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NEGOTIATING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE IN A SECOND LANGUAGE:
A CASE STUDY AND ANALYSIS

A Dissertation in Applied Linguistics
by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a case study and analysis of the use of academic discourse by four representative international students who studied in a U.S. university during the 2007-2008 academic year in a study abroad program. More specifically, the research investigates how students for whom English is a second or third language manage to negotiate the challenges of academic English during a study abroad experience at a U.S. university.

The study explores the particular challenges that study abroad students in the U.S. specifically, and second language speakers in general, face in the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The students in the study were enrolled in credited content classes for the duration of their study abroad program without the benefit of an English as a second language (ESL) class that would have assisted them in the process. The students had to address the demands of academic text and all typical academic requirements associated with university coursework. They had to negotiate academic literacy in a language other than their own.

The section on reading presents the challenge of drawing meaning from academic written text at the university level and the unexpected hurdles that emerge in the process, such as outside reading materials that do not adhere to textbook organization standards. The second language learners reported problems with both high-frequency and low-frequency vocabulary. They were perplexed by the use of familiar (e.g., informal, conversational) and metaphoric language in textbooks and frequent references to U.S.
The section on writing illustrates the demands placed on second language learners in writing for display and writing for learning. Writing a critical review, which entails the ability to draw information from the text, relate it to other sources of information, assume a stance, and develop a persuasive argument, also posed problems for these students. Additionally, incorporating cultural and historical references in written text was an unfamiliar process for them.

The section on listening and speaking covers the skills that were required of these ESL students in understanding and using spoken text. They were challenged with the spontaneity of oral/aural discourse. They had to follow the information presented in class lectures. They needed to interact with professors and classmates in the classroom. In addition, they were required to make academic oral presentations in front of a class.

The findings of this dissertation illustrate that a TOEFL score is not an adequate indication of guaranteed success in the academic setting of a U.S. university. Second language learners face many unanticipated challenges for which their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in their home institutions did not prepare them.

I hope that this dissertation will inspire further studies on the challenges of ESL students in U.S. universities so that we can provide a positive environment for their experience. The success of international educational exchanges derives from positive experiences of students in learning, sharing, and interacting within the cross-cultural academic environment of a U.S. university.
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When I first decided to take a sabbatical from my position at a small college, my plan was to learn more about the field of linguistics, an area that had always interested me. A Ph.D. was not even in my line of vision. Once I started on the path, I caught the bug, and the dream of completing the program and earning a doctorate degree in Applied Linguistics become a glimmer. The final realization of the dream, however, would never have been possible without the help and support of the wonderful people in my life.

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*I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my Aunt Grace and my father*
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Focus of the study

This dissertation is a case study and analysis of the use of academic discourse by four representative international students who studied in a U.S. university during the 2007-2008 academic year. These study abroad students, two of whom came from Korea, one from Japan, and one from Brazil, studied for one or two semesters at a private university in the Northeast U.S. This study explores the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking that were particularly challenging for the students.

Having attained the requisite score on TOEFL, these ESL students were deemed qualified to undertake the rigors of academic discourse in their second language. One of the underlying questions of this study is whether the TOEFL score ensures that the ESL students have attained the level of proficiency that is fundamental to the task of negotiating the specific challenges of negotiating academic discourse that they encounter in the university environment. Literacy is a prerequisite for success in the academic classroom. Literacy extends beyond the ability to read and write text and assumes the ability to go beneath the surface representations of language and be able to analyze and question text, draw information from intertextual sources, and express an opinion on the material (Goody 1977, Havelock 1963, Luria 1976, Ong 1958, Street 1984, 1993, 2001, Kress 1989, 1997, among others).
The study follows the four students through their experience in the University. Each student maintained a journal of impressions, kept records of their course work, and allowed access to their classes and professors.

All four participants in the study had to contend with maintaining a continual balance between content information and language skills in order to convert the new text into new knowledge. In order to maintain the balance, the students faced problems. Language problems included a rhetorical style that differed from that of their first language. Students said that they had to think the ‘English way’ in order to write the ‘English way.’ The student from Japan had to adjust to inanimate objects serving as subjects, a situation which did not exist in her language. They had to contend with unknown vocabulary and time constraints of too much to handle in a limited amount of time.

Linguistic issues, such as long sentences interspersed with unknown vocabulary, taxed their working memory. In addition, textbooks and class lectures contained references to cultural points that they did not understand. One of the two students from Korea missed the reference to ‘the tech bubble’ in a reading assignment.

When completing a writing assignment, the students had difficulty expressing themselves when they did not have the precise words that they needed. They were frustrated with the inability to label an existing concept in order to communicate it well. One student said that she had much to say, but she felt restricted having to say it in English.

Speaking in front of American classmates caused anxiety for the ESL students. One student related a situation in which he could not think of the word that he needed to
complete his thought, and he worried that his classmates would dismiss him as inferior because of that. Another student was concerned that the American students in her class would not understand her.

The analysis of the study is categorized by the specific language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Several topics, such as new vocabulary and cultural references, cross over these artificial boundaries and appear more than once.

1.2 Organization of the study

This dissertation is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 presents an overview of previous research on the topics that relate to this study. The chapter is organized according to the particular issues that are addressed. The topic of study abroad is included as a background for the types of experiences that are typical for university students who choose to study in a country other than their own. The subject of literacy and how its perception has evolved in the literature is addressed as a basis for understanding the challenge of adjusting to academic discourse in a second language. Academic text and textbooks are introduced to the reading challenge for second language learners. Finally, language proficiency is addressed as well as the individual skills that reading, writing, listening, and speaking invoke.

Chapter 3 presents the data and methodology of this dissertation. The chapter introduces the participants of the study, their background, their courses of study, their purpose for coming to the U.S. to study. The chapter also presents the first and second types of data sets that were used for the study. The first type includes journal entries, informal interviews, course syllabi, sample assignments, sample textbooks and reading
assignments, written papers, tests and quizzes, and written commentary from the
instructors. The second type includes informal interviews with course instructors and
classroom observations. Finally, the chapter addresses the organization of findings, that
is, the analytic chapters follow the areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking.
Vocabulary and cultural points are addressed within each of the analytic chapters.

Chapter 4 explores the area of reading and the challenges it implies for academic
literacy. It reviews strategies that the students employed. It examines textbooks and
other reading materials for particular problems that they may pose for the ESL students.
In addition, syntactic issues in text are reviewed as well as new vocabulary and cultural
and background references as they pose problems for the students.

Chapter 5 reviews writing and its inherent difficulties for second language
learners. It addresses how language skills, time constraints, and unknown vocabulary
affect the writing capabilities of the students. Strategies for writing, including ways to
approach the writing process, are explored. Types of writing, that is, writing for display
and writing for learning, are reviewed according to the individual problems they posed
for the students. How the students approached the task of writing a critical review is
addressed as well as informal writing, linguistic issues, cultural influences, differing
rhetorical styles across languages, and background and how they affect the writing
process of second language learners.

Chapter 6 explores the challenges related to listening and speaking in academic
discourse. The class lecture is reviewed for content, linguistic issues, accompanying
graphics, and background and cultural references. The use of familiar language is also
reviewed as an obstacle for understanding the content of the lecture. The challenge of
speaking in class in front of American classmates and all its implications is also addressed.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

International students who choose to study in the United States for one or two semesters in a study abroad program face significant challenges. They need to navigate their way through a new educational system which can differ widely from their own. They need to adapt to academic discourse in an English speaking university setting when English is not their first language. And, since they enter the university as upper classmen without the benefit of a gradual adjustment period as other international students experience, they need to adapt quickly. The purpose of this chapter is to explore these challenges and to better understand if and how these students manage to survive and succeed.

In order to be eligible to study abroad, students must be recommended by their home university as academically and emotionally capable. Additionally, for those who study in the U.S., their English language skills must meet a predetermined proficiency level, equivalent to that of other full-time international students. Thus the study abroad students in the U.S. come with a proven academic record and adequate English language skills. It puzzles universities authorities, therefore, why some of these students do not excel.

In the sections that follow I will provide a general background on study abroad, challenges for a study abroad experience in the U.S., and what is necessary for ESL students to meet the challenges. In Section 2.2 I will discuss study abroad, its benefits
and limitations. Section 2.3 centers on theories of literacy and academic literacy. In section 2.4 I address academic text and, in particular, the classroom textbook. In Section 2.5 I present the challenges of studying in a second language. In Section 2.6 I focus on language proficiency and the skills necessary to meet the challenges. Finally, Section 2.7 presents a look at the study abroad experience in the US from a student’s perspective.

2.2 Study Abroad

Study abroad has long been a source of language enhancement and real-life exposure to the culture of the target language. Many foreign language majors in U.S. universities are encouraged to spend a semester or year abroad to complement their language studies and to expand their understanding of the country and the people who speak the language. Although most of these students set out with high expectations and enthusiasm, the outcomes of the experience can vary greatly. Kline (1993) summarizes, “As visitors for a ten-month period, coping with the academic demands of a college year, students cannot realistically be expected to develop the knowledge, familiarity, and linguistic skill to which brochures allude.” (p. 67) The experience can be more demanding than ever expected.

Much of the research on study abroad has focused on language acquisition and how in context compares to in home institution. Kinginger (2007) noted that the main focus on study abroad research had typically been limited to the cognitive area of second language acquisition, but more recently, studies have begun to look at the social and policy-related issues in study abroad. Kline (1998), for example, looked at the effects of interaction with native speakers compared to just reading and the students’ grasp of the
role of sociolinguistics and pragmatics in the language. Also attending to pragmatics acquisition in language study, Kinginger and Belz (2005) considered the effects of intercultural social opportunities in both telecollaboration and residence abroad settings on the acquisition of contextually appropriate uses of language, in particular the formal and informal forms for ‘you’ in German and French.

In a broad review of studies on linguistic benefits of study abroad, Freed (1998) reported on a majority of findings that centered on increased confidence in speaking and improved communicative strategies. Collentine and Freed (2004) noted, however, that the review of such study abroad research was limited in scope because its main focus was on test scores, oral proficiency ratings, and data comparing at home vs. study abroad language classes. Collentine and Freed’s review instead centered on the influence of context of learning; nevertheless, they also narrowed their focus to linguistic gains in the end. Taillefer (2005), on the other hand, conceded to other variables, such as, linguistic interdependence, linguistic threshold, or contrastive rhetoric when she could not definitively determine whether foreign language (FL) reading skills transferred across cultures. This was the point of a study that looked at the effect of academic literacy and sociolinguistic background on reading skills and strategies. Because of her results, Taillefer thus recommended exploring both sides of the study abroad exchange, the home as well as the host cultures’ emphasis on reading and writing for academic success and the necessity to prepare students for classroom expectations in the host institution.

In her study, Kline (1998) emphasized the culture-specific academic context of literacy and the importance of understanding the nature of student literacy in both first language (L1) and second language (L2). Kline focused on literacy rather than reading
so as to include identity and context and saw the need to link cognitive, pedagogical, and linguistic domains of the experience with literacy in order to best understand the study abroad experience. She also promoted the idea of including perspectives of participants, such as their attitudes toward reading and writing, in order to broaden the scope of the findings.

Generally, research in the area of study abroad has examined how American students in Europe, Latin America, or other countries outside the U.S., use the target language and interact with the native speakers and the linguistic benefits or lack thereof from assimilation into the target culture (Kline 1998, Collentine and Freed 2004, Taillefer 2005, among others). Little attention has been paid, however, to the capability of the study abroad student to assume a role as a member of the student body of the host institution.

This study addresses a group of students from outside the U.S. who chose to study at a private university in the Northeast, hereafter referred to as the University. As study abroad exchange students, they are expected to assume roles as matriculated members of the student body. They register as full-time students and choose their classes according to their major area of study or courses that interest them. All of their courses are conducted in English, and they are in class with full-time American students whose first language is English. A salient distinction between study abroad programs where American students travel to countries outside the U.S. and this particular study abroad program here in the U.S. is that the students in this U.S. university are not offered language classes to support unexpected language issues. These participants face academic challenges in a new environment in a second language. They are expected to
function competently in the academic discourse. They are not here to study the language. Despite their documented academic skills and English proficiency, they face a challenge in adapting to the academic literacy of the host academic environment and meeting all the requirements expectations therewith. In the next section I explore the area of literacy and how it has been viewed in recent research in order to begin to determine the nature of the challenge these students face.

2.3 Literacy and Academic literacy

Literacy, long thought to be merely a mechanical skill or a means of extracting meaning from text (Goody and Watt 1968; Ong 1982), has been reexamined at length to demonstrate that this conception is inadequate (Lankshear and Snyder 2000; Street 1984, 1993, 2001; Kress 1989, 1997, 2000; Geisler 1994; among others). According to Lankshear and Snyder (2000), the traditional idea of literacy concerned the ability to figure out the code of the text by making use of appropriate skills, such as word-formation, grammar, and phonics. According to this traditional view of literacy, one would need to develop these skills to find the meaning in the text and then use this ability to pursue other goals (Goody 1977, Havelock 1963, Luria 1976, Ong 1958). In describing their view of traditional literacy, Ruddell and Unrau (2004) also referred to a linguistically-based model which encompasses orthographic, phonological, syntactical, and lexical knowledge.

Street (2001) reiterated the belief that literacy is no longer viewed as the grammar, lexicon and semantics of language, and asserted that we now have a broader range of semiotic systems that cut across reading, writing, and speech. Likewise, Kress
found a shortcoming in the idea that meaning usually refers to meaning in language, since this interpretation neglects the semiotic potentials of other modes and their role in cognition, representation, and communication. “…if language is no longer the only or even the central semiotic mode, then theories of language can at best offer explanations for one part of the communicational landscape only.” (ibid. p.153)

Lankshear and Snyder (2000) also renounced the basic ‘functional literacy’ (the ‘how-to’) in favor of a more complex process composed of three dimensions. The first, the operational, acknowledges that literacy uses language as its medium, so readers must have the competence to handle the written language system, to operate the system. The second, the cultural, deals with the ability to understand texts in relation to context and how the text functions in social practice. The third, the critical, addresses the idea that all social practices and, therefore, literacies are socially constructed.

Street (2001) promoted the idea that text is not neutral or autonomous, but instead embedded with cultural and ideological assumptions and that literacy can no longer be viewed as merely ‘technical skills’ provided to the ‘illiterate,’ (as in the ‘autonomous model’). Street’s (1984) approach to the discussion is based on his definition of literacy as the “social practices and conceptions of reading and writing.” Street criticized the ‘autonomous’ model of literacy which, he pointed out, ignores the social and cognitive processes involved in reading. His alternative ‘ideological model’ encompassed the social practices of reading and writing and complemented his belief that literacy incorporates a world view with an intention of spreading this view to its readers and that the social and cultural influences are what give meaning to the event.
Freire and Macedo (1987) reinforced the idea that literacy is not only reading and writing words but also understanding the relationship between the words and worlds:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world.....In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process.  (Freire and Macedo 1987: 35)

Kress (1997) also took the stand that literacy is a social and cultural phenomenon since writing and speaking happen in a social context and the characteristics of this social context shape how we use language. The New London Group (2000) followed this perspective and maintained that “…human knowledge is embedded in social, cultural and material contexts.” (p. 30).

Kramsch (1997) exemplified the existence of inherent social behavior and cultural knowledge in text in her illustration of how people can come away from an identical text, in this case, an ad for the fashionable department store, Bon Marché Rive Gauche, in a French publication, with differing interpretations. The Kramsch study took place in 1993 in Leipzig where language teachers from France, Germany, and the U.S were gathered together at a foreign language teaching seminar to discuss practical teaching methods. A French participant suggested that the German and American teachers of French use an advertisement for a French department store in their classrooms to demonstrate how historical myth and reality, i.e., equality and inequality, co-exist in France today. The ad included a picture of an aristocratic-looking woman holding a credit card and a caption below that read:

*Rive Gauche, il existe encore des privilèges que nul ne souhaite abolir.*
(On the Left Bank, there are still some privileges that no one wants to abolish)
The advertisement contained reference to the 1789 French Revolution and the ‘abolition’ of birthrights, repeatedly mentioned in textbooks as ‘l’abolition des privilèges,’ and to the Left Bank of the River Seine, which conjures up historical memory of May 1968 and the demonstrations for social justice. In the ad, birth privileges and civil rights are replaced by the prerogative of the credit card.

The Americans and Germans, however, did not make use of the French historical references to understand the message, and instead, interpreted the ad according to their own individual cultural understanding and worldviews. For the Americans, ‘privilège’ referred to one’s line of credit and membership in a community of consumers with no connection to birth rights. The Germans, on the other hand, interpreted ‘privilège’ from a performance-oriented context of equal-opportunity where one is entitled to reward based on merit or service, not birth or money. Kramsch found the different interpretations to be indicative of how people position themselves according to their worldviews and, in this case, to their respective definitions of privilege, right, and prerogative.

The representation of an interdependent nature of the social and individual aspects of language with each part depending on the other in a dynamic relationship was also addressed by Rodby (1992). Rodby saw literacy to be dynamics, not substances, wherein the individual is continually merging with the social. “Literacy practices are constructed of contexts. There is no boundary between literacy and context….Literacy is a contingent structure in reciprocal relations with its parts.” (Rodby, 1992; p. 56)

Gee (1998) presented a theory of literacy as the ability to function in a secondary use of language. Academic discourse, apart from familiar at-home discourse, is an example of a secondary use of language. Gee advised of possible conflict in mastering
secondary discourses because of the conflict with one’s primary discourse which can result in one’s being ‘non-mainstream.’ (p. 58). Gee (2008) claimed that one masters a discourse through enculturation and apprenticeship in the social practices in the community, not by way of learning rules.

Academic discourse and related social practices of the university community include reading and discussing the text, attending lectures, writing reviews, giving oral presentations, among other activities that follow characteristic conventions that are not rule-governed but instead require a type of enculturation or socialization process for all its members. The student is required to adhere to the conventions in order to pass through and needs to acquire the necessary skills to do so. According to Kress (2000), understanding and gaining control over the representational system and what it can do requires an ability to adapt to the requisite skills for each task at hand. “Every aspect of education is about transmission of a society’s culture in its verbal form so that a thorough understanding of texts, their constitution, construction and effects is entirely essential.” (Kress 1989: p. 5)

Kern (2000) posited that the acquisition of literacy requires a type of “socialization or acculturation into the particular conventions of creating and interacting with texts that characterize a particular discourse community.” (p. 35) According to the New London Group (2000), in order to succeed in education, students need to understand academic genre and its respective discourse, referred to as “a construction of some aspect of reality from a particular point of view, a particular angle, in terms of particular interests” (p. 25).
Lea and Street (1998) summarized ‘academic literacy practices’ as the process by which a student acquires new areas of knowledge by way of the contextual and cultural component inherent in reading and writing practices. Kern (2000) stated that literacy encompasses reading and writing but in context-specific situations to fulfill specific purposes. Literacy for Kern is “…. about the creation and interpretation of meaning through texts, not just the ability to inscribe and decode written language.” (p. 23).

In today’s world, university students must be able to draw meaning from integrated, multimodal texts that, according to Kress (2000), call for a revised theory of literacy that addresses the changes in use, form, and system. Kress believed that the conventional theories of literacy no longer suffice to describe the current situation. Lankshear and Snyder (2000) advised that today’s students need to decode and encode, research and report, and collect information in ways compatible with new technologies and media, since new ways of collecting and transmitting information accompany new modes of communication. In current times, Braine (2002) proposed, success in the academic community also requires students to build interactive relationships with instructors and peers and to adapt to the linguistic and social milieu and academic culture, because coursework cannot be limited to reading textbooks and writing assignments.

Academic discourse, what Gee (1998) referred to as a “secondary use of language,” i.e., discourse beyond the primary discourse, is the system in which students need to operate. This secondary use of language, according to Gee, extends beyond academic discourse in one’s home university, and academic discourse in another culture is an additional use of language.
In recent history, literacy theory and interpretation of literacy have evolved from the autonomous model to the social model. The shift implicates the way academic literacy and its role in the university are regarded. In the next section, I will explore the area of academic text and, specifically, the classroom textbook as a tangible example of academic text and why it might pose a problem for study abroad students.

2.4 Academic Text and Textbooks / strategies

Historically, according to Geisler (1994), the “cultural ideal of the autonomous text” (p. 4) continually promoted the idea that the text independently of context would impart the same meaning to all. If the meaning resides in the text, then everyone would come away with the same meaning, and standard principles would be communicated with consistency through text. This ideal notion that text can be neutral in its message, however, contradicts the idea that text carries meaning embedded within a context. Academic text is not autonomous with its meaning residing in the text, and instead is better categorized as contextually embedded (Street 2001; Kress 1997; Geisler 1994). Examples of contextually embedded text in academic discourse abound on the U.S. college campus: the professor’s lecture with implicit reference to historical or cultural events, classroom protocols, the professional journal article, the term paper, and the textbook with subtle and obvious cultural references.

The college textbook is a tangible artifact that can exemplify the contextually-embedded nature of academic text even though, as Geisler (1994) noted, the image of the ideal autonomous text still prevails in schools today, and teachers regularly treat the textbook as the autonomous source of information and encourage students to do so.
Geisler countered, “Despite their apparent autonomy from context, the content of contemporary textbooks is determined through a complicated interaction of commercial, public, and scholarly interests.” (p. 33)

In order for students to begin to recognize the context-embedded nature of the textbook and understand how to use it to their advantage, they need first to observe its make-up and delivery system. The New London Group (2000) recommended that students learn to identify and explain features of texts and the structures by which information is delivered and be able to distinguish textual differences and relate them to context.

According to Koda (2005), the academic textbook exhibits a distinct style of delivery, i.e., a non-narrative or expository text. Koda noted that its expository format differs from that of narrative text, in that whereas narrative text supposes a shared knowledge between author and reader in order to tell a story, expository text presents information with the intention of bringing about new insights, new information. In their study of 9th grade students’ use of the ‘structure strategy,’ Meyer, Brandt, and Bluth (1980) suggested that students be made aware of academic expository structure since it has a unique text organization that is important for understanding the message. Students need to be able to recognize what the author does to deliver her message to the reader. Eskey (2005) claimed that understanding the way text is typically organized will help the reader comprehend the texts because it is a part of what they need to know to read. Once the reader begins to understand organization of text, she can develop metacognitive strategies that allow her to self monitor and self-correct as well as to access relevant schemata in order to aid the process (Ruddell and Unrau 2006).
The challenge in recognizing text organization, according to Parry (1991), is that it differs from one type of textbook to another. Parry found the variation to be a defining factor in a comparison of students’ reading ability. As she pointed out, some texts put a greater emphasis on theory without much attention on presenting factual information in a systematic way. Recognizing the author’s method of delivery and way of structuring the text is important for the student.

Koda (2005) defined text structure as the means in which significant elements are given prominence in the text in order to draw attention to them and how they are connected to lesser important text segments in a detectable way. Koda distinguished microstructure – dealing with surface form – from macrostructure – overall text organization, an understanding of the relationship among elements presented. Meyer, Brandt, and Gluth (1980) identified these interrelationships at the superordinate level as rhetorical relationships, e.g., comparison, causal, description, collection, and problem/solution, that subsume and combine the information into a comprehensible whole. Similar to the Meyer et al. paradigm, Aebersold and Field (1997) presented the organizational pattern of argument where the author presents a claim in the first sentence followed by support for the claim with the option of citing an expert in the field to support her argument.

The rhetorical style and contextual factors that science-text authors use was singled out by Geisler (1994). Although the style appears authoritative, Geisler claimed, it is not an example of the assumed autonomous model. She explained that since context-bound laboratory data must be presented as a scientific object removed from the everyday, this type of text needs to remove itself from context in order to appear
authoritative. To do this, authors make use of metadiscourse when presenting claims in order to convey certainty, attitude, or involvement with the reader, using expressions like “undoubtedly,” “apparently,” and “it may appear that.” (ibid. p. 11)

In addition to being made aware of this type of metadiscourse in science text, Ruddell and Unrau (2006) suggested, readers should develop a mental schemata for understanding textual patterns which would enhance their text-processing strategies. According to Ruddell and Unrau, an understanding of inherent patterns helps the reader develop top-down processing that, in turn, aids in constructing meaning, a trait that distinguishes good from poor readers. In addition, they projected, a good reader uses text structure to facilitate recalling information from the text.

In a study conducted with 9th grade students, Meyer, Brandt, and Gluth (1980) found that when students are aware of top-level structures in well-organized text, they will use the same top-level structures in recall. In addition, the Meyer et al. study produced evidence that being made awareness of these cues (‘signaling’) affects processing depth and ease of retrieval. The retrieval follows the same order as that of the text and begins with top-level structure.

In a similar study, Meyer and Poon (2004) again attributed signaling explicit semantic and organizational cues of the structure relations in a text to the ability to draw a reader’s attention to the interrelationship of ideas and their relative significance to the text, e.g., “as a result” for causation. Results of the Meyer and Poon study strongly suggested that reading with structure strategy is even more effective than just signaling (being aware of text structures and semantic cues). The ability to identify and use text structure to their advantage appears to help readers with recall, the ability to determine
the important points in the text, finding the gist of the text, and understanding top-level structure. Additionally significant is that participants who previously relied on an ineffective listing strategy for recall successfully switched to the more effective structure strategy.

The Haas and Flower (1988) study also found that experienced readers make use of what Haas refers to as “rhetorical reading,” i.e., a reliance on a rhetorical context in which they can interpret the author’s intent, the context of the text, and the ultimate effect on the reader. The results of the study support the belief that a good reader must go beyond just finding the gist of a text in order to be capable of analysis.

Grabe (1991) promoted the idea that formal discourse structural knowledge, i.e., understanding how text is organized, influences comprehension, but added that organizational structure of text can differ across languages and the difference can affect recall in the L2 (if familiar or not to the reader).

Academic textbook structure and organization is a challenge that can become a strategy for ESL students. Once they begin to recognize the patterns, they can use the information to better access the text. I will now begin to unfold what specifically challenges the ESL student in reading text and functioning in all the aspects that academic literacy implies. Gee’s (1998) description of this type of “secondary use of language” included reference to an extension beyond academic discourse in one’s home university and academic discourse in another culture as an additional use of language. The ESL students need to adapt to the academic discourse in another culture, i.e., the additional use of language that they encounter in the U.S. academic environment along with an understanding of its inherent social practices.
2.5 Studying in a Second Language / challenges

Reading skills mean nothing without an authentic context of social practice, and ESL students can be at a disadvantage when reading textbooks in their second language if they lack the social practices of text structure and delivery style. As Lankshear and Snyder (2000) stated, literacy entails language, but also meaning and context. Literacy extends beyond the ability to decode the language in a text.

A study conducted by Carrell (1984a) looked at the influence of rhetorical organization of narrative text on comprehension and showed that English as a second language students had a more difficult time with recall of stories that violate the prescribed story structure – one that does not conform to the structure that the students expected. Another Carrell study (1984b) showed evidence that ability to use the text’s rhetorical organization to their advantage helped the ESL reader with encoding, retention, and retrieval of the information.

Carrell (1992) reinforced the benefit of structural pattern awareness and the ability to identify the structural patterns used by writers to organize text and furthered the assertion that if readers use a structure strategy when reading, they will recall more of the information afterwards. Carrell’s study found that participants were able to recall more top-level ideas from compare/contrast format than from descriptive passages most likely because of the predictability in the format.

Short (1997) saw the history text and its format as a potential problem for the English language learner. Because of the few transition indicators and often misleading headings in history text, it can be difficult for the student to follow connections of information from one paragraph to another. New vocabulary may not be addressed
adequately, and, according to Short, also problematic is the dense presentation of material that history text is noted for.

The skills related to argumentation are what Pally (2001) emphasized as a major requirement for college-bound ESL students. What complicates the challenge for the English language learner, Pally noted, is that argumentation and rhetorical conventions are not the same across languages. English non-fiction, for example, often uses a thesis-and-support structure, whereas many other languages and cultures do not. She claimed that if students were not able to follow the claims and proofs presented in text, they would not be able to question the text nor synthesize information derived from various sources, requisite skills for academic discourse. Grabe (1991) pointed out that L2 readers from cultures that do not question the text, the idea of truth in the text, may experience difficulty in challenging the text as an academic activity.

Although implicit expectations and reference to context and cultural implications may not be obviously apparent, academic text is contextually-embedded and understanding presupposes a cultural background of the reader (Papai 2000). The prevalence of the contextually-embedded text can pose a challenge for ESL students in U.S. university setting with English as its medium of instruction. What implicates the ESL reader, according to Wallace (1995), is that they are not part of the ideological presumptions in the text. The gaps in text, i.e., what is omitted, are the presumed, shared ideology of the interlocutors. If readers do not pull the meaning from the text (comprehension), they must construct interpretations. Eskey (2005) suggested that understanding L2 social practices is a part of reading in L2 since a writer typically assumes an audience with similar cultural background, knowledge base and value system.
Likewise, Rodby (1992) asserted that reading is not a neutral activity and that ideology informs meaning.

ESL university students who cannot recognize U.S. cultural norms and values inherent in the class textbook risk frustration or confusion, since these values and beliefs of the institution are an integral part of academic literacy, and the textbook is an integral part of the academic experience.

To illustrate inherent cultural references that occur in academic textbooks, I examined one textbook used at the University where the study abroad students of my study were enrolled. The college textbook *Contemporary Management* (Jones and George, 2003), often used for beginning level management courses, makes the assumption that their readership is part of a shared understanding of the cultural references. One prominent example of this practice is the inclusion of implied American ideologies from the U.S. business philosophy. In the beginning of Chapter One (p. 3) Jones and George present an example of the ‘rags to riches’ American ideal in which the regular guy, Bob Pitman, rises to a position of power, manager of the AOL-Time Warner merger. This Horatio Alger-type story is part of the American dream, but not necessarily a clear reference for international students. Additional cultural references in the textbook (see Table 2.1) include terms that students from cultures outside the U.S. may not be familiar with if there are no charitable organizations in their home culture terms, ‘for-profit’ vs. ‘not-for-profit’ and ‘charitable.’ Additionally, ‘Your local McDonald’s restaurant’ may connote an entirely different meaning to the international student. Whereas ‘McDonald’s’ congers up a ubiquitous fast-food chain for the native American English speaker, to the English language learner it may represent a symbol of U.S. pop
culture and the accompanying intrigue. Likewise, ‘Wal-Mart’ may just represent an image from movies, and the idea of a ‘part-time job’ may not exist in some cultures. The ‘burgers, fries, and shakes’ shortened forms do not have much meaning for those who do not recognize such lunch items as common if they reside in a rural area where there is no McDonald’s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1 Cultural references</th>
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<td>Moreover, salaries increase rapidly as people move up the organizational hierarchy whether it be a school system, a larger for-profit business organization, or a not-for-profit charitable or medical institution. (p. 7) Do you see someone who, like Bob Pittman, can determine the future prosperity of a large for-profit company? Or do you see the administrator of a not-for-profit organization such as a school, library, or charity, or the person in charge of your local McDonald’s restaurant or Wal-Mart store, or the person you answer to if you have a part-time job. (p. 5) Likewise, the principal goal of each McDonald’s restaurant manager is to produce burgers, fries, and shakes that people want to pay for and eat. (p. 5)</td>
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The use of figurative language is common in *Contemporary Management*, (see Table 2.2). Troublesome for an ESL student might be the use of ‘staggering’ in the discussion of stock options, since its dictionary definition typically relates to a manner of walking, and the use of ‘stiff’ with an actual definition relating to form, as a modifier for the noun ‘competition.’ This familiar language is not the type of English that an ESL student typically encounters in an ESL class, nor is it the formal language they expect to find in a textbook.

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<th>Table 2.2 Figurative language</th>
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<td>However, even more staggering is the fact that most top executives also receive stock or shares in the company they manage and stock options that give them the right to sell these shares at a certain time in the future. (p. 7) Stiff competition for resources from organizations both at home and abroad has put increased pressure on all managers to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and organizational performance. (pp. 14-15)</td>
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As indicated in this section, negotiating the discourse can not be presumed to be a direct result of language proficiency. Spack (1997) asserted that although it is assumed that ESL students arrive with L1 and L2 literacy because of their documented language proficiency levels, we should expect gaps in their stages of preparation. Spack added that the type of literacy instruction that they experienced before being admitted to college may not adequately prepare them for the academic demands that they face at the university level.

In the next section, I will address the topic of adequate language proficiency as a key factor for success in academic literacy and how language proficiency relates to proficiency in language skills.

2.6 ESL Language Proficiency and Skills

Underlying the understanding of text and meaning is the presumption of an adequate understanding of the language. Navigating academic discourse presumes proficiency, and academic tasks require an adept knowledge of all four skills of language, i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In a country where English is the medium of instruction, students read textbooks, write term papers, listen to lectures, and make presentations in class, among other tasks, all in English. What language proficiency is, what it encompasses, and how one acquires it need to be addressed in order to truly understand the challenge the study abroad student faces.

Language proficiency is a difficult-to-define construct. Segalowitz (1997) compiled a perspective of the second language learner by drawing from three disciplines that address questions in second language acquisition, i.e., second language acquisition
(SLA), cognition, and neuropsychology. The Segalowitz findings portray the learner as needing skills to recall linguistic information while attending to various stimuli carrying significant pieces of communicative information. This complex activity happens in a fluid and changing communicative situation where “successful negotiation within this environment requires an ability to perceive and use its affordances.” (p. 107). Segalowitz posited that this learner is indeed “situated in a complex, dynamic, communicative environment that imposes many different kinds of cognitive demands.” (p. 107). In the present study, the communicative environment with its imposing simultaneous linguistic and cognitive demands is academic discourse. In the next section I will address proficiency in L2 reading.

2.6.1 Proficiency in Reading

Clark’s (1980) “short-circuit’ hypothesis, later referred to as the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis, claimed that if a reader has limited proficiency in the target language, the reader will resort to poor reading strategies. The validity of this hypothesis was further researched by Bernhardt and Kamil (1995) in a study that explored the interrelationship between the Linguistic Threshold hypothesis and the Linguistic Interdependence hypothesis (reading skills acquired in L1 are available for reading in L2) and concluded that language proficiency is a more reliable predictor of reading ability in the L2. Lee and Schallert (1997) again questioned the contribution of L2 proficiency to L2 reading comprehension along with how L2 proficiency correlates with L1 and L2 reading ability. The Lee and Schallert results suggested the importance of building L2 linguistic factors as well as knowledge and experience, skills and strategies, background experiences and knowledge in advance of their being expected to read difficult text.
As for proficiency and transference of L1 reading skills to the L2 reading task, as addressed in the Linguistic Interdependence hypothesis, Koda (2005) pointed out cross-linguistic implications to be considered, such as, how different are the L1 and L2 rhetorical structures and how proficient in L2 is the reader to utilize L2 text-structure information. The wider the distance between L1 and L2 rhetorical structure, Koda asserted, the more proficient an L2 reader needs to be.

In order to become proficient readers, Aebersold and Field (1997) advised, English language learners need a manageable progression framework. Aebersold and Field observed that low-level ESL readers reading text written within their proficiency range understand enough to get a general sense of the message. On the other hand, they contended, ESL students struggle with text that is written beyond their proficiency range. In particular, new vocabulary and long, complex sentence structure can compromise the reading process and their level of motivation as well.

A less than proficient reader can become stuck in bottom-up processing, according to O’Malley and Chamot (1990), who observed that less proficient second language readers spend much more time processing function words (not necessary for meaning) whereas more proficient and native readers focus on meaning-based aspects of text. In addition, O’Malley and Chamot found that less proficient readers tend to focus more on the form – both meaning and structure - whereas native readers process syntactic points automatically. Koda (2005) concurred that L2 readers with low language proficiency depend on word-by-word reading tactics, and awareness of the text structure may not affect their efficiency of reading. Koda believed that L2 readers must achieve lower-level processing efficiency before they can focus attention on text structure.
Proficient readers, offered Grabe (1991), do not rely on the text as much as less proficient readers do to understand the message. Instead, they make efficient use of background knowledge and then rely on text to confirm and predict the information.

Another challenge for ESL readers, considered by Meyer, Brandt, and Gluth (1980), is that working memory of ESL readers is more heavily challenged than that of L1 readers because items such as problems and causes from the text are kept in short-term memory with repeated retrieval from long-term storage.

Grabe (1991) summarized general component skills and knowledge areas of L2 reading that reflect a consensus of reading research. Along with areas like vocabulary, syntax, automatic word recognition skills, formal discourse structure knowledge, content/world background knowledge, synthesis and evaluation skills / strategies, Grabe highlighted metacognitive knowledge, which he described as the ability to recognize the important information in the text and to use context to sort out misunderstanding; to preview headings, pictures, and summaries; to use search strategies for finding specific information; to formulate questions about the information, take notes, underline, and summarize information. As Kern (2000) suggested, “Reading for ‘meaning’ means going beyond the facts referred to in a text and probing the implications and significance of those facts.” (p. 20)

Leki (2001) asserted that once second language learners reach an adequate level of language proficiency, they can then begin to apply higher-order thinking skills like synthesis and evaluation and metacognitive knowledge to their L2 language skills. However, since text exposure in the ESL classroom is usually limited to the context-embedded and cognitively undemanding ESL text, these students do not reliably develop
these skills and strategies in the language classroom (Cummins 1992). Having been language trained in such a classroom, the study abroad students now find themselves in classes with context-reduced text that is cognitively demanding, and they need to perform higher-order thinking skills to succeed. The academic type of text is more demanding, according to the Cummins (1992) context-embedded/context-reduced and cognitively-demanding/cognitively-undemanding paradigm, since when a task is performed in a context-reduced situation, such as reading academic text or even following a discussion in a content classroom, there is little support for meaning and consequently is more cognitively demanding.

Of utmost priority in meeting the challenge of academic discourse is the ability to use the language to make meaning. Zamel (1995) claimed that language “evolves in and responds to the context of saying something meaningful, that language and meaning are reciprocal and give rise to one another” (p. 509). In the U.S. university environment, students need to respond to the communicative stimuli in written text and speech with an understanding of the inherent meaning and must be able to express themselves and their meaning in written text and speech just as well. Constructing meaning, according to Eskey (2005), requires that readers already know something about the topic and can relate the new information to what they already know. Accurate decoding is not enough to understand the text. Leki (1992) related this to readers’ schemata and states that the better the match between the reader’s schemata and that of the text, the better the reader will process the text.

Since background information and social practices play a significant role in the reading process, Spack (1998) suggested that students learn how to build a frame of
reference when they are not familiar with the topic and learn how to question the text. In order to understand an author’s style and purpose, Spack advised that students know how to summarize, paraphrase, and quote, and then incorporate the main ideas in their own writing. If students can manipulate the written text they read, they are more likely to adapt the style to their own writing.

Reading skills and strategies are essential for the ESL student. Proficient reading assumes an adequate level of language proficiency, but also the ability to draw meaning from text with the aid of a type of metacognition and not to rely on word-by-word translations. Reading written text affords the student the opportunity to closely observe the language in use, and developing a good understanding of how text makes meaning helps the student become a more proficient writer. Writing is the language skill I address in the next section.

2.6.2 Proficiency in Writing

Spack (1998) suggested that to write successfully, students need to know how to focus on a topic, support what they present, and address any implications associated with their stance. Although Rodby (1992) asserted that ESL text should not be expected to match that of the reader’s native English, since the voice of the ESL writer may not match that of the native English reader, resulting in what Rodby called, “commingling of two languages” (p. 48), these students are nevertheless held to classroom standards. Generally speaking, there often exists a gap between students’ writing and what is expected of them (Spack 1998), especially since there is a tendency among educators to notice differences (Zamel 1998). Rodby (1992) suggested that educators are, unfortunately, trained to be attuned for error rather than to appreciate the content.
L2 writers make errors. Attempting to approximate the standard form of the language tries their confidence level. McEnery and Kifl e (2002) saw evidence of this lack of confidence in the use of modality. In a study of L2 writers McEnery and Kifl e found these writers to be tentative in their assertions; their writing lacked adequate use of devices for expressing certainty and stance. The authors attributed the effect to the overuse of devices they were taught in ESL class. Ostler (2002) questioned the understanding that less-than-proficient L2 writers have about the rhetoric style of the language and, consequently, how adept they are at incorporating other linguistic devices, such as lexical and referential cohesion, in their finished product. As for syntactic errors in production, Kondo (2005) found that L2 learners tend to overgeneralize use of the passive with unaccusative verbs, such as ‘arrive’ and ‘break.’

In exploring what it takes to be a good writer, Tribble (2002) identified certain types of knowledge that academic writers need to have. The first is content knowledge, that is, knowledge of the concepts involved in the subject area. Second, they need writing process knowledge, which is knowledge of the most appropriate way of carrying out a specific writing task. Third, they need to have context knowledge, that is, knowledge of the social context in which the text will be read. Finally, they need to know the aspects of the language system necessary for the completion of the task. Spack (1998) added that the ability to write a term paper assumes that students can evaluate and synthesize text from various sources, thereby establishing their own perspective on the topic. Spack said that students need to read, take notes, summarize, paraphrase, quote, evaluate, compare, agree/disagree, etc., in order to develop a “cognitive framework.” (p. 100) Along the lines of Tribble’s (2002) recommendations, Spack pointed out that the
writer needs to develop an understanding of constraints on form, that is, knowing what goes in the beginning, the middle, and the end, which can help students develop writing strategies. In transferring these skills to a particular discipline, Spack (1998) recommended that the student be immersed in reading, attending lectures, seminars, and everything else associated with the class.

Rodby (1992), on the other hand, saw these literacy practices to be rooted in social behavior that includes mental, psychological, and individual parts. From this perspective Rodby addressed the ‘we’ and ‘other’ elements of identity in which, she asserted, the former, representing the mother tongue, continually subsumes parts of the latter, the target language, until a universal ‘we’ emerges. (p. 57). She interpreted the relationship between language and identity as dynamic and believed that the second language learners’ desire for similarity or identity with the ‘other,’ an abstract concept of the mainstream speakers, may be “quixotic and ethereal.” (p.61)

Learning to write in a second language entails linguistic skills and rhetoric appreciation, but also an understanding of the conventions of the L2 and the confidence to develop one’s own ideas in a manner that meets the standards of the target language. In the next section, I introduce the particular challenges ESL students face in developing the skill of listening.

2.6.3 Proficiency in Listening

Although listening is often categorized with reading as a receptive skill, Zamel (1995) reported that students say that they understand information differently when they hear it vs. when they read it. Rost (2005) listed listening as a spontaneous activity that depends on immediate processing. Rost summed up the skill of listening as “a complex
cognitive process that allows a person to understand spoken language.” (p. 503) He explained further that the process is made up of three cognitive components: reception, construction, and interpretation with which the listener simultaneously decodes, comprehends, and interprets the incoming message. The first two, reception and comprehension, can be especially challenging for the second language listener. For L2 word knowledge, the language learner needs to recognize the word’s spoken form and written form, its grammatical function, as well as its collocation, its frequency in English, any constraints on its use, its denotations and connotations, any associations and the concept(s) implied and the appropriate referents. Rost (ibid.) added, “In principle, listening is facilitated by the size of an individual’s mental lexicon and the listeners’ facility in spoken word recognition. The activation of background knowledge (content schemata and cultural schemata) that is needed for comprehension of speech are linked to and launched by word recognition.” (p. 508)

Word recognition, which falls under Rost’s decoding process, calls for the listener to identify the word then activate all lexical knowledge associated with the recognized word. During this phase, the listener also locates the onset of the immediately following word which in turn provides ‘proactive processing,’ allowing the listener to access syntactic and semantic constraints that help to recognize the words to follow. (p. 507)

Rost explained the second part of the process, comprehension, as a constructive process that involves the listener’s short-term and long-term memory. The listener relates the language heard to real world references and the personal memory of concepts. The listener then identifies the information, activates relevant schemata, makes inferences, and finally updates the representations already made. In addition, Rost stated,
comprehension depends on shared references, shared concepts and shared ways of reacting to the world, or at least the “imagination” of shared concepts” (p. 513) with the speaker.

Interestingly, the situation reverses itself in speaking when an L2 learner tries to relate an L1 cultural point in the L2. Spack (1998) pointed out the challenge of having to explain something that does not exist in the other culture. A Japanese student in her study had difficulty explaining a cultural reference to religion in Japan to people who were not Japanese.

Listening is more than just decoding the spoken word. ESL students need to recognize the word, understand it, and relate it to a knowledge base, a complex cognitive activity. In order to function successfully in an academic discourse, they need to handle the task instantaneously. In a U.S. university environment, speaking is as important. The next section focuses on the skill of speaking.

2.6.4 Proficiency in Speaking

The U.S. university classroom that emphasizes participation will expect students to make presentations, interact with fellow classmates, ask questions of the professor, and participate in group work. The interactive US classroom requires L2 students to speak. Nevertheless, these students may be reluctant to speak in class. They may lack confidence and may worry about their pronunciation. They may fear that the other students and the teacher will not understand what they are trying to say, and they will be embarrassed. In a study of intelligibility and comprehensibility of L2 speech, however, Munro and Derwing (2001) found that unintelligibility was influenced more by prosodic errors than individual sound mispronunciation.
Speaking in class is an opportunity for ESL students to display their academic strengths; however, speaking is an open display of language strengths as well. If a student’s speech is hesitant or faltering, they risk the possibility that the audience will not attend to the message that they are attempting to deliver. If they fail to display strength in language proficiency, faculty and classmates may confuse language deficiencies with intellectual ability. Zamel (1995) called this the deficit model: where language is viewed as a decontextualized skill separate from the production of meaning that must be accomplished before undertaking academic intellectual work.

Leki (2001) reported on a situation where linguistic limitations were interpreted as intellectual inadequacies. Leki suspected such a bias and to determine whether this was the case, she observed ESL university students interacting in classroom activities. She narrowed her focus to group work because of its combination of social and academic interaction and as a means of gaining access to academic practices of the class. The ESL participants in the survey reported afterwards that they had attempted to contribute meaningfully to the group project, but they had feelings of being denied access. One student sensed that other group members anticipated that nonnative speakers would not be able to contribute much to the group and that the group would necessarily carry her along.

Speaking is the skill that ESL students need to demonstrate their knowledge and accomplishments, but it can be intimidating. If they do not sound intelligent, other students and the professors may dismiss them as inferior.
2.6.5 General Proficiency Skills and Academic Discourse

Spack (1997) agreed that academic discourse can not only challenge these students but, in essence, can also exclude them from the conversation. A Japanese undergraduate student, Yuko, provided Spack an opportunity to observe the process of how this particular student came to acquire academic literacy in her L2 English over a three-year period, noting the student’s linguistic and cognitive progress. In the initial interview, the student revealed feelings of inadequacy despite a high TOEFL score of 640. Within the longitudinal study Spack looked at writing, reading strategies and the interrelationship of the two. She examined the influence of the student’s L1 academic literacy, her home educational experience, and cross-cultural factors.

Several troublesome areas for the student emerged while Spack (1997) was tracking development of her strategies in reading and writing in the academic environment. Yuko reported feeling that she lacked sufficient background knowledge in her course work and, consequently, felt inadequately prepared to follow the classroom discourse. She admitted having difficulty following lectures when the professor discussed material randomly rather than following the prescribed format of the syllabus. Also, she found argumentative, theoretical, and critical discourse to be the type of reading that she found difficult. Spack concluded that students face diverse challenges in diverse situations. “Success can be measured not by whether students adopt particular discourse practices but rather by how productively they can negotiate their way through diverse discourses.” (p. 51).

In her attempt to explore what particularly hinders student progress and what could ease the process, Zamal (1995) questioned her ESL students about what they would
request from professors to make their situation easier. The students said that they would ask for clear and explicit assignments and directions on tests and for the professors to complement their lectures with written information on the board. Zamel’s survey indicated that students want the same from faculty as faculty want from students, that is, accessible language, clarity, and good explanation.

2.7 Insights from a Study Abroad Student

In an interview format, I questioned a study abroad student, Minjong, who came from Korea, about her experience at the University. Minjong admitted having difficulty adjusting to academic expectations. In particular, her frustrations focused on language skills and cultural understanding.

Class expectations at the University differed from those at her home university. Minjong explained that class size was much larger in Korea than in the U.S. This typically results in a larger emphasis on reading and listening with much less interaction between teacher and student. In the U.S., on the other hand, class size is much smaller and results in more interaction. She felt that students are expected to speak and write more in this environment with less emphasis placed on reading and listening. Minjong admitted that she often neglected reading the textbooks because it was too time consuming but was willing to risk the consequence associated with not doing so. She was well aware that arriving in class without having read the assignment put her at a disadvantage. Without the content background, she often had difficulty with class lectures and did not feel adequately prepared to interact with classmates.
Class size here, Minjong noted, also affects how students are expected to behave in the classroom. The smaller class size promotes more discussion, student presentations, and frequent writing assignments. In U.S. classrooms students are expected to interact with other students, make presentations to the whole class on a particular topic, and ask questions of the professor during the lecture. Written assignments are also a frequent occurrence. Because of the focus on students, their opinions and contributions, she found the seminar format difficult to adjust to. Minjong repeatedly mentioned content background, adequate vocabulary, and cultural references as posing problems for her.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the challenges that ESL study abroad students face when they choose to study in a university in the United State. In the section on study abroad, I introduced the topic of the study abroad program by which U.S. students travel outside the U.S. and international students come into the U.S. to study for a short period of time, e.g., one or two semesters. Whereas U.S. students often continue their study of the target language while living in the target culture, the students in my study did not continue English language classes. They took only content classes and faced the same academic requirements as other four-year university students do, i.e., they needed to be literate in the target language. The section on literacy and academic literacy addressed what literacy is and what is involved in negotiating academic discourse at the U.S. university.

In the section on text and academic text, I focused on the drawing of meaning from text, in particular, the classroom textbooks. The section on challenges for the ESL
student addressed negotiating academic literacy and how it assumes an understanding of the social practices inherent in text and how the challenge extends to the contextual and cultural implications inherent in text. Underlying literacy is language proficiency which I addressed in the section on proficiency. Students need to be proficient in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in order to read textbooks, write term papers, listen to lectures, and make oral presentations, all in a language other than their own. The last section presented comments of an ESL student who studied in the U.S. and outlined some of the challenges that she faced in her experience. This student was one of four ESL study abroad students that participated in my study.

The next chapter will introduce the four participants and will outline the data and methodology which I used for the dissertation.
Chapter 3
DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present the details of the data collection and the methodology used for analysis. The data for this study consist of a multiplicity of samples of what I conceive to be developing “academic literacy” in second language learners.

In 3.2 I will present an overview of the study, its impetus and how it developed. In 3.3 I will introduce the participants in the study, four study abroad students in attendance at a private university in the Northeast (hereafter referred to as the University). In 3.4 I will present an overview of the data and how it was collected. In 3.5 I will address the organization of the findings.

3.2 Outline of Intent of Study

The impetus for this study came from a discussion I had with the Provost of the University in which he questioned the difficulties that study abroad students experienced in adjusting to academic life here. In order to address such concerns, I have chosen to study factors contributing to the successes as well as the frustrations of a limited number of students enrolled in the study abroad program at the same university in an effort to identify and analyze in depth the challenges that these students face in negotiating the academic environment.

I met with the new study abroad students when they first arrived for their semester or year as exchange students at the University in September 2007. The international
student advisor had already told them about my study and explained that if they were willing to meet with me, they should go to the international conference room for lunch. Meeting over lunch for the first time was a pleasant way to talk informally about my study and what I was asking of them.

The five students who were waiting for me in the conference room were from Japan, Korea (two), Brazil, and Ireland. After discussing the purpose of the study, the student from Ireland admitted that he would not be a good match because of his English language proficiency, and the other four remained. All four students signed the Informed Consent Form. A copy of the form appears in Appendix A.

3.3 Participants

The participants in the study were four ESL international students who were in the United States as study abroad students at the University for a short duration of time, i.e., for one or two academic semesters. In order for these students to be accepted into the program, they needed to demonstrate an intermediate level of proficiency in English, which translates to a 500 score on the paper version of TOEFL. An additional requirement of the University called for them to be in good standing academically in their home institutions. These students were studying for the first time in the U.S. and intended to stay at the University for one semester or one academic year, depending on their individual program. Their participation in the study was designed to last for the duration of their study abroad experience. All four students were enrolled in regular academic content courses for which they intended to receive academic credit that would transfer to their home institutions. Therefore, they were expected to participate in all
class activities and requirements, such as reading textbooks and writing term papers. Since the University does not currently offer any classes in English as a Second Language, these students were not enrolled in an English language class or program. The courses that they took were of their own choosing, whether in their major field of study or something entirely different. The students could choose whatever they wanted to take as long as they maintained a minimum of 12 credits to maintain their visa status.

The student participants in the study were three young women and one young man. They were undergraduate students with majors in business administration, German, communications, and English literature, and their TOEFL scores ranged from 510 to 597. Table 3.1 below summarizes the basic information concerning the four participants, including their names (pseudonyms), gender, home country, how many semesters they would be at the University for study abroad, their TOEFL scores, and their majors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1 Student Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Minjong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ariana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noriko</td>
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<tr>
<td>JongOh</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.3.1 Minjong

Minjong was from Korea and studied here for one academic semester. Minjong demonstrated good English language skills having attained TOEFL CBT score of 240 which translates to a paper score of 587. She was an English literature major at Sogang University in South Korea. She also had a minor in economics. In an initial meeting with me, Minjong said that she really wanted to study in the United States because of her interest in English literature and the English language as well. She had the opportunity to come to this University because of an affiliation agreement between the two institutions. While here in the fall semester, she reported that she enjoyed her classes, especially her Shakespeare class.

While enrolled at the University, she took five classes for a total of 15 credits. The courses she chose were Shakespeare, College Writing, Principles of Microeconomics, Psychology: Brain and Human Nature, and French. Minjong found the lecture format of her psychology class difficult for her to follow, and she did not enjoy writing. She said that writing in English was difficult because the Korean way of thinking was different from the English way, and the logical patterns of text differed. Because of her background in English literature and economics, she felt that she had an advantage in her Shakespeare and economics classes. In fact, she admitted having already taken a course or two in Shakespeare in Korea, but she said that she loved the teacher and the class.

Minjong enjoyed speaking English and said that she spoke English every day even with the other Korean student in the study. She said she hardly spoke at all when she first arrived on campus, but later in the semester she had many friends, both
American and international, and interacts with them often. Minjong lived in Fayette Hall which used to be the Spanish House, but now the international language spoken is English. She got along well with her roommates and liked talking to them every night. She said that at first she really had to make an effort to understand them when they talked, but reported later that she had made much progress.

I noted earlier that French was one of the courses that Minjong chose to take at the University. She told me that her decision to take French was based on the idea that it would be interesting to learn French in an English-speaking environment, but she was surprised that students had to speak French all the time. She said that she goes back to English not Korean when she does not know a word.

According to her interview, Minjong had a very pleasant experience as an exchange student in the U.S. and expressed regret at having to leave when she did. I was sorry to see her leave after only one semester because of her interest in her program and in my study as well.

3.3.2 Ariana

Ariana came from Brazil and stayed at the University for a full academic year. Ariana arrived with an IBT-TOEFL score of 64, which translates to a 510 paper score, an intermediate level of proficiency that is just above the minimum requirement for study in the U.S. She was a business administration major at her home university, Universidade Federal da Bahia. Ariana said that she chose to study abroad in the U.S. because she felt it would give her an advantage in the job market in Brazil, and this University was the only U.S. institution that had an exchange agreement with her school.
In the fall semester Ariana took 13 credits of course work: American Government, Principles of Microeconomics, Elementary French, College writing, and Phys Ed (one credit). Her spring semester of 12 credits consisted of another course in political science, but at a higher level, U.S.-Latin American Relations; an advanced course in finance, Working Capital Management; the continuation of her elementary-level French class; and Public Speaking, a class that she felt would help her speaking ability in English. Ariana said that she chose courses that would 1) enhance her understanding of U.S. history and culture, 2) improve her English, and 3) broaden her understanding of finance and economics. She intends to pursue a Master’s degree in international business in Brazil once she completes her undergraduate degree. While enrolled full time in academic study, she also had a part-time job with food services and helped set up and serve hors d’oeuvres and dinner for meetings and special events on campus. She was a member of the International Club, but she spent time with Americans as well as international students.

As I noted, Ariana’s English appeared to be at an intermediate level. She arrived with a yearning to learn as much English as possible while she was here. She wanted to keep everything she did in English and never sought out a fellow Brazilian to chat with. She tried to read, write, and talk in English, but found herself going back to Portuguese when it became too difficult. She enjoyed interacting with Americans and speaking English. She explained, “I like to repeat words I hear to practice but I can’t – it would be totally impolite.”

According to Ariana’s comments in one of our meetings, what most puzzled her was the professors’ communicative style of informal language. She studied a more
formal form of English in Brazil. All the slang and familiar language that she heard in class and at work was difficult for her to follow. She said that she used the dictionary quite often when she first arrived because she lacked confidence. Later she only turned to the dictionary for expressions like ‘off the ground.’

In one of our informal meetings, Ariana indicated that she was also very pleased with her experience. She enjoyed being at the University and hoped for more opportunities to experience living in the U.S. in the future.

3.3.3 Noriko

Noriko came from Japan and spent the full academic year here. Noriko’s TOEFL score was 513 (paper) before coming to the U.S, just above the minimum required amount of 500. She took the TOIC in April toward the end of her stay and earned a score of 735 on that test. Noriko came to the U.S. with an interest in improving her English, which she began studying in junior high school and continued throughout high school in a language school two times a week. She is a German major at Sophia University in Tokyo, but also has an interest in linguistics and psychology. Once deciding to study in the U.S., Noriko was able to choose from among three U.S. universities with which her university maintained exchange agreements. She narrowed her decision to this university because of a recommendation from another Sophia student who had previously studied here.

Noriko’s fall semester included Public Speaking; two psychology courses: Fundamentals of Psychology and Child and Adolescent Psychology; College Writing; and Intermediate German.
In the spring semester, Noriko chose to take the following courses: semester included Music History; Psycholinguists; Intermediate German; Adulthood and Aging (psychology); and Aerobics for a total of 13 credits.

Noriko is very quiet, although her friend JongOh disputed that idea since he sees her in her more talkative modes. She admitted that she was reluctant to speak in class, used the dictionary regularly, and did not have enough time to read assignments, because reading the chapters, she claimed, “took too much time.” Listening to class lectures challenged her, especially when the professor used vocabulary that she did not understand. She said that she could not understand one professor even when she spoke slowly. Taking notes while listening was difficult for her, especially when the sentences were long because it was difficult to remember the whole sentence.

Noriko spent most of her free time with other international students. She was very active in the International Club and even did a very nice presentation to fellow members on the culture of Japan. She said that she found it difficult to make friends with American students. Noriko was also very happy to spend time at the University as a study abroad student and said that she was very sad to leave at the end of the year.

3.3.4 JongOh

JongOh also came from Sogang University in South Korea, the same university that Minjong came from. He expected to be here for only one semester, but managed to extend his program and remained for the entire academic year. Like Minjong, he chose this university because of an exchange agreement between the two schools. In addition, his parents were spending a few months in New York State for work-related issues, and because of the proximity he would be able to visit them periodically.
Arriving with a TOEFL score of 247 CBT, a 597 on the paper test, JongOh had a high language proficiency when he began his classes. He is a mass communications/economics major at his home university and came to the U.S. to study and learn more about the U.S., economics, and English.

For his first semester, JongOh chose classes in his major field of study and a few others. He took International Economics; Development Economics; College Writing; a class in Salsa and Tennis; and Japanese. He took only three classes spring semester even though he was expected to take four because of his visa obligations. The three classes were hand selected for their relevance to his field of study, and they were courses that he enjoyed. The three courses were Advanced Macroeconomics; Mathematical Economics, and Calculus.

JongOh also spoke Chinese, having spent one semester in China, and was interested in learning Japanese as well. He said he was timid in class in the beginning of the semester, but what helped boost his confidence was a perfect score on an economics test. Once that happened, he felt he could compete in the class and do well.

JongOh was also an active member of the International Club and took part in many of the club activities. He made a presentation on Korea to the group during his first semester at the University. JongOh is a bright young man, very capable and self-assured. He was happy to be here, enjoyed his classes and the total experience as well.

All four students registered for content classes while they were at the University. Most of them chose classes that would readily transfer back to their home institution, but they also favored classes that would provide them with a better understanding of life in the U.S. Tables 3.2 and 3.3 list the selection of courses for all four students.
Table 3.2 below summarizes the coursework that each student took in the fall semester, 2007. The course names and numbers have been changed so that they may not be identified with those of the home University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minjong</th>
<th>Ariana</th>
<th>Noriko</th>
<th>JongOh</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basics of Microeconomics</td>
<td>Basics of Microeconomics</td>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
<td>International-Based Economics</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>College Writing</td>
<td>College Writing</td>
<td>College Writing</td>
<td>College Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>Psychology of Childhood and Adolescence</td>
<td>Physical Education: Salsa and Tennis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Elementary French</td>
<td>Intermediate German</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
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</table>

Table 3.3 below summarizes the coursework that each student took in the spring semester, 2008. As in Table 3.2, the course names and numbers have been changed so that they may not be identified with those of the home University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ariana</th>
<th>Noriko</th>
<th>JongOh</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
<td>Music History</td>
<td>Advanced Macroeconomics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. – Latin American Relations</td>
<td>Introduction to Linguistics</td>
<td>Mathematics of Economics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Intermediate German</td>
<td>Calculus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary French</td>
<td>Psychology of Adulthood and Aging</td>
<td>Physical Education: Aerobics</td>
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3.4 Data

The data for my study can be divided into two types: 1) the materials that the students provided regarding their course work and how they were able to use the language. 2) Data that I collected to supplement the materials collected in 1).

The materials for the first type of data (i.e., student-provided) consist of:

- journal entries
- informal interviews with students
- course syllabi from their courses
- samples of their assignments
- samples of their classroom textbooks and other reading assignments
- written papers
- tests and quizzes
- written commentary from the instructors

The materials for the second type of data consist of:

- informal interviews with course instructors (audio tape and field notes)
- classroom observations that I conducted (including transcripts and observation notes)

3.4.1 First type of data

This section contains materials provided by the students. These data provided an insight into the daily life of the students, their expectations and the expectations imposed on them by their course curricula. When reporting students’ commentary, I include their remarks verbatim as spoken or written by the students including errors of grammar, pronunciation, etc., so as to maintain the gist that they were attempting to convey.
3.4.1.1 Journals

At the beginning of the study I asked the students to keep a journal of everyday events, anecdotes about their classes, and any pertinent experience with language in the class or outside of class, generally, to keep a record of their experiences while studying at the University. They were to write down their thoughts and feelings, their accomplishments, and their frustrations. I asked them to add other subtleties, such as what motivated them to work through the frustrating times. I chose to include journals because I felt that the informal format would be likely to encourage candid commentary from the students.

All the students promised wholeheartedly to write regularly in their journals at first, but as time went on, they found that they did not have very much time at the end of their days to write something in the journal. Some of the students complied readily with the task supplying interesting stories, incidents, and disappointments as they happened, while others did not. In order to keep up with attending classes, doing assignments, and sending e-mails to friends back home, the journals were not a high priority. They expressed regret at not being able to follow my suggestions because of time limitations or just that they did not know what to write.

Some of the entries were very insightful reactions to their academic experience, such as the following from Julia: “The books for US and Latin American Relations are boring. I don’t know if it is because of the topic at this moment (Cold War) or if is because the readings itself are so complex!”
3.4.1.2 Informal interviews with students

I asked the students to periodically visit with me in my office or other convenient venues to talk about their experiences. These informal interviews provided me with a broad understanding of their moments of success and frustration. In a non-threatening atmosphere, such as my office or the snack bar, the students felt comfortable enough to open up and share their attempts, failures, success, and frustration. They were very forthcoming. I took notes while they spoke; I also taped some of the interviews for later transcription. I chose to include the informal interview because the casual atmosphere afforded me the opportunity to ask questions and lead the discussion in a way that would encourage the students to share their thoughts and experiences.

In one interview JongOh told me that he dropped a class because he could not understand the professor’s accent. In another session, he revealed a desire to write about the adoption of Korean babies in his writing class so that he could express his feelings on the very sensitive topic and share them with the teacher or American students in the class.

3.4.1.3 Course Syllabi

Student participants readily produced syllabi for their classes at the beginning of each semester. These documents provided me with information on course content, expectations of students, and a time-line of assignments. For example, I was able to understand whether the professor placed more emphasis on tests than class participation and how outside written assignments were weighted against in-class activities.

The student’s copy of the syllabus itself was revealing. I was able to see on the students’ notes what they considered to be important, such as underlining how assignments were weighted, and whether they understood what was included. If the
wording used in an assignment was not familiar to them, they made notes. For example, Noriko circled ‘appendix’ and noted ‘back of the book.’ She also translated terms from a psychology syllabus into Japanese: ‘distinguish,’ ‘contrast,’ ‘cumulative,’ ‘multiple’ (choice). If the outline of assignments was clear, there were no extraneous markings on the pages.

3.4.1.4 Samples of Assignments

Some of the assignments that these students encountered were routine university-level assignments that did not pose particular problems for the ESL students. Others, however, were challenging for these student because of background knowledge assumptions. For example, Ariana had to attend a local City Council debate and write a report on what she observed. She lamented afterwards that since she really did not understand the format of what she saw, she did not have any “material to base my writing.” When she was writing her report, she said, “How could I summarize one activity that even I do not know what is it?” The frustration was obvious, but the student did manage to complete the assignment.

3.4.1.5 Written papers

Students provided copies of their assigned papers for my review. They intermittently brought in a first draft, a rewrite, or the final submitted paper with teacher comments. They also let me know whether they sought outside help, i.e., the Writing Center, to complete the assignment. If so, they provided that particular draft with suggestions from the person with whom they worked.

Some of the papers related to an assigned activity by the professor. For example, for her Public Speaking class Ariana had to critique a speaker in a public forum. She had
to judge such things as how he gained the attention of the audience and how he delivered the message. In her comments about the speaker’s use of language, Ariana noted,

“The speaker uses a very clear language; it was easy to understand him. But in some way, it was also a formal language. As the audience was college students, he could have done his speech in a more informal way of talking. Even his body language was showing a formal position since he was behind the podium without moving his legs or arms. He was holding the paper just talking and giving his speech – and that does not call the audience attention.”

Comments like these provided not only a glimpse at their writing abilities but also a revelation of their personal thoughts.

3.4.1.6 Tests and Quizzes

Students shared results of tests and quizzes that they had taken in their respective classes. Some were discussed with great pride and others casually referred to as disappointing. Most tests were not made available to the students once they saw the results. In some cases, however, the professors shared the relevant information with me, e.g., the format of the test, the student’s grade, and even the test itself with the corresponding key.

Test format played a role in student performance. For some students, the multiple choice format was preferred, but for others, completion worked better. The short essay type was challenging for all the students. In Noriko’s psychology quizzes for her Adulthood and Aging class that I was able to review, it was clear that she had a difficult time with the multiple-choice format. For example, she missed the point of a question that asked for ‘an objective burden for caregivers.’ She chose ‘embarrassment.’

3.4.1.7 Written Commentary from Instructors

This category of data includes written comments that instructors provided on essays, discussion questions, etc. The types of assignments and tests that typically
contained written comments include term papers, reaction papers, essay exams, critical analyses, and the series of drafts for writing class.

Written comments from instructors provided insight as to whether or not the student understood the assignment from the instructor’s perspective and whether the student was making progress in the class. The comments also revealed whether the instructor focused more on grammar errors than content. This was clearly not the case in the commentary on one of Minjong’s Shakespeare papers. Under ‘Areas to Improve,” the instructor encouraged the student to ‘stay on topic’ and made the following remarks:

“Every paragraph in your paper must be directly tied to your topic. If the subject of your paper is never mentioned, then the reader will not understand clearly how that paragraph fits into your overall argument. Please notice that your paragraph on Theseus and Hippolyta doesn’t ever mention the subject of dreams, and therefore it will be hard for a reader to see how it is related to your thesis statement. Perhaps the paragraph needs one more sentence to link Shakespeare’s ridiculing of everlasting love to the topic of dreams.”

The instructor’s remarks concern topic development. He is guiding the writer in considering the reader’s perspective and is not focusing on grammar errors.

3.4.2 Second type of data

This section concerns the data that I collected to supplement the materials provided by the students. I interviewed students’ professors and observed classes. This type of data collection allowed me the opportunity to observe students ‘at work,’ to better understand professor expectations of student performance, and balance any bias that may have influenced student commentary and reporting.

3.4.2.1 Informal Interviews with Professors

I met with professors who taught the study abroad students to gain insight into student performance, the students’ strengths and weaknesses in fulfilling course
requirements, and overall reaction to their students’ English skills. Professors were very cooperative in agreeing to meet with me to discuss the students in their classes. They openly discussed the progress or lack of progress of the particular student and what they saw as the reason. One professor expressed concern that she had not been alerted ahead of time that one of her students, Ariana, was a second language learner. She felt that she could have handled the situation differently had she known that the student might have special needs that she could address. Another professor was pleased to have JongOh in his class because of the insight this student provided to the topics of the class. Another was distressed that the student in his class, Ariana, did not work hard enough.

3.4.2.2 Transcripts of Designated Class Lectures

I chose to visit students’ classes in order to observe first-hand the format of the class and the students’ comfort level in the class. The teachers graciously allowed me to visit their classes and audiotape the lectures. I was able to observe the students ‘in action.’ I was able to gauge the level of difficulty of the language that the professor used in the lecture, the amount of interaction expected in the class, and whether the professor used visuals to complement the lecture.

I found that the classes differed one from the other according to the academic discipline. Whereas the economics and finance lectures were usually accompanied by graphic depictions of equations, charts, and math problems, the psychology classes were straight lecture with minimal visuals provided.

The psychology professor followed an outline that she wrote on the blackboard at the beginning of class. She would add stories to demonstrate what she was describing. For example, in a discussion of how the elderly often refuse to move to a nursing home,
she told the story of an elderly woman who kept a gun to prevent people from taking her to a nursing home. The professor often used informal, familiar language: she referred to a caregiver in a nursing home as ‘a hoot,’ made reference to ‘a sponge bath,’ and summed up advice for choosing a nursing home with, “Ya gotta go and check ‘em out.”

The data for the study were well triangulated. By collecting information from distinct types of datasets, i.e., student perspectives, professor perspectives, and personal observations, multiple perspectives and multiple sources, I ensured a reliability of findings. I felt certain that the four study abroad students did not merely report what they imagined that I wanted to hear or what would save face on their part. When I initially introduced my study to the four participants at the beginning of the fall 2007 semester, I gave them time to ask questions to be sure that they understood my expectations. Once I was certain that they understood the expectations, I asked them to read and sign the consent form (a copy of which is included in the appendix). Each student agreed to the format of the study and assured me that they understood what their participation in the study entailed. All four expressed an interest in the study itself since learning English and succeeding in their study abroad experience had significant meaning to them.

3.5 Organization of Findings

For my study of the study abroad student, I chose to organize the data by skill area and not by individual case studies of each student. I found that this type of organization allowed me the flexibility to narrow the findings to better expose the types of challenges that these students face. The four students in my study differed from each other in language proficiency levels, personality types, and areas of discipline. I took advantage of the disparity to broaden the scope. I chose not to focus on each individual
separately as a case study. I felt that a broader interpretation would allow for more purposeful recommendations for future similar situations.

3.5.1 Reading and writing

The students admitted not always reading text assignments for class and not liking to write. This opened many areas of questions for me since these two skills are at the heart of academic discourse. One of the students felt that for one of his classes, reading the text was not necessary since the professor would always review the chapters with visuals in class. Since the students acknowledged that writing exposes inadequacies in language proficiency, many are reluctant to write.

I chose to look at reading, what it entails and typical challenges that it poses for the L2 learner. In particular, I examined texts that students identified as difficult and questioned students about such difficulties. For example, for his economics class, JongOh was required to read the novel *The Roaring Nineties* written by Joseph E. Stiglitz, which is about the prosperous decade in the U.S. economy. JongOh found the task difficult because the book did not follow textbook style format with headings and pictures. I address the topic of reading in depth in Chapter 4.

Writing at the college level is demanding for all students. JongOh claimed that the organization was what made writing so difficult for him. Ariana and Noriko both felt that inadequate vocabulary impeded their writing. Ariana said, “What is difficult when I have to write a paper is that I do not have the words in English. I know the concepts, but I do not know how to translate it in a English way.” I focus on the topic of writing in a second language in Chapter 5.
3.5.2 Listening and speaking

Under listening, I explored how students handled class lectures and conversations with native speakers and what in particular made the language easy or difficult to follow. Minjong claimed that one of her teachers spoke too fast and used unfamiliar vocabulary; consequently, she could not follow the lecture in that class. Ariana said her roommates used slang in their speech, and she could not understand them.

Speaking in class was a challenge for these students. Interacting with other students in group activities was difficult for Minjong because she found that listening took so much energy that she was unable to listen and talk at the same time. Oral presentations in class were also a challenge. Ariana found that not knowing transition words prevented her presentation from having a smooth flow. Noriko said that it was easier to make a presentation to a small class especially if she had already become friendly with her classmates. Chapter 6 will address my findings on listening and speaking in depth.

3.5.3 Vocabulary and cultural points

Students repeatedly mentioned vocabulary as an impediment to language understanding or production. They also said that they were at a disadvantage whenever a reference was made to a culture point or a shared understanding of a historical event. For example, JongOh said his economics professors often referred to financial events in U.S. history to make a point about economic trends. He felt disadvantaged since he was not aware of the referenced events. All four students often mentioned difficulty with vocabulary. For example, JongOh did not understand the meaning of “curbing
pollution.” The topic of vocabulary and cultural points are addressed as sub sections within Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the participants and the datasets and methodology of the present study. Specifically, I presented a background look at each of the students in the study, their major course of study, their English language proficiency scores, the courses that they took while in the study, and the type of participation that they engaged in at the University. I also described the data collection methods, i.e., the two types of data collection, those provided by the students and those that I collected to supplement materials from students, and explanations of the datasets from each. The datasets of the first type included journal entries kept by the students, informal interviews that I conducted with students, course syllabi from their courses, samples of regular class assignments, classroom textbooks and other reading assignments, written papers, copies of tests and quizzes, and written commentary from instructors. The data of the second type included informal interviews with course instructors by which I was able to better understand course expectations and how these students performed in the class and classroom observations that I conducted in order to see the students ‘in action.’ These materials will provide the foundation for the entire dissertation.
Chapter 4
READING

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present an overview and analysis of reading as it poses challenges for ESL study abroad students. The purpose of the chapter is to examine the types of problems that the four participants encountered, the types of text and assignments that presented problems, and the strategies that they utilized to overcome the impediments.

The major goal for ESL students is to negotiate academic discourse in all formats required in the academic environment. Since ESL students in a U.S. study abroad situation are responsible for the same assignments as the matriculated students, they need to understand written and spoken academic text and to produce clear, concise, coherent language well enough to compete with classmates and accomplish course requirements. According to Zamel (1995), however, academic discourse is not a monolithic discourse and cannot be reduced to a stable and autonomous phenomenon.

In this light, this chapter explores the role of reading in ESL students’ challenge of negotiating academic discourse in a U.S. university. The organization of the chapter is as follows. In Section 4.2 I will address reading strategies. In Section 4.3 I will present problems in reading textbooks and other reading requirements. In Section 4.4 I address language issues in reading. Section 4.5 presents vocabulary and its role in reading. Section 4.6 focuses on the cultural and background knowledge.
4.2 Strategies

ESL students need to read proficiently enough to understand written text and process and retain the information for later use. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) found that prior comprehension and retention are significantly influenced by knowledge, purpose, strategies, and application of information. These skills can distinguish a proficient reader who will alter strategies according to the task and context from a less proficient reader who will use fewer strategies or repeat strategies that do not work well. The ESL students who participated in my study shared the strategies they employed when reading.

In an informal interview, JongOh, one of my two participants from Korea, reported being able to read faster in the second semester, but that it still took a lot of time. “I cannot really feel the changes, but compared to before coming here, I can read much faster than before and reading in English is much more familiar now.” JongOh’s basic strategy was to reread two or three times, then rely on context, i.e., guessing from the general gist of the passage. He said he tried not to translate back to Korean. “Usually, when I read textbooks on English, I read whole sentence then if I do not understand it very well, I use dictionary to find words and read the sentence again. I cannot read books fast, even in Korean language or novels.” He felt more confident later and did not want to stop to look up every word that he did not know. “If I don’t know I just keep reading. Even I don’t know the word sometimes I can get the meaning or content.”

During the first semester JongOh used an electronic dictionary to look up words, which took longer. “I usually feel uncomfortable skipping sentences without understanding. That is why it takes too long time to read books. I try to read even though I don’t understand, but when I don’t understand, I feel worse.”
The choice of whether to take time to consult a dictionary for definitions of unknown words or to guess the meaning and continue reading is a typical dilemma for the ESL reader. Parry (1991) targeted the correlation between vocabulary and successful academic reading and found that strategies for handling unknown vocabulary typically vary from student to student. Parry discovered that when students guess meanings and make approximate correspondences, these strategies work in some situations, but do not at other times.

Personal interest was a factor in JongOh’s reading of an essay on adoption in order to acquire background information for a paper that he was to write. He said that the reading was interesting, not too hard to understand, and he did not use a dictionary.

Ariana, the participant from Brazil, said that she often used a dictionary at the beginning of her stay in the U.S. because she lacked confidence. Toward the end of the second semester, however, she reported using the dictionary only for unfamiliar expressions like ‘off the ground.’

Ariana said that she was especially frustrated when she did not understand the wording on an exam. When taking a microeconomics exam in the fall semester, she found many words “not related to the main problem of the questions.” Since it was in an exam, she did not have time to use the dictionary for every unfamiliar word. “So, my strategy is not be worried about these words and concentrate on the focus of the question.”

Ariana approached a reading assignment for her U.S. Government class with strong resolve. The assignment was to read President George W. Bush’s 2007 State of the Union Address and analyze it for his use of symbols. In an informal meeting with
me, the professor of the course elaborated on the assignment. She explained that students were to read the text and find ways in which the President utilized symbols that were significant for Americans, such as September 11, social security, or a story about terrorists’ treatment of women, in his speech. The story of the terrorists, for example, could have been used as a symbol to bolster support for the war in Iraq. Ariana decided that in order to truly understand the written text, she would need to read it three times, despite its length of 11 pages. She remarked that, “It can be boring but necessary in order to write a 3-page summary on the speech.” Her plan was to read the document, the first time highlighting unknown vocabulary. She would then look up the words in the dictionary, an English-English dictionary, since she found that method a better way to understand and learn new words. The next part of her process was to read the speech again in order to understand the meaning and purpose of the text, followed by a third quick reading as a review before starting the writing assignment. As time went on, Ariana found that the English-English dictionary method took too much time, and she did not have enough time “to learn and improve my English step-by-step. I have to finish the assignment.” Gradually, Ariana lessened her resolve and admitted that she could not read the speech three times. One reason that she mentioned was lack of time and the other was that “reading so many times a paper turns it in a boring paper. I was not interested in read President Bush’s speech any more.” In the end, Ariana was able to tease out two of the symbols the professor referred to, i.e., September 11th and hostile regimes. She did not mention social security.

Minjong said that reading is difficult for her. “I listen, speak, and write English, except reading in English. I read sometimes, but it is like skimming. I just try to get a
topic in the article, so many times I made a mistake.” She later said that she thought reading was becoming easier, but still difficult if she did not understand the gist. A strategy for Minjong was to make use of glossaries of English words, i.e., easily accessible definitions provided in the margins or appendix of the textbook, whenever possible. As for her Shakespeare reading assignments, even though Minjong acknowledged her struggle with Middle English, her professor referred to her understanding as ‘well interpreted.’

Noriko, the participant from Japan, reported having a difficult time reading the psychology textbook for her Adulthood and Aging class. She said that she had a hard time finishing the reading assignments because it took a long time, but not reading the text resulted in poor test grades. She admitted, “I think I should spend more time to read.” Noriko did not indicate any use of adequate strategies for reading her textbooks. For example, although she admitted that the vocabulary in her psychology textbooks was a definite problem for her, she did not share any methods that she used to help handle the problem. She did say, however, that she made use of glossed English definitions whenever provided in the textbook so as not to have to translate into Japanese.

Textbooks often follow a pattern for explaining new concepts. A type of explanation of topic that occurs frequently in Contemporary Management, a college text used for beginning management classes at the University, for example, is the use of words like is or involves to explain or define a topic. The following excerpt reflects how the text explained the concept of organizing:

Organizing is a process that managers use to establish a structure of working relationships that allow organizational members to interact and cooperate to achieve organizational goals. Organizing involves grouping people into
departments according to the kinds of job–specific task they perform. (Jones and George 2003: p. 10)

The text uses the words ‘is’ and ‘involves’ as means to introduce an explanation or definition of the topic, ‘organizing.’

Further, if Noriko had better understood textbook structure, she may have recognized cues for definition in the text itself, such as the following use of ‘or’ in her textbook to define the concept developmental reserve capacity:

“Baltes and his colleagues, in particular, have been active proponents of the notion of developmental reserve capacity, or the idea that individuals have a finite amount of resources to respond to stresses and challenges, and that this amount may decrease with age.” (Hoyer and Roodin 2003: p. 6)

In the above example, ‘or’ is being used as the functional equivalent of ‘in other words’—fulfilling an explanatory or definitional function. Noriko apparently had not previously encountered this rhetorical function of ‘or’ and she seemed to be interpreting it simply as a coordinating conjunction to express “choice.”

Another point that may have helped Noriko read her psychology text or at least come away from the reading with a rough idea of the topic was if she had been made aware of the use of the topic sentence. With a rhetorical purpose of introducing the essential idea of the paragraph, the topic sentence can aid the student in determining the gist of the commentary. Oftentimes the topic sentence appears as the first sentence of the paragraph, as in the following paragraph from Contemporary Management:

One of the most important goals that organizations and their members try to achieve is to provide some kind of good or service that customers desire. The principal goal of COO Bob Pittman is to manage the merger of AOL and Time Warner so that a new stream of goods and services, such as improved Internet service and TV, interactive games, movies on demand, and electronic books, are created that customers are willing to buy. The principal goal of doctors, nurses, and hospital administrators is to increase their hospital’s ability to make sick people well. Likewise, the principal goal of each McDonald’s restaurant manager is to produce burgers, fries, and shakes that people want to pay for and eat. (Jones and George 2003: p. 5)
The topic sentence can also occur at the end of a paragraph, such as:

First, in any society or culture resources are valuable and scarce and the more efficient and effective use that organizations can make of those resources the greater the relative well-being and prosperity of people in that society. Because managers are the people who decide how to use many of a society’s most valuable resources – its skilled employees, raw materials like oil and land, computers and information systems, and financial assets – they directly impact the well-being of a society and the people in it. Understanding what managers do and how they do it is of central importance to understanding how a society works and how it creates wealth. (Jones and George 2003: pp. 5-6)

In the first example, the topic sentence introduces the main idea of the paragraph, the goal of providing a good or service. In the second example, the topic sentence comes at the end of the paragraph and ties together what is mentioned in the previous sentences, i.e., the value and scarcity of resources and the manager’s job, into the societal importance of the manager.

Recognizing the rhetorical purpose of a topic sentence and being able to locate it can benefit ESL students. By understanding its purpose, they can begin to develop a useful strategy for targeting the essence of the paragraph and recalling the information efficiently. Once readers begin to understand organization of text, they will develop metacognitive strategies that allow them to self monitor and self-correct as well as to access relevant schemata in order to aid the process (Ruddell and Unrau, 2006)

4.3 Challenges in reading textbooks and other text assignments

ESL students face situations in reading that they had not anticipated when studying English in their home institutions. Reading is not a straightforward skill that is easily adaptable to any situation. It calls for preparedness on many fronts. As Meyer and Poon (2004) pointed out, reading includes recognizing semantic and organizational cues as well as the interrelationship of ideas and their relative significance to the text.
Students need to be able to determine the important points, find the gist of the text, and recall information despite obstacles that they encounter, such as densely worded text and informal use of language. Challenges abound.

4.3.1 The academic textbook

Students should be made aware of academic expository structure with its unique text organization that is important for understanding the message, as Meyer, Brandt, and Bluth (1980) suggested. In particular, Short (1997) examined history textbooks as a source of problems for the English language learner. Short found that history-related text had few transition indicators and often used misleading headings, which made it difficult to follow connections of information from one paragraph to another. He added that new vocabulary may also not be addressed adequately and that history text is noted for its dense presentation of material.

The textbook for Ariana’s U.S. and Latin American Relations course created a reading problem for her. She said that she had trouble following the message when reading. “I don’t know if it is because of the topic at this moment (Cold War) or if is because the readings itself are so complex!” She added, “What drives me crazy in this readings is because it has a lot of adjectives and adverbs to emphasize a situation and also it has a lot of words that I don’t know the meaning even in my native language.” She noticed the subjectivity inherent in the use of the adjectives and remarked that the use of adjectives revealed the author’s view.

Similarly, ESL students in the Schleppegrell, Achugar, and Orteiz (2004) study found history textbooks difficult because they used abstract words with inadequate explanation, listed facts with no elaboration or explanation, and provided few indicators
of arguments being made. Schleppegrell, Achugar, and Orteiz attributed some of the problems to the idea that many history textbooks often make the assumption that students will make the necessary connections.

Ariana’s history textbook, *Exiting the Whirlpool*, by Robert A. Pastor, exhibited many of the above-mentioned patterns. It did not include many charts, pictures, or glossaries, and the material is densely presented, as indicated in the following sample paragraph:

“Torrijos was not well-educated, but his life and career provide a kind of guide to the complicated relationship between the United States and Latin America and valuable lessons for both. Torrijos could be *flip*, as when he replied to *Haig* with a *parody of a post office message*, or he could be *deep*, as when he conveyed the point that times had changed: the United States could still give instructions to Central America, but it should no longer expect them to be followed. The influence of the United States in Latin America had diminished, not because of the decline of U.S. power or a lack of will on the part of its leaders, but because of the deepening of *nationalism* in the region. In 1954 the *CIA* overthrew the government of Guatemala with a force of 150. Thirty years later, the CIA could not dislodge the *Sandinista regime* with an army of more than 20,000 contras. Torrijos had tried to tell *President Reagan* that it was no longer easy to depose small governments, but *Reagan* had to learn the hard way.” (p. 2)

The paragraph includes abstract words, such as ‘nationalism’ with no explanation; it introduces facts like ‘the CIA could not dislodge the Sandinista regime with an army of more than 20,000 contras’ without elaboration; and it provides few indicators of arguments being made. Adjectives like ‘valuable,’ ‘flip,’ and ‘deep’ seem to reveal the author’s view, as Ariana had indicated. The phrase, ‘a parody of a post office message’ is perhaps an off-handed cultural reference to ‘wanted’ posters that are commonly on display in the U.S. post offices. The casual use of ‘Haig’ refers to Alexander Haig who served as Secretary of State under President Ronald Reagan. The paragraph assumes a readership with a good knowledge base of U.S. history during the period from the 1950’s
to the Reagan Administration, which supported the Nicaraguan contra fighters against the
Communist-influenced Sandanistas, in the 1980’s.

In contrast with her history text, Ariana found the textbook for her public
speaking class much easier to read. She said, “The readings for Public Speaking class are
very interesting. The language is simple and clearly. It seems that the book is made to
high school students because it explains everything step by step over and over in different
ways.”

A sample paragraph from Ariana’s textbook for public speaking, A Speaker’s
Guidebook: text and reference by Dan O’Hair, Rob Stewart, and Hannah Rubenstein
follows:

**Vocal delivery** includes speech volume, rate, pitch, variety, pronunciation, and
articulation. As you rehearse, pay attention to how loudly or softly you are
speaking. If you rehearse with a friend, as him or her to sit at the far end of the
room; if your friend cannot hear you from that distance, practice adjusting your
volume. Pay attention to the *rate* at which you speak and aim to speak neither too
fast nor too slowly. Beware of speaking in a *monotone*; audiences will quickly
become turned off by a speaker who uses an unvarying, flat tone. Decide how
you want to phrase your statements, and then practice saying them. Finally, check
that you are pronouncing words correctly and clearly. (See Chapter 18 and
Appendix D, “Commonly Mispronounced Words.”) (p. 25)

The paragraph is easier to follow than the history text. The bulk of the text makes use of
high-frequency vocabulary. The writing has a reader-friendly appeal: the topic is
emboldened to set the stage with its main points italicized and it uses verbs in second
person imperative form in direct address to the reader. Additionally, the reader is
referred to additional related information that follows in a later chapter and in the
appendix. It does seem to be less of a challenge for the ESL reader than the history text.

The two sampled texts, from the history and public speaking classes, differ from
each other in text format and readability. Whereas the history text includes multiple
references to people and events outside the immediate topic, the public speaking text introduces a topic and develops it. The history paragraph immediately presupposes the reader’s knowledge of historical events in U.S.-Central American relations. (The paragraph appears on page two of the book.) Ideas are introduced without elaboration. For example, the idea that ‘nationalism had deepened’ is introduced, but there is no elaboration on what it means or how, when, or why it happened. The writer moves from one reference to another in a conversation-like format without providing any explanation of its references or transition into the next topic. The lack of transitions results in a lack of coherence. The public speaking text, on the other hand, introduces the topic of ‘vocal delivery’ and builds a description of what it entails by way of a series of verbs that instruct the reader in second person imperative how to accomplish it. Coherence is achieved by the repetition of the verb forms and continued elaboration on the points of the topic sentence.

In an informal meeting, Ariana’s history professor informed me that the typical assignment for his class was 50 to 60 pages of reading per class meeting (twice a week) along with questions posted online that address pertinent issues. The assignment directs students to points that contradict or complement previously covered material. The intent of the questions, the professor added, was to help students focus on the material. He said that Ariana did not do well in the course and earned a final grade of a D. He attributed the low grade to her not having done the readings. He admitted that other matriculated students also had trouble completing the reading assignments.
4.3.2 Outside reading assignments

In addition to reading textbooks, university students are often required to read additional material that relate to the current topic under discussion in the class. These may be in the form of journal articles, newspaper articles, or novels. JongOh had to read articles from magazines and newspapers for his international economics class. He said, “Reading a newspaper or reading other materials including some books or handouts are much more challenging for me because most books or articles are not simplified like textbooks and there are more vocabularies that I have no idea what they mean.”

In order to examine traits that make a textbook simplified and less challenging, as indicated by JongOh, I have included a sample paragraph from Contemporary Management, a textbook used for introductory management classes. The text in the book is usually accompanied by an appropriate gloss (alongside the related paragraphs) which defines the topic at hand. To the left of the following paragraph was the gloss, “Strategy: a cluster of decisions about what goals to pursue, what actions to take, and how to use resources to achieve goals.”

“The outcome of planning is a strategy, a cluster of decisions concerning what organizational goals to pursue, what actions to take, and how to use resources to achieve goals. The decisions that were the outcome of Michael Dell’s planning formed a low-cost strategy. A low-cost strategy is a way of obtaining customers by making decisions that allow the organization to produce its goods or services cheaply so that prices can be kept low. Dell has been constantly refining this strategy and exploring new strategies to reduce costs; in 2001 Dell became the market leader as a result of this strategy. By contrast, AOL-Time Warner’s strategy is to deliver new, exciting, and different entertainment products to its customers, a strategy known as differentiation.” (p. 9)

In this paragraph the development of the definition is easy to follow, the term is repeated over and over with several examples and results of its use. The paragraph introduces the term ‘strategy’ as an outcome of planning, which was evidently presented previously.
The text follows a predictable pattern starting with a concise definition of the term and explicit examples of its implementation, repeating the pattern with a specific type of strategy and its definition. The examples use recognizable names in the world of commerce, Michael Dell and his product, Dell Computer, and AOL-Time Warner to demonstrate the application of the types of strategies presented. The vocabulary is mostly high-frequency and rather easy to read.

JongOh said that his macroeconomics textbook is similarly easy to follow and usually includes graphs, clear introductions to new topics, and a glossary. For his macroeconomics class in the spring semester, in addition to the textbook, he had to read *The Roaring Nineties*, a novel that addresses the American financial situation of the 1990’s. In one of our meetings, he told me that he found it more difficult to read than the textbook. He said that it was hard to guess what the contents would be because the text in the novel was not organized predictably as is a typical macroeconomics textbook. He said that textbooks are usually well written, objective, and easy to read. In fact, he found his English macroeconomics textbooks easier to read than the translated versions (from English to Korean) he read at his home university. When JongOh had to write a report on *The Roaring Nineties*, he said he had a hard time relating the text to the class because, “I couldn’t use my models, equations from class to explain the situation in the book.” JongOh was referring to the use of models and equations as well as charts and graphs that occur regularly in economics class lectures, notes, and textbooks.

The following is a random sample paragraph from *The Roaring Nineties*, the novel that was assigned in JongOh’s macroeconomics class:

“In several sectors, America had an outmoded regulatory system, one which had not kept pace with the changes in technology that were transforming the
economy, but we were too trapped into the mantra of deregulation, mindlessly stripping back on regulation. It was no coincidence that many of the problems of the Roaring Nineties can be traced back to the newly deregulated sectors – electricity, telecommunications, and finance. Distorted incentives combined with irrational exuberance induced America’s new financial behemoths to provide the finance that underwrote the bubble; they made billions from the IPO (initial public offerings) and the deceptive boosting of their favored stocks, even if their gains had to come at the expense of someone – in most cases, ordinary shareholders….‖ (p. 11)

This text was challenging for JongOh. It does not include graphics or charts to demonstrate the logic and functionality of the concepts presented, as would a macroeconomics textbook. Since it is a novel, the text is composed of prose and opinion. The author is telling the story of the U.S. economic situation in the 1990’s and sharing his feelings about the story. Although the information is based on facts, he uses the novel format to present his theories on what went wrong. The author’s theories are not presented as objective equations or formulae that can be interpreted and demonstrated to classmates. JongOh is used to a less subjective delivery style of language in the field of economics. This particular paragraph discusses the regulatory systems in the U.S. financial markets and the popular cry for deregulation. Without an understanding of a ‘hands-off’ government and the spirit of ‘irrational exuberance,’ any ESL reader would have difficulty following the arguments that the author is making. This text is an example of an author’s presupposing the reader’s shared cultural understanding.

4.4 Syntactic problems in reading English

Although generally adept at understanding written text in English, these ESL students encountered linguistic points that caused problems. Specifically, syntax posed problems for both Noriko and JongOh.
When reading her textbooks, Noriko reported being confused by the use of inanimate objects as subjects of a sentence. This was something that she was not accustomed to in Japanese. She provided an example from the textbook for her Childhood and Adolescence Psychology class:

“Both great upheavals such as war, famine, or mass immigration and subtle transitions in ways of life may stimulate changes in families.” Santrock (2007)

Here ‘upheavals’ is an inanimate object assuming the role of agency since it is subject of the sentence, and its verb contains a modal. Also, the subject, ‘upheavals’ is quite far from the verb phrase, “may stimulate changes in families,” thus making the subject all the more difficult to identify.

Another example provided by Noriko was a description of ‘manners’ from A Smart Girl’s Guide to Manners (Holyoke 2005)

“Manners aren’t a bunch of rules dreamed up by fusspots who want to cramp your style. Manners help people get along together. They make us nicer. They teach us to put ourselves in the other guy’s shoes.”

In this passage, ‘manners’ is the ‘doer’ of all the actions. ‘Manners’ is used in a figurative role of personification in which it ‘helps,’ ‘makes,’ and ‘teaches.’

Noriko was surprised by the fact that ‘manners’ was the subject of every sentence even though it is inanimate. She said that it was confusing for her, and she had to read the sentence more than once. She found this type of inanimate agency to be “one of the interesting writing techniques of English,” and hoped that she would be able to effectively incorporate inanimate subjects into her writing. She explained further that Japanese uses inanimate subjects, but usually only in written text and typically only for emphasis.
Long sentences can pose a problem for ESL students in locating the main subject, verb, and direct object in the sentence, i.e., the ‘who did what to whom’ syntactic word order pattern. JongOh related this problem when he was reading the handouts for his Development Economics class in the fall semester. He found the handouts to be harder to read than the textbook even though they were written by the same author. He attributed the problem to the frequent occurrence of long sentences in the textbook for his economics class: Development Economics by Debraj Ray. JongOh provided an example of a long sentence:

“Notice that some of these indicators – infant survival rates or life expectancy, for instance – may be regarded as defining features of underdevelopment, so in this respect the list above may be viewed, not as a statement of correlations, but as a definition of what we mean by development (or the lack of it).” Addendum to Ray 1998: p. 3

JongOh’s sample sentence is composed of fifty-three words. Its main verb is in the imperative and a noun clause is the direct object.

In the excerpt from the Ray (1998) text, the verb ‘notice’ is an imperative with ‘you’ as the implied subject. The object of the verb, the noun clause, ‘that some of these indicators – infant survival rates or life expectancy, for instance – may be regarded as defining features of underdevelopment, so in this respect the list above may be viewed, not as a statement of correlations, but as a definition of what we mean by development (or the lack of it),’ encompasses the rest of the sentence. To further complicate the parsing process, the verbs within the noun clause, ‘may be regarded’ and ‘may be viewed,’ are in the passive which reverses the usual pattern of agency. The added verbiage of the negative ‘not as a statement of correlations’ and the aside, ‘or the lack of it,’ further extend the delivery of the information.
Noriko also felt that long sentences were difficult and provided an example from her Adulthood and Aging psychology textbook:

“The Critics of Gutmann’s theory have questioned whether the observed changes in ego mastery style in middle age actually reflect role reversal or are a description of cohort effects and sociocultural influences.” (Hoyer and Roodin 2003: p. 45)

This sentence has thirty-one words with a lengthy noun clause used as direct object.

The subject ‘critics of Gutmann’s theory’ and the verb ‘have questioned’ in the excerpt from Hoyer and Roodin (2003) may be more easily identifiable than in the previous example from JongOh, but the confusion for Noriko is likely due to the lengthy noun clause, ‘whether the observed changes in ego mastery style in middle age actually reflect role reversal or are a description of cohort effects and sociocultural influences,’ used as the direct object. The entire clause answers the direct object question ‘what?’ Locating the S-V-O within the noun clause can also be difficult since the subject ‘changes’ has a compound predicate ‘reflect’ and ‘are.’ Another challenge for Noriko in this particular sentence may be the repeated use of nouns as adjectives, for example, ‘ego master style,’ ‘role reversal,’ and ‘cohort effects,’ which may complicate the isolation of subject and object within the noun clause.

Long sentences like the two sample sentences provided can challenge the working memory of ESL students. Trying to keep a sense of ‘who did what to whom’ while sidestepping unknown words demands focused attention and concentration. The challenge, as considered by Meyer, Brandt, and Gluth (1980), is that working memory of L2 readers is more heavily challenged than L1 readers’ because problems and causes from the text are kept in short-term memory with repeated retrieval from long-term
As Noriko summarized, “When the sentence is long, it’s difficult to remember the whole sentence.”

### 4.5 The role of vocabulary

ESL students typically regard vocabulary as a critical component of the language. They are fully aware of the necessity of knowing a good amount of relevant vocabulary in order to navigate the waters of academic discourse, but they fret over not knowing enough vocabulary. Nation (2006) determined an adequate vocabulary base for the L2 learner to be 8,000 – 9,000 word-family vocabulary to read a text. Nation compared this base to the 6,000-7,000 word families that a listener would need to know in order to understand spoken text, since spoken text uses a higher percentage of high-frequency words.

Snow, Met, and Genesee (1992) noted that ESL students need a broad usage of high-frequency words in addition to their repertoire of academic and uncommon words. Often very commonly used words escape their L2 vocabulary. For example, Parry (1991) found that ESL students typically had trouble with words that authors use to show relationships and other abstractions common to formal prose, such as ‘ensuing,’ ‘autonomous,’ ‘vitaly,’ ‘rudimentary,’ and ‘viable.’

In this study, I found that high frequency vocabulary can pose problems even when the student is fully aware of the meaning. Ariana once questioned the difference between ‘entire’ and ‘whole.’ In her journal, she mused over ‘the entire world’ and ‘the whole day’ and whether there would be a difference if one used ‘the whole world’ and ‘the entire day.’ Another point of confusion for her was the difference between ‘substitute
for’ and ‘substitute with.’ These are examples of language subtleties that can be difficult for any second language learner.

Ariana further expressed her frustration with words that she did not understand like ‘sidestepped’ and ‘at stake.’ She said that she had no idea what they meant and found it difficult to grasp their meanings using a dictionary. She also wondered how she could handle a word like ‘schedule,’ since it has three equivalents in Portuguese.

Similarly, Noriko indicated that she did not understand some high-frequency words on the syllabus for her Childhood and Adolescence class. She translated words like ‘contrast,’ ‘multiple,’ ‘sufficiently,’ ‘critique,’ ‘contribute,’ ‘make up exam,’ ‘reference,’ and ‘deletions’ into Japanese. These are words that a professor would assume that students know, but they may not have been introduced in English classes in Japan. Spack (1998) alluded to this type of situation when she reported on a student in her study who had no trouble with words like ‘repression’ and ‘schizophrenia,’ but had a hard time with descriptive terms like ‘to coax’ and ‘gnawing discomfort.’

JongOh found many unfamiliar words in the novel, The Roaring Nineties, a required reading assignment for his Advanced Macroeconomics class. Whenever he found one of these unknowns, he would consult an English-Korean dictionary and handwrite the Korean translations under the vocabulary in question. As indicated by the number of Korean translations in the book, he did not know some fairly high-frequency words, such as ‘indefinitely,’ ‘brag,’ ‘unprecedented,’ ‘impartial,’ and ‘culprit.’ JongOh also translated many words that are common in today’s economics lexicon, but not typically part of a language class in English. He did not know such words and expressions as ‘pensions,’ ‘globalization,’ ‘taxes,’ ‘benchmarks,’ ‘vantage point,’ ‘and
‘tax cuts.’ The following sentence from the book illustrates its use of economics vocabulary:

“Americans had confidently plowed their savings into corporate equities during the nineties; now, thanks to an $8.5 trillion decline in the market’s value, roughly a third of the worth of America’s individual retirement accounts, IRA and 401(k) plans, simply vanished.” (Stiglitz 2003: p.7)

The expressions ‘corporate equities,’ ‘the market,’ and ‘individual retirement accounts’ are common references in the economics lexicon, but not necessarily part of JongOh’s English vocabulary.

When I asked JongOh if he was able to use any of the words he looked up the meanings for in the dictionary, he replied that he now understands ‘vantage point.’ He said he was first puzzled by the expression when he saw the movie “Vantage Point,” but now knows that it means ‘from the angle of one person.’

JongOh readily admitted that vocabulary was his biggest challenge when reading The Roaring Nineties. One particular example was the word ‘gravitated,’ used as a verb in a description of the elder President George Bush’s presidency.

“Like many presidents before him, he (the elder George Bush) gravitated toward foreign policy, where the powers of the office are more clear.”

If JongOh had tried to guess the meaning of ‘gravitated,’ he could have successfully turned to the word family of ‘gravity’ and made a semantic connection or he could have been confused by changing the noun ‘gravity’ to a verb and associating it with a president and his foreign policy. When reading The Roaring Nineties, JongOh translated as many as eight words on a page with 28 lines of text. Examples of words he translated are as follows:

unfettered  vengeance  impetus  bode well  forestall
culpable  fiber optics  noxious  outmoded  exacerbated

Because of the overwhelming burden of unfamiliar vocabulary, JongOh did not finish the reading assignment.

In his macroeconomics textbook, JongOh was puzzled by the expression ‘sharp increase.’ Although he thought he understood the word ‘sharp,’ JongOh could not understand the connection of ‘sharp’ with ‘increase.’ Understanding ‘sharp’ as an attribute for a physical object, he was confused applying the word to an increase in prices. The polysemy of ‘sharp’ added more confusion to the reading challenge.

The polysemous word ‘subject’ caused a problem for Noriko when she attempted to determine the definition of ‘subjective’ by use of context in the following sentence:

“Expressionism is the tendency of an artist to distort reality for an emotional effect; it is a subjective art form.”

After a few futile attempts, Noriko said she was unable to guess the meaning of the word ‘subjective,’ a relatively high-frequency word. She said it was because ‘subject’ has several meanings, “so I have to consider what this word means in this situation.”

Guessing the meaning by context did not help. Similarly, Noriko attempted to guess the meaning of a low-frequency word, ‘eschews,’ in the following sentence:

“Originating in France, musical Impressionism is characterized by suggestion and atmosphere and eschews the emotional express of the Romantic era.”

Unable to deduce the meaning of ‘eschews’ from context, Noriko became frustrated. She stated, “I didn’t know this word and I couldn’t even guess what it means when I read this sentence first time.” The ‘guess-by-context’ strategy was insufficient for her in understanding a low-frequency as well as a high-frequency word.
Minjong wrote in her journal that not understanding words on an exam was frustrating for her. She reported that in an economics exam, she could not understand some of the written sections and missed several questions as a result. Not knowing the definitions made her nervous, and, she said, “I could not concentrate on reading questions in English. It took much more time than before.”

With regard to taking exams, what frustrated JongOh the most was when the professor changed the vocabulary or expressions associated with the topic. He said that he was confused and because of that, lost valuable time. An example of a switch in equation terms was when the professor alternated between ‘something minus something’ and ‘something less something.’ JongOh was not sure if they were synonymous.

ESL students know that reading, writing, listening, speaking all imply a strong vocabulary base, but they do not always agree on just how they can effectively build the necessary vocabulary, e.g., memorizing lists, searching the dictionary, and reading more. As for the relationship between vocabulary and reading, Eskey (2000) summed up the ‘chicken-and-egg’ dilemma for acquiring vocabulary, by saying that the best way to acquire the necessary vocabulary for reading is to read, and to read one needs extensive vocabulary. Parry (1991) found a correlation between the amount people read and how many words they know. Parry suggested that ESL students vary their strategies to learn vocabulary because some strategies may work better than others depending on the situation.

The strategy for learning vocabulary long used in language classes was for students to memorize word lists. An academic word list would follow this pattern. Eldridge (2008) opposed the idea of creating an academic word list for ESL students
because he regarded academic discourse as more than simple discrete lexical items. Instead, Eldridge found it more practical to approach vocabulary as “lexical bundles and the whole molecular attractions of collocation and co-occurrence.” (p. 112)

The feasibility of providing students with an academic word list that would facilitate academic reading was considered by Hyland and Tse (2007). Hyland and Tse discussed the efficacy of presenting students with a core of high frequency words common in the academic environment; they ended up, however, questioning the usefulness of such a corpus because of the array of communicative demands placed on students by the various disciplinary communities each with its own set of literacy practices. ESL students continually face the vocabulary challenge which presents itself anew in each area of discipline they enter. Vocabulary is a multi-faceted but crucial part of the language that ESL students need to acquire.

In the next section I address culture-related issues that emerge in reading text. The ESL students in my study spent only a semester or two in the United States. They were not familiar with references to events in U.S history, inherent cultural references in text, nor current social references that continually affect language use.

4.6 The culture behind the text: Background knowledge and familiar language

ESL students come to the U.S. with background knowledge that may or may not match that of the professor or other students in their classes. Differences are apparent in the classroom textbooks and other class-associated reading materials, since, as Eskey (2005) declared, a writer typically assumes an audience with similar cultural background,
knowledge base and value system. Understanding L2 social practices is a part of reading in L2.

4.6.1 The role of background knowledge

The challenge for the L2 student, as Kern (2000) saw it, is to construct meaning by way of reading and writing, and in so doing “... make connections between textual elements and existing knowledge structures to create new knowledge structures.” (p. 29). Reading requires ESL students to construct meaning by connecting their existing knowledge base with informative text in English.

Constructing meaning, according to Eskey (2005) requires that readers already know something about the topic and can relate the new information to what they already know. Accurate decoding is not enough to understand the text. Leki (1992) related this to readers’ schemata and stated that the better the match between the reader’s schemata and that of the text, the better the reader will process the text.

In her journal, Minjong described an unusual experience of a time when background knowledge did not transfer to her second language reading experience. She explained that she studied general psychology in Korea and chose to take another psychology class here in the U.S. She wrote, “I try to memorize some concepts in English but understanding the concept does not mean matching (uniting the concept in Korean).” When she thought she was learning something new in English, she later realized that she had already learned the concept in Korean. It was only after locating the definition of a word in an English-Korean dictionary that she realized she already knew it. She exclaimed, “It happened several times!” Minjong attributed the inability to recognize the concepts as familiar to the fact that she learned them in Chinese characters,
and it was different. Korean is an alphabet language that incorporates Chinese characters to name certain concepts.

Ariana wrote of a similar situation in her journal. She said that after half the semester of her Capital Management class had passed, she realized that she had already taken the same class in Brazil a year and a half beforehand in 2006. When she realized that she was studying the same material again in English, Ariana said that she was disappointed in herself for two reasons:

1) “My English is not so good to permit me what I was studying since the beginning of the class;

2) My finance skills are also not so good – how come I took so much time to realize that it was almost the same subject.”

She said that almost everything was the same, but not 100%. “I guess the subject at the beginning of the semester was a little bit different and that is why I just realize it now. Maybe…”

Apparently, these two students were trying to learn new information in English and not translate back to their L1, which was noteworthy. It is curious, however, that they were not able to scaffold the new information onto their existing knowledge. Perhaps they were concentrating on the English lesson so much that they neglected the practice of making predictions while reading, to be confirmed or refuted later.

A reader needs to draw upon background knowledge in order to match what is known to what is presented in the text. This procedure assumes an existing familiarity with the relevant social practices inherent in the text. Matriculated classmates were raised in the culture and have a clear understanding of the references, an advantage over
study abroad students. Ariana noticed the gap when reading the textbook for her U.S.-Latin American Relations class. She said that the material was more difficult for her as an exchange student because “the other students had more background.” She was referring to the multiple references to U.S. historical events and past records of U.S. foreign policy.

JongOh said it often took him a long time to understand the contents of articles and other outside reading assignments. Many times he read and felt that he understood, but he was not sure if he understood right. “Since I am an exchange student and I did not have other friends in that class, it was kind of hard for me to check if it is right.” As the semester proceeded, he made a friend in the class who helped him understand the content of the articles in, as he referred to it, “the context of American situation.”

JongOh provided an example of the disadvantage of not having the same background experience as his classmates. He said that distinguishing words like circumstance and circumference was confusing for him, whereas others in the class knew the words automatically because of their frequent usage in middle school and high school. Although JongOh knew what the terms meant, he said he had to stop and think about the meanings each time he encountered them. He found it difficult to remember these expressions and others like them, and when they appeared in tests, he was confused and was not sure what the professor was looking for.

The Roaring Nineties, the outside reading assignment for JongOh’s macroeconomics class, assumed background knowledge that he did not have. For example, he questioned references made to the ‘tech stock bubble’ and ‘the recession that arrived in March 2001,’ not understanding their significance. The follow sentence
illustrates how background knowledge of U.S. economy plays a role in comprehending
text in the novel, *The Roaring Nineties*:

“Conservatives, however, wanted to limit the role of government (except when it
came to giving subsidies or protecting businesses, such as steel, aluminum,
corporate farms, and airlines). In some cases, they even wanted to roll back
government, turning our Social Security system over to the private sector.”
(Stiglitz 2003: p. 12)

The paragraph makes reference to Conservatives, i.e., people of a particular political
viewpoint; U.S. government spending policies; and federal vs. private funding of an
entitlement program, Social Security. These references and issues appear regularly in the
U.S. media, but are not readily discussed in other countries’ media. JongOh said that this
type of reading assignment is “more real world.” He decided that it would be good to
have a partner in the class for instances like these. He said, “I can’t ask the professor in
class – ‘cause it might be common sense for everybody else.”

Ariana found that the text for her finance class, written by the professor of the
course, was easier to read because it had no obscure cultural references. She thought it
was because the professor was not born and raised in America. The professor was
originally from Pakistan, but has lived in the U.S. for many years.

### 4.6.2 Familiar language

‘Regular’ language, i.e., common, everyday language, is a type of language that
ESL students are not prepared for when they first come to the U.S. Not having had
previous exposure to informal use of language nor first-hand experience with U.S.
culture, they are unprepared for the type of language that permeates daily use nor the
cultural points and social practices that figure prominently in its form.
One area of culture-laden language is figurative language, the colorful, creative use of language that includes metaphors and similes. ESL students are at a disadvantage when faced with such use of language, since metaphors and similes rely on a common cultural experiences and background. JongOh found the examples of figurative language in his outside reading assignment, *The Roaring Nineties*, especially difficult because even his dictionary was not able to provide coherent definitions. The following sentences illustrate typical metaphoric language as it appeared in the novel:

- “But to add froth to the frenzy, taxes on capital gains (taxes on the increases in the value of assets like stocks between sale and purchase) were cut.” (p.11)
- “Distorted incentives combined with irrational exuberance induced America’s new financial behemoths to provide the finance that underwrote the bubble…..” (p.11)
- “It was abroad, in Asia, that the first glimmerings that something was wrong arrived…..” (p. 5)
- “Instead of curbing consumption to finance our boom, the United State borrowed heavily…..” (p.12)
- “We made some good long-run investments…but too much of our investment went into wasteful private expenditures - the dot-coms that didn’t pan out…” (p.17) (Stiglitz 2003)

The use of ‘froth’ adds a kind of textural connotation to the frenzy associated with capital gains taxes. ‘Behemoth’ refers to the wealthy, and ‘bubble’ refers to the economic situation of wealth without substance. ‘Glimmerings’ is used to mean the initial inclinations that something was wrong. ‘Curbing’ consumption is a figurative reference to training an animal to stay by the side of the road. ‘Dot-coms’ refers to the Internet companies that rose to success rapidly, but did not maintain the success. As explained, these are all cultural references to the common experience of people living in the U.S. at this recent time in history, reflecting the current social practices and worldview of the people.
Similarly, ‘on the fence,’ a figurative expression referring to the idea of ‘not having committed allegiance to one point of view or another,’ gave Noriko a difficult time. Because she did not understand the expression, she had trouble completing a syntax exercise in her linguistics class. She was supposed to change a sentence from active to passive, but needed to understand the figurative use of the expression to do so.

The aggressive politicians approached the guys on the fence.

Only familiar with the literal meaning of ‘on the fence,’ Noriko wrote:

The guys were approached ‘on the fence’ by the aggressive politicians.

(instead of: The guys on the fence were approached by the aggressive politicians)

Noriko would have completed the exercise correctly had she known the figurative meaning of the expression.

These above samples are indicative of the cultural influence on written text. Metaphors and new technological concepts reflect the society and its current world view. To truly understand these words and what they represent, ESL students need lengthy, intensive exposure to the culture.

4.6.3 Informal register

Minjong had always relied on formal style and correct structure for reading comprehension before coming to the U.S. For that reason, she noted in her journal that she found the writing of other students to be difficult. She wrote, “...notices by students or e-mails from classmates are the hardest things to get the meaning. Academic texts are the easiest one ‘cause they do not have grammatically wrong things.” Likewise, she had a difficult time with submissions to ‘Face Book,’ an online venue for communicating with other people. She said, “I really have no idea what people say in face book. Bunch of slangs and grammatically wrong phrase….but I think my Korean was like theirs.”
Ariana also mentioned that reading what other students/classmates wrote is hardest to understand because of the informal style. She said she studied a formal style of English in Brazil, and she found students’ use of language to be too unstructured.

For her job in the catering department of food services, Ariana regularly had to read the ‘pull sheet,’ a list of instructions and necessary materials, written by her boss for the next event. She found this style of written text very difficult to understand. She said that the job was not hard, but reading the paper was. It took much more time than she expected to understand, even though it did not have a complex structure in English. “Actually, it is the opposite.” She said that reading an academic paper or a journal or book is easier because the words are in a context, and she could see the connection, “and it makes sense for me.”

When ESL students study English in their home country, they typically learn formal English. The informal register they experience here challenges their flexibility. They can no longer rely on the formal schemata, the structure of the textbook or story to help them understand the text. They need exposure to the culture. Learning a second or third language outside the country/countries where it is spoken limits the scope of the experience. Students who learn English before entering a university in the U.S. face the challenge of filling in all the information gaps when they join native English speaking peers in the classroom.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented a cross-section of reading challenges that the ESL students face when they study in a U.S. university. Without the benefit of life-long use of
English as a main medium of communication with the deep understanding of the language that that would imply, these students continually encountered vocabulary or usage that they did not understand. In Section 4.2 I discussed the various reading strategies the four students employed, such as consulting a dictionary or contextual guessing, how students’ strategies differed one from another, and how they adjusted strategies to better serve the need. In Section 4.3 I presented particular challenges that occur in reading textbooks and other written text at the university level of instruction. In this section I focused attention on the history textbook as compared to other textbooks in its organizational patterns and use of adjectives and on a novel that did not follow textbook organization and used obscure vocabulary. Section 4.4 looked at linguistic points that confused the ESL readers, specifically sentence structure. I focused on the inanimate noun as subject and long sentences that obstruct locating the subject, verb, and object of the sentence. In Section 4.5 I addressed the role of vocabulary and how it can compromise a student’s reading capability. I explored the importance of knowing high-frequency as well as low-frequency words and the problems ESL students can have with expressions, such as ‘sidestep,’ ‘multiple,’ ‘vantage point,’ and ‘sharp increase.’ Section 4.6 covered the influence of background information and cultural references and their significance in understanding text. ESL students can be confused by references to points in U.S. history, such as President Reagan’s support of the Nicaraguan contras, or economic patterns with vocabulary like ‘the tech bubble.’ In addition, I addressed the figurative use of language, specifically the random use of metaphors, such as ‘on the fence,’ and informal register with its cultural-related familiarity as occurs in e-mail between students.
In the next Chapter I will address the challenges that the ESL students face when completing writing assignments and fulfilling other writing-related requirements.
Chapter 5
WRITING

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present an overview and analysis of writing as it poses challenges for ESL study abroad students. The purpose of the chapter is to examine the types of problems that the four participants encountered, the nature of the writing assignments that presented problems for them, and the strategies that they utilized to overcome the challenges.

ESL students need to produce good writing, which, as defined by Leki (1995b), “is writing that meets particular requirements set for a particular readership at a particular time and place.” (p. 41). Academic writing encompasses many particular types of writing and presents many challenges for the ESL students in this study.

The study abroad students at this University take credit courses and are responsible for all course writing requirements, including term papers and critical reviews. They need to produce work that is clear, concise, and coherent in order to compete with matriculated students in their classes.

This chapter explores the challenge of negotiating academic discourse that ESL students face when writing in a second language in a U.S. university. The organization of the chapter is as follows. In Section 5.2 I will address ESL students’ perceptions of the challenges that they face and their individual writing strategies. In Section 5.3 I present the types of writing that the ESL students need to produce and the accompanying
problems. In Section 5.4 I address language issues in writing. Section 5.5 addresses the cultural implications of writing in a second language.

5.2 Challenges and strategies

In an informal meeting, Minjong, one of the two Korean students in the study, shared her perceptions of how her university in Korea differed from the University she attended in the U.S. She claimed that the average class size in Korea was much larger than in the U.S. and, consequently, the Korean classroom placed a greater emphasis on reading and listening, whereas the smaller class size in the U.S. university resulted in an emphasis on speaking and writing. Minjong was surprised at the small class sizes and at the quantity of writing and speaking expected of students. She was challenged.

5.2.1 Limited English skills

All four students felt that their writing skills were compromised by their lack of confidence in English language proficiency. Minjong said that she felt her command of English was not strong enough to explain complicated ideas. She said, “I just pick easy words and, therefore, my paper looks like middle school students or elementary school students. It seems little bit childish.” Her strategy for improving her writing was to memorize more English words. Similarly, Noriko said that when writing a paper, she tended to use the same phrase again and again. She said, “So when I write my paper, I feel it’s not really good.” Minjong did admit that by writing more, her writing became “more comfortable, but not necessarily improved.” She said that it flowed better, and it did not entail the strained effort as it had when she first arrived.
Ariana reported in her journal that when preparing to write a paper, she tried to force herself to think in an “English way” since the paper needed to be written in English. She said that she needed to be mindful of the structure of the sentences since they are different from Portuguese. She related, “Sometimes the word comes in my mind in my native language, Portuguese, so I try to find the meaning in English looking at the dictionary.”

For JongOh, writing was stressful because of his limited vocabulary and the time involved in the process. Despite the amount of time that he spent in advance thinking about what to write, he became discouraged when he read the finished product. “It’s kind of different, but I don’t know how to express in another way.” He categorized his writing as “small, straightforward, and childish.” JongOh related in his journal that he was surprised that he did not have to write as often as the other students did because most of his classes were in the field of economics and mathematics.

JongOh did, however, take a college writing class during the fall semester that he said challenged him. He said, “It was not easy for me. But I think it helped me to understand the big image of academical writing.” In addition, JongOh said that writing helped him to write. He enjoyed his writing class assignments in which the teacher would give them a situation and they had to write a paper. For example, the teacher would describe two students (one good and one bad), and they had to write a letter of recommendation for each student.

5.2.2 Time consuming

Writing takes time, and time management is especially difficult for ESL students when writing. The Leki (1995a) study of the writing techniques of ESL students in
content courses reinforced this concern. Leki’s findings showed that students were worried about their ability to manage competing demands, such as managing course loads and regulating time spent on a particular assignment. All five of Leki’s students were concerned with limited time and the ability to cautiously parcel out time segments in order to accomplish everything required of them.

JongOh was concerned with time constraints. For him, writing in English took more time than he could comfortably devote to the assignment. He said that he would enjoy writing more if he had more time, but he spent a significant amount of time organizing his thoughts and composing. “Writing in English makes me spend much more time after I decided how to write or what to write. Actually, when I had to write a paper, I could not spend too much time in it. I know it will take long time, but I also need to prepare tests or exams. For me, it is better to study than spending too much time writing if I want better grade in total.” JongOh realized the need to distribute his time to his best advantage and to not be consumed with one assignment to the detriment of other pressing requirements.

5.2.3 Vocabulary and dictionary issues

The ESL students in the Leki and Carson (1994) survey listed the need to expand their vocabulary as their primary concern when faced with writing assignments in university content classes. Most frustrating for the students was the difficulty of finding the precise word for a particular situation with a limited vocabulary.

According to Snow, Met, and Genesee (1992), a good vocabulary base is necessary for success in academic context because of the need for meaningful and purposeful communication. Snow, Met, and Genesee suggested that students need to
have an understanding of what they called ‘content-obligatory’ as well as ‘content-compatible’ language. They distinguished ‘content-obligatory’ as the language required to master the content, such as structural (nouns, verbs, rhetorical devices) and functional (study skills, note-taking) language and the ‘content-compatible’ as language not required for content mastery, but necessary for naturally occurring communication (p. 30).

Noriko said that the most difficult part of writing for her was to find the appropriate word. She admitted using a Japanese-English dictionary often, but found that it did not help. She said, “Even though I found some word in English, I would feel that word is not the one what I want to say. Sometimes it’s hard to find the word what I want to say in English and it may take time.” She often resorted to using the same expression again and again and was not happy with the result. She felt constricted by having to express herself only in English, “But if I use Japanese, I can make the paper more interesting because I know a lot of expressions even though I say the same content.” She decided that speaking more English would have helped improve her writing. “I need to talk more. If I remember some phrases or expressions, I can use them in my paper. But I don’t think it helps to listen something people talk or read the books. I need to remember them to use in daily life including the paper, I think it helps more to talk to somebody.” Noriko did not interact often with Americans, but she realized that more interaction would have benefited her English vocabulary skills.

Ariana was also frustrated by limited vocabulary. “What is difficult when I have to write a paper is that I do not have the words in English. I know the concepts but I do not know how to translate it in a English way. On my native language (Portuguese) we have a lot of words to say the same thing that just one only word in English does.”
Ariana did, however, credit her study abroad experience for an improved use of English expressions. For example, she mentioned using the expression, ‘write down,’ without knowing how she knew it. She related, “I just know that it makes sense to me. I guess ‘write down’ is kind of a phrasal verb and I would not do this before come to the United States.” This type of unexplained retrieval, when words just come to mind, aided her writing. When they seemed logical, she used them. “I feel that it makes sense so I go ahead with the writing.”

JongOh said that vocabulary was the reason it took him so long to write. He felt that it would help to know more transitional expressions like ‘on the other hand.’ He also expressed frustration with not being able to express what he wanted to say without knowing the appropriate expressions in English. He admitted that using the dictionary to find words or idioms did not help because he felt he could not use it properly. His ultimate strategy: “What I do now is to use internet, and try to find the expressions in the contexts. It is still not easy to use those words or expressions like American people does, but it really helps me to understand the expressions and use it in my writings.”

Whereas Odlin (2004) promoted using a two-dictionary strategy, Ariana reported, “I used four dictionaries to write my paper:

1) English-English: when I know the word and I want to check the spelling or the meaning.
2) English-Portuguese: when I am not confident about the sentence that I wrote and I want to check if it has a meaning/ if it makes sense.
3) Portuguese-English: when I have an idea to write in my paper but I do not know how or when I do not know the word in English.
4) And I use the dictionary online (by internet) www.m-w.com; www.translate.google.com and www.translate.google.com”
She continued, “But my manual dictionaries are better than the dictionary online because I can check all the information related to the word (not just the meaning) and I can understand the grammar.” Ariana made a sincere effort to determine the appropriate words and expressions for what she wanted to say. She did admit, however, that her procedure took more time than she could afford.

When writing informally, Ariana altered her strategy. She said she would type an e-mail, read it, make changes to make it clearer and shorter, and finally, check the spelling. If still not satisfied with her message, she would translate it into Portuguese to see if it made sense. “Sometimes, however, some phrases just make sense in English and even the translation can not help me.” Dictionary use is a difficult skill difficult for many ESL students to master.

Zamel (1983) attested to the limitations of dictionary usage. Zamel indicated that few ESL students in her study were able to use dictionaries to successfully confirm their word choices and appropriateness. She attributed this problem to the students’ inability to discern word connotations. Their confusion often resulted in the use of impressive but contextually inappropriate words.

JongOh recognized the distinction between his receptive and productive use of the language when he recounted, “Even though I know the meaning when I read. It is hard to use in writing.” JongOh’s exposure to new vocabulary was not as bountiful as it could have been during his study abroad experience since he spent most of his time with international students and did not always complete his reading assignments. More repeated receptive exposures may have helped him in his productive use of vocabulary.
5.2.4 Writing drafts

When ESL students write drafts, Zamel (1983) recommended dialogue with another person, a teacher or peer, to allow the writers the opportunity to articulate their ideas and to guide them to finding the best order of delivery. The dialogue format would help writers to articulate their intentions and to discover any disconnect between the intended message and what is actually communicated. Zamel said that this type of dialogue affords writers a chance to discuss in advance with a reader what they want to say rather than being told by the reader afterwards what they should have said.

Ariana regularly submitted her papers to the Writing Center for outside help in writing. “They helped me a lot! I can discuss my ideas and I can find a way to represent/show it clearly. The Writing Center helps me to understand my mistakes (especially related to the grammar and the structure of the paper). Unfortunately, I could not discuss my essay twice times as I did in my other assignment.” She intended to submit her paper at least twice, but usually she ran out of time.

In the fall semester Ariana wrote a review of a newspaper article in The New York Times on the movement to draft Al Gore as a presidential candidate for the next election. The assignment was for her U.S. Government class, a freshman-level course. Ariana worked very hard on the assignment. As she wrote, she regularly consulted with someone at the Writing Center. She wrote four drafts before submitting the fifth and final to her professor. As Suzuki (2008) discovered from the Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) students in her study, students tend to revise word-level text when they revised by themselves whereas peer review resulted in more sentence-level changes in which students discussed topics, content, and ideas.
The following sentences are indicative of the type of exchange Ariana had with the peer tutor at the Writing Center. The first sentence represents the initial version she submitted to the Writing Center:

“From this phrase we can understand that, besides a political movement which comes from the supporters, exists a fact of doing something in a quiet or secret way”

The sentence was altered in consultation with the peer tutor to read:

“From this phrase we can understand that there is sometimes a suspicion that those sorts of political movements might be doing something in a quiet or secret way.”

Apparently, the discussion with the peer tutor explored Ariana’s interpretation of the author’s intent and how to express it clearly. The discussion most likely focused on topic, content, and ideas. As Zamel (1983) noted, the more skilled writers in her study did not allow surface-level problems to distract their attention while writing but tended to them later in the process.

Ariana received a 92 / A- for her final submitted version. The professor made a few comments of ‘unclear’ throughout the paper, but her final comment was ‘generally good, except for some unclear writing.’ The assignment was a manageable one for Ariana since she had enough time to devote to the writing process, and more importantly, since she had the time to return to the Writing Center four times.

5.2.5 The writing process

When studying the writing process of six ESL students, Zamel (1983) found that the participants did not follow a sequence of pre-writing, writing, and revision. Zamel noticed that the students had developed their own individual strategies for beginning the project and their strategies did not include one of pre-writing.
When questioned about her writing process, Minjong said that she starts with a rough draft in which she writes whatever she can in English, “but some words do not come into my head.” She then consults a dictionary and tries to memorize the word with help from the pronunciation cues.

JongOh also tried to write directly in English using expressions he knew, but he said that it took even more time than his old method of trying to copy expressions which he knew was inefficient. He ended up deciding that the best method for him was to read everything related to the assignment in order to understand the topic and then write down his ideas the best way possible.

Zamel (1983) found that the least skilled writers in her study exhibited an inability to produce a substantial amount of discourse and produced chunks of discourse that did not contribute to the overall interrelatedness of ideas nor to the flow of the text. Zamel attributed this to the students’ inability to approach the task globally and to distance themselves and instead to focus only on surface-level problems, such as word choice. She said that the least skilled writers seemed to be afraid of making mistakes whereas the skilled writers used strategies to develop their ideas without worrying about lexical or syntactic issues.

According to the Zamel (1983) interpretation, Noriko appears to fall in the least skilled category. Noriko’s writing lacks a sense of interrelatedness. An example of her writing follows:

“Everyone has a behavior that he or she wishes to improve. I also have a behavior that I want to improve. I am a member of brass band club and my part is clarinet. But I have just started playing, so I want to get my playing skill better. It is quite different to play the clarinet solo and to play with other members. If I play the clarinet with others, I have to try to get along well with them. I want to improve my skill especially when I play the clarinet with others.”
The writing lacks a flow and coherence and does not indicate Noriko’s ability to distance herself from the text in order to consider the reader’s perspective. Instead, Noriko displayed a fear of making mistakes. She seemed to be focusing on grammatically correct sentences with no misspelled words in relating her experience, but neglected to develop the topic with a concern for the perspective of the reader. As Tedick and Mathison (1995) noted, framing is an often neglected skill for ESL writers. Tedick and Mathison said that these writers need to consider the reader when writing and to provide enough context and development to satisfy a reader’s expectations. Authority, subject knowledge, and interest is typically what appeals to readers.

5.2.6 Synthesis

The ESL students in this study approached academic writing conscientiously, but they encountered many obstacles along the way. These students lacked adequate exposure to the language and the culture, and completing the writing assignments was more time-consuming than they expected. Guidance in accessing support would most likely have benefited them. More importantly, however, they needed the opportunity to discover what works best for them: they needed to find the strategies that suited their personal learning styles. Since study abroad students spend a limited time in the U.S., their opportunities for negotiating academic discourse are unfortunately cut short just when they are beginning to grasp the breadth of the challenge.

5.3 Types of writing

Academic writing usually falls into one of two categories. Raimes (1991) named the first category as writing for display, which includes quizzes and exams, distinct from
writing for learning, which includes series of drafts, revision, and edits. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) distinguished these two categories as knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming. Knowledge-telling is writing to show one’s knowledge or understanding of concepts, such as answering an essay question in an exam. In this type of writing, students recapitulate as much as they can on the exam paper so that the professor of the course can see that they studied the material and are able to verbalize the concepts they learned. Knowledge-transforming, on the other hand, is writing to discover in which writers develop an idea by way of completing multiple drafts, conferencing with others, and consulting outside sources.

5.3.1 Writing for display /knowledge-telling

Writing that calls for students to show what they know can intimidate and frustrate ESL students. Although they prepare for tests just as the L1 students do, they do not have the advantage of using a familiar language frame to display what they have learned. They may cognitively understand the concepts that they are asked to outline, define, and elaborate on, but they can be limited in delivering the information because of gaps in their language knowledge.

Ariana clearly expressed her dislike of essay-format exams and said that they made her nervous. She said that she was never sure if she had the right word and if it was spelled correctly, and consulting a dictionary would take time away from composing her answers. Ariana’s mini exam in U.S. Government in the fall semester included the following two questions:

What do we mean by the “privileged position of business?” How does the privileged position of business present challenges to democracy?

The following is Ariana’s response with instructor’s comments included [in brackets]:

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By the “privileged position of business” we mean that the contemporary companies has power level that no one other group can duplicate. It is related to the fact that, nowadays, business has so much powerful: although they do not care about anyone, they (few companies dominated by small elites) influence everybody life. [develop]

Those who have business and economic power also have their control of the political system. It presents one of the challenges to democracy: unaccountable corporate power. The companies have a huge power that enables them to bend the laws through their advantages. [unclear writing]

Ariana seemed to have a good understanding of the questions, but she appeared to be limited in her ability to fully express her ideas, especially in a timed situation. She presented initial general responses, but failed to develop the ideas into full paragraphs and to include explicit support for her ideas. An essay exam is meant for students to elaborate on what they know and understand about the topic. Ariana displayed some knowledge on the subject, but her resistance to further discuss what the issues entailed made it appear that she did not fully grasp what she should have learned. By not expanding the topic to include background, reasons, implications, and results, she did not display her knowledge adequately.

In an informal interview with me, the professor of the course later shared that Ariana’s writing was ‘unclear,’ but that was not as serious a problem as ‘unclear points,’ which meant the writing was not understandable. The professor found Ariana’s main issue to be that she would state without development. Overall, however, she found Ariana to be a good writer in English, her second language. Ariana did well in the exam, having received a B-/B.
5.3.2 Writing for learning / knowledge-transforming

Writing for learning, here categorized as assignment writing, poses a separate challenge for the ESL students. Cumming (1995) specified that different writing skills are required for knowledge-transforming writing from those of knowledge-telling. Students need to not only show what they know. They also need to develop a topic with clarity and coherence. Further, the category of writing for learning entails the individual guidelines and requirements prevalent in the specific disciplines. Ostler (2002) claimed that genre, which he defined as, “the type of writing expected by a particular discipline” (p. 169) challenged the L2 student, since university students need to distinguish one genre from another across the academic curriculum and be able to adapt to the conventions appropriate to each. Because of the many differing discourse communities that fall under the broad category of academic discourse, Leki (1995b) emphasized the importance for L2 students to recognize the purpose of the writing task. For example, Leki purported, whereas some disciplines may expect a writing style that includes a personal commitment to the positions stated, others find a full review of topic-related material to be most important.

All four of the ESL students in this study took a class in College Writing in the fall semester. According to the students, however, the class did not fully prepare them for the writing demands they were to face. Writing classes cannot address all writing issues. For example, they often do not address the process of demonstrating knowledge of source text in writing (Leki and Carson 1997), nor do they allow students the opportunity to learn collaboratively with classmates (Strauss, Feiz, Xiang, and Ivanova 2006). Strauss, Feiz, Xiang, and Ivanova stressed the value of dialogic interactivity,
which promotes learning language by using language and helps to initiate L2 students into the cultural literacy of the university.

Although all four students in this study had taken English classes in their home institutions before coming to the U.S., Leki and Carson (1994) noted that typical ESL classes do not encourage students to integrate opinion with outside sources of information and argument. Consequently, according to Leki and Carlson, ESL students may not be prepared for the array of assignments expected of them across disciplines. They noted that the students in their study, having advanced from ESL classes to regular credit classes, listed task management (second only to vocabulary) as a continuing ESL need. Task management for them meant the ability to write from one or multiple sources of reading. Leki and Carson (1997) reinforced that ESL students’ preparation for writing in content classes often lacked the ability to integrate new information with existing knowledge.

5.3.2.1 The critical review

The critique is an example of an academic genre which encompasses the individual skills of reading, writing, and analyzing along with adding personal opinion in one assignment. The format is challenging for ESL students. According to Dobson and Feak (2004), to write a critique, the student needs to analyze multiple sources of information on a topic, some with similar and some with opposing points of view, then develop her/his own perspective on the topic. As Dobson and Feak pointed out, the academic critique includes the skills of relating knowledge as well as transforming the knowledge.
Typically, a student is asked to write a critique of an article [another type of academic genre] or a book that is intended for an academic readership of experts and does not merely present factual information like their textbook. The article/book instead may challenge an existing viewpoint in the field or present a new extension of existing viewpoints. The student must then compare the content of the article/book with what they have already learned in the class or the textbook. They need to show that they can integrate information from different sources and can then develop their own observations. In addition, they need to assume an authority stance – unfamiliar to an undergraduate and especially to an L2 student. (Dobson and Feak 2004). The following three sections present individual experiences of Ariana, JongOh, and Noriko in writing critical papers.

5.3.2.2 Writing a critique: Ariana

Ariana stated that she was comfortable with an assignment which required her to summarize a single reading, such as a chapter or an article. She said that she could “make connections between two material, because I still have what to base my information on.”

However, a written assignment in the spring semester for her U.S.- Latin American Relations class, an upper-level class, gave her problems. According to the course syllabus, students were directed to write three papers in which they “1) briefly summarize the main issues addressed in that section’s readings, lectures, and videos and 2) provide a critical analysis and reflection on the material.” The professor of the class in an informal meeting described the assignment as requiring the students to review and reflect upon the main issues covered in the previous two weeks of class, i.e., the main
themes in the readings and class discussions. He said that students were to provide a reflection on everything and pull out 2-3 main themes, but not in chronological format.

The intertextual nature of the assignment challenged Ariana, especially since she had a difficult time with the readings. When I asked her in an informal interview about her general reaction to the Latin American Relations class, she related, “I’m taking a class that’s so hard, so hard. I’m studying like overnight and the next day in class I can’t handle myself because I’m so tired sleepy.” She admitted that she could not read all the textbook chapters that were necessary for background.

In academic writing, L2 students face the challenge of not only presenting their claims in an acceptable, orderly fashion that meets the demands of the conventions of writing in English, but also skillfully drawing in information from the textbook and outside sources to support their suppositions and theories (Strauss, Feiz, Xiang, and Ivanova 2006). For this type of skill, the New London Group (2000) posited that L2 students need to know how text connects to other texts in an intertextual context. Starfield (2007) asserted that making intertextual connections is essential to develop strong argument in their writing and writing success. These students, however, are at a disadvantage without having had a broad exposure to relevant texts and the cultural knowledge that is shared among their classmates (Ramanathan and Kaplan, 1996). Without the implicit understanding of ‘what’s out there,’ these students need to devote more study time to uncovering such relevant facts.

Ariana said that she spent many hours working on the paper. She prepared several drafts and consulted with the writing center, but she had a difficult time. Her grade for the first paper was an 88, an indication of a good attempt at meeting the
challenge. The professor, Dr. Jones (a pseudonym to protect the identity of the professor), marked ‘good’ for three separate paragraphs and four checkmarks indicating appropriate discussion. He questioned one point that she made in the following sentence (underlined):

“As a result, having a multilateral cooperation can help ‘to correct the image of the United States as an unfeeling giant, casting its shadow over its neighbors’ (Henry Forde, the foreign minister of Barbados, p. 61) as it happen in Carter’s administration and, however, it was gotten as Reagan’s credits.”

To which Dr. Jones commented, “I’m not sure about the significance here,” referring to her insertion of an unrelated issue that would have required more development if she chose to include it.

In an informal meeting with me at the end of the spring semester, Professor Jones candidly expressed his disappointment with Ariana’s progress in the class. He explained that the course requirements emphasized reading the assigned materials, writing three short and one long papers, and interacting in class. The professor claimed that although Ariana did only passable work on her first paper, he awarded her an 88 for her efforts. He said that the grade was inflated to allow for language issues.

Dr. Jones readily added that he had also studied abroad in Argentina when he in college. He claimed, therefore, that he understood her dilemma, i.e., studying in a new country in a new language and dealing with new material. When I pressed him for details on his study abroad experience, Dr. Jones related that while in the program he took Spanish language classes. His credit courses were designed for exchange students and consisted of light reading, discussions of culture, and trips to museums and local attractions. Unfortunately, he did not see the disjunction between his experience and that
of Ariana. She had no language classes, and she was taking upper-level courses that demanded a high understanding of academic discourse in the second language.

Further, Dr. Jones lamented the fact that Ariana completed only the first paper and that she did not even attempt to do even the other two short papers. According to Ariana, she did not have the amount of time necessary to do the other two papers. The professor also noted she did not participate in class. Consequently, she received a D for the course.

Dr. Jones’ attitude about language and language development in Ariana’s situation relates to what Zamel (1995) referred to as “the myth of transience,” that ESL students’ language problems are merely temporary. His remarks implied that Ariana did not work hard enough to overcome the language challenge.

5.3.2.3 Writing a critique: JongOh

Likewise, JongOh had problems with writing critical reviews. When discussing his work on reviewing an outside article for his Developmental Economics class in the fall semester, he attributed the problem to the density of the article. He confided with me that he wrote the review without having read the entire article because it was too difficult to read. Not surprisingly, the professor’s comments focused on JongOh’s lack of development of the ideas presented in the article and his need to provide more details. In particular, one comment was, “Discuss substantive freedom discussed by the author.”

In order to write a critique, according to Dobson and Feak (2004), the student needs to understand the article and be able to express the understanding in written form, which assumes, in addition to understanding the rhetorical structure, the ability to
summarize, identify the main points, locate the perspective of the writer, and establish support for a claim.

JongOh also had a difficult time writing a critical review of the novel, *The Roaring Nineties*, for his Macroeconomics class. The assignment, as listed in the course syllabus was:

Using the “Roaring Nineties,” students will be required to write two short papers on the experiences of the 1990s and their relevance to today’s economy. Each paper will be at least 1000 words long.

JongOh said that the assignment posed a problem for him because the reading was difficult and he was not able to successfully relate the content of the book to the class. “Assignment was to try to analyze and relate it to class. But difficult because all of our charts from class are simplified.” An example of what he wrote under “Analysis” follows:

Stiglitz emphasizes the role of Fed stabilizing and stimulating economy. He seems to be skeptical in many economical decisions with Alan Greenspan, who is fond of smaller government. The role of Fed will be emphasized by the economists who prefer bigger government, and others who pursue smaller government will prefer to be dependant on the market. As Stiglitz mentioned in this book, role of government should be balanced to avoid both ‘market failure’ and ‘government failure.’

Economical forecast is difficult, and the bad information leads the government take wrong policies. It seems that political elements affects economical forecast that every economist has different forecast even under the same situation. If we compare the economical forecast with the weather forecast, both of them are estimated by the information we have. Weather forecast can at least tell how the weather is now, but economical forecast seems much difficult that no one can assure how the “economical weather” is right now. It does not mean that it is useless to forecast the economical situation and deal with it. Government should try to provide good information and it should “act” when it is needed.

In conclusion, the Fed should help the economy stabilize when bubble comes out, and stimulate when it is recovering from the recession.

The professor’s comments at the end of the paper included:
Provide a more detailed review and analysis. Explain deficit reduction and why it worked. Explain in detail Fed’s role. Its inability to recognize the bubble and unwillingness to use tools such as raising margin requirements.

The commentary indicates that JongOh did not fully grasp the assignment and what it entailed. JongOh did provide several appropriate points that were introduced in the book; he earned an 85 for his work. He did not, however, address several main points that the professor found to be significant, and he failed to develop adequately the points that he did mention. As exemplified in the above passage, he presented the Federal Reserve Board’s position on the size of government, but failed to analyze the Fed’s position and its reluctance to address the bubble. JongOh was used to reading illustrated text with charts and graphs that offer visual representation of the ideas presented. Having to analyze written text without visual cues took him beyond his comfort area.

5.3.2.4 Writing a critical analysis: Noriko

Noriko found an assignment in her Adult and Aging Psychology class in the spring semester particularly difficult. In advance of the upcoming quizzes, students were required to write multiple-choice questions that could possibly appear on the test. The professor explained in an informal discussion with me that the purpose of the exercise was to help the students prepare for the test. It entailed taking information they had read or heard in lectures and writing questions based on the material. Underlying the task was an implication that students would be able to analyze and synthesize what they had learned during the period of time covered in the quiz. In the same interview with me, the professor said that Noriko had a difficult time with the activity. She felt it was due to Noriko’s inability to ‘manipulate knowledge.’ Noriko could not complete the
assignment, and she did very poorly on the exams. Consequently, she received a D in the course.

5.3.2.5 Review of ESL students’ critique writing

In writing critiques or assignments that called for analyses, the ESL students demonstrated difficulty in compiling information that they pulled from various sources and reacting to the text, which sometimes required the writer to take a stance. University ESL students need specific skills in order to write a persuasive argument. They need to implement skills like interpreting, evaluating, and analyzing material, synthesizing the information, writing with coherence and clear argumentative structure, and the organizational skills to manage the task (Connor and Kramer 1996; Strauss, Feiz, Xiang, and Ivanova 2006).

The ESL students may not have arrived in the U.S. with the necessary skills. English language class in their home country may not have addressed the skills they needed to accomplish academic discourse writing. According to Strauss, Feiz, Xiang, and Ivanova (2006), second language writing instruction is often more explicit in nature without affording students the opportunity to apply inductive reasoning and explore the complexities of academic writing in the target language. In addition, these students most likely were not adequately exposed to ‘socially and contextually situated language.’ (p. 4)

Noriko seemed to be hindered by her level of proficiency. She lacked the ability to synthesize material that she had read or gleaned from other sources in order to create representative points. This ability presumed that she understood the material well enough to manipulate it and write about it. Connor and Kramer (1995) revealed a correlation of language proficiency level and the ability to successfully handle academic writing.
Connor and Kramer indicated that ESL Students with lower TOEFL scores had difficulty with discourse-level reading and writing strategies as well as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax.

Connor and Kramer (1995) also suggested that L2 students may lack processes and strategies necessary to write an academic report and that these students may not know how to use evidence to build an argument or how to write the argument and support it with analysis of case information. In addition, Connor and Kramer claimed, it is important for these students to know how to disagree with text and maintain their own ideas. As a prewriting strategy, they reinforced the value of the study group in which students have the opportunity to disagree, compete, challenge, and agree with classmates. Strauss et al. (2006) stressed the value of interactive activity in a dynamic, social environment as a means for L2 students to experiment with and through the language, leading to the ability to analyze, interpret, and transform text.

Had the ESL students received more preparation for what writing a critique involved, they may have been more adept at the task. JongOh, for example, would have benefited from opportunities to interact with classmates and discuss the text he was assigned to analyze. Interactivity would have enabled him to weigh his interpretations, to analyze the findings, and to draw similarities to and differences from the class lectures and discussions.

5.3.3 Informal writing

Communicating in an informal style of writing is a necessary skill for ESL students who spend time in the U.S. Many incidental occasions for informal writing arise in daily life. Elbow (1998) presented a rationale for the need to attend to informal
language along with academic discourse in college writing classes since students need skills to write informal notes to friends, to keep a diary, and to write for entertainment. Elbow suggested that students need to know how to write “to render experience rather than to explain it.” (p. 147). He purported that this type of writing enables students to share daily events, such as what they see out the window and how they feel when they walk in snow.

Ariana experienced the need to write informally when she had to write an e-mail to a student whom she did not know in order to inquire about a room for rent. One of the girls who shared a three-bedroom apartment was leaving to study abroad and was looking for a replacement. Ariana said that it may have seemed to be a simple thing to do, but for her it was somewhat challenging. “To write to these girls I had to be at the same time, formal (because they do not know me) and informal (because they are girls just like me and we have the same age.) Writing in a formal way is easier than in a informal way or both of them. The reason is because in a formal way I just need to follow the grammar and be clear.” Her dilemma: “I have to give them more information about myself and tell them what I am looking for. How can I do it being clear and objective and, at the same time, not rude?” Ariana found writing to an American student to be more intimidating than writing to a professor, and she even reported taking more time to write to a fellow student. Her strategy for the informal writing was to imitate the writing of the students even using some of the same expressions. “I try to pay attention in how they talk, how they write so I can do the same. Just like a kid following the adults because she knows that the adult know more than her.”
Ariana also claimed that writing on the computer (instant messaging) for her was difficult because it entailed writing informally and writing fast. She said that when writing a paper or a letter, she usually takes time to review what she wrote again and again until she feels comfortable with her writing. Talking with her friends online, however, does not allow her enough time to make corrections. She remarked, “My mind goes faster than what I type and sometimes the words that I put it together doesn’t make sense when I read it again.” Kress (2003) called this a type of bidirectional communication, whereas, in the regular book era, communication was only in one direction.

The journal writing Ariana did for this study enabled her to practice informal writing, since she did not have to be concerned about her mistakes. She wrote that since I was the reader and she knew that I was looking for her mistakes and for how she improved her English, she could just write what she was thinking. “But to write a paper for a class, it’s different.”

5.4 Language-related issues

When writing in English, the ESL students had many language-related problems. These problems, which can range from the occasional misuse of a verb form to word usage that compromises the delivery of the message, tend to inhibit the flow of discourse and can distort the message that the writer is attempting to convey.

The use of English articles, i.e., ‘a,’ ‘an,’ and ‘the,’ is what caused difficulty for Minjong. Because of the complexity of the article system, understanding the use of English articles is often difficult for ESL students (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982;
Grannis, 1972). Minjong reported that they were particularly confusing for her because Korean does not use articles for definiteness the same way that English does. Following are sentences from an essay that Minjong wrote for her Shakespeare class in which there are examples of definite article omission:

1) “Henry proves his qualification for ___ throne by replacing the last words of Hotspur…”
2) “While he takes an affirmative position about language, he also brings the credibility of language with the tragedy caused by believing ___insincere words in King Lear.”
3) “He believes he can measure ___ magnitude of his daughter’s love by their words.”

In the three sentences, the underlined blank spaces represent omitted articles. The underscored articles were accurately provided by Minjong. In sentence 1, she missed an article before the noun ‘throne,’ but was able to supply the appropriate article ‘the’ before the expression ‘last words.’ Similarly, in sentence 2, she supplied three appropriate articles before ‘affirmative position,’ ‘credibility,’ and ‘tragedy,’ but missed one before ‘insincere words.’ In sentence 3, she omitted ‘the’ before ‘magnitude.’

In the journal she kept for this study, Minjong also displayed an uncertainty in her use of the definite article ‘the.’ In the following excerpt she is describing an assignment for an upcoming Shakespeare class:

“I have a short essay for a discussion the Shakespear’s play, Henry IV, for Shakespeare class tomorrow.”

Evident in the above sentences and excerpt, Minjong was inconsistent in her usage of the definite article ‘the.’ She sometimes included the article, sometimes omitted it, and another time she overused the article. Master (1995) suggested that there is a predictable order of article acquisition among ESL learners and found the omission of the definite article to be the most frequent error among the advanced ESL students in his
study, which Minjong displayed in her three sentences. In the journal excerpt, however, she overused ‘the’ with ‘Shakespeare’s play.’ Liu and Gleason (2002) suggested a progression from underuse to overuse of ‘the,’ but found that the tendency to overuse as well as to underuse ‘the’ decreased as proficiency levels of their participants moved from intermediate to advanced. Minjong’s TOEFL score range of 577 – 587 indicates that she is at a high-intermediate level of proficiency. With more practical use of English, she will most likely stabilize her use of the definite article.

As for other grammar-related issues, Minjong felt confident. In her journal, she noted that in one situation in her writing class, she was more knowledgeable than the matriculated students. She said, “My professor explained about some grammar and took some examples to help understanding of students. However, while (ironically) other students and the professor had some difficulty about it, I did not have any problem at all.”

JongOh expressed having a difficult time with word forms and parts of speech. In his writing he used the following:

“Underdevelopment countries have many inequality related issues including capability inequality, unemployment and gender inequality.”

In this case, JongOh should have used the participial form ‘underdeveloped,’ but instead chose the noun form, ‘underdevelopment.’ Likewise, the word ‘progresses’ caused him confusion in the following sentence:

“As a country goes through its developmental progresses, these inequalities will be decreased to have more freedoms.”

Apparently, JongOh confused the non-count noun ‘progress’ with the countable ‘progressions,’ referring to sequential steps forward. Another error in this sentence was the use of the passive to form the past tense of the unaccusative verb ‘decrease.’
According to Kondo (2005), L2 learners tend to overgeneralize the use of passive with unaccusative verbs, such as ‘arrive’ and ‘break’ because of the confusion over agency with these verbs. For example, in the sentence, “The window broke when the ball hit it,” the agency of the verb ‘broke’ is confusing. An L2 learner would tend to use “The window was broken when the ball hit it” to allow for window to assume overt subject position without agency. JongOh moved the Theme argument ‘inequalities’ into the subject position, but used the passive form of the verb ‘will be decreased’ instead of the active, ‘will decrease.’

Other language-related mistakes that JongOh made were:

1) “When they arrived to Seoul…”
   -- Incorrect preposition

2) “Sarah though that the feeling of being ‘stranger’ might be the feeling that Daniel would experience during his growth as an international adoptee.”
   “On the other hand, the children who were grown in a strong ‘white’orientation and had little contact with…”
   -- Awkward use of ‘growth’ and use of ‘grow’ in the case of children, as a transitive verb

3) “…failing of establishing their identities.”
   (Instead of ‘failure to establish’)
   -- Misuse of ‘noun + infinitive’ expression

4) “…that’s why some parents just ignore their child’s origin and try to adjust their children into American culture.”
   -- The use of ‘adjust’ as a transitive verb instead of an expression like ‘have,’ help,’ or ‘make’ children adjust

JongOh demonstrates a good English proficiency. He still makes minor errors that will probably diminish as he continues to study the language.

Ariana explained that when learning English in Brazil, she placed an emphasis on reading rather than conversation. She referred to this as ‘visual representation’ instead of oral because she did not include the sound of the word when learning it. Her dependency
on visual cues instead of phonological ones coincides with Akamatsu’s (2003) findings that L2 readers from non-alphabetic languages who depend on ideographs for meaning making usually process visually. Evidently, Ariana memorized the visual representation of words instead of relying on phonological cues as would the alphabet learner in Akamatsu’s study. Ariana felt that this strategy compromised her vocabulary knowledge and usage. For example, she avoided words like ‘through’ and ‘though.’ “This type of words, with a lot of consonants are the most difficults one to spell and to say, so I don’t use in my vocabulary every day what results in my papers: I do not use the words that I am not familiar with.” She admitted that she often misspelled the expression, ‘sign up’ as ‘sig up,’ an error she would not make if she were made aware of phoneme-grapheme rules in a deep orthographic language like English, where the letter ‘g’ is sometimes pronounced and sometimes is silent. If Ariana learned to depend more on visual reference along with the phonological representation to reinforce the understanding of the word, she would handle English vocabulary more efficiently. She said that she tries to correct the spelling whenever it happens, but does not remember the corrected spelling afterwards. She said that it is getting better, and she now uses words like ‘through’ in her writing.

Noriko shared a cross-linguistic issue for her in the use of relative clauses in English and Japanese. Whereas in English the relative clause follows the noun it modifies, it precedes the noun in Japanese. She explained, “In Japanese, we have the opposite grammar. If we would like to indicate the particular person or subject, we explain that before the noun comes.” She said that when she first learned the grammar
rule in English, she would repeat the subject and produce sentences like, “one of my friends, and she is in Japan, called me yesterday.”

The range of language issues the ESL students displayed were in line with what is expected of intermediate to high-intermediate levels of language proficiency. They varied according to individual differences, such as article usage, word families, spelling, and parts of speech, but there were no problem areas that compromised their progress in achieving their goal of functioning appropriately in the academic discourse environment they chose for study.

5.5 Cultural influences on writing

As Street (2001) declared, text is embedded with cultural and ideological assumptions. The ESL students, therefore, needed to follow the English conventions of written language and to attend to appropriate contextual and cultural references within the text. These students had studied in their first language for at least 14 years and will continue to do so when they return to their home institution. While in the U.S., they were expected to switch to an English format of written text and to discuss topics relevant to their U.S.-based course work. In the next section I address the cultural issues of writing that challenged the ESL students.

5.5.1 Cross-cultural styles of writing

The ESL students in this study repeatedly mentioned the influence of their first language on their writing in English. They often referred to a difference in the respective styles of writing and how the dissimilarities affected their writing in English. JongOh noticed a discrepancy between his original ideas and his finished product in English,
“When I started to write down what I had thought in Korean, the think is totally different with my thought.” Ariana wrote in her journal that her style of writing is influenced by her native language because, she said, “This is the way that I understand the world.” They were used to expressing themselves in their first language, and as Connor (1996) stated, culture-specific styles of writing are deeply rooted in writers.

Bloch and Chi (1995) found that the Chinese students in their study were affected by Chinese rhetorical traditions when writing in English as L2. In an attempt to explore why Chinese students have a difficult time writing term papers in English and how rhetoric compares or differs in Chinese and English, the Bloch and Chi study looked at students’ use of source text in term papers written in Chinese and English. Their findings revealed that both the Chinese and the English writers were aware of social contexts of their texts and that each form of rhetoric embeds its respective cultural traditions. Chinese rhetoric is as complex as English rhetoric, and since Chinese students who study in the U.S. are literate in their L1 with its long history of rhetoric, they bring this skill to the L2 language.

Bloch and Chi used their findings to demonstrate that Chinese rhetoric does not adversely affect second language writing in English. Their study did reveal, however, that problem areas for these students were consistent with characteristics of Chinese rhetoric traditions. Consequently, Bloch and Chi suggested that, in order to succeed in the U.S. university classroom, L2 students should make an effort to understand the social context of their area of discipline because of the specific cultural attitudes inherent within. They believed that students need to become familiar with constraints within their discipline, such as how to express criticism and what a research paper involves.
The difference in rhetorical style between Asian and American writing was a topic of several journal entries and informal discussions. The three Asian students, JongOh and Minjong from Korea and Noriko from Japan, often referred to American style and how it differed from that of their first language. JongOh said that he had trouble with the American style of ‘getting to the point.’ He explained that writing organization in Korean was different because the format is to write and lead to main point and not to start with main point. He was trying to adapt to what he termed ‘the American way of writing,’ but he wrote in his journal, “I’m still not sure if I’m doing good or not.”

The Söter (1988) study supported the idea that rhetorical patterns differ across language and that second language learners’ L1 influences their L2 writing.

Minjong said that she was afraid of writing papers in English because it entails a different way of thinking. She said that the “logical plot is different in Korean and English.” JongOh and Noriko further discussed this issue at length in one of our meetings. Their explanation of the inherent difference in the two styles of writing mirrored the cross-culture patterns that Kaplan (1966) presented. JongOh and Noriko’s description resembled Kaplan’s diagram format for Asian thought patterns. JongOh said that the Asian style was evident in Noriko’s oral descriptions as well. He said that she takes a long time to ‘get to the point.’ He knows that when she relates a problem, he will need to wait while she gradually presents all the related details before finally identifying the problem at the end.

Ariana often referred to the ‘American way’ of writing. She said, “English grammatic structure is more simple, practical and objective than in Portuguese.” This description also followed Kaplan’s (1966) linear portrayal of English. She said, “I used
to write with a diversity of words and expressions, but now I have to be more objective and cohesive.” In more recent work, Kaplan (2005) continued to refer to English as linear, noting that English does not allow unrelated interruptions in the flow of text. Ariana’s embellishments do not work well in English writing.

Ostler (2002) explored effects of crossing cultures in L2 writing. According to Ostler, “Rhetorical patterns vary across languages because of differences in the value systems of heritage cultures. Rhetoric, like other aspects of language, is socially constructed, and, as do other linguistic phenomena, changes as the society whose values it articulates changes.” (p. 171). Kaplan (1987) asserted that the truths of a culture’s universals and particulars lie in its literacy.

5.5.2 Background in relevant cultural information

Completing class assignments in another country often entails understanding cultural points of the host country. Common everyday occurrences and events are transparent to people who spend their lives in the culture, but they can be new and unusual for students from other countries visiting the U.S. for the first time.

In the journal that Ariana kept for this study, she described a difficult situation that arose for her when she was completing a ‘practical politics assignment’ for her U.S. Government class. The assignment, as described on the hand-out, was to attend a political event (Ariana chose a city council meeting with a debate of political issues) and prepare a three-page paper afterwards. Completing the assignment included the following segments, as outlined on the hand-out:

1) briefly summarize the activity,
2) explain the issue or conflict discussed that was the focus of the activity
3) explain how the elite and popular perspectives on democracy help you interpret what you observed at this activity and how the democratic debate is
reflected in what you learned about how decisions are made about this issue or conflict; and,
4) discuss your reaction to participating in a political activity

In reference to the first step of the assignment, Ariana lamented, “How could I summarize one activity that even I do not know what is it?” She decided to consult the Internet for a background on city council as well as the purpose of the League of Women Voters who organized the debate. In order to complete the rest of the assignment, she worked with a classmate and drew out the classmate’s opinions on what transpired at the meeting. She realized that she would not have been able to complete the assignment if she had not attended the meeting with someone to help her follow the activity, since the cultural background information played a significant role in her inability to complete the assignment. She wrote in her journal that she had attended a previous city council meeting by herself to become familiar with the format and could not understand anything. She noted additionally that she felt at a loss without anything on which to base her writing. Winfield and Barnes-Felfeli (1982) found a positive effect of cultural familiarity on L2 writing. Ariana’s experience with city council was an example of a negative effect of cultural familiarity in her completion of a writing assignment.

In academic writing, L2 students face the challenge of not only to present their claims in an acceptable, orderly fashion that meets the demands of the conventions of writing in English, but also to skillfully draw in information from the textbook and outside sources to support their suppositions and theories. For this type of skill, the New London Group (2000) remind us that L2 students need to know how text connects to other texts in an intertextual context. Starfield (2007) asserted that making intertextual connections is essential to develop strong argument in their writing and writing success.
These students, however, are at a disadvantage without having had a broad exposure to relevant texts and shared cultural knowledge of their classmates (Ramanathan and Kaplan, 1996). Without the implicit understanding of ‘what’s out there,’ these students need to devote more study time to uncovering such relevant facts.

5.5.3 Other cross-cultural issues

Proverbs, sayings, and familiar expressions do not readily translate across languages. JongOh related a frustration about writing in English when trying to find a way to communicate his opinions. He said that locating the appropriate expressions was not easy to find because certain expressions do not translate from one language to another. He illustrated his point with an explanation of how he wanted to use a Korean proverb to describe his sentiment on a particular point in an essay, but he realized that he would first have to explain the proverb and that would “ruin the whole writing structures.” He said that even though he has accumulated knowledge about his own culture that he would like to share in English, he cannot do it. Trying to interpret a Korean story into English written text was complicated, time consuming, and too lengthy to write. He said, “If I explain whole story and try to interpret everything, it will be longer than the paper.”

The reverse was also a point of contention for JongOh. He said it was difficult to use American cultural references when writing a paper in English. He said he is not familiar enough with famous TV shows, sports stars, or political issues to comfortably include them in his writing. He felt that knowing such references would bolster and improve his writing. He said, “Since I do not know the issues happening in American or American history, it is hard to find examples that I can use in my writing.”
JongOh’s experience reflects a type of what Rodby (1992) refers to as the ‘we’ and the ‘other,’ with ‘we’ being the mother tongue and ‘other,’ English. If JongOh were to remain in the U.S. for a number of years, the extended experience could afford him enough cultural familiarity that would enable him to communicate more comfortably in both cultures. According to Rodby, “Through ESL literacy practices, readers and writers develop highly mutable social relationships and interpretations of relationships…The ‘we’ can and frequently does embrace and subsume fragments of the Other until there may be no Other; there is only a ‘we’ a universal community.” (p. 57) Rodby explained the relationship between language and identity as dynamic, not necessarily stable or negative, nor necessarily the result of imperious social interactions with the ‘other’ in a dominant role. She clarified, “However, the ESL literates’ sense of identity with an Other, an abstract English speaking community, may be quixotic and ethereal.” (p. 61)

Shen (1998) shared his personal experience in writing in English as a second language and reported that he found it to be a social and cultural experience because, “The rules of English composition encapsulate values that are absent in, or sometimes contradictory to, the values of other societies.” (p. 124). Shen found that he needed to better understand the values of the Anglo-American society in order to understand and use the rules of English composition. This ESL writer from a Chinese ideology of collectivism felt that he needed to adopt the values of individualism in his writings. From this, however, he felt that the idealism point of view began to affect his view of himself as well as that of the universe because of the social connotations and his ideology as a whole. Shen explained, “I had to reprogram my mind, to redefine some of the basic concepts and values that I had about myself, about society, and about the universe, values
that had been imprinted and reinforced in my mind by my cultural background, and that had been part of me my whole life” (p. 124).

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the topic of writing in a second language in an academic setting and how it posed challenges for the ESL students in my study. In Section 5.2 I explored the students’ challenges and strategies. I found that they were aware of their limitations in their ability to compose text for their class assignments and that composing text was time consuming for them. In order to produce text, they knew that they needed the appropriate vocabulary and syntax, but they realized that consulting a dictionary was not a reliable aid. Each student had a unique way of handling writing assignments, but one of them realized the importance of writing several drafts of a paper with outside consultation before submitting it.

Section 5.3 discussed the two types of academic writing, writing to display knowledge, as in essay examinations, and writing to develop knowledge, as in writing term papers. Both types challenged the students in my study. They had difficulty with the intertextual nature of writing critical reviews and the practice of analyzing and synthesizing text and developing an opinion. Section 5.3 addressed the challenge of informal writing in a second language. Section 5.4 covered language-related issues, such as word forms and definite articles, that posed problems for the students in the study.

Section 5.5 dealt with the cultural influences on writing. The ESL students recognized the challenge of cross-linguistic rhetoric and the need to adjust to a new writing style. They sensed the influence of their first language on their second language
writing. They also noticed that a lack of sensitivity to the cultural references embedded in English text could restrict their productivity.

Many of the issues discussed in this chapter were issues for which they had no prior preparation. They realized, however, that they needed to face the challenge in order to succeed in the U.S. University environment.

In the next chapter I will address the challenges and expectations associated with listening and speaking in a second language, in areas like the classroom lecture and the oral academic presentation.
Chapter 6
LISTENING and SPEAKING

6.1 Introduction

Oral / aural skills can challenge the study abroad ESL students who come to the U.S. not having experienced spontaneous listening and speaking in immediate, face-to-face situations. Reading and writing allow the L2 students time to consult a dictionary and to reflect on references and connections. Skills needed for listening and speaking differ since the modes are immediate and not delayed. (Segalowitz 1997, Rost 2005, Tarone 2005; Flowerdew 1994). Flowerdew (1994) referred to real-time listening as occurring in time rather than space. “It is ephemeral and must be perceived as it is uttered.” (p. 10)

ESL students who spend a semester or two at a U.S. university need to meet academic requirements that encompass listening and speaking. These requirements include attending class lectures, taking notes while listening to the lecture, interacting with professors and students, and making oral presentations. These are familiar activities to ESL university students. In the U.S., however, the added challenge is that their grades depend on the ability to negotiate oral/aural academic discourse in a second language.

The spontaneity of speaking and listening can challenge the L2 students not yet familiar with the sounds of the language, and meaning can be difficult to follow. ESL students enrolled in tertiary institutions are most challenged by taking notes in lectures, giving oral presentations, and participating in class discussions (Ferris 1998; Dunkel, Mishra, and Berliner 1989; Ferris and Tagg 1996a; Ferris and Tagg 1996b; Morita 2000; Pica 1998; Benson 1994; Duff 2007a; Leeser 2004; Vandergrift 2006). Speaking and
listening being more spontaneous than writing and reading can be off-putting to the L2 student not yet completely familiar with the sounds of the language, and meaning of the message can be difficult to follow. (Segalowitz 1997, Rost 2005, Tarone 2005; Flowerdew 1994)

This chapter is devoted to the listening and speaking skills in English as a second language that are required of ESL students in the academic university setting and the challenges they pose. The chapter is divided into the following sections. Section 6.2 addresses the class lecture and implications of understanding. Section 6.3 focuses on speaking in class, which includes interaction and group work and the effects of social membership in class activities. Section 6.4 addresses the oral presentation.

6.2 Class lectures

The academic lecture is an integral part of the culture of learning in the U.S. academic environment (Benson 1994). According to Chaudron and Richards (1986), “The function of a lecture is to instruct, by presenting information in such a way that a coherent body of information is presented, readily understood, and remembered.” (p. 114). The listener, in turn, must understand the vocabulary and syntax and then be able to alter existing constructs while continuing to listen. The lecture-listening activity requires a combination of bottom-up/top-down processing. Syntax, word order, and lexical understanding make up the key elements of the bottom-up level, and the ability to comprehend the new information and relate it to existing knowledge constitutes the top-down (Chaudron and Richards 1986; Dunkel and Davis 1994). The top-down level was further outlined by Richards (1983) as consisting of three levels of processing: 1)
identifying the proposition, 2) interpreting the intended meaning, and 3) accessing real world knowledge to make sense of the message.

According to Dunkel and Davis (1994), ESL students (even those with TOEFL scores greater than 550) typically experience more difficulty with the process of interpreting a lecture than do native English speakers. Listening in a class lecture assumes that the L2 learners understand how knowledge is presented, how to determine which parts are pertinent, how to record the information while still listening, and how to integrate the new information with what they already know. (Chaudron and Richards 1986; Flowerdew 1994; Rost 2005; Benson 1994; Richards 1983).

University students extrapolate needed information from a class lecture. Clarity and coherence of delivery are essential for understanding, especially if the listener is a second language learner. Flowerdew (1994) recommended that professors modify the input of the lecture to assist L2 students in comprehension and alluded to the importance of confirmation checks on the part of the professor. In an informal meeting with me to discuss Ariana’s achievements in class, the professor for the U.S. Government class in the fall semester, Dr. Smith (this is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the professor), said that Ariana gave great cues to confirm whether or not she was understanding the class lecture. Ariana was providing what Rost (1990) described as “listener displays of understanding” (p. 91) The professor confirmed that watching Ariana’s face helped her to gauge the clarity of the presentation and to adjust accordingly. Dr. Smith said that she was aware of Ariana’s eagerness to do well in the class. The professor’s willingness to adjust the lecture enabled Ariana to do so.
The next sections address the role of syntax, vocabulary, and visual support in the classroom lecture. Section 6.2.1 examines syntactic constructions. Section 6.2.2 addresses problems with and strategies for unknown vocabulary. Section 6.2.3 visits the use of visual aids in the lecture.

6.2.1 Language issues in class lectures: syntax

Listening to a class lecture assumes the ability to understand the message and to extract pertinent information. However, if linguistic coding poses a problem for the L2 listener, comprehension is affected. According to McLaughlin (1987), linguistic coding can compromise comprehension because it can distract cognitive functions away from processing concepts.

Linguistic issues were at the base of Noriko’s concerns about class lectures. Noriko mentioned that her professors’ use of long sentences affected her level of comprehension. When trying to follow a long sentence, she could remember only the first and last words, and everything in the middle was lost. She felt that shorter sentences with pauses would have allowed her time to write unfamiliar words phonetically then find them in her dictionary after class. When I visited Noriko’s Adulthood and Aging class, I noticed that the professor used long sentences. For this classroom visit, I audiotaped the lecture and took extensive field notes. The following is one of the professor’s long sentences:

The nifty thing about Binet’s test was that results would give you the mental age and not just a recap of facts the person happened to know.

This sentence contains 27 words. As for the SVO configuration (in this instance, S – copulative V – predicate nominative), the subject is ‘thing,’ the verb is ‘was,’ and the predicate nominative is the noun clause that completes the rest of the sentence, ‘that
results would give you the mental age and not just a recap of facts the person happened to know.’ Within the noun clause, there is another S – V – O configuration: S is ‘results’, V is ‘would give,’ and O is ‘mental age’ and ‘recap.’ Further examination reveals a relative clause embedded within the noun clause, ‘(that) the person happened to know,’ an adjectival clause with its own SVO. The length of the sentence could have made it difficult for Noriko to follow the message of the sentence, to locate subject-verb-object (SVO). There is much information provided in the sentence, and a frame can aid the processing. Without the basic framework, the information is scattered and the main gist of the proposition illusive. Navigating the discourse was difficult for Noriko. While I sat next to Noriko in the class, I noticed that she did not take notes. She merely copied the outline on the board and listened. Apparently, she was unable to follow the lecture.

Locating the SVO in a sentence with an embedded clause, such as the noun clause and the relative clause in the above example, challenges the listener’s strategy for determining ‘who-did-what-to whom.’ If Noriko were more familiar with complementation and relativization patterns in English, she would have been better able to chunk the language and thereby reduce the overload of processing she encountered. Knowledge of syntax helps the listener to segment the discourse into manageable segments and to locate the proposition in a lecture (Richards, 1983).

In addition to lengthy sentences, I found that the professor used other syntactic structures that also complicated the task of locating the subject-verb-object configuration. The following are examples of the syntactically challenging structures that the professor used:

1. Rarely do you find…. 
This is an example of the use of the negative preverbal adverb of frequency ‘rarely’ which requires subject-operator inversion ‘do you.’ (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

2. What you would test under fluid would be spatial speed.
3. What Dr. Sheridan suggested was that …..
4. What’s really happening is that states are saving money
5. What you find is that there’s some overlap…
6. The thing to keep in mind really is that intelligence does not exist. It’s a construct, idea.

Sentences 2 – 6 include the use of ‘Wh-clefs’ or ‘pseudoclefs’ that emphasize the information following a form of the copulative verb ‘to be’ (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999)

These sample sentences make use of marked word order, i.e., distinct from the predictable SVO, for purposes of counterexpectancy and emphasis (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). If ESL listeners are not aware of these constructions and their rhetorical purpose, they can pose difficulties for the listeners in processing the information within the sentences.

Discourse markers, i.e., signals in the lecture that indicate change of topic, something important, or support to a statement already made, are another way of helping the listener to chunk the incoming message. Examples of discourse markers include: ‘first of all,’ ‘furthermore,’ ‘what I’d like to emphasize,’ ‘in addition,’ and ‘another point I’d like to make.’ Discourse markers, what Chaudron and Richards (1986) referred to as linguistic devices that signal rhetorical organization, could have helped Noriko organize the discourse. The Chaudron and Richards ‘macro markers’ include such expressions as, “Another interesting development,” “Here’s the problem,” and “That is why.” (p.127). If the professor of the Aging class had made a conscious effort to use these markers and if Noriko had been made aware of this type of linguistic device and the purpose it serves, Noriko might have been able to develop better strategies for following the organizational
patterns of the lecture and understanding the message conveyed. The next section looks at the role of unfamiliar vocabulary in the lecture.

6.2.2 Language issues in class lectures: New vocabulary

Lexis information in a second language is essential for comprehension in a lecture. Vocabulary provides the crux of the message, and the listener must process words and all that the words imply to follow the message. As Rost (2005) pointed out, “In principle, listening is facilitated by the size of an individual’s mental lexicon and the listeners’ facility in spoken word recognition.” (p. 508).

The ESL students in my study arrived in the U.S. with TOEFL scores that met the University’s admission requirement. However, TOEFL scores do not indicate the amount or the type of vocabulary that the test takers have acquired. Aitchison (1987) explained that a person’s ‘mental lexicon’ contains a large amount of information connected to the words, such as phonological cues, collocations, and word families. Aitchison estimated the vocabulary of an average native-speaker adult to be between 55,000 and 250,000 words. Using word families as a marker, Nation (2006) estimated that a listener would need to know 6,000 – 7,000 word families to process conversation, as opposed to the 8,000-9,000 word families necessary for written text. A classroom lecture could include vocabulary from the 6,000 – 7,000 word families in the Nation conversation category as well as additional low-frequency vocabulary and discipline-specific vocabulary that professors use in situations of analysis, explanation, or reference.

Unfamiliar vocabulary caused difficulty for Noriko when she tried to follow the gist of many of her class lectures. In an informal meeting with me, she explained that she became frustrated when she did not know the meaning of a key word and, consequently,
would be unable to follow the rest of the lecture. She provided an example of such a situation in a lecture in Psychology of Childhood and the Adolescent in the fall semester in which Noriko did not understand the expression ‘C-section,’ referring to the type of birth delivery. She said, “Last semester the professor was talking about C-section but I didn’t know the word c-section and she was talking about for a while and I couldn’t understand. After the class I looked up in the dictionary. I found it after class.” By that time, however, she had missed all the information pertaining to the topic. Rost (1990) suggested a listening strategy for ESL students of moving from non-understanding to assigning a plausible meaning to the utterance in question. This type of inferencing is a strategy that may have been helpful to Noriko.

Since the study abroad students at the University did not take an ESL class that would afford them the opportunity of direct study of the language, they needed to depend on context of lectures, textbooks, conversations, and other encounters with the language for their vocabulary enhancement. Learning from context is considered incidental learning of vocabulary from reading or listening to normal language with intention focused on understanding the message, not on the language itself (Nation 2001). These study abroad students had opportunities for incidental learning, but they were dependent on their own strategies to use the opportunities to build sufficient vocabulary in order to succeed.

When Ariana realized that it would be difficult for her to take notes in class when the professor used unknown words, she tried to become familiar with vocabulary in advance of the lecture to help her follow the content. Ariana would arrive in the classroom about ten minutes early, a strategy which enabled her to listen to other students
discuss the upcoming class and their ideas before the professor arrived and class began. In order to fill the gaps in her notes, Ariana borrowed classmates’ notes. Ariana made use of appropriate strategies that helped build her confidence and guide her through her lexical shortcomings.

JongOh had a clear understanding of the need to develop strategies for dealing with unfamiliar words. He explained to me in one of our meetings that if he heard an unfamiliar word in class only once, he would not remember it. He said, “Usually if professor say something I don’t know I just try to understand context.” If the word were mentioned two or three times in class, however, he would consider it a main point and would search for the meaning in his electronic dictionary. He explained, “First time….I’m trying to guess, second or third time I try to find it - doesn’t really take long time – five seconds while listening. But I don’t really write down that’s why I forget.”

JongOh illustrated the dilemma of how he learned the word ‘tedious.’ He first heard the word in class and said, “I wrote in my notebook ‘tedious.’ I looked at the dictionary, but later I forgot.” He heard the word another time in class, but did not know it. A week later he attended an evening lecture on a topic not related to the class and heard the word ‘tedious.’ He said, “Ah! The word made sense.”

As suggested by Nation (2001), repeated exposure to vocabulary in different contexts can result in incidental learning. Unfortunately, as JongOh realized, this type of reinforcement does not happen often. However, he knew that merely reading a new word was not adequate exposure for him to actually learn the word, and he knew that hearing a word spoken after having read it provided reinforcement and aided retention. JongOh had a metacognitive strategy for word-learning.
Vocabulary issues typically plague second language learners. As indicated above, the students in my study recognized insufficient vocabulary as a problem and approached it in their own individual ways. Some of the strategies worked some of the time, but building appropriate strategies appeared to be the key to success. Reading the assigned material in advance would have helped all the students, especially Noriko. However, reading the material was especially difficult for Noriko and time consuming for all, as indicated in Chapter 4. Guessing from context is another strategy, but not always reliable. Nation (2001) saw incidental learning by way of guessing to be a most effective means of acquiring new vocabulary, but cautioned that students meet with success only under favorable conditions.

Ariana’s idea to eavesdrop on fellow classmates before class began was resourceful and could have benefitted Noriko had she tried it. JongOh developed an awareness of the benefit of effective strategies to build his vocabulary, and his familiarity with the topics discussed in his economics classes also helped him fill in the gaps. Whatever the background preparation of the students, it appears that each student needed to be aware of the gaps and develop appropriate effective strategies. A general strategy for ESL students to help manage unfamiliar vocabulary is to develop a tolerance for ambiguity (Rost 1990).

Nation (2001) suggested that ESL students be given the opportunity to practice guessing unknown vocabulary in a controlled situation in which they are already familiar with 95% to 98% of the words used in the text, i.e., one unknown word in 20 to one unknown word in 50. Nation’s guideline suggests that students enrolled in a class with
familiar vocabulary at a lower percentage than 95% can become frustrated when attempting to guess in context, especially if they are not initiated beforehand.

The next section addresses visual support in the lecture. L2 learners can benefit from a bi-modal delivery of information in a class lecture.

6.2.3 The use of graphics in class lectures

Understanding how knowledge is presented and the ability to determine what is important underlie the ability to understand the content of a lecture (Olsen and Huckin 1990; Wesche and Ready 1985). ESL students also need to contend with understanding the language in spoken form. Lynch (1994) found that visual support, such as handout notes or summaries, was especially beneficial for L2 students in his class. In addition, writing on the board or on an overhead projector can provide students a type of plan of organization and help with major terminology. The ESL students in my study reported that visual graphics helped them follow the format of the lecture and recognize important points even when they experienced gaps in the language.

Ariana found graphic illustration, such as the professors’ use of power point and other computer applications, helpful for understanding the content of the talk. Just writing the main word of the topic on the board helped her. She said that in some classes she would not recognize a concept that she had already learned until the teacher wrote the word on the board. Seeing the word helped her follow the lecture. This one-word graphic aided Ariana in integrating new with existing knowledge because the visual representation helped her retrieve the knowledge that she had and relate it to the current situation.
On the other hand, Ariana said her Microeconomics teacher in the fall semester was difficult to follow since he spoke without using any complementary graphics. At the beginning of the course, Ariana asked the professor if he would write on the board or provide her with class notes after class. Ariana reported, “He said no. After that, I lost interest in the class.” She recognized the need for minimal reinforcement in the professor’s delivery of text. Unfortunately, the professor did not appreciate the value of the request.

In Noriko’s Adulthood and Aging Psychology class, she claimed that the outline the professor wrote on the board helped her follow the lecture. Despite the outline, however, she admitted that she still had a difficult time understanding what the professor said. For Noriko, the outline was not enough, and she was under the impression that it might have helped if the professor wrote more on the blackboard, not just the main points. Noriko copied the outline into her notebook, but she needed additional guidelines to help her write what she was hearing. As King (1994) pointed out, writing what is on the board is merely copying, whereas writing what is heard entails processing the message. As indicated above, unfamiliar vocabulary and difficulty with syntactic processing caused major impediments to Noriko’s understanding. The outlines could have provided her with cues to what was important in the lecture and how it was presented, but without the necessary understanding of terminology and how to chunk the language, the outlines could not fulfill Noriko’s expectations.

JongOh reported that he relied on professors’ graphics to follow lectures. The professor for his International Economics class used power point to complement the lecture, and JongOh said that it helped him visually to understand the main points of the
class and to take notes accordingly. Likewise, the professor of JongOh’s Macroeconomics class made use of graphs that made following the main points of the lectures manageable. JongOh reported in one of our meetings that this particular professor would continually write formulae or graphs on the board to be sure the students followed what he said. If the professor introduced a new concept, he would repeat it. Even if the professor did not write out a complete formula, he used codes and symbols that were easy to understand, such as ‘up arrow’ for ‘increase.’ Apparently, the Macroeconomics professor was aware of the benefits of visual complementation. This professor was an English as a second language speaker from Pakistan. Perhaps his experience in learning a second language contributed to his appreciation of the value for students of visual support.

From the reports of the ESL students in this study, visual support aided their ability to follow a lecture. In Ariana’s case, visual support helped her to access background knowledge that her language gap (recognition of the word) prevented. In JongOh’s case, visuals helped him fill the gaps in content that thereby reinforced his language skills. For both of these students, visual aids bolstered the interrelatedness between language proficiency and content familiarity. If ESL students are adequately proficient in the language, visuals help them override difficulty with unfamiliar content. If ESL students are not adequately proficient in the language, but familiar with the content, the visuals can reinforce content understanding and help with language gaps. Although Noriko felt that she benefitted from visuals as well, her situation was less successful mostly due to the fact that she had a more significant gap in both language and content.
The next section examines the challenges associated with note-taking. Since the ESL students are faced with a new language in a new environment, the experience is also new, but necessary for academic success.

6.2.4 Taking notes

Taking notes while listening to a lecture is a major part of taking credit classes because the lecture is often a major source of course content. However, writing while listening entails simultaneously processing the message and writing sufficient text in order to have something on paper that will help students to recall what that message was (King 1994). The second language learners in the Ferris (1998) study recognized note-taking to be a key factor for success in a class and understood that listening and recording can be especially difficult in a second language. According to Rost (2005), “It is reasonable to assume that notes will only assist comprehension if they are complete, accurate and clear enough to support subsequent reconstruction of key ideas and information.” (p. 519). If ESL students cannot write fast enough in English and resort to their L1, the quality of their notes may be questionable.

Ariana’s professor for U.S. Government remarked that Ariana’s note-taking skills in class were good. Ariana, however, had a difficult time taking notes at the city council meeting that she attended as a requirement for her U.S. Government class. She said that she took as many notes as she possibly could because she needed the information to incorporate into a paper on the event. She explained her frustration in doing so:

“But to write down while the person is speaking is not a easy work even in my native language. I know that I wrote a lot of words wrong, that I did a lot of mistakes with the spelling and the grammar. However, this was not my focus at that moment (to write correctly). My objective during the debate was keep the information to write my paper.”
She needed to record the events of the meeting; therefore, she took notes. However, Ariana had a difficult time sorting out the important points from the extraneous ones since she did not understand the purpose or protocol for the event. Afterwards, she borrowed notes from another student to verify the accuracy of her own, a good tactic because external notes can provide or reinforce understanding of the contents of the lecture even more than one’s own notes (Chaudron, Loschky, and Cook 1994).

For Ariana, taking notes while listening to an unfamiliar format and content taxed her ability to follow a continuity of context, make predictions, and verify the propositions, an essential listening skill described by Rost (1990), because she did not have enough background knowledge of the context. In the end, Ariana did manage to write a good report on the experience.

Listening and taking notes at the same time was challenging for JongOh. He said that he would use Korean if the professor spoke faster than he could write, since he could write faster “in my words” in Korean. This inconvenience for JongOh was probably due to his lack of a broad-base vocabulary associated with the topic despite a clear underlying understanding of the topic. JongOh indicated to me that he regularly reviewed his notes. If this were the case, whether the notes were in English or Korean would not matter. Reviewing the notes is what helps the student encode the lecture content.

Taking notes in a second language was challenging for the ESL students at the University. A lecture format, as Leeser (2004) pointed, does not provide the opportunity for control over the rate of delivery, as exists in conversation, and consequently, the rate of processing. Therefore, the students have to listen, process, and write simultaneously. A background course in preparation for and practice in note-taking could have helped
these students adjust to the demands of the activity. They could have benefitted from an introduction to schematic background of a lecture and strategies that would help them compensate for any language or culture gaps. As Ferris (1998) noted, taking efficient notes is essential for academic success.

The next section addresses embedded background and cultural references in the class lecture and the implications for the ESL students in this study.

6.2.5 Background and cultural knowledge in class lectures

According to Rost (2005), “Understanding what a speaker says depends, to a large degree, upon shared concepts and shared ways of reacting to the world, or at least the imagination of shared concepts” (p. 513). When ESL students do not share a cultural background with the professor, they can be at a disadvantage when trying to follow the message in the lecture.

JongOh noticed gaps in his understanding of references that his Macroeconomics professor made. These references included events in U.S. history, such as recessions and inflationary periods. Consequently, without a shared cultural understanding with his professor and classmates, JongOh was not sure whether he had a clear understanding of the concepts being discussed. The Macroeconomics professor confirmed JongOh’s concerns. In an informal interview with me, the professor related that he regularly makes reference to events in U.S. history to make a point about current economics. He understood that these references plagued international students who are not familiar with our history and have trouble understanding the references.

In addition, JongOh expressed frustration about not understanding background references because he knew they were important to class content. He explained that his
Macroeconomics professor often referred to material from other classes that University economics majors took. JongOh said that the required curriculum at this University differed from that of his university in Korea; the two universities did not follow the same developmental class sequencing. He said,

“Because the curriculum is different, because of that I don’t know the system here. Many times it’s different, some of the things I didn’t study for this class.”

The sense of being ill-prepared for course content tried his confidence. He sensed that he was the only person in the class that did not share a common background and that that difference put him at a disadvantage.

Ariana confessed that when she was unable to follow names and content in the lecture in her Latin American –U.S. Relations class, she would “drift off.” She said it was hard to concentrate when she did not know what the professor was talking about. Additionally, the cultural references confused her. In her journal Ariana mentioned ‘Jack and Jill’ and ‘lamb chop’ as examples that were referenced in one of her classes. She did not provide the context for these references, but she said that she did not understand the references nor the intended message for which the professor used them to illustrate a point.

Humor mixed into class lecture posed problems for Ariana and JongOh. Ariana said that her Microeconomics professor often used jokes to illustrate his points, and she did not understand the humor. “He was American,” she noted. Likewise, JongOh found his College Writing teacher difficult to follow for the same reason. Although he thought that the College Writing class was entertaining for most students because of the teacher’s interspersed anecdotes and jokes, he said that she spoke too fast and he could not follow the references; consequently, the humor was lost on him. JongOh said that intercultural
humor was difficult, “because we have to know about the culture and they don’t really speak in formal language. They use informal language.” Additionally, he felt at a loss when he heard other students making fun of politics.

Ariana said that she was able to follow one professor’s humor because it did not entail cultural references. She explained that this particular professor would make jokes about situations that were apparent to everyone in the class. For example, he would make a funny comment about the motion-sensitive lighting in the classroom and how it would go out during every class meeting at the same time. This reference was easy for her to understand, and she enjoyed the common laughter with the class.

Similarly, JongOh said that he could understand his Macroeconomics professor’s humor since he used what JongOh referred to as universal humor, such as making fun of one’s body. For example, JongOh laughed when the professor said that he did not want to carry heavy books to class, since it is enough to carry his body. Humor can unite a group if understood by all members; it can divide if not understood by all.

Lynch (1994) called for a training program for lecturers who host L2 students in their classes to enable them to recognize points that are not readily accessible to second language learners. Lynch said, “Lecturers should be sensitized to the need to avoid unwarranted assumptions of shared knowledge and to the risk that the use of cultural ‘insider information’ will exclude NNS (non-native speaking) students.” (p. 283). This was the situation for the ESL students. They were excluded from the insider jokes and references. As JongOh related, the gaps in understanding rendered him helpless. Since everyone else in the class understood the reference, the second language learners did not feel comfortable stopping the lecture to ask for clarification. If they do not ask, however,
they will not know what they have missed, how it relates to the subject at hand, and whether they will fall behind in the class if they do not know it. Professors at the University might benefit from a seminar to discuss ways to address language issues in lectures and how to be mindful of possible cultural gaps that international students may experience in their classes.

The next section focuses on professors’ use of informal and familiar language. Although it can enliven a class lecture, it can confuse the second language learner.

**6.2.6 The use of familiar language in class lectures**

Familiar language in a lecture can be pleasant for students. It can put them at ease in a tense setting. It can appeal to their sense of inclusion. If a professor uses informal language and includes familiar expressions, students may sense a type of camaraderie with the professor. If the familiar language conjures up shared concepts or imagination of shared concepts between professor and students, everyone can understand the underlying message (Rost 2005).

Informal language use in a class lecture, however, did not cause similar reactions with the ESL students. The ESL students in my study were surprised at professors’ informal communication style. Ariana explained that she had studied formal English in Brazil and never expected to hear U.S. professors use slang and familiar language in their lectures. She related a sense of frustration in her College Writing class because she could not follow the anecdotes that the teacher used in the class.

In order to understand the type of familiar language that teachers used in class, I visited some of the classes and recorded the lectures. I chose to visit classes that were taught by both native English speakers and non-native speakers of English.
One of the classes that I observed was Ariana’s Finance class which was taught by a professor who was originally from Pakistan. English was his second language. For the most part, the lecture was delivered in straightforward English, i.e., with no examples of familiar expressions or slang that might confuse ESL students. The only exception was an idiom that he used when he referred to a failed attempt to prove a theorem, “I thought we’ll hit the nail on the head, but we didn’t.” Ariana said that she understood that expression and had not had any problems understanding this professor.

On the other hand, academic discourse, as Duff (2007) noted, is often interspersed with vernacular expressions and extracurricular references that students find more difficult to comprehend than the regular academic language and topic discussions. Noriko had this type of difficulty in her Adult and Aging Psychology class that was taught by a native English speaker. The professor’s lectures were informative and delivered in a non-interactive format. Her speech, however, was peppered with familiar expressions, such as, “He was a hoot.” When relating a story about a woman who refused to be placed in a nursing home and kept a gun in the house to prevent such action, the professor used the idiom, “shooting from the hip.” She mentioned ‘guilt trip’ when referring to children of the elderly who choose to put their parents in a nursing home, and she used the expression ‘deliberately pressing some buttons’ referring to a mother’s strained interaction with her children. When referring to loose regulations of fire codes for nursing homes, she explained that many things ‘slip through the cracks.’ “She’d turn a cartwheel” was how she explained a nurse’s attempt to coax a patient to take her pills. In reference to seemingly illegal behavior on the part of the nursing home administrators, she said, “They’re fudging the records to get more money.”
The friendly, casual manner of the Psychology professor also included references to proverbs and familiar expressions to make a point. The following are examples.

**A rolling stone gathers no moss.**  
She was referring to decline in intelligence.

**You don’t lose all your marbles**  
Here she used metaphoric expression when describing comprehension decline in old age as a myth.

The professor did not seem to be aware of the confusion that this type of language caused for the second language learner in her class. The interjections of these colorful expressions added a spark to the lecture; however, the humor and levity were lost on Noriko. Noriko’s English classes in Japan did not provide the background that she needed to follow this type of lecture.

On the other hand, JongOh had a positive experience with the use of informal language used in his Macroeconomics class. The professor spoke in an informal manner, but he did not include idiomatic or familiar expressions. Instead he usually spoke in first person plural, as indicated in the following sentences:

“The moment we looked at the curve, we don’t see upward rising contrary to expectations.”
“We saw that the statistical line doesn’t make sense.”
“In order to get a better sense of this, let’s look at the graph.”
“How do we know that? Let’s take a look at it.”
“This time we will focus on….”
“Naturally, our equation will tell us…..”

JongOh had no trouble following the lecture. He said that he sensed that the teacher wanted the students to understand. The sense of inclusion made the class a comfortable setting in which to learn. According to Hansen (1994), the repeated use of *we, you, and us*, creates a sense of shared context between the lecturer and the listeners. Hansen
purported that it is intended to encourage the listeners to interact with the concepts being introduced.

A lecturer’s purpose is to present information that is both informative and understandable. In order to maintain a balance between the two areas, the lecturer gauges the background knowledge of the audience. If the audience is a group of university students, professors often add quips or anecdotes to enhance the material. Lecturers who share the L1 of the students do not have to stop to consider the cultural references implied or the type of language they use. The L2 speakers in their class who were part of my study, however, did not follow the ‘insider’ references.

If professors were made aware that the references inherent in their presentations may be lost on the L2 students, they might be able to temper their informative lecture so that it can be informative and understandable for both L1 and L2 students. Apparently, professors who did not share the dominant cultural background of the class delivered lectures that the ESL students understood more easily.

6.2.7 Summary of listening

The listening experiences that the ESL students in my study related to me indicated that the level of frustration depended on the particular situation and the resourcefulness of each student. Each student faced different situations and approached them in an individual way. A general concern of all four students was the uncertainty of ability to draw the important information from the lecture. Unfamiliar genre, unknown vocabulary, unclear use of language, and unfamiliar references contributed to the confusion as well.
Lecture format, lecturer style, and the language used by the lecturer affected the comfort level of the ESL students. Since the U.S. university lecture was a new experience for which these students were most likely not prepared, a descriptive preview of a class lecture including how content is communicated, the particular types of discourse prevalent in a lecture, and the strategies a lecturer employs would have benefitted them (Benson 1994). As Hansen and Jensen (1994) pointed out, the listener needs to be familiar with textual schemas (discourse-level conventions of text), pragmatic schemas (the nature of speech acts), contextual schemas (the appropriate situation), and rhetorical schemas (conventions of organization of discourse).

Unknown vocabulary and language style used by lecturers significantly complicated the ESL students’ listening. In order to overcome these obstacles, they needed to adopt effective strategies. Appropriate strategies could have assisted them in defining specific problems and tolerating the ambiguities. As Rost (1990) pointed out, the listener needs to develop the strategy of moving from the act of identifying non-understanding as general non-understanding to the act of identifying the sources of non-understanding. Once the ESL students were able to identify specific obstacles, they could have developed appropriate strategies to help. Although the graduate ESL students in the Mason (1994) study understood less than half of their content class lectures in their first month of classes, Mason claimed that their strong TOEFL scores (over 600) ensured a capability to adopt appropriate strategies and meet the challenge. Enough time on task and successful implementation of appropriate strategies could have ensured that the ESL students in my study would have met the challenge.
In the next section I address skills that ESL students need for speaking in class. ESL students need to be understandable to the listeners. They need to be confident and willing to interact with classmates. They need to become part of the discourse community.

6.3 Speaking in class

A significant challenge for ESL students is speaking in class. It requires the ability to speak with confidence about a subject that they are learning in a second language. They need to be understood by the professor and their classmates, and they need to produce work equal to that of their classmates. As Minjong noted, there is more emphasis on speaking and writing in the U.S. University than she experienced in Korea.

The areas that I will focus on in this section are the question of understandability when the ESL students speak and the implications and benefits of interacting with classmates. Section 6.3.1 covers understandability. Section 6.3.2 looks at interaction in the classroom. Section 6.3.3 addresses group work and becoming a member of the discourse community.

6.3.1 Understandability and confidence

The ESL students regularly related to me that they worried about their pronunciation. When they had to speak in class, they worried that the professor and their classmates would not understand them. Not being understood can cause anxiety which, in turn, can make the act of speaking even more difficult. According to Munro and Derwing (2001) in their study of intelligibility and comprehensibility of L2 speech, unintelligibility is influenced more by prosodic errors than individual sound
mispronunciation. Munro and Derwing also included speaking rate as a determining factor in perception of the accentedness and comprehensibility of L2 speech.

Of the four participants, Ariana was most concerned about her English speaking skills. Although her professor for U.S. Government, Dr. Smith, noted in an informal interview that Ariana did very well in her presentation of an analysis of a *N.Y. Times* article, the professor confided that the students had a difficult time understanding her. I also had difficulty understanding Ariana at times. Rate of speech was one reason. Ariana’s fluency in the language prompted her to race through her message. Prosody was another issue in understanding Ariana. For example, in one of our sessions, Ariana recounted feeling frustrated [frus TRA ted]. She placed primary stress on the second syllable instead of the first, as is expected in this English word.

When asked whether she would be comfortable talking about Brazil, Ariana replied, “No, because I don’t want to say something about my country and be misunderstood.” Not being understood was a problem for her. She said, “I can see that the Americans do not understand my accent.” When describing conversations with her fellow workers, she said, “They do not always understand me and they gave up trying to understand.” She did not give up trying to be understood. She lived with American students and interacted with them and other American students on a regular basis.

Ariana sensed that her pronunciation errors went beyond the issues of rate and prosody. She traced the problem to how she began her studies of English in Brazil in which she had placed emphasis on reading rather than speaking. She said that she had no one to speak with, but “For me: it would have been better to listen more. Sometimes I don’t recognize words I already know.” Her faulty pronunciation, she said, regularly
affected her ability to remember vocabulary. She explained that although she typically wrote down unfamiliar words, if she did not know the pronunciation, she could not remember the word.

Ariana named her problem a ‘visual dependence’ on written text. Apparently, when learning new vocabulary, she memorized the look of the word, but failed to include the phonological representation in the process. Her approach resembles that of ESL students from non-alphabetic language who, according to Akamatsu (2003), tend to rely on visual strategies that focus attention on the whole word and word shape information.

Consequently, Ariana did not have confidence in pronouncing some words that she had already learned, and she did not always recognize those words when spoken to her. She provided an example of the dilemma that occurred in her public speaking class in the spring semester. When delivering a presentation, she confused ‘feel’ and ‘fell’ and pronounced the word ‘sign’ as ‘sig.’ She noticed the blank faces on her audience and realized that she had made a mistake. Ariana related another situation in which she was not sure of the difference between ‘through’ and ‘tough’ because of their similar visual display. She elaborated, “I said ‘through,’ but no reaction on faces. I was okay.”

Ariana described an awkward situation in her Latin American – U.S. Relations class. Although contributing in class strongly affected the grade, Ariana admitted that she never spoke in class. She said, “The only time I talked - it was first day of class. I’ll never forget. I said, ‘Cuba’ [kooba], and he said, ‘Cuba’ [kyuba]. So I felt so bad, first because he correct my pronunciation and then because the answer was wrong. He said ‘no, Cuba.’ So, I was ‘okaay…’” She never spoke out in class after the incident. She said that her confidence in speaking in that class was destroyed. Ariana, however,
continued to speak in other venues. Her determination to improve her language skills would help her overcome minor setbacks.

6.3.2 Interaction in the classroom

The U.S. classroom format highly regards student interaction, different from the Asian context where attendance not interaction is the norm. Lately, in fact, there has been an increasing expectation for students to speak in today’s U.S. university classrooms (Mason 1994). As Duff (2007a) suggested, oral communication skills have assumed a stronger role in U.S. academia because of the emphasis on collaboration and communication in the workplace. For the ESL students at the University, this was a new experience.

JongOh related to me that interaction in class with a teacher is not common in Korea and that the difference is most likely due to class size. In his classes at the University, there are only 15 to 20 students in class, whereas in Korea there are typically 70 students in a class. JongOh said that answering the professor’s questions in class was intimidating. He said that he was willing to answer, but the professor did not allow enough wait time for him to organize his thoughts.

Minjong understood the value of interacting in class and expressed an interest in taking part in class discussions in her Shakespeare class. She was deterred, however, by the difficulty of listening and speaking at the same time. She wrote in her journal, “When I concentrate on their words, I could not think about what I would talk. Therefore, I did not tell anything.” Apparently, Minjong needed additional processing time.

Noriko had a similar reluctance to speak out in class. She related to me in one of our meetings that she was worried about her English. She said, “I want to say something,
but I’m not sure this phrase or this sentence is correct or not, so sometime I didn’t say what I want to say.” Noriko like the other two Asian students, JongOh and Minjong, lacked confidence in her speaking ability and was afraid to make a mistake.

The Ferris and Tagg (1996a) survey of university professors revealed a common concern among content professors that Asian students had cultural differences which inhibited their ability to speak in class. This generalization along with the students’ reluctance to speak for fear of making a mistake or their need for additional time for processing reinforce the need for these students to be eased into the process of speaking in class and making contributions to the class.

6.3.3 Group work

An integral factor in the learning experience of the ESL students enrolled in a U.S. institution is to become a member of the classroom community. Duff (2002) warned that students who remain silent “may face social exclusions as a result, perceived as intellectually inferior and socially inconsequential…” (p. 290). Duff (2007a) stressed the importance of “developing the capability to participate in new discourse communities as a result of social interaction and cognitive experience.” (p.01.4). Group work provided an opportunity for the ‘social interaction’ and ‘cognitive experience’ of these students that would help them become members of the discourse community.

JongOh said that he did not feel comfortable interacting with other students in class. He said that he was not used to it and was afraid of making a mistake. He confided, however, that the times he wanted to say something, he would have been right. Later in the spring semester, he admitted that he should have taken advantage of the opportunity. He was more confident in his knowledge and his English skills at that point.
By resisting class interaction, JongOh missed an opportunity for what Lave and Wenger (1991) referred to as participation in the community’s practice. Lave and Wenger recognized participation in communities of practice as a type of learning in which a newcomer becomes part of a community of practice by way of ‘legitimate peripheral participation.’ (p. 49). The resulting socialization provides an opportunity to better understand the inner workings of the class interaction, rules, and behavior – the conventions of the classroom. Typically in Lave and Wenger’s ‘legitimate peripheral participation in community of learners,’ the novice members of a community seek out the assistance of the more competent members (the experts). The roles are not so clearly delineated in the L2 study abroad situation, however, because the competent can learn from the novice as well, since the novice is novice only in language. Perhaps JongOh would have been accepted into the community as language novice but content expert if he had interacted more with classmates and they had the opportunity to recognize what he had to contribute to discussions.

Two of Ariana’s professors commented on her participation in class activities and her interaction in the classroom. Dr. Smith, the professor of the U.S. Government class, which Ariana took in the fall semester, remarked that she worked well with other students. Dr. Jones, also a pseudonym to protect the identity of the professor, Ariana’s professor for Latin American-U.S. Relations class, which she took in the spring semester, however, reported that Ariana resisted group work. In his class, Ariana was assigned to a small group of four or five students, and he said that she did not seem comfortable. He added that it was a missed opportunity for her to contribute her knowledge of Brazil. Ariana missed an opportunity to take part in the construction of meaning that would have
helped her advance in academic discourse (Zamel 1995). She missed an opportunity for participation in the community’s practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) which would have afforded her the opportunity to share experiences with her peers and learn from each other. Ariana, however, did not feel comfortable or confident in the advanced level Latin American – U.S. Relations class. She was comfortable and confident in the lower level U.S. Government class.

Toward the end of the spring semester, Ariana mentioned that she regretted not having studied with classmates and that she would have welcomed more opportunities for group projects. She said, “It would bring me closer to Americans.” Ariana realized that group work would have provided her an opportunity to talk, discuss readings, and develop friendships with classmates. She appreciated the intercultural experience in her classes, but she did not feel that she was a part of it. She commented, “I like it. I can see that in class I get emotionally involved. Because it’s watching America. Sometimes students make comments that really make me crazy, drive me crazy and I have to control myself not to say something else. So I prefer don’t talk in class because I don’t have the knowledge, the background, that they do.”

Ariana was curious about American students’ political beliefs and their willingness to speak out about political issues, but she refrained from joining their discussions. Group work might have provided the opportunity for her to establish a sense of belonging to the group and to contribute to the conversation, providing a rich experience for her and for the American students. Similar open-ended class discussions provided students in the Morita (2004) study the opportunity to negotiate participation and membership in the classroom community and resulted in their becoming recognized
as legitimate and competent members of the class. As stated by Lave and Wenger (1991), participation in group activity is based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world.

In order to measure how socializing contributes to or challenges academic success in a university setting, Schneider and Fujishima (1995) followed the progress of an L2 student from Taiwan at a U.S. university. Despite an early indication of a strong work ethic and focused motivation, this student failed to complete his graduate program.

What the Schneider and Fujishima study found was that the Taiwanese student was unable to overcome the linguistic and academic hurdles cast his way. He did not successfully develop the ability to express himself in speaking and writing, nor did he develop any compensatory strategies. Contributing to the failure was his unwillingness to understand the university culture. Because of the unfortunate outcome of this case, Schneider and Fujishima emphasized the importance of social factors for academic success in the university setting, such as the ability to interact in class, to understand the culture of the university, and to adapt to individual course expectations. They said that students need to take part in all facets of the university community in order to succeed within it.

Education at a U.S. university is usually not a passive, isolated activity. Students regularly interact in the classroom and outside of class with professors, classmates, and other members of the campus community. Such interaction affords students the opportunities to broaden their academic education beyond the scope of the classroom textbook and lecture. The study abroad students at the University were aware of the benefits of interacting with American students, but they felt impeded by their English
language skills. Whenever they were able to develop the confidence to step out of their comfort zone and interact, they benefitted from the results. Interaction and group work expanded their experience at the University.

6.4 The academic oral presentation

All four ESL students compared the amount of speaking required in their U.S. University classes to that required in their home universities. They said that there is a much greater emphasis on speaking in the host University’s classes than they had expected. Compounding the task of adjusting to the requirement to speak frequently in class was the necessity to speak in a second language. They found speaking in front of native English speakers to be intimidating since they risked making mistakes in the language.

A simple oral presentation for the International Club about their countries provided three of the ESL students, JongOh, Noriko, and Ariana, an informal opportunity to practice speaking English in front of a group of students. It was less threatening than speaking in front of a regular class since the audience included many second language speakers who were receptive and patient with language errors.

For Noriko’s presentation on Japan, she partnered with an American student, Pedro, who had previously studied in Japan. Although Noriko was nervous about talking in front of the group, she knew the material well. She was the expert, and her partner deferred to her knowledge. Noriko was confident, and she did well.

Ariana was not pleased with her presentation on Brazil. She said, “Even though my friends said that they liked it, I didn’t think that I did a good job.” Ariana realized
that although she had extensive knowledge about Brazil and could easily conduct a long conversation on the topic without notes, a power point and some notes were not enough for a presentation. She noted that she lacked transition markers from one point to another; consequently, the talk did not flow as it should have. Her International Club presentation provided a good opportunity for her to learn what she needed to do to prepare for classroom presentations.

This section addresses the skills and consequences of making oral presentations in class. Section 6.4.1 examines the individual oral presentation and the challenges it presents. Section 6.4.2 addresses the implications for the group academic oral presentation that students prepare in groups of three or four.

### 6.4.1 Individual academic oral presentation

An academic oral presentation, according to Morito (2000), requires students to summarize the material, critique it, provide implications, add relevance, take a stance, provide personal attachment to the topic, present a novel approach to the issues, communicate a sense of conflict and immediacy, support the stance, and deliver the presentation in an appropriate and timely manner. Morito referred to the oral academic presentation as a “literacy event, oral activity based on written material.” (p. 306).

Skills for delivering an oral presentation in a second language cross several areas. According to Zappa-Hollman (2007), three skills are involved in oral presentations: linguistic (which includes inadequate vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency), sociocultural, and psychological. Not only did the ESL student need to attend to language issues while speaking, they also had to be aware of their audience in order to
gauge their understanding, and they needed to be effective in their delivery without displaying nervousness and insecurities.

When JongOh made an oral presentation in his Mathematics of Economics class in the spring semester, he was conscious of the fact that he spoke slower than the American students. He explained further that when speaking he had to think about what he was going to say next and rehearse the expressions in his mind before saying them. He worried about making sense, mixing verb tenses, and other language points. As he paused between phrasing, he said,

“The time suddenly stops. Everyone has to wait for me.”

At one point he could not think of the word that he needed to complete his point. The word that escaped him was ‘tangent.’ He said:

“Oh what’s…I knew it…I knew it…..Everyone has to wait for me.”

He tried circumlocution, but that did not work. He said:

“So now I’m not really trying to find this the word, so I’m just trying to say using another way because I think it’s presentation so everyone is waiting, so even though it’s not correct vocabulary. Just say other similar thing. Make it go around, people can guess. Try to not stop to like the flow.”

JongOh could not remember the word, could not substitute another word, and he was aware of the passing time. Since the missing word was specific, he could not continue his presentation without it. He said:

“It makes me very more nervous. People think about me I’m not prepared even though I’m prepared. This kind of thing makes their thinking. Even though other things were good, they will think about this.”

JongOh related that the people in his classes did not know him, so they did not know anything about him. He explained a sense of being dismissed because he was an
international student. He said that the American students have “high standards” and are not interested in him or what he had to say. He said,

“I feel that they were judging me because if I make some mistake they will know. It makes me nervous.”

JongOh was aware of the time that passed, the chance for making a mistake, and the consequential fear of being judged by his classmates. Native speakers may not be patient with second language speakers. Leki (2001) found that there does exist a tendency of the native speaker to overlook the capabilities of the second language speaker.

JongOh was capable of presenting new information to his economics class because he had a strong background in the field. The fear of making a linguistic mistake in front of the ‘expert native speakers,’ however, made him leery of his capabilities and exposed him to the possibility that his knowledge would be scrutinized because of a simple language mistake.

6.4.2 Group academic oral presentation

The group academic oral presentation affords ESL students the opportunity to work together with classmates to develop and deliver a topic in front of the class. ESL students, however, can be overwhelmed by the demands of the oral presentation and what it entails as well as the challenge of working with matriculated classmates who speak the language better than they do.

In the fall semester JongOh had to work with three other students on an oral academic presentation for his International Economics class. JongOh said that at first he was reluctant to take part in the presentation because he did not feel prepared. He related that in Korea groups for academic presentations are bigger, and leadership is determined by age with the position of group leader assigned to the oldest male. JongOh often
assumed that role since he had already served in the army before entering the university and was often the oldest male of the group. He explained that the role involved a high level of responsibility, which included handling the free riders (‘free loaders’). JongOh had the experience of leading a group to produce material to present to the class.

In the U.S. University environment, however, JongOh worried about his English language skills. Similarly, the L2 students in the Morito (2000) study reported that their English was too simple and not academic enough to meet the demands of the academic oral presentation. Morito believed, however, that the presentation experience put non-native speakers (NNS) and native speakers (NS) on a level playing field since it can be a new practice for both groups. Since all students in the Morito study were challenged to use appropriate academic oral discourse, the L2 students felt more assured and saw that it was a good opportunity to express themselves and show what they knew.

JongOh also recounted a positive experience of working with his group. He said that everyone had to contribute and that everyone was responsible for a part of the project as well as the overall presentation. Because of the distribution of information gathering, JongOh said, “They had to listen to me.” The four group members had to negotiate differences and collaborate on the finished product. As Morito (2000) pointed out, the academic presentation is a venue for “a complex, locally situated process that involves dynamic negotiations of expertise and identity.” (p. 304). Since the format is not the typical one-way presentation of knowledge by the instructor to the student, it can be a vehicle for acceptance into the community of learners.

JongOh reported that he especially enjoyed working with one of the group members, Sam. He said that this particular member of the group helped him, and they
worked well together. JongOh explained that Sam was a good listener and was patient. He said, “He tried to understand what I talking.” This was a wonderful breakthrough for JongOh because he had previously had difficulty conversing with American students. As he explained:

“Because usually when American at the beginning they are very friendly, but trying to talk more deep – some thoughts. It’s really hard. I can understand them – communication is like broken.”

This group partner was different, and JongOh developed a positive connection with Sam. He said:

“He help me. We made idea together. Actually I had ideas but hard to express. He help me.”

If JongOh had an idea, Sam was able to help him explain the idea in English. They were productive together. When I questioned the collaboration of the relationship, JongOh said that sometimes Sam would write, and he would help Sam with phrasing. He said,

“Sometimes he was trying to find a good word and I would say how about this and he would say ‘exactly.’ We did it together.”

The presentation experience was a good experience for JongOh.

In the open-question forum following the presentation, JongOh recalled that he was not at all nervous. He knew that his partners would help him and each other if they had to answer questions. JongOh was pleased with the presentation, and he was happy that the group had worked so well together. The presentation was an opportunity for him to interact with classmates to collaboratively develop material to present to the class and to establish himself as a contributing member of the class community, since the classroom presentation is a productive means for ESL students to become initiated into the community (Zappa-Hollman 2007).
The daunting task of the academic oral presentation can make demands on the ESL students’ language proficiency, confidence, and capabilities. The forum, however, allowed JongOh and other ESL students the opportunity to interact socially with class members by way of an academic topic. It was an opportunity through which they could ease the tension that they experience when performing in class and by which they can begin to process the values adhered to in the class. The social interaction, in turn, can help them with their confidence in English and help them achieve membership in the community of the classroom.

6.5 Conclusion

Listening and speaking are skills that ESL students typically address in their English language classes. Once they arrive on a U.S. university campus, these skills are challenged in new and different ways than the language class exercises that they may have previously experienced. In the study abroad academic environment, they are required to listen to academic class lectures while taking notes, interact with classmates and discuss academic topics, and deliver oral presentations in front of their classes.

Listening is comprised of both a bottom-up and top-down activity (Chaudron and Richards 1986; Dunkel and Davis 1994; Richards 1983). Bottom-up listening includes the ability to draw a message from text while attending to the syntax and vocabulary of the language. Embedded relative clauses and other syntactic challenges can compromise locating the subject-verb-object, which is essential for determining the gist of a sentence. Unfamiliar vocabulary can interrupt the information flow as well. When one of the students did not know what ‘C-section’ meant, she failed to follow the rest of the lecture.
Top-down skills in listening, that is, the ability to recognize the proposition, interpret it, and relate it to existing knowledge (Richards 1983), can be aided by visual support and note-taking. The study abroad students reported an ease of comprehension when the professors used power point or other visual support for their lectures. In one case, just a written word on the blackboard helped one student connect the new information with what she already knew about the topic.

Listening and understanding text was also impeded by the use of background information, cultural references, and familiar expressions in English in the lectures with which the ESL students were not familiar. If the ESL students did not share an understanding of the concepts implied, they missed a part of the information conveyed (Rost 2005). One of the students was challenged when she had to take notes at a city council meeting because she did not know what a city council was. Another student missed references made to past events in U.S. history used to explain current economic issues. The expressions, ‘guilt trip’ and ‘turn cartwheels,’ were used to explain situations in nursing homes in another class lecture.

The bottom-up and top-down challenges associated with listening in the U.S. classroom exposed a gap in the ESL students’ preparation for their study abroad experience. They lacked adequate pre-exposure to the actual spoken language of the classroom. These students might have benefitted from an introductory course in the type of aural skills necessary to follow the academic discourse that would be used by the professors in their U.S. classrooms. In addition, an ongoing ESL course that complemented their content courses might have helped them better understand the cultural references and the use of familiar language as they experienced them. Such a
class could have also served as a venue for the ESL students to articulate the specific challenges and as a means to gather information that would provide professors an awareness of their special needs in the classroom.

The speaking challenges that the study abroad encountered in the U.S. academic environment tested their language skills, their knowledge of their discipline, and their overall confidence. When required to speak in class, they had to be understandable. They needed to use the appropriate words and expressions and the correct pronunciation. One student could not remember an essential word to make his point and worried about the time that passed while he searched for that word. Another student pronounced a word wrong, and nobody understood her. These and other similar situations made students feel that they were judged for their language skills and not for their abilities.

Building confidence in speaking was essential for the ESL students in order for them to take part in oral activities in the academic classroom. The study abroad students in my study had an opportunity to deliver a presentation to the International Club in front of peers who spoke English as a second language. They could have benefitted from additional opportunities to practice speaking publically on topics from their discipline in order to develop confidence in their speaking skills as well as confidence in their background knowledge of their area of study. Confidence in both areas would have aided them in their attempts to contribute to classroom discussions.

Further, interaction with professors and classmates afforded the study abroad students the opportunity to participate in the new discourse community. When preparing for an oral academic presentation with three of his classmates, one of the students discovered a unique opportunity for collaboration in working through language and topic
issues. The experience provided the student an opportunity to be initiated into and recognized by the community (Duff 2007a; Lave and Wenger 1991; Zappa-Hollman 2007).
Chapter 7
CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary

This dissertation constitutes a study of ESL students in a study abroad program in a university in the United States and the challenges that they faced in negotiating academic discourse. Although all the students had studied English before deciding to come to the U.S. and had demonstrated what the University considered to be adequate proficiency levels of English in order to study at the undergraduate level, it was soon apparent to them and me that functioning in academic discourse in English encompassed more than they had envisioned. Segalowitz (1997) summarized the process: English language learners when operating in an English environment continually face cognitive demands in dynamic situations of communicative stimuli. In reading, writing, listening, and speaking situations, the ESL students needed to rely on linguistic skills to decipher, comprehend and match the incoming information to their existing knowledge and to produce appropriate text accordingly (See Rost 1990; Rost 2005; Eskey 2005; Ferris and Tagg 1996a; Flowerdew 1994; Kern 2000; Lee and Schallert 1997; Leki 1995a; Rodby 1992 among others).

At the beginning of each semester the study abroad students registered for content classes in their field of study or in other areas for reasons of interest or personal gain. They were not able to complement the content courses with a class in English as a second class since such a class was not offered at the University. In the paragraphs that follow, I summarize the findings of the data from each of the analytic chapters.
Chapter 4 opened the study with the exploration of reading as it challenged the ESL students. The four students approached reading assignments in their own way. However, unknown vocabulary was regarded by all four to pose the biggest problem. The students shared with me the strategies that they used, such as guessing from context and referring to a dictionary for translations from the L1. Textbook organization was a challenge as well as a strategy, and there were problems associated with outside reading assignments that did not follow textbook-type organization. Linguistic issues, such as syntax and unknown vocabulary, affected reading comprehension. Finally, they faced a challenge in recognizing background and cultural knowledge embedded in text as well as the familiar language and informal register that was prevalent in classroom lectures.

Chapter 5 explored the challenges that are associated with writing academic discourse. Students claimed that inadequate language proficiency and time constraints posed problems for them. Also, they found that locating the appropriate word for the message that they wanted to convey was difficult. Each student expressed individual strategies for writing, including composing many drafts and seeking outside support. I was surprised to hear that the students did not always make use of support facilities on campus. I explored two types of writing, writing for display and writing for learning, and reviewed particular challenges for the individual students when they were faced with the task of writing critical reviews. Informal writing and its lax style of presentation posed a problem for one of the students, Ariana. Linguistic issues, such as articles and word forms, were another impediment to fluent writing. Finally, I explored the influence of culture on writing, i.e., the cultural implications of adapting to rhetorical constraints of the L2 and the influence of the L1 when writing in the L2.
Chapter 6 addressed the ESL students’ skills in listening and speaking that are necessary for academic discourse. I explored the challenges associated with the classroom lecture. Syntax and new vocabulary posed linguistic challenges, whereas professors’ use of graphics aided comprehension. I also examined what note taking entailed for the ESL students and how background and cultural knowledge as well as familiar language added complexity to the content of the lecture. Speaking skills also posed problems. Students needed to interact in the classroom with professors and classmates, and they had to work in groups with students whose first language was English. One student, JongOh from Korea, was especially challenged by the academic oral presentation, but he managed to do well and was pleased with the experience.

This final chapter is devoted to a discussion of the study. Section 7.2 addresses implications to the findings. Section 7.3 begins a review of the experience of each of the four participants in the study with Minjong’s experience. Section 7.4 presents a review of JongOh’s experience. Section 7.5 reviews the experience of Ariana. Section 7.6 presents a review of the experience of Noriko. Section 7.7 presents suggestions for a direction in improving opportunities for future study abroad students at the University. Section 7.8 presents commentary from professors who hosted the ESL students in their classes. Section 7.9 discusses the purpose and possible role for Content-Based Instruction at the University. Section 7.10 presents suggestions for future direction in study abroad programs at the University.
7.2 Implications to the findings

As Duff (2001) listed confidence as a primary necessity to performing in an education environment, I found that confidence was a major factor in the success of the ESL students in my study as well. Building confidence in reading, writing, listening, and speaking was essential for building confidence in academic discourse. What impressed me throughout the study was the importance of balance between confidence in linguistic skills and confidence in content knowledge. Confidence in content knowledge complemented linguistic skills, and confidence in linguistic skills complemented content knowledge. The two were interdependent to the point where confidence in one area could compensate for a deficiency in the other.

The ESL students faced multiple day to day challenges of negotiating academic discourse at the University. Similar to the findings of the Duff (2001) study, my findings revealed that a major challenge for the ESL students was to keep pace with the quick nature of intertextual interactions in the academic classroom as well as to function in the intertextuality of academic discourse at the university level in general. They needed to understand content and context of academic language and to convey relevant messages in content and context. They needed to be familiar with social issues and cultural and historical references in text in order to follow the message and to produce text appropriately. The demands were multiple, time sensitive, and high stakes.

Negotiating academic discourse in the class textbooks was a challenge for the ESL students. As noted previously in Chapter 2, the textbook is not a neutral source of information. Instead it is contextually embedded (Street 2001; Kress 1997; Geisler 1994). As Ariana, the student in my study from Brazil, discovered, her four dictionaries
were not adequate to help her understand her textbook reading assignments. JongOh, one of the two students from Korea, had a difficult time with a novel that made use of familiar expressions in English and frequently referred to events in U.S. history to make a point.

In the following sections I address the individual experience of each of the four students in my study. The first student is Minjong, one of the two students from Korea.

7.3 Minjong

Minjong studied at the University for only one semester, the fall semester. During that short time, however, she developed an appreciation for her study abroad experience and took full advantage of the situation. Minjong accomplished her goal of learning about the U.S. and improving her English.

Minjong had a strong background in the literature of Shakespeare, and for that reason, she chose a Shakespeare class as one of her courses at the University. It was a wise decision on her part because her background knowledge helped her compensate for shortcomings in English proficiency. According to the professor of the Shakespeare class, Minjong was able to read and interpret the text. She accomplished this despite the added challenge of having to read the text in Middle English. Minjong expressed concern that her inadequate language skills prevented her from taking part in small group discussions in the Shakespeare class. She said that listening and speaking at the same time in the small group format was difficult. As Minjong explained, “when I concentrate on their words, I could not think about what I would talk.” Nevertheless, she was able to follow the discussion because of her background in the subject and eventually developed
the confidence that she needed in her language proficiency to join in and offer her opinions.

Minjong made a gradual, but steady transition into English. In the beginning of the semester, she expressed a concern with an inability to develop ideas in writing because she first composed in Korean and then had difficulty transposing her ideas into English and conforming to English rhetoric. She felt restricted by her limited use of only simple words, and she said that her English was “not good enough to explain complicated things.”

Later in the semester, Minjong had a confidence building experience in her College Writing class. In a class in which the instructor was explaining several grammar points and presenting examples to help students understand, Minjong realized how solid her understanding of English grammar was. She said, “However, while ironically other students and the professor had some difficulty about it, I didn’t have any problem at all.” She sensed that she was possibly even more knowledgeable about some grammar points than were her English-speaking classmates. Following this event, Minjong’s writing strategy changed, and she began to write directly in English. She described her writing process as “writing down things in English (the sentences are rough though).” She no longer relied on Korean first to express her ideas.

Minjong noticed that she was making a transition into the English language. Toward the end of the semester, she shared an experience with me of when she used an English word without realizing that she knew the word. When one of her roommates asked what she was watching on TV, she replied, “a TV commercial.” She said that she was surprised to hear herself use that word because she had learned the word
‘advertisement’ in Korea. Her transition into English usage was even more noticeable by the end of the semester. At that point Minjong became worried about her ability to make the transition back into Korean. She said, “Even if when I meet a Korean, I just talk in English. And later I realized he is a Korean. But when I change my English into Korean I don’t know what should I say.” She added that she found herself translating English expressions into Korean when she spoke to her mother on the telephone. She said, “I come to be embarrassed cause I cannot remember what I usually said in Korean.”

7.4 JongOh

JongOh, the other student from Korea, recounted that for him a significant moment of confidence building occurred in the beginning of the fall semester, when he earned a perfect score on a test in his International Economics class. He considered the perfect score to be a confirmation of his strong background in economics, and he began to feel more confident in class. JongOh did not feel comfortable answering questions in class because he worried about his English language skills. In the fall semester, JongOh admitted to me that he rarely answered questions in his classes. At one point, however, he realized that although he did not offer to answer, he usually knew the answers.

The oral academic presentation that JongOh prepared for his International Economics class with classmates was a breakthrough of confidence building. He explained to me that he was pleased with the experience because his group had to listen to what he had to say. In addition, he was able to rely on the group for linguistic issues. Before this opportunity, JongOh said that it was difficult for him to talk with Americans because he felt that they would dismiss his message if he made language errors.
When I observed JongOh’s Advanced Macroeconomics in the spring semester, I noticed that the professor would regularly turn to JongOh when questioning a point that he was making, more often than he did with the other students in the class. JongOh had successfully demonstrated his background understanding of economics, and his confidence in economics had earned him the respect that he needed to take chances with his English language skills. He exuded confidence. Although JongOh often expressed frustration with his language skills, his content confidence helped him overcome the lack of confidence in language.

7.5 Ariana

Ariana, the student from Brazil, had difficulty finding a balance between competence in content and competence in language. When Ariana arrived in the U.S. at the beginning of the fall semester, she lacked confidence in her language skills. Her TOEFL score, although adequate to be admitted into the program, was the lowest of all four students’ scores. She knew that she would have to work hard to be successful in the U.S. classroom.

One of the courses that Ariana chose to take in the fall semester was a freshman-level course in U.S. Government, a course for which she had relatively little background knowledge. She chose this course because she thought that it would be an opportunity for her to learn about the U.S. She also reasoned that since it was a low-level class, she would be able to meet the requirements. Her classmates would be freshmen students, who were new to the university experience. Ariana’s limited background knowledge became apparent to her when she had to attend a city council meeting, and she had no
idea what city council was. Ariana, however, was determined, resourceful, and not afraid to ask for help. She developed multiple strategies, such as reading a text three times, using three or four dictionaries, and consulting with classmates. In addition, the classroom environment of the U.S. Government class was supportive. The professor recognized Ariana’s motivation and tried to accommodate her by modifying the lectures. Ariana worked hard for the U.S. Government class, but she also gained confidence from doing well in the class. She conveyed pride in her accomplishment in the journal that she kept for this study.

The confidence that she gained in the lower-level class prompted Ariana to choose an upper-level class in political science, U.S.-Latin American relations, for the spring semester. This class, however, challenged her confidence. Despite her Brazilian perspective, she did not sense an advantage of background knowledge. After a disheartening experience during the first class meeting, when the professor corrected her pronunciation of ‘Cuba,’ Ariana never again spoke in that class. She worked very hard on the first written assignment, but then she simply abandoned the class. Once she lost her confidence, she gave up the challenge.

Ariana’s overall experience, however, was very positive. She enjoyed all of her other classes, interacted regularly with American students, and made significant personal gains. Her motivation was inspiring. Even though she claimed that Americans did not understand her when she spoke, she continued to speak until they did understand. Ariana experienced linguistic problems. However, she had the advantage that the distance between her first language and English was closer than that of Korean and Japan, the first languages of the other three students.
7.6 Noriko

Noriko’s first language was Japanese; therefore, the distance between her L1 and L2 was significant. Furthermore, according to Noriko’s TOEFL score, her level of English proficiency was at the minimum level of the required range for admission to the program. Noriko did not develop the level of confidence that she needed to succeed in the U.S. academic environment.

Noriko explained to me that she registered for psychology classes at the University because she had taken psychology classes in Japan. She assumed that her background knowledge would benefit her progress in the courses. This was not the case. Apparently, she registered for two psychology classes in the fall semester, Basics of Psychology and Psychology of Childhood and Adolescence, against the advice of a professor in the Psychology Department. The Basics course is a prerequisite for the Childhood course. Noriko obtained special permission to take the two courses simultaneously. The result contributed to the demise of Noriko’s confidence instead of bolstering it.

Noriko categorized her difficulties in negotiating academic discourse in her psychology classes as linguistic. The linguistic problems, however, could have been mitigated by stronger background knowledge in the field. Insufficient strength in one area failed to compensate for weakness in the other.

7.7 Comments from the Study Abroad students

The ESL students in my study acknowledged their limitations in trying to navigate academic discourse at the university level in the U.S. They readily articulated
the frustrations that they experienced in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. They recognized their shortcomings when they encountered classroom textbooks, assignments in writing critical reviews, and academic presentations in front of a class.

Noriko, the student from Japan, said that she had expected to take an ESL class while she was here and looked forward to doing so, since it would be “more relaxing.” Ariana from Brazil expressed disappointment when she learned that she would not be able to take an English language class. She said, “It would have prevented stupid mistakes.” Ariana felt that a semester of ESL or a summer classes of English before taking regular classes would have benefitted her. Ariana explained, “You are never normal students – other students even freshmen – know what to do. I regret that I came here only four days before classes.”

Minjong, one of the two students from Korea, claimed that her College Writing class was not adequate preparation for her academic courses. She said that it was “just writing – remedial, not for international students.” Minjong expressed regret at not being able to take an English language class. She felt that even just one would have helped because, she said, “I keep making the same mistake.”

7.8 Professors’ Comments

Dr. Smith, Ariana’s professor for the U.S. Government class, wished that she had been informed in advance that she was going to have a second language learner in her class. “It would have been helpful to have known about her, especially taking American National Government. I usually assume background, but she didn’t have same background of American students.”
Dr. Jones, Ariana’s professor for Latin American – U.S. Relations class, expressed concern about the necessity to provide a good experience for these students. He also stressed the importance for the study abroad office to alert the department in advance about the students’ enrollment in classes and to follow the progress of the students throughout the semester. Dr. Jones suggested that these study abroad students would benefit from classes in U.S. history and the opportunity to learn about U.S. government, but he felt that they should take lower level classes that deal with concept development. Since he had a study abroad experience himself, he recognized the importance of offering ESL classes to these students. He noted that since all professors have their own style of conducting a class, it would be good to help the students adjust accordingly. Dr. Jones added that these students should have had a better orientation and preparation before registering for ‘regular classes.’

7.9 ESL and preparation for content instruction

The ESL students were ‘immersed’ in the target language. They were in a type of content-based instruction in which the content would theoretically help them improve their English language skills. Improved English skills would, in turn, help them better understand the content. The four students in my study had the experience of using the language in its academic setting. The intertextual nature of the challenge, however, was often beyond their comfort level of confidence in the language. They were not adequately prepared for the content-based instruction that was not complemented with English language instruction.
Further, the ESL classes that the four students attended in their home countries were most likely literature-based instruction, which did not adequately address the rigors of academic discourse. According to Kasper (1996), literature-based instruction does not call for the same amount of interacting knowledge sources as does discipline text. Kasper explained that when reading literature text, students can determine the main idea without advancing their knowledge base. Since subjectivity plays a significant role in literature comprehension, it is not necessary to draw upon and build schemata as is the case in discipline text. Kasper (1997) asserted that students in regular ESL classes are not required to connect texts and accumulate knowledge on a specific subject and, consequently, do not have the opportunity to hone skills necessary for success in an academic setting.

The study abroad students at the University needed preparation for the academic rigors they were expected to undertake. Their coursework expected them to use language to construct knowledge and to function in academic discourse or discourses with the requisite literacy skills to do so. Content-Based Instruction (CBI), an approach that connects language learning with content, would have benefitted these study abroad students while studying in the U.S.

7.10 The Purpose and Role of Content-Based Instruction

Recent research has shown that content-based instruction (CBI) is an effective way to advance language proficiency beyond the intermediate level (See Brinton, Snow, & Wesch 1989; Papai 2000; Wesche 1993; Snow, Met, and Genesee 1992; Kasper 1996; 1997; Garner and Borg 2005; Stoller 2004; among others). The ESL students in my
study were exposed to content courses, but the courses posed problems for them. The students were learning to function in content, but they lacked the means to bolster their confidence in language skills in order to function with self assurance in the content classes. Actual content-based instruction within a content-and-language format could have provided a means to accomplish this.

Content-based instruction (CBI), as defined by Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989), is a pedagogical approach that incorporates informational content with second language instruction, combining practical experience and theory. The belief behind the theory is that exposure to academic text enhances second language development because materials are presented in a meaningful, contextualized form, and the focus is shifted from language acquisition to acquisition of information. The result is a relationship that encourages advancement in both areas with one helping the other.

Mohan (1986) advocated the combination of the two, since “Any educational approach that considers language learning alone and ignores the learning of subject matter is inadequate to the needs of these learners.” (p.7) According to Mohan, since language is the medium of content learning, and content is communicated through language, the two go together. Language learning, after all, implies content, and content implies language learning. CBI incorporates the idea that focusing the learners’ attention on internalizing knowledge through language and the meaning communicated is how they will acquire language (Wesche 1993).

At the university level, a CBI program with attention paid to both content and language development could help students adapt to the challenges of the academic environment as well as advance their language skills. It would introduce them to
distinctions among disciplines: for example, science classes naturally scaffold and build upon content development, whereas social studies classes introduce discrete points of information in a more context-embedded format (Snow 1998). In addition, structures and functions of language are learned through content in a meaningful context with communicative purpose, a natural match since higher-order thinking skills called for in content promote higher-order language skills, and cognitively demanding situations call for complex language skills (Snow, Met, and Genesee 1992). CBI allows content to assist language development and language development to assist content learning.

Content-based instruction has three common forms:

1) theme-based instruction, an English language class that uses content from a particular topic as material for the class affording students the opportunity to use content for language analysis and practice;

2) sheltered content instruction, a segregated content class meant for second language learners; and

3) adjunct language instruction, a language class that complements the regular content course. (Brinton, Snow and Wesche, 1989)

An example of a theme-based instruction in a CBI-ESL class, provided by Papai (2000), used thematic units to focus on academic skills like book reports, compositions, oral presentation, and group projects with English as the medium of instruction. Students become familiar with the rhetorical style and cultural norms in the school community while still studying English. According to Papai, this set-up engendered confidence building in academic behaviors, which is key for access to the U.S. academic community. The students in the program developed academic competencies, increased their grades in
their content classes, raised their language proficiencies, and gained a general awareness of their new cultural environment.

Kasper (1995) compared the two other variations of CBI, the sheltered (separate course) and the adjunct formats. Kasper noted that both were equally effective and that both CBI groups had a decreased attrition rate in the mainstream courses for participants. She found that discipline-based text helped students construct relevant schemata, increase their metacognition, and adapt comprehension strategies. Further, CBI provided students the opportunities for self-monitoring and self-evaluation that helped them access appropriate strategies and regulate their leaning.

Many regular, full-time international students at the University, where my study took place, enroll in ESL programs in advance of their academic experience at the University. Nevertheless, from what I have learned from informal discussions with the Provost and professors, full-time international students regularly experience difficulty adjusting to the academic discourse. I do not believe that a full-time ESL program or a regular format ESL class is the solution to the problems of the study abroad students that I encountered. Instead, I would recommend a CBI-ESL adjunct course to complement regular content coursework. The study abroad students in my study would have benefitted from a CBI program that aided them in constructing relevant schemata and developing metacognition and comprehension strategies.

Research has supported the implementation of a content-based approach to guiding ESL students in adjusting to academic discourse at the university level. Kasper (1997), for example, found that former CBI-ESL university students did better than university students from regular ESL classes during the time of instruction and continued
to do better in subsequent content coursework in following semesters. Kasper’s students had higher scores on English proficiency exams, higher grades in mainstream courses, and higher graduation rates than student from regular ESL classes. Kasper credited CBI course work since CBI students are repeatedly encouraged to interact with the text and see how it relates to other texts. Interaction with text and intertextuality helped students to learn to synthesize information from various sources, eliminate what is irrelevant, and assimilate the information to their own knowledge base, invaluable skills for academic success.

ESL university students in the Pally (2001) study followed a format of reading a wide range of texts related to one topic that built on and reinforced one another. Pally found that the format, based on the premise that students need to understand the text well enough to take a position and support it, enabled the students to disagree with the ideas that they drew from the readings, form personal opinions, and justify them. They were able to develop an understanding of argumentation in text. Even lower-level students in the study were able to write papers with stronger argumentation than students from the regular ESL class format. Overall, the participants demonstrated that they were better equipped to analyze text, incorporate findings in their own writing, synthesize the source materials, demonstrate awareness of social, economic and political contexts, produce a claim-support paper structure, and include substantive exemplification in the paper. They could also categorize information, develop a position, support it, and recognize gaps in what they knew about the topic.

In addition to providing for sustained involvement in the topic and making connections across various sources of materials and across disciplines, Stoller (2004)
highlighted strategy development, an awareness of the transferability of the new strategies, and the ability to build on existing knowledge. In addition, Stoller promoted a framework that adopts the principles of cooperative learning with the belief that social interaction stimulates cognition.

I believe that a CBI-ESL adjunct class would benefit future study abroad students at the University. To be beneficial, however, the adjunct class would have to provide a well-balanced content-language venue that is intended to address academic discourse and related challenges. According to Garner and Borg (2005), the emphasis needs to be on academic points, such as analyzing the writer’s claims in a text, the implications of text, argumentation, and critical thinking. Garner and Borg advised against a format that would narrow the focus to contextualizing readings and helping students with listening to lectures. Instead, they called for coursework that provides the cognitive dissonance necessary for critical thinking and addresses the skills to manage conflicting information, opposing opinions, and developing a synthesis.

7.11 Suggestions for assisting University study abroad students

Study abroad students may find themselves in situations where they are faced with intellectual challenges via a medium that they do not yet fully understand (Early and Tang 1991). For this reason, Snow (1998) suggested training content teachers to deal with language issues and the needs and challenges of the English language learner. For example, professors could be encouraged to introduce the use of visuals or graphics in their class lectures, as discussed in Chapter 6, since they could help students visualize the
content and further their comprehension by helping them to develop the appropriate schemata.

In addition, I believe that this study has reinforced the importance of providing a session on consciousness-raising activities to make the professors aware of their teaching practices and how they affect the ESL students in their classes. For example, language issues, such as the use of metaphors and other forms of figurative language, familiar language, and informal register, which are commonplace in the U.S. classroom environment, can pose problems for English language learners. Professors should be made aware of the value of repetition as a means to help students solidify ideas. They should be encouraged to pair the study abroad students with peers for study groups or cooperative assignments.

Other ways to help future study abroad students succeed at the University would be to inform faculty in advance if they are to have these students in their classes. The advance notice would allow the faculty to prepare accordingly. As mentioned previously, it would be helpful if the International Office maintained communication with professors of the classes that these students take throughout the semester so that their advisor can be made aware of problems as they occur. Study abroad students might be encouraged to take beginning-level courses in U.S. history or political science that would help them develop a perspective of the U.S. and its history. From a language-learning perspective, the course textbooks of beginning-level classes would be less demanding than those of higher-level classes. Beginning-level courses would also serve to introduce the ESL students to the university class format since they typically do so for incoming freshmen who are also new to the experience.
The Writing Center is a valuable resource for the ESL students, as was evident in the case of one particular student in my study. The tutors should be ESL-sensitive and specifically trained to help these students work through their papers, e.g., help the students formulate their ideas out loud, express their opinions, and organize the text.

Finally, I strongly suggest that the University add a credit-bearing English language course (CBI-ESL) for the study abroad students. If the University were to offer these students the opportunity to complement their content coursework with an adjunct CBI-ESL class, their experience would be enhanced by a venue that would help broaden their understanding of the culture of the University and help them negotiate academic discourse in their classes.

7.12 Suggestions for the future direction of the Study Abroad Program at the University and Areas for future study

This study has explored the challenges that negotiating academic discourse posed for the study abroad students at the University during the academic year 2007-2008. These ESL students were expected to understand academic text and to produce academic text with the adequate level of background knowledge and language proficiency to do so.

Although the study abroad students had attained the required proficiency level of English and were not required to enroll in an ESL program, the study found that the students needed more preparation for the challenges that awaited them. A general recommendation resulting from the study is to offer future study abroad students the opportunity to take an intermediary course of a language – content combination while simultaneously enrolled in content classes. A course of this type would afford them the opportunity to reinforce their confidence in linguistic skills while building confidence in
content knowledge. Building ESL students’ level of confidence is dependent on building background knowledge and experience as well as skills and strategies (Lee and Schallert 1997).

This study has opened a discussion on the needs of the ESL students who visit universities in the U.S. for short periods of time. In the future, more focused attention to the issues brought forth in this dissertation can lead to a better understanding of their situations. For example, the discussion would benefit from a follow-up study that tracks these ESL students more regularly. Such a study could determine the effects of an adjunct content-based course with a controlled group of students in the CBI-ESL course compared to students who do not have access to the course. In addition, studies that focus on classroom lectures and the effects of culturally embedded text would further the understanding of the challenges that these students face.

Despite the challenges, obstacles, and frustration, all four students in my study told me that they were happy at the University, enjoyed the experience, and would recommend the opportunity to their friends. As Ariana shared, “I didn’t know I would love here so much.”


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APPENDIX

Consent form:

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Academic Discourse in ESL Study Abroad
Principal Investigator: Bonnie Alco
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Scranton, PA 18510 (570) 941-4776
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Advisor: Dr. Susan Strauss
300 Sparks Building
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1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to investigate how international students who participate in study abroad programs in the US come to understand the types of reading and writing assignments in the various classes that they take and how they fulfill the required written assignments (e.g., essays, term papers, quizzes, exams).

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate normally in all of your classes. I will also collect copies of your course syllabi, required textbooks, handouts, exams, quizzes, etc. In addition, I will ask you to provide copies of your own written work. In addition, I will also ask that you keep a daily journal of your school-related experiences. In this journal, I ask that you note down what was easy for you, what was difficult for you, and other types of reactions to the English-related assignments that you receive.

3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

4. Benefits: The benefits to you include extra attention that you will receive regarding English language instruction. This research will also help the University of Scranton and other similar programs understand the types of English language issues that are not problematic for international students as well as those areas that are more difficult.

5. Duration/Time: This research is designed to continue throughout your participation in the University of Scranton's study abroad program. However, as noted in item 10 below, you may withdraw from the study at any time, with no consequences whatsoever.

6. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured in a locked file cabinet in my office. Penn State’s Office for Research Protections, the Social Science Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. I will use a pseudonym (a made up name) instead of your real name in any paper that I publish or present at a conference.

7. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact me, Bonnie Alco at (570) 563-3755 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has harmed you. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Penn State University’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else.

8. Payment for participation: There will be no payment or compensation for your participation.

9. Cost of participating: No additional cost will result from participation in this research.
10. **Voluntary Participation**: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Bonnie Alco ____________________________ Date ____________________________
Curriculum Vitae for Ms. Bonnie Alco
P. O. Box 524 Tel: 570-563-3755
Waverly, PA 1847 e-mail: alcob2@scranton.edu

Faculty, Education Department: University of Scranton, Scranton, PA, 2005-present. Courses: Linguistics, Structure of the English language, Methods of Teaching ESL, and an introduction to the ELL for pre-service teachers

ESL Teacher Training:
• April 2007: Conducted a workshop presentation on Using Reading to Teach Writing in the L2 classroom to Scranton area ESOL teachers
• October 2006: Queretero, Mexico. Conducted an English teacher workshop on The Reading/Writing Connection to middle and high school teachers of English
• 1996: Taiwan. Conducted two teacher-training workshops for high school teachers of English
• 1993 - 1996: Conducted multiple ESL training workshops for NEIU 18, NEIU 19, and Lackawanna College in L2 Reading, ESL in the content areas, and cross-cultural instruction

Director, Intensive English Program: Marywood University, Scranton, PA, 1993-2005
• Wrote a comprehensive curriculum with performance objectives
• Designed marketing tools, including a brochure, video CD, and web page
• Hired and trained teachers
• Monitored instruction and teacher performance, instructed one or two classes/semester

EDUCATION
Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics, The Pennsylvania State University
M.Ed. in TESOL, University of Maryland
Foreign Service Institute, Washington, DC, 17-week Spanish language training program
Université de Paris (Sorbonne), Certificat de Mérite
McGill University, Montreal, Summer Institute in French
Université de Paris (Sorbonne), Cours de Civilisation Française
B.A. in French, Marywood College, Scranton, PA

CONFERENCES:

PUBLICATION: Articles in Refereed Journals

Alco, Bonnie (accepted with revisions). An L2 reader’s word recognition strategies: Transferred or developed, The CATESOL Journal