SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING BY ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS FROM DIFFERENT CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

By

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Yıldız Turgut
This dissertation is dedicated to my family.
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This qualitative study describes the meaning making process of English language learners with different cultural backgrounds during reading and writing activities based on a social constructionism theoretical framework. The data were collected through participant observations, interviews, archival documents and a feedback session. Six participants are from Venezuela, Honduras, Poland, Switzerland, South Korea and Japan. As a researcher, I was a participant with a Turkish cultural background. Through James Gee’s macro and micro discourse analysis, the findings indicate that reading and writing discussions unite participants despite cultural and linguistics differences. Due to the culture, Asian participants’ perception of classroom talk is to teach knowledge they are sure of whereas European and Hispanic participants consider it as a brainstorming tool that they learn together. Gradually, participants have constructed a group identity and served to the group through different roles. Towards the end of the study Asian participants became more talkative even on a topic considered taboo in their culture.
Through reading the writing of other participants, awareness of an audience developed in their writing. Also, peer corrections and suggestions have been considered more meaningful and easier to remember compared to the teacher’s corrections. Even though participants’ previous experiences on English language learning were based on focus on form, through this study they both focused on form and meaning. The implications of this study indicate that teachers should be aware of the importance of learning students’ cultural backgrounds. We can inform Asian participants about the multifarious purposes of having discussion, which include brainstorming and thinking together not simply replacing the teacher. Applying small-group activities might be used as a transition period for those learners to speak in class. Small-group activities help them to share their ideas with few members first and then to share and verbalize in front of the whole class. For teachers who do not use group activities (e.g., this teacher) and who might considered reading and writing activities as separate from conversation (e.g., this teacher), this study can provide a guide to help them understand and apply collaborative activities in their classroom. Researchers need to investigate in more detail where and when we should apply group work activities so that it will be more helpful to students’ language learning during reading and writing. Through a longitude study the transition from the participants’ second/foreign language acquisition to literacy development should be observed. This way the long term effects of group discussions on reading and writing can be better understood. More advanced research might evaluate different, non-traditional, classroom arrangements and the effect of these arrangements on student behavior as well as the overall learning process. This kind of research might provide information about the role of teachers and student training.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Historically, the theoretical framework of English language teaching moved from behaviorist to cognitive and recently from constructivist to social constructionism (Flood et al., 2004). According to the social constructionist perspective, language learners create their own meanings through interactions with others in the classroom. However, in most cases this theoretical movement has rarely been transferred into practice. For instance, classroom observations conducted at the English Language Institute (ELI) of the University of Florida during 2002-2004 indicated that especially during the grammar and reading and writing classes, teacher talk dominated the class time rather than student talk. While covering the topics in reading and writing classes, teachers spent more time on lecturing than any group or pair work activities. Therefore, students had few chances to speak out in the class except for asking questions or requesting clarifications, and these opportunities to speak were within the framework of a teacher-centered classroom. This dominance of teacher talk is also reported in other studies (i.e., Berducci, 1993; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Duffy, 1981; Goodlad, 1984; Gutierrez, 1993, 1994; Gutierrez & Larson, 1994; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, 1997; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Also, during my observations of the advanced level reading and writing class at the ELI, I realized that students in this class wrote “for the teacher” not even “to the teacher.” Writing “for the teacher” indicates that students do the writing to accomplish the task given by the teacher. Writing “to the teacher” indicates that students consider their teacher as an audience in their writing and considering their audience (their teacher) they
perform the writing task. “Writing to the teacher” shows that students know that somebody (their teacher) will read it; therefore, they have an audience in mind while doing the writing task. Hence, writing is a mean of communication and meaningful task to do. As I have learned English as a foreign language, I am aware of the fact that writing in English is thought of as an exercise in proving competence in grammar, sentence completion, and paragraphing. In most cases these exercises are done as individually rather than a group work. Observing the similar teaching ways at the ELI, made me questioned where this practice fits into the theoretical movement from constructivism to social constructionism?

My observations revealed that interactive language learning was not applied in the teacher-centered classroom. Through interactive language learning several language skills can be combined, such as reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, based on the curriculum of the ELI, these language skills are paired as reading and writing, and speaking and listening (ELI, 2005). Therefore, the implementation of activities where all language skills are emphasized in one class or not depends on the teacher and the characteristics of classroom activities. Even though reading and writing are separated from listening and speaking, students can still have a chance to practice all language skills through creating discussion environments. At the ELI, students with different cultural backgrounds can share their linguistic and cultural experiences with each other, which might enhance their understanding of reading texts and improve their writing through each other’s feedback. In such an environment how do students make meaning of the reading texts and scaffold each other to write better?
There is a general trend in education to move from a teacher-centered to a student-centered learning environment—it is not limited to trends in English language learning. However, due to limited class time, the number of topics that teachers must cover, in addition to being expected to prepare students to take the TOEFL and GRE exams, teachers have relied on the teacher-centered approach, especially lecturing format. In reading and writing classes, teacher-lecture format is employed more frequently than student-centered group discussions.

Considering these three general points (social constructionism, interactive language learning and student-centered approach) related to English language learning at the ELI, there is a need for a study which investigates the process of ESL learners’ interaction within small groups during advanced level reading and writing classes at the ELI in University of Florida.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the advanced level ELI students’ meaning-making process in small group interactions during reading and writing. Based on this research purpose, the following research questions will be asked:

1. How do English language learners’ linguistic knowledge of L1 and English influence discussions?
2. How do students’ language and cultural experiences influence their interactions during discussions?
3. How does interactive language learning interfere language learning?

What is Talking?

Talk is not just a form of social action; it is also a social mode of thinking by which humans can jointly construct knowledge and understanding (Mercer, 1995). Human beings use talk to give ideas a form of reality, to dispute them, to share them and develop them together; they use language to construct cultures. People collectively create and
establish language practices for doing so. Talking creates a capability for organizing ways of thinking together (Mercer, 1996).

One way to describe talk is to think about the range of audiences with whom we can interact (Rubin, 1990). When we talk to another person one-on-one, it is characterized as personal conversation; if the conversation includes several individuals we know, it is characterized as small group discussion (Rubin, 1990).

![Types of Talk](image)

Figure 1-1. A model of the continuum of talk (Rubin, 1990).

Discussion is a forum of collaboratively constructing meaning and for sharing responses (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). It refers to interactive events in which individuals collaboratively construct meaning or consider alternative interpretations of text in order to arrive at new understandings (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). In this present study the terms discussion and talk will be used interchangeably.

**Significance of The Study**

This study will contribute to at least three areas within the growing field of English language-learning research. First, this study explores the possibilities in transforming theory into practice by applying social constructionist and student-centered learning within a classroom. Second, there is a need to combine all language skills (talking, reading, writing) in language learning classes as several studies reveal that all skills
contribute to each other and to general language learning. Lastly, in the field of English language teaching and learning there is a need for a qualitative study based on a social constructionist theoretical framework in which participants will contribute to not only data collection but also data analysis. Unlike previous studies, in this study incorporates the participants’ contribution into both the collection and analysis of data, thus maximizing participant input that gives educators more insights into the interaction process.

Social Constructionist Language Learning Theory

There is a need for the transfer from theory to practice in terms of applying social constructionist and student-centered learning in English language learning classrooms. While learning a language, students not only learn the language from a linguistic perspective—linguistic competence (Chomsky, 1965)—but they also learn language from cultural perspective—communicative competence (Hymes, 1967). While reading a text in English, language learners need to be equipped not only with the linguistic knowledge (syntax, semantics, morphology), but also with cultural referrals (Gee, 1992). Cultural referrals are what the author refers to and what it means in the target cultural context.

Moreover, as Rosenblatt (1978) indicates, what a reader understands from a text can vary among readers because of their different background knowledge and experiences. If a reading text is discussed, each participant (because he/she is coming from a different cultural background) can provide new meanings, as a result of which new meanings are constructed within a group through discussions and negotiations (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Garcia, 1993; Gersten, 1996; Kong & Pearson, 2003). In that sense, this study can provide a discourse for the meaning making process of a reading text by ELI students coming from different language and cultural backgrounds.
There is a growing body of research in small group interactions in ESL studies (Alvermann, 1995, 1996; Bridges, 1988; Ellsworth, 1989; Goldbatt & Smith, 1995; Gore, 1993; Grant, 1996). Studies about native speakers’ interactions within a group (e.g., Hinchman & Young, 2001), indicate that students might feel oppressed when they speak and discover disagreement, disinterest, or disapproval in others’ reactions to their words. Then, what happens in the case of nonnative speakers’ interactions when they discover disagreement, disapproval in other group members’ reactions to their comments? These socio-cultural issues embedded in language learning should be investigated further within their discourses. In that sense, this study can provide insights to both English language teachers and learners enrolled in similar programs like the ELI that will guide them in their classroom activities.

Studies indicate that small group work provides a greater variety of discourse moves in initiating discussions, asking for clarification, interrupting, competing for the floor, and joking (Long et al., 1994; Almasi, 1995; DeLuca, 2004). However, in regards to group work, studies focus mainly on individuals’ gains as an end product of interaction with other group members (Long et al., 1994; Pica et al., 1989; Swain, 1993; Markee, 2000; Turner & Paris, 1995). However, rather than individual gains, the gains of language learners as a group in reading and writing through the group interaction remains to be more carefully examined.

Group work usually demands that students with different cultural backgrounds be paired either randomly (Schwartz, 1980) or according to their language proficiency. Their cultural backgrounds are often ignored in these studies. Considering this is an ignored field, studying the interactions of participants with different cultural backgrounds allows
for the possibility of understanding and theorizing cross cultural interaction. To achieve such understanding, the following questions must be answered: how does culture influence language learning and interaction? Can cultural differences be turned into group unity? If so, how does it happen?

**Interactive Language Learning**

There is a need to combine all language skills in language learning class activities as more and more studies reveal that all language skills contribute to each other and to general language learning. Several studies have proved that talking have a positive impact on other language skills, which enhance language learning, such as reading comprehension (Almasi, 1995; Galda et al., 2000; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2000) and writing (Britton, 1975; Hillocks, 1986; Kennedy, 1983; Sweigart, 1991; Zoellner, 1969). This is the case at different levels of age and language proficiency (Brooks & Swain, 2001; Kowal & Swain, 1997). Likewise, combining different language skills through interaction (Edelsky et al., 1983) enables learners to produce different kinds of output, which is also an important factor in acquiring language. Such output and input should be provided in a meaningful language learning environment (Swain, 2002). Discussions and meaning making can provide an optimal language learning environment (Long, 1980; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica & Doughty, 1985a; Varonis & Gass, 1985) in which students of different skill levels participate collaboratively in order to accomplish tasks, such as discovering a text’s linguistic and cultural background information. Also, interactive language learning helps students to combine academic language and basic communication language skills.

Studies in the field of second language reading and writing that focus on the role of talking in reading activities report that students who are given the opportunity to work in
discussion groups have better reading comprehension (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2001; Yano et al., 1994), vocabulary gain (Ruddell, 1994; Klinger & Vaughn, 2000) and learner autonomy (Alvermann, O’Brien, & Dillon, 1990; O’Flahavan, 1989; Slavin, 1990; Prawat, 1989; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1992; Gambrell & Almasi, 1996; Almasi, 1995; Almasi & Gambrell, 1994; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1992; Sweigart, 1991; Martinez, et al., 1992; McGee, 1992). Talking can be performed during different stages in the writing process, such as at the beginning to clarify topics and attempt pre-writing activities (Sweigart, 1991); in the middle, during composition of a piece of writing (Storch, 2000, 2001a, 2001b); and at the end, during revision and editing processes (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998, 2000; Tang & Tithecott, 1999; Paulus, 1999; Storch, 1999). Studies that focused on revisions (e.g., Storch, 1999) conclude that collaborative revision provided more benefit to learners.

All these studies indicate three major points: first, reading-talking and writing-talking are considered separately in the research field, but not the interrelation of reading and writing through talking; secondly, related to this separateness, talking before writing and after writing (for revision) has not been combined and investigated in a research; last, whether collaborative revision is more beneficial to learners than pair work (Storch, 1999), and what is its implications might mean. Therefore, we need to know what happens if students read a text in a group. Then, research must examine what happens after discussing, as they write about it and then revise what they have written through discussion. Earlier studies have only provided inquiries into half of this problem, so the this study allows us to see how talking plays a role both in reading and writing activities which are interrelated with each other.
In the literature of second language acquisition, studies indicate that when students with lower and higher level language proficiency are paired, surprisingly less proficient ones have been shown to help more proficient ones (Kowal & Swain, 1997). Recently, this comparison of lower and higher proficiency level has gained a more specific focus, examining how even in the same language proficiency level, students’ language proficiency level varies (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2001). Also, native speakers’ scaffolding nonnative speakers has been widely studied (Long, 1985, 1996; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; Brown, 2000; Lightbown & Spada, 2001). Compared to native-nonnative interaction even though students’ negotiate more in nonnative–nonnative interaction (Varonis & Gass, 1985), there is limited research about it. Then, how do both less and more proficient nonnative students belonging to the same general proficiency level contribute to each other’s learning?

Storch (2000, 2001a, 2001b) and DiCamilla and Anton (1997) indicate that when students are paired, each participant takes a role. Storch’s categorization of these roles based on equality (authority over the task) and mutuality (level of engagement with each other’s contribution) indicate four different combinations: collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive and expert/novice. Additionally, related to grouping, the literature (Dillon, 1994; Potter & Anderson, 1976; Spear, 1993) suggests some possible roles that might be assigned to the participants by the teacher such as being a note taker, controller, so forth. However, I wonder, if students are given a chance to decide on their own, what kind of roles naturally emerge during those interactions; what kind of roles participants took on their own when they are grouped instead of being paired? Through the roles they have chosen, how do they scaffold each other?
Social Constructionist Qualitative Research

In the field of English language teaching and learning there is a need for a qualitative study based on a social constructionist theoretical perspective in which participants contribute not only to the process of data collection, but also to the data analysis to show how social constructionist language learning activities, process and research are embedded within each other. Studies examining the peer interaction, social constructionism and discourse include mixed-method studies that incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods (i.e., Rodriguez-Garcia, 2000; Kong & Pearson, 2003; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991); however, there are not enough studies that are totally qualitative. For example, Hinchman and Young (2001) examined the peer interaction of two adolescent native speakers of English students (one white male, and one African-American female) with their classmates under the social constructionist theoretical framework and employed critical discourse analysis. However, the participants had a minor role in the research. In other words, they were not involved in the data analysis process. Therefore, there is a need for further investigation of small group interaction of participants who are coming from various cultural backgrounds within nonnative-nonnative speaker discourse (Glew, 1995; Pica et al., 1989; Sato, 1990) through a qualitative study based on a social constructionist theoretical framework. This study would give the participants a greater role in terms of their contribution to the study by including them throughout the data collection and data analysis processes, allowing for a deeper investigation of peer interaction and their meaning making process.

This study can enhance our knowledge in the social constructionist, student-centered language learning environment. Moreover, this study can also enhance our knowledge in the area of interactive language application providing language learners the
chance to practice all language skills (especially the influence of talking about reading and writing) besides practicing academic and basic language skills. Also, by including participants in the data analysis section, this study can enhance our insight of language learning and meaning-making via social-constructionist qualitative research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature starts with the teaching and learning theory of social constructionism and its role in second language learning. As the focus of this research is how English language learners coming from different cultural backgrounds make meaning of text (reading texts and their summaries), understanding the role of social constructionism in language learning can provide insights to the role of interaction, constructing meaning, and social collaboration. Within social constructionist theoretical framework, the Interactive Language Learning hypothesis serves as a mid-level theory in the present study. Within Interactive Language Learning specific roles of talk on reading comprehension and writing are examined further.

Social constructionism

Interactive Language Learning Through Talking

Impact on Reading Comprehension ⇔ Impact on Writing

Figure 2-1. Theoretical framework of this present study.

Social Constructionism and Language Learning

As a theoretical framework of this present study, social constructionism based on the constructionist epistemology is used for socially impacted construction, which refers to “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (Crotty, 1998). That is, meaning is constructed by human beings when they engage with the world that they are
interpreting; it is not discovered (Crotty, 1998). For that reason, reality is the product of social construction processes under the influence of cultural, historical, political, and economic conditions (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Dean & Rhode 1998; Geertz, 1973; Gergen, 1985, 1991). As knowledge is socially constructed, not only knowledge can vary historically over time and differ across cultural groups that hold diverse beliefs about human development and nature, but also the social construction of knowledge varies. Therefore, we cannot expect our interpretation to be a case of merely mirroring “what is there.” When we describe something, we are, in the normal course of events, reporting how something is seen and reacted to, and thereby meaningfully constructed, within a given community or set of communities. According to the social constructionist view, reality is always filtered through human language—we cannot gain direct access to it (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1994). “Rather than reflecting the world, language generates it” (Witkin, 1999 p. 5), coordinates and regulates social life (Gergen, 1994). In other words, language includes all social, economic, cultural knowledge within itself (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1985, 1994). Therefore, learning a language is also learning a culture and a society.

Sometimes referring to social constructionism, in Second/foreign Language Learning different terms are used, such as social constructivism and socio-constructivism. However, in some cases these terms might be referring to social constructionism which focuses on individual learners’ meaning making process, their motivational and cognitive experiences (Flood et al., 2003; Salomon, 1993) rather than constructing meaning as a social group. Therefore, this type of social constructionism is closer to constructivism rather than social paradigm and it serves as a transition from constructivism to social
constructionism which emerged in the late 80s by Bahtin (1981, 1990), Bruner (1990), Cole and Engestrom (1993), Wells (1999), and Wertsch (1991). They were trying to understand “how humans function as individuals, as the separate, unique nexus for forces working on personality tendencies, and motivations” (Flood et al., 2003 p 34). Even though this type of social constructionism differs from the constructivist perspective which focuses more on information processing (behaviorist notions on this dimension), the socioconstructivist perspective shares similarity with constructivism in terms of how the learner constructs interpretations of ongoing events, through making sense of language and life within the cultural/social/historical milieu into which every person is born and lives (Flood et al., 2003).

Also, the term “socio-cultural” might be used interchangeably with social constructionism, but in some cases as Mercer (1996) states it might refer to society level (home, school, working class cultures) with more critical and political perspectives (i.e., Au, 1997; Barton, 1994; Bloch, 1993; Street, 1984). In this present study, socio-cultural term is used interchangeably with social constructionism referring to the cultural meaning of a situation in which learning is taking place and to the social practices with power differentials that influence teachers and learners in learning situations (Flood et al., 2003). Nieto (1999) summarizes the socio cultural perspective on learning and education referring to social constructionism:

learning develops primarily from social relationships and the actions of individuals that take place within particular sociopolitical contexts. That is to say, learning emerges from the social, cultural, and political spaces in which it takes place, and through the interactions and relationships that occur among learners and teachers. (p.2)

Consequently, in this study grounded by social constructionism I am referring to constructing meaning through interaction and with a social focus as suggested by Gergen
(1994) and Gee (1996, 2002). Applying this framework into language learning indicates that knowledge is produced by a society of members in which individual learners bring their own cultural background knowledge contributing to constructions of new meanings. Learning occurs while people are participating in the sociocultural activities of their learning community, transforming (i.e., constructing) their understanding and responsibilities as they participate (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Oxford, 1997; Rogoff & Lave, 1984). In a community of learners, both children and adults are active in structuring the inquiry conversationally, although usually in asymmetric roles (Oxford, 1997). In social constructionism, the emphasis is on the learning process, rather than just the completion of projects, in activity-based situations with meaningful purposes in which students becomes acculturated, enculturated, or reacculturated (i.e., apprenticed into a particular learning culture or environment (Bruffee, 1993) through classroom activities and through the modeling and coaching of the teacher and many others (Oxford, 1997). Rather than just a teacher/learner dyad, many actors and many different kinds of relationships exist in which many people can provide the scaffolding that the students needs (Oxford, 1997).

**Language Learning Through Interaction**

Within social constructionist framework of language learning, Interactional Language Learning will serve as a mid-level theory in this present study. Interactional language learning combines both Input (Krashen, 1982) and Output (Swain, 1985) hypothesis. According to Input hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), second language acquisition does not occur when learners are memorizing vocabulary or completing grammar exercises, but occurs when they receive comprehensible input. One of the components that shape the input hypothesis is the “affective filter”, which refers to a language acquisition environment in which learners’ anxiety level is low and there is no
defensiveness. According to Krashen (1982), producing output might cause this filter to get increased with the result of no or less language learning. When students feel comfortable, they will produce output. However, some researchers argued that comprehensible input is not sufficient for the L2 learners to attain a high level of L2 proficiency (Hammerly, 1987; Harley, 1993; Harley & Swain, 1978; Izumi et al., 1999). Findings from these studies have shown that although comprehensible input helps L2 learners to gain high level listening comprehension skills and communicative fluency, these students have weaknesses in grammatical accuracy (Izumi et al., 1999). One of the reasons for that weakness is that learners had a little chance to practice using the target language in classroom (Swain, 1985) either because of the limited class time or because of the teacher-talk domination (Allen et al., 1990; Swain, 1985, Izumi et al., 1999).

Focusing on these drawbacks of the input theory, Swain (1985,1993) developed ‘output hypothesis’ as an alternative to Krashen’s “Input theory” (Kasagna, 1996). Output hypothesis suggests that in addition to receiving comprehensible input, learners must produce comprehensible output; in other words, explicit attention must be paid to the productive language skills for speaking and writing. During this process, in order to develop communicative competence, learners need to be “pushed toward the delivery of message that is… conveyed precisely, coherently, and appropriately” (Swain, 1985,p. 249). Pica, Holliday, Lewis, and Morganthaler (1989) supported Swain’s idea of emphasizing the importance of comprehensible output in L2 learning as a function of linguistic demands (Kasagna,1996).

Overcoming the limitations of both Input and Output hypothesis (only being exposed to comprehensible input; being pushed to produce output without a meaningful
context), Interactionist theory emphasizes the dynamic nature of the interplay between learners, their peers and their teachers and others with whom they interact (Brown, 2000). The interpersonal context in which a learner operates has great significance; therefore, the interaction among the learners is the focus of observation and explanation (Brown, 2000).

The relationship between social interaction and L2 acquisition has been the focus because the first systematic studies on these questions were undertaken in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see e.g., Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Hatch, 1978; Long, 1983), and to date, the role of social interaction in L2 acquisition has received very different interpretations in research that can be considered into three categories: a weak, a strong (Mondada & Doehler, 2004), and an intermediate. The weak version of the interactionist approach acknowledges that interaction is beneficial (or even necessary; e.g., Gass & Varonis, 1985) for learning by providing opportunities for learners to be exposed to comprehensible, negotiated, or modified input (e.g., Long, 1983, 1996). This version basically assumes that social interaction plays an auxiliary role, providing momentary frames within which learning processes are supposed to take place.

Contrary to this position, the strong version of the interactionist approach considers interaction as a fundamentally constitutive dimension of learners’ everyday lives (Mondada & Doehler, 2004). That is, interaction is the most basic site of experience, and it functions as the most basic site of organized activity where learning can take place. According to this view, social interaction provides an interactional frame in which developmental processes can take place and as a social practice, it involves the learner as a co-constructor of joint activities, where linguistic and other competencies are put to
work within a constant process of adjustment vis-a-vis other social agents and in the emerging context (Mondada & Doehler, 2004). This position is typically adopted by conversationalist (Bange, 1992; Gajo & Mondada, 2000; Krafft & Dausendschon-Gay, 1994; Pekarek, 1999) or sociocultural (Hall, 1993; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995) approach to L2 acquisition.

The intermediate version refers to the combination of Interactional hypothesis with the Output hypothesis in which output is produced in a meaningful process through interaction: peer–peer dialogue (Swain et al., 2002). This addition includes sociocultural perspective to the output hypothesis based on Vygotksy’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and it highlights collaborative learning through the dialogue form in writing, speaking, listening and reading activities. Vygotksy’s (1978) sociocultural theory posits that activities which are external to the learner but in which he or she participates (interpsychological) are transformed into mental ones (intrapsychological).

“Psychological processes emerge first in collective behavior, in co-operation with other people, and only subsequently become internalized as the individual’s own ‘possessions’” (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 1997, p.161). The process of internalization occurs via language either interpsychologically through dialogic interaction (Donato & Lantolf, 1990; Lantolf, 2000), or intrapsychologically through private speech (Lantolf, 2001). The output hypothesis affected by Interactional Language Learning hypothesis focuses mostly on the dialogic (interpersonal) interaction (Swain, 2000), and Swain (1997) called it as “collaborative dialogue”. In collaborative dialogue, learners work together to solve linguistic problems and develop cultural proficiency. During this collaborative process, language serves not only as a cognitive tool in a sense that it
enables to process and manage meaning making, but also as a social tool in a sense that it enables communication with other learners. As an important impact of this collaborative dialogue, the pattern on the output communication has changed: While at the beginning the output has a linear pattern, one of the learners produces output the other one gives feedback, this collaborative dialogue interaction has enabled the circular output movement: “the messages are transmitted as output from one source and received as input elsewhere” (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p:320; Wells, 2000). In other words, within a circular movement an utterance can be considered both as a process and a product (Swain and Lapkin, 1998; Wells, 2000): as “saying” and as “what was said.” “What they said” becomes an object on which the speaker or other participants can work further and later it turns into resource (input) for other participants.

Furthermore, affecting the Output hypothesis, Interactional language learning enables delivering the negative feedback effectively through dialogue and interaction. Presenting feedback in negotiation provides a context in which “error correction is considered as a social activity involving joint participation and meaningful transactions between the learner and the teacher” (Nassaji & Swain, 2000 p.35). Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994) examined corrective feedback in dialogic process and its relationship to the learners’ interlanguage. Their study found that the usefulness of corrective feedback mostly depends on the nature of the transaction and mediation provided by the expert in this procedure. The analysis of the dialogic interactions between the learner and the expert revealed that every type of error treatment was effective in so far as it was negotiated between the learner and the teacher and was provided at the right point or within the Zone of Proximal Development. Moreover, in a more detailed study, Nassaji &
Swain (2000) compared the effectiveness of getting collaborative feedback and random feedback in this dialogic process. The results indicate that the collaborative help is more effective than the random one (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). While in previous studies (i.e., Carroll & Swain, 1993; Schmidt & Fonda, 1986) presented the benefit of negative feedback over the positive feedback, recently the effectiveness of the positive feedback is also underlined (i.e., Spada & Lightbown, 1993). Even though which one is more efficient is still in debate (Robb et al., 1986), the certain thing is how one will deliver the negative feedback has changed: through dialogue and interaction.

Who can be the participant of interaction in the Interactional Language Learning hypothesis is also changing. That is, the common idea that all interactions can occur with the presence of a more knowledgeable person who will help the learner to move from being able to do something only with the help of that expert to being able to do it independently (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1987) has changed. While the expert/novice pair has typically been considered as an adult (e.g., parent, teacher) (Wertsch, 1985), in recent years, the idea that peer-peer interaction may also foster learning has been advanced (Tudge, 1990; Wells, 1999). This idea has extended within sociocultural SLA by suggesting that in peer to peer interaction, peers can be concurrently experts and novices (Brooks & Swain, 2001; Kowal & Swain, 1997). Furthermore, peers working within the ZPD of each other can support learning through, for example, questioning, proposing possible solutions, disagreeing, repeating, and managing activities and behaviors (social and cognitive) (DiCamilla & Anton, 1997; Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Tocalli-Beller, 2001). Consequently, how acquisition occurs in interaction, not as a
result of interaction (Swain and Lapkin, 1998:321; Swain, 2000) has become the new focus of the output hypothesis affected by the interactional hypothesis.

**Nonnative Speaker-Nonnative Speaker(s) Talk**

Within Interactional hypothesis, various combinations of interactions can occur facilitating language learning, such as native-nonnative speaker (N-NNS), Nonnative-nonnative speaker (NNS-NNS), teacher-student, adult-child, peer-interaction, through writing and oral. The focus of this present study is NNS-NNS, as a face-to-face, oral, peer interaction in a small group.

It is quite common for people to contrast ‘talking’ with ‘doing’—‘he’s all talk, he never gets things done’. But ‘talking’ can be ‘doing’, of course, a form of social action (Mercer, 1996). People use spoken language to account for themselves, to pursue their interests and try and make other people do what they want. Such ideas have been explored in an interesting line of pragmatics research, from philosophers (e.g. Austin, 1962) through the ethnomethodologists (e.g. Schegloff et al., 1977) into conversation analysts (e.g. Drew & Heritage, 1992). But talk is not just a form of social action, it is also a social mode of thinking by which humans can jointly construct knowledge and understanding (Mercer, 1995). Human beings use talk to give ideas a form of reality, to dispute them, to share them and develop them together; they use language to construct cultures. People collectively create and establish language practices for doing so. It is this capability for organizing ways of thinking together (Mercer, 1996).

Educational theorists and researchers often present the discussion as something that should be strived for because it allows for greater student expression and involvement and results in increased learning (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). This is usually part of a Vygotskian framework that views social interaction as effectively driving
cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Within this framework, discussion is essentially dialogic; it is not completely controlled by a single participant; rather it occurs as natural conversation in which individuals engage in a free and open exchange of ideas. According to Lindfors (1990), effective discussions are an “ongoing process of inviting and sustaining children’s talk and response… as they carry out their deepest human urgings; to connect with others, to understand their world, and to reveal themselves within it” (p.38). The second reason for growing interest in discussions is that discussion enables the meaningful integration of the language arts (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). Discussion brings together listening, speaking, and thinking skills as participants engage in exchanging ideas, responding and reacting to text as well as to the ideas of others.

Thirdly, and most importantly, social constructionist theory of learning views students as active learners who engage in the construction of knowledge. These theories suggest that the primary goal of instruction is to help students construct personal meanings in response to new experiences rather than to transmission of knowledge (Poplin, 1988). Therefore, there is the clear link between discussion and the social construction of knowledge; in other words, meaning making is learned through the social interaction of students, especially when they discuss and interpret text in small groups (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). Ways of meaning making are made public as students observe and participate in discussions about text which in turn makes students become part of the “active conversation that is reading, the conversation between the reader and text, between text and community and among other readers” (Straw and Bogdan (1993), p.4) (p.27). Thus, talking plays an important role in language learning as commonly a social, rather than an individual, activity; intellectual development is essentially a culturally-
situated, guided process; and becoming educated is largely a matter of learning certain ‘ways with words’ in a community of Discourse (Mercer, 1996).

Through a study on the amount of interaction opportunities available to ESL learners in three ESL classrooms, Berducci (1993) expected to find that more than half of the classroom interaction time “would be spent using the participation structures in which negotiated interaction could take place” (p.13). The findings revealed 86% of the time in one class and 80% of the time in another was spent in participation structures in which negotiated interaction could occur. A conversation-only class spent only 3% of the time in activities in which negotiated interaction could occur. Even though there was interaction in each class, hardly any of it consisted of meaning being negotiated and only an insignificant amount of negotiated interaction occurred between the students themselves. Moreover, the results indicated that it was primarily the teachers who negotiated with the students (Glew, 1998).

Although the teachers observed in Berducci's (1993) study acknowledged the need to replace more traditional teaching methods with a curriculum based on a practical communicative approach, which capitalized on interaction activity to promote language learning, this was rarely translated into the class lessons (Glew, 1998). It is interesting to ask if negotiated interaction is crucial for second language acquisition then why there was so little time spent giving students the opportunity to engage in negotiation with the teacher and other students. Also, when negotiated interaction occurred, who received the opportunities to engage in it; what types of interaction that occur in their classrooms; and how students contribute to each others’ learning. Answering these questions reflect on
teaching practice and curriculum implementation, which have the potential to facilitate second language development in the classroom context (Foster, 1998).

How pairs and small groups are grouped is important in the collaborative-dialogue. For instance, grouping nonnative-nonnative (NNS-NNS) and nonnative-native speaker (NNS-NS) might impact output and interaction. On one hand, through interacting with a native speaker, language learner learns language (Long, 1985, 1996; Pregoy & Boyle, 2001; Brown, 2000; Lightbown & Spada, 2001). On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that more negotiation of meaning may occur when two NNS are interacting than when a NS and NNS are interacting (Varonis & Gass, 1985).

Schwartz (1980) investigated the six nonnative- nonnative college level speakers’ negotiation of meaning through repairs in a conversation through discourse analysis. The participants were two Iranian male and four female who were Japanese, Mexican, Russian and Taiwanese. Each participant was paired with a friend coming from different language backgrounds so that English was the common language during the interaction. The participants’ language proficiency levels were elementary, intermediate and advanced. The participants were left alone for fifteen minutes with each other and the data was both audio and video taped. The findings indicate that repair is a process of negotiation, involving speakers conferring with each other to achieve understanding. The repairs included self-initiated repair resulting in self- and other-repair, and other-initiated repair followed by self- and other-repair. The negotiations in the conversations between second language learners of English included both verbal and extralinguistic processes. Especially during other-repair, in their conversations with each other, the teaching nature of repair work was evidently suggesting that second language learners can learn more
from one another. Moreover, repair work is a necessary part of conversation, and can even serve as a “vehicle of language socialization” (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977, p.33). Even the students in the most elementary level of language proficiency were able to deal with trouble sources and problems in understanding in their conversations by negotiating with each other to come to an agreement of meaning. Further research instead of pair interaction can focus on small groups with culturally more diverse participants.

Talking related to reading

Reading and writing are higher-order mental processes (Kong & Pearson, 2003) and acquired through interaction with more knowledgeable others in the enactment of cultural practices (Brock & Gavelek, 1998; Gee, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, students are knowledgeable beings with their own theories of world (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Smith, 1975), not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge (Kong & Pearson, 2003). As learners construct meaning through collaborating with others, the meaning has both a cultural and social face (Kong & Pearson, 2003). The cultural face refers to the dispositions and experiences learners bring to the reading process and the social face refers to “give-and-take” of classroom talk about text (Kong & Pearson, 2003 p.90). Hence, due to the dialogic and interactive nature of learning and meaning making, the participation is both the goal and the means of learning (Dewey, 1916; Lave & Weigner, 1991; Rogoff et al., 1996).

As literacy is inseparable from the cultural and social context in which it occurs, sociocultural and sociolinguistic orientations are also pertinent (Bloome & Bailey, 1992; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Rogoff, 1990). In other words, as “interpretive communities” of students and teachers interact, alternate interpretations and divergent views may be forwarded that have also an impact on a person’s interpretation (Fish,
Thus, the interactions, among group members involve a reciprocity in which the actions and reactions of individuals are influenced by one another as they interpret the text (Gall & Gall, 1976). These interactions of individuals within a social environment are referred to as “events”. Meaning is then viewed as being located within the event rather than in an individual’s mind (Gee, 1992; Heap, 1992). Thus, literacy is viewed as primarily social endeavor (Bloome, 1985; Bloome & Green, 1992), and discussion is viewed as primarily component of the literacy process.

More specifically, from a literary standpoint, meaning is derived from the transaction that occurs between the reader, the text, and the context of the literary act (Bleich, 1978; Iser, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1938/1976, 1978). Thus, the interpretation of the reader are not static but continually shaped by transaction between the reader’s experiences and the new information acquired from the text. Under such circumstances the reader’s interpretation constantly evolves and the interpretation that each person brings to a discussion may ultimately be transformed and shaped by the thoughts and ideas of other group members. Student-to-student conversations help to identify and clarify interpretations of informational texts and that discussions serve to enrich and refine our understanding. Findings of studies (Almasi and Gambrell, 1994; Gambrell & Almasi, 1996; McMahon, 1992) support a social constructivist theory of reading that posits that literacy is a social act (Beach, 1994). As readers engage in sharing responses to informational texts in a social context, they construct new meaning as a result of interaction with others in the classroom community. The social constructivist view of reading is supported by a number of educational theorists who contend that there are important linkages between social interaction and improved reading comprehension.
(Gavelek, 1986; Short & Pierce, 1990). Furthermore, the social constructivist perspective is consistent with Vygotksy’s (1962, 1978) work which presents language as both a communicative tool and a means by which humans develop intellectually. While a social constructivist theory is readily acknowledged with regard to narrative text, it is equally important to informational texts. Opportunities to discuss informational texts within a social context are one way that students can begin to develop higher order language expression and knowledge of content material besides multi-layered interpretations (Vygotsky, 1978; Barnes, Britton & Torbe, 1990; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Marshall, Smagorinsky & Smith, 1994).

As students participate in discussions of text, there are many opportunities for cognitive, social, emotional and affective growth (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). When classroom cultures allow opportunities for authentic discussions, students’ perceptions of the literary process, as well as their literary competence, are affected in ways that reflect that culture. (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). In the past, typical classroom discussions relied heavily on the public communications or recitation models of interaction, with the teacher as the transmitter of information. Teachers talked and asked questions and students listened and answered teacher-posed questions (White, 1990). This type of teacher-centered instruction provides students with few opportunities to enter into the dialogue of learning. The teacher controls the timing, the structure, and the content of classroom talk, allowing students limited opportunities to develop what Rubin (1990) has referred to as a “response-ability” (p.28). If students are to develop critical and creative thinking skills, they must have opportunities to respond to text. The ability to respond to text, or response-ability, is socially mediated and is learned through a process of
socialization in the literacy community. Thus, response-ability is nurtured when students have opportunities to negotiate meaning with text and with other members of the interpretive community. By its very nature, response-ability requires social interactions centered around text. In many ways, response-ability reflects Vygotskian (1978) perspective that the ways in which we think are learned through our social interactions.

According to Straw and Bogdan (1993), this perspective “argues for socially based classrooms, classrooms that lead students to the negotiations that are the heart of meaning making in the act of reading” (p.4). The reanalysis of the National Assessment of Educational Progress database found that social interaction was positively associated with reading activity (Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach, 1995). In particular, students of all ages who talked with their friends and parents about what they read were more active readers than students who engaged in less discourse about their literate behaviors. This information is consistent with the findings of Morrow and Weinstein (1986) who reported that scope of reading increased when students and teachers participated in discussions and debate about the ideas present in the text they read. These findings suggest that students who talk about what they read are more likely to engage in reading. When students have the opportunity to discuss what they read they are also more likely to respond aesthetically by sharing their thoughts and emotions about the text they read it (Many & Wiseman, 1992).

Besides cognitive, social and emotional growth, talking helps to increase reading comprehension, vocabulary development and autonomy of learners. Discussing a reading text with a peer increases reading comprehension (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2001). While reading a print newspaper (Times), Rodriguez-Garcia (2001) compared the three
conditions of meaning making, unmodified reading text with no peer interaction (authentic news article without any peer), modified reading text with no peer interaction (elaborative version of native like baseline news article), and unmodified reading text with peer interaction (Rodriguez- Garcia, 2001), indicate that comprehension was highest among the peer interaction. Their performance was reported as significantly different from those who read the same text but without interaction. Peer interaction group is not significantly different from those who read modified version of the reading text. The findings of this study provide a strong evidence that for students of at least intermediate levels of language proficiency interacting with their peers over the content of an unmodified (authentic) text effectively aids when they have a specific task to perform.

In another study on reading comprehension Yano, Long, and Ross (1994) explored the relationship between L2 reading and negotiation studies addressing the effect on comprehension of modifying a text along the lines of interactional adjustments native speakers make in face-to-face conversation. They found that such modifications results in elaboration of texts because of “maintaining much of the original…complexity in both lexis and syntax, but compensating by clarifying message content and structure… and by adding redundancy” (p.193). This elaborative modification was found to be as effective as simplification for making texts understandable, in spite of the greater complexity of the modified text. Yano et al., argue, like Leow (1993), that simplification may actually work against language acquisition while “elaboration appears to serve the twin functions of most foreign land second language reading lessons: (a) improving comprehension and (b) providing learners with the rich linguistic forms they need for further language learning” (p.214)
Besides helping students to apply comprehension strategies and co-construct knowledge while reading, peer-peer dialogue also helps vocabulary gain. After reviewing a number of research studies, Ruddell (1994) concluded: “The evidence we have so far suggests that positive effects results from social interaction during word learning” (p.436). Klingner and Vaughn (2000) investigated how a group of Spanish-English bilingual elementary school students collaborated to build their own reading comprehension and that of their limited English Proficient (LEP) peers. Through a classroom technique known as collaborative strategic reading (CSR) 37 participants in the study were taught four readings strategies to aid their reading comprehension of a context-based text. The text was in English but students discussed the content of the text in both English and Spanish. Qualitative analysis of the students’ discourse showed that through interacting in their CSR groups, the fifth grade students assisted one another in vocabulary comprehension, finding the main idea and asking and answering questions about their text. Klingner and Vaughn reported that in each of the six cooperative learning groups, the students taught concepts and vocabulary to their peers. In some cases bilingual students provided translations for the LEP students. The authors concluded that in their peer groups, the students provided scaffolding for each other and that even the higher achieving students benefited from the group interaction. According to Klingner and Vaughn (2000), for scaffolding to occur, the important factor is not expertise but rather whether students are instructed in how to provide assistance to their peers, as they had been in this study. Pre- and Post- test measures of vocabulary indicated that the students made gains in their language learning. While the LEP students appeared to demonstrate little improvement as measured in the tests, they were able to provide closer
approximations to the correct answers than they had in the pretests. However, due to the scoring criteria used, these gains were not qualified.

Thirdly, discussion provides more autonomy to language learners. Within classroom discussion, the responsibility for learning is transferred from teacher to students. In such an environment students come to believe that they can control their own learning as they learn how to interact with one another (Alvermann, O’Brien, & Dillon, 1990; O’Flahavan, 1989; Slavin, 1990). Thus, students involved in discussions not only learn how to interact socially and develop communicative competence, but they learn to take responsibility for their own learning. When students share their thoughts with others their thoughts become an object that can be reflected upon. By sharing, these thoughts are made available to all group members for inspection and provide an opportunity to expand a student’s limited perceptions. Thus, student interaction in discussions may be an important factor in promoting the ability to think critically and to consider multiple perspectives (Prawat, 1989) and in developing the ability to confirm, extend, and modify their individual interpretations of text (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1992). Students also benefit from discussions because they often make discoveries about themselves as individuals and as learners (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). Their responses reflect their beliefs and attitudes as well as their learning strategies. When students are given autonomy to explore their own topics for discussions of literature, the quality of their discourse is enhanced. Students who participate in discussions of text not only engage in more dialogue about text, but also in quality of their discourse is more complex than the dialogue of students who participate in more traditional teacher-led recitations (Almasi, 1995; Almasi & Gambrell, 1994; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1992; Sweigart, 1991).
Additionally, when teachers provided greater opportunities for students to share their opinions about a text, the types of responses that students share broaden (Martinez, Roser, Hoffman, & Battle, 1992) and reflect their personal reactions to the text (McGee, 1992).

ESL reading instruction through memorization has tended to focus on linguistic forms such as word recognition, pattern drills and oral reading instead of constructing meaning through complex thinking and critical response (Au & Raphael, 2000; Fitzgerald, 1995; Valdes, 1998). Through creating time and opportunity for diverse learners to construct textual meaning both individually and collaboratively through reading, writing and discussing in which students can actively produce language and develop more complex linguistic tools for communicating with each other are important for ESL learners’ language development (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Garcia, 1993; Gersten, 1996; Kong & Pearson, 2003). Reading activities could provide data both on the processes involved and on the language development that results (Grallet, 1981; Nuttall, 1982; Silberstein, 1994) where such suggestions involve group work, as they often do, the study of the interaction that takes place between the group members in these encounters is likely to be a fruitful field for research in a joint of second language acquisition and L2 reading text (Devitt, 1997). Furthermore, much work has been done on the nature of face-to-face interactions between native and nonnative speakers (Devitt, 1997) and how children with limited literacy and linguistic ability begin to read and learn the L2 at the same time, through a process of writing their own stories (Zamel, 1992; Edelsky, 1982; Hudelson, 1984). Therefore, further research can focus on the nature of interactions occurring as nonnative adult readers create meaning from text and revising their writing (their summary of a
text) to enhance reading comprehension further in a small group of other nonnative adult speakers.

Currently, there is a resurgence of interest in small group discussions, particularly as it relates to reading comprehension and learning from text (Barton, 1995; Commeyras, 1994; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995; Villaume, Worden, Williams, Hopkins, & Rosenblatt, 1994; Wiencek & O’Flahavan, 1994). When students engage in small group discussions they have more opportunities to speak, interact, interpret, clarify, and exchange points of view than are afforded in other talk structures (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). In particular the research on collaborative learning has encouraged teachers to provide more opportunities for students to work and interact in small groups (Slavin, 1989; 1990).

Talking related to writing

Several studies underline the importance of the link between talk and writing (Zoellner, 1969; Kennedy, 1983; Hillocks, 1986). Britton (1975) states “the relationship of talk to writing is central to the writing process” (p.30). Therefore, writing, reading and classroom talk are vehicles of active inquiry rather than recitation and review: “talking and writing to learn” (Britton, 1969; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Writing of various kinds such as paraphrasing, outlining and summarizing, has been found to produce better comprehension and retention (Glover, Plake, Robert, Zimmer & Palmere, 1981; Bretzing, Kulhavey, 1979; Kulhavy, Dyer & Silver, 1975; Taylor & Berkowitz, 1980; Taylor & Beach, 1984). Here, the literature review includes the role of talking before writing and after writing as revision focusing on peer feedback in terms of the nature and impact of peer mediation, value of peer-response groups, comparing individual work to collaborative work and peer feedback to
teacher feedback, training to give feedback, and the impact of all these interactions on students’ language learning.

Talking in small groups before writing provides clarification of complex topics. Sweigart (1991) study comparing three treatments of lecture, class discussion and student-led in small groups of fifty eight college preparatory twelfth grade students about the effectiveness of expository talk and writing found that the small group discussion was significantly more effective in improving the students’ knowledge as they prepared to write. According to Sweigart (1991) the talk in student groups provided help to understanding of complex topics and help to writing about these ideas in the environment in which students see each other as collaborators “jointly constructing meaning rather than as competitors whose primary goal is gaining the teacher’s approval” (p.493).

On collaborative peer revision of writing as apart of a series of studies with adult learners of Spanish as a L2 (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996, 1998), Villamil & de Guerrero (1998) assessed the nature and impact of peer mediation on writers’ final version of two types of rhetorical modes of writing: narration and persuasion. Analysis of the audio taped pair interactions showed that the majority of the revisions (74%) worked on during peer-revision sessions were incorporated into the final drafts of the writer. When revising the narrative mode, the students paid almost equal attention to grammar and content (31% and 27 & of the total revisions, respectively), when was revision the persuasive mode, the greatest percentage of revisions (38%) were focused on grammar. Moreover, assistance through dialogue prompted further revisions and self-revisions after the sessions, indicating that peer learning was conductive to self-regulated behavior.
Additionally, De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) adopted a microgenetic approach to analyze 16 episodes of interaction between a “reader” and a “writer” of their previous data set on peer revision. The students who was “the reader” provided other-regulation by instructing or giving mini-lessons, which is a type of scaffolding mechanism by which students exteriorize their expertise and offer each other knowledge about language. The writer incorporated that majority of the changes discussed with his partner and, in some cases, further revised on his own. The reader also made progress in aspects of L2 writing and revising as well as in being able to provide peer assistance. As the researchers noted, the opportunity to talk and discuss language and writing issues with each other “allowed both reader and writer to consolidate and reorganize knowledge of the second language in structural and rhetorical aspects and to make this knowledge explicit for each other’s benefit” (2000, p. 65).

Within peer revisions the value of peer-response has also been investigated. For example, Tang and Tithecott’s (1999) study in a university college level ESL writing indicates that students tended to be positive about peer feedback but had some concerns (i.e., they did not feel comfortable or know how to criticize somebody else’s work). However, many students improved while participating in the sessions because they were engaged in socio-cognitive activities that enabled them to become aware of deficiencies in their texts and, in turn, to make revisions. Both less and more proficient students benefited from the peer response sessions and increased their language awareness and self-confidence.

Concerning the collaborative performance of ESL learners with intermediate and advanced proficiency level, Storch (1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b) compared individual
work to collaborative work and studied the nature of peer assistance and its impact on students’ language learning. Storch (1999) found that collaboration and the metatalk generated a positive effect on overall grammatical accuracy when students completed a series of grammar-focused exercises (a cloze- exercise, a text reconstruction, and a short composition). There were two isomorphic versions to these exercises (i.e., they featured in the same theme, the same genre and were the same length and had approximately the same number of similar grammatical items to attend to). The first version was completed individually and the other version was done in pairs (or small groups). In the cloze exercise, accuracy improved in verb tense/aspect choice (up from 58 % to 78%) and particularly in morphology (up from 35 % to 84%). In the text reconstruction exercise, a greater proportion items were detected and corrected amended when working collaboratively than when working individually (72 % vs. 63%) and fewer were left undetected (10% vs. 17%). With regard to the composition, those written in collaboration with peers demonstrated a lower average number of errors than compositions written individually (7.75% vs. 13.6) and a greater proportion of error-free clauses (61 % vs. 47 %). Storch indicated that pairs spent more time on task as they discussed the changes, which clearly resulted in more accurate performance.

Also, Storch (2000, 2001a, 2001b) noted that the nature of peer assistance is an important factor to consider in terms of the impact that collaborative work can have on learning. Detailed analyses distinguished two dimensions of dyadic interactions: equality (i.e., authority over the task) and mutuality (i.e., level of engagement with each other’s contribution). From these, Storch (2000, 200b) derived four distinct patterns. In the collaborative pattern, both students contribute to the task, assisting each other (i.e., the
expert role is fluid) and reaching co-constructed solutions acceptable to both of them. The dominant/ dominant pattern is one in which, though both students contribute to the task and thus the expert role is also fluid, assistance is often rejected as it is an attempt to control and dominate both students. In the case of the dominant/ passive pair there is one dominant student who appropriates the task and who directs his/her partner and allows little or no contribution. The fourth pattern, expert/novice, describes the interaction that takes place when assistance is provided predominantly by one of the participants (expert), which is generally accepted by the novice. Like the dominant/passive pattern, one participant seems to be more in control of the task but unlike the dominant/passive scenario, the expert participant acknowledges the novice and encourages participation.

Analysis which linked interactions to evidence of language development in the students’ writing showed that in collaboration and expert/novice dyads there were more instances suggesting evidence of transfer of knowledge (22 and 15 respectively) than in dominant/dominant or dominant/passive pairs (six in each). Furthermore, these latter pairs produced a larger number of instances showing either no transfer or lost opportunities (due lack to involvement or challenge) than the former pairs (Storch, 2000). Adopting a collaborative orientation resulted in evidence of co-construction, more LREs, extension of knowledge, provision of scaffolding assistance, and language development (grammatical accuracy and new lexical knowledge).

Similarly, DiCamilla and Anton’s (1997) analyses of the discourse of five dyads of Spanish L2 learners collaborating on a writing assignment emphasized the importance of co-constructed scaffolded support and guidance through peer dialogue. In particular, they pointed out how repetition allowed students to recognize features of the language
and to provide the necessary mediation to solve certain problems (of lexis, spelling, verb form, etc). Repetition was also used to appropriate the new forms and/or to help peers with the mastery of provided forms.

With regard to comparison of peer feedback to teacher feedback, Paulus (1999) analyzed the audiotaped interactions of eleven ESL students who participated in peer review sessions to give each other feedback on their writing. She compared the students’ revisions to three drafts of a persuasive essay and compared them to modifications resulting from teacher feedback. The results showed that students used both the peer and teacher feedback to revise their drafts. Fourteen percent of total revisions were made as a result of the peer feedback. The majority of the revisions (52%) were influenced neither by the peer nor the teacher feedback but by some other unknown source, including the self. Nevertheless, peer and teacher feedback accounted for more meaning-level revisions than those resulting from the other sources. Notably, 32% of the changes made to the second draft of the essay, written immediately after the peer revision session, were a result of peer feedback. Furthermore, the majority of these changes (63%) were meaning changes, which points to the fact, as Paulus noted, that “not only do students take their classmates’ advice seriously, but they also use it to make meaning –level changes to their writing” (p.281). That is, students find their peers’ advice useful. However, the overall result of Paulus’ study indicated that teacher feedback was used more often than peer feedback (see Nelso & Carson, 1998; Tsui &Ng, 2000) indicating a possible need to help and train students in how to provide peer feedback.

Concerning giving intensive training to language learners to enable them to participate fully in the process of collaboration as suggested by Tang and Titecott (1999)
and Paulus (1999), Berg (1999) compared the performance of two classes in a university-based Intensive English Program that were trained in how to provide peer response (the treatment group) to two classes in the same program that received no such training. No difference between the pretreatment writing had been found between two groups. The training provided students with the language and rationale for using peer response in the classroom. Trained peer response then resulted in a significantly greater number of meaning changes in the revised drafts as well as in significantly higher writing scores. Berg (1999) noted that peer response can teach students about academic writing because, in discussing each other’s essays, they have to apply knowledge about their thesis statements, the development of ideas and the types of text organization. Furthermore, this discussion of ideas (content) and language can help students “discover” viable text alternatives to unclear aspects of their writing (Berg, 1999, p. 232)

Much work has been done about the talk between a teacher and student (one to one) while revising the writing contributing to the language learning as co-constructed development in situated discursive practices (Young & Miller, 2004); and peer revisions (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996, 1998; Paulus, 1999; Storch, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Tang and Tithecott, 1999). Also as a grade level, several studies were done about talking and writing in elementary, secondary and middle school level students (see Dyson, 1993; Gambrell & Almasi, 1996; Farnan & Dahl, 2003). However, there is limited study focusing on adult, college level English language learners coming from different cultural backgrounds while reading and revising their writing as a group. Additionally, the studies presented in this literature review indicate that there is not enough study examining the role of interaction combining both reading and writing
skills within their discourse through social constructionist theoretical framework in which participants belonging to different cultural backgrounds make meaning.

**Group Dynamics in Nonnative Speaker- Nonnative Speaker(s) Talk**

**Speakers' language proficiency level**

Speakers’ language proficiency level influences their participations to the small group interactions in terms of how and how much they contribute. Ohta (2001) investigated how social interactions during interactive language learning tasks constitute learning. Working within a socio-cognitive framework, over an academic year, Ohta (2001) examined how peers of Japanese students learning working at their ZPD can assists each other’s performance in the classroom and thereby promote language development through scaffolding. Her findings supporting the previous findings (e.g., Kowal & Swain, 1997) indicate that even less proficient peers are able to provide assistance to more proficient peers and through dialogue, learners can construct utterances that are beyond what each could produce individually. Ohta’s analysis revealed that the assisted performance comes in the forms of peers’ waiting for each other to finish their utterances, promoting or through co-constructions. Peers also provided assistance in the form of recasts which are incorporated in later utterances. Not all of the peer interactions was error-free, but Ohta found, contrary to previous study by Mackey, McDonough and Kim (1999) that incorporation rates of incorrect utterances were very low. According to Ohta (2001), the benefits of peer interaction overweight any negative effects, as through scaffolding, learners build “bridges to proficiency” (2001,p.125). This scaffolding, together with the internalization of the language learning occurring in social interaction, supports L2 development.
Another study on learners’ language proficiency level and their contribution to peer and small group interactions was investigated by Swain and Lampkin (1995). According to their study, the higher ESL proficiency students are twice as likely to rely on applying a grammatical rule (48 per cent) than on what sounds right (24 per cent); whereas the lower-proficiency students are about equally as likely to rely on either (18 per cent vs. 15 per cent) to solve their linguistic difficulty. Swain and Lampkin (1995) state that in the grammatical analysis, there are important differences between higher-and lower-proficiency learners. The studies show that language proficiency level in a small group or pairs might influence participants’ contribution to construction of meaning making and interaction with each other during the collaborative learning. Within their discourse, these contributions and interactions should be investigated.

**Speakers' cultural discourses**

Besides language proficiency level, speakers’ culture might also influence their contribution to the interactions in small groups. Linguistically, people appear to be more polite than others; in that, people who grown up in these different cultures might prefer to give and take feedback differently (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Fraser, 1981; Olshtain, 1983; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989). Therefore, if a person with a positive feedback background works with a partner who is coming from a negative feedback background, there might be some problems not only in negotiation pattern, but also in the output (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983).

Sato's (1990) study on ethnic styles in English language learning classroom discourse provided exploratory results on the relationship between ethnicity and the distribution of verbal interaction in the classroom. Sato (1990) found a relationship
between ethnicity and the number of speaking turns taken by ESL students. That is, the Asian students in her study took considerably fewer speaking turns with their teachers than the non-Asian students. Moreover, the Asian learners self-selected less often than the non-Asian learners and their teachers were also called upon them less often. It is interesting that the Asian American and Caucasian American teachers behaved no differently towards the students. The Asian American teacher called less often on the Asian students than the non-Asian students despite any ethnic ties she may have had with them.

According to Glew (1998), there may be several reasons for Sato’s (1990) findings. Firstly, the Asian students may be restricted in their “turn-taking behaviors because they adhere to an interpretation of the student-teacher relationship which pre-allocates speaking rights in the classroom to the teacher” (p. 91). Secondly, such student-teacher perceptions may create a spiral effect in the classroom, whereby the teacher calls on the Asian students less than the non-Asian student because she perceives unwillingness among the Asian students to talk (Sato, 1990). As a result, the outcome of these two phenomena is that the ESL students who are unwilling to initiate discussion and rely on the teacher to allocate speaking opportunities end up completely losing those interaction opportunities (Glew, 1998). Indeed, “the role of interethnic differences...and interaction with native speakers remains an issue of fundamental importance” (Sato, 1990, p.117). Therefore, according to Glew (1998) further investigation is called for to not only go beyond the Asian-non-Asian dichotomy and identify potential differences among those within the ethnic groups represented in classes but also identify in detail the types of verbal interaction in which ESL students and their teachers participate in the classroom.
Additionally, this further research might examine these differences through student-student interactions within a small group of nonnative speakers coming from different cultural backgrounds. This further research might enhance the findings related to Asian students.

This research seeks to the meaning making process of adult English language learners from different cultural backgrounds during reading and writing discussions. Much has been written about talking and reading and talking and writing interactions and benefits of talk to have a better understanding of reading texts and having better writing skills having before and after talking process with pairs. Also, much work has been done on the nature of face-to-face interactions between native and nonnative speakers. What has not been described is the social discourse interaction of nonnative-nonnative speakers with different cultural backgrounds interacting with each other in small groups to accomplish the combined reading and writing tasks in English. How those learners make meaning of text through interactive language learning and how those learners’ prior experiences including their culture influence their meaning making need further investigation.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation of this study is social constructionism, which is based on Constructionism as an epistemology. Even though “constructionism” in some sources refers to “social constructionism”, in this study both of them will be used separately: While Constructionism refers to epistemology, social constructionism and constructivism refer to two theoretical perspectives within the Constructionist epistemology.

Epistemological background of social constructionism is Constructionism and it can be defined that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998 p.42). That is, according to Constructionism, meaning is constructed by human beings when they engage with the world that they are interpreting, it is not discovered (Crotty, 1998).

Social constructionism is one of two theoretical schools of Constructionism. The other one is constructivism. Constructivist perspective “emphasizes the instrumental and practical function of theory construction and knowing” (Schwandt, 1994 p.125). For that reason, constructivism is used for an individualistic understanding of the construction. However, social constructionism is used for socially impacted construction; in other words, it refers to “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (Crotty,
Also, language component of social constructionism is a differentiating factor (Gergen & Gergen, 1991):

From social constructionist perspective, it is not the cognitive processing of the single observer that absorbs the object into itself, but it is language that does so. Accounts of the world (in science and elsewhere) take place within shared systems of intelligibility — usually a spoken or written language. These accounts are not viewed as the external expression of the speaker’s internal processes (such as cognition, intention), but as an expression of relationships among persons. From this viewpoint, it is within social interaction that language is generated, sustained, and abandoned. . . The emphasis is thus not on the individual mind but on the meanings generated by people as they collectively generate descriptions and explanations in language (p. 78).

‘Social constructionism’ term derives from the works of Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) and from Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality*, but actually the idea went back to radical critics Hegel and Marx (Crotty, 1998). Through Marx’s economic ideas stating that social being determines consciousness; in other words, “who own the means of production in any society have the power to affect the kind of consciousness that obtains in that society” (Crotty, 1998) social constructionism started to being shaped. During its development process, social constructionism collaborated with different theoretical perspectives, such as phenomenology, existentialism, symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1964). Berger & Luckmann, (1967) transferred social constructionism from social psychology to sociology to develop a type of “social psychology” defining the assumptions of social constructionism. Therefore, it is possible to see different kinds of social constructionism within different fields and collaborated with different theoretical perspectives.

In this present study social constructionism refers to the social constructionism elaborated by Kenneth J. Gergen (1985). According to Gergen (1985), social constructionism is a movement toward redefining psychological constructs such as
‘mind’, ‘self’ and ‘emotion’ as socially constructed processes, to be ‘removed from the head and placed within the realm of social discourse’ (p. 271). Moreover, objective reality is in fact the product of social construction processes under the influence of cultural, historical, political, and economic conditions. As knowledge is socially constructed, not only knowledge can vary historically over time and differ across cultural groups that hold diverse beliefs about human development and nature, but also the social construction of knowledge varies.

The reason for applying Gergen’s social constructionism in this present study is due to two reasons: Firstly, Gergen is a social psychologist, who elaborated social psychologist Mead’s symbolic interactionist social constructionism (1934) combining with Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) sociological psychology based social constructionism. Hence, Gergen’s perspective of social constructionism is more up-to-date and it enables studying language to identify knowledge embedded with ideological, political and permeated with values (Rouse, 1996). Secondly, Gergen is one of the strong (radical) social constructionist argues that language is embedded in social practices or forms of life, which limit or close that form of life to others (Giddens, 1993; Payne, 1997). In other words, “the world … is constituted in one way or another as people talk it, write it and argue it” (Potter, 1996, p. 98); and “it is human interchange that gives language its capacity to mean, and it must stand as the critical locus of concern” (Gergen, 1994a, p. 263). Launching on the idea that access to knowledge is based on language and social interactions, social constructionism in this present study can shed a light into the meaning making discourses of English language learners who are coming from different
cultural backgrounds through analyzing the language they use while they are constructing meaning of a reading text and American culture.

Social constructionism in this present study serves as a theoretical perspective, which shapes mid-level and micro-level theories in literature review section, research questions, design of the study, interview questions, researcher’s role and interpretation of the data. For example, research purposes and questions of the present study are related to participants’ collaboration, social interaction, constructing of meaning, and each of participants contribution to this process. Hence, through the process social constructionist theory, as a theoretical perspective, guides the study to conceptualize the truth and knowledge.

**Purpose of The Study and Research Questions**

Purpose of the study and research questions are shaped by social constructionism as a theoretical perspective, which indicates that as human beings we are born into a world of meaning; we enter a social milieu in which a ‘system of intelligibility’ prevails; we inherit a ‘system of significant symbols’; and for each of us, when we first see the world in meaningful fashion, we are inevitably viewing it through lenses bestowed upon us by our culture (Crotty, 1998). Our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning and, by the same token, leads us to ignore other things. It is not only our thoughts, but also our emotions are constructed for us (Harre, 1986). Besides being shaped by the culture that we are born into, we also shape the culture as members: “society is actively and creatively produced by human beings, social worlds being ‘interpretive nets woven by individuals and groups’” (Marshall, 1994 p. 484). Therefore, in social constructionism, culture should be considered as the source rather than the result of human thought and behavior (Crotty, 1998) and language “rather than reflecting the
world, it generates it” (Witkin 1999, p. 5); language coordinates and regulates social life (Gergen, 1994).

Through social constructionism as a theoretical perspective that gives importance to culture, language and interaction, this qualitative study aims to investigate the interactions of adult, advanced-level English-language learners who are coming from different cultural backgrounds, and their meaning making process during reading and writing activities. Based on this research purpose, the following research questions will guide the study:

1. How do English language learners’ linguistic knowledge of L1 and English influence discussions?
2. How do students’ language and cultural experiences influence their interactions during discussions?
3. How does interactive language learning interfere language learning?

Subjectivity Statement

This subjectivity statement expresses my subjective position that results from a previous observation of the teacher that I work with for this present study. The statement also includes my previous experiences. I have both worked with Asian students, and had experiences of my own as a student who has attended group work activities during different periods of my education life. Furthermore, my career as an educator and views of teaching also influence this research.

First, my previous observation of the teacher that has participated in this present study indicated that this advance level reading and writing class was based on mostly teacher-talk rather than student-talk. During the Fall 2003 semester, I visited this teacher’s class to conduct an observation assignment for my course work. During this two-hour class observation, I realized that the course was based on teacher lecture and
students participated in the class only to ask for unknown words in the reading text and to answer the questions. There was not any group work, which might influence this study in a negative way. Even though my participants were different from those I initially observed, the teacher’s style of teaching is the same and the students might have difficulty adapting to the group work and discussions in this present study.

Secondly, my previous experiences, such as working with Asian students and being a former student who participated in group work activities at different periods of my education life, and my view of being a teacher might influence this present study. Working with Asian students (South Korean and Taiwanese) made me realize that when they are silent, it does not mean that they are not thinking or they do not understand what one said. Typically, also, they do not give any paralinguistic cues to the listener such as nodding or saying “hmm.” During the pilot study, there were some instances where I was repeating or modifying what I said, but some of the participants interrupted me saying, “I am thinking.” This suggests I interrupted their thinking process, which made me realize that while working with Asian students I had to be patient before making elaborations.

Furthermore, the course work that I took during my education at the University of Florida and in other schools made me aware of the importance of group work. However, I must admit that at some point I had difficulty to adapting to this activity format as a foreign language speaker of English. I had difficulty finding the right time to enter into conversations and to understand when the other speakers have finished. The reason for is that my educational experiences as an English language learner in Turkey did not include
enough group work activities. The curriculum design and teaching methods were based on mostly a teacher’s lecturing.

Lastly, being a teacher myself and my views of being a teacher might influence this present study. I view the teacher’s role as creating a language environment based on the student-centered rather than teacher-centered approach. As a teacher I would like to let the students find the answers first, rather than telling the answers. During this process, students might have some difficulties and confusion, but I think it is the process of learning. During this present study, the participants might look for my guidance and expect to me to tell them the answers. Instead I want them to try to find the answers first, and this practice may cause some frustrations for the participants. However, I think in time they might get used to it. Additionally, unlike their classroom teacher I am not a native speaker; therefore, I might lack first native speaker proficiency, which affects my teacher authority. If I tell every answer that I know before letting them discuss, this action will clash with my view (student-centeredness) of teaching and learning.

The Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with four participants of the EFL/ESL students attending to English Language Institute at the University of Florida (UF) in order to get some insights for this present study. The pilot study investigated the process of collaboration with a partner impacting on meaning making while reading online newspaper in English. The theoretical orientation was social constructionism and the data analysis method was Gee’s (1999) discourse analysis.

There were totally four participants: 2 male (Jeff and David), 2 female (Young Me and Chris). They were English Language Institute (ELI) students at the University of Florida. Three of the participants were South Korean (Jeff, Young Me, and David) and
one participant (Chris) was Taiwanese; all aged in their twenties. All of the participants except Jeff were attending the advanced level at ELI; Jeff was attending the upper intermediate level. All of the participants had been learning English for at least for 8 years and they spent most of this learning process in their native country where English is taught as a foreign language.

Data was collected through participant observations, interviews and archival research. During the participant observations, four participants were formed into two groups according to their schedules as David and Chris, and Jeff and Young Me. While they were reading an online newspaper together in a computer lab at UF, they were expected to explain their thinking procedures out-loud to their partner. These reading sessions, participant observation, happened three times lasting from 30 to 60 minutes per session. For reading activity, for the first session the online newspaper was chosen by the researcher (*The New York Times*) but the article was chosen by the participants. In the following sessions, second and third sessions, participants chose which online newspaper they would like to read from the list of the online newspaper options. During the first two reading sessions participants read each paragraph and then they discussed. For the last reading section both groups read the whole article first, which was followed by a discussion. These reading sessions and procedures recorded on audiotape and they were transcribed by the researcher. The participants checked all transcripts listening to the audiocassettes for the accuracy.

After each reading sessions, the participants were interviewed individually for member checking. These interviews were semi-structured, happened three times, lasting 30- 60 minutes each. The interviews were also recorded on audiotape, transcribed by the
researcher and the accuracy was checked by the participants. In each interview, I asked the same questions to the participants based on the social constructionist theoretical framework. Also, the sequence of the questions was designed from general questions to specific ones following Spradley’s (1970) words grand-tour and mini tour. For the archival research reading materials were retrieved from their original online newspaper links.

In order to analyze the interview data, I applied Gee’s discourse data analysis method (1999). The data was divided into meaning units, including a question asked for meaning making, discussion about it and the end of discussion with a conclusion. Then, using data I performed Gee’s six building tasks, which are semiotic building, connection building, political building, world building, activity building and socioculturally situated identity and relationships. As a last activity, I combined them to show the context that took place. Data representations were utilized in terms of emphasis, pauses, overlaps, and laughter to give the audience some idea about the context in which the meaning making process took place. In order to get an outsider’s view on the sample data analyzed according to Gee (1999), the data should always be triangulated by another graduate student.

Using the archival data for discourse analysis, I compared what each paragraph was about, how they were connected to each other and how they were structured (linear or nonlinear format). Linear format included a short introduction, some development sections and a conclusion. However, in there were nonlinear elements to the paragraphs that disrupted the linear organization; for example, there were several back and forth movements in presenting ideas. In the archival data, I also checked whether there were
any pictures, any font color change, and any hyperlinks; I analyzed how these functions operated within the entire discourse.

Findings

The data analysis through different sources (participant observations, interviews, and archival documents) revealed that meaning-making process was in a nonlinear form, actually in a spinal shape adding new information to the previous discussion points. Therefore, for reading activities, the reading instruction sequence (first activating background knowledge, second cultivating vocabulary, and then comprehension) defined by Anderson (1999) and Dixon & Nessel (1992) could be replaced with recursive movements in which the reading instruction features are integrated and developing at the same time, because meaning-making is not a linear path. Additionally, during meaning making processes participants used different strategies, such as guessing from context, using different forms of words, and activating background knowledge (cultural, experiential, and so forth).

The partners balanced their relative positions of power in different sections of the meaning making process. The data indicated that both Jeff and David felt themselves less powerful in vocabulary and figurative speech explanations as Chris and Young Me’s language proficiency levels made them a leader in those cases. However, the roles changed in favor of David and Jeff while explaining background knowledge. Also, during the first interviews David and Jeff were less powerful, through the third interview their power started to increase as they took role of giving background information to their partners. A participant whose vocabulary proficiency level was higher than the other either explained the meaning of the unknown vocabulary or she/he tried to guess from a context. Therefore, the partner with a higher vocabulary proficiency level had more
power in this section; the other participant balanced this power-struggle through giving background knowledge to the vocabulary proficient one. Hence, each participant equally participated to the meaning making processes. However, the power status changed very frequently between the participants during meaning making processes.

In terms of motivation, reading with a partner had a positive impact on the participants as it made reading more fun and enabled more interactions and discussion, such as guessing meanings of words, getting more detailed information from the text, realizing their partners’ different opinions about the same topic, and receiving corrections from a partner of one’s understanding of texts. All the participants believed that reading with a partner made them better able to figure out vocabularies, figurative speech and American culture. They felt more powerful, more motivated, and they were better able to enjoy reading together than they did reading alone even though it took more time than reading alone.

**Implications**

The pilot study had implications in terms of grouping participants and establishing participants’ and researcher’s roles. As a researcher my role as a participant was neither a teacher nor a controller. However, I had difficulty in establishing my role as a participant especially in the first meetings in which I was the only one who was asking questions at the end of long silent moments to involve participants in the conversation. Also during interviews, I always asked questions without expressing my own point of view as a participant. This relational authority might be overcome if I had been involved more as a participant through answering interview questions as a participant in the same way other participants were expected to participate, and having group interviews instead of individual interviews. In a group, when modification of the questions was required other
group members could explain the question. As group interviews might keep the conversation dynamic and self-regulated, other authority-based problems could also be solved. For example, having three individual interviews with the same questions tended to cause participants to answer questions in the same way (memorization). In some cases it was difficult to keep participants (i.e., Jeff) on the question. Therefore, I was asking the same questions looking for further explanation. However, through group interviews and group observations (instead of pairs) I could have participated more than simply serving as a regulator. Also, having the participants’ feedback as a group instead of peer debriefing about the data analysis would have been beneficial as it could give more participants more active role in the study.

Another implication of the pilot study is the pairing of the participants. In the pilot study the participants were paired according to their schedule and one pair was comprised of two South Korean participants, which makes unauthentic interaction. Two people shared the same culture and language spoke English while interacting each other. In the pilot study this focus was not realized. It was determined that for the present study it might be better if each participant in a group at least belongs to a different country even though the language might be similar; this mixing would establishing the authenticity in interaction. For further research, participants’ interactions should be investigated in small groups instead of pairs. Investigating culturally diverse students’ interaction in small groups, researchers’ role as a participant to those interactions and participants’ involvement into the data analysis process may provide further information about language learning.
The Setting

The advanced reading and writing class of the English Language Institute (ELI) is located at Normal Hall at University of Florida in Gainesville, FL. Gainesville, with a population of more than 198,000, is located in the north-central Florida county of Alachua. The University of Florida is one of the preeminent universities in the United States attracting students from all 50 states and from 100 countries (City of Gainesville, 2006). The University of Florida is a comprehensive university, offering degrees in most known fields of study. The campus extends over 800 hectares. It employs more than 4000 faculty members and trains more than 42,000 students at one time. The ELI is a self-supporting program of the University of Florida located on the historic University of Florida campus. The programs are based on nearly 50 years of second language teaching experience and research. The core classes include Listening/Speaking, Grammar, and Reading/Writing classes. Students are placed into levels for each skill at the beginning of each term according to their proficiency in each skill. The ELI also offers elective courses in TOEFL, Business English, U.S. Culture, Pronunciation, Conversation Strategies, and other special courses that vary by term (ELI, 2005). The primary mission of the intensive English program is to prepare international students for successful study at the graduate or undergraduate level in institutions of higher learning in the USA (ELI, 2005). Classes at the ELI are small, averaging 12 students, allowing very individualized instruction. Advance reading and writing classroom is located on the third floor of the Norman Hall at the Education building of University of Florida. In a long corridor on the left site all other classrooms are located. Advance level classroom is located in the middle section. In the classroom, the left side is covered with windows, the right side with dusty bookshelves that are empty. The front of the room has a blackboard in front of which is
the teacher’s desk which faces students whose desks form two lines of ‘u’ shape. Above the chalkboard there is clock facing the students. All chairs are old and made of wood. The floors are covered with bluish carpet. There are few cultural elements: a world map located behind the students’ sitting places on the right corner and a picture representing a view from Honduras located in front of windows on the left corner towards the chalkboard.

The participants participate in the reading discussion sessions from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. on Mondays at my office located at Norman Hall room number 356, which is very close to the classroom. The interviews also took place in the same place at 11:00 a.m. as it was very quiet and very close to the participants’ classroom. From 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. the participants had another session and it was easy for them to come to my office instead of looking for other places for the meeting. On Wednesdays from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. there were writing discussions and writing interviews from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the same place. The feedback session occurred in the same place.

The reason for choosing my office for reading and writing discussions instead of the classroom was that there were two other groups guided by the teacher besides the group of participants of this study in the classroom which interfered with tape recording during the first week of data collection.

**Participants**

Six English Language Institute students attending to the advanced level reading and writing class were chosen for this study. Their language proficiency has already been already assessed and grouped according to the ELI Language Proficiency Test, which is applied to all of the students enrolled at the ELI at the beginning of the each academic semester.
They were recruited by a teacher of advanced reading and writing class at the ELI. As I mentioned before, I have known the teacher from a course that I took during my Ph.D. program (Fall 2002, TSL 6371 Materials and Techniques in Teaching English as a Second Language) during which I observed his class. In the first meeting with the teacher, I explained the purpose of this present study to the teacher and he gave me a brief explanation about the participants, such as their nationality and their age range. In our second meeting, the teacher rated all the students in the class according to their language proficiency level (considering their verbal participation to the class and grammaticality of the works they submitted to the teacher) and according to their attendance rate on the class.

After eliminating the students who have low attendance rates in the class, first I grouped students according to their home country under the three main titles: European, Hispanic and Asian. Second, under these main titles, I grouped students according to their home country and then according to their gender. As there are Hispanic and European female participants, I have decided to include also female participants from Asian cultures. The reason for not choosing male Asian participants is that there would be only one male participants, which might influence the power balance during the discussions as well reported by Lee (1993). The reason for including their home country is that even though some students share the same or similar native language, their country which is part of their culture can enable them to bring their own culture and discourse into discussions and meaning making process.

The participants of this present study are Vanessa, Patricia, KyungOk, Masami, Isabel and Gosia, which are all pseudo names. Through the study the terms, Asian,
European and Hispanic refer to these participants specifically and the terms, Asian
culture, European culture and Hispanic culture also refer these participants’ cultural
background.

Table 3-1. Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>The teacher’s rating (1 is the best, 15 is the worst)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Masami</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>KyungOk</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Gosia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vanessa is 25 year old and she is from Honduras. She has been in the U.S. for five
months, and she has been learning English for eight years starting from pre-school. Her
native language is Spanish and she graduated from a college with a B.A. degree in
Industrial Engineering. She attended Catholic school in her country and she is interested
in psychology. A relevant interest of hers is watching American movies without any
translation, even though most American movies in her country are translated.

Patricia is an 18 years old from Venezuela. She graduated from high school and
came to the U.S. for language education. She has been in the U.S. for six months. She
attended Catholic school in her country. When she returns to her country, she wants to
continue her education through attending college. She is interested in fashion design and
make-up art but her mother wants her study for a more practical career. Her native
language is Spanish and she started learning English when she was 11 years old. She
stated that she loves English. While she rarely reads any magazines or academic papers in
English in Venezuela, at UF not only did she frequently reads them but also prefers
watching movies in English without any translation.
KyungOk is around 25 years old and she has been learning English since high school—for ten years. She majored in English literature and she was attending graduate school for her master degree in her country, Korea. She wants to enroll in an English language teaching program (ESOL/TESOL) to continue her graduate school life in the U.S. Her native language is Korean. She has been in the U.S. for six months.

Masami is 22 years old from Japan. Her native language is Japanese and she has been learning English for nine years, since she was 12 years old. She has been in Australia for one month and she has been in the U.S. for last eight months. She has graduated from a college in her country. In the U.S. Masami prefers watching movies without any translation while she needed translation in her country.

Isabel is 19 years old and she just graduated from high school. She is from Switzerland and her native language is French. Her mother’s native language is Spanish and her father’s native language is French. Isabel has been learning English for eight years starting from middle school and she has a great interest in learning languages. Besides French, she also knows German, Spanish and Italian. She has been in the U.S. for eight months and she is staying with her aunts in Gainesville. Besides attending the ELI, she also takes a piano course. While she rarely read anything in English in her country, here she frequently reads magazines, and academic articles in English and watches movies without any translation.

Gosia is 25 years old and she is from Poland. Her native language is Polish and she has graduated from a college in Poland with a B.A. degree in Marketing. She has been learning English for two years, starting at college and she has been in the U.S. for seven months. Besides taking classes at ELI, she is also attending marketing and business
courses offered by the University of Florida. While she was frequently watches movies in translation in her country, here she watches them without any translation. Her current boyfriend is a native speaker of English and she has been speaking with him in English. Unlike other participants, her English skills includes the ability to use colloquial words and phrases from everyday life, such as “come on guys” and “oh man” [Field notes, March 21, 2005].

Data Collection

The data collection methods were participant observations, semi-structured interviews, archival data collection and a feedback session. The reason for using different data collection methods was to triangulate the data in terms of between method triangulation (Denzin, 1970). The participant observations for both reading and writing discussions provided insights for the participants’ interaction process with each other and for the role of participants’ socio-cultural identity for their comprehension and meaning making process. Semi-structured interviews served as a member checking for the participant observations and they also answered questions about how students’ meaning making during reading and writing discussions influence their writing and how interactive language learning influence English language learning (benefits, difficulties, and so forth). Archival research helped the documentation of products studied (i.e, reading text) and created during this study (i.e., journals, summaries, corrected summaries). It also helped getting more detailed information, doing member check and triangulated the data, such as participant journals. As this study is guided by the social constructionist theory, the participants’ contribution to the research process has been maximized through a feedback session, in which participants analyzed the data with the researcher and provide their feedback and comment to her.
As the theoretical framework of this present study is social constructionism, as a researcher during the data collection processes I was one of the participants of the group: another language learner coming from different cultural background, not a teacher. Like other group members, I wrote my own summary of the text and share it with the group for corrections and feedback, answering the interview questions, asking the words that I did not know within the reading text, sharing my knowledge with them and so forth. The total data collection process took five weeks. The first week was the trail activity for the participants, the teacher and me. This trial activity could not be included into this present study as the tape recording quality was very bad and participants did not attend to the activity regularly (e.g. they did not come to class regularly, they did not submit their work on time or at all). Also, there was miscommunication between the participants and me in terms of the directions related to the activities. Therefore, the real data collection started the following week as they have been showed in the Tables below.

The reading texts were about various topics. The first reading is “To spank or not to spank” an article published in Gainesville Sun on October 16, 2002 and retrieved from the online version of the newspaper on April 15, 2003 by Steve (the teacher) (see Appendix). It is two pages long and the paragraphs are very short usually two or three lines. The article written in argumentative style presents two sides who are in favor and against to spanking. The second reading text is taken from a book written by Luigi Barzani (see Appendix). The title of the book is “The Europeans”, which includes seven chapters: The Elusive Europeans, The Imperturbable British, The Mutable Germans, The Quarrelsome French, The Flexible Italians, The Careful Dutch, and The Baffling Americans. The taken part is about Americans, last chapter The Baffling Americans
focusing on what makes an American an American. This reading text is one page long including three paragraphs and there is no title on the top of the page. The last reading text is a PDF document taken from the University of Florida web page and the article is titled “In the classroom, Life experience, UF students learn about life by studying the culture of death” with a picture of Susan Bluck who offers this course at UF (see Appendix). Written by Staci Zavattaro this one page biography explains what the course is about, what kind of activities it includes and students’ opinion about the course.

Table 3-2. Week1, Group1: Hispanic & European Participants (Patricia, Vanessa, Isabel and Gosia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
<th>Archival research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Reading “To spank or not to spank”</td>
<td>Read the text and discuss</td>
<td>Group interview about reading discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Writing summaries in the computer lab during reading and writing class and sending it to group members</td>
<td></td>
<td>journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Writing discussion The summary of “To spank or not to spank”</td>
<td>Read the summaries and discuss</td>
<td>Group interview about writing discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Rewriting summaries in the computer lab during reading and writing class and sending it to group members</td>
<td></td>
<td>journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-3. Week2, Group 2: Asian & European Participants (KyungOk, Masami, Isabel and Gosia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
<th>Archival research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Reading “The Baffling Americans”</td>
<td>Read the text and discuss</td>
<td>Group interview about reading discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Writing summaries in the computer lab during reading and writing class and sending it to group members</td>
<td></td>
<td>journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3-3. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
<th>Archival research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Archival research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Writing discussion</td>
<td>The summary of “The Baffling Americans”</td>
<td>Read the summaries and discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Rewriting summaries in the computer lab during reading and writing class and sending it to group members</td>
<td></td>
<td>journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-4. Week 3, Group 3: Hispanic & Asian Participants (Patricia, Vanessa, KyungOk and Masami)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>“In the classroom, Life experience, UF students learn about life by studying the culture of death”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Writing summaries in the computer lab during reading and writing class and sending it to group members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Writing discussion</td>
<td>The summary of “In the classroom, Life experience, UF students learn about life by studying the culture of death”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Rewriting summaries in the computer lab during reading and writing class and sending it to group members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-5. Week 4: Feedback session, all participants (Masami, KyungOk, Gosia, Isabel, Patricia, Vanessa)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After all data collection and preliminary data analysis ends, 60 minutes</td>
<td>Asking some sections of data to participants, presenting my findings, having discussion and getting feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Observation

In this present study Danny L. Jorgensen’s (1989) participant observations is used for reading discussions and writing discussions. As a researcher, in each observation I
had the membership role (Jorgensen, 1989) and my involvement was overt (with the knowledge of insiders). Reading discussions included silent reading of a text (each time different text); asking unknown words, meaning of sentences, sentence structures; talking about the main idea and supporting ideas; expressing individual thoughts and experiences and so forth. Writing discussions included reading each others’ summaries; correcting their grammar; asking for clarifications; giving suggestions; and organization and so forth. The purpose of both reading and writing observations is to provide answers to how participants coming from different cultural backgrounds make meaning while reading and writing through interactive learning and how participants’ socio-cultural identity play a role in their comprehension and meaning making process. There were three reading observation and three writing observation which will take 45 to 60 minutes each of them.

Reading discussions were done on Mondays at class time; the next day (Tuesday) during the Reading and Writing class (at a computer lab), the participants wrote their summaries in the computer lab. On Wednesdays writing discussions were done at class time. On Thursdays the participants during their computer lab class of Reading and Writing course rewrote their summaries. This weekly cycle was followed with different group combinations with six participants for three weeks: The first week the first group will include Hispanic and European participants (Vanessa, Patricia, Gosia and Isabel, from Honduras, Venezuela, Poland and Switzerland). The second week the group included European and Asian participants (Gosia, Isabel, KyungOk and Masami, from Poland, Switzerland, South Korea and Japan). The third week the group included Asian and Hispanic participants (KyungOk, Masami, Vanessa and Patricia, from South Korea, Japan, Honduras and Venezuela).
All of the reading and writing observations took a place in my office located very close to the class. All the discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Also, after each participant observation, the researcher kept field notes and extended notes about each session.

Interviews

Other data collection method, semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996), were also employed in this study to provide insights for the participant observations and to answer the questions about how students’ meaning making during reading and writing discussions contribute to their writing and how interactive language learning influence English language learning (benefits, difficulties, and so forth).

These interviews were done following the observations of reading and writing discussions. Totally there were six interviews and each interview lasted 45-60 minutes with each group in my office located very close to the Reading and Writing class at ELI. Interview questions were focused on social constructionist theoretical frame (see interview questions in appendix). Therefore, the questions were included some key words reflecting the theoretical frame, such as “role”, “participating” and “collaboration”. Similar to the pilot study, in this study the sequence of the questions was designed from general questions to specific ones following Spradley’s (1970) words grand-tour and mini tour. (See Appendix for the interview questions and interview guide).

Different from the pilot study in which I interviewed with each group member individually, in this present study I have interviewed with the groups who have participated to the study (first week Hispanics and Europeans, second week Europeans and Asians and lastly, Hispanics and Asians). All interviews were recorded on an audio-tape and transcribed by the researcher.
Archival Data Collection

Archival research is another data collection method (Hill, 1993) that was employed in this study. Archival documents were collected simultaneously during the participant observations, interviews and the feedback session. The archival data included the participants’ summaries (first and rewritten), their group members’ notes on that summaries (each group member has copies of other group members’ summaries), their journals (two times each week), the researcher’s field notes, the reading texts given to the groups, teacher’s feedbacks on participants’ summaries, the researcher’s field notes.

Feedback Session

The last data collection method is the feedback sessions (Kvale, 1989). After observing the groups for both reading and writing discussions and interviewing with them after each discussions, there was a feedback session which included whole group members who participated to this study. For this feedback session all participants and I came together to analyze the data together and review the findings of the study with the researcher. As this study is guided by the social constructionist theory, the participants’ contribution to the research process has been maximized through this feedback session. This feedback session also took place in my office located at Norman Hall very close to the Reading and Writing class and it took 60 minutes. This session was also audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

Discourse Analysis

In this study the data analysis method is Discourse analysis (Gee, 1999, 2005), which is used as a method or set of tools for doing qualitative research developed in the sociology field emphasizing language in-use. The reason for using Gee’s discourse analysis in this study is that the research questions of this study investigate participants’
language use, meaning making while learning English and American culture interwoven with their own and other group members’ cultural and social discourses. In that, Gee’s tools for discourse analysis for both linguistic and social structures can serve to investigate this purpose. Social constructionism as a theoretical background and discourse analysis (Gee, 1999, 2005) as a data analysis method will guide this present study. As James Gee (1992, 1996, 2001) combined discourse analysis with the literacy field, I chose Gee’s (1999/2005) discourse analysis method in this study. Different from the pilot study in which participants took a medium role, in this present study participants have taken a major role through participating to the data analysis. Hence, participants have contributed to the study during the whole process of data collection, and data analysis applying social constructionist theoretical perspective at each section of this study.

There are two different conceptions of discourse analysis: discourse analysis used as a “unified body of theory, method, and practice goes by that name”; and discourse analysis used as “a method or set of tools for doing qualitative research” (Gee et al., 1992). In this present study the second concept will be considered as a Discourse analysis.

Also, within this second concept of Discourse analysis there are different variations evolved in the different disciplines: linguistics, cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics and poststructuralism, and sociology (Potter, 2002). Firstly, in Linguistics field discourse analysis has been applied to studies on sentence or utterance cohere into discourse aiming at duplicating on a wider canvas the success of linguistics analyses on units such as sentences (Brown & Yule, 1983). Secondly, discourse analysis in Cognitive Psychology
focuses on mental scripts and schemata are used to make sense of narrative. In other words, it answers to: “Do people work with story grammars to understand narratives in the way they use sentence grammars to understand sentences” (van Dijk & Kintch, 1983)? Similar to linguistics, the aim is to duplicate some of the success of work on grammar in the psychological domain. Thirdly, in Sociolinguistics discourse analysis focuses on interactions, such as classroom interaction in which typical interaction patterns in teaching based around “initiation- response- feedback” structures (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). The aim of discourse analysis in this discipline is to produce a model that would make sense of discourse structure in a whole range of different settings (Coulthard & Montgomery, 1981). Fourthly, in poststructuralism a very different variation of discourse analysis developed, called as “continental discourse analysis” in order to differentiate it from its rather more strait-laced Anglo-Saxon counterparts. Associated with Michael Foucault, this version of discourse analysis is less concerned with discourse in terms of specific interaction as with how a discourse, or a set of “statements”, comes to constitute objects and subjects. The last variation of discourse analysis developed in the field of sociology and more recently in social psychology and communications (Billig, 1992; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). There are some differences between this one and the other variations. For example, in this variation the cognitivism of the work in linguistics and cognitive psychology is rejected because it is very difficult to properly address how discourse is oriented to action (Edwards, 1997). Also, this latest version criticizes the discourse analysis in sociolinguistics as it is based on mechanistic linguistic analysis and inattentive to the complex social practices that take place in classrooms and other
discourses. Additionally, the latest variation, though it was influenced by Foucauldian approaches to discourse, states similar doubts about the discourse analysis in poststructuralism (Potter, 2002). Among these different variations of discourse, none of them is uniquely “right” because different variations might fit different issues and questions better or worse than others; and different approaches sometimes reach similar conclusions though using somewhat different tools and terminologies connected to different “microcommunities” of researchers (Gee, 1999). In this study the focus is on the latest discourse analysis, which has developed in sociology emphasizing language-in-use. Therefore, when I state “discourse analysis”, I am referring to this version. To sum up, with the discourse analysis term in this study I am referring to the ‘discourse analysis’ which is used as a “method or set of tools for doing qualitative research” (Gee et al., 1992) and the one that is developed in sociology emphasizing language-in-use; specifically Gee’s (1999, 2005) discourse analysis.

According to Gee’s (1999, 2005), discourse analysis is the analysis of language, as it is used to enact activities, perspectives, and identities. General principles of discourse analysis is that “rule-governed and internally structured human discourse is produced by speakers who are ineluctably situated in a sociohistorical matrix, whose cultural, political, economic, social, and personal realities shape the discourse; and discourse itself constitutes or embodies important aspects of that sociohistorical matrix. In other words, discourse reflects human experience and, at the same time, constitutes important parts of that experience. Thus, discourse analysis may be concerned with any part of human experience touched on or constituted by discourse” (Gee et al., 1992 p.229). As it is understood from its definition and general principles, discourse analysis focuses on
“Discourse” and “discourse” in language. “discourse” with a “little d” refers to “how language is used “on site” to enact activities and identities” (Gee, 1999, p.7). In other words, language alone is “little d”. “Discourses” with a capital “D,” refers to “different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language “stuff,” such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others” (Gee, 1999, p.7). In other words, Discourses with a capital “D,” is one’s identity kit shaping one’s way of speaking, thinking, and behaving in the world so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize as being themselves (Alvermann, 2000).

According to Gee (1999), we are all members of many different Discourses, which often influence each other in positive and negative ways, and which sometimes collaborate with each other to create new ones. For example,

When you “pull off” being a culturally-specific sort of “everyday” person, a “regular” at the local bar, a certain type of African-American or Greek-Australian, a certain type of cutting-edge particle physicist or teenage heavy-metal enthusiast, a teacher or a student of a certain sort, or any of a great many other “ways of being in the world,” you use language and “other stuff” – ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, together with other people and with various sorts of characteristic objects, symbols, tools, and technologies – to recognize yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways. In turn, you produce, reproduce, sustain, and transform a given “form of life” or Discourse. All life for all of us is just a patchwork of thoughts, words, objects, events, actions, and interactions in Discourses (Gee, 1999 p.7).

Discourse analysis combines both these linguistic and social structures features within itself. According to Gee (1999), discourse analysis indicates that humans “recognize” certain patterns in our experience of the world. These patterns include one of
the many “situated meanings” of a word. Words involve explanation of these patterns (Anglin 1977; Keil 1979, 1989), but different social and cultural groups, different age groups and genders, have different “explanatory theories” about these words. Moreover, all these theories are shaped by “status”. In other words, these theories are rooted in the practices of the sociocultural groups to which the learner belongs. Since these theories are rooted in the practices of socioculturally defined groups of people, they are called as “cultural models” (D’Andrade 1995; D’Andrade and Strauss 1992; Holland and Quinn 1987; Shore 1996; Strauss and Quinn 1997). Even though people are shaped and shapes cultures, there is always interactions because “bits and pieces of cultural models are in people’s heads (different bits and pieces for different people), while other bits and pieces reside in the practices and settings of cultural groups and, thus, need not take up residence inside heads at all” (Gee, 1999, p. 43).

It is suggested that in interpreting data in discourse analysis, there are two kinds of components: social structure (macro level tools, task buildings), and linguistic structures (micro level tools) (Gee, 2005). Among six task builders (significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign system & knowledge), many of them have been applied to the data but in some cases it could not be possible to identify all of them. Linguistic structures, including function words, content words, information, lines and stanzas have been considered. Stress and intonations were not applied because Gee’s (2005) suggestions are for native speakers of English; however, the participants of this study are coming from different language backgrounds with different stress forms, and as a researcher I do not know these various language and stress formations and their significance in their cultures.
As suggested by Gee (2005), all the data was first transcribed. As data analysis method is discourse analysis, in the transcriptions (both observations, and interviews) data representation was utilized in terms of presenting emphasis, pauses, overlaps, and laughter to provide a context that meaning making processes took place. Secondly, within the data stanzas meaning units were identified based on situated meanings, discourse models, social languages, discourses and conversations (Gee, 2005). Then stanza lines were identified, including function words, content words and information. These linguistic features provide an answer to how discourses, social activities, socially situated identities, discourse models are being designed linguistically in the data (Gee, 2005).

Thirdly, for each stanza twenty-six questions identifying six building tasks were asked. These questions helped me to find situated meanings, discourse models, social languages, discourses and conversations showing how social activities and socially situated identities are being enacted (Gee, 2005).

After finding answers to these questions, themes (motifs) were created and the analysis was organized to address to the research questions of the present study (Gee, 2005). The findings were compared with the archival data including the participants’ summaries, journals and the reading text as data triangulation.

Validity

In Discourse analysis, validity does not “reflect reality in any simple way” (Mishler 1990; Carspecken, 1996, Gee, 2005) because “reality” is not only constructed (Hacking, 2000); meaning that both human construction and what is “out there” beyond human control play a role in construction of reality (Gee, 2005; Hacking, 2000). Also, because language as reflexively related to situation and discourse in return reflect the language, analyst “interprets his/her data in a certain way and those data so interpreted, in turn,
render the analysis meaningful in a certain way and not others” (Gee, 2005 p.113).

Therefore, as Gee (2005) suggests validity should be taken to be something that different analysis can have more or less and validity is not for “once and all” but it is open to further discussions and dispute. According to Gee (2005) validity for discourse analysis is based on four elements:

*Convergence:* a discourse analysis is more, rather than less, valid (i.e., “trustworthy”), the more the answers to the twenty-six questions above converge in the way they support the analysis or, put the matter the other way around, the more the analysis offers *compatible* and *convincing* answers to many or all of them.

*Agreement:* answers to the twenty-six questions above are more convincing the more “native speakers” of the social languages in the data and “members” of the Discourses implicated in the data agree that the analysis reflects how such social languages actually can function in such settings. The native speakers do not need to know why or how their social languages so function, just that they can. Answer to the twenty-six questions are more convincing the more other discourse analysts (who accept our basic theoretical assumptions and tools), or other sorts of researchers (e.g., ethnographic researchers), tend to support our conclusions.

*Coverage:* the analysis is more valid the more it can be applied to related sorts of data. This includes being able to make sense of what has come before and after the situation being analyzed and being able to predict the sorts of things that might happen in related sorts of situations.

*Linguistic detail:* the analysis is more valid the more it is tightly tied to details of linguistic structure. All human languages are evolved, biologically and culturally, to serve an array of different communication functions. For this reason, the grammar of any social language is composed of specific forms that are “designed” to carry out more than one function. Part of what makes a discourse analysis valid, then, is that the analyst is able to argue that the communicative functions being uncovered in the analysis are linked to grammatical devices that manifestly can and do serve these functions, according to the judgments of “native speakers” of the social languages involved and the analyses of linguists. (p.113)

In this present study Gee’s (2005) these four validity elements were applied through answering twenty-six questions about task buildings as convergence and the agreement of these answers were discussed with the participants during the feedback session (agreement and coverage). Also, linguistic details supported the analysis through
applying Gee’s (2005) linguistic structures (micro level tools) to the data to support the social structure (macro level tools, task buildings).

Limitations

The possible limitations of the study are related to my subjectivity, theoretical perspective, data collection, data analysis and setting. Firstly, related to my subjectivity as a researcher I do not know specific knowledge about Hispanic, Asian and European cultures. Even though I have completed several studies with the Asian students coming from Taiwan and South Korea, there might be some cultural points that I might not understand well. However, this limitation was overcome by the feedback session that I have conducted with the participants. Additionally, my subjectivity towards the classroom teacher as he considered this study as an “experiment” in his class and as through his authoritative figure indicated that I could involve the class within some limitations. In other words, he did not want to make changes in his curriculum and he did not want to spend much time on the activities, which might be required by this study. Also, he has never applied group work activities before in his class; therefore, participants might have had difficulty in adapting to the group work and working with their group members. As the interaction in the classroom is teacher to student and student to teacher, participants might get used to getting a correct answer to their questions immediately as they asked to the teacher. However, during the group work activity some questions might not be answered and this situation might create frustration. Secondly, theoretical perspective of this study, which is social constructionism, limits this study as knowledge is constructed is specific to the group members including me. In other words, meaning is situated within this discourse because in a social constructionism framework individuals and individual meaning-making are relational to groups. Thirdly, data
collection methods include audio recording and the researcher’s field notes which might exclude some extralinguistic features within the discourse. Also, as I am the only researcher in the field, I might not give my whole attention to the various events that are happening at the same time. In terms of the participants, the participants in this present study turned to be all female and aged from 17 to 26, this study can provide insights for these participants’ discourses. Further studies can work on mixed gender groups and different age groups’ interactions and meaning making processes.

As data analysis, discourse analysis is employed in this study in a rubric that suggests that reality is represented through language in transcriptions. Studying a group interaction provides a high possibility to have more overlaps in speech which might result in inaccurate or incomplete transcriptions. Lastly, the setting had to be my office for data collection instead of the classroom, especially for participant observation, as there were two other groups in the class which caused so much noise that it almost made the recording impossible. Further research might investigate the interaction within a classroom with teacher presence.
CHAPTER 4
LINGUISTIC PATTERN OF DISCUSSION

This chapter uses a linguistic perspective to address patterns within the participants’ small group reading and writing discussions. Firstly, I will explain the language pattern of reading discussions. During the reading discussions participants focused on language to decode words (Word Attack) in the reading texts. In this process, first language and proficiency level of English morphology and lexicon affected their meaning making of the reading texts. Secondly, I explain the language pattern of discussions about writing. During the writing discussions, participants focused on language while discussing grammar and syntactic structure of their summaries on reading texts. Through an analysis of the writing discussions two major topics emerged which made participants focus more on language issues: differences in syntactic structures of first language and English (L2), and challenges in translating culturally embedded concepts and idioms from first language to English (L2).

To close this chapter I summarize the findings related to linguistic pattern of discussions in reading and writing under “Participants’ Explorations About Their Language Learning with a Linguistic Focus.” In the next chapter I address the social pattern of discussing reading and writing. Later, in chapter 6, I will connect the linguistic and social-cultural results of this research together in order to arrive at some tentative conclusions on how the small group interactions may support understanding of the texts, writing summaries, and how the group interactions may support L2 acquisition.
Language as the Focus in Reading

During the reading discussions, participants gave more importance to encoding unknown words in the texts either directly (through asking unknown words to group members) or indirectly (through content discussions). Due to participants’ overemphasis on unknown vocabulary, their perception of reading comprehension was subjected to Word Attack in which participants were working on constructing meaning of words in the reading texts.

Participants engaged in group discussions, working on unknown words to aid their understanding of the reading text. When language learners struggle to comprehend a text it is a natural process of learning for them to ask questions about grammar and vocabulary (Blyth, 2003). However, in this study, this process of learning was inhibited for some participants because of their hesitancy to ask their group members too many questions about unknown vocabulary and grammatical structures. They were also reluctant to ask for assistance in coming up with background knowledge for the topic. For instance, Masami stated that she did not understand the text because there were too many unknown words for her to handle on her own or to ask for the help of group members. Even though she looked for their meaning in a dictionary at home, she could not understand some of their meanings. Additionally, as Masami could not understand the whole text due to the unknown words, she tended to use almost the same vocabulary and syntactic structures of the reading text in her summary, such that she might be accused of as plagiarism (Brown, 2004; Fox, 1994; Kern, 2003). However, the reasons behind Masami’s act are both linguistic and cultural. It is linguistic because she lacks trust in her English language skills and thus in her ability to summarize the text clearly (Fu, 2006). It is cultural because of the scholarly tradition in which she has been trained may not
construe repeating the original passages of the text as a form of plagiarism (Pennycook, 1996). As the study progressed Masami adjusted to the scaffolding in the discussion groups and she overcame the linguistic and cultural issues that prevented her from asking more questions (see Education system in Chapter 5).

Group members scaffolded each other when they were working on Word Attack in the reading texts. In this scaffolding process, similarities between participants’ first languages and English (L2), and their language proficiency of English in morphology and lexicon combined to facilitate their contribution to the discussion and meaning making.

Differences Between First Language and English Inhibit Decoding Words

The participants in this study came from diverse language backgrounds (see Methodology): Spanish (in Honduras and Venezuela), Polish (in Poland), French and Italian (in Switzerland), Japanese (in Japan), Korean (in South Korea) and Turkish (in Turkey). The languages of the participants belong to different genealogies as summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ names</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Language families</th>
<th>Language root</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Indo-European</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Indo-European</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gosia</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>Indo-European</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>French, Italian, and German</td>
<td>Indo-European</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masami</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Considered a possible Altaic or Japonic</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KyungOk</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Considered a possible Altaic or Japonic</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yildiz (the researcher)</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>Ural-Altaic</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hispanic and European participants were able to guess some unknown words and concepts correctly in the reading texts as their L1 shares the same language root, Latin, with English. European and Hispanic participants also had an advantage in encoding
unknown words in the reading text due to positive transfer, whereas other participants’ word encoding was inhibited due to the differences between the language root of English and their first language family (Ellis, 1994). For example, KyungOk whose first language is Korean had difficult in guessing the meaning of “immutably” in the text as highlighted below:

_The United States has been compared to a man on a bicycle, who will collapse if he stops pedaling and moving ahead-unlike other, older nations, which are what they are immutably, whether standing still, going backward, or advancing. In its relentless pursuit of ultimate and unreachable perfection, it has been described as a daring experiment, one generation ahead of everybody else, the last word in modernity, the future that works, the next century._... [2. reading text, Baffling Americans]

As KyungOk could not decode the word on her own, she asked to the group:

`=>33 O: first “immutably” in the first line in 1,2,3 (counting) paragraph [line]
34 I: yeah it is something that doesn’t change that stays the same
35 O: doesn’t change?
36 I: yeah, we have the same word in French so, that is kind of easy for me.
[2. reading discussion]

Isabel explained the meaning of “immutably” (adv.) to group members by referring to the same word in French “immuablement” (adv.), which is her native language. Isabel applied a cognate strategy, that is, she looked for similarities between the English word and a word in her native language (Birch, 2002; Ellis, 1994). Hence, KyungOk to was able to overcome her disadvantage in encoding words that were dissimilar between her first language and English, because Isabel was able to provide scaffolding.

The similarities between European and Hispanic’s primary languages to English also helped Hispanic and European participants guess the meaning of some concepts shared in the Western languages and cultures. As language and culture cannot be separated, the similarities between the languages can also be observed in their cultures (Brown, 2000; Hymes, 1974; Lado, 1957; Sapir and Whorf, 1964). In that sense, sharing
the same language root also provides connection to some concepts, which are developed in the Western culture. Learners with different cultural backgrounds may lack knowledge of a word’s social, political, or religious connotations (Birch, 2002). For instance, the concept “pragmatism” which is developed by Jean Paul Sartre in France is cited in the second reading text, referring to the crucial role of practicality in American life style and culture. For the European participants understanding this concept was easier compared to Asian participants, as the concept was created within Euro-American culture and philosophy. Hence, European and Hispanic participants explained the meaning of “pragmatism” to Asian participants through elaborating their explanations with examples.

Participants’ English Morphology and Lexicon Proficiency Level Influence Decoding Words

In addition to the effects of first language on the construction of word meanings in the reading texts, participants’ English (L2) morphology and lexicon proficiency level also influenced the process of encoding words. While participants with lower language proficiency of English morphology and lexicon asked about the meaning of unknown vocabulary, participants with higher language proficiency explained the meaning to other group members. In addition, participants with higher language proficiency in English gave suggestions to group members about better word usage in their summaries during the writing discussions. During the word encoding process, generally high-proficient participants with knowledge on English morphology and lexicon provided a scaffolding for students who lacked similar proficiencies.

For example, Masami had difficulty in understanding the word “engage” as a verb form in the reading text given below:

deadth and life, students often walk away from the course with a better understanding of themselves.
Bluck often engages her students in candid discussions about death at the personal and societal level. Close to September 11, for instance, they talked about war and terrorism. From then on, that tone created a basis for frank discussions about many facets of death, often controversial. [3. reading text]

In order to solve this problem, Masami asked it to the group:

=>114 M: what does it mean “engage”
115 O/ V: where?
116 Y: engage?
117 M: in this sentences
118 P: ‘motivate’ like
119 M: ‘motivate’?
120 P: like…
121 V: like ‘to get involved.’
122 M: ‘convince’?
123 Y: do you know the ‘engagement’?
124 M: yeah. Of course
125 V: it is same thing
126 like you are in a class
127 and if you engage because you are very interested in the class
128 and you come every time and you participate.
129 M: aaaaa
130 Y: and ‘engagement’ is the noun form and this is the verb. [3. reading discussion]

Patricia and Vanessa tried to scaffold Masami through providing “motivate” (in line 118) and “to get involved” (in line 121) as alternative lexicons to the unknown verb “engage.” As Masami repeated the suggested verbs with a questioning tone (line 122), it was clear that she could not make the meaning of the alternative lexicons, which indicated she did not have enough lexical and semantic information to understand the word and its meaning (Birtch, 2002). Ellis and Beaton (1993) stated that nouns are easier to learn than verbs; for that reason, I tried to explain the word by changing its morphologic form from verb to noun, as “engagement” is more common than its verb form (line 123 and 130).

Through explanations from more proficient students not only other members but also lower-level students scaffolded each other’s learning. To explain a word, several people in the group worked together to elaborate each other’s explanations to help the
lower-level students. Consequently, these elaborations and explanations helped participants to understand the reading texts better (Garcia-Ramirez, 2001).

Language as the Focus in Writing

During the writing discussions, participants gave more importance to linguistic features rather than the content of the text in their summaries. Due to participants’ overemphasis on linguistic features, their perception of writing was subjected to grammatical and syntactic structures.

Participants’ perception of summary as a ‘good grammar and format’ rather than content might be due to the limitation of English language education they had either in their country or at their language study in the USA. For instance, Patricia’s knowledge about writing a summary in English that she learned in her country was limited to the format including paragraphs with eight or six sentences:

=>500 P: well maybe what I’ve written in the course that before come here 501 the course that I took, in English, 502 we had to write a little. 503 Eight-sentence paragraph with eight sentences or six sentences. 504 Maybe that practice. [1. writing discussion interview]

Patricia’s English language education on writing was limited to covering only the format of writing summaries rather than the content of it. According to Patricia, good writing was “good format.” Additionally, participants’ language learning experiences on writing at the ELI in the USA was also limited to format:

=>468 G: experiences? No I was always try to avoid writing so I don’t have many of them. 469 And maybe the classed we here in at ELI 470 it just helped me to see what is the structure in English writing. 471 So, it helped me to make it like look more like supposed to look. 472 I supposed to use indent like double space, 473 stuff like that, just like that and 474 I supposed to go from like main idea to like more advance, like more specific thing. [1. writing discussion interview]
For Gosia, her ELI experiences helped her to learn the linear organization of ideas in English, such as presenting the main idea first and then elaborating it with details and examples, and some formatting features, such as indentation and double spacing. As a result, not only was the participants’ perception of language learning based on their previous education used to correct grammatical features, revealing that the purpose of the ELI was to teach the linguistic features of language rather than teaching language through content-focused reading and writing. Based on these comments, participants’ knowledge about writing is mostly declarative knowledge, which enables identification of characteristics rather than procedural knowledge, enabling production (Hillocks, 1995). Therefore, grammar and formatting features became more important than what was presented in the content, especially in writing.

Due to the style of the participants’ English language education in their countries and at ELI, they considered writing as limited to strict grammar and formatting rules and, thus, made a direct correlation between their incompetent grammar skills and writing. This resulted in the participants’ very negative attitude towards writing, especially among those with low grammar proficiency. Motivation plays an important role in the learning of a language (Ellis, 1994); hence a student with a negative attitude, might not be expected to enjoy the learning process or to have higher language proficiency (Ellis, 1994).

According to Ellis (1994), social factors help to shape learners’ attitudes which, in turn, influence learning outcomes. For instance, being in a group and getting feedback about her summary from other group members, helped Gosia to have positive attitude towards writing. As Gosia was used to submitting her work to a teacher and getting back
her work with full of grammatical corrections, she was very discouraged and considered her work to be “bad” despite all the effort and time she spent. Gosia felt as if she was constantly being reminded that her English language skills were poor. As Gosia considered her written work an evaluation form, the results she received from it were not very promising. Therefore, Gosia had very negative attitude towards writing at the beginning of this study. She stated that she was not good at writing even in her native language, and unambiguously explained that not only did she “not like her writing” (line 463), she “hates” writing (line 455). Through Gosia’s statements the two different things “her hate of her grammar” and “her hate of writing” became as one thing. As she was not good at grammar, considering it as her “problem” (line 459, 463); therefore, it is not surprising when she says that her “writing is always short” (line 471) or when she equates good writing with “good grammar” (line 459, line 463). Due to her negative attitude towards writing, she thought that learning anything about writing was not necessary for her; she did “not need it” (line 462). The main reason for her negative attitude towards writing was that she considered writing as only “grammar” and a task that was done individually but not collaboratively. Therefore, through this study which required participants to interact and scaffold each other, not only Gosia but also other participants realized “writing a summary became easy” (line 345) as the reading and writing discussions progressed. Participants’ comments show a change in their attitudes towards writing. They suggest that writing is enjoyable process when it becomes not individual but group work; thus, the writing process does not require being silent and writing. Instead it requires talking, discussing, learning from each other and reflecting on the content in a paper and appropriate grammar.
Language proficiency, in addition to affecting attitudes towards writing, affected the comprehension of the reading text, and the composition of the summary composition. When participants understood the reading text, they summarized rather than depending on the structures in the reading texts. For instance, Isabel had higher-level language proficiency than Masami in the group (Isabel was also assessed as the most improved student in terms of grammar among all ELI students by the administration of ELI at the end of the semester). Isabel not only understood the reading text better, but she also had better grammatical knowledge to express the content in her own words. When Isabel and Masami were in the same group during the second reading discussion about American culture, the text was considered as “confusing” and “difficult to understand” by the participants, because it was a short section from a book without a title or context cues. Therefore, the ideas presented in the text were not clear for the participants. Even though Isabel said the text was confusing as others did, her summary was found as a well-written one and as the most comprehensible one in terms of clarity of ideas by the group members, which might be attributed to her high level English language proficiency level:

=>365 G: I like the Isabel’s summary because it was short and it was like very clear for me
366 so, I could understand what she meant.
367 Y: she paraphrased a lot
368 G: yeah she paraphrased. This is what
369 it was not the sentences
370 we are not taken from the text.
371 It was just paraphrased
372 so it make very easy
373 we didn’t have to know
374 first read after think change the normal language.
375 It was like it already in a normal language like everyday language
[2. writing discussion]
Table 4-2. Isabel’s summary about American culture

The text, written by Luigi Barzini is about US culture and the perception foreigners have of it. Americans are always going forwards, without taking any break, and it makes them being ahead of the other nations. The source of their energy to archive goals was at first their religiousness, which accustomed them to try everything to solve their problems. Americans also have two main characteristics that makes them different from the other cultures: the American dream, that makes them try to reach perfection, and pragmatism, that helps them to get efficiently the solution to a problem. Foreigners, especially Europeans, are very surprised by Americans’ eagerness to get results, sometimes without taking time to think. However, that is what makes the US so advanced.

This text was for me difficult to understand because it is taken out of a book, and therefore the reader can’t follow the author’s ideas in detail. Thus, I can’t say if I am pro or con his opinion. However, the topic is interesting, and makes us think about our experience in the USA. [March 29, 2005]

Unlike Isabel who represented the content with her own words, Masami replaced words with their synonyms and used similar syntactic structures showing a high-dependency on the reading text, which might both be due to her lower level English language proficiency and her previous education experience in favor of direct translation (Kern, 2003; Thompson, 1987). In Masami’s summary, as shown in Table 4-3, the underlined words and phrases are taken directly from the reading texts. However, in the second part of her summary Masami explains her opinion about the topic, which has also discussed during the discussion session, she less depends on the text.

Table 4-3. Masami’s summary about American culture

An article we read in our first discussion is about American identity. It is written by Luigi Brazini. The author described America as a man on a bicycle always pedaling and moving ahead. Because America chase the ultimate and the unreachable perfection of their goal relentlessly. It is one of the reason why America successes as most developed country. Second reason is because of their work ethic and greed. It is compulsion for American like all-pervading religiousness, sense of duty, the submission to God-given code of behavior, the acceptance of a God-given task to achievement and of all the necessary sacrifices. As an American characteristic, the author mentions about Pragmatism which is the belief that all problems can be solved and the impulse to solve all of them as soon as possible.Foreigners are surprised about Americans impatience. Americans are always in a great hurry. It can be impetuosity, ardor, and eagerness to
Table 4-3. Continued

apply incomplete formulas and achieve rapid results. Americans are more hurry than industrialized countries people such as Germans or Japanese. For American the main purpose of their life is resolution of problems.

After I read this article I felt that I don’t think Americans are always in a hurry and impetuosity. They are rather than patient for me, especially for Japanese. For example, they can wait in the restaurants and at the bus stop for long time. And at the Cafe shops, convenience stores and cell phone shops, they don’t change their selling goods so often. This is best way to survive in Japanese society. Because Japanese really like new things. In Japan almost every day they put new products in their shops to attract customers. After 1 or 2 weeks, the goods suddenly disappear. It is much faster than American does. In this way I feel American doesn’t chase **ultimately relentlessly**. [March 29, 2005]

Like Masami, in her summary about American culture KyungOk “wrote like full sentences from the article” without citation or quotation marks whereas “she (Isabel) change it” and “people didn’t read this article they also can understand more clearly and order [through Isabel’s summary]” (WD2, line 379, 381-382). Unlike Isabel who focused on representing the content of the reading text, KyungOk gave importance to linguistic features in her summary: KyungOk summarized the text through using synonym words as summary.

=>176 O: Whenever I write summary I just try to change the word from the article
177 like use another word
178 synonym kind of synonym
179 but after reading Isabel’s summary I thought she really wrote in her own word
180 not just change it word or synonym.
181 Maybe when later
182 next time when I write summary I will try to like her the way.
183 So, it can be good way to change my writing style.
184 And I didn’t know they are
185 like Gosia and other people didn’t understand my writing summary.
186 Maybe later to make my writing clear clearer to others
187 I will try to write write yeah clear. [2. writing discussion interview]

Through this quotation, KyungOk explained how her perception of summarizing has changed and she learned from Isabel how to write a summary, which also indicates that participants were learning from each other through this study.
Different from the participants’ previous experiences both in their country and in the USA (especially at the ELI), in this study participants were given a chance to talk about their summaries, read each others’ summaries, give suggestions to each others, and learn from each other. Through this present study, as participants shared their summaries with each other rather than submitting only to their teachers they have realized the change in their conception of “writing” and they tried to make improvements not only in terms of representing ideas in a well-organized way but also in expressing their opinions. Hence, their concept of a summary included not only linguistic and format focus, but also content one.

As participants’ earlier perception of writing in English was limited to grammar and syntactic structures, during the group discussions, their talk overemphasized the grammar points especially at the beginning of the study. The main difficulties participants had in writing a summary in English were mainly due to the differences in syntactic structures of their first language and English, and challenges in translating culturally embedded concepts and idioms from first language to English.

**Differences in Syntactic Structures of First Language and English**

As Gass and Lakshmanan (1991) state, ‘the learner initially searches for correspondences or matches in form between the native and the second language’ (p.272). Lower level English language proficient participants whose native language and English were similar more tend to translate the sentence structures directly from L1 (Odlin, 1990). Differences in syntactic structures of first language and English mostly appeared to be in phrase and sentence structures. For example, Gosia translated a word “discuss” directly from her native language Polish, but with an inappropriate preposition, “about.” In Gosia’s summary about American culture, she wrote:
Table 4-4. Gosia’s summary about American culture

| The text that we had to write during Monday’s meeting basically discusses about American culture. The point of this text is to show how and why American culture differs from other cultures. In this text we can find a few examples of differences between American peoples and other nations. Also we can find information about basics of the American identity. For example one of them is the truth that Americans are pragmatic. The author of this text is supporting his ideas by bringing up the facts from history. |

While discussing Gosia’s summary in a group, Patricia found an inaccuracy in the phrase, “discusses about.” Even though I have been learning English for a longer period of time than the participants, as a language learner, I did not know that “discuss about” was not accurate. Language learning involves producing output and testing it. Patricia, based on her previous experience on this issue, corrected it—the reading and writing teacher, Steve, had once corrected Patricia’s mistake on the same topic: “the article basically ‘discusses spanking’ or ‘talks about.’” Steve told me, you can’t put ‘discussed about,’ you put either ‘discusses’ or ‘talks about’” (line 869-870). Based on her experience, Patricia explained that Gosia could use either “talks about” or “discusses,” but not “discusses about.” During an interview that followed the writing discussion about this phrase, Gosia confirmed that she directly translated from her native language (Polish) to English: “Because we have this in Polish, like exactly ‘discussing about it.’ You say like this but in Polish. So I just like translate directly so I am doing this all the time even though I know about that I shouldn’t do” (line 353-358). If Gosia had higher English language proficiency, she would be more aware of what is acceptable or not in writing in English. She might have overcome the negative transfer of the direct translation from her native

[March 29, 2005]
language to English. In Gosia’s revised summary, instead of “discussed about” she used different form (talks about) that she has learned from Patricia on the previous day during the writing discussion.

Table 4-5. Gosia’s revised summary about American culture

| The text that we had to read during Monday’s meeting was written by Luigi Barzini. This text talks about American culture. The point of this text is to show how and why American culture differs from other cultures. In this text, we can find a few examples of differences between American people and other nations… [March 31, 2005] |

In addition to incorrect uses of some phrases, participants also had some difficulty in the subject–object–verb order of sentences in English. Vanessa, for instance, directly translated a sentence structure from her native language, Spanish:

Table 4-6. Vanessa’s summary about death and dying course

| Learning life by Studying the Culture of Death |
| The article we read in yesterday’s class talked about a course imparted in the University of Florida by Susan Bluck, an assistant professor in the center of Gerontological Studies and the department of Psychology. The name of this unusual course is Death and Dying. Her goal is to teach the many aspects of death by dismantling this taboo, and how death affects each person in daily basis. She tries to generate outspoken, sincere, wide-open and often controversial discussions in each class. This class helps not only those people who had experiences related with death but also those who are not familiar with it. |

I found interesting this topic. In my culture and religion its very common to talk about death but I had never seen it as a class or a course. In my case I would be interested in taking this course. I think for a psychologist it is important to know the different perceptions every culture and religion has about death to be able to help people deal with it. Even though I have this special interest in psychology, I think this course could be helpful to everyone. Death is something we all have in common, and sooner or later will touch our life in a special way. Everyone must seek ways and prepare themselves to overcome this type of experience. Last year I lost my grandparents (my mom’s parents). I think for all my family was very hard to deal with. But in my case, even though it was something I knew it could happen, was like a shock and it really mark a difference in my life. Still today I always think about that moment and the hard it was to say goodbye. I am really sure they are better there (heaven) than here but my selfishness make me feel sad for not having them with me. I think life is like a challenge, every day we had lived is a won battle. For me, since that sad experience, has helped me realized and treasure every little thing a have. I will never forget that moment, not even relieve the pain I feel, but I’m trying to be a better person and give in life all what I can to the people I love. [April 5, 2005] |
The reason for her direct translation is that the sentence structure in Spanish can be either Subject-Verb-Object or Subject-Object-Verb (Coe, 1987); In English the only probable order is Subject-Verb-Object (Coe, 1987; Ellis, 1994). Due to the dual sentence orders in Spanish, Vanessa directly transformed S-O-V order, which is a form of negative transfer, resulting in grammatically incorrect sentence in English. As her English language proficiency level was not high enough, she was not able to realize that only one of the Spanish sentence structures was applicable to English sentence structure.

Challenges in Translating Culturally Embedded Concepts and Idioms from First Language to English

Idioms are culturally embedded structures reflecting the cultural perspectives (Coe, 1987). According to Fox (1994), words or concepts can be untranslatable; equivalent verb tenses can be nonexistent or have different usage; linguistic elements can be completely absent. Therefore, sometimes it might be difficult for a literal translation of an idiom into another language due to incommensurable cultural signification. Even though idioms are translated word by word to another language, their cultural meaning might not have an equivalent meaning in that language due to the cultural differences. Therefore, when Patricia translated directly from her native language (Spanish) to English we find in Patricia’s summary about death and dying an unidiomatic expression in the sentence that reads “it is a way to see death with another eyes”:
After reading Patricia’s phrase “I think, even though, this is a strange course and way to see death with another eyes,” Vanessa, coming from similar cultural background (Hispanic), stated that she understood what Patricia meant to say through that phrase.

However, she explained that the idiomatic Spanish expression cannot be translated word for word into English:

=>361 V: the first sentence of the second paragraph
362 “I think, even though, this is an strange course and way to see death with other eyes”
363 ‘with another eyes,’ it doesn’t make sense
364 like ‘this is a strange, a strange course in way to see death with other eyes’ ??
...
392 V: you try to put like to “see death with other eyes” that is what you mean?
393 Because we have that
...
399 V: I understand if you say like sentence
400 “it is a way to see death with other eye”
401 that is perfect
402 but here “a strange course and way to see death with their eyes” doesn’t make sense
403 P: that is right and I wanna like find a way that or writing the same idea …[3. writing discussion]
In this dialogue, Vanessa understood Patricia’s idiom which was a direct translation from Spanish stating, “because we have that” (line 393). Vanessa also explained the reason for the ambiguity is the redundant use of the strangeness of the death and dying course through “it is a strange course,” and “seeing death with another eye” in her summary. As the students shared a like language and culture background, Vanessa was able to show Patricia the difficulties of this translation while the rest of us were listening to their conversations.

These challenges caused by translating idioms from first language to English can also be experienced at a conceptual level. Even though the Asian participants did not mention any specific problems that they encountered with culturally embedded concepts during interviews or discussions, I consulted with one of the Chinese participants, and she identified a direct translation problem that occurred in Asian participants’ summaries.

Table 4-8. KyungOk’s summary about death and dying course

| The article written by Staci Zavattaro presents the UF class dealt with the culture of death. Susan Bluck who is an assistant professor in the center for Gerontological Studies and the Department of Psychology teaches Death and Dying course at UF. In the class, she treats various aspects of death with objective concepts which are already taught by UF professor emeritus Hannelore Wass. Also, she talks about many experiences of death and how they affect on human's life with her students. Even some students’ obituaries are dealt with during class. She lets her students think about death which nobody can shun and reflects on their own lives thorough this class. [April 5, 2005] |

In the summary of the ‘death and dying’ course, in order to express the instructor’s responsibility as ‘covering/teaching the topics related to death and dying,’ KyungOk used the word “treat,” which is conceptually very similar to teaching in Chinese.

Participants’ Explorations About Their Language Learning with a Linguistic Focus

Through discussions students often make discoveries about themselves as individuals and learners in a student-centered learning environment (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). Also, in this study participants made explorations about their language learning
via interacting with each other and learning together in a student-centered language-
leaning environment. This section includes a theoretical component to revise the
findings related to linguistic patterns of discussions in reading and writing. The
participants’ explorations about their own language learning through social
constructionism are addressed under four subheadings: 1. becoming aware of language
fossilizations, 2. learning new vocabulary and representation ways, 3. practicing whole
language skills, and 4. role of English language proficiency level in talking.

Becoming Aware of Language Fossilizations

Language fossilizations are defined as “items, rules, and sub-systems that speakers
of a particular native language will tend to keep in their interlanguage while acquiring a
particular second language; that is, these aspects of the interlanguage are permanent and
will never be eradicated for most second language learners, regardless of the amount of
explanation and instruction they can receive” (Omaggio, 1986 p. 274). However, through
group discussions and group members’ scaffolding, participants became more aware of
their English language fossilizations, such as subject-verb agreement:

=>167 V: And with my writing
168 I think to realize more the problem with “have” and “had”
169 and with the words “everybody” and “everyone”
170 that for me it was like “everybody” it is group
171 and now it is clear that it has to be singular.[3.writing discussion interview]

After these discussions, participants reported that they started to pay more attention to
grammar and structure issues they have learned in their summaries.

Language fossilizations are difficult to correct for a nonnative speaker because a
learner is used to making the same mistakes without realizing it (Ellis, 1994). Therefore,
performing a self-evaluation for a writing sample may not be enough for nonnative
speakers. In this study, through three reading and writing group discussion processes,
participants pointed out these language fossilizations and became more careful about
syntactic structures and culturally embedded vocabulary use. Also, participants have
reported that they have remembered the points they discussed better than their ELI
teacher’s corrections on their papers (Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Izumi et al.,
1999). Lee Knefelkamp (1995), refers to this stage of reasoning as “courage in spite of.”
For freshmen, responding critically to each other’s writing is not the act of aggression
they initially think it is—an interpretation that grows directly out of their inability to
temper relativism with commitment. For advanced students the process of peer response
becomes much more quickly an act of community, of helping a classmate do the best job
she can. Reading and responding to peers' writing requires interpersonal and personal
resolution of multiple frames of reference (Spear, 2004). In this sense, collaborative
writing courses at all levels provide an essential opportunity to practice becoming
members of an intellectual, adult community. In such a community, commitments to
ideas and to the people who hold them become equally important.

Learning New Vocabulary and Representation Ways

During this study participants worked collaboratively with each other to construct
meaning of the reading texts and to write a comprehensible summary of the texts. As
participants read each other’s writing, they have learned new ways of organizing their
summaries, vocabularies, and phrases.

192 I: With your papers, I think it is interesting to know about other people
193 how they did their summary,
194 what they how they put their ideas together.
195 And sometimes I think yours I like Yildiz’s
196 because I think it was most smooth to read then mine.
197 Because mine I just put I try the text was so difficult
198 so I try to summaries paragraph after paragraph
199 and like one sentence or two sentences per paragraph.
200 But I think your was more smooth to read.
So, I think I don’t know I don’t know how
what I can
how can I change mine
but I think …..think about something.[2. writing discussions interview]

Seeing other group members’ writings enhanced participants’ own writing because participants saw different ways to present the same topic (Olson, 2003).

Before this present study, students only turned in their summary to their teacher without sharing it with anyone in their reading and writing classes at the ELI. After their teacher read and corrected their work, he returned it to students. Through all these process, the only person who read their summary was their teacher. Therefore, participants never read any of their peers’ work. In this study, participants had a chance not only to share their writing with each other, but also to give suggestions to each other. During this process, participants scaffolded and learned from each other. These interactions, which are essential in writing classes as Olson (2003) says, enabled student writers to think critically about how they were expressing what they thought in a new language. In addition to the benefits of sharing their writings with group members, this activity also allowed group member to get to know each other better and satisfy social needs of affiliation, identification, and inclusion as well as emotional and intellectual support. Purves and Hawisher (1990) and Kaplan (1988) state that every culture has its own writing style that differs from other cultures; however, during this study, by working together and becoming aware of different ways to present the same topic, students tried to find the appropriate expressions to express their culturally embedded concepts and ideas in English.
Practicing Whole Language Skills

According to Kern (2003), in the traditional English language teaching curriculum, reading, talking, and writing are relatively distinct phases of a linear instructional sequence (see Figure 1). Reading and writing are left to students’ own learning although these are the most difficult part of language learning, where students need the most help (Kern, 2003).

Besides Kern (2003), also Olson (2003) note that reading and writing have been traditionally thought of and taught as “flip sides of the coin - as opposites; readers decoded or deciphered language and writers decoded or produced written language” (p.249). Since the early 1980s, however, researchers have increasingly noted the connections between reading and writing. One of the best ways to increase comprehension skills is learning where learners are working together to solve problems and create projects (Withrow, 2004). This “meaning-constructive process of both writers and readers (and of course speakers and listeners) are collaborative and social, dialogic and interactive” (Witte and Flach, 1994, p. 221) in which readers project themselves into the role of the writer, writers also project themselves into the roles of readers (Smith, 1988). Hence, talking combines reading and writing activities and it becomes the centre of learning (Figure 4-2).
This study was beneficial to the participants in terms of practicing their English language skills in a meaningful context. In this study reading and writing activities were combined through discussions. Having reading discussions prior to writing summaries enabled participants to write their summaries “easier” (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996; Taylor & Beach, 1984). During the reading discussions language learners produced their sentences through speaking and they tested their language and grammar hypothesis (Swain, 2000). Then, they wrote these sentences into their summaries. Talking about their experiences helped participants to put these experiences into their writing. As they have already produced these sentences while speaking during the reading discussions, writing was easier for them according to the participants:

=>254 G: I think that the reading discussion helped me to like to understand the text so it was much easier to write after because I knew what the main idea is. Like I had some like some half idea but I was not sure so discussion with you guys helped me you know to make sure that I have like correct or incorrect way of thinking. [2. writing discussion interview]

Additionally, reading discussions created a meaningful context for writing discussions. As participants discussed the reading texts during the reading discussions, reading discussions provided the basic understanding of the text and reaching the similar
understanding. Hence, when a group member was discussing about his or her writing, everybody in the group knew what that person tried to say. Therefore, it was easy to correct mistakes and keep the meaning the way one wanted to.

583 V: for me like 
584 it helped 
585 because we read the article together and we discuss it together and 
586 so everyone had like the same point of view of the article 
587 and we all knew like basically what we thought 
588 so we could it understand better their writing. [3.writing discussion interview]

Hence, reading discussions, writing summaries and writing discussions were connected to each other enabling participants to practice their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in a meaningful context. In this way, as Hillocks (1995) asserts that writing becomes:

[A] recursive process that requires the reconstruction of text already written, so that what we add connects appropriately with what has preceded. That progress brings ideas not written into conjunction with what has been reconstructed, providing endless opportunities to reconsider ideas and reengage the processes that gave rise to them in the first place.(p. 47)

This study enabled participants to have more time for talking and experiencing interactions from multiple ways (expert to novice, novice to novice) because their previous experience in the reading and writing class, the teacher tended to talk most of the time and there was only one-way interaction from teacher to students (teacher is the only authority in terms of his knowledge of English and students are there to learn). Hence, even though they were English language learners, they could be an expert (collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice) while explaining a point they know to other participants within the continuum of equality and mutuality (Storch, 2002).
Role of English Language Proficiency Level in Talking

Even though sharing similar cultural background might help participants to understand each other’s meanings and to elaborate each other’s statements during the discussions, it did not guarantee collaboration between the participants. That is because the participants with lower level English language proficiency could not participate to the discussion or help the participant with a similar cultural background to complete and elaborate her or his statements as much as the higher proficient ones (Ellis, 1994).

During the reading discussion about “American culture,” Gosia was explaining the contradiction between the reading text, which argued that American lifestyle was based on pragmatism and her observations about daily life of American culture through giving detailed explanations and examples. During Gosia’s talk, Isabel frequently completed her sentences. For example, when Gosia was talking about gardening in her country (Poland) she paused for a moment in order to recall a vocabulary word. During this pause, Isabel provided the word, “fence,” which might be a common feature in European gardens. After hearing the word from Isabel, Gosia continued her statement: “fence, they can do whatever you want.” In another case, in order to describe the length of the grass in gardens Gosia tried to explain it through a kinesthetic movement (allowing her arms and hands shows the length). At that moment, Isabel assisted Gosia by providing the word she was looking for—“perfect grass.” Through these contributions, two people (Gosia and Isabel) were collaborating so much that it seemed as if both of them knew the topic and were telling the same story to the rest of the group. Similar to European participants, Vanessa and Patricia, both coming from Hispanic cultures, completed each other’s statements and sentences. Additionally, when Vanessa answered Patricia’s questions, she also checked whether Patricia understood the point or not, which might be due to the fact
that they were close friends and Vanessa’s language proficiency was higher than Patricia. Among the Asian participants, KyungOk completed some of Masami’s sentences, while Masami could not complete many of KyungOk’s sentences due to Masami’s lower English language proficiency level.

Although some of the group members’ language proficiency level was low, in face-to-face interaction surface-level deviations in grammar and pronunciation caused few misunderstandings during cross-cultural communication (Saville, 1989). Even gaps in vocabulary knowledge are successfully overcome as students negotiate meaning through nonverbal means. Similar to Saville’s (1989) findings, in this study misunderstanding of surface linguistic forms was much more likely to occur when forms contrast with a deeper-level systemic concept about how language works (such as how sounds, meanings, and symbols should correspond), or when they are similar to another form which the listener expects (or finds reasonable in the context) to hear. Whenever expectations at higher levels were shared, verbal forms were often correctly decoded, even with very limited language proficiency. In turn, understanding of verbal forms often served as cues or scaffolding for interpreting intent, recognizing larger discourse structures organizing the communicative event, and drawing on the background knowledge necessary for understanding. The present findings reinforce the recognition that “the Westernization of elites” (Saville, 1989) in various countries and the spread of formal schooling has created an international middle class culture and school culture, which, despite national differences, exists across national borders. We may conclude from this that a shared linguistic code is neither necessary nor sufficient for successful
communication, while shared cultural knowledge is both necessary and often sufficient for communication to succeed (Saville, 1989).

This chapter shows that participants’ previous English language education focused heavily on teaching and learning grammar and learning tasks, which favored separate language skills rather than the integration of reading, writing, speaking and listening activities. Due to the overemphasis of grammar knowledge, participants viewed reading and writing activities as “grammar” rather than content. Additionally, participants’ previous learning tasks were teacher centered, limiting the benefits that these students would have received from more collaborative assignments. Such benefits include enhanced vocabulary and phrase development, access to different points of view, possible elimination of language fossilizations, and an improved understanding of culturally embedded idioms and phrases.

Through working in groups participants were able to overcome their limited knowledge on English by scaffolding each other while encoding words in reading by the help of their first language and their knowledge of English morphology and lexicon. Also, participants scaffolded each other in writing by helping each other to identify syntactically ambiguous sentences that arise from the differences in syntactic structures of their native languages and English. Collaborative learning, finally, helps students to navigate the challenge of properly translating culturally embedded concepts and idioms from their first language into English. Hence, they have learned about writing from each other
CHAPTER 5
SOCIAL PATTERN OF DISCUSSION

Earlier in this research, the linguistic pattern of reading and writing discussions was introduced to the reader. Participants’ overemphasis of grammatical points in reading as Word Attack in writing as giving suggestions about syntactic structures explained participants’ struggle to reach an understanding of the texts through first solving linguistic problems. During this process, participants’ English language proficiency level affected their comprehension of morphology, lexicon, and syntax. Participants’ L1 similarity with English had both advantages and disadvantages for the participants. While the similarity is an advantage when guessing unknown words (Word Attack) as cognates, similarities between L1 and L2 caused problems, when participants with lower English proficiencies attempted direct translations from L1 into L2.

In this chapter, I discuss the social pattern of reading and writing discussions. I especially focus on how the Asian participants’ contributions to the group discussions were salient to the researcher and the other participants. In order to understand these effects of cultural difference on group discussion I will provide some possible explanations based on my field notes, observations, participants’ comments during the reading and writing interviews, and their individual journals.

After outlining the cultural differences, which seemed to separate participants’ ways of contribution to the discussion, the chapter then examines how participants bounded into a group from different cultural backgrounds. Through explaining how participants constructed a group bounding identity by considering themselves as
foreigners learning English in the USA, I will discuss the roles they created based on their English language proficiency and their cultural background. I argue that to serve the group to accomplish their goal to understand and learn English language and American culture they were able to bridge vast cultural difference.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of how this social pattern of discussion helped participants to explore and evaluate their own language learning. Hence, under the title “Participants’ I will attempt to tie the data together and arrive at some tentative conclusions on how the interactions may support the understanding of reading text and writing comprehensible summaries of the texts and how the interactions may support L2 acquisition.

Cultural Differences and Discussion

Cultural differences influence participants’ taking turns and engagement to the conversations (Glew, 1998; Sato, 1990). These are two of the dynamics that I explore in this section. First, I will explain the preliminary findings of the social patterns of discussions. Then, further analysis will be used to explain who, where, and when participants contributed to discussions, the content of their contributions, and possible cultural reasons for differing participation in the discussions.

The preliminary findings of my observations, listening to discussion cassettes and reading transcriptions, journals, and interviews showed that Asian participants contributed to the reading and writing discussions differently from the European and Hispanic participants. Compared to other participants, Asian participants were less talkative in the group. They only talked to answer the questions asked by the group members and often talked so softly that in many instances it was difficult to hear and understand what they were saying. Also, they initiated fewer conversations. They became
more talkative while discussing grammar points that they knew and while explaining cultural information about their countries.

After these general findings, I looked into transcripts and listened to the cassettes to understand how conversations were initiated during the group discussions, focusing on when and where a participant initiated a conversation. When Asian participants were grouped with Hispanic participants, Vanessa was the most talkative person in the group. Whenever the group members decided whose summary they would discuss, Vanessa started first and explained every mistake she had found in that summary. Then, Patricia took her turn. KyungOk contributed to the conversation to correct mistakes or to question Vanessa or Patricia’s grammar. KyungOk contributed to the discussion by providing explanations of grammar rules and terminology. Masami contributed either when I asked her opinion directly, such as “Masami what do you think about this topic?” or when she found an ambiguity or a grammar issue and brought that to the group’s attention.

When Asian participants were grouped with European ones, Gosia and Isabel started the discussion. However, the discussion format was different from the way the Hispanic-European group discussed. In the previous group (Hispanic-European), participants discussed paragraph by paragraph rather than having one person that explained all the points while another one took turns. Even when grouped with Europeans, Asian participants—especially Masami—were not as talkative as Gosia and Isabel. Similar to their roles in the Hispanic group, Asian participants talked only to clarify the mistakes of Isabel’s and Gosia’s or to provide assistance when they could not find a solution. Masami only talked when being asked.
Tracking how conversations were initiated during the group discussions showed that both European and Hispanic participants were more active in deciding whose paper would be discussed next while the Asian participants tended to keep quiet. Moreover, whether being grouped with European or Hispanic participants, Asian participants’ behavior to contribute to the discussions was similar. Whenever the language proficiency of the person in charge of correcting mistakes was not advanced enough to correct the mistake, KyungOk participated. Also, Masami rarely pointed out grammar mistakes and on those occasions, she did not offer an answer to the problem. In any case, Asian participants were always the ones who passively followed the pattern of the discussions whereas both Europeans and Hispanics were the ones who actively lead the discussions.

As a participant of the discussions and as a researcher, I was able to show that Asian participants are different from other participants in terms of initiating few conversation topic and speaking softly, but I was puzzled with the reason(s) behind it. Why did they participate less? In order to examine this issue, I looked at the data analysis, considering the content of the participants’ talk during the discussions. Further analysis of the data showed that participants have different perceptions about classroom talk, which were attributed to the culture they lived in. The pattern of participation among Asian participants highlighted the cultural difference in the perception of classroom talk among the participants. Asian participants considered talking as a way of “teaching” something they know and were sure about its truth, whereas for Hispanic and European participants’ talking was a way of “brainstorming” and learning together. For that reason, participants belonging to these cultures were expressing their thoughts more, and while they were thinking about the answer to grammar issues, they thought out-loud.
In that sense, European and Hispanic participants talked whenever they thought about something and started a conversation on the topic they wanted to learn through seeking opinions. Therefore, it seemed that European and Hispanic participants dominated the whole discussion. In both reading and writing activities, Asian participants complained that there were no experts who could answer their questions; they expressed frustration about the uncertainty of the conversations as a pedagogical methodology. However, both Hispanic and European participants were aware that the purpose of the discussion was a collaborative learning technique, and the purpose of sharing assumptions and possibilities about unknown words and clearing points about the text was a method for problem solving.

As Asian participants considered discussions as a way of “teaching one another” rather than brainstorming or finding an answer all together, they did not participate in the discussion unless they were really sure of its truth. Reynolds (2004) asserts that people from European cultures interpret silence in negative ways, whereas those from the Asian cultures tend to interpret silence as respectful and thoughtful. Due to their cultural values stating that “think ten times and speak one time” (line 235), Asian participants only participated when they were sure that they knew the exact answer to the problem, such as in providing definitions, grammar rules, or information about their culture. For example, KyungOk only explained the words or the grammar points she knew, and information about her country. The other Asian participant, Masami, spoke when I asked questions to her or when she was very curious about a topic.

Also, instead of thinking out-loud, Asian participants just said the sentence that they thought was the right answer to the problem. Asian participants’ transcriptions
showed no use of phrases like “maybe “or “it might be like this.” These phrases show the possibility as a brainstorming activity (Gee, 2005), which were used very frequently by other participants. In many cases finding the right solution in their mind on their own took a longer time and other participants came up with other answers, and as they were thinking out-loud, their suggestions were accepted by the group.

Additionally, as Asian participants considered discussions as a teaching method rather than simply sharing ideas, they did not argue about suggestions whereas both European and Hispanic participants argued, and asked more questions about the reason for the suggestions in order to understand the reason behind it. However, Asian participants accepted the corrections and suggestions, without any question, even though they did not like the suggestions.

The possible explanation for Asian participants not to discuss the answer further with other participants might be based on their own perception of the classroom talk “if one is not sure, she does not attempt to answer it. So, if one gives a suggestion, from Asian participants’ perspective, it gives that person authority, an expert position unlike European and Hispanic participants’ perspective in which suggestions are also for further discussions and learning. Secondly, the person who gives a suggestion is considered as an “expert” by Asian participants and having an “expert’s opinion” initiates a social role in which being silent represents respect for authority. If a suggestion is discussed, it would appear to challenge and questioning the authority who made the discussion, which is equated with disrespect and thus unproductive because cultural norms privilege harmony, especially in Japanese culture (Fox 1994).
The possible reasons for Asian participants’ hesitancy to talk and the differences in their perception of classroom talk are influenced by the cultural and social discourses that frame their values and the social roles they have learned. These social and cultural discourses are broken into four major sections: “Hierarchy in Society,” “Directness vs. Indirectness,” “Education System,” and “Religion.” I chose to focus on these four areas because together they represent social patterns among participants, and the interview data revealed that these areas were salient to the participants.

**Hierarchy in Society**

Social hierarchies played a role in participants’ especially the Asian participants,’ hesitancy to participate. Asian participants stated that Asian culture’s influence on their hesitancy to talk in the reading and writing discussions. KyungOk states, “my culture is listening always almost listening what other’s say” (line 404), and Masami was also not used to “tell[ing] her opinion in public” (line 345). For that reason, during the group discussions, KyungOk states, “I really express my own feeling and my opinion so like this like this activity. Actually it is not normal. Sometimes it is not comfortable for me but compared to first time, now it is better” (KyungOk, line 398-404). They were trying to adapt to a new system, which required them to share their opinions and become more talkative instead of being a passive listener.

Coming from individualistic culture (societies that value individualism), both European and Hispanic participants were unfamiliar with the discourse in the collectivist, high power distance cultures, in which people recognize and accept a hierarchy (including within families) based on factors such as age, gender and family background (Kagitcibasi, 1994; FitzGerald, 2003; Reynolds, 2004; Kang, 2004). During the interviews, participants discussed the role of hierarchy in Asian culture.
Stanza: hierarchy in Asian culture
398 O: for me telling my opinion to others
399 for the first time, like first, my first not comfortable for me, but it is better now
400 Always in my case like
401 after others telling something I listen to that
402 and I tell my opinion.
403 Y: why?
404 O: yeah, my culture is listening always almost listening what other’s say
405 G: so you usually like it is the older people
406 O: yeah yeah
407 G: and after
408 O: yeah I think so
409 G: but like usually the men or
410 like you are a woman
411 so the first people that they are talking is like older people
412 and like maybe men and on the end
413 just like this?
414 O: yeah yeah
415 Y: so, there is a kind of hierarchy?
416 O: yeah but it changing,
417 it is changing
418 but long time ago, it is more like yeah older people and men and women
419 but it is now changing.

According to KyungOk, even though it is a changing process now, Asian traditions give
priority of talking to elderly people first, men (as a gender issue) second, and then
women. Hierarchy in Asian culture defines taking turns in a conversation by both
emphasizing giving importance to what to say (“think ten times, talk once”) and to
consider whose turn to talk.

Even though European participants also gave importance to the traditions such as
being more silent and listening to others, Gosia could break the traditional rules–she
became more talkative–when she came to the USA:

Stanza: being in a different cultural environment
=>385 G: and but maybe because of that we usually are like quiet
386 and I don’t talk
387 and I am here, like now
388 I don’t have to respect the rules that we have there
389 so I can express my thought
Gosia built a new identity (an intercultural identity) for herself “in here” (Shehadeh, 2006), in the USA, which is different from her identity in her native country, Poland, referred to as “there” (line 387-388). While she was in her country she had to “respect the rules” (line 388), which required students to be “usually quiet” (line 385). Through obeying the rules, she identified herself with “them” of her native country, Poland, using “we have there” (line 388). Gosia’s identity changed depending on whether she was in Poland or in the USA. As a result, she became more talkative in the USA where she did not follow the traditions.

The possible reason for not applying this intercultural identity and change talking behavior in Asian participants unlike European participant, Gosia, is also another cultural issue: “loosing face” in public is a most hurtful issue in Asian culture (Barnlund, 1989). Asian participants do not want to be hurt and they do not want others to be that way either, which is also a characteristics of a collective society (Kiesling & Paulston, 2005; Landis et al., 2004) rather than a society that values individuality.

As a participant of this group discussions and as a researcher who has already worked with Asian students and also as a graduate student with several Asian friends in the same program I have more experience with Asian people and culture. While at the beginning of the study European and Hispanic participants were complaining about the participation of the Asian students in the discussions, which also made them to take less and slower taking turns during the discussions with longer silent moments, I realized that European and Hispanic participants did not actually know Asian participants even though they have been taking the same class for almost three months. I had realized that as
having both European and Asian background (Turkey), during my first meeting with Asian people four years ago, I held similar cultural values (see the subjectivity statement in chapter 3). As I know more about Asian people and culture, I understood why Asian people are less talkativeness during the classroom discussions. Similarly, both European and Hispanic participants become more aware about Asian culture during this study. The acceptance and understanding of the different cultural values are important discussions while learning language in a group.

**Directness vs. Indirectness**

Directness and indirectness are another set of cultural values that influence participants’ contribution to group discussions. Asian culture is more indirect compared to European and Hispanic cultures (Fox, 1994; Reynolds, 2004; Kim, 2004; Suedo, 2004; FitzGerald, 2003). Therefore, Asian participants typically do not refuse other participants’ suggestions during the group discussions. These are the incidences that Asian participants expect to have a negative response from others.

Asian participants often expressed “no” in indirect ways while European and Hispanic participants expressed “no” directly during the reading and writing discussions. The reason for expressing “no” indirectly was that according to Asian culture, which values people who are “easy going” (line 429) and “respect other people” (line 435), is that it is considered “rude” to use a “very strong answer” (line 432). For that reason, instead of directly expressing “no” they always said “yes,” and yet they did not mean it. Hence, they avoid confrontation. This was very hard for European and Hispanic participants to understand the real meaning because they were more direct to express “no” (line 437). Additionally, there are several ways to express “no” indirectly in their culture (Kincaid, 1980). For instance, according to Masami and KyungOk, one should
“smile” as an acceptable behavior (line 435) and say “oh yes, yes” (line 435) or start a sentence with “I feel like” (436). Also, one could say “yes” directly, “maybe, ok.” and “ah yes, but” (line 446) structures. All of these structures were the indication of meaning “no” indirectly, as the politeness rule in their culture (lines 441-442). However, Hispanic participants, especially Vanessa has learned when KyungOk said “yes” meant “no” through some experiences. During the group discussions, there were some moments when KyungOk said ‘yes’ when she wanted to say ‘no,’ and Vanessa directly said “I know you, you don’t like, but you never say no.” As Asian participants could not express “no” directly, they accepted all suggestions during the group discussions and considered these suggestions later on their own. For that reason, as a researcher I found it salient to me that Asian participants did not engage in the discussions to refute the suggestions during the reading and writing discussions whereas European and Hispanic participants argued and discussed the suggestions before they accepted it and clearly stating which parts of the suggestions they did not like.

Secondly, as Asian culture is more indirect than European and Hispanic cultures in the group. Asian participants were very hesitant to point out other participants’ ‘bad points’ in their summaries. For that reason, they were not very talkative especially while finding the mistakes, criticizing or telling anything wrong to one another.

Asian participants were very sensitive about other participants’ thoughts about themselves and their comments, which was also confirmed by European and Hispanic participants because losing face in a collective society is more shameful than individualistic society (Barnlund, 1989; Craig, 1994; Samovar & Porter, 2001). Asian participants thought that whenever they showed others’ ‘bad points,’ other participants
would get angry with the Asian participants because in many collectivist cultures, people
tend to conceive events in terms of multiple contingencies and to believe that it is best to
live in harmony with the environment rather than try to change it (FitzGerald, 2003). In
that, how being perceived by others was very important for the Asian participants and
they wanted to live in harmony with others instead of pointing out the ‘bad points’ and
discussing with other participants. For that reason, Asian participants seemed “more
reserved,” “more respectful,” and giving importance to “perfection” [without making any
mistakes] (line 35). However, European and Hispanic participants were more comfortable
pointing out mistakes and making mistakes. This was due to perspective differences
between the participants: for European and Hispanic participants, one could learn through
their mistakes (line 38-42); in that sense making mistakes was acceptable and good for
learning (line 708); For Asian participants pointing out mistakes or being pointed out was
shameful. Through comparing her cultural view of discussions with other participants’
views, Masami commented that they were “different” (line 381) and other participants
were “honest” (line 383) as they told all the points. In Japanese culture, according to
Masami, one should tell only good points directly, but not the “bad points” because it
meant criticizing—something one should not do. Therefore, having discussions,
especially writing discussions, in which “bad points” were discussed was a new and
challenging learning style for Masami.

Due to the differences between Eastern and Western social and cultural perceptions
in which making mistakes or pointing out mistakes is considered very sensitive
(Reynolds, 2004). Asian participants were hesitant to point out problems in other
participants’ summaries or comments during the reading and writing discussions they did neither want to be hurt nor want others’ feelings to be hurt.

**Education System**

Another possible explanation for Asian participants’ being less talkative might be related to the Confucian education systems in Japan and Korea. First, Asian participants believe that “learning is listening and teaching is teacher’s lecture.” During a class, lectures occupy more time than student-talk, and a teacher is considered an absolute authority in terms of knowledge expertise and being responsible for making decisions for all the teaching and learning processes. Secondly, classroom/group time is for everyone; so, they believe that insignificant talk is waste of valuable class time. Therefore, Asian participants were very selective and sensitive about when to talk and what to say. Related to this issue, Asian participants were very sensitive about how they will be considered by other students and what their peers think about Asian participants in a classroom. Due to this oversensitivity about how being conceived by their peers, Asian students became more hesitant to talk not only in a group, but also in a classroom environment.

Firstly, Asian participants were not used to student-centered classroom environment. Asian participants stated that “in our education I think we used to listen not tell our opinions like in schools, all during school, class time just teacher talks and we listen” (lines 47-50). In that sense, the teacher was considered as a person who transferred knowledge to students and students were considered as passive learners who were supposed to receive all the information. Hence, the teaching and learning process was in one direction: from a teacher to students. For that reason, they “don’t have discussion in my [their] country” (Masami, line 373) and KyungOk emphasized the dominance of a teacher-talk over their talk (student-talk) using the phrase “just teacher talks” in line 50.
Also, by saying “we don’t have discussions in my country” (line 373) Masami indicated that Japanese culture gave more importance to the authority figure, which prevented having discussions or arguing with the authority figure (Fox, 1994). As a result, Asian participants were not used to expressing their own opinions and thoughts about any topic in the class and as they considered their teacher as the only eminent person, they did not consider themselves capable of being responsible for their learning process or informative enough to scaffold each other in learning which reflects the Asian learners’ reluctance to accommodate to American ways of speaking in the classroom (Sato, 1981). Additionally, in the teacher-dominant education system in their country, the questions the teacher asked had only one “correct” answer unlike the student-centered education system in which multiple answers might be possible for one question. For Asian participants, it was also a new perspective that they should get used to while participating to the discussions in the American education system at the ELI and this study. This adaptation process has also caused pressure and hesitation for them, which affected their participation in the reading and writing group discussions:

Stanza: pressure
=>52 M: so
53 for us there are some pressure.
54 It is only one answer
55 but if your ask one question we will discuss and
56 you have many answers from many people
57 so it is
58 I think it is different.
59 O: so, asking question or expressing our opinion is hard for me [2.reading discussion interview]

Masami explained the differences in education systems by comparing the Asian and American education systems from line 54 to 58. According to this comparison, for Asian teaching and learning methods “there is only one answer” to a question whereas in the
American teaching and learning way (i.e. ELI) or at least in this study, “you have many answers from many people so it is I think it is different” (line 56-58).

The other point about education system is that Asian participants were very sensitive about what their peers’ thought about Asian participants’ comments and they were afraid of being embarrassed in front of their peers because of their “incorrect answers” to the questions.

Stanza: pretentiousness
=>407 O: in school like if someone ask something to the teacher, you say
408 we think that student is “ah he try to show off or he try to
409 G: yeah we have the same
410 O: yeah
411 we think yeah
412 we never ask question and everything opinion.
413 M: me too.
414 Usually I don’t express my opinion or opinion to other people.
415 I am not used to talk about students
416 so it is difficult for me
417 but I respect like talk people who talk about anything
418 but it is very difficult.
419 O: sometimes during the class time someone ask a question to teacher
420 or they talk about their opinion
421 like Gosia, Vanessa
422 M: except Asian people
423 O: yeah except Asian. [2.reading discussion interview]

According to KyungOk, an important reason for her silence in the classroom is her friends’ opinions about the students who ask questions. These students are considered arrogant or “showing off” based on her previous school experiences. This goes against Asian cultural values of modesty, and humility (KyungOk, line 86). As Asian participants gave importance to unity in the group, they did not want to be separated which is indicated through several proverbs and sayings in their culture: “The nail that stands out will get hammered” (Japan), “Behind an able man there are always other able men” (Korea), and “The sheep that’s separated from the flock will be eaten by the wolf”
(Turkey)” (Reynolds 2004). Therefore, Asian participants did not ask or make comments in class. In line 408, KyungOk identified herself with people who considered the talkative students as “showing off.” As identifying herself with that group, KyungOk emphasized her values, which include “never ask question and everything opinion” in line 412, emphasizing the word “never.” From line 414 to 415 Masami expressed through her statement, “I am not used to talk about,” that students have no opportunity to have a discussion and are not given assignments that might have many possible alternatively correct answers. For that reason, expressing her ideas was difficult for her. In order to show her appreciation to the people who were talkative, she says in line 417: “but I respect like talk people who talk about anything,” which indicates Masami gave importance to being talkative but she was not used to it.

Stanza: internal obstacles
=>424 O: I think I try to
425 I want to
426 but so in my mind
427 G: it is like some barrier like wall that you can’t jump through
428 O: for my it’s hard to [2. reading discussion interview]

Like Masami, KyungOk also valued a talkative person in the classroom as seen in line 425. However, it was difficult for her to accomplish this even though she “tries” (line 424). Gosia in line 427 helped Asian participants in expressing themselves on their behalf showing empathy that she understood their position.

As Asian participants gave much importance to what others think about them, they were very fond of their privacy compared to other participants in the classroom. Gosia gave the following example:

Stanza: privacy at school
=>762 G: and the thing that I think I noticed like
763 they always like they have a question
Asian participants preferred asking their question to the teacher in “private,” “not like loud” voice but very softly (line 763-764 and 770). She stated that they did not ask these questions to anyone in the class. Coming from a collectivist culture, Asian participants consider classroom time for everyone; therefore, they do not want to waste the time which mean for everyone. Through using “never” (line 771), she emphasized her point that none of the Asian participants asked questions to Gosia or any other student in class. Asian students might prefer to ask their question to the teacher either because in their education system the teacher was the authority figure (teacher knows the right or the best answer) through a teacher-centered learning environment or asking a peer who might be an embarrassment for them, because how they were perceived by others was a big concern for the Asian participants.

The teacher at the ELI did not use applied group or student-centered activities; instead he used lecturing and questions to students. So, even though the ELI is an American education institute and the reading and writing teacher is American, his method is similar to the participants’ other language teachers in their home countries. Therefore, learning from other students is a new concept for the participants. During this study, Asian participants became aware of their potential to teach to and learn from other group members, instead of learning only from a teacher. Considering themselves and other
group members as “experts” was a noticeable change for the Asian participants for their adaptation to the student-centered language. Their self-confidence increased enough such that they were able to contribute to meaning making processes, language learning through group discussions and to express their own opinions about topics rather than just looking for the one “right answer.” As a result, Asian participants became more talkative over time. This phenomenon was noticed by European and Hispanic participants in the group. Also, as a group Asian participants started to ask questions about problems that they could not solve. Participants indicated that through group discussions they were asking questions that came to their mind and it was more effective than in a teacher-centered learning environment at the ELI, because they often had some questions to ask their teacher but did not. Group work enabled them to ask questions to each other immediately and ask the ones they could not solve as a group to the teacher. Also, they said that they were motivated to learn the answer of the questions they could not solve as a group.

Religion

Participants’ religious beliefs and values as a discourse also might influence the participation to the group discussions in this study. The reading texts participants read and were supposed to discuss during the reading discussions might include culturally sensitive topics that participants, i.e. Asian participants, were reluctant to talk about. For example, in Asian culture talking about death and dying was a taboo whereas the same topic was one of the everyday conversation topics in other cultures. According to Masami and KyungOk, in Korean culture people “rarely talk about like this topic like death and dieing” (KyungOk, line 426 and Masami, line 428). KyungOk used “rarely” to refer that this was not one of the common topics that people talked about. Therefore, she was “not familiar” with talking about how and when one would die (lines 427-429). As KyungOk
was “not familiar” with the topic, she could not understand the function of death and
dying course offered at the University of Florida and she really had difficulty in believing
and understanding why people thought about their death and wrote about how they would
die as their own imaginary obituary in the third reading text. Hence, KyungOk’s
understanding of the reading text has changed after group discussion by the help of
Vanessa’s explanations whose culture talked about death and dying (line 434-435). In
order to emphasize the change in her understanding of the text, KyungOk stated that the
group discussion “open my mind to think about this” (line 435). Masami added that death
and dying “may be discussed at school a little bit” (Masami, line 482), but they “don’t
have any [religious] groups,” indicating that the role of religion in Japanese people’s life
was not as much integrated as religious institutions or groups as in Honduran culture
(Masami, line 480). Hence, both Masami’s and KyungOk’s statements indicated that
talking about death was not common in Asian culture no matter which religion people
believed (Atheism, Buddhism and Christianity). KyungOk showed the conflict between
her culture and her religious belief, Christianity: “in my culture it is hard to talk about
death, but, in, for my religion [Christianity] talking about death, even though [my culture
did not]” (line 512-515). On the other hand, according to Hispanic participants, in their
culture talking about death was very common. According to Vanessa, talking about death
was part of life in her culture “Catholic people talk” (line 452), which made them value
the moment (line 448). Also, through giving an example to build a significance of
appreciating the moment, Vanessa told her previous experience of losing her grandfather
indicating that death was the part of life and could happen to anyone anytime: “it is an
everyday thing like I always think about it. It could happen to me, to my parents. I always
think of that possibility” (line 439-441). According to Vanessa, her thought of death and being religious person was related to Vanessa’s parents who were very religious people and they went to church and group meetings every week (line 516). Like Vanessa, Patricia also stated that in her culture people talked about death and dying “it is not like taboo or something like that we can’t talk about (376), “for us death is normal” and “someday you will gonna die” (line 373 and 374), so “[talking about death] it is necessary” (line 377) “but [they don’t talk] not very often” (line 457) as in the case of Vanessa. The reason for not talking about death in Venezuela as often as Vanessa’s culture, according to Vanessa, was that Venezuela was not a very strict Catholic country as Honduras was (line 468) and Vanessa’s parents were participating to the religious group, but Patricia’s did not (line 460). Hence, for both Vanessa and Patricia, attending to a Catholic school, their parents, the religious groups, and their religious beliefs were in favor of talking about death and dying and therefore, they were more talkative about this topic compared to Asian participants.

As a change, gradually Asian participants became more talkative and open to share their ideas with the other members of the group about death and dying.

Stanza: become more talkative as a change
=>337 O: in my culture even though we have own opinion about some topic
338 we rarely talk about their opinion in public
339 just keep in my mind and writing
340 so this every week discussion we have to tell my opinion, our opinions
341 so, first time I am not really accustomed to telling my opinion.
342 But time go go go the last week right
343 some like us Asian people,
344 Vanessa and Patricia
345 I think in my opinion
346 Patricia and Vanessa like they are more
347 V: open
348 O: Yeah express their opinion them us.
349 So, I influenced I got influenced from Vanessa and Patricia
KyungOk coming from Korean culture stated that due to her culture, unlike Vanessa and Patricia, she was not used to express her opinions to others “in public” (line 337-339). Therefore, it took time for her to adapt to this new way of learning, which required participating to the discussions (lines 341 and 342). KyungOk was able to explain what was in her mind to the group (line 345) but compared to Vanessa and Patricia, she was not “much open” as they were (line 346-347). Also, KyungOk stated that she was “influenced” by Patricia and Vanessa (line 349).

From Cultural Differences to Group Bounding

While at the beginning the participants’ cultural backgrounds created differences in their participation to discussions, in time despite those differences, participants created a group bounding. While cultural differences create separateness among participants, later those differences became advantages for participants to enhance their learning. As a group, participants united which positively influenced their English language learning. In this section, through applying James Paul Gee’s (2005) discourse analysis to the data, I will explain how participants developed a group identity and roles as a member of the group during the reading and writing discussions.

“Discourses” with a capital “D,” refers to “different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language “stuff,” such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others” (Gee, 2005, p.7). In other
words, Discourses with a capital “D,” relates one’s identity, which shapes one’s way of speaking, thinking, and behaving in the world so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize as being themselves (Alvermann, 2000). Meanwhile, “discourse” with a lower case “d” refers to “how language is used “on site” to enact activities and identities” (Gee, 2005, p. 7). In other words, language alone is “little d.” For the discourse analysis James Paul Gee (2005) studies linguistic structures (micro-level tools) such as function words, content words, information, lines and stanzas; discourse analysis also examines social structures (macro level tools) such as six task building (building significance, building activities, building identities, building relationships, building politics- the distribution of social goods-, building connections and building significance for sign systems and knowledge); for more detail on discourse analysis see Chapter 3.

Group-bounding Identity as “Foreigners”

The group formed an identity that can be described as: “we are foreigners in the USA.” This group identity indicates three overlapping phenomena: first, participants considered themselves as “foreigners” living in the USA; second, they saw their culture and values as different from the American culture that surrounded them; third, they saw being a ‘foreigner’ as an advantage for them.

Even though participants have lived in the U.S. for a period of time, all of the participants considered themselves as “foreigners,” “here” in the U.S.—the place that they came to learn English better. Through this identity, they shaped their group identity as “foreigners” who came to the USA to learn English. Saying, “we are foreigners here,” participants created an in-group that they perceived as being different from the people and culture of the United States.

Stanza: Being a foreigner as a group
I think my experiences helped me a lot because we are here and we are foreigners so we have some ideas some perspectives and maybe it is not. It just helped me to realize that I am not alone that other people see that even though there are global world, people are different in other countries and I don’t I am not the only one who feels that this country is different than ours.

In this study, participants developed the group identity as “foreigners” in the USA (line 225), and the “we” referred to a group identity (Reynolds, 2004), which includes all the participants enrolled in this study (building identity, Gee, 2005). As Gosia identified herself with other group members who were coming from different cultural backgrounds, she felt that she belonged to this group: “I am not alone” in line 228 (building identity, Gee, 2005). The characteristic of this group with which Gosia associated herself was a group who “feels that this country (U.S.) is different” from their own country in line 230 and 231. Gosia supported her statement about the difference of U.S. from other countries through stating that people coming from different countries agreed with Gosia (line 230 to 23, building significance, Gee, 2005). Research suggests that the extent to which learners acculturate depends on social and psychological distance (Schumann, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c; Ellis, 1994). Social distance refers to the degree to which individual learners become members of the target-language group and, therefore, achieve contact with them. Psychological distance concerns the extent to which individual learners are comfortable with the learning task and constitutes, therefore, a personal rather than group dimension (Ellis, 1994). One possible explanation for the reason why participants consider themselves as “foreigners” is that American culture differed from the
participants’ cultures based on participants’ experiences and observations in the USA.

According to Gosia, American culture differed from European culture in several aspects:

Stanza: giving importance to cultural activities

=>229 G: god! (laughter)
230 my head is empty (laughter) (0.3)
231 For instance that (0.1) we think
232 some of us think (0.2) that people here
233 they try to show off what they have
234 and they spend too much time on doing (0.2) like (0.1) not many important things
235 (0.2) like (0.1) for example (0.2) like culture
236 which is in European countries very important.
237 Help me Isabel (looks at Isabel in the group)

Compared to European people, American people did not give much attention to the
“important things” such as cultural activities (connection building, Gee, 2005) in line 234
and 235. In order to emphasize the difference in that sense, Gosia used “very important”
in line 236 to explain the importance given to cultural activities in Europe (building
significance, Gee, 2005). Towards the end of her comment, Gosia asked for help, “help
me Isabel” in line 237, from Isabel who was coming from another European country,
Switzerland. Gosia’s behavior indicated that she was already aware of the similarity
between herself and Isabel: they were both coming from Europe (identity building, Gee,
2005). However, Gosia was also aware of possible differences because referring to
European culture she stated that cultural events were important in “European countries”
(line 236) in a plural form of “country” (Gee, 2005), meaning that there were several
countries in Europe and they shaped the European culture (building significance, Gee,
2005).

Another difference between European and American culture was respecting elders.
While explaining how much they respect elders in Europe rather than her country, she
puts Europe, Asian countries and America in a hierarchical scale.
Stanza: levels of respecting elders

=>258 G: very important for me
259 I think (0.2) all of us (0.3) we respect older people (0.1) like (0.1)
260 maybe European country they don’t respect so much (0.2) like Asian countries
261 but still respect (0.1)
262 more respect than here. [2. reading discussion]

According to her, Asian countries paid the most respect to elders, European people were
the second and Americans were the ones who paid the least respect to elders from line
260 to 262, which represents building connection (Gee, 2005). As a difference between
American culture, her culture and other participants’ culture, Gosia in line 258 introduced
the topic (respecting elders) with a statement that showed it was an important difference,
“very important for me,” which represents building significance (Gee, 2005). Through
line 259 and 261, Gosia talked on behalf of the group (building identity, Gee, 2005) “I
think all of us, we respect older people” (line 259) and through using “all of us” and
“we,” she identified herself with the group members, with us (building identity, Gee,
2005). She so much identified herself with the group, not as a European personality but
as a group member, that in line 260, she kept herself separate from the European people
even though she was one of them, referring them as “they,” but not as “we,” which
suggests identity building (Gee, 2005).

In addition to cultural differences between the American and participants’ culture,
how the American culture was represented abroad and the lifestyle in the U.S. were also
different. Masami stated what was said about American culture as a common knowledge
and what was happening in real life was different based on her living experiences in the
US.

Stanza: buses are on time or not

=>294 M: for example American (0.2) it is more normal
295 but we are foreigners
so (0.2) we think it is strange for us
it must be on time (0.3)
but for American people it is ok (0.3) it is late. (0.4)
They don’t care too much. [2. reading discussion]

For instance, even though in the reading text American people were represented as people who gave very much importance to being on time, according to Masami sometimes buses were late, which was an activity building through giving an example (Gee, 2005), but it was not a concern for American people even though in the text states that being on time was considered as an American characteristics. According to Masami, “American it is more normal” (line 294) than it is for Japanese people. However, as a foreigner who has already lived in Japanese society which gave more importance to being on time, “for us” (line 296), Masami and others like her, “it is strange for us” (line 296) if bus was late which “must be on time” (line 297) (building connection, Gee, 2005). Through using “they” in her statement, “they don’t care too much,” she isolates herself from American culture (building identity, Gee, 2005) in line 298-299. Also, in line 299, “they don’t care too much,” there is negativity in this statement shown in the word “too” (building significance, Gee, 2005). Masami used it to show the contrast between what the article states her observations of Americans living their everyday life.

According to the participants “being a ‘foreigner’” in the USA is an advantage rather than a disadvantage. Gee (2001) describes a process in second language acquisition where two Discourses can interfere with one another; aspects of one Discourse can be transferred to another Discourse, as one can transfer a grammatical features one language to another. In that, “we can also talk about a literacy being liberating ("powerful") if it can be used as a "meta-language" (a set of meta-words, meta-values, meta-beliefs)=Liberating literacies can reconstitute and resituate us” (Gee, 2001 p.214).
According to Gosia, as they were ‘foreigners’ they already have their home culture, which gave them a perspective to understand the American culture and the reading texts better as all group members were coming from different cultural background and have different experiences with the US culture that might enhance the text’s meaning.

According to Gosia, considering herself as a foreigner in the U.S., being a foreigner gave her a power because, “we” referring to other international students in the group, they have “some perspectives” about America and American culture whereas American people only have one perspective about themselves in line 225 and 226 (connection building, Gee, 2005). In that sense, participants’ cultures enhanced their learning about American culture by making comparisons to “our” culture in line 230 (relationship building, Gee, 2005) because “a meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another foreign meaning” (Bakhtin 1986, p. 7).

Participants’ Roles in the Group

When participants coming from different cultural backgrounds bounded with each other despite those cultural differences, participants operate in the group through adopting some roles. Therefore, during the reading and writing discussions, participants had different roles. These roles were not given to them at the beginning of the activity, but developed during the discussion processes based on their language proficiency level and cultural background knowledge. Also, these roles were not static and all of the participants enrolled into these roles at some times during the discussions. These roles are as follows: Grammar analyst, Cultural attaché, and Group activator.
During the reading and writing discussions, Asian participants were called “expert on grammar points” by both European and Hispanic participants. For example, during the last writing discussion, participants were giving feedback to Vanessa about her summary about the death and dying course text.

Table 5-1. A part from Vanessa’s summary about the death and dying course:

| Even though I have this special interest in psychology, I think this course could be helpful to everyone. Death is something we all have in common, and sooner or later will touch our life in a special way. Everyone must seek ways and prepare themselves to overcome this type of experience. Last year I lost my grandparents (my mom’s parents). I think for all my family was very hard to deal with. But in my case, even though it was something I knew it could happen, was like a shock and it really mark a difference in my life. Still today I always think about that moment and the hard it was to say goodbye. I am really sure they are better there (heaven) than here but my selfishness make me feel sad for not having them with me. I think life is like a challenge, every day we had lived is a won battle. For me, since that sad experience, has helped me realized and treasure every little thing a have. I will never forget that moment, not even relieve the pain I feel, but I’m trying to be a better person and give in life all what I can to the people I love. |
| [April 5, 2006] |

Masami was pointing out the missing subject position as underlined in the part above in Vanessa’s summary during the discussion:

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1262 M: second paragraph (0.5) this people ‘but in my case even though it was’(reads from a summary)
1263 I mean (0.4).”they have”
1264 what is subject?
1265 V: ‘What is subject?’
1266 I don’t (0.1)I didn’t learn (0.2) I don’t know (0.1), I just (0.2)=
1267 M : difficult]..
1268 O: haaa (realizes the point)
1269 V: Asian people analyze (laufther)=
1270 O: =yeah (laufther)
1271 V: things (0.1) ‘subject,’ ‘noun’ (0.2) and I am like ‘I don’t understand’ (0.2)
1272 I just write and
1273 for me it sounds good.
1274 You don’t ask (0.2) I don’t know.[3.writing discussion]
```
To Masami’s question, “what is the subject?” Vanessa answered with a same question while she was thinking out-loud for a second, and then she explained that she did not know the term “subject” stating, “she didn’t learn.” While Masami was trying to find a solution to the missing subject problem in that sentence, KyungOk showed her surprise and ambiguity through an utterance “ahh.” In line 1269 Vanessa underlined the difference between herself and the Asian participants as they analyzed the sentence. According to Vanessa, Asian participants were an expert on grammar analysis whereas she did not have any idea about terminology related to grammar.

Grammatical analysis of the way participants analyzed the sentences differed between students with lower and higher English proficiency. For the lower ones what sounded good was right, for the higher ones what was grammatical was right (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Also, these analyses through talk made the participants critical thinkers and developed their creative skills (Rubin, 1990). For example, referring to the syntactic problems as Vanessa says she “just write and for me it sounds good. You don’t ask I [she] don’t know” (line 1272-1275). So, Vanessa did not analyze the grammar of her sentences in her summaries. Similar to Vanessa, Gosia also answered several grammatical points during the discussions as “to me, it sounds good” (line 274) whereas Isabel and other participants found the structures as grammatically incorrect.

Participants with a lower language proficiency in English pointed out the problematic sentence, but they could not explain why it was ambiguous or could not correct it. Participants with a lower language proficiency in English corrected mechanics and word level problems but participants with a higher language proficiency in English corrected syntactic level.
In Patricia’s summary about death and dying in Table 5-2, Masami found mistakes like the subject (it) is missing in the sentence “I think is depressing” in the third line:

From line 684 to 692 one can see that Masami corrected that sentence in terms of adding a subject as the sentence was missing it. Hence, the sentence became “I think it is depressing.” On the other hand, KyungOk tried to correct the mistake in the if-clause sentence in terms of time agreement from line 693 to 705. Also, the type of inaccuracies participants found was related to their language proficiency level. That is, lower
proficient ones found the mistakes related to spelling, capitalization and basic grammar structures such as missing subjects, whereas higher proficient students found more difficult mistakes, such as grammar problems related to phrase and sentence structures and the connection or disconnections of ideas in the content. For example, Gosia and Masami corrected mistakes related to spelling and capitalization. KyungOk and Isabel corrected complex mistakes, such as sentence structures and connection of ideas.

**Cultural attaché**

Participants connected the reading texts with their culture and experiences. As a cultural attaché of their country and culture, participants contributed to the group discussions through providing information about their cultural backgrounds. In some cases, these interventions ended in opposition to what the author of the reading text wrote due to the incorrect and inappropriate presentation of the perspectives. For instance, in the reading text about American culture, the author Luigi Barzini (1983) represented American people as “all anxiously rushing about always in a great hurry.” According to KyungOk, group discussions enabled participants to discuss their own point of views as a group (line 282-286). Based on her experiences Korean people were in a more hurry than American people even though in the reading text it has been considered as Americans:

=>281 O: this text (0.1) after reading (0.1) I like (0.1) we can discuss about this
282 like (0.1) I don’t agree the American (0.2)
283 American people like (0.1) in a great hurry
284 but (0.1) I think it is (0.1) Korean is more hurry (0.2) more hurrier than American
285 (0.1) but other countries people (0.1) like Isabel and Polish people maybe (0.3)
286 when they read this article (0.1) they think “ah maybe Americans like that”
[2. reading discussion interview]

Therefore, KyungOk can argue with the author and inform other group members (connection building, Gee, 2005) in lines 282 and 286. KyungOk continues:

Stanza: informing others about text during the discussion
KyungOk, coming from Asian culture specifically from the South Korean culture, considered herself as informative (building identity, Gee, 2005) to the other group members (line 287-289). She stated that if she hadn’t explained that Korean waiters were in a much more hurry than the American waiters, the group members would have accepted that the American waiters were the fastest waiters in the world, which built the significance of her contribution to the discussion (Gee, 2005). Hence, she corrected the author’s mistake that American waiters were very fast and so, the meaning of the text that readers in the group could get also changed, as a group now we knew that it was not true any more: “we can think about other ways not just exact what the author said” (line 291-292).

Stanza: finding alternative meanings of the reading texts

Asian participants spoke up if they are sure of the answers or an expert of the information, such as of their counties and culture. As an Asian participant, KyungOk’s contribution to the discussion through explaining that waiters in Korea were faster than the ones in the U.S. was very interesting. The reason was that Asian students were known for their obedience to the authority (Resnick, 1990; Ting-Toomey, 1990), who can be a teacher. However, in this group meeting about this article, she argued with the author. She even went one step further, stating, “it is not true.” What made her argue with the author and share this argumentation with other group members might be due to several
reasons: the friendly atmosphere of the group, her awareness that all the group members were international students, and/or her strong national bounds to her country that she mentions by saying “my country” and “my country’s people.” Sharing this cultural information made group members powerful according to her because as they discussed and shared more information, they may not agree with the author’s views.

Having reading and writing discussions with participants from different cultural backgrounds has changed Gosia’s perspective of the world culture and meaning of the reading texts. While Gosia was traveling in Europe, she noticed people doing the same activities which she listed (activity building, Gee, 2005) as watching same TV channels (line 248), listening to same kind of music (line 249), “do similar staff” (line 251), playing computer games (line 252) and sharing values (line 254). Gosia thought that belonging to the same cultural heritage of Western culture European and American people were similar: “so I thought that we are, more or less, we are the same” (line 253). Through using “so” at the beginning of line 253, Gosia indicated that this was a conclusion (activity building, Gee, 2005) that she has reached based on the evidences of having several similarities she observed through her experience during her travel of Europe (connection building, Gee, 2005) and the U.S. I think because of this travel experience she identified herself with Isabel rather than other people in the group, such as Masami, KyungOk, or me (building identity, Gee, 2005). Also, she continued to identify herself with the European culture using “we have the same like values something like that.”

During the study, by discussing some issues from their own cultural perspectives they were able to understand better some differences between cultures. Also, they found
some logical explanation for culturally misrepresented items. For example, during the reading discussion, they discussed the possible reasons for waiters’ speed in Europe and in Korea. By giving some cultural information they came to a conclusion. Through KyungOk’s explanation that waiters in Korea were faster than the ones in the U.S., as a group we were wondering why it was so. About these issue Gosia uses “I” to emphasize that she has solved our problem about why waiters are slow in the US whereas they are faster in Europe and Asian countries (line 259). However, in order not to be seen too sure about the solution, she adds “maybe” referring that what she will suggest might be the solution (activity building, Gee, 2005). The solution was that in the US due to the regulations people have to leave tips to waiters. In order to emphasize this she was using “you don’t have a choice” (building significance, Gee, 2005). However, as a comparison (connection building, Gee, 2005), in Europe in order to get tips from customers, waiters had to be hurry if they would like to get a tip because is it not mandatory: “in Europe you can, but you don’t have to” lines 263 and 264. The discussions continued among the participants, as described in the following quote: “our meanings cannot always be as fixed and immediate as the ideal of Western culture might wish” (Hillocks, 1995 p.8), Elaborating the text and making connections to a participants’ culture provides a beginning point to move on to further understanding because learning begins with the familiar and continues only after making connection with the known. Interviews allow students to use the speaking, listening, and writing abilities they already have as they develop new abilities (Bruner, 1990 p.124).

**Group activator**

Participants as ‘group activator’ were helping the task organization before they started group discussions. During the discussions, while the higher proficient ones were
opening new conversation topics to discuss related to the reading text topic, other group members provided required information to answer these new questions or topics. Hence, lower level language proficient ones’ involvement was mostly to provide information about their culture.

At the beginning of the discussion, sometimes I, and sometimes other participants, such as Gosia and Vanessa, were organizing the tasks. For example, Gosia was asking to the group members:

=>590 G: so (0.1) we have KyungOk.
591 Y: KyungOk’s?
592 G: ok (0.1) who want to start? [2. writing discussion]

Here, Gosia starts the discussion about KyungOk’s summary through asking, “who want to start” (line 592). She wants other group members to express their suggestions and to give feedback to KyungOk’s summary.

Group activators also opened new conversation topics during reading and writing discussions. Group activators had higher conversational skills due to their higher level proficiency. They directly asked questions to open new conversation topics for the group and provided a statement besides asking others’ opinion about the same topic. Groups activators directly asked questions related to the reading topic. For example, related to the death and dying text, in order to understand more details about this class, Vanessa asked:

=>434 V: what topics (0.1) how they will grate it and
435 at the end what is the thing she want to students get of the class?
436 I think (0.1) it is interesting class (0.1) but we need to know like (0.1)
437 what is the name for that class?
438 Look (shows from the text) because in here it just seems like a discussion (0.1)
439 like you say group therapy or something.
440 P: that is why I think it is course [3. reading discussion]
Vanessa put a series of questions together and waited for the group members to give her an answer. She maintained a positive attitude by saying she found this class very interesting. It looked like she enjoyed having questions: she found it interesting but at the same time a topic she introduced “we need to know” details about it. Through finding a section from the text, she also helped others to participate to the discussion. She provided some answers and discussion points, such as by comparing the course to “group therapy or something.”

Another example of opening a new conversation is making a statement about the topic. Patricia opens a new topic through starting to tell one of her experience.

After participants talked about death and dying course in the third reading discussion, towards the end of the meeting Patricia started a new conversation topic through uttering the sentence, “There is something interesting not in my culture, you know indigenous.” In order to attract our attention or to show the importance of why she was uttering this sentence, she put “interesting” adjective into her sentence. Therefore, as listeners we would like to learn what the thing was that was interesting and somehow related to her
culture. In order to increase out attention, she also stated that this interesting topic was a contemporary one through using “still” in front of the verb “exists.” Therefore, we totally directed our attention to her sentences and helped her to complete her sentences through providing the words that she was looking for and asking for some clarification. Group activators act as interaction providers. By putting some issues into discussion and asking questions, they created a conversational environment which reminds the statement that “language acquisition occurs ‘in interaction’ not as a result of interaction” (Swain & Lapkin, 1998 p.18).

Participants’ Explorations About Their Language Learning with Social Focus

Through discussions students often make discoveries about themselves as individuals and learners in a student-centered learning environment (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). In this study through interacting with each other and learning together in a student-centered language learning environment participants explored about their language learning. After explaining the participants’ interaction through a social pattern, in this section I will tie the data with participants’ L2 learning through interactions. The participants’ explorations about their own language learning with a social-focus through social constructionism are addressed under three subheadings: Interaction is a Way of Learning, Transition to Student-centered Learning, and Developing a Sense of Audience in Their Writing.

Interaction is a Way of Learning

For sociocultural theorists, the metaphor “participation” rather than acquisition guides their work (Sfard, 1998). Learning is a socially situated activity rather than individual activity. Individuals obviously do play a role in learning, but what they will eventually be able to do by themselves, they first achieve collaboratively during social
interaction (Ellis, 2005). In this view of language learning, “the distinction between use of the L2 and knowledge of the L2 becomes blurred because knowledge is use and use creates knowledge” (Ellis, 2003a: 176), or as Landolf and Pavlenko (1995) say, the sociocultural theoretical view “erases the boundary between language learning and language using.” (pp.116). Sociocultural theory, therefore, offers a much more holistic perspective of language learning where individual and social merge into one and where use (language performance) and knowledge (language knowledge) indistinguishable. As Witte and Flach (1994) assert, “The meaning-constructive processes of both writers and readers (and of course speakers and listeners) are collaborative and social, dialogic and interactive” (221).

Compared to the beginning of the reading and writing discussions in this study, Asian participants’ perception of talking changed towards the end of the study. At the beginning, Asian participants perceived “talk” as a response for showing what they have understood and learned whereas for other participants, talking was for brainstorming about the issues so that they could learn together. Also, due to language proficiency, the presence of culturally sensitive topics (i.e., death and dying), and social-cultural behaviors (such as giving more importance to listening to others rather than talking), Asian participants were less talkative compared to other group members. However, by the end of the study Asian participants became more open and talkative in the group, which was also noticed by European and Hispanic participants. KyungOk started to participate particularly more in the discussions compared to her participation in both the first discussion in this study and the reading and writing classes at ELI as reported by
other participants. During the second interview, Asian participants expressed that they were aware of this gradual change that they have been experiencing through this study.

239 O: actually still nervous for me
240 because for the first time really afraid of telling someone something.
241 I think you it is not right like this
242 because I in my case
243 I always care about others’ what others think about what I am saying.
244 So, first time like I almost like no…..
245 I am just listen to others
246 but it is better now.
247 Now I try to tell something but still it is not enough.
248 G: but you need to practice
249 M: For me also like you…….discussion
250 I still feel uncomfortable.
251 Because …….is difficult.
252 I always accept my ……..they showed.
253 They clear……. I mean I add more for example [2. writing discussion interview]

Compared to the earlier discussions, Asian participants, especially KyungOk, felt more comfortable participating in the discussion. Humor and tease, as in the data below, show participants’ relax and comfortness in the group. In Masami’s case, although she was still the least talkative one in the group, she became more talkative and she was also feeling more comfortable in the group. Also, Hispanic and European participants realized this change in Asian participants, especially KyungOk. According to KyungOk, the change in the perception of talking depended on other group members’ role modeling for her. Being grouped with other participants from different cultures who expressed their thought and shared them with others, KyungOk pushed herself to talk more than listen to others:

337 O: in my culture even though we have own opinion about some topic
338 we rarely talk about their opinion in public just keep in my mind and writing
339 so this every week discussion we have to tell my opinion, our opinions
340 so, first time I am not really accustomed to telling my opinion.
341 But time go go go the last week right some like us Asian people,
342 Vanessa and Patricia
343 I think in my opinion Patricia and Vanessa like they are more
344 V:….
Different cultures have different perspectives about talking and being silent. While in Hispanic and European cultures, being talkative is valued as a better behavior (“I am proud of you”) (line 353) and being silent is a sign of “not care,” “don’t know” or passivity that one should “get rid of” (line 352), in Asian culture, “listening to others” rather than talking” is more valued (Chong & Baez 2005). Despite these cultural differences, through the interaction process of discussions KyungOk’s participation in the discussions has changed due to other participants’ (European and Hispanic) role modeling. In that sense, KyungOk considers Vanessa and Patricia as her “teachers” (line 354) from whom she has learned the importance of expressing her opinion and the perception of talking as brainstorming, problem solving and learning together rather than to “teach” or say things they are very sure of.

Secondly, as stated in the interviews, through interacting with each other during the reading and writing discussions, participants were able to understand the text better similar to Pica, Young and Doughty’s (1987) findings. Through this study reading and writing activities were interrelated with each other through talking (discussion). According to (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2001; Yano et al., 1994), talking after reading a text enhances reading comprehension and having a talk before and after a writing activity improves learners’ writing skills and language learning. In addition to these findings, this
study has found that through interrelating both reading and writing activities, participants had a better understanding of the reading texts and they had a chance to practice whole language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) in a meaningful context. They enhanced their skills and understandings through different activities. Even though there was not enough time to read and understand the text on their own, participants can have better understanding of the text through reading discussions:

=>265 M: we never I ….. I need much time to understand
266 so actually in the first discussion the time is not enough for me
267 but everyone finished so I have to …….
268 But from discussion I can understand…. [2. writing discussion interview]

Through reading these discussions participants gather their understanding of the reading text together, trying to understand the whole text. In that sense, reading discussions is a chance to fill the gaps about the reading text in participants’ minds. Additionally during the writing discussions while the group members were discussing their summaries, they were still discussing about the reading texts, which provided more comprehension of the reading texts.

=>293 O: last time we read together and we discuss about what we know about article
294 and that this time we….. we can think about article again and again.
295 So, we could get clear thinking about the topic and
296 I found out like we have same topic and same process
297 but I found out when we wrote summary,
298 we put the sentence or the meaning what we focus on.
299 We read same article but Isabel took sentence include
300 for example like she wrote about a, b, c from the article
301 but even same topic I focus on like b, c, d even same topic.
302 I found out “ ahhhh” the person understand or focus on that thinking
303 but in my case I …….. [2. writing discussion interview]

=>320 M: because in first discussion we …….we become clear about article and
321 because we share our idea or experience
322 so we have we come out more another idea
323 so in the second discussion we can discuss more things. [3. writing discussion interview]
Through writing discussions we discussed further points about the reading text, which enhanced comprehension and created a base for more discussion. Additionally, even though everybody has reached a better understanding of the text at the end of the reading discussions, in their summaries everybody wrote differently. They used the same meaning but different phrases and with different emphasis points of the text. This might also enhance comprehension of the text. Also, through reading discussions the participants focused on the small details of the reading text. In that sense, reading discussions have helped writing discussions. Writing discussions is a chance for checking further reading comprehension (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991).

Transition to Student-Centered Learning

Eisentein (1980) suggests that it is not just the amount of experience, but also the type of learning experiences that individual learners have had, that influences the kind of instruction they prefer and from which benefit the most. Learners whose experience is restricted to a foreign language classroom where a premium is placed on formal grammar training may be encouraged to develop high levels of conformity and control, as these appear to be important for success in such environments (Ellis, 1994) which explains why ELI teachers teach use teacher-centered methods. Through this study participants experienced the transition from teacher-centered approach, which is based on a teacher-lecture and teacher-dominance on the classroom talk, to student-centered approach in which students’ talk is dominant and participants are responsible for their own learning. The transition to student-centered learning benefited participants; for example, they gave importance to each other’s suggestions and shared learning about each other’s cultures. As participants were used to a teacher-centered learning both in their country and at the
ELI, at the beginning of the transition, they had some difficulties to adapt to the new approach. The major difficulty experienced by the participants was that they did not have self-confidence at the beginning of the study. Due to their previous learning experiences, participants were used to having a teacher-dominated language environment rather than student-centered one. They were not used to taking responsibilities of their own learning and to organizing the tasks on their own. For that reason, at the beginning of the study participants asked for very detailed directions and guidelines for their summaries. As they became used to considering the teacher as the only “authority” because of the role of their previous teachers who transformed knowledge to them, students did not have much self-confidence on language proficiency. Therefore, participants did not consider themselves competent enough to give suggestions and they complained, “they were not an ‘expert’ or a ‘teacher’.” However, during one of the discussions, Vanessa told to the group that the important point is not “to do perfect our summaries,” but “do it better.” After, this comment, other participants also felt relieved and became more confident in sharing and asking questions. Hence, participants became aware of the fact that unlike the traditional education system in which there is only one “correct” answer, there might be more than one possible answer to a question. In the teacher dominant learning environment, the teacher is responsible for transferring all the knowledge to participants who are like “empty bottles” that are supposed to intake all the information as passive learners (Fox, 1994). During group activities, participants became more active constructed knowledge through combining and discussing the knowledge that all group members brought with them linguistically as well as culturally to solve the problems (Reid, 1989). Group members served the group based on their expertise areas. For example, some of the
members became a grammar analyst to correct and explain the grammatical issues while other members were mostly enrolled in questioning and arguing about other group members’ suggestions. According to Hillocks (1995), disagreements in the group are “the stuff of learning. When students are encouraged to disagree and to defend their ideas reasonably, they develop a very meaningful stake in classroom proceedings” (p.66).

Some of the group members became responsible for organizing tasks in the group such as whose summary would be discussed next by the group. All members were also a cultural attaché of their own culture and country who elaborated the text topics making connections to their own cultural backgrounds. Hence, through the construction of knowledge, participants started to take more responsibility for their own learning.

At the beginning of the study participants were very hesitant to give and take suggestions to and from each other; by the end of the study, participants started to feel more comfortable sharing their opinions and suggestions with each other. In that sense, they became more open to each other’s opinions related to reading text and about their writing, which influenced Gosia’s language learning and motivation in a positive direction as a social factor (Ellis, 2005, 1994).

=>222 G: my previous experiences
223 like for example the other discussion that we had like a week ago.
224 It helped me to like to listen during this discussion I try to listen to more to
225 like accept
226 because sometime in the first one like you know “no no no not change no way”
227 and like now I try to listen to you
228 and I try to correct my mistakes
229 and I try to remember
230 and I also like more concentrate on other people’s writing.
231 So, I could help them to understand their mistakes if they had like this.[2. writing discussion interview]
Among the participants, at the beginning of the study Gosia was the most insistent member for not accepting her peers’ suggestions. However, towards the end of the research, she started to value others’ feedback.

Furthermore, Asian participants were very hesitant to point out their peers’ mistakes and to make suggestions to them due to their social and cultural backgrounds. Through following European and Hispanic participants as a role models Asian participants became more talkative during the reading and writing discussions. Through the study participants became used to working together as a group despite their differences in terms of cultural, linguistic and religious beliefs. Participants elaborated the reading topics through connecting them with their cultures and experiences and sharing them with other group members.

**Developing a Sense of Audience in Their Writing**

Through reading each other’s summaries and getting some feedback from each other, participants developed the sense of audience in their writing. As they became aware of the audience in their writing, they started to consider the clarity of their work through readers’ perspective.

Research indicates that when students collaborate frequently as readers and writers in small groups, they not only develop a keener sense of audience and appreciation of how author’s craft influences reader response, but also can respond to and revise their own writing with more objectivity (Graves & Hansen, 1983; Newkirk, 1982). Before this activity both in their countries and at the ELI, participants were writing for their teacher. That is, participants were writing in order to accomplish the task given by their teacher and nobody but their teacher was reading their work. However, students need to see their own writing as being worthy of close textual analysis and discussion, whether they have
written a personal narrative or an analytical essay. They need to see the audience for their writing as extending beyond the teacher (Olson, 2003). Through this study participants had a chance to share their work with their group members besides their teacher. Sharing their work with their peers enabled the participants to receive a larger amount of more carefully detailed feedback about their work. For example, Patricia was using very long and confusing sentences in her summaries. Until she received feedback from her group members about the ambiguities in her summary due to using very long sentences, Patricia was not aware of it.

P: Long my long sentences were difficult to understand
134 for me this is not, of course I wrote them.
135 But for the rest of the people that read it, they are not clear enough
136 so I didn’t know that [3. writing discussion interview]

After this feedback, Patricia became more aware of her long sentences in her summaries and started to make them shorter and clearer for the audience. Hence, participants started to pay attention to the clarity not only in terms of linguistic structures, but also in terms of clarity of their ideas in their summaries. Further, they were able to consider the clarity of their work as they became more aware of the audience in their writing. This also established a more meaningful purpose for their work beyond simply completing the task given by the teacher. Writing is a social phenomenon—it is a technique for negotiating meaning with other identifiable sets of human beings which requires far more than a minimal control of syntactic and lexical items in the target language (Kaplan, 1988; Kern, 2003). Hence, participants had a chance to produce output to represent their understanding

At the end of the group discussions, the summaries served to organize participants’ thoughts about the topic and better understanding the reading discussions
(Glover, Plake, Roberst, Zimmer & Palmere, 1981; Bretzing, Kulhavey, 1979; Kulhavy, Dyer & Silver, 1975; Taylor & Berkowitz, 1980; Taylor & Beach, 1984). The group had a chance to hypothesize new vocabulary and syntactic structures used in their summaries as an output. Through the feedback they received from other participants, they tested their outcome as a form of negotiation which is reported as the most beneficial form of revision (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Swain, 2000). Participants gained in terms of presenting their hypothesis to wider audience. They could both test and learn rules about English language, such as new vocabulary, and new ways of representing similar ideas in their summaries. It also created better writing habits for the participants as their teacher reported. The participants paid more attention to do their writing tasks, and became more responsible about considering their audience. Their reading and writing teacher was hesitant at the beginning of the study about whether the participants would be able to accomplish the writing tasks or not because he had difficulty making them write even a paragraph. At the end of the study, participants turned in their summaries on time and were writing one and a half page summaries which they were ignoring at the beginning. Participants commented that they became more aware of their own writing. They knew the points they should check in their writing and they are aware of the process writing. As a group, they were trying to “make their writing better.”

This chapter shows participants’ cultural differences in terms of hierarchy in society, directness, education system, and religious values together influence the participants’ interactions with each other during the discussion. After knowing each other better, gradually participants realized what keep them separate: cultural differences. From
this separateness, participants were able to bond with each other and they developed a
group identity. This group identity, being a foreigner in the USA learning English, helped
participants to solve language problems they have encountered during the reading and
writing discussions. As each participant came from different cultural background and
with different experiences, these participations enriched the reading and writing
discussions. Within the group each participants took different roles (grammar analyst,
cultural attaché and group activator), which were not static. Through these small group
interactions, participants explored that interaction is a way of learning and learning
should not be simply teacher dominant. Furthermore, as the participants had a chance to
share their work with the real audience (other group members), they realized the meaning
of audience in their writing and they started to pay more attention to be sure that what
they wrote is also clear and understandable for an audience.
CHAPTER 6
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I summarize the findings related to linguistic and social pattern of discussions in reading and writing, which are already mentioned under “Participants’ Explorations About Their Language Learning” in both Chapter 4 and 5. Additionally, I attempt to tie the data of linguistic and social-cultural findings together and arrive at some conclusions on how the interactions may support understanding of the texts, writing summaries, and how the interactions may support L2 acquisition. The chapter concludes with teaching and research implications, and suggestions for future research.

Interactive Language Learning

During the reading and writing discussions through experiencing interactive language learning, participants’ cultural backgrounds, and participants’ experiences adjusting to the student-centered language learning environments are salient for English language learning.

In this study of interactive language learning, in addition to culture, the participants’ experiences of student-centered language learning contributed to their English language learning. Discussion provides more autonomy to language learners (Almasi & Gambrell, 1994). Within classroom discussion, the responsibility of learning is transferred from teacher to students. In such an environment participants come to believe that they can control their own learning as they learn how to interact with one another (Alvermann, O’Brien, &Dillon, 1990; O’Flahavan, 1989; Slavin, 1990). Thus, students involved in discussions not only learn how to interact socially and develop
communicative competence, but they learn to take responsibility for their own learning. When students share their thoughts with others, their thoughts become an object that can be reflected upon. By sharing, these thoughts are made available to all group members for inspection, which is an opportunity to expand a student’s limited perceptions.

Besides expanding the students’ perceptions, discussions also enhance the quality of discourse during the discussions. Students who participate in discussions of text not only engage in more dialogue about text. Within this dialogue their discourse is more complex than of students who participate in more traditional teacher-led recitations (Almasi, 1995; Almasi & Gambrell, 1994; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1992; Sweigart, 1991). Additionally, when teachers provided greater opportunities for students to share their opinions about a text, the types of responses that students share broaden (Martinez, Roser, Hoffman, & Battle, 1992) and reflect their personal reactions to the text (McGee, 1992). The contribution of participants’ student-centered language learning experience are grouped into three areas: Response ability, scaffolding, and feedback.

Response Ability

The teacher-centered instruction (teachers talked and asked questions and students listened and answered teacher-posed questions) provides students with few opportunities to enter into dialogue with the learning process (White, 1990). The teacher controls the timing, structure, and content of classroom talk, allowing students limited opportunities to develop what Rubin (1990) has referred to as a “response-ability” (p.28). When comparing the Asian participants’ participation at the beginning and at the end of the study, there is an obvious difference (they became more talkative) observed by not only Asian participants themselves, but also by other participants. If students are to develop critical and creative thinking skills, they must have opportunities to respond to text. The
ability to respond to text, or response-ability, is socially mediated and is learned through a process of socialization in a literacy community. Thus, response-ability is nurtured when students have opportunities to negotiate meaning with text and with other members of an interpretive community. Thus, participants’ interaction in discussions is an important factor in promoting their ability to think critically and to consider multiple perspectives (Prawat, 1989). It is also important for developing their ability to confirm, extend, and modify their individual interpretations of text (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Leal, 1992).

**Scaffolding**

In this study scaffolding is defined as the gradual withdrawal of an expert support, as through instruction, modeling, questioning, feedback, etc., for novice learners’ performance across successive engagements, thus transferring more and more autonomy to the novice learner (Tudge, 1990; Wells, 1999). During this scaffolding process both expert and novice students start to support each other (Kowal & Swain, 1997; Ohta, 2001; Tudge, 1990; Wells, 1999). The higher ESL proficiency students are twice as likely to rely on applying a grammatical rule than on what sounds right; whereas the lower-proficiency students are about equally as likely to rely on either to solve their linguistic difficulty (Swain & Lampkin, 1995). Therefore, in the grammatical analysis, there are important differences between higher and lower proficiency learners (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Even though language teaching institutions and educators give importance to assessment, measurement and testing, we find in this study that language proficiency level is variable even in the same level—a finding similar to Rodriguez-Garcia (2001). For instance, in this study all participants were advanced-level students according to ELI assessment test that applied to all participants at the beginning of the spring semester.
However, through this study, it is clear that some of the participants were more advanced on some skills than other participants. In group activities, typically the expert participant acknowledges the novice and encourages participation (Storch, 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b). Through applying group work, all students might benefit the whole advanced-level reading and writing class. Advanced students will help their classmates, they learn better (Yano et al., 1994). Previous studies (e.g., Kowal & Swain, 1997; Ohta, 2001) suggest these results, which indicate that even less proficient peers are able to provide assistance to more proficient peers and through dialogue, learners can construct utterances that are beyond what each could produce individually. In Ohta’s (2001) terms learners build “bridges to proficiency” (p.125). This scaffolding, together with the internalization of the language learning through social interaction, supports L2 development.

During the reading and writing discussions participants discussed the reading texts and their summaries. Through those interactions, participants not only internalized knowledge (Vygotsky, 1972) as comprehensible inputs (e.g., other participants’ elaboration of the issue) (Krashen, 1985), but also produced output (Swain, 1985) through explanations to each other in a meaningful task (Long, 1996). During this internalization process as there is no evaluation or teacher authority that they have to consider; thus the affective filter is low (Krashen, 1982). Participants produce language for explanations, which is their output. Additionally, the feedback and corrections (negative feedback) are in the form of negotiation, which is considered the most useful way of language acquisition (Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Swain, 2000). As peers can be concurrently expert and novices (Brooks & Swain, 2001; Kowal
& Swain, 1997) within their ZPD, all participants support each other’s learning through questioning, proposing possible solutions, disagreeing, repeating and managing activities and behaviors (DiCamilla & Anton, 1997; Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Tocalli-Beller, 2001). This study presented how acquisition occurs in action, not as a result of interaction (Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Swain, 2000).

Similar to the Klingner and Vaughn’s (2000) study which also focused on peer interaction in groups, in this study the participants provided scaffolding for each other and even the higher achieving students benefited from the group interaction. For example, participants reported that through working with their peers they have learned new vocabulary as earlier reported as the “positive effect results from social interactions” (Ruddell, 1994 p. 436) and new ways of expressing concepts their writing.

Feedback

This study enabled participants to give meaning to their own writing. That is, before this activity participants were writing their assignments for the teacher, not even to their teacher. However, sharing their writing with each other and knowing that somebody other than a teacher reads their summaries enabled the participants to develop the idea of considering the audience in their mind while writing their summaries. Hence, they started to check the clarity of their writing from the audience’s perspective and assistance through dialogue prompted further revisions and self-revisions after the sessions, indicating that peer learning was conductive to self-regulated behavior (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998).

Participants benefited from discussions because they made discoveries about themselves as individuals and as learners (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996). The repetition allowed students to recognize features of the language and to provide the necessary
mediation to solve certain problems (of lexis, spelling, verb form, etc.) (DiCamilla & Anton, 1997). Repetition was also used to appropriate the new forms and/or to help peers with the mastery of provided forms (DiCamilla & Anton, 1997). In this study participants became more aware of their language fossilizations. For example during the discussions issues of fossilization were pointed out to the participants by other group members.

Besides enabling students to master some forms by repetition and feedback, the talk in student groups and the feedback they gave to each other provided help for understanding of complex topics. The discussions assisted their writing in an environment in which students see each other as collaborators “jointly constructing meaning rather than as competitors whose primary goal is gaining the teacher’s approval” (Sweigart, 1991 p.493).

During this study participants also mentioned the benefit of peer feedback. In a similar study, by Paulus that suggests the majority of changes that students underwent were meaning changes. This points to the fact, as Paulus notes, that “not only do students take their classmates’ advice seriously, but they also use it to make meaning –level changes to their writing” (p.281). That is, students find their peers’ advice useful.

Peer response can teach students academic writing because in discussing each other’s essays, they have to apply knowledge about their thesis statements, the development of ideas and the types of text organization (Berg (1999). Furthermore, this discussion of ideas (content) and language can help students “discover” viable text alternatives to unclear aspects of their writing (Berg, 1999, p. 232).

Although students valued the feedback they got from each other during the study, at the beginning participants did not feel comfortable while criticizing other group
members’ work. As in the case of Tang and Tithecott’s (1999) study, gradually they got used to it. Both less and more proficient students benefited from the peer response sessions and increased their language awareness and self-confidence.

**Interdependence of Reading, Writing and Talking**

Talking is a social mode of thinking by which humans jointly construct knowledge and understanding (Mercer, 1995). Thus, talking plays an important role in language learning as commonly a social, rather than an individual, activity; intellectual development is essentially a culturally-situated, guided process; and becoming educated is largely a matter of learning certain ‘ways with words’ in a community of discourse (Mercer, 1996). Also, according to social constructionist theory (Gee, 1992-1999, Gergen, 1994), students are knowledgeable beings with their own theories of world (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Smith, 1975), not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge (Kong & Pearson, 2003). As learners construct meaning through collaborating with others, the meaning has both a cultural and social face (Kong & Pearson, 2003). The cultural face refers to the dispositions and experiences learners bring to the reading process and the social face refers to “give-and-take” of classroom talk about text (Kong & Pearson, 2003 p.90). Meaning is viewed as being located within the event rather than in an individual’s mind (Gee, 1992; Heap, 1992). Thus, literacy is viewed as primarily social endeavor (Bloome, 1985; Bloome & Green, 1992), and discussion is viewed as primarily component of the literacy process. Hence, due to the dialogic and interactive nature of learning and meaning making, the participation is both the goal and the means of learning (Dewey, 1916; Lave & Weigner, 1991; Rogoff, et al., 1996). As students participate in discussions of text, there are many opportunities for cognitive, social, emotional and affective growth (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996).
It is interesting to ask if negotiated interaction is crucial for second language acquisition, why there is so little time spent giving students the opportunity to engage in negotiation with the teacher and other students. Also, when negotiated interaction occurs, who receives the opportunities to engage in it; what types of interaction occur in their classrooms; and how do students contribute to each others’ learning. Answering these questions affect teaching practice and curriculum implementation, which have the potential to facilitate second language development in the classroom context (Foster, 1998). Through combining reading and writing, small discussion groups has allowed Asian students to participate in conversations and to express their ideas and thoughts, through which other students in the class might benefit; they might learn about that culture and their perspectives, and how they make meaning of the same reading text. Through combining reading and talking, writing and talking with each other, not only Asian but also other participants gained benefits.

Besides cognitive, social, and emotional growth, talking helps to increase reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and autonomy of learners. Discussing a reading text with a peer increases reading comprehension (Rodriguez- Garcia, 2001). During the reading discussions, participants’ elaborations served “the twin functions of most foreign land second language reading lessons: (a) improving comprehension and (b) providing learners with the rich linguistic forms they need for further language learning” (Yano et al., 1994 p.214; Leow, 1993).

Students’ reading comprehension improved throughout the study, and their perception about writing changed. At the end of the study participants’ comments showed a change in attitudes toward writing. They began to see writing as an enjoyable process.
Because writing became not individual but group work, the writing process did not require being silent and writing, but talking, discussing, learning from each other and reflecting those contents in a paper with appropriate grammar. As talking is a way of organizing thoughts (Mercer, 1995), talking with other group members enabled participants to organize their thoughts first and then write them, which also makes writing easier for participants, because they had a better understanding of the text. Also, as they elaborate, they were able to express their ideas in different ways, which also might prevent plagiarism in nonnative speakers’ writings.

Therefore, writing, reading and classroom talk are vehicles of active inquiry rather than recitation and review, which is described as “talking and writing to learn” (Britton, 1969; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Writings, such as paraphrasing, outlining, and summarizing improved, which revealed an improved comprehension and retention (Glover, Plake, Roberst, Zimmer & Palmere, 1981; Bretzing, Kulhavey, 1979; Kulhavy, Dyer & Silver, 1975; Taylor & Berkowitz, 1980; Taylor & Beach, 1984).

At the end of the study, as De Guerrero & Villamil (2000) show, the opportunity to talk and discuss language and writing issues with each other “allowed both reader and writer to consolidate and reorganize knowledge of the second language in structural and rhetorical aspects and to make this knowledge explicit for each other’s benefit” (p. 65). The participants’ interactions during the reading and writing discussions indicate that participants’ English language learning focus is more on form than meaning. Also, participants’ first language can both inhibit and enhance English language learning.
Focus on Form vs. Focus on Meaning

Similar to other studies (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1998; Kowal & Swain, 1997; Swain & Lapkin, 1995), this study confirmed that participants’ feedback included more grammatical corrections and suggestions rather than content ones. Both reading and writing discussions indicated that participants gave more importance to linguistic features (grammar) of language rather than content. Typically, during the writing discussions, emphasis was on giving suggestions and dealing with grammatical issues either in word or sentence based forms rather than the content of the work. During the reading discussions participants gave more importance to the content especially connecting the topic to their own culture and share their knowledge with other group members. The participants’ focus on form (linguistic structure of language) is related to the curriculum for the teaching of English in a foreign language learning environment and American language institutes, such as the ELI, that keep this traditional “focus on grammar” and not a focus on meaning (Gascoigne, 2002). However, as Gascoigne (2002) suggests, we should combine both in our teaching and learning process.

First Language and English

The literacy relation between participants’ first language and English is another important issue related to combining talking through reading and writing. For example, during the reading discussions Hispanic and European participants were able to guess some unknown words and concepts correctly in the reading texts as their L1 shares the same language root, Latin, with English. First language influence gives advantages to European and Hispanic participants for encoding unknown words in the reading text as a positive transfer whereas participants’ from language groups outside of Europe find that
word encoding is inhibited due to the differences between the language root of English and their first language family (Ellis, 1994).

During the writing discussions, as Gass and Lakshmanan (1991) put it, “the learner initially searches for correspondences or matches in form between the native and the second language” (p.272). Cross-linguistic transfer hypothesis posits that knowledge is transferred from the learners’ first language into the performance of cognitive and linguistic tasks in the second language (Hornberger, 1994; Koda, 1997, Odlin, 1989). The greater the similarity in the writing systems of the two languages, the greater the degree of transfer, thus reducing the time and difficulties involved in learning to read and write the second language (Odlin, 1989). However, this present study indicates that knowing a students’ English language proficiency level is important in order to differentiate which similarity between L1 and English can be used in English and which cannot be used. Similar to Odlin’s (1990) findings, participants with a lower-level English language proficiency, and whose native language and English were similar, more tend to translate the sentence structures directly from L1. These translation caused ambiguous meaning to appear in phrase and sentence structures—a result of the differences in syntactic structures of first language and English and the lack of cultural meaning equivalency of the culturally embedded idioms in English. Additionally, as in the case of Gosia, not all students of English are good at writing in their L1. Based on research on this field (Fu, 2006), L1 literacy helps the acquisition and development of L2. Therefore, educators teaching English should be aware of students’ literacy skills in their native language which might be a reason for limits in a student’s ability in writing in English.
Teaching Implications

Rodriguez-Garcia’s (2001) study shows that language proficiency level is variable even in the same level. Therefore, educators should be aware of the students’ individual needs. As a teacher in a classroom it might difficult to meet all students’ unique needs, but through small group interactions, students can learn from each other, which meets their individual needs.

Another set of important factors in the English language learning classroom are cultural differences (e.g. having different perception of classroom talk). As language teachers, we should be aware of these cultural differences and inform Asian participants about the multifarious purposes of having discussion, which include brainstorming and thinking together not simply replacing the teacher. Also, teachers should be aware of the fact that even though asking questions and participating in the conversation through making comments are the characteristic of American classroom culture Asian students can also contribute to it. Applying small-group activities might be used as a transition period for those learners to speak in class. Small-group activities help them to share their ideas with few members first and then to share and verbalize in front of the whole class.

The ELI teacher who contributed to this study with his class commented that combining reading and writing activities through talking in small-group activities helped all the students in the class. He said, “their English language learning has improved a lot. I could not do it myself.” However, he also commented that he would use group work activity two or three times in a semester because it takes more time compared to teaching through a lecture. Therefore, even though he believes in the value of group work, due to time management issue, he views the practical applications of group work as being limited by the curriculum. Researchers need to investigate in more detail where and
when we should apply group work activities so that it will be more helpful to students’
language learning during reading and writing.

ESL reading instruction through memorization has tended to focus on linguistic
forms such as word recognition, pattern drills and oral reading instead of constructing
meaning through complex thinking and critical response (Au & Raphael, 2000;
Fitzgerald, 1995; Valdes, 1998). Through creating time and opportunity for diverse
learners to construct textual meaning both individually and collaboratively through
discussion would allow students to actively produce language and develop more complex
linguistic tools for communicating with each other—these tools are important for ESL
learners’ language development (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Garcia, 1993; Gersten, 1996;
Kong & Pearson, 2003). For teachers who do not use group activities (e.g., this teacher)
and who might considered reading and writing activities as separate from conversation
(e.g., this teacher), this study can provide a guide to help them understand and apply
collaborative activities in their classroom.

Writing should be taught not only through lectures but also through writing. In this
study I was a participant. Like other participants, I wrote summaries about the reading
texts we read and discussed as a class. My summaries, even though it was not my
intention to do so, provided a model for the participants. During the trial week, the
teacher also wrote his summary. For the first time, students saw their teacher’s summary.
However, later the teacher stopped writing. I believe students need to see their teacher’s
writing instead of learning how to write by being their work corrected by their teacher.
Also, seeing their teacher’s work, as in the case of their seeing my work, thought them
that writing is not only a product as they have been taught in their country, but a process
through which we write several drafts to reach the final product. The effects of how an expert’s writing samples contribute to participants’ writing development should be investigated.

**Research Implications**

In this study the reading materials were provided by the teacher and chosen by the participants. As a further study, we should ask whether participants can learn while writing in specific genre (e.g., argumentative, narrative) from the structure of reading texts. If so, how does the structure of reading texts help students to write in that genre? In this study, during the reading discussions within the limited time (in this case, a 50 minute period), participants spent most of the time working on vocabulary and the topic of the texts, but they had very limited and in some cases no time to analyze the structure of the reading texts. As reading and writing connections indicate that teaching of one area can facilitate skills in another area are highlighted in previous studies (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1984; Stotsky, 1984; Langer, 1986; Tierney & Leys, 1984). How discussions facilitate reading and writing interrelationship should be investigated further.

The role of talking is investigated in this study. During the writing discussions, when other participants pointed out an ungrammatical and meaning ambiguity, a participant had a chance to explain why she used a structure or what she tried to mean by that structure. Then, other participants gave a suggestion with an explanation why she could not use it in that way. Participants reported that through those explanations, they could remember the points better. During the discussions and explanations, participants mostly focused on grammar and vocabulary issues, which are mostly related to language acquisition. At the beginning of the study, the teacher was not even sure whether participants would be able to write a summary, because since the beginning of the
semester participants were only writing very short journal entries without any structure (free writing). This study provided participants to move from free writing to writing a summary as a way to organize their understanding of the discussions about the reading topic and their opinion about it. Further research should focus on participants’ move from organizing ideas in a summary to learning to write in a specific genre, such as argumentative essay. The ELI mission statement puts forward the goal of the institution as the preparation of international students for graduate education, and participants, especially ones attending the advanced level, should know how to write an argumentative essay which is an important skill for the successful completion of a graduate degree. Therefore, the goal of learning genres of writing, such as the argumentative essay should be incorporated into the curriculum of the various language classes. With that being said, the role of talking as a method for teaching the writing of an argumentative essay in English must be researched. Such research should also cover the uniqueness of English rhetoric as a component of Anglo-American cultural values, and how these values might serve as obstacles in a cross cultural classroom (Fox, 2004).

This study included four weeks of intensive data collection. As language learning takes time especially academic language learning (Thomas & Collier, 1995, 1997), a longitude study should explore participants’ interactions. Through a longitude study the transition from the participants’ second/foreign language acquisition to English literacy acquisition should be observed. This way the long term effects of group discussions on reading and writing can be better understood.

In this present study, the participants were all female and aged from 17 to 26; further studies should investigate groups that have a mix of genders, and a mix of
different ages groups’ interactions and meaning making processes. As female and male roles are shaped by culture, students’ participation in the discussions (e.g., turn taking) and the roles they have enrolled (e.g., explanation or questioning) might be different. Additionally, the roles emerged naturally through this study (e.g., group activator, cultural attaché and grammar analyst) might be investigated in different cultural groups, such as during Turkish students’ interactions in a small group.

Future studies should also take into consideration the role of the classroom environment on group activities. For this study the setting had to be my office for data collection instead of the classroom, especially for participant observation and recording purposes. Further research might investigate the interaction within a classroom with a teacher presence. More advanced research might evaluate different, non-traditional, classroom arrangements and the effect of these arrangements on student behavior as well as the overall learning process.

The reading and writing teacher had no experience with group work activities during this study. Therefore, like many teachers with limited experience with group work and with a lecture-centered philosophy of teaching, the teacher had some concerns about adjusting his position in the group activities. As there is a shift of authority from teacher to students, the teacher who is used to having the control of the class experienced anxiety over his loss of control. In time, he tried to lessen his controlling role in the group activities through letting students explain their ideas to each other. The students’ group interactions with the teacher, with the researcher, and without any teacher and researcher (students on their own) should be investigated further. This further analysis can provide
valuable information about the influence of teacher/researcher/native speaker vs. all nonnative speaker interaction.

This study has provided some insights about the researcher as a participant in group work. However, especially in a foreign language teaching and learning environment, having a native speaker of English teacher is difficult and teacher cannot meet all of the students’ needs because of the larger classroom sizes (e.g. in Turkey around 45 students per class at College level, around 30 students in private institutions teaching English) compared to the ELI (15 students per class). Therefore, how students without any researcher or a teacher interact and how this interaction contributes to their language learning should be investigated further. Additionally, working with a teacher who has some experience of group work activities and with students who already participated to group work activities should be investigated. This kind of research might provide information about the role of teachers and student training.

The growth of English as an international language (ELI) requires more research on the varieties of what is commonly called “world Englishes” (Kachru & Nelson, 1996; Kachru, 1985, 1992). According to Kachru, learning English in India, for example, really does not involve taking on a new culture since one is acquiring Indian English in India. The “Indianization” of English has led to a situation in which English has few if any British cultural attributes. This process of “nativization” or “indigenization” (Richards, 1979) of English has spread to an “outer circle” (Kachru, 1985) of countries that includes India, Singapore, Philippines, Nigeria, Ghana, and others.

Similar to the postcolonial situation where English is embedded in an L1 culture (Kachru, 1985) as an official language within national boundaries, there is also an
“international English” (Saville, 1989), which is used for the communication of people across national boundaries. This international English involves speakers with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who have learned English as a foreign language, as in the case of this study. Unlike world Englishes, international English brings speakers of English as a foreign language with different L1 cultural backgrounds together using English. As showed in this study, participants communicate with each other in English but retain their L1 cultural values, as seen in their talkativeness, notions of authority, and turn taking responsibilities. As speakers coming from different cultural backgrounds, the idioms they have translated to English might only be understood by the person who shares the same L1 and culture. If we take this present study as an example, with participants coming from three major cultural backgrounds (European, Asian and Hispanic), understanding what is said in English must have been very difficult because participants’ sentences were not clear due to grammatical problems and meaning ambiguities. However, participants were somehow able to understand each other as there were two people who share the similar culture. As a sample, this study provides some insight about the function of International English as the cultural values of participants to the discussions during the reading and writing activities. If there had been only one person from each culture, how would they communicate?

Furthermore, we need to study the role of technology on communication among international English speakers. The learning environment is changing as a result of technology, for example the international English language learning environment is taking more prominence through the Web (e.g., online English courses) than ELI institutions.
APPENDIX A
SCRIPT FOR READING SESSION

I want to observe you while you are reading text given by your teacher, your discussions with each other and your explanations of your thinking procedure to your group members out-loud. Sharing your ideas with your group members is the most important part of the session. Therefore, I would expect you first to read the text on your own and then to commend, to discuss, to ask questions, to ask for clarification in order to articulate your and your group members’ ideas. I will be also one of the member of your group. I will tape record the sessions.

Let’s begin.

(Group members and the researcher (Yildiz Turgut) read the text and share their ideas about the text.)
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR READING SESSION

I want to talk to you about your reading activity that you did with your group members few minutes ago. I am interested in your perceptions of meaning making with your group members while reading the text and how the process of collaboration with a group members impact on meaning making while reading a text in English.

4. I would like to ask you few questions.
5. Describe the process of reading the text that you just experienced.
6. Describe some benefits of shared reading activity.
7. Describe the difficulties during this reading activity.
8. How did each of you contribute to the reading the text?
9. How did your discussions change your understanding of the text?
10. How do your previous experiences and interests assist you in reading the text?
11. How do your culture influence your meaning making in this reading activity?
12. Is there anything that you would like to add? Do you have any questions or comments?

Thank you for your time.
APPENDIX C
SCRIPT FOR WRITING SESSION

I want to observe you while you are discussing about your writing assignment that was given by your teacher, your discussions with each other and your explanations of your thinking procedure to your group members out-loud. I will be also a group member and we will share our ideas with the group members, which is the most important part of the session. Each paper written by the group members are supposed to be read beforehand. Therefore, I would expect you first to talk about your own paper and then to commend, to discuss, to ask questions, to ask for clarification in order to articulate your and your group members’ ideas. I will be also one of the member of your group. I will tape record the sessions.

Let’s begin.

(Participants will talk about their papers to refresh our memories and share their ideas about them.)
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR WRITING SESSION

I want to talk to you about your discussion about writing activity that you did with your group members few minutes ago. I am interested in your perceptions of meaning making with your group members after writing your essay and how the process of collaboration with a group members impact on meaning making for your and others’ writing in English.

13. I would like to ask you few questions.

14. Describe the process of sharing writing the text that you just experienced.

15. Describe some benefits of shared writing activity.

16. Describe the difficulties during this writing activity.

17. How did each of you contribute to your writing?

18. How did your discussions change your understanding of your writing and others’?

19. How do your previous experiences and interests assist you in writing?

20. How does the discussion of the reading text in the previous time influence your meaning making through your writing?

21. How does the discussion of the reading text in the previous time influence your meaning making through discussion that you had in writing session?

22. How do your culture influence your meaning making in this writing activity?

23. Is there anything that you would like to add? Do you have any questions or comments?

Thank you for your time.
APPENDIX E
TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

A letter followed by a colon indicates the speaker of the utterance.

Y: = Yildiz (researcher from Turkey)
O: = Ok (from South Korea)
M: = Masami (from Japan)
P: = Patricia (from Venezuela)
V: = Vanessa (from Honduras)
G: = Gosia (from Poland)
I: = Isabel (from Switzerland)

*Italics* indicate that the word is in another language other than English.

=> Arrow indicates that the beginning point of discourse analysis in a quotation.

[ ] Brackets are used to show how a speaker’s utterance is interrupted by another speaker

() Words in parenthesis indicate what the speaker are doing while they speak.

____ Underline represents emphasis

(…) Parenthesis with ellipses indicates that a portion of the transcript was omitted.

?? Two question marks represent an inaudible or unintelligible word.

= An equal sign is placed in between utterances that occur simultaneously.

// Words in slashes indicate a quasi-phonetic spelling of sound produced.

All other punctuation is used for the convenience of the reader.

Words in a box were participants’ summaries.
The first reading text: “To Spank or not to Spank”

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Article published Oct 16, 2002

**To spank or not to spank**

Tina Yokum was angry when her 5-year-old stepson, Michael, shredded a brand new school shirt with a pair of scissors.

She counted to 10 and asked the boy if it was the only shirt he destroyed, “if you did this to any other shirt, you have to tell me right now,” she said sternly. “If I find out later that you didn’t tell me the truth, then I’ll spank you.”

So when Yokum discovered another ruined shirt the next day, Michael got a spanking.

Though spanking is rarely used as a form of discipline by Yokum or her husband, David, she says she is certain the situation called for it. Sometimes, she said, a spanking gets the message across when nothing else does.

Yokum is hardly the only parent with that opinion. National surveys say four out of five parents turn to spanking at least occasionally, and many parents’ rights groups believe mom and dad should be left to make that decision.

But other parents say spanking is a form of child abuse and that hitting a child is no better than beating a dog or punching an adult.

“Spanking a child does for that child’s development exactly what wife beating does for a marriage,” says Jordan Rlak, founder of Projector No Spank in Oakland, Calif.
Spanking has long been a hot-button issue, and the debate has once again made national news.

Jerry Regier, Gov. Jeb Bush’s choice to head the beleaguered Department of Children & Families, tripped a cultural fuse over his views on spanking. The agency’s previous director resigned after months of embarrassments, starting with the agency’s admission in April that it had lost a child in its care without noticing for more than a year.

In August, Regier came under fire for an article he wrote 14 years ago in which he condoned spanking, even when it causes welts and bruises.

That goes against the position of the American Academy for Pediatrics, the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association, all of which firmly oppose spanking. So do the widely used teachings of Dr. Benjamin Spock.

Still, spanking, a form of corporal punishment, is legal in the United States. Several western European countries have outlawed spanking, but surveys suggest 94 percent of American parents spank their children by the time they are 3 or 4 years old.

That number does not account for the regularity or severity of the punishment, or the context in which the punishment is delivered.

One thing is certain: It’s not an issue that will be clearly resolved any time soon. “It’s an issue that people feel pretty passionately about,” says Dr. Richard Marshall, a licensed child psychologist and a professor of educational psychology at the University of South Florida. “No matter which side of the debate you fall on, you feel strongly about it.”

At the heart of the issue is the line between corporal punishment and child abuse.

Researchers generally define spanking as two swats on the bottom with an open hand, but that doesn’t necessarily reflect what parents do, especially when they’re angry.

“Too often, spanking is done in anger,” Marshall says. “That line between spanking and abuse is a very narrow one, and it’s easy to cross that line.”

State laws on corporal punishment vary. Generally, laws state that such punishment is excessive or abusive if it results in sprains or broken bones, cuts or lacerations, significant bruises or welts, and permanent or temporary disfigurement, among other injuries.
Corporal punishment remains legal in at least 23 states, and the United States Education Department’s most recent data show that 365,000 children were paddled in the 1997-98 school year, mostly in the South.

Marvin Munyon, director of the Family Research Forum, a state lobby in Madison, Wis, says he believes the anti-spanking group has vilified spanking, making safe, controlled spanking appear to be a form of child abuse.

“We’re not doing it to hurt (children), but to send a message that there are consequences to their actions,” he says. “I’m talking about spanking a child on their bottom, not... beating a child.”

Munyon, a father of three grown children who advocates spanking in situations of extreme bad behavior, used a Ping-Pong paddle to spank his children.

“Reasonable, physical discipline of a child is a parental right that ought to be protected,” Munyon says.

But anti-spankers like Marshall, who has never spanked his four children and does not condone corporal punishment, believes the rights of a child come first.

“We wouldn’t dream of spanking an adult to change their behavior,” he says. “Why should we do that with a little person?”
The United States has been compared to a man on a bicycle, who will collapse if he stops pedaling and moving ahead—unlike other, older nations, which are what they are immutably, whether standing still, going backward, or advancing. In its relentless pursuit of ultimate and unreachable perfection, it has been described as a daring experiment, one generation ahead of everybody else, the last word in modernity, the future that works, the next century….

Very few imitators have understood that the secret of the United States’ tremendous success is not merely technology, know-how, the work ethic, or greed. It was a spiritual wind that drove the Americans irresistibly ahead. Behind their compulsion to improve man’s lot was at first an all-pervading religiousness, later the sense of duty, the submission to a God-given code of behavior, the acceptance of God-given task to accomplish and of all the necessary sacrifices. Few foreigners understand this, even today. The United States looks to them like the triumph of soulless materialism. The religious fervor and Protestant ethic that were so blatantly evident in the past are certainly less visible now. But they are still there, even if few Americans mention them….

The American “dream,” the somewhat impractical knight-errant idealism, must be understood in conjunction with another fundamental, ever-present, and sometimes contradictory American trait: pragmatism. The two don’t always go well together. Pragmatism is the belief that all problems can be solved, combined with the urge to solve all of them in the shortest time….

What does frighten foreigners, Europeans in particular, is America’s impatience. That might also be called impetuosity, ardor, eagerness to apply premature formulas and achieve rapid results. Its origins are obscure. For more than two centuries, foreign visitors to the United States have noticed with awe that its inhabitants are all anxiously rushing about always in a great hurry, and many of them—Jefferson, for instance—have tirelessly invented time-saving devices. Whether Americans are really always in a hurry, more in a hurry than other busy industrialized people, more say, than Germans or the Japanese, is of course, debatable. American trains and waiters have always been much slower than European ones; American drivers surely do not go as fast as Italians. Where was and is the fire? Perhaps pragmatic Americans consider life with problems unacceptable. They believe that all problems not only must be solved but that they can be solved, and that, in fact, the main purpose of a man’s life is the solution of problems…. If each problem has a solution, why lose time, why not find it immediately, now today? All it takes, in most cases, is an assemblage of eminent and talented specialists, scientists, and professors from the right universities with enough money and time—not too much time, of course—and the answer will emerge.
Rachel Visschers already knows about death.

The UF senior lost her father, Rudy, to lung cancer in 2002. He was just 52.

Yet Visschers chose to immerse herself in the culture of death last fall when she took Susan Bluck’s Death and Dying course at UF. Now the class has Visschers thinking about life.

“We spoke about how it is to lose a father, and one of the questions was, ‘Do you reflect on your life regularly?’” says Visschers, who discovered several classmates who had lost siblings and friends, including one who was also dealing with the loss of a parent. “Because we both lost people, the answer was, ‘All the time.’”

Bluck, an assistant professor in the Center for Gerontological Studies and the Department of Psychology, says she hopes to educate her 20-plus students about the many facets of death and how death affects each of us every day. This includes dismantling taboos as well as raising awareness of quality of life at the end of life.

While the curriculum focuses on death and life, students often walk away from the course with a better understanding of themselves.

Bluck often engages her students in candid discussions about death at the personal and societal level. Close to September 11, for instance, they talked about war and terrorism. From then on, that tone created a basis for frank discussions about many facets of death, often controversial.

“All of us are going to have this happen to us,” she says. “All of us are touched by death right now in one way or the other.”

Bluck sees death as a time of potential growth. She says there is no way to overcome the emotional, mortal and real side of the last stage of life.

“It’s not something you just “get over,” she says.

Bluck, who came to UF four years ago from Berlin, actually revived a Death and Dying course previously taught by UF professor emeritus Hannelore Wass. Bluck has taken his concept and added many of her own topics, including homicide, suicide, care-giving, quality of life and biomedical research.

Bluck even has the students write their own obituaries. And oddly enough, it’s an exercise the students enjoy.

Choosing how to die was the hardest part for Visschers and her classmate, senior Kristen Viverto. In the end, Viverto decided she’ll be hit by a car.

Mirroring her father’s death, Visschers chose cancer.

“I think it’s a good reflection on life because it makes you realize what’s important in life and what you want to be,” Visschers says of the project.

Going into the course, Bluck says she had certain expectations for undergraduate students — they might not be familiar with death or ready to discuss it so openly. The range of experience in the class, however, surprised her.

“The students are responding really well. I love doing this,” she says. “It’s sort of funny to say that it’s fun teaching a death and dying class, but I enjoy it. I’m doing something that’s meaningful.”

— Staci Zavattaro (4JM)
APPENDIX G
PARTICIPANTS’ WRITING SAMPLES

Isabel
29 March 05
Summary (first draft)
Luigi Barzini
Group 1

The text, written by Luigi Barzini is about US culture and the perception foreigners have of it. Americans are always going forwards, without taking any break, and it makes them being ahead of the other nations. The source of their energy to archive goals was at first their religiousness, which accustomed them to try everything to solve their problems. Americans also have two main characteristics that makes them different from the other cultures: the American dream, that makes them try to reach perfection, and pragmatism, that helps them to get efficiently the solution to a problem. Foreigners, especially Europeans, are very surprised by Americans’ eagerness to get results, sometimes without taking time to think. However, that is what makes the US so advanced.

This text was for me difficult to understand because it is taken out of a book, and therefore the reader can’t follow the author’s ideas in detail. Thus, I can’t say if I am pro or con his opinion. However, the topic is interesting, and makes us think about our experience in the USA.
The text, written by Luigi Barzini, is about American culture and the perception foreigners have of it. Americans are always going forwards, without taking any break, and it makes them be ahead of the other nations. The source of their energy to achieve goals was at first their religiousness, which accustomed them to try everything to solve their problems. Nowadays, Americans have two main characteristics that make them different from the other cultures: the American dream, that makes them try to reach perfection, and pragmatism, that helps them to get efficiently the solution to a problem. Foreigners, especially Europeans, are very surprised by Americans’ eagerness to get results, sometimes without taking time to think. However, that is what makes this country so advanced.

This text is difficult for me to understand because it is taken out of a book, therefore the reader cannot follow the author’s ideas in detail. However, the topic is interesting. It makes us think about our experience in the country. Contrarily to the author’s opinion, I think, after 8 months of observations, that Americans are not in hurry. They have always time to go to a baseball game, watch their favorite television show, or cut the front yard’s grass. Moreover, cashiers and waiters are the slowest I have ever seen. It is true that a few people, such as businessmen, do not have much free time and work a lot, even when they do not need to. However, the reason is not only "religious." I think that this type of Americans immerse themselves into their work because they are obsessed with money, success and power. They are so materialistic that they forget to live.
An article we read in our first discussion is about American identity. It is written by Luigi Brazini. The author described America as a man on a bicycle always pedaling and moving ahead. Because America chase the ultimate and the unreachable perfection of their goal relentlessly. It is one of the reason why America successes as most developed country. Second reason is because of their work ethic and greed. It is compulsion for American like all-pervading religiousness, sense of duty, the submission to God-given code of behavior, the acceptance of a God-given task to achievement and of all the necessary sacrifices. As an American characteristic, the author mentions about Pragmatism which is the belief that all problems can be solved and the impulse to solve all of them as soon as possible. Foreigners are surprised about Americans impatience. Americans are always in a great hurry. It can be impetuosity, ardor, and eagerness to apply incomplete formulas and achieve rapid results. Americans are more hurry than industrialized countries people such as Germans or Japanese. For American the main purpose of their life is resolution of problems.

After I read this article I felt that I don’t think Americans are always in a hurry and impetuosity. They are rather than patient for me, especially for Japanese. For example, they can wait in the restaurants and at the bus stop for long time. And at the Cafe shops, convenience stores and cell phone shops, they don’t change their selling goods so often. This is best way to survive in Japanese society. Because Japanese really like new things.
In Japan almost every day they put new products in their shops to attract customers. After 1 or 2 weeks, the goods suddenly disappear. It is much faster than American does. In this way I feel American doesn’t chase ultimate relentlessly.
The article we read for our first discussion is about American identity. It is written by Luigi Barzini. The author describes America as a man on a bicycle always pedaling and moving ahead. There are two reasons why America succeeds as the most developed country. One of the reasons is Americans chase the ultimate and the unreachable perfection of their goal relentlessly. The second reason is their work ethic and greed, so they are compulsion for American like religiousness and sense of obligation. As an American characteristic, the author mentions Pragmatism which is the belief that all problems can be solved and the impulse to solve all of them as soon as possible. Also, foreigners are surprised about Americans’ impatience. Americans are always in a great hurry. It can be impetuosity, ardor, and eagerness to apply incomplete formulas and achieve rapid results. Americans hurry more than industrialized countries’ people such as Germans or Japanese. For American the main purpose of their life is resolution of problems.

After I read this article that I don’t think Americans are always in a hurry and impetuosity. They are rather more than patient for me, especially for Japanese. For example, they can wait in the restaurants and at the bus stop for a long time. At the Cafe shops, convenience stores and cell phone shops, they don’t change their selling goods so often. This is best way to survive in Japanese society, because Japanese really like new
things. In Japan almost every day they put new products in their shops to attract customers. After 1 or 2 weeks, the goods suddenly disappear. It is much faster than American does. In this way I feel American people don’t chase ultimate relentlessly.
The text that we had to write during Monday’s meeting basically discusses about American culture. The point of this text is to show how and why American culture differs from other cultures. In this text we can find a few examples of differences between American peoples and other nations. Also we can find information about basics of the American identity. For example one of them is the truth that Americans are pragmatic. The author of this text is supporting his ideas by bringing up the facts from history.

I think that this text was very interesting, because now I know that I am not the only person who thinks that even though we live in a global world we differ from each other. Being a foreigner in the USA is not easy and I think that people shouldn’t express their opinions about American culture if they have never been in this country.
The text that we had to read during Monday’s meeting was written by Luigi Barzini. This text talks about American culture. The point of this text is to show how and why American culture differs from other cultures. In this text, we can find a few examples of differences between American people and other nations. The most highlighted in the text are: American people’s way of solving problems, their impatience, and the fact that generally they are in a hurry. Also, we can find information about basics of the American identity. For example, one of them is the truth that Americans are pragmatic. The author of this text is supporting his ideas by bringing up the facts from history. He tries to show the connection between the American people’s way of acting in the past with their religiousness.

I think that this text was very interesting, because now I know that I am not the only person who thinks that even though we live in a global world, we differ from each other. Being a foreigner in the USA is not easy and I think that people shouldn’t express their opinions about American culture if they have never been in this country.
Cultural Identity

The text taken from a book explains the characteristics of American people and culture. One of the characteristics is: always moving and going forward; being impatient and producing time-saving gadgets besides being idealistic and pragmatic at the same time. According to the author, the American spirituality is the base for the success. This spirituality includes believing to God, accepting the God given duty and responsibility to accomplish this task. The author further explains how the Americans' practicality and idealism makes them different from other nations, such as Germans, Japanese, and Europeans. That is, the Americans' perspective of life creating an environment eliminated from any problem. Therefore, even though the American waiters and drivers considered to other nations are slow, there is minimum or no problem during the service time. In other words, this is the way American practicality and idealism are unified.

The author takes a distance position while presenting the topic: he/she presents what the outsiders such as Europeans and other nations think about the characteristics of the Americans. The author’s role in the text is to teach and clarify the points about the American culture to foreigners. As the text is taken from a book, I guess, it is difficult to understand the order of the ideas presented in the text as it is only a part of the whole text.
Learning life by Studying the Culture of Death

The article we read in yesterday’s class talked about a course imparted in the University of Florida by Susan Bluck, an assistant professor in the center of Gerontological Studies and the department of Psychology. The name of this unusual course is Death and Dying. Her goal is to teach the many aspects of death by dismantling this taboo, and how death affects each person in daily basis. She tries to generate outspoken, sincere, wide-open and often controversial discussions in each class. This class helps not only those people who had experiences related with death but also those who are not familiar with it.

I found interesting this topic. In my culture and religion its very common to talk about death but I had never seen it as a class or a course. In my case I would be interested in taking this course. I think for a psychologist it is important to know the different perceptions every culture and religion has about death to be able to help people deal with it. Even though I have this special interest in psychology, I think this course could be helpful to everyone. Death is something we all have in common, and sooner or later will touch our life in a special way. Everyone must seek ways and prepare themselves to overcome this type of experience. Last year I lost my grandparents (my mom’s parents). I think for all my family was very hard to deal with. But in my case, even though it was something I knew it could happen, was like a shock and it really mark a difference in my life. Still today I always think about that moment and the hard it was to say goodbye. I am really sure they are better there (heaven) than here but my selfishness make me feel sad for not having them with me. I think life is like a challenge, every day we had lived is a won battle. For me, since that sad experience, has helped me realized and treasure every little thing a have. I will never forget that moment, not even relieve the pain I feel, but I’m trying to be a better person and give in life all what I can to the people I love.
"Life Experience" is the title of an article read yesterday in class, which was published in a UF magazine. The topic is not usual. It is about a course imparted by The University of Florida where psychology students learn about life and death. Those classes are taught by Susan Bluck, an assistant professor in the Center for Gerontological Studies and the Department of Psychology. She says her goal with this uncommon course is letting people to know more about death and how this taboo topic can influence us; it also provides students to see the verb “to die” from another perspective, to understand better its meaning. Bluck thinks death is not a theme that we can avoid; that it will happen someday, and that is what she wants to bring to her students; she wants them to be ready in the future to talk and discuss it in an open way.

I think, even though, this is an strange course and way to see death with another eyes, it is very helpful for those people who don't like to talk about this important issue, for those who getting over the loss a loved has been hard, and for preparing students to affront future deaths even, your own. Honestly, I wouldn't take it. I don't think I need it because, first of all, I haven't lost a close relative. Thank God!; and also because I am not afraid to talk about it, If I have to, I just do it; but I wouldn't like to discuss this that often. I think is depressing. If I good major in Death and Dying, what job could I get? Perhaps in a Rehabilitation Center for people that are depressed because somebody close to her/him died. My opinion about death? I agree with Susan Bluck. In my opinion it will take place someday, early or late; it's normal if we were born; I see it as something fair and necessary, something that we shouldn't be afraid of.
The article written by Staci Zavattaro presents the UF class dealt with the culture of death. Susan Bluck who is an assistant professor in the center for Gerontological Studies and the Department of Psychology teaches Death and Dying course at UF. In the class, she treats various aspects of death with objective concepts which are already taught by UF professor emeritus Hannelore Wass. Also, she talks about many experiences of death and how they affect on human's life with her students. Even some students' obituaries are dealt with during class. She lets her students think about death which nobody can shun and reflects on their own lives thorough this class.

In my case, I have never imagined this kind of class in my country. So it was unfamiliar story for me. Everybody has his own thought about death or the end of life. Also, we might have experiences to talk about this topic whether it's done by in private or public. If this class could be an opportunity to think about life and death, I would be interested in this.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yildiz Turgut was born in Izmir, Turkey. She received her bachelor’s degree in teaching English as a foreign language from the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, and her master’s degree in the curriculum and instruction with ESOL endorsement from College of Education of the University of Florida. She also received minors in applied linguistics and educational psychology, and a specialization in educational technology from University of Florida.