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The challenge of "doing discussions" in graduate seminars: A qualitative study of international students from China, Korea, and Taiwan

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The challenge of "doing discussions" in graduate seminars: A qualitative study of international students from China, Korea, and Taiwan

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2002

Dedicated, with love,

to my parents, Chih-Kang Liu and Chin-Yueh Lin.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation could not have been completed without the friendship and support of many people who I would like to recognize and thank.

First and foremost, I want to express my deep appreciation to the Chair of my committee, Dr. Diane L. Schallert. She supported my interests and efforts every step of the way in this graduate program. Her steadfast devotion to research and teaching, her enthusiastic support to students, her expert guidance in my research, and her generous friendship to me have helped greatly in the growth of my professional and personal development. I want to express my deep and heartfelt gratitude to her for giving me the courage and the guidance that made this dissertation possible.

I also want to thank Dr. Edmund T. Emmer, Dr. Elaine K. Horwitz, Dr. Ghislaine Kozuh, and Dr. Claire Ellen Weinstein, who as members of my dissertation committee provided thoughtful comments and suggestions to improve the quality of my study. Their advice has led to a more mature and sophisticated report of classroom discussion experiences.

I am especially grateful to the participants of the study. Despite their already crowded schedules, they graciously participated in the study and spent time to answer my questions and to attend the interviews. Their

willingness to share their classroom experiences with me was very much appreciated.

This study would never have come to fruition were it not for the support of my family and my friends. Their timely words of encouragement, prayers, and presence have enabled me to overcome many challenges along the way. I am forever thankful for them, especially my parents, my sisters, and my parents-in-law.

My acknowledgement would not be complete without mentioning the love and understanding my husband, Andy, has given me. Adjusting to this country and culture has been much more pleasant with him by my side. He has opened up many new windows for me to see the wonderful parts of my experience here in the America. His interest in my field of study has also generated thought- provoking questions and helped me to see my study from different perspectives. He has not only given me his unwavering commitment, but also stimulated my thinking and creativity throughout the duration of my study. As my best friend, Andy is the most wonderful gift God has given me.

The challenge of "doing discussions" in graduate seminars: A qualitative study of international students from China, Korea, and Taiwan

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2002

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The present study was an attempt to explore the experience in which international students from China, Korea, and Taiwan engage as they participate in the fast-speed exchanges commonly found in classroom discussions at the graduate level. I collected data from three graduate classes over a two-month period at an American university in the southwest. One class was in the College of Fine Arts, another in the College of Natural Sciences, and a third in the College of Education. Although the focus of this study was on the international graduate students from China, Korea, and Taiwan, the other members of the classes were also included in

data gathering and data analysis in order to gather important contextual information for interpreting the experience of the focal participants.

The research method utilized was a qualitative method, specifically the grounded theory techniques. I observed and audiotaperecorded classroom discussions, interviewed the selected pool of participants (18 total) and used two questionnaires that included questions about general personality tendencies, about experiences with different culture(s), and about specific incidents that I had observed in class.

My results indicated that because of language limitations, it was very taxing for the focal international students to participate in oral discussions, and that just like the American students, their experience in class was moment-by-moment constructed and reconstructed in response to the physical and social environment. The focal participants seemed assiduously trying to figure out what was going on in class, when they could talk, the classroom role they had assumed or should have assumed in the class, and how well they had learned. As the focal international students developed awareness of cultural differences about how to **do** a graduate classroom discussion, they continuously combined their growing awareness of cultural differences about how to do discussions with their other views, such as what is allowed for any graduate student. Culture, thus, was reflected as a complex and dynamic construct that is imbedded in context.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The present study was an attempt to elucidate the experiences of international students when they move from their native classroom cultures to the American classroom culture. Specifically, I studied the classroom discussion experience of international students from China, Korea, and Taiwan. In this chapter, I will first talk about international students in the United States. Next, I will address the practical importance of the study. Then I will present my rationale for selecting students from Asia at the beginning of the study as the focal participants, followed by a section in which I explain what I mean by "culture". Afterwards I will briefly describe the theoretical and empirical background of the study. Finally, I will conclude with a brief summary of this chapter and an overview of the next four chapters.

International Students in the United States

Open Doors, the most comprehensive set of data on international students in the United States, defines an international student as "anyone who is enrolled in courses at institutions of higher education in the United States who is not a U.S. citizen, an immigrant or a refugee" (Davis,

1998/1999, p 195). This report also illustrates how the international student population has grown considerably in the United States and continues to rise. According to this report from the Institute of International Education, there were about 150,000 foreign students enrolled in U.S. universities in the academic year 1974-1975, and by the academic year 1997-1998, a little more than two decades later, that number had already tripled to nearly 500,000 (Davis, 1998/1999). During the academic year 2000-2001, there were more than 510,000 international students enrolled in U.S. universities, an increase of 4.8% over the previous year (Davis, 2001). It is predicted that because of economic growth around the world and an increasing global population, there will be a continual rise in the number of international students who are seeking higher education in the next two decades (Schneider, 2001). Furthermore, American universities, as a whole, have been recognized as world leaders in their research resources and facilities. So the U.S. is likely to continue to attract a growing population of international students.

The influx of foreign students has stirred up questions and studies in areas concerning institutional practices (Mohr, 1994; Sharif, 1994; Tompson & Tompson, 1996), the adaptation process (Henderson, Milhouse & M.H.R., 1993; Zhang & Rentz, 1996), and academic difficulties (Coleman, 1997; Tapper, 1996; Petress, 1995). Thus, it is not only international students who must cope with life in a foreign land and demands on a foreign campus, but also the U.S. institutions themselves have had to adapt.

Practical Importance of the Study

Despite the fact that graduate students typically constitute almost half of the international student population (Davis, 1996/1997; Davis, 1997/1998; Davis, 1998/1999; Davis, 1999/2000), and that they are typically required by their graduate program to participate in classroom discussion, little research has been focused on these students' experience of classroom talk. There are many reasons why it is important to investigate this topic, one that has so much to do with students' academic success. For example, investigators have reported that international students are much less likely than native English speakers to make comments and to talk in class discussions (Dunnett, 1985; Kao & Gansneder, 1995; Tompson &Tompson, 1996), and research has shown that such quiet behavior is detrimental to foreign students' academic success. As described by Tompson and Tompson (1996) in a survey of U.S. faculty's observations about the most detrimental behaviors impeding foreign students' academic success, the most consistent responses were that: 1) international students do not participate much in classroom discussion; 2) they rarely debate issues in class or disagree with the opinion of a classmate or instructor; and 3) they usually fail to ask for a clarification of issues or of assignments that are unclear. This reticent behavior is especially unproductive in classrooms in which active participation in the discussion, debating, or disagreeing with classmates

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and/or the instructor, and sometimes asking for clarification over subject matter, are the expected behaviors.

Moreover, educators and recruiters believe that there is a benefit in having international students in American universities. For example, Liberman (1994) stated "... the perspectives they offer of United States traditions are invaluable mirrors in which Americans can obtain a more informed assessment of themselves" (p. 174). Others have stated that foreign students elevate the learning environment for American students (Kao & Gansneder, 1995). Nevertheless, as pointed out by Kao and Gansneder (1995), the mere presence of international students on U.S. campuses does not guarantee cross-cultural interaction. Studies have shown that many international students are often quiet in the classroom (Schallert et al., 1999; Kao & Gansneder, 1995). Thus, it is an important task, both for the benefit of the international students as well as for the other class members, to help international students interact with each other, with their American colleagues, and with their professors.

International Students from Asia as the Focal Participants

Although my literature review does not limit itself to foreign graduate students from Asia, I did intend, from the very beginning of this research, to limit the focal participants to international graduate student from Asia, specifically Southeast Asian countries. One of the reasons is that such a

focus would offer a particularized point of departure for cultural interpretation of the data. The other reason is that students from Asia usually account for more than half of the international student population in U. S. universities, while European students have typically accounted for about only 15 percent as the second largest group (Davis, 1996/1997; Davis, 1997/1998; Davis, 1998/1999; Davis, 1999/2000). In other words, these students are the main subset of international students in the United States. In addition, a majority of them are enrolled at the graduate level, where classroom discussion is a major format for learning (Open Door, 1996/1997). However, as pointed out by Henderson et al. (1993), research has shown that "Asian" students have more adjustment problems than students from Europe or other Western-oriented countries because "The U.S. is basically Western in its cultural orientation. Consequently, Asian students, with their Eastern cultural background, are more vulnerable to becoming emotionally or physically dysfunctional and powerless in the so-called "first-world" Western cultural environment" (pp. 380-381). Moreover, Jandt (1995), citing Samovar and Porter (1991) indicated that the highest difficulty level of intercultural communication is between Westerners and "Asians." Therefore, the focal participants in the study with Eastern cultural backgrounds may have more difficulty in graduate classroom discussions than other international students.

Culture

Just like the research mentioned above, many studies, including the ones I was part of in the past, often monolithically described one's culture by using terms such as "Asian" or "Western." The problem with terms like these is that, first, they cover a very broad range of countries. For example, "Asian" includes countries like India, Singapore, parts of Russia, and China, countries do not necessarily share the same customs and histories. And yet studies that used these terms frequently have failed to specify the participants' country of origin. Thus, it is important to point out that in this study the focal participants are from China, Korea, and Taiwan.

Secondly, these terms, including "Asian culture", "Chinese culture" or "American culture", easily denote certain commonalities among particular group members and ignore individual differences. Not only do we respond to the same environment differently as an individual, but also we are all members of various cultural communities and subgroups. For example, I see myself as a member of the Chinese community, the Taiwanese community, the Christian community, the social science community, the educational psychology community, the female community, the international teaching assistant community, and the married community. Together, these various communities also shape our individualities.

I recognize that studying the groups with which we identify can help us see how they shape our values and behaviors. In this study, grouping

people as a cultural group is not an attempt to stereotype, but an attempt to understand an individual's behavior that is influenced by the dominant tendencies within his or her culture, knowing that every student in every culture varies from others within the same culture. Therefore, the cultural boundaries I mentioned in this research, although they have cultural significance, are only one of the many ways to interpret and understand the culture of a person. The limitation of terms, such as Asian culture or American culture should also be kept in mind when reading this study.

Theoretical and Empirical Background

My interest has been concerned with the process by which international students participate in graduate school classroom conversations. How do these international students, with their different degrees of problems with English language proficiency and social conventions, respond and manage the task of participation in graduate classroom discussions, where the verbal exchanges happen very quickly and the topics may change minute by minute? In order to pursue the answer to this question, I developed the conceptual framework for this research by drawing from the rich perspective of socio-constructivism.

Theorists of socio-constructivism believe that learning occurs in socio-cultural practices of communication and participation in social life (Geertz, 1983; Resnick, 1991; Wertsch, 1991). This approach signifies the roles of both

language and social context in learning. Based on this theoretical perspective, the use of interpretive and self-report research methods, the examination of the social environment, the contextualization of meaningful constructs from the study, and the importance of the present research were established.

Researchers in the area of classroom discourse have conducted numerous studies in order to understand how the language in the classroom represents the community of the classroom, and how the language they use affects and effects learning (Cazden, 1988; Faigley, 1992; Mehan, 1985). In their view, which is in line with socio-constructivists' view, participating in a classroom discussion is a complicated task for students. Social, cognitive, and emotional factors are intertwined and influence the students as they engage in classroom talk. In addition, the difficulty in grasping complex discourse rules may make the task of participating in classroom talk difficult and restricting for any student.

Specifically, studies have shown that language proficiency (including all areas of a language) is the fundamental problem of international students (Church, 1982; Xu, 1991). Although the graduate programs of most universities in the United States demand as a major admission requirement that international students obtain a minimum score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), critics have claimed that the TOEFL does not serve as the most appropriate measure for certain areas of language

proficiency required by a graduate student (Coleman, 1997; Xu, 1991; Ayers & Quattlebaum, 1992). Some universities require students to take classes in ESL (English as a Second Language) in the United States, but foreign students cannot count on acquiring all the language skills that are needed for classroom functioning in these short-term courses. One of the major reasons for this is that there is a great discrepancy between what foreign students are trained to do in ESL programs and what these same students need to do in the actual educational settings in which they pursue their degrees (Ballard, 1996).

When reviewing related studies on international students' participation in classroom discussion, I generally found that there were three important factors considered: culture differences, language competence, and anxiety caused by speaking in a second language. However, these related studies often were limited in their scope, mostly restricted to a global interpretation without systematic study of the process and context.

Conclusion

The number of international students entering U.S. graduate schools has risen steadily in recent years. Many studies suggested that most of these students are considered to be unprepared for the demands of classroom discussions. Yet, we have little knowledge of the processes through which these students experience classroom discussions and acquire the

conventions of their respective disciplinary discourse. In this research, I conducted a study to explore the experience of international graduate students from China, Korea, and Taiwan while participating in classroom discussions. I hoped the results of this study contribute to a better understanding of intercultural communication in the classroom, which would lead to a better learning environment for both international and non-international students.

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I include a literature review in areas that are relevant to my study. Chapter 3 details the procedures used to carry out the present study including the different data sources and descriptions of the settings and participants in the study. Then, in Chapter 4, I present the results in five parts: 1) a description of the past classroom experiences of the focal participants in their home countries, 2) a report of the expectations they had and may still hold for discussions in class, 3) a chronological depiction of their experiences in classroom discussions, 4) an overview of these students' participation patterns in contrast with their American classmates, and 5) a model that illustrates the classroom experience of these focal participants. Finally, in Chapter 5, I relate the findings of this present investigation to the results of other relevant studies. I first compare the results of my study with the findings of other related research. I also point out some limitations of the study. At the end of Chapter 5, suggestions for

future research and for practice related to international students' participation in classroom discussions are proposed.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

In this literature review, I present theoretical and empirical works in areas that are relevant to my study. Because my interests were informed by a socio-constructivist view of learning, in which language becomes a means for knowledge construction and the role of social context is essential, I begin with an overview of these theories. Then, I direct my attention to the body of research on classroom discourse, where language and learning in the classroom are systematically studied. Next, I further explore another line of research focusing on international students' adaptation to American universities. International students' classroom participation, as one specific aspect in their experiences, is discussed afterward. Following that, I extend the discussion on the three common threads that I have noticed running through many articles related to international students' classroom participation: language competence, emotional states while communicating in a second language, and cultural differences. Finally, I present brief results from research I conducted either alone as a pilot study or as part of a collaborative research team.

Socio-constructivism: The Roles of Language and Social Context

Socio-constructivists believe that individual abilities derive from socio-cultural practices of communication and participation in social life (Resnick, 1991; Wertsch, 1991). Rather than an exact focus on an individual process, these theorists emphasize that learning occurs through interactions with other people and the social environment. According to Vygotsky, the acknowledged "father" of socio-constructivism, higher mental functions are first applied and learned in social interaction through the medium of language (Geertz, 1983; Resnick, 1991). This view gives explicit recognition to the role of language as a means of learning and as a social mode of thinking. A classroom discussion, then, becomes a social environment that manifests underlying thought processes involved in learning. Teachers can use classroom talk to judge if learning is advancing or if misunderstandings have occurred. This reflects the intricate nature of the participation engaged in by international students who are using English as a second language.

Additionally, from a socio-constructivist's point of view, the social context is an important factor that constrains and constitutes language and learning. According to this perspective, any construct is contextualized (Hickey, 1997). In other words, concepts are closely bound to the larger socio-cultural context, and thus are best understood in terms of the larger physical and social environment. As stated by Kress (1989), all discourse is situated and bounded by cultural norms and potentialities. That is, any

utterance can be interpreted only in relation to what has occurred and what is about to occur. This view also falls in line with Neil Mercer's (1995) communicative theory of learning, which states that if one wants to study how classroom talk is used to construct knowledge and understanding, one must consider the context and observe the classroom talk as it naturally progresses in class. Thus, the socio-constructivist view provides a strong framework for observing and understanding the social environment in which the participatory processes take place.

Furthermore, another underlying principle of the socio-constructivist view is that language and knowledge are dependent on each other. Language is the means by which we come to construct and express our knowledge and our knowledge, socially constructed, constitutes our language system. This principle denotes the assumption that, "…students' knowledge of such experience (constructed as it was through the social interaction of group members) and the language they used to reflect that knowledge were inseparable"(Alvermann, Weaver, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, Thrash, & Zalewski, 1996, pp. 247-248). Alvermann, et al. (1996) further applied this perspective to the rationale for using interviews in their classroom discussion study, which is described later in this chapter. Likewise, my study utilized self-reports and interview data based on the same principles. Yet, because some of the participants were speaking in their second language, this principle was used with caution in this study.

This notion of socio-constructivism also implies that there is a way of thinking and knowing in every discipline. Gee (1990) has argued that there is no single language of the academy but rather there are many different discourses communities of the disciplines represented in universities. Because the knowledge of a learner is shaped by the people with whom he or she interacts, the cultural tools (e.g. traditional way to express symbols or knowledge) used including language, and the socio-cultural fields in which he or she resides, each discipline has its unique way of knowing and thinking. In such a view, the process of learning is a process of being part of a community, looking at the world as members of a particular discipline. This is accomplished through acquiring cultural tools, learning to think like the members of the community, and developing specific discourse practices appropriate to that community. Learners need to know what is important and relevant knowledge as well as how this knowledge is conventionally expressed. Therefore, it seems that discussion may play out differently in different disciplines.

Classroom Discourse

In line with the socio-constructivist view, many researchers in the area of classroom discourse have attempted to understand how the language in class represents the community of the classroom, and how the language used participates in the learning that occurs. This body of research has

studied classroom discourse and characterized discourse rules, patterns, and social practices in the classroom. In the following paragraphs, I offer an overview of the studies in this line of research that provided me with important background knowledge when I embarked on this inquiry.

One of the most influential works on this study was done by Alvermann, Weaver, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, Thrash, and Zalewski (1996). Through a multicase study on five American classrooms, Alvermann and her colleagues examined middle and high school students' experience in classroom talk about texts. They found that, even at a young age, the middle and high school students developed sophisticated expectations and thoughts about classroom discussions. For instance, these students were aware of characteristics of good classroom talks and of factors such as topics or tasks teachers assigned that influence their participation. Moreover, results illustrated that during these classroom experiences, students were carefully taking on classroom roles and responsibilities and showed great interest in listening to each other's opinions and arguments. At the end of the study, Alvermann, et al. concluded that students were more concerned with their relations with other students in class and their understandings of the required readings than with their teachers' reactions.

The study described above influenced the present research in three areas. First, the results of the study shaped my expectations concerning the level of sophistication American graduate students would have in terms of

participating in discussions. Second, it reminded me once again of the important role that other class members play in participatory processes. Finally, the interview questions used and assertions made in the study guided the construction of possible interview questions for my study.

The most prominent discourse pattern found in K-12 and even in undergraduate classroom discourse is the three-part sequence of teacher initiation, student response, teacher evaluation (IRE) (Cazden, 1988; Faigley, 1992; Mehan, 1985). Researchers have described the many known-answer questions as one of the characteristics of the I-R-E sequence. The teacher oftentimes asks questions to which he or she already knows the answers, and students usually know that the teacher is not asking the question to get genuine answers, but rather to evaluate the knowledge they have learned. This characteristic indicates that the function of classroom discourse is not only for imparting information, but also for evaluation (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1985). Furthermore, the I-R-E sequence points to the great power differences displayed in class between teacher and students. In essence, this type of classroom talk reveals how important the teacher's role is in students' learning, because the teacher represents a social and evaluative authority in the classroom.

Being influenced by the line of work of theorists such as Vygotsky, who emphasized the important mediational role of language in higher human mental functioning (Resnick, 1991), researchers have in recent years been

concerned about the disadvantages of the I-R-E sequence. It was noted that the pattern of the I-R-E sequence may prevent students from stating their thoughts or asking questions and, consequently, can interfere with their learning. Mainly, the concern was that students need to learn to recognize the important and relevant knowledge as well as understand how this knowledge is conventionally expressed, yet the I-R-E sequence makes it difficult for this to occur because it reduces students' opportunities to participate in a genuine conversation (Kress, 1989), and takes away opportunities for students to become genuine members of the group. In I-R-E classroom talk, the teacher is always in an evaluative and authoritative position, representing "the member" of the respective discipline, and students are not given opportunities to express a new thought, to develop their own thinking, and to talk through an issue, which are abilities demonstrated when one is a member of a discipline.

Cazden (1988) stated that, "it is essential to consider the classroom communication system as a problematic medium that cannot be ignored as transparent by anyone interested in teaching and learning" (p. 3). According to Moffet and Wagner (1983), genuine discussions have three major elements: attention, participation, and interaction. Abiding by this standard, the seminar class is a place where the occurrence of genuine discussion is the goal of the class (Schallert, Dodson, Benton, Reed, Amador, Lissi, Coward, & Fleeman, 1999). Yet, the occurrence of genuine discussion may

not be an easy goal to obtain. For example, You and Schallert (1992), in their study of classrooms at the university level, reported that in ideal situations students participate in classroom discussions with genuine questions and they expect replies from the class that will help their learning. However, they found that some students felt nervous when asking questions in class, and were afraid of asking questions because they did not want to reveal their ignorance. Furthermore, Schallert et al. (1998) showed that social factors such as age, ethnicity, and classroom roles taken on by different individuals influenced the conversation in the classroom. Additionally, Bloom and Bailey (1992) stated that if students want to participate fully in classroom discussions, they have to be able to talk in an appropriate register and manner, to get the floor, and to link the information that they want to say to that which has already been said. Therefore, although the classroom environment in seminar classes is intended to be more democratic in its participation patterns, the difficulty in grasping complex discourse rules may make the task of participating in genuine classroom talk difficult and restricting for many students. The task may be particularly difficult for international students who may not be as familiar with the local social rules as native students.

Overall, the findings from classroom discourse research portray classroom discussion as an intricate interplay of cognitive, social, and emotional factors. They also pointed out important aspects that need to be

considered while studying classroom participation. Through actively engaging in epistemic talk, students are said to develop their knowledge and the discipline-specific discourse practices of their respective fields of study. Furthermore, during discussions, students are also defining where the authorities for interpretation and meanings are located (e.g. in the text, in the teacher, or in the students). In other words, students not only acquire knowledge of the discipline, but also figure out their own places and the place of others in the class.

International Students' Adaptation to American Universities

Moving to a foreign country to pursue one's studies is much more than physically relocating one's belongings. It is a process of saying goodbye to family and friends and of bringing a temporary, or sometimes permanent, closure to commitments and activities. It is a new stage in one's life. Excitement can come from starting to see one's lifetime dream becoming realized and from the novelty of being in a new country. Some people also enjoy expanding their horizon of knowledge by traveling and meeting people. However, relocation has other effects: loss of control over one's own actions and their outcomes in the new and unfamiliar environment; loss of familiar social and personal support systems; misunderstandings, distress, and difficulties caused by value differences between cultures; fear of embarrassing situations and of mistakes that could have negative effects on

future careers; concern about the difficulty of communicating; helping one's children adjust and stay healthy; and maintaining one's identity in the midst of change. The list could go on. A Chinese student commented about his experience of being in the U.S.: " It seems I was swimming in the vast sea of foreign culture, knowing no depth of my position, shocked and paralyzed by the new culture" (from Henderson et al., 1993, p. 381). Meek (1992) estimated that 50% of international students experience culture shock.

Oberg (1960), who first introduced the term "culture shock", defined it as an experience caused by "anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p.177). Several theories have been proposed about the cultural adjustment process (Alder, 1975; Church, 1982; Oberg, 1960; Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Brown (1994) commented that there are four successive stages to the process: The first stage is a period of excitement and fascination with novelty. The second stage, cultural shock, is a period of hostility and aggressive reaction brought on when individuals start to notice that there are more and more cultural differences that challenge them. As they familiarize themselves with their new surroundings, gradual and tentative recovery leads to a third stage, in which some problems of acculturation are solved, but others still exist. The fourth stage is a period of assimilation or adaptation that signifies near or full recovery from culture shock.

Anyone who is visiting a foreign country experiences a mild form of culture shock but may never experience the intense cultural adjustment that a foreign student may go through. This is probably due to the fact that in order to succeed academically, a foreign student must adopt a great proportion of the host culture. In their study, Henderson, Milhouse, and Cao (1993) noticed that during the four stages of acculturation, the second stage that represents culture shock and hostility took the longest time for Chinese international students to overcome. During this period of time, most of the students became "emotionally paralyzed." However, most of the students did come through eventually and reported positive outcomes. Henderson, et al. summarized the experience in the following manner:

> Although culture shock is most often associated with negative consequences, …it can also be an opportunity to increase one's personal flexibility. Just as other life-changing experiences often force people to examine their identities and adaptability, culture shock can also be perceived as a highly stimulating state in which people may direct their energies toward personal achievement (p.388).

Surdam and Collins (1984) investigated a number of variables that were related to international students' adaptation. They found that the following factors were related to this process: type of student interaction (those who spent more leisure time with Americans were adapted better than those who

spent more time with their own countrymen), English language facility (those who perceived their English as adequate from the very beginning of their arrival were adapted better than those who perceived it otherwise), parental education (those whose parents were better educated adapted better than those whose parents were less well-educated), religious attitudes (those who developed a positive attitude toward religion adapted better than those who developed a negative attitude), western and non-western students (those from Western Hemisphere nations adapted better than those from outside the Western Hemisphere), perceived student discrimination (those who perceived that discrimination had been a problem in the first three months of their stay were less well adapted than those for whom discrimination was never an issue).

Stoynoff (1997) examined the factors correlated with freshman international students' academic achievement (measured by GPA, credits earned, and number of withdrawals) and found that language proficiency (i.e. scores on the Test of English as a Foreign language (TOEFL)), and selected learning, and studying strategies (measured by the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory-LASSI, Weinstein, Palmer, & Schulte, 1987) correlated with students' academic achievement. In addition, he learned from interview data from a subgroup of the sample that the highest achievers incorporated social assistance into their learning, while the lower achievers did not.

As Stoynoff's study indicated, language proficiency is an important factor for international students' academic achievement. Language difficulties were the most common problems reported by international students when adapting to American universities (Church, 1982). In order to ascertain that international graduate students can pursue their academic work without too much interference from lack of proficiency in the English language, the graduate programs of most universities in the United States demand as a major admission requirement minimum scores on the TOEFL. This minimum score, usually set at a level considered to represent an intermediate proficiency level (550 or 600), indicates students' readiness at a minimal level to begin their studies, but it is very much a minimum. Research has questioned whether the TOEFL score serves as the most appropriate measure for language proficiency required by a graduate student (Coleman, 1997; Xu, 1991; Ayers & Quattlebaum, 1992; Tompson & Tompson, 1996).

Even after taking some ESL (English as a Second Language) classes in the United States, foreign students cannot count on having acquired all the language skills that are needed for classroom functioning. Ballard (1996) noticed that there is a great tension between what foreign students are trained to do in ESL programs and what these same students need to do in the actual educational settings in which they pursue their degrees. The following table was provided by Ballard in order to illustrate the contrasts

between the aims of language classes and academic classes in terms of four language modes: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without claiming to be inclusive, this table contains indicative information about two types of classroom goals, goals indicating that learning English is very different from using English to learn another subject. So far, few ESL programs have yet to develop a syllabus that meets this language need (Ballard, 1996).

Mode	Language class aims	Academic class aims
Listening	total comprehension	selective of content
	capacity to 'store' whole text	selective 'storage'/ note -taking
	attention to discrete language features, e.g. pronunciation and sentence construction	critical responsiveness to content
Speaking	production of accurate sentences	expression of complex ideas
	accurate pronunciation and intonation	raising relevant questions/ criticisms
Reading	generation of correct linguistic structures	development of ideas
	manipulation of appropriate registers	command of appropriate style of argument
Writing	generation of correct linguistic structures	development of ideas
	manipulation of appropriate registers	command of appropriate style of argument

(Table 2.1 from Ballard, 1996 on p. 156)

Also, most ESL classrooms have problems in training students to initiate discourse, which is a skill very much in demand in seminar

classrooms, because of the prevalence of the IRE exchanges in classroom discourse. Ellis (1985 & 1992) came to this conclusion from a review of studies by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Coulthard and Montgomery (1981), and Sinclair and Brazil (1982). He gave an example (note that in his analysis, IRE becomes IRF: initiate, respond, and feedback):

 T: Is the clock on the wall?   Initiates

 P: Yes, the clock is on the wall.   Responds

 T: Good. The clock is on the wall. Feedback

What happens in this type of discourse pattern is that students rarely have opportunities to initiate and to practice initiating classroom talk. Thus, typical ESL classroom instruction can be said to limit students' development in acquiring a wide range of speech acts and a linguistic repertoire associated with the initiating role in conversation (Ellis, 1985, 1992). Furthermore, Ellis's own study in 1992 posed a disturbing result that suggests that even when the classroom context provides substantial opportunities for natural language use, students may still fail to acquire the ability to vary their choice of request strategies and linguistic repertoire according to situational factors (e.g. different addressees). In other words, international students may still not be able to use a full range of requesting language norms according to situational factors, even when they have been in an ESL program that provides ample practice opportunities.

International Students' Classroom Participation

Generally, studies have shown that international students, especially "Asian" students, were typified by reticent behaviors in class (Tompson &Tompson, 1996) (no country was specified in the original). In addition, Sato (1982) suggested that students from Asia can be more reticent than foreign students from western countries. Little has been done concerning international students' classroom participation. Even so, there are three studies I found to be helpful in understanding the experience of classroom participation.

The first study is by Kao and Gansneder (1995) who conducted a survey to investigate the frequency with which international graduate students participate in class discussion and reasons that prevent them from speaking up in class. They found that although male students reporting speaking more often than female students in class, statistically the selected variable of gender differences did not affect the speaking frequency. However, the analysis did show that the other two selected variables, culture and having English as one's official language, influenced whether students spoke up in the class.

Results indicated five factors that prevented international graduate students from speaking up in class: negative classroom climate, problems with English, nonassertiveness, lack of familiarity with discussion content, and speaking not being required. Further, they examined the differences

regarding these five factors for not speaking up and discovered that age and gender did not affect whether students cited different factors for not speaking in class; however, major, country, length of stay in the United States, satisfaction with spoken English, English as an official language in one's country of origin did influence whether students cited the factor "problem with English" as a reason for not speaking up in class. The results also revealed that students from Asia (no country was specified in the original) cited two factors, "problems with English" and "nonassertiveness," significantly more often than students from other countries

Kao and Gansneder provided one of the most comprehensive studies on classroom participation of international graduate students. Nevertheless, this study did not include information about how these factors intertwine and work together in affecting international students' classroom participation. Also, because the authors did not provide information about the specific discourse practices in English, we are left with only global ways and not specific ways to recommend so as to increase the frequency of speaking up by international graduate students.

The second study is that of Garner (1989). Based on her own experience working as a teacher and counselor in Indochinese refugee camps in the United States and in Southeast Asia, Garner studied one Vietnamese student in her class and offered a basic understanding of what Vietnamese students'

problems and needs might be, in the hope of helping teachers to accommodate the diversity of students in class.

She examined two aspects of the situation: cultural differences and second language acquisition. She noted that the Vietnamese student in her class, Tran, would only speak when she called on him, and suggested that one of the reasons for this is that the culture in which Tran was raised did not stress classroom participation as U.S. schools do. Therefore, she suggested that teachers sometimes call on students at random, rather than to pick only on those who raise their hands. Furthermore, Garner pointed out that because other areas may also be influenced by cultural differences, such as academic freedom and body language, one should keep in mind that "things are not always what they seem" (p. 128).

The other area Garner examined was Tran's language difficulties. Following Cummins (1983), Garner made a distinction between regular conversational skills and formal academic language skills and mentioned that many of her refugee students, while communicating rather well in daily regular conversations, still had great difficulty in understanding the lectures and readings for a class. She further suggested some teaching techniques to help students like Tran, such as having the students read the class materials after the lecture, or forming study groups.

Because Garner's study was based on her own observation, the student's perspective about the experience, which could have enriched the

results, is not available in the study. Additionally, the focus of my study is on international students, who are in many ways like refugee students in Garner's study, yet at the same time, in many ways unlike them. Therefore, I expected there would be some similarities as well as differences in their classroom experiences.

The third relevant study is by Liberman (1994) who interviewed 680 international students from Asia (the country of origin was specified such as Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, India, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Pakistan), and drew some valuable conclusions concerning what "Asian" international students think about American university instruction. The study showed that these international students generally approved of their educational experiences in the U.S., and appreciated the freedom of choice in the course of study selection and the democratic structure of professor-student interaction, especially in the classroom. Nonetheless, they were also critical of the informality between teacher and students in class. Many of them asserted that American professors should be treated with much more respect.

Moreover, results from the study indicated that the majority of these international students found it difficult to participate in classroom discussion, and that they questioned the quality of their learning when there is too much student discussion instead of teacher lecture during a class. Therefore, according to this study, "Asian" international students'

reservations about classroom interaction in the U.S. came from both language difficulties and different cultural beliefs about learning, knowledge, and the roles of teacher and students. Although Liberman's study provided valuable insight from the students' perspectives, it is limited because of the decontextualized nature of the study. Because the study did not provide the contexts of these events, it can be misleading when interpreting the results of the interviews.

Three Reoccurring Themes in the Relevant Literatures

Through examining the relevant literature, I determined that there were three themes commonly occurring in the past research findings: language competence, emotional states while communicating in a second language, and cultural differences. Because these three topics offered me a basis for embarking on the initial analysis of the data collected and had a significant effect on the project, they are further elaborated with other details.

Language competence. Gardner (1989) noted that there are differences between conversational skills and formal academic communicative skills. She stated, "Mastery of conversational English is no indicator of linguistic skills necessary to succeed in an academic setting. The capacity to communicate informally differs greatly from the literacy skill level needed to function in school" (p. 129). A similar observation was made by Dunnett

(1985), who noticed that although many international students seemed competent when conversing in daily life, they still found it difficult to participate in higher-level classes and in seminar discussions. Particularly, Kao and Gansneder (1995) discovered that international students from Asia, significantly more often than international students from other countries, cited "problems with English" as a factor for not speaking in class. Thus, an adequate formal/academic communication skill in English is a great concern among these international students as it impacts classroom participation. However, what is meant by formal academic communication skills remains to be specified. One of the major interests in the present study was to investigate the particular skills needed for formal academic communication.

Many sociolinguists and others have long acknowledged the limitations in the Chomskyan formulation of linguistic competence and suggested that in order to communicate effectively in another language, one needs to have the knowledge of the pragmatics in that language as well (Richards, 1985). Just as Ballard (1996) stated, "Once again the linguistic problem masks a much deeper culturally-based intellectual disjunction"(p. 159). Hymes (1967,1972) is often recognized as the first to advance the notion of "communicative competence," as distinguished from linguistic competence (Brown, 1994; Hoekje & Williams, 1994; Wallat & Piazza, 1988). Brown (1994) explained that, "Communicative competence, then, is that aspect of

our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts" (p. 227). This construct of communicative competence, so prominent in second language teaching and learning, was used as a resource in this study to analyze what were the specific discourse practices that are needed by the focal international students in order to be effective participants in seminar classrooms. When discussing communicative competence, what has been used as a reference point for essentially all the studies in second language teaching and learning is the work of Canale and Swain in 1980, later modified by Canale in 1983 (Brown, 1994). According to Canale and Swain, there are four components that constitute the construct of communicative competence: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence is "knowledge of the rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, lexical items, and phonology" (Hoekje & Williams, 1994, p. 13). Discourse competence is knowledge of how to "connect sentences in stretches of discourse and to form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances" (Brown, 1994, p. 228). For example, international students may misuse, overuse, or overgeneralize what are called conversational gambits, or, words that signal directions and relations within discourse, such as "yes but," "anyway," "actually," and "as a matter of fact" (Richards, 1985). According to many of these studies, failing to

make cohesive links between ideas can cause great confusion to the listener (Hoekje & Williams, 1994). Sociolinguistic competence is "knowledge of the sociocultural rules of language and of discourse" (Brown, 1994, p. 228). This knowledge enables one to communicate appropriately in the particular social context in which one finds oneself. Strategic competence is knowledge of "verbal and nonverbal strategies that can be used either to compensate for deficiencies in other components of competence or to increase communicative effectiveness in general" (Hoekje & Williams, 1994,p. 23).

The definition of communicative competence by Canale and Swain has been modified over the years. Bachman's study in 1990 of schematization captured best the newer modifications on communicative competence, which he called language competence (Brown, 1994). The following diagram shows how Bachman further defined the construct of communicative competence. There are some differences between the new outlook and the old outlook. First, strategic competence became an entirely separate construct, one that executes both knowledge of the language (language competence) and knowledge of the world (knowledge structures). Second, Bachman renamed discourse competence as textual competence, which he combined with grammatical competence to construct organizational competence. Finally, he added illocutionary competence with sociolinguistic competence to construct what he calls pragmatic

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Language Competence

Organizational Competence   Pragmatic Competence

Grammatical Competence   Textual Competence   Illocutionary Competence   Sociolinguistic Competence

Vocabulary   Morphology   Cohesion   Rhetorical Organization   Ideational Functions   Imaginative Functions   Sensitivity to Dialects or Variety   Sensitivity to Naturalness

Syntax   Phonology/Graphology   Manipulative Function   Heuristic Functions   Sensitivity to Register   Cultural References and Figures of Speech

(Table 2.2 from Bachman, 1990, p. 87)

competence. My study made use of the construct of communicative competence, described above by Bachman, in exploring the particular discourse practices that were needed by the international graduate students participating in my study.

Emotional state while communicating in a second language. Studying classroom talk, You and Schallert (1992) found that some students felt nervous and were afraid of asking questions in class. Indeed, speaking up in front of the class is a form of public speaking, which often causes anxiety in the speaker. Furthermore, Daly (1991) explained that because speaking in a second/foreign language imposes a greater degree of uncertainty, communication apprehension may occur when students are struggling in the language.

Some researchers in the area of second language learning research have argued that foreign language anxiety is a specific construct that should be separated from the construct of learning anxiety. For example, Horwitz

(1986) demonstrated that foreign language anxiety can be distinguished from the constructs of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) further explained that because of the challenges placed on self- perceptions and because of the beliefs of foreign language learners, learning a foreign language can cause great anxiety and arouse complex feelings within the learner. In addition, MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) showed that although trait anxiety, state anxiety, and test anxiety may impact language learners, there seems to be a type of anxiety that is more specific to language learning. Thus, nonnative speakers may experience anxiety in their regular academic courses, especially those that involve a large participatory component.

It does not seem to be certain, however, that anxiety always impedes learning and the use of English as a second/foreign language. Kleinmann (1977) made the distinction between facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety. Facilitating anxiety enables the student to "fight" the new learning activity, so that positive learning outcomes are produced. On the other hand, debilitating anxiety has a negative impact on the learning because it makes the student 'flee' and avoid the leaning task. These two concepts were considered to be very important when studying foreign language anxiety. Kleinmann (1977) and Scovel (1978) both stressed how the distinction between these two concepts could resolve conflicting results reported in early research (Backman, 1976; Chastain, 1975).

Mejias, Applebaum, and Trotter (1991) studied the oral comprehension apprehension of Mexican American students in Texas, and found that a person's communication anxiety increases as he or she moves from informal (dyad) contexts to formal (public) contexts. Also, they noted that reducing communication anxiety in the dominant language may result in reduction of communication anxiety in the second language. These results imply that international students could experience communication anxiety when they speak up in front of the class and that those who have lower anxiety while speaking in their own native languages may have lower anxiety in speaking in English.

Some studies suggested that anxiety may play a different role in foreign language learning for advanced students, such as international graduate students. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) reviewed several studies that indicated that as experience and proficiency increase, anxiety is reduced in a fairly consistent manner. They also proposed that foreign language anxiety develops if the student's subsequent experiences with the foreign language are not positive, and that poor foreign language performance reinforces foreign language anxiety. In this sense, international students who have bad experiences in earlier classroom discussions may become more anxious. It also implies that those who are familiar with the classroom discussion format may have less anxiety than those who are not familiar with that format.

Cultural differences. Results of many studies have indicated that foreign students from Asian countries may have difficulty in appreciating that there is any learning taking place in classroom discussion. Scollon and Wong-Scollon (1990) and Zongren (1984) discovered that if a teacher plunges right into a discussion, "Asian" students often interpret this to be an indication of poor teaching (cited by Liberman, 1994). Additionally, Johnson (1997), from his own teaching experience, observed that "these students may even be disdainful of a professor who allows students to interrupt with questions or comments or who admits to incomplete knowledge of a subject and invites speculation from the class" (p. 49). Finally, Liberman (1994) demonstrated that although most "Asian" international students in his study agreed that classroom discussions encourage the interchange of ideas and promote creative thinking, they questioned the quality of learning when there were many discussions instead of lectures during the class period. Furthermore, Liberman pointed out that many of these students perceived American students to be egotistic and often overconfident in class, and they question the possibility of learning from someone they do not respect (Liberman, 1994). Consequently, some international students may find it difficult to consider the interactions in the class to be significant contributions to their learning.

When researchers, through multinational surveys, have investigated the significant dimensions on which cultures differ, the notion of

individualism-collectivism has often been identified (Hofstede, 1980, 1983, 1991; Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Trompenaars, 1993). Many studies that have been concerned with cultural differences have addressed this notion (Bond & Smith, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). Generally speaking, the discussion refers to how in collectivist cultures (e.g. Southeast Asia countries such as Taiwan, China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong) one's behavior is considerably determined by goals of collectives, such as family, community members, and the country, and the task of becoming oneself is determined in relation to others and the position of the group in society; whereas in individualistic cultures (e.g. Western countries such as America, France, England and Australia), one's behavior is predominately determined by personal goals, and becoming oneself is determined by individual accomplishments (Bond & Smith, 1996).

One of the extensions of individualism-collectivism is that social order becomes very important in collectivist countries, because in these countries one needs to know where one stands in relation to others. There, the view is that everyone should hold their proper position in society and behave accordingly, making it improper to disrupt the social order (Ramanathan &Atkinson, 1999). Therefore, students, who are from collectivist countries, may perceive the equality between professor and students that is presented in classroom discussions to be threatening to their notion of social order. For example, Ballard (1996) commented that, " In Japan the subordinate role

of the student overrides any attempt to develop independent or individual views. In these societies the roles and reciprocal duties of student and teacher are clearly understood and respected; and the classroom is not a venue for critical questioning or argument" (p. 154). Carson and Nelson (1994, 1996) described how students from China and Taiwan found it difficult to comment on their peers' essays because they did not feel they had the authority to do so (from Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). As a result, students from collectivist countries are often described as culturally unaccustomed to initiating a comment or giving a comment in class. They have reservations about the value of learning from classroom discussions, because, to them, it is the teacher who should teach and from whom they should learn, not the students; they are there to learn.

Another extension of individualism-collectivism is that while collectivist countries are very much group-oriented and emphasize creating a state of harmony in the group (Shigaki, 1987; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999), individualistic countries stress independence and the right to voice one's own opinions (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). Classroom discussions, during which new ideas are formed and new ways of thinking are explored, usually signal critical thinking and disagreement. What is postulated, thus, is that the classroom discussion format, such as that found in a seminar class, can be not only something unfamiliar to the international students from collectivist countries, but also a situation that they want to

avoid. Making comments and voicing opinions in the classroom can easily be interpreted as being different or even as showing off, which is the kind of behavior students from collectivist countries have from their early years been dissuaded to have. For example, according to Richards and Sukwiwat (1985), in Japanese and Thai societies more regulated forms of communication, in which involvement is restricted and the disclosure of self is limited, are much more accepted. Therefore, it is not surprising that the factor of "nonassertiveness," such as feeling uncomfortable speaking in groups, is one of the main causes of low participation of "Asian" international students in class (Kao & Gansneder, 1995).

These two extended concepts from individualism-collectivism are consistent with the results of a study by Schallert, Reed, Fowler, and Lissi (1993) that concluded that "they (this refers to international students, but can also apply to international students from Asia, because out of the 11 international students in their sample, 9 were from Asia) report much more often than other students that they are in class to hear what the professor has to say and not what other students contribute. And yet, they are much less likely to tune out others' comments and to discriminate among class members in terms of which students they would listen to and which they would tune out" (p. 12). From the previous discussion about cultural differences, it would seem that due to established beliefs about the proper social order in their society, students from collectivist countries would be

more comfortable with teacher-led classroom formats and perhaps do not appreciate comments from their peers. At the same time, because group harmony is a very important concept, they may not be used to critical thinking patterns and to being assertive about their own opinions. Thus, tuning out others' comments and discriminating among class members are behaviors that are less likely to happen among international students from collectivist countries.

Ballard (1996) stated that, "For a student coming from a culture in which knowledge is less open to question and criticism, the first barrier lies in the need to make a deliberate change of attitude about how knowledge can properly be handled. Once the student has overcome that cultural hurdle, then the art of generating productive questions has to be learned"(p. 159). However, international students often are not intending to remain in the U. S. for the rest of their lives, but usually plan on going back to their home country after a few years of study in the U. S. and may find it difficult to change their ingrained beliefs to become "American" in their participation in classroom discussions, partly because these behaviors would be unwelcome in their home countries (Tompson &Tompson, 1996).

My Own Research Experience

One of the major reasons that sparked my interest in this topic is my research experience with the D-team ("D" stands for the word "Discourse"),

which began with a collaboration on the nature of classroom talk. Our research team has studied the classroom discussions in advanced seminars. We typically collected our data by audiotaping and later transcribing oral discussions, by collecting the printouts of written discussions produced as part of a synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) program, and by using some student questionnaires, among other data sources. Our analyses have been mostly qualitative, based on the traditions of research on classroom discourse and conversation analysis. Special attention has been given to the nature of the talk, both oral and written, to the influence of social factors such as sex and age, and to the differences between individual and social constructions of knowledge. Since joining this collaboration team, I have come to appreciate the influence of "cultural tools" in learning. I have been interested in the talk where learning is situated. Additionally, because our data have always included both oral, face-to-face discussion as well as written, CMC discussions, I have also been fascinated with how different modes of talking, written and oral, can influence the talk and the learning in class.

Although our previous studies included international students, they were not our focus of study until spring, 1999. In that study, we explored how international students navigate through the oral and written discussions. To our surprise, the results showed that not all the international students from Southeast Asian countries fit into the typical stereotype of

respectful but silent students. We noticed that students who rarely talked could be found from both groups, American and non-American students. There were also some international students from Asia who participated more than some of their American classmates in both modes of discussions. Therefore, the individual differences within each group were as important as between group differences.

Because of language limitations in all areas (e.g. speaking, listening, writing, and reading), the results of the study showed that it was very taxing for international students to participate in either oral or written discussions. However, the use of written discussion allowed these students' voices to be heard at least to a greater extent than oral discussions. Several American students also commented on how much they appreciated the contributions of international students.

Later, in order to advance my understanding of this topic, I conducted a pilot study. I went to observe and videotape five oral classroom discussions of a graduate seminar class. From these tapes, I was able to transcribe the classroom discussions and was also able to observe the class discussions for more than one time. Two interviews with students from Korea and Taiwan in this class were transcribed and analyzed. Then, I examined several reflective journals of one American student. Printouts of two written discussions as well as informal talks with the teacher and other students in class were also included in the data sources.

One of the major findings in these preliminary results is that American students and international students from Korea and Taiwan, for the most part, agree on their views of proper classroom behaviors. Therefore, although previous studies have suggested that, due to cultural differences, "Asian" international students felt that American students have too much freedom in class and show disrespectful behavior towards teachers, I found in the pilot study that the degree of cultural differences may be much smaller than expected. One explanation for the conflicting results may be that previous studies have been collected only through either interviews or surveys, without examining the context of the "improper" behaviors to which "Asian" international students were referring, and without comparing their thoughts with American students towards the same event. More details of the findings from my pilot study are presented in Appendix A.

My research work and the past research all have contributed greatly to my understanding of what it means to participate in classroom discussions for international graduate students. The knowledge I gained served as starting points for me to "pull" information from the data that I collected. In the next chapter, I outline the methodology used in the present study.

Chapter Three

Method

In this chapter, I present the methods used for the study. First, I provide the rationale for the qualitative approach used in this study. Second, I briefly illustrate the specific qualitative approach applied to this study, grounded theory. Third, I then describe the present study by addressing the following: (1) researcher's background, (2) participants and sites, (3) procedures, (4) data sources, and (5) plan of analysis. Finally, I include the evaluative criteria used to determine the "trustworthiness" of the present investigation.

Rationale for Undertaking A Qualitative Approach

The nature of this study lent itself best to a qualitative approach, because it attempted to describe the nature of a phenomenon rather than to determine a cause-effect relationship between variables. Usually lacking in the studies mentioned in the earlier chapters were descriptions of the processes of participation and its context. Therefore, it was my intention to search for understanding and insight rather than for prediction and control, and to clarify particular contexts rather than to discover universal generalizations. As stated by Strauss and Corbin (1998), results of research

that focuses on the understanding of the meaning or nature of experience will be more complete if the researcher gets out into the field and finds out what people are doing and thinking. Furthermore, the participatory processes engaged in by students in class are likely to be authentic and context-specific. In other words, any meaningful results of this study about the type of participatory experiences of students should be based on real-life situations and the perspectives of the participants themselves.

Grounded Theory

The specific type of qualitative method used in the study was a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory was developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The goal of this method is to generate theory that is grounded in the data collected, theory that captures and explains the phenomenon under study. "Grounded in the data collected" means that the theory must emerge inductively from the data collected and not be imposed from a theoretical, a priori starting point. Instead of using an experiment in which hypotheses are tested, a grounded theory approach generates concepts and relationships from the data through a systematic set of procedures.

The steps of data collection and analysis in a grounded theory approach are not sequential, but rather overlapping procedures. Data are analyzed as they are collected, and the earlier analysis provides focus for the

succeeding data collection. Asking questions and making comparisons are the two major techniques that are used throughout data analysis. Additionally, three procedures are often involved in developing a theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open coding is a technique in which from reviewing the data collected, researchers develop concept labels and group categories to characterize and conceptualize results. This technique permits researchers to discover patterns and relationships within and across each source of data. Axial coding relates categories to their subcategories in the data. This enables the researcher to link data at the property and dimensional levels. In order to integrate major categories of data and to group categories in a systematic manner, the selective coding technique is then used. This is the process by which the theory is integrated and refined.

The grounded theorist also records his or her reflections during the study, especially during the analysis. At the end, these reflections can contribute to the formulation of the theory, because they help the researcher to sort out his or her implicit assumptions and hunches during the study. Finally, after the theory is integrated, it is also important to validate the abstract interpretation of the data. One can accomplish this by comparing it to the raw data or by showing it to respondents to ask for their comments on how well it seems to fit their situations. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that, "A theory that is grounded in data should be recognizable to

participants, and although it might not fit every aspect of their cases, the larger concepts should apply"(p 161).

Researcher's Background

In essence, the results of a study such as this one that utilized a grounded theory approach, are the reconstructed realities of the researcher. Therefore, it is crucial for me to highlight aspects of my background that were related to the study. Through this reporting, which is about my experience, my stances on related issues, and my research interests, I hope to provide sufficient information so to portray the perspective I took while investigating this topic.

I have been an international student myself for the past seven years (1994-2002). I came from Taiwan with Mandarin Chinese as my native language. Although I was exposed to different languages and cultures since I was a child (I spoke the language of the aborigines with my grandmother when I was a child and lived in a neighborhood where many aborigines dwelled; also, I acquired some Taiwanese through watching Taiwanese soap operas), I had not been intrigued by the ways of words in different languages and the cultural differences until I majored in English at Tamkang University in Taipei. In 1994, after finishing my undergraduate degree, I came to the United States for my master's degree in Foreign Language Education. During that period of time, I found myself captivated

by the psychological and emotional processes of language learning. That eventually led me to my doctoral degree now in Educational Psychology. Recently my status in the U.S. changed to that of a permanent resident due to my marriage to an American. However, my past experience as an international student provided me a great advantage to pursue this topic. While remaining strictly as an observer in this study, I was able to use my insider knowledge to help in analyzing data.

The pursuit of this dissertation topic originated from my research interest in classroom discourse and my desire to help international students. I have been fascinated by how people use words to negotiate and present themselves as a teacher or a student in classroom discussions. Language has always seemed to me a powerful tool that shapes our thoughts and through which our thoughts are expressed. Teachers use words to deliver the information they want their students to know, and then through words they evaluate students' learning outcome. More importantly, students and teachers use words to negotiate meanings, during which multiple social factors are in place. Sometimes this negotiating process can be very emotional. For example, it is frustrating when one misunderstands or cannot be understood by the other. Using a second or foreign language makes this process even more complicated. I have discovered through my interactions with other foreign students that of all of the problems they experienced, language barrier was the most difficult one. Sometimes it is difficult to know

if communication breakdown occurs because of inaccurate use of words or simply because of coming from two different perspectives. Including myself, I have seen so many international students struggle to learn through English. In my own struggle, there were times I wondered if I was still "I." Thoughts like, " I used to be very capable at articulating myself, but most of the time I am not sure if people understand me well" or " I used to crack people up with a lot of good jokes, but people don't laugh at my intended jokes anymore!" have challenged my personal identity. However, there were lessons to be learned, and I also found that the hosts, Americans, could make major differences during this process, most often making me feel comfortable and encouraged, but occasionally making me feel embarrassed, not welcome, and alien.

Participants and Sites

At a major university in the southwestern part of the United States, I observed three different graduate classrooms in three different disciplines over a two-month period of time. The reason for choosing this university was simply because it had one of the largest groups of international students from Asia in the country; at the same time, it was a convenience sample. All three participating classes included classroom discussions as part of their class content. One of the three classes was in the area of

Biology; the other one was in the area of Education; the third was in the area of Music.

Although the focal participants of the study were from China, Korea, and Taiwan, the rest of the members of the classes I observed were also part of the study because they provided important contextual information in interpreting the data. Thus, the participants of this study were all the students and teachers involved in the three classes. All individuals in these three classes agreed to participate in this study. Table 3.1 illustrates the distribution of the participants in each class.

Table 3.1: The distribution of the participants in each class.

	Biology Class	Education Class	Music Class
# of participants	9	21	12
gender of participants	5 F; 4 M	16 F; 5 M	11F; 1 M
# of focal participants	3	5	2
gender of focal participants	1 F; 2 M	3 F; 2 M	2 F; 0 M

Because the definition of international students can vary, I need to provide further details about the characteristics of those who participated in the study. The focal international students in this study came from China, Korea, or Taiwan, and they were those who did not consider English as their first language. Therefore international students who came from Asia but who considered English as their native language were not counted as the focal participants in the table above. For example, one student came from India and she considered English as her first language. Furthermore, all the focal international students had finished their undergraduate degrees in their own home countries (four of them had also finished their masters in their own home countries, two women and two men), and then had come to the United States for their graduate studies. Thus, those who had come to the United States due to marriage or family immigration (two individuals) were not included as focal participants (third row in the table above), either.

Another common characteristic among the focal international students was that they all had been in the United States for about one to two years, except for one in the Education class who had been in the United States for her graduate study for about five years. Further, this particular university in which the study was conducted was their first American university.

All of the classes were taught by women teachers. In order to keep in mind what classes they were teaching, I have given them pseudonyms that

reflect their field of study: Dr. B (B for Biology), Dr. E (E for Education), and Dr. M (M for Music). Dr. B and Dr. E had taught graduate –level courses for many years, but Dr. M, although she had taught before for several years, was still a novice in teaching graduate courses. Further, this was her first year at this particular university.

Although all three classes were arranged so as to reflect a friendly setting for a discussion by having everyone in the class, including the teachers, sit around a table facing each other, their daily routines were carried out in different ways. In the following paragraphs I present specific information about each class.

(1) **Biology class**: The class met once a week for about one hour to one and half hours. Every student and Dr. B were scheduled to give one presentation on one article they chose for one class period. A week before each presentation, the article for the following presentation was distributed to the rest of the class members. Everyone was expected to have read the article for each presentation before class. Each class day, Dr. B would call the class to order and class would begin. If there were no curriculum issues or scheduling problems that needed to be dealt with, Dr. B would signal the student who was scheduled to present to start. The presentation usually lasted for about 40 minutes. It was clear that students and teacher were free to raise questions during the presentation, but there was time always set

aside for questions at the end of each presentation for about 30 minutes. In order to make sure that the presenter could finish his or her presentation, students often waited until the end of the presentation to ask their questions. Most of the questions were directed to the presenter, even when it was a student who gave the presentation. When Dr. B was not the presenter, she assumed a role just like one of the students in class. She generally refrained from talking at length. However, due to the fact that Dr. B often was the only person who knew the answer to a student's questions, she did have a higher level of participation than other students. At the end of the presentation and discussion section, she would resume the teacher's role and make comments about the presentation. Additionally, the questions were usually factual in nature. Therefore, the discussions in class were generally controlled and slow- paced in the sense that the topics did not change drastically or quickly, and students did not feel they had to fight just to get the floor.

(2) **Education class**: The class met once a week for about two and one-half hours. One unique aspect of this class was that it included opportunities for the class members to engage in written discussions in addition to oral discussions. In addition to meeting face-to-face in the classroom for the oral segment of discussion, class members also engaged four times in synchronous and asynchronous CMC written

discussions during the period when I was observing the class. Reading assigned articles prior to the class was expected. However, Dr. E also made it clear to the students that she did not expect them to read all the readings for each class. Dr. E typically would start the class by asking students to share examples for one of the class projects. Often curriculum issues or questions about assignments were also raised during this time. Then, Dr. E would move on by summarizing what had been said or done in the last class period, and would give a mini lecture introducing the week's readings. Eventually however, she would solicit discussion by asking a question related to the readings, or one of the students would simply start to make comments that would then open up the discussion. Students were free to jump into the discussion at any time. However, Dr. E often was so attentive to students' body language and facial expression that she would call on students when she thought the student might have a question or comment. For example, she would ask a student, " ***, do you want to say something?" Although Dr. E talked at length about certain topics during each class period, there were plenty of student comments or questions, too. Dr. E conceptualized the class as a bridge between a seminar and a lecture. Because of the number of the people in this class (21 students) and because the topics in class could change moment to moment, some

students found it difficult to get the floor in class. Sometimes students would raise their hands before they spoke up in order to get the teacher's attention and would wait to be called on. There were also times individuals found it difficult to understand what students had said on the other end of the long table.

(3) **Music class**: The Music class met twice a week for one and one-half hours each time. Students were expected to finish the readings before class. This requirement was emphasized very much by Dr. M. In the syllabus, Dr. M also further stated that 20% of their grade would be determined by participation and that it would be calculated not only by their attendance record but also by the quality of their contribution to class discussion. Dr. M designed the course as a seminar. She gave students handouts, on which several questions or topics for the coming discussion were written. However, students were also encouraged to ask questions and to explore their own interests related to the readings. Every class, students walked into the classroom and would hand in their short assignments to Dr. M first, if there were any. Then Dr. M would start the discussion by asking a question related to the readings. Throughout the class period, she guided the class discussion by raising questions or responding to students' comments. Dr. M typically avoided speaking for a long time and did not give any lecture at all. Interactions among students

also occurred quite often in this class. Except for one class in which every student took turns to finish an in-class exercise, students usually made comments without being called on and Dr. M never called on students, either.

Procedures

In the beginning of the semester, after obtaining each teacher's consent, I met with the students of each class and asked them to participate in the study. I briefly introduced myself and explained the nature of this study without revealing the focus of the study was on international students. After each student signed a consent form, a participant information form with personal background checking questions (Appendix B) was administered to each class.

I then started to observe, taking field notes and audiotape recording the oral classroom discussions over a two-month period of time. In addition, I also corresponded with the students and/or the teachers through email when specific events of interest happened during the class, and requested every participant at least one time to respond to another short questionnaire concerning their experience during a specific class (Appendix C).

Finally, at the end of the two months of observation, I began to conduct semi-structured interviews with selected students. I consulted a list of guiding questions during the interview (Appendix D), but I also invited

the students to elaborate or clarify their thoughts on any relevant issues. These questions were structured by considering the research questions, related studies' questions (especially from the studies by Alvermann et al., 1996; Schallert et al., 1999), and insights gained from on-going observation and analysis. In the end, 18 students were interviewed. Eight of these were the focal international students, nine were Americans who spoke English as their native language, and one was a native speaker of Japanese who was an American immigrant. My goal was to interview all of the focal participants, but two of them were not included in the semi-structured interview because of language difficulty. The choice of the nonfocal students to be interviewed was more or less arbitrary, with the consideration of which student was most likely to provide rich information in the interview. As well, I tried to represent in the nonfocal group some students who were talkative in class and some who were quieter.

Data Sources

The primary data sources for this investigation were from 1) transcripts of recorded classroom oral discussions; 2) transcripts of the interviews; 3) the observation notes I took during each class; 4) results of the participant information forms with personal background questions; 5) e-mails correspondences with the students and the teachers; and 6) results of

the short questionnaire concerning students' experience during a specific class.

The secondary data sources included: 1) course syllabi; 2) readings; 3) discussion guide; and 4) copies of some students' assignments.

Analyses

The process of my data collection and data analyses were intertwined and conducted simultaneously. As data collection began, through the two major operations of asking questions and making comparisons, I began open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During these processes, key concepts and repeated activities were sought in the data to become the categories of focus, and then as new data were collected, I was provided with more examples of the categories of focus, as well as some new categories. For example, "culture" and "teacher" were categories established in the early stage of the analysis. Here is one of the focal participant's recall of her experience. In this example, my coding included "culture" and "teacher":

> *I got to think that if it happens in Korea, we might have to paraphrase some expression in order for the person who is raising the issue to look more proper* (coded "culture"). *Right, it was brave. But in the context of yesterday's class, it was alright because I knew Dr. E is not the person who*

might be upset by that kind of remark (coded "teacher"), *and I was expecting Dr. E would react to that remark in much more funny way.*

Later in the study, I asked the participants more questions about their teacher's characteristics, and explored the common teacher qualities that encouraged classroom discussions and how influential the role of teacher was.

After this initial analysis of all the data, I analyzed each data source for each class and then combined all the data sources together to examine the experience as a whole. At this point, the scope of my analysis changed to focus only on the focal participants. Then I counted the number of times each category appeared in the data analyzed, and then sorted out the major themes for the model and removed the categories that were mentioned less than 25 times in the data. For example, the category, "familiarity with the content knowledge" was only found twice in the data, and although it seemed an important factor to consider, it was not cited in the model. However, the category, "Moment by Moment", although it appeared in the data under 25 times, because it was true of every focal participant, it was included in the model.

When the major outline of the theoretical model was formed, I went back to the original data and looked for contradictory examples. I had also written down my reflections, feelings, and assumptions during data collection. For instance, I wrote down how hard it was for me to gain the

trust of the participants, which could be a major limitation of the current study. I also recorded how the categories, "changes" and "it depends" emerged together into the category "Moment by Moment." These reflections contributed to the formulation of the theory because they helped me sort out the implicit ideas in my mind and provided directions for theoretical sampling. Additionally, referring to these notes as a check made me aware of the possible bias I had as a researcher. After one meeting with my dissertation chair, I wrote, "Notice that 'self' (a category established earlier) might be a bias of mine because of my personal experience and interest in Psychology." After reexaming the data in "self," I then decided to rethink the construct of "self."

Evaluative Criteria Applied to Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods are based on an assumption that there are multiple constructed realities rather than a single "true" reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because of this fundamental difference, the conventional tools that are used to insure validity and reliability in other research methodologies are not appropriate for qualitative studies like the present one. However, Lincoln and Guba offered the following alternative criteria and techniques to establish the trustworthiness and scientific validity of naturalistic studies (1985):

- Credibility. Credibility refers to the "truth value" demonstrated by the approval of the participants of research findings. In other words, do the researcher's reconstructions of the reality present the original multiple realities adequately? This is similar to the conventional concept of "internal validity." Credibility can be established by several means: prolonged engagement with the participants, persistent observation, triangulation of the data (i.e. using different data sources and collection methods), and member checking.

- Transferability. Transferability refers to the applicability of the present findings to other contexts or with other participants. This is similar to the conventional concept of "external validity." Because the researchers in naturalistic studies can only make conclusions that are bounded within a specific time and context where they are found, external validity cannot be specified in qualitative studies. Thus, in naturalistic studies the responsibility of a researcher is to provide detailed and precise descriptions of the phenomenon under study to enable those who are interested in applying the findings to another context to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be possible.

- Dependability. This criterion refers to the consistency of the findings. This is similar to the concept of "reliability."

Dependability can be supported by using different data sources and by using overlapping collection methods. In addition, continual examination both of the process and the results can also increase the dependability of the findings. As with validity and reliability, credibility cannot be established without dependability. Thus, it is possible to use the techniques for increasing credibility to help demonstrate dependability.

- <u>Confirmability.</u> The last criterion refers to the degree of neutrality of the researcher. This is similar to the concept of "objectivity." Naturalistic researchers acknowledge that objectivity in research is an illusion. Confirmability can be addressed in a qualitative study by acknowledging possible researcher bias. During the study, the researcher can record his or her personal feelings and assumptions in observer comments and memos and refer to these as a check during the stage of analysis. Further, confirmability also can be increased by having an outside audit of the data sources and interpretation of the findings.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness and scientific validity of this study, I used the following techniques: prolonged engagement with the participants (i.e., two-month period of observation), persistent observation (i.e., I continually went to the observed classes), triangulation of the data

(i.e., I obtained information through observations, questionnaires, interviews with different participants), member checking (i.e., I asked some of the participants to provide feedback about the results of the study to ensure an accurate presentation of each individual's experience), and referring to the record of my own reflections, feelings, and assumptions in observer comments and memos as a check during the stage of analysis (i.e. constantly looking at my records and examining my own thinking).

Chapter Four

Results

In this chapter, focusing on the focal international students in the study, I describe the cognitive and affective processes of the participants in the study, as well as their interactions in classroom discussions. I begin this chapter with a description of the past classroom experiences of the focal international students in their home countries, followed by a second section that contains the expectations they had and may still hold for discussion in class. Next, I outline their classroom experiences by describing chronologically what it was like to be "Them" in classroom discussions. Then I give an overview of these students' participation patterns in contrast with the American students. In the last section, a model that depicts the classroom experience of the focal international students is presented.

Past Experience in Their Home Countries

Being a student from Taiwan myself, my personal experience had guided me to assume that these students would share similar college experiences with each other in terms of the teaching style they had encountered in class. The only probable discrepancy I expected to see was the difference between undergraduate courses and graduate courses,

because the goals for these courses are different in many ways. To my surprise, even students from the same country with similar educational backgrounds had different degrees of familiarity with classroom discussions. For example, two students who had finished their master degrees in China had different classroom experiences. One said, "*I got nervous when I have to speak up in front of the class...We didn't do [presentation] in China.*" But the other said, "*In seminar, one student will do the presentation. It has the atmosphere of a discussion class. Students ask questions. The class was pretty small, 8 or 10 people.*"

One might suspect that the different experiences of the two students above was due to coming from different disciplines, but I found that another two students from China who had finished their undergraduate degrees in the same discipline also gave two different accounts of their classroom experiences. Although one described his undergraduate classes as being all lectures, the other student recalled the experience of having small group discussions in class. She said, "*At that time, professor would do a presentation and then we were divided into small groups... In the small group, we would discuss some questions. The size would be the same, 10 or so students… Yes, I like [small group discussion]. Sometimes it's comfortable to be in a small group, and you can just talk about your idea and questions…. Everyone has their own idea, I think. Because it's academic question, you can think this way, and you can think that way. [Disagreeing with someone] is very common.*"

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In the past, I noticed that some students would get annoyed with the personal anecdotes brought up by class members. Therefore, I specifically asked some participants about their experiences on this issue. Again, I found major individual differences within the group. One Korean student said, "*In the class [in Korea], we all just focus and talk about the readings. We never talk about 'my dog' or 'my cat'.*" However, another Korean student described one of her classes in Korea as filled with personal stories, "*But I took the class, language education, in Korea…And it was first time for me to take the course in out of department. So I found that most of the students are teachers, so they talked a lot about their students and teachers at school.*"

Before I close this section, I would like to conclude with an example that illustrates how someone who had a negative past experience in class did not shy away from speaking up in the present class. This particular student had native English speakers as teachers in his seminar classes in China. During the time when I observed classes for the present study, he was one of the students who did not fit into the stereotype of a silent "Asian" international student. So, during the interview when he mentioned how he never talked in class when he was in China, I was very curious about what had happened. He said, "*In China, in the situation without any foreigners, the person may not have language problem, but he or she may still not talk because she or he doesn't like to talk. So then it can be challenging… I was like that when I was in China. I wouldn't talk. Because I don't think my [English] oral*

language is very good. When I got in the graduate school, there were 10 of us, and my entrance score was the lowest. Other people scores were higher, and talk more, the teachers like them more, too. There were some classes I didn't talk at all for the whole semester. … Before I don't think the teacher would like me, and I didn't feel proud of myself sitting there in class, either…. Now I think, first I am interested in the topics, also I feel the readings were very high quality and filled with information, but I don't really learn a lot. So if I have questions, and I don't ask, then I would be missing a lot of information. So if I have questions, I would ask." Eventually, he confirmed that it was the desire to learn and knowing that speaking up in class was the only way to find out the answers to his question that kept him from remaining silent in class.

I also noticed, however, how the professor in class made a difference in this situation. When I asked him to describe his present professor in class, he used the word "fair" to describe her. He said, "*I think she is more fair too…. Anybody can ask question, and every question is addressed. Sometimes I think there are teachers only show interest to certain topics or certain students. Some teachers may have preference, and talk to students for a much longer time than others. If it happen once, it probably would be Ok, but twice or three times, the student would start to think the teacher doesn't like me, and would not want to ask questions anymore since he or she doesn't have to ask you questions.*" Unfortunately, that was how he felt about his professor in China. He sensed other students were more active in discussion and that the teacher

apparently enjoyed these students' comments very much. He did not think that the teacher liked him or even cared if he had said something or not. I think the teacher's action was a key issue that distinguished the situation in China from the present class. The professor in China did not provide him with an environment where he felt secure to take a risk. By contrast, in the present class, the professor made it clear to him that he was welcome, just like anyone else in class, to make any comment. Additionally, because every comment was welcome and addressed, then there was no need for him to compare himself with the other class members. This led to an environment in which he felt comfortable to speak up without worrying about how good he was.

Expectations for Classroom Discussions

These students also revealed certain pictures they had in mind about what classroom discussion would be like. Most of these expectations came from their past experiences, including watching what their American classmates did in class. The demonstration of their expectations or ideas about classroom discussion is important, because the pictures they had in mind also to some degree projected what they would do in class. Furthermore, these ideas often disclosed not only what they expected themselves to do in class, but also what they expected other class members should do in class. For example, students who considered classroom

discussion to be a situation in which teachers evaluate and probe students' thinking tended to be more cautious about their comments in class than those who regarded it as informal talk. The students who perceived discussion as informal talk could tolerate the casualness of a discussion more than other students.

To illustrate other ideas individuals had about classroom discussion, I offer the following examples:

• A social interaction

Ex: *Anyway, you can learn something from the presentation, and you can learn a lot of techniques about your own experiment. At the same time, the social skills, just try to express yourself and your idea…you learn how to express yourself. That's very similar to the social occasions, where you try to express your ideas. There are some similarities. You need to consider what they say.*

• A process of independent thinking

Ex: *There are some topics or stuff doesn't fit lecture format, I think. These are topics that are better learned through negotiation. During this process of negotiation, students are more aware of the development of the knowledge and would learn better. If you just give the knowledge to them, they may not accept it totally, but through negotiation and talk, they would come to realization that it makes sense that this is the point.*

In some ways, this also provided me with information on how sophisticated they were as participants in discussion. In my view, a

sophisticated discussion participant is a class member who values the learning experience and recognizes how his or her knowledge has grown in the process of the discussion. At the same time, he or she is also aware of the role of contributor to the class. Thus, sensitivity to other students' feelings or reactions is an essential part of their thinking. For example, they may apologize when they hold the floor for too long because they are so eager to inquire about certain issues. I was very impressed with the sophisticated level of understanding about classroom discussion possessed by some of participants, including those who had only been in the United States for a little over a year. They saw themselves as learning content knowledge through classroom discussion, and valued the experience of having discussion in class. They also perceived the discussion in class as a social event, where they were learning to interact with people in their respective field. They knew their classmates would be their possible colleagues in the future, so they felt they needed to learn to express their ideas and discuss them with the rest of the class.

The picture students had in mind also extended to certain expectations they held about their classmates and their teachers.

- Students have to do their homework

Ex: *I don't like it when Americans feel so freely to say, "I forgot to do the readings." I think it's horrible. I feel angry.*

- Students need to consider other class members

Ex: *But she often would cut in with a new topic, and she is a kind of a person that would elaborate on an issue in a very detail way. But in a discussion class, you need to consider other people, and let other people have the floor. Don't give a complete answer at once. …A participant in discussion needs to have a sense of responsibility and community. You need to share and contribute, but also consider other people's parts.*

- The teacher should be in charge of where the discussion goes

Ex: *Sometimes I found what my classmates say in class really interests me. I found that very constructive. But sometimes I couldn't see the focus of the discussion. People cut in from different angle, then I found it not very constructive. …So it depends. This is why I think the teacher plays an important role. When she or he found that there is no focus in the conversation, she or he can pull it back a little to guide the conversation to a productive direction.*

Clearly, just like many American students, these international students did hold the teacher and each other responsible for the quality of the discussion. They genuinely embraced the discussion format in class, even those who had never had such an experience. They perceived it as an opportunity for experiencing a different way of learning. At the same time, they expected productive learning results. In their mind, in order to achieve

a successful discussion, all class members and the teacher had to fulfill certain duties and played important roles in the process.

Yet, I sensed that there was a difference in their attitudes about a work ethic from those of American students. Similar to the student I cited above, most international students felt it would be inappropriate for someone who apparently had not done the readings to make comments during the discussion, but American students seemed to be more lenient on this issue. One comment from an American student showed the disparity between her and the focal participants, "*If it's pretty casual, then I am pretty comfortable showing my opinion, even if I haven't prepared ... It totally depends on the sprit of the classroom, and the spirit of the classmates, too…Even when I have done the reading, I don't know if I miss something, or. In this class, I would just sit there and smile and go…but in a class where the teacher has encouraged active discussion, I have no shame, I am usually comfortable saying, " Hey, where is that?" You know, " What are you talking about?" I am usually not the only one, you know.*"

Although, within each group (American and the focal participants), everyone's comment on this issue was a little different from each other, it is plausible for me to conclude that most American students' attitude about whether or not to speak up when they had not completed the readings was more moderate and forgiving than most of the focal participants. I gathered that in certain circumstances most American students would feel

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comfortable to speak up in class without having done the readings. However, to most of the focal participants, the bottom line was that a student should feel embarrassed if he or she had not done the readings. Thus, admitting this fact without reserve and even going on to give opinions was almost disrespectful to other students and a waste of their time.

This is in line with the fact that they displayed greater favor toward a discussion that had many comments directly pulled from the readings, as opposed to comments like, " This reminded me of…" or " I really have hard time agreeing with the author of this article, because I think..." Across two class meetings, the focal participants always rated the required readings to be the most helpful tool for increasing their knowledge, in contrast to the classroom discussion and the teacher's talk. Moreover, two focal participants rated both the class discussion and the teacher's talk to be the least helpful tools, whereas three focal participants rated classroom discussion to be the least helpful tool. However, across the same class meetings, three of the seven American students whom I interviewed rated the class discussion to be the most helpful tool for their learning and two rated the teacher's talk to be the least helpful. In the beginning, I was influenced by the knowledge I gained through reading previous literature and quickly presumed that this result was due to cultural beliefs that lead most "Asian" students not to appreciate the format of classroom discussion. I had thought that this would occur because they were not used to

discussion or because they did not think they could learn from anybody other than the teacher.   As I advanced in my inquiry, I found that they generally were open to the idea of discussion. When the focal participants felt negative about a discussion, it was caused by other factors. Here are some examples of what students from the same class said:

> "*Rather than peer-to peer discussion, peer-to teacher discourse was more helpful for my learning because it was related more to the reading assignments…*"

> "*I expect to understand more about the readings from the discussion and the instructor's intervention. The first topic of this course was done, but I can hardly believe how little I got from the discussions. There are so many things need to be clarified and explained in the readings.*"

This suggests the kind of expectations these international students had, the way they wanted the discussion to go, and why it was important to them for everyone to finish their readings. In other words, if the comments from their classmates were directly related to the readings, they appreciated how those comments added to their understanding about the readings (i.e., What exactly are the readings saying), and they were likely to see the discussion as significant.

Later, I also realized that their comments about the class discussion not being directly related to the readings were influenced by their inability

to see the links between what other students had said and the readings. Several of them expressed comments such as this one:

"Sometimes I don't clearly see the links between what people say about their experience and what the theory says [in the readings]. Sometimes they say something, I think that has nothing to do with our readings or discussion in class. But I often see the links later and thought those are good examples."

It is still not clear to me, however, whether or not this disjunction was caused by their limited language proficiency or cultural knowledge, or both.

What Was It Like To Be "Them" in Class?

To demonstrate what it was like for the focal international students to participate in classroom discussion, in the following sections I bring together the results I obtained through different data sources and present an analysis that follows a chronology of their experience in class. One thing to keep in mind is that although to some degree their experiences were similar to each other, they all constructed a unique path throughout their experiences. The experiences portrayed in the subsequent segments only served as possible scenarios for each student, and the degree to which it was true for each of them varied.

(1) Class Preparation

Although most of the focal participants were inexperienced in classroom discussion, none of them had sought advice or help about how to

participate in classroom discussion. They all used the technique of "sit and watch" when they entered a class that included classroom discussion. They observed what their classmates did and tried to figure out what the teacher wanted them to do. They had no problem about "doing as the Romans do." As eloquently stated by one of the focal students, *"I think we, Chinese, may sometimes think that Americans like to show off, but to American it's just a self-expression, no big deal. I think that when you come to this country, you need to respect their customs. You yourself sometimes need to make adjustments in your thinking."* To all of them, language was the most taxing element in their participation in class. This brings us to another aspect of their participation, their English proficiency, which sometimes became an obstacle even before they participated in discussion.

The TOEFL scores of the focal international students were around 600 to 650, except for two who scored around 500. These two students were very worried about receiving low grades because of not being able to participate in the classroom discussion. One of them went to talk to the instructor after the very first class meeting, and the instructor comforted the student by saying she understood and wanted her to try still to participate. Nevertheless, they did not think the teacher truly understood their worries. One of them said to me, *"They all said they understand, but I don't think so."* Later during the semester, this student also told me that it took her a long time to finish the required readings, and sometimes she could not

understand the readings at all. When I asked her if she was interested in the topic discussed in class, she replied, "*Actually I didn't read [the] whole thing. So I don't know [if] I am interested in this topic or not.*" Her comment made me once again realize how the language problem could limit one's learning. In this student's case, the language difficulty was such that she could not even make a judgment about her interest in a topic.

For those who had better English proficiency, understanding all the required readings before class did not come easy, either. Sometimes they understood certain required readings perfectly, other times they felt they only somewhat understood certain readings. Most of them rated "kind of" on their level of understanding of the assigned readings (American students generally would rate these as "very well understood," although there were certain articles they said they understood but not completely). Sometimes they had to read through the readings twice or three times in order to understand them well. In addition to reading through the readings, some of them also utilized other strategies to prepare themselves for the classroom discussion, such as highlighting key points in the article, writing a summary, reading additional supplementary materials, and discussing the readings with someone else in the class. They also often wrote down their comments and practiced how to deliver the comments before class.

(2) Engaging in Classroom Discussion

Except for the two students who could not comment on their interests in the discussion topics due to language problem, the rest of the students all expressed genuine interest in the topics discussed in class. This, however, did not guarantee that they always were engaged in and enjoyed the classroom discussion.

The problem with English proficiency also permeated their engagement in class. Students who did not understand the readings very well on that day and could not understand the discussion well often appeared to be not engaged in discussion. I observed signs such as not making any eye contact with the students who were talking for a long period of time, not having any facial expressions when there were heated discussion or jokes going. One student revealed that, "*I didn't feel fully involved in oral discussions because sometimes could not catch what other said or didn't understand what they were talking about, especially jokes and when they spoke too fast.*" The result of not understanding the discussion was not feeling part of the talk. When one does not feel he or she is part of the conversation, he or she would choose either to try to cut in or to leave the conversation. Due to the limitation of their English proficiency, some of the students could not even start to make sense out of the discussion, and for them it would have been an impossible task to try to cut in or make themselves part of the talk in class. Thus, understandably they drifted off to another world. Some

of them did try to be part of the discussion and succeeded in doing so. For example, one student was struggling with one part of the readings, but when the class discussion finally came to a conclusion that confirmed her understanding of the readings, she wrote, " *So I felt in-group in terms of level of understanding of the topic, which made me psychologically involved in the process of meaning construction with others.*"

When there was no language barrier, whether learning occurred or not seemed to correlate with their engagement in class. Here are two examples that demonstrate this statement:

"Dr. E's utterance caught my attention because I had not thought about any criticism other than what …In fact, I liked the reading and felt the cognitive model fascinating. I was waiting for what Dr. E would say next with interest and curiosity."

"I was deeply involved when Dr. E was shifting the focus from the article on rhyming impact on learning… which I had never realized as theoretically persuasive."

They generally reported being very involved in discussion when learning opportunities occurred. The discussion at this point might have answered a question that the student had had in the past or contained information that was different from his or her original idea, and thus new knowledge was gained through the discussion.

Contrasting situations were also happening. In the same class, Dr. E's class, one student commented that, *"I was physically a bit tired in class yesterday. Particularly, when the students talked about their personal experiences related to cultural differences, I was bored and uncomfortable. It was just like lunch-talk."* This student also said that, *"I think one or two examples would be good for our better understanding of the topics, but too many wastes time and makes me bored."*

Furthermore, although discussion topics that were related to their own personal experiences could spark interest, it also sometimes caused the students to be not involved in the discussion that was taking place at the moment and thus lose track of what was going on in class. A student recalled his experience in class in the following words, *" I felt that her characterization were so true of me that became suddenly so involved in checking what she said, and thinking in retrospect about all the typical traits I had that fitted her characterization…and my backtracking took me so long that I lost track of what followed in the discussion."*

(3) Unable to Comprehend the Discussion

All of the focal participants reported at times how they were unable to follow the discussion during class because of not being able to understand the conversation. Comments such as, *"It was hard for me to keep up with the discussion…The major factor I think was language,"* were repeated by every one of the focal participants. According to them, this often

happened when the conversation was about something that was not in the readings or humorous comments that contained many words that were not in the readings. They also found that native speakers who spoke fast or who tended to use long and wordy sentences were much more difficult to understand than other native speakers.

One thing I found interesting but not surprising was that they all consistently rated at a higher level their understanding of the teacher's English than their classmates' English. I did not find this surprising because all three professors articulated their English very clearly and at a relatively slow speed. They were also more conscientious than the students in class in terms of filling in gaps between information. Their comments usually were directly from the readings and they were disposed to elaborate on what they said, thus allowing the international students to have more information to work on. Another factor is the inborn limited attention capacity. Like one student said, "*Sometimes this is because I purposely don't want to listen carefully, because I want to think about the ideas that are forming in my head at that time.*" These students needed time to contemplate what they wanted to say in class, they had to choose a time to withdraw back from the conversation so that they could participate later in the conversation, and they often chose the time when students, not the teacher, were talking to do that reflection.

The inability to comprehend the conversation by and large led to negative results in class. As I mentioned earlier, when students could not

understand the discussion well, they often felt they were not a part of the conversation. That feeling would then cause indifference to the conversation. When this happened, they made no eye contact with students who were talking for a long period of time. They would not have any facial expression when there were heated discussion or jokes going, either. To those who tried to understand the conversation, it was a tiring process. One student said, "*I felt kind of tired when they were discussing the difference between teacher's talk to kids and to colleagues, because I was confused with their discussions.*" Moreover, this was also one of the situations that caused them not to speak up in class, because the inability to comprehend the conversation caused negative evaluation of oneself. The following are two comments from the students that exemplify my point here:

> "*I don't understand well, because they speak fast. But I didn't ask questions to them because I thought the questions may be too easy. Plus the rest of the people understand them apparently since everyone laugh. So I didn't ask.*"
>
> "*I hesitated to ask a question for a moment, but shortly decided not to because everybody but me looked like they did not have any problem in understanding Dr. E's comment…I didn't want to be the focus of attention and to reveal my lack of understanding by asking a question about what nobody seemed to have problem in understanding.*"

Both of these students had a question about a comment in class. After they saw that everyone else had no problem or question about it, they started to

doubt themselves and were convinced that asking the question would only reveal their ignorance. As a result, they did not voice their questions in class.

Just like the student in the second example above, other focal international students also reported at least one time when they were uncertain about whether they should speak up in class. In the following part, I will demonstrate the reasons they provided for deciding whether to speak up or not in class

(4) To Speak or Not To Speak

Typically, the focal participants categorized the state of their minds before they wanted to speak up as "*confused*," "*interested*," and "*curious*." There were times when a comment came to the student, and he or she, without thinking too much, simply stated what was on his or her mind. In this case, the student simply uttered a comment because there was no time for reflecting and being scared: "… *sometimes you come up with a question in the middle of the discussions because somebody mention something related, I don't get nervous in that situation*." However, when there was time to think, they described many concerns and worries they experienced about speaking up in front of the class. Here are some examples of their concerns:

"*Before I spoke, I felt a little worried if I could express clearly.*"

"*Sometimes, you know, I have questions, sometimes I cannot express myself. …I worry that people cannot understand my question, so I got nervous.*"

"[I was thinking] Will my question bother others because it is a quite different view from them."

"I would be thinking whether or not this is a appropriate question, or if this is a good way to ask that question. I am afraid that people would think this is an easy question and it's not worthy to ask in class. Therefore actually get more nervous."

In general, their worries came from a lack of confidence about their language ability, fear of their opinions of not being accepted, and apprehension about looking stupid in front of their peers.

These worries prevented many of them from speaking up in class; nonetheless, sometimes some of them overcame these concerns with helpful and positive thinking. One student said, *"I worry about that. Sometimes I am not quite confident in myself. Maybe I worry about that. …After that I told myself " everything is going to be Ok. I will try my best". …In the beginning I have that feeling (feeling stupid). Sometimes I asked a very simple question, but they cannot understand me. That makes me feel embarrassed. …We are foreigners. We just cannot help. It's normal that we would have language problem and I think if I were in their situation, I would have the same idea."* Another student described her thoughts after speaking up in class this way, *"I thought it might be good to talk to the class. But while I was talking about the story, I kept concerning about my English. But after that moment, I thought it should be better than not to say anything to say something with my poor English."*

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The trepidations I discussed so far were all inward in the sense that they came from and were related to the students themselves (i.e., their language limitation and their viewpoints). However, some of their concerns also were related to others in class. For instance, they were very concerned about holding other people up. On one occasion, when a presentation lasted longer than usual, a Chinese student decided to ask his questions later. He explained that, "*I just didn't want to make the class longer, I asked [the presenter] the questions later after class.*" Many of the focal international students also mentioned how they did not make a comment in class because they felt they would break the flow of the conversation that was taking place. "*I did not want to go backward in the discussion flow just to ask my question. This has been frequently experienced of mine,*" a student said. To this student, it seemed that because the class was ready to move on, he did not want to keep everybody at the same point.

The conditions described in the last paragraph were made worse by the timing issue. Sometimes the classroom discussion changed topic so quickly, students just did not have a chance to say something. They often found that they needed a long pause before getting the courage to cut in. Some students stated how they needed time to think carefully about what they wanted to say. One student explained why she did not make her comment one time in class saying, "*Because the class already moved to other topic when I thought I was ready to talk. You know. I always somewhat hesitate*

(whether to make a comment or not) before I make a comment in class." While recalling her previous experience in a classroom at this university, another student pointed out that "*For me, it's my speaking style, I guess, it's very difficult to speak out my idea [like that]. I have to think about it first before I talk. It takes me long time to do that… I need time to think before I speak up. Is my idea clear? Does this support another theory? Is this connected with that?*" Thus, when the discussion went on and changed topics minute by minute, the focal international students found it hard to throw in their comments. And, when there was a chance for them to do so, they sometimes were too polite to bring the topic of a discussion back to where their comments would be related. Therefore, by the end of a class meeting, they might end up having said nothing.

In addition, anything that was face-threatening to others was very much avoided. One time, a Korean student experienced difficulties making her intended question clear to the teacher. While the process of negotiating meaning was still going on, another student in class, out of good intention, spoke up for this Korean student and tried to clarify the confusion. However, what she said did not clear up the Korean student's comment and actually the clarification went astray from the original meaning. The Korean student later wrote, "*I could not stop her…since [she] turned her back toward me while she talked with Dr. E, it was not easy for me to give her a sign that it was not my actual question. In addition, as I personally know her very well, I considered*

that stopping her abruptly seemed impolite between friends or even might insult her in front of others." Yet she further explained how in certain circumstances she might still interject. She said that she saw an interesting point in the student's comment, but if it had been a comment that she considered to be incorrect in nature or a threat to her own image, she would have corrected that student.

Furthermore, it was apparent to me that the teacher and the classmates greatly influenced these worries and concerns that sometimes prevented the focal participants from speaking up in class. If the classmates seemed friendly and open-minded, it usually set them free from the worries they had. For example, a student who spoke up in class a few times depicted her classmates this way, "*Most of the students are very polite. They try to talk to you very politely. I never feel uncomfortable from the discussions… They are all very nice. If you don't know somebody, when you disagree with him or her, [there] may be some uncomfortable [feelings]. But if we know them well, that will not be the case.*" On the other hand, if the classmates appeared to be indifferent, it would reinforce their silent behavior. "*Sometimes I do notice when one international student, for example, a Korean talks about the Korean or ESL something like that, the Americans look so bored. I really feel discouraged form that,*" a student replied after I asked her to comment on what things her classmates do discouraged her from speaking up in class. Another student also replied to this question with similar information: " *I feel that every one in*

class still pretty much focuses on the teacher. They face to the teacher. Psychologically, I don't think we are ready to say I am talking to everyone in class, not only the teacher. I do have this feeling. So I don't really feel as welcome by my peers."

Teachers played a similar role as the classmates in class. In fact, at the beginning of my coding, "teacher" was the first prominent category that surfaced. I detected how students from the very first day of the class attempted to understand the teacher and to discern what she wanted them to do and what she allowed them to do. Therefore, during the interview I inquired about the characteristics of their teachers. I discovered some common characteristics of teachers that encourage discussions:

- The teacher appeared to be knowledgeable about the topic.

Ex: *I think when she talks or when she answer students questions, the way she speaks facilitates students' learning and understanding. Her explanation is very effective to me usually.*

Ex: *She knows a lot about the field. She explains things slowly and clearly.*

- The teacher appeared to be sensitive to students' needs.

Ex: I noticed Dr. E would often check with students in class by asking, "*So...Am I not understanding you?*" Additionally, one student said, "*Dr. E apparently read my face and said.. Dr. E seemed to try to understand my thought beyond my utterance.*"

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Ex: *She told us how to organize your paper, print out your presentation. In other general class, I never learned that. …She gave us two papers about how to do presentation, and that paper also talked about how to communicate with your audience. It was very helpful.*

- The teacher appeared to be helpful while I am speaking.

Ex: *She would try to find ways to include your comments in the discussion, so you feel you are included.*

Ex: *Sometimes when you cannot answer the questions people addressed to you, she would help you, give you some clues to answer the questions.*

- The teacher appeared to be careful not to use words that may put a student comment down.

Ex: *She didn't say this is right or this is not right. She just try to lead you think. Let you think. Let you speak up…. not put something in your head… students can argue with her, she doesn't mind.*

Ex: *She kept a very low position in this class, just like one of us. She is also careful in her words, I think. She never use 'it should like,' but just 'In my opinions' or ' In my experience.'*

- The teacher appeared to be genuinely interested in the students' comments.

Ex: *She is very nice, and always pay attention to your question, give comments to it. And she is very interested in the topic you select or my question, and always try to help you.*

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Ex: *When I talk in class, she understands what I said. It's not just "ok, I hear you." She values my opinions. …Like there was one professor would answer my question without much thoughts…even if what he or she said is something I don't agree or understand, if the professor was serious, I would continue and ask more questions politely, like ' No, I mean this, that's why I think this.' But I just gave up.*

All these characteristics gave students the feeling that they could learn from the discussion led by the teacher, but also the sense that their comments, even mistakes, were valuable experiences to the teacher. Recall that in the beginning of this chapter when I explained their past experience in their own home countries, I gave an example of a Chinese student and demonstrated how he perceived himself to be the least qualified student in class and not favored by the teacher.   Indeed, I found that it is crucial for teachers to make students feel secure about making mistakes, especially to those who think they **are** going to say something imperfectly, such as these international students.

During the time I was collecting data, I also observed behaviors (usually opposite to the ones I mentioned above) that caused some students, including American students, frustration and sometimes disengagement. For instance in Dr. M's class, there were several times I noticed the frustration and disengagement among some American students. Here is what happened:

Dr. M would ask a question and one of the students would respond. Then there would be a long silence that usually lasted at least for 30 seconds. Without clearly acknowledging (i.e. I could not detect the acknowledgement if there was any) the student who had just spoken and without responding to what the student had just said, Dr. M would turn her head away and look at other students during that long silence. When I later asked her about this and what she intended by her actions, she said, *"Usually it was because someone didn't really answer the question. I also found that if I waited, someone would jump in. The best discussion is one that I might monitor but not direct, so I would try to stay out of the way as much as possible. In other words, to respond to what everyone said would be for them to have a conversation with me, and what I wanted was a discussion. …but I wanted someone ELSE to solve the problem…"*

Unfortunately, this was not the perception many American students had in class. I usually detected irritation right away from the students. Even though they generally liked her as a person, many of them said that they felt frustrated they had to guess what Dr. M wanted. They assumed that what they had said must be wrong and became emotional sometimes because they did not think their comments should be dismissed like that, or they felt stupid. The following comments from two students exhibit the emotional experience:

"[When this happened] it's kind of like, I guess I am wrong again…I don't feel really encouraged by her all the time…I think that sometimes she really bites down too hard, and it's like 'No, you are wrong,' instead of 'well, that's an interesting way of looking at it, how about seeing this way or what do you think about that.' She doesn't really do that. Kind of leading you to think different directions. She kind of tells you 'no' or she just says 'oh, Okay.' Her body language is kind of aggressive and abrupt. She has this little look where she goes 'anyhow' and kind of turns her head …And you are like 'Ok, I'll just shut up now.' It's like 'Wait a minute, I am talking still. Can you respond?' "

" I think one of the things, my friends in class have all expressed irritation with, is usually if you want to ask a thought-provoking question, you need to acknowledge our answers as viable, 'That's interesting, thank you for bringing that up,' you can say, and 'What do you think?' even if you disagree with it. Or 'that's good, but I am meaning more for this'… But she asks questions, and has like one tiny little obscure answer that she is looking for, and all other pretty viable things that [we're] bringing into conversation are wrong. And she looks at us like, 'Yeah?' I don't think anybody has ever landed on what she is looking for until then she explains it to us like we are stupid….If you know the answer, why do you make us guess?… I think facial expression is very important too. …If I am thinking that you're stupid idiot, my face totally says it. And unfortunately so does hers…I found it

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very insulting… she doesn't look like that's interesting, the body language that says 'I am interested in what you have to say.'… I am certainly willing to question that I am wrong, but not argue it with me like I must be wrong…She always acts like our opinions are wrong."

The situation in Dr. M's class reminded me one more time of how complex it is to participate in a classroom discussion. It is not only an intellectual activity, but also a very personal and social event. Students were carefully finding out their position in class while learning the content knowledge. Many of them felt vulnerable in front of the class. At the same time, I also recognized that this makes the teacher's work in class a very challenging one. I want to include two more comments from the focal participants:

"I think I am very sensitive student. Sometimes I do notice that she may not be as happy as other days. She seems to be more serious, and even if she smiles it's more like she made herself smiles, and it wasn't a happy smile. Under those circumstances, you would think she probably doesn't agree with what you said, or doesn't really care what you said. But it was just a feeling at that moment."

"From this experience, I saw that if a student's question is about a hotly debated issue or somewhat important matter, the professor tends to easily understand what the question means even though the utterance of the question is vague to some extent. I myself tended to evaluate my question as

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less valuable based on Dr. E's reaction, and simply dropped my original

question."

Accordingly, like some of the American students, some focal participants were also perceptive and cautious in trying to figure out what to do in class. Sometimes, the conclusion students made simply did not match what the teacher thought she expressed.

The last theme I gathered as a factor for speaking up in class is an issue of dependence on other resources. To some of them, knowing that someone else in class might say something similar to what they wanted to say was comforting, because then they did not have to worry about speaking up in class or having a question unanswered. Thus, they waited awhile to see if another student would say something that answered their questions, instead of voicing their own comments. They depended on other resources as well. For example, they were comfortable not asking their questions because they knew they could do so after class or during the teacher's office hours.

(5) During and After Speaking Up

When the focal participants did speak up in class, it was like a roller coaster ride for some of them. The words they used to describe their emotions were "*nervous*," "*afraid*," and "*concerned*" when they spoke up in class. After they finished their comments, they might feel "*relieved*," "*still concerned*," "*embarrassed*."

Here is a telling example to demonstrates what they were thinking when they spoke in class. "*My major problem is English maybe. I don't like this excuse. I am an International student…but it's scary. I am not confident that I can finish my question or my sentences…When I start to say something, everybody look at me and it's kind of rushing me. O I have to say something quickly, and I have to finish this…it makes me very nervous…In this class, especially American, they really talk fast. It's faster than any Americans I met… It's intimidating.*" Just like this student, many worries still came from their uncertainty about their English. Then, after they had made a contribution, they might still be concerned about how well exactly they had done. They felt embarrassed if they noticed that others did not seem to understand what they had said. On the other hand, they felt a strong sense of relief if their comment was accepted. A student disclosed his feeling by saying, "*Before I spoke, I felt a little worried if I could express clearly. After speaking, I felt relieved if my opinion were accepted.*"

The reason I say these emotions only applied to some of them is because there were three focal students who reported feeling comfortable while speaking in class and who seemed only focused on the content of the discussion, instead of worrying about other things, like how they had looked and how their English had sounded. To some degree, their statements surprised me. First, this was not like the experience of any of the students in the preliminary study. Second, these three students' English

was not much better than most of the other focal students in the study. Were they not concerned about their language problems? In fact, they did say how they worried about the language issue at different points during the study. Nevertheless, they also overcame these worries by very positive ways of thinking, such as, "*and I think if I were in their situation, I would have the same idea,*" or "*my English has improved.*"

Another thing I noted is that although these three students were from different disciplines, one common characteristic among them was that they all had a very strong sense of "I am here to learn." I suppose it was this strong motivation that kept them centered on one thing: Despite what might happen, I need to find a way to learn what I need to learn. As one of them stated, "*I know when you take out- of-department classes, they are going to be different. But I am not nervous. Probably because I have been students for too long…It's not my expertise, therefore I don't know it well, I don't have to feel embarrassed about it…My purpose is to learn more.*"

(6) Summary

So far, through a chronological description, I have presented the major themes of the classroom discussion experience of the focal international students. These themes were created after many rounds of data analysis. Subsequent to the initial analysis of all the data, each data source for each class was analyzed separately and then combined together with the others to create the whole picture of the experience. At this time I

concentrated on the data that included the focal international students only. What I have shown in this section was the final result of that analysis. I was, however, very interested in identifying the differences between these students' experiences and American students' experiences. Interestingly, I found their experiences to be very similar, except for the differences in work ethic as a student and the great concern with language limitations expressed by the focal international students.

Because of language limitations in all areas (e.g. speaking, listening, writing, and reading), the results of the study showed that it was very taxing for these international students to participate in oral discussions. The language obstacle could even begin before the class meetings. A few of them could not capture the meanings of the required readings. Under this circumstance, participating or speaking up in a discussion became an unattainable task. It was also true, however, that just like the American students, their experience was moment-by-moment constructed in response to the context, as stated by this student, "*It's really case by case. This week may be a great class discussion, but next week, the situation may change.*"

The focal participants were not silent because of experiencing cultural shock. Just like their American classmates, they were actually quite assiduously judging how well they were learning, what was going on in class, when could they talk, should they talk, and how well did they fit into the picture of the class. Their experience was a changing and growing one. It

was constructed and reconstructed continuously. One student described how he became comfortable with speaking up in class, "*I become comfortable with this kind of situation. I found out it would be Ok to ask some questions. It seems to me first if you ask stupid questions, it would be a waste of time, but it turns out in most case, if you get lost, most of the people would also get lost.*" Another student expressed her growing appreciation for classroom discussion stating, "*I found it useful to my learning. Honestly, it took me more than one year to realize that it is useful. I used to hate it, because I can see that sometimes the professor just let the student to have not exactly the right ideas. You know what I mean. I just expect her to reveal the truth. However, these days in *** class, their ideas, my ideas, even the wrong ones, scaffold my idea, and often lead me to think in another direction.*" What was more impressive and encouraging to me in the comments is the fact that some of the major transformations were likely to happen within a semester.

Even though I am saying that the focal international students exhibited a growing awareness of cultural differences about how to **do** a graduate seminar, and that major adjustments could be achieved in a short period of time, I also do not want to minimize the complexity of the process. These students continuously combined their growing awareness of cultural differences about how to do graduate seminars with their views of what is allowed for any graduate student. For instance, one student pointed out that, "*When you are graduate students, you need to think by yourself. You don't*

have the same experience or knowledge like your professor or adviser, but you do have the ability to think." They were acquiring a complex view of the experience as we all do entering a new cultural group. In essence, these results exemplify the idea that culture is a complex and dynamic construct that is multifaceted and imbedded in context.

Undeniably, culture was influencing the focal international students, but so was culture influencing the American students. If I place interpersonal communication (with an emphasis on individual processes) and intergroup communication (with an emphasis on group differences) as ends of a continuum, I have become convinced that these students' experience was more toward the interpersonal communication end. Furthermore, if there was a transition between the two, the transition of interpersonal communication to intergroup communication in this study was rarely marked by nationality, skin color, and eye shape. Rather, it was marked by how well a student understood the class discussion, how well they had learned the content of the class, or how well their views were accepted by the teacher or their classmates.

The Participation Patterns of the Focal International Students

Since the beginning of this study, I never questioned the possibility that I would find students who would stand in contradiction to the stereotype of the "silent Asian" international students. In my previous

research with the D-team discussed earlier, we had discovered that students who rarely talk and students who are relatively talkative in class could be found in both groups, American and international students from Asia. The results of this study confirmed those of the previous study. In all three classes, there was always someone among the American student group who had about the same number of speaking turns as any of the focal international students.

Table 4.1 offers a verbal depiction of the various class members across three discussions in one class and reveals an example of one student who went against the stereotype of the "silent Asian" international student. Here I present my counts of the number of turns from three oral transcripts from Dr. E's class, one from the beginning of the study, the other in the middle, and another one from towards the end of the study. The other two classes, Dr. B's and Dr. M's, showed similar results. Because Dr. E's class had most of the focal international students (half of them) and the result displayed a variety of participation patterns, I chose her class.

Table 4.1: Class member participation across three discussions

	9/13		10/4		10/18		**Total**
	#turns	%turns	#turns	%turns	#turns	%turns	%
American							
Rose	12	8%	6	3%	5	1%	12%
Matt	7	4%	1	<1%	12	4%	9%
Wonda	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Bert	5	3%	13	7%	3	1%	11%
Elle	5	3%	19	10%	18	6%	19%
Focal							
Wu	18	12%	14	7%	17	6%	25%
Deng	0	0 %	6	3%	0	0%	3%
Yun	0	0 %	1	<1%	0	0%	1%
May	1	<1%	3	1%	0	0%	2%
San	2	1%	1	<1%	0	0%	2%
Total	146	100%	184	100%	283	100%	

The total number of students in Dr. E's class was 21. In this table I included all the focal international students, which were three women and

two men, and a group of five American native speakers who also consisted of three women and two men.

Although for two of the discussions, the focal international students as a group took about 13 % of the speaking turns, the majority of these turns were from Wu. In fact, he often took more turns than some native speakers. Additionally, this table also supports the point I made earlier, which is that students who were relatively quiet in class can be seen in both groups, American and "Asian" international students. However, the table also revealed that there is a difference in the participation patterns between the two groups. The percentages for turn taking are more evenly distributed among American students than among the focal participants.

Throughout my observation, I also noted a major common problem of these international students' English language. They often had a hard time making their intentions for speaking clear to the rest of the class. This observation was also confirmed by some of their classmates. For example, one student said, " *** *has really excellent English, but he tends to keep talking. Either he hasn't gotten to the point yet, or he has said the point three times.*" As described by one of the American students, "*I don't think it is a problem with the pronunciation, it is just how to phrase things, you know because sentence structure is very different, so sometimes how to phrase questions and stuff, you have to really listen for the content of the question instead of what is actually being said.*"

In the following example more details about how an American student struggled to understand one of the foreign students talk in class are illustrated. She wrote (her thoughts that went through in her mind as the event unfolded are in the parentheses):

" *Female student: On number, on page eight, at the bottom (we were looking at page 37 of the Chapter 3, in particular, paragraph 17) (At the time, I did not look at the page I was on, assuming that she was referring to something that we were just talking about…*

Dr .E: Number 17 or number… (Dr. E was assuming, as I did, that she is referring to something on the page we were talking about.)

Female student: Just the bottom page…

Dr. E: Uh huh.

Female student: 14 is more informative than number…14A.

Dr. E: 14A (at this point, I am starting to get confused because there is no 14 A on the page we were looking at before the female student started to make her inquiry.)

Female student: I couldn't understand why. (Why? Why what? …she was not giving me enough information for me to figure out what it is that she is talking about.)…"

I think what the international student, identified as the "female student" in the transcript above, needed to do was to be aware of what was being said when she asked her question, and to use words to connect what was being said to what she was about to say. Another focal participant also

made a similar mistake several times. He changed the topic of the discussion without smoothing out the transition. As the class was discussing Topic A, he raised a comment, " *I have a quick question.*" And when the teacher acknowledged him by saying, "*Yeah?*" he asked his question which was not at all related to Topic A. By comparison, when an American student wanted to ask a similar off-topic question, he or she generally would prepare the audience by saying something like, " Sorry, this is not related, but I have a quick question…" Otherwise, the question would seem too abrupt and odd to the rest of the class members.

The focal international students also often would have the wrong expectation that their American colleagues could understand the underlying intention of their comments. For example, one of the focal students hoped that the teacher and her classmates would turn to a certain page by saying "*On page 49.*" Actually, at that moment, she needed to say something like, "I have a related question, but can we turn to page 49 first before I ask my question?" Most of the American students expected that the intention of a speaker would be clear from the very beginning of a comment. By contrast, an American student began his comment in the following manner: " *I was thinking some of XXX, and was wondering if some of these XXX are violated in YYY.*" Then he continued by giving details and examples of what he meant. At the end, he then gave his final thoughts on the issue. Just like this American student, in order to make themselves understood easily, the focal

participants needed to express more explicitly what they intended to do in their comments.

Generally speaking, the American students were appreciative of the focal participants and could relate to the difficulty of speaking in second language to certain degree. For example one American student stated that *"it has been exciting for me because I learn so much from engaging in a conversation about their culture and what they prioritize and stuff, I have never really had a problem with it."* Another said, *"Sometimes I wonder how um these people who can barely make up a sentence in English that you can really understand. How they get along here at UT? How do they read all this hard stuff, we have a lot of hard stuff… Sometimes they ask a question I am not sure , I kind of think maybe it's the language thing that they didn't understand because of the language thing, otherwise, you are thinking you know " Dear! How can you get confused about that?"*

However, non-positive comments also occurred. For example, one of the American students expressed hesitation in being sympathetic about the focal participant who had not yet said anything in her class. She said, *"I understand, but I also wonder that. Somebody told me once that they [international students] use that to their advantage...even if she understands the conversation, but [she] doesn't feel like participating, if I thought I could get away with that, just acting like [I cannot speak up because it is my second language], I would do it, so...I am always kind of curious…I think they probably do get away with not saying*

anything…I always worry that I sound stupid, but I'd rather sound stupid than sit

there wishing something interesting would happen, you know." Just like the focal

participants, the American students also held the focal participant

responsible for the classroom discussion. It was important then for the focal

participants to make effort in participating in class.

Model

The participatory process of the focal international students was

highly interrelated with and influenced by sociocultural, cognitive and

emotional factors. There were many variations occurring in the process as a

result of individual experiences or strategies employed. The commonality

was, however, the process by which students responded to the classroom

experience. <u>Responding to the classroom experience</u> was the central

phenomenon of the larger participatory process in the classroom discussion.

In this final section, I will present the model constructed from the data

collected. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate the focal participants' experiences

and how different factors interacted with each other in influencing how they

felt about their classroom experience. In Figure 4.1, I demonstrate their

response to their classroom experience as a dynamic and growing

experience by using a spiraled line. Because of the complexity of this

process, I further display in Figure 4.2 the interrelated issues that constitute

each part in Figure 4.1. At the very end, I will explain through two cases how this model represents their experiences.

Figure 4.1 represents the focal participants' experience in classroom discussion across the semester. The response to their classroom experience was continuously influenced by two major factors, <u>cultures</u> and <u>physical limitations</u>. "Cultures" includes, but is not limited by, the culture(s) from which each student and the teacher have come, and the culture of the setting. The physical limitations include the setting of a class, the time of a class meeting, the number of class members, the class members being fatigued or in an emotional state, and their limited capacity for attention to the class. The impact of both of these factors, cultures and physical limitations, was pervasive. Every component of the process both summatively and also moment-by moment seemed to be influenced by both of these factors at every level.

As I stated above, two factors, cultures and physical limitations, continuously influenced the middle part of Figure 4.1. This middle segment gives a picture of the focal participants' experience as a process that was <u>moment-by-moment</u> constructed in response to the context. Just like their American classmates, these international students were attentively assessing what was going on and what they should have done in class. Thus, I utilize a spiral to signify the dynamic nature of their experience. Then this class experience, which was constructed and reconstructed moment-by moment,

eventually contributed to changes in their <u>content knowledge</u> and their <u>ability to adapt to American graduate seminar culture</u>.

Figure 4.1: Responding to the Classroom Experience

Physical Limitations	Cultures

Moment 1

Moment 2

Moment 3

Moment

Content Knowledge

Ability to Adapt to American Graduate Seminar Culture

Figure 4.2: Responding to the Classroom Experience
Moment by Moment

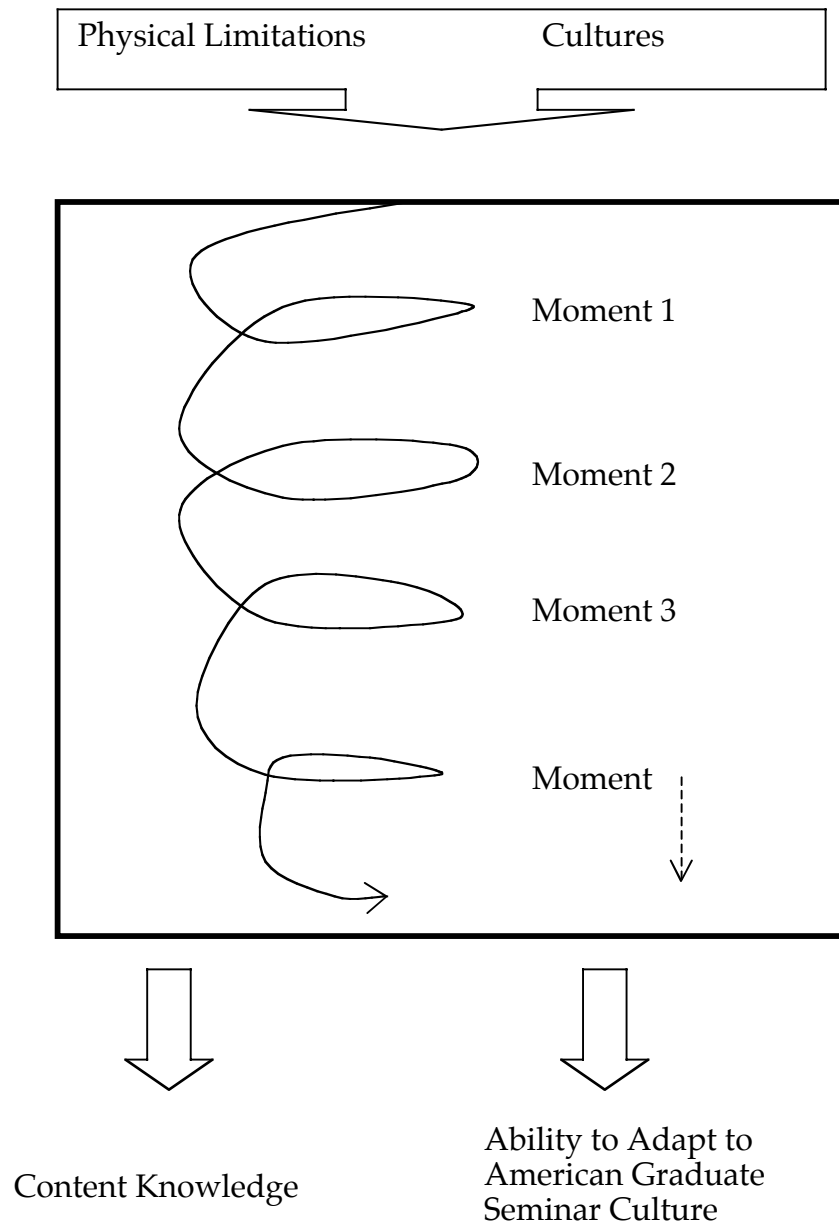Physical Limitations   Cultures

Teacher

The Individual   Classmates

Language Ability

Motivation & Goals

Self-concept

Comprehension & Production

What to do in class
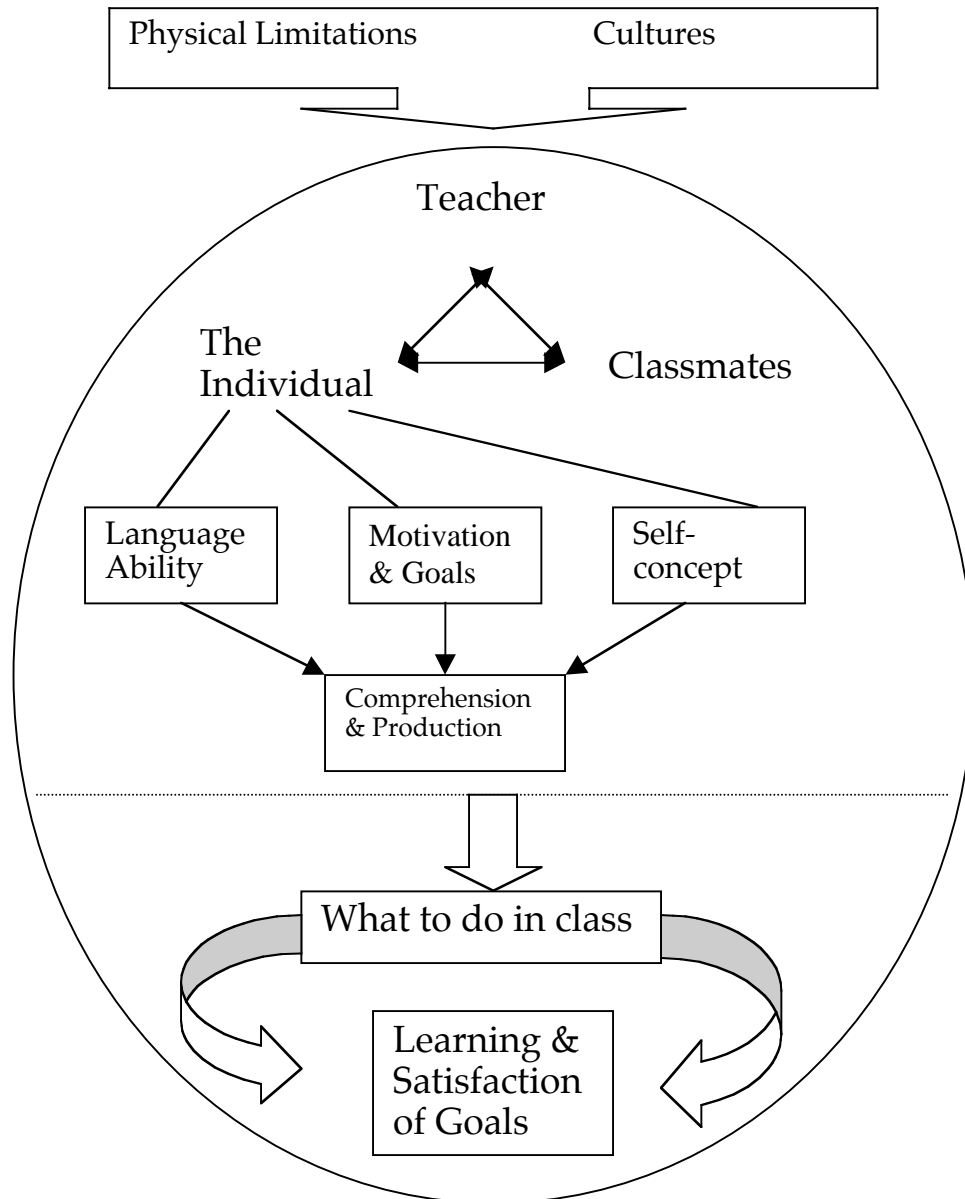
Learning & Satisfaction of Goals

Figure 4.2 represents a magnified picture of any one moment during the focal participants' experience. As explained in the earlier section, physical limitations and cultures are two constant factors that had an effect on the process. Then, the first upper part of the oval demonstrates that the experience for each moment was also influenced by <u>the teacher</u>, <u>the other class members</u>, and <u>the individual himself/herself</u>. Furthermore the triangle with two-directional arrows denotes the interactive nature of these three factors, teacher, classmates, and the individual.

Three elements of the individual have played important roles in the process. These three elements are <u>language ability</u>, <u>motivation and goals</u>, and <u>self-concept</u>. "Language ability" here means the English proficiency of the individual in general, which includes reading, listening, speaking, and writing abilities in English. The category, "Motivation and Goals", includes the degree of one's motivation towards specific task, goal of impression management, goal of learning the content knowledge, goal of learning social skills, and goal of considering others' needs. "Self-concept" refers to self-view, actions such as self-verification or self-evaluation, anxiety about speaking in front of the class, and concerns of the self. These three elements of an individual interacted with, the teacher, and the rest of the class members, factors. This was mainly due to the fact that the three elements caused variations in the interactions with the teacher and/or with the classmates. A student's inability to communicate, appearing to be

uninterested, or having low self-concept may have caused confusions or misunderstandings among the teacher and the rest of the class members. Subsequently, their negative reactions could have led to greater obscurity in the student's understanding of the content of the class, to lower motivation, or to lower self-concept. By contrast, if one's teacher and classmates seemed to be open and helpful (i.e. finishing or rephrasing comments for the speaker when it was needed), then it could have helped the confidence of the student and have kept his or her motivation high.

Meanwhile, these three elements of an individual also had significant impact on his or her <u>comprehension of the content of the class</u> and the <u>production of his or her English</u>. For example, classmates who spoke fast would have posed greater difficulty for some focal participants to understand the content of the conversation. At the same time, focal participants who were highly motivated or those who had higher self-concept were likely to figure out a strategy they could use to improve their understanding of the conversation. By contrast, those who were not motivated or those who had lower self-concept were likely to conclude their inability to understand was merely caused by language barriers without considering other ramifications.

So far I have discussed the factors in the oval that are above the dotted line. Directly beneath the dotted line is a large one-direction arrow. This arrow indicates that each factor above the dotted line could have

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independently or collectively influenced <u>what an individual did</u> in class, including passive and active reactions to an event. A student who was in a friendly classroom environment could have still been more reticent in class just because of his or her low English proficiency or low confidence in English. In contrast, in a friendly environment, a student with high English proficiency or high confidence in English was likely to be outspoken in class. Finally, what an individual did in class resulted in his or her <u>learning</u> and <u>satisfaction with his or her goals</u> for that moment.

Students' learning and satisfaction of their goals influenced their responding to their experience in the classroom discussion. The process of negotiating contextual and individual factors that constitute how the students responded to classroom discussion was repeated and reconstructed moment after moment. In the end, the accumulated moments that make up how they responded to their class experience led to their content knowledge and their ability to adapt to the American graduate seminar classroom.

In the following paragraphs, two cases are presented to illustrate how the model operates (the categories of the model are in the parentheses):

<u>Case 1:</u> One of the focal participants in Dr. M's class (The individual) had a great deal of difficulty in understanding the content of the class discussion and the required readings, and mentioned that because of her language problems, how she sometimes could not function in some part of

daily life (Language ability influenced the comprehension of the class discussion at that moment). As a result, I observed many signs of disengagement (What to do in class). She looked bored and did not learn much as a result of the class (Learning and Satisfaction of goals). However, one day, Dr. M. specifically designed a simple in-class exercise that could include everyone and modeled the exercise so that everyone knew what to do (Teacher). Although this focal participant still held the same level of English proficiency, she could understand what she needed to do and participated in the exercise (Comprehension and Production) with Dr. M.'s help. That day was the only time she spoke up in class (What to do in class). She did the exercise accurately and looked happy that she had participated in class (Learning and Satisfaction of goals).

Case 2: One male participant in Dr. E's class, although he had a goal at that time *"to learn more about the readings…and the teacher's interventions,"* felt it was important only to speak up when he felt he could *"add to the conversation"* (Motivation and Goals). He described how because of speaking in his second language, he was slow in constructing the comments he wanted to make (Language ability influenced Production). Therefore, by the time he was ready to speak up, the topic of the class conversation had already moved on to something else. At this moment, he found the comment irrelevant to the topic discussed, and he wanted to speak up only

"*when I feel I have something to offer.*" As a result, he did not ask his questions, or attempted to do so unsuccessfully (What to do in class), and was unsatisfied with his learning that day (Learning and Satisfaction of goals). He said, *"I can hardly believe how little I get."*

Chapter Five

Discussion

Under the premises that language is the medium for learning and that learning is situated in the social context where it happens, the central purpose of my research was to investigate and describe the processes by which international graduate students from three Southeast Asian countries, with different degrees of problems with English language proficiency and cultural conventions, participate and learn from classroom discussions. Additionally, I anticipated that systematic study of the social context (i.e., the settings, other members in the settings, etc.) would provide valuable information about the participatory process involved in classroom discussion, something that had been underexplored in previous studies.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the dynamic nature of the participatory process for the focal international students. It was evident that they, just like the American students, assessed constantly what was happening in class, and the response to their experience was constructed and reconstructed continuously. Furthermore, as I had expected, the results substantiated that social context factors, such as the teacher, classmates, their actions, their attitudes and their words, played essential roles in the participatory experience of the focal international students in classroom

discussion. Nevertheless, I was also pleasantly taken by surprise with the sophisticated and considerate yet brave thought-processes and behaviors revealed by some of the participants. Their aspiration to learn prevailed over the worries of looking incompetent in class. Their desire to be polite presented them in class to be some of the most thoughtful people I have ever met. Their openness to a new academic environment led them to consider other dimensions of a classroom discussion, where students not only learn the content knowledge, but also cogitate independently and create a discourse community in the discipline to which they belong.

In this chapter, I attempt to relate the findings of this study to the existing literature. I first compare the present study with previous research. Then, I identify the limitations of the study. Finally, implications for research topics and practices in this area will be presented.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The present study provides a first-time examination of international students' participatory process and its dynamic and evolving nature. Seldom undertaken before, this analysis detailed systematically how different factors in the discourse environment interacted with each other in this process. These results support and extend the research in the area of classroom discourse. As argued by many researchers (Cazden, 1988; Faigley, 1992; Schallert et al., 1999), classroom discourse imparts not only "the facts"

to students, but also values, roles they are supposed to take on, and ways to learn. The data of this study demonstrated that during discussion, students, including the focal international students, not only internalized the content knowledge, but also the rules of the class and how they fit into and learn from the class. It also illustrates how the students in class continuously evaluated and readjusted these beliefs and values. In other words, the classroom discussion that the teacher and/or the students orchestrated and participated in shaped the students' thinking and ultimately changed the course of their development as students.

The data also fit with the work of Horwitz (1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), who argued that foreign language anxiety is a specific construct separated from learning anxiety because the complex feelings aroused while learning or speaking a second/foreign language often make someone confront their self-conceptions. This was noticeably the case in the current study. None of the focal participants mentioned the concern about appearing to be ignorant about the field, or having insufficient knowledge about the area of study, something that was a major concern for some American students. Nevertheless, when, or even before the focal participants spoke up in class, most of them felt nervous just because they were speaking in their second language. They envisioned themselves as being in the spotlight and worried about the language mistakes they knew they would make. All these caused anxiety within them. Because the focal

participants' comments in class would elicit responses and would require further responses immediately, the anxiety was even more intense.

In addition, when other people could not understand their English, there was simply no way to avoid the realization that they could not express themselves well in English, and that no matter how knowledgeable they were about a topic, others might not perceive them as such. Based on their comments, I inferred that after a while, they may even have begun to question whether they knew what they were talking about just because classmates always looked confused when they made a comment. Luckily, some of the international students eventually overcame this anxiety and disappointment with a positive attitude, expressed as "Practice makes perfect." They divested themselves of the "harsh inner voice" and tried to focus on their improvement and on learning.

Previous studies (Liberman, 1994; Johnson, 1997) have often suggested that, due to cultural differences, students from Asia do not value the learning experience in classroom discussions and feel that American students have too much freedom and behave even disrespectfully toward their teachers. However, in my study I found that the degree of cultural differences was rather minor. Overall, the present study reveals many more similarities than differences in the participatory experience of the American students and the focal international students. This is consistent with my earlier findings and the D-team's research results. Although I must

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acknowledge the influence of cultural differences, I also saw that other factors, such as individual differences, the setting of the class, and who the other members in class were, competed with or modified the influence of culture on one's experience in class. Thus, in the present investigation, students who were quieter or relatively talkative were found in both the American group and the focal group.

Furthermore, it was noted that the students from both groups shared similar concerns about their participation in class. Similar to the focal participants, most American students were also conscientious about what the teacher expected of them and/or the way they would be perceived by others. A few of the American students even said to me that they were not used to classroom discussion because they had not had this type of learning format in the past, a comment often globally ascribed only to international students.

I also observed a major distinctive characteristic among these international students, which, in my opinion, contributed to the smaller cultural differences mentioned above. That is, they all to different degrees were open to or expected the cultural differences they experienced. Unlike the participants in many of the cultural studies reported who lived in their home countries and cultures (Bond & Smith, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), these international students had come to the United States for their higher education. Thus, they may not have been like the "traditional"

population in their home countries. In some ways, they anticipated the cultural differences they found. Even though this did not guarantee a successful and uneventful ride to their cultural adjustments, they were ready to take on the challenge. Consequently, these international students seldom or only reluctantly attributed their difficulties to cultural issues.

Not surprisingly, I found that language problems were a major and sometimes sole concern among the focal participants. This observation corresponds closely to preceding studies (Church, 1982; Stoynoff, 1997) that have reported that English proficiency is a fundamental element in international students' academic achievement. It also fits with the work reported by Kao and Gansneder (1995), which stated that international students from Asia cited "problems with English" as a factor for not speaking in class significantly more often than international students from other countries.

In my further attempts to understand the nature of their language difficulties, a practical finding from the present study emerged. The examination in the present study as well as my earlier pilot study indicated that their language problems were mainly caused by insufficient vocabulary and the inability to deliver the illocutionary meanings intended. I found that the two focal international students who had TOEFL scores between 500 and 550 when they began their programs a year before were simply unable to follow the discussion taking place in advanced graduate classes. At this

point, their language problems were essentially due to insufficient vocabulary. The reverse was the case for the students who had TOEFL scores above 600 when they had entered their programs a year before. Generally these students were able to follow the discussion in class and spoke up in class from time to time.

Additionally, I noticed that even when the focal participants seemed competent to participate in classroom discussion without any vocabulary hindrance, they were short of the phases that help to make the point of their statements clear. Sometimes American students were unable to grasp the intention of the statement (i.e., Was the student disagreeing with something or agreeing? Was it a question or a statement they were making? etc.) or to follow their line of reasoning. Related to Bachman's work (1990) and the categories he described as a part of language competence, I categorized the problematic areas of these students' English as problems with textual competence and illocutionary competence, which specify the ability to use effective connecting words to form cohesion between sentences and the ability successfully to convey the illocutionary meaning of an utterance with consideration of the linguistic and situational settings in which the utterance is being uttered.

Limitations

Even after a great deal of effort to "tell the story" in the previous chapters and even though I have a sense of fulfillment that these findings help to provide small pieces of the puzzle in this area of work, I am still left with the feeling of not being able to "pack" all of what I saw in the data together. It is important to note that a story can be told from many different perspectives, and this is true here. Consequently, just like many qualitative studies, the findings I presented may have overstated or understated certain perspectives of the participants' experience. For instance, without presenting the details of each participant's experience (i.e., through a case study on each individual), the individual differences in the course of development may seem unimportant in my analysis of the experience.

Another limitation to keep in mind when interpreting the results is the selectivity of the participants. First, all three instructors in the study were women. This was the case due to the availability of participating classes. Nonetheless, researchers and theorists have often commented on how gender plays an important role in terms of the power paradigm in some cultures, and thus it is reasonable to infer the likelihood of different dynamics in classroom discussions because of the gender of teachers. Second, the focal participants came from China, Taiwan, and Korea. Students from these countries possibly will have different experiences compared with those who are from Hong Kong or Singapore where English

is an official language and western culture a more usual element in their lives. Lastly, none of the focal participants were in their first year of staying in the United States. As suggested in the work on cultural adjustment and the present study, international students' experience is an evolving and growing one. Therefore, it is conceivable that the very beginning of one's initiation into graduate school in a foreign country may be so unique that it is distinct from other stages of the experience. Thus, the present research may have failed to capture the overwhelming learning and cultural adjustments an international student goes through when first entering the culture. Although I asked them about their earlier experiences, the intensity and the entirety of their depiction of the experience may have been lost due to the time lapse.

Being once a member of the very same group as the focal participants served as a double-edge sword for me in this investigation. It helped me to connect with the focal participants, yet it also placed restrictions during my quest about this topic. Most of the problems came from the fact that English is my second language as well. I was unable to understand the content of the Biology class very well for example, and thus I may have failed to attend to some nuances that would have allowed me to understand better the social and knowledge aspects implicated by the discussion, from which richer results can emerge. I was also unable to reach out completely to the two students who had great difficulty in speaking

English. The questionnaires were translated beforehand for them into their native language, Korean, so I was able to obtain some information about their experiences through written format. However, because they were reserved about having an interpreter present during the interview and we were unable to communicate fully in English with each other, we could not set up interviews. Furthermore, all interviews were conducted mostly in English, unless some of the Mandarin Chinese native speakers felt more comfortable speaking in Mandarin Chinese at certain points during the interview. The problematic issue here is that we were all using English and for us, it was our second language. Through member checking and constantly negotiating with the focal participants, I am confident in my understanding of their statements about the major themes in the proposed model. However, some valuable information about their experiences may have been missed.

Implications for Research

Most intriguing and deserving of future study is the powerful role of goals in the participatory process of engaging in classroom discussion. This is one of the surprising findings of the present research. Although it seems obvious now, I never thought about "goals" as one of the major factors influencing students' experience as I began this inquiry. This category emerged as a great force driving the behaviors and thoughts of the

participants. It became apparent to me that they held various goals while participating in classroom discussion. Students possessed not only a goal of gaining new knowledge on the topic, but also other goals such as keeping a good relationship with others or presenting oneself in a certain way. From time to time, these goals conflicted or complemented with each other and caused different levels or types of motivation within one person.

One student said, "*If you don't understand it, and just let the class pass like that, then you may not have any other chance to ask it again and learn. Therefore, I think asking questions is very important.*" Yet another said, "*Overall, I do not see this as a meaningless conversation. Because as I myself dropped the subject that I initiated, the responsive discussion smoothly moved in a certain direction around another valuable topic and finally was achieved to some extent in the whole classroom level. I believe that everyone including me was satisfied with the points of the discussion.*" Both of these students were motivated to learn, but they approached the task differently. The nature of their goals seemed different. The latter student showed goals other than concern for individual learning.

According to goal theorists, students with a mastery goal orientation are said to undertake a task for the purpose of improving their competence. In contrast, students with a performance goal orientation are very concerned about how they are evaluated by others and they undertake a task for the purpose of having greater competence compared to others (Blumenfeld,

1992; Dowson & McInerney, 2001; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Moreover, some studies also indicated that in order to maintain their superior appearance, students with performance goals may avoid work altogether. Although this study illustrated that students' goals influenced their motivation and had a great effect on their decision-making and behavior, it is unclear what relationships among performance goals, mastery goals, and work-avoidance existed in this context. For example, how do students with a mastery goal orientation and students with a performance goal orientation react to the occurrence of a communication breakdown? Given that most students hold both performance and mastery goals, what factors then influence students' decision about whether to speak up or not?

Recent studies in the area of goal theory have incorporated another type of motivational goal called social goals (Dowson & McInerney, 2001). Dowson and McInerney (2001) identified social affiliation (i.e., wanting to belong to a group), social responsibility (i.e., fulfilling a perceived classroom role), and social concern (i.e., considering others' needs) as part of the construct of social goals. Overall, all of these goals are related to social reasons for students' behaviors. Other studies have suggested a strong relationship between social goals and work-avoidance. In this study, some data indicated that many students avoid speaking up in class for social considerations. The question remains: If more than one social goal exists simultaneously within one person, how does the person reconcile his or her

desire to affiliate and thus not voice an opinion with the desire to fulfill one's responsibility as a participant in the discussion? Are there social goals that are more eminent than others to the participants in this context and which are these social goals?

In addition to exploring the area of goal theory in this context, I also believe that a longitudinal study addressing the same issues as the present study would extend our understanding. Given the fact that the present data pointed to the participatory process as an evolving experience, the issue of development becomes even more crucial for theory building and the validation of theoretical positions presented in this study. Through a longitudinal study over three to five years, one could assess ability and development of individuals over time and hence offer insights into the links across different developmental stages. This, in turn, would help elucidate the nature of the participatory process of international students engaged in classroom discussion. Ultimately, this knowledge may facilitate more effective programs that would assist international students coming to the United States to study.

Implications for Practice

Importantly, my findings confirm findings of earlier classroom discourse studies and further signify the powerful roles of a teacher and classmates in the classroom experience of international students. The

practical implication is that as a member of a class, teachers and students should be aware of their influential roles in class. American teachers and students should see themselves as hosts and welcome everyone into an intellectual "party." Moreover, this will allow the international students who may not be familiar with the "party rules" to enjoy their classroom experience much better. The results of this study also call for American teachers and students to view all international students as individuals. Although the general knowledge about an individual's culture(s) can contribute to a better understanding of the individual, results of this study caution us not to simplify and generalize such information.

Likewise, international students should realize that they themselves have a great effect on their own classroom experiences, and should avoid generalizing any cultural observations to all American individuals and to every situation. I would encourage international students to be open-minded and to keep in mind that the American students are very much like them in many ways. One misconception that international students may frequently have is that American classrooms are free-for-all, competitive, and individualistic environments. This is sometimes propagated in the ESL/EFL classrooms when discussions of cultural differences lead to stereotypes that are not borne out by my own experience or data from this study. Actually, many Americans are very careful in terms of keeping the harmony of the group, and have their own politeness strategies. As the

American students enter the "party," they are also trying to figure things out and meet everyone. It is very likely that certain American students do not know much more about the "party" than the international students. They may not know everyone in the "party," and may not even know the "host" (teacher) before the "party." Furthermore, I would also recommend that before the "party," it may be helpful for the international students to ponder upon possible topics or comments to offer in conversations, which seemed to be an effective strategy employed by some international students in the study.

The information about the focal participants' language problems mentioned above serves as a reference for school authorities while making decisions on international students' language proficiency levels and creating possible interventions to help them participate effectively in classroom discussions. Although the TOEFL score does not measure all aspects needed for successful language competence, I did find that in this study the two students with TOEFL scores below 550 had such difficulty that they were simply not able to participate in classroom discussions. Thus, I recommend a TOEFL score above at least 550 as an entry score for international graduate students, especially when their graduate program involves seminars or classes with discussions and/or presentations. Additionally, programs that foster students' abilities to construct cohesive sentences and deliver

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effectively the illocutionary meaning of their statements are also recommended.

Appendices

Appendix A

In the following paragraphs, I present the results of my study in four sections: (I) Asian international students' general experience in class, (II) characteristics of Asian international students' speech in discussions, (III) the influence of cultural beliefs on participation, and (IV) concern for the self.

(I) Asian International Students' General Experience in Class:

Although all five international students from Asia have passed the English competency exam required by the university, they still seemed to have great difficulty with the English skills required in graduate school. Three of them (Ming, Jeru, and Sook, all pseudonyms) have expressed their worries on not being able to understand the ongoing discussions. Two of the three (Ming and Jeru) said that they also have difficulty understanding the reading materials. The other two students (Yung and Shoo) worried about not being able to catch up with the classroom discussion. For example, Yung said, *"I am still thinking about one topic, they already moved on to another topic."*

During the five oral discussions, only one of the five international students made frequent comments, while one made comments occasionally, and three made no or very rare contributions to the class. There were also fewer comments made by these five students in written discussions compared to the American students. In their written discussion on April 12th, even though the topic was about second language writing which is a topic they are very familiar with, the five international students still only contributed about 20% of the written comments, while the seven American students who were in class that day made almost 70 % of the comments.

(II) Characteristics of Asian International Students' Speech in Discussions

Out of the five international students, there were only two students whose pronunciation of English was considered to be easy to understand. The rest of the three students had strong accents and their English was often difficult to understand. The American students in the class often had to make a special effort to focus harder when listening to these three international students.

Sometimes the sentence structure made by foreign students can reveal some of the qualities that made them "foreign." For example, Teresa asked a question to Ming: "*Ming, are your roommates American or ??*" Ming answered: "*My roommates are husband and wife both of them American, 50 years old.*" Ming also made another interesting sentence that follows: "*I felt I am organizing myself by learning a academic writing....*"

Sometimes the sociocultural practices in conversation also hinder the international students ability to effectively communicate their ideas in class. An American student, Reggie, said, *"It seems like the Korean students will ask questions that you won't understand, unless you are really focused when they make them... and you are not sure whether or not they are asking the question to participate or not."* Some American students are very good at using these conversational practices to communicate effectively in class. For example, Jackie would say, *"I'm sorry, I have to beat this to death..."* when it seemed she was struggling with a point in class and took a lot of the class time. The only international student that was sensitive about this seemed to be Shoo. For example, one time in the class we were discussing someone's article and Shoo suddenly raised a question about how to pronounce the author's name. Although his question was sudden and disruptive, he right away explained his desire to ask the question: *"I was just curious about it,"* and he appeared to be apologetic. Because he made his intention clear, people understood why he asked the question (they related to his outburst), and the

conversation resumed with no problem. I discussed this with the professor of the class and another American, and they agreed that Shoo handled this incident in an "appropriate" American way.

Another issue was concerned with the appropriateness of their speech. One time the teacher asked Ming to answer a question. Ming timidly giggled, pointing to the male Korean student next to her and said that he was better qualified to answer the question. They were just friends, not related. When I discussed this incident with the professor, she also agreed that it was awkward classroom behavior. Another incident was when the professor said that she was dying for a piece of gum and asked if anybody had some. In an attempt to express the same desire, Sook said *"I am also dying for gum. Please give me one if somebody gives you some."* Instead of addressing the class in general for gum, Sook wanted to use the professor as some sort of distributor, a middle-man.

(III) The Influence of Cultural Beliefs

Although many studies have shown that "Asian" students are more reserved in class than American students due to cultural beliefs, in this study, I found that there are also some similarities. Two examples are as follows: There were two American students often dominating the classroom discussions. They spoke aggressively and for an extended period of time. Both the international students from Asia and American students expressed similar feelings about these two people:

Reggie: *"I had a class with Carrie earlier in my academic career, so I know how it works. I've seen her get into it with AF, another student who likes to speak their mind. It was interesting how we all watched the ping pong match go on and on....[referring to CMC]... we have two little pieces of each class... and we know that we won't sit there listening to the same people [Teresa, Carrie] discussing things among themselves."*

Ming: *"At first I was very very upset... I don't know how to interpret their way of talking... it seems like we have three teachers in one classroom... it seems we just stop there, cannot move on to the next topic. That's why I was mad at that... And then drawing pictures [Teresa will draw pictures during discussion, but this doesn't seem to distract her from the discussion], I just cannot take it."*

Another example is the concern about what they say may not be important: Ming and Jeru both mentioned that many times they do not speak up in class because they don't think what they say is important. However, some American students also have very similar concerns. Reggie said, *"It's kind of like I ask myself whether whatever I have to say is really worth arguing about."*

(VI) Concern for the Self

Although most of the time, Asian international students looked like they were very attentive to the discussion in class, sometimes I saw a sign of uncertainty, especially when they spoke up. Jeru often times would blush, even when someone else in the class simply mentioned her name. These students were also concerned about losing the identities they once had in their home countries. Shoo said: *"I am thinking of the influence of L2 , English, writing style on my L1 , Korean, writing [style]. Sometimes I found myself writing in Korean they way I write in English. I felt so sad..."* Sook also had a similar comment about this: *"When I wrote my M.A. thesis in Korea, my young brother, whose major is Korean language and literatures, commented me about my way of writing , 'your writing is very English.' ...I didn't think that I wrote that way, I mean English way. .....But here in the United States, many people commented about my English like 'your English is very Korean, not in English way.' ...I am using the third language."*

Appendix B

Participant Information Form

1.Name: _____ 2. Email or phone_____

3. Major & Area of Specialization_____

4. Degree sought: __PH.D. __D.M. A. __Masters __Undergrad. __
   Other _ _ _ _ _ (Please specify)
   When did you start the program mentioned above?_____

5. Previous Degrees and Year (If it was finished in a country other than the U.S.,
please also write down the name of the country where you got your degree(s)):

_____

6. Do you consider English as your first (native) language?_____
If yes, what other language(s) do you also speak fluently (e.g. Intermediate Level;
You think you will be able to function well in daily activities if you go to a country
where that language is the only or main means of communication)?

_____
If no, what's your first (native) language(s)? _____

7. Describe what you would like to accomplish in this class (Or the reason for taking
it):

8. Identify the people in this class that you already knew before class began. Please
explain further the relationship.
___I don't really know anybody
___There are some people I kind of knew (e.g. people you will say hi to or ask
quickly how they are doing if you see them on campus. Name(s):

_____

___There are friend(s) of mine (e.g. outside this class, you also (can) do other things
with them, like having a coffee, together sometimes. Or you feel free to call them
when you have a question or need help) Name(s):

_____

9. There are students from different countries and cultures in your class. Before this class, did you have experience interacting with people from foreign countries? How often? Please describe in brief your experience in general (If you are from a foreign country yourself, please describe your experience with Americans):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. How would you describe yourself in your own words when you are interacting **in your first (native) language**, (e.g. shy, outgoing, quiet, talkative)?
Situation 1, with a group of good friends, talking about your favorite hobby:

_____

_____

_____

Situation 2, with classmates, talking about a homework assignment that requires teamwork:

_____

_____

_____

***** Since you know that I am interested in the talk that goes on in class, if there is anything else you think I should know about you as a participant in classroom discussions, please feel free to write it down on the space below. **Thank you very much for your time.**

Appendix C

Quick Questions about Today's Discussion

1.Did you finish the readings before the class? __all__most(2/3)__some(1/2)
                                                      __little or none
   How well did you understand the readings you did? __very well __kind of
                                                           __ not very well
   How did you prepare for today's class (e.g., read through the readings, wrote
   summaries, underlined the key points or discussed it with a classmate)?

2. Were you interested in the topic discussed today? __Yes ___No

3. Did you like the discussion today? Do you think the discussion today helped you
understand the subject better and/ or made you want to learn more about the
subject? Is there something that can be done to improve the situation in the future?
Please explain briefly.

4. What do you think about the quality of the comments in class (both of the teacher
and of your classmates)? Were there any person's comments today that were your
favorite or least favorite?   Please explain briefly.

5. Think about how much the following helped you in terms of increasing your
knowledge about the topic, out of 100%, how would you assign the proportion to
the following categories:
   _____ readings _____teacher's talks (or presentation) _____class discussions
       (The total of these three categories should be 100 %)

6. Was there any time during this discussion when you wanted to make a comment
or ask a question, but didn't? If yes, why didn't you?

7. At the time when you spoke up in class, what were you feeling or thinking before
and after?

8. Was there a time during the class you felt special emotional or physical
responses (e.g., tired, angry, uncomfortable, confused or frustrated)? Please describe
briefly and mention when that happened (who was talking and the theme people
were engaging in) and why you felt that way.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

- Why do you think teachers encourage classroom discussions? Have you been given advice about how to do participation in class? Have you been given advice about the value of classroom discussions? Do you find this type of learning (classroom discussions in general) valuable?
- Did you have similar classroom discussion experiences before this class? Please describe your experience briefly.
- What are your general feelings or thoughts about discussions in this class? Does it help you to understand the subject better?

- Can you describe in your own words what your teacher is like?
- What do your teacher and classmates say or do that encourages you to speak up in the class?
- What do your teacher and classmates say or do that discourages you from speaking up in the class?

- Is there any particular person in class to whom you usually pay attention more often than others? Why? What do you think about ***?
- (For Americans) How much contact have you had with other cultures? What do you think about the foreign students in class? Do you really care if they say something or not? Do you find it strange that they rarely say anything? Do you think they should at least try because it's everyone's responsibility to participate?

- (For Asian Students) How much contact have you had with American students? Do you have some American friends? What do you think about the American students in this class?

- What are your main concerns, in general, in classroom discussions?

- Are there certain strategies you used to prepare your readings for discussion (e.g., only read what you interested in or made up some questions to ask in class or made up some comments before coming to class, read the teacher's assigned questions, like in Music class) or strategies you used while in class, so that you can participate effectively in the discussion (e.g., don't takes notes, take notes, looking at the speaker)?

- (For Asian students) GRE verbal score and TOEFL three scores and total score.

- (For Asian students) Is this the first time that you came to America? Is UT your first school here in the States?

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