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**Adult ESL Learners Reading and Discussing *The Great Gatsby*:
Literary Response to and Perceptions of Reading and Discussing
a Narrative Novel written in English**

Committee:

Diane L. Schallert, Supervisor

Colleen M. Fairbanks, Co-Supervisor

Elaine K. Horwitz

Zena T. Moore

Jacqueline M. Henkel

**Adult ESL Learners Reading and Discussing *The Great Gatsby*:
Literary Response to and Perceptions of Reading and Discussing
a Narrative Novel written in English**

by

Hyung-Hwa Chu, B.A.; M.A.

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 2008

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of
my grandfather, Yong-Sam Kim,
August, 12, 1928, to September, 9, 2004.

Acknowledgements

A long and laborious ascent has led to the end the completion of my dissertation. Without support of my mentors, colleagues, and family, I would not have arrived at this peak with views of both the hills that I have climbed and the range of peak on the other side.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Diane L. Schallert and Dr. Colleen M. Fairbanks, my dissertation supervisors. Dr. Fairbanks guided me along every step of this project. Her expertise and keen insight greatly contributed to this study. Despite her relocation far away from The University of Texas at Austin to The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, she was generous and diligent in helping me with important decision and with the shape of this study. I am especially grateful to Dr. Diane L. Schallert for her support, patience, and encouragement throughout my graduate studies. She was always there to listen and coach me when I felt overwhelmed by challenges along the way. I appreciate their time and support that contributed to the successful completion of this dissertation.

I would like to extend special thanks to the other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Elaine K. Horwitz, Dr. Jacqueline M. Henkel, and Dr. Zena T. Moore, for their contributions to the elaboration of this work. Dr. Elaine K. Horwitz and Dr. Zena Moore supported me throughout my studies in the FLE program. I appreciate Dr.

Henkel's insightful comments on my draft. Their editorial advice improved the contents of this dissertation.

My special thanks go to the staff and teachers at the ESL Services at UT Austin, Michael T. Smith, Teresa Baker, Susan Anderson Kerr, Meghan Ackley, and Patricia Jobe, for allowing me to carry out my study at the program and for their generosity and assistance. Most of all, the students who participated in this study deserve my sincere gratitude for their warm and kind cooperation. Their enthusiasm and energy inspired me as a learner, teacher and researcher. Good memories of the time that I had with them will stay in my heart for a long time.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my friends and family for their love and cheers. Pamela Bona graciously spared her time and editing skills for my study. I appreciate the advice and high expectations from professors at Chonnam National University in Korea, Dr. Kyung-Soon Lee and Dr. Byung-Kyu Ahn. I am grateful to my parents and parents-in-law for their dedication and many years of support. Here I remember my grandfather, Yong-Sam Kim (1928-2004), who would be proud to know what I have achieved as a scholar and teacher. Lastly my deepest love goes to my husband, Baek-Seung Lee, and our precious boys, Jae-Woo and Sang-Hoon. Their patience, understanding, comforts, and support cannot be described enough in words.

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Publication No. _____

Hyung-Hwa Chu, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2008

Supervisors: Diane L. Schallert and Colleen M. Fairbanks

The purpose of this study was to examine how adult students in a reading class offered in a college-affiliated ESL program responded to *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925; *GG*, afterwards) in small group book discussion sessions over eight weeks, and how they perceived their reading and discussing experiences.

Analysis of students' literary responses demonstrated students' strategies in constructing textual meaning and transformation of their meaning-making strategies across time. Students in this study made sense of the text by making connections between the textual world and the text, themselves, and the world around them. Students also brought into discussion their reading experiences and a critical approach to the text.

The percentage of comments devoted to each response category illustrated the changes in the focus of discussion and meaning making strategies across time. Taking up the novel, initially students spent more time discussing the historical context of the text and formulating connections with themselves and the world. Students were self-conscious about their reading difficulties. Further along in their reading, as they derived more information from the text, their discussion became more text-centered. Inferential comments and emotional reactions became more frequent elements in discussion, and talk about the reading experience itself and contextual information about the text diminished.

Perceptions expressed about their reading experience of the literary text in their second language were predominantly about the enjoyment of reading and challenges and rewards in terms of: 1) language challenges, 2) culture challenges, and 3) literary challenges. Analysis of students' perceptions of their experiences in literary discussion as they read *GG* revealed their enjoyment of discussions and appreciation of how literary discussion had enriched their interpretation of the novel by providing opportunities for: 1) checking up on the textual information, 2) exchanging opinions, and 3) building a sense of learning community.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how adult students in a reading class offered in a college-affiliated ESL program responded to *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925; *GG*, afterwards) in small group book discussion sessions over eight weeks, and how they perceived their reading and discussing experiences. Using reader response theory and a socio-constructivist concept of reading as lenses, I explored L2 readers' efforts to make meaning of *GG* as demonstrated in literary discussion. By investigating adult ESL learners' self-reported experiences, I also analyzed the benefits and challenges of integrating literary texts into the language classroom.

The Statement of the Problem

This study originated as an attempt to attend to the two major problems surrounding the issues of incorporating literary texts in language instruction. First, professional and scholarly opinions about use of literature for the second and foreign language classroom are still being debated. Second, the pedagogical practice employing literature in the language instruction has most often disregarded socio-cultural construction of understanding of written texts.

EFFECTIVENESS OF USE OF LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

The first argument I intended to take in this study is conflicting viewpoints about the concept of incorporating literary texts as a tool to enhance language proficiency. Learning a second or foreign language using L2 literature has often been described as involving greater challenges and limitations to facilitate language development. However, researchers and educators in the L2, as well as L1 field, have persistently emphasized and empirically reported the value of literature in language acquisition.

In support of using literature in the language classroom, literary texts have been widely implemented in primary and secondary school language arts classes in the United States. Extensive research indicates that a literature-based curriculum can function as a vehicle to encourage students' affective engagement in reading (Lazar, 1993; Lewis 1997), to develop students' linguistic proficiency by presenting language in context (Nagy, et. al., 1985; Stoller & Grabe, 1993), and to enhance multicultural tolerance and competence (Collie & Slater, 1990; Langer, 1995; McKay, 1986; Wesche & Paribakht, 2000).

The benefits of literature-based language teaching have been suggested in L2 contexts as well, particularly during the past two decades (Hall, 2005; Maley, 1989; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000). The recent "academic interest" (Paran, 2006, p. 1) in literature has been influenced by trends in and perspectives of second language acquisition (SLA) theory and method.

One of the leading theories in SLA that validates the use of literature in language classrooms is the *Communicative Approach*, developed in the 1970s. Communicative competence (Kramsch, 1993; Omaggio, 1986) in L2 learning emphasizes the importance of cultural understanding and authentic use of the target language. In this context, incorporation of literary texts in language instruction is strongly recommended for developing students' linguistic and cultural awareness (Collie & Slater, 1990; Galda, 1998; Hadaway, Vardell & Young, 2002; Kramsch, 1985, 1993; Schofer, 1990).

Using literary texts in language teaching makes possible the provision of reading materials at students' language proficiency level. Based on the concept of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD), Krashen (1985, 1991) claimed that each language learner should be provided curriculum with the appropriate input challenges, which he labeled *comprehensible input*. When reading texts are carefully chosen, literature is an effective medium to offer wide selection of materials "tailored to students' individual proficiency levels" yet "something new to stretch toward as well" (Hadaway, et al., 2002, p. 42).

Literature may also serve to enhance students' cultural competence in the target language because it represents the social context in which characters think, behave, or believe (Collie & Slater, 1990). Scott and Huntington (2000) pointed out that learning L2 culture through poetry was effective in developing "affective awareness and cognitive flexibility" (p. 622) of the target culture and in reducing rigid concepts about the target culture. Viewing literature as "mirrors and windows," Galda (1998) asserted that literature provides a window into other cultures and a reflection of readers themselves. As

well as illustrating cultural information in context, literature often “challenges cultural norms, ... enables the [L2] reader to reflect about cultural stereotypes,” and “forces [readers] to rethink accepted norms” (Swaffar, 1992, p. 245).

Despite theoretical and empirical support for the beneficial effects of literature on language acquisition, concerns and challenges associated with using literature with L2 learners have been persistently raised. Scholars (Edmondson, 1997; Horowitz, 1990; Topping, 1968) have pointed out that structural complexity or lack of standard grammatical rules represented in literature may impede language learning. Research on L2 reading comprehension indicates that L2 readers often fail to understand the tone and cultural implications of the text and fail to produce critical responses to the text (Bernhardt, 1990; Carrell, 1983; Davis, 1989, 1992; Duff, 2001).

For example, Bernhardt (1990) concluded from the recall data of college students in second-year German classes that most L2 readers could not “select the most appropriate portion of the text for processing” (p. 39). Bound by initial misunderstanding of linguistic features, students were unable to interpret the text properly or to apply story structure to L2 story reading. A study with French literature college students by Davis (1992) also revealed students’ difficulty in understanding text. Lack of cultural and historical knowledge about the target culture or insufficient target language competence hindered students’ access to literary experience or even resulted in misunderstanding of the whole story. L2 readers are ‘in essence, ... linguistically, conceptually, culturally, and socially different from the usual audience of literary texts’ (Bernhardt, 1990, p. 23).

However, these counterclaims for the use of literary texts for language learning reveal some gaps in how to conceptualize the phenomenon. Primarily, arguments against using literature do not correspond with current conceptions of literature as reflected in reader response theory and socio-constructivist views of literacy. For instance, reader response theory highlights the role of the reader in constructing literary meaning (Culler, 1975; Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). Because reader response theory embraces variation in interpretation according to the reader's personal experiences, beliefs, or cultural background, it may provide a theoretical foundation to legitimize L2 readers' active creation of literary meaning from their own linguistic, conceptual, cultural, and social situations. Reader response theory also grants its scholarly attention to the ways in which readers build their own understandings of the text (Langer, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995). The goal of reading literature is not considered to lie in search of an already agreed upon interpretation, but rather in the process of arriving at the reader's own understandings.

L2 LITERARY DISCUSSION

Another problematic issue that this study aimed to address is lack of research examining the incorporation of literary discussion in L2 reading classrooms. Most of the research on classroom discussion in L2 has concentrated its focus on conversation analysis based on interaction hypothesis (Long, 1981). Interaction with native or non-native speakers has been considered prerequisite to improve L2 language proficiency

(Carrell, Devine, & Eskey, 1988; Gass & Varonis, 1994). However, few studies, except Kim's (2004) inquiry of literary discussion in college level ESL classes, have explored L2 literature discussion as a medium.

Studies on incorporating literature in language teaching also have widely neglected L2 literary discussion. In contrast to the dearth of research on L2 literary discussion, language arts teachers and researchers in the United States have recognized literary discussion as an important realm in which students construct their understanding and interpretation of a text (Marshall et al., 1995). Discussion of literature has been distinguished as one of the most effective tools to improve learning and understanding (Almasi & Gambrell, 1994; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Marshall, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). In order to promote students' progress in literacy and literature awareness, various literature-based discussions have been implemented in the form of literature circles, book clubs, class inquiries, and others (Daniels, 1994; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Schlick-Noe & Johnson, 1999).

Socio-constructivist views of literacy also contribute to an understanding of the process of developing literary meaning. In such views, readings of students are socially constructed depending on the "interpretive community" (Fish, 1980) in which they belong. While interacting with others, students can learn about literature, the scope of acceptable responses, and the ways of sharing interpretations with others. According to Marshall et al. (1995), in order to understand construction of literary meaning, in-depth investigation of literary discussion is necessary.

Despite an urgent need to examine the literary discussion environment, previous research investigating L2 reading comprehension has often ignored the social context in which the reading is occurring. These studies typically set the focus on the end products of reading activity, such as reading journals, written or spoken recall, with less emphasis on the social construction of meaning.

Taking into consideration gaps in previous research, I aimed to examine the literary responses formulated in small group discussions in an ESL class. To investigate the phenomenon proposed in this study, I relied on two major theoretical frameworks, reader response theory and socio-constructivist notions of reading and literary discussion. In the following sections, I will discuss these theoretical constructs in detail.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The theoretical frameworks that guided this inquiry include reader response theory and the socio-constructivist model of reading. They provided a foundation for my conceptualization of reading as a process of generating meaning. They also offered an understanding of literary discussions as important contexts in which students learn how to read and interpret texts. Within these frameworks, reading and talking about *GG* performed by adult ESL learners in a college-affiliated program is represented as a creative and socially constructed process.

READER RESPONSE THEORY

One of the most significant concepts influencing reading instruction today is reader response theory, with its claim that the meanings of texts derive from a transaction between the text and reader within a specific context. Led by Rosenblatt (1938) and other theorists (Fish, 1980; Iser, 1978), the reader response movement claimed that literature exists only when it is read, and literary meaning and value are created by the interaction of the reader with the text.

Reader response theory emerged as a paradigm shift from author- or text-centered literary analysis that had been advanced by New Criticism, to the reader and the reading process as a source of meaning (Ali, 1994; Langer, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978; Swaffar, 1988). New Criticism was based on the belief that meaning is inscribed in the text. According to advocates of New Criticism, the reader's task is to scrutinize the text to search for the correct meaning. In defining teaching, reading literature in the classroom from this view was considered a process of transmission of the right interpretation of the text to students. An instructor represented an authority figure who knew the right answer and led students to the author's intended meaning. Students were not expected to express their own voices in interpreting a text because individual and personal interpretations were unacceptable. Impressionistic or affective effects of the text were disparaged as the "affective fallacy," according to Wimsatt and Beardsley (1949).

In her 1938 edition of *Literature as Exploration*, Louise Rosenblatt, a pioneer of reader response theory, proposed the reader's construction of the meaning from the text as a unique and subjective "event." Individual readers approach the text equipped with

their personal memory, feelings, and knowledge, and create their own “poem,” or meaning, of the text.

The special meaning, and more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text (p. 30-31).

Rosenblatt described the particular and momentary event of reading in terms of a *transactional theory*. She viewed reading as a process in which the reader, with his or her past experience, beliefs, expectations, and assumptions, interacts with the perspectives in the text; and meaning is determined as the result of this transaction. She emphasized “the essentiality of both reader and text,” and its “to-and-fro, spiraling, nonlinear, continuously reciprocal influence” (p. xvi) in the meaning making process. Rosenblatt suggested that to make the most of experiences with literature, “our [teachers’ and readers’] primary responsibility is to encourage an aesthetic stance” (p. 275) because students may be able to reach a deeper level of personal understanding when they take the aesthetic stance in reading literature (Cox & Many, 1992).

Reading, according to reader response theory, is a reflective and creative process, and meaning is self-constructed. The meaning and structure of the text are not considered to be inherent in the print but are invited by the author and imputed to the text by the

reader situated in a particular context (Swaffar, 1988). Similarly, Fish (1980) argued that literature exists when it is read; reading is a temporal process. Readers do not simply reside in the same context. Even the reading contexts of an individual change over time. He further asserted that a reader's momentary experiences throughout reading the text ought to be included in literary experience.

Langer (1995) developed the term *envisionment* to describe momentary interpretations that are subject to change as ideas unfold and new ones are developed. Iser (1978) also suggested that texts contain gaps that the reader has to explain, make connections with, and create in his or her mind. With the definition of literature as something that exists meaningfully in the mind of the reader, reader response theory endorses a redefinition of the reader. The reader is not a passive recipient of meaning that an author has rendered in a text, but rather an active maker of meaning. Because readers' contexts are not fixed, the meaning also differs according to different reading contexts.

Applied in the language classroom, reader response theory provides a foundation to encourage students to respond to the text and express their own ideas, opinions and feelings freely. In such a classroom, the teacher is a facilitator of the interchange of multiple interpretations of a text, rather than the bank of exclusively correct answers as readers develop literary understanding. From a pedagogic perspective, multiple interpretations allow for creative and critical thinking to take place in an atmosphere where there are no threats or any compulsion to learn the correct answer or to complete the best interpretation.

L2 readers can benefit from reader response theory and its implementation in the classroom as well as L1 readers. Previous research investigating L2 reading comprehension has mostly focused on L2 readers' limitations in linguistic and cultural knowledge to understand literary texts. Studies have described how often L2 readers fail to understand the tone and cultural implications of the text and to produce critical responses to the text (Bernhardt, 1990; Carrell, 1983; Davis, 1989, 1992; Duff, 2001), which may increase L2 reading anxiety (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999). L2 readers are only located in the low end of Lotman's (1982) continuum of degree of shared representation of discourse between the text and readers.

However, as much as reader response theory allows variations of interpretation depending on readers' background, it provides a theoretical foundation from which to appreciate L2 readers' linguistic, conceptual, cultural situation as a force to produce unique interpretation of the text. When L2 learners are encouraged and ensured to read L2 literature as governed by the reader response approach, readers' experience may go further than a literal understanding of a foreign text and advance to an aesthetic appreciation of the text (Carlisle, 2000). L2 readers are far more likely to become motivated and engaged in reading and to move towards critical appreciation when their personal responses are valued in literature reading.

SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIVIST VIEW OF LITERATURE DISCUSSION

Another theoretical framework that contributed to this inquiry was the socio-constructivist view of reading. As the literary discussions in this study worked as a medium for students to present their response to the text, socio-constructivist views of reading and discussing formed the conceptual background of the study.

In describing reading, the socio-constructivist approach acclaims that students' reading is shaped in the community to which they belong. Reading contexts where individual readers are located implies the norms and values of a community associated with interpretation (Marshall, 2000). According to Fish (1980), *interpretive community* signifies a community with shared conventions and agreement in interpretation of the text. He claimed that meaning is entirely context-dependent and that there is, consequently, no such thing as literal meaning. In his argument of academic institute equipped with shared cultural practices, Culler (1975) emphasized the *literary conventions* that a literary community possesses.

Among various reading contexts, literary discussion has been recognized as an important setting where students construct their understanding and interpretation of the text (Marshall et al., 1995; Mercer, 1995, 2000; Wells, 1999). Marshall et al. (1995) claimed that students' readings are shaped primarily through discussion. They asserted that, in order to understand construction of literary meaning, in-depth investigation of literary discussion is necessary.

Literary discussion studies also fall under the big umbrella of classroom interaction research with a focus on meaning making and learning through interaction

with a teacher and peers. Vygotsky (1978) advanced a view of learning that stresses social influences on the ways in which people think. This view sees thinking as being shaped by the social and cultural environment in which an individual develops, with language being among the primary mediators of learning in the environment. In the same sense, Wertsch (1991) remarked that “human mental functioning [is] socially situated” (p. 86).

While interacting with others in discussion, students learn about literature, the scope of acceptable response, and the ways to share interpretations with others. The exchange of individual responses in discussion may provide readers with opportunities to reflect on their initial responses and extend their ideas. Lehman and Scharer (1996) asserted that “collaborative interaction helps learners to stretch beyond their limits and gain new insights” (p.27).

The ways in which students read and respond to the text seem to be decided according to discussion patterns (Marshall et al., 1995), gender roles in discussion (Finders, 1997), and social patterns in the group (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Lewis 1997). For instance, Lewis (1997) investigated the social dynamics involved in literature discussion in fifth and sixth grade classrooms. She described how students’ socioeconomic status, social origin, status and power out of classroom influenced literature discussion.

Although the teacher-student interaction takes up a great deal of classroom interaction in contemporary school setting, recent interaction studies have come to highlight the collaborative meaning making of peer group discussion. Much of first

language research on literature-based instruction has focused on the role of group discussion in promoting student talk and students' understanding (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Gambrell, 1996; McMahon & Raphael, 1997; Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993). The free exchange of individual responses in discussion is meant to provide readers with opportunities to reflect on their initial responses and extend their ideas. Golden and Rumelhart (1993) emphasized that students may be able to acquire better understanding of text while extending the scope of their interpretation as they engage in discussion with other readers. Where the discussion between pupils is *exploratory* talk (Mercer, 1995), students may retain greater chances of thinking together, producing alternative ideas, enhancing knowledge construction (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002). By encouraging and allowing students to respond to literature in peer group discussion, the active construction of meaning is promoted.

In terms of L2 reading education and research, an in-depth study of literary discussion among learners may promote an understanding of the L2 reading process and pedagogical value of literary discussion. Previous research investigating L2 reading comprehension has often ignored the social context in which the reading is occurring. L2 reading comprehension studies typically have concentrated on the final products of a reading activity, not the reading process in context. Instead, here, the goal of reading literature is not considered to lie in search of an already agreed upon interpretation, but rather in the process of arriving at socially constituted understandings. A close examination of literary discussion may provide a portrait of L2 readers' construction of meaning as they work with ideas and try to make sense of the literary text.

The Current Study

As I stated above, the purpose of the current study was to examine how adult students in a reading class offered in a college-affiliated ESL program responded to *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925) in small group book discussion sessions over eight weeks and how they perceived these reading and discussing experiences. I explored L2 readers' efforts to make meaning of this literary classic as presented in literary discussion. Because the goal of this study was exploring the content and formation of literary responses in discussion, I did not use conversational analysis of interaction as a research method in this study. By investigating adult ESL learners' self-reported experiences, I also investigated benefits and challenges of integrating literary texts into the language classroom.

Reader response theory and socio-constructivist notions of reading provided the conceptual framework of this inquiry. These theories have been applied in practice and study in language arts classrooms in U.S. Despite an urgent need to examine literary discussion environment, few studies have explored L2 literature discussion as a medium. Studies of incorporating literature in language teaching also have widely neglected literary discussion.

Because it was a lack of related studies that triggered this inquiry, I used qualitative methods for this investigation. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) stressed, qualitative methods are effective research tools for investigating an area of inquiry about

which little is known. I expected this qualitative study to enhance the understanding of adult ESL learners' reading in college-centered classrooms.

Research Questions

The goal of this study was threefold. First, I wanted to examine how adult students in a reading class offered in a college-affiliated ESL program responded to a reading of *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925; *GG*, afterwards), a text chosen by the group in this case, in small group book discussion sessions. Second, I wanted to investigate how students perceived their reading and discussing experiences, with a focus on their understanding of the text and English language learning. Third, I was also interested in identifying the benefits and challenges of integrating literary texts into the language classroom.

The research questions that guided my study are as follows:

- 1) How do adult ESL learners respond to a literary text in small group book discussions?
- 2) How do students perceive their reading experiences of the literary text?
- 3) In what ways are the small group literary discussions perceived by adult ESL students to affect their interpretation of the text?
- 4) What are the challenges and benefits in incorporating literature in ESL classes, as students perceived them?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The current chapter reviews theoretical and empirical works in the research areas that are relevant to this study. To recap, the primary focus of this inquiry is to examine adult ESL learners' literary response to and their perception of reading and discussing *The Great Gatsby (GG)* through eight weeks of in-class book club sessions. Divided into three main sections, this chapter begins with the review of studies that analyze issues related to integrating language and literature in the classroom. The second portion of this chapter discusses studies of literary responses. The third part presents reviews of scholarly works on literary discussion conducted in different environments.

L2 Language and Literature Connections

Existing studies concerning the relationship between second/foreign language teaching and the teaching of literature vary according to the academic disciplines and perspectives taken. Two different approaches commonly used to describe the language-literature relationship include *the use* and *the study of literature* (Maley, 1989), also referred to as *literature as topic/resource* and *literature as object of study* (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000), respectively. Frequently, language teaching and the teaching of literature is considered incompatible (Bassnett & Grundy, 1993); however, both sides realize the need to incorporate the other. Building bridges between language and literature is

claimed to be a way to reinforce one another (Arens, & Swaffar, 1987; Hall, 2005; Maley, 1989; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000; Schofer, 1990).

This section will review the debate around the issue of incorporating literature into second and foreign language teaching. In the adult ESL context reported in this dissertation, the argument for the use of literature as an integrated component of teaching language seems to be more directly relevant than does literature as an object of study. However, the research field approaching literature as a primary discipline should not be dismissed in the course of understanding the language-literature relationship. Empirical studies in foreign and second language literature research have contributed to a pertinent body of knowledge about L2 literature comprehension and pedagogical challenges. Underscoring the point that research from the two distinctive perspectives leads to relevant observations about the literature and language incorporation, I review previous studies on (a) the study of literature as a primary discipline and (b) the use of literature as an integrated component of language teaching. While summarizing corresponding research on each side, I add observations and conclusions to highlight the necessity of incorporating both components in consideration of L2 acquisition.

STUDY OF L2 LITERATURE

The research from what Maley (1989) called the *study of literature* perspective approaches literature as an academic subject of study (Parkinson & Thomas, 2000). Literature, from this view, is considered a body of knowledge that we learn for its own

sake. When the discussion focus moves to L2 readers, the study of literature tends to become more challenging because of their limited target language proficiency to understand the text or to move up to literary criticism in their new language.

In line with the language threshold hypothesis (Cummins, 1976), L2 learners are said to be able to read literary texts in L2 only when they have reached a certain level of language proficiency. As Bernhardt and Kamil (1995) commented, the concept of a linguistic threshold in foreign or second language literature pedagogy implies that language is the crucial factor in reading L2 literature. Before students achieve enough L2 proficiency to read, the goal of reading classes seems to be to *learn to read*, rather than *read to learn*.

The view that a higher level of L2 proficiency is needed to read literature may have been influenced by the general position of L2 literature study in the curriculum. In foreign language literature education, L2 literature is considered to belong to the curriculum of upper undergraduate or graduate level students (Bernhardt, 1990; Davis, 1992; Fecteau, 1999; Swaffar, 1988). Ironically, the problems arise from the reality that most students are not actually equipped with the L2 competence that professors of literature classes expect.

The research on the L2 reading process has shown that L2 readers often fail in understanding the tone and cultural implications of the text and in producing critical responses to literary texts (Bernhardt, 1990; Carrell, 1983; Davis, 1992; Duff, 2001). For example, Bernhardt (1990) concluded from the recall data of college students in second-year German classes that most L2 readers could not “select the most appropriate portion

of the text for processing” (p. 39). Bound by initial misunderstanding of linguistic features, students were unable to interpret the text properly or to apply story structure to L2 story reading.

A study with French literature college students by Davis (1992) also revealed students’ difficulty in understanding texts due to their limited foreign language proficiency. Lack of cultural and historical knowledge about the target culture or insufficient target language competence hindered students’ literary experience, at least, and wholly impaired their understanding of the story, at most. Students often failed to experience intended effects of literary texts although they seem to understand the literal meaning of the texts.

Another factor in L2 language and literature research and education is the declining number of students registered in foreign language and literature programs. In 1997, the Modern Language Association (MLA) reported that the number of students in foreign language departments had been decreasing gradually. In the process of defining factors involved in this decline, researchers in foreign language and literature education discovered decreasing interest in foreign language literature among students. General descriptions of current trends in teaching L2 literature point to a mismatch between students’ expectations and program curricula centered on literature (Arens, & Swaffar, 1987; Bernhardt, 1995; Davis et al., 1992; Swaffar, 1992).

As an example, via a survey of undergraduate students in French and Spanish departments, Davis and others (1992) measured the students’ expectations for the program and reasons for the drop in enrollment in foreign language literature classes.

They concluded that factors driving the situation involved a mismatch between students' goals and the curriculum of foreign language literature classes, problems in traditional teaching styles, and students' lack of the cultural knowledge necessary to understand foreign literature.

Currently the students in foreign language and literature programs are expected to read literature anthologies from their third year of study on. After two years of foreign language study, it is no wonder that most students are overwhelmed with heavy, classical masterpieces of L2 literature. The curricula from "spoon feeding" up to "anthology reading," as Schulz (1981) called it, have been criticized as reflecting a hierarchic view of literature and an indifference to the diversity of the student population (Bernhardt, 1995). Schoffer (1990) and O'Sullivan (1991) also blamed "self-imposed isolationism" and an "elitist" view of literature for having caused negative consequences on foreign language students, leading literature study to end up as an unpopular subject.

Being aware of the challenges that students experience while reading L2 literature, educators and researchers have made efforts to adjust curriculum and pedagogical practices according to students' L2 proficiency levels and expectations. For instance, they have reshaped their understanding of students as language learners, also as "nonintended" readers of literature in the foreign language (Essif, 2002; Kern, 2002; Kramersch & Kramersch, 2000). Sharing the opinion that students deserve linguistic support in the classroom, Nance (1994) advised FL teachers to provide language and cultural information while teaching literature to students in foreign language literature courses. There have been suggestions to develop "bridge level" courses (Rava, 2001, Brantmeier,

2003) as an intermediate level curriculum connecting the basic language courses and the literature courses. Pointing to the lingering issues in the foreign language literature curriculum, the latest MLA report proposed “a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole” (Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007, p. 236).

USE OF LITERATURE

The use of literary texts as an integrated part of second/foreign language instruction has attracted the interest of researchers and educators for the past two decades (Maley, 1989; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000). As Gilroy and Parkinson (1996) and Maley (1989) argued, literary texts have always taken a part in L2 instruction; excerpts from literary texts are common in the language textbooks. However, the “academic interest” (Paran, 2006, p. 1) in literature use in language teaching has been influenced by trends in second language acquisition (SLA) theory and methods.

The most influential SLA trend that validates the use of literature in language classrooms is the *Communicative Approach*, developed in the 1970s, with its emphasis on communicative competence and the authentic use of language in the target culture (Hymes, 1971; Ommagio, 1986). The claim in this approach is that to function adequately in certain situations in one’s L2, one needs cultural understanding and authentic use of the target language. In this context, it is strongly recommended that literary texts be incorporated into language instruction to develop students’ linguistic and

cultural awareness because of their authentic representation of culture (Collie & Slater, 1990; Hadaway, et al., 2002; Scott & Huntington, 2000; Swaffar, 1992) and language use (Lazar, 1993; McCloskey, 1998; Muyskens, 1983; Schofer, 1990).

Literature is valued as model of language use because it provides highly refined and authentic use of language. Readers can experience and acquire new ways of using language by reading literature (Collie & Slater, 1990; Langer, 1995; McKay, 1986; Wesche & Paribakht, 2000) in that literature presents natural language, language at its finest that can serve as a model of representation to learners. Lazar (1993) argued how literary language is common in other forms of language, such as news articles or advertisements, and therefore, has advantages in the language classroom.

Several scholars (Edmondson, 1997; Horowitz, 1990; Topping, 1968) have expressed concern about using literature for language instruction because structural complexity or absence of standard grammatical rules represented in literature may disturb language learning. However, advocates of literature use in language teaching have claimed that, by thoughtful selection of the text, characteristics of literature can be useful in language instruction. Using literary texts in language teaching enhances the possibility of providing reading materials according to students' language proficiency level and instructional goals. Based on the concept of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD), Krashen (1985, 1991) claimed that literature is an effective material to provide each student with the appropriate input challenges, which he labeled *comprehensible input*. When texts are carefully chosen, literature can successfully offer a

model of input that seems “tailored to students’ individual proficiency levels yet offers something new to stretch toward as well” (Hadaway, et al., 2002, p. 42).

Empirical studies have demonstrated the impact of L2 literature use on language development, such as vocabulary, critical literacy, grammar, and fluency in general, as well as for practicing literary analysis. For instance, Cho and Krashen (1994) found that ESL adults, after reading *The Sweet Valley Kids* series, acquired significant amounts of vocabulary and developed confidence in their target language ability. In examination of ESL preschool children’s story reading, Collins (2005) described significant development in their vocabulary acquisition especially when they received rich explanations about vocabulary and opportunities for repeated reading. Cohen’s (2007) case study reported that Mario, a high school ESL student, became confident in reading and dramatically developed reading proficiency after intensive instruction during a summer literacy program.

As a practical application of reader-response theory in EFL literature teaching, Carlisle (2000) introduced the activity of student-written reading logs in literature classes at a junior college in Taiwan. He argued that while reading logs were already used in L1 literature teaching, the activity is particularly appropriate for L2 use, because it stimulates foreign language readers to go beyond the first barrier of semantic understanding and to move towards critical appreciation. Carlisle claimed that the “learner’s experience will go beyond literal understanding and move towards aesthetic appreciation of the text” (p. 12-13).

Along with linguistic competence, literature may serve to enhance students' cultural competence in the target language. Literature represents a fictitious world, but it contains social contexts in which characters think, behave, or believe (Collie & Slater, 1990). Instead of providing cultural information as a piece of knowledge often embedded with stereotypical views, literature often leads L2 readers to challenge cultural norms, enables them to "reflect about cultural stereotypes," and "forces [them] to rethink accepted norms" (Swaffar, 1992, p. 245). In their qualitative study, Scott and Huntington (2000) examined students' development of competence in a second culture by reading poetry. In introductory French courses, two groups of students read a fact sheet and a poem, respectively, about a Francophone country. Results indicated that the poem was more effective in developing "affective awareness and cognitive flexibility" of the target culture, whereas the fact sheet reinforced rigid concepts about the target culture.

As a tool to teach culture to students in business courses, Torres (2004) asserted the effectiveness of using literary texts in the class. Based on teaching experiences, he recommended a number of literary texts that have been integrated into a commercial Spanish program. *The Great Gatsby (GG)* was also used in business classes to discuss business ethics, as McAdams (1993) reported. He argued for the use of *GG* as an introductory text to teach ethics, American values about wealth and social class, and the American dream.

LANGUAGE-LITERATURE CONTINUUM

So far, I have reviewed existing studies concerning issues associated with studying literature for its own sake and using literature as an integrated part of language instruction. A comparison between these two positions is presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Necessity of Language-Literature Integration

Main Goal of the Study	L2 Language acquisition	L2 Literary criticism
Reasons for the Need of Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Learning authentic language use from L2 literature● Learning authentic culture from L2 literature● Enhancing L2 reading motivation through literature reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Literature as certain practice of language● Students' expectation to learn L2 language in the class● Enhancing L2 proficiency to interpret L2 literature

Diverse theoretical and empirical studies seem to be well represented on the “language-literature continuum” (Paran, 2006; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000). The language-literature continuum, with the teaching of language and literature on opposite ends of the pole, effectively illustrates the different approaches and the relative emphasis given to incorporating both language and literature in the L2 classroom. Actual teaching practice and goals are located somewhere between these two ends.

As noted at the beginning of this section, whether the focus is language or literature teaching, both perspectives need to incorporate the other. In recent years several

researchers (Hall, 2005; Schofer, 1990; Parkinson & Thomas, 2000) have expressed concern about institutional split, suggesting the need for the disciplinary conversation. Hall (2005) emphasized educators and researchers moving on from the historical tension between two distinct fields, language and literature. Building bridges (Arens, & Swaffar, 1987; Bernhardt, 1995; Hall, 2005; Schofer, 1990; Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes, 1991) between language and literature is encouraged to the benefit of both language and literature instruction.

Educators who teach L2 literature as a topic of the course have encountered challenges in practice. They have devoted their efforts to investigating students' L2 reading experience and limitation in understanding L2 literature due to lower proficiency levels of target language and culture. Accordingly, both theoretical and empirical research studies have been published to diagnose the problems and to suggest solutions of relevant issues encountered in the classroom when teaching foreign language literature. This research highlighted students' expectations for the foreign language and literature classes be more centered on foreign language learning. These findings led to pedagogical and curricula changes incorporating foreign language learning aspects into the literature curriculum.

For researchers in the language teaching field, literature is valued as a supplementary material effective in developing L2 learners' linguistic and cultural competence in the target language. Literature has been considered an authentic text equipped with model use of language in context. The social/historical background embedded in literature has been regarded as a factual and authentic window on the target

culture. Also, literary texts have the potential to provide language learners with comprehensible input corresponding to students' language proficiency level, enhancing the possibility of pleasure reading.

Literature Response Research

Responding to literature has a myriad of meanings, depending on the disciplinary tradition or theoretical foundation from which literacy events are understood. As Marshall (2000) noted, the boundaries among definitions of response to literature extend to social science, literary theory, and education, often termed *political*, *critical*, and *empirical* traditions. Each tradition has contributed to an understanding of the ways in which readers respond to literature.

Considering the association of this thesis to an educational setting, the review of research on literature response here mainly pertains what Marshall (2000) calls the empirical tradition, in terms of distinction. Below, the first part of this section surveys studies that examine the content of literature response. Following Marshall (2000) and Beach and Hynds (1991), text, reader, and context are adopted as a way to review existing studies. The second portion of the review outlines studies that have assigned more emphasis on the socially situated character of literacy activity.

CONTENT OF LITERATURE RESPONSES

Academic studies have analyzed the content of literary responses according to categories that distinguish differences and group similarities in responses. Originating from I.A. Richards's (1929) categorization of students' response to literature, researchers have developed diverse systems of content analysis of response, including the level of responses (Marshall, 1987), reading stances (Langer, 1995), characteristics of response (Vipond & Hunt, 1984), and the mental process that the reader experiences (Purves & Rippere, 1968). For instance, Vipond and Hunt (1984) coded students' responses into three categories: "information-driven," "story-driven," and "point-driven." Purves and Rippere (1968) introduced one of the most widely-used coding systems, categorizing responses as "engagement," "perception," "interpretation," "evaluation," and "miscellaneous." Marshall (1987) attempted to code responses according to level of responses from "brief, shallow response" to "elaborated inferences with specific support from text."

Taking into consideration the broad range of categorizing systems, we can say that scholars have made significant contributions to understanding the source of variation in literary responses. Response to literature can differ according to what is being read, who is doing the reading, and where and when the reading is taking place. Beach and Hynds (1991) and others (Lewis, 1999; Marshall, 2000) categorized existing studies of literary response in terms of three sources: 1) text; 2) reader; and 3) context.

The text is the primary factor to shape students' literary responses. Although Rosenblatt's (1938) transactional theory highlighted the role of the reader in literary

meaning, the text is the principal force guiding readers' aesthetic experiences (Fish, 1980; Langer, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1938). When Fish (1980) emphasized the reading process, he meant that the reader's momentary experiences while reading the text are part of the literary experience. Because the text escorts readers to certain experiences, a range of responses is assumed regardless of who reads a particular story.

In research on the role of the text, empirical studies examined the specific aspects of texts that influence readers' responses. In an early study, Squire (1964) analyzed tenth grade students' instant reactions after reading partitioned sections of four different short stories. The data showed that the structure of the text affected changes in response as students read each part of the story. Other studies have illustrated the ways in which the cultural aspects of texts influence students' responses (Kang, 1992; Ross, 1978; Wham, Barnhart, & Cook, 1996). In a study of high school students' responses to Canadian and New Zealand poetry, Ross (1978) described students' more advanced interpretation of the poems from the vantage point of their own culture. Wham, Barnhart, and Cook (1996) found that multicultural texts enabled elementary students to "share in the lives of others" and to experience "an avenue of multicultural understanding" (p. 2). Students demonstrated higher levels of motivation to read and personal attachment to the story when multicultural texts contain cultural, linguistic, or historical background familiar to the readers (Cox & Baksibe-Boyd, 1997). In as much as the text guides literary responses, Crawford and Hoopingarner (1993) suggested that different genres of literature lead to significantly different categories of discussion. Comparing first graders

reading both fiction and non-fiction, they emphasized that they “could never develop one category sheet that could be used in all situations” (p. 271).

The reader has been considered a dramatic element in the production of different literary responses. Response to the text can vary according to gender (Bleich, 1986; Flynn, 1986), background knowledge (Mailloux, 1982; Moje, Dillon, & O’Brien, 2000; Peregoy & Boyle, 2000), and reading stance that the individual reader takes. Bleich (1986) and Flynn (1986) found that compared to woman readers, male readers tend to dominate the text or distance themselves from it. Readers’ knowledge of literary conventions (Culler, 1975; Mailloux, 1982) and background knowledge about content of the text facilitate comprehension (Moje, Dillon, & O’Brien, 2000; Peregoy & Boyle, 2000). Readers’ motivation is examined by Golden and Guthrie (1986) as a crucial element for literary response and academic success.

Thirdly, the context in which the reading is taking place contributed to readers’ responses. The cultural context in which individual readers are located impacts the reading and interpreting of texts (Culler, 1975; Marshall et al., 1995; Wertsch, 1991). Schools seem to be important environments for students to learn norms and conventions for reading literature. Researchers (Marshall et al., 1995; Smagorinsky & O’Donnell-Allen, 1998; Zancanella, 1991) have claimed that teachers’ beliefs, modeling, and classroom practices influence individual students’ response to literature. For example, Hynds (1989) examined the social influences of self-perception and social relationships with peers in and outside the classroom on high school students’ attitude toward reading and their responses to short stories.

SOCIAL THEORY OF RESPONSE

Categorizing literary responses have contributed to understanding the source of variation of responses, whether, text, reader, or context. However, as Galda and Beach (2001) pointed out, recent socio-constructivist trends have blurred the boundaries among these three factors in reading response. As scholarly interests in the cultural context in which reading is taking place increase, it has become harder to draw lines between considering an individual as coming from a social context or viewing a text from a certain context.

Instead of understanding literacy as “a set of properties residing in individuals,” Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 8) maintained a social theory of literacy, asserting that the literacy is best understood “as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities.” Based on the perspective that reading needs to be studied in the context of social and cultural practices, Gee (2002) acclaimed how the concept of New Literacy Studies (NLS) has been triggered by “massive ‘social turn’ away from a focus on individual behavior... and individual minds... toward a focus on social and cultural interaction” (p. 61). Lewis (1999) also shared the idea that reading activity provides “a productive space for exploring the ways in which social and cultural contexts, interpretive communities, authors, readers, and texts combine to produce a play of meanings” (p. 115).

As an example of studies on gendered reading practices, Cherland’s (1994) ethnographic study examined the ways in which reading construct gender identity of sixth grade girls. Similarly, Finders (1997) explored how students held and resist certain social

roles, and how social roles are defined by texts. In study on literary discussion, Evans (1996), investigated how gender influenced the way students positioned themselves in groups.

As reviewed so far, social theory of response provides a concrete basis of examining literary practice in specific context, literary discussion, for instance. Review of studies on literary discussions follows in the next section.

Literary Discussion

Considering the synthesized action of the text, the reader, and the context in literary meaning, literary discussion seems to be a valuable setting needing examination. Language arts teachers in the United States have increasingly used literature discussions to promote students' progress in literacy and literature awareness. Discussion of literature in and outside classroom has been recognized as one of the most effective tools to improve learning and understanding (Almasi & Gambrell, 1994; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Marshall, 2000; sVygotsky, 1978). Various literature-based discussions have been implemented in the form of literature circles, book clubs, class inquiries, and others (Daniels, 1994; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Schlick-Noe & Johnson, 1999).

This section covers, first, studies exploring how meaning is constructed in literary discussion setting in general. The second part reviews research on literary discussion composed of peers.

CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING IN DISCUSSION

Various benefits of discussion were described in previous studies. In comparison to discourses presented in recitations and collaborative reasoning discussion, researchers have reported that the latter produced “greater engagement and more extensive use of higher level cognitive process” (Chinn et al., 2001, p. 379). Nystrand (1997) also noted that “discussion engenders discourse; recitation elicits a performance” (p. 18), and therefore, discussion is seen as playing an important role in shaping response to literature.

Examining responses in literary discussion also contributes to an understanding of readers’ reading and meaning making process. Rosenblatt (1938) asserted that when students share responses to literature through discussion, they can learn how their reaction toward the texts can vary, and become aware of their own processes as readers in a more critical manner. In literature discussion, individuals can make connections to build upon their own understanding of the text. Blau (2003) claimed that literature workshops may help solving many of the classic instructional problems, such as students’ reliance on teachers. He suggested that “talking with others about our literary experiences and making literary judgments” (p. 54) allows for meta-cognition about reading experiences happening in teachers and students.

Analyzing reading processes, many researchers (Blau, 2003; Langer, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978) have pointed out that one thing readers do is try to find meaning or idea of the text. Following Scholes (1985), Blau (2003) asserted that reading, interpretation, and criticism are not in a linear relationship. Instead, they are working together as evidence in process of making sense of the text. While exploring literary

discussion, Langer (1995) proposed a view of the reading process as “envisionment” and conceptualized how it might unfold in literature classrooms. She mentioned that “understanding does not involve going after a right answer but working with ideas and trying to make sense of them” (p. 10). According to Langer, these envisionments are subject to change as ideas unfold and new ones are developed.

Both textual talk and social talk as these apply in a discussion environment often drew the attention of research studies. For example, Crawford and Hoopingarner (1993) sorted responses in terms of *literature discussion* that includes specific discussion about the book, including details, inference, and opinions, and *conversation discussion* that refers to conversation develops from literature discussion to other topics or comments in discussion. Similarly, Gilles (1993) used the phrase “cycles of meaning” to indicate the circular and dynamic movement between students’ social conversation that constitutes discussion and textual conversation ranging from retelling a story to critical discussion of the text.

The other thing that students learned from the peers participating in discussion was the ways to construct meaning of the text in a manner strategic and acceptable to a literary community (Fish, 1980; Kucan & Beck, 1997). Kucan and Beck (1997) pointed out that students actually learn in and through discourse environments is “the process of constructing meaning from the text” (p. 290).

...when students participate in discourse environments and engage in dialogue or communication, their learning is not confined to knowledge constructed as a

product in such a context, but also includes a developing understanding of and ability to use the process by which such knowledge is constructed. For example, in discussions about text in which students communicate their developing understanding of text ideas and listen as other students do the same, students would be expected to construct not only an understanding of text content but also an understanding about the process of constructing meaning from text (p. 290).

Interpretive Community

In describing reading, the socio-constructive approach claims that students' reading is shaped in the communities where they belong. Reading contexts where individual readers are located bring with them the norms and values of a community associated with interpretation (Marshall, 2000). According to Fish (1980), *interpretive community* signifies a community with shared conventions and agreement in interpretation of a text. He claimed that meaning is entirely context-dependent and that there is, consequently, no such thing as a fixed literal meaning of a text. Readers do not simply reside in a single context. Even the reading contexts of an individual change over time.

In his discussions of literary conventions, Culler (1975) examined the process of reading in the context of shared cultural practices of the academic community. In considering the cultural context of the reader, he pointed to "the nature of literature as an institution" (p. 129). In his view, institutionalized literary competence means "mastery of system" and internalized "grammar of literature" (p. 114). Culler mentioned that a theory of literature cannot be asked to "account for the 'correct' meaning of a work since we

manifestly do not believe that for each work there is a single correct reading” (p. 122). He continued,

... there are numerous other bizarre conventions which might be operative if the institution of literature were different, and hence the difficulty of interpreting some works provides evidence of the restricted nature of the conventions actually in force in a culture. Moreover, if a difficult work later becomes intelligible it is because new ways of reading have been developed in order to meet what is the fundamental demand of the system: the demand for sense. A comparison of old and new reading will shed light on the change in the institution of literature (p. 123).

As a practice in the classroom, interpretive communities refer to where the readers are located in the literary discussion settings. The next section moves into details of classroom discussion research.

Classroom Discussion Studies

Many researchers have studied classroom discussion because the classroom represents the most important realm in which students construct their knowledge. Marshall et al. (1995) claimed that students’ readings are shaped primarily through discussion. They asserted that if we are to understand what students are learning about literature, then we may need to understand the nature of classroom discussion. The ways in which students read and respond to the text seem to be decided according to discussion

patterns (Marshall et al., 1995), gender roles in discussion (Finders, 1997), and social patterns in the group (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Lewis, 1997). For instance, Lewis (1997) investigated the social drama of literature discussion in fifth and sixth grade classrooms. She described how students' socioeconomic status, social origin, status, and power out of classroom influenced the literature discussion.

Literary discussion studies fall under the big umbrella of classroom interaction research in terms of aspects of meaning making and learning through interaction with a teacher and peers. Vygotsky (1978) forwarded a view of learning that stressed the social influences on the ways in which people think. This view sees thinking as being shaped by the environment in which an individual develops, with language being among the primary mediators of learning in the environment. In the same sense, Wertsch (1991) remarked that "human mental functioning [is] socially situated" (p. 86). As interaction and sociocultural relationship with others shape students' knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991), literary discussion contributes to forming students' reading experience and understanding of the written text (Mercer, 1995, 2000; Wells, 1999).

Classroom discussion research has been focused on whole class interactions which the teacher leads and organizes structure and content of interaction (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002). Researchers have attempted to identify typical interaction structures, such as an well-known Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequence (Mehan, 1985). Traditional IRE interaction has been criticized in that the questions made in this type of interaction patterns tend to be closed "rather than open, inviting factual or literal answers rather than answers requiring extensive reasoning or evaluation" (Marshall et al., 1995).

However, Mercer (1995) and others (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Maloch, 2002) have found that teacher-student interactions can build exploratory talk to enhance students' learning. After examining students' talk in discussions, Mercer (1995) emphasized the teacher's role in encouraging collaborative discussion. Similarly, Eeds and Wells (1989) reported how adult teachers in training facilitated fifth and sixth grade students' literature discussion group through which they became members of "grand conversation" about literature. Maloch (2002) demonstrated the ways in which a teacher intervention in literature discussion facilitated exploratory talk in third-grade students discussing literature.

PEER GROUP DISCUSSION

Although the teacher-student interaction encompasses a large part of classroom interaction in contemporary school settings, recent interaction studies have also valued the advantages of collaborative peer group discussion. The Vygotskian perspective on learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) has provided a theoretical basis for student-to-student interactions as a more viable to support peer learners with more complex dynamic (Cohen, 1994; Hicks, 1995; Maybin, 1991) and more "ample opportunities for joint meaning-making and knowledge" (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002, p. 14). According to Vygotsky, new information can best be offered to students based on their zone of proximal development (ZPD). In classroom interactions that are not teacher-guided,

learning may be more effective with help from peers because information may be more likely to stay within the learners' ZPD.

When the IRE interaction structure is dominant in literature discussion, the focus of reading and talking about the text tends to be on the transmission of knowledge. The teacher stands for the authority figure, also referred to as *interpretive authority* (Chinn et al., 2001), equipped with higher level information and the power to decide the interpretation of the text. While the teacher controls turn-taking and the topic of discussion, students' individual impressions, opinions, or questions are excluded. Although teachers often encourage personal response from students, social cultural factors within and beyond the classroom makes it difficult for some students to accept the invitation (Alverman, et. al., 1996; Finders, 1997; Lewis, 1997; Marshall et al, 1995). Different status can lead to silence and resistance in discussion.

Interaction among students with the teacher's role reduced enhances a deeper level of understanding and learning, especially when the discussion is literature-based. Almasi and Gambrell (1994) compared teacher-led and peer-led discussions of literature in fourth grade classrooms. Beach (1993) noted that when students articulated difficulties, they have a better chance to apply problem-solving strategies to their understanding. They proposed that student-led discussions posed more questions and produced more complex and abundant interactions, which led to higher level of understanding.

The free exchange of individual responses in discussion may provide readers with opportunities to reflect on their initial responses and extend their ideas. Lehman and

Scharer (1996) asserted that “collaborative interaction helps learners to stretch beyond their limits and gain new insights” (p. 27). Golden and Rumelhart (1993) also emphasized that students may be able to acquire better understanding of text while extending the scope of their interpretation as they engage in discussion with other readers. Where the discussion between pupils is *exploratory* talk (Mercer, 1995), students may experience greater opportunities to think together, producing alternative ideas and enhancing knowledge construction (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002). By encouraging and allowing students to respond to literature in peer group discussion, the active construction of meaning is promoted.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed previous studies pertaining to 1) the language-literature connection, and to 2) literature response and literary discussion studies in the L1 language arts field. Most of the theoretical and methodological foundation for literature-based instruction is based on research conducted on L1 language arts instruction. As a method to enhance students’ meaning making of texts, literary discussion has often been implemented in such classrooms. Around the issue of integrating L2 literature and L2 language into a classroom, there exist different perspectives and objectives of instruction. Whether they are language- or literature-oriented, integration of literature and language aspects in a class is required from both

sides. Use of literary texts in ESL/EFL also has been encouraged as a tool to develop students' linguistic and cultural proficiency.

Despite a great number of studies describing the value of integrating literature in the language instruction, the research on literature discussion research involving ESL students in college-affiliated programs is scarce. Most of the research on ESL classroom discussion has concentrated on acquisition of oral competence in the target language (Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Kramsch, 1985; Swain, 1985; Gass & Veronis, 1985). Some of the studies (Bernhardt, 1990; Davis, 1992) on L2 literature response have tracked readers' linguistic and cultural limitations in constructing an understanding and producing a critical interpretation of L2 literature. Only a few studies (Ali, 1994; Kim, 2004) investigated literary discussion in peer-groups in college level ESL classes. Advocating for the necessity of in-depth descriptions of discussion in literature-based ESL classes, Kim (2004) qualitatively described adult ESL classroom conversation about a novel written in English. Ali (1993) attempted to incorporate reader response approaches into the Malaysian English literature class and recounted that the practice of literature circle successfully offered a "no threat environment" in the L2 classroom.

Considering a lack of studies examining adult ESL learners' reading in college level language classrooms, this study explored how adult students in a reading class offered in a college-affiliated ESL program responded to *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925: *GG*, afterwards) in small group book discussion sessions over eight weeks, and how they perceived their reading and discussing experiences. The existing body of research on literary response and literary discussion contributed to building the

foundation for this study and to analyzing findings from this particular sociocultural context, as well. In the next chapter, I provide details of the procedure of the study.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Chapter 3 presents the research methods adopted in gathering data for this dissertation study. First, I address the rationale for my decision to pursue qualitative inquiry in exploring adult ESL learners' response to L2 literature and their perceptions. The next section of the chapter describes the contextual information, including research site, participants, and my role as a researcher. Lastly, details of data collection procedures, sources, and analysis are followed by an explanation of my effort to ensure credibility of the study, as qualitative research conventionally applies.

This qualitative study seeks to explore how adult English learners in a university-affiliated ESL reading class responded in literature discussion and how they perceived L2 literature reading and discussion. Data collection included filed notes, post-discussion surveys, audio-recorded and transcribed literature discussions, artifacts, and interviews. Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Rationale for Methodological Frameworks

The overarching goal of this inquiry was to provide a rich description, which may have been neglected in previous research studies, of how L2 learners read and discussed literature within a particular sociocultural context. To address this research objective, I employed qualitative research methods for several reasons.

As noted in previous chapters, little research has been conducted regarding issues of L2 learners' literature reading and discussion. The lack of related studies triggered much of this inquiry to be exploratory in nature. Instead of testing an existing theoretical framework, this study was centered on developing a new research area. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stressed that qualitative methods are the most effective research tools for investigating an area of inquiry about which little is known.

Mertens (1997) emphasized the importance of the theoretical orientation of a study, because such an orientation has "implications for every decision made in the research process, including the choice of methods (p. 3-4)." The concept of reading as a socially constructed activity, rather than a solitary endeavor (Long, 1993), determined the paradigmatic view of this study. Considering reading as inextricable from societal factors, the paradigm of this study falls into the category of the interpretative/constructivist paradigm often referred to as *qualitative* (Mertens, 1997). A qualitative paradigm emphasizes interactive links between researcher and the participants and contextual factors of the phenomenon under study, because reality is viewed as socially constructed.

Others have similarly identified qualitative research as the study of "things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3). Succinctly put by Merriam (1998), the goal of a qualitative study is to provide an in-depth portrait of the context, process, and meaning of the phenomenon.

Essential characteristics of qualitative research that researchers commonly value include 1) contextual factors; 2) interpretative reality; and 3) presentation of multiple perspectives. These factors are permeated in this study to provide 1) a comprehensive picture of the particular case; 2) exposure of the researcher as human instrument; and 3) triangulation of data in collecting data and reporting the results of the study. Keeping in mind the three elements of qualitative research, I describe, in the following sections of the chapter, the research setting and participants and the methods of data collection and analysis. My role as a researcher in this setting and issues of credibility are elaborated on in the final part of the chapter.

Setting

This study was conducted in an advanced reading/discussion class of a college ESL program at a large U.S. university, during the fall semester 2006. Courses lasted 15 weeks during the regular semesters. The fall semester of that year began in the last week of August and ended in the first week of December. The class met twice a week, from 1:00 to 3:45 on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. The book discussion started in the fourth week of the semester and lasted for eight weeks. Every Thursday, approximately 40 minutes were designated for group book discussion. However, the exact length of each book discussion varied according to the content of the assigned segment of the text and the schedule of other class activities.

The criteria for selecting this particular class were as follows. To paraphrase Merriam (1998), most sampling tends to be purposeful in order to satisfy the researcher's objectives. I selected the research site based on the teachers' interest in reading and discussion of literature. The site in which literature reading and discussion were encouraged provided optimal exposure of data and maximized my ability to identify emerging themes.

In detail, first, I wanted a class for this research to consist of students who had not studied English literature as their major in their prior schooling. This ESL Center offered both academic (Academic English Program, AEP) and conversational (English Learning Program, ELP) ESL programs. The programs were designed to help students who planned to enter or were currently registered in a graduate program at the university or to expand students' English for "communication, study, business, or pleasure," respectively. Because my research focused on exploring the use of literary texts for English learning of non literature majors, I chose a class from the ELP Program. Students in the ELP Program included mostly college students from all over the world, BA degree holders who wanted to improve their English for occupational or academic reasons, and family members of university faculty and students. The profiles of the programs are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. ESL Services of Current Research Site

	Academic English Program (AEP)	English Learning Program (ELP)
Goal of the Program	To prepare students for graduate studies	To expand students' English for communication, study, business, or pleasure
Target Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least an undergraduate degree, required • Students who plan to enter a graduate school • At least low-intermediate proficiency through a TOEFL score or an oral interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least high school graduation, required • Undergraduates, visiting scholars, business people, and family members of university faculty and students
Core Classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic writing • Listening and Speaking • Reading and Discussion • Grammar and Idioms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing • Listening and Speaking • Reading and Discussion • Grammar and Idioms

Each class in the ELP Program had six levels of instruction—Level 1 being the lowest. The level of class did not reflect any absolute proficiency of students assigned to that class. Once the ESL Center had accepted applications and received placement test scores for each student, students were grouped according to scores and divided into classes of approximately the same size.

The second criterion for a research site was a class in which small peer group discussion was a prominent activity. Because my research topic was small group discussion of literature, the class had to be selected from the Reading and Discussion

classes in this ESL Program. The stated goals of this class were to improve students' "comprehension of fiction and non-fiction," and to develop vocabulary, reading speed, and discussion skills.

Thirdly, the most critical requirement for the research site was frequent use of literary texts in the class. Any types of literary texts, including short stories, biographies, fables, novels, and poetry, must be included in the curriculum. Although this study eventually focused on discussion of only one particular book discussion during the semester, the teacher's enthusiasm and willingness to use literature in the ESL class was prerequisite for this study.

Margaret, the teacher of this class, was a middle-aged European American woman. She had earned a doctoral degree in English in the late 1970s. She had 10 years of ESL teaching experience and had been working in this institute for six years. She had been using short stories, fables, folklore, and novels throughout her reading/discussion instruction career. As a method for literature discussion, she used whole class discussion and small group discussion. Professionally enthusiastic about incorporating these kinds of texts in ESL instruction, she had presented papers on teaching practice at several academic conferences. The semester after I finished data collection in her class, she presented her instructional technique of using fables in the class at a major national conference for the teachers of English. The teacher's teaching practice and scholarly background meshed well with my own and helped me work with her on many levels, which I will explain in the following section.

BOOK CHOICE AND BOOK DISCUSSION PROCEDURE

Among the various literary texts introduced in the class throughout the semester, this dissertation focused only on the reading and discussion of *The Great Gatsby* (GG) over eight weeks. This section details how the book was chosen as a class novel and how book discussion was organized and managed.

The method that the teacher adopted for choosing a book was democratic. Rather than choosing the book by herself for the class, Margaret invited students to offer suggestions. Before proposing a list of books, she allocated a certain amount of class time for students to consider their individual preferences of genre, theme, and ethnic culture of the book to be read in the class. The second assignment was to search for books according to the teacher's advice for what to consider in choosing a book for the class. The parameters Margaret had set for the book selection included that it be 1) recent (less than 75 years old), 2) originally written in English, 3) balanced with male and female characters, 4) free of dialect and difficult language, and 5) not previously read by any classmate. Students could consult anyone, the Internet, bookstores, and other resources for recommendations.

At the next class meeting, students reported their findings. The teacher proposed additional titles. *The Good Earth* (Pearl S. Buck, 1958), *My Ántonia* (Willa Cather, 1918), and *The Life of Pi* (Yann Martel, 2001) were among the many proposals by students and the teacher. Each student explained her suggestion and references to the rest of the class. When the entire list of books had been presented, more time was set for individual research on the possible titles.

On the day appointed for a final selection, the teacher brought to class several books from the list. Students had time to flip through the pages and eye and touch the books. The decision was made using a ballot method.

Of the 12 class members, 10 students voted for *The Great Gatsby* (*GG*). The other two students picked *The Good Earth*. My informal and formal interviews and observations suggested that the reason for their preference was the relatively short length of *GG*. Comparing books that had been brought to class, students had noticed that *GG* looked pretty slim.

The novel this class had chosen to read during the semester was *The Great Gatsby* (1925) written by the American author, F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896 - 1940). This novel is often regarded as one of the great American classics to be read and taught in academic courses on modern American literature. I had been introduced to this novel in my American literature courses in college and my graduate program in Korea. However, none of the students in Margaret's class had read it, not even in translation in their native languages.

The story of *GG* is set in New York City and Long Island during the summer of 1922. Nick Carraway, a bond dealer from the Midwest, narrates the story of his wealthy neighbor Jay Gatsby. Nick learns that Gatsby had loved and lost Nick's cousin, Daisy. What is more, with the hope of attracting Daisy's love, Gatsby had gotten involved in illegal business to build a fortune. Daisy and Gatsby begin an affair shortly after a reunion arranged by Nick, at Gatsby's request. Tom Buchanan, Daisy's husband, grows

increasingly suspicious of his wife's relationship with Gatsby. On the night that Gatsby and Daisy reveal their relationship to Tom, Myrtle, with whom Tom is having an affair, is hit by Gatsby's car, driven by Daisy, and is killed instantly. After talking with Tom, Myrtle's husband assumes that Myrtle had been killed by Gatsby and shoots Gatsby to death. The novel ends with Gatsby's funeral and Nick's re-encounter with Tom and Daisy.

As for the book discussion, the twelve students in the class were organized into three groups comprised of four students. During book discussion sessions, students met with the same group members. Following the third session, students were shuffled to accommodate several students, whose complaints concerned other members' lack of preparation for book discussion. They considered that some students in their group had not finished or misunderstood the text and resented that they did not participate actively in group discussion. Groups remained stable after the reorganization.

Margaret gave instructions for the tasks that students had to accomplish in each book discussion. Each member in a group was assigned responsibility for a specific task: explanation of characters, plot summary, selection of favorite passages, or preparation of discussion questions. Following the teacher's general instructions about book club, students took turns with the different roles. Questions from each group were collected after book club. At the next class meeting, the teacher brought in printed questions from each group and introduced some of them as whole class discussion topics. The four tasks were described as follows.

- **Task 1: Characters**

Focus on characters. Who are they? Does anyone change? Do we meet new characters? What can we infer from their behavior and appearance?

- **Task 2: Plot**

What happened? Make a timeline of the plot and check the notes of others for accuracy and completeness.

- **Task 3: Favorite passage in the assigned reading**

Identify a favorite passage or sentence. Check the meaning of words and practice reading the passage aloud so you can read it to your group.

- **Task 4: Discussion Questions**

Write down three questions and lead the group in discussing each question. You can create fact questions, opinion questions, and prediction questions.

During the early phase of the book discussion, students seemed to adhere strictly to their assigned roles. However, the role assignments were dropped after the fifth book discussion. Instead, for the remaining sessions, Margaret assigned discussion question preparation, the fourth task, to all students. She considered that as students read further, there was less need to discuss new characters and more need to address a variety of questions in discussions. She expected students needed more time for more various questions and general discussion of the story.

A detailed synopsis by chapter and the weekly reading schedule are summarized in Table 3.2. Changes in group formation and task assignments for discussions are also identified.

Table 3.2. Book Reading and Discussion Schedule

Discussion Session	Chapter(s)	Pages	Synopsis	Assigned Task	Group Formation
1	1	1~16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nick moves next to Gatsby’s house on West Egg, Long Island • Nick joins a dinner party at the home of his cousin Daisy and her husband, Tom Buchanan • Nick arrives home, he sees Gatsby for the first time 	4 tasks	Set 1
2	2	16~26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of scenery lying between West Egg and New York City • Tom has a party with Myrtle, his mistress 	4 tasks	Set 1
3	3	26~39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nick attends a luxurious party at Gatsby’s house for the first time • Nick meets Gatsby in person 	4 tasks	Set 1
4	4	39~52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nick lists all of the people who attend Gatsby’s parties • Nick goes to New York with Gatsby to have lunch • Jordan Baker tells Nick that Gatsby told her that he is in love with Daisy and wants Nick to arrange a meeting 	4 tasks	Set 1

Discussion Session	Chapter(s)	Pages	Synopsis	Assigned Task	Group Formation
5	5	52~62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gatsby meets with Daisy at Nick's house 	4 tasks	Set 2
6	6 & 7 1/3	62~75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rumors about Gatsby circulate in New York Tom and Daisy attend a party at Gatsby's house 	Discussion Questions	Set 2
7	Rest of Ch. 7	76~93	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nick drives to East Egg for lunch at the house of Tom and Daisy. He encounters Gatsby and Jordan Baker there, as well Driving back to Long Island, Nick, Tom, and Jordan discover that Myrtle has been fatally hit by an automobile 	Discussion Questions	Set 2
8	8 & 9	93~115	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nick learns that it was Daisy who was driving the car that hit Myrtle Myrtle's husband gets Gatsby's name from Tom and kills Gatsby Nick describes the events that surrounded the funeral; The only people to attend the funeral are Nick, Owl Eyes, a few servants, and Gatsby's father, Henry C. Gatz, Daisy leaves with Tom for a trip and returns 	Discussion Questions	Set 2

SUPPLEMENTARY LITERATURE READING AND INSTRUCTION

Although data gathering was focused on the students' reading and discussing of *The Great Gatsby* (*GG*) in small groups, other literary reading and supplementary materials that were provided to the class need to be discussed. These materials contributed to students' reading and comprehension of *GG*. Fables and short stories introduced students to literary conventions and narration to prepare them for reading *GG*. Expository text about the history of the 1920s provided relevant background information and context for *GG*.

Over the semester, Margaret used texts from a variety of reading materials, including newspapers, a textbook, and magazines. The curriculum was based on the textbook, *For Your Own Information*, and supplemented with short texts: short stories in newspapers, fables, "The Story of Ping" from China, "Rumpelstiltskin," a fairy story originated in Germany, and "Gift of the Magi," a short story written by the American writer O. Henry (1862-1920). In this class, literary texts comprised about one fifth of the reading materials.

Special instruction about literary devices was provided before the book discussion. Margaret explained plot, point-of-view, character, theme, setting, style, tone, and symbol. She created an activity with the Chinese fable, "The Story of Ping," to make students apply those devices to a story. Students worked in small groups to discuss plot, conflict, and crisis in this short story.

Along with instruction on literary devices, Margaret helped students understand the social background of the story. Once the novel had been chosen, she provided extra

materials to familiarize students with history relevant to *GG*. Because the era that Fitzgerald portrayed in *GG* was the 1920s, Margaret brought in several pages about the United States in the 1920s and 1930s (p. 122; p. 126-131) from *American Roots*. This text contains historical information about automobiles, the sense of fashion, and “the young and the fun-loving spirit of the times” (p. 122) that permeates *GG*. It also explains Prohibition, the legal ban on the sale and consumption of alcohol. This information helped students recognize that the source of Gatsby’s fortune was illegal business.

Margaret also brought in a recording of “The Love Nest,” mentioned in *GG*. When Gatsby gives Daisy and Nick a house tour in Chapter 5, they see a man in the music room playing this popular song from 1920s. The song that Margaret introduced to the class was, actually, a different version entitled “Ain’t We Got Fun” performed by Jessica Molaskey.

The final supplementary material, chapters from *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) written by Azar Nafisi (1955-), was introduced when the class finished reading *GG*. In chapters 16 through 19 (p. 119-137) of her book, Nafisi describes a debate about the inclusion of *GG* in the curriculum at a college in Iran. Margaret’s students discussed these chapters in class.

Participants

The class in this study consisted of 12 students (5 women and 7 men). Because a high school diploma was required to enter the ELP program, students in this class varied

from one who had just graduated from high school to master degree holders. Brief demographic information about the students, including pseudonym, age, nationality, and educational background, is described in the Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Demographics of Participant Students

Number	Name	Gender	Nationality	Age	Educational Background	Goal of ESL Learning
1	Ajani	M	Angola	20's	Engineering College Freshman	Entering an undergraduate program in U.S.
2	Arrigo	M	Brazil	40's	Business MBA	Learning English for a job at home
3	David	M	Brazil/Italy	20's	Art College Senior	Entering an undergraduate program in U.S.
4	Carolina	F	Mexico	20's	Graphic design College Freshman	Learning English for a job at home
5	Hanan	F	Saudi Arabia	20's	Biology College Freshman	Entering an undergraduate program in U.S.
6	Juliana	F	Mexico	20's	Journalism College Senior	Learning English for a job at home
7	Joon-Ho	M	South Korea	20's	Biology College Senior	Learning English for a job at home
8	Judith	F	Germany	19	High school graduate	Experiencing a different society
9	Oma	M	Saudi Arabia	30's	Business MBA	Entering a graduate program in U.S.
10	Rasha	F	Saudi Arabia	20's	Business College graduate	Entering a graduate program in U.S.
11	Santo	M	Brazil	20's	Journalism College graduate	Learning English for a job at home
12	Tevin	M	Angola	20's	Engineering College Freshman	Entering an undergraduate program in U.S.

MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER

Qualitative research is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.3). Although I attempted to sustain a non-participant observer position to maintain the integrity of the natural setting, the fact that I was present in the class must have influenced the reality. My presence distinguished it from a wholly self-contained teacher-students environment. The viewpoint from which I interpreted specific phenomena further affected the results of this research. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) characterized the researcher’s role as *bricoleur* (p. 4), maker of quilts or filmmaker, the research will only reveal the representation that a researcher provides, and this representation reflects only a certain portion of reality. To address this inherent factor, apparent and relevant features of my situated context must be identified.

At the time of data gathering, I was a 35-year old South Korean. At the time of the study, I was in my fifth year in the doctoral program of Foreign Language Education. Before moving to the U.S., fall 2000, I had studied American and British literature in a graduate program in Korea. My special interest in this program was modern British novels from the perspectives of feminism and post colonialism. I had taught English at universities in Korea and had worked in the office of the English Education Department.

My relationship with the research site began a semester before the data collection for this study. I conducted a pilot study in two reading/discussion classes in this institute to test the feasibility of this study. Margaret’s reading class was one of them. My other involvement with the ESL institute was as a part-time employee in the administrative

office. My duties included assisting prospective and current students with issues related to academics, registration, and other personal challenges. My work area was situated where teachers could always see and talk with me while I was in the office. My position had the great advantage of providing frequent opportunities for me to build rapport with the teacher and students and to interact casually with them outside the class.

To achieve the qualitative research aim of “uncovering an emic perspective” (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc., 2001, p. 219-220), I believe that my situation was adequate to maintain “a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation” (Spradley, 1980, p. 60).

Like the participants in my study, I am a non-native speaker of English and have taken ESL instruction in different facilities. I could relate my experience to their challenges and goals of learning English and taking classes. Simultaneously, I could associate myself with Margaret, the teacher. As she had studied American and English literature in graduate school, I also had in Korea. Not only am I equipped with basic knowledge of literary analysis but also the novel the students had chosen to read in the class was a familiar piece that I had studied in my undergraduate and graduate courses. As Margaret struggled, I was, likewise, attempting to build connection between literature and language education. My predisposition toward literature and literary analysis and toward connecting literature and second language education may have, consequently, interfered with an unbiased interpretation of the phenomena.

I tried to approach this class from the viewpoint of an outsider researcher. I took the researcher position of an observant, non-active participant in discussion, by sitting in

a chair and not participating in pair work, whole class, or group discussion. Nevertheless, some students often invited me to join their group discussion or pair work by suggesting I sit closer to them or by asking my opinion about specific issues that they were supposed to discuss with their partner(s). Frequently, the teacher invited me to help with students' understanding, especially during group or pair work. In most cases, I accepted their request but tried to limit my participation so as not to interrupt students' opportunities to practice English and to express their opinions. During book discussion, I reduced my participation drastically. Gradually, students developed an understanding of the range of my participation in class activities.

Data Collection Procedures and Sources

The data collection procedures consisted of four stages. The first was a pilot study in Margaret's class the semester prior to the actual data collection for this study. The pilot study provided a valuable opportunity to evaluate and adapt research methods, to build on the personal relationship with the teacher, and to experience her instructional method.

The second step was consisted of setting up the stage for data collection in the class I planned to study. I joined the class from the first day of the semester. Although book discussion was scheduled for the fifth week of the semester, attending class from the outset of the semester helped me understand the class culture and students better. It also allowed students to become adjust to my presence and audio-recording and survey collection practice. During this period, I was introduced to the class and joined group

discussion whenever the teacher and students invited me to do so. I gradually reduced my participation in the class as the time for book discussion approached.

The shift to the data collection began with the book discussion. I observed and audio-recorded book discussions and took notes, as necessary. Occasional informal conversations with the teacher and students took place both in and outside class.

Finally, I wrapped up data collection. I scheduled and conducted individual interviews with the students and the teacher outside the class. Though the book discussion had ended, I continued attending the class until the last day of the semester.

Throughout these stages, a cyclic process of data collection and analysis occurred. In the following sub-sections, I will describe in detail how I collected and dealt with each data source. As preview, the major research methods of this study included 1) field notes taken during the observation of the class, 2) transcription of audio-recorded book discussions of each group, 3) post-discussion surveys, 4) interviews of students and teachers, and 5) miscellaneous artifacts from the class.

FIELD NOTES

One data source of this study consisted of *field notes*, which are defined as a brief or continuous “written account of the observation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 104). Although the audio-recording and transcribing of the book discussion sessions were of primary importance for this study, the in-depth description of the site presented by me, the

researcher, as “human instrument” (Adler & Adler, 1987) is considered vital to understand the meaning in context.

I took brief in-session notes while attending classes from the first week of the semester, whether or not literature was read or discussed. Based on qualitative research guidelines from *TESOL Quarterly* (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc., 2001) and from my pilot study experience, I strongly advocate “prolonged engagement” and “persistent observation” as data collection strategies. Knowing classroom cultures and activities by observing every single class was crucial to my understanding the book discussion dynamics and individual students better.

The focus of observation and field notes was determined by several guidelines for both general class and book discussion observation. For the general class observation in and out of the classroom, I directed my attention to the routines and structures of the classroom. I jotted down students’ participation, topics in the class/group discussion, and any unusual occurrence, whenever necessary. Any instruction relevant to literary conventions and whole class discussion about *The Great Gatsby (GG)* led by the teacher received my fullest consideration. During the *GG* discussion sessions, I moved from one group to another in order to grasp the general flow and dynamics of each group. It was impossible to observe all three group discussions simultaneously from beginning to end, but I was able to look at general trends in each group and determine the sorts of topics each group took up. Field notes also included my own “feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, and working hypotheses” (Merriam, 1998, p. 106), during and after class observation.

Immediately after each class meeting, I reviewed and extended on my notes. As many researchers have recommended (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Merriam, 1998), completing extended field notes as soon as observations are finished reinforced my memory. Audio-recordings of the whole class and group book discussion and documents from that day's session were of great service. They helped for me remember incidents or fill in parts that I had missed during class observation, thereby enriching the extended field notes. I also narrated my feelings, evaluations or inferences, and spontaneous conversations with teachers and students, in these extended field notes.

The general guideline for observations and field notes are summarized in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4. Observations Guideline

Occasions	Focal Points of Observation
General Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class schedule, activity • Reading materials • Teacher's lecture and instruction • Student participation • Any instruction or comments relevant to literature or <i>GG</i>
Book Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members formation and presence • Topic in discussion • Student participation • Students' attitude to peers and discussion topic • Enthusiasm of students • Types of students responses • Other conditions of students • Teacher's participation in the group discussion

RECORDINGS AND TRANSCRIPTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS

Another data collection method entailed audio-recording of discussions that took place in the classroom. I recorded whole class discussion that was relevant to literature and *GG*, and all group book discussion sessions. During the book discussion sessions, a digital voice recorder was placed in the center of each of the three groups. Students learned how to operate the machine so they could start, pause, and end the recorder. Occasionally students moved it closer to the speaking member.

The recorded book discussions of each group were fully transcribed by me, then, coded according to topical units (Maynard, 1980; Mehan, 1979; West & Garcia, 1988). In his research to identify standard structure of classroom conversation, Mehan (1979) relied on the notion of conversation topics. Each topical conversation is made up of a series of related topics, including claims and explanations that rely on the discourse structure. In this study, each topical unit was coded according to literary response category.

POST DISCUSSION SURVEY

The purpose of the post-discussion survey was to obtain students' immediate responses to the literature discussion and their perception of how the discussion influenced their understanding of the text. The survey consisted of six questions with seven scales, one through seven. The lowest number signified the lowest level of perception for each entry. Extra space for supporting or miscellaneous comments was provided after each question and at the end of the survey. Survey questions included

students' self-marked 1) degrees of enjoyment of the reading and discussion, and 2) learning experience through discussion in terms of the understanding of the text (e.g., linguistic, cultural information, interpretation of text, affective response to the text). See Appendix A.

To introduce the post discussion survey to the class, I provided a brief explanation about the survey questions beforehand and answered several questions from the students. Students also had a chance to practice answering the surveys after reading and discussing an article from the textbook, *For Your Information*. As the novel reading set on, I suggested students to narrate comments on the survey. Students began adding additional comments thereafter.

INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

Interviewing is one of “the most common forms of data collection in qualitative studies in education” (Merriam, 1998, p. 70). Especially when the research aims to examine participants' perceived experience or emotional reaction, interview is considered to be an efficient tool to collect data. In this study, I conducted individual interviews with students in order to draw out information about their general attitudes and ideas about reading and discussion of L2 literature, and, more specifically, *GG*.

Interviews with individual students were conducted during the last two weeks of the semester, after the curriculum for *GG* had been completed. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. English was used as the language of interviews, with the

exception of my conversation in Korean with the one Korean student. Interviews were audio-recorded and, then, fully transcribed.

The interviews were semi-structured, or what Berg (2001) calls *semistandard*. The semi-structured interview involves a set of predetermined questions that guides “a systematic and consistent order” (Berg, 2001, p. 81) of interview and digressions that allow the researchers “to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions” (p. 81).

The guiding questions of my interviews with the students were categorized into three parts: 1) general background information; 2) the student’s experience and attitudes toward reading literature texts, and in particular *GG*; and 3) the student’s perceptions of the effect of the book discussions and their experience of these. Primary interview questions are included in Appendix B.

ARTIFACTS

The documents that I collected include various artifacts, ranging from curricular materials from the teacher to discussion questions prepared by students for book club sessions. I also gathered students’ written assignments related to literature reading and their answers to monthly exams.

To provide further explanation about written homework for *GG* reading, free style essays were assigned as homework twice during the semester. The hand written essay was collected on the third week of *GG* reading, with the direction, “After finishing the

assigned reading, try to write down freely what you understand and feel about the story. You will be making a note of understandings, feelings, thoughts, questions, associations.” In the fifth week of *GG* reading, the students posted their impressions and reflections about *GG* on the Nicenet (<http://www.nicenet.org>), a non-profit on-line based Internet Classroom Assistant (ICA).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was a cyclic, ongoing process, throughout data collection and beyond, based on the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The multiple data sources described above were examined to identify initial patterns and categories related to ESL readers’ responses to *GG* and students’ perceptions of literature reading and discussion. As tentative categories were identified, temporary hypotheses emerged. The working hypotheses were tested in the process of further data collection and analysis.

The transcripts of the recorded literary group discussions were used as a primary data source to analyze the students’ responses to the text. I employed both deductive and inductive methods (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993) in identifying categories and codes of transcribed literary discussion data. The analysis was deductive because some of the categories and subcategories were adopted from existing research (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Keene and Zimmerman (1997) illustrated three categories? the text, the self, and the world? to guide students to formulate questions as strategies for

understanding and developing sophisticated interpretations of the text. Although the participants in the current study were not native speakers of the text that they read, I anticipated their connections with those three aspects before the data collection. Most categories and subcategories were developed by inductive methods in which categories gradually emerged from on-going analysis throughout data collection and afterwards.

The transcripts of the recording from book discussions were coded in terms of topical units (Mehan, 1979; Maynard, 1980; West, 1988). In this study, each topical unit was coded according to literary response category. Each topical conversation was comprised of a series of related topics, including claims and explanations that rely on the discourse structure. A topical unit could be either a portion of a comment from one person or a set of several turn-changes. For example, when students in one group discussed Gatsby's offer to cut the grass in Nick's yard, the discussion topic was maintained throughout four changes of turns. The following interactions were counted as one unit.

Joon-Ho: ... Gatsby offered something to Nick. Can you remember?
Judith: He offered something?
Juliana: Make his garden before meet Daisy.
Judith: Ah! The grass! Cut the grass! He sent someone over to cut the grass.

Also, a single sentence could be divided into more than one unit, depending on the categorical topic. In the following remark from Oma, the underlined part denotes that two categories, which are coded as broader self and personal experience, were present in one sentence.

Oma: After I came here, I noticed that people do have different things they feel valuable self. You do have seen in your life, yourself. It's difficult to judge people not because you are better because everybody have different background, different set of experiences that I've never seen.

Along with the transcripts of the book discussions, individual interviews and written responses were used to triangulate my interpretation of students' literary responses and their perceptions of reading and discussing the literary text, *GG* in this case. In detail, post discussion surveys were analyzed to capture the students' perceptions of book reading and discussion. Extended field notes, interviews, and artifacts were used in qualitative data analysis. Data sources and analysis methods are summarized in the Table 3.5.

Table 3.5. Data Sources used to Report Each Results

Result Sections	Data Sources
Chapter 4. Response Categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literary Discussion • Reading Essay • Interview
Chapter 4. Response Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Discussion Survey • Literary Discussion
Chapter 5. Reading Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Discussion Survey • Reading Essay • Interview • Literary Discussion
Chapter 5. Discussion Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Discussion Survey • Reading Essay • Interview

Enhancing Credibility of the Study

The qualitative research paradigm, as described by Mertens (1997), is developed from *hermeneutics*, which values interpretative understanding of reality. “Objective reality can never be captured” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3), nevertheless qualitative researchers have developed various strategies to ensure credibility of inquiry. Denzin (1994, p. 513) reasoned that credibility of qualitative study can be enhanced by using one or more of the following strategies: “prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation.” These strategies were included in guidelines for qualitative research in a

special issue of *TESOL Quarterly* (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc., 2001).

To promote the credibility or trustworthiness of this dissertation study, I employed “ongoing [in-depth] observations over a sufficient period of time” (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc., 2001, p. 361) to cultivate “trust with respondents, learn the culture (e.g., classroom, school, or community), and check for misinformation introduced by both the researcher and the researched” (p. 361). Throughout the semester covered by this dissertation study, I attended all the classes, of which eight were dedicated to the book discussion of *GG*. This strategy helped me build rapport with students and the teacher. It enhanced my understanding of individual students, the classroom culture, and activities relevant to *GG* reading. Participants had mutual opportunities to know me and to become familiar with my presence as a researcher. My work at the ESL office offered frequent, additional opportunities for participants and me to interact in a familiar extended context.

Another strategy that I adopted to assure credibility of this study was multiple methods and sources reflecting the phenomena in question. As Mertens (1997) noted, “multiple perspective yields better interpretation of meaning” (p. 17), this study developed triangulation by examining various data sources for inquiry. Multiple data sources? qualitative data of transcribed discussions, post discussion surveys, class observation, extended field notes, and informal and formal interview with participants? were analyzed to reveal “multiple perspectives” of students’ book discussion and experience of reading and discussing *GG*.

Thus far, detailed research methods that were employed for gathering and analyzing data for this qualitative study have been laid out. The contextual information and efforts to ensure credibility of the study have been described as well. The following two chapters are devoted to a description of research findings relevant to the guiding research questions. This dissertation aimed to investigate how adult ESL students read and responded to a literary text, *The Great Gatsby (GG)*, and how they perceived the tasks of reading literature and classroom discussion. The research questions that lead this inquiry were as follows.

- 1) How do adult ESL learners respond to a literary text in small group book discussions?
- 2) How do students perceive their reading experiences of the literary text?
- 3) In what ways are the small group literary discussions perceived by adult ESL students to affect their interpretation of the text?
- 4) What are the challenges and benefits in incorporating literature in ESL classes, as students perceived them?

CHAPTER 4. ESL READERS' LITERARY RESPONSE IN SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

This chapter refers to research findings relevant to the first guiding research question: How do adult ESL learners respond to a literary text in small group book discussions? In the first part of this chapter, I present the various responses that students made to *The Great Gatsby* (*GG*) in small group discussion. In the second section, I describe changes of responses over time, observed as an emerging theme in the course of my data analysis.

Before presenting these findings, I will briefly summarize the *GG* discussion procedure. The methods chapter has already described how the groups chose this text and how the teacher set up discussion procedures, but a recap is necessary before I present response categories and students experiences in reading and discussing *GG*.

Summary of Book Discussion Procedure

This advanced level reading class met twice a week, from 1:00 to 3:45 on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. The book discussion started in the fourth week of the fall semester 2006 and lasted for eight weeks. Every Thursday, approximately 40 minutes were designated for group book discussion.

Students had chosen this particular novel for the book discussion. After reviewing various texts in and outside classroom, a majority of students picked *GG* as the book they

would read and discuss over the next eight weeks. As for the book discussion format, the twelve students (5 women and 7 men) in the class were formed into three groups. During book club sessions, students met with the same group members for the first four book discussion. The groups were reorganized for the fifth and subsequent book discussions. The following table shows the group formation throughout *GG* discussion.

Table 4.1. Group Formation for Book Discussion

	Set 1 (Discussion Sessions 1 ~ 4)	Set 2 (Discussion Sessions 5 ~ 8)
Group 1	Arrigo Oma Ajani Juliana	Arrigo Oma Carolina Tevin
Group 2	David Rasha Carolina Joon-Ho	David Rasha Ajani Santo
Group 3	Hanan Judith Santo Tevin	Hanan Judith Joon-ho Juliana

Margaret, the teacher, assigned the tasks that students needed to accomplish in each book discussion. Each member in a group was asked to be in charge of a specific task: explanation of characters, plot summary, selection of favorite passages, and

preparation of discussion questions. Following the teacher's general instructions about book club procedures, students took turns with the different roles. The role assignments stopped after the fifth book discussion. Instead, Margaret assigned discussion question preparation, the fourth task, to all students for the remaining sessions. She considered that as students read more, there would be less need to talk about new characters and more need to discuss various questions from the text.

The students in this class had a specific purpose for taking ESL courses, such as gaining admission to undergraduate or graduate programs in U.S. colleges (6 students), developing English skills for jobs (4 students), or experiencing American culture (1 student). Most of them had planned a specific limited time to stay in ESL courses. Five students (from Angola or Saudi Arabia) had received scholarships from their governments or a company of their home country. Others paid expenses from their personal finances and planned to stay in this country for only two or three semesters.

With these particular purposes for taking ESL courses, students participating in this study were sensitive and concerned about the value of the coursework, more than about social relationships between class members. Literature response studies for primary and secondary school students have reported complex social dynamics in and outside the classroom and their impact on book discussions (Finders, 1997; Hynds, 1989; Lewis, 1997). However, in the current study, the social background and relationship between members seemed less important to students' responses to the text as presented in small group book discussions. On the contrary, the performance in the discussion itself created social dynamic connected to literary response.

Due to the different characteristics of the students in this study, and the lack of studies examining adult ESL students' literary discussion, I decided to focus on the content of the literary responses in the small group discussion. However, this choice does not mean that contextual information has been disregarded in the description of the findings. The contextual information will be provided whenever necessary.

Literary Response Categories

Answering the first research question, "How do adult ESL learners read and respond to L2 literature?" I present the features of literary responses that adult ESL students showed in small group book discussions, according to the response categories.

As previously explained in the method section, the transcripts of the group discussions were used as a primary data source to analyze the students' response to the text. Each group's discussion through the eight sessions was audio-recorded and then transcribed. I employed both deductive and inductive methods (Altrichter, et al., 1993) in identifying categories and codes of transcript data. Some of the categories and subcategories were adopted from existing research (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997), and some gradually emerged from on-going analysis throughout data collection and afterwards.

As a general summary of the section, my analysis of the students' literary response is divided into two main categories: 1) making connections with the text, self, and the world, and 2) meta-reading responses. The first group of response categories

reflects students' efforts to make sense of the text and to construct a textual world. Instead of restricting themselves to information from the text only, students pulled information from wherever they could. Students activated prior knowledge about the text, about themselves, and about the world around them, all of which contributing to their understanding of the text.

The second section, meta-reading responses included students' responses out of the textual world. Stepping out of the discussion of story, students criticized the text in the aspects of its style, techniques, or genre. Students also looked into themselves as readers and expressed their concerns and reading difficulties during discussions with peers. Each category will be described more in detail in the following sections with excerpts from the data sources. In summary, Table 4.2 on the next page presents students' response categories and criteria for each coding.

Table 4.2. Response Category from ESL students

	Code		Criteria
Making connections with	Text	New information from the text	Any information that is clearly presented in the text
		Earlier part of the text	Quotes from earlier parts of the text other than the one assigned for that week
	Self	Personal experiences	Reader's personal experiences relevant to the story
		General human experiences	People's shared experiences, feelings, or attributes
		Emotional reactions	Students' emotional reactions or preferences to characters or story
		Opinions	Evaluative opinions of the story or characters
		Inferences	Reading between the lines or filling in missing information in a text
		Predictions of the story	Students' own anticipation about the characters or events
	World	Historical/Social background of the story	Social/historical background information relevant to the story
		Other cultures	Comparison or contrast of cultural aspects between the text and others
Meta-reading responses	Discussion of reading experiences		Meta-cognition of reading experiences
	Critical approach to the text		Criticize the text in terms of literary conventions and devices

CONSTRUCTION OF TEXTUAL MEANING

Response categories included in this section refer to the students' various efforts to make sense of the text by finding connections with the text. Students construct the meaning of the text by gathering pieces of information available at each moment of reading and making sense of it as best they could. This information came from the text, the reader, or the world. To build up textual meaning, students tried to find connections between what they had read earlier and what they read for a specific book discussion. They also utilized information from personal or general human experiences, their emotional reactions, opinions, or prediction of story which come from their private knowledge base. Lastly, students drew on the historical/social knowledge relevant to the text in order to compare it with the cultural knowledge from sources other than text. These meaning-making strategies also served as supporting evidences when students wanted to convince discussion members of their interpretations about certain issues. Each following subsection in this chapter will present distinctively characterized response categories of meaning making efforts.

Making Connections with the Text

This group of responses indicates students' understanding of characters, their behaviors, setting, events, and story via the help of information provided explicitly in the text. Information from the text includes 1) new information acquired by reading the part of text for the certain week of the class or 2) earlier parts they had already read in *GG*.

New Information from the Text

Newly acquired information from the text tends to concern the setting of the story and description of the characters and incidents as literally presented in the text. Whether it was a direct quote or rephrasing from the text, this category of responses includes students' restatement of narration from the text. Here are some examples of discussion about characters and events.

Rasha: First principal character is Nick, the narrator. He talked about Gatsby, but I think he doesn't appear yet, right?

Carolina: No?

David: Only at the end... at the very ending.

Rasha: OK. Then it's Tom Buchanan, old friend of Nick. There is Daisy, his wife, Tom's wife. He is Nick's cousin and Miss Baker and I think these are characters.

As shown above, students discussed characters as described in the text. They figured out each character's position and relationship to the others, such as Nick being the narrator of the book and a cousin of Daisy; Daisy being the wife of Tom.

Also, the story line and other details were mentioned in the book discussions. In the following excerpt, students talked about Nick's personal history prior to the timeline of this story, *GG*, unfolded.

Juliana: Then he [Nick] goes to the war. When he comes back, he felt that he should go to the East and talked with his father. His father agreed that he will pay for one year accommodation.

Joon-Ho: It's not New York, some place near New York.

Juliana: OK. He drove to rent a house and first he did it with his friend then the friend need to ... he needs to go out. So he rent this house

by himself. It's 18 dollars a month. It was a really nice place. Then he is invited to have dinner with his cousin and her husband then he arrives there he met also the other lady they eat. In the middle of the dinner both of the couple walked out and he discovered that her husband is cheating on his wife.

The information about Nick was explicitly explained in the text and Juliana rephrased it when she introduced characters to the discussion group. She also summarized events portrayed in the text, such as Nick's meeting his cousin, Daisy, and her husband at the dinner party.

In the book discussion, talk about information collected from the text served two purposes: 1) providing and reminding group members of textual information, and 2) offering textual evidence for their arguments. Sharing facts described in the text took an essential part of book discussion. During early weeks of the book discussion, summarizing the story line and recapturing the characters were part of group assignment. Even when students were not required to work on plot and character summary, they often willingly brought up textual comments in discussion. It was usually combined with a higher level of responses such as evaluation of the characters, story, or critical analysis of the theme. The clearly stated information from the text served as supporting- or counter-evidence to those claims.

In the following example scripts, information of characters and events described in the text was intertwined with students' arguments. Students seemed to gather pieces of information from the text and gradually infer characters' intentions and viewpoints, which are not explained in the text. For example, they developed the argument that

Gatsby always loved Daisy, but Daisy had different ideas about love and valued money more than anything.

Juliana: Daisy try to let Tom know the relationship. That's because she is becoming obvious, like she invited Gatsby to her house.

Judith: I think she is right. Maybe to revenge Tom. Revenge or something.

Juliana: She can do outside of her house but the problem is going to be hidden. Maybe she is trying to revenge or something by cheating Tom.

Judith: She was cheating to revenge Tom.

Participants in this discussion concluded that Daisy's reunion with Gatsby was probably intended to allow her to take revenge on her husband for cheating on her. The fact that Daisy invited Gatsby home where her husband and other friends were present provided supporting evidence of Juliana's claim that Daisy may want her husband to notice her relationship with Gatsby. With Judith's agreement, Juliana insisted that Daisy's intention in her affair with Gatsby would be simply to take revenge on Tom, rather than any romantic feeling towards Gatsby.

At a larger level, the above discussion about Daisy's reasons for reuniting with Gatsby showed the students' attention to understanding Daisy as a character and her perspective about Gatsby and marriage. Prior to Juliana's mention of the party scene, the group discussed how Gatsby and Daisy's relationship had ended in the past.

Joon-Ho: I thought maybe the letter was from Gatsby and he said that he loved her something at the same day she got married.

Judith: Now we know that she didn't want to marry Gatsby because he was poor at that time.

Hanan: So she broke up with him?

Juliana: Maybe, yeah.

Judith: Daisy said that the only problem was that he was poor. He was poor and she was tired of waiting for him.

Based on the brief description in the text, students came to realize that Gatsby still loved Daisy but it was Daisy's decision to break up with him in the past and eventually get married to Tom. The reason behind her decision was money, according to the information that students had found from the text.

So far, new information from the text section illustrated how students developed their understanding of characters, their behaviors, events, and story, relying on the information rendered explicitly in the text. As they obtained new information from the part of the text while they continued reading the book, the textual world seemed to be constructed gradually in students' minds. In the discussion, students helped each other build the textual world together. By sharing textual facts with others, students could ensure that every member in a group understood the text. Especially for ESL students who were reading a literary text in English, checking textual content in the discussion facilitated their understanding of the texts.

At the same time, students also learned how to provide evidence of their interpretations, such as evaluation of the characters, story, or critical analysis of the theme. Among other connections they utilized in meaning construction, which I will describe afterwards, the text was considered the most critical and reliable source of information. Students learned to offer textual evidence for their arguments and practiced the strategy in the discussion.

In the next section, I will explain students' effort to gather information from the reading of previous parts of the text.

Earlier Part of the Text

The other kind of responses that students drew directly from the text includes quotes from earlier parts of the text other than the one assigned for that week. Students were supposed to talk about the chapter that was assigned for that week as shown on the reading schedule on Table 3.2, but the discussion often extended to earlier parts of *GG* that they had read previously. Students remembered incidents or descriptions that they had read before and mentioned them in the later discussion whenever they thought them to be relevant to the current discussion and meaning making.

Several studies analyzing literary responses often include a similar category to refer to students' connection with other texts than the one they are reading (Burke, 2000). However, participants in my study did not show any connection with texts other than *GG*, except a few comments on a movie. Instead, I use this category to indicate students' mentioning of previous readings in the same text.

The intention behind this decision was consideration of the value of students' connection between the earlier parts of the text and the new information from the part assigned for the discussion of the week. Usually the discussions about earlier parts of the text occurred when they were compared or contrasted to the original interpretation of the text. Students were checking on their existing understanding with respect to newly

incoming information about characters, incidents, the novel as a whole, or the author intention. When old understanding agreed or differed with the new information of the text, students provided quotes from previous readings as a counter or supporting evidence of their reinterpretation of the text. The new incoming information from the text may have triggered them to reevaluate and to shed new meaning about previous incidents in the textual world, or vice versa.

The following example demonstrates how students interpreted new information in relation to the story from earlier parts of the text. The fact that Gatsby treated other people with coldness as described in the preceding part of the book suggested one valid explanation about people's behavior after his death.

Arrigo: It was sad that nobody is coming to the funeral, at least the people who enjoyed the party

Carolina: Yeah, that's sad

Oma: He died and nobody cares to him

Arrigo: Because the others are very superficial

Oma: It's not superficial. He was treating them in a way that he didn't build the relation. It was free bar for most of them he didn't care who was invited.

Carolina: He was... never liked talking. He just liked to watch them like he was not talking everybody and make friends.

Arrigo: It's like passage that people have same behavior while he was alive. It's like they were invited somewhere they bought ticket. They don't like invite to somewhere like you said, I bought ticket. No relationship at all.

During the discussion of Gatsby's funeral, members in this group expressed pity for his not having as many guests as he had had at the luxurious parties at his mansion. However, Oma turned other members' attention to Gatsby's attitude towards other people

when he was alive, which was information presented in previous parts of the book. As Gatsby was completely indifferent to others, people, even those who had had a joyful time at his parties, did not attend his funeral. Considering Gatsby's behavior during his lifetime, others' uncaring reaction to Gatsby upon his death seemed apt and it supported the students' construction of meaning. Oma's connection to the textual information provided in the earlier part of the book brought a different interpretation of new information from the text.

The next piece of conversation shows students' development of their interpretation as they gained more information about the characters. As they read the text gathering more information behind mysteries around Gatsby, students gradually changed their interpretation about him from an earlier conversation built upon the earlier reading to newer understandings as they continued to read and discuss. At first, the text does not reveal the origins of Gatsby's fortune and background as it begins with Nick's complimentary introduction of Gatsby with only a little ambiguity suggested. The students were not certain why Nick believed Gatsby to be a model of moral value. As they obtained more information through their reading, they grew to judge Gatsby positively, at least understanding that his misdeed had a romantic cause.

Santo: Why did Gatsby say before? Gatsby said before in the beginning. Nick asked him where his money got from and he said his parents are dead.

David: He was lying all the time, cause he had to throw all his past, his illegal thing where he is getting his money. Now I understand why Nick thinks Gatsby is model. He loved Daisy he did everything for Daisy but ...

Rasha: Yeah, I think, I felt like liking Gatsby also. I think I've got this impression. I don't hate him. I don't think he is a bad guy. Actually I like him. Nick likes him so we have to like Gatsby. But in the beginning, he was not admiring Gatsby, he was just being interested in Gatsby. But in the end he admires Gatsby. He admired him and then he started to doubt about him and admire him in the end again.

David: Yeah. Then he knows the whole story.

Santo: Gatsby's sake, I think he is not like... he had many problems but at the same time he is a nice guy. It is not like for nothing.

In the excerpt above, the students seemed aware of their changes in feeling and evaluation of Gatsby. From the perspective of Nick, the narrator, they came to understand how Nick changed his ideas about Gatsby and why Nick began his narration with praise of Gatsby. Gatsby had done everything that he could to make a fortune, even engaging in illegal activity and lying about his lower-class origins, according to the underlined part in the transcript above. All of his wrongdoings seemed to be excused because they were done in the name of love for Daisy.

Keeping track of changes in their understanding of the text from previous to current readings indicated the degree of their efforts to understand characters or incidents at a deeper level, as a whole. Students were building a broader and more complex meaning of characters, and understanding the text at a more intricate level than before.

So far, I have illustrated details about students' efforts to construct meaning by making connections with the text, either the part they had read for the assigned week or for previous weeks. Focusing on the content of the text seemed to be an important part of building their knowledge of the text and providing a basis to engage in a deeper level of

interpretation. The fact that the students continuously referred to the text as they discussed meant that they were constructing the textual world guided by the information provided in the text. When they tried to advance to a higher level of interpretation of the text, quotes from the text worked to provide a solid foundation for their claims.

In the next two sections, I will describe in greater detail the students' efforts in making connection with self and the world.

Making Connections with Self

Making connections of the textual world with students' personal experiences, opinions, and emotional reactions was adopted as one of the strategies that students applied to making sense of the text. This group of categories referred to responses about characters and the story in relation to students' existing knowledge and perspectives. I will discuss several elements that can be characterized as knowledge that students brought in from the self, which included the following: 1) personal experiences; 2) general human experiences; 3) emotional reactions; 4) opinions; and 5) predictions of the story.

Personal Experiences

The *personal experiences* category refers to students' construction of textual world by making connections between characters' behaviors, feelings, and situations and the students' own experiences. Students either compared their experiences with or

contrasted them to their understanding of the textual world. Often they imagined themselves to be in the situation of one of the characters.

For example, relating herself with a character, Judith made a connection between her own experience in a new place, the U.S., and Nick's situation in New York.

Judith: Sometimes I feel close to Nick, because he's a stranger and lonely
just like we are in Texas.

[Reading Essay]

Judith was feeling like an outcast in a strange place, and she saw that Nick was in a similar condition. She compared her personal experience and the character's, building sympathy for Nick.

Juliana also compared Nick's effort to stick to his father's advice with her attitude toward her own father. In the beginning of the book, Nick mentioned his father's wisdom about being cautious when judging other people. Nick seemed to try to adopt his father's wisdom, but Juliana responded that she would have reacted differently to her father's advice, mostly not listening to her father's advice as carefully as Nick did.

Juliana: It's like something like, if my father told me something, I would like, oh yeah well but I think.... that's all. But he likes to make big situation of everything.

In the long discussions of the advice from Nick's father, Oma also brought up his own experience in the U.S. in order to support his claim. He insisted that Nick was a character full of pride. According to Oma, Nick's claim that he did not judge people

actually meant that he believed himself to be superior to others and that he constantly judged them more critically than others usually would.

Oma: After I came here, I noticed that people do have different things they feel valuable. You do have seen in your life, it's difficult to judge people not because you are better because everybody have different background, different set of experiences that I've never seen and maybe I've never experienced in my life.

Oma's point was more focused on the vanity of judging other people because he had come to pretend himself situated in the character's shoes. Actively involved in the characters' conditions, students were envious of characters or tried to offer advice to them. As shown in the following excerpt, Judith joked that she would be lucky if she could have a boyfriend like Gatsby, who would be patient enough to stay loyal for a long time even after his girlfriend betrayed him.

Hanan: I want to know their relationship, were they couple or did have affair?

Juliana: No, there were like hanging out....in the past?

Joon-Ho: they used to date

Judith: he was waiting for 5 years after he was dating her. I want to have such a guy. Can you wait for 5 years? OK, then I will have some fun. (laugh)

Also, students often attempted to offer advice to characters for certain decisions described in the text. Especially with regard to Gatsby's long lasting desire to regain Daisy's love and his vigorous efforts by means of unlawful and unethical actions, many students responded that he should have turned away from Daisy for his life. They

suggested that Gatsby should “forget Daisy and move on his life, just like Daisy did” [Judith, Discussion]. Ajani, in the interview, also mentioned Gatsby’s flaws as shown in the following.

Ajani: I don’t think he did very good choices. If I were him, I would choose otherwise. He had money, he had everything. I think he could have better choice for his life. I don’t think he lived happy. He lived all this life to fulfill one wish to get back his lover. But in the end he didn’t get her back, neither the life he had, nor friends when he died. He wasn’t normal. He lived in fancy in his head.

[Interview]

Making connection with personal experience often served as strong support of students’ arguments, just as the citations from the text usually worked. They brought up personal experience when they found connections to their claim, making their opinions or interpretations more persuasive.

This next example is an excerpt of the discussion about Daisy’s confession to Nick that she prayed for her daughter to be a fool. Rasha told the story of her cousin’s experience as an effort to understand the reason why Daisy made such a wish for her own daughter.

Rasha: I know people. I know lots of women. One of my cousin, she was very naïve, after she grew up she learned a lot from life, she said that I wish I didn’t learn anything. I wish I were a fool like I was, because now you see and you understand. Back then she didn’t understand. She didn’t see bad things, every thing to her was perfect.

Carolina: But I think it’s better to see

Rasha: For me, for me I like to be smart

Carolina: I think it's good. If you are living in lie, you are not living in the real thing. I personally wouldn't live like that

Rasha: You can see that there are...

David: You would never know, when you don't know.

Carolina: I wouldn't know that I don't know. I don't know that, I can't tell but

Rasha: So this is saying that fool is a good thing. So you will not know because you are a fool.

Carolina: If someone ask me, OK, do you want to know, or don't you want to know, which one would you choose. Yeah, I wanna know, tell me.

Rasha: Of course

Carolina: Of course

Rasha explained that if people do not know much of what is happening around them, they would live happier lives, as her cousin believed. Rasha's argument was followed by others' personal perspectives about living a happy life without much knowledge, about the hazards of life, or maintaining a life with fully open eyes and ears. Students continued a heated conversation, declaring that they would rather face all the truth than remaining a fool.

In the same discussion about becoming aware of a partner's cheating, Rasha asked other group members to think about how they would react to this issue if it happened to them.

Rasha: Would you like to know your father or mom was cheating? For example, no but yeah, yes you have to know all these bad behaviors.

David: I wouldn't like to know if my mother or father have something.

Rasha: What if you are married and your wife cheated?

Carolina: Maybe. That's different. Maybe you can say no to your parents'. If you are involved in like, personally.

David: I wouldn't involved personally. How could imagine that?

Carolina: If she is cheating at you, you are not like a fool, because it's not to you, it's between them. You know what I mean.

David: Yeah, I understand.

As shown in the conversation above, association with a personal situation was used as an effective tool to understand the text and convince others. David expressed reluctance to relate himself to the idea of a partner's cheating or facing the truth of this matter. Carolina and Rasha seemed to push him to consider the issue that Daisy had on a personal level, moving the concern from a parental matter to his own problem. Members in the group guided others to use the strategy and helped them to reshape the textual world.

Excerpts presented so far illustrated how students made sense of the text by finding connections between their own experiences and the characters'. Making connections to their personal experiences helped students relate to the characters' emotions, behaviors, and incidents, making it easier for them to construct a textual world. This strategy also served as supporting evidence when students wanted to convince their group members of their opinion about certain issues.

General Human Experiences

Another connection strategy that students adopted to understand the text was expanding on a character's feelings or behaviors to connect them to greater humanity. Usually this connection with general human attributes was used to convince other group members of one's point. Raising people's awareness of generally shared experiences and

feelings seemed to work effectively as a support for a group member's claim about a particular understanding of the characters. Making connections with the real experiences of real people seemed to make it easier to understand the characters and their behaviors.

The following example shows that considering people's common behaviors and feelings may help to understand a character's personality.

Oma: Unfortunately, most persons think that they themselves are the center of the wisdom, center of knowledge. This is very common in people. The more you see people, the more you notice that nobody has the wisdom, ultimate wisdom. Everybody has part of big picture, small part in a big picture.

Arrigo: I know that how much I know how little I know

Juliana: And you know, we still learning things

Arrigo: All of the people think that they know a lot

In the long discussion of the father's wisdom, Oma claimed that Nick must be an arrogant person contrary to his actual claim about being modest. In discussing Nick's character, the judgment of people implied that he was arrogant and judgmental. Oma argued that these are common traits in human nature, and that Nick is a character with pride and arrogance. David then attempted to convince others that Gatsby should have exposed his true identity instead of lying to others. If Gatsby had told the truth from the beginning, there would have been someone who would have liked him.

David: Which it kind of shows you that you don't have to lie about yourself to feel yourself of, to make other people like you if you are the divorced but you tell the truth, there may be someone who like you as who you are.

Santo: Yeah, that happened to Nick and Gatsby.

As of the last example of the general human experiences category, the following excerpt portrays how students often brought up an appeal to the greater experience in society to assist their understanding of the text. In discussing relationships and values as described in *GG*, Rasha first expressed emotionally that a human relationship built around money would be a “crazy” thing to see.

Santo: He wanted to... he wanted to be with Daisy. Daisy was not interested in him. What she wanted to him was money all the time.

Rasha: I think it's crazy. If a person knows that someone likes you only because of money, isn't this really depressing? I would be like get out of my face.

Santo: Yeah, but if you like the person, how can you deal with someone like them? Sometimes you don't have choice. It just happens. Do you think it happens in real life?

Rasha: I think that happens in the real life.

Rasha made a personal level response to people who would appreciate money over human relationships by saying “get off my face,” as if she were in the situation recounted in the book. Responding to her, Santo seemed to try to understand Gatsby's decision to satisfy Daisy by making money. In order to convince Rasha, Santo asked her if she thought that this kind of incident would occur in real life. That Daisy could put a higher value on material things seemed to have extended to characteristics of some people in the real world.

According to the examples described in this section, students made connections between experiences, attributes, ideas of general human nature and of the characters'

from the book. Finding similarity with or contrast to common sense shared by people in the real world helped students understand the characters and their behaviors.

Occasions when they showed this connection with the broader self were relevant to efforts to extend the emotional reactions, which will be presented in the next section.

Emotional Reactions

Students often expressed emotions about certain aspects of the text, simply by saying whether they liked it or not. Preferences that students mentioned in literary discussion included reactions to individual characters, their behaviors, literary style, or story. Those preferences, in most cases, were accompanied by supporting reasons that other members would request, if they were not provided with the preference statement.

For instance, students discussed their affection or dislike for specific characters. Rasha expressed that she had come to like Gatsby after she found out all the secrets about him.

Rasha: Yeah, I think, I felt like liking Gatsby also. I think I've got this impression. I don't hate him. I don't think he is a bad guy. Actually I like him.

Also, they talked about any passage that they liked purely because of the way it was written, as a part of the assignment for the group discussion. Rasha chose this part of the text as her favorite passage because of its fascinating style in describing a person.

Rasha: There is the thing that I really liked. “He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life.” I liked this one how was the smile of Gatsby. It was something in his smile make him curious about him. when he saw you because once you look at you, you feel like you are the only one he is looking at, he wants to know you, like he give you, you know they are some people when you talk to you, who gives full attention. He felt that just from his eyes, and smile when he met Gatsby. I like this one.

During the final book discussion, most of the students were interested in a general evaluation of the book as a whole. They began the discussion with the question about their emotional reactions to the ending of the story. One of the main story elements that students liked to discuss was Gatsby’s quiet funeral. Contrary to his crowded parties while he was alive, the funeral was very lonesome. They responded that it was a sad scene to watch.

Carolina: How do you like the novel so far. So far, at the end?

Arrigo: Yeah, I liked it. I was a little surprised the mayor’s behavior. I thought he was going to the funeral.

.....

It was sad that nobody is coming to the funeral, at least the people who enjoyed the party.

Carolina: Yeah, that’s sad.

As illustrated in the excerpts so far, students expressed emotions about characters, their behaviors, literary style, or the story as a whole. These preferences were often intertwined with reasons why they felt that way. Students’ emotional connections to the text took up an important part of literary discussion, especially for these ESL students

reading L2 literature. Although students' emotional reactions to elements of the story sounded simple, they functioned as lures to attract L2 readers to be involved in the textual world. Particularly in the discussion environment, students seemed to enjoy opportunities to express their emotions and learn others'.

Opinions

This response category indicates students' evaluative opinion of characters or story. Students expressed what they thought about characters and stories, from the perspective of their value or ethical criteria. Compared to the emotional preference category, this category includes more critical opinions, frequently accompanied with evidence from the text.

For example, Arrigo presented his evaluation about Nick based on the information presented in the first chapter of the book.

Arrigo: I think he try to decide what he like to do in his life. He doesn't think his study doesn't give some money. I don't think he has definition of what he can do in his life. I think he is looking out to find the way.

During the discussions about the wisdom of Nick's father and Nick's truthful effort to observe it, some students in this group noted that Nick might be an unstable or arrogant person. In contrast, Arrigo showed a more sympathetic opinion of Nick, emphasizing

Nick's age and new move to New York. Arrigo evaluated Nick as a youngster who was stepping into the real world for the first time and still searching for his goal in life.

One of the issues that students liked to discuss was the ethical evaluation of the relationship between Gatsby and Daisy. They expressed their ideas about what Daisy and Gatsby had done and what they should have done in their relationship. Among the various perspectives about their romance, the following excerpt is an example showing their opinion that Daisy should divorce Tom and go back to Gatsby. From Judith's evaluation about Daisy's feelings toward Tom and Gatsby, Daisy did not love Tom or had married him for reasons other than love.

Joon-Ho: My second question is what you think about the romance between Daisy and Gatsby? Is it right or wrong because she is married?

Judith: Yeah, but she doesn't love her husband. She is not in love with him. When they describe the wedding ceremony, I think she was drunken in her bed in the dress something like that. I mean she doesn't seem to be really in love. I think like, she should leave her child to her husband when she love Gatsby. She should be with him.

Juliana: Yeah

Judith: Interesting. Ah no, she knows that Gatsby doesn't have enough money.

Hanan: What made Daisy marry Tom?

Judith: I think she wasn't really thinking...Maybe just she needs to be married? Maybe it was her age?

In contrast to Judith's opinion that Daisy should marry Gatsby, other students expressed different ideas about the relationship between these two characters. For example, Oma remarked that their affair was immoral and criticized Nick for his role in

this matter. Considering Oma' religious background, Islam, his critical reaction to Daisy and Gatsby's affair seemed expected.

Oma: The strange thing is Nick, he thought himself being a good guy. It was strange that he would allow his married cousin to meet with a guy. She used to love this guy. It's like to invitation to...I don't know the word in English... betrayal, invitation to betrayal.. Maybe he... She is married, and leaving them alone at the end was... but I think he took curious to see what would happen and then to think what is right or wrong.

Oma brought into the conversation that Nick was the person who had arranged a reunion of Gatsby and Daisy with full knowledge of Gatsby's intentions. Oma evaluated Nick's behavior as an "invitation to betrayal," pointing out that he was helping his married cousin to meet her old lover in a secret place.

As excerpts in this section reveal, students expressed in discussion what they thought about characters and stories, from the perspective of their values or ethical criteria. Building connections between their own beliefs and the characters' helped students make sense of the text. Active evaluations of the characters' ethics and behaviors seemed to reflect how much the students were engaged in the textual world. Particularly for students from different cultures than the texts, opinions might be expected to vary accordingly. Literary discussion environment functioned as a space to enhance students' free expression of their opinions and activation of these connections.

Inferences

Inference commonly indicates reading between the lines or filling in missing information in a text (Clark & Clark, 1977). This category shows students' effort to fill in the gaps of the story that are not explicitly described in the text. It resembles assembling puzzles. Whenever they have a missing piece, readers use their own reasoning to make the picture of the story whole.

ESL students in this study were capable of actively involving themselves in understanding the text. Students added their own reasoning and expectations to make sense of unexplained parts in the text. They included analysis of characters' hidden feelings or intentions or incidents. Because inference occurred to help the reader make sense of an unexplained part of the story, almost always it came with a description of the text in discussion.

One example from the discussion was captured from Arrigo's comments on Daisy's reaction to Tom's affair with another woman. During the discussions about Daisy's wish for her daughter to be a foolish girl, Arrigo expressed his understanding about her internal pain caused by her husband's cheating. Based on the comment from Daisy, he inferred that her comment reflected Daisy's inner suffering from her husband's cheating.

Arrigo: I think this shows how much she suffers because she didn't mark a lot. She didn't like her child suffer like her. I think this is the desire her child don't suffer

Even though there was no explicit description about Daisy's emotional trauma in reaction to Tom's cheating, students were able to fill the gap with hints taken from the text. Other groups related Daisy's reaction to the cultural norm of the society at the time. They agreed that Daisy was smart enough to be cautious not to express her awareness of Tom's affair.

Rasha: Can you imagine why she said that?

David: Of course because, then she may not discover her husband's cheating, and she will be happy.

Rasha: Exactly. Because she is smart and she knew her husband's cheating and her life has been ruined, because she can't do anything with it. But she knew it.

.....

Daisy she is acting to be a fool.

David: Yeah because if she let know that she knows, then she will have problem for her husband for her and society and for everyone.

Rasha: And it's different back then.

Many inferences occurred around the mystery behind the car accident that killed Myrtle, Tom's mistress, and Gatsby's death. The book only let the readers know that Gatsby confessed to Nick that Daisy was behind the wheel during the accident. After the incident Tom talked with Daisy in the kitchen, but nobody knew what the conversation was about. Also, the talk between Tom and Myrtle's husband was not detailed to the reader, either.

Students enthusiastically argued about these mysteries. They made guesses about whether Tom knew that it was Daisy who hit Myrtle, and Tom manipulated Myrtle's husband to think that it was Gatsby who had killed his wife. For example, Arrigo inferred

that Tom talked with Daisy in the kitchen that night after the car accident and must have known that Daisy was driving the car that had caused the accident.

Arrigo: Maybe after the accident, when he discussed in the kitchen. It's my guess that she had talked that she was responsible. I think they run away after Gatsby's murder because I think Tom worry that Daisy can tell about the accident. I think his first reaction was to protect Daisy. It's my guess that Gatsby was not responsible to the accident. The papers put Gatsby like the person killed the woman. It's my guess.

As illustrated so far, the inference category shows students' efforts to fill in the gaps of the story that are not explicitly described in the text. ESL students in this study were capable of actively involving themselves in understanding the text by adding their own reasoning and expectations to make sense of unexplained parts in the text.

Predictions of the Story

The last category of the students' meaning making through connection with the self is *anticipation*. Students imagined and expected upcoming parts of the story as they read on. They expressed their own anticipation about the characters and incidents. As they read more and gathered more information from the text, they confirmed or corrected their expectations. They kept talking about whether their predictions were right or wrong.

For example, when Nick first met Gatsby and described what he looked like, Rasha was as surprised as Nick that Gatsby was much younger than Nick had imagined.

Rasha had not expected Gatsby to be young or handsome.

Joon-Ho: Do you have any part that you like?

Rasha: I like the way he met G, like I haven't met the host, I am G. Ok I am the host. he is very humble guy. I think he is very funny thing is that he had his haircut very short and as if he is cutting like.... he is kind of old, not old but very... which means when I have imagined at the beginning because he is very rich he may be ugly, then I saw this young charming guy.

Their expectations often were right on the point. Carolina proudly spoke that her predictions about the ending of Gatsby was correct, as soon as the group sat down together for the last book discussion.

Carolina: I told you Gatsby will die.

Arrigo: You were right.

Even when students had no specific prediction to make, at least they were able to express that they expected that something would happen when they read more. After reading to Chapter 3, Ajani still expected that there would be more facts to reveal Gatsby's mysterious background.

Ajani: This chapter Gatsby personality is kind of explain itself. I think that he is still a mysterious man. Especially when it comes to how he became rich, he was nervous when Nick asked him how he got his money. Plus with the fact that he is friend of Wolfsheim who is probably a gangster, a ruthless man. There must be something about his past that makes him be isolated man he is, perhaps Daisy is involved but it is a little early to say so. Daisy appears to just an old lover. Maybe the next chapter will explain better what they

were talking that made Daisy cry. I believe there is still a lot to come about Daisy and Gatsby.

[Reading Essay]

Anticipation of upcoming incidents or behaviors continued throughout the book discussion even at the ending of the book.

Oma: Tom is... have great best. I think it's best for him.

Arrigo: I prefer happy end or fair end

Oma: But it was fair. For Tom it is good. For Daisy it's good.

Carolina: But it's not good because she will... gonna live with it. She knew that she killed.

So far, the literary responses in discussion have been demonstrated according to students' efforts to understand the text via making connection with the self. Students' personal experiences, feelings, and reasoning from general human experiences, emotions, opinions, inferences, and predictions were activated to make sense of the text. These connections helped students relate themselves to the characters' emotions, behaviors, and incidents, eventually making it easier for them to construct a textual world.

ESL students in this study revealed how much they were capable of actively involving themselves in understanding the text. They utilized their own experiences, feelings, and reasoning in order to find connections between themselves and the textual world. Particularly in a discussion environment, students seemed to enjoy opportunities to express their connections and learn others'. Discussion activity encouraged students' building and sharing these connections, and in the end, assisting each other constructs a textual world together.

In the next section, students' efforts in making connections with the world will be described in detail.

Making Connection with the World

This category refers to students' efforts to understand characters and their behaviors in the context of the historical and social background of the text. Connection with the world was used strategically to situate text in a bigger context. Students' interest in the situational context of the story was often extended to a comparison and contrast with their previous knowledge or curiosity about cultures other than the one that the story is based upon.

As mentioned in the introduction of the book, *GG* is widely appreciated for its thoughtful montage of the Jazz Age, the 1920s in America, including a thick description of the society and nuanced portrait of psychological values and norms of that society. When students participating in the study read *GG*, first, they became aware that certain behaviors and customs are culture specific. They tried to understand characters and the meaning of the story as situated in the specific time and place of the text. Second, certain times and places in which the story is based led them to compare and contrast with cultures more familiar to them, such as their prior knowledge about cultures other than the one of the story, or cultures from which the students came. Both of these connections to their knowledge about the world would be used as a way to understand behaviors and thought of the characters, and to make meaning of the story.

Historical/Social Background of the Story

This category refers to students' approach to the text with the focus on the social/historical background relevant to the story. When students in this study read *GG*, they had some understanding of the historical background of the 1920s in the U.S. from the pre reading activity and supplementary material provided by the instructor or from their previous knowledge about this time period in U.S. history. Students assigned meanings to certain behaviors or events in the text based on their knowledge of the historical, cultural setting of the story.

For example, students understood the party scene and people's behavior to be a cultural aspect of the story. In the description of the party at Myrtle's secret apartment, students felt the interaction between people was "superficial." In group discussion, students raised the point that the characteristics of the party might be a specific feature of the segment of society that the story presents, which is upper class New York in the 1920s.

Juliana: what do you think about the topic discussed in the party because the topic they talked in the party, the discussion was superficial. everyone ended up like it's just kind of party... they called them they were used to that kind of situation, everybody is talking about everyone, interpreting.

Oma: I think that's New York.

Arrigo: I think they used to have dinner together discussing kind of gossiping. [I think it is] more characteristic of this part of this society.

As another example of students' efforts to understand the characters through their cultural understanding of the story, one group discussed closely Daisy's reaction to her husband's cheating. Daisy knew that Tom was cheating on her and having a hard time with the knowledge emotionally but did not express her awareness or pain. Students first responded that Daisy's reaction, actually no reaction, was something that they could not understand, and they maintained that she should have divorced Tom or expressed her emotions somehow. Then, the students took up the idea of the social setting in which Daisy lived. This group came to realize that Daisy could not rush into divorce because of the social values and legal system at that time.

Rasha: I think back then, it was 1922, right? Maybe it was difficult for women to get divorced when she wants

Carolina: Yeah. So...

David: Also it was because of the money the guy has .. there is all the money that the guy is giving. Maybe she was just like, she like the guy. Sometimes they may just like the guy, no matter who he does

Carolina: It may be the time when it works that way? It was very difficult, if you get divorced, you may be treated very bad, like, yeah she is a divorced woman. It was different.

Participants in the discussion above understood Daisy's reaction to her husband's affair out of marriage from the perspective of the social atmosphere of the 1920s in America. Also the role of the legal system in marriage was raised as a possible reason that Daisy could not deal with her husband's cheating more aggressively.

As described so far, the *historical/social background* response category indicated students' understanding of the text with consideration of the social/historical context

relevant to the story. Students activated their prior knowledge about the culture represented in the story as well as gaining new cultural information about the context. These students coming from different cultures could benefit in their learning of L2 cultures by reading L2 literature. Their understanding of the cultural elements of the story facilitated different interpretations of the text. When characters' values and behaviors were perceived as reflecting the aspects of history and society, students could approach them at a more intricate level of understanding.

Other Cultures

The *other cultures* category refers to students' efforts to make connection between behaviors and norms of cultures described in the text and other parts of the world. When students in this study read *GG*, they had some understanding of the history of 1920s in the U.S. more or less. The discussion of the cultural and historical background of the story often expanded to include cultures from different times and places. Most often the students made comparison or contrast between the text and the cultures from which they came or others with which they were familiar. They explained the culture of their home country or asked other members of the group about their own customs. Individual readers functioned as cultural informants.

Cultural comparison was often a popular topic in this ESL context. Because the student body of the ESL center is international, cultural discussions happened frequently in and out of the class. The teacher commonly asked students about customs or factual

information about their countries, and students very frequently asked the teacher about American culture. Students were used to these comparisons, and cultural comparisons during *GG* discussions occurred under these influences. For example, the following long discussion about divorce issues in this group showed students' interest in the customs in other cultures. When they discussed Daisy's knowledge of Tom's cheating, the members expressed their curiosity about her failure to express her knowledge and the reasons why she did not choose to divorce him. This segment of discussion comes right after the discussion about Daisy's status in the society as I presented in the historical/cultural background section on page 110 and 111.

Rasha: You know what? How about in your country? For example, in our country this was the situation. In my country back then when a woman know something about her husband for example, he is violent or that he has something. They will just accept that and they will say nothing. Now it's different, it's like completely opposite. It's like, if there is something, very minor thing, they will make big deal of everything. They will tell her parents, they will get divorced in a month or a year of the marriage. I don't know which one is better. I think, to be in the middle is better not to be very.

Carolina: Maybe there are like you need to have balance.

David: You marry whom you want, not anyone whom your family choose?

Rasha: No. was this your situation in your country back then?

David: Long time ago... I think that happens everywhere. Sometimes when a person is poor, and the other is rich, then I like this person doesn't matter you love him or not poor person marry

Carolina: In your country you choose whom you marry?

David: Nowadays?

Carolina: Yeah

Joon-Ho: In the past we used to

Carolina: In most of the country it happened

David: They still

- Rasha: My question was whether it was the case in your country in the past, because in the past we used to have 6 children, it was very difficult to live together all the people start gossip. They don't want their daughter come back again. So it was different, but now it's the case of my country
- Carolina: In my country people get divorced. Maybe not as much as now. yeah, but I think it's very like, people do whatever they want and now woman can live by herself
- Rasha: Yeah, it's changing. This is what happens now. Women can live alone. Women work. This is my question. I think this is the case all around the world. I guess this is how happens

In this discussion, students' explanations about the reasons Daisy could not divorce Tom in spite of his cheating extended to the marriage customs of the past and present of other countries. Students appeared to compare or contrast the culture and cultures in the story with ones in the current time and space of the reader. They collected information about other cultures by asking peers and the teacher.

To summarize the group of response categories under *making connections with the world*, students demonstrated their efforts to make sense of the text by examining the historical/social background of the story or other cultures. Students activated their prior knowledge about this culture, as well as gaining new cultural information of the context as illustrated in the text. Students who were from different cultures could benefit in learning L2 cultures by reading L2 literature. When characters' values and behaviors were considered from the perspective of history and society in which they were located, students could construct meaning of the text at a more intricate level. The discussion of contextual information of the story often expanded to conversations about cultures from

different times and places. Particularly, these ESL students enjoyed the experience of diverse cultures in the class.

In the next section, another group of responses, *meta-reading responses*, will be explained. As well as constructing textual meaning by making connections with the text, self, and the world, students talked about how they looked at themselves as readers and the text as an object.

META-READING DISCUSSION

The second main group of response categories demonstrated in adult ESL learners' book discussions during the eight weeks of *GG* reading was meta-reading response. The content of talk was not limited to discussions about the book itself. This out-of-textual world category includes students' discussion of reading experiences and critical approaches to the text. Meta-reading discussion is possible when students see reading and text as an "object" (Langer, 1995). They consider the text as reading material to be analyzed in terms of aspects of its technical devices.

The following sections will present two features of meta-reading responses: 1) discussion of the reading experience, and 2) critical approach.

Discussion of Reading Experiences

In the discussion, students also talked about their reading experiences. They spoke of the difficulties that they encountered during reading and the portions that they did or did not understand from the text. Their meta-cognition of their own reading experience

indicated students' self evaluation of themselves as a reader. They continuously evaluated their reading abilities and tried to track down the reasons they did not understand, searching for solutions. Discussion activity served as a place to share their reading difficulties and help each other find answers.

For instance, Joon-Ho said that he did not fully understand what the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg that appeared in the description of the driveway meant.

Joon-Ho: First I was confused with Dr. Nickle [Dr. Eckleburg], I thought he is a person but he has blue eyes, I thought who he is. Santo told me that it is just an advertisement, just a sign.

Joon-Ho was confused, in the first place, about whether the doctor was a character or not. With the help of other classmates, he learned that it is an old billboard that stood on the side of the street. Similarly, Ajani asked the same question about the sign advertising the Doctor and a member in the group provided an answer for him.

Ajani: I don't understand about Dr Eckleburg. Is he Tom's friend? And they are driving together?
Oma: Dr Eckleburg? He is an old doctor who left the city. Nobody knows him.
Ajani: Yeah?
Oma: Big Eyes where the sign for his, I don't know, hospital, he is nobody.

The expression of difficulty comprehending the text often extended to an explanation of the reasons why it was hard to understand and to their efforts to find a way

to resolve challenges. During the early discussion, students frequently discussed that the style of writing of *GG* was difficult for them to understand.

Oma: There is some language that is hard to understand.

Arrigo: Yeah, very.

Oma: Maybe it's the time when the story is written. The story is like 100 years old. So maybe it's (because of language)

Arrigo: At that time that's the way they use the language. People in that ages I think so, but nowadays...

Juliana: It's different because it is hard to read usually. Maybe I will spend a little more or less... I read really fast and just finish it like...

Oma: Hard to read it in that way.

Juliana: I know.

Oma: The way the story is written

Juliana: Yeah, it was not so easy. When I went back several times here... yeah here. It was very different.

The participants in the discussion above figured that the reasons why they felt it difficult to read this text included the writing style and the time difference. They assumed that the language style of this text was common at the time when the novel was written, as well as a style that is quite different from ones they usually have seen in other genres. They also shared reading strategies with each other, as Juliana told the members that she had to read certain parts several times.

As shown in the examples above, literary discussion seemed to help build community among students as readers of a foreign text. It reassured them that the difficulty of reading this text posed difficulties for all of them, motivating students to keep on reading.

Critical Approach to the Text

Students approached *GG* critically as a literary text equipped with specific conventions and devices. Literature uses certain rules to organize the storyline and to provide description different from that seen in other types of text. Students seemed to understand these customs more or less, according to their discussion of the story.

For example, Oma, here discussed the symbolic significance of long description of the scenery. He also suggested Doctor Eckleburg's eyes may represent the eyes of somebody who used to take care of the city, and then had left.

Oma: The second part began in the middle of the train between west and east of NY. He talked about, I think the author stated mental status of the people who living there. It's dark ashes everywhere. Everything looks like ashes, cars and everything. I think he is trying to say that between these two big cities, which are NY and... not everybody living happily in the middle of nowhere. He speaks a lot of Dr Eaklberg's eyes. They represent the eyes of Doctor maybe somebody used to take care of them but left them. The doctor is not there anymore. Just the eyes, which is only the symbol of somebody watching, because of the government situation and economic situation. There is no one taking care of that area anymore. Maybe it's the translation for the eyes.

Analyzing the theme of the book from an old billboard sign was an example of a critical approach to the text. Students could explicate symbolic meaning hidden in the text. They also understood certain organization convention of the novel. In some cases, not much action happens at the beginning of a book as was true of *GG*. In the very first book discussion, Ajani summarized the chapter they had read, but he explained that there was not much that had happened because it was the very beginning of the book.

Ajani: I don't think I could build one [plot]. Maybe after two or more chapter, I may have better timeline. It's just beginning.

At the end of the story, the students saw a certain kind of poetic justice that in the resolution of the crisis of the story. When they interpreted the end of *GG*, students appreciated that the fate of different characters represented a certain level of poetic justice.

Carolina: Do you like the end?

Arrigo: I like the ending. Tom is... have great best. I think it's best for him. I prefer happy end or fair end.

Oma: But it was fair. For Tom, it is good, for Daisy, it's good.

Carolina: But it's not good because she will gonna live with it. She know that she killed.

Oma: Nobody cares. She has her husband now, so... I know she doesn't need to worry about the other woman. Tom doesn't need to worry about the other man.

Carolina: It was only bad for poor Gatsby

Gatsby was one source of conflict in the story and he was removed from the scene. It seemed to end the crisis of the story, allowing other characters to return to peace.

In this discussion about critical approaches to the text, all students may not have been acquainted with literary conventions. However, some of them knew these conventions and could show how they approached the text from a literary criticism perspective. The discussion activity seemed to provide an environment that students allowed practice and learn literary conventions gradually.

SUMMARY OF LITERARY RESPONSE CATEGORIES

In this section, I have examined the literary responses that ESL students showed in their book discussion sessions across the eight weeks. Adult ESL students in this study demonstrated various efforts to construct textual meaning by finding connections between the textual world and their knowledge of the text, themselves, or the world. Students also brought into discussion their reading experiences and a critical approach to the text.

The first group of response categories referred to the students' various efforts to make sense of the text as they read *GG*. Students constructed the textual world by gathering pieces of information available at each moment of reading. The sources of information included the text, the reader, and the world. Students made connections between the textual world and what they had read earlier, and what they had read for a specific book discussion. They also utilized information from the personal or general human experience, their emotional reactions, opinions, or prediction of story which came from their prior knowledge base. Lastly, students drew on any historical/social knowledge relevant to the text in order to compare it with the cultural knowledge they had from sources other than text. These meaning-making strategies also served as supporting evidence when students wanted to convince discussion members of their interpretation about certain issues.

While demonstrating connections they made with the text, the reader, and the world, students also discussed their reading experiences and critical approach to the text. These meta-reading responses indicated students' stepping out of the discussion of story,

criticizing the text in terms of its style, techniques, or genre. Students also expressed their concerns and reading difficulties during discussion with peers.

As illustrated in the response categories, these ESL students successfully constructed the meaning of the text in discussion. The students could activate prior knowledge about themselves and about the world around them instead of restricting themselves to information from the text only. Discussion worked as an environment to enhance these meaning making efforts and to share them with others, eventually helping them construct textural meaning together.

The next section will present the ways in which the students' response changed over time. Starting from the quantitative analysis of response changes in literary discussion, qualitative analysis of data will show what can be learned from a chronological examination of literary responses.

Response Changes over Time

The current section presents chronological changes in the response categories. In the previous section, I analyzed the students' literary responses according to their meaning making efforts based on connections with the text, self, and the world. Their meta-reading responses were also included in their literary responses. Based on those response categories, the current section discusses how these literary responses demonstrated change as they read and discussed *GG* across the eight weeks.

Each of the three groups seemed to show a similar pattern in literary response across the discussions. The results illustrate that there were similar tendencies in the students' responses in each category across the eight weeks of reading and discussing *GG*. Simply speaking, the story of *GG* makes a major shift in Chapter 5, with the revelation of the main incident of the story, Gatsby and Daisy's affair. Before Chapter 5, the narrative mostly provides descriptions of background and parties. Even for the main characters, especially Gatsby, only a partial picture of them was revealed up until Chapter 5, but with that chapter, the crucial point of the story is introduced and part of the mystery associated with Gatsby starts to unfold.

In order to examine response changes over time, three sessions of literary discussion were analyzed. Among the eight discussion sessions, responses in the first, the fifth, and the last sessions were counted according to response categories. The rationale for choosing these three sessions was based on my observations and on reading enjoyment scale changes, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Because there were three small groups in each session, nine units of responses are presented in Table 4.3. The numbers in each category indicate the percentages of each response category from among all responses.

As explained in the research method chapter, the groups remained the same until the third book discussion, with a reorganization of group membership from the fourth session on. Groups from then on kept the same members until the last discussion session. Hence, in Table 4.3, the members of groups in discussion sessions 5 and 8 were the same.

Table 4.3. Percentage of Responses Representing Different Coding Categories in Three Groups

		Coding	Session 1			Session 5			Session 8		
			Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Making connection with	Text	New information from the text	25	22	26	28	19	34	20	24	20
		Earlier part of the text	0	0	0	9	7	9	10	5	8
	Self	Personal experiences	8	4	7	3	5	7	3	0	4
		General human experiences	3	7	5	5	1	2	5	0	1
		Emotional reactions	5	1	3	3	1	5	10	5	8
		Opinions	6	24	16	5	18	12	20	16	19
		Inferences	16	20	17	26	27	14	24	41	30
		Predictions of the story	4	1	5	7	7	12	3	4	7
	World	Historical/Social background of the story	4	8	3	5	3	0	0	0	0
		Other cultures	20	2	9	7	9	0	0	0	0
Meta-reading responses		Reading experiences	5	3	6	0	0	5	3	1	2
		Critical approach to text	4	8	3	2	3	0	2	4	1

The percentage of responses representing each response category was counted from these three discussion sessions of literary discussion, and these percentages suggested a change in the focus of discussion and meaning making strategies across time. The responses that students showed more frequently during the first rather than later literary discussions was 1) personal/broader self connection, 2) social/historical background of the text and other cultures, and 3) meta-reading responses, which included comments about reading experience and literary criticism. The last discussion session showed higher percentages in 1) the making connection with the text category, 2) emotional reaction the story, and 3) inference, when compared to the previous literary discussion sessions. Table 4.4 summarizes the comparably prominent discussion features between the first and last literary discussion sessions.

Table 4.4. Prominent Aspects in Responses Changes

First Discussion Session	Last Discussion Session
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal/Broader self Experience • Social background/Other cultures • Meta-Reading Responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making connection with the Text • Emotional Reaction • Inference

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONSES IN THE FIRST LITERARY DISCUSSION SESSION

During the early period of the students' reading, the effort to relate to the textual world with personal and broader self led to higher percentages of the discussion in these

categories than it did in later discussions. Second, efforts to make connections to the world were mostly present during the early literary discussions. The third characteristic shown during the first week of literary discussion was the more frequent meta-reading responses.

The connections that students made with the textual world were more concerned with personal and contextual information rather than with what students could get directly from the text. In a sense, *intertextuality* (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993) was indicated as connections to a personal and social knowledge base to be incorporated in students' understanding of the text. Instead of getting their full information from the text alone, students gathered supporting information about the text from other knowledge sources that they already had.

The existing knowledge that they brought to understanding this literary text included the historical background of where and when the story was taking place and the personal and general life experiences that might be relevant to someone presented in the story. This finding supports previous research suggesting that readers begin understanding of a text from a primarily personal reader-based level (Lehman & Scharer, 1996).

When they first met the text, students tried to figure out the setting. As *GG* is a novel set against the background of New York in the 1920s, any historical and cultural knowledge that they had was drawn into the discussion to help their understanding of *GG*. The popular discussion topics in the discussion were the social atmosphere of the

U.S. after World War I, including people's interest in wealth and fashion. The Feminist movement was also mentioned to help students understand Daisy.

Also, personal and general human experiences functioned as another resource that students activated to understand the story and characters. By making connections with their own experience, or the general human experience, students seemed to find it easier to relate themselves to the story. For example, students liked to address their own experience or to imagine what they would do, when they discussed Daisy's emotional agony caused by Tom's betrayal, and Nick's pledge to follow his father's advice to be careful in judging others. Personal connections with the story worked as an effective tool to make their arguments more persuasive.

The cultural and personal discussion specifically related to *GG* was often expanded to what would work in other cultures. For example, Feminism and Daisy's reactions were combined for students to build sympathy for her, and then, compared with their own socio-cultural background.

Another feature that students showed often during the first literary discussion was meta-reading responses, which were distinguished as comments about their literal understanding and literary criticism. These were related to challenges the students experienced and their efforts to understand the reason for their struggles.

During the early period of reading, students' reading struggles were mostly concentrated on understanding the text literally. They also tried to understand the reasons for their troubles, relating often to the different language used in this story as it is not Modern English. Also, there were not many incidents as the beginning of the book.

Students were occupied with getting to know the style of the text. As they shared the reasons for their reading struggles, students became aware of the written style of *GG* as a literary piece written more than half a century ago.

The reason why students in the first literary discussion did not depend on the textual information as much as they did in later discussions seems to be related to their reading challenges. As L2 readers, students struggled to understand the text, especially during the early stage. They expressed their struggles in the discussion and often shared reading strategies with each other. Students may have drawn information from other sources and utilized them as much as possible, because they had less understanding when relying solely on the text.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONSES IN THE LAST LITERARY DISCUSSION SESSION

Compared to the first literary discussion session, the last discussion session showed higher percentages in 1) making connection with the text, whether it was to a part they had read recently or several weeks ago, 2) their emotional reactions to the story, and 3) inferences to understand *between the lines*. These response features seemed to indicate text-based comments rather than contextual and reader-based comments.

As they gathered more information for the text, the discussion focus and meaning making strategies seemed to change. The discussion focus during the last session moved to a stronger involvement in the textual world. Students seemed to relate an understanding of the text to the textual information more actively. Because they constructed a more stable textual world, students seemed to become more confident to fill

in the missing parts of the story, resulting in a higher number of inferences in literary discussion.

Students' understanding of *GG* became temporarily complete when they finished the book. Once they had read the ending of the story, students were able to relate the part they had read previously with their whole understanding of characters and story. For example, the most heated part of the last discussion session was reinterpreting Daisy and Gatsby. The rich young man, Gatsby, dies in the end, and Daisy pretends as if nothing happened. Also, because the truth of the car accident and Gatsby's death were not clearly revealed in the story, students needed to build their own scenario and argue from various evidences.

Thus, discussions in the later weeks were more centered on emotional preferences and evaluations of the text. For example, students liked to discuss the people who showed up at the Gatsby's funeral and their new understanding of Gatsby and Daisy. The fact that only three people attended his funeral made students feel sad. Also Gatsby's death and Daisy's reaction to it disappointed or bothered students emotionally.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSE CHANGES OVER TIME

In this section, I illustrated changes in students' literary responses over time, by comparing the first and the last discussion sessions of the three discussion groups. Based on the coding of response categories described in the previous section, I analyzed percentage changes in each category.

This result may suggest that readers struggled to make sense of the text throughout the reading. They used various strategies to construct a textual world depending on how much textual information they were able to get from the text. During the early discussions, the focus of students was more on personal experience, the historical/social background of the story, other cultures, and meta-reading responses. Students seemed to gather information as much as they could. The information sources that students used more during the early period of book reading were knowledge about themselves or the world. Students seemed to rely less on the textual information during the early part of book reading.

As they read more and constructing their understanding of the textual world, their discussion became more focused on the text. As they got to know more about the text, they became less concerned with background or personal experiences. Less discussion about the background of the story did not necessarily mean that students did not view the text in a social context anymore. Once students were acquainted enough with the social/historical background of text, they may not have needed to talk about it as the discussion went on.

In the later book discussions, students talked mostly about the text. They did not necessarily need to bring in information from out of the text to understand the incidents or characters. Their interpretation seemed to happen in a more solid way, and students actively added more individual responses, emotionally and intellectually. With fuller knowledge of the story, understanding of the characters seemed to have changed. To correct or confirm their understanding, they consulted previous parts of the text more

frequently than they had before. Inferences and emotional reactions were more evident during the last literary discussion, and there was less discussion of the historical and social background or comparison with other cultures.

This tendency seems to suggest that there are response changes as students read on the text. Langer (1996) described four stances involved in envisionment building. According to her, the stances are not linear. She remarked that the four stances do not have a set sequence and any of the stances may be adjusted to any stage of reading. However, my results indicated that at least with a reading of *The Great Gatsby* (GG), there was tendency of response over time.

I will move in to the next chapter to an examination of students' self-reported perceptions of literary reading and discussion.

CHAPTER 5. STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF READING AND DISCUSSION OF THE LITERARY TEXT

This chapter illustrates research findings relevant to the last three guiding research questions: How do students perceive their reading experiences of the literary text?; in what ways are the small group literary discussions perceived by adult ESL students to affect their interpretation of the text?; and, what are the challenges and benefits in incorporating literature in ESL classes, as students perceived them? Data sources used for their perceptions of *The Great Gatsby* (*GG*) reading and discussion included a post discussion survey, transcripts of literary discussion, written reading essays, and individual interviews.

The first part of this chapter offers how students described their experiences of *GG* reading. In the second section, I address students' perceptions of the small group book discussions of *GG* in the class.

Students' Perceptions of the Book Reading Experience

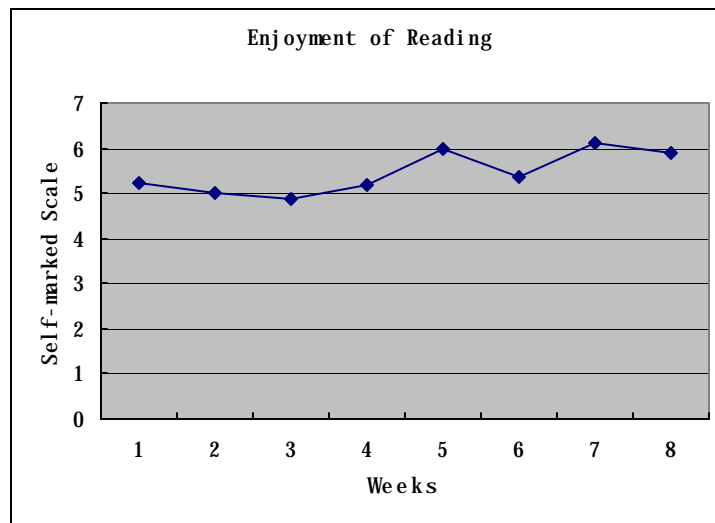
Prominent features that students reported about their *GG* reading experiences included 1) enjoyment of reading and 2) reading challenges in understanding the text. The current section describes the enjoyment level change over time followed by textual factors affecting students' enjoyment of reading *GG*. Students felt that reading *GG* was a difficult process but that it provided learning opportunities for the aspects of (a) linguistic

challenge, (b) cultural challenge, and (c) literary challenge. These three factors seem to correspond with their reading enjoyment. The following subsections will address them in order.

ENJOYMENT OF READING THE BOOK

The most distinguishing feature of students' responses to reading *GG* was enjoyment of reading. To determine trends of reading enjoyment, I averaged enjoyment scales in the post discussion surveys collected from nine of the twelve students in the class. The three discarded responses appeared unreliable and were omitted from the analysis. Among these three, one of the students was frequently late to class or absent and unable to take survey as often as others. Surveys from two other students were excluded because they made no distinction of their enjoyment over time; they gave the same scale response—7— in all surveys. The mean average responses to reading enjoyment of the nine students who differentiated their responses are presented in the Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. Changes in Reading Enjoyment Level



As shown above, students' general reading enjoyment level marked individually by students illustrated that their enjoyment levels generally stayed on higher points (5.46 on average), and increased across the eight weeks of *GG* reading. The range of each survey revealed that individual student's enjoyment varied. The mean average enjoyment scores do not reveal the lower levels of enjoyment score marked by several individuals. The lowest marking, 3, for the reading enjoyment entry appeared in the first three weeks in responses from Joon-Ho, Judith, and Carolina, respectively.

Aside from average score of reading enjoyment, the focal point of this study is enjoyment level changes over time. As illustrated in the graph above, the general enjoyment scale of *GG* reading suggested differences in enjoyment among the parts students read. Roughly speaking, the fifth reading appears to have been a turning point, because mean enjoyment levels before Chapter 5 tended to be lower than enjoyment of Chapter 5 and beyond. Although the enjoyment level dropped slightly at the sixth

reading, the mean enjoyment score remained higher after Chapter 5 when compared to the levels shown prior to that chapter.

Individual responses indicated on the post discussion surveys appear to provide detailed information about changes in students' reading enjoyment. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show students' reading enjoyment ratings and supplementary written comment written on the post discussion surveys. Two students, Arrigo and Carolina, among nine students in the class were always present in class and did not miss any post discussion survey entries. They showed variation in their reading enjoyment and wrote additional comments on the side of the survey both positively and negatively about reading *GG*.

Table 5.1. Arrigo’s Post Discussion Survey Responses about Enjoyment of Reading

Reading Part	Marked Scale Rating	Comments
Chapter 1 (p.1-15)	4	“Boring and I think old expressions.”
Chapter 2 (p.16-26)	4	“I think it’s boring and use old fashion vocabulary.”
Chapter 3 (p.26-39)	5	“The book is boring.”
Chapter 4 (p.39-52)	5	“The book is getting exciting.”
Chapter 5 (p.52-62)	7	“This chapter was very interesting and gave us a good discussion.”
Chapter 6-7.5 (p.62-75)	6	“More interesting.”
Chapter 7 (p.76-93)	7	“Great chapter. The chapter is very good and plenty of emotion.”
Chapter 8, 9 (p.93-115)	7	“I like so much this kind of reading”

Table 5.2. Carolina’s Post Discussion Survey Responses about Enjoyment of Reading

Reading Part	Marked Scale Rating	Comments
Chapter 1 (p.1-15)	5	“The book has a lot of difficult words.”
Chapter 2 (p.16-26)	3	“I am not liking the book.”
Chapter 3 (p.26-39)	4	“It was hard. I’m not liking it very much.”
Chapter 4 (p.39-52)	5	“Something about to happen!”
Chapter 5 (p.52-62)	6	“I liked this chapter, it is fun.”
Chapter 6-7.5 (p.62-75)	4	“This chapter was kind of boring, because I didn’t know very much.”
Chapter 7 (p.76-93)	7	“This has been the best chapter.”
Chapter 8, 9 (p.93-115)	7	“I liked the ending. In the end, it was interesting, lots of actions.”

As shown in the reading enjoyment responses from Arrigo and Carolina, students felt at first while reading the first half of the book that the reading was not a pleasant experience. Arrigo and Carolina commented that *GG* reading was “boring” and “hard,” and they did not like it. Similarly, Judith responded, in her reading essay written while reading Chapter 3, that *GG* was boring because no dramatic action had happened so far.

Judith: I don't really like the book so far... I'm pretty bored by the book so far. It doesn't happen anything exciting or dramatic, in general. There's no suspense. I have the feeling that the story is not really moving forward and stuck. I don't know what's the point of the book is.... Maybe it just takes several pages till the real story begins and knew, then it will get better.

[Reading Essay]

However, after Chapter 5, Arrigo and Carolina felt that the story became “interesting” and they began to like the book. Santo noted in his post discussion comments after reading Chapter 5, “This part is one of the best.” During her individual interview, Juliana described how she had enjoyed reading *GG*.

Juliana: In the beginning, I think it was kind of slow, nothing happened, it was very detailed and boring. But, then, in the end, it was kind of good. It was lot of passion. Lots of happening, kind of drama, very interesting.

[Interview]

Simply considering the reasons students gave for their increased enjoyment from Chapter 5 onward, the story content of the part they read seemed to influence their enjoyment of reading. Before Chapter 5, the book is mostly concerned with scenery

descriptions, party scenes with tedious lists of guests, and only partial disclosure of the main characters. Gatsby does not show up until Chapter 3; beforehand he is a mysterious undefined character. Chapter 5 is the critical chapter with an abrupt main incident of the story and the beginning of revelations about the mysteries around the protagonist. Students' interest level seemed elevated because of the vibrant action in the story from Chapter 5 on.

While tracing down the relationship between reading enjoyment level and the storyline of *GG*, I saw one possibility as to why the enjoyment level dropped down again after reading Chapter 6. Chapter 6 renders a description of another Gatsby party, although all the main characters attended the party this time. While a secret meeting of Gatsby and Daisy is not described clearly in the text, the listing of valuable guests at the party and their actions takes up a majority of the chapter. Students may have felt it was another long list of outsiders, making them feel more bored with reading. They seemed to be disappointed with the same old long description of the people at Gatsby's party especially after the excitement from reading the previous chapter.

Along with the content of the story, various reading challenges corresponded to student' reading enjoyment. Linguistic, cultural, literary difficulties that students experienced had an impact on their enjoyment of reading *GG*. In the next section, I will discuss three factors interacting with students' enjoyment of *GG* reading. The reading enjoyment tendency over time seems to be relevant to the various reading challenges that students experienced when they met this specific type of written text. These challenges included: 1) linguistic challenges; 2) cultural challenges; and 3) literary challenges. Each

of these aspects will be discussed in relation to reading enjoyment and students' beliefs that these factors was challenging but rewarding sources of meaning making.

LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES

The vital element strongly related to students' reading enjoyment was challenges involved in understanding the text literally. Students appeared to have struggled in understanding the meanings of words, expressions, or the style of the book. Students clearly expressed several ways in which these linguistic challenges interacted with their general reading and learning processes and occasionally frustrated them as they continued to read the book.

For example, the very first issue that students brought into discussion was their difficulties with reading. As already cited on page 116, Students in one group complained about their struggles to understand the vocabulary and expressions, then tried to analyze the reasons for their experience. They understood that the writing of the text was not modern and not familiar to them. They generated agreement for the reason of their reading difficulty, as that the author was using some specific writing customs. Students also compared their reading habits in L1 and they shared their reading strategies.

Students' individual comments, as well, showed degrees of concern about the linguistic challenges. For example, Tevin noted in the reading essay completed after the third week of reading as follows.

Tevin: Sometimes there is idioms or expressions or new vocabularies I don't understand which makes me spend some time looking it up in the dictionary.
[Reading Essay]

Juliana also said that she was having a hard time reading especially during first week.

Juliana: I always finished story. I was a slower reader. In the first part I was slower than the rest of the book.
[Interview]

Students' reading challenges due to linguistic limitations were more apparent during the early period of reading. Analysis of response changes according to categories shown in Table 4.2 in the previous chapter suggested that students more often discussed their interpretation difficulties during the early reading period compared to the later period of reading. As they continued reading *GG*, they seemed to feel less frustrated with linguistic features of the text.

The fewer occurrences of talking about linguistic challenges in the later book discussions as shown in Table 4.2 did not necessarily guarantee that students suddenly were understanding the text without any difficulty. Instead, students appeared to have acquired words during their reading of *GG* week by week, making themselves familiar with the vocabulary and style of the book. Above all, students' interest seemed to have shifted away from concerns about reading difficulties to the content of the story.

At the end of the long journey of reading *GG*, students reckoned that linguistic challenges of the book offered them learning opportunities. For example, Ajani said that

he appreciated the value of this book because of its richness of vocabulary, yet it was challenging material for him to read.

Ajani: I think it [GG] is good because it was very rich in vocabulary. I took a lot of words for weekly vocabulary test. I think the book is somehow complicated to read. Therefore it gives a little bit of challenge. It is a good challenge for learner.

[Interview]

Juliana also noted that reading literary text was effective to learn language “without noticing.”

Juliana: I think it [reading literature in ESL classes] was a good way to improve language without noticing. Maybe you don't know during learning this word or that word, but I think it helped me writing. You get the sense of how to write but, without knowing, it's like you don't plan but you will learn. Using literature in language class: it is different. In the class you read textbook. Out of the class, you read magazine, newspaper, not always book. So it's useful to have a book in the class.

[Interview]

The fact that students finished reading one entire book gave them a feeling of achievement. Rasha mentioned in the final interview that she felt proud of herself being able to read the long pages of *GG*. Experiencing and completing reading *GG* lead her to try reading another long novel in English.

Rasha: I was telling my husband that we have TOEFL institutional a week from now. I wanna get novel, big one, and challenge myself to finish it before that. I bought *Da Vinci Code* and I challenged myself to finish it as soon as possible. I did that in five days. I

cannot tell you how helpful that experience was for me because I used to be a TERRIBLE reader, I am VERY slow, VERY slow. After that I felt I'm improved a lot. Actually I recommend all the teachers to assign big novel not small novel because sometimes you, when people read and learn, sometimes, you will see difficult words but you will just pass and you'll never know once you start to read a lot. You just get the whole idea. Yeah I believe reading novels helpful.

[Interview]

Many students remarked that reading *GG* was a helpful experience for them to improve their English; however, it is hard to say that this was the case for every student in the class. Linguistic challenge in understanding the text is related closely to the cultural and literary aspects of the text, which I will argue in the following sections.

LITERARY CHALLENGES

Another challenge that students experienced in reading *GG* was its literary style and the convention of the novel. *GG* is well known because of its symbolism used by Fitzgerald to convey the theme of the story. However, except for a few students, the readers in this study did not show much interest in the symbolic style of writing. Instead, the specific style of this book was perceived by most of students as something different and difficult for them to understand and enjoy.

Most of the students felt that the early part of the book was boring with many different ways of describing parties and scenery. They began to enjoy reading as the story moved on. For example, Juliana mentioned the reading difficulty of *GG* was mostly due to the style of the text.

Juliana: I think, in the first part, how the writer wrote, the style of writing that the author used in this book, it was hard to understand. I needed to read several times to understand what he was saying, but it was just part of a sentence or a segment.

Judith also felt the linguistic difficulty of the story disrupted her enjoyment of the reading, as she commented “The fact that the book is written in a very confusing way and I have to reread the passages, take away the joy of reading” [Reading Essay].

In addition, the writing style especially in beginning parts of *GG* caused students difficulty. For example, to Carolina, the long descriptions of the party and scenery, which are often praised by literary critics as a metaphor for the society of the time, seemed merely boring and meaningless to her.

Carolina: The *GG* is a very complicated book, I think. It gives you a lot of details, so for me the book is kind of boring. I don't know why the author keep telling us so many details about everything. The few things that had really happened, like the big party, the little party (the one with 6 persons) and the dinner in Tom's house, had been interesting, but maybe it could be more funnier or entertainment, it never goes straight to the point, and I don't like that. ... I don't like the way the story is told.

[Reading Essay]

The writing style and symbolic descriptions of the scenery and people's behavior at the party failed to convey any symbolic message to Carolina. These literary techniques instead hindered her enjoyment of the text. She felt that the reading was fun when the story described dynamic actions in the later part of the book. When she finished reading and evaluated the book as a whole, Carolina gave an overall positive response to *GG*.

Although she felt that the beginning of the book was not enjoyable, in the end, she commented that the book was interesting to read.

Carolina: I like *Great Gatsby*. I like fiction. I love romantic story. But in the beginning, I think it was kind of slow, nothing happened, it was very detailed and boring. But, then, in the end, it was kind of good. It was lot of passion. Lots of happening, kind of drama, very interesting.

[Interview]

By contrast to the agreeable reaction to the end of the book, some students perceived the ending of the story to be more confusing than before. They remarked that the character's intentions and the author's messages were baffling to understand, especially at the end of the story when Gatsby dies and Daisy seems indifferent to Gatsby's fate. After all the turmoil, she seemed to go back to normal as she used to be. There was no hint of emotional regret or sorrow from her in any part of the book. For example, Judith evaluated the ending of the story as making it harder to understand the theme of the story.

Judith: I didn't like the end of the story. Gatsby loved Daisy for a long time. He died and I didn't like that. Daisy ran away, I didn't like that either. I keep asking myself what this book is about. What's the main point of the book? Is it about trust? Is it about love? Is it about revenge? About what? I cannot tell. If I had to think too long or concentrate to find the meaning in the movie or book, it is so confusing, when it's too complicated, I become hate it..... I think at least the topic of the book is about everything a little bit.

[Interview]

Ajani felt the same way about the conclusion of the story. He mentioned that the ending of the story confused him about the character or the theme of the book as a whole. He concluded that he could not understand Daisy, what she wanted, or what the author wanted to say to the readers.

Ajani: Debate, no agreement, it's because of the way they wrote a book, specially the ending. Especially Daisy, I don't understand the character of Daisy. She causes a lot of trouble, like how to define the wishes of her, what she really wanted. Gatsby was clear.... I don't think the ending was the best. I didn't like the ending. Cause I didn't understand, at the end, what Daisy really wanted. And how she ended...I mean, they didn't talk Daisy after the death of Gatsby or even in the end. I don't know. The ending was very short, not very clear. What was the message about Daisy? About Gatsby, maybe the message that we can take is that once you have time for himself, that's the part he missed for himself, think about himself, live preparing for himself, and choose right option, sometimes he is irrational. I think Daisy made Gatsby irrational. Poor Gatsby. He didn't have time to have children. I think he was never happy.

[Interview]

On the other hand, some students appreciated the confusion involved in understanding a literary text. Because they understood that literature does not claim one correct interpretation, students often felt more liberated to express their own opinion. Oma commented, for example, that reading *GG* was enjoyable because there is no one correct way to interpret the text.

Oma: In literature, there is no right answer. I had some disagreement even with the teacher, in some point explaining something. It was answer in the exam. I wrote something but she didn't give the credit, but, I was like this is my point of view.

[Interview]

As described so far, students' perceptions of literary conventions of *GG* were different student by student. Some of them struggled to understand the style of the text, but became familiar with it, or gradually disregarded these difficulties and concentrated on the content of the story. Some felt that the message of the book became more confusing in the end. For others, the literary conventions of *GG* were appreciated as a special aspect of literature.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES

The cultural elements of *GG* functioned as both challenges and motivation that students experienced during reading. *GG* has been highly praised for its montage of the Jazz Age, the 1920s in America. Fitzgerald's nuanced description of the societal values and norms have provided readers opportunities to observe a portrait of American culture set in a prestigious group of society in New York. Students in this study showed interest in the background of the story and reported that they enjoyed learning about the culture and history of America in the 1920s. At the same time, cultural elements of the story unfamiliar to students challenged their understanding of the text.

For example, Ajani felt that the cultural aspects of the novel were difficult for him to understand. He commented in the interview that, along with linguistic difficulties, the cultural aspects of the novel were a challenging part of the reading. He realized that he needed to know more about the culture. However, Ajani eventually developed an

understanding of the characters' behaviors and values in terms of culture-specific characteristics.

Ajani: When there is part that I couldn't understand, I used dictionary, when I have trouble with words. The other things would be the cultural things. Like why some of the things happen. That's the background of 1920s here, for example, the way the mistress got their money, the life they lived. That's the complicated things...It shows mentality of that time. It's important to know how they think, how they felt, because the book, especially in the beginning, there is a lot of concern about looks, and materials, stuff, having car, having what, that's why I think there is cultural thing to learn. And the town, what people thought Gatsby and how they treat Gatsby. There is a lot of difference. You need to have background.

[Interview]

Juliana also remarked how clearly she understood that the culture rendered in the text offered one piece of information about the target culture.

Juliana: *The Great Gatsby* is classic but I liked *The Great Gatsby*. I really liked it. Because it was interesting to see different ways, they show how it was one part of the American society at that time. It is interesting because it was related to reality even if it was fiction but related to reality. This part is involved in story.

[Interview]

Students' general interest in the historical and social background to *GG* was partly influenced by the teacher's instruction. Margaret, the teacher, introduced historical information about the 1920s to the class before they began reading *GG*. The supplementary document contained information about people's growing interest in fashion and money and the law banning alcohol. Class instruction with these additional

materials seemed to have provided a great help to students to understand the historical and cultural aspects of the story.

Reflecting the cultural information that students had acquired before they read *GG*, the cultural topics that frequently attracted students' attention included 1) people's general interest in wealth and fashion, 2) the feminist movement after World War I, and 3) Prohibition. As shown in excerpts presented earlier, students seemed to recognize the characters' behaviors and values as reflecting the cultural norms of their society. For example, students analyzed Daisy's silence about her husband's affair with another woman from the context of women's status in society at the time the story was written. Also, the historical information about the lawful ban on alcohol was an important point needed to understand Gatsby's source of fortune. The illegality of his business shed light on his recklessness to achieve his goal. It shed a different meaning on his actions.

Cultural aspects of the book seemed to provide learning opportunities to students. The process of acknowledging and importing information about culture was cyclical rather than one-directional. Students were equipped with some of the cultural and historical information to understand the text, however, this information was not enough. Students continued to experience new aspects of culture while reading the text. The text seemed either to reinforce or challenge the previous knowledge. In both cases, students experienced the text as learning experience.

The challenges that students experienced in understanding the cultural aspects of *GG* involved temporal and spatial distance between the culture of the text and the readers. The cultural background of the students did not match the one reflected in the

story. The culture described in the text was not necessarily congruent with the contemporary culture of the target language. However, students were able to distinguish gaps between these multiple layers of culture associated with reading L2 literature. To build their textual understandings, students used their prior knowledge about the cultural setting of the story. These ESL students were able to learn about the target culture in context as represented in the text. As well as acquiring cultural information from the text, ESL students brought their own cultural background to make connections with the cultural elements of the story.

SUMMARY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BOOK READING EXPERIENCE

So far, I have discussed students' reading experiences based on their self-reported perceptions. Students' reading enjoyment corresponded to the content of the book. Three kinds of reading difficulties were identified interacting with reading enjoyment: linguistic, literary, and cultural reading challenges.

Students' enjoyment level of reading *The Great Gatsby* (GG) remained at a high level with some fluctuation over time. It was lower during the early part of reading and higher in the second half of the book. With Chapter 5 as the pivotal chapter in showing change in levels of enjoyment, students became more engaged in the development of the story. When Gatsby and Daisy's reunion occurs, creating interest in students' minds, they understood reasons for the luxurious parties and his business success, their sympathy for Gatsby changed.

Along with the content of the story, reading enjoyment seemed to have interacted with linguistic, literary, and cultural challenges that students experienced during the reading process. Students' literary responses as demonstrated in discussion, interviews, and written literary essays reflected these reading challenges and struggles in dealing with reading difficulties. The challenges involved in reading L2 literature seemed to hinder students' enjoyment and understanding; however, these reading difficulties also worked as a learning point when students could see that they were making some headway.

ESL students' perceptions of reading *GG* appeared to suggest a different perspective from findings reported in previous research that has emphasized L2 readers' limitations in understanding L2 text. In examining L2 reading comprehension, scholars (Bernhardt, 1990; Carrell, 1983; Davis, 1989, 1992; Duff, 2001) have described how L2 readers often fail to understand the tone and cultural implications of the text and to produce critical responses to the text. Students in this study also experienced difficulty and frustration in reading the text written in English, but, at the same time, they felt that reading literature was beneficial to their learning of English, the target culture, and literary conventions.

The findings about students' perceptions of reading *GG* also suggested the corresponding relationship between reading enjoyment and these reading challenges. When students became more involved in the textual world, they paid less attention to reading difficulties. It would be difficult to claim that students solved all problems after they had read through the first several chapters of the book. Instead, once they felt the

story was interesting, they seemed to disregard their concerns about the writing style, vocabulary, or cultural background of the story. In terms of reading enjoyment influencing students' perceptions about reading difficulties, findings of this study support previous research reporting that enjoyment of reading is the most predictive element of the successful literary experience (Hidi, 1991; Langer, 1995; Schiefele, 1991; Worthy, 1999).

Students' Perceptions of the Literary Discussion

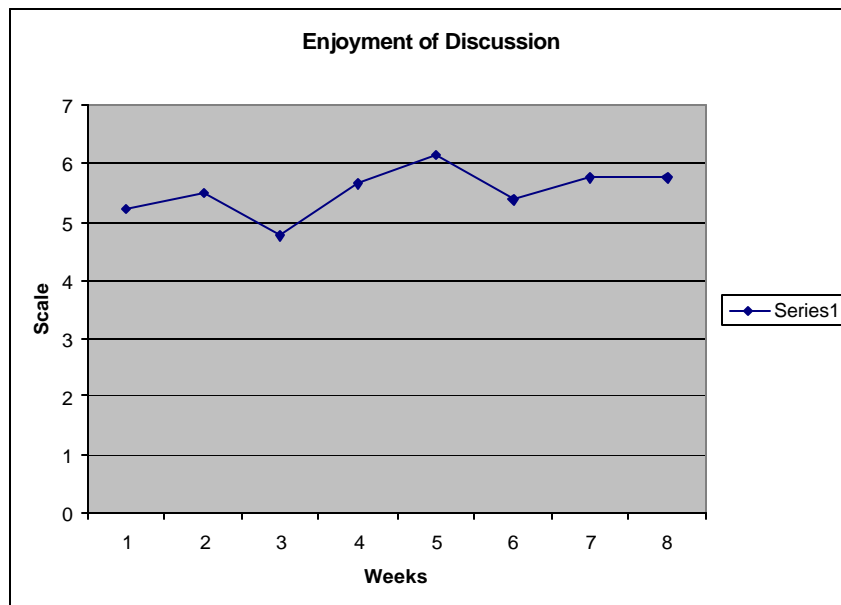
This section reports on the findings relevant to the research question; "In what ways were the class discussions perceived by adult ESL students?" The analysis was based on several data sources including post discussion surveys, interviews, written reading essays, and field notes. They revealed several issues involved in the ways in which students understood their literary discussions, such as whether they felt the discussion was an enjoyable and good learning experience, and the reasons for their evaluations.

The organization of the section corresponds with prominent aspects of students' perceptions about literature discussion of *GG*, which include: 1) enjoyment of the discussion, 2) learning value of discussion, including (a) checking up on the textual information, (b) exchanging opinions, and (c) building learning communities.

ENJOYMENT OF THE DISCUSSION

The central aspect on which students reported was the degree to which they enjoyed the literary group discussion. To report on the general level and changes in discussion enjoyment, I averaged enjoyment scale scores for nine students' markings in the post discussion survey. As I introduced reading enjoyment in the previous section, the responses from the other three students are not included in the analysis because of frequent absence from the class or no variation in scale marking across time. The mean average responses to reading enjoyment from the nine students are presented in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2. Changes in Discussion Enjoyment Level



Students responded that they generally enjoyed the literary group discussion, as shown in Figure 5.2. Ratings remained high (average scale: 5.5) during the eight weeks of discussion. The mean ratings of discussion enjoyment also indicated changes across the eight weeks of *GG* discussion. The third discussion marked the lowest point in the discussion enjoyment level but enjoyment rose from the fifth discussion on.

An interesting point about this discussion enjoyment rating is that their pattern appears in to reflect the pattern of reading enjoyment levels. Figure 5.1 in the previous section demonstrated that students' reading enjoyment levels also were lower during the early parts of reading the novel. With the fifth week of reading as a turning point, the reading enjoyment scale rose. Students' ratings were also comparatively lower for the sixth week both in reading and discussion enjoyment level.

Keeping in mind the discussion enjoyment rating trends, the following subsections address issues related to students' enjoyment of literary discussion. Students' enjoyment level of discussion seemed to be related to the degree and kind of help they could receive from the literary discussion in the process of constructing their understanding of the text.

ENRICHING INTERPRETATION FROM DISCUSSION

The literary discussion functioned as an opportunity to enrich an interpretation of the text, with the help of: 1) checking up on the textual information, 2) exchanging opinions, and 3) building learning community. While engaged in talking with others,

students could ascertain if their interpretation of the text was literally correct; hear different opinions about the characters, events, or themes of the book; and share reading experiences.

Checking up on the Textual Information

The prominent point that students noted as the benefit they obtained from the literary discussion was *story line check up*. Via literary discussion, students helped each other correct and add to their literal understanding of the text. Even when all members of a group had finished reading the assigned part of the story, the students often reported they did not understand some parts. In discussion, each student assisted others in understanding different aspects to different levels, as remarked on the following comments from students:

Carolina: It [literary discussion] was useful because you can understand some parts of the book that wasn't very clear for you.
[Post Discussion Survey]

Arrigo: In the discussion, the points got really clear. Even though I read, it was not very clear so when one would explain in discussion, I would see the point and change ideas.
[Interview]

Hanan: The conversation helps me to understand more the story because the story is hard for me so I learn many things from my classmates. And I too tell my classmates about some plots that they didn't pay attention to them while they reading. In conclusion, I think that the conversation is helpful.
[Reading Essay]

Students reported that the book discussion was beneficial when they could gain a clear view of the story and characters from it. Literary discussion offered students a chance to ask group members about details that confused them. For example, Ajani asked about the eye sign on the street that he could not understand.

Ajani: Dr. Eakleberg, George Wilson, Tom, he is already known, George Wilson, Mrs. Wilson, sister Katherine. They are main characters. But I don't understand about Dr. Eakleberg... is he Tom's friend? And they are driving together?

Arrigo: No, it is the advertisement sign.

Even when she could not gain new information from the members in the discussion, Rasha mentioned that by talking to others, she could clarify her own understanding of the text.

Rasha: I feel that discussing *The GG* in a group is really helpful. Although my group is not very active and some of them hardly do their parts, but when I explain for them the novel, it becomes even clearer for me.

[Reading Essay]

However, the process of reminding each other of details and of the story line was not an exciting part of the discussion for all students. Some students felt bothered with checking the story line because they were confident that they knew the details of the story. When the discussion dealt only with the things they already knew, they could not learn something new from the discussion.

Rasha: Some of the group members didn't finish their parts and they don't know how to discuss. I was really bored.

[Post Discussion Survey]

When they came to class with a solid understanding of the textual meaning, they expected to learn something more than they already knew or let others know what they knew. Students who understood the text clearly compared to others appeared to be located at a different stage of building the textual world. They anticipated the discussion to have more a focus on critical opinions of the text, instead of simply recapturing the story. These students valued exchanges of opinions rather than checking the story line as a discussion activity.

Another element related to individual reading and understanding of the text was participation in the discussion. When students had not finished reading or could not achieve a solid understanding of the text, their degree of participation in the discussion tended to be low. For example, Ajani realized that he did not have many things to say in the discussion, even though he had read the assigned part.

Ajani: In the first day, I came to the group. When I was starting to talk, I soon realized that I knew so little compared to others.

[Interview]

In the case of Joon-ho, reading difficulty hindered his participation in the discussion, either because he felt that other students were much ahead of him or he felt he did not understand the text much.

Joon-Ho: Even though I read all of the assigned homework, I didn't understand the main point.
[Post Discussion Survey]

When students had a hard time understanding the text, the discussion seemed to be at risk of not providing any benefit to the m. Although abundant information about the story was presented in the discussion, Joon-Ho was worried and depressed with his insufficient reading. He marked on the post discussion survey that he realized that he was not a good reader, and during the interview, he also expressed how much he struggled to understand the book.

Several students' struggles in reading and discussing had an impact on other students' enjoyment of the discussion. Students often complained about low participation of their fellow group members.

Juliana: Boring moment in discussion was when just one or two read the book in my group. It [Book discussion] was useless. Others' participation is important in discussion.
[Interview]

As described so far, students took advantage of the literary discussion to help their understanding of the text. They could straighten out any missed or misunderstood part of the story with the help of others. Because the understanding level of the text differed among the students, more knowledgeable members of a group assisted less knowledgeable group members. In this study some students expressed frustration if the

discussion focused too much on story line check up; however, most students felt that the discussion was beneficial in helping their understanding of the text.

Exchanging Opinions

In students' views, the most beneficial and exciting feature of the literary discussion was exchanging diverse opinions about the text. Because they were well aware of the atmosphere in this class that interpretation of literature did not have a right or wrong answer, they tended to feel free to argue and express their opinions during literary discussion. They appreciated each other's different interests and perspectives, and listened to and adopted the opinions of others in their group consciously and unconsciously.

For instance, many students expressed how much they liked to share different interpretations of the text in the literary discussion.

Arrigo: The group is good and bring very interesting ideas. We could know other points of views. The group has good and different ideas.

[Post Discussion Survey]

Ajani: Discussion was very helpful. Cause you see a lot of different ideas about the same reading. Different points of views about the same reading. It gives further knowledge about the book. I like the book discussion. Very helpful. Very efficient.

[Interview]

Specifically, students who had finished reading seemed to have certain expectations about the content of discussion. They preferred active exchanges of opinions, and such active exchanges seemed to decide whether the students enjoyed the discussion. When group members did not offer many opinions, students felt that the discussion was boring or useless. When members in a group finished reading and exchanged opinions actively in a discussion, they usually felt that they enjoyed and had learned from the discussion.

Rasha: It was good to know people have different interpretation to the same thing.
[Post Discussion Survey]

The characteristic to notice is that the discussion content seemed heavily influenced by the reading experiences of the students. As Juliana mentioned in the interview, when students came to class having enjoyed their reading, they were more ready to involve themselves in the literary discussion.

Juliana: When you don't like reading and you don't get involved.. I want to say something just to participate and it's all but.. When you really like the topic, you try to understand why.. not to convince others, why to understand why others' opinion is different from him .What is different with yours and mine.
[Interview]

As more students finished and enjoyed the reading, many different opinions appeared in the literary discussion contributing each other's interpretation of the text. Literary discussion influenced students' understanding of the text.

Ajani: Yes, I changed my opinion a lot. First even in the book, I changed a lot of my opinions a lot from beginning to the end about Gatsby, then, about Nick, Tom and Daisy also. I changed idea about characters, Nick, Tom and Daisy. In the discussion, the points got really clear. Even though I read, it was not very clear so when one would explained in discussion, I would see the point and change ideas. It's more about characters. Mostly about evaluation of character.

[Interview]

Juliana: Change opinion after discussion? In the first moment I judged very hard on Daisy. And then after they say it's not easy for her. It will end the situation and I was like, I don't agree your decision and I don't like her personality. It's against my personality but after that I was not being so hard on her. I am not in her shoes.

[Interview]

However, when interviewed about the influence of the discussion, most of the students responded only about getting more details of the story line, listening to others' opinions, instead of its influence on changing their own opinions. For the question whether they felt they had experienced changes in their original interpretation of the text, most of them answered negatively.

Opinion changes after literary discussion seemed to happen more or less unconsciously rather than consciously. Students were more apt to persist in their own

opinion, but nevertheless, seemed to acquire new interpretations through literary discussion gradually.

For example, one student in one group did not pay much attention nor had much interest in the social and historical background of the story. However, the interest expressed by other students in the group in the social background to the story made an impact on Juliana's interpretation of *GG*. When Arrigo and Oma were enthusiastically talking about the history associated with the story, Juliana tried to change the focus of discussion but failed as there was more than one person who wanted to talk about the societal background of this story. She mentioned in the post discussion survey that she would have liked to talk only about the text itself rather than other topics.

Juliana: We talked about society and is a great topic. It will be more interesting to discuss a real book.

However, in the later interview, Juliana mentioned that she valued this novel because of its cultural montage of the society.

Juliana: *GG* is classic but I liked *GG*. I really liked it. Because it was interesting to see different ways they show how it was one part of the American society at that time. It is interesting because it was related to reality even if it was fiction but related to reality. This part is involved in story

Even though she did not initially have much interest in the historical background of *GG*, and she even worried when discussion focus centered too much on this issue, she later appreciated it as an aspect of background.

The more common changes students experienced after discussion was rebuilding the story line and reinterpreting the characters.

Juliana: Because there is no right answer in book discussion: I don't like to have right answer. I like to listen different opinion because you can change and reach your own opinion. I don't like [to judge] this is true or wrong. That's because I like book.

Rather than seeing it as changing their opinion, they believed that the interpretation of the text had been "enriched" after group discussion.

Arrigo: My main thinking about *Gatsby* didn't change after class discussion, but some new ideas and perceptions were added with the discussion. The group had similar main thinking about *Gatsby*, but usually everyone bring some new information and/or clarify some point. I think the discussion has had enriched the thinking about *Gatsby*.

Building Learning Community

Another beneficial point that students reported about the literary discussion was the sense that they were building learning community while participating in talking with others. The group discussion functioned as a place to share reading challenges with each other and creating a sense of fellowship with other readers. They were reading the same

text at the same time and experiencing similar reading challenges and changes in themselves as readers. Students appeared to realize that they could rely on group members as people who could provide answers to their questions, to take a literary journey with them.

For example, Tevin, in the following written essay, implied that the literary discussion with peers did not help him significantly in his understanding of the characters. Because he knew that it was not possible for students to learn all the mysteries about Gatsby, Tevin considered the further understanding of the text as a job for “we.”

Tevin: Gatsby seems to be an obscure person, my opinion of him is that he has something to hide, something that made him be the man he actually is. I also believe that the way he acts is just a cover or a facade for what he really is a fragile person, someone affected by an important fact that happened in his past. Although I do not know what it is, I believe we're pretty close to discover as we're getting closer to the end. The conversation between them have not help me significantly because Gatsby character still is unknown to me.

In a learning community, students saw each other as teaching and learning the ways of constructing meaning of the text. In the discussion situation, individual students were forced to provide evidence of their claims in order to make their contributions seem feasible. As numerous examples shown in the first section of this chapter, students demonstrated how they made connections with information rooted in the self, world, and text. These connections with the textual world functioned as solid foundations of their

claims in understanding the text. Students shared strategies of meaning making practices acceptable in the discussion.

For example, in the discussion about Tom's affair and Daisy's reaction to it (cited in pages 94-95), Rasha and Carolina understood the situation and feelings of the characters by making connections with themselves. When David did not seem to personalize the issue as much as they did, Rasha and Carolina persuaded him to imagine it happening to himself. They asked him "What if you are married and your wife cheated?" and what "If you are involved in like, personally." In this way, students helped others to interpret the text by making connection with the self. As well, they shared how to manage the discussion in the sense of convincing others.

SUMMARY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE LITERARY DISCUSSION

In this section, I have illustrated the findings relevant to the students' perceptions of their experiences in literary discussion after reading *The Great Gatsby* (*GG*). The analysis of data coming from post discussion surveys and interviews, reading responses, and field notes revealed students' perceptions of the literature discussion of *GG*, which included their enjoyment of discussions and appreciation of how literary discussion enriched their interpretation of the novel.

Students enjoyed the literary discussions, in general. Whether they understood the text or enjoyed reading the assigned part of the book, students saw that they benefited from discussion with others. In their views, the functions of the literary discussion

included: 1) checking up on the textual information; 2) exchanging opinions; and 3) building learning communities. Most importantly, literary discussion helped students experience different interpretations of the text, eventually enriching and shaping their textual world.

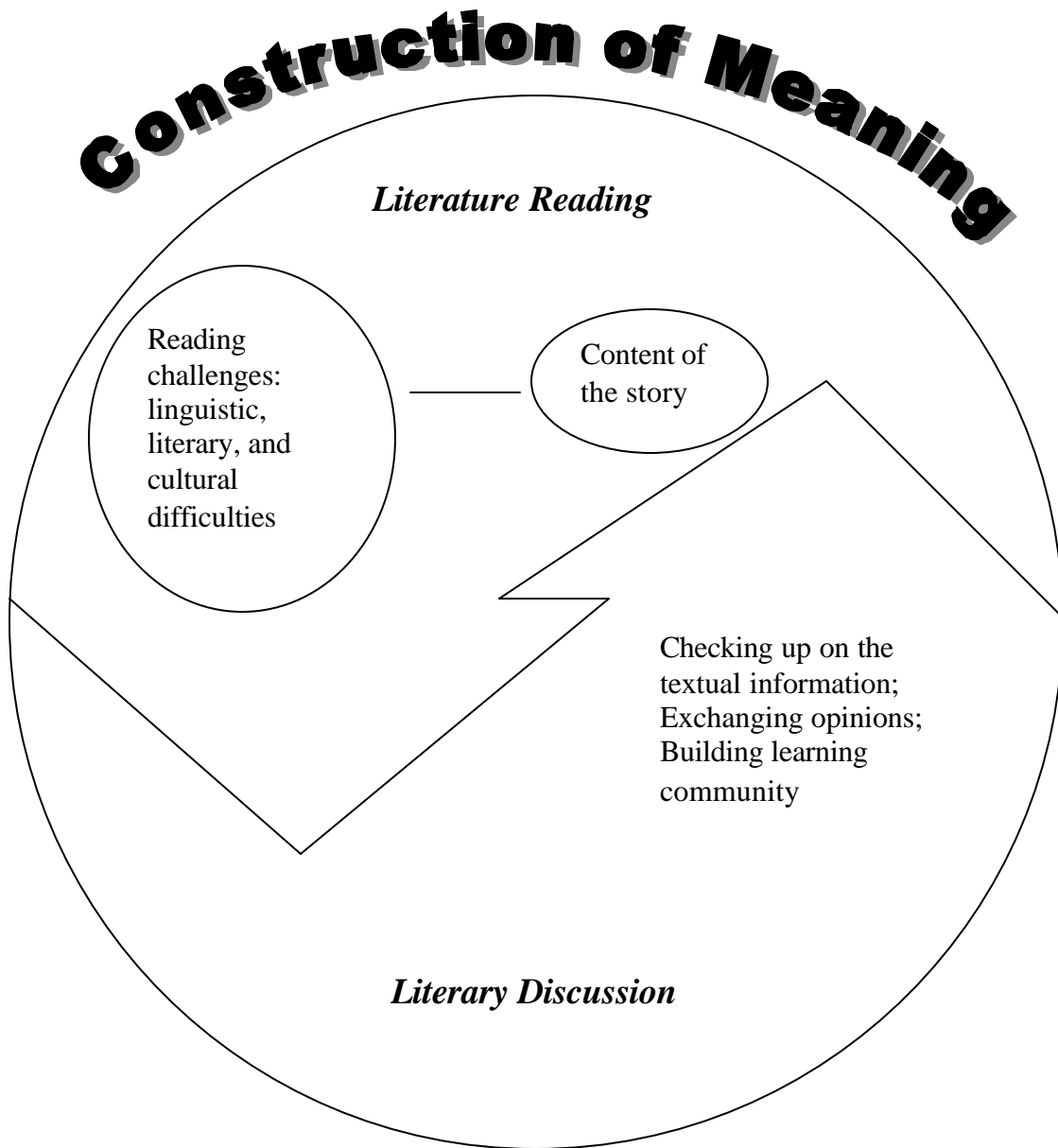
These findings about students' perceptions of their experiences in literary discussion resonate with several aspects reported in previous studies (Almasi & Gambrell, 1994; Lehman & Scharer, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978; Short, 1990). As Vygotsky's ZPD indicates, peers can help other peers in more effective ways. While talking with members of literary discussion group, students could gain textual information and diverse alternative interpretations of the text. Considering Almasi and Gambrell's (1994) remark, "restructuring of textual interpretations resulting from the acquisition of new information," literary discussion seemed to offer more abundant and attainable information to students. Because the understanding level of the text differed among the students, more knowledgeable members of a group assisted less knowledgeable group members. Adult ESL students in this study clearly recognized the kinds of help they could obtain from discussion with others.

In addition, the findings of this study presented more intricate nature of students' literary discussion experiences. Even though students enjoyed the literary discussion overall, the sources and levels of enjoyment of literary discussion could differ. When they came to class with a solid understanding of the textual meaning, students anticipated the discussion to have more a focus on critical opinions of the text, instead of simply recapturing the story. For students who had struggled with understanding the content of

the story, straightening out any missed or misunderstood part of the story with the help of others was considered the most valuable point of the discussion activity. In conclusion, literary discussion itself can be a pleasant activity to any student, yet, has inseparable relationship with reading experiences.

Based on this analysis, I built a diagram to show the interrelationships between these elements. Figure 5.3 represents how reading and discussion experiences were interacted for the students in my study. Reading challenge and content of the story contributed to the level of enjoyment of reading and discussion. This model points to the relationship between reading experience and literary discussion.

Figure 5.3. Connections between Literature Reading and Literature Discussion



CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how adult students in a reading class offered in a college-affiliated ESL program responded to *The Great Gatsby* (*GG*) in small group book discussion sessions over eight weeks, and how they perceived their reading and discussing experiences. Based on reader response theory and a socio-constructivist concept of reading, I explored L2 readers' efforts to make meaning of *GG* as demonstrated in literary discussion. By investigating adult ESL learners' self-reported experiences, I also analyzed the benefits and challenges of integrating literary texts into the language classroom.

The findings presented in Chapter 4 mainly described students' various strategies utilized in constructing textual meaning and transformation of their meaning making strategies as they read the text week by week. The students who participated in this study, even as learners of English, displayed various strategies to make sense of the text. They constructed meaning by making connections between the textual world and the text, themselves, and the world around them. Also, they were conscious about their reading experiences and expressed freely their reading difficulties, even as they approached the text as literature equipped with specific rules and conventions.

These literary responses and meaning making strategies changed over time. Taking up the novel, initially students spent more time discussing the historical context of the text and formulating connections with themselves and the world. Students were self-conscious about their reading difficulties. Further along in their reading, they derived

more information from the text, and their discussion became more text-centered. Inferential comments and emotional reactions became more frequent elements in discussion, and talk about the reading experience itself or contextual information about the text diminished.

Chapter 5 was devoted to illustrating how students perceived their reading experience of literary text in their second language and how they felt about the classroom activity of discussing in a group with peers. Self-reported perceptions expressed about their reading experience of literary text in their second language were predominantly about the reading enjoyment, challenges, and rewards in terms of: 1) language challenges, 2) culture challenges, and 3) literary challenges. First, students felt that reading literature was beneficial for their English learning. Second, the cultural aspects of the story were challenging to them but it was also considered one benefit of reading literature. The third element involved the difficulties mentioned by students while dealing with literary conventions presented in the text.

Analysis of students' perceptions of their experiences in literary discussion after reading *GG* revealed their enjoyment of the discussions and appreciation of how literary discussion enriched their interpretation of the novel. Students enjoyed the literary discussions, in general. Whether they understood the text or enjoyed reading the assigned part of the book, students saw that they benefited from discussion with others. In their views, the functions of the literary discussion included: 1) checking on textual information; 2) exchanging opinions; and 3) building learning communities. Most

importantly, literary discussion helped students experience different interpretations of the text, eventually enriching and shaping their textual world.

In the subsequent sections, I will first discuss the limitations of the study, followed by discussions of findings of this study. I will then discuss how this study can contribute to the incorporation of literary texts in the language classroom, focusing in particular on students' meaning making process and their perceptions of their reading and discussing experiences of *GG*. Lastly, I will suggest some implications for future research on the literature reading process and literature use in language instruction.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of this study need to be addressed prior to discussing findings and implications of this study for practice and research. These limitations were associated with the qualitative research paradigm itself that views the human researcher as an instrument of inquiry and research design particular to this study.

First, my background and the viewpoint from which I interpreted specific phenomena may have affected the results of this research. As I previously described, I studied modern American and English literature in a graduate program in Korea. I studied *The Great Gatsby (GG)* as one of the outstanding 20th century novels both in my undergraduate and graduate programs. My predisposition toward literature and literary analysis and toward connecting literature and second language education may have, consequently, interfered with an unbiased interpretation of the phenomena.

The second limitation of this study was related to the particular setting and participants of the study, challenging transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this unique context, Margaret, the teacher of this class, was a doctoral degree holder in English who was professionally enthusiastic about incorporating literary texts in ESL instruction. She had been using short stories, fables, folklore, and novels throughout her reading/discussion instruction career. The students participated in this study had comparatively advanced proficiency levels of English. Their high English competence may have contributed to the reading and discussion process as well as to the quality of literary responses.

The response analysis to the specific novel read in this study also may have introduced limitations and not apply to the reading of different texts. Texts are likely to have influenced reading experiences and subsequent discussion experiences in unique ways. Thus, findings from reading and discussing *GG* in this study may be limited in generalizability to reading of other texts. As different texts may lead to different response categories and transformation of meaning making strategies over time, future research would need to investigate responses to several novels or other literary texts.

However, despite the limitation in transferability of findings, the unique nature of the study was appropriate to enhance effectiveness of inquiry. The teacher's and my strong backgrounds in literature and positive perspectives toward connecting literature and language education maximized the understanding of phenomenon. Examining literary discussion with an individual text rendered particularly meaningful implication for further research and practice. Because literature reading and subsequent discussion

experiences strongly depend on the content of the reading text, teachers and researchers need to build a deep understanding of the reading text in order to get a better picture of students' reading and discussion contributions. Implications of the findings of this study contributing to research and practice are further discussed in the following sections.

Discussions of the Findings

Based on the findings of the study, I draw several implications into the spotlight. Although the literary event rendered in this study was set in a particular sociolinguistic context, students' responses and discussions were also similar to what has been reported in existing studies though it brought some unique features as well. The ESL situation examined in this study produced unique responses differentiating them from L1 contexts. While analyzing the results, I also realized that the findings of this study echoed previous research on literature reading and discussion, adding another example of what happens in response and peer group discussion of literature.

As a result of categorizing students' literary response and their perceptions of the reading and discussing experiences, the following themes were identified:

- ESL readers' efforts to make meaning of the literary text
- Collective construction of meaning in literary discussion
- Reciprocal relationship between reading and discussion
- Intersection of cultures in L2 literary discussion

ESL READERS' EFFORTS TO MAKE MEANING OF THE LITERARY TEXT

Data analysis revealed that students' reading and discussing of a literary text in their L2 was not an easy task. Students in this study pointed to several challenges they experienced while they read and discussed *GG*. Linguistic, cultural, and literary aspects of the text were challenging to them. Unusual vocabulary and cultural elements in a book that is based on early 20th century U.S. added to their difficulties with several parts of the text. Students also struggled to become familiar with the literary conventions of this specific text, which is rich in symbolic technique and descriptive expressions.

Although the participants of this study were non-native speakers of English who were reading a novel written in English, their literary discussion successfully revealed in this study how readers constructed the textual meaning of the literary text, often in ways very similar to L1 readers. They could construct the textual world by gathering pieces of information available, and they could make sense of it as best they could at each stage of reading. The ESL students could activate prior knowledge about themselves and about the world around them, instead of restricting themselves to information from the text only.

According to the response categories described in the findings of this study, the information could originate from readers' knowledge about the text, the readers themselves, or the world. These ESL students had some disadvantage in accessing the textual world because they were situated at a greater distance from the culture and language of the text. However, students' own personal and social knowledge base was effectively incorporated in understanding of the text. Instead of getting full information

from the text, students gathered supporting information about the text from other knowledge sources that they already had. Students made connection between these bodies of knowledge and the textual world that they were building on.

The findings from this study about ESL readers' literature response support previous studies on reading and response to literary texts. Beach and Hynds (1991) and others (Lewis, 1999; Marshall, 2000) reviewed existing research on literature response arguing that according to the sources of different interpretations, the text, the reader, and the world, it operated in constructing meaning of the text. Many studies put their research focus on one of these factors to explain variations in the interpretation, but the findings of my study seem to provide a more comprehensive picture of literature response. During the eight weeks of reading *GG*, students utilized their prior knowledge drawn from all sources, the text, the reader, and the world, blending these simultaneously to contribute to the construction of meaning of the text.

The extended nature of reading that was the case in this study showed clearly how the contribution of each factor worked over time. The response changes over time suggested that responses in discussions of *GG* moved from the primarily personal reader-based level to the text-based level (Lehman & Scharer, 1996). During the early reading of the novel, readers were more active in searching for clues from among other extra-textual information, such as personal and social knowledge sources. Discussion about reading difficulties appeared more frequently in the earlier discussion sessions. As they continued reading the book gaining information from the text gradually, discussions moved the readers' focus to text-based responses. In her categorization of responses according to

reading stance, Langer (1995) described readers as stepping in and out of the textual world and moving back and forth in interpretation. She emphasized that the four stances occur without sequence, but my findings suggested there was tendency for certain stances to occur in a particular order as students read across the eight weeks.

COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING IN LITERARY DISCUSSION

The findings of this study described the ways in which students' meaning making of the text occurred collectively in discussion environments. The literary event seemed to contribute to their understanding of the reading process, and more specifically, to the ways in which they could build meaning of the text. While talking with others, students acquired alternative interpretations of the text and different ways to construct meaning from peers participating in discussion. Discussion worked as a milieu to support these meaning making efforts, eventually helping students construct meaning collectively.

Considering Almasi and Gambrell's (1994) remark that "restructuring of textual interpretations resulting from the acquisition of new information" (p. 4), literary discussion seemed to offer greater possibilities for students to encounter new information including textual information and alternative interpretations. When readers participated in discussion with others, they could check with others about comprehension of the story, characters, events, and background information of the text. Students could learn textual information they may have missed or misunderstood while talking with others.

Literary discussion also provided students opportunities to share different interpretations and perspectives (Lehman & Scharer, 1996). Students demonstrated different opinions according to their personal experiences, interests, perspectives, and context. These diverse interpretations of the text were shared in discussion setting and became infused with and enriched others' understanding.

In addition, by participating in discussion with peers, students learned the ways to construct meaning of the text in a manner strategic and acceptable to a literary community. Kucan and Beck (1997) pointed out that students actually learn in and through discourse environments is "the process of constructing meaning from the text" (p. 290). In order to make their interpretation more credible and persuasive to others, students had to learn to bring evidence of their claims from the sources available to them. They made sense of the text by finding connections between the textual world and the text, the self, and the world. When members in a group lacked any supporting evidence, they encouraged each other to offer reasons for the claim or summed up connections collectively. Their co-work to comprehend the text functioned as an opportunity to train each other to build their textual world in a meaningful way in this particular interpretive community (Fish, 1980).

The findings of this study presented numerous excerpts describing how much the group work offered a chance to develop ability to understand the text. Reading theorists and practitioners (Burke, 2000; Robb, 2000) have emphasized encouraging meta-cognitive strategies of students and this study described that ESL students were capable of actively involving themselves in understanding the text and develop strategies to make

sense of the text collectively. As reported in the categories of literary responses and students' perceptions of the literary discussion experiences, book discussions assisted students collectively to build up their view of the textual world.

RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING AND DISCUSSION

Findings from students' literary responses, their perceptions about reading, and their discussing experiences seemed to imply an inseparable relationship between reading and discussing processes. As Crawford and Hoopingarner (1993) noted, "meaningful book [reading] lead to meaningful discussions. ... if a book was powerful and thought provoking, the children's discussions were also" (p. 272). In this study, changes in literary response over time suggested a reciprocal relationship between students' perceptions of reading and discussing. When students began reading *GG*, they experienced various challenges, enough so as to hinder reading enjoyment. Their reading experiences were intertwined with discussion content, helping them decide on the quality and enjoyment of discussion. Simply speaking, a text that would be perceived as fun to read would seem to decide almost all subsequent processes. Also, the literary discussion seemed to be beneficial in itself, whether the reading was easy or difficult.

As shown in the analysis of response categories, students were more conscious of reading challenges during the early period of their reading. In the later reading periods, they put their focus on the textual content and on their critical responses. The linguistic, cultural, and literal challenges that students experienced during reading closely interacted

with the content of the book, such as whether the story was exciting to the reader or not. With the fifth chapter as pivotal point when students universally felt more interested in the story, reading challenges seemed to lessen.

When the reading process was perceived as enjoyable, resulting in a higher level of understanding of the text, students had better chances to enjoy the discussion. Borrowing Csikszentmihalyi's (1993) concept of *autotelic* experiences, Schallert and Reed (1997) pointed out that people seek to recreate the pleasure of certain activities that they enjoy for their own sake.

... over time, readers who have experienced the pleasure of becoming absorbed by a text will develop a sense of the types of texts or tasks that will successfully cause involvement and of the conditions that need to be in place for them to be able to re-create the joy of autotelic experiences (p. 79).

Similarly in the case of L2 reading, if students understood and enjoyed reading of the text, they seemed to be more willing to share their responses with others as a means to recreate the joy of the experience of the textual world. The discussion introduced more opinions as well as checking on story details, which contributed to enriching and enlivening the discussions. Even when the text was difficult to understand, students often felt that the discussion was a fun and rewarding experience in itself. Because the discussion provided the chance to gather information about textual content, students could perceive the discussion as helpful for them to understand the text better.

INTERSECTION OF CULTURES IN L2 LITERARY DISCUSSION

When non-native speakers of English read and discuss a novel written in English, multiple layers of cultures intersect in the literary discussion event. For these students, different cultural elements working in the literary discussion included:

- Text culture: Culture set in the text; Text culture may not be the same as the target culture of the main society
- Target culture: Culture of the main society outside of the ESL class
- Class culture: Culture of the class and discussion group in which students participate in discussion
- Student culture: Culture from which students come; Ethnic background of students

The Great Gatsby (GG) is a literary work reflecting a particular set of cultural elements during the 1920s in America. Cultural elements of the story unfamiliar to students functioned as challenges that students experienced during reading. The students reading *GG* in this study also showed interest in the societal setting of the story and incorporated their cultural knowledge to their understanding of the characters' behaviors, emotions, and events. They eventually developed an understanding of the characters' behaviors and values in terms of culture-specific and historical characteristics. They also reported that they enjoyed learning about the culture and history of America in the 1920s.

However, the culture described in the text was not necessarily congruent with the contemporary culture of the target language. Because ESL students aimed to acquire general and current knowledge of L2 culture, the textual culture was subject to comparison with the one shared in the main society outside the ESL classroom. Students were able to distinguish gaps between the temporal differences of culture associated with reading L2 literature. To build up textual understanding, students used their prior knowledge about the culture represented in the book. These ESL students were able to learn about the target culture in context as represented in the text.

Another layer of culture involved in L2 literature reading and discussion involved students' own ethnic background. The cultural background of the students did not match with the one in the story. ESL students in this study brought their own cultural background to make connections with the cultural elements of the story, as well as acquiring cultural information from the text.

In the ESL classroom environment, the diverse cultures that the students brought into the class flourished the festival of culture. Different cultural backgrounds often contributed to produce different responses to the literary text. The discussion setting offered an arena in which to exchange these culture-imbedded interpretations of the text and share information of their own cultures, as well.

In sum, highlighting cultural aspects of literary discussion seemed to have several advantages. Talk with others provided these ESL students with opportunities to “understand their own and others’ cultural and social identities” (Enciso, 1994). To build up textual understanding, L2 readers used their prior knowledge about the culture set in

the book. These ESL students were able to learn about the target culture in context as represented in the text. As well as acquiring cultural information from the text, ESL students brought their own cultural background to make connection with the cultural elements of the story. Cultural aspects from the story were actively compared with their own and fellow students' from different cultures. Duff (2001) addressed that when ESL students lack confidence in class, discussion that gives them a chance to talk about their own culture may work to build a sense of efficacy, as important as their academic proficiency. Considering the cultural diversity in this ESL classroom, in discussion, students could learn about others' cultural background as well.

Implications for Practice and Pedagogical Issues to Consider

A close picture of ESL students' meaning making process presented in literary discussion seems to implicate several pedagogical suggestions. I want to draw attention to the value of L2 literature reading and discussion in terms of language acquisition, importance of book choice, and the instructional concentration required to maintain book reading, especially when the text is long.

L2 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOSTERED BY READING AND DISCUSSING L2 LITERATURE

One of the significant features that ESL readers showed in this study was L2 language acquisition through L2 literature reading and discussion. Considering their situation as students who were staying in a foreign country with the goal to improve their

English, it seemed sensible that students would attend to the effectiveness of reading these materials used in the class. They were attentive to the choice of the reading materials, the teacher's instruction, and they judged the possible value of any class activity.

Their self-reported perceptions about reading and discussing *GG* suggested that using a literary text in a language learning classroom is effective in language learning. As ample number of studies have claimed intuitively or empirically (Collie & Slater, 1990; Langer, 1995; McKay, 1986; Schofer, 1990; Shanahan, 1997; Wesche & Paribakht, 2000), this study demonstrated examples of the advantages of incorporating literary texts in language instruction. Students reported that reading a literary text helped their development of L2 language proficiency, in terms of vocabulary, expressions, and English reading ability.

Participants in the study could build their confidence simply by finishing a book-length reading. Compared to the short reading materials commonly used in the ESL classroom, such as newspapers, excerpts from textbooks, or fables, a 115-pages book is a long text. After completing reading the entire book, students reported a sense of achievement and confidence about their English proficiency in reading. Other studies have described how the experience of reading literature leads to a change in children's views of themselves as successful readers (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Samway, et al., 1991; Tse, 1996).

Literary discussion also helped students improve their English. As Bean (2001) pointed out, literary text provides a useful topic of discussion because of its theme which

is more general to people than academic articles or short essays. Book discussion was perceived by these students as a setting for speaking practice about a meaningful topic. When students were involved in reading, the subsequent discussion became more meaningful “real talk.” As Crawford and Hoopingarner (1993) emphasized, meaningful books can produce meaningful discussions, “power and thought provoking” (p. 272) text can enrich the discussion. Especially when the text is a literary text and students are reassured that there is no right answer to any question or one correct interpretation, students may feel more comfortable in participating in discussion.

Literary discussion also offered the students a chance to talk about their reading challenges. These ESL students were very well aware of their own reading abilities. They could compare their L2 reading with their L1 reading processes. In discussion with others, students shared their difficulties and strategies for these challenges. Discussing linguistic challenges may help students to overcome language barriers through more active reliance on other sources rather than only the text.

BOOK CHOICE

One of the most important aspects to consider when incorporating literary texts in language teaching is the selection of the text. As illustrated in Figure 5.3, literary discussion was under the strong influence of the reading experience. The choice of the text may be the influential factor deciding students’ reading engagement and literary discussion activity as well. As wide as the possibilities for selection of literary texts are,

much thought is necessary to achieve successful implementation of literature in the language classroom.

Based on the findings of the study, the following list of criteria is suggested to be considered in the selection of appropriate literary text for the ESL classroom.

Language difficulty of the book. The first thing to take into consideration in choosing books for language teaching is the language difficulty level of the text (Monson, 1995). The students in language classes have specific expectations about a class. They want to improve their language proficiency by attending the class. In the reading class, students aim to develop their reading proficiency, vocabulary, expressions, and speed of reading. They also want text challenging to their proficiency level yet giving them a feeling of pride and accomplishment.

The level of difficulty needs to be able to provide appropriate input challenges, which Krashen (1985, 1991) labeled *comprehensible input*. He claimed that literature is an effective material to provide students with reading materials at their language proficiency level and instructional goal.

As the variety of the literary texts is huge at different language difficulty levels, careful selection of text will lead to literature that can enhance students' language proficiency. When texts are carefully chosen, literature can successfully offer a model of input that seems "tailored to students' individual proficiency levels yet offers something new to stretch toward as well" (Hadaway, et al., 2002, p. 42).

In the process of book decision, reading several pages of the books may help a teacher or group of students in decision making. Instead of finding a book for which the students know the vocabulary or expressions, they will be able to decide on a book with a suitable amount of challenges, which will help their L2 language acquisition.

Teacher's involvement in the book selection process. Many studies (Gambrell, 1996) have emphasized the importance of allowing students to inform the choice of the books to be read. They have pointed out that letting students decide on the book they will read may reflect students' interests, motivate them, and increase learning responsibility and ownership.

However, this study did not find particular benefit from the voluntary book selection process implemented in the class. Whether the participants in this study had voted to read this novel or another, students expressed their preference for the book throughout the weeks, without showing any hint of the responsibility of their choice. Democratic book choice did not necessarily guarantee ownership of the learning and reading of the book in this context.

Several students suggested stronger involvement of the teacher in book decision. They commented that when voting for the book, they had only looked at the theme of the book explained on the Internet or on the back cover of the book, and at the number of pages. Some students mentioned their experiences in other reading classes where teachers decided on the text or proposed only a few selections from which students could choose. When a teacher is more familiar and experienced with a specific text, he or she can

anticipate students' reading process and the main points that may need to be brought out for each discussion sessions. Questions guiding each discussion can be provided in a more systematic manner. When the teachers have more control of reading activities section by section, more efficient preparation for instruction will be possible.

SUPPORTING BOOK READING AND DISCUSSION

As much as the book selection can influence the successful incorporation of literary texts in language classes, the attention to maintaining and supporting the book reading and discussion is necessary. Although the literary texts are known as motivating and inspiring reading material, one cannot simply throw books at students and expect them to read them on their own. Instead, a deeper understanding of the text and creative ideas to maintain book reading and discussion would be needed to accomplish the goal. In that sense, using literary texts may make the job of the teacher more demanding.

Most importantly, understanding the students' likely experience in reading would help teachers' preparation for the class. As Blau (2003) introduced, the literature workshop may serve as an effective approach to solving many of the classic instructional problems associated with teaching literature. When the teacher understands the students' reading of the literary texts, he or she can anticipate discussion focus, reading challenges, or enjoyment level and prepare class activities accordingly.

My study has the potential to contribute to an understanding of ESL students' reading experiences. As demonstrated in this study, during the early stages of reading a

novel, students activated personal experiences and previous knowledge about culture. Planning activities to help finding connections with the self and the world would help students to enter into the textual world especially at the beginning of the book. Also, textual analysis would make it easier for students to become familiar with the style and vocabulary of the text.

Once students become used to the language of the text and gradually build their understanding of the textual world, they may need more time to discuss the story and their critical responses to it. Because depth and interest level in discussion can vary chapter by chapter, time for the discussion activity may need to be adjusted flexibly. Especially in an ESL context, opportunities to talk are valuable to enhance speaking competence. Without reducing students' time to talk in literature discussion, additional whole class discussion to summarize interesting issues from the text would enrich students' interpretation of the text.

Implications for Research

Research implications of this study include suggestions for future studies with more focus on changes in the reading experiences of students across a longer period of time and response analysis with different texts.

Previous response research analyzing response categories seemed to fail in describing the changes in students' reading experiences over time. By contrast, my study observed literary responses across eight weeks and could thereby shed light on students'

response changes over time as they read the book. Considering the possibility that a class might use a bigger volume of books, examination of reading experiences over the long term would help teachers' understanding of students' reading and their preparation for the class.

In addition, further research may be needed to investigate reading of different text. As Crawford and Hoopingarner (1993) suggested, different literary genres and different literature will produce different categories of responses. Readers' responses chapter by chapter will be different also. More study with different genres and different texts would contribute to a deeper understanding of students' literary responses.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Post Discussion Survey

Name: _____

	Not at all		Half			All		Details
How much of the assigned reading did you finish for the discussion?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

How would you describe your feelings about reading and this small-group discussion in terms of:

	Not at all		Some			A Lot		Details
a. the degree of enjoyment with reading:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
b. the degree of involvement you felt during the discussion:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
c. the degree of enjoyment you experienced during the discussion:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
d. the degree to which you felt the discussion was useful to your learning:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Other comments:

Appendix B. Primary Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself:

- How long have you stayed and will stay?
- What are the purpose of this ESL training, and your future plan?
- What other classes are you taking?

2. Tell me about *The Great Gatsby* reading experience:

- Book choice

Probe: What's your preference for book choice? Which aspects you did or didn't like about The Great Gatsby?

- Reading difficulty

Probe: Was the speed of reading schedule was troublesome for you? How did you solve any understanding gap? How much reference did you use other than the book, if you used one?

- Reading stories and novels in English were helpful to your English proficiency?

Probe: How? In what aspects? How did you feel about reading literature in English learning classes?

- How do you evaluate the book, as a text for ESL class, or in general?
- Do you think you learned something from the story?

3. Tell me about the book discussion experience:

- How do you think about your participation in *The Great Gatsby* group discussion?
- How do you think about others' participation in the book discussion?

- How do you think about tasks assignment in book discussion? Which one did you prefer, discussion format with role assignments or later discussions without tasks assignment except discussion questions?
- Was there anything you felt that interrupted your enjoyment of book discussion?
- Was there any moment that you wanted to say something during discussion but couldn't? If yes, could you tell me the idea that you didn't say in discussion?
- Any changes after discussion to your original interpretation, questions, opinions or anything?

Probe: If yes, could you tell me more about it? What aspect of group discussion was helpful to your understanding of the text? Did you experience any changes in your understanding of the text during/after discussion? If yes, what was it?

- How different book discussion is compared to reading other kind of reading materials, such as newspaper, informational article, or textbook?
- What was most helpful when you read and discuss story other than others
- Do you think your discussion would be different if you use L1?
- Do you recognize you pattern in discussion and reading?

Probe: When you didn't read, you could not participate in discussion? Did group participation influence on your enjoyment in group discussion?

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Vita

Hyung-Hwa Chu was born in Wando, Korea, on January 9, 1972, daughter of Ok-Hyun Chu and Bok-Soon Kim. After completing her work at Joong-Ang High School, Kwang-Ju, Korea, in 1991, she entered Chonnam National University in Kwang-Ju (CNU). She received the degree of Bachelor and Master of Arts with a major in English Language and Literature from the same University. In 1998, she entered the doctoral program of English Literature and became a doctoral candidate in 2000. While she was in the graduate program, she worked in the English Education Department at CNU and Dong-shin University. August 2001, she entered the Foreign Language Education Program of Graduate School in the University of Texas at Austin. Her husband, Baek-Seung Lee, and she have two sons, Jae-Woo and Sang-Hoon.

Permanent address: 3366 Lake Austin Blvd. #C, Austin, TX, 78703

This dissertation was typed by Hyung-Hwa Chu.