



**MONASH** University

Faculty of Education

**Negotiating Institutional Identity:  
'International' doctoral students in an Australian  
university**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the informal second language interactions of eight doctoral students in an Australian university. The students were from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The study seeks to understand the ties between language, identity and social representations through an analysis of recorded informal conversations and focus groups.

Negotiation of identity, legitimacy and membership is discursively mediated in institutional interactions (Gee, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton, 2006). For many international doctoral students in Australia, this happens in an additional language and culture, in English. Construction of new social and academic identities for these students intersects with negotiations of language, power, culture and ‘social capital.’ As newcomers to Australia, the students in this study experienced multiple identity transitions, as well as serious challenges in interaction in informal multicultural cultural contexts.

The study showed that institutional practices impose certain institutional identities on members which may be negotiated in and through interactions. Like ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’, the label ‘international student’ imposes a social identity on the newcomer student. The students used an array of communication strategies to resist the label and the stereotypical features attached to it. They sought to renegotiate legitimacy and membership, and to reposition themselves in and through institutional interactions.

The findings thus reflect the role of agency and intentionality in student participation and learning. The main contribution of the study is an illumination of the processes of negotiating legitimate institutional identities that occurred for each participant in a different way according to their varied goals, sources of sponsorship, and agendas for PhD education. The study also offers a new lens for the analysis of communication

strategies as indexes of agency, participation and intentionality. Finally, the study's findings serve as evidence for universities and the scholarly community regarding the quality of the graduate student experience, and elements that enhance it.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **OVERVIEW**

Australia has the highest percentage of tertiary international students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, with 21.3% of all students coming from overseas (<http://aei.dest.gov.au>). The ‘flow’ of international students to Australian universities has turned them into “global education contact zones”, where student interactions are the interface of multicultural encounters, involving language, culture, power, membership and legitimacy negotiations (Singh & Doherty, 2004, p. 11). However, as Wright and Lander (2003) point out, “It is one thing to have a culturally diverse student population and yet another to have those students engaged in positive interaction” (p. 237).

Ironically, although many researchers focus on learning through social interaction within professional communities (Wenger, 1998), international students in Australian universities are reported not to have effective interactions with the local community (Benzie, 2010). Many international students choose Australia as a destination to improve their English language skills through immersion and intense interaction with an English-speaking society, and universities claim to embrace internationalisation, yet relationships and interactions remain problematic.

In full-time postgraduate programs in Australian universities, in which this study is situated, the majority of the student cohort is internationally educated (<http://aei.dest.gov.au>). Cadman (2005b, p. 131) calls for a “pedagogy of connection” for such a diverse cohort of students, many of whom were educated in languages other than



English and for whom the experience of studying in an additional language and culture is new and confronting. Engagement in informal institutional interactions for these students may entail not only second language communication but also the negotiation of social representation and identity. This thesis investigates the negotiation of identity in tandem with the role of the English language and communication strategies for international postgraduate research students, and their engagement in out-of-classroom interactions in an Australian university.

## **1.1 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA**

Internationalisation has a history of over sixty years in Australian higher education. The 1950 educational scheme called the Colombo Plan sponsored an estimated 300,000 students from 26 different countries to study in Australian universities (Chowdhury, 2008). Yet, the Australian scheme for internationalisation of education has since been criticised for being ‘market-driven.’ In her review of Australia’s Internationalisation Policy, and the Internationalisation Plan, Cadman (2005a) highlights one chief objective repeatedly prioritised on the higher education agenda, which is “to increase the net income by increasing the numbers of fee paying international students” (p. 83). The international education industry in Australia is now worth \$17 billion. In Victoria alone, the industry earns \$ 4.5 billion each year (Collins, 2010). However, there are tensions between the prevalent market forces and the original mission of internationalization, now overshadowed by the drive for income. Chowdhury (2008) reveals his understanding of ‘international education’ in Australia as follows:

At its most obvious, international education is associated with the recruitment of international students. It may also refer to transnational education, the broad range of educational activities that cross national borders. However, international education is most commonly perceived as a global business consisting of

spatially dispersed networks of institutions, academics (both teachers and students) and administrators. A university's 'international' status is determined by its ability to generate income from international sources such as international student fees, franchises, overseas and domestic branch campuses and aid and donations from overseas alumni. An international university's marketing staff traverse potential hotspots all over the world to engage with prospective students and offer on-the-spot placements offering international education in the politically neutral language of the 'market'. As well as selling on-campus full-fee programmes, it also caters for 'dot.edu' online 'virtual' courses. In other words, the international university is a business, whose students albeit rational and choice-exercising, in the end are interpolated by the market and can safely be seen as 'customers', who are the same the whole world round. (Chowdhury, 2008, p. 14)

Numerous national media releases addressing the issues surrounding international education highlight the significance of the debates over globalisation in higher education. The Australian Federal Minister of Education is now only responsible for school education. In an article entitled 'Students from abroad treated like cash cows', Craig (2010) reported that a Minister for International Education has recently been appointed to ensure nothing threatens Australia's third-biggest export earner. The working agenda for this ministry relates solely to maintaining the international education market. Easing student visa criteria, implementing strategies to avoid the setbacks in the industry caused by the 2009 global recession and the impact of the rising value of the Australian dollar, downgrading the visa assessment levels, and speeding up the process of student recruitment are some highlights of Australia's current international education agenda (Collins, 2010). In a media release, Craig (2010) criticises this 'market-driven' agenda and the commodification of international students. By way of contrast, in another media release, Marginson (2010) stresses that "treating the students as people, is essential in our global credibility". He draws attention to the discrimination against international students in Australia, writing,

As people, international students live in the shadows. ... Four in five are from Asia. Most are non-white. Though Australia is moving away from its old identity as a bastion of the 'British race' in Asia, and our public culture is tolerant and

cosmopolitan, non-white people can still face extra problems. ... International students in Australia have a poorly defined legal identity and unclear presence. ... As globally mobile people, international students fall between two national jurisdictions. They cannot gain access to citizen protections and entitlements while away from home, but they lack the rights of citizens in Australia.

There is little doubt that one crucial aspect of the mission of internationalisation of Australia's higher education system, namely celebrating student mobility and diversity, has noticeably been overshadowed by the fact that global education is considered a commodity in Australia. As Cadman (2000) has stressed, "a central challenge of internationalizing postgraduate education is for us to embrace the politics of difference which it generates in a way which moves us fruitfully towards culturally inclusive learning dialogues" (p. 204). The internationalisation of universities is closely related to globalisation and identity. As Marginson (2002) writes,

Globalisation relativises the nation, without abolishing it. It highlights the constructed nature of national identity. It emphasises the changeable, precarious nature of all identity. The transition from a nation-dominated world to a global/national world constitutes a sorting out period, in higher education and elsewhere. (p. 414)

Cadman (2005a) has emphasised that Australian universities should realise they are educational institutions, and not export earner corporations. She highlights opening 'transcultural' learning spaces as the true mission of educational internationalisation, which, she argues, demands more investment both financially and intellectually. She contends, "in this commercial educational context, the challenge to learn is on both sides. Valid 'transcultural' education requires that the values of Western academic tradition be critiqued through the perceptions and experiences of international scholars" (p. 202). Giving voice to international students' perceptions, challenges, and experiences is critical to the process of internationalization and 'transcultural' education.

## 1.2 STUDENT VOICES

Australia's third largest export earner, international education, has continually been challenged with debates over recognition of student diversity (Alexander & Rizvi, 1993; Marginson, 1997, 2002; Rizvi, 2004), and for abrogating responsibility for "the fundamental purposes of education within a global context" (Singh & Sproats, 2005, p. 52). Singh and Sproats (2005) warn,

In terms of pedagogy, the worry is that efforts to internationalise higher education privilege untheorised claims to facts, rather than pedagogies that engage and enskill students in investigating the historical, ideological and localising practices of the contemporary transitions in globalisation. (p. 53)

In view of this concern, it is important to critically investigate the lived experiences of students with diverse language and cultural backgrounds, a matter which has often been neglected in higher education research.

At the postgraduate level, Cadman (2000) stresses the need "to create academic space for the unheard voices" of international students (p. 478). Pennycook (2005) advocates the need for a "pedagogy of flow" for Australian universities, arguing that transnational mobility has brought fluidity to Australian universities where "students can no longer be understood as located in a bounded time and space in and around their classrooms, but rather are participants in a much broader set of trans-cultural practices" (p. 29). Pennycook (2005, p. 29) argues that "with English increasingly becoming the medium of global transcultural exchange, we need to understand the relations between English, popular culture, education and identity, or the ways in which global Englishes become a shifting means of transcultural identity formation. What I want to suggest here, then, is that in order to be attentive to the politics of location in the global context, we need

a *pedagogy of flow*.” Norton (2006) also reminds us that internationalisation means taking into account who the students are, where they come from, and what their goals are.

One main point of conflict in the process of internationalisation in the universities in Australia concerns the use of English by non-English speaking background students. The English language proficiency levels of international applicants are assessed by standard tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at entry, However, as Cadman (2005a) puts it, the “nasty,” “sarcastic,” “rhetorical” discourses of good English and bad English, and the chimera of native-like proficiency have long been an instrument to construct an “other” international student (p. 81). Cadman writes,

Obviously these contemporary manifestations of Scheurich’s ‘social order’ demonstrate a community desire among the educated at least, to commodify and so preserve an elite version of English which may not sit congruently with the escalating internationalisation of its education system. The western English language academy and its Higher Education institutions are particularly powerful representations of this social order. (p. 81)

With English used as a powerful commodity for pushing the ‘international student’ to the ‘other’ end of the social order continuum in Australian universities (Cadman, 2005), an important aim of this study is to investigate what Kettle (2005) refers to as the “strategic actions” of the so called “non-English speaking background international student”, while trying to engage in discourses of power, negotiate legitimacy and ‘audibility,’ and to construct an academic identity. The study therefore seeks to answer questions as to how newly arrived doctoral students engage in the target institutions’ discourses, and how they discursively negotiate legitimacy and membership.

The research imperative here is to reflect students’ voices and to investigate how they themselves describe the tensions and frictions of studying abroad in an additional language and culture. In the light of theories of learning through interaction (Lave &

Wenger, 1991), it can be argued that an understanding of student interactions may be a preliminary step to developing any pedagogy for Australian universities as contact zones, and to facilitate ‘transcultural’ learning experiences. This study addresses Cadman’s (2000) call for “critical appreciation” of student diversity when she writes,

Globalisation and the spread of English language academic cultures demand that we should be proactive in creating transcultural spaces for the exchange, for the reshaping, of knowledges, in our own heads no less than in university degree programs. Further exploration of the reflective experiences of international postgraduates may offer us opportunities to avoid losing international scholars’ voices ‘into the air’, and to develop new critical appreciation of the variety of knowledges in the world. (p. 215)

### **1.3 COMMUNICATION IN EDUCATIONAL ‘CONTACT ZONES’**

...international students’ perceptions and experiences of the global university contact zone are as heterogeneous as the cohort of students we interviewed. Understanding the globalised university as a contact zone is one step towards recognising the complexity of these students’ experiences. (Kenway & Bullen, 2003, p. 17)

Globalisation has multi-socialised and multi-culturalised today’s communication contexts. Global interaction increasingly incorporates communicators from an array of social and cultural backgrounds. Statistics show that today more than 80 percent of contexts of English in use take place between non-native English users from different language backgrounds with no native speakers present at all (Graddol, 2003). Australian universities, in the guise of globalised educational institutions, and particularly the university in this study, which is regarded as the most internationalised university in Australia, provide what would seem like obvious sites for multicultural interaction.

Australian universities also exemplify postcolonial “contact zones” where English is recognised not only as the medium of instruction but also as the medium for social

interaction among diverse students and staff (Kenway & Bullen, 2003, p. 5). Norton (2000) highlights the links between language proficiency and power, defining power as “the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated” (p. 7). Norton (2001) also argues that proficiency in second language use is an investment in constructing new social identities. Such a social view of English use reminds us that the English user is no longer a passive learner of native speakers’ norms, but a holder of a recognisable identity who tries to appreciate the hybrid norms, learn from and contribute to his/her multilingual community and be ‘audible’ in a language other than his/her mother tongue (Miller, 2003a).

Cadman (2000) points to a ‘paradox’ experienced by international students in Australian universities, which includes but is not limited to the challenge of communicating in an additional language. She writes,

Deeper and deeper levels of paradox exist for students themselves, positioned as they are in multiple communities: some of these require them to have English language proficiency to thrive, or even to survive, at this moment in history; other communities to which they belong are threatened by the same expectations.(p. 72)

As stressed by Cadman, students’ engagement in language interactions within Australian universities can be far more complex than simply communicating in an additional language. Interaction also entails the politics of belonging and the negotiation of legitimacy. Kenway and Bullen (2003) stress the need for more research on the ties between the politics of belonging, student voice and construction of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in Australian universities as ‘contact zones,’ writing,

In postulating an educational contact zone created by the globalisation of the

contemporary university, a contact zone that includes but extends beyond the classroom, we ask whether any of these goals are being realised. Or, do the asymmetrical relations that typified historical 'contact zones' persist? Do the international women students whose voices form the basis of this study experience the globalised university as a 'world' which acknowledges and accommodates their difference and their struggles? Or, does being an international woman student mean being marginalised, reduced to 'other.' (p. 10)

The participants in this research include male students, too, but similar questions are addressed. A further attempt is also made to investigate the relationship of these issues with the communication patterns of the students.

## **1.4 THE BACKGROUND CONTEXT**

Australian universities provide contexts for interactions in English between students from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The university in this study has one of the largest populations of overseas students in Australia, which provides a fertile ground for the research. It has more than 20,000 overseas students mainly from ten source countries: Malaysia, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, India, Botswana, South Africa, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka. Table 1.1 illustrates the ten top source countries with the number of students in Australian universities in 2009.



Table 1.1 Ten top source countries with the number of students in Australian universities in 2009

OVERSEAS STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN 2009, by major source countries		
Source country	No.	%
China	69800	22.0
India	34200	10.8
Republic of Korea	2500	7.9
Malaysia	17900	5.6
Hong Kong	16700	5.3
Japan	14600	4.6
Thailand	13300	4.2
Indonesia	12600	4.0
United States of America	11800	3.7
Singapore	8800	2.8
Other nationalities	93300	29.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>317900</b>	<b>100</b>
Calendar year data 2009		
Source: AEI international student numbers		

This study is focused on postgraduate research students. In 2011, more than half of the 21,000 international students present at the university under this study were enrolled in postgraduate programs. Unlike many North American universities, PhD education in Australia is undertaken solely through research. Postgraduate research students are often accommodated in office spaces, where they spend three to four years on their PhD research projects under the supervision of one or two academics. Lack of coursework interaction has

been found to intensify student isolation (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland & Ramia, 2008) at the PhD level. Ryan and Viete (2009) similarly stress that postgraduate international students in Australian universities can feel “excluded, ignored, isolated, marginalised, or simply distanced” (p. 309).

#### **1.4.1 The ‘international student’/‘local student’ identity in an Australian university**

Citizens in multicultural contexts are familiar with terms like ‘migrant,’ ‘refugee’ and ‘minority’ groups to mark the Other (Pavlenko, 2001, 2006a, 2006b). In the contexts of Australian universities, Ryan (2005) notes that international students are treated as similar to each other and different from local students; they are associated with markedness, difference, and Otherness, and sometimes with deficient English, compensation on achievement by paying higher fees, and passiveness. As Kettle (2005) points out, many international students feel voiceless and underestimated, like “drops at sea,” a ‘nobody’ in Australian universities (p. 48).

On enrolment at university all students are administratively categorised as either ‘local students’ or ‘international students’, with international students paying fees approximately four times higher. The ‘international student’ label marks the student as being from an outside place, while it also conveys a sense of indifference regarding the country of origin. As Sawir et al. (2008) conclude in their Australian study, “international students must establish themselves as foreigners staying for a time, as neither inside nor outside” (p. 149). The homogenisation and marginalisation of international students in Australian universities has also been a concern of other researchers like Kenway and Bullen (2003), who write,

Homogenisation is integral to the process of ‘othering,’ to the creation of an ‘other’ who is typically stereotyped, silenced, marginalised. In the context of the

relationship between coloniser and colonised, it is by these means that the subjectivity of the coloniser is established and empowered (p. 11)

Ryan (2010) similarly notes that Western researchers often homogenise the international student, ignore their diversity and “search to identify ‘deficits’ or qualities that the international students lack, in contrast to academic values supposedly possessed by Western students” (p. 39). She challenges the ideal notion of the Western learner as a model or standard against which the learner is measured. She also warns against the harmful influences on individuals, academics, institutions and policy makers of the negative stereotyping of the Asian student and positive stereotyping of the Western student. Ryan contends that in Australian universities, academics’ perceptions of international students as rote-learning, passive, and superficial learners lacking critical thinking skills have given rise to negative stereotypes. In her words,

Many academics and educational developers appear to have been selective in the messages that they have taken away, often invoking the so-called Chinese students in seminars and conference papers, focusing on the skills or qualities that international students lack, without any examination of their own cultural biases. Rather than recognizing the possible diverse practices and perspectives found in (all) students’ previous educational experiences, or examining their own failings, they turn these into deficits that their students are lacking and need to develop in order to pass the test of Western academic virtues. (p. 42)

Assumptions exist that international students are less interested in a quality academic experience than in Australia’s permanent residency, toward which an Australian university degree accrues extra points (Benzie, 2010). Yet, the ‘international student’ label seems to overlook the diverse motivations and agendas of individual students for their Australian education experience. It seems that finding one single label to address a group of students who come from an array of geopolitical, social, cultural, historical and language backgrounds, and may have nothing more in common than not being Australian, creates a

problematic situation. Their country of origin and identity seem irrelevant to the new context and the diversity of the students disappears under this all-purpose 'homogenised' label.

Benzie (2010) warns against a stream of 'othering' in Australian universities, defining "othering" as "the process by which the discourse of a particular group defines others in opposition to itself and tends to make value judgments based on stereotyped opinions about that group as a whole" (p. 450-1). Similarly, Ryan and Viete (2009) criticise the silencing and marginalising nature of power relationships within their consideration of institutional interactions. They stress that "the suppression of voice" of international students as minority groups and their marginalisation by "the lack of access to privileged positions" can lead to "an intense loss of self-esteem and identity" (p. 307).

Administratively, the 'international' label is used to refer to students who do not live permanently in Australia and have entered the country as students. They come from both English-speaking and non-English speaking countries. The particular concern of this study, however, which focuses on language development, necessitated the decision to select participants who: (1) were newly arrived in the country (less than 6 months prior to data collection), and (2) had their prior education in non-English speaking countries. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the term 'international student' refers to this specific group. The 'local student' label, administratively, refers to permanent residents and citizens of Australia. This includes recent immigrants from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, refugees and non-English speaking background students who have entered Australia to live permanently. However, again due to the focus of this study on language, accent, and identity issues, in this study, the label is used primarily to refer to Australian-born, English-speaking students.

To date much of the Australian research on the issues surrounding higher education and internationalisation has focused on the gap between international students' performance and the academic expectations of their institutions. The literature addresses a perceived challenge facing Australian universities as they struggle to maintain their academic standards without sacrificing their international market. Language and cultural barriers are seen in the literature to amplify the space between international and local students.

The aim of this study is to investigate what happens to 'the international student', to this 'nobody' who may be struggling to overcome the language barrier, and to engage in discourses of power, to negotiate a legitimate identity. How can students resist a 'suppression of voice', marginalisation, and move forward from being 'Other' towards being a successful, recognised member of their academic institution? How do they negotiate a legitimate institutional identity, and gain access to useful academic networks? Informal interactions among postgraduate students are used to explore how students work towards 'audibility' (Miller, 2003), and how they overcome the perceived language and cultural barriers to construct, a legitimate institutional identity.

#### **1.4.2 The journey from the international to the institutional**

As a consequence of the international mobility of postgraduate students in Australian universities, it is important to consider the challenges, the tensions and frictions these students experience in their journey from their home countries to Australia. As Ryan and Viete (2009) note, many doctoral students who decide to pursue their education in Australian universities, have had professional careers in their own countries. They want to learn more, progress, be heard and valued in the new context also.

Newcomer international students may go through multiple identity transitions at the time they start their education and their new lives in Australia. Besides possible professional transition (i.e., transition from an expert professional to a novice student), students may go through linguistic, social, and cultural transitions, too. They may experience transitions from ‘a native-speaker’ of their mother tongue to ‘a non-native speaker’ of English, from ‘a legitimate member’ in their social circles in their own countries to ‘a newcomer’ to Australia. It is likely that these identity transitions influence their interactions in the target community, their expectations and goals for communication, and their language use and communication strategies.

One main goal of this study is to investigate the potential ties between the participants’ language and communication strategy use and their identity negotiations.

#### **1.4.3 Constructing an institutional identity**

Participants in this study are all doctoral students. Doctoral study itself has been described as a process of identity transition (Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010). For newly enrolled students like the participants in this study, departmental interactions entail negotiation of new memberships and construction of new identities. As Gee (2005) reminds us, in our day-to-day lives we become engaged in multiple social interactions, take different social roles, and accordingly construct and enact multiple social identities. Membership in an educational institution, therefore, demands that members construct, negotiate, and (re)negotiate new social and professional identities which can enable them to be recognised as legitimate members within the institution. But these goals, as Ryan and Viete (2009) emphasise, “are heavily mediated by the discourses in the new settings, and the roles students play in interactions with peers, teachers” (p. 308). Institutional interactions in

Australian universities among students and staff are arenas for negotiation of social capital.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define social capital as,

The sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrues to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (p. 119)

In this study, the participants' negotiations of membership, legitimacy, and identity is viewed as tied to their language use, choice of communication strategies, and engagement in informal institutional interactions.

Eckert and Wenger (n.d.) have previously written about institutional identity and investigated its construction and development in the context of transition from school to work. They refer to institutional identity as a "continual construction of the self in relation to institutions and to the communities that arise and endure within those institutions" (p. 2), and make two assumptions about institutional identity as follows,

First we assume that institutional identities are not just functions, but that they are the enactment of an understanding of institutional practices, and thus imply ways of being in and seeing the world. Second, we assume that they are not just labels or titles, but are constructed in the day-to-day practice of learning to live within an institution.

A major goal of this study is to illustrate the processes of the evolution of institutional identity as a subcategory of social identity through membership in an institution and developed through day-to-day engagement with the institution. In the context of this study, the construction of institutional identity among postgraduate research 'international' students from diverse language, cultural and social backgrounds is described.

#### **1.4.4 The role of tearoom interactions in emerging identities**

Aside from occasional seminars and workshops, informal departmental interactions are often sites of second language use, networking and identity construction for international PhD students in Australian universities. For postgraduate research students with no set courses, engagement in informal departmental interactions is highly relevant to learning, access to useful academic networks, and ultimately success.

Tearoom interactions, however, can sometimes be saturated with colloquial, local and cultural themes which are unfamiliar to many new international students (Ryan & Viète, 2009). Newcomers to any institution face the pressure of adjustment to the new environment, discourses and culture (Gee, 2005). Lack of familiarity with Australian colloquial language, slang and accent may be additional impediments to international student engagement in informal interactions. Accordingly, this case-study research was designed based on the following assumptions:

1. Research gatherings, lunch-time breaks, and faculty social events provide contexts for students' casual face to face interactions, which are an important mode of communication and involvement in the university community.
2. English is the "communal resource" in such interactions (Wenger, 2000, p. 229). Therefore, international students' success in being recognised in their new target community may depend on their use of English and their discourse patterns and strategies.
3. An understanding of the discursive patterns used by graduate students in particular social contexts will contribute to the knowledge needed by institutions and university communities to facilitate student participation and engagement in departmental interactions.



#### **1.4.5 ‘Indexicality’ of intercultural communication strategies**

Duff’s (2007) Language Socialisation Theory reminds us that “one crucial aspect of language learning is that particular kinds of linguistic and non-linguistic cues help people understand the sociocultural contexts they are in or that are being referred to” (p. 315). It can be argued that in multicultural and asymmetrical communication contexts such as those in this study, participants’ choice of communication strategies may be tied to the language, social, and cultural factors embedded in the background context of interactions. Therefore the participants’ communication plot and strategies may have the potential to be telling, signalling the social factors inherent in the background of interactions. Hence, it is essential to take these factors into consideration before making any elaboration on the participants’ choice of communication strategies.

Duff (2007) has criticised the simplistic accounts of engagement, interaction and socialisation by some advocates of the community of practice theory, and suggests that within every institution several communities of practice may form and individuals may choose to negotiate membership in certain communities and avoid engagement in others based on their intentions, goals and agendas. Communities, too, may be different in the way they open opportunities for socialisation to newcomers (Miller, in press). Some might seem more hostile and encouraging to the newcomers, while others may not provide sufficient opportunities for interaction between mainstream members and newcomers, between insiders and outsiders. Duff points out,

The coexistence of participants’ multiple communities and sociolinguistic norms, languages, registers or styles, hybrid activities, codes, and identities must be taken into account better. Whether the analyses are more oriented to linguistic studies of indexicality or to more sociological analyses of individuals’ relationship to, and participation in, local (as well as remote) communities of practice, the challenge remains one of providing evidence for the cognitive, linguistic, social, and cultural learning that takes place within situated practices.

We should also try to take into account learners' status and levels of participation within their chosen communities, the factors that prevent or enable greater integration and success (if that is the goal), and the consequences of that involvement (or lack of involvement). Thus, language educators and researchers must strive to understand better not only the micro- and macro-processes of language socialisation but also how the linguistic socialisation students engage in at present (as well as their prior experiences, if known) affects their future activities, opportunities, and identities. (p. 318)

Based on Duff's theory, it can be argued that intercultural communication strategies have the potential to index participation, engagement, and integration. For example, in the context of this study newcomer international students may choose to be active members of certain communities and avoid participation in several others. The communication strategies in use have the potential to reflect the dynamic language, social and cultural power play inherent in every asymmetrical interaction context and represent participants' power relations, intentions, and agendas for communication.

This study assumes language to be a 'symbolic resource' for negotiation of social identities (Chen, 2010). Such a perspective of language as not only a means of communication, but as a resource for negotiating membership and identity within target communities of practice, means taking into account a new paradigm of strategic competence and communication strategy use which is related to the dynamics of participation, membership and identity.

Identities emerge dynamically and are negotiated in language interactions (Miller, 2004). For many international students this happens in a language other than their mother tongue, in English. In second language interactions in multicultural contexts, construction of social identities is also likely to intersect with negotiations of power and culture (Norton, 2006; Pavlenko, 2006a). As Sole, (2007) argues,

In the era of post-colonialism and post-structuralism, language users seek to prove themselves legitimate in the new linguistic milieu, a status far removed

from the defective nonnative standard label predicated in the past. Instead, they represent themselves as ‘audible’ L2 users who are fully legitimised both by themselves and by the target discourse community. (p. 214)

Such a standpoint reminds SLA researchers to take into account the possibility that second language users may be strategic in their interactions to negotiate ‘audibility’ and legitimacy (Miller, 2003). Jackson (2010) has stressed that the complex ties between languages and users are worthy of being more finely researched. The link between language and its users has been almost absent in communication strategy research. In such research, there seems to be a tendency to analyse communication strategies as mechanical tools in the hands of a speaker or a listener to maintain the flow of communication (Bialystock, 1990). As Firth and Wagner (1997) point out, “the learner identity is the researcher’s taken-for-granted resource” in second language communication research (p. 288). This failure of the literature to take account of identity in the study of communication strategies has inspired this research.

This study investigates the possibility that discourse patterns, practices and strategies may be tied to negotiations of representation, legitimacy, ‘audibility,’ participation, and agency. Figure 1.1 illustrates the main hypothesis of the study which relates communication strategy use to the social and the individual.

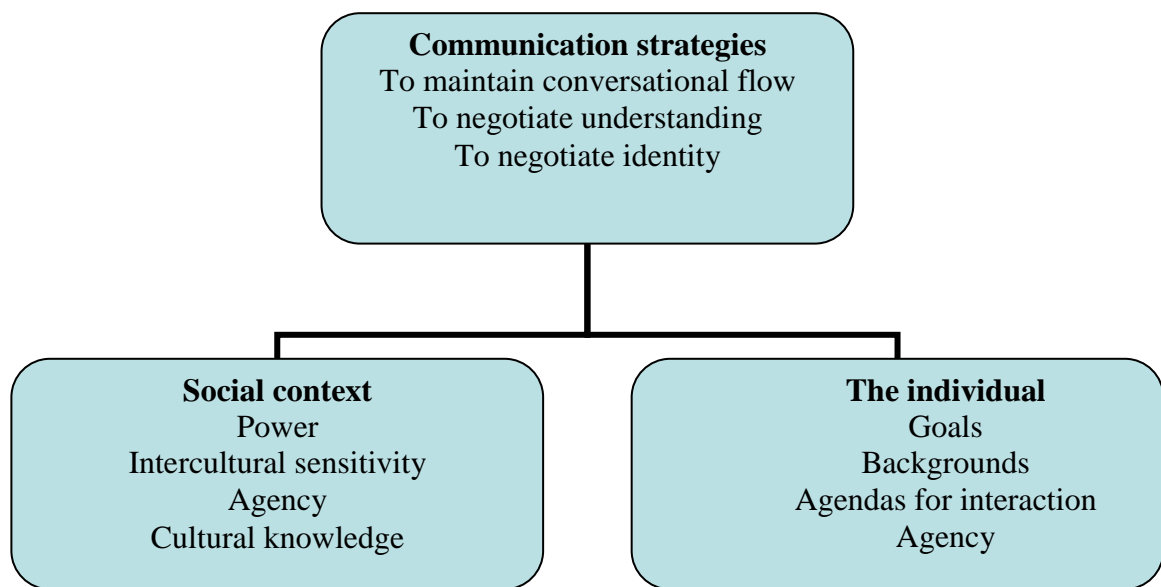


Figure 1.1 The interrelationship between communication strategies and the social context of interactions

It is hoped an investigation of discourses used by students in their ‘contact zone’ interactions may illuminate the process of identity negotiation and lead to an exploration of intercultural communication strategies in multicultural contexts.

## 1.5 RESEARCH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to observe out-of-classroom language interactions among international students from a sociocultural perspective of second language in use, to explore how international students are represented in an Australian university and how they manage to work towards negotiating legitimate identities in and through informal second language interactions. The study is particularly interested in the way new international postgraduate research students construct, develop and negotiate their new identities in relation to their academic institutions, their new institutional identities.

This research is a case study of a small number of newly arrived postgraduate international students. In addition to exploring the identities and strategies that emerge in the participants' casual face-to-face interactions, this study addresses how the process occurs, how discursive patterns are evidenced in communication and how these are integrated into participants' new institutional identities. Another objective is to investigate the role of agency in engagement and participation, along with the issues surrounding interaction in the process of negotiating institutional identity.

In their theory regarding communities of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) make it clear that communities are not constrained by physical boundaries but are rather united by common tasks, goals and objectives. This means that within every institution, several communities of practice may form and every institutional member may negotiate membership in one or several communities of practice within their institution. Within these communities, language is not only a means of communication but also a powerful instrument for negotiating membership (Baker, 1997). Accordingly, this study aims to identify departmental communities in which international PhD students seek membership and legitimacy, and to investigate the role of language and language strategies in students' negotiations of social representation. Therefore, the study compares the participants' discourse patterns and strategies when they negotiate membership in (1) their international student group, (2) the broader postgraduate research student group, and (3) the department in their university, to understand if or how their use of communication strategies differs when they move among these communities.

The study starts with a detailed description of the social context of student interactions by asking the students themselves to describe their concerns, expectations, challenges, agendas and goals for communication, and then uses recorded empirical

conversational data to identify the communication strategies they used. The main objective all throughout the data analysis is to investigate the ties between social context, language and communication strategies in use, and the enacted identities. In sum, this study aims to investigate the informal departmental interactions between postgraduate international students from diverse backgrounds in order to:

- illuminate the process of face-to-face interactions of students from diverse backgrounds in informal settings;
- explore the ties between discursive patterns and identities at play and the social context, and
- explore the role of communication strategies in negotiating identities, memberships and representations in multicultural education contexts.

Three major questions are addressed in this research. Each of these main questions embodies subsidiary questions which are outlined below:

1. What are the informal discursive patterns among postgraduate research students in an Australian university?
  - a) How are these discursive patterns tied to students' negotiations of membership, legitimacy and 'audibility'?
  - b) How are these discursive patterns related to the social context?
2. How are students' social and professional identities negotiated in and through informal departmental interactions?
  - a) Do interactions change when students cross between multiple communities of practice shaped in their university (i.e., peer groups, postgraduate research community, and so on)? If so, how?
  - b) What is the role of agency in these negotiations?
3. What role do communication strategies play in informal face-to-face multicultural interactions?
  - a) How is the use of communication strategies tied to negotiations of identity, membership, and engagement?
  - b) How are the participants' communicative strategies influenced by contextual

variables?

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Social identity and the integration of the second language user in contexts of interactions have seldom been on the agenda of researchers working within SLA (Miller, 2003), and even when a heterogeneity of contexts is acknowledged, it is “framed uncritically” (Norton Pierce, 1995, p. 12). This thesis relates second language interactions with social representations and institutional practices. Further, I have tried to frame the interrelationship between language user and social field critically, highlighting the politics of strategic negotiations of identity, membership and representation.

The role of language in social access and identity construction, the ties between second language learning and the social context, as well as the ties between the individual and the social have been well-established in the literature (Miller, 2003, 2004; Norton, 2001, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). As Giroux (1990) stresses,

It is important that educators possess a theoretical grasp of the ways in which difference is constructed through various representations and practices that name, legitimate, marginalize and exclude the cultural capital and voices of subordinate groups in society. (p.43)

This study has revealed some of the ties between second language strategies and the political negotiations of representation and social memberships. Norton (1997) reminds us that language use is not neutral but situated in unequal sets of social relations. This study highlights that second language communication strategy use can also be implicated in unequal negotiations of social representation. In another study with a similar background context, (i.e., international student interaction in Australian universities), Cadman (2005a) notes,

International and other EAL students studying in the English academy are in highly contested personal and professional spaces. Thus in our classroom, community and institutional attitudes are not merely matters of theoretical policy foundation, but person-to-person interaction. (p. 72)

In such “highly contested professional spaces”, this study investigates the language use and identity negotiation of postgraduate research students through the little used lens of informal departmental interactions. The study addresses the social gap in the communication strategy literature by relating communication strategies with their users and the social context and offers fresh perspectives of communication strategies as indexes of agency and investment in social and professional identity.

## **1.7 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY**

At a theoretical level, SLA has for years been informed and hybridized with theories from sociology, sociolinguistics and cultural studies. Such an integration of ideas has formed the basis of a number of significant studies in which language learning is conceived as a social practice (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2002; Miller, 2003; Norton, 2000, 2001, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Rampton, 1995). All these studies share the view that intercultural interactions “do not occur in a vacuum” (Giles & Bourhis, 1994, p. 167). Discourse is no longer seen as isolated from its sociocultural context. As Gee (2007) remarks, “discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities by specific groups” (p.3). Gee provides an account of the link between language and social membership, arguing,

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of language and other symbolic expressions, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting, as well as using various tools, technologies, or props that can be used to identify oneself



as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network”, to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful “role”, or to signal that one is filling a social niche in a distinctively recognisable fashion. (p.161)

Consequently, discourse analysis needs to elaborate on context as part of research. As Miller (2004) points out, “to view language as discourse, we need to incorporate a number of perspectives sometimes missing from traditional SLA research; we need to perceive any communicative performance as socially contextualized and mediated” (p. 292). Identities are constructed and negotiated throughout interactions. Therefore, within a sociocultural approach, communication strategy use is related to cultural, institutional, and social contexts (Wertsch, 1998).

Some sociolinguists advocate that successful communication in multicultural contexts demands a new level of literacy. Heyward (2002) defines “the interculturally literate person” as anybody who “possesses the understandings, competencies, attitudes and identities necessary for successful living and working in a crosscultural or pluralist setting” (p. 10). Using a Bourdieuan perspective, Norton (2000) argues that real intercultural communication happens when “those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen and those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak” (p. 8). This study perceives language and communication in its social, cultural and individual background context.

Such a framework acknowledges that language is social by nature and is a resource for dynamically shaping and reshaping social identities. Three theories that underpin the sociocultural nature of language analysis form the theoretical foundation for this study. They are Lave and Wenger’s theory of ‘communities of practice,’ Gee’s theory of ‘situated

meaning' and Norton's (2001) investment theory. These theories will be discussed and elaborated in the next chapter.

## **1.8 METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative research project aims to identify some of the strategies used in the context of informal multicultural interactions and show how they reflect participants' agency and intentionality in engagement and integration. As noted by Holiday and Aboeshiha (2009) "a postmodern qualitative research methodology is able to engage with the subjectivities if the unspoken discourses of TESOL professionalism, and therefore to uncover elements of global positioning and politics behind the 'nonnative speaker' ... label, which in turn reveal an ideology of racism" (p. 669).

My approach to identification of communication strategies is not based on discourse or conversation analysis on a large corpus of recorded conversational data. In this small-scale case-study, I look at participants' experiences and stories, and link these to their interaction strategies, based on the constructs of situated identity (Gee, 2000, 2004a, 2004b, 2005), community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and identity negotiation, power and investment (Norton, 2000, 2006). This means that in the process of data analysis, I have assumed that within the academic institution observed in this study, multiple communities of practice are formed that shape the context of identity negotiation for the participants. To investigate the communication strategies used by the participants in the multicultural interaction contexts, I draw on existing SLA taxonomies of strategies (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). I then highlight the influence of context on the use of negotiation strategies and also argue for the idiosyncrasy of communication strategy use.

The study comprises two interconnected phases. The first phase involved recording participants' 'second language socialisation' (Duff, 2007) to observe how students tried to "position themselves in and through discourse" (Roberts, 2001, p. 111). In this phase, the eight participants were placed into two groups of four based on their availability and met once a week at lunch-time in the faculty's tearoom where their conversations were audio-recorded. To avoid the researcher's impact, the groups were left by themselves with three general stimulus questions left on the staffroom table for each session. The questions were to initiate conversation if needed, and were used at the participants' discretion.

The second phase involved two focus groups. The first focus group was conducted shortly after the completion of Phase One when the students were in the early stages of their PhD journey. The second focus group was recorded two years later when the participants were in the final stages of completing their degree. The focus group questions were generated based on the salient themes from Phase One data. I used examples from participants' statements to generate new data on key themes. I used this "tactical authenticity" (Guba & Lincoln, 2008, p. 275) as a technique to provoke participants' reactions, to elicit their "memos to self" and collect their personal stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4).

Two of the participants also emailed me their reflections on their faculty interaction experience, which provided insights into the circumstances impacting their interaction patterns and clarified their beliefs, viewpoints, impressions from their past experiences, and the way they resolved problems. Therefore, the data comprised two sets of audiorecorded group conversations including three one-hour-long sessions for each of the two groups, two one-hour-long recorded focus groups and two narrative emails. Details of the data collection and analysis are presented in Chapter Four.

In sum, this study seeks to understand the ties between language, identity and social representations through an analysis of recorded informal conversations and focus groups of eight doctoral students in an Australian university.

## **1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) contend that codes of ethics in value-free qualitative research are based on four guidelines, “informed consent, description, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy” (p. 38). This study respects normal codes of ethics and complies with all university guidelines and requirements in terms of (a) voluntary participation of subjects, (b) provision of full and open information of the procedures of research before asking for the participants’ agreement, (c) protection of participants’ identities and securely concealing personal data, (d) anonymity of the data, and (e) ensuring a value-neutral interpretation by avoiding fabrications, omissions, or contrivance of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000)

## **1.10 COCEPT MAP**

The main concepts that shape the basis for data analysis and discussion are listed below:

**Institutional identity:** A subcategory of social identity which is constructed through membership in an institution, developed through day-to-day engagement with the institution, and negotiated in and through institutional interactions (Fotovatian, 2012).

**Voice/Audibility:** “the degree to which speakers sound like, and are legitimated by, users of the dominant discourse” (Miller, 2004, p. 291)

**Linguicism:** Discrimination based on language (Phillipson, 1992)

Legitimacy: A process of legitimisation and acknowledgement, entailing social relations within an institution, and the joint participation of speaker and listener (Bourdieu, 1993). The power to impose reception is part of this process.

Contact zones: Kenway and Bullen (2003) introduced the notion of ‘contact zones’ to describe student interactions in Western universities in the era of globalisation which mainly tends to highlight the diversity of the students engaged in university interactions.

Pedagogy of flow: Pennycook (2005) advocates transnational mobility has brought fluidity to Australian universities and the flow of international students to Australian universities urges rethinking pedagogies and a move towards ‘pedagogy of flow’.

Agency: Solé (2007) defines agency as “the amount of control and choice the self can exercise over one’s actions through language” (p. 205). Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) stress the role of agency and intentionality in student participation and learning and Firth and Wagner (1997) highlight the significance of importing human agency to communication strategy research.

These notions are instrumental to the foundation of this thesis which investigates through out-of-classroom language interactions among international students how they are represented in one Australian university and how they manage to work towards negotiating legitimate identities in and through these interactions.

## **1.11 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS**

There are nine chapters in this thesis. This chapter has introduced the context and assumptions which shape the research questions and research aims. It presents an overview of the thesis, its aims and key questions, theoretical framework, background context, and the research design in brief.

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framework for the study, and presents the three theories which form the framework for this study. It also elaborates on how each of these theories is relevant and contributes to the research. Chapter Three presents empirical research on the relevant themes of the study such as intercultural communication strategies, negotiation of identity in intercultural interactions, negotiation of understanding in intercultural interactions, the notion of space in intercultural interactions, power relations and dominance in native/nonnative interactions and international students' patterns of interaction in Western universities. The chapter compares previous studies carried out on similar themes with the present research, and identifies the similarities and differences both in methodology and theoretical framework.

Chapter Four describes the design and methodology of the research. It presents the data generation and data analysis methods. Data were collected in two phases through various sources. It includes an elaboration of the different procedures of the study, including participant selection, the site of data collection, and other methodological issues. The chapter also explains how data were contextualized and reflexively analysed and interpreted, using the participants' profiles.

Chapter Five focuses on interaction data and the contextual themes tied to the interactions. Themes such as face, stereotyping, culture and relation are presented as aspects that impact on the language used in any social context and consequently the intercultural interaction strategies involved in this study.

Chapter Six further investigates the context of informal departmental interactions, highlighting issues such as identity and space. It describes how identities emerge in language interactions and how physical, cultural and social space is negotiated through

language interactions. Negotiation of social, cultural and personal space through using communication strategies is the main theme of the chapter.

Chapter Seven presents an analysis of the links between discursive patterns, social representation and social membership. The chapter elaborates the process of each participant's negotiation of institutional identity, highlighting the role of agency in participation and learning through departmental interactions. Based on empirical data, the chapter introduces three constructs of institutional identity among the students who chose distinct approaches to engagement in interactions. Accordingly, the chapter underlines student diversity and the impact of students' goals, sources of sponsorship, and agendas for doctoral education on their negotiation strategy use.

Chapter Eight offers a critical argument for a need for a new lens through which communication strategy use in multicultural contexts may be analysed and categorised. It argues that social and cultural factors need to be integrated with multicultural interaction strategy research. Based on the social and cultural factors from this study, it introduces a new perspective on communication strategies in multicultural contexts as indexes of agency, representation and participation.

Chapter Nine presents the conclusion of the thesis. It provides a summary of the analysis and discussion and suggests new directions for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMING**

#### **OVERVIEW**

At a theoretical level, SLA has been informed by theories from sociolinguistics and cultural studies. Sociolinguists emphasise the integration of language and social life, and argue that language is formed and reformed in relation to social relations which impact on the acquisition and use of language (Gee, 2005, 2007; Heller, 2002; Miller, 2003; Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Rampton, 1995). Much research confirms that language interactions “do not occur in a vacuum” (Giles & Bourhis, 1994, p. 167). Within a sociocultural approach, discursive analysis provides an understanding of how language is related to cultural, institutional, and historical contexts (Wertsch, 1998). In addition, as Hymes (1996) points out, language research requires “the peculiar combination of social theory, ethnographic perspectives, and linguistic skills” (p. 118). My study is grounded in a shared core of social, cultural and linguistic theories.

In this chapter, I first elaborate on these theories and their input to the foundation of this study. I then present the ideological notions that underlie the research.

#### **2.1 LESSONS FROM BOURDIEU**

Bourdieu (1991) pioneered the conception of language as socially constituted, a realisation that is central to the theoretical foundation of this study. His perception of language as ““social capital””, a communal asset, and a source of symbolic power has influenced second language research and pedagogy (see, for example, Miller, 2003). Bourdieu draws the



attention of SLA researchers to several limitations of structuralist linguistics and argues that unlike structuralists' perceptions of language, it is not a set of homogeneous and predictable symbols and rules. Neither does he agree that communication is a mechanical process of transferring competence into performance. For Bourdieu (1993), there are two main problems associated with structuralism. First, the binaries between competence and performance assume language to be a mechanical system of construction and production which has little to do with the individual's feelings, beliefs and agendas for language use. Second, "the social conditions of possibility of communication" is neglected in the structuralist's approach to language learning (p. 65). These shortcomings, Bourdieu argues, portray an idealised view of language far different from its practical complexity.

Bourdieu's theory particularly explains why meanings are sometimes constructed and negotiated in different ways by different people and in diverse contexts. That is, relationships between the participants in a discourse event sometimes impact on the process of negotiation of meaning; communication strategies are needed to negotiate power relationships and space; certain forms or topics in communication work or do not work to maintain the flow of communication; and finally language competence is used according to the social context to produce a socially appropriate performance.

Bourdieu (1991) established the interrelationship between language use, social rules and power relations, a triangular relationship which has influenced many researchers. This social view of language use has been echoed by several other researchers (Block, 2003a; Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 1996; Lippi-Green, 1997; Norton, 2001; Miller, 2003). Jenkins (2000) reminds us that language "cannot be analysed or understood in isolation from its cultural context and the social conditions of its production and reception" (p. 152). In what

follows, I elaborate on some major social theories that inform the theoretical foundation of this study.

## **2.2 RELEVANT SOCIAL THEORIES**

While structuralists perceived linguistic competence as the major component for communication success, post-structuralists believe that people are not able to communicate unless they share certain social and cultural images, beliefs, and attitudes (Jaspars & Fraser, 1984; Moscovici, 2001). Discourse is no longer isolated from the sociocultural capital of its contextual circumstances. Consequently, discourse analysis has witnessed a shift of interest towards more learner- and context-based research. With this perception of language as “socially contextualized and mediated” (Miller, 2003b, p. 292), the conclusion that social interactions have the potential to help models of acquisition of second language seems quite logical.

The influence of verbal interaction on second language acquisition has been established in many studies (Duff, 2003, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis, 1994; Lesznyák, 2002; Long, 2004). In this work, second language social interactions are viewed as sites for the construction and negotiation of second language identities (Norton, 2000, 2006). The critical question here is: What facilitates engagement in social interaction in English for nonnative English language users? And, for international students, what supports the construction of their social and academic identities in such interactions?

Miller (2003) stresses the role of the listener in speakers’ negotiations of ‘audibility’. Similarly Ryan and Viete (2009) argue that international students seek legitimacy in their interactions with peers, academics and staff and membership within their target communities. They argue that building a sense of belonging to the academic

community in student interactions is essential in their learning. This study aims at observing and highlighting the strategies that international student use to negotiate their ‘audibility’, legitimacy and membership in their second language social interactions.

The foundation for this research is based on a framework which acknowledges that language is social by nature and is a resource for the dynamic construction and reconstruction of social identities. Four theories underpinning the sociocultural nature of language analysis form the theoretical foundation for this study, namely Duff’s (2007) language socialisation theory, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of communities of practice, Gee’s (2005,2007) theory of situated meaning, and Norton’s (2001, 2006) theory of language, identity, investment and access. These theories are summarised below.

### **2.2.1 Language use is social**

The shift in SLA towards recognition of language learning and use as a social practice is not new. Miller (2003a) proposes a model which highlights the contrasts between the traditional understanding of second language learning as an isolated individual-based, cognitive function and the recent social views of language use as an interactional, mutually experienced, contextual and communicative experience. Table 2.1 shows Miller’s contrastive analysis of these two analytical frames.

Table 2.1: Contrasting orientations in SLA and discourse studies. (Miller, 2003a, p. 49)

<b>SLA</b>	<b>Language as discourse</b>
Cognitive and mentalist orientation	Social and contextual orientation
Focus on individual competence	Competence realised socially through interaction
Native speaker as idealized source of perfectly realized competence	Competence realized by all speakers to varying degrees in a range of situations
Native/non-native binary	Collaboration of native speaker and non-native speaker in discourse
Standardised language as the goal	Standardised language as a myth
Focus on formal learning environments	Draws on discourse in a range of settings, broadening of the data base to include naturalistic settings
Search for generalisable rules and methods	Understanding the contingency of local contexts
Lack of an emic perspective	Centrality of participant perspectives
Focus on development of grammatical competence	Focus on contextual and interactional dimensions of language use
Learner as subject	Speaker as a social identity, used as a fluid and flexible resource
Difficulties predominate in studies	Consideration of communicative successes; problems viewed as contingent social phenomena
Learner as defective communicator	Learner/speaker drawing on resources in an interactional context
Misunderstandings common in native/non-native communication	Misunderstandings common in all communication
Interlanguage, fossilisation and foreigner talk as key concepts	Language use and social context as key concepts

As suggested in the above model, second language communication is no longer viewed as an isolated learner's task. Theoretically, native/non-native boundaries are now contested, and communication is viewed as a joint collaboration. The question here is to what extent this view has emerged from a theoretical framework, and into everyday social communication contexts.

Duff (2007) argues that language is a means of communication, a means for socialisation. Therefore linguistic, communicative and sociocultural competences develop

through socialisation. She insists that newcomers to a social environment who need to communicate in an additional language and culture can significantly improve their communicative skills through social interaction with the old timers of those social circles, communities and societies. Duff (2007) describes “language socialization” as referring to

the process by which novices or newcomers in a community or culture gain communicative competence, membership, and legitimacy in the group. It is a process that is mediated by language and whose goal is the mastery of linguistic conventions, pragmatics, the adoption of appropriate identities, stances (e.g., epistemic or empathetic) or ideologies, and other behaviors associated with the target group and its normative practices. ...It is a means of foregrounding social, cultural, and linguistic knowledge and how it is gained, across a variety of language learning situations at various ages and stages of life. (p. 310)

One particular aspect of language socialisation theory which significantly contributes to the theoretical foundation of this study is its emphasis on the role of agency in language development. Duff (2007) notes,

Second language socialisation can lead to variable outcomes for immigrant students depending not solely on how the local ‘experts’ (teachers and peers more proficient in English) attempt to socialize the newcomers into what the former deem to be ‘appropriate’ and valued local practices, but also depending on the agency and discernment of the latter groups regarding the practices they may wish to emulate and those they do not. (p. 311)

The research imperative in this project is to reflect newcomer doctoral students’ language socialisation experiences, as they are lived, and to ask the students themselves to describe their interactions with local Australian peers and their approaches to integration into the host community. One central aim of this study is thus an investigation of the role of agency in integration and learning through social interaction. Given the diversity of the participants in this study, diverse approaches to the study abroad experience are possible, even likely.

Contextualisation of language use is another feature of the language socialisation theory, and is useful in this study. Duff (2007) writes,

Social interaction contextualized within particular routine activities is a crucial aspect of cultivating communicative competence in one's first or additional languages and knowledge of the values, practices, identities, and stances of the target group. (p. 311)

For the participants in this study, all newcomer doctoral students with diverse language and cultural backgrounds, participation in daily departmental interactions is a crucial channel for developing not only language, culture and values of the target community, but also knowledge of the institutional practices and norms, 'ruling relations,' and new levels of institutional literacy (Smith, 2001). If we believe in the contextual, situated nature of literacies, then in their journeys from the international to the institutional, participants rely on institutional interactions to gain institutional literacies, construct new institutional identities and develop communicative competence in social academic registers.

Another key feature of Duff's (2007) theory is its understanding of the process of learning through socialisation as bidirectional in nature, whereby both sides enter a dialogue to exchange information. She considers interaction as a translearning experience. In her words,

Experts or more proficient members of a group play a very important role in socializing novices and implicitly or explicitly teaching them to think, feel, and act in accordance with the values, ideologies, and traditions of the group. However, novices also 'teach' or convey to their more proficient interlocutors what their communicative needs are, and the process of socialisation is therefore seen to be bidirectional – or multidirectional if multiple models of expertise co-exist. (p. 311)

While it is not easy, realistic or even fair to teach people to feel, act, or think based on others' ideologies, particularly in a multicultural society such as Australia, Duff's point that mainstream members in every community can play a crucial role in familiarising newcomers with the new community's culture, language and values seems valid. The

knowledge of how things work (e.g., institutional relations), or how language is used in the new context (e.g., formal or informal), and what kinds of communication strategies may be effective in enacting social and professional identities can be transferred from proficient to novice members of every community or institution. However, as Duff notes, it is the participants themselves who decide on their interaction patterns based on their needs and goals.

Similarly, Han (2009) stresses the role of experienced community members in inducting newcomers to the environment, language, and culture. In the context of new immigrants arriving in Canada, she makes the point that,

The old-timer and the institution has the potential to actively and effectively induct and mentor newcomer by allowing immigrants a legitimate voice and opening up spaces for them to speak. Each and every individual and institution has the responsibility and capacity to induct newcomers into the host society; denying such responsibility and capacity is at the root of immigrants' language problem. (p. 664)

In the context of this study, participants were all newcomer doctoral students to their department, educational institution, and Australia. To understand the extent to which they are provided with opportunities for socialisation with the mainstream academic members within their institution and the broader local community is another focus of this research.

Also relevant to the social nature of learning is Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of community of practice. Wenger (2000) argues that learning is social by nature and therefore occurs through regular social interaction with people who share similar concerns and passions. Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated meaning stresses that human beings are social by nature and one's contributions to the society are meaningfully situated in social relations. Thus, every institution should encourage its members to engage in social interaction within its community as the "social container" of an effective social learning

system (p. 229). The depth of the social capital, they argue, depends on the members' ability to engage with the community and be trusted as valued partners in interactions. Wenger (2000) notes that besides our intellectuality, our ability to learn from our interactions depends on our ability to open up, engage and develop our identities in a given community. He further emphasises the role of language as a "communal resource" and as a major code of access to communities (p. 230).

Lave and Wenger (1991) perceive learning as "a dimension of social practice" (p. 47). Their theory is based on the relational nature of learning and argues that informal interaction with people with shared concerns, goals, and interests, in 'communities of practice' can significantly enhance learning. In Lave and Wenger's view, community, domain, and practice are the three sides of a triangle in which learning is situated, enhanced and enriched through interaction. In this research postgraduate students form the community, and their research and work towards a postgraduate degree and professional career forms the domain of practice.

In a university context, the context of this study, communities of practice incorporate students, staff, or academics who share a set of concerns, and who try to deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting with each other on an ongoing basis. According to Wenger, members "find value in their interactions, create knowledge standards and develop a tacit understanding (Wenger. 2000, p. 235). Given the fact that English is the main language of interaction in this research context, international students may also have the chance to acquire or improve and practice language models via social interactions with their academic community.

Theory suggests therefore that social interaction is a major channel for learning. It is through social interaction with our peers, colleagues, friends, boss, manager, supervisors



and employers that we can assess and value participation, involvement and contributions as members. Lunch-time conversations, and morning-tea chats, not only encourage our sense of belonging to and care for the institution and its members but often become good sites for updating our knowledge, hearing about the news, and inspiring and learning from our community. But are all members involved in such informal learning sites? Do the institutions provide the same chance for engagement for all their members? How can language as a “communal resource” affect such engagement? Does partial fluency in English impact on members’ involvement in such social interactions?

Second language users, feel the need for social interactions in English to help the acquisition of appropriate models but at the same time if they fail to adopt appropriate language patterns, how would that affect their social relations? Gee’s (2007) sociolinguistic theory addresses these questions, elaborating how social interactions are contexts for the dynamic development of appropriate social language models.

### **2.2.2 Language use is situated**

To appreciate language in its social context, we need to focus not on language alone, but rather on what I will call “Discourses’ with a capital “D.” Discourses include much more than language. Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a kind of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others recognise. (Gee, 2007, p. 2)

Gee (2005) argues that appropriate social patterns for every social setting are determined by the social context in which the learners are engaged. It is the social context that motivates the language user to select appropriate patterns and sub-patterns from the infinite potential patterns and sub-patterns existing in any language. The language user practises a flexible

variety of discourse patterns which emerge out of his/her interactions in a multiplicity of social contexts. Every social context encourages a set of appropriately selected patterns that make up a particular Discourse.

Gee (2007) describes Discourses with capital D as “ways of being in the world” (p. 127). He writes,

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of language and other symbolic expressions, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting, as well as using various tools, technologies, or props that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network,” to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful “role,” or to signal that one is filling a social niche in a distinctively recognisable fashion. (p. 161)

Gee (2007) emphasises that “language must not only have the right grammar and be used appropriately, but must also express the right values, beliefs, and attitudes – the “right who”, the “right type” of person” (p. 151). He contends that each of us is a member of many Discourses, and each Discourse represents one of our multiple identities. These Discourses “need not, and often don’t, represent consistent and compatible values. There are conflicts among them, and each of us lives and breathes these conflicts as we act out our various Discourses” (p. 4).

Gee (2007) makes a distinction between two sets of Discourses in any society: “primary Discourses” which refers to Discourses to which we are apprenticed in the early stages of their lives in our primary socialisations within such groups as family, and “secondary Discourses” which are acquired and practised later in our social life through our interactions within our community, school, or workplace (p. 168). “Primary Discourses constitute our first social identity, and something of a base within which we acquire or resist later Discourses” (p. 168). “Secondary Discourses are those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socialisations within various local, state, and national groups

and institutions outside early and home and peer-group socialisation – for example, churches, gangs, schools, offices” (p. 168). He continues: “Later in life, people strategically use aspects of their primary Discourses or community based secondary Discourses in pulling off performance in some of their secondary Discourses” (p. 169).

Gee (2007) argues that for most people mastery in any Discourse (primary or secondary) can only take place through acquisition, not learning. In other words, literacy (i.e., fluency) in a primary or secondary Discourse is a product of acquisition, not learning and thus requires “exposure to models in natural, meaningful, and functional settings” (p. 177). Second language social interactions, are potential contexts for practising second language Discourses. Overt teaching, Gee (2007) argues, is not liable to function very contributively to mastery in Discourses and may even initially interfere with the acquisition of natural and meaningful models. “Time spent on learning and not acquisition is time not well spent if the goal is mastery in performance” (p. 177).

In the context of this study, informal staffroom conversations are viewed as arenas for newly arrived international students to practise authentic social Discourses which, according to Gee, can be more effective than hours of classroom learning. To Gee, Discourse patterns incorporate and reflect the social context. However, he makes the point that while the mind can invite patterns for routine Discourses with an “unconscious recognition”, a further “conscious thought” is needed for the selection of appropriate patterns in intercultural communication, since such patterns are “mostly based on conscious thoughts or strategic plans” (Gee, 2005, p. 68). In Gee’s opinion, intercultural communication never happens at the level of English, but at the level of several social Englishes mapping the social and cultural identities of the communicators.

When placed in multicultural contexts, like the context of this study, the situated meaning of our Discourses may be unpredictably interpreted by people from various cultural backgrounds. Gee (2005) explains that “a situated meaning is an image or pattern that we assemble on the spot as we communicate in a given context, based on our construal of that context and on our past experiences” (p. 65). He points out that “situated meanings are not just in our heads; they are negotiated by people in interaction” (p. 70). How international students negotiate meanings in their social interactions in the multicultural university context of this study, is another question which is addressed.

Gee (2005) also introduces the notion of Conversation with capital C to refer to “all the talk and writing that has gone on in a specific social group or in society at large around a major theme, debate, or motif” (p. 22). He points out that “thinking about the different Conversations a piece of language impinges on or relates to is another tool for engaging in discourse analysis” (p. 65). He asserts that “as members of various social groups and of our society as a whole, we are privy to a great many such Conversations” (p. 65). In this study, many local staff and students are privy to the informal tearoom conversations, while to many new international students who had learned English in EFL classrooms, these Conversations are unfamiliar. For international students, language is only one aspect of social interaction. They dynamically try to construct their new social and professional identity in their second language Conversations. Gee (2007) adds that the key to enter and remain in Conversations is recognition:

If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others recognise you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity) here and now, then you have pulled off a Discourse. (p. 18)

This study aims to look closely at international students' engagement in the classroom conversations in their Faculty, their dynamic acquisition of the language, and the construction of their second language identities.

Gee (2004b) introduces the term “authentic beginners” as opposed to “advantaged learners” to refer to those “who have come to learning sites of any sort without the sorts of early preparation, pre-alignment in terms of cultural values, and sociocultural resources that more advantaged learners at those sites have” (p. 14). Gee (2004b) stresses that for “authentic beginners” the problem of making visible and recognisable who they are and what they are doing always involves “a great deal more than just language. It involves acting-interacting-thinking-valuing-talking-(sometimes writing-reading) in the appropriate way with the appropriate props at the appropriate times in the appropriate places”(p. 26). Newly enrolled international students in this study can be deemed authentic beginners who try to speak, interact, value and engage in interactions in an appropriate way to help the construction of their professional and social identity, which are dynamically shaped, reshaped and negotiated in their target academic community.

Gee (2004b) believes that authentic beginners are outsiders who might find it difficult to pull off the insiders' Conversations not only because they are not privy to their Conversations but for the pressure they feel to say the ““right”” thing and behave in an ““appropriate”” way (p. 25). Gee's theory can best serve this study to achieve its major goal which relates to observing interactive patterns of international students, as newcomers, in their conversations with ““insiders””.

This feeling of discomfort, along with the pressure to say the “right” thing and behave in the “appropriate” way is not intrinsic to international students but can be experienced by anyone engaged in intercultural communication with people with different

‘cultural models’ (Gudykunst, 2003). However, international students as authentic beginners might feel more stressed, particularly in their interactions with local students who may play the role of gate keepers of not only the language but the sociocultural capital.

Gudykunst (2003) argues that the outcome of our utterances in intercultural communication contexts is less predictable than that produced in intra-cultural communication contexts. This lack of predictability brings about some degrees of uncertainty and anxiety which should be managed by communicators for effective communication. In his Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (AUM), he argues that, placed in contexts incorporating interlocutors from different backgrounds, communicators need to be “‘mindful’” of their communicative behaviour and manage their Anxiety/Uncertainty at an appropriate level between a minimum and a maximum. He argues that if our level of ‘mindfulness’ falls below a minimum, careless misunderstandings are likely to emerge. On the other hand, if the A/U level goes beyond a maximum, it hinders fluent and effective communication.

In situations where anxiety or uncertainty is high, Gudykunst (2003) argues that speakers refrain from completing the process of message exchange. He also points out that empathy moderates such restraining feelings and enhances communication by facilitating the process of “negotiation of meaning with strangers” (p. 106). In the context of this study, based on the AUM theory, participants in the tearoom conversations are likely to be mindful about the interpretation of their messages in the multicultural context of the interactions. In particular, new international students including the participants of this study can be strategic in their social interactions within their target academic community.

In multicultural interactions, strategies may also be used to save face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Goffman (1981) defines “‘face’” as “the socially attributed aspect of self

that is temporarily on loan for the duration of the interaction in accordance with the line or lines that the individual has adopted” (p.125). Accordingly, Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed Face-Saving Theory (FST) to advocate that participants in language interactions usually tend to apply strategies that can save their own and the interactants’ face. To show their politeness, interactants avoid language that involves the risk of threatening their interactants’ face in a conversation. Face-saving techniques are applied strategically depending on the importance attributed to face in different cultures and different social relations. Ting-Toomey (2005) argues that face is negotiated throughout the process of intercultural interaction. She proposes Face-Negotiation Theory (FNT) which shows how face is dynamically and mutually negotiated in language interactions.

In this study, participants are new to their community, university, country, and culture. Therefore, it is likely that they use certain strategies to negotiate ‘face’ in their second language interactions. The strategies involved in their informal crosscultural second language interactions are observed in this study. Moreover, considering the emphasis of researchers on the ties between second language use and identity (Norton, 2001, 2006), departmental interactions between students are also observed from this viewpoint.

### **2.2.3 Language use as investment in social identities**

Over the last decade, emphasis on the inter-relationship between language and the self has gained acceptance in applied linguistics (Duff, 2002b; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Miller, 2003; Norton, 1997, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2001, 2002; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Norton Pierce (1995) places emphasis on the second language learners’ choice and motivation in interacting with the target community members as a way of facilitating

language acquisition, and this she asserts, may be heavily mediated by the contextual and social conditions inherent in the background context of interactions. She writes,

Language learners can choose under what conditions they will interact with members of the target language community and the learner's access to the target language community is a function of the learner's motivation. (p. 12)

Norton (2006) argues that learning a new language is an investment in gaining access to new communities and constructing legitimate social identities. In second language interactions in multicultural contexts, construction of social identities intersects with negotiations of power and access to useful networks. Miller (2003) argues that social memberships are legitimised and 'audibility' is negotiated in second language interactions.

Norton (2000) holds that real communication happens when "those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen, and those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak" (p. 8), an idea that echoes Gee's (2005) notion of being recognised as "a particular type of who" (p. 18). According to Norton, questions like: who is an L2 speaker?; how does s/he fit into the social world surrounding him/her?; what cultural and behavioural values does s/he hold?; how is s/he flexible in matching his/her roles with his/her identities? Are ones that should be asked prior to any questions regarding the acquisition and mastery of a second language.

Similarly, Duff (2002) argues that residents of multicultural societies need to hear nonnative English users and recognise who they are and what they bring (culturally and socially) to their target community. Institutional interaction in Australian universities, among students and staff, also features negotiation of the 'social capital.' Access to powerful social networks and ultimately success is discursively mediated in institutional interactions (Pavlenko, 2001; Pennycook, 2004; Norton, 2001). Hence, engagement in



institutional discourses determines if and how the new international student manages to negotiate a legitimate 'self' in second language interactions at university. In this study, second language interaction patterns are perceived as avenues for construction, negotiation and (re)negotiation of new social and institutional identities.

### **2.3 STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY**

An early researcher in the field of social identity and social roles, Goffman (1963), proposed that people choose to take different social roles based on their assessment of the social context. Goffman argues that people choose the way they want to present themselves based on the impression they want to create. So, just as an actor chooses a role or a character, people have several identity masks from which they choose what to display. Goffman also argues that people enact their preferred social identity through the way they speak and the verbal or nonverbal forms of communication styles they use.

Developers of Goffman's social identity theory later proposed the idea that, just like the impact of scenario or co-players on a character in a play, our social identities are partly influenced or even imposed by the social context and the people with whom we interact socially (Gee, 2005, 2007; Norton, 2001, 2004, 2006). In this sense, it can be argued that in this study, the participants' social identities which are enacted in their informal institutional interactions, are partly negotiated through their choice of language, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, and partly influenced by the social context, and the people they meet during their study abroad experience (peers, staff, academics and the broader Australian community). However Goffman's theory omits the power differential that can also impact on social roles and the acceptance or uptake of these.

From a cultural point of view, in study abroad contexts, Swann's (1987) identity negotiation theory suggests that people who live in foreign countries and cultures retain their original identities but, under some conditions, modify them in response to exposure to the host culture. Two other theories of identity also elaborate identity change during study abroad experience. Self-categorization theory (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994), suggests that the fluidity of identity and its reliance on social memberships, makes students who cross borders to study in a foreign culture internalise the culture abroad and become very connected to it. Alternatively, self-verification theory (Swann, 1997) proposes the idea that since the construction of people's personal identities is a continuous and a lifelong process, often adult students are highly reluctant to change their personal identities and prefer to cling to their existing identities and remain connected with people from the country of origin.

The investigation of the impact of the study abroad experience on the participants' personal identities is not the focus of this study. However, given the fact that all international participants are mature doctoral candidates holding certain personal, professional, cultural, and social identities in other countries, it seems likely that upon moving to the new environment, their dynamic negotiations of identity and social interaction will be tempered by the fact that they are no longer 'at home' within the host community.

Jackson (2010) elaborates on different outcomes of study abroad experience particularly with regard to sojourners' language and identity development. She highlights the role of agency and individuals' attitudes in socialising within the host community, writing,

Using academic language in a formal L2 classroom differs considerably from the informal discourse situations that typify daily life in the host culture. Moreover,

not all language learners react to face-to-face intercultural contact in the same way. Some may find the environment inhospitable and limit their use of the host language; others may find their hosts welcoming and fully embrace the opportunity to explore and grow. (p. 28)

Jackson elaborates on the difference between academic language use within classrooms on the one hand, and social language use on the other. She makes it clear that students' participation in informal daily socialisations in the host community provides considerable learning opportunities, however, these can rely on student agency and attitudes. Students' attitudes towards the host culture, she contends, significantly depend on how they assess the hospitality of the host community.

## **2.4 LINGUICISM**

Differences in terms of accent, grammar and vocabulary, the very differences overlooked by formal linguistics, are indices of the social positions of speakers and reflections of the quantities of linguistic capital (and other capital) which they possess. (Thompson, 1991, p. 180)

The native/nonnative-speaker dichotomy is argued to be associated with not only language but race, skin colour, culture, and ideology (Lippi-Green, 1997; Shuck, 2006). In her 'language subordination model,' Lippi-Green (1997) contends that the native-speaker model of language is "a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language of the upper middle class" (p. 64). Shuck (2006) echoes her, arguing that the "ideology of nativeness" is the offspring of the intersection of linguistic and racial discrimination,

Simplified native–nonnative categories ...are mapped onto other social hierarchies—especially class, ethnicity, and race—as well as onto existing

cultural models of educational and political systems. These models join to construct a social order inextricably tied to language use. (p. 260)

According to Shuck's (2006) theory of markedness, in every kind of binary the neutral or unmarked is accounted as standard while the marked is viewed as non-standard, signalling the "Other". He continues that, just like race or skin colour, 'accented English' marks the Other. Shuck's (2006) theory of markedness, elaborates on the ideology of native speaker as standard and nonnative speaker as marked or non-standard. He proposes that ideology by definition describes things as wanted rather than as they really are. Accordingly, he argues that the hegemonic disputes over the native/nonnative distinction are not yet over. In an American educational context, Shuck (2006) argues that the native/ nonnative dichotomy includes other-than-language components.

Table 2.2 Native/nonnative speaker dichotomy (Based on Shuck, 2006, p. 263)

Native speakers	Nonnative speakers
are American	are international
are White or Anglo	are non-White or non-Anglo
are local	are international
are US	are THEM
are experts in English	are novices in English
are ahead/faster	are behind/slower
take normal classes	take easy classes that cater to them
have no accent or have regional ones	have accents
are perfectly comprehensible	are incomprehensible
have little or no responsibility for effectively with communicating	have full responsibility for communicating effectively
have no culture	have culture

Shuck's theory of markedness reveals the hegemony of English language and the interrelationship between language and social discrimination. It perpetuates the idea that speaking English with an international accent is associated with social discrimination. He

also highlights the generalisations often made about international nonnative students, stereotyping them struggling learners in English-speaking universities. Shuck continues,

By investigating how everyday speakers discursively accomplish the processes of marking and unmarking individuals and groups, we can better understand how racialisation is often a subtle practice deeply embedded in the way we speak. (Shuck, 2006, p. 261)

The hegemonic nature of English language and its role in provoking racist generalisations about student groups has been stated by other researchers as well. Lippi-Green (1997) argues that “accented English” is a major deterministic feature in racialising the nonnative speaker. Miller (in press) suggests that, “sounding different can have social and material consequences, as well as shape the social and professional experience of speakers”. She writes,

A speaker’s experiences in ‘finding a voice’ may vary widely depending on their personal resources such as language proficiency, social capital, personal biography, interactional skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Negative evaluations of second language speech may be consequential for the speaker in social, professional and psychological terms.

Miller emphasises the role of the hearer in legitimising the speaker, arguing from a Bourdieuan perspective that “the listener has significant power to allow speakers to become audible to dominant language speakers”. She explains,

Speakers may demonstrate many aspects of language proficiency, but be perceived as second language speakers due to their accents, intonation, grammar, vocabulary or other prosodic features. Hearers also take into account aspects of the speaker’s identity, including social status. (Miller, in press)

Phillipson (1992) uses the term ‘linguicism’ to address discrimination based on language, arguing that “[L]inguicism has taken over from racism as a more subtle way of hierarchising social groups in the contemporary world” (p. 241). Linguicism, therefore,

may be part of daily multicultural interactions and as Lippi-Green (1997) points out, accent may become “the last back door to discrimination” (p. 73).

Shuck (2006) also argues that “while face-to-face interaction is the site for the construction of immediate social relationships as well as broader sociocultural systems, casual conversation, because of its primacy in our daily lives, has a major role in constructing social relationships” (p. 263). Aside from this primacy, informal daily community interactions are saturated with local and cultural themes which may make them unfamiliar to newcomers. Daily social interactions are the interface of the negotiation, renegotiation and display of our identities on the Self/Other social continuum (Lippi-Green, 1997; Philipson, 1992).

In this study, the dichotomy of international vs. local student may exist and might be tied to ideologies of English language skills and ‘nativespeakerdom’. In the context of this study, for example, participants’ unfamiliarity with the local and cultural themes of informal lunch/coffee-time conversations impact on the construction of their new institutional identities. I would like to conclude this section with a statement by Miller (in press) who adverts: “the danger of negative evaluations of those who sound ‘different’ is the very real danger of social exclusion and discrimination.”

## **2.5 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND STRATEGIC COMPETENCE**

In the 1970s and 1980s, SLA researchers sought to elaborate the forms of competence needed for effective communication in a second language. One influential model was Canale and Swain’s (1980) model of communicative competence. In their model, Canale and Swain propose that every L2 learner needs to acquire four types of competence to be

able to communicate effectively, namely, grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. They define grammatical competence as a mastery of the language rules of grammar, vocabulary and structure. They further argue that grammatical competence by itself can not lead to effective communication. Competence in using appropriate language forms according to the sociocultural context, taking into account who the participants are, and the goals of communication is crucial in effective communication. Discourse competence, which refers to “how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres” (p. 9) is, they argue, another type of competence needed in L2 communication. A further competence in this model is strategic competence, which entails mastery of verbal and non-verbal strategies to enhance communication, which they define as “the knowledge of how to use communication strategies to communicate intended meaning” (p. 32). Strategies like repair, paraphrase, or asking for clarification and non-verbal gestures and facial expressions, they argue, can help the flow of communication.

Effective communication informs the theoretical foundation of this study and it is pertinent to understand that this entails more than a set of symbols and rules, as shown by the complexity of Canale and Swain’s 1980 model. However, given the multicultural context of this study, it can be argued that communicative competence by itself may not result in effective intercultural communication. The viability of this argument has been the agenda of communication strategy research (Gudykunst, 2003; Gumperz, 1982; House, 1999; Modiano, 1999). Jackson (2010), for example, stresses that in addition to communicative competence, intercultural communication involves a level of intercultural competence, reasoning that “in today’s complex, ever changing world, intercultural competence is as important as L2 competence for responsible global citizens” (p. 214).

Bennett (1997) also contends that fluency in a second language without intercultural competence does not equip people for effective intercultural communication. Rather it makes them sound like ‘fluent fools.’ Jackson writes,

A fluent fool is someone who speaks a foreign language well but doesn’t understand the social or philosophical content of that language. Such people are likely to get into all sorts of trouble because both they themselves and others overestimate their ability. (p. 44)

Byram (1995, p.???) uses the term “intercultural speaker” to refer to a foreign language user who successfully communicates across cultures, and who has a grasp of the social content and context of language. Prodromou (1997) estimated that up to 80% of communication in English takes place between non-native speakers who do not share language, or cultural backgrounds. In rapidly increasing multicultural interaction contexts, and given the recent emphasis on the role of the hearer in effective intercultural communication (Miller, 2003), perhaps it can be argued that successful intercultural communication needs intercultural hearers as much as it needs intercultural speakers.

It has also been argued that socio-cultural competence is a shared responsibility, and speakers from different L1 backgrounds need to be equipped with intercultural strategic competence, which helps speakers to bridge their sociocultural gaps (Gumperz, 1982). Heyward (2002), too, argues that the capability to engage in effective intercultural communication demands a new level of literacy which is required by both native and non-native speakers of a language, which he calls “intercultural literacy”(p. 10). He defines intercultural literacy as “the understandings, competencies, attitudes and identities necessary for successful living and working in a crosscultural or pluralist setting” (p. 10).

With English language being increasingly used as a means of international communication among people with a range of sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds,



boundaries between native and non-native speakers seem not to be viable bases of judgment any longer. Jenkins (2003) proposes that English as an international language has no non-native speakers. Rather than insisting on native-like modeling for effective communication, she argues, international communicators in English need to familiarise themselves with different varieties of English, and to develop intercultural literacy.

Similarly, McKay (2003) suggests that “it is time to recognize the multilingual context of English use and to put aside a native speaker model of research and pedagogy” (p. 19). This has implications for intercultural communication contexts, which, rather than focusing on whose English is standard and whose is not, more efficiently makes one focus on the goals of the interaction, and the ways through which they can be achieved. Such a standpoint means avoiding the imposition of certain models and ideologies, and instead trying to negotiate understanding to enhance intercultural communication. But these shifts can never happen overnight. They may face resistance in practice, and bring about challenges for English language speakers. As Kramsch (1999) notes “the global spread of English challenges learners of English to develop both a global and a local voice” (p. 131).

In increasingly multicultural societies such as that of Australia, people are often evaluated based on their English, and institutions still impose the so called ‘standard’ English over certain varieties of English (Miller, in press). As Lippi-Green (1997) argues, “the evaluation of language effectiveness, while sometimes quite relevant, is often a covert way of judging not the delivery of the message, but the social identity of the messenger” (p. 17). Miller (in press) also reminds us that “identity is relational, negotiated, discursively constructed and socially enacted, and that being recognised and heard by others is a critical part of the representation of identity”. Many researchers have a similar message that intercultural communication may flow better in situations where participants avoid

evaluating each other's Englishes, or imposing their communication styles, and instead collaborate on understanding. Through an examination of student interactions, this study aims to investigate how far these messages are reflected in an Australian university.

Giles (1980) argues that successful intercultural communication among people from an array of language, socio-economic, demographic, and cultural backgrounds happens through accommodation. His Communication Accommodation Theory suggests that interlocutors in an interactive event accommodate to each other's style to ease their communication. Giles argues that participants in intercultural communication either choose to converge to each others' communicative style, or to diverge from each other. He advocates that convergence is the key to successful intercultural communication. His theory was later developed by his successors like Coupland (1988) who introduced the notion of "approximation strategies" to refer to the three possibilities of maintenance, convergence and divergence in interaction.

Coupland (1988) is among the first sociolinguists to suggest that the listener plays a crucial role in the speaker's communication success. His idea was echoed by Miller (2003) who introduced the notion of audibility in second language interaction. She suggests that the outcome of any intercultural communication event depends on the attitude of the listeners. She explains that "the listener may choose to support the second language speaker in the interaction, or to abandon them (p. 7). She argues that today's increasingly English dominated multicultural interaction contexts demand "taking the mainstream headphones off" (Miller, 2003b, p. 177) to hear everyone beyond the politics of difference. She has recently emphasised the need for another type of language competence in multicultural societies, which allows listeners "to hear above the noise of difference" (Miller, in press).

This study takes into account the impact of the social context, the hearer, and the individuals' goals and agendas for interaction on their choice of communication strategies, and thus suggests the need to revisit, analyse and evaluate the efficacy of intercultural communication strategies. The participants themselves expected that interactions within the group and with locals would all constitute intercultural encounters.

## **2.6 SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

The notion of communication strategies was first introduced by Selinker in the 1970s. He viewed communication strategies as devices used by L2 speakers as a result of a mismatch between their linguistic resources and communicative intentions. Faerch and Kasper (1983a) define communication strategies as “potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communication goal” (p. 8).

Pioneer researchers of communication strategies, such as Tarone (1977), Faersch and Kasper (1983), and Dörnyei and Scott (1997), based their works on cognitive and psychological perspectives of communication strategies, considering them as part of communicative competence. Researchers like Firth and Wagner (1997), or Pica (1994) have approached communication strategies from a social perspective, considering them to be negotiation tools applied in interpersonal interactions to reach mutual understanding. Foster-Cohen (2004) criticises both approaches as either “out there” (totally cognitive) or “in here” (merely social) (p. 290). She suggests that an integration of both the social and the cognitive approaches would provide a way to explore the real nature of communication strategies.

Within the cognitive approach, communication strategies are classified mainly into the three different categories of cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. A detailed taxonomy for communication strategies from a cognitive perspective and for ESL/EFL classrooms was formulated by Dörnyei and Scott (1997). In it they identified 33 categories of communication strategies. Table 2.2 is a list of communication strategies as identified by Dörnyei and Scott (1997) in an ESL classroom context:

Table 2.2 Communication strategies (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, pp. 188-194)

1	Message abandonment
2	Message reduction (topic avoidance)
3	Message replacement
4	Circumlocution (paraphrase)
5	Approximation
6	Use of all purpose words
7	Word coinage
8	Restructuring
9	Literal translation (transfer)
10	Foreignizing
11	Code switching (language switch)
12	Use of similar sounding words
13	Mumbling
14	Omission
15	Retrieval
16	Self repair/ other repair
17	Self rephrasing
18	Over explicitness (waffling)
19	Mime (nonlinguistic/paralinguistic/strategic)
20	Use of fillers
21	Self repetition/ other repetition
22	Feigning understanding
23	Verbal strategy markers
24	Direct/indirect appeal for help
25	Asking for repetition
26	Asking for clarification
27	Asking for confirmation
28	Expressing non-understanding
29	Interpretive summary
30	Comprehension check
31	Own accuracy check
32	Guessing
33	Response (repeat/ repair/ rephrase/ expand/ confirm/ reject)

Although considered one of the most detailed taxonomies of communication strategies ever produced, Dörnyei and Scott's taxonomy cited above pays little attention to the impact of the delivery context on the choice of strategies. Moreover, their list of communication strategies has been produced out of an ESL- classroom observation which is a different context from the context of this study. The communication context plays a significant role in people's choice of communication strategies. As Faerch and Kasper (1983a) write,

Communication context will influence preferences for certain communication strategies. The learner's communicative experience and his assessment of the situation will determine his choice of communication strategies. (p. 3)

In the multicultural and informal context of this study, participants may choose to use different types of communication strategy. Parks and Raymond (2004) argue,

Despite the long-standing interest in strategy use and language learning, little attention has been given to how social context may constrain or facilitate this use or the development of new strategies. (p. 374)

Monereo (2007) also reminds us that acting strategically implies reading the requirements of contextual demands correctly, and using the appropriate social role in our social interactions. This study takes the contextual and social viewpoint of communication strategies expressed in Monereo's remarks that strategies are involved to help us communicate "those representations, emotions, practices and discourses that respond to our own expectations and goals, and those of the people around us" (p. 520).

Boekaerts (2002) argues that although so far neglected, strategies should be considered as tools to manage the communicative behaviour of a whole person in a given context. Questions like 'what do I want to achieve?' 'what would I like to be?' 'what are my goals?' influence the patterns of interaction mediated through application of certain

communication strategies, and together they negotiate the social or academic identity of the person and his or her success in recognition within the target community. But our personal goals and achievements do not act in isolation, rather they are influenced by and negotiated with others involved in and attached to the social circle around us (Monereo, 2007).

In SLA, Coupland, James, Howard, Henwood and Wiemann's study (1988) was another attempt to propose the idea that the listener plays a role in the speaker's choice of communication strategies. They introduced three sets of strategies to refer to the speaker's management of attending and adjusting to the interlocutors' interpretive competence or ability to understand. The first set is called interpretability strategies, which are applied in order to modify the complexity of speech (for example, by decreasing diversity of vocabulary or simplifying syntax, as in foreigner talk) or to increase clarity (by changing pitch, loudness, or tempo), or to influence the selection of conversational topics (keeping focused on familiar areas for the other person). The second set of strategies is used as a result of the interlocutors' attention to the other's conversational needs. Coupland et al. called this set of topic management strategies discourse management strategies. Finally, participants may apply a set of interpersonal control strategies to manage their role in the interaction (turn taking management strategies) and distance from other interlocutors (approximation strategies).

Pica (1994) asserts that communicators employ communication strategies to negotiate meaning in interactions and suggests the replacement of the term 'communication strategies' with 'negotiation strategies.' But, when communication takes place between different language and cultural groups the sources of the negotiated gap may not only be linguistic but cultural or conceptual, caused by the mismatch in communicators' social or

cultural beliefs. In addition, the emphasis on the role of human agency in language interaction justifies a new trajectory for communication strategies (Firth & Wenger, 1997).

Communication strategy use is now perceived as not simply a cognitive function, but as socially mediated and contextually triggered. Canagarajah (1995), for instance, believes that language practitioners switch between L1 and L2 in the same conversation, to negotiate their identities and membership. The same strategy (i.e., code switching) can be used to express solidarity (Adendorff, 1996), to establish rapport (Lucas & Katz, 1994), to build friendship (Goldstein, 2006), or to reduce social distance (Camilleri, 1996).

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

Norton and Toohey (2001) remind us that access to social communicative events is critical for newcomers to integrate socially, to represent themselves, and to negotiate their identities. As noted by Miller (in press), the dominant language community may or may not open up possibilities for newcomers to practise and to participate in social interactions. On the other hand, language users' goals and values, perceptions and preferences may cause them to be strategic in language use, and in the process of construction and negotiation of social identity. Communication strategy use may be contextually triggered and socially oriented. Therefore, an investigation of newcomers' communication strategy choice can illuminate their processes of identity and membership negotiation, as well as levels of social integration and engagement in communicative events.

Accordingly, in this study communication strategies are perceived as more than mechanical tools in the hands of "a listener" or "a speaker" to compensate for language problems. They are techniques that help individuals to engage the self in daily encounters, in dynamic negotiations and renegotiations of power, recognition and legitimacy, and in

ongoing struggles to construct and communicate social and professional identities. This study perceives the communicator as an identity rather than “a speaker” or “a listener,” observes communication strategies in their social context, and tries to understand how different social contexts elicit certain strategies, and how different strategies bring certain identities into play.

Norton (1997) stresses that “an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, which changes across time and space” (p. 411). I would argue in this study that adapting useful interaction strategies is also an investment in social identity, particularly in intercultural and multicultural contexts.



# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND INTERACTION STRATEGIES**

### **OVERVIEW**

The mainstream SLA approach to the study of language learning has contributed some useful insights into ways in which grammatical items are acquired, how a first language may affect a second language, or the relative roles of formal instruction and more natural acquisition, but it has had virtually nothing to say about learners as people, or contexts of learning, or the politics of language learning more generally. (Pennycook, 2001, p. 144)

Departing from the traditional SLA and taking a sociocultural perspective of second language use, this research seeks to investigate the ties between language in use, identities and the contexts of interaction. Students' informal departmental interactions are observed and analysed from this viewpoint and perceived as reflections of identity, membership, and legitimacy. This study tests the assumption that communication strategies may be used by international doctoral students to negotiate legitimacy, membership and social representation in informal departmental interaction.

### **3.1 HIGHER EDUCATION, INTERNATIONALISATION, AND STUDENT VOICE**

Singh and Sproats (2005) emphasise the need for critical insights into international students' experiences to inform Australian universities' development of global pedagogies. To address this need, and to inform the process of globalisation of Australian universities, they examined the formal and informal learning experiences of 120 Chinese students who

had moved to Australia to study in undergraduate programs. They interviewed the students to understand how students' prior education in China had informed their study abroad in Australia. The students reflected on their positive and negative experiences in Australian universities. The Chinese students in Singh and Sproats's study complained that often cultural exchange was one-way and their views had been neglected. Another major issue raised by the students was their trouble in interacting and integrating with the Anglo-Australians because of the difference in their culture and the language barrier. The researchers conclude that true globalisation in Australian universities demands "hybridity in local/global pedagogies" (p. 54). Their study focused on Chinese undergraduate students in Australia. This study investigates the experiences of postgraduate research students from a range of cultural backgrounds.

In the context of postgraduate research education, the development of 'graduate skills' has been the focus of much research in Australia (Ballard & Clanchy, 1995; Cumming, 2010; Hawkins, K.G. & Bransgrove, T.G., 1998; Mills, 1997). However, there has been an ongoing debate regarding a clear definition of 'graduate skills,' particularly in an era of globalisation. Cumming (2010) has addressed the skill debate in postgraduate research programs and has stressed the need to "prioritise performance over performativity" (p. 412). He develops the concept of 'contextualised performance,' and argues that students need to construct and enact skills in relation to authentic settings and challenging situations, rather than responding to a set of ideological expectations. Cumming criticises the universities' frameworks for being too much dependant on ideologies of 'graduate skills' and little informed by student voices, experiences and authentic needs within the university. In his Australian-based study of postgraduate research students, he reports,

Representatives of postgraduate students have rejected deficit models of skill development, advocating that greater recognition needs to be paid to the skills

they already possess, as well as the contribution they are making to contemporary research. Unfortunately, however, their voice has not been heard, let alone acted upon. (p. 415)

Internationalisation and student diversity in postgraduate research programs means that student voices, lived experiences, and transferable knowledge and skills should be considered in debates about international education. A reflection of diverse students' voices, patterns of interaction, and experiences, which is the agenda of this study, might be informative in understanding the process of internationalisation in Australian universities.

Cadman (2005a) has stressed the need “to invest, intellectually as well as financially, in creating contexts of reciprocal dialogue for international postgraduate education” (p. 488). The focus of her study is similar to that of this research, reflecting postgraduate international students' voices, describing their expectations in Australian universities, and exploring ways which can facilitate ‘transcultural,’ rather than one-way, learning experiences. Situated in Adelaide University, based on the students' reflections of their experiences of studying a postgraduate program, Cadman highlights three main issues that can lead to international student inclusion or exclusion: 1) confidence in communicating in English, 2) The degree of familiarity with the new university's research culture, and 3) response to the challenge of engaging in the dominant academic discourses (i.e., oral and written). Cadman, however, argues that since the international postgraduate students who are enrolled at Australian universities are already highly educated students and professionals, changing academic cultures is thus a challenging experience for many of them as well as for the institutions and academics. Therefore she suggests,

...it seems clear that explaining Australian academic conventions is neither adequate nor appropriate to facilitate change at this level; time, practice and, above all, reciprocal learning development are required for postgraduate students and staff to come to terms with such deeply acknowledged challenges. (p. 480)

Cadman (2005a) continues to argue that it is a mandate for Australian educators, particularly those involved in postgraduate programs, to invest intellectually as well as financially in providing spaces for reciprocal, ‘transcultural,’ and multidimensional knowledge exchange, rather than knowledge transfer. To understand how and where the investment in enhancing reciprocal learning spaces in postgraduate programs should take place, this study has taken into account the preliminary need to describe students’ diversity in patterns of interaction, engagement and participation, and approaches to identity negotiation.

### **3.2 PATTERNS OF INTERACTION OF INTERNATIONAL TERTIARY LEVEL STUDENTS IN ENGLISH SPEAKING UNIVERSITIES**

It is ironical that while research emphasises the significant positive correlation between participation in institutional interactions and learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), recent statistical data have revealed that 68% of female and 63% of male international students in Australia have complained about lack of social and academic interaction in their universities (Sawir et al., 2008). The significance of pastoral care in doctoral education has been emphasised by previous researchers (Sawir, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Rawlings-Sanaeid, 2009). The need for providing all students with contexts for positive interaction, engagement and integration is part of this.

Past empirical studies of student interaction patterns have been mainly limited to peer interaction analyses in classroom contexts with predefined settings such as pair/group work to investigate certain defined goals such as identification of students’ learning styles.

Despite the autonomy the students may enjoy in out-of-classroom interactions on the one hand, and the significant role such interactions can play in the students' overall satisfaction with their study abroad experience on the other, this area of study –crucial as it is in understanding the postgraduate international student as a whole person – has been neglected. Particularly in postgraduate research programs with no set courses, students' informal peer interactions may comprise one major channel for learning, growth, and identity construction.

One Australian study indicates that international students' university interaction is significantly impacted by lack of familiarity with colloquial language. Using a quantitative methodology, Robertson, Line, Jones and Thomas (2000) sought to identify the main needs of international students in one Australian university. Their questionnaire surveys of 20 international students enrolled in undergraduate courses in an Australian university identified difficulty in understanding colloquial language as the most common issue in student participation and learning. "Feelings of isolation from Australian classmates" and "lack of confidence to speak in front of their Australian classmates" were two other major barriers for these international students in engagement in university interactions (pp. 94-5). Given the informal context of this study, it is possible that participants may have similar issues in engaging in departmental interaction.

In another Australian study, Sawir (2005) interviewed twelve Asian students from five countries, namely Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, Hong Kong and Thailand to find out how students described their interactions. She reports that 85% of international students felt their departmental interactions with their supervisors, peers or staff featured miscommunication due to a mismatch between the patterns they learned in EFL classes in their home countries and what they authentically needed to use in the Australian context.

The international students in Sawir's study asserted that focusing on grammar and structure did not help them communicate effectively in Australia.

Kettle (2005), however, argues that students can take proactive and strategic actions to respond to the social, institutional and academic demands of Australian universities. Her case study of a Thai postgraduate student (Woody) in an Australian university describes Woody as an agent in taking strategic actions to move from a "nobody" position in the beginning of his course to a "somebody" (p. 45) position by the end of the program. Through a series of semi-structured interviews with the student, the researcher sought to understand how Woody engaged with a multiplicity of discourses in the new academic environment, and how he negotiated new and multiple identities. Kettle's study provides evidence of the relationship between agency, power, participation and identity. It portrays the international student as an agent who takes strategic actions for engagement in university interactions. She concludes her study with these words: "the analysis challenges the images of international ESL students 'at sea' in the western university. Woody was aware of his situation and actively engaged in transforming it" (p. 57). This study is similarly interested in investigating the student role, agency, and their strategies in the process of negotiation of legitimacy and institutional identity.

In a related study, Hee and Woodrow (2008) investigated the cases of six Korean postgraduate students enrolled in a Master of TESOL program at an Australian university. They recorded and counted instances of student out-of-classroom interactions through different modes (i.e., face-to-face, email, phone call, and so on) during a group project. They found that while face-to-face interaction was the major mode of communication, overall Korean students had very limited instances of out-of classroom peer interaction. The main finding of their study is that lack of confidence in using English, regardless of the

students' actual English fluency level, kept them from openly engaging in out-of-classroom peer interaction.

Hee and Woodrow's (2008) study is a rare example of empirical research on student interactions in out-of-classroom contexts. As mentioned earlier, most other studies on student interaction patterns have focused on classroom contexts. For example, Wright and Lander (2003) used a quantitative methodology to compare the differences in the verbal exchanges of participants in mono-ethnic interactions versus bi-ethnic interactions. They studied 72 first year male undergraduate engineering students from two ethnic cohorts (Australian-born Anglo-European and overseas-born South East Asian students). In classrooms and on given group tasks, the researchers used the frequency of verbal interaction as the independent variable to measure and compare the participants' patterns of collaborative interaction in mono and bi-ethnic participant groups. Their findings show that participants had significantly more verbal interaction in mono-ethnic groups than in bi-ethnic settings. The key finding of their study is that South Asian students are "inhibited" in their verbal interactions with Australian students (p. 237).

However, counting the number of words or sentences in interactions is only part of the picture in measuring communicative engagement. Storch (2002) focused on ten pairs of adult ESL students in an Australian university and investigated their patterns of interaction through recording dyadic interactions of the students in an ESL class. She reports four distinct interaction patterns used by participants: (1) Expert/Novice; (2) Dominant/Passive; (3) Dominant/Dominant; and (4) Collaborative. She also investigated instances in the interactions expressing a transfer in knowledge and measured the frequency of such instances in the four patterns of interaction. Her findings show that the participants, who were all nonnative English speakers, predominantly applied collaborative patterns among

themselves rather than the other three patterns. The collaborative patterns also contained more instances of exchanging knowledge, the criterion which Storch regards as the main feature of effective interaction. However, she does not identify nonnative speakers' patterns of interaction when they speak with native speaker partners or in the presence of English native speakers.

Unlike Storch, who focused on ESL learners' patterns of interaction among themselves, Parks and Raymond (2004) attend to the patterns of interaction between local and international student pairs in a North American university. They investigated how international and local students shared their pair-work contributions. Their participants were 18 Chinese MBA students, and they looked at how students managed their interactions with their local Canadian peers and shared the team work projects as part of their course requirements. They report that those language learners who took opportunities to interact with their local peers developed certain social strategies in their interactions and took part more fully in group discussion and team work, while those who failed to apply such social strategies remained silent and passive. Accordingly, they conclude that developing social interactive strategies and progress in language learning are positively correlated. They remark, "as amply noted within the language learner strategy literature, social strategies are key strategies associated with good language learners" (p. 378). The questions that can be raised here are: what is the role of agency in strategy use? What is the impact of the background context of interactions on the strategy choice? These often neglected questions are asked and responded to in this study.

Mohan and Smith (1992) investigate why international students have difficulty participating in small group talk in classroom discussions with their local peers. They point out that major obstruction for international students is their negative feelings that they



might be regarded as the inferior partner in the interactions due to their linguistic and cultural differences. Leki (2001) also reports that “the native English-speaking students, consciously or not, appear to be positioning themselves as experts, masters, or at least more senior members of a community of practice and position their bilingual group mates as novices, incompetents, or apprentices” (p. 60). However, neither of these studies focuses on the students’ use of communication strategies.

Roberts (2006) compared the communicative behaviour of tertiary-level international students in a British university in the two settings similar to those defined for this study (i.e., international-international vs international-local). Roberts recorded casual conversations of eight international students speaking in English with other international students from different backgrounds (Asian, South American and African) in groups of two or three without the presence of local students and compared their patterns of interaction with settings where they spoke in English in the presence of local students. He focused on the communication and negotiation strategies they used and also compared the proficiency level of the English they used in the two settings, through counting and comparing their K1 (beginner level) and K2 (advanced level) words. He concludes that international students try to be more cooperative in their interactions with other international students than with local students, showing convergent styles by hedging, down-toning, back channeling, inclusive questions and collaborative turns or sometimes by overlapping with each other in a supportive manner like simply expressing agreement through supportive laughter. He refers to the behaviour observed as speakers’ development of “intuitive competencies to negotiate differences” (p. 87). Roberts concludes,

freed from feelings of inadequacy and the requirement to accommodate to native speakers, freed from negative feelings aroused by native speakers’ use of

Foreigner Talk, nonnative speakers can create and sustain comity and cooperativeness among themselves. (p. 55)

Roberts' study is among the few studies designed to identify communicative patterns in native/nonnative conversations with the awareness that the social or contextual circumstances might explain certain interaction patterns. However, like most previous studies on native/nonnative talk, his approach to discourse analysis is linguistic and does not focus on the ties between his participants' choice of discourse strategies, their identities and social representations. This study shares Norton's (2000) belief that in SLA research, taking into account who the learner is, where they come from, and what their goals are, are all significant to the data analysis.

From a feminist postcolonial perspective, Kenway and Bullen (2003) introduced the notion of 'contact zones' to describe student interactions in Western universities. They studied social representations of international postgraduate women students using semi-structured interviews to compare the lived study abroad experiences of ten students enrolled at a Canadian university with those of ten students in an Australian university. Their participants had diverse backgrounds and little past experience of studying in English speaking countries. The key finding of their study involved the differences in the experiences of students in Australia and Canada and based on this they concluded that 'the international student cohort' is nothing more than a loose assumption. Although the researchers identified certain commonalities in the students' study abroad experiences such as solidarity, ambivalence, or resistance, they contend that international students have diverse agendas for study abroad and live the experience in various ways. They conclude,

Homogenisation is integral to the process of 'othering,' to the creation of an 'other' who is typically stereotyped, silenced, marginalised. In the context of the relationship between coloniser and colonised, it is by these means that the

subjectivity of the coloniser is established and empowered. The idea of identity in the contact zone, by contrast, is heterogeneous. (p. 10)

This study, although not using a feminist approach, shares its understanding of student diversity with Kenway and Bullen and seeks to understand the ties between students' self representations and their social interaction patterns.

### **3.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF INTERACTIONS**

Context shapes language in use and social identities (Gee, 2007). At the turn of the 21st century, researchers observed that up to 80% of communication in English takes place in contexts where native speakers are not present at all; that is between people from different language and cultural backgrounds (Prodromou, 1997). Graddol (2003) reports that nonnative speakers using English for international communication outnumber native speakers. As Canagarajah (2006) points out, internationalisation happens at a price, and English language gate-keepers need to rethink 'native' modeling for interaction contexts where native speakers are not present at all.

Kachru's (1992) model of the spread of English shows how the language has been represented in the world. 'Inner-circle' countries such as USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand provided the norms for 'outer-circle' countries such as Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania as their colonies to use English as their official language besides their native mother tongue. 'Outer-circle' countries then spread these norms to the 'expanding circle' such as China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Zimbabwe, and so on, where English was learned as a foreign language. Based on Kachru's (1992)

model, English is the native language of ‘inner-circle’ people, the second language to ‘outer-circle’ residents, and a foreign language for the people in the ‘expanding circle’.

In traditional ESL/EFL contexts, native speakers were viewed as the ‘norm providers’ and native-like proficiency was both encouraged by teachers and sought after as the ultimate goal by ESL/EFL learners (Solé, 2007). British Received Pronunciation (RP) continued to be associated with upper class prestige until some applied linguists started to question the idea of native modeling in a world where English is more used as a means of communication between nations than a tool to bring supremacy (Smith, 1992).

Block (2003a) argues for an urgent need to import social understandings into SLA research, “which (1) are based on a broader framing of what the phenomenon involves and (2) take place in more diverse contexts than is presently the norm” (p. 132). He contends that framing and modelling English language with reference to dominant native speakers is no longer appropriate for global communication contexts, as it “reduces human existence to the principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability, controllability and standardisation” (p. 132). Such a perception of English language use has shifted much recent research from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts to English as an International language (EIL) contexts which are distinguished from each other by certain characteristics as elaborated below.

### **3.3.1 EIL contexts and the ‘native speaker’**

The ‘nativespeakerdom’ inherent in traditional EFL contexts, seems increasingly irrelevant to the more globalised EIL contexts, in which about 80% of verbal exchanges in English do not involve any native speakers of English at all (Prodromou, 1997). Traditional native speaker supremacy in EFL contexts, as Lippi-Green (1997) outlines, has functioned via

what she calls a language subordination model, a system through which speakers are systematically marginalised based on their English language proficiency or accent, and English competence is used as a “litmus test for exclusion” (p. 64). This point is also made by Jenkins (2003) who writes,

A number of scholars have begun to argue that when English is used for international communication, that is, among speakers from a wide range of international settings then it cannot have ‘nonnative speakers’. In other words, while the native speaker/ nonnative speaker distinction holds good for EFL and for other modern foreign languages, since these are largely learned as L2s for use in interaction with their L1 speakers, EIL is used mainly among L2 speakers of English, often with no native speakers present at all. (pp. 80-1)

As a consequence, some scholars of the field (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004) call for empirically-based research to provide successful models of English and to enhance communication in international/intercultural contexts. Such a reconceptualisation of modeling is based on the findings that native proficiency by itself cannot guarantee successful communication in EIL contexts where the majority consists of L2 users of English from an array of L1/cultural backgrounds.

Even in phonology, the intelligibility of the native model for general EIL users has been questioned. Smith and Rafiqzad (1979) carried out a study in which they asked English teachers from various origins, including American native speakers, to read a short paragraph to English learners from various nationalities using sentence completion tasks. They demonstrated that the native speaker may often be the least intelligible to nonnative speakers. Smith and Rafiqzad (1979) concluded that:

Since the native speaker phonology doesn’t appear to be more intelligible than nonnative phonology there seems to be no reason to insist that the performance target in the English classroom be a native speaker. (p. 380)

The researchers argued that there was nothing inherently good or better about American accent to make it more intelligible to the corpus of EIL users. Smith (1992) points out that “being a native speaker does not seem to be as important as being fluent in English and familiar with several different national varieties” (p. 80).

The supremacy of the native speaker in the traditional ESL/EFL contexts has placed all the burden of trying to succeed in communication on nonnative shoulders (Lippi-Green, 1997; Shuck, 2006). Here is a view from a nonnative English speaker, dramatic but poignant in its intent,

We nonnatives are desperately learning English; each word pronounced by us represents our blood, sweat and tears. Our English proficiency is tangible evidence of our achievement of will, not an accident. Dear Anglo-Americans, please show us you are also taking pains to make yourselves understood in an international setting. Mikie Kiyoi (cited in McArthur, 2003, p. 21)

To what extent these messages have been heard in an Australian context, is another theme of this study.

### **3.3.2 Collaboration and negotiation as key to communication in EIL contexts**

Firth and Wagner (1997) have criticised the hegemonic nature of the traditional EFL/ESL contexts, which, they believe, “conceive the foreign language speaker as a deficient communicator struggling to overcome an underdeveloped L2 competence, striving to reach the target competence of an idealised native speaker” (p. 285). They argue for the need for a reconceptualisation of second language communication, writing,

SLA research requires a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use, an increased emic sensitivity towards fundamental concepts, and the broadening of the traditional SLA data base. With such changes in place, the field of SLA has the capacity to become a theoretically and methodologically richer, more robust enterprise, better able to explicate the processes of second or foreign language acquisition, and better situated to engage

with and contribute to research commonly perceived to reside outside its boundaries. (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 285)

This represented a turning point in SLA research, and gave ground to the argument that communication in English among people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds should be viewed with a focus on cooperation and collaboration, rather than accuracy and traditional SLA measures. However even in traditional SLA research where the emphasis on the role of human agency was almost absent in research, willingness for cooperation was still recognised as essential for a smooth yet effective communication to flow (Tarone, 1981). For instance, the strategy of ‘repair’ is often reported to serve as key to mutually reach shared understanding in conversation (Gass & Veronis 1985; Long 1983). Firth and Wagner’s (1997) contribution is to suggest a broader social context for these interactions and their interpretation.

As mentioned before, Giles’s Communication Accommodation Theory (1980) suggests that interlocutors in an interactive event accommodate to each other’s style to ease communication. In every communication context, speakers often accommodate their speech style to their interlocutors (Giles & Bourhis, 1994). As proposed by Coupland et al. (1991) in multicultural contexts, interlocutors need ‘approximation techniques’ to collaborate on understanding. Therefore, collaboration and convergence promote communication while divergence highlights the differences. As Bremer, Broeder, and Roberts (1996) point out,

The interactive nature of the understanding process requires that both sides negotiate to achieve sufficient shared inferences for a commonality of meaning to be established. (p. 193)

Although the seminal work of Long (1983) on negotiation in L2 learning made important contributions to understandings of communication, it was only after Pica’s (1994) research

on negotiation and second language learning that researchers started to realise that ‘negotiation’ in interactions can avoid communication breakdowns which may be caused by little shared knowledge or background. She perceived negotiation as “a means of working through perceived or actual gaps in communication” (p. 513).

In EIL contexts, Leznyák (2004) found that nonnative speakers negotiate on the sociolinguistic rules of their interactions while norms seem to be fixed to native speakers. Meierkord (2002) also reported that, released from the pressure of speaking accurately in the presence of native speakers, the interlocutors in out-of-classroom EIL contexts focussed on the content of their contributions rather than their grammatical mistakes.

It is argued that the more gaps there are between the two parts of the interaction, the more interactants negotiate to avoid a breakdown in their interaction (Modiano, 1999; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Pica, 1994; Varonis & Gass, 1985). If we generalise this finding to EIL contexts where interactions take place among people with diverse language, social and cultural backgrounds, we expect to see more instances of negotiation of meaning. As Modiano (1999, p. 10) puts it, EIL communication can only take place on a negotiated “common core”.

In multicultural contexts, Knapp (2002) argues that strategic negotiation of meaning is one of the major reasons why intercultural communication flows well despite the inevitable contextual gaps. Pica (1994) also proposes that negotiation of meaning, and negotiation of form (as long as it clarifies the meaning), contributes to successful communication. She defines negotiation as, “the modification and restructuring of interaction that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility” (p. 494). Typical modification and restructuring strategies signalling participants’ negotiation include backchannels as



comprehension checks, clarification requests, and confirmation checks, self/other repair and different forms of repetition.

Participants in crosscultural encounters, whether native or nonnative speakers of English, need strategic negotiations not only for their linguistic gaps but for their sociolinguistic and sociocultural differences (Giles, 1980; Gudykunst, 2003, 2005; Gumperz, 1999). Seidlhofer (2004) emphasises that negotiation of understanding, through application of certain communication strategies, is the key to communication success in multicultural contexts with people from different cultural and lingual backgrounds. Long (1996) describes the process of negotiation of meaning as follows,

Negotiation for meaning is the process in which, in an effort to communicate, learners and competent speakers provide and interpret signals of their own and their interlocutor's perceived comprehension, thus provoking adjustments to linguistic form, conversational structure, message content, or all three, until an acceptable level of understanding is achieved. (p. 418)

Negotiation strategies are defined as “means of working through perceived or actual gaps in communication” (Pica 1994, p. 513). The ongoing use of these strategies throughout the interactions is the reason why Neil (1996) declares that her empirical data collected from everyday workplace conversations in EIL contexts show very rare instances of mis/non-communication.

Firth (1996) argues that an inevitable strategy which comes into play when gaps between the communicators are too wide to be bridged is “Let It Pass” (p. 238). He refers to Let It Pass as a last-resort strategy which helps to avoid communication breakdown. From a different standpoint, House (1999) warns that crosscultural communication involves too many instances of ‘compromise’, which can make interactions superficial rather than effective. Meierkord (2002) also contends that ELF communication is “stripped bare of its

cultural roots” (p. 128). Seidlhofer (2004), however, believes that crosscultural communication in EIL contexts often flows well despite involving many instances of “over-negotiation”, a phenomenon which may only happen through negotiation (p. 219).

Meierkord (2002) found the best manifestation of negotiation in topic management. She studied the communicative behaviour of native vs. nonnative speakers of English to find how they managed the topic of their interactions. She reported that within the intercultural interpretation, the preference for safe topics can be explained due to the participants' insecurity as to the acceptability of the topics they introduce. Even though the participants were aware that cultural differences regarding delicate topics might exist, they had trouble identifying taboo subjects. Participants therefore avoided any topics that might have been taboo and selected topics which were known or at least expected to be safe. The conclusion is that topics about which this certainty does not exist are avoided, which explains why Meierkord (2002) describes English as a *Lingua Franca* communication as “stripped bare of its cultural roots” (p. 128).

In traditional SLA, negotiation of meaning is considered as contributively essential in language learning (Long, 1996; Pica, 1994). In most of such linguistic research, repair is identified as a critical strategy for negotiation on mutual understanding. Doughty (1996) argues that a repair strategy is used by speakers in a verbal interaction when they receive listeners' non-understanding signals which can be either direct or non-direct. Triggered by such signals, then, the speakers start to repeat themselves and repair the listeners' understanding and finally end up in some mutual understanding. Nakahama et al. (2001) videotaped conversation dyads of three native/nonnative pairs. They analysed the data both qualitatively and quantitatively to understand in what ways repair is used as a strategy for negotiation of meaning. They found that repair can help mutual understanding both in

particular gaps like lexical, morpho-syntactic and pronunciation problems, as well as global gaps, referring to content and discourse gaps. However, like other linguistic studies, they paid no attention to the contextual and social circumstances and failed to understand the power relations and social goals that might have influenced the strategies in use.

Researchers as early as Hymes (1972) introduced the notion of sociocultural competence as an element of communicative competence. Halliday (1978) pioneered a social and contextual perspective to studies of interaction, viewing language as a shared resource for meaning. Yet, the social view of language interaction has been neglected in empirical research on interaction strategies. Halliday pioneered movements in SLA research to take into account the human, the social and the contextual background of language interaction. Furthermore, the emphasis on the role of human agency in communication has opened a new line in interaction research which focuses on the ongoing negotiations of identity in diverse communities (Norton, 2001, 2006).

### **3.4 NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY IN CROSSCULTURAL INTERACTIONS**

Smith (1992) argues that negotiation of understanding demands constant and conscious attention towards five aspects: self, other, the power relationship between the self and the other, goal and context. This could be visualized as a pentagon, as follows:

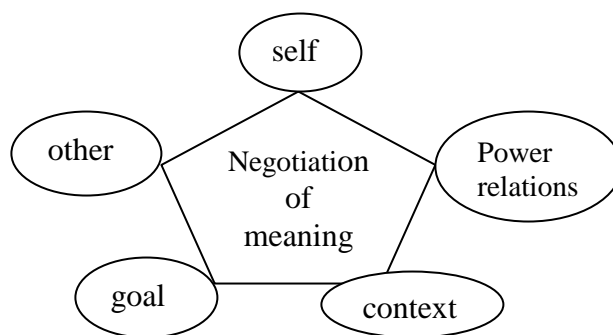


Figure 3.1 Aspects of negotiation in intercultural communication (Based on Smith, 1992, p. 76)

Later in the 1990s his argument was taken up by Norton and her successors who argued for the centrality of identity in language interaction and the critical role of human agency in communication. Norton (2000) contended that real communication happens when “those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen to, and those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak” (p. 8). Norton’s research addressed questions such as: Who is an L2 speaker?; How does s/he fit into the social world surrounding him/her?; What cultural and behavioural values does s/he hold?; How is s/he flexible in matching his/her roles with his/her identities? This involved meticulous reviewing of language learners’ stories prior to an analysis of their target language discourse features.

Participants’ narratives have been used in research to help the researcher explore the reflexive ties between second language use and self representation in the target community (Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Toohey, 2007). However, as Block (2003a) points out: “The analysis of learners’ language stories brings out interesting social issues about SLA, but leaves the linguistic side of SLA completely marginalised” (p. 133). In this research a combination of a discourse analysis approach and analysis of participants’ language stories is used to help the understanding of the ties between language, identity and the social context.

Some researchers have used interviews or focus groups to verify participants' narrations (Cole & Zuengler, 2003; Kramsch, 1996). Kramsch (2000) used communication between three businessmen from Germany, France and England to observe negotiation of identity. Participants in her study spoke in their native languages and communicated with the help of interpreters. Even in contexts where communicators spoke in their mother languages, Kramsch found evidence of dynamic negotiations of identity through strategic use of language. Recording participants' conversations in this study can provide empirical data to understand the process of identity negotiation in and through second language interactions.

Identity negotiation in language interactions has been investigated by Cole and Zuengler (2003). They studied a ninth grade science class in a high school in the United States, comprising students from African-American, Hispanic-American and Asian-American ethnic backgrounds. They observed how students enacted and negotiated their social identities throughout their interactions. The researchers identified multiple social identities that emerged while students engaged in a group activity, namely a science project on asthma. The researchers used videotapes of the science class, field notes taken in the class, interviews with the science teacher, and focus groups with the students. They identified four distinct identities emerging during the students' engagement in the project including the "good vs not good student" identity or the "scientist vs researcher" identity (p. 103). Cole and Zuengler point out that "these identities can be fore-grounded or backgrounded in the moment-to-moment interactions of any class period" (p. 110). They stress that the discourse in use while each of these four identities were being enacted was distinct, although at some moments they had some shared or overlapping features. The key finding of their study was that "at the local level, within classroom interactions, students

actively negotiate multiple identities” (p. 112). They further suggested that “in addition to talking about what identities community members may be engaging with, there is the question of how the process occurs” (p. 110). Through recording conversations and listening to participants’ language stories in focus groups, this study seeks to understand how communication strategies are used to enact multiple social identities in intercultural face to face interactions.

To research negotiation of identity in tertiary intercultural contexts, Rubenfeld, Clemente, Lussier, Lebrun and Auger (2006) studied fifty Anglophones and fifty Francophones in a Canadian bilingual university. The researchers designed a set of questionnaires to understand how students’ second language experience related to representation in the L2 community. Their seven-point-scale questionnaires asked about participants’ self-evaluation on their L2 use, and their attitudes towards the L2 community. Their analysis revealed that for both groups, confidence in the L2 led to more positive and accepting views of the L2 community. The study also explored the ties between language and identity.

Miller (2003) argues that in Australia, being a nonnative English speaker and sounding different can contribute to the marginalisation of international and immigrant students even more significantly than visible differences. In her case-study, she reflects the voices of immigrant students in an Australian secondary school and explores how they struggle to be legitimately heard among their native-speaker peers. She writes about the ties between their English language competence and their integration into their school community. The context of her study is different from this study, which targets postgraduate research students who seek legitimacy as recognised PhD students in their new academic community. However, Miller’s conclusion that in Australia, in addition to

looking different, sounding different can sometimes contribute to marginalisation, under-representation, and isolation of linguistically and culturally diverse students, is a finding significant to this research.

The notion of linguistic legitimacy has been the theme of narrative research by Solé (2007), also based on the idea that communication involves negotiation of self representation. She points out, “learners do not communicate in a social vacuum but acquire new roles, positions and vantage point from which they negotiate their L2 selves (p. 203). Solé uses a postcolonial Bourdieuan approach and follows the recent research paradigm set by researchers like Norton, Kramsch Lantolf, Pavlenko, Miller, and Toohey to address the central question of how second language users position themselves in the social world through discourse. She contends,

Linguistic legitimacy ... is not the by-product of having been into or having spent most of one's life in a particular language community; it is primarily a constructed possibility, open to new members of the linguistic community, who adopt new historical meaning and negotiate new social positions for themselves while entering into a dialogue in the L2. In a similar way, language learners will have to legitimise their positions in the target language. (Solé, 2007, p. 206)

Solé's (2007) study is based in a university in UK and her participants were 35 students enrolled in a beginner Spanish as a second language course. While her study has many similarities in terms of approach and theory with this research, the fact that the L2 in her study is not English may change the whole story. The hegemonic nature of the English language, and the native/nonnative dichotomies in English language learning and use associated with social class are more clearly related to the outcomes of this study.

### **3.5 EXPERTISE AND DOMINANCE IN NATIVE/NONNATIVE TALK**

It is not surprising to find in the literature that native speakers tend to take the lead in negotiating meaning, in nominating and terminating topics, in repairing and offering assistance with syntax, lexis and pronunciation (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Pica, 1994). However, Woken and Swales (1989) note that an asymmetrical relationship based upon expertise can affect the native speakers' dominance in interactions. They examined conversations between native and nonnative speakers of Chinese in which nonnative speakers clearly held the role of experts. They report that in the role of experts, nonnative speakers communicate in the target language with greater confidence. They conclude that the domain of knowledge is a vital factor in determining discourse competence.

Similarly, Gass and Varonis (1985) studied dyads between native and nonnative speakers of English in circumstances where the context of conversation was highly technical – concerning computers and IT – and the nonnative speakers had a higher degree of expertise and knowledge in their special major and. In their study, T-Units (number of complete sentences) and their length were used as a measure of the amount of talk, the number of inquiries (procedural or instructional/rhetorical), along with the number of corrections and directions appealed for as measures of dominance in conversations between nonnative and native speakers. They conclude that certain features such as task and topic expertise can have a powerful impact on the conduct of the conversation. They suggest that in settings where communication is functionally rather than socially directed, where the nonnatives are placed in position of authority by virtue of their possessing a greater field expertise, native speakers may no longer be dominant.



Zuengler (1989) paired a native speaker with a nonnative speaker in classroom dyads. The nonnatives were all male students but from different L1 backgrounds. The pairs were strangers to each other but all studied the same major at the same university. Each pair had two conversations: one domain involved a topic outside their field in which both could be expected to have equal knowledge (such as food), while the second domain was within their major. In the latter case, dyads consisted of a nonnative speaker who was more advanced in his major than his native speaker interlocutor. Her findings show that in topics in which both participants had equal knowledge, there was no evidence of dominance from either the native speakers or nonnative speakers. But when nonnative speakers were in the position of the knower in domains where the topic was related to their field of study, they appeared to speak significantly more than the native speakers. Therefore, the researcher concludes that nonnative speakers show dominance in conversations when put in the knower position. Even in domains with general topics, Zuengler reported, nonnative speakers with a high level of proficiency in English were speaking more. Negotiation of power and dominance in native/nonnative interactions is a central theme in this study.

### **3.6 DISCOMFORT IN NATIVE/NONNATIVE TALK**

The impact of having a native-speaking interlocutor has been studied in previous research (Jacobs-Huey, 2002; Lesznyák, 2004; Meierkord, 2002; Takahashi, 2000). Almost all report some degree of psychological discomfort which may impact nonnative speakers' performance. For instance, based on data collected from questionnaires filled by Japanese ESL learners, Takahashi (2000) reports that about 70 percent of Japanese ESL speakers, predominantly women, experience feeling extremely uncomfortable speaking English to another Japanese in the presence of Americans, especially when the other speaker has a

higher English proficiency level. Consequently, they either make more mistakes in English than usual or end up being very quiet in the conversations.

Lesznyák (2004), in an effort to provide comparative data on the study of NS-NNS talk, found that, faced with a majority of native speakers, nonnative users may no longer use their strategic flexibility to co-construct rules of topic management but have to accept those imposed on them by their native English interlocutors instead. Furthermore, she suggests that sociolinguistic and pragmatic rules of interaction are negotiated by nonnative users from different backgrounds, while they seem to be fixed for native speakers.

Strategies may differ when interlocutors are in a competitive situation. Students in a class trying to monitor their English accuracy are likely to show different patterns of interaction from those socialising with their peers. Based on face-to-face group conversational data tape-recorded in a student hall of residence for overseas students from a heterogeneous corpus of overseas students in Britain, Meierkord (2002) reports that when released from the competitive pressure of classrooms, interlocutors react to the contents of each others' contributions rather than focusing on each other's grammatical mistakes. They then collaboratively try to achieve the completion of the information expressed.

Breen (2001) adds another element, autonomy and willingness for participation, to the contextual variables that affect "the learner's action in the context" (p. 176). He stresses that such variables interplay at a contextual level [the classroom in Breen's research] to build individual learning experiences. The learner's past experience in participation and recognition in their community of practice, he argues, determines their future patterns of participation and contribution to their interactions. However, the particularity of the classroom context of his study makes his participants' 'action in context' different from those which might be observed outside of the classroom, and in this study.

The realisation that participants in crosscultural interactions, whether native or nonnative speakers, need to be equipped with certain ‘conscious’ and ‘problem-oriented’ strategies of communication goes back to applied linguistics’ research in the past three decades (Faerch & Kasper, 1983b; Tarone, 1981; Selinker, 1972; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Bialystock, 1990). However, given the increasingly multiculturalised context of interactions, recent research emphasises a sociocultural framework for the study of communication strategies. Recently, a focus on the social context of English in use has been complemented with a focus on identity and human agency to understand their part in the choice of communication strategies. Norton and Toohey (2001) argue that,

Whereas previous research viewed good language learners as gradually developing appropriate strategies for interaction in their respective linguistic communities by, for example, monitoring their performance more diligently and exploiting the target language more systematically, recent research on identity and language learning demonstrates that the process may be far more complex. (p. 312)

### **3.7 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

As a pioneer in communication strategy research, Tarone (1980) defines communication strategies as “tools used in a joint negotiation of meaning where both interlocutors are attempting to agree as to a communicative goal” (p. 420). She believes that communication strategies are “mutual attempts of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures are not shared” (p. 418). Tarone identified five broad categories of communication strategies, namely, *avoidance*, *paraphrase*, *transfer*, *appeal for assistance*, and *mime*. Her fellow researchers identified more detailed lists of communication strategies applied in second language classrooms (Bialystok, 1990; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Paribakht, 1985). Among all of these, Dörnyei and Scott’s (1997) taxonomy of communication strategies is the most detailed (see Table 2.2 for the full list of the D&S

taxonomy). Corder (1983) also considers communication as a cooperative enterprise by nature and argues that strategies adopted by speakers are constantly modified based on the interlocutors' signals of understanding.

Firth and Wagner (1997) pioneered a re-conceptualisation of communication strategy research which takes into account the feelings, beliefs, and goals of the language learner. Rather than analysing communication strategies used by a 'speaker' or a 'listener,' Firth and Wagner argue that language user is a whole person holding certain beliefs and goals for communication. They stress the role of human agency in communication strategy research, and argue that communication strategy research needs to be situated in the particularity of its social context. However, almost all studies on communication strategies have been carried out in ESL classroom contexts. The competitive pressure of classroom, and more importantly the teaching/learning goal that overshadows ESL classes, may influence the choice or the frequency of communication strategies involved.

Recent empirical research in multicultural interaction contexts suggests that communication strategies may be used to negotiate cultural, pragmatic and conceptual differences besides language gaps (Canagarajah, 2006; Chen & Starosta, 2004). However, a common critique of many empirical studies on the identification, classification and categorisation of communication strategies is a lack of attention to how they are tied to the social context. Almost all communication strategy taxonomies have been produced out of ESL/EFL classroom contexts. It is likely that in everyday informal intercultural interactions people use strategies different from those reported in classrooms.

The possibility that communicators' choice of strategies can be influenced by the macro features present in the broader context seems neglected in communication strategy literature. Monereo (2007) writes,

There is need for more adequate explanation of how these different contextual conditions relate to each other and how the strategic communicator establishes priorities when making some decisions and does not do so when making others. In other words, we should establish in more detail, how these strategies read the global context and determine the weight of each condition in their decision making. (p. 507)

Kerekes (2007a) argues that interaction in intercultural contexts is mutually co-constructed. In her interactional analysis of employment interviews in an American recruitment agency, she reports that the interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee in such ‘gate-keeping encounters, proceed smoothly only when both parties co-construct their interaction. She reports that most of her newcomer Internationally Educated Professionals (IEPs) failed their job interviews due to socio-cultural miscommunication instances. Accordingly, she argues that having communicative competence alone may not necessarily end in a successful interaction. Effective intercultural communication, rather, needs a positive attitude for negotiation and collaboration on understanding from those involved. Similarly, Heyward (2002, p. 10) contends that in globalized communities effective communicators need to have intercultural literacy”. He defines “the interculturally literate person” as anybody who “possesses the understandings, competencies, attitudes and identities necessary for successful living and working in a crosscultural or pluralist setting” (p. 10).

A major research gap in the communication strategies literature which motivated this study is that hardly any attempt has so far been made to identify communication strategies used in daily informal multicultural encounters with the agenda to link communication strategy use to the individual.

### **3.8 COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND IDENTITY**

Doctoral study has been portrayed as a process of “transformation of identity” (Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010, p. 433). Kamler and Thompson (2006) argue that through doctoral education, students practise to establish themselves as the knower in an academic discipline, in order to defend their knowledge claims, and engage in scholarly debates. Similarly, Barnacle and Mewburn (2010) write that through the process of becoming doctor the student learns to secure “the right to occupy the position of the academic knower and adopt the authority of scholar” (p. 434). A central question addressed in this study is, to what extent being new to the language and culture of the social context of doctoral study might impact participants’ voice and identity.

In communication strategy research, the role of the individual in selecting and appropriating strategies has often been overlooked. As Firth and Wenger (1997) point out,

For SLA, the learner identity is the researcher’s taken-for-granted resource, rather than, or as well as, a topic of investigation. In most cases, learner is implicitly taken to be an adult receiving formal education in S/FL. The emic relevance of the learner identity is not an issue in SLA. More important, the learner is viewed as a defective communicator. (p. 288)

The significance of importing human agency to communication strategy research has increasingly attracted second language researchers’ attentions (Adendorff, 1996; Canagarajah, 1995; Cole & Zuengler, 2003; Foster-Cohen, 2004; He & Lindsey, 1998; Rubenfeld, et al., 2006). However, only few have used empirical data and once identity is used as a lens, the studies are either focused on single strategies such as code-switching (i.e., Adendorff, 1996; Canagarajah, 1995) or have only elaborated on certain contextual issues such as power negotiation (Cole & Zuengler, 2003; He & Lindsey, 1998; Rubenfeld,

et al., 2006). A common caveat in such research can be artificiality and the interference of the researcher who wishes to centrifuge the research context.

This study takes the approach that the social context is holistic in nature and that separating out particular contextual elements is difficult and artificial. This study also holds the view that language and language strategies are contextually motivated and individually used by a whole person, not simply a ‘speaker’ or a ‘listener.’ That is, individuals have the autonomy and agency to dynamically match their language in use with their agendas, goals and beliefs throughout the interaction process. Based on this framework, this study has been designed to focus on a small number of participants and describes their heterogeneity in communication strategy use and the different contextual features that influence their language in use.

Foster-Cohen (2004) argues that recent communication strategy studies are either too abstract, lacking empirical evidence, or too mechanical, ignoring the individual’s goals, differences and heterogeneities. Baker (1997) argues that such links between the abstract and the tangible can only be made through expert analysis of empirical interactional data. Although writing from an ethno-methodological perspective, she suggests “a focus on analysis”, writing that “a focus on the researcher’s expertise in the analysis of the interactional data as much as in the generation of it, changes significantly how interviewing may be understood and pursued within the social sciences” (p. 130). Baker (1997) urges the investigation of “talk as social action” and contends that an expert researcher can use interactional data to identify social membership negotiation strategies or what she terms “membership categorisation devices” (p. 131).

This study uses a two-way approach to analyse participants’ discourses both for content, and for clues, strategies, patterns and practices used. The content reflects students’

voices, stories, experiences, concerns, and challenges, and the language and strategies in use reveals their techniques to negotiate understanding, membership, and identity. The main objectives of the study are to investigate the relations between these two and to situate participants' communication strategy use in the social context of the interactions.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

As explained in this chapter, despite the rich number of empirical studies on communication strategies, few researchers so far have situated the use of communication strategies in a social context of interactions. In addition, most often the context of previous studies has been ESL classrooms. Firth and Wagner (1997) describe research on second language discourse strategies as 'impaired.' They point to the need for further attention to the contextual and the individual. They remark that communication strategy research can benefit from "(a) a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language in use, (b) an increased emic (i.e., participant-relevant) sensitivity towards fundamental concepts, and (c) the broadening of the traditional SLA data" (p. 286).

This research goes beyond a discourse analysis of students' conversations, to their in-use patterns of interaction and engagement in ongoing social interactions within their academic community. The study holds the view of many recent researchers that engagement in multicultural encounters needs more than communicative competence. Situating discourse in casual daily multilingual encounters, this research perceives communication strategies as both linguistic and socially oriented. This study perceives the choice of communication strategies as both a reflection of enacted identities and integrated in manipulating the social identities at play. Therefore, a primary goal is to describe the



particular contextual features that help explain the choice of strategies, interaction patterns and thus enacted social identities.

This research is an observation of postgraduate international students in out-of-classroom interactions in their university. The strategies international postgraduate research students choose to negotiate their engagement in the out-of-classroom informal interactions with their peers, and how their engagement strategies and interaction patterns impact on their professional identity, are intrinsic to the research. The theories presented in Chapter Two and the research literature presented in this chapter underpin and provide a warrant for the current investigation. Both will be used to develop and drive its arguments.

As discussed in this chapter, so far little research has elaborated the interaction between agency, social context and communication strategies, particularly in informal multicultural encounters. This research addresses this gap in the communication strategy literature, sharing a view with Pennycook (2001), who points out that

once we start to see identities not so much as fixed social or cultural categories but as a constant ongoing negotiation of how we relate to the world, then we have to acknowledge that second language classrooms, speech therapy sessions, literacy in the workplace, applied linguistics courses, or the process of translating have a great deal to do with questions of identity formation and transformation. If we take seriously the idea that engagement in discourse is part of the continuing construction of identity, then the context of second language education raises significant issues in the construction and negotiation of identity. (p. 149)

Although this study is not about second language education per se, it involves tertiary study in an additional language.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **OVERVIEW**

The social context of the language in use is a core concern in recent communication research. Roberts (2001) stresses the need for this “social import” in SLA, arguing that second language researchers need to consider in their work,

the effect on social identities, groups and relationships of the multitude of intercultural interactions which takes place everyday ... [and] the effect of these intercultural encounters on individuals - who are, themselves, part of these wider social forces (p. 108).

This research is focused on the understanding of the ties between social context, social identities at play and second language strategies in use. This includes contextual background factors that impact on the engagement of the participants in the interactions. There are no claims for replicability or generalisability of the findings of this small situated case study, but instead I have tried to report my situated observations and interpret their ties to the background context, following Denzin and Lincoln’s (2008) emphasis that,

Standards concerning what constitutes scientific research are based on the criteria for establishing the rigor of conversational experimental research: internal validity, external validity (generalisability), replicability, and objectivity. These criteria have been criticised as inappropriate for phenomenological inquiry and race and ethnic studies theorists, feminist theorists, and postcolonial and border studies colonies have proposed new formulations more appropriate to their inquiry concerns as well as criteria more meaningful to the communities with which they work. (p. 17)

This research is a case study of eight newly arrived postgraduate international students in an Australian university. It observes their social interactions within their institution, as they struggle to become 'audible' in English (Miller, 2003). In addition to exploring the identities that emerge in the participants' casual face-to-face interactions, this study addresses questions of how the process occurs; how discursive patterns are evidenced and how these develop each participant's 'audibility'. A further attempt is made to compare international students' English in use in two different groupings: (1) when the eight international students are by themselves interacting with each other without the presence of local students; and (2) when they converse with two local students. Data were generated in two phases: Phase One involved audio-recording semi-focused small-group conversations and video-recording of one focus group interview. Phase Two involved a second focus group and collection of electronic reflections of some of the participants. Data analysis began with an axial coding of the salient themes in the conversational data which were used to generate questions for focus groups (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In this chapter, I first introduce and justify my choice of methodology, data generation methods and data analysis techniques and later I provide an overview of the context of exploration and introduce my participants and elaborate on their profiles.

## **4.1 A QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

It is a long time since the initial rise of qualitative methods in sociolinguistic research. However as Silverman (2006) points out, "qualitative researchers still largely feel themselves to be second-class citizens whose work typically evokes suspicion, where the gold standard is quantitative research" (p. 36). For me, to understand how English speakers from an array of social and cultural backgrounds managed their social interactions and

manipulated their language in use to position themselves in their social and academic circle, demanded more than charts, numerical figures and statistics. To me, identification of communication strategies could only be meaningful when I could provide the reader with detailed elaboration on the background context of interactions and the participants' beliefs, goals and agendas for communication. Therefore, I needed a qualitative approach, because "qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4).

Silverman (2006) stresses the need for broadening the scope of qualitative research to include issues of language, identity and social engagement which are at the focus of this research. Holliday (2007) points out that "to understand human affairs it is insufficient to rely on quantitative survey and statistics, and necessary instead to delve deep into the subjective qualities that govern behavior" (p. 7). Bouma (2000) also asserts that a qualitative approach is needed when research is designed to "describe in detail what is happening in a group, in a conversation or in a community, who spoke to whom, with what messages, with what feelings, with what effect" (p. 171). I was particularly interested in these details, in finding the interrelationship between the observable and recordable language use, the elements in the background of the interaction context, and the individuals' goals, concerns, beliefs and agendas for communication. I did not want to constrain the interaction settings with predetermined tasks nor with controlling the age or gender of the interactants. Before I generated my data, I was not sure of my chances of finding any new strategy not previously identified in previous research, but I wanted the interaction behavior to occur in natural settings as far as possible. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) stress that the role of qualitative researchers is to investigate "the socially

constructed nature of reality” (p. 14). In other words, I tried to minimize, as far as possible, any intrusion which could make the context of the investigation unreal or unnatural.

I wanted each participant’s voice to be heard while each could connect to the whole story. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) use the analogy of a quilt to illustrate the role of the qualitative researcher in putting together data pieces in a meaningful and purposeful way despite their dissimilarities. Denzin and Lincoln contend that qualitative research is an experience of “quiltlike bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage - a set of interconnected images and presentations. This interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole” (p. 8). I wanted to put together the participants’ voices, different or harmonic, in a meaningful way in which every voice could be heard and its significance in the final composition of the thesis could be felt.

I also wanted my own voice to be heard as an English as a second language user, teacher and researcher. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) also describe qualitative research as a reflection of “the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (p. 14). They hold that the qualitative researcher understands that the journey “is an interactive process shaped by his or her own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 8). I also acknowledge that my ontology was a part of my ongoing and dynamic interaction with the research.

## **4.2 AN EMIC PERSPECTIVE**

Bishop (2008) points out that “despite developments in research that attempt to listen to the voices and the stories of the people under the study... the dilemma remains that... much research is still presented from an outsider point of view” (p. 150). As an international

doctoral student in Australia, I had an insider position which helped my connections with the participants and provided a common ground. I had worked as the convener of the research students' community. The role involved me in intensive communication with postgraduate research students particularly newcomer international students, who needed orientation in accessing the resources, and connecting with the academic community. I was the 'go to' person for many postgraduate students for a range of their queries, from information about social events in the community to workshops, seminars and academic support programs for students. Another volunteer role that I took in my first year of study was mentoring newcomer international students which again put me in a direct relationship with newly enrolled international students. Again, this role provided an opportunity for me to directly listen to and observe international students' early adjustment challenges. My observations as well as my own status as a new international student going through very similar stages, gave me an insider position to the themes I was interested in researching.

Having this insider position not only provided an easier access to my participants, but as Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, and Muhamad (2001) remark, it also gave me "the ability to ask more meaningful questions and read nonverbal cues, and most importantly be able to project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study" (p. 411). Bishop (2008) points out that insider researchers are able to "undertake research in a more sensitive and responsive manner than outsiders" (p. 148). This emic position, additionally, showed me "ways of thinking critically about [the] processes, their relationships and the quality and richness of data and analysis" (p. 137).

Van Lier (1988) points out that the emic position of the researcher provides a common ground with the data and participants, which contributes to a more efficient description and analysis of the data,

Behind the data set, however small, the researcher brings to the task whatever insights and experience may have accumulated over the years, and this is of crucial importance. This knowledge constitutes the base line, a sense of common ground between the observer and setting, which underlines efficient description and analytic work. (p. 5)

My participants were non-English speaking background English teachers, studying for postgraduate degrees in an Australian university. Not only was the site familiar to me, we shared a history of several years of teaching English in non-English speaking countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Bangladesh, China, Nepal and Iran. Like me, my participants made their move to study for a PhD in an English speaking country. We had switched from our teacher identity to student identity, embracing the challenge of our eligibility in teaching English among English native speakers. During my interactions with my participants, I felt very comfortable connecting with them, but they also seemed to trust me as an insider observer and researcher.

My emic position helped the revelation of experience. For example, when one of my participants, Amar, told me that in the tearoom, local students and international students sit at different tables and hardly interact with each other, I had a clear image of the situation and I could easily recognise the scene. Or when Ratna, another participant, told me that despite her extensive experience in both learning and teaching English in Indonesia, she could hardly understand a word when she overheard the staff gossiping in the tearoom, I realised that like me, she might possibly have had very little if any exposure to the discourse of gossip in Australian English.

Bishop (2008), on the other hand, warns that insider researchers might inherently be biased or too close to and intimate with the situation to ask critical questions. I tried to maintain a level of “critical reflexivity” by “resisting the charges of having played the

‘native’ role via a non-critical privileging of [my] insider’s status” (Jacobs-Huey, 2002, p. 799). Guba and Lincoln (2008) define reflexivity as “the process of reflecting critically as researcher... the conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself” (p. 278). Critical reflexivity, they continue, demands that,

We interrogate each of ourselves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives. We must question ourselves, too, regarding how those binaries and paradoxes shape not only the identities called forth in the field and later in the discover process of writing, but also our interactions with respondents, in who we become to them in process of becoming to ourselves. (Guba & Lincoln, 2008, p. 279)

I tried to adhere to this by constantly reminding myself not to position myself as knower, and by trying to widen the lens through which I tried to interpret the data to encompass different perspectives by joining a writing group which included academic supervisors and a number of PhD students in my field. I showed them pieces of data and sought their comments on the identification of themes and codification of strategies to minimize anecdotalism and subjectivity in interpretation.

### **4.3 MULTIPLE CASE STUDY DESIGN**

This study is not a longitudinal ethnography but some of the major goals, clearly illustrated in the following quote, are shared between the two.

Ethnographic interviews and regular participation in the lives of a particular sub-group contribute to the analysts’ understanding of how minority workers are positioned in encounters with the majority and the long-term effect of this on individual motivation, personal and social investment and the construction of social identities within the relations of domination that characterize a multilingual society. (Roberts, 2001, p. 119)



In educational studies, case study design is the most widely used approach among methods for qualitative research (Duff, 2008b). A case study design was chosen for this study since it had the potential to provide more extended answers to the questions central to this study. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) explain that case study design has the capacity for “the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (p. 436). In second language education studies, Duff (2008b) associates case study design with interpretive qualitative research associated with recurring principles as “boundedness,” “in-depth study,” “multiple perspectives,” “particularity,” “contextualisation” and “interpretation” (p. 23). A case study design in research related to language and identity, also has the potential to look at language in a sociocultural matrix, to reveal the contextual features in their local settings, to incorporate an emic perspective and reflect the voices of participants as people and the researcher as the composer (Miller, 2003).

Since the study contains more than one case, it can be deemed a “multiple case study” (Yin, 2003, p. 45). Each of the eight international students involved in this study is an individual (with their own personal characteristics such as age, first language, gender, identity, cultural background), yet also part of an international student community. In other words, while participants’ social and cultural self-representation is central to the study, the study was at the same time interested in the patterns of international students’ communication.

A case study design, as Duff (2002a) points out, allows for the recognition that “each human case is complex, operating within a constellation of linguistic, socio-linguistic, sociological, and other systems, and the whole may be greater than -or different from- the sum of its parts” (p. 37). Such design allows for locating the participants in the

local settings of social interaction in English as their second language. It provides the means to study the English used in social and multicultural contexts and also allows for the observation of how participants strategically manipulate their engagement in the social interactions. It provides a lens to observe their second language identity as “socially defined and interactionally negotiated” (Rampton, 1995, p. 323), and at the same time a close and local understanding of the second language social interactions and participants’ investments on their engagements, and even further, their investments in a conscious and strategic engagement (Norton, 2006).

This research is observed and analysed from a postmodern point of view, since as Holliday (2007) points out,

postmodern qualitative researchers portray people as constructing the world and researchers as themselves constructing the social world through interpretations of it. ...the postmodern break from naturalism does enable a far greater variety in procedure and scope, in which data is presented more creatively, with more openness about who the researcher is and how she spins validly through argument. (p. 20)

Several theoretical perceptions support a postmodern perspective towards second language use in its social context. Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that grounds the assumptions for this research in an explicit way, because “it deals directly with issues such as language, communication, interrelationships and community. It is all about those basic social interactions whereby we enter into perceptions, attitudes and values of a community, becoming persons in process” (Crotty 1998, p. 8). Furthermore, the assumptions for this study match the three major assumptions of symbolic interactionism enunciated by Blumer (1969):

That human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them; That the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows; That these meanings

are handled in, and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p. 2, cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 8)

In short, as in symbolic interactionism, at its core this study is founded on the belief that meaning emerges out of social interactions which are inevitably symbolic because they become possible only through symbolic tools such as language, or anything that human beings share to communicate with (Crotty, 1998).

#### **4.4 CONTEXT OF EXPLORATION**

Contextualisation of the data in qualitative research is important because meaningful data are connected to particular settings with manageable boundaries determining where, when and with whom data are collected (Holliday, 2007). This study took place at a large Australian university with a high enrollment of international graduate students, on its largest campus in a highly multicultural suburb of Melbourne. It provided a perfect research ground for the observation and exploration of communication behavior in multicultural contexts.

In the faculty used in this study, there are almost 400 postgraduate students including full and part-time students. International students comprise the majority of full-time students. The five top countries where students come from are: China, Indonesia, Malaysia, India and Hong Kong. The diversity of international students has resulted in a sociocultural and linguistic diversity in the faculty. The faculty has accommodated research students in shared office-rooms. On each floor, there is a tearoom which is used for morning tea and lunch, facilities which include free tea and coffee, crockery, microwave oven and tables and chairs. Both postgraduate students and staff use the facilities. These

tearooms are sites for the daily interactions of faculty staff and postgraduate students. For this project, focusing on English used in social encounters, I found the tearooms to be ideal sites for recording casual conversations between postgraduate students. In fact, it appeared to me as the researcher that daily informal tearoom interactions are the very first sites for engagement of new students in the faculty; arenas for construction and negotiation of their new professional and social identities, and avenues for the negotiation of legitimacy.

#### **4.5 PARTICIPANTS**

The decision to exclude undergraduate students from the focus of this study was primarily made to strike a balance between the depth and breadth of this research. A review of recent research showed that fewer studies focused on the communication patterns of graduate students (Storch, 2002; Sawir, 2005; Wright & Lander, 2003). Moreover, the fact that PhD study in this university is through research only, highlights the importance of out-of-classroom interaction for research students as the major channel for the construction of their academic and social identities within their institution. In other words, international and local postgraduate student do not study together in coursework programs. Their research is conducted in isolation, and their social interactions take place mostly outside of their office spaces.

The main method for seeking participants was through contact with my peers. Having planned a study on the communicative patterns of postgraduate international students, I tried to establish social networks within the sites connected to graduate international students. During my first year in the university, I made contact with the International Students Support Unit, the Research Graduate School, the Postgraduate Association, and the faculty's research community.

My contact with these sites gave me an opportunity for the “purposeful selection” (Freebody, 2003, p. 78) of non-English speaking background international student volunteers, including a diversity in first language background. Silverman (2006) believes that purposive sampling “guided by time and resources, and theoretical sampling” can even enhance generalisability in qualitative research (p. 311). He points out,

purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested... Purposive sampling demands that we think critically about the parameters of the population we are interested in and choose our sample case carefully on this basis. (Silverman, 2006, p. 306)

I called for volunteers, by placing advertisements on the notice boards in the university’s Postgraduate Association, the Faculty International Students Support Unit, Research Graduate School and Education Research Community. I also used a snowball technique via which I asked friends and contacts to spread the word that I was looking for volunteer participants for my PhD research. After receiving expressions of interest from volunteers, I arranged for a meeting with potential participants to explain my research plan and design, and the data recording procedures, and to invite participants.

Eight postgraduate international students and two local students, all from the same faculty, chose to be part of the study. This small number was sufficient for my research since my goal was to “understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 408). The international participants came from a background of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in their own countries and had all arrived in Australia less than one year prior to the data collection. As a condition to enter postgraduate courses in the university, all international students held a score of at least 6.5 in the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test. Local students were Anglo-Australian, born and raised in Australia. In my first meeting with the international

participants, I asked them each to fill in a demographic data form. Table 4.1 shows a summary of the participants' demographic data. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 4.1 Demographic data of participants

Name	Gender	Age	Country of origin	First Language	Arrival date in Australia
Ratna	F	35	Indonesia	Indonesian	Feb. 2008
Sima	F	40	Nepal	Nepalese	July 2008
Xia	F	38	China	Mandarin	March 2008
Amar	F	34	Mongolia	Mongolian	July 2008
Joko	M	32	Indonesia	Indonesian	March 2008
Hannah	F	46	India	Hindu	July 2008
Shamim	M	31	Bangladesh	Bangla	July 2008
Aini	F	36	Malaysia	Malay	March 2008
Clare	F	34	Australia	English	
Jan	F	36	Australia	English	

All participants were recently enrolled students at the time of data generation, so they either had no prior knowledge of each other or had met just once on the Orientation Day. The presence of two male students among participants helped the study to avoid being gender-specific, and reflect the comments of both genders.

## 4.6 DATA GENERATION

Lincoln and Denzin (1994) distinguish between thick and thin description of data, pointing out that

a thin description simply reports fact, independent of intentions or circumstances. A thick description, in contrast, gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organized the experience, and reveals the experience as a process. (p. 505)

Bounded social settings can provide the ideal conditions for thick description of the data as suggested by Holliday (2007):

The social setting within which the research takes place takes on a critical function...bounded social settings provide an important means for thick description.....it is by recognising how connections between people, beliefs,

images, traditions etc. operate within a small social setting, that the collective representations that thick description aims to reveal can be seen. (p. 75)

However, he makes it clear that it is not the amount of data that make thick description possible, but “the interconnected data” with its social and cultural matrix. The data generation methods of this research were designed in a way that could allow for (1) a thick description of international higher degree students’ contexts and spoken interaction patterns with their peers in an Australian university; and (2) a contextualized analysis of communication strategies in reflection of context and identity.

The study comprised two interconnected phases. The first involved recording participants’ ‘second language socialisations’ (Duff, 2007), and a focus group with students to observe and identify how they tried to “position themselves in and through discourse” (Roberts, 2001, p. 111). The second phase involved my email communications with participants about their past and present experiences of social encounters in English as well as a second focus group.

The description of the language in use and identities enacted in the interactions of international students against a background of the social environment of interactions helped me explore the ties between international students’ patterns of interaction, their identities at play and the social and contextual variables involved. This two-phase method of data collection, controlled the “falsifiability” of the research by helping me avoid self-interpretation of my observations and instead, get the participants to venture reasons for their observed communicative patterns (Silverman, 2006, p. 302).

Triangulation is the process of “combining multiple theories, methods, observers and empirical material to produce a more accurate, comprehensive and objective representation of the object of study” (Silverman, 2006, p. 291). Denzin and Lincoln (2008)

regard triangulation as an alternative to validation, arguing that triangulation “reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (p. 7).

Collecting qualitative data through multiple channels in this study allowed for some comparison which resulted in a more comprehensive interpretation of the data. However, I am reluctant to use the term triangulation of data for what I did to gather interconnected data in the two phases, since neither the “object of the study” nor the contextual elements are fixed or repeatable in social research. For instance, I could not ask the participants to speak with the same intentions, feelings, and attitudes twice to verify the interaction patterns. Change in the social context is inevitable, and therefore as Silverman (2006) points out, the major problem with triangulation in social interaction research is that, “by counter-posing different contexts, it ignores the context-bound and skillful character of social interaction and assumes that members are cultural dopes who need a social scientist to dispel their illusions” (p. 215).

The same critique may apply to the issue of transferability. In qualitative research, and particularly in ethnographic case studies, it is impossible to determine whether or not the results are applicable to other settings and contexts (Davis, 1992). However, a detailed description of the participants' profiles, the context and the social settings helps to demonstrate the potential transferability of this research. Objectivity in qualitative research, as Denzin and Lincoln (2008) contend, is more a fancy than a reality, since objective reality in social research can almost never be captured. I share this viewpoint which has been stressed by other researchers like Guba and Lincoln (2008) who write, “objectivity is a chimera: a mythological creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower” (p. 275).



In what follows, I provide a detailed description of the procedures of the two phases of data generation, and explain how I tried to interconnect these.

#### **4.6.1 Phase One**

Phase One comprised the audio-recordings of conversational data in casual face-to-face interactions of graduate international students in two different groupings, first, when they were by themselves talking in small groups; and second, when international students had face to face interaction with or in the presence of local students. The eight international students were put into two groups of four based on their availability. I arranged with each group to meet in the faculty's tearoom. Each time, I recorded the conversations as they were having their tea/coffee or lunch for about one hour. To minimize the interruption, I put a sign on the door saying "Data-recording in process, please do not enter." Once the four participants were seated, I placed the digital audio-recorder device on the table, left the room and closed the door. I asked the participants to stop the device and return it to me when they finished their conversation. Then, I repeated the same procedure with the second group. Therefore, I had six files of data recorded on the device, three for group one and three for group two. Interestingly, they were all longer than one hour which I initially requested (in one case almost two hours!). They all seemed to enjoy their conversation and enthusiastically discussed their viewpoints (in one recorded file they even thanked me for bringing them out of their offices and providing them with the opportunity of speaking with each other about their problems!).

As mentioned earlier, I used the faculty's tearooms as sites for recording participants' conversations. To understand people's methods for engagement in orderly social interactions, Silverman (2006) suggests recording their conversations. He argues that

“Conversation is central to making the world the way it is” (p. 203), and its analysis enables the researcher to “focus on the actual details of one aspect of social life” (p. 204).

Audiotapes of naturally occurring conversation can provide what Silverman (2006) describes as “marvelous data to analyse how people actually went about construction of a social world together” (p. 203).

For me, it was very important to link the participants’ interaction strategies with the particularity of the social setting of their encounters which was an informal, social and multicultural interaction setting. Recording conversations was important to explore the strategies involved, and to allow for a careful analysis of the emerging themes. In other words, I was not only hoping to investigate how international students strategically managed their social interactions with their international and local peers. I also sought to understand their beliefs and viewpoints, their impressions from their past experiences and their solutions and resolutions which made them use communication strategies.

During my first year in the field, I took notes, read and developed prompts for my participants’ conversations. As an international student myself, there was a strong chance for a similarity between the way I was feeling in my early months in the faculty and what my participants were going to experience the following year. I did not want to miss the opportunity of making the best use of this similarity. So, some of my questions were raised based on the hypotheses I developed from my own experience. Silverman (2006) argues,

There is absolutely no reason why observational research cannot combine insight with rigor. In other words, it is right to expect that such research should be both original and valid. This will involve testing hypotheses that we have generated in the field. (p. 4)

For example, since my early weeks in the faculty, I observed that local students had long conversations in the tearoom. They opened up conversations, talked about personal subjects like their families, weekends, or their research projects. The same happened when

international students ran into each other. But when local and international students were mixed, their conversations tended to remain at the level of 'hi and bye.' I noted this in my diary and later generated a hypothesis that among themselves, international students may use different communication strategies which they may not use in their interactions with the broader faculty community. This hypothesis prompted several questions for the first focus group such as 'how do you describe your interactions with other international students?'

I divided the eight international student participants into two groups of four based on their availability. Aside from availability, I also considered what Coupland, Wiemann and Giles, Coupland and Coupland (1991, p. 13) call "uncertainty reduction techniques," which refers to a change in the interaction techniques in situations when interlocutors feel intimate with each other. Accordingly, when I realised that two of my participants shared the same office, I put them in two different groups. Then I arranged to record their semi-focused conversations. In each of the six sessions, I printed three of my questions as stimuli on a card, put the card on the table in the tearoom and left the room, while a digital recorder was left to record the discussion.

Silverman (2006) points out that "observers may change the situation just by their presence and so the decision about what role to adopt will be fateful" (p. 82). I decided not to intrude on the discussions. Silverman argues that once stimuli are provided for discussion, it can no longer be called a conversation group. Instead, he believes that in focus groups, "respondents are offered some topic or stimulus material and then encouraged to discuss it amongst themselves" (p. 4). This study incorporated 'semi-focused discussion groups,' since while some topics were provided, I was not present to control the discussions, and the participants were free to move between the topics, or discuss anything else that emerged, and to manage their roles themselves.

In sum, I recorded the interactions of students in two different groupings: first, when they were by themselves talking in small groups of four; and second, when the groups included local students. Semi-focused discussions of each group were recorded in three sessions, each one-hour long. In the first two sessions of each group, international students were discussing the topics tabled without the presence of local students and in the third session of each group they discussed the topics with their local peers. Table 4.2 provides details on the semi-focused discussions.

Table 4.2      Semi-focused discussion: Groups 1 and 2

<b>Group 1 participants:</b> Amar (F) from Mongolia , Ratna (F) from Indonesia, Hanna (F) from India, Bina (F) from Nepal <b>Group 2 participants:</b> Shamim (M) from Bangladesh, Joko (M) from Indonesia, Aini (F) Malaysia, Xia (F) from China			
Date	Time	Place	Topics tabled
6.10.08	11 am -12 pm (Group 1) 12 pm-1 pm (Group 2)	Tearoom 4th floor	(1) Do you think your social and academic life is balanced? (2) Do you feel part of community at the university?
20.10.08	11 am -12 pm (Group 1) 12 pm-1 pm (Group 2)	Tearoom 4th floor	(1) Do you think people here are interested in your research? (2) Is your English proficiency important in your social or academic life?
27.10.08	11 am -12 pm (Group 1) 12 pm-1 pm (Group 2)	Tearoom 4th floor	(1) How would you describe your interactions within the faculty? (2) How would you describe your interactions with other international students?

When I finished the transcription of the semi-focused discussion data, I spent time finding and coding themes that were salient in the data. Based on the themes of the Phase One data, I generated further questions to use in the focus groups. Then I arranged for another focus group interview which I videotaped to incorporate the nonverbal contextual clues in the analysis (Silverman, 2006). Since, my major goal for this focused discussion was

developing my understandings of the previous data and possibly evoking further evidence to support the identified themes, I was present and played the role of the mediator this time. However, as pointed out earlier, the fact that I was also an international student enabled a comfortable environment for the participants, that supported their “self-disclosure” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 101). However, all through the discussions, as Holliday (2007) advises, I tried to “keep the familiar scenario strange” (p. 145), to avoid leading the participants. A summary of data sources in Phase One is as follows:

- Three sets of audio-tapes of Group One, each one hour long;
- Three sets of audio-tapes of Group Two, each one hour long;
- Two one-hour sets of videotaped focus group interviews..

Phase One Data was used to:

- Identify the emerging themes related to identity and language use;
- Identify participants’ communication strategies (e.g., verbal direct ask for support, repair or feigning understanding);
- Identify participants’ strategies for engagement in their conversations (e.g., verbal signals to take turns, change the topic, or silence)

#### **4.6.2 Phase Two**

Reporting the communication strategies of the participants without reflection on the contextual elements involved would diminish the interpretation of the study. Phase Two generated data that helped me understand the feelings, thoughts and beliefs of the participants which influenced their choices of communication strategies and their patterns of interaction in the two different groupings. As Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) point out,

We are not going to argue that personal narratives should replace observational/experimental research; rather we believe they bring to the surface aspects of human activity, including SLA that cannot be captured in the more traditional approach to research. (p. 159)

A follow-up focus group was held with the participants two and a half years after the first focus group. As Silverman (2006) argues, qualitative research is strong only when it applies methods “to understand people’s perceptions and experiences... that can involve trying to get inside the heads of any group you find around you” (p. 5).

To help the generation of authentic questions for the focus group in Phase Two, I waited until I had completed the identification of the main themes in the Phase One Data. I then referred back to the participants with examples from their own statements, to stimulate more data on each theme. For example, when I coded ‘passive smiling’ as a strategy to negotiate engagement in interactions, I sent an email to all participants to understand when, where, and in which contexts they might use this strategy.

The second focus group helped to understand the changes and developments in the participants since the start of their PhD study. Two and a half years after the first round of data collection and when participants were at the final stages of their doctoral education, I recorded a second focus group. By this time, I had finished a preliminary analysis of the data which generated more questions. In this way, the second focus group helped to clarify my understandings and interpretations of the previous data.

In sum, the dataset in this research includes:

- Transcriptions of audiotaped semi-focused discussions in two different groupings: (1) international students; (2) international students with local students;
- Transcriptions of videotaped focus group interviews;
- Two email narratives received from two of the participants (Ratna and Joko).
- Researcher’s field notes.

## **4.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

This study seeks an understanding of the ties between the strategic manipulation of English as a second language in use and second language identities, as well as the social and contextual background of the face to face interactions of recently arrived international university students.

### **4.7.1 Data at the micro level**

At the micro level, this study observes how nonnative speakers of English strategically manipulate their language of socialisation in contexts incorporating interlocutors from different language backgrounds. It was expected that international students may use different communication strategies when they encounter native speakers. Therefore, it was important to compare how they repaired each other's talk, took turns, supported or sought help among themselves and in the presence of local students. A two-way analysis was made by analysing the communication strategies emerging in the conversations and at the same time listening to how the participants themselves explained their strategies and communicative plans in their interactions. Furthermore, to explore the potential ties between communication strategies involved and the enacted social identities, close attention was paid to the representation of social identities throughout conversations.

As a model of reference for encoding negotiation strategies in this research, Dörnyei and Scott's (1997) taxonomy of communication strategies was referred to, for its amplification of categories of communication strategies as well as its interactive nature (See Table 2.2 for a detailed list of Dörnyei & Scott's strategies). Dörnyei and Scott (1997) distinguish between three categories of strategies: (1) Direct strategies which provide an "alternative, manageable and self-contained" means of problem management; (2) Indirect

strategies which “prevent breakdowns and keep the communication channel open”; and (3) Interactional strategies which involve “trouble-shooting exchanges collaboratively” (p. 199).

However, since Dörnyei and Scott’s (1997) taxonomy of strategies was produced from ESL/EFL classroom-based research, some context-triggered modifications to their taxonomy seemed inevitable. These modifications include discarding linguistic-based strategies (e.g., simplification, paraphrase, transfer) and instead focusing on the exploration of interactional strategies which participants employed mutually to maintain the interaction (e.g., repair, repetition, asking for assistance). This research focuses on the strategies that flag how participants managed topics, roles and turns in their conversation, how they negotiated mutual understandings collaboratively by for instance, supporting the speaker, or asking for support, or evasively, by for instance, feigning understanding, letting it pass, or changing the topic. An attempt was made to identify new strategies not mentioned in Dörnyei and Scott’s list. Moreover, a distinction and comparison was made between evasive, meta-controlling and collaborative types of strategies encoded in the two different groupings (as illustrated in Figure 4.1).

With regard to the interactive and intercultural context of the study, a major focus was on observation of the following categories of communication strategies to find how contextual circumstances stimulated participants’ use of these strategies in the two distinct groupings defined for this research and also how the participants’ choice of these strategies constructed their social identities. Figure 4.1 illustrates the categories of communication strategies which lie within the focus of this research. The model is based on three groups of communication strategies previously identified by Dörnyei and Scott (1997).



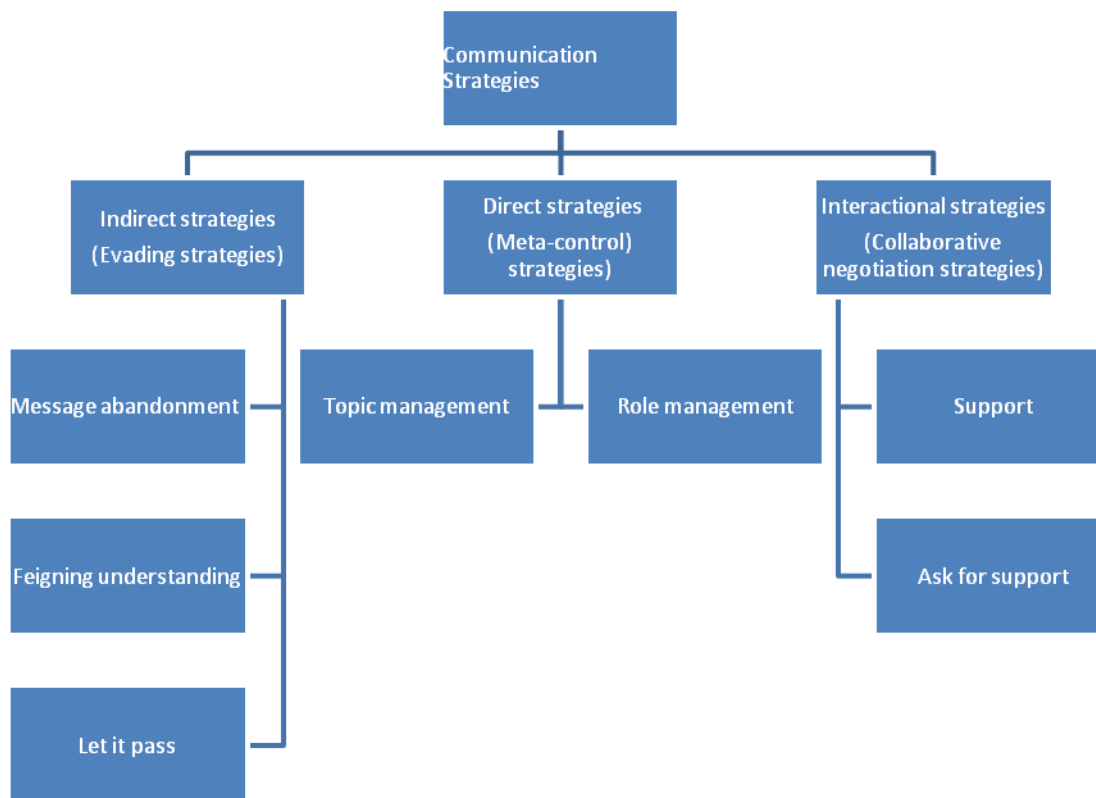


Figure 4.1: A model of reference for identification of communication strategies (Based on Dörnyei & Scott, 1997)

Some researchers who have focused on native/nonnative talk argue that nonnative speakers are more cooperative in understanding each other when they are released from the pressure of adjusting to native-speaker norms (Roberts, 2006). Through comparison of communication strategies used by international students in the two groupings defined before (i.e., interactions with other international students vs. interactions with or in the presence of local students), this study seeks to investigate this argument. Students also discussed issues about the differences between international and local students, which were not always explicit in the talk, but apparent in the context of the talks. This warranted a level of macro-analysis, discussed below.

I also used an analysis of the participants' discursive practices (Chen, 2010). This was done through discourse analysis of the recorded conversations to understand how the students positioned themselves and each other in and through discourse, and how the institutional practices that were surrounding them and the background context were imposing a social and academic positioning for them. This level of discourse analysis helped to illuminate the process of membership and social representation negotiation throughout the interactions.

#### **4.7.2 Data at the macro level**

This study is interested in understanding the social, cultural and contextual background factors that influence the participants in different interactional settings. For such understanding, reference is made to the participants' narratives and statements. As mentioned earlier, in social research dealing with aspects of human life across actual settings, it is impossible to eliminate the contextual factors that influence what is observable. A detailed description of the different factors and social and contextual conditions contributes to the credibility of the findings (Silverman, 2006).

The participants' attitudes and feelings, their accumulated knowledge and experience over years, their sociocultural background and their religious beliefs are only some of the different factors which play a part in their second language interactions. Effort was made in the data analysis to explore these factors, and to link them to the communication patterns observed.

## **4.8 LINKING THE MICRO AND THE MACRO**

Central to this study, is the belief that language and identity are shaped by the social context (Gee, 2005). As mentioned in Chapter Two, there have been numerous studies at the micro level with a focus on identification or categorisation of second language communication strategies (Corder, 1983; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Varonis & Gass, 1985). Other studies have targeted the macro level and aimed at gaining an understanding of human agency in second language acquisition (Miller, 2003, 2004, Norton, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2002). The major goal of this study is, however, to seek links between micro and macro features of intercultural interaction contexts. This study assumes communication strategy use to be tied to the individual in the one hand, and to the social context on the other. Therefore a description of the social context and an exploration of the contextual elements engaged, as well as a detailed description of the participants, their identities, beliefs, goals and agendas for study abroad is believed to be fundamental to any explanation for the participants' communicative patterns and interpretation of the data in this study. As Palys (1992) stresses,

Exploration and description are not, after all, simply ends in themselves; they're the processes through which one identifies those elements that are important to investigate further, and the description one engages in should be of those elements that are most integral to developing explanations about the phenomenon of interest (p. 299).

To develop links between the micro and the macro in this study, I followed an inductive approach in data analysis (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Flexibility was needed to allow for changes in the pathways of the analysis. I read through the transcripts of the semi-focused discussions, identifying themes and subthemes which were later used for focused interviews or turned into topics for electronic reflections. First, I looked for salient themes

at the micro level starting with those that repeated themselves to those which were observed only once. It was a very dynamic and ongoing process. For instance, the interrelationship between language and culture expanded into a major salient theme in the data which itself spread out to multiple relevant themes. As I went on with more data, I referred back to the transcripts again, went through the themes and subthemes again and again to find more themes I had not seen earlier.

I used axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), with the emergent themes on the horizontal axis and the quotes, details of the speaker and the strategies involved. Clearly, there is no simple relationship between micro and macro features (see Appendix 8). That is, one single communication strategy may link to several contextual features or one macro feature may play a part in several micro features.

After coding the data, I organized the themes so that they would sustain a logical argument to support the claims made in the study. That is, I focused on themes as building blocks of my arguments and then explored them using the data collected from different sets. Holliday (2007) points out that rich data is “placed, interconnected and given meaning within the argument of the thesis. Therefore, although something is lost in the break-up of the raw corpus, more is gained through embedding in argument” (p. 105). This was how I tried to build up my arguments in the analysis. The themes shaped the stories I wrote and accordingly the chapters of my thesis.

Silverman (2006) warns about anecdotalism in qualitative research. Anecdotalism refers to cases which “appeal to a few telling examples of some apparent phenomenon, without any attempt to analyse less clear data” (p. 4). This was a challenge for me since I wanted to go beyond what I was familiar with in my own similar journey. Another challenge for me was “knowing when to shut up” (Silverman & Marvasti 2008, p. 55). My

history was similar to that of my participants, and helped me to identify themes in the data and to interpret them. Yet, overclaiming the data or ‘adding salt and pepper’ to what the data told me was a risk. I had both empathy and passion for the stories of my participants. To ensure that writing grew out of my data and to avoid anecdotalism, I joined a writing group which included academic supervisors and a number of PhD students in the same discipline. I took pieces of data to the group and sought their comments on the identification of themes and codification of strategies. My peers and my supervisor, helped me to minimize anecdotalism and writing from my perceptions rather than from the data.

The major concern in this study was more with its credibility than transferability. It goes without saying that such a small group can not represent a broad population. Neither can I claim that my focus on this small group led to providing the whole picture of the phenomenon under study. However, the interaction styles discussed in this study may be partially transferrable to small populations with compatible demographic patterns.

Silverman and Marvasti (2008) point out that a PhD is more about proving professionalism in research and eligibility for admission to a community of scholars than demonstrating originality. Nevertheless, I claim some degree of originality for the techniques and procedures I used in my data collection. The focus on the illustration of the ties between the communication strategies, enacted social identities and the social context, offers a perspective not usually evident in SLA or identity studies.

## **4.9 CONCLUSION**

The procedures for data collection and analysis in the design of this study have the potential to enhance transferability and credibility of the study through:

- Collection of data through different channels (recorded conversational data, self-reports, focus groups);
- Contextualisation of the research through interconnection of data with settings and informants;
- Reflexive interpretation of data through connecting data with participants' profiles;
- Axial coding of the key themes.

The summary of the design for this study is illustrated below, (based on Duff, 2008a, p. 107):



Figure 4.2 Summary of design of the study

#### **4.10 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY**

In an era of globalisation and when 80% of verbal exchanges in English take place among nonnative English speakers, Seidlhofer (2004) argues that “Monoculturalism, monolingualism, monomodels and monocentrism, have been replaced by multiculturalism, multilingualism, polymodels and pluricentrism” (p. 234). However, observations from multicultural encounters in English demonstrate that “[l]anguage socialisation presumes an expert/novice model for the transmission and negotiation of information” (Cole & Zuengler, 2003, p. 110). These counter arguments underline the fact that such realisations have been resisted in practice. Nevertheless, some researchers in the field agree that poly-modeling for effective crosscultural communication should start from observation of authentic patterns of interaction in actual social settings against a background of the individuals involved (Block, 2003; Jenkins, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2004).

This study focuses on international students embarking on research in a Western English-speaking university. Observations grounded in social contexts and incorporating both attention to social language use and identity contribute to the base knowledge needed for understanding of effective student interaction in multicultural contexts. Given the investment of Western universities in recruiting and enrolling research students from different countries across the globe, it is important to understand the social consequences for many of these students, and the ways in which they are able to construct legitimate academic identities.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **TOWARDS INTERACTIVE INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS**

### **OVERVIEW**

The central argument in this study is that social context, social representation and language in use are interrelated (Gee, 2005, 2007). Therefore, it is important to elaborate the particular contextual features of interactions before any discursive analysis of the data. In this chapter, I elaborate on contextual elements in informal multicultural encounters such as cultural gaps and L2 identity construction which make them different from classroom interactions. In particular, I explain the issues in the background context of informal departmental interactions among doctoral students. The discussions in this chapter provide a basis for my arguments in the following chapters, which look at the participants' strategy use, and how this is related to the social context of interactions. In fact, this chapter addresses the first research question as to the variables in the background context of daily multicultural interactions that may influence negotiations of identity and membership.

Drawing from transcripts of group conversations and focus group interviews, several overlapping topics emerged, all related to the factors influencing engagement in intercultural encounters. I start with the reflections of the international student participants on their journey to postgraduate study in Australia, and then continue to elaborate on the factors which influence their social and language interactions within their academic community.



## 5.1 “PHD ALREADY A LONELY ROAD”

As discussed in Chapter One, unlike many North American universities, there is no coursework for PhD students in Australia. Previous research in Australian universities has established that loneliness is “endemic to the international student experience” (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). Sawir et al. (2008) also highlight that the situation is worse for postgraduate research students in Australia who have no set courses or classes, and thus daily classroom interaction. The international students in this study unanimously stated that all found PhD through research more challenging than doing coursework. They all mentioned that doing a PhD in an Australian university was an isolating experience. Ratna, a new PhD student from Indonesia, said: “PhD already a lonely road. That’s why it makes it so hard, no courses I mean, you are all alone.” She continued,

I didn’t expect to do my PhD here without no courses. Courses is good, because you meet other students. It is totally you and your research. I think it is good to have courses, and you can talk about your work. And it is good to talk to other people in the beginning, yeah, about your problems, yeah. I found it really hard, really hard to do it by myself. In course, you can meet people with similar interests, yeah. I only have one supervisor, and it is very lonely. (Group 1, Session 1)

Although coursework may not necessarily be the only solution to the isolating nature of the PhD journey, Hanna another PhD student from India agreed with Ratna’s point and added that meeting and talking to people particularly in the beginning of the journey could psychologically help to relieve the stress of moving to a new place and starting a new journey. Later she declared, students would feel ready to continue their journey on their own.

In the beginning, it is really necessary to talk to people. You can stop going alone which is really stressful, very harmful, we women. It is good talking with each other, relieved, you know. We haven’t the chance to feel that way. Probably we are

far away from those communities. Because, we don't know how to contact with them. There is a lot of information you know? (G1S1)

Hanna spoke about the feeling of being detached from the education community and being on her own from the very beginning. She also highlighted students' solidarity and in particular, women's need to share their experience with others and seek advice. She felt far away from 'those communities.' In her mind, 'those communities' were sources of 'a lot of information' that she did not know how to seek. The need for building a sense of belonging to a community was stressed by other participants, too.

## **5.2 "I WAS LOOKING FOR A COMMUNITY"**

Ryan and Viete (2009) underline postgraduate research students' need to belong to 'somewhere.' They stress that an established sense of belonging to a research community plays a pivotal role in facilitating student engagement and learning through departmental interaction. In line with their remarks, Ratna stressed her need to build a sense of belonging to the new community. She talked about her feeling of being lost in the beginning of her PhD and her need to be part of a supportive community,

For me, at that time when I arrived, I was looking for a community. Actually, I am lost. Who is here? So, I just read the boards, all the boards, reading all the boards. Then Anna had a workshop. And I said I should join that. Whatever, I am going to join that. And then I met Mina and heard about Education Research Community, yeah. (G1S1)

Ratna mentioned that she needed to read the boards for information about the activities and workshops in the Faculty, or, accidentally, she heard about programs from other students. She also pointed out that she attended workshops in the faculty not for their content, but to meet more people, get involved, escape the isolation and feel part of the community. A

sense of belonging to ‘somewhere’, ‘whatever’ was Ratna’s main concern, which became her agenda for participating in early workshops. Bina another PhD student from Nepal also stressed a sense of detachment and need for a supportive community that could provide her with more information about the new environment. She said, “yes, we don’t have information. I still feel not part of the community only the supervisor, huh the community of two” (G1S1). Bina’s ironic tone and words “huh a community of two” is telling. Joko another Indonesian PhD student added,

In my case, I have no chance, no contact with local friends except for my supervisor. I mean, I only talk to my supervisor. But I have not any local friends. I mean, I could not find local friends. (G2S3)

Joko pointed to another consequence of studying in isolation, lack of interaction with local peers. The fact that he considered meeting and talking with local students ‘a chance’ implies that, as an international student, he viewed local students as useful but not openly available resources. His statement is evidence of the international/local student interaction gap in postgraduate research programs. Shamim, a PhD student from Bangladesh, added another point that could aggravate the isolation of PhD students in their educational institute,

Sometimes I think that PhD students have very limited opportunity to mix with these people, because all of them are too busy. And besides the academic stuff, we have some family-oriented responsibilities. So, after they study, they go home to spend time with their family. But like me, actually I don’t have any family responsibility here, but I find that nobody is here like me. So they don’t spend time with me, [I am] just with friends of my country. (G2S1)

Shamim talked about the limited time of PhD students for socialisation and the fact that they have family commitments and prefer to spend their time with their families rather than their peers.

The data confirmed previous reports by Sawir et al. (2008), who highlight that many PhD students in Australia do not experience “an active research culture” in their program (p. 163). All international students in this study complained that they had very limited space for interaction with their peers at the university for several reasons, such as having no set courses, the isolating nature of research work and family commitments of many doctoral students. The participants added that they were willing to find Australian friends, interact with Australian students and seek information about the Australian context, but most of the time the only Australians they were in touch with and could speak to was their supervisor(s). Sawir et al. (2008) write,

Without classes, PhD students lack the surrogate social network and the opportunities for genuine friendship that these provide. A degree of loneliness is inherent and can only be overcome if the university provides structured groupings. (p. 163)

Later in this chapter, I explain how coffee-time interactions in the staffrooms have the potential to provide connections between international and local HDR students. In the next section, I elaborate on *international student* identity and its construction in an Australian university.

### **5.3 THE ‘INTERNATIONAL’/ ‘LOCAL’ STUDENT LABELS**

As discussed in Chapter One, on enrolment at university all students are characterised as either ‘local students’ or ‘international students’. The ‘international student’ identity is associated with difference. They are treated administratively as similar to each other and different from local students. They are often stereotyped as lacking English language skills, a research culture, and critical thinking (Ryan, 2005).

Sawir et al. (2008) argue that the *international student* label in Australian universities often portrays a group who compensate for their admission by paying higher fees than local students. The international student group is perceived as a separate group who stay for while, contribute financially to the education industry of Australia, and return to their countries after their course. They are perceived by some academics as groups who do not intend to contribute or participate, with a standard of learning that is generally lower than that of Australians.

Nevertheless, as mentioned in Chapter One, the perceived ‘international’/‘local’ labels and the administrative categorisation may not match with how students view themselves or their peers.

### **5.3.1 “Actually I am an Australian citizen. But I still regard myself an international student”**

Chapter One explained that in the context of this study and its participants, ‘local students’ are native English speaking Anglo-Australians and ‘international students’ are students from language backgrounds other than English. Administratively, the international/local labels refer to students’ citizenship status and this makes a huge difference in the tuition fees they pay and the kinds of scholarship and financial support they are entitled to seek. Some data here confirmed that the stereotypes of ‘international’ or ‘local’ student in Australian universities partially reflect administrative categorisations. The situation is far more complex as Xia understood.

During her PhD, Xia’s visa status had changed. She had received her Australian permanent residency and based on administrative categories she no longer belonged to the international student group. In response to my questions in the second focus group (i.e., Do you consider yourself a local or an international student now?), she replied,

Currently I have permanent residency here. Actually I am an Australian citizen. But I still regard myself as an international student because my previous education was in China. I also ask this question in my own research. Many Chinese immigrants who have been born here, they say international student. So, I actually, yes, I think I am an international student or maybe in between. (FG2)

Xia said that as an Asian student, she felt closer to the international student group regardless of her visa label. Even as an Australian citizen, Xia still felt closer to the ‘Other’ or “maybe in between”. Similarly, the ‘local student’ label can also be confusing and problematic.

### **5.3.2 “In my mind, local is white.”**

The administrative label of ‘local student’ includes recent immigrants, refugees, and all permanent residents of Australia. However, in student participants’ views, the term ‘local’ was associated with being Anglo and speaking English with an Australian accent. In Joko’s words, “In my mind local is white” (FG2). Xia also talked about this distinction, saying,

In this faculty there are many Chinese students who are citizens here but they are not considered local students and some students look local. They are White but they are not Australian. They are from East Europe. So, we are not sure who is ‘local’ and who is ‘international.’ So, it is not always clear.

Xia talked about the complexity of the Australian multicultural and multilingual citizenship. She associated a combination of being White and speaking English with an Australian accent with the ‘local student’ group and looking and sounding different with the international group. She talked about Asian students who administratively are categorised as local students but are still perceived as Other and international in the faculty.

The terminology of ‘international/local’ is problematic. Yet, the above data suggest that the term itself may not be the reason behind the dichotomy. The term tends to frame and define a group in ways that do not reflect the complexity and plurality of experiences, although finding terms to reflect an administrative category remains a challenge.

Nevertheless, it seems that a problematic situation arises from attempts to find one single label to address a group of students who come from an array of geopolitical, social, cultural, historical and language backgrounds, and who may have nothing more in common than not being Australian. The country of origin seems to be irrelevant to the new context, and the diversity of the students disappears under this all-purpose term. The identity of international student is also assigned in the label attached to them. It is a label and identity recognized by academic staff and supervisors, and by other students.

## **5.4 HOMOGENISING THE ‘INTERNATIONAL STUDENT’ LABEL**

As explained in Chapter Four, to understand if ‘local’ and ‘international’ students had effective interactions and why, I asked them to discuss the topic in small groups without my presence. An emergent theme in student discussions was stereotyping and homogenizing student groups. For instance, Clare, one of the Australian participants, raised the issue of stereotyping of international students as passive and not contributing to discussions and highlighted its impacts on her interactions,

Stereotyping is interesting. When I first walked in the room, my first impression was you were going to be quiet. Yeah, my stereotyping was that you never want to contribute that much. So, I was expecting you to be quiet. (G1S3)

She continued talking about her preconception of international students as groups that stick to each other, keep to themselves and have little will to interact with other students,

To me international students always look happy and busy and into stuff. So, I sort of don't think that you might want to make friends. You look, I suppose to me, happy on your own. But we do have the impression of international students of being, wanting to keep to yourselves, and not wanting to ask. So I'm not likely to ask you a question, that I might ask ourselves. (G1S3)

The above data confirmed previous research on stereotyping international students as a closed and separate group (Ryan & Viete, 2009; Sawir et al., 2008). Clare explained how such stereotyping impeded her interaction with international students. She implied that she avoided interaction with international students because she generalised international students as a separate group who did not ask questions and wanted to keep within themselves. In one way, her explanation absolved her from getting involved or playing a part in the community. Clare drew a line between 'ourselves' and international students, and pointed to the difference in her conversations with a different group (of local students).

Ratna showed a sense of understanding for this avoidance by local students in approaching international students and said, "but you know, I don't blame them as well. Because I feel they are very conscious about us. They know we are strangers and they don't want to make us feel pressured in a way" (G1S3). Ratna sees herself as a stranger who is under the pressure to adjust to the new environment. She feels local students do not want to put her under pressure by asking questions or initiating talk. Joko, however, objected to being treated differently. He said he was sensitive to being spoken to in a different way. He desired to be involved in interactions with native speakers.

Joko: When you speak to international students, do you slow down?

Jan: Yes

Joko: Uh, I personally don't like it when you slow down, because initially you treat us differently. (G2S3)



Joko here complained that he did not want to be treated differently. He wished to be heard and seen as similar to his local peers. So, Australians may slow down in their speaking to help him understand, yet he viewed this as discrimination, not help.

The 'international student' label has some cultural associations as well. The international students in this study considered this term as an inclusive label for students who share a non-Western or 'Other' culture. Data also showed that it was not only international students who were stereotyped. Local students were perceived by international students to have certain characteristics, and associated with the Western culture and individualism. Cultural stereotyping and hence linking that to the language of social interactions was noticeable in Aini, Shamim and Clare's conversation,

Aini: In Malaysia, we learn that Western people don't like it, if we ask are you married.

Clare: Oh no that's the first thing I would ask. You got kids or where do you live?

Shamim: English people are different I think because they don't like to talk about personal things, I think.

Clare: Aussies are very open. (G2S3)

International students mentioned that they had also learned to stereotype Western students. Aini and Shamim talked about their stereotyping of Australians as associated with Western individualistic culture. They mentioned that they were conscious not to ask too many personal questions to avoid intrusion. Clare, however, denied this representation and pointed out that Aussies have a very open culture and they welcome personal questions and social interaction. Ratna admitted that her stereotyping had kept her from approaching local students openly,

I realise that my problem is that I am an English teacher, and we had a trainer. He used to talk to us about Western culture and you know Western culture refers to certain countries and he imprinted in us these stereotyping, you shouldn't be talking about personal things, they like privacy so much. (G1S3)

As Ratna pointed out, many English teachers overseas are aware that teaching a foreign language must be complemented by getting students to know the target culture.

Generalisation and stereotyping of Western culture in EFL textbooks and materials may be part of the problem. In Ratna's view, stereotyping spreads a preconception of Australian people as Westerners who appreciate privacy, are individualistic, and thus want others not to intrude into their personal space. This preconception can reinforce a distance between international students and local Australian students. Such stereotyping usually derives from a lack of cultural, social and personal knowledge, and it seems to be exercised by both sides. Both international and local students in this study pointed to the gaps which exist as the result of avoiding each other, and the problem of creating a shared space for communication. In what follows Bina, Hanna and Aini linked a physical space between themselves as international students and their local peers in the faculty to lack of mutual knowledge.

Bina: Actually we don't know how they perceive us.

Hanna: So, our problem is that if we had a class, we could ask them.

Aini: But last time, [in a workshop] we didn't do that.

Bina: Yeah, we didn't do that.

Hanna: Because we had our friends and we sat close to our friend and local students sat by another table, and local students only hi [laugh].

(G1S3)

The physical space between international and local students is a theme of Chapter Six. Yet, the conversations above show that there are certain representations held by each group which may keep them from approaching the other. For instance, the individualism

associated with Western culture keeps the international students from initiating tearoom interactions, from fear that they may be intruding on the others' privacy. On the other hand, the label international student with its cultural connotations also plays a part in this gap. In one Australian university, Ryan and Viete (2009) observed that unlike many academics' prejudgments and presuppositions, international students were willing to participate, contribute and be heard. The data here, although limited, confirmed the existence of intention for integration among doctoral students but also unfolded the impact of stereotyping on their interactions.

The data in this section provided a glimpse of the international student experience and the identity that this label imposes on newcomer students. Resistance to this imposition, along with legitimacy and membership negotiation in and through departmental interactions is a theme in Chapter Seven. However, it is interesting to see the direct reflection of such stereotyping in the everyday interaction patterns between international and local students in this faculty. All international students stressed that they lacked interaction with local students, which resulted in a vacuum between the two groups. As a result of this vacuum or gap, they did not know how they were perceived by the other side. They based their perceptions of each other on stereotyping and what they had read in books or been told by their teachers, rather than their actual exposure and contact with the other group. Ratna, however, considered this vacuum a normal consequence of moving to a new culture, and being a newcomer to a new country.

'International student' as a label overlooks student diversity, and is negatively loaded. It also undervalues the students' autonomy and agency in participation, learning and developing an institutional identity.

## **5.5 BEING A NEWCOMER**

In a recent study in Canada, Kerekes (2007b) has focused on internationally educated professionals (IEPs) who immigrate to Canada and search for jobs relevant to their profession in Canadian companies. Her pilot findings show that intercultural miscommunication can be responsible more than any English language barrier for constraining employment opportunities for IEPs. She argues that in the context of job interviews, which she refers to as an example of gate-keeping encounters, most ‘miscommunication nuisances’ are due to cultural gaps between the newcomers and the interviewers. These gaps limit the chances of immigrant professionals in competing with their local rivals for jobs and for negotiating job interviews successfully.

Similarly, international PhD students in this study were all newcomers to Australia. They shared their stories of the pressure they felt as newcomers to Australia and trying to adjust themselves to Australian culture and a new way of life. They seemed confused and on the other hand, concerned, about how to react and behave as newcomers while they had little knowledge of the context. Despite the difference in the cultural and language background of the participants, based on the commonality of being newcomers to Australia, Bina made a general conclusion about a major challenge which all international students face in their language interactions with Australians. She commented, “so, we don’t know how to react” (G1S3). To Ratna this confusion was predictable and a normal outcome of moving to a new environment, “I think this is part of coming to new culture, everything is strange” (G1S3).

Bina had a story of the consequences of not being familiar with the Australian rules. She spoke about different cultural values and how strange and unknown some Australian cultural values appeared to her.

Bina: Yeah, it happened to me last time. I was in school and a girl was hurt by a boy and she started crying and I just didn't know how to react, yeah, whether I should go to her or not. In our culture we immediately go to the child and hug her but here I don't know how to react. I was scared whether to hug her or not. If I go and touch her is it good or not? Because here I don't know because touching in our culture is good, getting close, you know, to show affection.

Ratna: Because of molestation case I think. If you touch them, they might accuse us of yeah you know, what do you want from this child? Yeah, child abuse, yeah. We are strangers you know. Strangers should not touch children here. Children are not supposed to talk with strangers, yeah. They are very strict about that. (G1S3)

Bina talked about her confusion about how to react as a newcomer to a new community with different cultural values. She compared the new culture with her own and this even added to her confusion. Ratna even mentioned that she had missed a potential work opportunity only because of her unfamiliarity with the new culture.

I found it actually just recently, when I went for an interview for a job: teaching children; and the interviewer asked me, do you have working with children permit? And I was surprised, said what? What's that? And then she explained all these things to me, that ... that, this is a kind of permit about how you should behave children, huh! How should I behave children! Wow it's so strange! Oh my god! So, I said OK, I don't want to work with children, because I'm afraid, they might get it wrong, the way we treat children. (G1S3)

Both Ratna and Bina stressed that besides learning the new language, they needed time to become familiar with the new social and cultural values to be able to integrate in the target society. They explained how unfamiliarity with the new cultural values interfered with the construction of their professional identity in the new community.

One of the participants in this study explained how her friendship with an Australian teacher helped her to learn the “Australian way of life” and contributed to her confidence in language interactions with Australians.

## **5.6 A CLOSE LOCAL FRIEND, LEARNING, AND IDENTITY**

Sawir et al. (2008) emphasise that in the context of Australian universities and particularly for research students with no set courses and classes, friendship networks can be more fundamental than hours of student counseling services in helping students to keep from ‘social loneliness’. They define social loneliness as “a lack of an engaging social network with peers who share or partly share one’s concerns or view of the world” (p. 152). International students in this study were all well-aware of their need to engage in social networks, but among all Xia was the only case who considered herself ‘lucky’ enough to get to know an Australian teacher who later became her close friend. She placed a great value on this relationship and acknowledged the enormous effect of this close contact particularly on her confidence in using English language for socialisation.

Actually I think sometimes I wasn’t improving in my English until I met a friend here. Actually I should thank my supervisor actually as he gets a lot of students to supervise and he made me meet a group. Actually a discussion group about some topic, and so I was lucky to have chances to speak with local students there. And also I had chances to meet new friends, one of them a very lovely lady. She is very outgoing and she is also a teacher. Actually I think because she is a teacher so she knows how to communicate with a person whose English is not good. I am very happy and thankful because she invited me to a lot of social activities she had with her friend. And that was a very good chance for me to improve my English. We lived together for some time. I think that’s the best way for international students to know these people and English is to live with them. (G2S2)

Xia placed a great value on her socialisation with her Australian friend and considered it essential in her English language improvement. She was grateful of her supervisor's help in introducing her to this Australian teacher who later became her close friend and roommate. Xia emphasised that this friendship had helped her not only with her English language but also had made her more familiar with the Australian culture which together improved her confidence in interacting with the local community. She added,

She herself also is very kind and friendly person, so very pleasant experience for me. Even though she was an immigrant from Europe, she lived here for her whole life. She also tries to know Chinese and Chinese culture. So, I never feel like they say... oh she is a foreigner. This also makes me feel confident when I communicate with people here, good feeling when you care for others, the other people think the same way of you, mutual understanding. (G2S2)

She mentioned that she was happy to socialise with her Australian friend because she never felt like a foreigner. There was mutual respect and her friend showed interest in knowing about Chinese culture. She pointed out that living with her Australian friend had a great influence on her English and communication success within Australia. The mutual respect and the close relationship between her and her Australian friend made her feel confident in speaking English and maintain social interaction with the local community. She added that her local friend was herself a teacher and knew how to communicate with people who have problems in speaking English. Xia continued,

I think for international students, it is true that language problem is sort of barrier to know this country and to communicate, but we also can think of some good ways. And also sometimes, depending upon luck, I think who you meet, what kind of local people you meet and what kind of experience do you have, then I think that would help, that will influence how well you get familiar with this country and socialise with these people. (G2S2)

Xia emphasised the positive influence of close contact and socialisation with the local community on learning, development and integration in Australia. She pointed out that international students' language skills can be developed through socialisation in the host country. However, she consented that this opportunity is not always open to students and often relies on 'luck' in meeting people who have the right attitude. Xia sounded confident and willing to participate in interactions. Unfortunately, this was only Xia's experience and all other participants complained about the superficiality of tearoom interactions.

## **5.7 INTERACTION AT 'HI AND BYE' LEVEL**

Wenger (2000) argues that participation complements language acquisition. He views second language learning as a "process of becoming a member of a certain community" (p. 6). This perspective highlights the influence of socialising on ESL acquisition which has been emphasised by other researchers as well (Duff, 2003). For instance, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) argue that the focus of SLA research needs to shift from language structure to "language use in context, and to the issues of affiliation and belonging" (p. 156). They stress that in order to investigate the 'hows' of language learning, researchers need to focus on participation, contextualisation and engagement of ESL learners with others.

Nevertheless, Ryan and Viete (2009) report that postgraduate international students in Australian universities do feel "excluded, ignored, isolated, marginalised, or simply distanced" (p. 309). Seven out of the eight international participants in this study complained that their interactions with their local peers were not interactive. In their view, most of the times, the international/local students' interactions lacked a sense of belonging and participation, and were short, not engaging, superficial and contracted to a 'hi and bye level.'



Ratna: Have you ever like timed yourself how long you can stay talking to local students. With international students I can stay talking for a long time. What about you?

Amar: Yeah, same.

Bina: If I, for example, come across international students. We can stay and talk, but with local students, I feel they are in rush. So, we just say hi, how are you, good thanks, you know, yeah, the same. (G1S3)

The participants mentioned that brief formulaic exchanges and greetings is the common limit of their conversations with local students. Ratna, Amar and Bina all mentioned that their tearoom conversations with their local peers feel ‘squeezed’ even if they only say ‘hi,’ a smile, and ‘bye’, while they are able to extend their interactions with other international students. Bina implied that she felt her local peers did not have enough time for interaction and socialisation.

Sawir et al. (2008) stress that institutions must take ‘quasi roles’ and assist their students with English language, which they emphasise is “a vital ongoing condition of survival and academic success” (p. 170). However they do not explain what is seen as problematic with the English language skills of postgraduate international students, whose language levels have already been approved as a condition for their admission. Moreover the main emphasis of most international student support programs, particularly at the postgraduate level, is on academic reading and writing skills. Despite this focus, students may be discouraged from engaging in conversations in English that could help them improve. In what follows, Ratna explained how her lack of exposure to the Discourses of socialising in English caused her to withdraw from socialising with her peers.

Ratna: Yeah, just hi and bye. Yeah, you know, language of socialisation is very difficult for us. We don’t know sort of discourse local people here use.

Clare: So, do you feel nervous in going up to people and talking?

Ratna: Yes, we just don't know what sort of reaction. You say hi, how are you?

And I say, good thanks, but I don't know what to say next, how to continue.

Bina: How to keep going, we don't know. That's the problem. You don't know what to say, we don't know either. So, the conversation, what to say that's difficult.

Clare: Uh that's probably why you don't, but if you go to another international student, would it go further? Is that easy?

Bina: Yeah, we can talk about our problems. Sometimes, we talk about our study, and also sometimes family problems. But we don't know what sort of topics to speak with local students.

Clare: Really, you guys probably are talking about same things we are talking about, [laughter], how the school, the uni is? Who's doing what? But it is that you don't talk about that stuff to us? Because you think it is not the right thing to talk about? But you talk about it with each other?

Bina: Yeah, yeah.

Clare: Oh really! But not to us? [laughter] (G1S3)

Ratna mentioned that her problem in speaking with local students was that she was not familiar with informal English, topics to talk about in informal conversations with Australians and how to respond to their casual greetings. Bina similarly mentioned that she did not know what to talk about with local Australians. She also mentioned that with other international students she felt comfortable enough to discuss her study or family problems, while with local students she did not feel this sense of empathy which was why she was not able to maintain long conversations with local students.

English teaching and learning in Asia is mainly focused on the formal contexts of English use rather than the informal conversations (Sawir, 2005). In addition, in most contexts of English as a foreign language use there is no face to face interaction with native speakers. This makes casual conversations with native English speakers quite unfamiliar to

Asian background students. I could sympathize with Ratna's point about the discourses of casual social interaction in English as the major barrier in her socialisation with her Australian peers. But, the interesting point here is that language cannot be the only problem because Ratna and Bina both claimed that they could keep talking with other international students from different backgrounds in English.

It is hard to find a single explanation of why the participants' interaction strategies varied in their face to face interactions with other international students and with their local peers. This resulted in what they pointed to as 'hi and bye' level interactions in their international/local face to face interactions as opposed to interactive and more engaging interactions with international student peers. It seems to me that aside from language, a number of issues such as the issue of face, appropriateness, empathy, fear of being judged, legitimacy, culture and relationships, stereotyping and even constraints and avoiding conflicts are involved in turning patterns of international/local students' engagement in informal social second-language interactions to short and superficial hies and byes.

### **5.7.1 The issue of 'face' and appropriateness**

Ryan and Viete (2009) report that many academics in Australian universities assess international students' English language proficiency based on their "idealised views" of competence in English and thus restrain their students' legitimacy for participation (p. 304). They argue that such hegemonic views of interaction in English language make new international students' focus on "appropriating" their language forms rather than "participating" in their target academic community (p. 310). Similarly, literature reports that during native/nonnative interactions, native speakers take the floor and speak more, while nonnative speakers are passive and inhibited (Lesznyák, 2002; Meierkord, 2002).

Silence is highlighted in the literature as a second language communication strategy (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). However, in the inter-cultural context of this study, the underlying reason for the ‘silence’ of international students and their hesitation in participation was not limited to language issues. Xia, for example, pointed to the strategy of keeping silent not for her language problems but to remain safe from stating something which might be interculturally inappropriate.

Everyone wants to talk to other people and get together. But because it is a foreign country zone, so they are not sure about everything, so the best choice or the safe strategy is to keep silent. Sometimes if we ask, then we are in trouble. (G2S3)

Xia stated that she did not want to say something that might threaten her ‘face.’ She talked about the consciousness that in a foreign country with a different culture it is difficult to predict the appropriateness of what is said, so she believes a good strategy is to avoid speaking or asking questions. Like Bina, she mentioned that she was able to connect with other international students, and she felt her conversations with them were comfortable, friendly and focused on exchanging ideas rather than worrying about appropriateness and ‘face.’ Joko agreed with the point and said that he tried to avoid long conversations with local students to avoid unintentional ‘face threats’ as a result of not being familiar with the cultural and social norms of Australia.

Joko: Sometimes, I may say something that may insult them, so ...

Xia: Yes, might insult them yes.

Shamim: Then yeah, I think why did I ask them such thing Why?

Xia: Yeah, why did I say that.

Shamim: So you think you are scared to ask them questions because you think might insult them, or does not suit their culture?

Joko: Yeah, yeah, the thing is that if I don’t have business with them, then why should I ask them anything?

Xia: Yeah, sometimes if we ask then we are in trouble. (G2S1)

Joko and Xia both pointed to the importance of ‘face’ in the contexts of intercultural communication and in particular, when they spoke with native speakers. They both chose to avoid interactions with their local peers, because they found them risky, involving intercultural miscommunication. They clearly said they felt constrained to say something insulting, because they were not familiar enough with the cultural values and boundaries across communities. Therefore, they simply avoided asking questions or talking about their problems not to put themselves in trouble. A detailed analysis of participants’ communication strategies such as ‘avoidance’ is the theme of Chapter Eight. Yet, it is worthy to note here that in the intercultural context of this study, avoidance is used as a strategy to avoid cultural miscommunication and threats to ‘face.’

Hanna also pointed to her fear of saying something inappropriate or asking questions in a way which could hinder her interactions with local students. She mentioned though that in her conversations with other international students she could feel very comfortable to ask her questions and exchange the message and not have to focus on appropriateness:

We don’t know the appropriate way to ask our questions. Even if we have questions, we don’t ask, but with only international students, of course we speak friendly and we ask our questions and exchange ideas. So, actually I think there is some difference with speaking among international students and among native speakers.  
(G1S3)

The data confirmed Ryan and Viete’s (2009) point that ‘nativespeakerdom’ can force international students to avoid participation due to the pressure of ‘appropriateness.’

Hanna’s distress about “the appropriate way to ask questions” shows how the pressure of adherence to local and native-like models had made her refrain from volunteering to speak

out. Other international students, however, did not feel the pressure of modelling their language and culture and could negotiate understanding. The difference that the presence of native speakers makes in interactions has been noted in previous research (Lesznyák, 2002; Robert, 2007). Lesznyák (2002) clearly points out that in nonnative/nonnative talk, speakers negotiate language rules among themselves while in native/nonnative interactions, language rules seem to be fixed and less negotiable. In the context of this study, international students talked about a difference they felt in their interactions with other international students and local students. For instance, Hanna described her interactions with other international students as being ‘friendly’ and long, but also talked about feeling constrained and concerned about the ‘appropriateness’ of her words and statements in her interactions with local students and staff.

While the literature confirms that nonnative speakers tend to speak less and keep silent in their interactions among native speakers, most previous studies have concluded that this is a language problem and the lack of command of the second language is the issue (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Takahashi, 2000). However, the discussions of international students here showed that language is only one part of the picture. In Chapter Eight, I will discuss how unfamiliarity with the local discourses, cultural and social norms and concerns about social and cultural appropriateness of the utterances play their part in making the students choose silence as a ‘face’ saving strategy.

A salient theme in the data was the role of culture in daily interaction, participation and connection.

### 5.7.2 Culture and relationships

In one Australian university, similar to the setting of this study, Ryan and Viete (2009) found that international students' prior studies of English did not equip them well for their interactions in their new institution, which they describe as "saturated with unfamiliar local knowledge, pronunciation and mores of dialogic exchange" (p. 306). International students in this study similarly mentioned that they could engage in conversations about their research and academic subjects more easily than in general, informal, lunch-time conversations.

Bina: Sometimes when you are talking we can't understand what you say.  
When you talk about study we understand, but when you are joking we can't understand your jokes, we don't know what you are laughing about.

Clare: You don't get it, why is that?

Jan: It's cultural.

Hanna: If it's about footy, because it is a very popular game here.

Jan: Because it is informal English, isn't it? It is very different from the formal, and there is much more culture in that. (G1S3)

The participants mentioned that engagement in discussions about the current social, cultural and local events was challenging for them. Gee (2005) points out that 'old timers' in every community are privy to Conversations with which newcomers are unfamiliar. Lunch-time conversations are usually informal and saturated with local and cultural knowledge which makes them hard to understand for new students. When Bina raised this issue, I referred to my own journal entries. I wrote this note only 35 days after arriving in Australia.

Last Monday, during lunch, everybody was talking about footy. I didn't know anything about this game, or players, or teams, so all the time I sat silent and almost got a headache for not understanding even a word. It was disappointing. Then I decided to buy a newspaper, read about footy so that next time I could have some comments to make. But on Wednesday, when I went again to the staff room and had

lunch with the same group, they started to talk about one of their famous pop musicians, who again I wasn't familiar with. (May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007)

To me, getting engaged in interactions and avoiding isolation was so important that I consciously tried to increase my knowledge in the domain of the local, social, political and cultural discourses. I was then interested in knowing if other international students consciously put an effort into learning about local topics. In the focused interview, I asked this question: "Do you try to familiarise yourself with local and current events by for instance reading newspapers, or watching TV?" Here were two answers:

Joko answered,

Only if it is about something I am interested in, but if it is something I don't like, then why should I read about it? (FG1)

Amar answered,

No I don't have the time to watch TV, you know this PhD also my family, my daughter, no I usually don't watch TV. ( FG1)

Ratna added, "When they talk about footy, I make an excuse and escape, for example I say uh I want to go to toilet and never come back" (FG1). The diversity of student approaches to engagement in informal departmental interactions, recalls the role of agency in participation and learning through interaction.

Aside from the issue of saving 'face' in speaking, the international participants pointed to the problem of partial comprehension which places them in a stressful situation that finally leads to constraints in their engagement in interactions. But again their comprehension problem was not a language issue. Bina pointed out that their comprehension problem was a discursive issue. She explained that she could not understand the content of messages, because local discourses are inundated with local



cultural themes. They all agreed that understanding jokes was very difficult, since jokes usually involve culture.

Amar: Sometimes if they speak fast and with heavy accent then I don't understand them. So how can I respond when I don't understand?

Bina: And sometimes we just don't understand their content what they are talking about, because different cultures maybe yeah.

Amar: And most of the time for my case, I don't understand their jokes

Ratna: Yeah, yeah, very different.

Bina: Oh jokes are the most difficult. (G2S3)

Unfamiliarity with local Discourses plays an important role in the isolation of international students from the local community and not everyone has the time or interest to consciously try to engage in such conversations. While shortage of time was the major withholding reason for Amar as a PhD student with family responsibilities, Joko held the view that language was a means of communication and not a gate to cultural transformation. His viewpoint recalls Pavlenko and Lantolf's (2000) emphasis on the role of agency in second language use. They point out,

It is ultimately through their own intentions and agency that people decide to undergo or not undergo the frequently agonizing process of linguistic, cultural, and personal transformation...If we assume the social constructionist view that identities do not exist within people but are constructed between them in interacting, then, in one case the individuals undertake the construction of new identities, appropriate to the new surroundings, while in another they assume an overarching identity as nonnative speakers- legitimate but marginal members of a community. (p. 171)

Joko is a good example of the second group of ESL users who decide to object to 'cultural transformation', usually associated with learning a new language and living and studying abroad. His viewpoint had direct influence on his language use, even in writing his thesis. In his own words,

Joko: I don't deny that yes if we compare the writing of a local and an international student it goes without saying that they are different. Even though IELTS is there, but IELTS is IELTS. I think that in supervision they should acknowledge that this work belongs to an international student. I never compare myself with native speaker standard. I myself, I have a totally different stand here. My friends ask me why I usually don't go to writing groups or use the services here and ask people in the library here to check my writing. I say I don't care. I write my own writing and I think it is the native speakers' job to understand that I am an international student. And I am lucky because my supervisor doesn't care. She knows this is my way of writing and I always write this in my introductions in the chapters that my focus is on the content to see if I am clear in the ideas.

R\*: This means you don't make grammatical errors?

Joko: Yeah I do make grammatical errors. At this stage this is my first draft I just want comment on my ideas. Later I can fix everything.

(FG2, R\*: Researcher)

Joko here made it clear that he did not intend to speak, write or behave like a native speaker. He wanted to be heard as who he was. He sought legitimacy in his knowledge of his subject area and ideas and not the form and the language of his expressions. He conceded that his language was different and at times not perfect but he expected native speakers to appreciate his ideas and the fact that the work has been produced by a nonnative student.

Joko assumed what Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) called an 'overarching identity' for himself; a nonnative, yet legitimate English as an additional language user. Pavlenko and Lantolf (p. 170) write, "the individual may feel comfortable being who he or she is and may not wish to become a native of another language and culture. Thus negotiation of new meanings and construction of new subjectivities may be irrelevant to his/her personal

agenda”. Joko, however continued that he could not build a deep relationship with people from a different culture.

I think the main thing keeping us from mixing with others people, is culture. I mean, I personally, it is hard to mix with other culture. What I mean is that for me sometimes to start personal relationship, and not academic one with people from other cultures is difficult I think. (G2S1)

Joko pointed to the difference between academic and personal relationships. He mentioned that he could build academic relationship with people from different cultural backgrounds much more easily than a personal relationship. He implied that for him starting personal relationships with people from a different culture could be difficult. Joko perceived culture as an essential element of relationships. However he was not content to negotiate his cultural values. To Joko, cultural gaps and not the language created a major barrier to intercultural communication. Hanna added the point that language problems contribute to cultural space.

Culture is a barrier as well, but language is more. You know, due to language barrier you can't just talk to other people in open mind. So you can't talk to other people. You can't know about culture, even it also stops you to know about their culture, as well, isn't it? (G1S2)

Culture and language are so integrated that makes it difficult to judge which contributes more to maintaining intercultural interactions. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) conclude,

It is not accidental that many immigrants settle in communities in which they continue to live, as closely as possible, the lives they led in their native countries in order to follow their own customs and traditions. (p. 170)

In line with this remark, Bina placed all international students in one cultural group in opposition to the local ‘Western’ cultural group. She added that she felt her culture was similar with other international students’ and far different from local students’ culture.

Therefore, she drew the conclusion that empathy helped her interactions with other international students.

But for me, it is not only the language problem, but it is our culture. Different cultures, so when we find other international students, we feel we are on the same ground. We can feel ourselves, being far away from home, and everybody has same kind of, have similar feelings. So, we feel more comfortable talking to other international students. And, something is that, when I speak with local students, I feel that they just don't understand us at once. We have to repeat ourselves. (G1S2)

Miller (2003) reports that Asian students in her Australian study felt they came from the 'same place' although as she reports they were from three different countries, namely Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. Similarly, Bina here talked about her feelings and how they affected her communication even more than language. To her, commonalities between international students, such as coming from a distant place or being unfamiliar with the new environment built up a sense of understanding and a common ground which helped communication. Her statements confirm Gudykunst's (2005) claims that sympathy eases the pressure of unpredictability in intercultural communication and thus facilitates interactions. Bina's simplified view of culture sees all international students as part of one cultural group whose commonalities facilitate communication, with local students in a different group. She grouped international students at one end of a hypothetical 'understanding' continuum, and local students at the other.

International students in this study made the point that culture plays an essential role in relationships. They agreed that for them cultural difference was more influential than language difference in building close or personal relationships with their local peers. They felt that their misunderstandings were more cultural than due to language problems. International students in this study mentioned that the pressure of 'appropriating' was not

simply a language issue. They said they were more worried about misinterpretation of their words in intercultural contexts. Such ‘appropriating,’ they agreed, adds to their stress in speaking particularly with native speakers as the gatekeepers of the culture and language they had chosen to study in. Among other international students, they felt comfortable and friendly and this empathy eased their communications, although communication context might be even more multicultural. The data are in line with previous findings by researchers like Roberts (2006), who stated that international students are able to create a sense of ‘comity’ among themselves which helps their communication. Both international and local students in this study mentioned that cultural gaps also caused them to avoid certain topics in their conversations.

### **5.7.3 Constraints on topics of conversation**

In intercultural communication, boundaries are often unclear and negotiated which demands some levels of ‘mindfulness’ (Gudykunst, 2003). As Smith (1992) points out, words and sentences may be interpreted in a different way when we communicate with people from different backgrounds. This constant negotiation and monitoring involved in intercultural communication may make it more demanding or strategic than everyday routine conversations with people who share certain images, schemata, backgrounds and beliefs. Clare posed this point in her statements where she alluded to avoiding difficult conversations with international students,

I think yeah, I think with international students there is a tendency to say hello and keep going because you anticipate that it is going to be a difficult communication. So, you kind of unless they get stuff into the conversations you don’t tend to initiate it as much as you like with a local students. Not consciously I think. (G1S3)

Clare pointed to what she considered a general constraint involved in speaking with international students. She did not make it clear, though, why in her opinion, communication with international students was difficult. She did not comment whether language, accent, or culture caused a gap. Aini, who is Muslim and wears an Islamic scarf, asked,

Aini: In Malaysia we all have a religion and we talk about it but here is it Ok to talk about religion? Or somebody asks questions about it for example.

Clare: But she might be thinking that, she's got to be careful about what she says. Because, there is always constraints. I wouldn't ask the questions I might ask Jan, have you got kids? Because I think you probably aren't allowed to talk about that, or you are not comfortable talking about that, but I probably ask Jan something I wouldn't ask you.

Jan: I wouldn't ask you questions about your beliefs. It's not sort of thing we generally bring up. (G2S3)

In response to Aini's question, Clare pointed to the constraints on sensitive topics. Jan also mentioned that topics like religious beliefs are avoided in their interaction with international students. Australian students mentioned that while they felt comfortable to open up casual conversations with each other and ask personal questions, in their interactions with international students, they felt reluctant to initiate some topics which they characterised as sensitive.

Researchers as early as Varonis and Gass (1985) reported that the greater the gap in language proficiency, the more participants needed to negotiate their understanding. In intercultural interactions, the same rule may apply referring not only to the language gap but also the gap in ideological and cultural beliefs. Clare pointed to the notion of difference and its consequences on communication. When Aini continued the conversation and asked

Clare if she felt comfortable initiating a conversation with someone who wears a scarf, Clare replied,

I think it [wearing or not wearing a scarf] does make a difference, not in a negative way but I don't understand it. I suppose, I would think, I think, uh, what's the word for it, I think people would think that maybe you are so different that I might not be able to relate to you, maybe a little bit of this. Yeah, it's not a prejudice thing, it's just about lack of understanding, and the difference is so obvious. (G2S3)

Clare did not feel comfortable to discuss this issue. She implied that relating to people who hold different cultural, religious, or ideological beliefs was difficult for her. Appearance is often the first and the most obvious sign of difference, as Clare pointed out. Miller (2003) argues that Anglo-looking immigrants can have better chances for improving their English through socialisation in Australia than Asian immigrants. Based on the data here, it can be concluded that looking, sounding, or even acting different impacts on chances for social integration in the target community. Looking non-Anglo, wearing a scarf and speaking English with an accent were all issues that contributed to marginalisation of newcomer students in this study. The Australian students in this study explained below how such differences and constraints caused them to avoid engaging international students in the interactive and personal casual conversations they usually have with their local peers in the staffroom.

#### **5.7.4 “Hitting the personal”**

Australian students in this study identified opening up conversations about their personal life or according to Clare ‘hitting the personal’ as the element that can move the interactions forward from the ‘hi and bye’ level. They pointed out that talking about personal matters established an element of connection in the interactions. They mentioned

that Australians are culturally open and welcome personal questions. International students, on the other hand, can find it uncomfortable to get involved in personal conversations. In what follows, Ratna related this to culture and made the point that it is difficult to see the boundaries in a foreign culture. Clare agreed with the point and consented that in encounters with people from different cultures, there is always the tendency to keep the conversation at the safest level.

Clare: You can ask me anything [laugh] about kids, absolutely anything. Because when you get to personal, you make the connection. And that's probably why the connection is not happening we are not talking to you about personal stuff, and you are not talking to us. Because we always go for the safest level. The quicker you get to personal stuff, I think, the better the connection.

Ratna: I think, the thing that worries me is that I don't want to make people uncomfortable. So, I don't ask so many personal questions. Because I find it very difficult to see the boundaries. Every people have their own boundaries.

Clare: Because we also feel you like to stick to yourselves. So, it's sort of bizarre. But, yeah most of our culture is very open. You can sort of say almost everything. So, we really get personal. And if you don't be personal, it means you don't really want to connect. So, you often need to offer something personal. (G1S3)

The above data unfolded a cultural stereotype of international students as a group with closed culture who want to keep to themselves and not initiate interactions. Clare talked about another assumption about international students' conversations. She said,

Clare: Yeah, probably with international students, it doesn't get personal very quickly. We probably would hit to personal quicker. I don't know why, but we get personal quicker. You probably get personal with each other too, yeah? Because, I'm sure you also have lots of personal things to talk about.

Hanna: We also talk about personal things. (G1S3)



Clare assumed that international students might prefer to talk about their personal problems only among themselves. In the continuation of the conversation, Aini asked Clare, “Do you ask each other questions about age or married life or children?” Her questions again show how, as newcomers, international students struggled to understand the cultural and social boundaries and how complicated topic control is in multicultural interactions. But it also implies that Aini was concerned with ‘appropriateness,’ and adherence to the new culture’s norms; an issue which can reduce the interactions between local students and newcomer students. In Clare’s view, the general belief of the ‘closed culture’ of Asian students, as opposed to the open culture of West, is the main obstacle. She said, “Yeah, we ask these questions. Or, how many kids do you have? Yeah, personal questions, we ask many personal questions. What suburb do you live in? Yeah, all the normal stuff.”(G2S3) Both Australian students in the study stressed that talking about personal things relates people and makes their communications more interactive.

And mostly, because we also feel you like to stick to yourselves. So, it’s sort of bizarre. But, yeah, most our culture is very open. You can sort of say almost everything. So, we really get personal. And if you don’t be personal, it means you don’t really want to connect. So, you often need to offer something personal. (G2S3)

In her comparison of Western and non-Western culture, Clare defined Australian culture as very open. She contended that Australian conversations very soon get personal and if you don’t talk about personal things, it means you don’t want to connect. But then she continued that it is the newcomer’s responsibility to offer something personal in the conversation. Clare once again pointed to the constraints in their interactions with international students. This time, constraints were not on conversational topics but on opening up personal conversations with international students. International students made

it clear that on their part such constrained conversations are due to fear of keeping in the 'appropriate' zone, especially where there is uncertainty about the norms and boundaries.

Taking risks in second language use is a characteristic of good language learners (Norton & Toohey, 2001). The inevitable constraints of spontaneous multicultural encounters, however, may be challenging to even the risk-taking second language users. International students in the contexts of this study mentioned that such constraints along with many other factors like the issue of 'face' or 'appropriateness' or cultural misunderstandings put them in a situation that makes them avoid taking the risk of getting involved in interactive interaction with their local peers. This avoidance, unfortunately, may be a costly and self-defeating strategy for newcomers, which may delay their integration in the community. Local students, on the other hand, aggravate the situation by avoiding the risk of initiating interactions which might be a potential source of conflict.

For international students, interactions with local students are often contracted to a 'hi and bye' level, because they do not know 'how to keep going', 'what to talk about', or 'what sort of topics to speak about with local students'. From the local students' point of view, interactions may be cut short because relating to difference can be difficult or involves constraints on certain topics. Mutually inaccurate stereotyping, for instance stereotyping international students as a group with a closed culture who wish to keep to themselves and stereotyping local students as part of a Western individualistic culture who want to have privacy and personal space, also limits interactions. Like all newcomers to a new community, international students in this study explained how they tried to integrate in the faculty and how their English language and communication strategies played a role in their integration.

## 5.8 JOINING THE LOCAL CIRCLE

“One day I feel part of the conversation, another, like oil on water, a puddle of otherness” (Ryan & Viete, 2009, p. 312). Like Ryan and Viete’s international student in this quote, I heard the sense of not being part of community, feeling like outsiders, lacking the sense of intimacy or belonging from almost all my participants. Bina points below to her unwillingness to engage in the inner-circle Discourses, and a feeling that she was marginalized.

When we are talking with local students, we feel like we are always outsiders. Personally I feel like that, so I can’t enter their discussion. I don’t want to enter their conversations. (G1S2)

In the above data, Bina described her feeling of being an outsider to the local students’ conversations, which kept her from engaging in local students’ conversations. By way of contrast, Aini said that she willingly and consciously put in the effort to get close and enter the circle. She stated that she tried to improve her strategies to get involved in their interactions and to feel part of their group.

Aini: I am actually a sessional English teacher at Highland College, so most of my colleagues are local people. But we don’t talk to each other often. It is very different from Malaysia. In Malaysia we like talking to each other. But here, they don’t talk in the break time or lunch-time. We just get in to the office, and just say hi, very different from our culture. Basically, I really, really want to find close friends from Australia. But so far, I couldn’t. I mean, I talk to some of them, but they are not really close friends.

Clare: Why? What do you think is the barrier?

Aini: I don’t know. Sometimes, I don’t understand them. When they make jokes, it is very difficult to understand their jokes. What I am doing now, I’m learning now to understand their jokes, how to make jokes with them, how

to respond. You know, just to response with a very sharp answer. Like oh no, that's good, really great.

Clare: [laugh] Yeah, get out, get out! (G2S3)

The fact that Aini is an English teacher in a college in Australia shows that her English level is adequate for teaching in a formal classroom context. However, she still felt unable to connect to her local peers on account of not understanding their break-time conversations. In particular, she mentioned that she could not understand jokes. Although a language teacher, Aini pointed that she was still learning how to react to jokes, how to respond quickly to local expressions. She was new to these social contexts, having never before experienced being in the staffroom among local colleagues and making jokes, which is why she could not respond quickly or automatically. Aini's attempts to sound like her local colleagues, and to enter the social circle of the staffroom failed because her informal English and her prior exposure to English jokes, casual greetings and local conversations was limited. Despite being an English teacher, she said she was learning how to respond, 'with a sharp answer, a quick joke, a quick reply to their jokes' to avoid sounding different. It seems that being able to exchange inner circle jokes, compliments, or add short quick comments, helps the sense of belonging to the inner circle. At this time, Aini felt unable to do this, or to feel a sense of belonging to the circle.

Even with a good command of formal English, as required by most Australian universities as a condition of admission, the participants found it challenging to move into the level of the sophisticated insider language use where they could cross between informal and formal language use in conversation. As Gumperz (1999) notes, engagement in daily informal face-to-face multicultural interactions entails much more than linguistic or communicative competence. It engages the participants in a dynamic social game in which

they need to read the contextual clues correctly in order to avoid miscommunication. As nonnative English speakers and newcomers to their academic institutions, they found it challenging to pick up on all of the culturally predicted nuances entailed in informal interactions, and comfortably make the shifts. Another theme which emerged in the data was the importance of familiarity with English slang for international students' integration in the Australian community.

## **5.9 SLANG AND INTEGRATION**

Teaching English in EFL classrooms is mostly focused on formal English and grammar (Sawir, 2005). On the move to English speaking countries, many EFL English users sense this mismatch in their English language. This frustration may be the result of not practising everyday English and the limited exposure to native speakers. In what follows, Joko points to the problem that in his social life he is unable to communicate with his local friends due to his limited exposure to slang and informal English.

I went to a trip to Great Ocean Road, a very interesting trip, and I met an OZ girl from North West University. And after that, we talked to each other by messenger, and sometimes by phone. But to me, I really prefer to talk to her by messenger than phone, because sometimes I don't understand her on the phone. I can understand messenger, because sometimes, she uses a language that is not familiar for me. And then, I try to check this language in dictionary or something. But I couldn't find this, because they have a different language, special words. So, I prefer text messages and mails. She sometimes asks me why I don't call her. I told her in the first time, I didn't tell her about my problem, but then, I told her that sometimes I don't understand you. So, I prefer to communicate with you with this messenger. I think language is not only affecting me in my academic life, but also in my social life.  
(G2 S2)

Joko here clearly pointed out that his limited prior exposure to informal English was impeding social networking. He referred to phrases he could not find in dictionaries, and that he preferred written electronic communication which gave him more time to analyse the English and prepare his responses. On the phone, he cannot see the phrases and they do not sound familiar to him either. But with messenger, he can read the phrases and look them up.

Aini was also very conscious about learning to use slang. She commented that slang is part of tearoom conversations and everyday interactions and therefore she needs to learn the expressions if she wants to become engaged in the interactions.

Aini: Do you say words like breaky, telly?

Clare: Yeah, slang, yeah.

Jan: A cuppa

Aini: What?

Jan: A cup of tea, yeah the slang. Everybody here uses them, very often.

Aini: Yeah, I don't know. Sometimes, I don't understand them. I am teaching international students in MC, prior to my teaching, I had observation to a local teacher, teaching. Her name is Michelle. Michelle was talking to her students about slang. This is what happens in Australia, and people all use it, the words they use, slang. And I saw all the students wanted to know about it. I was thinking that I need to learn slang. A lot of people use slang here, yeah?

Clare: Yeah we all use it.

Jan: Sometimes, we say something like, we're going to the loo.

Aini: What? What's that?

Clare: Going to toilet or...

Joko: Uh, I didn't know that, uh [laugh].

Jan: This arvo. What are you doing this arvo?

Clare: Arvo, this afternoon, arvo, short form for this afternoon.

Joko: Not so many, you just listed four.

Jan: Uh, quite many. Telly for television, we use them automatically. We shorten everything, names also we shorten. (G2S3)

Aini here talked about phrases that she heard among local students, but sometimes could not understand, slang and certain language to which she felt not been exposed. To feel like an insider, she felt the need to understand and exchange words such as ‘breaky,’ ‘cuppa,’ or ‘this arvo.’ To her, these phrases were like secret keys which could build and sustain social networks and memberships. When she failed to use them, she felt outside of the circle. Both Clare and Jan confirmed that slang was very common in their language.

The data in this section underlines the role of language in the negotiation of social membership and integration into the L2 community. Given the informal context of the interactions, international students stressed their need to familiarize themselves with Australian slang. As pointed out by Sawir et al. (2008), such a focus is not part of EFL preparatory courses for academic purposes in many countries. Australian slang is not on the agenda of English teaching in Bangladesh, China, Indonesia or Malaysia where the students in this study came from, but the data here suggest it can be as important as formal grammatical rules in social language use.

## **5.10 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has focused on the contexts of intercultural interaction, and how participants in this study perceived their interaction patterns. Based on the discussions between the participants and also their interviews, it was argued that many different factors are involved, which makes intercultural interactions more demanding and sometimes more superficial than communication where a culture is shared. This in turn may influence the language strategies involved. Differences may encompass an array of social, cultural and

linguistic factors such as cultural gaps, constraints on topic selection, legitimacy and being judged, and social and professional identity. These factors are integrated and interdependent.

While previous research has identified certain strategies as applied in ESL/EFL contexts such as *avoidance*, *support*, or *ask for clarification* to help interlocutors communicate despite their second language limitations, the data in this study suggest that strategic interaction is not necessarily just language-oriented. This study illustrates that participants in intercultural interactions choose strategies for saving face, avoiding conflicts, and negotiating unfamiliarity with the cultural or social norms or with the local Discourses.

In line with the literature, the data in this research showed that the presence of native speakers during intercultural interactions does make a difference in the interaction patterns. The fear of being judged on the basis of legitimacy to speak or comment in English among native speakers, consciousness about the social and cultural appropriateness of utterances and the feeling of being different or speaking with a different accent and style all make it more stressful for nonnative speakers – and particularly newcomers – to speak out among native speakers. On the other hand, the sympathy and empathy that is established among newcomers from different backgrounds makes their connection amongst themselves easier.

Data also showed how unfamiliarity with informal discourses, cultural themes, and Australian slang can impede international students' social integration and engagement in daily interactions. Participants monitored and controlled their language strategies in order to enact their imagined social identity throughout their interactions. Further it was shown how issues of 'face' impact student participation.



In the next chapter, I elaborate on some strategies used to negotiate social, cultural and physical space. These strategies will be linked to the elements raised here as part of the background context.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **STRATEGIC NEGOTIATION OF SPACE AND IDENTITY**

#### **OVERVIEW**

In Chapter Five, I argued that language interactions are dynamic sites for engagement, participation and learning. ‘Fluidity’ of identity, culture and representations in interactions was a salient theme in the data. Unlike ‘fixity,’ ‘fluidity’ brings the need for negotiation. Student mobility has opened spaces for negotiation of boundaries and identity (Singh, Rizvi & Sheresta, 2007). Singh and Doherty (2004) argue that the ‘flow’ of international students to Australian universities has turned institutions to “global education contact zones” (p. 11). Pennycook (2005) advocates the need for a “pedagogy of flow” based on the argument that “students can no longer be understood as located in a bounded time and space in and around their classrooms, but rather are participants in a much broader set of trans-cultural practices” (p. 29). Negotiation has been a recurring theme in recent research on multicultural interactions as endemic to global communication.

In this chapter, I address the second research question which verifies the ties between language and identity in the context of this study, and argue that since the dynamics of ‘flow’ is tied to the dynamics of representation, participation and learning, the negotiation of space and identity through interaction strategies is part of any pedagogy for Australian universities as global learning sites. In the first section, 6.1, I illustrate how participants negotiated their physical, cultural, and social space in their interactions. Then I analyse the impact of accent on space. In section 6.2, I describe how multicultural encounters such as those recorded in tearooms are stages for identity negotiation. In

particular, I focus on the negotiation of social and cultural identity in multicultural encounters and add a third identity theme, namely *institutional identity*, which is also subject to negotiation in social interactions. In 6.3, I discuss the role of English language in social inclusion and access to academic networks and the discriminating power of English. I then argue that multicultural encounters with native speakers can be seen as gate-keeping encounters and the basis for judgment over legitimacy of membership.

## **6.1 NEGOTIATION OF SPACE**

Kostogriz (2005) points out that personal space is dynamically negotiated in language interactions. He refers to the process as “related to the use of language (discourses) through which people construct, imagine and formulate their understanding of places, making sense of their situationality in those places and, hence, of their situated identities” (p. 188).

Kostogriz writes about the importance of daily workplace encounters as space for representations of professional knowledge and practice. He refers to multicultural institutional sites as stages for negotiation of social, cultural, personal, and professional space. He advocates that learning in workplace interaction sites is overshadowed by the hegemonic, hounding and aligned nature of multicultural encounters and can only be facilitated by opening a space for hegemony-free dialogue which he refers to as the ‘Thirdplace.’

In their study to reflect tertiary international students’ experience and efforts in negotiating space, Singh et al. (2007) note that international students negotiate a space which is neither home nor abroad to them, but is where they could sense they belonged to. They note four challenges faced by students in their negotiations of space, writing,

First, the sense of otherness generated by language and cultural barriers provide them with the threshold for negotiating a space in which to secure a sense of

belonging. Second, space is shown to be integral to the shift in balance between the challenges of day-to-day survival and building a sense of independence and opportunities. Third, there is the dilemma of generating a sense of belonging (or not) in the quest for global cultural spaces, as students seek to create new spaces that are both vehicle for promoting global uniformity as much as they are sites of division and diversity. And finally, the new spaces produced by the students are not neutral and contain markers of class formations and privilege, with their mobility becoming a major element in their sense of cosmopolitanism. (p. 198)

In the recorded tearoom conversations in this study, participants seemed aware that their staffroom interactions were part of the construction of their new social and professional identity. Their struggles to navigate their space strategically and negotiate their identity in their new community could be observed in their interaction patterns. In other words, their interaction strategies were partly influenced by their intention to negotiate their physical, cultural, social and professional space. For instance, their silence, avoidance, seeking help, or topic management strategies were all tied to their management of space and identity. In this chapter, I elaborate on how participants strategically negotiated their personal and professional space within their university, and how this negotiation was reflected in their language interactions. In what follows, I look at physical, cultural and social space and the role of accent in multicultural encounters.

### **6.1.1 Physical space**

Negotiation of personal space is a social objective in everyone's daily life. One aspect of personal space which was negotiated by participants in this study was their physical space. The data in this section illustrate how students from different backgrounds negotiated their physical space in the student lounge and staffrooms. Amar, a student from Mongolia, here talks about negotiation of physical space at lunch-time in the student lounge:

Most of the time, only international students go for lunch on the table in the lounge, and sometimes only local students are there. So, when there are local students, international students don't go, and when there are international students, local students don't go to that table. (G1S3)

Amar talked about the physical space between international and local students. She made observations about the student-lounge where students usually eat lunch, have a cup of coffee or meet to talk. She observed that both international and local students refrained from mingling with each other and sitting by the same table in the lounge.

I had used the postgraduate centre lounge Amar was talking about several times and my observations were similar to hers. In the same centre, several times, I observed the physical space between international and local students. Whenever I dropped in the lounge for lunch or coffee, I saw student groups from the same country, sitting at one end of the room, and Australian students sitting at the other. Even by timing and using the lounge at different times, student groups managed to negotiate their physical space. Centre coordinators seemed to have allowed this arrangement in allocating new students into their rooms. During my stay, I did not see international and local students sharing their office-space.

Amar continued to talk about the division of physical space in lectures and connected this space to contribution and engagement,

Yeah, even in lectures, I see that in mixed groups with international and local students, international students all sit in a corner and they don't ask questions. Always local students ask. In that case, international students are very silent, they keep silent. (G1S3)

Amar pointed to the physical space between international and local students in lecture halls and also international students' silence during lectures. According to her observations, international students tend to sit together at a corner and remain silent during lectures,

while local students get involved in the discussions and engage in lectures by asking questions.

Hanna talked about this physical space in social activities organised by the faculty saying, “We had our friends and we sat close to our friends, and local students sat by another table” (p. 6). Hanna associated physical space with closeness and friendship. She pointed that local students were separated from them physically by sitting around at different tables. She said that the closeness and friendship among international students diminished the physical space between them. Shamim, a PhD student from Bangladesh, reflected on his observations of the physical space between students with different backgrounds linking that to culture,

I tried to join some social activities and enter some discussions in English. But I found that students from each country, are sitting in groups. I mean, there were groups, and students from each country were just enjoying themselves in their groups, but they did not have conversation with other groups. (G2S1)

Shamim here pointed to the social activities arranged by his Faculty for research students. According to Shamim’s observations, students from the same country chose to sit close to each other possibly due to their shared first language. It is easier for them to talk and ask their questions in their first language. He pointed that even when he tried to increase his chances of interaction in English language and probably learning about the new culture, he ended up sitting at a table with a group of students from his own country and not interacting with local students. He stressed that even in such social activities, which are often designed to encourage integration of students, students from different cultural groups tended to sit together and avoided mingling.

Hanna used the metaphor of ‘running’ to describe negotiation of space between herself as part of the international student group and local students as members of an

academic community. She said, “you know, they [local students] are all running and we are not good runners. Sorry, I am talking of myself I am not a good runner, I mean” (G1S1). Hanna perceived herself far away and unable to reach the local student community. Her statements implied her ongoing challenges to negotiate membership, legitimacy and a space close to her local peers.

Although Lave and Wenger (1991) stress that learning happens through ‘legitimate peripheral participation,’ the use of space described by participants raises the questions as to what extent this is enacted in authentic daily encounters? Physical space between international and Australian students was a dominant theme described by the participants. Another theme which emerged in the data was the impact of cultural space on student integration.

### **6.1.2 Cultural space**

Modern anthropology stresses the interrelationship between culture and the situation of personal space within communities (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Daily interactions are stages for the negotiation of cultural self-representations, and second language interactions are part of this. The unavoidable fluidity of the cultural capital in multicultural encounters, the dynamic nature of social identities, along with the diversity of language backgrounds make participants in intercultural interactions negotiate and renegotiate towards some ‘common core’ (Modiano, 2001). In other words, culture, representations, and language are intertwined in second language interactions in multicultural contexts. As Holliday and Aboeshiha (2009) highlight “the flows of cultural forms produce new forms of localisation, and the use of global Englishes produce new forms of global identification” (p. 31).

Considering the sociocultural perspective of this study and the role of human agency in language interactions, the interrelationship between the participants' discourse strategies and the negotiation of their cultural space became a major emerging theme in the data. A recurring theme in the data, as shown in Chapter Five, was the role of culture in building connections in interactions. To some participants cultural space was less negotiable than others. Joko, a PhD student from Indonesia, described his process of negotiation of cultural space this way,

When I talk about my thesis it's easy, but about our life, I feel I don't want to. For example, locals-I don't want to get into their problems. So we might seem nice to each other, say hi or hello, how are you. But, then I mind my own business, and they also mind their own business, you know? So, if I want to speak, then they might say hey mind your business. Or, I say hey mind your business. You know, we have some culture. You know, so, you only say hi, hello, how are you, and then, that becomes something, something everyday. (G2S1)

Joko here talked about boundaries and his perceptions of what could happen in his interactions with local students. He asserted that he chose to avoid personal conversations with people from different culture and preferred to maintain the cultural space. To him cultural differences impede personal connections. He pointed that it was difficult for him to connect to people from different cultures because of his fear of talking over boundaries. That is why he thinks local and international students run into each other in the faculty, greet with each other everyday, but never get close to each other. This, he believes, has become a routine and neither of the two intrude in each other's spaces. Modiano (2001) warns,

For learners who primarily want to acquire the language because it is a useful crosscultural communication tool, pressure to attain near-native proficiency may result in establishing them as auxiliary members of the culture which is



represented by the prescriptive educational standard, something not in harmony with their own self-image. (p. 340)

Joko exemplifies a learner who uses English as a useful tool for communication but not a gate to adopt other cultures. He did not feel culturally close to his Australian friends and was not willing to negotiate his cultural space for the flow of crosscultural communication and building relationships with ‘people with different culture.’ Possibly this was a personal choice for Joko to be self-sufficient and not show interest in other cultures and keep with his own cultural values. To him cultural boundaries were fixed and not open to discussion. That is why he believed that intercultural interactions seem nice at surface but in fact are superficial. Bina agreed with the role of culture in communication and said,

But for me, it is not only the language problem, but it is our culture. Different cultures, when I speak with local students, I feel that they just don’t understand us at once. We have to repeat ourselves but with international students, it is easy.  
( G1S2)

Bina here made a generalisation about culture and placed international and local students into two separate cultural groups. To her, international students share a set of cultural commonalities which ease their communication. In this way, she takes culture beyond a personal level and talks about cultural groups. To her, international students form one cultural group and local students form another. Bina’s use of inclusive ‘we’ for international students signals how she felt part of international student community and apart from local students. She perceives culture as major barrier to communication. She then associated cultural space with gaps in understanding, adding the point that people from different cultural groups cannot understand each other easily. She stated that understanding is easier among international students, despite their different language backgrounds.

Holliday and Aboeshiha (2009) point out that language interactions in multicultural contexts are embedded with cultural stereotyping. They argue that, “the common descriptions of other cultures, under the headings of individualism and collectivism, which appears to be neutral, are in fact underpinned by cultural prejudice” (p. 669). Such embedded cultural stereotyping in language interactions can make them asymmetrical in nature, congested with negotiations of power, and thus opens doors to discrimination. It is interesting to see the impact of cultural stereotyping on the space between international and local students in this study. What Bina and Joko implied in the above data gives us an idea about why international students feel more comfortable in approaching each other and interacting within their group, despite their diversity. The data have indicated that cultural space causes a space in understanding, connection and communication. The sociocultural nature of language interactions shows how communication depends on far more than language skills.

Seidelhofer (2004) points out that in second language interactions, the greater the gap between the participants’ language proficiency level, the more they need to negotiate shared understanding. Based on the data in this section, it can be concluded that in multicultural or intercultural contexts, negotiation takes place beyond the language level. Negotiation of cultural space involves intercultural aspects, identity and perceptions. For example, Bina clearly pointed to the strategy of repetition for self-clarification in her interactions. She explained that the use of this strategy was not only for language problems but also to negotiate cultural gaps. In traditional second language acquisition contexts, researchers have identified a variety of communication strategies used by nonnative speakers to help their speaking and listening skills. Lesznyák (2002) argues that in ESL contexts nonnative speakers use a variety of strategies to negotiate understanding while

native speakers seemed fixed in their norms and standards. The data in this study, although taken from a small sample, showed that in multicultural contexts, too, international students feel able to flexibly negotiate their cultural space and build relations and connections among themselves. Social space is another fluid notion in multicultural encounters which is discussed below.

### **6.1.3 Social space**

Daily social interactions are important learning sites for many international students. As mentioned in Chapter Five, many international students choose to study in Australia as an English speaking country to improve their English in a social immersion context. They want to improve their English language and learn more about Australian culture through daily social interactions with native speakers. Participants in this study, however, talked about the space they felt between themselves and the local society in their daily interactions outside university. They felt they were closer to other immigrants or international students in their community, workplace or neighborhood than the local community. For instance, Shamim brought an example from his workplace to talk about the social space he felt between himself and his local colleagues.

Sometimes, we have no good place, no good time, to talk with locals, unless we have something outside the academic life. But for example in my case, I used to work in a bakery. And most workers were Indians and Indonesians, only very few local workers. And it was very friendly you know. And I had contact only with non locals. (G2S1)

Here, Shamim talked about his part-time work environment outside university. He declared that initially he considered his part-time work environment a potential place for social interaction with Australians outside the academia. But later, he failed to build a close and

friendly connection with his local colleagues. Previous research in other multicultural societies like Canada shows that immigrants and minority groups in English speaking countries experience more attachment to other minority communities than with the local community (Han, 2009). Here, too, Shamim who is from Bangladesh, found it easier to connect to his Indian or Indonesian colleagues. Another participant, Aini, talked about her social space with her neighbors this way,

Aini: I live in a unit, there are 12 units. There are people from Nigeria I think, Chinese also and the owner is Australian. What I experience is my neighbors seem very busy, very busy. I wanted to say hello to them, but the Australian lady seems so far from me. She is always busy. It is very different from what I expected. Do you think it is because they are always busy?

Joko: See, they are busy, but you are also busy, same, same. But you say hello.  
( G2S2)

Aini, a full-time PhD student, part-time teacher and mother of two, here talked about her limited social interactions with her neighbors. She lived in a unit complex where 12 units were rented by a diverse group of people and shared a yard. Aini used the idea of “so far from me” to describe the social space with her Australian landlady and mentioned that she could not sense closeness between neighbors. She suggested whether the distance she perceived was due to busy lifestyles and limited time. The metaphor of being ‘far’ from each other suggests that Aini cannot imagine herself in a similar social place with her neighbors, and particularly with her Australian landlady.

In one conversation, Joko put Clare on the spot and asked her about her past experience in mixing with international students,

Joko: So, you have made friends with international students from which country?

Clare: Uh, yeah. Mmmmmm, let me think, hhhmm yeah, probably, I know some Lebanese I think. I probably haven’t had much contact yet. But I think we

assume that international students are happy on their own, doing their own things. So you don't sort of feel that.

Joko: Local people who have been dealing with international students might have different views. So, I think contact is the best practice here for communication.  
(G2S3)

Clare's hesitation in answering Joko's question implies that she could hardly find any cases of close social relationship with her international peers. She only mentioned a conversation she had once with a Lebanese student. Later, she said she always assumed that international students were happy on their own and they did not seem to need local friends. As Joko also implied the social space between international students and the local community seems to have resulted in generalisations about both groups which are often wrong. Joko stressed that local people who have closer contact with international students are usually more aware of their needs and said "contact is the best practice." What stands out in the above discussions is the interrelationship between social space and communication.

The data in this section show that fixed boundaries have the potential to block communication flow. Therefore, communication flow in multicultural contexts correlates with the flow of physical, social, and cultural space. The social, cultural and physical space between international and Australian students impedes their communication. Among themselves, international students feel close and allied, which helps their communication despite their diversity. This closeness, connection and empathy enable them to communicate easily despite their vast variety of language accents. Physical, cultural and social space is less felt in international/ international student communication and therefore understanding is more. Communication strategies help the negotiation of space and thus help the communication flow.

#### 6.1.4 Accent and space

The interrelationship between accent, space and communication flow was another emerging theme in the data. As Kell and Vogl (2007) write,

Many international students prior to coming to Australia have spent many years learning to speak English and thus enter the country unaware of the extent to which local accents, fast speech and Australian colloquialisms are going to reduce their ability to speak and understand English in Australia. (p. 2)

Similarly participants here talked about their communication problems with their local peers. They highlighted the difference between understanding academic conversations and daily conversations outside their university.

Ratna: But you know, I think what I am experiencing is different. I have no problem understanding people here. I mean local staff here, but outside, I mean in the streets, I can't understand local people at all, not in the university.

Amar: Yes, non academics. Their language is very different, also very heavy Australian accents.

Ratna: Yes, I just can't understand them.

Bina: Yes, and they maybe using slang, and we are not supposed to know slang, you know?

Ratna: Yes, once I was speaking with a security, not here in the university, in a shop. And I couldn't understand what he was talking about. He was one of these local people. And I couldn't understand him, you know. And I just said OK, OK, I leave.

Amar: Usually, I found that academic people are Ok.

Bina: Yes, they speak the standard things, and very straightforward. (G1S2)

Both Ratna and Amar talked about the Australian accent and its impact on communication with the local community. Ratna highlighted the difference between understanding a male security guard in a shopping centre and her supervisor at university. Both could communicate with academics much easier than with people on the streets who may speak

with a heavy Australian accent. The majority of interaction contexts for Ratna and other participants are located in their faculty and with people who have similar academic backgrounds. Once they were in the wider society for their daily interactions, they found it difficult to communicate with local people. This barrier can restrict social interactions. Ratna's words: "OK, OK, I leave" show her frustration and incomprehension of the situation.

Ratna also talked about her strategy of evading communication or message abandonment. She abandoned the communication above to avoid further interaction. Bina's sentence, "we are not supposed to know slang" shows that some international students still have a perception that learning slang and colloquial English are not meant to be part of their repertoire. As mentioned in Chapter Five, many international students were not exposed to Australian accent, colloquial English and slang in their EFL classes. Once they start authentic interaction with the local community, they realise the importance of knowledge of Australian colloquial language and slang in their daily interactions. This mismatch, as Sawir (2005) has also stressed, impacts on the ability to communicate with the local community.

The above data showed that international students also compared the intelligibility of the English spoken by academics in their faculty with that of the people on the streets. They referred to the English they hear at university 'standard' and 'straightforward' and the English on the street as 'difficult.' Joko distinguished between communication with urban citizens and rural citizens in Australia. He said,

When with my friends, we went to countryside, we went to a caravan park. Countryside of Australia speak very differently. Sorry?, sorry?, sorry? They didn't understand us, we didn't understand them either. So, sorry?, sorry? So for some

people who have never met immigrants, or who have never been in multilingual places, it is difficult to understand us. (G2S2)

Joko made the point that the experience of living in multilingual contexts facilitates interaction between people from different cultures. Those who live in cities have the experience of interaction with immigrants where newcomers find jobs or study. Joko added that the incomprehension with the rural people was mutual, and was due to little experience of both sides in understanding each other's accents. Joko then talked about his expectation of local Australians to familiarize themselves with accented English,

Joko: Have you familiarized yourself, your hearing with accented English like ours?

Clare: Hmmmm, not really. We have to listen, I have to really listen. They are so different.

Joko: Sometimes I feel it is unfair we have to learn English, how you speak Australian accent, and we try to be as close to your accent, Australians, you know? (G2S3)

Joko here talked about his expectation of Australians as citizens of a multicultural society to familiarize themselves to and show some effort in hearing and understanding international accents. He claimed that it was not fair that newcomers to Australia need to try hard to understand and adjust to the Australian accent and in return see no sign of attempt for understanding from native speakers. For him the effort should be reciprocal. He continued, "Here, we have so many accented English, why do you hear just your accent? Why don't you try to hear accented English? They have to give us some air (G2S3)."

Joko here made the argument that citizens of highly multicultural societies such as Australia need to accept and hear accented English instead of expecting a native standard. In contrast, Aini talked about her desire to sound like Australians. She said,



I personally like Australian people and their culture. Sometimes I feel I really want to speak like them, with Aussie accent and use their slang, but I can't. I have learned American English. So, I think I am always a foreigner. (G2S2).

Aini sought to integrate into the Australian community but she had learned to speak English with an American accent. She still felt somewhat excluded by this and defined as a 'foreigner.' She thinks newcomers should not be pressed to change the way they speak English to be considered part of the society. Kell and Vogl (2007) argue that for the public Australian, the Australian accent is "evidence of a national character" and a form of resistance to Americanisation or the domination of the English colonial masters (pp. 1-2). Likewise, Aini stressed that she felt like a foreigner in Australia because of her accent.

In what follows, Shamim, a PhD student from Bangladesh, highlighted the hegemony of English language more broadly.

Yeah, actually I don't have any direct experience like this, but, I can compare this kind of experience with my country. There are some foreigners in my country working there. They try to learn our language; Bangla, because it is the only language speaking there whether you are international or not. But when foreigners try to speak our language, we like it very much. Whether their accent is not good or their speaking is not accurate, but we like it. We try to understand what their feeling is, try to understand them. But, I don't know the OZ people. (G2S2)

Shamim compared English language learners with Bangla language learners and the way they are treated and accepted by the native Bangla speakers. He pointed out that in Bangladesh people like to see foreigners trying to learn Bangla and even if they speak Bangla with errors or strange accents, people try to understand them, and appreciate their efforts.

To conclude this section on accent, international students made judgments about the different Englishes they hear in Australia. They made distinctions between local people

who came from academic backgrounds and the ordinary people on the streets. They also distinguished between rural and urban Australians and pointed out that they could communicate with urban people more easily than with rural Australians. International students also expressed an expectation of local Australians to understand non-local Englishes. The Australian accent might thus be perceived as a filter which amplifies the space between Australian and non-Australian students.

The fluidity of identity in language interactions was a central and recurring theme in the data, and second language interactions involve constant negotiation of identity, which is the theme of the following section

## **6.2 LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY**

The interrelationship between language and identity has been established in much recent literature (Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2004, 2006; Miller, 2003, 2004). Social identities are constructed in language interactions, as Gee (2007) highlights, “it’s not just what you say or even just how you say it, it’s also who you are and what you’re doing while you say it” which shapes us and the way we engage in the world (p. 3). Norton (1997) stresses that identities dynamically emerge in language interactions and gaining and being denied access to powerful social networks depends on the ability to construct and enact social identities. Miller (2009) argues that it is not enough to engage in social interactions, but one needs to enact a recognisable ‘self,’ legitimate for membership in social groups.

International students in this study were well aware of the interrelationship between their social interactions and construction of their social and academic identities. However, for participants in this study, enacting social identities was at times hindered by limited exposure to informal L2 Discourses, and more importantly limited exposure to the

embedded cultural and social practices of university. They tended to maintain their cultural identities and yet engage in their new academic community's interactions, seeking to become legitimate members. Negotiation was central to this process.

### **6.2.1 Negotiation of social identity**

Despite the recent emphasis in literature on second language acquisition through second language social interaction and the importance of socialisation on language learning (Block, 2004; Duff, 2003), most international students in this study stated that they used to be much more sociable in their own countries, and moving to a new environment had limited their social interaction. They explained how they were unable to enact this sociable identity in their interactions within the faculty. In Xia's words, "Everyone likes to get together but because it is a new culture, we prefer to keep silent" (G2S1, p. 4). Joko added,

Sometimes, when I want to speak, I think I might be rude. So, I don't ask. But then I think if I don't ask they may say he is not understanding. So, it is difficult, yeah."  
Then I think if it is unnecessary then why should I go and speak? You know our culture is different. (G2S2)

Joko explained how his feelings affected his language interactions and how he strategically tried to manage to negotiate his social identity. He did not want to be judged rude nor passive. Aini agreed with Joko and said she had lost her sense of humour and her sociable personality in her English interactions. Kettle's (2005) study on an international postgraduate student named Woody who was taking an Educational Leadership Course at an Australian university showed how "Woody's discursive practice constituted a program of agentive action through which he created a new social positioning for himself within an Educational Leadership course" (p. 57). The data here showed that in and through informal departmental interactions, Joko, too, engaged himself in a series of 'agentive actions' to

reposition himself, a plan which he described as ‘difficult’ and challenging due to the cultural, social and pragmatic differences.

I think, for me, I don’t have a sense of humor anymore. I mean I like to be a fun friend not a machine, you know. So, I am still learning, how to react with a quick response, with a quick joke, how to use slang(G2S2).

Aini explained how her unfamiliarity with Australian colloquial language, slang, and local jokes had kept her from showing her fun side in her interactions. That was why, she claimed, she had put effort to learning Australian colloquialism.

In contrast, Xia talked about her close friendship with an Australian teacher. She challenged other participants’ ideas of not being able to enact their social identity in their second language interactions as follows,

In my second semester, I lived with an Australian teacher. She was very kind and invited me to a lot of social activities she had with her friend. And that was a very good chance for me to improve my English. We lived together for some time. I think that’s the best way for international students to know these people and English is to live with them. (G2S2)

The counter-example, Xia’s case, suggests how the depth of the relationship could alter the communication. Gaining confidence in speaking English with native speakers and initiating social interaction was facilitated for Xia by a close local friend. Of the eight participants, this opportunity only occurred for Xia. She continued,

She [her Australian friend] was very interested in Chinese culture and food. I never felt like a foreigner. I really felt comfortable to talk to her and her friends. This, I think really helped me to improve my English and learn the Australian way of life. (G2S2)

Xia here talked about mutual learning, understanding and development. Cadman (2005a) stresses that only internationalisation in Australian universities cannot be claimed unless

they invest intellectually in ‘transcultural’ learning. She argues that all students can experience mutual learning and growth within transcultural learning and teaching spaces. Xia here stressed how her confidence in speaking English, building social relationships with the local community, and learning a new culture was enhanced through mutual and transcultural learning.

Cadman (2005a) criticises the materialistic alignment of the internationalisation plan of Australian universities and argues that there has not been enough intellectual investment in opening transcultural learning spaces in postgraduate research programs in Australia. The data here emphasised the significance of this investment, yet implied that only one of the students had experienced such a learning space.

Along with literature, the above data illustrate how social identities and communication flow are interrelated, how the enactment of social identities is embedded in language interaction, and how language and communication skills play a part in showing a sense of self in daily interactions. International students in this study explained how they could not afford to enact their sense of humor, or their more sociable personality in their English interactions as well as they could in their mother tongues. It was also suggested that the depth and intimacy of relationships can influence communication and help new international students negotiate a social identity in their interactions with the local community. Cultural identity was also negotiated in the multicultural encounters recorded in this study.

### **6.2.2 Negotiation of cultural identity**

Pennycook (2005) suggests that the flow of international students into Australian universities has turned them to zones for global contact and interaction. He writes,

I am interested here in the ways in which the flows of cultural forms produce new forms of localisation, and the use of global Englishes produce new forms of global identification. (p. 31)

Pavlenko (2001) argues that cultural identity is constantly subject to negotiation in language use. She considers negotiation of cultural identity as part of socialisation in multicultural contexts and among people with diverse cultural backgrounds. In the context of this study, students' casual conversations with other students featured this theme of negotiation. The eight students in this study differed in the way they chose to negotiate their cultural identity in their interactions. At one end, Xia chose to flexibly negotiate her cultural identity to connect to her Australian friend and at the other end, Ratna showed minimal signs of negotiation and preferred avoidance and silence over connection. In Ratna's words,

In the beginning, I tried to avoid interactions with local students and kept silent and preferred to eat my lunch in my room, because you know, the culture is different. I might say something and they get me wrong. (G1S1)

While literature reports that strategies such as silence or avoidance are used when negotiations for understanding fail due to language gaps (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Pica, 1994), Ratna here explained that she used these strategies when she felt she was unable to negotiate her cultural identity.

Joko had a more materialistic view of the negotiation of cultural identity. Participating in new culture seemed not to interest him. It all depended on his long-term goals.

I think if we want to stay here after PhD and apply for PR [Permanent Residency] here, then it is very important to find some local friends and get close to them. But for me, I want to return to my country after PhD. So, why should I learn their culture? (G2S2)

Joko was an international student who was sponsored by his own government to study in Australia. He considered himself as a temporary resident of Australia and had plans to return to his own country after graduation. Joko's words suggest that he had not made a connection between language and culture. His motivation for getting a PhD was instrumental and he did not have interest in learning a new culture. He implied that he was not willing to sacrifice his cultural identity for integration. What can be understood in Joko's statement is the link he makes between culture, assimilation, closeness and staying in Australia. Joko cannot see himself in a close relationship with Australian friends or the Australian culture.

In contrast, Aini's case was an interesting example of 'global identification.' Neither did she want to be marginalised and nor did she tend to sacrifice her own religious beliefs for integration. The fact that Aini was wearing an Islamic scarf showed that she did not want to sacrifice her beliefs for integration. And her efforts in learning Australian colloquialism and finding a close Australian friend showed her willingness to communicate and integrate. She tried to avoid choosing between marginalisation and assimilation by negotiation. In different parts of the conversations she stressed she wanted to enact a sociable and culturally open identity and find close Australian friends and learn more about the Australian culture. She said, "I really want to find a close Australian friend but so far I couldn't." She asked Clare,

Aini: If you see a student with scarf in this room do you go and talk to her?

Clare: Well. I suggest communication would be difficult, because the difference is so obvious. (G2S3)

Clare here linked cultural and religious identity to communication and suggested that communication with people who have different beliefs might be difficult. Clare's response

to Aini's question suggests that for some people, cultural or religious beliefs are fixed and less open to negotiation. By spotting on Clare, Aini wanted to challenge this general perception and yet signal her willingness to communicate, integrate and negotiate cultural identity.

From the above, it can be seen that international students are diverse in the way they experience being a student in Australia, negotiate their new social identities, and think about culture and integration. The data illustrate that they should not be considered as a homogeneous group. It can also be concluded that cultural and social choice can block integration and constructive participation as significantly as the language barrier. Ridley (2004) emphasises the effectiveness of socially situated approaches like those advocated by Vygotsky (1978), or Lave and Wenger (1991) in bridging the gaps between newcomer international students' skills and those expected by academics. She stresses the importance of "critical moments for conversation" on international students' learning and writes,

If the doors are genuinely open, it should be possible to walk through them both ways, giving space for mutual learning between cultures and allowing for the emergence of new and valued higher education discourses incorporating aspects of each one.(p. 106)

It should be acknowledged that even if doors are open, Joko's choice not to engage remains an option. Modiano (2001) writes that for many adult English as second language users, acculturation is not a motivation. Instead, he reports, many of them wish to use English to communicate with people across borders while maintaining their cultural identity.

Similarly, postgraduate international students in this study expressed their awareness that culture is fluid in social interactions. Nevertheless, they were different in the way they negotiated cultural identity in their second language interactions. For instance, Joko wanted to maintain his cultural identity in his interactions in the new community and also said, "I



think I like to talk about my research, but not about personal things. You know our culture is different” (G2S2). Xia enjoyed engaging with her Australian housemate and in her own words, put an effort to learning “the Australian way of life.” Other participants were also trying to maintain their cultural identity and at the same time integrate into the local community.

A recognised part of the negotiation of identity for these participants was to achieve new academic identities in their institution. In the following section, I analyse the way they negotiated this membership, or what I call their *institutional identity*.

### **6.2.3 Negotiation of institutional identity**

In relation to social identities which are subject to negotiation, Pavlenko (2001) calls for further research to identify and analyse more identity streams which are negotiated in the process of language interaction. She writes,

Future studies may refine this analysis with regard to other identities, including religious and sexual, and examine if it can be applicable to other areas where negotiation takes place, such as institutional encounters” (p. 339).

Data in this study, collected from casual staffroom interactions of students and staff, showed that participants who were all newcomers to the institution used tearoom informal interactions to negotiate an *institutional identity* which brought legitimacy to their new memberships in their academic institution. Having no set postgraduate courses, as mentioned in Chapter Five, all participants pointed out that their only academic contact within their faculty was their main supervisor. The students were looking for more opportunities for interaction, apart from their supervision meetings and occasional faculty seminars. As Hanna said, “We need to go and talk to people about our research. Otherwise, how do we know anyone is interested? OK, we know that our supervisor is interested but

we need more people, you know?” (G2S1, p. 3). Through interaction with other members, and in an attempt to bring value to their memberships, the participants dynamically negotiated ‘a legitimate PhD student’ identity in the tearooms.

The conversational data of this study were recorded in the first few months of the participants’ arrival at the university. Most participants had left their ‘teacher’ or ‘academic’ identities, their ‘insider’ positions in their old institutions, and were experiencing multiple identity transitions; from teacher to novice student, from legitimate social member to newcomer, from native speaker to nonnative speaker. In this context and time, I observed, new international students tried to construct and negotiate a new form of social identity, which began upon their enrolment and gradually shaped as they started their journey as postgraduate research students in a Western university.

Like many other students or employees new to institutions, international PhD students in this study sought legitimacy in their new memberships in their educational institution in Australia. They showed a desire to mingle with the local community, not only as a basic social need but also to construct and develop their new social identity as postgraduate students. For postgraduate research students in this study, tearoom conversations provided one platform for the construction and negotiation of their institutional identities. Bina, described her negotiations this way,

It is important that we go and talk to them and show them that we are here and we are studying hard. Because they might think we can’t discuss academic things like them. (FG1)

Bina talked about how she felt other members might perceive the international student as not being able to actively participate in scholarly debates. She argued that international students as a group needed to resist the inferior and weak student identity. Her statement

showed her desire for getting a voice and also showed the significant role of discussions she perceived in the negotiation of membership and institutional identity.

Another participant, Ratna, described her transition from a teacher to a student this way, “They treat me as a student. They don’t understand that I was a teacher in my country ( FG1).” Ratna’s sentence shows how identity transition was a challenge for her and influenced the way she was constructing her new institutional identity. Ratna felt her imagined ‘PhD student’ identity was not reflected back to her. At the PhD level, she expected an academic identity which was more than ‘student.’ Xia, too, who had worked in China as an English language teacher for several years before coming to Australia as a student, was hit by this transition. In Australia, she nevertheless felt that her English was not good enough for integration with the native speakers and that she could not engage in discussions in seminars. She explained,

I already, I come from already a very good job. My English was not good enough even though I taught English for seven years. But I need to do many discussions, and a lot of discussions are initiated by local students, you know. (G2S1)

Besides transition from teacher to student, Xia experienced another identity transition. In her country, China, and among other nonnative English speakers, her English was considered good enough to earn her a teaching position. In Australia, and among native English speakers, she felt she did not have that level of fluency. Xia talked about her challenges to construct, maintain and develop her new academic identity. She asserted that despite her initial optimism, in the real interactions in her target community, she struggled to engage in discussions. She explained, she did not see herself in an equal academic space with her local peers and immediately connected the gap to language and communication skills. This situation, she added, was very stressful for her and was totally different from her initial expectation. She mentioned that most discussions were initiated by local students

and she felt under pressure to hold up to their level. The transition from a ‘teacher identity’ to a ‘student identity’ along with the transition from ‘fluent in English’ in China to only an ‘average’ English speaker in Australia, is challenging for Xia.

The above discussion, recalls Pavlenko and Norton’s (2007) notion of ‘imagined identities.’ Participants felt a gap between their ‘imagined identities’ in their new academic community and what was reflected back to them. The construction and negotiation of ‘legitimate PhD student’ identity was not easy for participants as nonnative English speakers. The English language itself was an intervening factor. Shamim described his understanding of the gap between his imagined identity and what was reflected back to him this way,

I was hopeful before coming here that with a PhD from Horizon University I could find an academic job in Australia, but now I think it is difficult. I think my English is not good enough, you know. I mean I tried to find a part-time job, but I couldn’t. (G2S2)

In one focus group discussion, I asked about the extent to which students thought English played a role in their professional possibilities and achievement. These were some of their answers:

- Aini: I work as a part-time English teacher in a TAFE institute.  
What I observe is that all other teachers are locals. Actually the only other non-Australian teacher is you (pointing to me). And for me, I can never imagine they’d hire me someday as a full-time staff member. Because they hired me as an emergency teacher to substitute their teachers when they cannot make it to come to class. Most of them, their education is not like me, I mean they only have a certificate in teaching but you know I am a PhD student in English teaching. I think their policy is to try to hire native speakers for full-time.
- Ratna: But I don’t blame them. It is their language you know.  
We can’t, I mean I am talking about myself, I don’t think I can ever

speaking English like them.

Joko: But even in jobs not teaching English, in their job ads, they always want strong communication skills and I never know what 'strong' means. I mean I think my English is good but sometimes I can't get those jobs. Once I applied for a part-time job outside university in a shop and I was rejected. I don't think that job needed much English at all. Sometimes I think it is only something when they want to reject you. (FG1)

Aini, Ratna and Joko here talked about their work opportunities in Australia and the impact of being a nonnative English speaker. They mentioned that particularly in the profession of English language teaching, they could feel discrimination between native and nonnative teachers to the extent that Aini felt she could never be hired as a full-time staff member in spite of her university qualifications. Ratna, however, found it natural that native English speakers were preferred for this profession, given their language proficiency.

Holiday and Aboeshiha (2009) warn against discrimination in the TESOL profession, the data above imply the existence of such discrimination. Joko complained that even in non-TESOL jobs, the criterion of 'having strong communication skills' was possibly a motive for discrimination. He pointed out that the standard of 'strong communication skills' for employment was confusing and undefined. An IELTS score of at least 6.5 (i.e. fluent in all the four skills of speaking, reading, listening and writing) had been the condition for admission of the postgraduate international students in this study, not to mention that many of them had worked as professional English language teachers in their countries. Aini had also taught in Australia. Still they felt their professional opportunities lay in the hands of gatekeepers who, as Ryan and Viete (2009) put it, think and act too much ideologically. Ryan and Viete write that "nativespeakerdom" places great pressure on international students to prove their legitimacy among their Australian peers (p. 307). They

criticise the silencing and marginalising nature of power relationships notifying “the suppression of voice” of international students as minority groups, and marginalising them by “the lack of access to privileged positions” can lead to what they call “an intense loss of self-esteem and identity” (p. 307). They write,

‘Nativespeakerdom’ can take many forms, and even those with very sophisticated English-language skills can feel powerless in the new language environment of Academia. (Ryan & Viete, 2009, p. 307)

In what follows, Ratna explained how she felt being judged on her professional legitimacy, and described her ongoing feelings during her interactions with native speakers this way,

Ratna: The most difficult thing for me is that, you know, because I am an English language teacher, you know, I feel I expose myself to a lot of evaluation. I mean they say, oh you are an English teacher and your English is like this!

Hanna: [laughs] Yeah, they say, you are an English teacher! Really! (G1S3)

For Ratna, ‘the most difficult thing’ about having interactions with native speakers was putting herself in the spotlight of gatekeepers’ judgments and exposing herself to their evaluation of her legitimacy. In what follows Aini, who is an emergency English teacher in Melbourne, pointed to her similar challenges saying that,

When I am teaching in classroom to all international students I feel confident in my English and comfortable and I think I concentrate only on the point I want to teach, the content. But when I am in staffroom talking to native English teachers, I feel very uncomfortable, always watching my pronunciation, stressing, you know, and this even makes me make more mistakes. (FG1)

Aini mentioned that away from the feelings of being judged on her legitimacy as an English teacher by her native English-speaking colleagues, and away from being positioned in the spotlight of their disbelieving looks, she had a better command in English and could speak

with fewer mistakes and with concentration on the message rather than on the form. She pointed out that among native speakers, as an English teacher, she constantly tried to watch her English accuracy, which interfered with her concentration on content. She also mentioned that as a nonnative English teacher, speaking with her local colleagues made her feel uncomfortable and consequently she made more mistakes; as if she was seeing herself in a gate-keeping encounter.

The stress of being exposed to judgments and evaluations on legitimacy distracts Aini in her staffroom interactions with her Australian colleagues and affects her self-esteem. Other international students, too, felt uncomfortable speaking with native speakers who knew they were actually English teachers in their countries and the pressure impacted their communication.

Ratna: I don't think I'm uncomfortable in a bad way. But sometimes I'm afraid I will be evaluated, that's the thing that makes me uncomfortable. But, this could be just my thought.

Amar: Yeah, we are just very conscious of whether we make mistakes or not. You know, because English is not our native language. (G1S3)

Ratna pointed out that the feeling of being judged on her legitimacy to be recognised as an English language teacher among native English speakers made her uncomfortable in their interactions. She added that this judgement might actually exist but that's how she felt and made the construction of her professional identity challenging in Australia in spite of working in the same profession for several years in her country.

The above data show that in the process of negotiating a legitimate and legitimated institutional identity, participants were dealing with the pressure of engaging in English language interactions at native-speaker levels, but also were dealing with the fear of having

their legitimacy challenged. Joko tried to resist the portrait of the international student as weak in English communication skills. He asked Clare,

Joko: When you speak to international students, do you slow down?

Clare: Yes

Joko: Uh, I personally don't like it when you slow down, because initially you treat us differently.

Joko knew part of his new institutional identity was imposed by the institution and its members. Clare may slow down in her conversations with international students to help them understand and communicate. But Joko considered this evidence of the assumption that international students had weak English skills. Joko here stressed he was sensitive to being spoken to in a different way. He desired to be involved in interactions with native speakers but on an equal footing.

The above discussion shows how part of Joko's institutional identity was imposed by his institution and pre-existing stereotypes about international students in the perceptions of other members. It also suggests Joko was dynamically negotiating his institutional identity in interactions, working against type. Based on the above data, institutional identity can be defined as the integration of social and recognised professional identity shaped by membership of an institution, through legitimated interactions with other institutional members. Part of this identity is imposed by the institution and other institutional members, while part is negotiated through institutional interactions.

Joko's concern that English language proficiency can be a basis for discrimination has been reflected in the literature as 'linguicism,' the theme of the following section.



### 6.3 LINGUIICISM, ACCENTICISM AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Philipson (2002) writes about the issue of linguicism in the modern multicultural societies. He defines linguicism as discrimination based on language. Participants in this study indicted their confusion over the definition of strong communication skills, often highlighted in job advertisements. Even for jobs that do not require strong English communication skills. The lack of clarity around ‘strong communication skills,’ they suggested, might open doors to subjectivity and discrimination.

In what follows, Joko again raised the issue of social inclusion of immigrants and international students in Australia and the impact of speaking English with an accent,

I think, from the point of view of Australians, we can never get into the circle. I mean we are always foreigners. Appearance and language is their main concern about us. I feel it is a bit unfair, for example some Asians, they are trying to, for example they colour their hair to look like them, but I think, you can’t fool them, you know, they know they are not Australian. That’s one thing, and about language, uh, we have been trying to speak as native as them, you all are aiming to have best accent as you can, but they have never been trying to understand accented English, you know. Some Australians say, I’m sorry, I don’t understand, but why don’t you try to understand accented English? In fact, here, we have so many accented English, why do you hear just your accent? Why don’t you try to hear accented English? So, it’s been unfair for us, for international students, for immigrants. I know that we are living on their land, you see, but, we can’t press our English, you know. **They have to give us some air**, they have to let us, they have to learn different Englishes. This is my experience. (Joko, G2S2, p. 5)

In the above statement, Joko talked about how accented English can be a signal of difference similarly to appearance. He believes that immigrants and international students try to negotiate their new identities in their target society but are hardly included in the

‘circle.’ Joko pointed to the role of English accent in this distance. He mentioned that immigrants and international students try hard to speak English with an Australian accent, yet their efforts are not appreciated by native speakers, although the burden of communication flow is often placed on the shoulders of the newcomers.

Joko believes that people from very different backgrounds live in Australia and therefore Australian citizens need to hear and understand different accents of English. Joko feels like an outsider living on someone else’s land. He has not yet felt himself part of Australia and related that to his different English. He continued, “they have to give us some air, they have to let us, they have to learn different Englishes.” His words suggest that he feels he is under a lot of pressure to adjust to Australian English and needs some space and ‘air’ to maintain his own identity and speak his own English. He expects Australians to hear him as he is. Joko blamed a materialistic society, saying,

Ok if we are talking about this campus, I think, if we have same beliefs, same interests. If we have good contacts here with academics, and we have a strong project, they accept us, they include us. They begin to think of our project, because the project is more important than our skin or our accent, our language. But, if we are talking about outside this campus, Australians outside this campus, I don’t think, they don’t let us into their circle. (G2S2)

Joko pointed out that within the faculty community, he felt students were valued for their projects and knowledge and not for skin colour or accent. He added that international students are accepted in academia if they offer some useful and professional contribution to Australia like their research projects, but they are still not recognised as part of the wider society.

The impact of the hegemony of English language on nonnative speakers’ interactions with the local community has been highlighted by several researchers in the

literature (Block, 2003b; Philipson, 1992; Lippi-Green, 1999; Pennycook, 2004). Miller (2004) writes that for some, accented English can be as excluding as a visibly different appearance. International students in this study felt that their accented English had limited their opportunities for integration. Given the participants' advanced levels of English proficiency in this study, perhaps the term *accentism*, rather than linguicism, better describes how accented English may incite discrimination.

## **6.4 CONCLUSION**

The discussion in this chapter reflects the fluidity of identity in language interactions which opened a space for negotiation. International students dynamically tried to negotiate space and identity in their interactions within the new academic community. They used a range of strategies to negotiate their physical, social, cultural and professional space within the new context, and to integrate into the target community.

It was shown how boundaries and fixities in space and identity impede multicultural interactions and how physical, social and cultural space can block communication flow as much as any language barrier. Amongst themselves, international students felt close and connected in their language interactions, and most of their social interactions were with other international students. Culturally, they also felt closer to other international students than to local students, as if they had negotiated to form a cultural group despite their diversity of origin and language. Local participants also talked about a space between them and their international peers. Both groups mentioned that connecting to the 'Other' was not easy for them. Linguistic and identity negotiation was more evident in international/international student interactions, while fixed language and cultural ideologies impeded some IS/ LS interactions.

The data here, although generated from a small group, support Philipson's (1992) notion of 'linguicism,' and social judgments based on accent. Some of the participants in this study felt they were rejected for jobs just for sounding different, that their accent in English instigated discrimination. This raises the question as to whether discrimination based on accent or *accenticism* could be another form of racism.

Miller (2004) writes that immigrant students seek 'audibility' in Australia. She defines 'audibility' as "the degree to which speakers sound like, and are legitimated by, users of the dominant discourse" (Miller, 2004, p. 291). Participants in this study stressed a desire for 'audibility.' They argued that in multicultural societies such as Australia where the population of immigrants outnumbers its local citizens in some locations, legitimacy to speak should not be based on native-speaker models. International students in this study argued that citizens of multicultural societies need to rethink their ideological views of the standard, hear accented English and show more flexibility for the different.

The data also show how identity is a salient theme in language interactions, as identities are dynamically negotiated in all language encounters. However, in second language interactions, the enactment of social identities is subject to negotiation due to unfamiliarity with the new cultural, social and contextual discourses. Many international students were unable to enact their desired social identity in some second language interactions, which caused them in some instances to avoid social interactions. In other words, using Gee's (2000) model of identity enactment, being new and unfamiliar to the context, and unfamiliar with the discourses of informal conversations, jeopardized some international students' *institutional identity* and legitimate membership in their new academic institution.

Finally it can be concluded that the flow of identity and space is integral to the flow of multicultural communication. The more participants showed willingness for negotiation, the more they could connect in interactions. Fixed physical, social and cultural boundaries limited the room for negotiation and thus communication. The more fixed the space, the harder the communication. It is also important that institutions provide dynamic spaces for ‘transcultural’ learning. Joko felt quite excluded from the broader Australian community interactions but within his academic community he felt he had something to say, to rely on as an asset for identity negotiation. Relying on his knowledge and PhD project, he felt, he could negotiate legitimacy regardless of his skin colour or accented English. His point recalls the responsibility of universities to provide contexts where all students feel their knowledge is valued regardless of their visible or audible differences.

In the last two chapters, I have shown how English language use, social, cultural and personal identity, social integration and recognition are closely related. In the next chapter, I will analyse data from a focus group with the participants two years after the first round of data recordings, when they were in the final stages of completing their PhD journey. These data illustrate how institutional identities are constructed and negotiated in language institutional interactions over time.

# **CHAPTER SEVEN**

## **TWO YEARS ON: FROM INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY TO INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY**

### **OVERVIEW**

In previous chapters it was argued that for all the similarities between the participants, and the tensions, frictions, and negotiations which they had in common, they experienced their research degrees in different ways. Therefore, the process of negotiating a new, yet legitimate institutional identity was slightly different for the participants in this study. My purpose now is to offer an updated account of how each of the participants continued to grapple with the challenges and tensions of being ‘an international student’ in the process of developing a legitimate PhD student identity.

The previous two chapters emphasised the significance of informal departmental interactions in postgraduate research students’ learning, access and success. It was argued that engagement in departmental interactions is tied to institutional representation and for international students this happens in an additional language, namely English. Chapter Five conveyed the participants’ solitude in the beginning of the journey, their challenges as newcomers to a Western university, and the importance of tearoom interactions in the negotiation of international students’ physical, social and cultural space and their PhD student identity. Data also showed how issues such as ‘face,’ fear of being judged, perceived cultural gaps, and unfamiliarity with the Australian colloquial language sometimes kept some new students from openly engaging in informal interactions. Chapter

Six described the ties between language and identity and the complexities of construction, development and negotiation of international students' new institutional identities at a time when they were experiencing multiple identity transitions in a language and culture different from their mother tongue.

The discussion in the previous chapters reflected the participants' views and concerns about their new experience a few months after arriving at the university. This chapter presents data collected two and a half years after the first phase, when the participants were in the final year of their PhD journey. The chapter offers insights into each individual's day-to-day experience of living as a postgraduate student member of an Australian university, and a new member of the broader Australian community.

The chapter starts with a description of the development and negotiation of institutional identities and academic networks of the participants in their faculty. It then raises questions regarding 'international student' as a label, and what and whom it represents. Section 7.2 compares participants' approaches to their Australian education experience and maps the role of agency and intentionality in learning through interaction. Finally, Section 7.3 concludes the chapter with arguments over the complexities and the idiosyncrasies of the process of identity negotiation in and through institutional language interactions.

## **7.1 DEVELOPING AN INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY OVER TIME**

Two years after the completion of the first phase of data collection and analysis, a focus group of four out of the eight student participants talked about the development of their institutional identity over time. In the early stages of their study, almost all participants complained about their solitude in the PhD journey. Two years on, they talked about ways

and strategies through which they sought ‘audibility’, expanded their sense of belonging, established networks and developed legitimate institutional identities.

### **7.1.1 Writing groups and sense of belonging**

Data from the first phase revealed that students felt isolated, detached, and remote from the ‘sources of information’. Two years on, participants talked about the strategies they had developed over this time for integration. For instance, Bina talked about participation in peer groups, which had developed her sense of belonging to the faculty and to the research community.

Uh, when I compare the previous time and now, I am very active now. I am involved in two writing groups and we are very active. So, this way I feel like I belong here, not isolated. So we think we are together in this journey and not isolated as before in the beginning. So I feel like this is a joint journey not a lonely journey. (FG2)

An intense sense of belonging to institution and community facilitates participation, engagement in institutional discourses, and learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the context of Australian universities, Ryan and Viete (2009) identified three major factors that facilitate student integration and learning. “Feelings of belonging” to the academic institution and the academic community is the first factor, along with “being valued as a person with knowledge” and “being able to communicate effectively, creatively, with confidence” (p. 309).

Bina highlighted the role of student writing groups as a major channel through which postgraduate research students in this study formed a ‘Community of Practice,’ generating a sense of belonging to their institution, and reinforcing learning in their community. Bina described ‘her’ writing group this way,



Bina: In my group, we are five, three international students and two local.

R: So being international is irrelevant?

Bina: Not in that group. We feel very close, and our writing is similar and we work together. In that group, we are at the same stage. So, I don't think my writing is crap. So, we can discuss whatever I have. There we can be more open now. People hesitated so much to be in front of others. We are not hesitating anymore. We can bring whatever we have written and we have then that discussion. We get some good feedback from our friends and we have a facilitator also there. (FG2)

In contrast to the feelings of being separate and hesitant at the start, Bina here talked about feeling close, equal and at one with her local peers. Membership in writing groups intensified Bina's sense of belonging to her faculty. Bina's words show how her confidence was improved through this membership, and how she could be open within group. She stressed that confidence had replaced her hesitation "to be in front of others."

To Bina, mixed international/local students' writing groups was a dynamic space for mutual learning and dialogue, free from hegemonic negotiations of power, culture and dominance. She described her learning space as open, free from hesitation, and a place to "get some good feedback from friends." Such an environment has real potential to facilitate learning through interaction. As Monereo (2007) highlights, learning "occurs effortlessly when the relationship with these models is supportive and emotionally positive; however, this internalisation is less smooth when the relationship is strict and based on criticism" (p. 513). Positive experience, supportive interaction and mutual recognition can facilitate progression from the 'inhibitor' or observer stage to the 'protagonist' stage when interlocutors can confidently "play a certain role in the script" (p. 513).

### 7.1.2 Writing groups and the negotiation of institutional identity

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) highlight the importance of understanding situated identities in the light of power relations. They differentiate between three situations where power relations within communities and institutions impact on members' learning: (a) where "the power differential is such that resistances of negotiations are impossible," (b) where "resistances of negotiations are impossible," (c) where "interlocutors or the negotiating parties enjoy a relatively equal power balance" (p. 250). The students' writing groups exemplified the third situation identified by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004). Bina said,

Writing groups are very empowering in establishing our identity. We feel we belong to here and there are local students there too and they are also like us and we can give them feedback too. The PhD student identity is very strong there. (FG2)

Bina described writing groups as an avenue where she could enjoy 'audibility' (Miller, 2003), developing identity and negotiating legitimacy. It is evident that engagement in writing groups had developed Bina's institutional identity. She had been able to negotiate a 'strong' identity in her interactions with her group. Xia, too, talked about the positive influence of the writing groups on her confidence and participation. She said,

I know that in writing the thesis the quality of my writing is not native but actually this [participation in writing groups] helps me reduce my being nervous and now I can submit my writing to my writing group and ask for feedback. So I simply write it out and give it to others. Because it is not criticism they do. They give you comments. I actually struggled a lot. Before, I did not contribute or give any piece of writing to my writing group. But now, I am not afraid anymore. So, I say to myself, write it out and give it out to other people to get their comments; this is not

criticism. Instead of criticism, they give you comments and you can make it better.  
(FG2)

The first focus group showed that international students in this study avoided participation for fear of being in the spotlight of judgments and comparisons to a native-speaker model. Here, Xia talked about her participation in a writing group and its positive influence on her confidence. Like Bina, she had been too nervous to show samples of her writing to her peers for review. But the intimacy among the students in her writing group had given her the confidence to show her writings to her peers. Her words, “it is not criticism,” show that she felt feedback was commentary and not critique. She felt comfortable to “write it out and give it out to other people to get their comments”. In this sense, both Bina and Xia described the writing groups as spaces in which they felt ‘audible’ and legitimate, a space which strongly contributed to their active participation and learning.

### **7.1.3 The student-academic divide**

The data from the second focus group showed the significant role of peer interaction in the construction of students’ institutional identity, confidence in participation, sense of belonging to the academic community and ultimately learning. The students explained how, through engagement in peer groups, they had established academic networks with their peers within their faculty. Norton (2006) highlights the significance of establishing academic networks in developing an academic identity. For PhD students, like participants in this study, pathways to professionalism also include establishing networks with the academics in their field of research (Kenway, Epstein & Boden, 2008). How far international students were successful in establishing networks with academics, or if indeed this was an aim for them, was another theme of discussion in the second focus group.

Most participants expanded on their awareness of the significance of academic networking in their professional success, but after two years, they had not been able to establish visible academic networks. For example, Bina said, “my relationship with academics is only with my supervisor. So, with my peers yeah I am getting close. But with academics, I still know just my supervisor” (FG2). Participants valued establishing networks with staff and academics but expressed a sense of discomfort in approaching academics, partly due to their English. Xia said,

Actually the language problem is always there, because we are not native. We are nonnative. I also attend seminars by academics and professors here about their PhD journey and their experience and realise that even though they are professors or lecturers now, the whole PhD journey is not easy and they also struggled in their journey. I also attend lectures and seminars of Dr Shan. She is a nonnative and speaks with accent. But she says we know we are nonnatives, but we actually enrich the research field in education. So, that is an inspiration. (FG2)

Xia’s words show that she was still concerned with her English language as an intervening factor in communicating with academics. She had gained enough confidence to interact with her peers but not with the faculty. Hearing about academics’ experiences in their PhD journey, their challenges and particularly the success of a nonnative academic who speaks English with an accent had been inspirational to Xia.

English language and the fears of not being able to communicate at native speaker level was not the only reason for the space between international PhD students and academics. Cultural beliefs about the hierarchical relationships between students and academics in the countries of their origin were also part of the problem. Xia explained,

Maybe this is my cultural background. I always think I am a student. Academics are academics and students are students and I am a student. Even though we have all been given staff email, I never use that. I use my student email. Because I am a

student, I am not eligible to use that. I know I am a student. I do respect and appreciate this way how the faculty regard HDR students as part of them but I always feel nervous to talk to staff no matter who they are whether it is the Dean or a lecturer. I think in my mind they are different people. (FG2)

Xia here talked about the hierarchy in the student-academic relationship in China.

Culturally, she was not used to social interaction with academics ranked higher than her.

She said “in my mind they are different people.” This may partially explain why ‘international’ students may not be as successful as some local peers in establishing academic networks. Their perceptions about the student-academic hierarchy pointed to a social distance between them and the academics. Xia perceived the hierarchy impacted on her academic networking. This, according to Xia, was why local students had stronger academic networks.

Xia: I think local students are less involved in the faculty activities. For example in the HDR students’ research community you see not many locals joined. Maybe they don’t see the need for them. And in terms of access to academics or academic networking, yes I think they have more access to academics and staff.

Bina: Yes local students have more academic networks. They have more access to staff here.

R: Full-time locals?

Bina: Yes

Xia: But we don’t see many full-time local students here.

Joko: No. but they have better connections.

R: Is that access important to you? Is that an important thing?

Bina: Yes, but we don’t know how to approach them. I think they know it in a better way. (FG2)

Bina's comment that local students 'know it in a better way' was telling. It implied her view that there were certain mechanisms that help local students develop their networks. She expressed the need for academic networking and her need to learn useful strategies for academic networking in the Australian context. Bina here talked about 'access' and perceived academic staff as resources that are more accessible to local students. She felt that international students were distanced from academic resources in the faculty partly because of lack of networking strategies. Joko's statement "they have better connections" also implies a space between the international student community and the staff community in the faculty.

As nonnative English speakers, the participants found it challenging to pick up on all of the culturally predicted nuances entailed in informal interactions, and comfortably make the shifts, especially in the situation of crossing power barriers, such as those between academics and doctoral students, where the boundaries are not clear, differently defined across cultures, and where communication is so consequential.

This may partly explain the space between international students and other HDR students and staff in the faculty. Pennycook (2005) however, argues that ESL classrooms are "sites of cultural politics". Informal departmental interactions in the context of this study can also be described as sites of cultural, social and power play. In other words a combination of linguistic, cultural and strategic factors plays part in the students' alignment to certain communities and detachment from others within their institution.

#### **7.1.4 The international/local student dichotomy and academic networking.**

In addition to struggling to build effective networks, students talked about the existence of an international/local student dichotomy in their institution, which, in their view, also involved academics. Bina argued,

In their [academics'] perceptions that IS /LS dichotomy exists but should not be [due to] English language because we must have that standard with English language. I think we must have that standard, otherwise we are not here. But in the perception of academics here yes, that perception exists. They know that the thinking process is different. Because we may have different thinking process, I mean local students learn how to do research when they are at primary school, but us we learn it here. But in terms of language, I don't think there must be considerations. (FG2)

In the above, Bina resisted the stereotype of the international student who has weak English language skills. However, she considered lack of exposure to the research culture a major drawback for many international students. She stressed that having a different 'thinking process' was an issue of concern for academics who work with international students. This, Bina argued, had consequences for international students' success to the point that the same degree might have different values for the two groups. As Bina continued,

If you compare a LS and an IS doing their masters here, yes that LS gets a job here and the IS should go back to their country. Both do the same degree here but the value is different. The degree has more value for local students. This may not be because of English, but different kinds of thinking process. (FG2)

Bina here implied that an international student who decides to stay and work in Australia may have a smaller chance for employment than local peers, but she did not ascribe this difference to English language. However, this discrepancy has been researched and international students' employability problems have been linked to communication skills and presentation skills (Benzie, 2010).

Bina's words remind us of Cangarajah's (2003) comparison of 'peripheral' and 'central' communities. Participants in this study had made their moves from their countries to a Western institution to integrate with their 'imagined' academic community, but what was offered to them was a space in the periphery. Negotiating legitimacy in such an environment happened for each participant in a different way.

## **7.2 AGENCY IN NEGOTIATING INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY**

The international student experience can be informed by the multiple discourses outside the university context, and by a range of individual goals. Students may be strategic, opportunistic, or purposely nomadic, seeking 'global citizenship' via cross-border study experience (Singh & Doherty 2004; Singh & Han, 2005). For example, among the eight participants, Joko and Xia had very different approaches to participation, integration, and identity negotiation in their academic community.

Jackson (2008) argues that advocates of community of practice need to consider the role of agency and intentionality in engagement in community interactions. Drawing upon her ethnographic case study of four students from Hong Kong who were "sojourners" from a study abroad program in UK, she makes this conclusion,

In the host culture some L2 sojourners may decide to learn and use their L2 only to a certain extent (e.g., to express their basic needs and wants), avoiding new ways of being in the world. Some may resist the language of the host community, believing that it positions them unfavorably or disrespects their first language. By contrast, others may embrace the new linguistic community, interact more frequently across cultures, and experience identity expansion. (Jackson, 2008, p. 36)

Earlier, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) also stressed the role of agency and intentionality in participation and learning,



While a person may become a functional bilingual either by necessity or by choice, as an adult she or he becomes a bicultural bilingual by choice only. More than anything else late or adult bilingualism requires agency and intentionality. It is through intentional social interactions with members of the other culture, through continuous attempts to construct new meanings through new discourses that one becomes an equal participant in new discursive spaces, but apparently not without a cost. (pp. 173-4)

A comparison of the data from the first and second focus groups showed how, over the two years, students chose different pathways to live the experience, and relatively to construct, develop and negotiate their institutional identities. Some chose to participate, and invest in interactions while others chose to focus on reading and writing in the isolation of their office-spaces.

In what follows I compare three constructs of institutional identity which emerged in the data: Joko's self-conserving approach, Xia's self-engaging approach, and Ratna's self-isolating approach to identity negotiation.

### **7.2.1 Joko's self-conserving approach**

Joko was an Indonesian male student who was sponsored by his government for his PhD education in Australia. He had an academic job in Indonesia and was planning to return to his country after his PhD. To him, the goal was to "get a PhD and go." His long-term goals and plans had a direct influence on his interactions. In the beginning of his PhD Joko said,

I think if we want to stay here after PhD and apply for PR [Permanent Residency] here, then it is very important to find some local friends and get close to them. But for me, I want to return to my country after PhD. I want to get a PhD and go back to my country. So, why should I learn their culture? (G2S2)

Participation, engagement, or integration was not a prime goal for Joko. He had instrumental motivation for his study abroad experience and did not feel the need for social

interaction and professional networking in Australia. Joko's long-term goals influenced his interactions and the way he negotiated his institutional identity. He preferred to spend his time in his office focused on reading and writing his PhD thesis. He said,

Not much networking I do. I have been in the writing up. So, I have been busy with myself. I was invited by MERC to join a writing group. But at that time I wasn't ready. I'm not ready for commitment. In such a group you don't only take, but you also give. You know? You don't get others' comments on your work, but you also give comments. This means you also spend some of your time for them too. And I didn't think that pushing myself to different groups with different interests would be beneficial for me at that time. But lately, I was thinking that I have been lonely in my journey. I feel left behind. But at the moment, I am thinking of just finishing my PhD. My research is going to be beneficial in my career in teacher education in my country. (FG2)

Developing a professional identity for Joko was not through interaction with academics and peers in his field. Joko mentioned at times he had felt lonely in his journey, yet he preserved his time for reading and writing his thesis in isolation and did not invest in institutional interaction and networking. His main goal was to complete research which had implications for his country.

Joko's approach to his study abroad experience draws attention to the central role of agency in theories of learning through participation, such as 'community of practice.'

Individuals' positive attitudes and willingness are the prerequisite conditions for grasping the opportunities that contact, participation, engagement and social encounters open for learning.

### **7.2.2 Xia's self-engaging approach**

Xia had different goals and a different approach. She had applied for and was granted Australian permanent residency. She was planning to stay in Australia after graduation and

find professional work there. Her long-term goals made her consider participation and interaction with the local community as an investment. She said,

I enjoyed my time here and still enjoying it. I tried to be more involved by participating in many events. Like participating the MERC events last year and convening MERC this year. Although convening MERC was demanding a lot of time and energy but I accepted. Because this way, I know many people and they know me. (FG2)

In contrast to Joko, Xia invested in “establishing and maintaining relationships” to develop her intercultural communicative competence alongside her linguistic competence (Byram, 1997, p. 3). Xia participated in institutional interactions and established institutional networks to bring legitimacy to her membership. Her long-term goals made her participate in writing groups which were facilitated by her faculty to establish networks and improve academic writing skills. She attended most seminars and engaged in social and research programs. She said,

I participate in writing groups. I think English is very important. Because it is an academic environment you always need English to communicate in term of speaking or writing. If you participate in a seminar and you can't understand that will interfere or influence our confidence. I actually think if you don't participate in events or activities or simply stay in your office and write your research, it is hard to improve your English. So, it is better to get out of office and talk with people, no matter they are IS or LS. Otherwise we don't improve our English. (FG2)

Xia emphasised the role of English language in her confidence and negotiation of legitimacy. Again she perceived participation in faculty activities as an investment to improve her English language through interaction. Xia was keen to integrate, and willing to interact with the local community to learn and grow. Still, despite her positive attitude to be involved in social interactions, she talked about interactions with the broader local community this way,

R: Do you have your social networks outside the university?

Xia: No I don't have many friends. No, not in the society. I don't feel lonely or excluded, because I am involved in many activities this year. But last year the feeling was different. I think now I have many things to do, stuff to think about. So I don't care, I have my own daily plan. (FG2)

A striking shift in the standpoint of Xia towards integration into the broader society was observable when I compared her statements in the first and second focus groups. Xia lived on her own with her 12 year old son. Her husband had stayed in China to work. When they first arrived in Australia, Xia's supervisor introduced her to an Australian teacher with whom they shared a place to live. Xia's close friendship with the Australian teacher, which she described as 'exceptional luck' had strong positive effects on her attitude towards integration and communication. But this close contact ended for Xia when her friend moved out. At the time of the second interview, after two and a half years, she shared a place with another Chinese family within the Chinese community. At this time, when Xia talked about her social interactions with the local community, she implied that even as an Australian citizen, she did not feel part of the broader society. She claimed that she had tried to combat her loneliness by engaging in many activities at the university. In fact, engagement in university interactions was her only channel of integration with the broader society.

Xia's example underlines the social component of the process of identity negotiation and reminds us that even individual experiences are shaped and (re)shaped in the construct of times, places and people.

### 7.2.3 Ratna's self-isolating approach

Among the eight participants, Ratna had noticeably accurate English. Despite her linguistic competence, she considered herself shy and 'not sociable.' During my stay in the faculty, I observed that she had minimal contact with other students, staff and academics. She had her meals and coffee alone in her office and described herself as a 'creeping creature', 'creeping to the office and creeping back home'. Unlike Joko, Ratna held an Australian scholarship. When I asked her about her goals after the PhD, she said she wanted to apply for a post doc at the end of her PhD either in Australia or North America. Through our occasional conversations, I realised that she was well-aware of the importance of academic networking in developing an academic identity. Yet she had minimal interaction with others and did not participate in any peer groups.

To understand the trajectory of Ratna's self-marginalisation, I reviewed her statements in the first focus group, when she talked about her past experience of paper-presentation in an international conference. She had described her feelings through a conference presentation this way,

I have a bad experience. Once, I was presenting my paper at that time in Thailand. It was an international conference. I was presenting and you know, there was this lady, she is very old and she is sitting right in front in the front row. She keeps fixing my pronunciation, my grammar, like she is being very rude. And I was shuddering all the way. (FG1)

Jackson (2010) points out that "[n]egative experiences of unmet expectations may result in elevated levels of stress, homesickness, a heightened sense of identification with one's in-group, and rejection of host nationals" (p. 6). Ratna did not attend the second focus group. Neither did she attend any of the peer groups such as writing groups or faculty seminars. She spent most of her time reading and writing in the seclusion of her office. She

complained once, ‘they treat me as a student here they don’t understand I am a teacher’’. Her statement signals her challenges over her simultaneous identity transitions. Ratna’s approach to her Australian study experience was partly impacted by her identity transition, partly by her negative experiences of being criticised for her mispronunciations during a conference-presentation and perhaps her shy personality.

Ratna’s case showed complex ties between language use and language users. It confirmed one of the assumptions of this study that linguistic competence alone is not enough to ensure a legitimate institutional identity. While it is important to understand situated identities in light of power negotiations, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) stress that sometimes “the power differential is such that resistances of negotiations are impossible” (p. 250). It is also essential to note that power relations within institutions are perceived, defined and understood by individuals differently. Ratna’s past experiences of power hierarchies in native/nonnative interactions meant that she limited her ongoing chances for interaction, negotiation, integration and learning.

Ratna chose a self-marginalising approach which was different from Xia’s self-involving approach and also from Joko’s self-conserving approach. These students all exemplified some of the different ways of engaging the ‘self’ in language interactions and institutional experience. When I asked her if she felt her English had improved over time, Ratna said,

I think my English has improved a lot because as I read a lot of books and articles for my research, I learn new structures and phrases. And also I watch TV and listen to the news. But sometimes I think I could do all this from home! (FG2)

What Ratna said above highlights the link between approaches to integration and participation and strategies for learning. In her study abroad experience, Ratna’s limited social relations within her institution shifted her mode of learning from participation in

second language interactions to texts. This discussion also implies that discourse and power are interrelated and work together in shaping identities and negotiating access to learning resources.

The participants were different in their approaches to the construction and negotiation of institutional identity. Their idiosyncrasies, and particularly their goals, influenced the way they chose to live their Australian education experience. The discussion highlights the role of intentionality and agency in integration and learning through participation. It also reemphasises the “complex relationship between power, identity, and language learning” (Norton, 1995, p. 17).

### **7.3 CONCLUSION**

The data and discussions in this chapter show how identities emerge in language interactions and how they are negotiated in institutional experience. It was argued that for students, as members of an academic institution, everyday interactions at university are avenues for multiple negotiations of language, identity and power; and that for these international students, this happens in a language other than their mother tongue. An understanding of the process of these negotiations provides insights into the ways institutional identities are constructed for these students.

The data in this chapter illustrate the processes of the evolution of postgraduate research international students’ institutional identities through day-to-day engagement in institutional interaction. While institutions construct identities for their members, institutional identities are also dynamically reconstructed and negotiated by social members in institutional interactions. Bina’s example of participation in writing groups at university showed how her interactions with her community of practice developed her institutional

identity, her sense of belonging and enhanced her learning through engagement in institutional interactions.

The data further showed that (re)construction and (re)negotiation of institutional identity through participation in institutional interactions may vary according to students' agency and intentionality. Agency is a determining factor in learning through community interactions. Individual goals can also be considered an influential factor in the way the students choose to manage their everyday institutional interactions. This was highlighted in the data showing three different approaches to integration and participation in departmental informal interaction. Joko's long-term goals kept him from investment in institutional interactions and made him conserve his time for other priorities such as reading and writing for his research. Ratna's shy personality and negative past experiences made her avoid informal departmental interactions and isolate herself behind her desk, despite her awareness of the significance of institutional networking in success and access. Xia's goals to stay in Australia and her agenda to establish professionally productive networks caused her to invest in institutional interactions for networking and learning. These findings offer a further critique of 'international student' as a label, which underplays the heterogeneity of students' approaches to and experiences of their doctoral research programs.

The findings confirm previous researchers' comments that investment in institutional interactions is related to the ability to construct and enact discursively situated social identities, and to build social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Norton, 2006; Pavlenko, 2008). It was further argued that in second language interactions in multicultural contexts, the construction of social identities intersects with negotiations of language, power and culture. It was also stressed that while an individual's goals, agendas, past experiences and identities determine their approach to engagement in institutional



interactions, institutional practices also impact on members and may work against them. The tension between the individual and the institutional, between individual agendas to construct legitimate identities and imposed institutional identities opens a space for a reconsideration of institutional interactions.

In the next chapter, I describe in more detail the student interactions and some of the strategies they used for negotiation of legitimacy, and identity. The data in Chapters Five Six, and Seven support the major assumption for this study that interaction strategies are influenced by multiple contextual factors. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the communication strategies I observed among participants in their informal conversation. I have termed these intercultural communication strategies.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES, DISCOURSE PATTERNS AND MULTICULTURAL CONTEXTS**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The social turn in second language learning research has meant fresh perspectives on language as a ‘symbolic resource’ for negotiating new social identities within target communities (Chen, 2010). Learning and using a second language is also argued to be an investment in constructing new social identities by providing a ‘communal tool’ for interaction with new communities (Norton, 2001; Wenger, 2000). Accordingly, second language communication strategies should no longer be perceived as simply a set of linguistic tools. They are also techniques to negotiate social representations, legitimacy, and ‘audibility.’ In other words, investment in social identities means investment in the use of appropriate and effective communication strategies within a range of social and institutional interaction context.

So far, in previous chapters, it was argued that informal departmental interactions are arenas for identity construction for postgraduate research students in this study who have no classroom interactions. It was also argued that identity is discursively constructed, relational, and subject to negotiation. Given the multicultural context of the interactions in the study, and the multiplicity of self and social representations in everyday encounters, participants’ communication strategies are viewed as tied to their identities at play and the social contexts of interactions. Chapters Five and Six provided description of the background context of these interactions and Chapter Seven the description of a range of

social identities deployed in social interactions. This chapter addresses the third research question intending to explore the role of communication strategies in the negotiation of representations, institutional identities, participation, and social memberships. Of particular interest in this chapter are the micro-level strategies which the participants used in their interactions to negotiate institutional identity and the discursive patterns they used to negotiate social membership. In this chapter, I will challenge the viability of existing communication strategy taxonomies in intercultural interaction contexts and then, using aspects of the Language Socialisation Theory (Duff, 2007), I urge the need for a new lens for the observation and identification of intercultural communication strategies. This is needed to incorporate the political context of intercultural communication and the ties between language, the user, and social context. I will use empirical data to show how intercultural communication strategies can serve as indexes of social representation, membership and participation.

## **8.1 ‘INDEXICALITY’ OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

Communication strategies have long been known to play a key role in second language interactions, and a range of negotiation and communication strategies are associated with multicultural and intercultural interactions. In traditional SLA, communication strategies are perceived as linguistic tools for the second language learner to keep the communication flow despite language gaps (Bialystock, 1990; Tarone, 1981). Several conversation analysts and discourse analysts have analysed second language or lingua franca interactions to identify and categorise communication strategies (Bialystock, 1990; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Tarone, 1981). As a pioneer in the field, Tarone (1981) identified five major

categories of communication strategies of (1) Avoidance, (2) Paraphrase, (3) Transfer, (4) Appeal for help, and (5) Mime. Later on these categories were expanded by other researchers. Finally, Dörnyei and Scott (1997) introduced one of the most detailed taxonomies for communication strategies which includes 33 categories (see Table 2.2). However, these studies were produced in classroom contexts. That is, interactions recorded and analysed took place between ESL students and their teachers in classrooms, and all searched for the trajectory for the use of communication strategies in the ESL students' language gaps.

In intercultural communication contexts, Pica (1994) used the term 'negotiation strategies' to refer to communication strategies used in multicultural encounters to negotiate cultural and linguistic gaps between interlocutors. Given the multicultural context of this study, I use Pica's term 'negotiation strategies' to refer to strategies the participants used not only to negotiate meaning but their social representations.

Recently, communication strategy researchers have written about the ties between the application of certain strategies and social representations. For instance, the strategy of code-mixing or code-switching is found to represent hybrid identities (Trudgill, 2000) or to signal resistance against the dominance of the English language (Jackson, 2010). As Coulmas (2005) points out,

It is not necessarily for lack of competency that speakers switch from one language to another, and the choices they make are not fortuitous. Rather, just like socially motivated choices of varieties of one language, choices across language boundaries are imbued with social meaning.” (p. 109)

Yet, much of communication strategy research is still linguistically oriented and does not explore the links between negotiation strategies, users and background context. This gap in

the literature and research to date was intrinsic to this research. Duff (2007) underlines the need to research communication strategy use from a social perspective, writing,

The coexistence of participants' multiple communities and sociolinguistic norms, languages, registers or styles, hybrid activities, codes, and identities must be taken into account better. Whether the analyses are more oriented to linguistic studies of indexicality or to more sociological analyses of individuals' relationship to, and participation in, local (as well as remote) communities of practice, the challenge remains one of providing evidence for the cognitive, linguistic, social, and cultural learning that takes place within situated practices. We should also try to take into account learners' status and levels of participation within their chosen communities, the factors that prevent or enable greater integration and success (if that is the goal), and the consequences of that involvement (or lack of involvement). (p. 317)

In the context of this study, as illustrated through previous data chapters, the participants are situated in layers of community within their academic institution (i.e., HDR student community, international student community, the faculty as a whole, the broader Anglo-Australian community, and so on). In this chapter, I illustrate the links between the students' strategy use and negotiation of membership, which itself reflects participants' agency and intentionality in engagement and integration. This is done through an analysis of some discourse patterns, and individuals' reflections of the strategies they use in interactions. Duff (2007) contends that, "One crucial aspect of language learning is that particular kinds of linguistic and non-linguistic cues help people understand the sociocultural contexts they are in or that are being referred to" (p. 311). During data analysis in this chapter, I elaborate on the 'indexicality' of communication strategies and show how communication strategies can index the sociocultural context of multicultural interactions. I argue that communication strategies in use can be tip of an iceberg which, if analysed carefully, can lead us to clues to the 'agentive actions' of the participants and the social context of interactions.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, my approach to data analysis here is based on the constructs of situated identity (Gee, 1996, 2000), community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and identity negotiation, power and investment (Norton, 2000). This means that in the process of data analysis, I have assumed that within the academic institution at the locus of this study, multiple communities of practice are formed that shape the context of identity negotiation for the participants.

The chapter identifies several negotiation strategies from existing strategy taxonomies used by the participants in multicultural interaction contexts. This is to highlight the influence of context on the use of negotiation strategies and also to argue that the use of communication strategies can be idiosyncratic. The chapter offers a description of participants' negotiation strategies at the micro level, and shows how the nuances of social context influence the participants' choice of different negotiation strategies in managing their interactions.

The chapter begins with a section on the ties between the use of negotiation strategies and agency. Some traditional SLA communication strategies such as topic management, and summarisation which were also used in the context of this study are revisited for the role they played in negotiation of agency and intentionality. Next follows discussion of the ties between discursive patterns and identity, and the ways in which discursive patterns represent students' sense of belonging to communities and social memberships. Finally, there is a comparison of the strategies and discourse patterns international students used within their community of peers and when they crossed between communities in interactions with local students and staff.

## **8.2 NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES AND AGENCY**

Solé (2007) defines agency as “the amount of control and choice the self can exercise over one’s actions through language” (p. 205). In second language interactions, agency is negotiated and “co-constructed by the sociocultural environment and by those around the L2 user” (ibid). In SLA communication strategy literature, Corder (1983) argues that there are certain evading strategies which allow second language learners to avoid trying new structures. These strategies help the second language learner to use what they know and to avoid new structures and patterns. Risk taking, on the other hand, is argued to be an index of willingness to learn new structures, step outside familiar areas, and explore new ways of interaction (Norton & Toohey, 2001).

In intercultural contexts, Monereo (2007) argues that certain strategies help the speakers and interlocutors to move from an ‘inhibited stage’ in interactions towards a ‘protagonist stage’ where they can “play a certain role in the script” (p. 513). In what follows, based on participants’ reflections, I argue that negotiation strategies vary in the way they enable or constrain agency and integration. While some strategies facilitate effective participation and learning, others may lead to isolation and marginalisation.

### **8.2.1 ‘Let it pass’**

Firth (1996) defines lingua franca communication as interactions in English “between persons who share neither a common native tongue, nor a common culture and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication.” (p. 240). He points out that when gaps in communication are too wide to be bridged, interlocutors negotiate to ‘Let It Pass’ as a last-resort strategy to avoid communication breakdown, to “let the unknown or unclear action, word or utterance pass on the common sense assumption that it will either

become clear or redundant as talk progresses” (p. 243). Firth claims that this strategy is a commonly-deployed technique in lingua franca interactions.

The multicultural context of this study fits Firth’s description of lingua franca interactions. However, it emerged in the data that while participants used the strategy of ‘let it pass’ commonly in their interactions with native speakers, they used a variety of socio-affective strategies (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997) such as asking for clarification, helping or seeking help, paraphrasing or summarising among themselves to convey their messages. In what follows, the international students articulate how they used ‘let it pass’ strategy to avoid engagement in unfamiliar local or cultural discourses with their local peers.

Bina: Yeah, we prefer to be quiet most of the time with local students.

Ratna: That’s true.

Amar: Me too, with native speakers I also prefer to be silent.

Bina: So, we already know we must speak up but....

Amar: Yeah, sometimes if they speak fast and with heavy accent then I don’t understand them so how can I respond when I don’t understand.

Bina: And sometimes we just don’t understand their content of what they are talking about.

Ratna: Yeah, yeah, because of different cultures maybe yeah. And one thing is that I think I may say something inappropriate.

Bina: And most of the time I don’t understand their jokes. So, I just smile.

Ratna: Yeah, yeah jokes are very difficult. (G1S2)

Bina and Ratna stressed here remaining quiet in interactions with native speakers. They pointed to several pragmatic and cultural reasons for not being able to actively engage in the interactions and highlighted silence and smiling as ways to ‘let it pass.’ They also raised linguistic, cultural and pragmatic barriers here which led to this strategy (See 5.4).



### 8.2.1.1 *Smiling and silence as signals*

In multicultural contexts, avoidance of speech does not necessarily signal language problems. Regarding passive smiling and silence among Australian students, Xia said, “Everyone wants to talk to other people and get together, but because it is a foreign country zone, the safest strategy is to keep silent and smile.” (G2S2) Xia highlighted smiling as a safe strategy to avoid conflict or threats to ‘face’ in an unfamiliar social and cultural context. Language interaction in a new and unfamiliar social and cultural context involves risks of both misunderstanding and being misunderstood (Gumperz, 1999). Xia thinks that in the early stages newcomers keep silent, observe and learn before they feel ready to speak. I have used the term *passive smiling* to refer to this strategy.

In what follows, Aini talked about her experience of superficial interactions and letting it pass through silence and smiling.

I used to live in a home-stay for a very short time with an Australian family. They were very good to me, very kind. They often invited their family, their parents, and you know, what happened to me, I just sit down and listen and smile. I couldn’t understand probably 40% or so. (G2S3)

Aini used *passive smiling* and silence to ‘let it pass’ when she was unable to follow the conversations. Shamim talked about a similar experience with one of his local peers this way,

You know John? He speaks with a very heavy accent. Whenever I see him, I just guess what he says. Sometimes I can see in his face that he expects me to say something. Maybe he has asked me a question. Then I smile and run away. (FG1)

‘Feigning understanding and guessing are common communication strategies in ESL contexts used by learners who want to save ‘face’ in front of their teacher or classmates (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). In out-of-classroom contexts involving native-speakers the same strategies are used.

*Passive smiling* was a strategy which helped the participants to avoid potential threats to ‘face’ in interactions. It shows their hesitation in seeking help to understand, but also a self-regulated silent period when they were new to a situation.

Joko also highlighted using *passive smiling* as a strategy which helped him negotiate participation and engagement in his encounters with people with different cultural values. He suggested that a cultural gap was the main reason he avoided engagement in some interactions.

I think the main thing keeping us from mixing with others people is culture. I mean, I personally it is hard to mix with other culture. You know, we have some culture, you know? So, you smile and only say hi, hello, how are you? And then, that becomes something, something everyday. (G2S1)

For Joko, cultural gaps made engagement in multicultural encounters superficial and limited to daily formulaic greetings. He pointed to *passive smiling* as a way to evade engagement in interactions.

Another student, Aini, used evading strategies when she felt uncomfortable speaking English with a different accent among her local peers and colleagues,

Aini: Most of the time, I smile but don’t talk. Sometimes I don’t like it when I pronounce some words so differently from the local people. So, let’s say, I pronounce [seif], but you say [sæif].

Clare: [Sæif] yes, but don’t speak like us, it’s awful.

Aini: But we want to. (G2S3)

Aini wanted to sound like local students to speak with an Australian accent. She did not like to speak with a different accent. *Passive smiling* helped Aini to avoid sounding and feeling different. Ratna sent an email where she discussed smiling as follows,

I think I smile as a form of politeness and friendliness as being attentive to the person I am conversing with. Usually, I am more aware of doing this, when there is social distance existed (age, gender, higher or lower social rank, unfamiliar context and background knowledge). If I smile (although I cannot hear the message sent to me clearly) while making the effort to listen to the utterances attentively, it means that I am sincere and have shown my sincerity for being attentive, not faking to be sincere and attentive. It also depends on how I want to relate with the person that I'm conversing with. If I am interested to develop good relation with the participants or to the topic being discussed, I would make further verbal efforts in understanding what the speakers say. (Electronic Communication)

Ratna made the point that *passive smiling* showed a partial listening comprehension, but did not signal insincerity. She made a link between her strategy use and social context, saying that she used this strategy more in contexts where she felt a social distance with the interlocutor(s). She considered smiling a face-saving strategy and a sign of politeness. Her statement, "If I am interested to develop good relation with the participants or to the topic being discussed, I would make further verbal efforts in understanding what the speakers say" showed that she was aware that the strategy of passive smiling did not contribute to her agency in the conversations and she needed 'further verbal efforts' to engage more actively in conversations.

The discussion in this section illustrates how one strategy is used for different contextual and personal agendas. Despite its multiple motives and meanings (e.g., avoiding threats to the 'face,' avoiding engagement in culturally different conversations, or avoiding sounding different), the strategy of *passive smiling* contributed negatively to student

engagement in interactions. Besides, smiling to let it pass, topic management as a strategy emerged in the data as an index of participation.

### **8.2.2 Topic management.**

Meierkord (2002) points to keeping to ‘safe topics’ as a common communication strategy in multicultural contexts to avoid the risk of opening up a discussion about a topic which may be taboo in some cultures. In the context of this study, participants mentioned they used topic management as a strategy in their interactions to negotiate engagement in culturally-loaded conversations.

In this study, topic management was used by both local and international students as a strategy to avoid engagement in potentially sensitive and controversial discussions. For example, Clare mentioned that she used this strategy when she felt the topic of discussions was not appropriate for international students and they “probably aren’t allowed to talk about that, or, are not comfortable talking about that.” The strategy of topic management was used by Clare and Jan in their interactions with international students to avoid potential conflicts. As students mentioned below, unfamiliarity with the other group’s cultural and discourse boundaries contributed to the use of this strategy,

Clare: So you guys probably are talking about same thing we do who is in the faculty doing what. So, it’s sort of bizarre. So you probably don’t want to talk about these to us.

Bina: Yes, we talk about personal things, too. ( G1S3)

Gudykunst (2005) stressed that in multicultural encounters with people from different cultural backgrounds, the interpretation of our words is not as clear as in our conversations with people with whom we share language and cultural background. Therefore, a wider

range of topics are avoided or abandoned in multicultural encounters, which contributes to the superficiality of communication in such contexts. As Jackson (2010) puts it, effective communication in multicultural contexts demands both linguistic competence and intercultural competence. What Ratna points to below is in line with this literature,

For me something is that if I want to speak with local students it is hard for me to identify the boundaries. I mean they have a very different culture. So, I think I may say something that is rude or they do not like it. So, when I see them I only talk about my study and if they are talking about personal stuff, I prefer not to speak. (G1S1)

Ratna here explained why she abandoned personal topics in her conversations with local students and how she strategically negotiated her engagement in such conversations by sticking to study-related topics. Like passive smiling, topic management impacts on student engagement in interactions.

Ratna reflected on the strategies she used in her departmental interactions in an electronic communication where she wrote,

I tend to adjust or modify my style of communication depending on context, the participants (friends, boss, colleagues, siblings, etc.), social distance. I'm sure that these will affect the way I behave verbally or nonverbally. I think it is also related to personality matter. I do not consider myself as an outgoing person or a sociable kind of person. I tend to use more silence (this does not mean being 'passive' as what has often been generalised in the literature) than smiling. I tend to use more silence when I'm not interested in the topic or the person, or while I'm focusing on something, or as a way for saving face, mine or the speakers I'm conversing with. If I'm not interested in the topic, I might use more strategies than just smiling. I could also change the topic or making an excuse to leave. (EC)

Ratna stressed that her verbal and nonverbal strategies were linked to the context of interactions, the people involved and their social and status hierarchies. She also related her

strategy use to her personality and identity. She highlighted silence and passive smiling as face-saving strategies and pointed to topic change as means of disengaging from certain conversations. In this sense, strategies like passive smiling and topic management for Ratna did not help her take a protagonist role in interactions. Then she continued to talk about strategies “more than just smiling” that she used to be more agentic in interactions.

In what follows I bring an example from the data to show how Bina strategically negotiated agency and moved towards a ‘protagonist stage’ in interactions.

### 8.2.3 Summarisation

In the communication strategy literature, strategies like *paraphrase* and *summarisation* are used by the speaker when limited language resources, require them to rephrase the original message. In the recorded conversations in this study, Bina used summarisation to take an active social role to support the group in understanding the theme of the conversation.

Hanna: I never thought I was such a good presenter. I gave a presentation in New Zealand and that was good feedback, you know? So, I am relaxed now in my presentation, it is my good experience.

Bina: So, your experience makes you feel confident now.

Hanna: Yeah (G1S2)

In the above conversation, Bina used ‘so’ to summarise and repeat Hanna’s message to support Hanna’s message. She often took an active and supportive role in interactions. Here is another example of how she used summarisation:

Ratna: Uh how to continue the conversation, I don’t know what to say next. So I just run away.

Bina: Yeah, so topics for socialising, we don’t know. (G1S2)

Here is another example for the link between Bina's social role and her strategy use,

Amar: Even if we have questions, we don't ask. But with only international students, of course we speak friendly and we ask our questions and exchange ideas. So, actually I think there is some difference with speaking among international students and among native speakers.

Bina: So there are some barriers. So what are the barriers?(G1S2)

Bina used 'so' to summarise Amar's words and help the flow of the conversation. By paraphrasing and summarising speakers' messages, Bina enacted a role to support her friends in communicating with each other by repeating and synthesising the themes. Dörnyei and Scott (1997) argue that 'socio-affective' communication strategies such as support and seek support enhance communication. The above excerpts showed that among themselves, international students deployed this category of strategies frequently. While evading strategies such as let it pass caused international students to be inhibited in their interactions with native speaker, within their own community they moved towards a 'protagonist stage' which was reflected in their use of socio-affective strategies such as summarisation and support.

The following section elaborates the ties between these strategies and social memberships in language interactions.

### **8.3 DISCURSIVE PATTERNS AND NEGOTIATION OF SOCIAL MEMBERSHIP**

In their theory of community of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) make it clear that communities are not constrained to physical boundaries but are rather integrated by

common tasks, goals and objectives. This means that within every institution, several communities of practice may form and every institutional member may negotiate membership in one or several communities of practice within their institution. Within these communities, language is not only a means of communication but a powerful instrument for gaining access to new social roles. In the context of this study, the participants negotiated membership in several communities inside their institution including for example: (1) their international student group, (2) the HDR student group, and (3) the Faculty of Education in their university. Smaller communities of practice such as peer groups (writing or reading groups) were also shaped within these communities which were multicultural. The participants described their interactions within and across these communities this way,

Ratna: With other international students, I feel comfortable to ask questions but I usually don't seek help from local students. Because I think they may say Oh she did not know this!

Amar: Yes, me too. Even when I go to Research Office, I usually go to Rashid. Because he is not a native speaker. I feel more comfortable to talk to him because he also has an accent when he speaks and another thing is that he is always welcoming. (G1S3)

Within the community of international students, Ratna said she used strategies like asking for help and seeking information to communicate while across the community she hesitated to ask her questions openly for the fear of being judged. Amar also talked about her comfort in speaking with a nonnative speaker staff member because she felt at ease in speaking English with an accent. Their conversation shows how communication strategy choice can be affected by the social context and individual's feelings and beliefs.



Roberts' (2006) remark that among themselves, international students form a comity which helps their communication. Bina described interactions within the international student community this way,

When we find other international students, we feel we are on the same ground. We can feel ourselves, being far away from home and everybody has same kind of, have similar feelings. So, we feel more comfortable talking to other international students. And something is that, when I speak with local students, I feel that they just don't understand us at once; we have to repeat ourselves.  
(G1S2)

Bina pointed out that the empathy between international students facilitated their communication. She clearly related this sense of understanding with language understanding. Within the international student community, Bina both felt comfortable and understood which facilitated her communication. The commonalities among international students (e.g., being away from home) have intensified Bina's sense of belonging to the group despite their language and cultural diversity.

The data in this section illustrate how discursive patterns of interactions indicate participants' negotiation of social membership and how the patterns change in cross-community interactions.

### **8.3.1 The use of 'you know' to seek empathy and belonging**

The use of 'you know' in language interactions is argued to be more than a lexical choice. It is considered "a locally occasioned, emergent resource" to negotiate participation in interaction and "jointly structure interaction" (He & Lindsey, 1998, p. 133). Baker (1997) associates the use of 'you know' with social membership perceiving it a "membership categorisation device" in analysing interview data (p. 131). In the context of this study,

‘you know’ was commonly used to claim membership within the international student community interactions. Among themselves, international students built a sense of understanding which helped their communication to go beyond the superficial level. For example, the use of ‘you know’ in the following excerpts is a strategy to seek empathy,

I am spending a lot of time in finding a house on the internet. It doesn’t match always with me, always, you know? Financial problems, and it has to be matched, at least minimum standard and the payment, the rent also suitable, you know? (Hanna)

Hanna perceived herself in a community of newcomer international students who share similar concerns and objectives to settle down in Australia and cope with their study abroad challenges. Hanna strategically negotiated membership within the community of new international students by using ‘you know’ and seeking empathy. This was more than a conversation filler, but was used to build connection. On another occasion she said, “we women, it is good talking with each other, relieved, you know?” (G1S1)

Ratna, too, used the same strategy in some of her statements when she said,

The most difficult thing for me is that, you know, because I am an English language teacher, I feel I expose myself to a lot of evaluation, you know? I mean they say, oh you are an English teacher and your English is like this! (G1S2)

To negotiate her membership and sense of belonging to ‘the international student’ community, Ratna, highlighted another common characteristic of the group, being nonnative English speakers. Again, she used ‘you know’ to seek empathy and affirm membership.

Norton (2000) points out that real communication takes place when “those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen to, and those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak” (p. 8). The above data showed how participants sought membership in the community of newcomer international students with shared objectives

and challenges, built a sense of understanding among themselves in their interaction, and used strategies which enhanced their communication. The findings also highlight the role of sociocultural context of the interactions on the strategies in use.

### **8.3.2 The use of pronouns to negotiate belonging.**

Kramsch (2000) has a perspective of engagement in language interactions which identifies negotiations of membership at the socio-institutional level. She argues that the second language user may align with and seek membership in certain social groups within an institution. In the context of this study, the use of inclusive first person pronouns of ‘we’ and ‘us’ by the participants showed their alignments and therefore can be accounted as a strategy to negotiate membership in the socio-institutional communities which were available around them. Here are two examples of the use inclusive pronouns to affirm membership,

1. Ratna : But you know, I don’t blame them as well, because I feel they are very conscious about us, they know we are strangers and they don’t want to make us feel pressured in a way, you know?  
Bina: So, actually we don’t know how they perceive us. (G1S2)
2. Amar: yeah, we are just very conscious of whether we make mistakes or not, you know, because, English is not our native language. (G1S3)

Here, Ratna and Bina, and Amar expressed their sense of belonging to the international student community within their institution by using inclusive pronouns. By using this strategy, they strategically affirmed membership in the same community. Amar’s use of inclusive pronouns suggests that she perceived herself among a community of nonnative English speaking students who all share the similar challenge of making mistakes in English that might threaten their ‘face.’ The use of third person pronouns such as ‘they’ or

‘them’ to address local students indicates that international students categorised their local peers as a separate community and ‘Other.’ The discourse of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the above excerpt signals a divide within the HDR student community.

While international students often used ‘we’ to refer to their group and ‘they’ to refer to the local student group, in the following excerpt, Bina used a combination of pronouns to negotiate her membership in a mixed writing group which included both international and local students. She said,

Writing groups are very empowering in establishing our identity. We feel we belong to here and there are local students there too and they are also like us and we can give them feedback too. The PhD student identity is very strong there. (FG2)

Bina’s use of pronouns and their reference to membership is summarised in the table below:

Table 8.1 Bina’s use of inclusive pronouns to negotiate membership

our	Writing group
our	PhD students group
we	Writing group
we	Writing group
they	Local students in the writing group
us	International students in the writing group
we	International students in the writing group
them	Local students in the writing group

Bina’s complex use of pronouns indicates her membership in the layers of community within her department and reminds us of the multiplicity of self in social interactions. Bina felt ‘audible’ and legitimate in writing groups. This empowered her PhD student identity as well as her sense of belonging to the community. In this sense, she positioned herself as having the same power status as her local peers and used ‘we’ to affirm her membership.

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) point out that negotiations of membership are possible where “the negotiating parties may enjoy a relatively equal power balance” (p. 250). This had happened for Bina in her writing groups but not for Xia who talked about membership within the faculty staff community this way,

I always think I am a student. Academics are academics and students are students and I am a student. Even though we have all been given staff email, I never use that. I use my student email. Because I am a student, I am not eligible to use that. I know I am a student. I do respect and appreciate this way how the faculty regard HDR students as part of them but I always feel nervous to talk to staff no matter who they are whether it is the Dean or a lecturer. I think in my mind they are different people. (FG2)

Xia’s use of ‘they’ to refer to academics in the faculty implies that she did not consider herself part of the staff community and identified status and difference as the main reasons. Then in her conversation with Bina and Joko, she commented on local students,

Xia: In terms of access to academics or academic networking, yes I think they have more access to academics and staff.

Bina: Yes local students have more academic networks. They have more access to staff here.

R: Full-time locals?

Bina: Yes

Xia: But we don’t see many full-time local students here.

Joko: No. but they have better connections.

R: Is that access important to you? Is that an important thing?

Bina: Yes but we don’t know how to approach them. I think they know it in a better way. (FG2)

Xia pointed to the reality that full-time international students outnumber local students in the faculty. Still, she thought, local HDR students had better connections with academics

and staff in the faculty. Participants placed local HDR students more centrally in the faculty community. They used ‘they’ to refer to both local HDR students and staff and academics in the faculty. Their use of pronouns in the above excerpt implies how students positioned themselves and other members within their institution. In the participants’ views, local HDR students were closer and better connected to the central community of staff and academics. Despite being given material resources (i.e., a staff email account), international students did not feel confident to claim membership in the staff community.

#### **8.4 DISCURSIVE PRACTICES AND NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY**

Negotiation of social selves in and through second language interactions with the target communities of practice is a feature of much identity research (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2001, 2002). Literature highlights that communication does not take place in a social vacuum but in a space where second language users dynamically position and reposition themselves and negotiate their L2 identities (Norton, 2000, 2001, 2006, Norton & Toohey, 2002). Negotiations of legitimacy, ‘audibility’ (Miller, 2003), and ‘right to speech’ (Bourdieu, 1991) are part of the dynamic process of second language interaction. On the other hand, as pointed out by Parks and Raymond (2004), strategy use is “a complex socially situated phenomenon, bound up with issues related to personal identity (p. 135).” To understand and identify identity components within communities of practice, Chen (2010) argues for the importance of the analysis of discursive practices. Chen describes discursive practices as “verbal descriptions used by other members to talk about the focal member’s discursive identities with regard to social, linguistic, and academic competencies” (p. 167). In what follows, I highlight the discursive practices that indicate participants’ negotiation of social identities.

#### 8.4.1 Discursive negotiation of identity

Social construction of the ‘Other’ in language interactions has been the locus of recent research (Pavlenko, 2001, 2006, 2008). In the context of this study, the stereotype of ‘international student’ in Australian universities and the discursive construction of the ‘international student’ is an example of constructing and imposing identities in institutions. The discursive practices of ‘they’ and ‘we,’ signals the international/local student dichotomy.

Bina: When we see local student, we can’t talk because don’t know what topics you talk about.

Clare: Yes, we have the same feeling too. I wouldn’t ask the questions I might ask Jan, have you got kids? Because I think you probably aren’t allowed to talk about that, or you are not comfortable talking about that, but I probably ask Jan something I wouldn’t ask you. Yeah Aussies are very open.

Hanna: But we like to talk about personal things, too. (G2S3)

The above conversation between a local student (Clare) and two international students (Bina and Hanna) underlines the discursive patterns which indicate the dichotomous identity groups. Here is another example.

Most of our culture is very open. You can sort of say almost everything. So, we really get personal. And if you don’t be personal, it means you don’t really want to connect. Yeah, you often need to offer something personal. (Clare, G1S3)

An Aussie student group with an ‘open’ culture, and an international student group restrained to talking about certain topics, are two identity groups constructed in the above excerpts. Holliday and Aboeshiha (2009) stress that the cultural stereotyping embedded in multicultural interactions makes them asymmetrical, and discriminatory in nature. The above conversations showed how, in one instance, tearoom interactions between local and

international students included nuances of identity and cultural assumptions. Holliday and Aboeshiha (2009) warn against the construction of “neo-racist” identities in postmodern Western institutional native/nonnative interactions through a process of “associating individualism with the always positive attributes of being consistent, open to new experiences, having fun, and self-reliance and collectivism with the always negative attributes of circular thinking, being closed to new experiences and deferential to group tradition” (p. 679). They stress that embedded cultural stereotyping in native /nonnative interactions makes them far from neutral and turns them to contexts for “the ideological projection of an imagined superior Western Self on an imagined inferior Other” (p. 680). The above conversations suggest that institutional staffrooms can become sites of cultural, social, and power play.

#### **8.4.2 Social context, discursive patterns and negotiation strategies: Crossing between communities**

Many researchers have stressed the impact of social context on social representations (Block, 2003; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Raymond 2004). Among all, Monereo (2007) has argued that the background social context of intercultural interactions sometimes forces the interlocutors to an ‘inhibited stage’ and sometimes supports them to progress to a ‘protagonist stage’ where they can confidently “play a certain role in the script” (p. 513). Progression from an inhibitor or observer stage in interactions to a ‘protagonist stage’ for the participants in this study was tied to their use of negotiation strategies. For example, as mentioned previously in Section 8.1, within the international student community, participants used socio-affective strategies such as seeking information or asking for help to convey their messages despite their diversity. When they crossed communities in their interactions with staff and local students, the participants talked about being passive and



using evading strategies to save their ‘face.’ Another difference in the participants’ communication which was also triggered by the background context was a shift of focus from content to form. This shift of focus from content to form in native/nonnative talk has been reported by researchers as early as Bialystock (1983) as a feature of classroom ESL contexts. In the out-of-classroom informal interactions in this study, this shift of focus from content to the form of messages was triggered by the presence of native speakers. Aini said,

In classroom and when I am alone with my international students, I speak more fluently and with comfort, but among my native colleagues in the staffroom, I am so conscious about my mistakes that I can’t concentrate on what I am saying. (FG1)

Aini talked about her self-consciousness and her meticulous attention to the language form in interactions with her local colleagues, and in contexts where she represented an ‘English teacher.’ Aini’s point is in line with Monereo’s (2007) statement that,

When faced with a social situation that produces tension and insecurity, we can activate a protective self that tries to act in a very controlled, meticulous and conservative manner, ensuring each movement and avoiding speculative or hazardous behaviours. (p. 534).

Ratna, too, talked about her experience of speaking in English among native speakers and explained why her focus shifted from content to form among native speakers,

I feel more comfortable when talking about my research because I am not self-conscious about grammar. I mean my mind is so focused on the content, and we are really talking about the content, so I don’t think about my grammar or pronunciation. But when I concentrate on my language, it makes me uncomfortable. (G1S2)

Ratna talked about the uncomfortable feeling of constantly self-monitoring her performance and being anxious about making language mistakes. She said her knowledge of the content,

for instance when she talked about her research, increased her confidence and facilitated her communication.

As previously mentioned in Section 8.1, within the community of international students, the participants used socio-affective strategies more which helped them enact protagonist roles in interactions. When they crossed between communities and in interactions with the broader HDR student community, international students were more concerned about making language mistakes, were focused on the form of their language, and used evading strategies such as passive smiling and message abandonment more. In this sense negotiation strategies in use can be seen as index of agency.

Building on Gee's (2008) triangle of self, social context and language in use and based on the data in this study, I wish to suggest that language in use is saturated with negotiation strategies and each angle of the self, social context, and language in use triangle embodies multiple layers and issues which make the use of strategies idiosyncratic, yet socially and contextually situated.

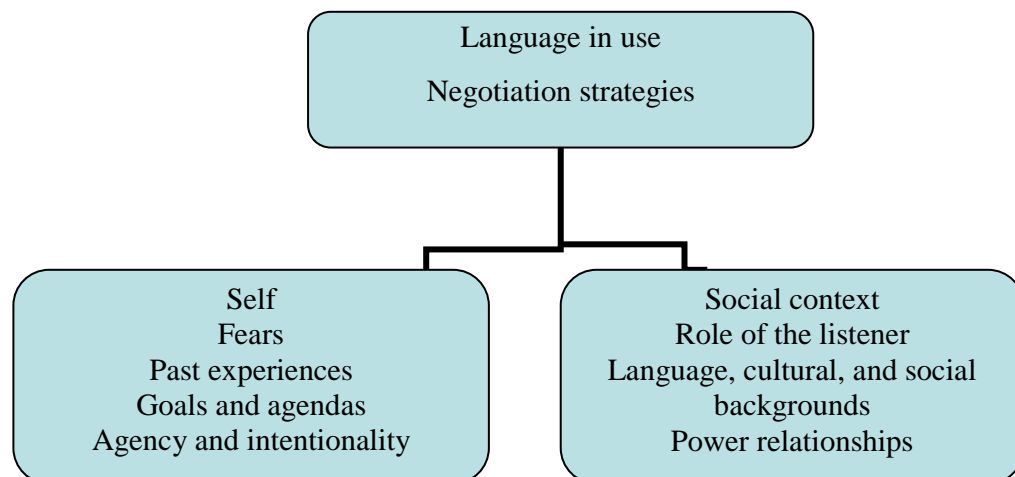


Figure 8.1 The interrelationship between self, language in use, social context and negotiation strategies

## 8.5 CONCLUSION

The data in this chapter illuminated the ties between negotiation strategies and social representations. It was argued that the background contexts of interactions influence the negotiation strategies in use. For example, asymmetrical power relationships, the social construction of the Other, fears of cultural misunderstanding or fears of being judged and other language factors resulted in a range of evading strategies to avoid risks and potential conflicts in interactions. Supportive socio-affective strategies were used in contexts where students felt connected, close and ready to engage with peers.

The data also suggest that strategies can be used to negotiate power, identity, culture and social roles. Chen and Starosta (2004) call for a theory of communication competence that includes the dynamics of representations in multicultural encounters. They write,

The global context of human communication and the need to pursue a state of multicultural coexistence require that we abolish the boundaries separating me and you, us and them, and develop a theory of communication competence that takes into account individuals' multiple identities. (p. 12)

The data also illustrate the interrelationship between language in use and social identities at play (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), and supported the argument that the use of negotiation strategies in a given social context is a process far more complicated than a theoretically neutral version of second language communication strategy use. Figure 8.3 illustrates the multiple roles of negotiation strategies in multicultural contexts.



Figure 8.2 The multiple roles of negotiation strategies in multicultural contexts

In addition to highlighting the multiple roles of negotiation strategies in multicultural encounters, this study shows how strategy choice is incorporated into the construction of different social identities across a range of social contexts. The following diagram shows how context influences strategies in use and how strategies serve to construct and negotiate social identities.

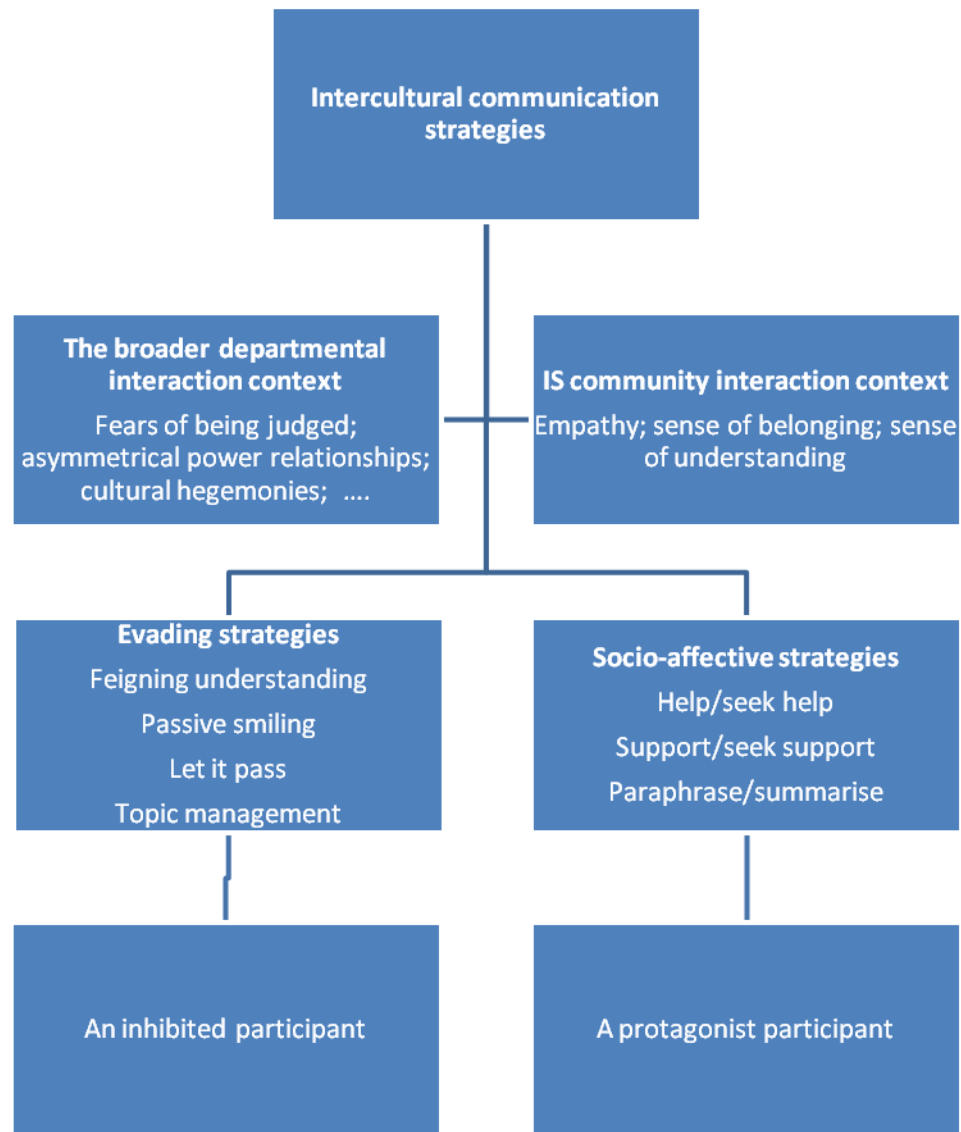


Figure 8.3 Enactment of social identities through the use of negotiation strategies

Asymmetries embedded in multicultural communication contexts involving power, language, and culture may construct either an ‘inhibited’ self or a ‘protagonist’ self in interactions. However, since identities are dynamically and strategically negotiated, this means that the binaries between the two categories are never fixed, but negotiated and

(re)negotiated. Therefore in multicultural contexts, negotiation strategies are more than linguistic tools, and provide an index of agency, identity, social memberships and participation.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **CHALLENGING INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES**

#### **OVERVIEW**

Throughout the data chapters I have tried to illuminate informal institutional interactions as contexts of second language use, intercultural encounters and arenas for negotiating institutional identity. I have been concerned throughout with the links between identity, discursive representations, and discursive patterns, practices and strategies. I identified and described the small communities intrinsic to the larger faculty community in this study and tried to work inductively to use the discourses of informal coffee-time interactions to provide insights into the power relations, and the processes of identity negotiation within and across communities.

In broad terms, this study aimed to explore the relationships between social identity and language use, and to locate English language use within sociocultural contexts. It was focused by two main research questions:

- 1) How do international postgraduate research students negotiate social representations in and through informal departmental interactions?
- 2) What is the role of communication strategies in the discursive negotiation of identities?

This chapter is a brief review of the main findings and summarises my responses to the research questions



## **9.1 A SNAPSHOT OF POSTGRADUATE INFORMAL DEPARTMENTAL INTERACTIONS**

Tearooms, staffrooms and student lounges in Australian universities are ‘contact zones’ and avenues for multicultural interaction and identity negotiation. Particularly for PhD research students in this study who had no set courses, it was argued that informal departmental interactions were major arenas for identity construction and negotiation.

The findings showed that staffrooms and tearooms are sites of social, cultural and power play where some newcomer students felt at times they were in the spotlight, and judged in terms of their legitimacy. In addition, informal tearoom conversations were saturated with cultural and local themes which made them difficult to understand for these international students. Even with good command of formal English, international students found it challenging to pick up on all of the culturally predicted nuances entailed in informal interactions, and comfortably engage in informal lunch-time conversations. The students were concerned that these challenges could lead to false judgments about their legitimacy as members, and to generalisations that could in turn lead into further cultural stereotyping.

The data, however, showed that tearooms were arenas for discursive negotiation of ‘self,’ and at times of the self as ‘other.’ In and through informal lunch/coffee time institutional interactions, ‘international’ postgraduates took ‘agentive actions’ to reposition themselves and negotiate institutional identity. Joko’s statement, “I think if I don’t ask they may say he is not understanding”, or Amar’s statement “we have to go and speak, otherwise they think we are not understanding” shows an aspect of the students’ ‘agentive action’ to reposition themselves and negotiate ‘audibility.’

## **9.2 CHALLENGING THE STEREOTYPE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT**

The data in this study underlined a tendency in Australian universities to stereotype the ‘international student.’ The association of the label with weak English language skills and passive learning on the one hand and Otherness, exclusion and marginalisation on the other was argued to suppress student voice and limit international students’ access to useful academic networks. An international/local student dichotomy was shaped partly by ascribing the ‘international student’ label to new students. The label was found to be implicated in the notion of the identity of these students, and a fixed component of their potential academic identity. The international student label in Australian universities was argued to be discriminatory in nature, as it often perpetuates wrong generalisations about this group, and detracts from the considerable diversity of origins, agendas, capabilities and practices of these students. The study thus raised questions regarding the term ‘international student’ as too broad to represent the cultural diversity of this group of students, and the heterogeneity of their approaches to academic life in Australia.

The data, however, confirmed Kettle’s (2005) findings that ‘international’ postgraduate students in Australia work towards challenging “the images of international ESL students at sea in the Western university” (p. 57). The participants here showed how they planned strategically to negotiate legitimacy. For all the similarities between the students, the tensions, frictions, and negotiations which they had in common, the students in this study experienced the new academic experience in different ways. Therefore, the process of negotiating legitimacy and identity was different for each of the participants in this study. Despite their similar backgrounds and common feelings at entry to their university, international students chose different pathways to develop and negotiate a

legitimate PhD student identity in and through their day-to-day institutional interactions. For example, Aini and Xia invested heavily in engaging in departmental interactions and expanding their institutional network, while Joko or Ratna decided to focus on writing their PhD theses.

Students' diverse agendas, goals and sources of sponsorship also influenced their identity negotiations and participation in institutional interactions. In some, the difference directly impeded their institutional interactions, participation and their strategies for self-representation. For instance, while Bina's example of participation in writing groups at university showed how a sense of belonging was built for her through engagement in institutional interactions over time, Joko and Ratna's approach exemplified the role of agency in investment in institutional interactions. Even though Joko and Ratna seemed similarly conservative in investing in engagement in social departmental interactions, their choices were derived from different trajectories and reflected their different past experiences, beliefs, agendas for doctoral study and goals. This diversity is also overlooked in the broad label of 'international student.'

### **9.3 DIVERSE CONSTRUCTS OF INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY**

I used the term institutional identity in this study to refer to an evolving identity the participants, all doctoral students, were constructing and negotiating in and through their institutional interactions. Institutional identity can be defined as the integration of social and recognised professional identity shaped by membership of an institution, through legitimated interactions with other institutional members. Part of this identity was argued to be imposed by the institution and other institutional members, while part was negotiated through institutional interactions (electronic, face to face, presentations, and so on). The

stereotypical imposition was articulated by Clare when she joined the participants' conversations and said "Stereotyping is interesting. When I first walked in the room, my first impression was you were going to be quiet. Yeah, my stereotyping was that you never want to contribute that much. So, I was expecting you to be quiet".

In this study, participants' institutional identities started to evolve upon enrolment at the university and developed through membership in the institution. Students worked towards shaping a 'legitimate PhD student' identity. It was seen that the 'international student' identity, associated with a 'nobody position' (Kettle, 2005), was imposed by the institution as a preexisting component of institutional identity. However, departmental interactions provided the students with a context to take 'agentive action,' to reposition themselves, to reject the 'nobody position'. Like 'Woody' in Kettle's study, Bina, Shamim, Hanna, Ratna, Amar, Xia, Aini, and Joko all had their own strategic plans to negotiate legitimacy, to stand out in the international student 'sea.'

The process of negotiating institutional identity for the participants of this study was concurrent with multiple transitions in their social identities. At the time of data collection, the participants were experiencing transitions from teacher to student, from native-speaker of their mother tongue to nonnative speaker of English, from legitimate member in their social circles in their own countries to newcomer to Australia, and their new academic institution, from expert academic or teacher to novice first-year PhD student. Their institutional identities were shaped by these transactional and transitional processes.

Three constructs of institutional identity were identified in the context of this study, as exemplified by four individual participants. These were: (1) Joko's self-conserving approach, which minimised engagement in departmental interactions as a channel of learning; (2) Bina and Xia's self-engaging approach, which used 'agentive action' to invest

in departmental interactions; and (3) Ratna's self-isolating approach, self-constraining and unready to openly engage in interactions despite her intention to invest. This heterogeneity in the construction of identities, and negotiation of participation in the Australian education experience reveals the role of agency and intentionality in investing in institutional interactions. It also leads to another critique of the 'international student' as a label, as it undervalues student agency and diversity and overlooks their diverse motivations and agendas for coming to Australia to do a PhD.

## **9.4 WRITING GROUPS**

Students' participation in writing groups was one example of agency in working towards repositioning the self in the academic community. A sense of belonging to the academic community was enhanced for some through participation in some departmental interactions. For example, Bina and Xia highlighted the role of student writing groups as a major channel through which postgraduate research students formed a 'community of practice', generated a sense of belonging to institution, and reinforced learning in community. The mixed writing groups were spaces for connection, 'transcultural' learning and identity negotiation. Bina described her writing group as a space in which she felt "the PhD identity is strong". Providing all students with spaces to share knowledge and experience can be argued to be a primary step towards "pedagogy of connection in critical research education" (Cadman, 2005b, p. 353). The students in this study talked about feelings of being lost, disconnected, and lacking information in the beginning of their journeys. Ratna stressed she "was looking for a community." Hanna even suggested that taking a few courses at the start of PhD could provide students with better opportunities to connect to each other and to their local peers and staff.

Despite feeling distanced, and left behind in the beginning of their study, the students who participated in writing groups talked about feeling close, equal and at one with their local peers. Membership in writing groups intensified their sense of belonging to faculty and replaced their hesitation “to be in front of others” with confidence in engagement. To Bina and Xia, in particular, mixed international/local students’ writing groups was a dynamic space for mutual learning and dialogue, a hegemony-free space for learning through interaction. Bina, for example, described writing groups as an avenue where she could enjoy ‘audibility’ (Miller, 2003), develop identity and negotiate legitimacy. Both Bina and Xia described the writing groups as spaces in which they felt ‘audible’ and legitimate, a space which strongly contributed to their active participation and learning.

## **9.5 CROSSING BETWEEN COMMUNITIES**

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that communities of practice are bounded with shared goals, objectives, concerns and agendas. The data in this study, however, showed that within multicultural institutions like the university in this study, the politics of language, culture and power can work to form central and peripheral communities positioning some institutional members at the centre and others at the periphery.

At the start of their PhD journey, some of the participants in this study talked about a divided community of practice and complained about being left at the periphery, separated from the central community of local students. Hanna used the metaphor of running to describe this space when she said, “they are all running and we are not good runners”. The students also talked about the academic/student divide and stressed that they felt local students had better access to the faculty and staff. With the broader Australian

community, too, the participants complained about a lack of connection. For example Shamim took us to his workplace in a bakery where he described his social interactions as limited to socialisation with other immigrant workers. Joko took us to a caravan park where he experienced a social interaction with a rural Australian family, which he described as difficult communication for both sides.

As pointed out by Canagarajah (2006), in today's globalised societies, the notion of community can be as chimerical as the ideology of the native speaker. The data showed that students' interactions were situated in community layers, and some were more centrally situated and some were formed at the periphery. Despite evidence of space and detachment between community layers surrounding the participants, they were able to cross over the boundaries, build connection, and learn from interaction. Xia's socialisation with her Australian roommate was described by her as "very effective in learning the Australian way of life". The role of Xia's PhD supervisor in helping her to bridge the connection was central, which recalls Duff's (2007) socialisation theory in which she insists, "experts or more proficient members of a group play a very important role in socializing novices" (p. 311). Cadman (2005b), also stresses that, as the most immediate people of contact for postgraduate research students, PhD supervisors play key roles in bridging students' connection and participating in the "the pedagogy of connection" in HDR programs (p. 353).

Xia's reflection on herself an international student, despite officially being an Australian citizen, show that communities are united or divided by people's beliefs, sense of belonging and social identification rather than administrative labels, geographical boundaries or immigration laws. It was also shown in the data that the negotiation of belonging is dynamic and subject to time, space, and context. When Xia lived with her

Australian friend, at the beginning of the research, she felt closer to the local community. Two and a half years later when her friend had moved out and she shared a place with other international students, she felt closer to the international student community. Xia's increased feelings of detachment by the end of the journey, or Ratna's self-isolation after her negative past experience of being judged for her English language communication ability in front of an audience at a conference remind us of a caveat regarding representation. That is closing the doors for the newcomers to cross between communities and pushing them to the periphery is a phenomenon which may occur more easily than opening opportunities for them to connect.

Bina and Xia, however, provide evidence that students can take 'agentive actions' to diminish these boundaries and negotiate legitimacy. The example of writing groups showed that when the social, cultural and language barriers diminished, the HDR student community benefited from interactions, constructed legitimate identities and enhanced their sense of belonging to their department.

## **9.6 INTERCULTURAL NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ties between the student, the social context and the language in use rather than to identify categories of communication strategies. This study thus shares a standpoint with Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) who stress that,

It is through intentional social interactions with members of the other culture, through continuous attempts to construct new meanings through new discourses that one becomes an equal participant in new discursive spaces (pp. 173-4)

However, the students' intentions for participation in social interactions were partly influenced by their goals, agendas and sources of sponsorship which made them strategic in



their interactions. In this sense, as illustrated in Figure 9.1 below, using appropriate negotiation strategies in different social contexts was highlighted as key to participants' repositioning and the construction of new discursive identities.



Figure 9.1 The process of negotiation of institutional identity

As illustrated above, participants' use of negotiation strategies signaled their intention to be agentic, to reposition themselves, and to reject the 'nobody position.' The relationship between being agentic and acting strategically was evident in the data, for example when Bina said, "we know we need to speak up, otherwise they think we do not understand." Ratna said, "If I am interested to develop good relation with the participants or to the topic being discussed, I would make further verbal efforts in understanding what the speakers say." These examples showed how students invested in using strategies to be agentic, to negotiate legitimate institutional identities.

The data illustrate that diverse negotiation strategies were deployed in different contexts. Depending on who their ‘interactive other’ was (Davies, 1999), and what social, cultural and power asymmetries were inherent in the interaction contexts, students used different negotiation strategies. For example, Bina’s statement: “when I speak with local students, I feel that they just don’t understand us at once. We have to repeat ourselves but with international students, it is easy” signals that international students felt more ‘audible’ within their own community. The data highlighted a difference in participants’ strategy use among themselves, that is, within their community of international students, and when they crossed over communities, in their interactions with native speakers. Within their own community, they felt ‘audible,’ and used supportive socio-affective strategies such as *support* and *seek support* more to negotiate membership and legitimacy. In interactions with local students and staff, the participants used face-saving and evading strategies more such as *passive smiling* or *topic management* to avoid threats to ‘face,’ sounding different, or being judged for legitimacy. These findings stressed that, situated in diverse social contexts, participants used different strategies to negotiate social membership, identities, and agency as well as language comprehension.

The data showed that intercultural communication strategies can be viewed and analysed for their ‘indexicality’ (Duff, 2007). The participants’ choice of communication strategies revealed many clues about the background social context of interactions, the power relationships, hegemonic discourses and the hidden discursive construction of ‘self/other.’ The analysis of the students’ communication strategy choice also provided clues to their ‘agentive actions,’ to their strategic plans to negotiate institutional identity in and through the interactions. The indexicality of communication strategies was articulated by the participants themselves; for example, Ratna mentioned, “If I am interested to develop

good relation with the participants or to the topic being discussed, I would make further verbal efforts in understanding what the speakers say”. It is also important to consider communication strategies as indexes of membership negotiation. For example Bina’s discursive patterns, her use of inclusive pronouns such as ‘we,’ and ‘they’, as well as her use of *protagonist* vs *inhibited* communication strategies (i.e., passive smiling, or support and repair) indexes her negotiation of membership in her writing group community. She also avoided engagement in certain other groups which did not seem as hospitable as the writing groups to her.

It was argued that although using intercultural negotiation strategies was generally a sign for agency, strategies were different in the way they encouraged participants to take protagonist roles in interactions. For instance, passive smiling and ‘let it pass’ caused student inhibition, while support and seeking support were strategies which encouraged students’ active engagement in interactions. This highlights the role of negotiation strategies and strategy choice in the constructions negotiation and (re)negotiation of social identities.

Norton (2000) reminds us that language facilitates, “the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated” (p. 7). The data in this study showed that using socially and contextually appropriate negotiation strategies is essential in facilitating access and constructing legitimate social identities. Progression from an inhibitor or observer stage in interactions to a ‘protagonist stage’ for the participants in this study was tied to their use of negotiation strategies.

## **9.7 DISCURSIVE PATTERNS, PRACTICES AND REPRESENTATION**

The interrelationship between participants' discourse patterns and self-representation was another emergent theme in the data. Bina's complex use of plural and inclusive pronouns indicated her dynamic negotiations of membership in the layers of community within her department and pointed to the multiplicity of selves in social interactions. The discursive moves between 'they' and 'we,' signaled the international/local student dichotomy and a divide in the HDR student community.

The discourse patterns of the recorded conversations in this study illustrated how cultural stereotyping is embedded in language interactions. An Aussie student was perceived to have an 'open culture,' while the international student group was perceived to be confined to a limited range of topics. The discursive construction of self and the Other was partly due to cultural stereotypes and common discourse practices and generalisations surrounding the 'international student' label. For example, Clare mentioned how generalising the 'international' culture as closed had kept her from connecting with international students openly. As she said, "we feel you like to stick to yourselves. So, it's sort of bizarre. But, yeah, most our culture is very open. You can sort of say almost everything. So, we really get personal. And if you don't be personal, it means you don't really want to connect".

Institutional labels signal institutional discourse practices (Miller, 2003). The 'international student' label attached to students in this study impacted on their day-to-day negotiations of space, identity and representation in departmental interactions. Their evolving institutional identities were partly influenced by the label attached to them and the institution's discursive practices. For example, when Joko complained about local students'

slowing down in speaking with international students, he signalled his resistance to being spoken to differently, to being stereotyped. Such resistance to the institution's discursive practices implies international students' rejection of the 'international student' identity and their efforts to reposition and legitimise themselves as social members.

## **9.8 TOWARDS A 'PEDAGOGY OF FLOW'**

Australian universities acknowledge internationalisation in their agenda and the need to move towards a "pedagogy of flow" (Pennycook, 2005). Transnational mobility has brought fluidity to Australian universities and turned them into avenues for multicultural interactions. This small study has highlighted that student interactions in Australian universities are visible examples of multicultural encounters where language use, culture, membership and legitimacy are constructed and negotiated. Understanding this process is therefore a preliminary step to developing pedagogy for Australian universities, which are international 'educational contact zones'. To understand student interactions, this study followed Norton's (2001) advice to take into account who the students are, where they come from, and what their goals are. In so doing the study has reemphasized Cadman's (2005b) call for a 'pedagogy of connection' in postgraduate research programs as the prerequisite for any 'pedagogy of flow' for Australian universities.

This standpoint entails a move towards opening 'transcultural' learning spaces, the recognition of the plurality of student voices, and leaving behind the stereotypes of the 'individualistic' vs the 'collectivist,' the 'Western' vs 'non-Western,' or the 'international' vs 'local' labels attached to student groups. It also means a consideration of the goals and agendas of individual students. As emphasised throughout, the eight student participants in this case study had diverse social and cultural backgrounds, came with different past

experiences, and had diverse agendas and goals for their study abroad experience, a diversity which influenced their interaction patterns and their ways of being in an Australian university.

## **9.9 LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

Several limitations should be acknowledged in regard to this study. First, it represents a small number of international doctoral students, chosen from a range of backgrounds. The students' interaction patterns and language strategies are in some ways representative of multicultural encounters and negotiation strategies, but also reflections of individual choices. Second, although the data collection phase extended well over two years, this was a very brief space of time in terms of the representation of identity in second language interactions. Third, the case study situated the participants at a specific time and place, capturing elements of their lived experiences and language use, both of which change and will continue to change over time. The cases are therefore not generalisable to other students, or those in different phases of their study abroad experience. This means that students enrolled in other programs at other universities may experience their study abroad in different ways. Finally, while I have tried to avoid overclaiming, underclaiming and other traps inherent in the imaginative and creative work of the qualitative researcher, my interpretations are inevitably partially subjective. The fact that I am myself an international student, sharing with the participants' many of the challenges and concerns raised in this research, I acknowledge, had some impact on the composition of the thesis, and the way I felt connected to the data. Nevertheless, the data I have presented are hopefully sufficient to

sustain my own interpretations, although different interpretations might be made by other researchers.

There are several ways to address the limitations of this study through further research. Firstly, an investigation of a larger cohort of students drawn from a broader range of universities and countries would illuminate the process of identity construction and negotiation as students work towards academic and social integration. Secondly, an investigation of intercultural identity analysed through a detailed discourse analysis of student interactions would reveal how closely discourse is linked to identity. Thirdly, further research might address whether existing communication strategy taxonomies are appropriate in intercultural communication contexts among students, or if new intercultural communication strategy taxonomies need to be developed. Finally, an investigation of local students' perceptions of communication and identity in their interactions with their international peers could be fruitful in further understanding the development of identity through student interactions. The voices of local students are little represented in this context, or in other research related to international students.

The key issues of identity, language use and representation are critical for all newcomers to the discourses, sociocultural practices, and multicultural institutions in a new country. Insights into their work in acquiring a new repertoire of social, intercultural, linguistic, and interpersonal competences which facilitate their self-representation may be gleaned from institutional interactions. Therefore, further research into the institutional interactions and multicultural encounters embedded in most organisations, may illuminate the sociocultural power play, the politics of inclusion or exclusion, and the process of construction and negotiation of institutional identities.

The theoretical contribution of this study is an understanding of the role of second language communication strategies in the politics of language, social, and cultural negotiations embedded in institutional interaction contexts, in spite of the individual goals and agendas. In this sense, this study has been an attempt to bridge the gaps between broader theoretical analyses of language and dominance, and focused research on strategy use in second language interactions. The project has opened an avenue to study the international education experience through the little used lens of interpersonal departmental interactions. It has revealed a diversity of motivations, agendas, and institutional experiences that reflects students' strategic approach in their interactions. It has offered perspectives on the second language negotiation strategies observed and shown the roles of agency and investment in institutional interactions.

This study highlighted the significance of research into how new members to an institution with diverse language, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, construct, develop and negotiate institutional identity. It also opens up other questions. How are the politics of language and culture woven into the process of identity construction and social representations? What role do institutional practices play in centralising or marginalising their members, in amplifying or suppressing student voices? But perhaps the most significant implication of the study is for the Australian higher education system, underlining the need to better understand the lived experiences of students in international education to promote international education, and to replace the stereotypes of international student with a recognition of the diversity and potential of these students.

The data have shown how participants consciously and strategically rejected the 'nobody position' (Kettle, 2005), resisted the 'international student' label, renegotiated their institutional identities in and through informal institutional discourses and



repositioned themselves in legitimate rather than marginalised positions. Such legitimacy can only be negotiated in an environment where cultural and linguistic diversity is valued and where individual differences are appreciated, where everyone hears, “I know my English is different but I have something to say” (Joko, FG2).

## **9.10 CODA**

Before concluding this thesis, I need to acknowledge how the composition of this thesis has both been informed and challenged by my own identities, those that I had established before starting to do this research and those which I constructed, developed and negotiated throughout.

Devereux (1967) asserts, “what happens within the observer must be made known, if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood” (p. 6). What happened within me since the time I arrived in Australia had significant impact on all stages of my research, from choosing the topic to writing my research questions and interpreting the data. Undoubtedly, my most striking study abroad experience happened in the very first weeks after my arrival when, wherever I went, the first question I heard was, “Where are you from?” It felt as if everyone was rushing to tell me that I looked and sounded different. The question by itself imposes a sense of displacement on every newcomer, but to me it was even more difficult to answer as I had a life challenged by great mobility. As an Iranian-born, American-raised, Canadian resident, I sometimes had to think and decide which of these places contributed most to the construction of my identity and where I felt I belonged. Often, I did not have to worry about trying to find an answer to this question, many who raised the question, solved it by themselves, deciding that based on my appearance, I was a

Middle Eastern woman of color, and so, I thus represented an ‘other,’ ‘international student’ from somewhere in a vaguely defined global space.

Regardless of my geographic location, I was raised in a family which did not necessarily appreciate the fundamentals of social equity. As a child, I was never allowed to take my plate to the maid’s room, or eat lunch with her, or play with her children. Even in my adult life, I certainly enjoyed my central and powerful insider position when I travelled to and worked in Iran, when I was in a position of authority, hiring EFL teachers in my city of birth, Shiraz, and I had little appreciation for social equity. It must be admitted that I too did not avoid making subjective value judgments on the credibility of the potential EFL teachers, based on their names, religious beliefs, or English accents.

This research has helped me to think more deeply about such phenomena. Based on my own personal lived experience of movement, mobility and immigration, I need to say that it is not only us, them, or the context that opens or closes doors to integration. Our social representations and access are shaped by various elements of time and place including social, political, economic, and historical events. When I was a child in an international student family in the United States in the 1970s, as Iranians, we never represented danger, terrorism, and conflict, but three decades later things had shifted greatly. The realities of political regimes, global relations, and historical events, which as ordinary people we were never in a position to make any difference in, have certainly impacted on our social position as a nation in the world. Such a repositioning – or better put a depositioning – has also influenced my life as part of the Iranian nation in various ways including my everyday socializations, access, and my global ‘social capital’.

In this thesis, I wrote about the transitions the participants went through during their move to Australia and their study abroad experiences. The most striking transition for me

was the dislocation from my position of influence and authority to a position of novice outsider. I had moved from the 'legitimate' to the 'marginalized.' Ahead may lie further instances of the impact of my non-western name on my career as an English teacher or lecturer in an English speaking country. For now I am content that my study abroad experience has instigated so many deep changes within me, and that the journey has been worth it.

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# APPENDIX 1

## ETHICS APPROVAL



MONASH University

Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH)Research Office  
Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH)Research Office

### Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

Date: 9 September 2008

Project Number: CF08/2007 - 2008000986

Project Title: Postgraduate international students in an Australian university: An investigation of language in use and identities at play

Chief Investigator: Dr Jennifer Miller

Approved: From: 9 September 2008 to 9 September 2013

#### Terms of approval

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained and a copy forwarded to SCERH before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. **Failure to provide permission letters to SCERH before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all pending information (such as permission letters from organisations) is forwarded to SCERH. Research cannot begin at an organisation until SCERH receives a permission letter from that organisation and confirms that research can start.
4. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by SCERH.
5. You should notify SCERH immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
6. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.

7. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to SCERH and must not begin without written approval from SCERH. Substantial variations may require a new application.
8. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
9. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
10. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. SCERH should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
11. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by SCERH at any time.
12. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

Professor Ben Canny  
Chair, SCERH

Cc: Ms Sepideh Fotovatian;

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ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **EXPLANATORY STATEMENT**

Title: Postgraduate International Students in an Australian University: An Investigation of Language in Use and Identities at Play

My name is Sepideh Fotovatian, and I am conducting a research project with Dr. Jennifer Miller ( senior lecturer) in the Department of Education towards a PhD degree at Monash University. This means that I will be writing a thesis which is equivalent to a 300 page book.

This research focuses on language interactions of postgraduate students (international and local). I am conducting this research to find out what communication strategies are involved in language interactions of international students from different backgrounds among themselves and with local students and how their communicative behavior affect their academic identity. The findings of this research have the potential to enhance effective interaction between international and local university students.

The study involves audio-recording conversations, (three sessions of each 40 minute long) video-recording a focus group interview (one- hour long) and electronic communication with the researcher (diaries of critical daily relevant incidents). The estimated time for the completion of data collection is three months.

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you may only withdraw prior to the audio-recording of the conversations.

Maximum effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the data. The results will be only published with pseudonyms. Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and kept on University premises in a locked filing cabinet for five years. A report of the study will be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Ms. Sepideh Fotovatian on [REDACTED] or email: s [REDACTED]  
The findings are accessible for September 2009.

If you would like to contact the **researchers** about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator: Dr. Jennifer Miller, Room 308 Faculty of Education, Building 6, Clayton campus, Monash University. Or cal [REDACTED] Or email:

[REDACTED]

If you have a **complaint** concerning the manner in which this research is being conducted, please contact: Executive Officer, Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH)

Building 3e Room 111, Research Office, Monash University VIC 3800. Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Fax: +61 3 9905 1420 Email: [scerh@adm.monash.edu.au](mailto:scerh@adm.monash.edu.au)

Thank you

Sepideh Fotovatian

Dr. Jennifer Miller

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **CONSENT FORM**

**Title:** *Postgraduate International Students in an Australian University: An Investigation of Language in Use and Identities at Play*

*NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records*

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

*List all procedures relevant to your data collection – delete those not applicable*

**I agree to allow my conversations to be audio-taped and/or video-taped**

☐ Yes      ☐ No

**I agree to make myself available for a further focus group interview which will be video-recorded**      ☐ Yes      ☐ No

**I agree to make myself available for electronic communication with the researcher**

☐ Yes      ☐ No

**I agree to complete questionnaires asking me about demographic details**

☐ Yes      ☐ No

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the observations/ focus group / electronic journals for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

I understand that data from the **focus group/transcript/audio-tapes/ electronic journals** will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

**Participant's name**

**Signature**

**Date**

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

Focus Group 1: 20.02.2009 (Aini, Xia, Joko, Ratna, Shamim)

- 1- A participant has raised this issue that she feels uncomfortable speaking in English with local students who know her as an English teacher, is this the way you feel?
- 2- A participant has said he does not like it when local speakers slow down in their speaking to communicate with him, because he does not like “to be treated differently.” Another participant has mentioned that she expects local students to slow down and avoid slang in their communication with her to let her understand them easier. What do you think? Which way do you prefer?
- 3- Do you think learning slang and colloquial English is important to your academic or social life here?
- 4- Do you try to familiarise yourself with local and current events by for instance reading newspapers, or watching TV?
- 5- Do you feel comfortable to approach other students or staff to ask questions?
- 6- Do you think you speak English with an accent? Are you concerned with your English accent?
- 7- Do you have similar conversations when you meet other international students in the tearoom to situations where you meet local students?
- 8- What do you usually enjoy talking about in lunch-time when you are with your local peers (e.g., your thesis, jokes, local news)?

9- Do you feel part of the community?

### **Focus Group 2: 3.11.2010 (Xia, Bina, Joko)**

- 1- How do you describe your networks in the faculty? Since the previous focus group almost 2 years ago, has anything developed?
- 2- What has established in writing groups and what has being part of those groups done for you?
- 3- How does the experience of being part of these groups contribute to your identity as a legitimate PhD student here in the faculty?
- 4- Do you feel confident with relationship with academics?
- 5- Has English language got anything to do with that confidence? Do you feel more secure with English now than two years ago? Or is that not related?
- 6- Do you perceive two groups among the HDR student in the faculty or not? Local and international or this grouping is not relevant at all?
- 7- Do you have the perception that the local and international students have different process of doing the PhD? Or is it a level thing?
- 8- Do you have similar academic networks with your local friends? Is networking important to you?
- 9- Are you worried about the future after you finish the PhDs? and getting a job?
- 10- [To Xia particularly who has now become an Australian citizen]: Do you yourself consider yourself an IS or a LS?
- 11- Do you have any issues with discrimination?

12- We talked about that dichotomy (IS/LS). Do you think in the perceptions of academics that dichotomy exists?



## **APPENDIX 5**

### **SAMPLE OF FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTIONS**

Focus group 2 3.11.2010 Bina, Joko, Xia, and the researchers

J: How do you describe your networks in the faculty? Since the previous focus group almost 2 years ago, has anything developed?

B: Uh yeah. When I compare the previous time and now, yes, I am very active now I am involved in two writing groups and we are very active regarding the faculty no not much has changed because I have my own office at that time we were two students in our office but now we are seven students so we have our socialisation in our office but with faculty not much.

J: me too, not much networking I do. I have been in the writing up so I have been busy with myself. I was invited by MERC to writing group but at that time I wasn't ready. I'm not ready for commitment in such a group you don't only take but you also give you know you don't get others' comments on your work but you also give comments this means you also spend some of your time for them too and I didn't think that pushing myself to different groups with different interest would be beneficial for me at that time. But lately I was thinking that I have been lonely in my journey. I feel left behind but at the moment I am thinking of just finishing my PhD. My research is going to be beneficial in my career teacher education in my country.

Xia: I enjoyed my time here and still enjoying it. I tried to push myself to focus on my research and be more involved by participating in many events. Like participating the

MERC events last year and convening MERC this year. ... I participate in writing groups and I think these writing groups, was a really good idea.

J: Who leads the writing group?

We have five writing groups and a lot of students are involved

J: They are both IS and LS?

B: Yes, in my group we are five 3 international students and two local

J: So being international is irrelevant.

B: No not in that group we feel very closed and our writing is similar and we work together. In that group we are at the same stage.

J: What has established in those groups and what has being part of those groups done for you? How does the experience of being part of these groups contribute to your institutional identity and being recognised as a legitimate PhD student here in the faculty?

B: as a PhD student that identity is very strong but I don't think that is related to our being a faculty member. So there we can be more open now So people hesitated so much to be in front of others. We are not hesitating anymore we can bring whatever we have written and we have then that discussion we get some good feedback from our friends and we have a facilitator also there.

J: You mentioned others who are these others?

Other PhD friends, other PhD friends. We are all at similar stage. So, I don't think my writing is crap so we can discuss whatever I have. So this way I feel like I belong here not isolated so we think we are together in this journey and not isolated as before in the beginning. So I feel like this is a joint journey not a lonely journey.

J: I am hearing you are talking about peers. What about academics, do you feel confident with relationship with academics?

CH: Maybe this is my cultural background. I always think I am a student.

Academics are academics and students are students and I am a student. Even though we have all been given staff email, I never use that. I use my student email. Because I am a student I am not eligible to use that I know I am a student. I do respect and appreciate this way how the faculty regard HDR students as part of them but I always feel nervous to talk to staff no matter who they are whether it is the dean or a lecturer. I think in my mind they are different people.

What about you?

B: Yeah same same . My relationship with academics is only with my supervisor even with you I don't have that kind of relationship. So with my peers yeah I am getting close but with academics I still know just my supervisor.

Joko: I have a different experience here. I think the staff here are very kind people. I have conversation with academics next to my office.

J: You mean regular conversation?

J: Yes regular conversations and I think knowing them is good they treat us as colleagues and I think that's the best environment I admire them.

J: It sounds like you all have built some confidence. Has English language got anything to do with that confidence? Do you feel more secure with English now than two years ago? or is that not related?

X: I think English is very important because it is an academic environment you always need English to communicate in term of speaking or writing If you participate a seminar and you can't understand that will interfere or influence our confidence. I actually think if we don't participate in events or activities or simply stay in your office and write

your research it is hard to improve your English so it is better to get out of office and talk with people no matter they are IS or LS otherwise we don't improve our English.

S: Sometimes when I want to send an email to my supervisor or write sth. I look at it and say Gosh no this is not like a native speaker's writing and then hesitantly I press the SEND button as I have no other way.

J: It is because you compare yourself with native speaker standard. I myself I have a totally different stand here. My friends ask me why I usually don't go to writing groups or use the services here and ask people in the library here to check my writing I say I don't care I write my own writing and I think it is the native speakers' job to understand that I am an international student. And I am lucky because my supervisor doesn't care she knows this is my way of writing and I always write this in my introductions in the chapters that my focus is on the content to see if I am clear in the ideas.

J: This means you don't make grammatical errors?

J: Yeah I do make grammatical errors. At this stage this is my first draft I just want comment on my ideas. Later I can fix everything.

B: In my case in writing emails I don't care because I don't compare myself with native speakers. In my writing I also feel the same way because in my own work I use many words and my supervisor corrects them only one word is enough why do you use so many words and so I wish like a native speaker I could use fewer words more effectively. I don't have that kind of flow Ideas I have but flow of language I don't.

X: Actually the language problem is always there because we are not native we are non-native. I also attend seminars by academics and professors here about their PhD journey and their experience and realize that even though they are professors or lecturers

now the whole PhD journey is not easy and they also struggled in their journey. I also attend lectures and seminars of Dr Shan. She is a non-native and speaks with accent but she says we know we are non-natives but we actually enrich the research field in education so that is an inspiration. I know that in writing the thesis the quality of my writing is not native but actually this helps me reduce my being nervous and now I can submit my writing to my writing group and ask for feedback. So I simply write it out and give it to others because it is not criticism they do they give you comments. I actually struggled a lot. Before I did not contribute or give any piece of writing to my writing group but now I am not afraid anymore. So I say to myself write it out and give it out to other people to get their comments; this is not criticism. Instead of criticism they give you comments and you can make it better.

J: I think you are being very realistic and very sensitive. Do you have the perception that the local and is have different process of doing the PhD? Or is it a level thing?

B: I think the process is the same but they are here so they know the process in the very beginning but we came here at this stage only For example in research we do research only at PhD but here I realize they talk about research even in primary school so when those students come here they know the process but we do it here at this stage. So they may know better than us.

J: They express themselves better than us.

X: I would say bcz I worked in a university in China for nine years. In China the model is very similar but how we do it is very different. Our whole education experience is only memorizing, we never criticise anything but here you have to think critically and think how you want to apply that, criticizing and thinking critically is something we never learn to do but here your opinion is very important.

B: yes here they talk about plagiarism since the beginning. Please use your own words. He or she says something but you make up your own words. So LS when they come to this stage nothing is unfamiliar to them.

X: Yes the thinking process is different.

J: It seems to me that as you have progressed Local/Int'l S dichotomy is getting weaker now?

S: Do you perceive two groups among the HDR student in the faculty or not? Local and international is not relevant at all here?

J: Yes the dichotomy exists.

S: Do you have similar academic networks with your local friends?

J: I think local students are less involved in the faculty activities for example in MERC you see how many locals joined maybe they don't see the need for them. And in terms of access to academics or academic networking yes I think they have more access to academics and staff.

B: Yes local students have more academic networks. They have more access to staff here.

J: Full-time locals?

J: Yes

B: but we don't see many full-time local students here.

J: No. but they have better connections.

S: Is that access important to you? Is that an important thing?

B: Yes but we know how to approach them I think they know it in a better way.

X: Sometimes I'm not sure how we can define locals?

J: in my mind local is white.

X: In this faculty there are many Chinese students who are citizens here but they are not considered local students and some students look local they are white but they are not Australian they are from east Europe so we are not sure who is local and who is international so I don't really mind who is local and international because it is not always clear. For instance I am a citizen here but this does not mean that I involve in many activities. I mean actually if I have a white local friend that means I am involved. I don't think this way. What is the point in that?

J: So you are actually integrated apart from university? You have your social networks outside the university?

X: No I don't have many friends. No not in the society. I don't feel lonely or excluded because I am involved in many activities this year but last year the feeling was different. I think now I have many things to do, the stuff to think about so I don't care I have my own daily plan.

J: Are you worried about the future after you finish the PhDs? and get a job?

J: In my area as an English teacher I don't think there is a job here.

S: Do you yourself consider yourself an IS or a LS?

X: Currently I have permanent residency here. Actually I am an Australian citizen. But I still regard myself as an international students because my previous education was in China. I also ask this question in my own research many Chinese immigrants who have been born here and they say IS. So I actually yes I think I am an int'l student or maybe in between.

J: Do you have any issues with discrimination based on being an IS?

B: Not that much

J: No

J: It seems to me that you have established very strong institutional identities here specially through those writing groups?

B: Writing groups very empowering in establishing institutional identity and we feel we belong here and there are local students there too and they are also like us and we can give them feedback too.

S: We talked about that dichotomy (IS/LS). Do you think in the perceptions of academics that dichotomy exists?

J: yes

B: Yes of course

J: and I think they should acknowledge the existence of such dichotomy in examining or reading the work of IS they should consider this in their assessment and think that this is an IS

B: but I disagree

S: I think this means they should acknowledge that the IS is weak in English Are you trying to say the same thing by using the word acknowledge?

J: Yes I don't deny that yes if we compare the writing of a local and an IS student it goes without saying that they are different. Even though IELTS is there, but IELTS is IELTS. I think that in supervision they should acknowledge that this work belongs to an IS

B: Not really. I don't think so. I think we must have that standard otherwise we are not here. But in the perception of academic here yes that perception exists they know that the thinking process is different. Because we may have different thinking process but in terms of language I don't think there must be considerations so in the perceptions that IS and LS exists but not in English language because we must have that standard. But yes if you compare a LS and an IS doing their masters here yes that LS gets a job here and the IS



should go back to their country. Both do the same degree here but the value is different. the degree has more value for local students. This may not be because of English but different kinds of thinking process

B: here LS enter university only if they have HD but IS everyone can enter the university this also makes a difference.

## **APPENDIX 6**

### **SAMPLE OF TRANSCRIPTION OF CONVERSATION GROUPS**

Group 1 Session 2 20.10.08 Room 407 B6 11:00 am – 12: pm

Participants: Amar, Ratna , Hannah, Bina

Topics tabled:

- (3) Do you have effective interaction with other students?
- (4) Do you find any barriers in your socialisation with other students?
- (5) Is English language important to your social life?

Amar: Maybe the first main reason is that because of our English... we usually don't approach native speakers very often,... we prefer to interact with international students because if we make a mistake they understand us, and if they make a mistake we understand

Bina: but for me,... it is not only the language problem, but it is our culture different cultures, so... when we find other international students, we feel we are on the same ground... we can feel ourselves, ...being far away from home, and everybody has same kind of have similar feelings, so we feel more comfortable... talking to other international students, and something is that, when I speak with local students, I feel that they just don't understand us at once, we have to repeat ourselves.

Hanna: I think vocabulary, for me,... I don't find the proper word to express myself, maybe I wish to say something... but then I immediately say... OK forget it, because I hesitate to stress... whether they understand me or not... these things are barrier obviously, but this culture is a barrier as well, but language is more, you know... due to language barrier, you can't just talk to other people in open mind, so... you can't talk to other people you can't know about culture, even, it also stops you to know about their culture, as well, isn't it?

Bina: so, when we are doing with local students, we feel like we are always outsiders,... personally I feel like that, so, I can't enter their discussion, I don't want to enter their conversations

Hanna: another thing is, if you have some people from your culture around you, you don't feel... well... like to speak with other people,... you speak with them... it is also a barrier for speaking English, a very good advantage to have people from your own culture, if you have very good friends from your culture, it is a very big advantage, but at the same, time, it is a barrier... if I don't have these people around me, then I have no way, I have to go to local people, another thing is that people around me... I mean the local people, are not likely to be very friendly,... they don't smile at you... I mean office people, they are non friendly just say, hi... hello... but...

Bina: I think, that's their nature you know... that's not a big deal, their individualistic culture

Hanna: It is only cultural, but it makes me comfortable... I prepare myself to smile but...

Bina: so, you belong to that kind of culture. In an institution, everybody belongs to each other... you know... but here it is not like this,... they treat you as stranger

Hanna: maybe I expect him to say hi... hallo, Maybe this is another barrier to socialisation

Bina: but talking to staff is easier than students, how do you feel? I haven't found many local students here... like friends

Ratna: yes, most of them are part-time, they are not here

Hanna: yes, we don't see them... they don't come here, so...

Ratna: yes, just hi or bye

Hanna: but office people are ok, for example if you go to M, he is very good... very welcoming

Bina: but M is not local (laugh),...

Hanna: [laugh] yeah... but he gives you a smile from far away, that is very welcoming

Bina: yes, I agree it is easier to talk with people from other cultures than locals

Ratna: the guy in the library, is also very nice

Bina: yes, there is a man from other culture there, he is very nice, I always like to talk to him, than other ladies... he is just very nice he greets very kindly, and he talks other things ...asks questions about you ...personal questions

Ratna: for me, yes, I agree... the language of socialisation is more difficult than ... you know,... if we speak of our study, we feel more comfortable, we are used to that... we know how to do that, but... socialisation language is...

Hanna: we need to interact with people, but lack of vocabularies appropriate vocabularies... you know, to use what...

Bina: when we can't communicate, we can use our body... we can just show our facial expressions, but when we want to explain them, that's a problem... we know the language because we have been teaching English... you know... but we don't know how to use that appropriately.

Ratna: yeah, daily kind of conversation... yeah... sometimes... I just don't know how to react,... I am confused... how am I supposed to react in that kind of atmosphere... and then... I think ...it does not seem appropriate for them,... oh I'm sorry...you misunderstood me ...it is very nervous.

Amar: I think this is an issue for masters' students. Masters' students have course you know, and in classroom, you know ... once I saw international students sit in one corner, you know ...Australian students are fewer than international students, but the four of five of them just sit together... on one table and discuss, so... we can't approach them and they also don't approach us so...it's same.

Bina: mentioning these things, yes... international students are always excluded, and they are passive students all the time here, in seminars ... or other places, there are few international students who raise their questions, most sit passive... only local students ask.

Amar: now, we don't have classes, it's making it even worse... we have just to stay in the office, and sometimes take part in workshops that's all, we don't have to talk much, actually

Bina: yes, if you are lucky you get just one officemate... that's all (laugh)

Hanna: I think people who are here... I mean the staff... want to do something, they feel that.

Amar: yes they are feeling that,... they want to do something, but don't know how maybe maybe they need to increase the number of workshops... maybe, last term, it was only three you know.

Amar: probably, they don't know how to make it more comfortable for international students, because they are feeling... Ilana was saying several times for the research students... she was saying the loneliness in that workshop...

Bina: and you know all students were local presenters

Amar : yeah, do you think the last presenter ...yeah... his accent was very Australian, and I could not catch him... I felt a bit discouraged, you know... and Ilana told me don't worry... it is not related to your field, but he spoke very fast with Australian accent, you know

Bina: yeah... he was talking about attitude and other things, I didn't understand (laugh)

Ratna but you know,... I think what I am experiencing is different. I have no problem understanding people here... I mean local staff here, but outside... I mean in the streets...I can't understand local people at all, not in the university.

Amar: yes... non academics... their language is very different, also... very heavy Australian accents

Ratna: yes... I just can't understand them

Bina: yes, and they ...maybe... using slang, and we are not supposed to know slang,... you know

Ratna: yes, once I was speaking with a security... not here in the university, in a shop, and I couldn't understand what he was talking about... he was one of these

local people, and I couldn't understand him... you know ... and I just said ok... ok... I leave

Hanna: I think with the supervisor, it is nice for me, I can understand... you know, she really speaks English which I can understand, she doesn't have local accent you know... but, S, her supervisor is real OZ... has very OZ accent... he speaks OZ

Bina: usually, I found that academic people are Ok

Amar: yes, they speak the standard things, and...

Hanna: very straightforward

Ratna: and they are willing to communicate... so, if we don't understand each other, they are willing to work it out with us... so, yeah... they have more strategies to communicate, so they say... oh... I found it very different ...oh

Hanna: and they have many options,... different kinds of thinking... you are not comfortable speaking after saying one word or one sentence, we just have no more options to express ourselves

Ratna: I feel more comfortable when talking with academics, because I am not so self-conscious about grammar, I mean... my mind is so focused on the content, and they are really talking about the content, so... I am not self-aware of my grammar or pronunciation, because if I tend to do that, then I start to ruin the whole conversation and just cannot communicate.

Hanna: grammar is not important, when you speak... actually

Ratna: because I have a bad experience,... once, I was presenting my paper at that time in Thailand, it was an international conference... I was presenting and you know... there was this one lady,... she is very old and she is sitting right in front ... in the front row... she keeps fixing my pronunciation, my grammar... like she is being very rude, and I was shuddering all the way...

Hanna: What was her origin?

Ratna: maybe From England

Bina: uh white hhh

Hanna: are you sure she was real British... I don't think so... but white people from other countries maybe

Hanna: in latest ELT... they don't bother about grammar, communication is more important... it is only for written

Bina: yes, if they correct our mistakes, we can't even continue

Hanna you should have told her... please let me finish and then I will give you my whole day to correct my grammar

Ratna yes, very rude, and she calls herself a teacher... for goodness sake... oh my god... very rude

Hanna: There are some people... who actually are very conscious about grammar, I have some colleagues... when we present, they are very conscious about grammar, after presentation, of course, discussion sessions you know..., but it doesn't have anything to do with the presentation, you know ... but we are very critical of them, as an academic community... we don't support them... because if you are speaking about history, or because it is not my language...

Bina: yes, the message is important, you know... and it doesn't happen in writing, you know

Hanna: it doesn't happen, because in writing, you are very careful, and speaking is very much needs practice

Bina: so, it was a nightmare there

Hanna: when was it?

Ratna: seven year ago

Hanna: Ok, at that time, you become more brave... brave enough to stop someone

Ratna: yes, and I still feel uncomfortable in presentations, you know

Hanna: obviously, if you have experience which is not good experience... like this Chase

Hanna: How comes that an English person corrects you in the middle of presentation? It is against their own culture,... because I have experience in English culture,... probably... this is more personal than cultural

Ratna: maybe, it is just because it was an old lady really... you know

Hanna: but were you fearing the same thing in your presentation last week?

Ratna: yes, did you notice in the beginning, I was worrying ... stressed ... nervous you know

Hanna: but you should not worry about these things

Hanna: my experience about presentation is good, because I had my first presentation in England... all the students were there, lecturers were there I told them... look this is my first presentation in English and I am very afraid, but she told me don't worry, I am sure you will enjoy that ... nobody thinks of grammar, and I received encouragement, so much encouragement ... even after the presentation, so she said, " see if your presentation was bad, you didn't have so many questions ...I mean, they didn't ask so many questions." So, I am relaxed now in my presentation, it is my good experience, I don't have to worry ... I never thought I was such a good presenter... after that, I gave a presentation in New Zealand and that was also good .... good feedback ... you know

Bina: so, you feel confident

Hanna: yeah

Bina: but... we feel safe with other internationals than locals,... I mean... more confident with internationals than locals, and we don't have enough interaction with locals Hanna the thing is that, I don't have much opportunity to have interaction with local students ... I always talk with other international students

Ratna: do you have any local friends?

Amar/Bina no, not yet... only the supervisor

Hanna no I don't have yet

Bina: only our supervisor



Hanna: we should hunt for a local friend

Amar: how about you? do you ?

Ratna: I know Jill, she is nice ... we can communicate ... but she is different you know ... she is a teacher, and knows how to ... you know... the strategies ... she knows more

Bina: yes,... experience ... she has

Ratna: yes, I feel comfortable talking with her

Hanna: yes, talking to the teacher or the tutor or academic is not a problem, because... you know ... you have limited area to discuss, it is relevant to your study, probably... and if you start talking about your area, it is not a problem...

Bina: very few local students here, and 70 percent of local students are part-time

Amar: yes, also the international students ... the requirement is that they should be full-time... yes, that's why they do many seminars at six o'clock ... yes last time they were people from Peninsula also

Bina: and did you see a very strong research community at Peninsula?

Hanna: and peninsula is more active, and more warmer welcoming more warmer relationship,... one day I attended a session there, and they were warmer, they socialise more ...

Amar: I think they also socialise

Bina: we here, are minding our own businesses, ...they have strong community

Hanna: we should go there often

Hanna: What we can do ...is ... we can do more socialisation, and invite some local people, because more international students here...

Ratna: the important thing is to know the local people

Bina: yes, it is important ... so, that we can learn from each other, I mean... if you don't have interaction, you don't learn.

Hanna: If you come the long day in the office, and go back, then, when you go back to your country, they ask you... who is your Australian friend?... and you say,... I don't know

Amar: yes, when I go back to my country, I say ... I only know my supervisor, no local friends you know... I only know about local people from international students,... that means, I don't have interaction even through email... you know... I only contact international people

Hanna: It will happen more in PhD, of course, because you don't have to interact,... you don't have to ask questions,... you have your desk, and your books, and only your officemate

Ratna: but... what type of local cultures, have you learned?

Amar just very few general things,... that, they like to spend more free time outside, you know... socialising, and they are very physical, they like sports and aboriginal arts

Hanna: but, it is from the news, and speaking with other international students, but not from speaking with local people

Amar; yes, on TV

Hanna: but, you can do this from your own country

Hann: I have learned about local students, from other international students, particularly, they like to be independent, and value other people's independence, take their own decision... which is good, but... too much independence, is not good for us... they don't like interruption,... not interruption,... intervention,... or I don't know what to call it, they don't like it,... and too much self-independence, what we call it,... I don't know is not useful for us, we need support.

Ratna: I don't know about you, the way they interpret caring and attention is very different, I have an experience... I mean... maybe in Asia, caring means, giving solution... maybe, when I come to you and talk about my problem, maybe... I just need someone to listen, I mean... the Indonesian or Asian students, they tend... you know.... like to give you the solution to me,... it means... they want to tell me

what to do,... maybe... I am trying to find the solution, but in that particular moment, not yet... you know... and I don't like it, ...telling me do this, this, this, and this... and then, I say, I think about it, and then, they become more aggressive, you know... they want you to follow what they tell you to do, but... when I speak with local people, it is different... they are really there for you, listening, they don't tell you what to do, then... maybe, give you their experience, but don't give you the solution,... they're giving you the time to...

Bina: maybe, they just share their experience with you

Ratna: then, I realize... maybe in Asia, they don't know boundaries,... but they are using English to me, it is their language... the problem is that, we can not transform our values into English,... it becomes very intrusive in English, you know culture is very different, because you can't really say it, when you are using English.

Hanna: I experience these things, but in my culture, I have seen this... if you write an academic paper, they ask where are the recommendations? Where are the recommendations? it is difficult to give recommendation based on one paper, my experience in England they don't bother to give recommendations, maybe you have your own view in your explanation,... they may give you probable options, but it is up to you they consider the context and give you the time and probable options you know.

**Participants: Shamim, Joko, Ain, Xia, [joined the group at 12:15 pm]: Clare and Jan**

Topics tabled: Compare your interactions with international students and with local students; Do you feel your English is different? In which situation do you tend to communicate more willingly? Do you use any particular strategy for communication in each of these two settings?

Joko Jenny, I'm Joko from Indonesia. Nice to meet you

Shamim: I'm Shamim

Jan: and... we met from Friday... what's your name again?

Shamim: Shamim, s-h-a-m-i-m ... from Bangladesh, a difficult name ...

Clare: so.... here is the first barrier... some names are really hard to Where are you from?

Aini: I'm Aini, from Indonesia

Xia: I'm C my English name is Xia... I'm from China.

Jan: whee..re?

Xia: Beijing

Clare: We have practiced now [with previous group]

Clare: so tell us your experience... tell us all about it

Shamim: I have little experience,... in fact, I only talk to my supervisor as a native speaker initially it was very difficult... I couldn't understand, I sent her an email and said I can't understand what you say

Clare: you have done well... you have come a long way

Clare: you still don't get it?

Aini: like me... first time I met my supervisor, I couldn't understand

her... but now, it is ok, I mean not maybe 100% but 90-95% ... it's personally the same... I understand now... sometimes you mumble ...you know

Clare: Uh we do, we all do ... so, we get it

Xia: my supervisor is very kind, during our conversation, he suggest me to bring tape recorder and take it back with me, and listen to it, and it is very efficient... and he is very considerate, so I have no problem... I can easily listen to him later, and actually,...I have met a research student also under his supervision... she is same age, and also single, so... so... we have been together for some times, like camping and research seminars, and also send emails... and I have invited her to china, and actually my English improved a lot with her... with this friendship... yes

Clare: so, do you think that... you guys feel you don't approach people, because you are afraid you make mistakes?

Joko: In my case, I have no chance ..no contact with local fiends except for my supervisor,... I mean... I only talk to my supervisor, but I have not any local friends... I mean I could not find local friends, but once I went out to Brisbane and we went to a caravan park,... I listened to local country people [laugh] yeah it is hard to understand,... and of course they also found our accent hard to understand... of course we could communicate, but the initial communication was hard

Clare: how about you... you also have same experience?

Aini: no,.. I am actually a sessional English teacher in TAFE, so most of my colleagues are local people... but we don't talk to each other often, it is very different from Malaysia, in Malaysia we like talking to each other, but here... they don't talk in the break time or lunch-time, we just get in to the office, and just say hi... very different from our culture, basically I really... really want to find close friends from Australia, but so far, I couldn't... I mean I talk to some of them, but they are not really close friends

Clare: why? what do you think is the barrier?

Aini: I don't know... sometimes... I don't understand them, ...when they make jokes, it is very difficult to understand their jokes,.. what I am doing now, I'm learning now to understand their jokes... how to make jokes with them ... how to respond, you know... just to response with a very sharp answer, like oh no that's good, really great ...

Clare: [laugh] yeah, get out, get out!

Shamim: also culturally is also different... when I listen to their jokes on TV or so... I don't usually understand, so I don't laugh

Jan: that's so culturally different

Joko: for me communication with locals... for me is not a matter of whether my English is good or bad, it is a matter of starting the communication,... I mean understand when you say: "mind your own business" ... you know

Jan: no, no,... we were just talking about that in the other group, they said that to us were surprised... it is not us at all, we are quite open people... actually we think that about you guys

Xia: I don't know other countries, but Chinese people, specially female people, are shy, so most of the time when other people say hello, Chinese people do not respond or make eye contact... so there is misunderstanding that Chinese people are rude... not because of English but because of shyness, but I tried to change it you know, and a lot of things changed... my next door neighbors are Australian, and I now feel comfortable... I mean as time goes by, I am more comfortable to talk with them

Jan: but even we have same problem, I mean I probably am more shy that Clare is, so Clare is more likely to talk to people while I am...

Clare: but we do have the impression of international students of being,... wanting to...keep to yourselves,... and not wanting to ask... so I'm not likely to ask you a question, that I might ask ourselves

Xia: everyone wants to talk to other people and get together, but because it is a foreign country zone, so... they are not sure about everything... so, the best choice or the safe strategy is to keep silent

Clare: and mostly... because we also feel you like to stick to yourselves... so, it's sort of Bizarre... but, yeah... most our culture is very open, you can sort of say almost everything... so... we really get personal.... and if you don't be personal, it means you don't really want to connect

Clare: so,... you often need to offer something personal

Aini: to me... actually, I often feel uncomfortable if I can't talk to people I just like talking... actually

Clare: What goes wrong if you are sitting with someone and you don't feel close to them?

Aini: I just feel uncomfortable. When I sit by someone, the first thing I do is to smile when she or he responds... then I say, it's a rainy day and blub blub blub, but if she doesn't respond, maybe she is busy or... she doesn't want to talk something then...

Clare: but she might be thinking that... she's gotta be careful about what she says... because there is always constraints,... I wouldn't ask the questions I might ask Jan... have you got kids? .... Because I think you probably aren't allowed to talk about that ... or you are not comfortable talking about that, but I probably ask Jan something I wouldn't ask you

Aini: But in Malaysia we always ask how many children do you have....

Clare: oh no... you can ask that you wouldn't ask gee something like is your husband having an affair.... or [laugh]... but you would ask... have you got children

Xia: so... maybe that's a misunderstanding from the books

Jan/Clare that's a surprise

Aini: Because in Malaysia... we learn that western people don't like it, if we ask are you married?

Clare: oh no... that's the first thing I would ask. You got kids or where do you live?

Shamim: English people are different I think

Jan: No no

Shamim: Because they don't like to talk about personal things, I think

Jan; Aussies are very open

Joko: so... you have made friends with international students from which country?

Clare Uh... yeah.... Mmmmmm.... let me think... hhhmmmyeah... probably, I know some Lebanese I think... I probably haven't had much contact yet but I think we assume that international students are happy on their own, doing their own things, so you don't sort of feel that

Joko: local people who have been dealing with international students might have different views... so, I think contact is the best practice here... for communication and..

Clare: So, you're there guy,... so how many kids do you have? But... If I didn't know you,... the first time I met you... I wouldn't ask you that

Jan: yeah,... not straight away

Clare: yeah,... I might ask questions about work, but I would be nervous doing the wrong thing

Joko: have you familiarized yourself your hearing. with accented English like ours?

Clare: hmmm ...not really... we have to listen, I have to really listen... they are so different

Joko: sometimes I feel ...it is unfair we have to learn English how you speak Australian accent, and we try to .... as close as to your accent Australlians you know but you..

Jan: Oh you don't have to

Aini: we want to

Clare: oh you've got high expectations



Jan: as long as we can communicate with each other...

Joko: I see that's the conception

Aini: the first time I came here, I was very frustrated, because my English is more American...

Clare: uh I can tell that

Aini; because we watch more American

Clare: telly

Aini; films, and most our teachers lecturers were American educated, so... it was very hard for me to understand... sometimes I don't like it why I pronounce some words so differently from the local people, so... I just let's say pronounce safe but you say saif

Clare: saif yes... but don't speak like us... it's awful

Aini: but we want to

Clare: no, no, no, it's horrible, when I hear other Australians overseas, it's awkward

Aini: you say aight for eight

Clare: yeah,... yeeeeh [laugh]

Xia: but I don't think we should learn the accent, because when you listen to Radio, ABC or .. we can understand, no matter whether it is American or British or Australian, we understand the radio, so... actually I think you had better imitate your accent from radio, and not local people because you know in China we have so many dialects and...

J: yes, yes

Xia: we have dialects like Manderine like TV programs so because it is widely used, but if you speak Shangainese or.... not many people understand... so, I think English is the same... so, we better learn the standard, and not the Australian accent, what you hear on radio... the American...

Clar: not the slang

Jan Yeah, not the slang... you don't have to

Clare: it is good if you can understand them when we use them,

Aini: but do you understand? Is it OK...when for example I say safe and not saif do you understand?

Clare: yeah,... we watch a lot of American movies too... so, we are very attuned to yeah we can... that is irrelevant

Jan: my son came home from school, and said eeeent for that little tiny black. Insect, you know. And I said it is not eeeeeent.... it's ant

Clare: yeah,... we watch a lot of American films, too.... so, that's no different

Joko: when you speak to international students do you slow down?

Clare: yes

Jan: probably yes

Joko: uh... I personally don't like it, when you slow down

Jan: I probably don't slow down now... but initially when we first came in, I slowed down... I was conscious gradually

Aini: why... why don't you like?... you mean you like them to be natural?

Joko: because initially you treat us differently, I have a room in the hotel, you know ... janitor, you know ....when she speaks to me she speaks very slowly, I am thinking... why you are speaking so slowly!

Clare: you should say that

Xia: and also I think... if she sees you speaking English good, probably she doesn't slow down... so, I would understand that the intension is quite good

Joko: I thought that is her style

Clare: probably not, she might think you wouldn't understand... just stereotyping

Aini: I used to live inn a home-stay for a very short time in Brisbane with an Australian family... so, they were very good to me very kind they often invited their

family... their parents, and you know what happened to me... I just sit down and listen and smile,... I couldn't understand probably 40 percent or so

Clare: it's very hard

Aini: it's very difficult... I don't know In Brisbane... you know...there are more local people, so ....on the bus you know... I couldn't understand anything but here in Clayton specially, you ....

Clare: Uh Clayton, yes, but when I travelled overseas, I travelled Ireland and I couldn't understand them...

Aini: yes,... Ireland also very strange accent

Clare: yeah... and I couldn't understand them

Joko: so... were you considered a foreigner in Ireland

Clare: yeah

Shamim: sometimes, in my country, is like this... people from same language speaking in different accents... can't understand each other

Clare: yeah

Aini: if you go to Queensland, they talk slightly different

Jan: and also south Australia maybe

Aini: but do you say words like breaky, telly

Clare: yeah,... slang ...yeah

Jan: a cuppa

What?

Jan: A cup of tea

Jan: How do you go... when people say how are you going?

Joko: Good thanks and how are you? ... and then we want to end out the conversation quickly

Shamim: one day I went to a fast food, and the girl asked me: “take out or have here?” I said what? She repeated take out or have here? Again I said, pardon! and then again she repeated,... I couldn’t understand, and finally I say... uh I will take away.

Clare: probably she said take away or have it here,... we don’t usually say take out

Jan: yeah... take away

Shamim: uhhh

Joko: I think the words are the initial things for communication

Clare: and probably the thing that you guys think we want to be closed, and we also think you do not like it,... so we do not break it, and you do not break it

Jan: and the other problem is, often our informal English is very different from our formal English that perhaps you have learned. So, yeah when informally we say... hi how are you doing?... we don’t say that in formal situations,... so, in an international conference, we probably say hello my name is..., but here, we say hi...

Clare: How’s it going? ...It’s terrible...

Aini: I am teaching international students in TAFE, prior to my teaching, I had observation to a local teacher, teaching... her name is Michelle. Michele was talking to her students about slang, this is what happens in Australia, and people all use it... the words they use

Clare: the Slang

Aini: yeah, the slang... and I saw all the students wanted to know about it. I was thinking that I need to learn slang.

Joko: a lot of people use slang here, yeah?

Clare: yeah we all use it

Jan: Sometimes, we say something like... we’re going to the loo

Joko: what?... what’s that?

Clare; going to toilet or...

Aini: Uh, I didn't know that

Shamim: uh {laugh}

Jan: get a cuppa... means a cup of

Clare: this arvo... what are you doing this arvo?

Joko: this arvo?

Jan: this arvo.... this afternoon ....arbo, short form for this afternoon

Joko: not so many,... you just listed four

Clare: uh... quite many... tely for television, we use them automatically... we shorten everything, names also we shorten

Jan: yeah my name is Jennifer, but everyone calls me Jenny or Jen

Joko: oh you are the supervisor Jenny Miller? yes?

Jan: oh no... there are more than one Jenny in Australia [laugh]

Aini; I want to ask you a question... do you treat people differently based on age?  
You know sometimes we look younger, but we are old...

Clare: mm I wouldn't

Jan: I reckon in university, perhaps more different from everywhere else. Everybody at PhD level, treats everybody at PhD level, regardless of whether they are supervisors or emiratus professors or who they are, everybody goes by first name

Clare: so, no difference... I would be more formal with older people

Joko: How are you?... more formal?

Clare: I might not talk about the things I would with others, I wouldn't ask my supervisor... I wouldn't say... because he is older than me, are you married?... or about his marriage... or...have you got kids?...

Joko: How about slangs? Do you use slangs?

Jan: yeah... it is so automatic

Clare: yeah... they are part of our language, everyone uses that.... I wouldn't use swear words, though... that I would probably use with people of my age. Not many of those, you know what I mean 'swear words'?

Joko: yeah

Clare: but what did you want to say about age?

Aini: I mean when for example we go shopping, do you think they treat us by face, I mean maybe from your face, I guess you are 25, so, I treat you differently

Clare: no

Aini: different from one who is 40?

Clare: no,... not in that environment it is more to get into knowing someone,... but you guys probably look younger, yeah?

Aini: uh yeah.

Clare: How old are you? [laugh]

Joko: above 30

Jan: so,... is that a rude question to ask you?

Shamim: in my country, it is a very rude question for guys

Clare: that's difficult I think... because I asked you that, but I wouldn't ask you such question normally, because I would be nervous to be rude

Shamim: in our culture, if you are a guy, you wouldn't ask this question

Jan: probably same here... here also guys wouldn't ask girls such a question

shamim: so,... it seems universal, I think

Xia: I think in china, it is a very common question, usually the elderly ask you this question.... and you are happy to tell her... but if a man asks you your age, it is very strange even if he is older

Clare: yeah, yeah... here we girls ask each other, but guys wouldn't ask us..., but is it rude for me to ask you guys are you married? Can I ask that?

Joko: yeah, it's normal... yeah... yeah

Aini: so, as girls... asking age is OK?

Clare: yeah, well ... you wouldn't ask somebody who is 50 about her age [laugh]  
but yeah,... we ask these questions, or... how many kids do you have?... yeah....  
personal questions... we ask many personal questions

Jan: What suburb do you live in?

Clare: yeah, all the normal stuff

Clare: so, probably we talk about all the same things you guys talk about, but we  
probably don't know you like to talk about it

Clare which is probably why we are not finding we are getting close to those people  
Mistafa sometimes... if we are planning to apply for permanent residency, we  
try to find local friends, because it is good for our future... but if we are planning to  
go back to our country, we don't try to get close to locals

Clare: yeah... it's not worth an effort,... that's interesting, because, I could probably  
expect that, ...I think, you guys are here to get a PhDwell, you probably think... I'm  
here to get my PhD, I've gotta get it, and I've got to go, so,... I don't think you want  
me to be friends, and you just confirmed that

Aini: I think it is also personal

Xia: I think it is not PR... or not... because I was an English teacher,... I always  
wanted to find local friend,... not only for the English but for the culture,... and the  
way of life here.... the more communication, the more we learn about life here....  
so, for me... understanding about similarities and differences is very important...

Jan: has anybody asked you about culture shock?.Being homesick? Missing home?

Shamim: I have already forgot home.

Clare: you are very optimistic

Xia: I think technology has improved a lot now, we can communicate with home,  
easily

Aini: I want to ask you a question. Because in Malaysia, I don't know about Bangladesh,... we always ask people to have a religion, but... do you feel comfortable talking to people like me wearing scarf?.... or about religious things?

Jan: hmmm.... I don't know..... well,... probably if you initiate conversations about religious things, .... talk about what your beliefs are,... I would continue that.... but otherwise, I wouldn't ask you questions about your beliefs. But since Australia is very multicultural, so... we see people from very different religions....

Clare: but I think since we have so many different religions here in Australia, it's not sort of thing we generally bring up about.

Aini: so, it's not question of... oh... this person is wearing scarf and this person is not wearing scarf?

Clare: Uh... well.... Ummm... I think... I think it does make a difference, not in a negative way...but I ... I don't understand it... I suppose, I would think... I think uh what's the word for it... I think people would think that maybe you are so different that I might not be able to relate to you,... maybe a little bit of this, yeah... it's not a prejudice thing... it's just about lack of understanding,... and the difference is so obvious...

Aini: yeah... because I have a friend, she asked me how do you wear scarf?

Joko: uh no

Clare: see... this is again something cultural... I wouldn't dare to ask you this question,... because I think you would be insulted

Aini: Uh ...she was a close friend.... that's why she asked

Joko: so, how do you think this conversation has changed your view about international students?

Jan: Uh well, definitely it changed a lot

Clare: I personally didn't know you guys like to talk about these things

Xia: that's I think the point of this research



Clare: well... in our culture you see we laugh a lot we are not serious people we get silly and...

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **SAMPLE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE RESEARCHER AND THE PARTICIPANTS**

This email attachment was received on 11.08.2010, sent by Ratna reflecting on ‘smiling’ as a communication strategy:

I tend to adjust or modify my style of communication depending on context, the participants (friends, boss, colleagues, siblings, etc.), social distance. I’m sure that these will affect the way I behave verbally or non-verbally.

Without any intention to generalise or stereotype my communication with a particular ethnic group, I would try to answer this question as far as I could remember on what occasion in a communicative event I smiled.

I think I smile as a form of politeness and friendliness as being attentive to the person I am conversing with. Usually, I am more aware of doing this, when there is social distance existed (age, gender, higher or lower social rank, unfamiliar context and background knowledge). I disagree if people view this act as giving a fake response. If I smile (although I cannot hear the message sent to me clearly) while making the effort to listen to the utterances attentively, it means that I am sincere and have shown my sincerity for being attentive, not faking to be sincere and attentive. It also depends on how I want to relate with the person that I’m conversing with. If I am interested to develop good relation

with the participants or to the topic being discussed, I would make further verbal efforts in understanding what the speakers say.

If I want to disagree with someone (barring in mind the social distance exists or in a formal communicative settings), I would smile to give them a sign “Yes, I do understand your point, but....” before I state my disagreement in an indirect way too.

If I’m not interested in the topic, I might use more strategies than just smiling. I could also change the topic or making an excuse to leave.

I think it is also related to personality matter. I do not consider myself as an outgoing person or a sociable kind of person. I tend to use more silence (this does not mean being ‘passive’ as what has often been generalised in the literature) than smiling. I tend to use more silence when I’m not interested in the topic or the person, or while I’m focusing on something, or as a way for saving face, mine or the speakers I’m conversing with.

## APPENDIX 8

### SAMPLE OF THEME ANALYSIS OF THE DATA BASED ON STRAUSS AND CORBIN (1990)

Theme	Quote	Source	Strategies involved
Solitude of PhD journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>for me, I didn't expect to do my PhD here... without no courses,... courses is good because you meet other students, it is totally you and your research, I think it is good to have courses,... and you can talk about your work, and it is good to talk to other people,... in the beginning, yeah... about your problems, yeah... I found it really hard, really to do it by myself, in course you can meet people with similar interests, yeah... I only have one supervisor, and it is very lonely</li> </ul>	Ratna G1S1, p.7	Speaker use of "yeah" to seek support Interlocutor use of 'yeah' to support
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>PhD already a lonely road</u>; that's why it makes it so hard,... no courses I mean ... you are all alone</li> </ul>	Ratna G1S1,p. 7	Self-clarification
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are the community? I don't know? Sometimes, <u>I feel isolated.</u></li> </ul>	Hanna G1S1,p. 7	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>yes, we don't have information... <u>I still feel not part of the community only the supervisor...</u> huh the community of two...</li> </ul>	Bina G1S1,P9  Shamim,	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sometimes ...I think that a PhD student, are very limited opportunity to mix with these people... because all of them are too busy, and besides the academic stuff, we have some family-oriented responsibilities.... so after we study, we go home to spend time with our family, but like me... actually I don't have any family responsibility here, but... I find that nobody is here like me, so.... they don't spend time with me... just with friends of my country...</li> </ul>	G2S1,p.4	
space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the beginning, it is really necessary to talk to people, you can stop going alone, which is really stressful... very harmful... we women, it is good talking with each other,... relieved... you know we haven't the chance to feel that way, probably... we are far away from those communities... because... we don't know how to contact with that.... there are a lot of information... you know</li> <li>for me, at that time... when I arrived, I was</li> </ul>	<p>Hanna G1S1 p.8,9</p> <p>Ratna G1S1,p.10</p>	<p>“you know” to Seek support</p> <p>Focus on message rather than grammar</p>

	<p>looking for a community ...actually ....<u>I am lost...</u> so... who is here, so... I just read the boards, all the boards... reading all the boards... then [R.] had a workshop, and I said, I should join that... whatever... I am going to join that, and then I met [S]... and heard about MERC, yeah</p>		
Limited contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In my case, I have no chance ..no contact with local fiends except for my supervisor,... I mean... I only talk to my supervisor, but I have not any local friends... I mean I could not find local friends</li> <li>• I am actually a sessional English teacher in TAFE, so most of my colleagues are local people... but we don't talk to each other often, it is very different from Malaysia, in Malaysia we like talking to each other, but here... they don't talk in the break time or lunch-time, we just get in to the office, and just say hi... very different from our culture, basically I really... really want to find close friends from Australia, but so far, I couldn't... I mean I talk to some of them, but they are not really close friends</li> </ul>	<p>Joko G2S3, p.3</p> <p>Aini G2S3, p.4</p>	<p>Self- elaboration or self-explanation</p> <p>Using “we” for same culture people and “they” for Australians</p>
Culture and	- Yeah, it happened to me last time I was in school and a	Bina & Ratna,	“We” vs “you” the dichotomy of IS and LS

relations	<p>girl was hurt by a boy and she started crying and I just didn't know how to react, yeah whether I should go to her or not in our culture we immediately go to the child and hug her but here I don't know how to react I was scared whether to hug her or not if I go and touch her is it good or not because in our culture if a child cries we go immediately to her but here I don't know...because touching in our culture is good getting close you know to show affection</p> <p>- because of molestation case I think , if you touch them, they might accuse us of.... yeah..... you know..... what do you want from this child? yeah, child abuse, yeah, we are strangers you know, strangers should not touch children here, children are not supposed to talk with strangers yeah, they are very strict about that ....I found it actually just recently, when i went for an interview for a job,... teaching children.... and the interviewer asked me, do you have working with children permit? and I was surprised, said what? What's that? And then she explained all these things to me,... that ....that, this is a kind of permit about how you should behave children,..... huh! how should I behave children! wow it's so strange! ... oh my god! so, I said OK, I don't want to work with children, because I'm afraid,... they might get it wrong, the way we treat children...</p> <p>- <u>so we don't know how to</u></p>	G1S3,p.4	<p>Using “so” as sign for confirmation of each other and agreement with each other</p>
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	<u>personal, it means you don't really want to connect so,... you often need to offer something personal...</u>		
Fear of appropriateness (cultural, social, local, discursive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- native speakers know actually how to ask the questions, <u>the appropriate words, actually we do don't know the appropriate way to ask our questions</u></li> <li>- <u>even if we have questions, we don't ask, but with only international students, of course we speak friendly and we ask our questions and exchange ideas, so actually I think there is some difference with speaking among international students and among native speakers</u></li> <li>• everyone wants to talk to other people and get together, but because it is a foreign country zone, so... they are not sure about everything... so, the best choice or the safe strategy is to keep silent</li> <li>- I want to ask you a question... do you treat people differently based on age? You know sometimes we look younger, but we are old...</li> <li>- mm I wouldn't... I reckon in university, perhaps more different from everywhere else. Everybody at PhD level, treats everybody at PhD level, regardless of whether they are supervisors or emiratus professors or who they are, everybody goes by first name</li> </ul>	<p>Hanna &amp; Amar G1S3, p.7</p> <p>Xia G2S3, p.6</p> <p>Aini &amp; Jan G2S3, p. 17</p>	<p>Overlap to support</p> <p>Xia detaches herself from other IS using 'they' to refer to IS</p> <p>Direct advice by IS vs Indirect advice by LS "I wouldn't..."</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How about slangs? Do you use slangs?</li> <li>- yeah... it is so automatic... yeah... they are part of our language, everyone uses that....</li> <li>• sometimes, I may say something that may insult them,</li> </ul>	Joko, G2S1,p.5	
<p>Space (personal, cultural, social, physical)</p> <p>”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• yeah, even in lectures, I see that in mixed groups with international and local students, international students all sit in a corner and they don't ask questions, always local students ask, in that case international students are very silent,... they keep silent</li> <li>• I don't have any opportunity to mix with them</li> <li>- if you have some close friends I think it is ok I mean a close native friend but because we don't have close OZ friends that is difficult</li> <li>- but how should this be possible to find an OZ friend, Oh can you be my friend, they are all running and we are not good runners sorry I am talking of myself I am not a good runner I mean</li> <li>• . that is the culture of my home country...you usually say hi to everyone ...even you</li> </ul>	<p>Amar, G1S3,p.7</p> <p>Shamim G2S1,p.4</p> <p>Bina &amp; Hanna G1S1, p.6</p> <p>Joko G2S1,p.5</p>	<p>Self- repetition to signalempphasis of the point</p> <p>Longer sentences in IS- IS settings by IS, more effort on message exchange</p>

	<p>don't know, so... but here, the local people say, ...you have your own business, but I also have my own business,... so...I should say that <u>it is hard to find the time ...the right time, and the right place to get into the Australian people to have conversations...</u> make friends... and outside this building, it is hard to find local people, we have locals here... lecturers... staff... but outside the academic life, it is actually difficult to find local people... we meet locals here... like staff, academics here... but it is hard to find locals outside academics,... you know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• But I am single... I need to get social ...actually, I tried to join some activities... some discussions... but I found that students from each country, are sitting in groups ...I mean... there were groups, and students from each country were just enjoying themselves in their groups, but they did not have conversation with other groups</li> <li>• I think ...the main thing keeping us from mixing with others people, is culture ...I mean... I personally... it is hard to mix with</li> </ul>	<p>Shamim G2S1,p.6</p> <p>Joko G2S1,p.6</p> <p>Hanna G1S1 p.9</p> <p>Amar, G1S3,p.2, 3</p>	<p>More unfinished sentences, more grammar mistakes, more sentences with only content words in IS-IS</p>
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	<p>other culture... what I mean is that for me sometimes to start personal relationship, and not academic one... with people from other cultures ...is difficult ...I think... I feel... I don't want to... for example, locals...I don't want to get into their problems, so... <u>we might seem nice to each other... say hi or hello, how are you...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• probably... we are far away from those communities... because... we don't know how to contact with that... there are a lot of information... you know</li> <li>• I have an office in MRGS, and there is the lounge, usually students come for lunch, if they want to join other students and have talk, maybe for half an hour during lunch you know, the thing I observe there is that sometimes there are only international students and maybe one or two native students so I go but sometimes I mean most times, mainly there are only native students and no international students so I prefer to stay in office, I mean international students if they see only native students they just</li> </ul>	<p>Amar, G1S3 p. 22</p>	
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	<p>prefer to be away, so, yes <u>I also sometimes very careful, oh if there are so many OZ students then I don't know I am very careful how can I join them and prefer to stay in my office.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• according to my observations... in MRGS.... sometimes.... international students and local students mingle with each other,... but most of the time.... only international students go for lunch on the table in the lounge,... and sometimes only local students are there... so,... <u>when there are local students, international students don't go... and when there are international students, local students don't go to that table.</u></li> </ul>		
Stereotyping	<p>stereotyping.... is interesting because when I first walked in the room my first impression was you were going to be quiet yeah.... my stereo typing was that you never want to contribute that much... so... <u>I was expecting you to be quiet</u></p> <p>I think my problem is... now I realize that my problem is... that I am an English teacher, and we had a trainer,... he used to talk to us about western culture and you know... western culture refers to certain countries and he</p>	<p>Clare G1S3, p19</p> <p>Ratna, G1S3,p.15</p> <p>Clare, G1S3, p.16</p>	<p>The majority in number is with IS but a LS is the major dominant speaker, initiates topic changes, and takes the role of the discussion host or convener</p> <p>Uncertainty in speaking about cultural themes “I</p>

	<p>imprinted in us these stereotyping,... you shouldn't be talking about personal things,... they like privacy so much</p> <p>but to me international students always look happy and busy and into stuff ...so I sort of don't think into that you might want to make friends , you look... I suppose to me... happy on your own but we do have the impression of international students of being,... wanting to... keep to yourselves,... and not wanting to ask... so I'm not likely to ask you a question, that I might ask ourselves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Because in Malaysia... we learn that western people don't like it, if we ask are you married?</li> <li>- oh no... that's the first thing I would ask. You got kids or where do you live?</li> <li>- English people are different I think because they don't like to talk about personal things, I think</li> <li>- Ausies are very open</li> </ul>	<p>Clare G2S3,p. 5</p> <p>Aini, Shamim &amp; Clare G2S3, p.7</p>	think,...probably...possibly..."
<p>"initially they treat us differently"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- when you speak to international students... do you slow down?</li> <li>- yes</li> <li>- uh... I personally don't like it, when you slow down.... because initially you treat us differently, I have a room in</li> </ul>	<p>Joko &amp; Jan G2S3,p. 12</p>	

	<p>the hotel, you know ... janitor, you know ....when she speaks to me she speaks very slowly, I am thinking... why you are speaking so slowly!</p>		
<p>Fear of judgment on legitimacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the most difficult thing for me is that,... you know... because I am an English language teacher,... you know... I feel I expose myself to a lot of evaluation, I mean they say, oh you are an English teacher and your English is like this!</li> <li>I don't think I'm uncomfortable in a bad way,... but sometimes... I'm afraid I will be evaluated.... that's the thing that makes me uncomfortable, but... this could be just my thought</li> <li>yeah, we are just very conscious of whether we make mistakes or not, you know... because English is not our native language</li> </ul>	<p>Ratna, G1S3,p.8</p> <p>Ratna &amp; Amar, G1S3, p.8</p>	
<p>Language of socialisation (mumbling, slang,...)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the language of socialisation is so difficult for me so yeah for example I think OK what should I say if I say hi and then hello and how are you and then I say good thanks and I'm fine and then,...uh how to continue the conversation... I don't know how to ...what to say next so I just run away</li> <li>yeah so topics for socialising we don't</li> </ul>	<p>Ratna &amp; Bina G1S3,p.2</p>	<p>Generalisation, theory induction</p>



	<p>know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- you know <u>...language of socialisation is very difficult for us, ...we don't know... what sort of discourse local people here use</u></li> <li>- so, do you feel nervous... in going up to people... and talking?</li> <li>- yes,... we just don't know... what sort of reaction.... you say hi... how are you ...and I say good thanks,... but I don't know... what to say next... how to continue</li> <li>- how to keep going,.... we don't know.... that's the problem, you don't know what to say we don't know either ...so, the conversation ...what to say that's difficult</li> <li>- uh that's probably why you don't... but if you go to another international student... would it go further? Is that easy?</li> <li>- yeah, <u>we can talk about our problems, sometimes we talk about our study and also sometimes family problems, but... we don't know what sort of topics to speak with local students</u></li> </ul>		<p>LS shows her dominance by asking questions</p>
<p>Interaction at hi and bye level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• yeah I think... <u>with international students there is a tendency to say hello and keep going ...because you anticipate that it is going to be a difficult communication, so, you kind of... unless they get</u></li> </ul>	<p>Clare, G1S3,p.9</p>	

	<p>stuff into the conversations you don't tend to initiate it ... as much as you like with a local students, not consciously I think ...is that your experience is that what happens?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we might seem nice to each other... say hi or hello, how are you... but then I mind my own business, and they also mind their own business... you know... so, <u>if I want to speak, then... they might say they mind your business... or, I say they mind your business</u> ...you know... we have some culture... you know... so, you only say hi... hello... how are you ...and then, that becomes something... something you know everyday,... <u>and sometimes, I may say something that may insult them, so,...</u></li> <li>• <u>the language of socialisation is so difficult for me so yeah</u> for example I think OK what should I say if I say Hi and then hello and how are you and then I say good thanks and I'm fine and then,...uh how to continue the conversation... I don't know how to ...what to say next so I just run away</li> <li>- I realize for me, it's like for example, when I want to talk to local students, I just say hi and bye, nothing else,</li> </ul>	<p>Joko, G2S1,p.5</p> <p>Ratna, G1S1,p.2</p> <p>Ratna &amp; Amar, G1S3,p.5</p>	
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	<p>just two seconds,... but with international students I can stay talking for a long time. What about you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yeah ....same</li> <li>- so, do you feel nervous... in going up to people... and talking?</li> <li>- yes,... we just don't know... what sort of reaction.... you say hi... how are you ...and I say good thanks,... but I don't know... what to say next... how to continue</li> <li>- how to keep going,.... we don't know.... that's the problem, you don't know what to say we don't know either ...so, the conversation ...what to say that's difficult</li> <li>- uh that's probably why you don't... but if you go to another international student... would it go further? Is that easy?</li> <li>- yeah, we can talk about our problems, sometimes we talk about our study and also sometimes family problems, but... we don't know what sort of topics to speak with local students</li> <li>- If I for example, come across international students, we can stay and talk, but with local students, <u>I feel they are in rush, so we just say hi, how are you, good thanks, you know...</u> yeah...the same</li> <li>- what sort of questions would you like me to ask you? Uh... are you from Nepal... and</li> </ul>	<p>Clare, Ratna &amp; Bina G1S3, p.10</p> <p>Clare &amp; Bina G1S3, p.16 \\</p>	
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Contact is the best practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local people who have been dealing with international students might have different views... so, I think contact is the best practice here... for communication and..</li> <li>• actually... I think.... sometimes ....I wasn't improving in my English until I met a friend here,... actually I should thank my supervisor,...I have met a research student also under his supervision... she is same age, and also single, so... so... we have been together for some times, like camping and research seminars, and also send emails... and I have invited her to china, and actually my English improved a lot with her... with this friendship... yes because I was an English teacher,... I always wanted to find local friend,... not only for the English but for the culture,... and the way of life here.... the more communication, the more we learn about life here.... so, for me...understanding about similarities and differences is very important...</li> </ul>	<p>Joko G2S3, p.8</p> <p>Xia G2S1,p.3</p> <p>Xia G2S3,p.3</p> <p>Xia G2S3, p.21</p>	

<p>Avoiding risk (IS: face, LS: conflict)</p> <p>Constraints for example talking about beliefs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sometimes if we ask, then we are in trouble</li> <li>• everyone wants to talk to other people and get together, but because it is a foreign country zone, so... they are not sure about everything... so, the best choice or the safe strategy is to keep silent</li> <li>• but she might be thinking that... <u>she's gotta be careful about what she says...because there is always constraints...</u> I wouldn't ask the questions I might ask Jan... have you got kids? .... Because I think you probably aren't allowed to talk about that ... or you are not comfortable talking about that, but <u>I probably ask Jan something I wouldn't ask you</u></li> <li>• I wouldn't ask you questions about your beliefs... it's not sort of thing we generally bring up about</li> <li>• I think it [wearing or not wearing a scarf] does make a difference,... not in a negative way...but I ... I don't understand it... I suppose, I would think... I think uh what's the word for it... I think people would think that <u>maybe you are so different that I might not be able to relate to you</u>,... maybe a little bit of this, yeah... it's not a prejudice thing... it's</li> </ul>	<p>Xia G2S1,p7</p> <p>Xia G2S3, p.6</p> <p>Clare G2S3, p.6</p> <p>Jan, G2S3,p.22</p> <p>Clare G2S3,p.22</p> <p>Clare G2S3,p.22</p>	<p>Xia is detaching herself from IS Identifies herself not as an IS anymore using “they” for IS and taking the role of advisor</p> <p>Frequent pause while talking about sensitive topics like wearing or not wearing a scarf, conscious wording, self-monitoring</p>
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	<p><u>good or bad, it is a matter of starting the communication, ... I mean ...I understand when you say: "mind your own business" ... you know</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to me... actually, I often feel uncomfortable if I can't talk to people I just like talking... actually</li> <li>- What goes wrong if you are sitting with someone and you don't feel close to them?</li> <li>- I just feel uncomfortable. When I sit by someone, the first thing I do is to smile when she or he responds... then I say, it's a rainy day and blub blub blub, but if she doesn't respond, maybe she is busy or... she doesn't want to talk something then...</li> </ul>	Aini & Clare G2S3, p.6	
Frustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when I first came to Australia, because I was teaching English, I was very excited to be coming to this English speaking country, and improve my English, as an English teacher, I expect myself to improve my English here, as well, so... I tried my best to improve all aspects, listening, speaking</li> </ul>	Xia G2S1,p.1	



	<p>reading and writing,... and I am very optimistic, I mean ...I don't need to worry about my future job.... I mean I already ...I come from already a very good job, so.... I tried my best just to improve my English, I come to all seminars, workshops... anything you know <u>my English was not good enough... even though... I taught English for seven years</u>, but I need to do many discussions, and a lot of discussions is initiated by local students... you know their response in seminars, is very good... but we, as international students, you know... and when they talk about cultural things.... footy and those kind of things, ...you know we don't have that background, so... we can't give any comments, so... sometimes ...we feel isolated from the discussion... and the time we have a lot things, <u>not only English but we have to accustomed to their accent here, and also all English environment, and the culture.... so, we are quite under a lot of pressure... and at the</u></p>		
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	<p>same time, a lot of reading.... you know ...a lot of pressure... and also you have to think of the best way you can make yourself more familiar with this new event... for you,...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I first came here in March, then...I request one of our teachers... you know ...AB... she was conducting a course in my field, as you know... as research students... we don't need to take any formal classes... courses ...but, I asked her to accept me in her class, as volunteer... and you know ...she accepted, so when I attended the class, I had some problems... I could understand the language of the teacher, but... I could not understand the language of some of the students, there were two kinds of students, some were from this country ... Australian students... so far, I remember, there were four Australian students of which more or less of three... I could understand, <u>but one was totally beyond my understanding, and I also had problem understanding one</u></li> </ul>	Shamim G2S1,p.3	
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	<p><u>Chinese, and also one Indonesian,... and... I feel very scared, because I don't understand them,... sometimes... they all had fun laughing, and I didn't laugh.... because, I don't understand... this is my experience</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the first time I came here, <u>I was very frustrated, because my English is more American...</u> films, and most our teachers lecturers were American educated, so... it was very hard for me to understand... sometimes <u>I don't like it why I pronounce some words so differently from the local people, so...</u> I just let's say pronounce safe but you say saif</li> <li>• one day I went to a fast food, and the girl asked me: "take [away] or have here?" I said what? She repeated take out or have here? Again I said, pardon! and then again she repeated,... I couldn't understand, and finally I say... uh I will take away.</li> </ul>	<p>Aini G2S3,p.9</p> <p>Shamim G2S3, p.7</p>	
	<p>- sometimes If they speak fast and with heavy accent then I don't</p>	<p>Amar Bina, Ratna</p>	

Culture and relation	<p>understand them so how can I respond when I don't understand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- and sometimes we just don't understand their content what they are talking about</li> <li>- because different cultures maybe yeah</li> <li>- and most of the time for my case I don't understand their jokes</li> <li>- yeah yeah very different</li> <li>- Oh jokes are the most difficult</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sometimes in my previous experience, the tutor said "oh interesting" and we didn't understand what she means by interesting so we discussed with our Bangladeshi people. It is very difficult to understand interesting is good maybe or not here what does interesting mean?[laugh] Interestingly different maybe [laugh] yeah, sometimes <u>it is not the language not the word but the culture the interpretation we don't know</u></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sometimes when you are talking we can't understand what you say... when you talk about study we understand, but when you are joking we can't understand your jokes, we don't know what you are laughing about.</li> <li>- you don't get it, why is that?</li> <li>- its cultural</li> <li>- if it's about footy, because it is a very</li> </ul>	<p>&amp;Amar G2S3,p.1, 2</p> <p>Hanna, G1S3,p3</p> <p>Bina, Hanna, Clare &amp; Jan G1S3, p.14</p>	
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	<p>popular game here</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>because it is informal English</u>, isn't that?... it is very different from the formal.... and <u>there is much more culture in that</u></li> </ul>	Jan G1S3,p.22	
The gap between theory and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- but the research does not say this, they write many nice things in research you know... <u>the researchers write all those nice things about minorities you know...but it goes only into the research</u>,... one of our economists in our country, he is also a researcher,... he says, he is just tired of these English people you know... the people in developed countries, he says, they just you know... I don't know the exact word... , but he says, they write in books in research so many nice things that we understand cultural things,... economic crisis, everything,... they understand... and they say developed countries should approach like this all those things that we do like, but in practice they don't do that,... so he finds... he is a researcher and an economist and he ... he actually left one of his positions, because he says they actually write something ... so many good things, ... but they</li> </ul>	Hanna & Bina G1S3, p.9	<p>Focus on message content in IS-LS</p> <p>Hanna puts more effort on making herself understood in IS-LS interactions while she is often silent in IS-LS</p> <p>Supporting the speaker</p>

	<p>in practice do something else</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- mismatch...gap between theory and practice</li> </ul>		
Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I think, the thing that worries me is.... that I don't want to make people uncomfortable... so, I don't ask so many personal questions because I find it very difficult to see the boundaries ... every people have their own boundaries...</li> </ul>	Ratna G1S3,p.17	
Empathy			
The hegemony of English			
I want to enter the circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you say words like breaky, telly?</li> <li>- yeah,... slang ...yeah</li> <li>- a cuppa</li> <li>- What?</li> <li>- A cup of tea...yeah the slang everybody here uses them ...very often</li> <li>- Yeah... I don t know... sometimes... I don't understand them, ...when they make jokes, it is very difficult to understand their jokes,.. what I am doing now, I'm learning now ...to understand their jokes... how to make jokes with them ... how to respond, you know... just to response with a very sharp answer, like oh no that's good, really great ...</li> <li>- [laugh] yeah, get out, get out!</li> </ul>	Aini & Jan G2S3, p.14	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> <li>-</li> </ul>		
<p>Who is responsible?</p> <p>Who needs to make the move?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• follow it up,.. have a chat,... be brave...or sometimes this stereotyping.....yeah.... get over it...</li> <li>- have you familiarized yourself... your hearing ....with accented English like ours?</li> <li>- hmmm ...not really... we have to listen, I have to really listen... they are so different</li> <li>- sometimes I feel ...<u>it is unfair we have to learn English how you speak ... Australian accent, and we try to .... as close as to your accent Australlians you know but you</u></li> <li>- Oh you don't have to... oh you've got high expectations... as long as we can communicate with each other...</li> <li>- I see that's the conception</li> </ul>	<p>Clare, G1S3,</p> <p>Joko &amp; Clare G2S3, p.8,9</p>	<p>LS take the role of the knower, the advisor, using the imperative</p>
<p>Present but passive</p>	<p>I used to live in a home-stay for a very short time in Brisbane with an Australian family... so, they were very good to me very kind they often invited their family... their parents, and you know what happened to me... <u>I just sit down and listen and smile,...</u> I couldn't understand probably 40 percent or so it's very hard</p>	<p>Aini G2S3, p.13</p>	<p>Pretending understanding</p>

