

## How to Implement an Interpretive Qualitative Study: Via Exploring Graduate Students' CMC Discourse Practice

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The purpose of this article is to provide a forum for discussing an interpretive qualitative approach to second language learning and teaching. This paper focuses on investigating what are the rationales for doing qualitative research, what kinds of criteria qualitative research should meet, and how it may be implemented in a particular learning and teaching context, centering the discussion around a research project I have conducted. The interpretive qualitative research I present in this article was conducted with the aim of examining the nature of discourse practice involved in a TESOL graduate course where nonnative- and native-English-speaking graduate students negotiated meaning through CMC activities. An explanation of the rationale behind this qualitative approach is followed by a description of how data was collected and analyzed and then by a review of research findings. This overview of some of the theoretical and methodological considerations involved in conducting interpretive qualitative research suggests the complex and challenging nature of conducting these types of studies. This article concludes that successful implementation of the qualitative research into the nature of discourse practice requires an understanding of the research methodology as well as the rigor of the research procedures.

### I. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing acceptance of qualitative research in education, many researchers who conduct second language (L2) research in classrooms, schools, and communities have become interested in the ways in which qualitative studies can inform the second language acquisition (SLA) field. Of particular note is the well-established Research Issues column that appears twice a year in *TESOL Quarterly*. A subtle change in its focus is detectable since its inception in 1990. Earlier articles tended to focus on the quantitative methodological aspects of research such as statistical significance and power, Likert scales,

and multiple t tests and ANOVA (Brown, 1991, 1992). More recently, contributions have situated qualitative research as a contextualized practice, viewing observation from an ecological perspective and considering interview as a co-constructed activity (Block 2000; van Lier, 1997). In addition to this specialized column in a renowned journal, an increasing number of books have been published that are mainly devoted to informing L2 researchers and teachers of conducting qualitative research in the field of SLA (Holliday, 2002; Hymes, 1996; Chongwon Park, 2003; Richards, 2003).

Other positive advances in the discussion of SLA issues within the qualitative research paradigm are found in Cumming's (1994) edited *TESOL Quarterly* article, in which various researchers each wrote a short piece on alternative approaches to L2 research, including descriptive approaches (analyses of learner language, verbal reports, and texts), interpretive approaches (classroom interaction analysis and ethnography), and ideological approaches (critical pedagogical research and participatory action research).

Despite such encouraging moves, Tarone (1994), the author of the piece on analyzing learner language, cautions that while researchers agree, in theory, that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are essential to the analysis of learner language, quantitative methods of research have been over-dominant. Pennycook (1994), writing about critical pedagogical approaches to L2 research, also observes that the lack of published work in critical pedagogical research in SLA reflects the difficulty in getting such work published rather than a paucity of critical work concerning L2 learning and teaching issues.

In fact, Lazaraton's (2000) analysis of all the data-based articles in four applied linguistics journals (*Language Learning*, *The Modern Language Journal*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, and *TESOL Quarterly*) over a 7-year period (1991-1997) showed that among a total of 332 empirical research articles analyzed, 292 were quantitative, 33 were qualitative, and 7 were partially qualitative. The fact that so few of the 332 total articles analyzed were qualitative was disheartening to those in the qualitative research areas. A recent comparative analysis conducted by Jin-Wan Kim (2004), however, showed a more positive picture to those working within a qualitative research framework. He analyzed all the empirical research articles published in *English Teaching* and *TESOL Quarterly* over the last 14 years (1990-2003) and his comparative analysis revealed that *TESOL Quarterly* now employs more qualitative methodology (34.7%) than quantitative methodology (30.1%) while in *English Teaching*, among the total of 557 articles analyzed, 69 were qualitative, accounting for only 12.4 percent. It seems obvious that there is a mismatch between the recent animated discussion on qualitative research and the empirical work being published in a major applied linguistics journal in Korea. Among the qualitative studies published in *English Teaching*, as Jin-Wan (2004) suggests, there is a paucity of studies with interpretive and ideological orientations.

It is evident that no research approach is suitable for every situation or question.

Nevertheless, we might ask why qualitative research is not prevalent in applied linguistics in general (with the exception of the recent advances in *TESOL Quarterly*), given our increasing interest in the sociocultural context of language learning and use. Davis (1997) suggests that one reason qualitative research is not more widely used in SLA studies is that qualitative research views language learning from a language socialization perspective rather than acquisition perspective, crediting context and culture for much of what happens in the learning environment. Because many of the studies that use quantitative data rarely consider these social and cultural factors, it is understandable why the qualitative approach has not been more widely adopted in the acquisition-oriented research field. Closely related to this is the common view that quantitative studies (experiments, correlational studies, or statistical studies) produce valid, reliable, and replicable data, whereas qualitative studies do not. In fact, over the years, researchers who operate within a quantitative paradigm have indicated their belief that validity (the question of how research findings match reality) and reliability (the extent to which research findings can be replicated) can be established by using powerful statistical procedures, random sampling, and exclusion of possible observer bias and observer effects (Brown, 1992; Nunan, 1992). However, since different types of research are based on different assumptions about the nature of reality, the concepts of validity and reliability should be viewed differently. For example, qualitative researchers who work on the epistemology that “there are multiple constructed realities” can show that their reconstructions in the form of findings and interpretations are credible to those being researched by using procedures such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation (Davis, 1995; Farrell, 1997; Lazaraton, 2003; Richards, 2003).

It follows that, to gain or maintain legitimacy within the SLA field, not only must qualitative studies meet the specific requirements of the approach used, but they must also offer recognizable contributions to the field. In this respect, it would be important to investigate what are some of the rationales for doing qualitative research, what kinds of criteria qualitative research should meet, and how it may be implemented in a specific learning and teaching context.

In this paper, I attempt to examine various issues related to conducting qualitative research. Firstly, I will present a critical review on the qualitative research in SLA in general and the specialized field of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in particular, of which the latter is closely tied to my own qualitative study that will be presented and further elaborated as an example throughout this paper. Then I will introduce my own research experience of conducting the qualitative study, with the aim of shedding light on what constitutes qualitative research and what issues need to be addressed in the process of conducting qualitative research. The qualitative research I present in this paper was conducted with the aim of examining the nature of discourse practice involved in CMC in a graduate course where nonnative- and native-English-speaking graduate

students negotiated meaning through CMC activities. An explanation of the rationale behind this qualitative approach is followed by a description of how data was collected and analyzed, and then by a review of research findings. Through this detailed account of the entire process of implementing the qualitative research, I hope to provide L2 researchers and teachers with some insights into the theory underlying the practice of conducting a qualitative study as well as practical guidance.

## **II. A REVIEW OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

### **1. Qualitative Studies in the Field of SLA**

In this section, I will review some of the recent qualitative studies on second language learning and teaching to see what contributions qualitative research can make to the field of SLA. The studies that will be reviewed here seem to offer tremendous potential for contributing to the rich body of literature on the mental aspects of language acquisition by providing an understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of this process.

Willett (1995) explores SLA in an ESL classroom from the perspective of socialization using an ethnographic approach, suggesting that language acquisition is not only a mental activity but a socially constructed endeavor that is dependent on the functions of L2 use. Morita (2000) also explores the discourse socialization of nonnative- and native-English-speaking graduate students through their engagement in oral academic presentations. She argues that academic discourse socialization should be viewed as a potentially complex process of negotiation rather than as a predictable process of enculturation. She further claims that the qualitative research mode she employed in the study helped her better understand the nature of academic discourse socialization.

In an attempt to examine L2 learning and teaching practice from a broad sociocultural perspective, Duff (1995) explores the acquisition of English in EFL high schools located in Hungary. She reveals the ways in which culturally determined expectations for discourse are transformed in Hungarian classrooms. Through this study, Duff contributes to our understanding of how ESL pedagogical methods both affect and are affected by the sociocultural setting in which they are implemented. Likewise, Spack's (1997) case study of a Japanese undergraduate student studying at a large US university contributes not only to our understanding of an individual student's SLA processes but also to our understanding of the particular sociocultural contexts the learner is situated within. In a more critical approach to language learning and teaching, Chick's (1996) and Canagarajah's (1993) studies treat the classroom as a site of struggle between competing discourses. They attempted to interpret classroom discourse not just in terms of linguistic features but in

terms of sociocultural forces that shape that behavior. In the process, they showed that their interpretation of classroom discourse was made possible only through a qualitative mode of research that is sensitive to participants' responses to the discourse practice.

The qualitative research that has been vigorously sought for around the world has not gone unnoticed in Korea. Several EFL researchers in Korea have recently begun to employ a qualitative research framework in their studies and report implications for language learning and teaching in terms of language skills, teacher education, and research methods (Kyungsook Chang, 1997; Inran Choi, 2003; Jaeyoung Choi, 2003; Chongwon Park 2004).

Kyungsook Chang (1997) investigates the use of diary studies in language teacher development, and suggests that diaries can be an important tool for shedding insights on language learning and teaching. Inran Choi (2003) offers a rationale for doing an ethnographic study and provides practical guidance on implementing it, centering her discussion on a research project she conducted. The researcher concludes that the ethnographic study, when conducted with sound theory and vigorous research procedures, can reveal the richness of literacy practices embedded in adolescents' daily lives. Jaeyoung Choi (2003) investigates the thoughts behind elementary school teachers' instructional decision making in preparing English lessons. The researcher shows that the teachers' decision-making process is significantly influenced by their perceptions about communicative language teaching, which in turn could interfere with the successful implementation of tasks in elementary classrooms. In relation to the qualitative research she employed in her study, the researcher points to the need for more in-depth qualitative research into this issue. Chongwon Park (2004)'s recent ethnographic study examines a diverse range of interactional contexts, providing a thick description and explanation of why and how interaction is not possible. Drawing on multiple sources of data including interviews, observations, and diaries, he suggests that sociocultural, institutional, psychological, and linguistic factors could hamper students' English learning processes as well as their language products.

From this selective review of qualitative studies in the field of SLA, one can see that qualitative research has tremendous potential for offering an alternative to mainstream SLA studies in viewing acquisition not only as a mental individualistic process, but as one that is also embedded in a particular sociocultural context in which it occurs. In sum, theoretically well-informed and empirically well-conducted qualitative research, which is characterized by its accountability to the complex social contexts, its tendency to provide thick description of the learning situation being observed, and its usefulness in shedding insights on practice and policy, will provide a good place for research endeavors within the field of L2 learning and teaching.

## 2. Qualitative Studies in CMC

CMC, defined as “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers” (Herring, 1996, p. 1), has been increasingly used to supplement face-to-face learning in a variety of formal educational settings. As CMC becomes an integral part of L2 learning and teaching, there grows a need to look at this electronic space as a social place in which a variety of contextual factors mediate the CMC discourse practice. This merits the development of a research approach that necessarily moves beyond the individual mind or written product itself, and that is sensitive to the particular dynamics linking texts to discourse practices, to contingent social contexts. In suggesting a research agenda for studying CMC discourse, Murray (2000) recently argued that in CMC “the complex interaction of contextual aspects results in specific bundles of linguistic features, the medium being only one aspect of context” (p. 400). Similarly, Kern and Warschauer (2000) argued that in order to understand the full impact of CMC in the classroom, we must “look beyond the texts of interaction to the broader contextual dynamics that shape and are shaped by those texts” (p. 15). Yagelski and Grabill (1998) in this regard provided a good example of exploring contextual factors that might affect CMC discourse. They gave a detailed account of how contextual factors embedded in two undergraduate writing courses may shape the students’ online interaction. Data sources came from field notes of class meetings, interviews with instructors and students, surveys, and transcripts of online discussions. Results of the study revealed complex relationships between online discourse and in-class discourse within the context of a particular course.

By and large, however, the contexts in which CMC occurs have not been studied in sufficient depth. To understand the full impact of new forms of interacting in the classroom, we must look beyond CMC texts to the broader contextual dynamics that shape and are shaped by those texts. This entails “holistic, qualitative research that goes beyond inventories of linguistic features and attempts to account for the way classroom cultures take shape over time” (Kern & Warschauer, 2000, p. 15). Following this line of argument, my study attempted to situate CMC discourse within a particular classroom in which various contextual factors are embedded. It is this complex interplay of texts, interactions, and sociocultural contexts that I set out to understand and investigate in my study.

## III. RATIONALE FOR DOING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

As a way to illustrate the case at issue, I will present my own study conducted within an interpretive qualitative framework. I illustrate my arguments for the qualitative mode with a brief analysis of a research project I have completed in which I examined the language

learning experiences of nonnative- and native-English-speakers engaged in CMC activities in a TESOL graduate course. The purpose of my study was to explore the complexity of discursive practices of students involved in the construction of CMC texts. I chose to study students' utterances produced in online discussions primarily for two reasons: 1) CMC contexts may offer new opportunities for the linguistic, academic, social, and cultural development of students in the process of interpreting and producing utterances online; and 2) Bakhtin's constructs, rich and evocative descriptions of discourse acquisition and use, had seldom been used to describe CMC activities that are being increasingly incorporated as disciplinary writing in educational settings.

As CMC activities become an integrated part of discourse practice in many L2 learning and teaching contexts, many researchers suggest that CMC can open up new avenues for reading, writing, discussion, and learning. The asynchronous nature of computer conferencing, for example, allows students to tailor class participation to fit within their lives and locations (John, 1998). As a result, all voices can be given equal opportunity to contribute to class discussion. By taking the perspective of peers with diverse backgrounds and trying to understand their expectations and potential reactions (Bonk, Appelman, & Hay, 1996), a community of learners can be formed that is unique to many of the participants' educational experiences. My investigation of asynchronous CMC as a focal discourse practice was encouraged by this recognition of the learning depth possible in this interactive, social, and technological context.

To investigate such potentially complex CMC discourse practice, my study drew on Bakhtin's dialogic perspective as a theoretical framework. Primarily known as a theorist of social language, Bakhtin (1986) proposed that the basic unit of analysis for understanding language is the "utterance." In his view, language is an unending dialogic web of cross-connected utterances, each utterance, depending on its occasion and context for its very existence, for its comprehensibility, and for its transformation. Bakhtin's dialogism postulates the speaker as "dynamically situated within both an interactionally and an ideologically complex world" (Dyson, 1995, p. 8), suggesting that we are not only interacting with others in using language, we are also using others' words that are pervasive in a particular context to represent our own meanings. This Bakhtinian concept allowed for a description of how language works as an activity that is contextualized in terms of historical, institutional, cultural, and individual factors. Based on this conceptual framework, I examined students' engagement with CMC texts in a classroom setting by focusing on the contextualized meaning of texts. The following research questions guided my approach: 1) How do contextual factors contribute to students' experience of CMC embedded in a graduate course? 2) What are the characteristics of CMC texts that are constructed from the complex interplay among diverse contextual factors embedded in the class? and 3) What is the nature of an utterance in CMC?

At this point, I want to comment briefly on the importance and role of a theoretical framework in a qualitative research. As Davis (1995) notes, theory and method are inextricably bound together in conducting and reporting interpretive qualitative research. As he further argues, contrary to the often-held belief that qualitative researchers have no preoccupations about the area under investigation, they bring particular theoretical and experiential frames of reference to the research site. The first step in conducting a qualitative study is then to “determine the theories and views that are likely to affect the study” (p. 436). In line with David’s position towards the role of theory in qualitative research, I entered into the research site with a working theoretical framework that would guide me throughout the whole process of conducting the research. In fact, the Bakhtinian theoretical framework not only guided the initial research venture but was also used to help interpret data.

#### **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Just as the Bakhtinian theoretical framework directly influenced the way I think about and frame the study of CMC texts, the interpretive qualitative research framework affected the whole process of collecting and analyzing the data. The relationship of the theoretical framework to research methodology is just as significant as it is to the theoretical framework for the study. The foremost goal of this study was to provide a rich description of the sociocultural context in which CMC activities were embedded and explore how meanings are constructed in that particular context. As context, process, and meaning were crucial in my study, I adopted what Moss (1996) referred to as the “interpretive” perspective on social science. As Moss explained, according to the interpretive perspective, “the object domain of social science is made up largely of symbolic constructs – texts, products, performances, and actions – that reflect the meanings, intentions, and interpretations of the individual who produce and receive them” (p. 21). In the context of my study, the meanings of students’ CMC texts arose not from the text alone but also from the students’ own perspectives on how they produced and interpreted them. Meanings arose, too, from interaction among the students and the teacher. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) observed, “realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic” (p. 37) and they “cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts” (p. 39).

While analysis of the participants’ co-constructed CMC texts by itself may provide some insight into my investigation of how utterances are constructed in the CMC activity, it seemed unlikely that the participants’ understanding of the complex processes of utterance production and interpretation could be ascertained from the text alone. As Mishler (1979) noted, “meaning is always within context and contexts incorporate meaning” (p. 14).

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) also pointed out that “to divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context is to lose sight of significance” (p. 27). To explore fully the complexity of social and discursive processes operating in the students’ CMC utterances, it was important to ground such textual analysis within the interpretive perspective so that I could better investigate my research questions.

This interpretive perspective called for in-depth interviews and a holistic approach to the class experience. The advantage of employing the interpretive qualitative study seemed to be especially appropriate given the nature of my study. This was, after all, a theory-building study, one that attempted to provide a rich description of the sociocultural context under investigation that would lead to a modeling of how utterances are constructed in this particular context. Because all the relevant factors were clearly not known prior to the study, immersion within the field was essential to see as much as possible all that was “going on” within the classroom. To get at the various realities and meanings within the given scene, it was necessary to enter into the setting as a human instrument. By immersing myself in the field, remaining open to multiple possibilities, I was better able as a researcher to understand the context from the participants’ own perspectives and, thus, was better able to identify factors that shaped discourse in context.

As a theory-building study, then, my investigation followed an emergent design, one that developed or “unfolded” during the study. Of course, this does not mean that I began with a blank slate. Rather, one might say that I began with a “working framework” for the design. As should be clear from the previous section, I entered into this study with a theoretical framework focusing on Bakhtin’s understanding of utterance. Because I was guided by a Bakhtinian concept of utterance, I could anticipate prior to the study at least some of the ways in which my research questions might be investigated. Nevertheless, much of the design emerged from the context of the study. For instance, though I began with tentative possibilities for such research instruments as initial interview questions, and coding categories for data analysis, the precise questions and categories arose out of the study as it unfolded.

## 1. The Research Site and the Participants

In my research project, I observed a TESOL graduate course on psycholinguistics at a major university in the U. S. The students were expected to come to the class prepared to discuss assigned readings. Over the semester, the students participated in three asynchronous discussions held outside the class, and it is these online discussions that became the focal point of my investigation. Of the 23 students (18 women and 5 men), 11 were nonnative-English speakers and 12 were native-English-speakers at the doctoral and master’s level. This group of students was diverse in terms of ethnicity. There was one Palestinian, four

Taiwanese, seven Korean, one Mexican-American, and eleven white Americans. The students' ages ranged from their 20's to 50's. The nonnative-English speakers were generally fluent and competent in English. My criteria for selecting this particular course were based on several factors. First, the class needed to include an asynchronous CMC component as part of classroom discussions. Second, I wished to select a class that involved both nonnative- and native-English-speakers so that I could better see the dynamics of negotiating different interests and intentions. Third, I wanted to observe a class that was taught by a teacher who considered that one of the primary goals for the course was to encourage students to read and write "texts" for knowledge construction and meaning negotiation. This was important because I was interested in a particular graduate class in which students were encouraged to become conversant in a variety of academic discourses and to try out multiple ways with language. I wished to discover, understand, and gain insight into the complexity of discursive practices and the kind of learning experiences involved in CMC speech activities. Therefore I needed to select a site from which the most could be learned. As Patton (1990) argued, the logic and power of purposeful sampling in a qualitative study lies in selecting an information-rich case for study in depth. For this study, I chose an information-rich class as a research site from which I could learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of my study.

## 2. Data Sources and Procedures

For this study, I collected data from the following sources: 1) classroom observations supplemented by audiotapes of every class session, 2) background interviews with the students and the teacher, 3) discourse-based interviews with the students and the teacher conducted soon after CMC texts were created, 4) printouts of CMC texts, 5) copies of the students' self-reflective essays, and 6) my own reflective research journal. Data from each source in this study complemented each other and helped me obtain a holistic picture of the participants' utterances created in CMC activities. Set out below is a description of these data-collection methods.

### 1) Classroom Observations

Because this was a theory-building study for which all or most relevant factors were not already known prior to the investigation, I participated as an "interested" observer to see "what was going on" from the participants' perspective. At the same time, I also consciously worked to maintain a "disciplined subjectivity" (Kantor, Kirby, & Goetz, 1981, p. 297) that would provide me with enough objectivity to examine broader connections and

relationships among phenomena. I conducted classroom observations throughout the semester, attending every class meeting. I audio-taped each class session and took notes during class whenever I could do so unobtrusively. I also noted classroom observations in my researcher's journal immediately following class. By observing the class, I was able to describe some of the details of critical classroom interactions (e.g., class dynamics and the professor's interactions with students) and to examine how the classroom context influenced students' evolving sense of CMC activities. While attending and observing the class, I also collected written materials embedded in the course (e.g., readings, syllabus, handouts), which provided another window to look at how classroom activities and assignments are addressed and what the professor expected of these activities and assignments.

## 2) Background Interview with the Students and the Teacher

I conducted a semi-structured background interview with a total 23 students at the beginning of the semester. In the initial interview, I focused on establishing and enhancing rapport with the students. Also, in order to gain insight into the various discourses and "voices" within the student's life, I obtained information on such things as the student's age, cultural and educational backgrounds, interests, goals, academic major or fields of interest, other classes the student was taking, the reasons for taking the course on psycholinguistics, his or her initial impression of the class in general, and the students' social networks in the class. From this initial interview with the students, I was also able to obtain information about the students' personal perspectives and their sense-making with respect to the course, teacher, purpose, and nature of assignments and classroom speech activities. In an initial interview with the professor, I focused on understanding the teacher's educational background, goals for the class, instructional philosophy, and her rationale behind the choice of course topics and assignments. This initial interview with the teacher also helped me understand the purpose of different forms of class activities and her expectations for these activities.

## 3) Discourse-based Interviews with the Students and the Teacher

Three one-hour discourse-based interviews were conducted with all 23 students and the teacher. Each discourse-based interview with the students and the teacher was conducted soon after CMC texts were created, usually within a week after each CMC discussion. The discourse-based interview provided a way for me to look at some of the participants' thoughts and reasons underlying the words on the texts. While a discourse-based interview cannot reveal all the various, on-going thoughts of a writer during the composing process,

it can be useful in gaining greater insight into why students make certain rhetorical choices, especially when the interview occurs soon after the text was written, and focuses on specifics in the text (Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983).

Keeping in mind the advice of Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Seidman (1998) concerning interviews in qualitative research, I structured these interviews as open-ended but still “guided.” I first began the interview in a very open-ended manner, simply asking the student to tell me about the experience in general (e.g., what’s your general impression about this particular asynchronous discussion? How did you experience the discussion?). Such general questions were appropriate at the early stage of the interview because, here, I was not trying to get the student to recall his or her reasons for making specific textual choices at the time of constructing their utterances. Instead, I was simply asking for a current evaluation as the student now looked back at what he or she had written.

For the majority of the hour, the student and I would read through the whole transcript together and I would let the student talk about such things as what was the major motivation for writing this particular message, to whom he or she was responding, what was the major concern in composing the message, etc. Then following a procedure similar to that of Odell, Goswami, and Harrington (1983), I asked the student about specific passages that I had noted prior to the interview. I gave attention to places where contextual cues seemed to be present. In conducting discourse-based interviews with the teacher, I followed the same procedures.

#### 4) Printouts of CMC Texts

After each CMC activity, I collected the transcript of the CMC discussion. Because I was informed by data collected from all the various procedures noted above, I had a much greater sense of context that would allow me to analyze more fully the processes that lie beyond the text itself and help me identify various contextual factors embedded within the text. I examined the transcript with potential Bakhtinian concepts in mind prior to the discourse-based interviews. When examining the CMC transcript, I referred to any reading assigned during the unit, the assignment sheet, the transcript of background interview with the students and the teacher, classmates’ comments, and the teacher’s comments from class discussions in order to identify places where the student might be responding to the interests, questions, or concerns expressed by the teacher, classmates, authors of assigned reading, and so on. I also identified phrases that appeared potentially useful in gaining information during the discourse-based interviews. For instance, I noted places where the student used an example to illustrate a point. The kind of example used might point to the students’ background information that had not been revealed in an initial interview.

Following my initial analysis of the transcript, I conducted discourse-based interviews to

further develop my analysis. Following each interview, I took notes and used these notes to check my initial analysis. Thus, I was revising and developing my analysis during the semester as I continued to collect data. However, even more analysis took place as I transcribed all the interviews, coded them, and then developed and revised my on-going analysis of the transcript according to the students' own explanations for why they responded to a particular person, wrote a particular phrase, and used a particular example.

#### 5) Self-Reflective Essay on Written Discussion

As part of the assignments for the course, the students submitted a self-reflective essay on written discussion. The purpose of the analysis of written discussion was to make the students reflect on what had happened to them in written discussion. In this self-reflective exercise, the students were asked to describe the kind of learning they experienced during the written discussion. The reader should note that because the students were informed on the first class that I would use their written analysis as one of my primary data sources, their self-report on the experiences with the written discussion might have been influenced by the fact that I would read and analyze them later on. One student even asked me not to use her self-reflective essay as data for the study, because she would be self-conscious in her report, even though she agreed to participate in text-based interviews. Nevertheless, this self-reflective essay proved to be extremely helpful in providing information not mentioned in the interviews as well as in allowing me to peep into the students' crystallized after-thoughts about their experiences with the written discussion.

#### 6) My Own Reflective Research Journal

Within this journal, I recorded not only descriptive observations but also my on-going reflections, insights, questions, and concerns related to all facets of the research process, including my own roles within the investigation. During the interview sessions, I also included notes to supplement the interview transcripts because "the tape-recorder misses the sights, the smells, the impressions and the extra remarks said before and after the interview" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 75). Ranging from a few sentences to several pages, these memos were instrumental in enabling me to trace the patterns emerging from the data, particularly as the amount of data increased.

### 3. Data Analysis

In working with the qualitative data from the various sources noted previously, I followed the naturalistic procedures set out by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The first part of

the analysis was inductive and on-going throughout the investigation. While I was in the process of collecting data, I was also continuously taking notes, both descriptive and reflective, keeping track of what I had so far and analyzing it, arriving at new insights, and developing tentative categories for coding my findings. This on-going data-analysis process also helped to devise more fine-tuned questions for subsequent interviews. The second part of the analysis occurred after all data had been collected and the audio-taped interviews had been transcribed in their entirety. This involved the final development of coding categories and a development of a model that shows an array of interrelationships between categories. Throughout the process, I continually searched in the existing literature for relevant constructs. The purpose of my inquiry in the whole processes of data analysis was to develop and refine categories of the phenomenon under investigation to allow a comprehensive description and interpretation of human activities.

In addition to the more general qualitative, interpretive methods described above, my approach was also guided by a critical discourse analysis strategy proposed by Fairclough (1992). Claiming that “any discursive ‘event’ (i.e., any instance of discourse) is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice” (p. 4), he provided a good analytic framework for integrating a description of discourse with a description of its context of production and interpretation. Fairclough’s advice that it is useful to “begin with some sense of the social practice that the discourse is embedded within” (p. 231) in developing and presenting a model for discourse also led me to follow the progression of the analysis and presentation of the data for the study from social practice to discursive practice, and only then, to text.

#### 4. Assuring Credibility of the Study

Though the interpretive framework necessarily embraces subjectivity, it is nevertheless essential that the qualitative study remains rigorous (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and that the qualitative researcher provides enough objectivity to see the broader connections and relationships among phenomena. My study incorporated some techniques in order to meet the standards of credibility for the interpretive qualitative study. First, my investigation employed “prolonged engagement,” what Lincoln and Guba (1985) described as “the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the culture, testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust” (p. 301). I attended and observed the class for an entire semester and this provided me with a lengthy and close examination of this particular course. It also allowed me to capture some of the details of critical classroom interactions. In addition, I could better understand the nature of CMC speech activity embedded within the class culture.

In addition to prolonged, in-depth observation, I achieved triangulation by employing

multiple sources of data. Not only did triangulation provide me with the means of observing data that may have been overlooked by one source of data collection, it also allowed me to see the same data from various perspectives and, in the process, to clarify the meaning of the data in its fuller context.

In the process of analyzing the data collected from the multiple sources, I discussed my on-going investigation with a colleague who knew a great deal about both the area of my inquiry and the methodological issues. Such discussions served the purpose of “peer debriefing,” what Lincoln and Guba described as “exposing oneself to a disinterested professional peer” to “keep the inquirer honest.” Informal conversations with her about this study assisted in developing and testing categories as well as “obtaining emotional catharsis” (p. 308).

## V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Having described the procedures of carrying out an interpretive qualitative study and having discussed the key elements of my methodological approach, I now briefly present my research findings. I hope that these will help the reader see how the methodological issues discussed in the previous section were closely intertwined with the interpretation and reporting practice of the qualitative research.

### 1. The Sociocultural Context

Arising from my analysis of data were complex interrelationships among the values and practices of the classroom community, and the students’ different experiences within the community, which in turn played an important role in shaping the overall discourse practice in CMC. A variety of factors related to course context and to the students’ and the teacher’s perceptions of CMC played a significant role in shaping online discourse. Among these many factors, four factors emerged from the data as especially important: 1) the unique histories the students brought to the class and their own perceptions of the members’ resources for their learning in the class; 2) the nature of the course, especially how the teacher chose topics, assignments, and activities for the course, and how the purposes of the course were presented to and understood by the students; 3) the ways in which CMC was assigned and managed by the teacher and perceived by the students; and 4) the students’ perceptions in general of CMC as a communication medium and their evolving sense of their roles as participants in course-related CMC discourse.

### 1) The Members' Resources

The students differed in their goals and in the directions they set out for the class as they did in the cultural and educational backgrounds they brought to the class. The students' different backgrounds initially set a stage for potential conflicts among voices in the class as well as served as the resources the students could draw on from each other in reading, writing, and learning online. The students generally responded positively to the effect of the diversity of the students' backgrounds on their overall learning processes. As one of the participants commented, "Where one came from was not a drawback; on the contrary it was an enrichment of the class in terms of the provision of new perspectives and insights" (Ali, Self-reflective Essay). However, for certain few students, the diversity of the students' backgrounds was perceived as a negative influence on the quality of the interaction online especially when the students could not see the relevance of other students' input to their disciplinary knowledge.

### 2) The Nature of the Course

In addition to the unique histories the students brought to the class, the nature of the course affected the students' participation of CMC. The teacher of this study, Nancy, set her goal for the course as introducing the students to the discipline. Her educational philosophy, a social constructivist view of learning, was manifested in her use of "text" as a focal classroom event for the students to express themselves and explore course concepts. She encouraged her students to become authors and speakers themselves in both face-to-face and CMC sessions. Particularly influential to the students was the way the teacher on the first day tried to promote the students' feeling of "we are in this together" on a journey of understanding course concepts and her emphasis of taking an open stance toward each other's contribution. In addition, the teacher's careful planning for the course that centered around a focal event of "text" connecting all the readings, assignments, and activities was acknowledged and appreciated by the students who said that their position toward CMC was influenced by their awareness that "everything is connected to everything else in this course" (Rita, Self-reflective Essay). Weaving CMC into the fabric of the course allowed the students to take a more active role in their participation in CMC.

### 3) The Teacher's Role in CMC

The ways in which CMC was assigned and managed by the teacher and perceived by the students affected the students' experience with CMC. The CMC activity was introduced as a partial replacement of face-to-face meetings, with the teacher's conviction that the

alternative format of discussion would serve as an avenue in which the students' voices could be better heard. In the oral class, the teacher very seldom ruled out exception and alternatives. Thus, even in her long lectures and her typically dominating role in the oral exchanges, the teacher of this class demonstrated a deep desire and commitment to hear and consider the students' ideas and opinions. The teacher's construction of such subjectivities was projected in the CMC discourse as well, yet in a more dynamic and constantly shifting manner. The teacher in CMC activities initially assumed a guiding role, pulling the students together, which was perceived by the students as a positive force: "I think that the instructor has to participate in the discussion like Nancy does, not just letting the students engage in the discussion... I think she can help us to see what we can't see, point out the controversy or clarify our questions and misconceptions" (Yiping, Discourse-based Interview, Nov. 20). However, as the conversation evolved, significant in the CMC discourse was an absence of a privileging of the authority of a single expert as the students negotiated expertise with peers as well as with the teacher. The students freely initiated new topic threads and shifted the course of the conversation.

#### 4) The Students' Perceptions of CMC

Finally, the students' evolving sense of CMC as a communication medium contributed to their experience in this particular learning environment. One of the advantages that the students perceived with the use of CMC in their learning was the opportunity to be reflexive as a result of the time lag between their rereading of a message and posting a reply. Many participants reported that they rarely responded to messages straight away, often allowing several hours, even up to a day before posting a reply. Another advantage was the opportunity for the students to share their diverse experiences and gain an understanding of the applications of course concepts to their own real-life learning and teaching situations. In addition, for some students, the asynchronous CMC provided a relatively comfortable way to take issue with what others said. Initially, the students hesitated to disagree with each other; however, gradually, with modeling from the teacher and a few students, more began to question, negotiate, and disagree with each other.

Despite overall positive responses to CMC, the students also identified some of the constraints the medium put on their participation and learning. Some students were not ready to enjoy its potential for transforming traditional discourses. Because messages in CMC were conveyed in a written form, some students found themselves worrying about producing grammatically correct sentences and writing lengthy, well-crafted, "smart" messages as if they were writing an essay. In addition, some students reported that the lack of non-verbal clues and immediate responses in the asynchronous CMC led them to feel clueless as to whether they had correctly interpreted others' words. Despite the difficulties

and resistances the students occasionally experienced, the asynchronous CMC nevertheless affected the students greatly on an emotional and social level as well as a cognitive level, whether they liked it or not: “If you are gone one day and you come home, you get fifty messages. Oh my gosh! But I do think, as much as it’s annoying, as much as I want to pull my hair out, it forced me to understand the article deeper, sometimes I had to reread the articles to make sense of what other people had to say” (Alicia, Discourse-based Interview, Nov. 21).

## 2. CMC Discursive Practice: Appropriating and Reaccentuating

As the CMC environment facilitated interaction among multiple voices within the individual and within the class, much of what the CMC discourse showed was a complex process of appropriation and reaccentuation of others’ words in the chain of communication. Drawing on Bakhtin’s (1986) overarching construct, “intertextuality,” in which any concrete utterance is “a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere” (p. 91), I looked into the distributional networks and intertextual chains into which CMC messages entered, and the transformation that they went through, thereby attempting to describe the overall characteristics of CMC discourse. The excerpt (see Appendix) will give the reader a sense of how the processes of appropriation and reaccentuation were played out in the intertextual chain of discourse in CMC.

Six participants in the discussion forum posted messages on the “Too Ideal” topic thread. Let us first look at how Minhø (#1) initiated this topic. In initiating this “Too Ideal” topic, Minhø offered a thoughtful and well-crafted narrative (“Discussion, my opinion, discourse, interpersonal relationship... These were somewhat new and may be still new to the deepest part of my mind”). Then he recounted his experiences in the Korean educational system, and ended with an indirect question (“I really wonder how I can make my future students free from the bondage of the number and result-oriented attitude and enjoyable with such pluralism and heteroglossia”).

In a discourse-based interview, Minhø reported that after reading the articles assigned for the week, he had ambivalent feelings about the constructs the authors of the articles created. In the following comment, Minhø illustrated how the words of the authors were not easily assimilated into his own context: “I’ll ultimately go back to Korea and teach English there. So I have this tendency to think of everything I read in this class from an EFL teacher’s perspective. After reading these three articles, I was like, “That’s great, but would that work in Korea?” (Discourse-based Interview, Sept. 16)

Certainly the question of how possibly to apply what he had learned here in the U. S. to his own context was an issue he had considered deeply; he was pinned by the paradoxical need for new teaching practices that might conflict with the need for considering his own

future teaching context in Korea. Minhø's discourse about himself and about his world fused with the authors' discourse about themselves and their world. Such an internal fusion of two points of view, two intentions, and two expressions in one utterance offered a living dialogic resistance. This made it possible for other participants to adopt various attitudes toward the argument and to take various positions in this argument.

Let us now look at how the teacher, Nancy (#2) responded to the image Minhø created in his text. She responded by injecting acclamation ("Wonderful, Minhø. You are highlighting the fragile and difficult aspect that such an approach to discussion requires. I love your words"). In a discourse-based interview, Nancy commented on how she could easily embody his words when she first read Minhø's message: "He had chosen words that were almost poetic for expressing his ideas." Nancy further explained her take on Minhø's words as follows: "I felt as if he was asking such an honest question" (Discourse-based Interview, Oct. 9)

The next speaker, Morgan (#3), chose to comment on Nancy's choice of words. Just as Nancy noticed Minhø's words, Morgan noticed Nancy's words and injected acclamation ("What an incredible turn of phrase!"). Morgan reported that even though it was not technically on the subject of what the group was discussing, that phrase of Nancy's ("I love your words") caught her eye. As a lover and a close observer of the linguistic phenomena occurring in her everyday life, Morgan was fascinated by the way Nancy used language, finding them very communicative in this CMC context. For Morgan, what was significant to her was not so much to get involved in the discussion of the given topic, but to make a meta-discourse comment on the kinds of discourse that had just evolved in this activity.

Jason's message (#4) in response to Minhø's query presents an interesting case of appropriation. In a discourse-based interview, Jason admitted that he was very interested by the two terms Minhø brought up at the end of his message, *pluralism* and *heteroglossia*, rather than by the whole message Minhø was trying to convey. Even though those two words were in fact cited in one of the assigned readings, he had not noticed them as he was reading the article. Only when Jason saw the words embedded in Minhø's text did the words begin to make an enormous impact on his ideological world: "I added to his "Too Ideal" thread because the terms triggered the whole idea of how each individual student is different." (Discourse-based Interview, Oct. 18)

For Vivien (#5), Minhø's message served as a locus from which to reposition herself in this particular CMC activity that had already generated several topic threads before this "Too Ideal" thread. By the time Vivien saw Minhø's message, she had already posted something about the common theme running through all the articles of the week in another topic thread titled "Common Theme." There, Vivien had argued why respect should be the core construct of any classroom learning and teaching practices. After posing her thought on the theme, however, Vivien was mindful that she might have sounded too idealistic.

When she saw Minhø's message and Jason's response to it in this "Too Ideal" thread, Vivien was glad that she could have another opportunity to reposition herself in relation to all the constructs she had talked about before. Vivien finished her utterance with a compromise ("And Minhø, I can relate (a little) to what you're talking about. But, like Jason said, it's an ideal we should strive for").

The last contributor to the thread, Seunghee, who came from Korea, brought Minhø's message back to her own context in message #6 ("I agree with Minhø, esp. because we're from the same culture"). Seunghee explained why she chose to respond to Minhø's message in the first place: "Minhø wrote a message that I could sympathize with, because he talked about why the dialogic class is hard to realize in Korean educational contexts. When I saw Minhø's message, I thought this is one where I could stand equally side by side with American peers" (Discourse-based Interview, Oct. 19). From her comment, one can see that Seunghee turned her background, her sense of the past, into resources with which she could position herself equally with English-speaking peers in this chain of communication.

In all, different interests and motives of all the participants in this "Too Ideal" topic thread constituted the intertextual rhythm of CMC discourse. Minhø's ambivalent feelings about the constructs that the authors of the assigned readings created and his desire to let his American peers know where he came from and how he felt about the constructs, Nancy's observation of Minhø's language use as a psycholinguistic example, Morgan's fascination with how Nancy's particular turn of phrase was communicated in this particular speech activity, Jason's impression of the two theoretical constructs Minhø brought up from the reading, Vivien's desire to reposition herself on the issue the group had discussed, and Seunghee's affiliation with the situation that Minhø described in the first message had all compelled the participants to select for themselves what was significant in their reading and writing of the texts and reaccent it with their own evaluative tones. What was evident in the analysis of the interaction among utterances in CMC was the transformation of perspectives the participants experienced as a result of the online dialogue that encouraged the students to work through the tension between others' words and their own. As one of the participants in the study commented, one of the greatest values of the asynchronous CMC was the many opportunities to connect with others and to create something new: "The responses from others were full of thought and made me more thoughtful. I feel that the asynchronous discussion made deeper meanings of the text. It seemed like an interplay of languages, stemming from all of us, our entire prior knowledge interacting in our own texts created as a response to others' texts. Amazing!" (Hillary, Self-reflective Essay).

I want to point out that much of my analysis of CMC texts was complemented by discourse-based interviews to obtain more holistic insights into the participants' thoughts and reasons underlying the words on the CMC texts. From the excerpt, one can see that in the discourse-based interviews the students engaged in many reflective and analytic

observations about their own processes of learning that were not directly available in the discussion transcripts. Truly remarkable is the way the interviews revealed the participants' different motives and interests that in turn compelled the participants to weave their discourse with the multiple resources drawn from their life experiences. I suggest that there is a rich history behind every piece of utterance, if only every speaker had the opportunity to reveal it, and that the discourse-based interview is one very valuable means to discovering the "contextual" meaning behind the texts.

## **VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Having discussed some of the important findings of my study, I must now outline the ways in which the data may have been adversely affected by limitations in the research design. This section identifies these limitations. One of the key limitations of the study relates to the nature of interpretive qualitative inquiry. In this type of analysis, one often tends to highlight some data and devalue other data. This may lead to misrepresentation of some aspects of the data. Like other qualitative researchers, I faced the difficult task of reducing what I saw in the data into a story to be conveyed to others. As with all stories, the story I presented in this report could be told from a variety of perspectives that might overemphasize or, conversely, undervalue different aspects of the data. In this study, I encountered substantial difficulty in my effort to package what I was seeing in the data into clearly marked findings. In interpreting and reporting the results of the study, I often felt as if I had revealed only a portion of the story that could be told. That is why it is important to remind the reader that there could be "other" realities that I might have missed, and that some of the realities I reported might have been misrepresented even though I worked hard to enhance credibility by triangulating the findings from various data sources.

Another limitation relates to the research particulars. While I made every effort to ensure the "transferability" of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it is important to note several possible limitations in the research design. This study was conducted in a particular graduate course at a major research university in the United States. The nature of the course in which "discourse" was an important theme and the students were explicitly asked to reflect on their learning in the CMC environment as part of the course assignments, and the composition of the student body should be considered in the transfer of any interpretation from this study. Moreover, although the findings of the study may appear to cast the students' experiences in CMC in a somewhat positive light, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the students in general were highly motivated students who came to the class with interests in language and discourse. As one participant commented, "I'm in classrooms all the time where talk is very important and discourse is really

important” (Hillary, Discourse-based Interview, Nov. 21). Because I have dealt with a single classroom, many specific results cannot be generalized to other cases. The interpretive nature of just one rather unique class experience with the asynchronous CMC prevents me from generalizing these results to other educational settings or other mediums of computer communications. The study here involved only a small group of graduate level students; therefore, it does not provide enough information to predict how other teachers would use conferencing systems or other on-line communications or how other groups of students would react to it. Despite the special nature of this course, however, I believe that the issues raised in this study concerning the reflective practices and the construction of multiple identities through CMC are appropriate in other contexts as we move further along the road of virtual learning in different settings. The findings are even more appropriate in any classroom setting in which “discourse” is one of the central themes for the course as in fields such as linguistics, communications, language and literacy, and foreign language education.

Another limitation of the study is that the students might have purposely withheld information or acted unnaturally because they knew they were being audio-taped in interviews. Knowing that their comments in interviews might be published in the report of the findings of the study, for example, they might have chosen to say what they thought the teacher or I expected them to say. What was striking, however, was the candor they showed in their discourse-based interviews in revealing their moment-by-moment decision-making processes in their attempts to make their utterances more meaningful to themselves as well as to others. I was once again relieved to read the students’ self-reflective essay on CMC, which was submitted to the teacher as part of their course requirements at the end of the semester. The same candor was evident in those essays.

## VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, I have discussed what is involved in conducting an interpretive qualitative study, centering the discussion around a research project I have completed. This overview of some of the theoretical and methodological considerations involved in doing interpretive qualitative research suggests the complex and challenging nature of conducting these types of studies. It also suggests, however, that the interpretive qualitative research mode has both theoretical and practical implications for language learning and teaching issues. I want to conclude this paper by offering some implications of this study for the future research and teaching in the following areas: literacy studies and CMC studies.

Firstly, I have responded to literacy researchers’ plea to create a more satisfactory convergence between the study of texts and the study of practices. As Barton (1994) noted,

studying practices involves understanding how literacy is embedded in people's lives and the different ways in which they go about similar tasks involving literacy. It has been my goal to contribute, even if only in a small way, to this convergence by focusing on the participants' intentions behind the texts, and by grounding textual analysis within the interpretive qualitative approach to the study of classroom culture.

Secondly, this study attempted to take a comprehensive view of the discourse in CMC environments. I am not aware of other full qualitative studies of the asynchronous CMC discourse that have drawn on Bakhtinian concepts, rich and evocative descriptions of discourse acquisition, and use in context. With the aid of Bakhtinian theoretical constructs, I have responded to CMC researchers' call for studying CMC discourse in context, the complex interaction of contextual factors embedded in a particular sociocultural context, "looking beyond the texts of interaction to the broader contextual dynamics that shape and are shaped by those texts" (Kern & Warschauer, 2000; Murray, 2000; Yagelski & Grabill, 1998). Among a host of methodological tools I employed to probe the meaning of an utterance in CMC, CMC researchers would be well advised to use a discourse-based interview. This tool can complement textual analysis in an important way by using its results to probe "the thinking behind the text" in collaborative work within learning communities in networked environments. Further investigators employing similar methods might replicate the study in the EFL context. This might enable the investigator to address the following question left unanswered by this study: Would the results of this study have been different if it had carried out in the EFL context?

The discursal construction of utterance in CMC is a relatively new research focus, providing a challenging project for the future. There are still many theoretical questions about the social construction of utterances in CMC and the nature of learning in the online environment that need to be pursued. This was an exploratory study, showing the richness and complexity of what is involved in the construction of utterances in CMC, but it paid only cursory attention to some issues. A particularly valuable complement to this study would be further research on how the same person constitutes utterances differently in different activities (e.g., academic writing tasks, synchronous CMC, asynchronous CMC, and oral activities) embedded in a particular sociocultural context, both through writing and through other semiotic means. In short, there are many avenues for future study within the broad field of the social construction of texts and an interpretive qualitative research framework is warranted to probe the complexity involved in any textual activity.

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## APPENDIX

### CMC Messages in "Too Ideal" Topic Thread

*#1 Date: Thu Oct 3 2002 4:17 pm, Author: Minho, Subject: Too Ideal...*

Discussion, my opinion, discourse, interpersonal relationship with teachers and classmates, classroom discourse and Dialogic discourse, Inquiry, etc... These were somewhat new and may be still new to the deepest part of my mind.

I am from a different culture where at least in my school days no discussion, no question, no response (I am a little bite exaggerating) were allowed. One of the main reasons might be too many students in a classroom. (I wonder these approaches are feasible in such a big classroom environment too.)

In a nutshell, there was no "PUBLIC SPACE" for students. In the first article, Kathy looked struggling to put a different breath into the traditional classroom environment. She, however, was confronted with a variety of obstacles like sociopolitical forces and even what she has got used to.

I think some of my teachers in my school days might have been like Kathy. I guess they were also faced with similar problems. In particular, the number things like test scores, how many students entered a prestigious university, etc might have haunted them.

I think high of "dialogic approach in education" but at the same time I really wonder how I can make my future students free from the bondage of the number and result-oriented attitude and enjoyable with such pluralism and heteroglossia.

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*#2 Date: Thu Oct 3 2002 4:45 pm, Author: Nancy, Subject: Re: Too Ideal...*

Wonderful, Minho. You are highlighting the fragile and difficult aspect that such an approach to discussion requires. I love your words.

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*#3 Date: Fri Oct 4 2002 10:06 am, Author: Morgan, Subject: Re: Too Ideal...*

What an incredible turn of phrase! "I love your words." It's not an expression that would have ever occurred to me, it seems much more natural to me to praise the idea than the words. I'm trying to decide if

that's something that comes of your bilingual background or from your linguistic studies background. In any case I think it's far more communicative and expressive in this case than the other would be.

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*#4 Date: Thu Oct 3 2002 4:52 pm, Author: Jason, Subject: Re: Too Ideal...Amen!*

I agree whole heartedly with Minhho. The concept of diglossia seems to misrepresent the class as one collective unit equal in to the teacher. But any collective is made up of individuals. As Minhho astutely stated, these individuals are NOT HOMOGENEOUS. Each person brings unique schema to the environment upon which to draw. Based upon this fact, we have the basis for socially constructed knowledge. The down side? Some will contribute and some might not. Here the teacher has to play two assertive roles: First, the teacher has to in order to facilitate learning and clarify or correct misconception (as we saw, for example, in the Hammer article); second, the teacher needs to act as a mediator when students either over-participate (if such a thing really exists) or under-participate.

The theoretical construct of classroom dialogia is an ideal every teacher (irrespective of the course content) should aim for. I think it is up to us as teachers to now take the next step... how to practically implement the construct into classes where it only exists as theory. I believe that it won't be as easy as it sounds (sorry about the skepticism)...

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*#5 Date: Fri Oct 4 2002 9:36 am, Author: Vivien, Subject: Re: Too Ideal...Amen!*

Jason and Minhho,

I couldn't agree with the two of you more! I completely understand the pressure of tests and student performance on those tests. Although I worked in a university setting, I was expected to cover the material that would be presented on the test. And to make matters worse, the classes grades had to fit on a "perfect" bell curve. So, the reality of education or whatever you want to call it is sometimes overwhelming for the good-intentioned teacher. So, Jason, I do not see you as a skeptic. And Minhho, I can related (a little) to what you're talking about. But, like Jason said, it's an ideal we should strive for.

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*#6 Date: Fri Oct 4 2002 1:50 pm, Author: Seunghee, Subject: Re: Too Ideal...*

I agree with Minhho, esp. because we're from the same culture. In my high school days, a new German teacher came. Her teaching style afreshed us a lot. There was a discussion, sts' role plays and it was quite dialogic. At that time, German was one of the required courses in the college entrance exam. So, the other classes were definitely lecture-based, monologic ones. Thus, a while after, we could see she was in conflict with other German teachers. The school system was too inflexible to accept different approaches, and there were incessant concerns about the possible drawbacks of something new. (e.g., falling classroom average grades)

However, despite the difficulty to be feasible in a certain culture, I think that dialogic classrooms in itself have many good aspects. It's been just one year since I came here. Adjusted to the lecture-based instruction, firstly, I had difficulty in some discussion-based classes i took here. But, i think that despite the reduced lecture, i could learn a lot by my peers. Most of them were very experienced teachers, so they shared their teaching experiences and understanding several discussions. I, as a foreigner and inexperience teacher, could learn a lot by my more advanced peers.

But, again I think because of what Minhho pointed still in some culture, the "dialogic class" is TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

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Applicable levels: tertiary education

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