of participation in terms of the number of postings

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they read and posted on the BBs. However, if the students were graded on a bell curve (relative to other students' participation) instead of the absolute system (meeting the minimum requirement to get full marks), the results might have taken different directions. Ping, for example, stated that the major reason that she was able to participate more in the online forums than in class was the requirement was to post on the BB only once a week. The ease of achievement might have affected students' perceptions of their participation in the BB. Daehan's comment in his interview supports this speculation as he said if he had been assessed based on the number of postings to other students' messages, he would have received a low grade due to his lack of English ability.

Another interesting point that came up during the interviews was what students put as "critical thinking."[20] Daehan commented that one major block to composing, particularly in response to others' messages came from his lack of "critical thinking," which seemed to come along more naturally for his L1 colleagues. In fact, this type of issue often came up not only in this study but in my previous pilot studies and personal communication with other Asian friends who shared their experience of the BB participation. By critical thinking these L2 speakers meant the ability of picking up on a point made by others and sustaining their argument with their own stories, which, to their eyes, occasionally appeared as "leaping from one topic to another," "imaginative" or "irrelevant to the previous topic." This seemed to be crucial to L2 students when their participation in response to someone else's was graded as in Course B. Daehan said the following:

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[20] The term critical thinking is defined elsewhere as "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (Ennis, 2005, ¶ 19).

Daehan: I noticed that Canadian students respond in various ways even to simple topics. When a topic is given, I cannot think of anything much, but the students here seem to have a lot to say.

Kecia: What do you think is the reason?

Daehan: I think it's a difference of educational methodology. Since their childhood Western people are encouraged to speak their thoughts. Students here sometimes talk about things that are not relevant to the discussion topic. I have to respond to other students' postings, but it's not easy to do that. It's difficult for me to speak freely about my thoughts. All I can say to other students' messages is "Yes, you are right," and then I have nothing further to say. *(Daehan; Interview 1; 2/4/2003)*

I was not sure, however, whether these L2 students really lacked critical thinking as they said because, based on private conversations with the focal students, I personally found them quite critical and intellectually stimulating on various topics. As some researchers argue, different cultural/educational background may account for this. Unlike in North American culture, where argumentation and debate is valued, in the Asian school context, raising questions or comments is not commonly practiced, and therefore there is little interaction among students, and students are not likely to "challenge" the instructor's academic authority (Chen, 2003; Jones, 1999; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Stefani, 1997). Stefani (1997) discussed a cultural effect on communication as follows:

> The North American culture values argumentation and debate, while many other cultures emphasize harmony and cooperation. Hence, students from these cultures may not possess argumentative skills that are often found in North American classrooms. Not only do LEP [limited language proficiency] students carry the burden of higher linguistic and cognitive load, but he or she must also adjust to new methods of learning. (p. 358)

As was probably the case in all conversational settings, the subject knowledge was another important factor that came up in the interviews that was related to students' degree of participation in the BB. It applied to both the face-to-face and the online setting as well as the L1 and L2 students. For Mei in Course A, for example, even

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though she valued what she learned from other students' accounts and their teaching tips on the BB, her lack of personal or professional knowledge in children's English language development was a block to taking part in online discussions. As she said in the interview:

> Sometimes I think I couldn't participate very positively, very often, because I'm not familiar with their experience. They talk about strategies, how to teach children, how is their experience of their children. I can't share that. I have experience with only my son. But my son is a special case, so it's different. *(Mei; Interview I; 2/12/2003)*

5.2.4 Summary and Discussion

My focal participants in this study reflected a common view that students from East Asian countries tend to be reticent in face-to-face academic classrooms (e.g., Duff, 2001; Jones, 1999; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Morita, 2002). In the face-to-face classroom, the whole class discussions were mostly dominated by a few L1 students. The interview with L2 students revealed that L2 students faced various challenges, such as keeping up with quick-paced discussions, speaking anxiety, adapting to Western classroom culture and understanding culturally-loaded topics. The focal L1 students' accounts revealed that anxiety to speak applies not only to L2 students but to them as well, but L2 students' anxiety was increased by the additional concern of producing linguistically correct discourse. More importantly, as discussed extensively in Morita (2002), the way students participate in academic discourse cannot be explained simply in terms of linguistic and cognitive ability but should be interpreted in relation to sociocultural context. The issue of a lack of participation of L2 students in a large class seems to be confounded with many of the factors such as linguistic ability, self-confidence, anxiety, personality, culture, educational background or group composition.

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According to Lave and Wenger (1991), participants' understanding and experience are in constant interaction, and participation entails "negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world" (p. 51). The students in Course B, however, felt their ideas or interpretation of activity were constantly "corrected" and had to be justified by what the textbook and the instructor said. Sohee, for example, probably fell short of meeting the instructor's expectations in her presentation in class. Her interpretation of desirable form of the oral presentation in class was dismissed by the instructor and lost her chance to play her part of "leading" the class discussion.

In spite of difficulties, no L2 students negotiated their needs or conditions in class but passively accepted marginalization of their full access to resources that they needed in the process of gaining membership in academic discourse. What Lave and Wenger (1991) call *legitimate peripheral participation* becomes legitimate only when the learner is not penalized for participating on the periphery. Daehan's accounts illustrate the case which the learner had a different frame of reference of participation and consequently faced penalization on his course grade.

The salient features of the BB in comparison with the conventional face-to-face learning setting were the use of a mediator (i.e., computer) and written texts as the means of communication. These features could either facilitate or inhibit students' participation and sometimes affected L1 and L2 students differently. For example, the BBs allowed both L1 and L2 students, time to produce more reflective messages, and it was evident that the L2 students benefited more from the asynchronous written-based BB discussions. With the provision of the BB as an extension of class discussions, many L2 students used it as a channel to convey knowledge and to communicate needs. The L1 students who

benefited particularly from the BB communication were those who had high anxiety about speaking in a large group (e.g., Rory). This finding provides some support to other online researchers' claim that students who are reluctant to speak up in class will benefit from online communication (e.g., Bett, French, Farr, & Hooks, 1999).

Contrary to a common assumption that L1 status will increase participation in the BB, L1 students shared some difficulties with L2 students, for example, anxiety, comprehending textbooks, achieving an academic level of writing. The combination of my observations, the questionnaires and the interviews indicates that L2 students' increased participation in BB discussions came from their higher level of comfort and confidence in reading and writing English than speaking it. As observed by the instructor in Course B, successful participation in an online community required "university language" skills, and it seemed to disadvantage some L1 students for whom writing was not their strongest skill. This is congruent with Morita's (2002) research finding that successful class participation requires obtaining a "new language" (p. 144) grounded in "academic and professional experience pertaining to the subject mater of the course" (p. 144).

On the other hand, some factors such as the instructor's rules or the relationship with the instructor created discomfort and tension among both L1 and L2 students in Course B. Kathy, for example, changed from being an active participant in both the face-to-face and the online settings to a passive and reticent one as the course developed. According to her accounts, on the BB she had to project a different self from her norm in an effort to meet the instructor's expectations.

The focal L2 students pointed out that participating in either face-to-face or online discussions meant more than enhancing their learning opportunities for them. Many of them desired to be part of the community of practice in the North American context, and being silent during class discussions was to "isolate" themselves from the rest of the community and make them "invisible" or appear less competent. The BB community provided a tool with which these quiet L2 students could control discourse and demonstrate themselves as competent and knowledgeable members of the community. Furthermore, one L2 student, Sohee, used the BB as a place she could seek feedback and support from her peers on her performance in the face-to-face classroom, which she would not have done otherwise.

Interestingly, even though many students valued the use of the BB as a beneficial addition to their conventional class, no students wanted the BBs to replace their face-to-face classes due to the latter's immediate and interpersonal aspects. Furthermore, the interview data did not corroborate other research that CMC promotes interactive learning, motivation and negotiation of meaning. On the contrary, most students found that they could not get immediate responses, if ever, and it took longer to reach conclusions or solve problems through CMC.

In sum, factors that shape students' participation in face-to-face and online learning environment support the sociocultural view that participation needs to be be understood as "complex social and locally accomplished activity" (Doehler, 2002, p. 26). In the following chapter, I will move my focus to another component of an activity system. Keeping the overall picture of the participatory unit within the activity system, I

will examine *division of labor*, i.e., participant roles and how they are shaped in relation to other components of the activity system.

CHAPTER 6

ROLES OF L2 STUDENTS IN RELATION TO CONTEXT

This chapter explores the participant roles L2 students assumed in online discussion activities in comparison with their observed and reported participant roles in face-to-face classroom settings in the same course. To answer this question, I introduce a new analytical framework to reflect what participants are doing in the online community, the BB, in particular. The framework identifies their participant roles based on two functional aspects of discourse, speech functions and message topics. In Section 6.1, I present an overview of speech functions and message topics that were the recording units of participant roles, and the overall procedure I used to develop the categories of participant roles. In the following Sections 6.2 and 6.3, I present findings of participant roles from two different learning settings, face-to-face and BBs in both courses.

6.1   Overview of Speech Functions and Message Topics

As mentioned earlier, I examined participant roles on the BB in terms of speech functions and message topics. Table 6.1, Table 6.2 and Table 6.3 summarize the definitions and sample clauses or sentences of each speech function and message topic obtained from the data. The three categories of speech functions are quite distinctive from each other in that each function is often realized by certain grammatical forms. *Expressing knowledge/opinion* is to give either factual information or attitudinal/evaluative information and is realized by declaratives or interrogatives. Declaratives are typically used to initiate conversational exchanges by putting forward information, whereas some interrogatives can be used to challenge others, avoid asserting

opinions, solicit confirmation or to refute information/opinion from other interactants.[21]

One example of challenging others using interrogatives is:

> Should government really play a role in the Digital Divide? In other words, should a group of middle-upper to upper-class white conservative males be in charge of deciding who gets what and how they get it? *(Kathy in Course B, BB Excerpt, 3/18/2003)*

Table 6.1: Summary of Speech Functions

Speech Functions	Codes	Examples
Expressing knowledge/opinion (EK) Expressing or sharing existing knowledge, opinion, own experience, information or one's new ideas)	**Initiate**: not necessarily responding to a particular message [EK- In]	The digital divide can be separated into two distinct issues; regional and global.
	React: replying to a particular message usually in response to a request, providing assistance or feedback [EK-Re]	What I do is write my posting in word and then copy and paste it into this dialogue box.
Making request (MR)	**Request for assistance**: Making questions or statements that seek assistance or input/ feedback [MR-RA]	Is it possible to write our discussion postings on Word and then attach it? –anybody knows how to do that?
	Making commands: Making a request that directs class activities [MR-CO]	Post your evaluation to the pertinent discussion forum and receive feedback
Social formulas (SF) Codified social responses of courtesy, such as greetings, thanking, acknowledging, apologizing, etc.	SF	Thanks for posting this provocative discussion starter, Elsa.

---

[21] The types of grammar and its corresponding functions are drawn from Eggins and Slade (1997).

Students provided knowledge/opinion through retrieving, summarizing or evaluating old information (e.g., weekly readings, personal experience, their colleagues' comments, etc.) with or without elaboration (e.g., added information, applying, inferring, analysis, etc.).

The function of making requests is classified into *request for assistance* and *making commands*. Requesting assistance is done when a speaker does not have information or knowledge and tries to elicit information/feedback or assistance from others. In this case, they usually use interrogatives or modulated declaratives (tempered directness with declaratives), as in the following example:

- Now that I have sent the document I can't open it. Can anyone else? How? *(interrogatives)*

- We are looking forward to your suggestions and comments. *(modulated declaratives)*

The forums that were reasonably interactive, where the students frequently replied to each other, were usually marked by a high frequency of interrogatives. This kind of exchange of ideas between students was often prompted by students' soliciting questions as illustrated in the following excerpts from a BB message of Course A. In the following example, Sunny (a focal L2 speaker) initiated a question seeking other students' opinion on her observations:

Message no. 419 [Branch from no. 384]

Posted by **Sunny** on Fri Jan 24, 2003 17:43
Subject Re: Discussion Question

However, some EFL learners, especially adults, insist that teachers are responsible for correction. Learning styles are different in different learning groups or levels in the EFL context. The reading of "learning to pronounce" part in Chapter 3 reminds me of my L2 young learners' problem. Some of them are confused by /p/ and /b/, /r/ and /l/. Most of them cannot pronounce "th" sound. Some educators said that is the common problem with Asian people. So should I agree with the biological view? What do you think?

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(Sunny in Course A, Excerpt, Forum 2B)

This question functioned to stir up discussion and generate supporting comments from her colleagues. In responding to Sunny's question, some students provided information or anecdotes based on their personal experience and observations as teachers, as follows:

> **Message no. 421** [Branch from no. 419]
> Posted by **Jenny** on Sat Jan 25, 2003 13:28
> **Subject Re: Discussion Question**
>
> Hi Sunny. Thanks for your response. In my experience, many young children mix up p, b, r and l. When it comes to L2 learners I would not say that it is Asian people. I would say that many L2 learners have this problem because of the way that these sounds are created (position in the mouth). Jenny
> *(Jenny in Course A, Forum 2B)*

> **Message no. 431** [Branch from no. 419]
> Posted by **Dana** on Sat Jan 25, 2003 18:50
> **Subject Re: Discussion Question**
>
> Dear Sunny, If I may comment on your observations – your comment about correction and the teacher's role is interesting and it is an issue of debate I have experienced working in a French Immersion context. Some teachers insisted on explicit correction while others advocated the need to focus on meaning and expression (that accurate pronunciation and use of correct grammar will develop through exposure and modeling). [...]
>
> About the "th" sound, this is a difficult one for many L2 learners and I think that most languages other than English do not have such sound (?). I know it is a foreign sound in Slavic languages as well as in French. When I worked in Quebec, I would hear my French-speaking colleagues struggle with this sound.
>
> Also, embarrassing at the time – but true, I was initially pulled out of first grade as there was concern that I was not producing the 'th' sound. After a few sessions with the speech therapist, I told her that I didn't like to say the 'th' sound because it felt as though I was going to spit and that this is why I avoided it. (this was not a sound I had heard at home where English was the L2). I don't know what exactly happened with the correspondence between the adults in my life then, but that was the last time I went to the 'speech lady'.
> *(Dana, Excerpt, Forum 2B)*

Message no. 439 [Branch from no. 431]
Posted by **Chris** on Sun Jan 26, 2003 14:26
Subject Re: Discussion Question

As classroom teachers, I feel we need to be aware of the range of time when a child "usually" is able to pronounce a sound. My speech/language pathologist was helpful and gave me an outline of which phonemes should be acquired by what age. When I have a child who appears not to be able to produce sounds in their age range, I alert her. [...]

So...I think correction at the appropriate age is important for those children having difficulty.

Another thought... How do local accents pertain to the "correct" pronunciation of phonemes within words and as a different "accented" educator, who is correct?
(Chris, Excerpt, Forum 2B)

Again, this message from Chris prompted another student to ask a question directed back

to Chris:

Message no. 443 [Branch from no. 439]
Posted by **Mindy** on Sun Jan 26, 2003 19:48
Subject Re: Discussion Question

Hi Chris! The help that your speech/language pathologist gave you sounds very interesting! Do you have a copy of that or a reference where I could find it? There are sounds that all children have trouble with and I'd love to see what sounds come easier and which come later. Thanks, Mindy
(Mindy in Course A, Forum 2B)

Except for the general discussion starter, rhetorical questions or questions to achieve

commands, the questions tended to function to probe information, seek assistance or

challenge others forming a chain of messages related to the previous messages.

Making commands, on the other hand, is used to direct or negotiate action, and in

order to achieve this imperatives, modulated interrogatives or modulated declaratives can

be used. Imperatives often "position the speaker as having some power over the

addressee" (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 88). It was often the instructor or discussion

facilitators who used this speech function on the BB as in the following example:

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- Could each group please arrange to bring 12 copies of your current, working transcript, to distribute at Wednesday's class, March 12th? *(modulated interrogatives)*

Lastly, *social formula* is codified social responses of courtesy, such as greeting, thanking, acknowledging and apologizing.

Table 6.2: Summary of Message Topics

Message Topics	Codes	Examples
Course topics (Topics that are related to course readings or course assignments)	CT	I'd like to pose a more specific question to al of you: "Why do educators study language development?"
Course logistics (Comments related to course logistics, such as meeting time or group member structure)	CL	You'll find that the course calendar has been updated.
Quality of messages (Comments related to the quality of messages)	QM	I am very impressed with the posts that I have been reading.
Communication/Medium (Comments on communication or medium)	CM	Are your messages showing up at the level you want them to? This is determined by whose message you are replying to.
Social matters (Comments on social matters that are unrelated to the course subjects)	SM	Hi, Hilary, Everyone's working on a Sunday night! What has become of us?
Other topics (Topics not related to the above)	OT	A virtual conference on copyright started last Monday and there are some interesting postings there.

Message topics, on the other hand, have been divided into six categories as described in Table 6.2: course topics, course logistics, quality of messages, communication/medium, social matters and other topics. *Course topics* have to do with topics related to the subject matter of the course such as course readings or course assignments whereas *course logistics* is comments relevant to the actual operation of the course. *Quality of messages* is usually remarks evaluating one's own or others' messages as illustrated in the following message:

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Message no. 654 [Branch from no. 631]

Posted by **Dana** on Mon Mar 24, 2003 08:57
Subject Re: Storytelling from a wordless book

Dear Jenny, Michelle, Mary, Grace:

Your summary analysis of Ben and Sam provides a good idea of the behaviours
they showed during the 'book activity'. I think you made a good choice using
these two different age groups - what a rich source of observation and analysis.
[…]
Dana
(Dana, excerpt, Week 11, Forum: Our Term Paper's Analysis of Findings)

The students used quality of messages also to clarify or monitor their communication on

the BB. As suggested in Chapter 5 already, Michelle, who felt particularly insecure

about her written communication with her colleagues, often revealed her concern in her

message by interjecting a sentence, such as, "Does this make sense?"

Topics on *communication/medium* are comments on delivery of message itself or

use of computers as a medium of communication. Comments on

communication/medium reflect, to a certain extent, the technical aspects of CMC in

online discourse. During the first few weeks of the semester, in particular, there were

some comments related to technical difficulties indicating students' unfamiliarity with

CMC. For example, Kathy in Course B was seeking assistance regarding how to use the

BB more efficiently in the following message:

Message no. 27 [Branch from no. 22]
Posted by **Kathy** on Tue Jan 21, 2003 19:59
Subject Re: Can't see previous posting

I also posted one yesterday and can't see it today. Is it possible to write our
discussion posting on Word and then attach it - so that if it disappears, we still
have the message saved? Also, is there a way to write in this box off-line? I don't
have a separate number for the internet, so I stay on the minimal amount of time
possible - anybody know how to do that? (Kathy in Course B, Week 3)

Table 6.3: Summary of Online Discourse (Speech Functions and Message Topics)

Message Topics / Functions	Course topics (CT)	Course logistics (CL)	Quality of messages (QM)	Communication or medium (CM)	Social matters (SM)	Other topics (OT)
Expressing knowledge or opinion/ information sharing (EK) –Initiate	I think we need early intervention for the digital divide....	Here is the revised members' list for Discussion Forums 2B Revised and 3B Revised.	Hope my discussion starter is clear.	If you just reply to a previous message, your posting will show as subordinate to that message, rather than to the general question.	*No Examples Found in the Text of Either Course*	A virtual conference on copyright started last Monday and there are some interesting postings there.
EK-React	Dana, there are some excellent resources to use for an informal course project on this topic.	As my email earlier today indicated, we have learned that there will be no job action on campus today,	I was impressed with your well organized summary,	What I do is write my posting in word and then paste it into this dialogue box.	We are all well, and we are very lucky that Sophie is not fussy, and is happy to eat and sleep,	*No Examples Found in the Text of Either Course*
Making requests (MR) – Request for Assistance (RA)	Herold – have you seen any evidence of this?	If we choose to support the strike action should we inform just you,...?	Does this make sense?	Now that I have sent the document I can't open it. Can anyone else? How?	I hope you will let us know how all is going for you.	I have a question for you techno-wizards
MR-Command (CO)	I'd like to pose a more specific question to all of you: "Why do educators study language development?"	Can each group please arrange to bring 12 copies of your current, working transcript,	*No Examples Found in the Text of Either Course*	*No Examples Found in the Text of Either Course*	*No Examples Found in the Text of Either Course*	*No Examples Found in the Text of Either Course*
Social Formulas	Thanks for posting this question, Mina: I really look forward to seeing the response!	So to all of you, I enjoyed the course reading discussions on webct and working in our groups on the language assignment.	I just wanted to add a short note of congratulations here on your conducting such a vigorous and searching debate of these questions....	Sorry for the delay... Thank you, Tim, for getting me back online so quickly.	Enjoy the rest of your spring break everyone!	*No Examples Found in the Text of Either Course*

Topics on *social matters* are comments that are unrelated to the course subjects whereas *other topics* are topics that are not categorized into any of the five topics.

By matching each message topic with its speech function, I generated the categories of participant roles on the BB as listed in Table 6.4: Information-providers/resource persons, information/help seekers, discussion facilitators, motivators, directors, evaluators, monitors and socializers. For example, if a person makes a question or statement that seeks information regarding course logistics, she assumes the role of an information seeker, whereas if she makes a request that directs course activity regarding course logistics, she assumes the role of a director.

Students undoubtedly played more diverse and subtle roles than listed in the table. However, the matching categories listed, inferred from the combination of speech functions and message topics provide a clearer picture of what participants were doing on the online BB. The general definition of each role-category is as follows:

- *Information-providers/resource persons* provide knowledge, opinion or information on course topics, communication/medium or other topics.

- *Information/help seekers* are those who ask for information or assistance.

- *Discussion facilitators* are those who pose questions to initiate, lead or close threads of discussions.

- *Motivators* are those who post messages with an explicit intention of promoting discussions among members.

- *Directors* are those who control or guide the course activities by providing information or direction related to course logistics.

- *Evaluators* make evaluative remarks on others' or their own work.

- *Monitors* are those who make comments to check clarity of message content.

- *Socializers* are those who make comments that are intended to promote good relations between members and a friendly atmosphere rather than communicate about the course subject.

Table 6.4: Generation of Participant Roles

Message Topics / Speech Functions	Course topic	Course logistics	Quality of messages	Communication/ medium	Social matters	Other topics
Expressing knowledge or opinion /information sharing (EK)- Initiate	Information provider/ resource person	Director	Monitor	Information provider/ resource person	Socializer	Information provider/ resource person
EK-React	Information provider/ resource person	Director	Evaluator	Information provider/ resource person	Socializer	Information provider/ resource person
Making requests (MR) - Request for Assistance	Information/ help seeker	Information/ help seeker	Monitor	Information/help seeker	Socializer	Information/ help seeker
MR- Command	Discussion facilitator	Director	Director	Director	Socializer	Director
Social Formulas	Motivator	Evaluator	Socializer	Socializer	Socializer	Socializer

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6.2 Participant Roles in the Face-to-Face Classrooms

Participant roles identified in a face-to-face classroom setting differed depending on class activities. Both Course A and Course B followed quite a structured order of activities in class throughout the semester as was described in Chapter 4. Course A, for example, usually started with the instructor's introducing the topics that would be covered in class and announcements about either face-to-face or WebCT activities. For example, if there were any new items the instructor had uploaded on the course Web site, he demonstrated to the students the sources and how to access them. A quarter of the class time was often spent on the instructor's *providing information on communication/medium,* or *course logistics.*[22] The next quarter of the class hour was led by the instructor's presentation of some research input related to the course topic. Students were welcome to jump in to ask questions (e.g., seeking clarification or more information) or make comments to extend on the instructor's or the colleagues' comments. The instructor also solicited answers from the students during his presentation. Even though some students commented in the interview that the structure of the face-to-face classes was "less discussion-oriented and more lecture-oriented" compared to other graduate courses they had taken, interaction during the instructor's presentation took on a more discursive pattern than the classical I-R-E structure posed by other researchers (e.g., Mehan, 1978;1985; Kamhi-Stein, 2000). Applied to some of the equivalent terms of speech functions used in the analysis of BB discourse, some of the typical interaction patterns observed were as follows:

- Instructor: Expressing Knowledge/information (initiating or reacting) followed by Making a Request (a question to facilitate discussions)
  → Student A: EK (response)

---

[22] These terms (italicized) are used in reference to the categories of speech function developed in this study.

- → Student B: EK (response)
- → Student C: EK (response)
- → Student D: EK (response)
- → Instructor: Social Formula (thanking for students' input)
- → Student B: EK (response, information sharing) followed by MR (information seeking)
- → Instructor: EK (response)

[…]

or

- Instructor: EK (initiate)
  - → Student A: MR (seeking clarification or more information)
  - → Instructor: EK (response)
  - → Student B: EK (response)
  - → Student C: EK (response)
  - → Student D: MR (seeking information)
  - → Instructor: EK (response)
  - → Student D: EK (response) (sharing her experience)

[…]

Overall, the in-class discussions were mostly interaction between a few L1 students and the instructor. For example, during the 70 minute PowerPoint presentation of the instructor during the class of Week 8, there were 54 exchanges of conversation between the class members. During this communication, 50% of the exchanges (27 turns) were taken by the instructor, and the rest of the exchanges were distributed among seven students: Hilary (10 turns), Dana (8), Chris (6), Jenny (4), Mary (2), Sara (2), and an L2 student, Ping (1).[23] This pattern was reasonably consistent throughout the semester, so it was Hilary, Dana, and Chris, who communicated the most during whole-class discussions. It was the instructor who played the major role of information provider/resource person, facilitator (particularly in Course A), motivator, director and evaluator in face-to-face classes. On the whole, the instructor was more prominent as an information-provider/resource person in face-to-face classes. His role could be more

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[23] *Turn* is defined as transfer of a speaker in conversation (Eggins & Slade, 1997).

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appropriately termed as "coach," "mentor" or "assistant," which came up in the interviews with the focal students and the instructor himself. In particular, the role of the instructor of Course A as a *socializer* was prominent such that, as one student put it, he was "forming a sense of community with the group in the class" *(Hilary; Interview II; 4/24/2003)*. Another L1 student, Michelle gave a very similar account of the instructor's roles as follows:

> In face-to-face discussions, it's interesting. I almost see that he was fostering a more social atmosphere and trying to have everybody get to know each other at a more personal level. Um, he would be interested in what's happening in our personal lives. One of our classmates had a baby, and we talked about that. Or he always brings us refreshments. I think that helped encouraging more personal relationship with each other because we were only seeing each other only twice a month. *(Michelle; Interview II; 4/8/2003)*

The dominance of a few L1 students and the instructor in class discussions was obvious in Course B as well. As has been pointed out in the previous chapters, it was mostly the L1 male students who stood out among other students as information providers/resource persons. Two L1 focal students, Kathy and Rory were passive in speaking out during the whole-class discussions. Kathy, who was quite active at the beginning of the semester in providing information and expressing her opinion, became much less expressive as the semester progressed. The interview data revealed that the instructor had a prominent image in the class as an expert and knowledge imparter. Despite the fact that the classes were led by student facilitators, analysis of the classroom observation log revealed that the instructor's turns were much more frequent and longer than the instructor's in Course A. A typical interaction pattern of class discussions in Course B is as follows:

Facilitating student: Expressing Knowledge/opinion (Initiate)
→ Instructor: EK (Response) – elaborating on the facilitator's comments

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→	Student A:	EK (short Response)
→	Instructor:	EK (2 minute Response)
→	Student B:	EK (Response)
→	Instructor:	EK (5 minute Response)
→	Facilitating student:	EK (Initiate) – Continues his/her presentation
→	Instructor:	EK (Response) with evaluating quality of students' comments (e.g., "Absolutely!")
→	Facilitating student:	EK (Initiate) – Continues his/her presentation
→	Student C:	Making a Request (information seeking)
→	Instructor:	EK (Response) –Answering Student C's question
→	Student D:	Making a Request (information seeking)
→	Instructor:	EK (Response) –Answering Student D's question

An L1 student, Rory's accounts corroborate this interaction pattern, as she said:

> I feel that the instructor also worked to facilitate the discussion and bring in her ideas or what was going on. So basically she just kind of makes sure everything stayed on track and also put in her ideas. And sometimes this was good and bad, because we learned what she thought, which is very important. But at the same time, it kind of took away from the presenters. So then it was sometimes ended up with the presenters were just standing there, and the instructor was just talking. *(Rory in Course B; Interview II; 4/15/2003)*

The focal L2 students' participation in both courses (except for Sunny) during whole-class discussions was marked by silence. When they did talk, it was usually when they were asked to report their progress or the findings of their group project to the whole class.

6.3   Participant Roles on the BBs

In contrast to the face-to-face classroom where the instructor was the main resource person that members depended on for knowledge, the online forum seemed to provide the students with more opportunities to demonstrate and share their knowledge/perspectives with their colleagues. This reflected the instructors' pedagogical goals for the courses as they stated in class. The instructors in both courses made it clear in the interview that they intended to maximize students' learning by promoting student-

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to-student discourse rather than instructor-to-student discourse on the BBs. Dr. Taylor explained it as follows:

> I mentioned already that I do not intervene in the discussion forums because I think that the way they were structured works better to fulfill the academic goals we have for the course. I'm not intervening and drawing all of the discussion back to me. I would much rather that be student-to-student debated discussion. So we widen the scope of the perspectives on the course readings, and just as important for this course, the educational applications in professional practice that the variety of participants can bring to bear on the course readings. *(Dr. Taylor; Interview; 4/15/2003)*

Both instructors kept their postings minimal, and as a result the ratio of their number of postings to the total number of postings through the semester was 23% (Course A) and 5 % (Course B) respectively. Table 6.5 is a quantitative summary of speech functions and message topics based on the discourse analysis of two weeks of messages on the BBs from the focal students and their instructors.

Table 6.5: Quantitative Summary of Speech Functions and Message Topics

	Course A			Course B		
	L1	**L2**	**Instructor**	**L1**	**L2**	**Instructor**
Expressing knowledge-In	2.25	1.67	9	2.5	2.3	1
Expressing knowledge-Re	6	4	5	2.5	1.33	0
Making requests-RA	2.75	3	2	2	.33	0
Making requests-CO	.25	0	1	0	0	0
Social formula	2.75	3	9	0	.33	0

Table 6.5 (continued): Quantitative Summary of Speech Functions and Message Topics

	Course A			Course B		
	L1	L2	Instructor	L1	L2	Instructor
Course topics	7.25	5.33	6	2	3.67	0
Course logistics	.25	.33	11	0	0	0
Message quality	2	.33	3	1	.33	1
Communication /medium	.5	.66	3	1.5	0	0
Social matters	1.5	1.67	2	0	.33	0

The number in the column of "L1" and "L2" in the table is the mean frequency and the one for "instructor" is the raw number of the frequency of categories identified in their online discussion messages. As is illustrated in the table, the L2 students in Course A used a wider range of speech functions and message topics than their counterparts in Course B. Besides using the speech function of expressing knowledge/opinion, the students in Course A were actively using requests for assistance, social formulas and social matters.

In addition, according to the table, the instructor of Course A appeared more frequently on the BB with a wider range of speech functions and message topics compared to the instructor of Course B. However, the review of the instructor's choices of speech functions and message topics reveals that most of the Course A instructor's entries were, in fact, social formula on course topics or quality of messages, and expressing knowledge/opinion on course logistics. The instructor's short message immediately followed the discussion starter posted by a discussion facilitator,

acknowledged the posting and encouraged students' participation as in the following

message:

> **Message no. 389** [Branch from no. 384]
>
> Posted by **Tim Taylor** on Mon Jan 20, 2003 11:40
> **Subject Re: Discussion Question**
> Thanks for posting this provocative discussion starter, Jenny. I suspect the
> question of purpose and point of view will arise in a discussion of the role of
> corrections! Tim
> *(Dr. Taylor, Forum 2B)*

In closing each discussion forum, the instructor also added a few comments to express

acknowledgement of the students' active discussions and indicate the closure of the

forum as in the following BB excerpt:

> **Message no. 514**
>
> Posted by **Tim Taylor** on Tue Feb 11, 2003 14:18
> **Subject: Thanks for your participation in forum 4B!**
>
> A warm word of thanks to Chris for animating this helpful and most energetic
> discussion, and to all you for taking part in it this week. Sunny even slipped in a
> last word just a few minutes ago!
>
> I look forward to seeing you tomorrow (Wednesday) at our in-person meeting!
> Tim
> *(Dr. Taylor, Forum 4B)*

In the interview he described his main role as to "make sure that discussion

forums were open at the right time," close some of the early discussion forums, and

"monitor the discussions to be sure that everyone was having an opportunity to be

online." The following message is an example of a message posted by the instructor on

the forum to encourage participation. The message was posted by the instructor after a

majority of students had failed to respond to an earlier message to post a tentative version

of a term paper topic after 10 days:

Message no. 400

Posted by **Tim Taylor** (Course A) on Wed Jan 22, 2003 12:32
Subject Your topic urgently needed here! Tim cracks the whip...

I am a bit concerned that class members not delay getting their *tentative* statements of topic interest posted here. This is a course requirement for *this* forum, remembering that the objective is to identify a few groups of people who can work together on this major term paper task. I don't want to see people rushed at a later stage, and the way to avoid that is to "front load" the thinking a bit.

Let me encourage you to post in this forum sooner rather than later: it will pay huge dividends later in the course. Next Wednesday we will be moving to the next step, formulation of guiding questions: as one favourite professor of mine used to say, " don't be backward about coming forward."
Tim
(Dr. Taylor, Forum: Term Paper Draft Topics)

As stated in Chapter 4, interview data indicate that students in Course A felt more ownership in constructing online discourse than those in Course B. At the same time, they were aware of the instructor's presence on the online forums and appreciated his balanced feedback and timely involvement to provide resources or monitor discussion, as reflected in one student's recollection of the instructor's role:

> He [Dr. Taylor] is very good about letting us go our own course … I think in one of our chapters, we were maybe getting a little off-topic. So he interjected and said, "I think these are good points, but maybe you guys should concentrate more on-" I can't remember exactly what it was, but he redirects us when he sees necessary. And other than that he posts all the pertinent information we've discussed in class elsewhere. So it's there for us to refer back to, which is nice. *(Michelle; Interview I; 2/26/2003)*

One aspect that makes the BB different from other writing tasks such as reading responses that students write to submit to the instructor is that the BB is a public place where all members can read each other's messages and use them as a basis for further discussion. The students appreciated how their colleagues responded differently to the same question and used BB text produced by their colleagues as a tool for developing

new ideas through extending and questioning. Most of the students, as first-time users of BBs, seemed to learn from one another not only the subject matter but also the register used in online communication, as Michelle (L1) in Course A said:

> I think you also learn, and this is something you don't see often when you're in these level courses. You don't see other's writing style? And that really comes through. I know when I write, maybe I'm not as academic in my writing. Whereas when I read other classmates' writing, it sounds official and sounds academic, and that really comes through. I learn about writing style that way. *(Michelle; Interview; 2/26/2002)*

The students who lacked an academic register tried to adjust their writing style to other students'. Some others, particularly L2 students, paid attention to their colleagues' colloquial expressions, which they had rarely had a chance to learn.

Overall, the interaction dynamics and diversity of participant roles in the online forums were more prominent in Course A than in Course B. As mentioned in the previous chapter, students' writing styles in Course A were influenced more by their colleagues whereas in Course B, they seem to be more influenced by the instructor's set rules and interventions. It appears that the students in Course A were building a supportive environment on their own and developing bonds among the members by playing diverse roles on the BB, which was indicated by frequent appearances of positive appraisal, social formulas and the focal students' accounts in the interviews. In face-to-face class it was almost exclusively the instructor who made evaluative comments, such as "That's a wonderful finding," "I love your way of expression," and "Good question!", whereas on the BB it was the students themselves who evaluated each other's work and encouraged their peers by exchanging comments and ideas. In Course A, in particular, the frequency of positive appraisals increased as the semester developed when the

students got to know each other better. Michelle, for example, commented in the interview regarding other students' messages on the BB as follows:

> In our group so far, they've been really good. Everybody is quite supportive one another. They are very nice. We seem to piggyback on one another's ideas. "Oh, I really liked how you said that," "I'll expand on that." So other discussion leaders sometimes answer sometimes. I found it, it's good that way. You get to know a little bit about each other, not a whole lot, because it's not that personal. *(Michelle: Interview I; 2/26/2003)*

The participation of two of the focal students, Hilary and Dana, who were active communicators during in-class discussions in Course A continued to be quite active on the BB as well. They outnumbered the average number of postings of the students in Course A (35~36 postings in total) through extending on the discussion topics, seeking knowledge and providing assistance to their colleagues. The examination of the BB messages of both courses showed a greater diversity of participation across students, particularly across L1 and L2 groups. Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2 show a comparison between focal L1 and L2 students' BB postings in each course in terms of the mean frequency of participant roles identified in BB messages for two weeks (Week 3 and Week 11). As is shown by the length of the graphs, L1 focal students played more diverse roles on the BB than L2 students in both courses. When compared the ratio of the mean number of postings through the semester between L1 and L2 focal students, it was also L1 focal students who posted more number of messages on the BBs as is shown on Table 6.6.

Table 6.6: Mean Number of Postings of L1 and L2 Students in Two Courses

	Posted Messages in Course A	Posted Messages in Course B
L1 focal students	28	22
L2 focal students	17	19
Class Mean	*20*	*17*

What should be noted, however, is the comparison of L2 students' participation between face-to-face classes and the BBs. In contrast to appearing as novices participating on the periphery of Western mainstream face-to-face classes, L2 students played various roles such as information provider, information seeker, motivator, evaluator and socializer. They demonstrated their knowledge and experience on the BBs with more confidence and comfort. In the following BB message, Ping demonstrated her expertise as a linguistics major and motivated other students for further discussions during the week she was the designated online discussion facilitator.

Message no. 553 [Branch from no. 537]

Posted by **Ping** on Mon Feb 24, 2003 12:16
Subject Re: Chapter 6

That's a good observation, Jenny. Children's innate knowledge on linguistic aspect is a key one. There has been claim of Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in
linguistic approach, which is assumed to be a physical part of the brain like the wings for birds. Environment triggers the maturation of a LAD. Does this LAD include pragmatic "structures"? I haven't found answers for this question.
(Ping in Course A, Forum 5)

Ping also had a strong background in computer use and was often observed to help her colleagues who lacked familiarity with WebCT, as illustrated in the following communication on the BB:

Message no. 662
Posted by **Chris** on Mon Mar 24, 2003 21:39
Subject Observations of Children's Ability to Rhyme

This is technology beyond my capabilities. So here goes!!

Message no. 663 [Branch from no. 662]

Posted by **Chris** on Mon Mar 24, 2003 21:43
Subject Re: Observations of Children's Ability to Rhyme

Now that I have sent the document I can't open it. Can anyone else? How? Chris

Message no. 664 [Branch from no. 663]

Posted by **Ping** on Mon Mar 24, 2003 22:05
Subject Re: Observations of Children's Ability to Rhyme

Yes, I can, Chris. You have to read what Hilary and I have posted threaded in the second column of this forum.
(Course A, Week 11, Forum: Our Term Paper's Analysis of Findings)

Ping commented in the interview that online communication helped her better understand the class discussions by being able to read messages until she understood. As she said:

> In a classroom, it's harder to understand somebody's real opinion. Especially after a long talk, I really get lost. I feel inappropriate to respond, because it might not be the person's purpose, so I might understand it wrongly. If I don't understand other people's opinion, I usually don't interrupt in class. So I participate fewer [in class]. However, in online I can read, and read and read again until I understand. So I'm sure what I'm responding. So I'm more confident in that way. Yeah. *(Ping; Interview I; 2/4/2003)*

In terms of quality of participation, the mean length of L2 students' messages in Course B was as extensive as L1 students'. In Course B, the total number of postings each L2 student made throughout the semester exceeded the number of the average students' postings.

When compared the range of student roles between Course A and Course B, the focal students (both L1 and L2) played more diverse roles in Course A as is shown in Figure 6.1 and 6.2. The range of the student roles in Course B was restricted mostly to the role of information provider. This kind of pattern reflects to a great degree the

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students' interpretation of the BB task based on the instructor's expectations. As Daehan said in the interview:

> I focused on summarizing the readings. I tried to fully understand the content of the articles and included it in my postings. I tried not to talk too much about myself and my own thinking. Other people wrote a message from their own perspectives and referred to the reading from time to time. But in my case, I added my comments based on the summary of the reading. Some students used the expression in their writing, such as "this doesn't make sense" or "absurd." But I would rather not to use such emotional expressions, but instead provide rational and logical explanations. *(Daehan; Interview II; 4/12/2003)*

Figure 6.1: Summary of Participant Roles of the Focal Students (Course A)

students' interpretation of the BB task based on the instructor's expectations. As Daehan said in the interview:

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Figure 6.1: Summary of Participant Roles of the Focal Students (Course A)

Role	L1	L2
Info. provider	7	5.3
Info.seeker	3	2.67
Facilitator	0.25	0
Motivator	2	0.67
Evaluator	1	0
Monitor	0.25	0
Socializer	1.25	1.67

Figure 6.2: Summary of Participant Roles of the Focal Students (Course B)
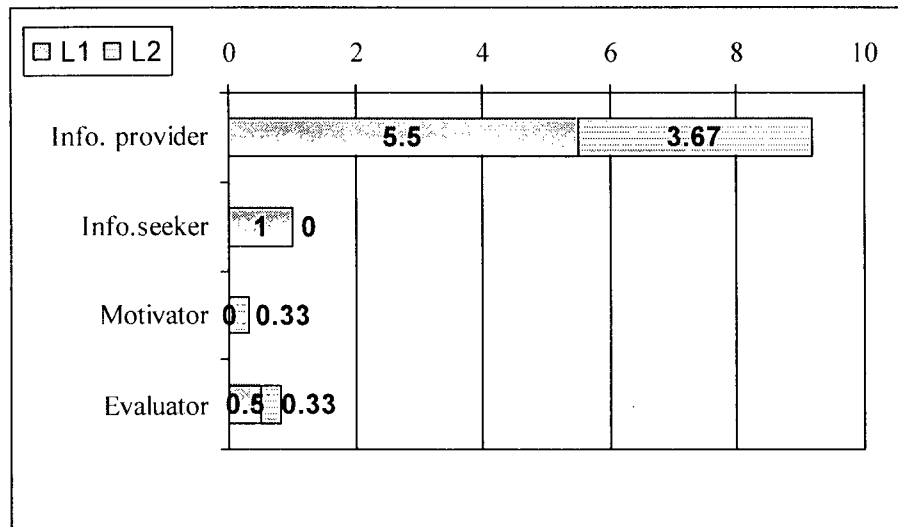
It appeared that successful engagement in BB discussions did not so much depend on a high level of technology skills or knowledge but on a firm grasp of the content of the reading materials, which dealt with issues about technology. Except for three female students, the students in Course B had extensive teaching background. When composing messages on the BB, students in Course B drew mainly on the readings of the week and added their personal or professional experiences as teachers or learners to support their arguments.

According to the instructor, the BB messages the students produced were "very distilled form of academic discourse," and the desired form of BBs, as she commented on the BBs on Week 11:

Message no. 229

Posted by **Debbie Wall** on Sun Mar 16, 2003 10:44
Subject WOW - Impressed...

ok, so i have to say that i am very VERY impressed with the posts that i have been reading. The level of analysis and reflection on the (maybe previously) taken for granted is incredibly impressive. There is a lot of intellectual risk-taking

and boundary stretching going on here and the level of dialogue is very sophisticated. I know full well that although i provided my homily at the beginning about how this was not a "how can we integrate technology in the classroom" course, that as we moved into theories of learning and then culture and then cyberculture there was anxiety around the focus being "abstract" and "philosophical". So, thank you for staying the course (literally and metaphorically) and letting go, if only to be able to participate, of the notion that in a graduate course in Education we somehow need to stick with material that is immediately relevant to classrooms and teaching practices.

Debbie
(Dr. Debbie Wall, Week 11)

Interestingly, however, what appeared to be the successful and high level of

discussions on the BB did not correspond to the students' level of satisfaction with their

use of the BB in this course, as a few excerpts from the interview data show:

> I don't think anybody like that kind of writing, actually. But we talked about this kind of problem, I don't know actually if this is a problem or not. Someone in my class said it's too academic, it's hard to access, sometimes. We wanted to speak more freely to exchange our information or just our life. But, the instructor asked at least twice, you know the first one is the very academic response to the reading material, and the second one should be a response to other students. It's very fixed, actually. The characteristic of BB is very fixed, and sometimes I feel uncomfortable about posting my interests or my personal experience, something like that. *(Sohee; Interview I; 2/7/2003)*

> [...] on the BB, we say more in a professional level, and there was no interaction of emotion, I guess. People just stayed on the topic, and wrote about what we were to write about. It wasn't like friendly- *(Rory; Interview II; 4/15/2003)*

> [...] the prof. made a point that they have to be, you know, professional, academic, this and that. There's a lot of things that I have questions about or I have opinions about. You're not supposed to, she said, put that on there. So it can't be opinionated, it can't be anything. It has to be a summary and where your learning goes, sort of very higher level of thinking, sort. *(Kathy; Interview I; 2/10/2003)*

The instructor seemed to be aware of the students' dissatisfaction with the BB activity

probably through reading the students' feedback in the course evaluation at the end of the

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semester. When I asked her if she had achieved what she had intended in Course B, she said, "Everything except making it work." She added:

> It's like that really corny line in the field of dreams. "If you build it, they will come." Well, no, you can build it. They won't necessarily come and participate. I think I created a really exciting, rich, interactive online environment not just to complement the course but to be crucial part of the course. I don't think I was successful at engaging most of the students in that space. *(Dr. Wall; Interview; 4/29/2003)*

I had no access to the course evaluation and had no idea what students might have written in the course evaluation. According to Dr. Wall, it was clear that students did not like the BB activity, as she said:

> I think they didn't like it, but they did it, and they did it really well. If you look at the archive of the messages, then I think, you can have a really rich demonstration of the depth of interaction that can take place in BBs. You have a group of students having very high level discussions about abstract concepts. The students think that it's better to do it face-to-face. That's their gut feeling. However, I would have to disagree with them empirically. They might think that that's better. But if you look at transcripts of f-2-f dialogue compared with archives of BB messages, I think, you see a greater diversity of participation, and I think that students whose first language is not English, that their mean length of a linguistic perspective, just how much they get to say is more extensive. And, on the whole, the level of discussions is much higher. The intellectual caliber of discussion is much higher. So they did it. They just at the time thought they didn't like it. *(Dr. Wall; Interview; 4/29/2003)*

6.4 Summary and Discussion

In this chapter I introduced a new analytical scheme to identify participant roles in online academic discourse through examining speech functions and message topics. Comparison of each message topic with its speech function generated the following categories of BB participants: Information-providers/resource persons, Information/help seekers, Discussion facilitators, Motivators, Directors, Evaluators, Monitors and Socializers. The distribution of roles identified in the online discourse indicates, to a certain extent, the shift of the relationship and power among the participants in two

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learning settings. The examination of the BBs in two courses showed a shift in participant roles by diffusing instructor expertise and placing the students in a more active position as information providers and resource persons, with the instructor coaching or monitoring on the sidelines.

It appears that a learner's perception of the context is likely to determine what kinds of roles the learner will assume in the discourse community. However, shared interests and objectives among students were not always displayed in the same pattern of participation within a community. For example, all the focal students in Course A believed that the instructor's occasional interventions on the BB would clarify or guide the directions of their messages. An L1 student, Hilary, particularly had the zeal for getting more input from the instructor on the BB. She made an effort to engage the instructor by explicitly calling for help from the instructor in her message. Mei, on the other hand, acted differently in response to the lack of the instructor's presence online. As a strong believer in learning from "the expert," she did not find the online environment helpful in achieving her personal goals of either practicing spoken English or listening to the lecture in Course A. She posted the minimum required and stayed off-line throughout the semester.

Unlike in the face-to-face discussions, which were mostly the interaction between the instructor and a few L1 students, the online forums seem to provide a channel for not only L2 but also reticent L1 students to raise their voices and demonstrate knowledge. The findings of this study support Belcher's (1999) claim that asynchronous CMC helps L2 students gain an increased voice in academic courses where they are often underrepresented and play a passive role. In contrast to the image L2 students projected

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as novices participating on the periphery of Western mainstream classes, L2 students were able to register their presence to others as more competent and knowledgeable members on the BBs.

The findings of this study did not quite fit into Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of the "expert" and "novice" relationship, where a newcomer steps into a community of practice, assuming short and simple tasks with little responsibility and slowly replaces old-timers. As examined above, L2 students demonstrated their expertise and rich experience on the BB even though they seemed to be "novices" in face-to-face classes in terms of managing discourse and conforming to discourse conventions of Western universities.

Two courses that appeared to be successful in generating a high level of academic discourse differed in terms of the diversity of participant roles in the online forums and student satisfaction as revealed by the examination of the BBs and students' interviews. As examined in Chapter 4, the BB postings in Course A showed much higher frequency of positive appraisal words or phrases and social formulas.

Palloff and Pratt (1999) listed the indicators of a successful online community as follows:

- Active interaction involving both course content and personal communication
- Collaborative learning evidenced by comments directed primarily student to student rather than student to instructor
- Socially constructed meaning evidenced by agreement or questioning, with the intent to achieve agreement on issues of meaning
- Sharing of resources among students

- Expressions of support and encouragement exchanged between students, as well as willingness to critically evaluate the work of others (p. 32)

What is salient in the statement above is the social aspect of communication on BBs. Many researchers have emphasized the importance of the social presence in online discussions to foster effective online collaboration and a community of learning (e.g., Beuchot & Bullen, 2005; Gunawardena, 1995; 1998; Lally & Barrett, 1999; Maor, 2003; Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, and Archer, 1999; Stacey, 2001). Rourke et al. (1999), for example, claim that social presence on computer conferencing supports both cognitive and affective objectives "by making the group interactions appealing, engaging and thus intrinsically rewarding, leading to an increase in academic, social, and institutional integration and resulting in increased persistence and course completion" (p. 52).[24] This kind of claim was confirmed in this study, as evidenced by the relatively high number of postings to the BB in Course A and the Course A students' positive accounts of their participation in the interview. The emergence of participant roles suggests the importance of the instructor's presence in the online discussions in actively engaging discourse communities, playing various roles and implementing various strategies.

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[24] Rouke et al. (1999) defines *social presence* as "the ability of learners to project themselves socially and emotionally in a community of inquiry" (p. 52).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1   Theoretical Implications

This study explored how L2 students are socialized into online academic discourse by examining their understanding of participation, factors affecting their participation and their roles in online forums. In examining students' participation in online forums, I used Engestrom's model of an activity system to design the present research, analyze the data and draw implications. Engestrom's model is a useful tool to capture the "social and interactive character" (Engestrom, 1990, p. 264) of activity, as my research confirms that L2 students' participation in online academic discourse must be understood in relation to a number of contextual aspects of activity. One contextual aspect of activity that I examined was how L2 students co-constructed online discourse under contextual constraints such as rules of participation (Chapter 4). In (re)constructing knowledge of discourse conventions, the students used written text of the BB as a mediating artifact and tool for reflection and generating new meanings. The online discourse students produced enabled participating students to develop a new understanding of both subject matter and discourse conventions (Wells, 1999).

However, in applying Engestrom's model, my data suggest that Engestrom's model does not accurately reflect individual learners' relationships with an activity system. His model has not sufficiently examined how individuals in an activity system exercise their agency and how that, in turn, can affect the entire system. In interpreting his model, which posits the close connection between individual thinking and contextual components of one's social environment, I would like to caution against the danger of

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overlooking the agentive aspect of learning (Leung & Mohan, 2004). In Course A, for example, given the rules and constraints of the BB activity, students projected themselves as active agents who played diverse roles by (re)constructing online discourse based on their needs and what they observed in the messages of their instructor and colleagues in this new learning environment. Being first-time users of BBs in an academic setting, most students were active in constructing their own registers through observing the collective register, and employed strategies to produce what they understood to be salient discourse conventions. In the course of constructing their understanding of academic online discourse, the students in Course B, on the other hand, experienced a conflict between their understanding of what discourse should be and the demands they had to meet to be recognized as competent members in the course. This caused tension and constraints among students in exercising their agency.

In relation to L2 students, my research findings indicate that the BB allowed them more power over discourse and more confidence to extend their roles as equal contributors to academic discussions than the traditional face-to-face setting, where L2 students often feel left out on the periphery of the class community due to limited speaking and comprehension ability in English (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

Besides, Engestrom's activity model is not sufficient for explaining the participation of an individual in relation to his/ her personal history and in relation to one or more other individuals. As stated in Chapter 2, the relationship between subject and community needs to include individual members' relationships to each other within a community. Lave and Wenger (1991) locate learning not in the acquisition of knowledge but in their increasing participation in expert-like performance. The students in Course

B, however, struggled because their interpretation of received ideology or their ideas of discourse conventions were in conflict with their instructor's. Instead of exercising power over discourse, they found themselves constantly corrected by the instructor. These apprentices experienced tension because what was required of them in this course was to *acquire* the master's knowledge and rules, and be *corrected* until they became masters, rather than to exercise agency in constructing knowledge and discourse conventions. According to my data, Lave and Wenger's (1991) argument for participation as "situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world" (p. 51) seems to be contingent on the instructor's flexibility regarding activity.

As the interview data suggest, unlike the common claims made by other online researchers that CMC increases interaction and motivation of participants, students in Course B perceived online posting as "monotonous" work that they had to do strictly to meet the instructor's expectations and were unmotivated to actively participate in online forums. My study did not extend to looking at the question of whether this tension can be an opportunity for learning and development as Engestrom (2001) argues. However, I do note that the BB activity became solely task-oriented as evidenced by a lack of appraisal in online discourse and the focal participants' accounts. Many of them reported that while they learned a lot from this course they did not completely enjoy it.

My research also suggests that treating L2 students as "global citizens" who are not any different from L1 speakers may be as inappropriate as dismissing them as members of a homogenously passive language minority group. The L2 students in both courses were perceived by their instructors as being quite fluent speakers who had a high capacity for academic discourse as manifested in their BB messages or term papers.

Take Ping, for example, whose demonstrated expertise in linguistics and computers on the BB contrasted with her reticence in the face-to-face classroom. Particularly during the week she was the designated facilitator of the BB discussion, her performance as a facilitator, resource person and motivator was well received by the instructor.

These L2 students, however, continuously felt insecure about their language ability, which they thought of as a major obstacle to becoming a competent member of the community. In spite of the difficulties they experienced, the L2 students in my study did not seek to have their needs accommodated. Instead, they passively accepted their silence or marginalization as legitimate in class. Problems clearly arise when these students are penalized for those difficulties or for having different frames of reference regarding in-class participation, as occurred in Daehan's case. In part, the difficulties experienced by the L2 students were the result of a lack of clear guidelines from the instructors in relation to participation, and a break-down of negotiations with the instructors for accommodation.

My data suggest that confidence in speaking, the principal factor explaining L2 students' lack of participation in the face-to-face classroom, is compounded by other factors such as the individual learner's cultural/historic background, anxiety, personality and other situational factors. It is important for instructors to be aware of culturally, historically and locally constructed factors that either facilitate or inhibit learners' participation and how these factors interact with other components. I indicated in Chapter 5 that Daehan was not able to actively engage himself in small discussions when he was paired up with other L2 colleagues, Sohee and Chang. Daehan's anxiety of speaking increased even in a small group discussion setting, for fear of being judged by

another Korean student, Sohee. Against the common assumption that communicating with other L2 speakers will make an L2 speaker more comfortable speaking than L1 speakers, Daehan felt the opposite. Furthermore, due to the pressure of having to use correct grammar during discussions, he lost his motivation for speaking up in his small group discussions. This finding has practical implications for instructors in organizing small group activities, which I will discuss further in the following section.

In addition, I would like to extend Lave and Wenger's argument regarding the expert-novice relationships from one of only considering language ability (e.g., L1 vs. L2 speakers' proficiency) to looking at the whole range of individuals' competencies, knowledge and actions contained within the activity system. This shift in perspective thus takes into account students' multi-dimensional competencies and identities. A community of practice, as described by Lave and Wenger, is a place where newcomers, who initially have reduced production pressures with little responsibility for their errors, change their position and expertise gradually by gaining more responsibilities. A graduate seminar in my research, however, portrays a space where an individual student takes on both novice and expert roles within a single course, and even within the same interaction, depending on the channel and content of communication. As illustrated above, international students, who were novices in terms of managing the discourse conventions of Western universities, brought knowledge and expertise they had built in other communities.

With regard to participant roles, this study proposes a new analytical framework that uses both qualitative and discourse analytic methods. As discussed in previous chapters, many of the existing frameworks used for analyzing online text do not

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adequately reflect the roles of members that I tried to identify in this research. The categories suggested by others are often a mixture of theories or constructs, which are not mutually exclusive. This new framework also differs from Speech Act Theory, which deals with individual sentences in isolation and therefore is neither efficient nor straightforward for the researcher to identify speakers' intentions based on the produced text alone. Instead, I tried to identify the functions of speech and message topics in more extended discourse, which manifest what participants were doing on BBs more clearly and adequately reflect academic online discourse.

The analysis of academic online discourse using the functional aspect of language revealed the roles of, and relationship among, members of the discourse community. As illustrated in Chapter 6, the students in both courses were playing the major roles of information providers and resource persons, in contrast to the face-to-face class, where the instructor dominated most of the conversation. If the range of roles members play in the community is the indicator of developing academic competence, as Gutierrez and Stone (1997) suggest, the BB seems to be an efficient addition in support of expanding student roles and in knowledge building. The students (both L1 and L2) in my research were given the opportunity to play more diverse roles on the BB by sharing responsibilities of discourse with the instructor as a facilitator, evaluator and information provider/resource person.

7.2   Practical Implications

The findings of this research suggest some important implications of using CMC in academic courses as an extension of class discussions. On a positive note, the asynchronous place-independent nature of CMC can be used to enhance participation of

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students who have difficulty articulating their ideas in oral discussions for various reasons (e.g., linguistic constraints or personality), by allowing them to participate in discussions at their own pace to a certain degree (Harasim et al., 1995; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). As I noted in previous chapters, L2 students can demonstrate their knowledge more effectively by taking time to formulate their thoughts and edit their language. Since L2 students tend to have difficulty in fully comprehending face-to-face class discussions due to the fast flow of such discussions, the use of text-based communication may serve as a scaffold which enhances their understanding of a course subject. Besides, as Wells (1999) explains, written text is a useful tool for individual reflection, and students can use the BB for discussing complex ideas and developing new understandings. The students in my research took advantage of the asynchronous nature of CMC in order to engage in deliberate dialogue.

In spite of the advantages of CMC, however, no students wanted face-to-face instruction to be completely replaced by CMC, given that students experienced difficulty in maintaining necessary interactive discussions, clarifying meanings and reaching consensus on the BB. This raises an important implication of selecting one communication mode over another for learning. For activities that require clarity checks, immediate feedback or urgency, the discussion will be better facilitated by selecting face-to-face communication over CMC.

Furthermore, as Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) suggest, the instructor should consider students' talent, goals, and problem at hand in choosing the mode of communication. As I noted in previous chapters, some students excelled in written communication rather than oral communication whereas for others the opposite held true.

Rory preferred text-based CMC better because she felt she had difficulty articulating her ideas in front of other people. Daehan and Mei, on the other hand, thought face-to-face oral communication would better prepare them to be competent speakers. To maximize the benefits of CMC for learners with different strengths in terms of writing and speaking, incorporating the audio function into CMC and having students choose the mode may be other alternatives. Students who feel more competent in oral communication would then choose to record their messages into the computer and post them as attachments on the BB, while students who excel in writing remain with written-based communication. Different choices of communication modes would also benefit students who would like to have more opportunities for practicing the skills they need to develop. Consider Daehan and Mei, who viewed face-to-face discussions as opportunities for practicing English. Having practiced in writing in a more comfortable setting already, international students can be encouraged to practice oral skills in the online setting without too much time pressure.

It was evident in my research that the L2 students were better able to engage in discussions through CMC than the face-to-face mode, which confirms Kamhi-Stein's (1999) claim that Web-based discussions lowered L2 students' inhibitions and reduced cultural and linguistic barriers. As other researchers claim, racial, linguistic and cultural differences are less visible in the online setting than in the face-to-face communication setting. This in turn has an important implication for face-to-face classroom instruction. In a classroom where racial, linguistic and cultural differences are more visible, the instructor's expectations, evaluation criteria and guidelines for participation should be sufficiently clear to minimize misunderstandings with L2 students. Daehan's unfortunate

incident with another instructor was a clear example of two different frames of reference regarding participation in class, in conflict, which was communicated to the instructor unsuccessfully. Daehan did not speak up during class discussions in his other course because he did not want to slow down the flow of class discussions with his insufficient speaking ability. He assumed he would still get full participation marks as long as he attended class. He was, however, penalized for his lack of participation by getting a few points taken from his grade. Online forums are relatively new to many students and therefore instructors usually try to provide detailed guidelines and assessment criteria for participation in discussions. Regarding face-to-face participation, however, they tend to assume that their conventions are shared and therefore place full responsibility on students if their expectations are not met.

Adjustment by L2 students to the instructor's expectations regarding participation is not enough. It is also necessary for instructors to employ some adjustments or strategies to engage L2 students who have difficulty speaking up in class in terms of facilitating discussions. Daehan expressed in his interview his desire for instructors' consideration and understanding of L2 students' difficulty with participation. As he said:

> I wish the professor would consider international students' difficulty in class and give some kind of opportunities to them to speak. For example, asking a question to them, let's say, once per class, or applying some turn-taking strategy in order to give international students some opportunities to speak. Then I might be able to talk more actively. Without those kinds of provisions, international students would get disadvantaged. *(Daehan; Interview II; 4/12/2003)*

There should be greater awareness and sensitivity from instructors and colleagues in discourse communities that L2 students bring different conversational norms to their classrooms, apart from any linguistic difficulties. Advancing global citizens on campus should be a collaborative endeavor between institutions, instructors and the students.

Jones (1999), who examined Asian L2 students' reticence and constraints in academic group discussions, stresses the need for academics to be encouraged to attend a seminar or workshop to increase cross-cultural awareness and provide them "with a programme that includes cultural reasons for silence and reticence, the ethos of education in other societies and examples of oral discourse styles that vary from the local norm" (p. 252). Thus it is important for the instructors to have increased understanding for L2 students in a classroom, to slowly help them use the norms of Western universities and provide them with necessary adjustments.

In addition, universities should provide the newly arrived L2 students with various programs that introduce the academic culture of their university and discipline in order to ease the process of integration into a new learning setting. Universities may offer workshops for international students to help ensure their academic success. What is critical in implementing this kind of workshop, however, is to identify the various needs and concerns that international students have and try to address those issues, rather than take a top-down approach that merely feeds the students information as if they were empty vessels. Otherwise, those well-intended services may disappoint a fair number of students as typical hit-and-miss kinds of events.

One strategy for decreasing speaking anxiety during academic discussion is the use of small group discussions, which many instructors (in private conversation) found beneficial for both L1 and L2 students. As indicated in this study, students (both L1 and L2) seem to find discussions in small groups less intimidating and more engaging. In a small group setting, students seem to find it more comfortable to clarify meanings with their peers. They can use this opportunity to practice speaking in a less intimidating

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setting and transfer the confidence they have built to communicating in a larger group. In forming small group discussions, the instructor should allow variation in group composition by making up different types of groups, with heterogeneous backgrounds so that everyone can have a fair opportunity to interact with classmates from diverse backgrounds in terms of knowledge, experience, culture, etc.

A small-size group discussion was well received in the BB setting as well according to the focal students in Course A. With a large number of students, BBs can be overwhelming for the participating students, with information overload occurring (Harasim et al., 1995; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). When the class was broken into two smaller groups for discussions on the BB, according to the interview data, the students found it more manageable to follow the threads of discussions, in contrast to the first week when all the students had to respond to one guiding question and felt overwhelmed by information overload.

As stated before, the interview data in my study did not bear out the common claims about CMC that it generates increased motivation and an increased level of interaction (e.g., Abrams, 2003; Beauvois, 1998; Harasim et al., 1997; Kern, 1995). All the focal students perceived face-to-face communication as a more powerful tool than CMC in terms of face-to-face communication being more capable of generating feedback immediately, exchanging paralinguistic or nonlinguistic cues and clarifying meanings, etc. If CMC cannot be combined with face-to-face meetings in distance education courses, it will be more critical for the members of the online courses (i.e., the course designers, instructors and the students) to endeavor to create a sense of social presence or human connections online (Beuchot & Bullen, 2005; Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

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Particularly in Course B, there was a wide discrepancy between rich text the students produced on the BB and the perceptions of the learners' participation. I believe it is a strong indicator that we should be cautious about measuring the efficiency of CMC by merely looking at the produced messages alone. I corroborated this by examining the participant roles that unfolded in the BB text. My research shows how online discourse in two courses, which appeared to have produced equally enriched dialogue, can be different in terms of register and the range of participant roles. As illustrated in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6, for example, online discourse in Course A yielded a much higher number of appraisal expressions and wider range of participant roles.

As was examined in Chapter 6, my research findings strongly suggest that technology alone cannot promote participation and build knowledge-building communities (Bullen, 1998; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994). The focal students in my study often commented that they "felt vulnerable exposing themselves to the whole class online" and were reluctant to compose on the BB in the beginning of the semester because they "did not know the people" and feared being judged by others in their class. As the course progressed, however, and as they got to know more about their class members in class and became familiar with each other's writing styles online, they started to feel more comfortable expressing their opinions on the BB. It is important to build social connections among members of the community to promote more engaging and productive discussions and maintain a strong and conducive community.

To make this possible, the instructor's role is critical. Stacey's research (2001) shows that the instructor's role of establishing and modeling social presence is a major factor in increasing the frequency of social elements among students in online

conferences. Other researchers also emphasize the social dimension of CMC and view the level of socio-emotional support as an important basis for successful task completion and facilitating an online community (e.g., Beuchot & Bullen, 2005; Gunawardena, 1995; 1998; Lally & Barrett, 1999; Maor, 2003). Instructors should be more flexible in managing online discourse by allowing personal communication among students while they communicate course content and share resources. Palloff and Pratt (1999) comment that the instructor should make room for the personal and social aspects of an online community in order for the participants to maintain a sense of community and successful learning experience. As Gunawardena (1995, 1998) recommends, the instructor can encourage students to introduce themselves, especially at the beginning of the course, and exchange their professional interests and experiences.

The instructor's monitoring of the online discussions is also important to ensure a fair opportunity for participation among the students. The instructor in Course A, for example, carefully monitoring the discussion forum, would send a message to a student privately who was not visible on the BB to see if they had any problems in posting (Chapter 6). At the same time my research suggests that students feel the need for the instructor's balanced feedback in online forums. Palloff and Pratt (1999) and Shotsberger (1997) also emphasize that responsiveness of the instructor to the needs and concerns of students is crucial to the success of distance learning. Facilitating student-centered forums may not simply mean the lack of the instructor's presence online. The students in Course A appreciated the instructor's timely intervention in and redirection of discussions when their dialogue was going off track. Instructors need to be prepared to

provide responses to student questions and encourage and model social presence online (Stacey, 2001).

As revealed in my research, students are active agents who bring different historical or cultural backgrounds and goals to an academic community. However, due to unbalanced power relations between students and the instructor, when students cannot properly exercise their agency, this becomes a source of frustration and collision. Kathy in Course B, for example, chose to project a different self toward the end of the course by saving words both in class and online. Palloff and Pratt (1999) advise that a successful learning community should provide participants a sense of empowerment. As they stated:

> In a learner-centered environment, the learner is truly the expert when it comes to his or her own learning. Consequently, participants in the online learning community take on new roles and responsibilities in the learning process and should be encouraged to pursue knowledge wherever that path takes them. (p. 162)

Regarding face-to-face participation, Daehan shared an episode with me in private conversation a year after my official data collection. At that time, he was taking another course from Dr. Wall. The course structure was similar to the previous course he had taken from Dr. Wall and the face-to-face discussion was facilitated by individual students taking turns every week in presenting weekly readings. In the middle of his presentation, he was stopped by the instructor again as she told him to skip the summary of the chapters. However, Daehan considered presenting a summary as a necessary step for a smooth transition to discussion with the other students. In spite of the instructor's intervention, he continued his presentation with the part the instructor told him to drop. It was a big change for Daehan, who had been apologetic about his English and his

presentation a year ago. I am not trying to recommend that students persist in what they believe to be right when in conflict with their instructor. Instructors' expectations or teaching practice may vary, and it is important that assessment requirements and learners' roles be communicated and negotiated clearly. In Daehan's case, as was stated earlier, negotiation of understanding on the part of the student and flexibility of activity and sensitivity toward a student on the part of the instructor might help students feel respected and facilitate their creativity in the learning process.

7.3   Limitations of This Study and Directions for Further Research

This study delimits research samples to asynchronous CMC in mixed mode and graduate courses in education. As stated in Chapter 3, the purpose of selecting mixed mode courses, as opposed to distance education courses, is to investigate in what ways student participation in two different modes differ when the course subject, the instructor and the class members are controlled. The findings obtained from this research may not mirror CMC use in solely Web-based education. Students' perceptions of online participation seem to be influenced by their experience in the face-to-face mode in mixed mode courses. For example, the comfort of composing the messages and relationship among members experienced in the online forums appear to be attributable in part to the atmosphere created in face-to-face classes. In the same way, the interview data revealed that composing anxiety on the BB in Course B seems to be in part caused by the conflict and tension students have experienced with the instructor in face-to-face classes.

The students in two courses were engaged in, according to their instructors, a very extensive, high level of discussion on course topics on the BB. The results obtained from this study may not be relevant to lower grades (e.g., secondary or elementary school) or

other disciplines. Regarding grade level, Bullen (1998) implies that participants' cognitive maturity is a pre-requisite for the successful implementation of computer conferencing in distance education. Cognitive maturity may also include self-discipline, initiative, independence and responsibility required for maintaining and learning through the online community. Although Harasim et al. (1995) suggest a potential for CMC with high school students and a wide variety of subjects, this does not mean that implementation of CMC will automatically secure learner-centered and discussion-oriented learning.

For L2 learners, there are still a couple of remaining questions to be answered: (a) Whether writing skills students gain from online communication can transfer to their speaking performance, and (b) whether gained confidence and reduced anxiety in an online communication environment can promote L2 students' active speech roles in a face-to-face, whole class discussion setting. Researchers in favor of the attributes of CMC that allow reading, composing and editing at one's own pace have speculated that CMC use may help L2 students improve their speaking ability as well (e.g., Chun, 1994; Kern, 1997). Abrams (2003) sheds some light on these questions when she provides some empirical evidence with regard to the effect of CMC on oral proficiency. Based on her study, it seems the *synchronous* CMC gives L2 students more opportunities to practice language output, which can transfer to oral performance. It is conjectured that when the asynchronous computer-mediated discussions are perceived as formal writing, practice in formal writing does not transfer to oral skills in a short-period time (her study was conducted over a semester).

During the semester, I did not observe noticeable changes in L2 students'
participation in the face-to-face class. I observed relative consistency in their reticence
during in-class discussions throughout the semester. Daehan commented in the interview
that his writing became much easier as the semester progressed and so did his confidence
in writing:

> I got the knack of writing later. Compared to how I did at the beginning of the
> semester, my writing skill has improved. Now I can write faster than before.
> *(Daehan; Interview II; 4/12/2003)*

He was doubtful, however, regarding his improvement in oral proficiency. It was another
constraint of this research that the research sites (two courses) were run for a semester
(14 weeks). Data collection took place over four months, which was not long enough to
capture changes in student participation or transformation of the community. This opens
up an important topic for future research.

The data of this research has little to say regarding whether the use of
synchronous CMC such as chatting would have generated conflicting findings.
Synchronous CMC may promote a more face-to-face like interactive environment in
which participants get immediate feedback or responses from the other members. This
tends to stimulate further communication on the topic (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993). This kind
of interactivity was what Chris in Course A thought she missed out the most during
communication, which is congruent with Bullen's finding (1998). However,
synchronous CMC may not allow as much flexibility of control over discourse as
asynchronous CMC, because participants would not have the luxury of time to reflect on
the topic, edit their messages and engage in in-depth discussions. As Palloff and Pratt
(1999) discuss, in synchronous CMC, the fastest typist may contribute the most to the

discussion, and it may also create confusion among participants in finding the appropriate time for turn-taking, which may result in discussion being out of sync. Future research can perhaps explore the linkage between synchronous CMC and linguistic and academic benefits and challenges of L2 students in academic courses.

All the L2 students in my study came from an East Asian background (China, Korea and Taiwan). International students from East Asian countries are often described as reserved and unassertive, being accustomed to one-way communication as they regard the teacher as authority figure and find it relatively difficult to disagree with the teacher or to raise a new topic to discuss in class (Hofstede, 2001; Pan, Tsai, Tsai, Tao & Cornell, 2003). The focal students (except for Sunny) in my research reflected this stereotype in class discussions, and some of the findings can be explained in relation to their cultural background. Slightly different issues arise if the L2 students were speakers from another ethnic background, such as French, German or Mexican. I do not intend to stereotype international students from East Asian countries or those who have that background. I have acknowledged and identified the complexities and variations among individuals and within an individual and how they relate to their participation and learning in academic discourse communities. Despite the risks associated with stereotyping students according to ethnic background, I believe that it is still important to be aware of some of the salient characteristics of certain cultural groups to increase understanding and sensitivity toward these groups of students.

Lastly, I would like to point to the aspect of assessment of participation in online discussions. As discussed in Chapter 5, a different evaluation procedure (percentage of participation marks in the total course grade and assessment criteria) of participation

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might have affected the findings of this research, such as the way students shaped the discourse community and their perceptions of participation, etc. As revealed in Ping's account, her gained confidence in discussing the course subject online was partly attributed to the fact that she had to post only one message per week. As an L2 speaker, formulating and articulating ideas was still taxing in the online forums as well. If students were graded on a bell curve as opposed to an absolute system for the number of postings, it might have caused difficulty for those students whose writing or typing skills are not strong. This throws light on the assessment procedures for CMC writing. If the instructor evaluates students' performance based on the quality and quantity of postings, he or she might have to make the assessment procedures transparent to the students by providing clear guidelines and rubric of assessment criteria while negotiating with students on how to evaluate the quality of postings.

7.4   Concluding Remarks

My original motive for producing this work came from the hope that it would increase awareness among educators in higher education of how L2 students are situated in relation to varying contextual aspects. As part of this endeavor, I examined L2 students' participation in two different forms of instruction, face-to-face instruction and distance education with BBs. By examining the process of L2 students' socialization in academic online discourse, I hoped to demystify some of the assumptions and claims of existing literature on SLA and distance education in higher education of North America.

For example, at the initial stage of this research I worked under an assumption that L2 students have a more difficult time in oral discussions in academic discourse than L1 students. Through extensive reading of literature in SLA, personal communication

with L2 colleagues in various disciplines and through my own experience as an L2 learner, I vaguely understood that an L2 student's socialization into academic discourse involves issues such as linguistic ability, content knowledge and his or her historical and cultural background. The findings from this research add evidence to earlier literature that L2 learners' language learning and performance should be understood by taking into account additional complex aspects such as medium of instruction, personal goals, the relationship between members of a discourse community, etc.

Another assumption I articulated earlier in this study was that the nature of online communication is different from conventional face-to-face communication due to the physical characteristics of two forms of instruction. Some attributes of CMC such as time and place independence seemed to have a beneficial and detrimental effect for both L1 and L2 students. What seems to be particularly beneficial for L2 students is the asynchronous written nature of CMC, in which students can process the message in a more deliberate manner without time constraint. As revealed in previous chapters, however, what makes a difference in maximizing student learning is not the mere introduction of the technology. My research strongly suggests that creating engaging discourse communities should accompany careful course design and an instructor's suitable strategy in terms of creative facilitation and management of discussion activities. Furthermore, what is equally important, if not more, than creating an exciting and rich environment is having empathy for and openness to students. Then the instructors could be more patient and receptive to students from different linguistic, cultural or educational background or with different levels of proficiency.

As all the researchers desire, the initial aim of this research was to contribute to the field of SLA and distance education qualitatively rather than quantitatively. In other words, I hoped to advance the understanding of pertinent issues beyond existing claims rather than be content with merely adding to the existing literature. Toward the end of this study, however, it dawned on me that this research was a process of demystifying my own assumptions about CMC and learning in academia. Moreover, the whole research process reflected a trajectory of my discourse socialization in academia and apprenticeship in a graduate program in North American universities. As a newcomer in an academic community of higher education, I had lacked considerable sociocultural discourse capabilities in terms of when to participate, how to participate in oral discussions and what it means to be successful at academic writing, etc. I took the apprenticeship into academic discourse mostly as a process of following the hegemony of ideology, reiterating dominant views and acquiring knowledge and research skills from a variety of texts and instructors.

Gradually, however, as my research progressed, I recognized the agency of learners who continuously construct and reconstruct meanings and world views, including discourse practices. In the process of deepening my understanding of L2 students' discourse socialization, I slowly learned to exercise agency over received theories or arguments by a careful process of scrutiny, interpretation, and making connections between what my data revealed and what other literature has argued. It was a process of negotiating my understanding of the past and current enterprise with newly received ideas. I realized it was a process of changing my identity slowly from a person who is learning from experts to the one who is thinking *with* experts through gained

confidence and exposure to varied forms of practice. Most of all, the production of this work is not so much an end product as a reflection of my continuing journey of discourse socialization into academia.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

Consent Form for the Project "Second Language Students' Class Participation in the Online Learning Environment"

Dear students:

You are invited to participate in a study, **"Second Language Students' Class Participation in the Online Learning Environment."** This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Monique Bournot-Trites in the Department of Language and Literacy Education, by a doctorate student, Yoonkyung Kecia Yim, to complete her degree in Teaching English as a Second Language.

PURPOSE: This study seeks to explore second language speaking (L2) students' experience of participating in online discussions.

PROCEDURES: This study will be carried out over the semester. The methods for data collection will include observations of face-to-face and online discussion activities, interviews of the focal student participants and the instructor, ratio of message entries, a short written questionnaire, and class documents (e.g., course syllabus).

1) Classroom general participation: The main purpose of observing face-to-face classroom and online discussions is to gain understanding of the class settings, activities, and communication behavior. Classroom activities will not be tape-recorded whereas the text of online discussions may be printed out for analysis. Regarding online discussions, I will use only the data of the students that give consent, while I will replace the all the participants' names with pseudonyms in all reports of the completed study to protect confidentiality.

2) Participation as focal participants: Those who decide to participate in this study as **focal participants** will be invited to interviews at your convenience. A brief questionnaire (10 ~ 20 minute long) will precede the interview in order to collect demographic information and your general opinion of class participation. The purpose of the interview is to better understand students' perceptions of their participation in the online learning environment compared to your experience in face-to-face learning. You will be interviewed twice, at the beginning of the semester and again at the end of the semester. The duration of the interview can vary, but will take approximately 1 ~ 2 hours for each interview. You will also be invited to a couple of brief meetings, which can be done by phone or email depending on your preference. The purpose of this is to share with you tentative findings and conclusions of the study and get your feedback. This will be done only upon your consent and the length of the meeting will be kept minimal.

Please complete and return Page 4 to the course instructor. This one is for your own records (check the appropriate response):

I understand that my participation in this study, "Second Language Students' Class Participation in the Online Learning Environment" is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with complete assurance of no adverse consequences to my continued participation in this course.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form including all attachments for my own records.

Classroom general participation

_____ **Yes**, I will participate in this study **in general**

Participation as focal participants

_____ **Yes**, I <u>will</u> participate in this study as **focal participant**.
_____ English is my first language.
_____ English is my second (or third) language- I am an International student or a recent immigrant)

_____ **No**, I <u>will not</u> participate in this study as **focal participant**.

****
Only the students who consent to participate as **focal participants**: please fill this out.

_____ **Yes**, I give additional permission to the investigator to contact me (either by email or phone) in case she has further questions to clarify the information I will have provided for this project.

My Email Address:_____

My telephone Number:_____

_____ **No**, I don't allow the investigator to contact me after the interviews.
****
_____ I consider myself introverted in general (**focal participants only**).

_____ I consider myself extraverted in general (**focal participants only**).

_____ I consider myself neutral in general (neither introverted nor extraverted) (**focal participants only**).

Signature: _____

Name (Please print your name): _____

Date: _____

Consent form for the project **"Second Language Students' Class Participation in the Online Learning Environment"** (this page is to be returned to the student investigator).

I understand that my participation in this study, "Second Language Students' Class Participation in the Online Learning Environment" is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with complete assurance of no adverse consequences to my continued participation in this course.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form including all attachments for my own records.

* Please check the appropriate response:
Classroom general participation

_____ **Yes**, I will participate in this study **in general**

Participation as focal participants

_____ **Yes**, I <u>will</u> participate in this study as **focal participant**.
_____ English is my first language.
_____ English is my second (or third) language- I am an International student or a recent immigrant)

_____ **No**, I <u>will not</u> participate in this study as **focal participant**.

****
Only the students who consent to participate as **focal participants**: please fill this out.

_____ **Yes**, I give additional permission to the investigator to contact me (either by email or phone) in case she has further questions to clarify the information I will have provided for this project.

My Email Address:_____

My telephone Number:_____

_____ **No**, I don't allow the investigator to contact me after the interviews.
****
_____ I consider myself introverted in general (**focal participants only**).

_____ I consider myself extraverted in general (**focal participants only**).

_____ I consider myself neutral in general (neither introverted nor extraverted) (**focal participants only**).

Signature: _____

Name (Please print your name): _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INSTRUCTORS

Page 1 of 3

Consent Form for the Project "Second Language Students' Class Participation in the Online Learning Environment"

Dear Dr.   ,

      You are invited to participate in a study, **"Second Language Students' Class Participation in the Online Learning Environment."** This study is being conducted, under the supervision of Dr. Monique Bournot-Trites in the Department of Language and Literacy Education, by a doctorate candidate, Yoonkyung Kecia Yim, to complete her degree in Teaching English as a Second Language.

The Purpose of the Study: This study seeks to explore second language speaking (L2) students' experience of participating in online discussions.

PROCEDURES: This study will be carried out over the semester. The methods for data collection will include observations of face-to-face and online discussion activities, interviews of the focal student participants and their instructors, ratio of message entries, a short written questionnaire, and class documents (e.g., course syllabus).

The main purpose of observing face-to-face classroom and online discussions is to gain understanding of the class settings, activities, and communication behavior. Classroom activities will not be tape-recorded whereas the text of online discussions may be printed out for analysis. Regarding online discussions, I will use only the data of the students that give consent, while I will replace the all the participants' names with pseudonyms in all reports of the completed study to protect confidentiality.

The focal student participants will be invited to interviews twice at the beginning and again at the end of the semester. The purpose of the interview is to better understand students' perceptions of their participation in the online learning environment compared to their experience in face-to-face learning. A brief questionnaire will precede the interview in order to collect demographic information and their general opinion of class participation. They will also be invited to a couple of brief meetings, where the student investigator can share with them tentative findings and conclusions of the study and get their feedback. This will be done only with their consent, and the length of the meeting will be kept minimal. The meetings can be done by phone or email depending on their preference

As a course instructor, you will be invited to an interview at your convenience. The main purpose of this interview is to gain understanding of your perceptions of class participation. Your informal observations of students' class participation will also be a valuable source of information for this project. The student investigator will ask you a few questions, which will not

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Instructor's consent form for the project **"Second Language Students' Class Participation in the Online Learning Environment" (to be returned to the co-investigator)**

I understand that my participation in this study, "Second Language Students' Class Participation in the Online Learning Environment" is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with complete assurance of no adverse consequences or penalty to any of my status.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form including all attachments for my own records.

* Please check the appropriate response:

_____ Yes, I will participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Name (Please print your name): _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

1. I am L1 student _____   L2 student _____

2. Gender: Female _____   Male _____

3. Age (approximate)

18 ~ 25	26 ~30	31 ~ 35	36 ~ 40	40 ~

4. What is your nationality (if the ethnic and national background are not the same, what is your cultural orientation)? *(L2 students only)* _____

5. Years of residency in Anglophone countries *(L2 students only)*: _____ yrs.

6. Years of formal education in Anglophone countries *(L2 students only)* _____ yrs.

7. The area of study (**also** indicate Undergraduate, MA or PhD) _____

8. The number of online courses taken prior to this course _____

9. How comfortable are you with using a computer at your work, school, or home? (from 1: very comfortable to 7: very uncomfortable)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. What kinds of computer programs are you familiar with and have used for your work, study, or personal purposes?

_____

11. The level of comfort in using a computer for an online learning courses from 1 (very comfortable) to 7 (very uncomfortable)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

12. Do you own a computer? Yes _____   No _____

13. Do you have easy access to the Internet to participate in the current online learning course?

1.Yes	2. Medium	3. No

14. What stage are you at in your program of study and what are your plans for the future after completing your studies at this university?

_____

_____

15. What is your main purpose for taking this course (other than getting credits to graduate)?

_____

_____

_____

16. What is your general opinion of courses that use an online component as an extension of class discussions?

_____

_____

_____

_____

17. What is your **English proficiency level** (in listening, speaking, reading, and writing)? – *L2 students only*

1	How would you rate your overall English proficiency for a speaker of English as a second language?	Excellent (native-speaker level) (5)	Very good (4)	Good (3)	Poor (2)	Very poor (1)
2	I can communicate with English speaking people on daily affairs without grammatical errors.	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
3	I can read academic journal articles without resorting to dictionaries.	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
4	I can comprehend academic lectures or seminars in English.	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
5	I can actively participate in academic or professional discussions in my area of study or work.	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
6	I can write academic essays or journals without getting help from others.	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)

18. Do you think participating in class discussions (both face-to-face & online) is important, and why?

_____

_____

_____

☺ *Thank you very much.* ☺

APPENDIX D

GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

Background Information of the Participant:

1. Would you tell me a little bit about your personal background that might be helpful for me to know for this study (e.g., academic, professional, or unique situation)?

2. How did you learn English? *(L2 only)*

Participation in the Course:

3. What do you think of this course in general?

4. What do you think is needed to participate successfully in this course?

5. Are there any concerns or difficulties you have encountered taking this course? According to you, what are the major challenges to successfully complete this course? How do you deal with those challenges?

Participation in Class Discussions:

<u>**Face-to-face discussions**</u>
6. How do you find the format (interaction pattern) of face-to-face (face-to-face) discussions in this course?

7. What do you think is needed to participate successfully in face-to-face discussions in this course, and why?

8. How do face-to-face discussions help your learning in this course? What do you learn from them?

9. How do those elements (you reported in Question 6) hinder your participation in face-to-face discussions?

10. Do you think you speak up more than other students in this course in face-to-face discussions? Reflecting on your participation in this course, in what context do you usually speak up or stay silent during class discussions?

<u>**Online discussions**</u>
11. How do you find the format of online discussions in this course? Is it easy to follow?

12. What do you think is needed to participate successfully in online discussions for the same course, and why?

13. Does WebCT help you in any ways with taking this course? If any, what do you think you learn from online discussions?

14. Have you found anything that makes it uncomfortable or difficult for you to participate in online discussions? What are they?

15. The relationship between medium, learner and tasks, instructor, and other members in the online learning environment

    15.1   What do you think of using **a computer** to participate in the online learning discussions in this course compared to conventional in-class discussions? Do you think your participation has been affected by using a computer for discussions?

    15.2   What do you think of your **writing experience** in the Bulletin Board compared to speaking in class and other types of writing, such as writing academic papers?

    15.3   What do you think of **reading** posted messages on WebCT? How comfortable are you reading and understanding other people's postings?

    15.4   What do you think of the **instructor's messages** on the Bulletin Board? How do they help you? Do you think the instructor should be more involved in the online discussion or not?

    15.5   What do you think of discussing online with **other peers** without facing each other?

    15.6   What do you think of **other students' messages** in the Bulletin Board? What, if anything, do you think you learn from them?

    15.7   Do you think you compose more messages than other students in the online discussions?

    15.8   Reflecting on your participation in the Bulletin Board, do you think you tend to respond to a **certain kinds or people's messages** more than to other messages? Would you explain why?

    15.9   How does the fact, **"being L2 students"** affect your participation in online discussions? In other words, do you think that your performance in online discussions would have been different if you were an L1 speaker? *(L2 students only)*

    15.10   What, if any, **channels of communication** do you use other than the electronic discussion forum to communicate with your instructor or your classmates (e.g., telephone, fax, email, etc.), and why?

16. Do you think your status as *focal participant* in this research influenced your perceptions, attitude, or behavior in any way in terms of your class participation in either face-to-face or online discussions?

17. Do you have any other comments related to this issue?

APPENDIX E

GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH INSTRUCTORS

1. Position at the university (sessional instructor, assistant, associate professor, etc.)

2. How many years have you been teaching in higher education institutions?

3. How many times have you offered this course in a mixed mode with a discussion board in it?

4. What was the overall purpose of offering your course in a mixed mode using the Bulletin Board (BB)?

5. Do you think you have achieved what you had intended in this course?

6. What do you think is needed for students to participate successfully in online discussions for this course compared to the face-to-face class, and why?

7. Would you talk about your roles and responsibilities in the online discussion forum compared to the face-to-face class?

8. What kinds of students do you think will benefit from electronic discussion forums?

9. What do you think of the students' postings on the BB in terms of quality and quantity (including the number of postings and the length of the messages)? Were they consistent through the semester?

10. What do you think of the L2 students' participation and their postings in the online discussion forum compared to L1 students in the face-to-face and the online discussions?

11. Would you talk about your assessment of students' participation in the BB (Course A: BB-25% based on complete/incomplete basis only; Course B: BB-20%, Participation/Facilitation in class- 20%)? How do you assess "complete" and "incomplete"(Course A)? Would students get full marks as long as they exceed the passing line (Course B)?

12. Were students allowed to post any informal messages other than the two required messages? (Course B only)

13. Have you encountered any unanticipated turns in terms of students' online participation during this course? What were they? How did you cope with them?

14. Did you find any drawbacks of the online discussions in this course? Is there anything you would like to change or try with your online course in the future?

15. Do you have any other comments you would like to add related to this research?

APPENDIX F

CONVENTIONS OF TRANSCRIPTION

(Adapted from Wells, 1999)

-	Incomplete utterances or restarts are shown by a hyphen on the end of the segment that was not completed.
CAPS	Capitals are use for words spoken with emphasis
< >	Angle brackets enclose segments about which the transcriber was uncertain.
*	Passages that were insufficiently clear to transcribe are shown with asterisks, one for each word judged to have been spoken.
___	When two participants speak at once, the overlapping segments are underlined and vertically aligned.
" "	Words that are quoted or passages that are read aloud are enclosed in quotation marks.
( )	Interpretation of what was said or description of other relevant behavior (nonlinguistic information) is indicated in parentheses.
[ ]	Square brackets enclose descriptions of other relevant behavior.
.	One period marks a perceptible pause. Relatively longer pause than one second is indicated by " ... "
[...]	Three spaced ellipsis points within brackets indicate material omitted from the original data source.