

Integrating a focus on form into task-based language teaching: an investigation of four communicative tasks conducted by advanced learners of English using synchronous text-based computer-mediated communication.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Liverpool John Moores University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This thesis describes an action research project designed to investigate four communicative tasks performed by two groups of ESOL learners at Liverpool John Moores University. The tasks were carried out using the text-based computer-mediated communication tool 'Lightweight Chat', available on Blackboard, the university's Virtual Learning Environment. Native-speaker data was also collected for two of the tasks.

Tasks have been used to investigate second language acquisition and theories of second language acquisition have been used to justify the use of tasks in language learning classrooms. However, there are concerns that tasks may encourage fluency at the expense of accuracy and there are difficulties in designing task-based syllabi. The study was therefore designed to investigate these issues.

The tasks were implemented over the course of a normal teaching semester using a novel framework which was specifically designed to integrate the use of technology after a review and consideration of the task-based language learning literature. Transcripts of the recordings of the task-based interactions were analysed to compare the language which learners employed in each of the four tasks and the types of error that students made. Evidence of episodes of interaction thought to be significant in second language acquisition was sought from the transcripts and patterns of interaction were investigated. The tasks were also evaluated by the students in terms of challenge and interest.

This study has made several significant contributions to knowledge. It has suggested a novel framework for implementing communicative tasks which integrates text-based CMC. It has provided compelling evidence for the need for a form focus when using tasks with advanced level learners. In relation to the four tasks under study, detailed structural and functional templates have been compiled and suggestions for the implementation of form-focussed task have been made. These can assist teachers in the design and implementation of appropriate structural and functional syllabi. Finally, this study has highlighted two issues significant to

second language pedagogy: the treatment of errors and the selection of appropriate models for learners of English.

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Declaration

I, Amanda Mason, hereby declare that the work presented herein is an original contribution to the field of study and has not been submitted for the award of a degree to any university heretofore.

Signed:

Date: 30 March 2010.

This thesis is dedicated to my Mum, Lillian June Mason

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List of Abbreviations

CMC	computer-mediated communication
CLT	communicative language teaching
ELT	English language teaching
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
LJMU	Liverpool John Moores University
PPP	Presentation Practice Production (model of language teaching)
SCT	Socio-cultural theory
SLA	second language acquisition
TBL	task-based learning
TBLT	task-based learning and teaching
TESOL	teaching English to speakers of other languages
VLE	virtual learning environment
ZPD	zone of proximal development (concept within socio-cultural theory of learning)

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study is an action research project designed to enable practical pedagogical problems to be solved within the context of teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In order to achieve this aim, it brings together ideas and issues from theoretical fields such as second language acquisition research and education and literacy studies. In this introductory chapter, the context in which the study took place, and then the pedagogical issues out of which the study arose, will be described. The broad questions on which the study was based will be set out and the aims of the study will be described. This will be followed by an outline of the thesis.

1.2 The Context

This study is situated in the context of language learning and teaching in Higher Education, more specifically in the Liverpool Business School at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). The School offered a range of undergraduate programmes in modern languages including a BA in Applied Language Studies (ESOL) as well as a half programme in ESOL. This half programme could be combined with one of three other half programmes: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Tourism and Leisure or, another language. The most popular combination was ESOL and TESOL (approximately 90% of students choose this combination).

The entry requirement for all ESOL undergraduate degrees in terms of language proficiency is a minimum IELTS score of 5.5. By the time students graduate, they are expected to have near native-speaker proficiency in the language. The student profile is extremely diverse. The majority of students come from EU member states, but some students are immigrants to Britain, and others, who have international status, have come to Britain solely for the purposes of study.

1.2.1 The ESOL Curriculum

At Level 1 (first year of study) ESOL students study one language module per semester: ESOL 1A in semester 1 and ESOL 1B in semester 2. The motivation for this study arose from the experiences of the researcher as the module leader and tutor of both these modules. However, since the study was specifically situated in ESOL 1A, it is this module that will now form the focus of attention.

1.2.1.1 ESOL 1A

The aims of this module, as outlined in the module proforma¹, are shown below.

- to help students communicate effectively in a new environment where the medium of instruction is English
- to develop their communicative and study skills
- to broaden vocabulary in the areas relevant to life and study in a British university

These aims are intentionally broad to allow the module tutor the creativity to develop a course appropriate to the needs of a diverse and ever-changing cohort of students. Although the students have a minimum entry level of IELTS 5.5, the range of skills and abilities in the group, have, in the experience of the researcher and tutor, always been extremely variable. For this reason, the tutor usually devises a topic-based syllabus, which enables the four skills to be developed and practised, and allows language structures and functions to be recycled (Estaire and Zanón, 1994:83 and Nunan, 2004:30).

In the tutor's experience, writing is usually students' weakest skill and the one which in an academic context is most likely to impede their progress (Celce-Murcia, 1991: 465 and Hinkel, 2004:4). To facilitate the development of students' writing skills, this component of the module is assessed through a portfolio, which allows both a genre and process approach to teaching and assessing writing (Badger, 2000; Err, 2001; Johns, 2008; McGarrell and Verbeem, 2007 and Nunes, 2004:327). The genre approach enables a focus on the organisational features of writing while the process

¹ All modules are validated according to the module proforma, which outlines the aims, learning outcomes and outline syllabus of the module.

approach allows students to re-draft and edit their work with tutor guidance and feedback prior to formal submission at the end of the semester. Students are also instructed on how to use various tools such as dictionaries and grammar books so that they can correct their own errors (Bartram and Walton, 1991:84 and J. Willis, 1996b:58). This approach thus has two main benefits: students become more independent learners and the tutor is able to offer a more learner-centred way of developing grammatical and lexical accuracy in a mixed ability class (Nunes, 2004 and Vickers and Ene, 2006). This integrated, 'incidental focus-on-form' (Ellis, Basturkemen and Loewen, 2002:420) approach to grammar, as discussed in the next chapter, is considered to be a more effective approach in an academic context (Burgess and Etherington, 2002:450) and avoids the need to impose a structural syllabus (Hedge, 2000: 172) which may be inappropriate for mixed ability classes.

Finding such a systematic approach to developing spoken and interactive communication skills has been more problematic, however. Although tasks are often employed by the tutor to develop speaking skills, the danger of a task-based approach as discussed in the following chapter is that fluency is often encouraged at the expense of accuracy (see Skehan, 1994, for example). Students at this level of proficiency can usually communicate their message successfully in most situations. The challenge is, therefore, to improve their accuracy to prevent fossilisation (Han, 2004, Han and Selinker, 2005; Higgs and Clifford, 1982; Schmidt, 1983). This is particularly important for the TESOL students (the majority of the ESOL cohort) who will be teaching English in the future. A common pedagogic technique for dealing with accuracy problems when students are performing oral tasks is for the teacher to monitor groups while they are engaged in the task and to note any errors. Post-task, students are then asked to correct the errors through a variety of activities (Bartram and Walton, 1991:59-63, Edge, 1989:41 and Gower, Phillips and Walters, 1995:169). This approach bears practical difficulties, however. Firstly, it is impossible to monitor all groups simultaneously, so, as the teacher moves from group to group she receives only a 'snapshot' of how a particular group is performing the task. In addition, even with a relatively small class, it is often difficult to hear what students are saying and write down exactly what a student has said and in its original context. To overcome this, some researchers have recommended the audio recording of group activities so that the interactions can then

be transcribed (Lynch, 2001 and Lynch and Maclean, 2001) This activity, although valuable, is of course extremely time-consuming and impractical to do on a regular basis.

The second main difficulty encountered by the tutor was that of selecting a range of tasks which would both challenge orally proficient students while also encouraging less confident students to participate equally (Willis, 1996b:48). The tasks should also elicit a range of language structures and functions appropriate to the level of study. Task selection had normally been carried out on a rather ad hoc, intuitive basis, that is, tasks were selected because they had previously seemed successful in that they engaged students and elicited talk (Ellis, 1997:219).

The third issue concerned raising awareness of learners' individual weaknesses. As mentioned earlier, learners at this level have most of the necessary communication strategies and linguistic resources to get their message across. This can sometimes lead to a kind of complacency and lack of motivation to achieve greater accuracy (Schmidt, 1983). The tutor felt that the usual post-task activities were not encouraging learners to notice their own errors sufficiently (one of Bruton's (2002) main criticisms of tasks) and thus not pushing them to improve their accuracy.

A trial and error approach to syllabus design and to solving these issues was felt to be unsatisfactory (Ellis, 1997:85 and 2003:210, Estaire and Zanón, 1994:83, Nunan, 2004:40). For this reason, the tutor decided to adopt a more systematic approach by employing *Lightweight Chat*, a computer-mediated communication (CMC) tool available on *Blackboard*, the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

The potential of Lightweight Chat as a language-learning tool became immediately apparent when the researcher attended a staff development course on the Communication Tools embedded on Blackboard. A pilot study carried out by the researcher revealed that the experience of using this tool, for both students and teachers, was generally positive. Moreover, it became apparent that this CMC tool could possibly provide solutions to some of the earlier mentioned problems encountered on the ESOL1A module. It was therefore decided to undertake this

formal study to gain a clearer understanding of how tasks could be selected and implemented in a more effective manner.

1.3 Aims of the study

The research approach adopted in this study is that of action research. The main motivation behind this study was to investigate the task-based interactions of LJMU Level 1 ESOL students using Lightweight Chat in order to seek insights into present practice with the aim of improving it. After an extensive review of the literature concerning task-based language learning and second language acquisition the following research questions were developed:

1. Would the tasks motivate and challenge the students?
2. Would students participate equally in completion of the task?
3. What language structures and functions would the tasks elicit?
4. What errors would the learners make? Could these be used as the basis of a structural syllabus?
5. Would the text-based nature of communication encourage learners to notice their own errors? Would learners be able to correct their own errors with or without scaffolding?
6. Would some tasks be more likely to elicit episodes of interaction thought to be significant in promoting second language acquisition?

It was hoped that by investigating these questions the teacher would be able to develop insights into how this group of ESOL learners perform a set of tasks which might lead to suggestions for future pedagogic interventions in task design and implementation. In other words, the main aim of this study is professional development within the specific teaching situation. The aim of the study is not to produce findings which can be generalised to a larger population but it is expected that some of the findings may be transferable to similar learning and teaching contexts. These will contribute to knowledge in several ways outlined below.

1.4 Contributions to knowledge

Firstly, by collecting additional data from other groups of advanced learners and some native-speakers, it should be possible to identify core functions and structures elicited by the tasks which could be used by other teachers to facilitate syllabus design. As mentioned in the previous section, syllabus design still remains an issue within task-based pedagogy (Ellis, 1997:85 and 2003:210, Estaire and Zanón, 1994:83, Nunan, 2004:40). These findings could thus prove to be significant.

In addition, this study should provide insights into pedagogical practices surrounding the implementation of tasks. Various models of task implementation exist in the literature but these need to be adapted according to specific contexts and needs of specific groups of learners. This study offers an innovative model in which technology has been embedded. This model could be adopted by language teachers in other contexts globally. It could also be used by other researchers to investigate tasks and/or second language acquisition.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, by answering research questions 4 and 5, this study endeavours to develop a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the development of learner accuracy when teachers adopt a task-based approach in the second language classroom. This understanding is crucial for all teachers implementing, or considering implementing, a task-based approach.

Finally, answers to research question 6 should add to the growing body of evidence from SLA research concerning tasks and second language acquisition.

1.5 Outline of thesis

This chapter has described the context of the study and the problems which motivated the research. Aims and research questions have also been described. This final section of the chapter will now outline the main body of the thesis.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide a review of the literature relevant to this study. In the following chapter, the main theories of second language acquisition will be reviewed in order to provide a theoretical underpinning for a task-based approach to language learning and teaching. Since the aims of this thesis are more related to pedagogical concerns than attempting to add to SLA theory, the first part of chapter 2 is mainly descriptive, outlining the main theories in order to introduce important terms and concepts from SLA (second language acquisition) research which will be later discussed in relation to pedagogy. The second part of the chapter then moves from theory to practice by providing a more critical analysis of the use of tasks in language teaching based on the present state of knowledge from SLA research. Task and task-based teaching are defined, a rationale for task-based learning is provided but also criticisms of the approach are discussed. This leads to a discussion on the issue of how to integrate accuracy work into a task-based approach. The chapter concludes by discussing the main findings of studies investigating tasks and SLA.

Chapter 3 begins by discussing the evolving role of computers in education in general and the relationship between technology and literacy. The focus then narrows to discuss the role of computers in language learning, firstly by providing a historical perspective on computer-assisted language learning (CALL) which demonstrates how the role of computers in second language classrooms has evolved almost in parallel with shifts in theories and approaches to language teaching. The next part of the chapter deals more specifically with computer-mediated communication (CMC) and discusses research which has investigated the nature of CMC compared with other modes of communication such as writing and face-to-face oral communication. The findings of studies investigating the use of CMC in education generally and then specifically language learning are evaluated in order to determine the potential affordances (see section 3.6.5) of CMC technologies for learners and teachers. Research which has specifically investigated the use of CMC using various SLA models will then be discussed. Finally in this chapter, predictions are made regarding the future of CMC research in language teaching.

Chapter 4 describes the overall methodological approach of this study. It begins by discussing the three main paradigms associated with educational research. Then, the

research approach adopted for this study, action research, is discussed and a rationale for adopting a 'practice-to-theory' approach to research rather than a 'theory-to-practice' approach is provided based on the problems highlighted in earlier chapters. The action research cycle is also described in this chapter. This includes the development of a framework for task-implementation which is based on a synthesis of some of the key ideas and concepts highlighted in chapters 2 and 3. An attempt is then made to situate the approach taken in this study within one of the three research paradigms previously described. The final part of this chapter contains a description of the overall research design and a rationale for the selection of specific methods of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5 contains detailed descriptions of all the procedures followed to collect and analyse data in this study. The first section of this chapter provides a detailed description of the three groups of participants. This is followed by a description of ethical protocols that were followed. Then some general features of the teaching approach employed on this module are outlined. It was considered important to do this to enable readers to fully contextualise what is essentially a classroom study. The next section of this chapter is devoted to describing how the tasks were implemented. This section is divided into two parts: the first part describes general classroom procedures adopted for the implementation of all four tasks while the second part describes specific classroom procedures employed for each task. The final section of this chapter contains procedural information concerning the methods employed to collect and analyse the data.

The key findings of this study are presented in chapter 6 and are organised according to the research questions. These findings are discussed in relation to the relevant literature in chapter 7. In chapter 8, several main conclusions are drawn and the limitations of the study are considered which leads to suggestions being made for future research. The final chapter concludes with the teacher/researcher reflecting on both the product and process of this study.

2. Theories of Second Language Acquisition and Task-based Learning and Teaching

2.1 Introduction

A variety of approaches and methods of second language teaching have evolved during the long history of second language teaching and learning (for a comprehensive review of these see Richards and Rogers, 2001; Howatt, 2004 and Waters, 2009). Few of these approaches, however, have had any strong grounding in second language acquisition research, simply because the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a relatively recent one (Ellis, 2005 and Lightbown, 2000). Since the late 1980s however, both pure and classroom based SLA research has proliferated and although the relationship between the evidence from these studies and second language pedagogy remains complex, it seems apparent that any pedagogical approach should at least be based on an understanding of what these studies have revealed (Ellis, 2005 and Lightbown, 2000). The aim of the first part of this chapter is thus to review the main theories of second language acquisition in order to provide a theoretical background to the second part of the chapter which discusses the relationship between tasks and second language acquisition research. An exploration of the literature concerning this relationship provides the context for research questions 5 and 6 of this study. Moreover, the concepts discussed and issues arising from this chapter have underpinned both the teaching and the research approach (see chapter 4) adopted by the researcher in this study.

2.2 Theories of learning and second language acquisition

This section aims to describe some of the most significant theories of learning in order to introduce theories and concepts relevant to this study. It is divided into two main parts. The first part describes theories of first language acquisition and general theories of learning. The second part deals with theories of second language acquisition.

2.2 .1 Theories of learning

In order to review the SLA research in a wider context, it is necessary to provide an overview of some of the theories of first language acquisition and general theories of learning. Several of the main theories can be categorized as follows: behaviourist, innatist, cognitive and interactionist (Lightbown and Spada, 2004). Experiential learning will also be considered since it has significance for task-based language teaching.

2.2.1.1 Behaviourism

Behaviourism is an approach to psychology which is concerned with the observation of human behaviour (Williams and Burden, 1997:9). The most renowned work with respect to behaviourism and learning is that of Skinner (1957). His work has had a tremendous influence on language teaching and provided theoretical support for the audiolingual method, which was at its most popular in the 1960s (Richards and Rogers, 2001:65 and Williams and Burden, 1997:10). Central to Skinner's (1957) principles for human behaviour was the idea that behaviour and learning could be controlled by environmental stimuli and that if behaviour is reinforced in some way, for example by giving a reward, then that behaviour would be more likely to occur in the future. Thus the behaviourist driven audiolingual method of language teaching had a strong emphasis on language drills and imitation, and errors were discouraged in the belief that they would become habits (Richards and Rogers, 2001).

2.2.1.2 An innatist theory

Skinner's position was challenged by Chomsky (1959). Chomsky (1959) argued that it failed to explain how children knew about grammar. How for example, did a child know that to make a past simple ending in English an "ed" is added and then often over apply this rule to irregular verbs by saying, for example "comed" instead of "came"? Chomsky hypothesised that children must have an innate ability to discover rules for themselves. He called this ability a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) although this is now usually referred to as Universal Grammar (UG) (Cook, 1988). Although there is still a lot of disagreement about the nature of UG, there does seem to be widespread agreement that children are born with some sort of

innate knowledge of certain principles of all languages and that an understanding of this can have pedagogical value (see for example Shortall, 1996 and Lowe, 2002). The innatist view also led to the distinction between acquisition and learning (Krashen, 1975) which will be discussed further in section 2.2.2.2.

2.2.1.3 Cognitive Theories

Cognitive psychology, in contrast to behaviourist psychology which is concerned only with environmental influences, focuses on the internal processes of the human brain. Williams and Burden (1997) divide the cognitive psychologists into two groups: the constructivists and the information theorists. Each will be discussed in more detail below.

One of the most important and influential constructivists is Jean Piaget. Piaget (1932) believed that one of the main problems with behaviourist research was that learning was seen as a passive activity. In contrast, for Piaget, learning was very much an active process. An important concept of Piaget's work is that of '*adaptation*'. This involves two processes, assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the modification of new knowledge so that it can fit into the learners existing knowledge. Accommodation is the modification of existing knowledge to take into account new knowledge (Williams and Burden, 1997). This concept has parallels with the concept of '*restructuring*' which shall be discussed later in relation to second language acquisition.

Information theorists view the brain rather like a computer (Williams and Burden, 1997:13). Information Processing models of how the brain works have attracted most interest from SLA researchers. Klatzky (1980) and Best (1986) have focussed on *attention*. According to Klatzky (1980), although we are exposed to large numbers of stimuli, most of these are filtered out as we select only those that are most important to us. Best (1986) sees attention as a cognitive resource that we draw upon when we most need it. McClaughlin (1987) has carried out some of the most important work on information processing with respect to language learning and his model later will be discussed in section 2.2.2.4.

2.2.1.4 Interactionist Theories

Although Piaget was discussed as a constructivist, Lightbown and Spada (1999) classify Piaget as an interactionist since his work emphasised the role of interaction between the child and its environment. The Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978) was also concerned with the interaction between child and environment and, like Piaget, Vygotsky believed that knowledge is constructed as the learner makes sense of new information. However, there is one major distinction between the views of Vygotsky and Piaget: Piaget (1932) believed that language develops in order to express knowledge, in other words, language develops *after* cognitive development. In direct contrast, Vygotsky (1978) believed that language was a necessary tool for learning and the development of knowledge. Vygotsky's work has received significant attention by second language acquisition researchers recently and some of his ideas will be explored in more detail later in section 2.2.2.6.

2.2.1.5. Experiential Learning

Experiential learning views learning as an active process grounded in experience and is clearly illustrated in Kolb's (1984) well-known experiential learning cycle shown in figure 2.1. The model incorporates four specific stages of the learning process beginning with concrete experience and followed by reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. To illustrate this, an example from teacher education will be used: The trainee teacher gains concrete experience through supervised teaching practice. Immediately after the lesson the supervisor encourages the trainee to reflect on a particular aspect of the experience (reflective observation). This leads to a stage of theorizing about this aspect (abstract conceptualisation) when the trainee reads some relevant theoretical accounts. The final stage (active experimentation) allows the theory to be tested in practice in the trainee's next teaching practice session.

Kolb's work has come under criticism on various fronts (Smith, 2001) including his method of measuring learning styles (see for example Pickworth and Schoeman, 2000) and for the fact that it doesn't deal in enough depth with reflection (Järvinen and Poikela, 2001). Kolb's model has however, been widely appreciated and applied

in many fields including language learning (Kohonen, 1992). Its relevance to this study will be discussed further in chapter 4 and will also be used to provide a framework for reflection in chapter 9.

Figure 2.1 – Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle

2.2.2 Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Having briefly summarised some of the main theories of learning, some of the key ideas concepts and theories in the field of second language acquisition will now be discussed.

2.2.2.1 The significance of errors in SLA

The role of errors in second language acquisition has received significant attention. It was mentioned earlier that followers of the behaviourist driven audiolingual method had a rather negative view of errors, seeing them as a form of negative behaviour which should be avoided. Behaviourists believed that second language errors are made because of the inherent differences between the mother tongue (L1) and the second language (L2) and that these ‘bad habits’ were transferred. Although this approach to language teaching was extremely popular in the 1960s it has been criticised on several levels. Firstly, as noted in section 2.2.1.2, it was dismissed on theoretical grounds by Chomsky (1959). On a practical level, teachers found that its exclusive focus on grammatical accuracy in the classroom did not necessarily lead to learners being able to use the language practised outside the classroom (Lightbown,

1983). Another criticism arose from studies of the types of errors that learners made. Behaviourism was associated with the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) which arose from studies comparing different languages. The hypothesis was formulated by Lado (1957) on the basic premise that learners would acquire the target language structures most similar to their L1 with more ease than those less similar. It was also used to predict the errors that learners would make as a result of transfer from their L1. However, research conducted into the actual errors made by learners did not always match these (Dulay and Burt, 1974; Jackson and Whitnam, 1971). This suggested that L2 learning was not such a simple matter of habits learned from the L1 being transferred to the target language.

A seminal paper by Corder (1967) turned the behaviourist view of errors on its head. According to Corder (1967), errors were evidence of the learner's stage of development in the target language. From this point forward, errors came to be seen in a more positive light, as natural occurrences in language development rather than negative habits to be avoided at all costs. As Corder himself (1967:163) put it, the research emphasis was beginning to shift '*away from a preoccupation towards a study of teaching towards a study of learning*'.

Corder's work also led to a term widely found in the SLA literature: '*interlanguage*'. This term was first coined by Selinker (1972) but was an extension of Corder's ideas. Interlanguage describes '*learners' developing second language knowledge*' (Lightbown and Spada, 1999:74). At a given point in time, a learner's interlanguage system will exist somewhere between the L1 and the target language, and it is unique to that learner. The system is dynamic, with changes occurring as new knowledge about the language is learned.

A second important concept put forward by Corder (1967:166), based on studies investigating the order of natural acquisition, was that learners have a '*built-in syllabus*'. As a result, they will learn aspects of language in a pre-determined order which cannot be influenced by externals. This clearly has significant implications for teaching and particularly for syllabus design. For this reason, this concept will be returned to in section 2.3 in relation to designing grammatical syllabi.

2.2.2.2 Acquisition versus Learning

Chomsky's innatist views were developed further by Krashen (1975, 1981 and 1982). Krashen (1975, 1981 and 1982) hypothesised that as long as children (and adult second language learners) are provided with enough 'comprehensible input', that is language which is at a level slightly higher than the learner can produce, then acquisition will proceed without the need for explicit instruction. Krashen (1975, 1981 and 1982) made a clear distinction between acquisition and learning. Many native speakers have not '*learned*' the grammatical rules of their mother tongue but can speak it fluently, so according to Krashen, they have *acquired* it. Many second language learners have 'learned' the rules of grammar but cannot apply them in communicative situations. Therefore, he argued, learned knowledge does not lead to acquisition. One of the major criticisms of Krashen's belief that acquisition is an unconscious process is that it is untestable (Gregg, 1984 and McClaughlin, 1978). Further criticisms of Krashen's ideas will be discussed later.

Krashen has been extremely influential in the field of second language teaching and his work has been the basis for a form of communicative language teaching where there is no explicit grammar teaching (Krashen and Terrel, 1983). The role of grammar in second language instruction still remains extremely controversial (Derewianka, 2001:241 and Ellis 2005, 2006). Krashen's view that comprehensible input is a *requirement* for acquisition is however, not controversial. In contrast, that comprehensible input is *sufficient* for acquisition is now widely discredited (Gass, 1997, Morgan-Short and Wood Bowden, 2006). The following section will examine evidence which has led to this censure, and lead to the more recent debate concerning the role and nature of comprehensible input.

2.2.2.3 The role of output.

Hatch (1978) was one of the first researchers to find a role for 'output' in second language learning. For Hatch, production could not be seen merely as a form of practice, it was in fact the *means* by which language was learned. Nunan (2004:79) summarises this position by stating '*we learn how to converse in a second language by having conversations.*'

It is Swain's (1985, 1995, 2000) work however, that has been instrumental in highlighting the importance in L2 pedagogy of providing learners with opportunities for production. Swain (1985) studied children learning French as a second language in an immersion system and compared their performance with native speaker French pupils. The non-native speakers (NNSs) received plenty of "comprehensible input" but the native speakers (NSs) consistently outperformed the NNSs, particularly in acquisition of grammatical forms. She believed the reason for this was the lack of opportunity the NNSs had to take part in social interaction in French. This study resulted in Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis. The Output Hypothesis suggests that learners need to be 'pushed' to produce comprehensible output. In other words, when they try to produce language, their interlocutor pushes them to notice an error which results in them having to reformulate their language. According to Swain (1995 and 2000), output has three roles in promoting second language acquisition. Firstly, it affords opportunities for 'noticing' (this concept will be described in more detail below). Secondly, according to Swain (1995) and Swain and Lapkin (1998) it allows learners to test their hypotheses about language, that is, they can experiment with new language forms. They may then receive external feedback as to whether their hypotheses were true from a teacher, for example, or they may have to use their own knowledge. In this way, output pushes the learner to produce language that is just beyond their current level of ability and thus '*stretches*' their interlanguage system (Swain, 1998:68). Thirdly, Swain (1998:69) argues that '*metatalk*', that is learners talking *about* the language that they are using in meaningful situations, can enable them to become aware of the actual processes of learning. Communicative tasks, both written and spoken, provide learners with opportunities for output. This is a major reason for using tasks in the classroom and thus will be discussed further in section 2.3.

2.2.2.4 Cognitive Theories of Language Learning

McLaughlin (1978) was mentioned earlier in his criticism of Krashen. McLaughlin (1987) has been instrumental in developing ideas from cognitive psychology and applying them to second language learning in adults. In his theory, second language learning is viewed as the '*acquisition of complex cognitive skills*'

(McLaughlin, 1987:133). Humans are viewed as '*limited capacity processors*' (McLaughlin, 1987:134) and processing can be either '*automatic*' or '*controlled*'. Gass (1997:92) uses the analogy of learning to drive a car to explain these notions. When you begin learning you have to concentrate consciously on procedures such as starting the car and changing gear. This controlled processing uses much of the processing capacity leaving little to focus on anything else such as navigating. Gradually, however, through extended practice these processes become automatic. As these aspects become automatic, you have more processing capacity available to focus on other more complex aspects such as navigating traffic. To apply this analogy to language learning, the example of an elementary learner of a language will be used. In the early stages of learning, the learner will only be able to pay attention to the main words and phrases in a message when engaged in interaction, as these words still require controlled processing. Gradually, however, as the use of these words and phrases becomes automatic, the learner will have more processing capacity remaining to be able to shift their attention to the grammatical features of the language.

Another cognitive theorist, Schmidt (1990), sees no difference between learning and acquisition, a view directly opposed to Krashen's. Schmidt (1990) has focussed on the importance of '*noticing*', arguing that you cannot learn a particular grammatical form until you have first consciously noticed it in the input. Schmidt and Frota (1986) also used the term '*notice the gap*' to describe how learners may become conscious of a mismatch between their own interlanguage system and the target language (TL) system. Another level of noticing, termed noticing a 'hole' (Doughty and Williams, 1998b), has been used to describe what Swain (1995) observed when learners were unable to articulate exactly what they wanted to communicate. These concepts are significant in relation to research question 5 of this study.

Restructuring is another important concept in cognitive theory (McLaughlin, 1990). This is thought to be the interaction of old and new knowledge. In order that new knowledge fits into an existing system, the existing system has to be transformed. For example, it is now known that the acquisition of past simple endings in English typically follows the sequence: eat, ate, eated, ated, ate. If one were to observe the use of the past simple by a learner of English over a period of time the learner would

appear to be regressing. However, psychologists such as McClaughlin (1990) argue that this is because the existing system (i.e. 'knowledge' that all past simple endings end in <ed>) has to be restructured.

Other significant contributors to second language acquisition in this area include VanPatten (1990) and Skehan (1996). Van Patten (1990, 2002) is interested in how input leads to acquisition and this will be discussed in more detail in section 2.2.2.5.1 below. Skehan's (1996) work has focussed on using communicative tasks to achieve a balance between fluency and accuracy and the relevance of his ideas in relation to task-based learning will be discussed later in this chapter and in chapter 4 since one of the main aims of this study was to begin to explore ways of implementing tasks to achieve this balance.

2.2.2.5 Interactionist Theories of Second Language Acquisition

The significance of input and output in second language learning has already been mentioned. It is now necessary to return to the nature of input and how it is made comprehensible. Several researchers have tried to address this by investigating the way in which, first of all, input is modified in some way for both children learning a first language and learners of second languages. The phenomenon of 'baby talk' or 'child directed speech (the way adults adapt their speech when talking to babies and young children) is believed to be essential to first language acquisition (Sachs, Bard and Johnson, 1981). Similarly, in terms of second language learning '*foreigner talk*' (modifications made by native speakers talking to non-native speakers) can also make input comprehensible (Hatch, 1983).

Long's (1981 and 1996) Interaction Hypothesis suggested that it was only through modified interaction or '*negotiation of meaning*' that input could be made comprehensible. Conversational modifications occur usually when there is a breakdown in communication. Examples include clarification checks or confirmation checks. Negotiation of meaning has received considerable attention from researchers, particularly in relation to task-based language learning and thus shall be explored further in section 2.3.5.1. Another feature of interaction also thought to be beneficial to second language acquisition is corrective feedback (Long,

1996), in particular the use of recasts. A recast is a reformulation of a learner utterance which modifies the form in some way so that the meaning is unchanged but the utterance more grammatically accurate. Recasts are one of six types of corrective feedback identified by Lyster and Ranta (1997) in their study of French immersion pupils. They investigated the frequency of use of each type and their effect on 'uptake', the output that a learner produces as a result of the feedback. The most frequently used type of feedback was the recast but they suggest that this was the least effective in terms of uptake. Mackey and Philp (1998) argue however, that uptake is not always a good indicator that the student will be able to use the form correctly in future interactions and that recasts may be beneficial to interlanguage development. Rather than focussing on the 'uptake' of recasts by learners, they included a pre-test and post-test in their experimental design and found that some learners did eventually use those recasts. A more recent study by Lyster (2004) suggests that prompts, which encourage the learner to self-correct, might be the most effective form of correction feedback. An understanding of the effects of feedback is significant in this study in relation to research question 5. There is much controversy surrounding the issue of corrective feedback in relation to written work (Ferris, 2003 and 2004). Truscott (1996 and 2004) has argued strongly against correcting students' written grammatical errors on the grounds that it is harmful to both their writing fluency and overall quality of writing. Chandler (2004) in response to Truscott, argues that error correction may be of value, particularly for adult learners, in raising their awareness of the how grammatical rules and lexical items can be applied. A study by Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005) compared the effect of different types of corrective feedback on upper-intermediate ESOL learners' writing. They found that indirect feedback rather than direct feedback was more effective in helping learners develop their accuracy. Moreover, the most effective form of feedback was a combination of written and one-to-one oral feedback from the teacher. However, they only investigated three categories of errors: past simple tense, definite articles and prepositions. What most researchers do agree on is that more experimental studies are required in this area (Ferris, 2003:67).

2.2.2.5.1 The Input Interaction Output (IIO) model

In this chapter so far, it has been shown that input is believed to be necessary for second language acquisition and that input can be made comprehensible through interactional modifications. The next question to be addressed is how does that input lead to acquisition? The Input Interaction Output (IIO) Model (a term used by Block, 2003:26) is an attempt at explaining this process.

According to Block (2003:26), the IIO model has become the most prominent model of SLA research because it takes into account input, Long's (1981) Interaction Hypothesis, Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis as well as encompassing ideas from cognitive theories. The main concepts of this model as set out by Richards (2002:40) and Gass (1997) will now be summarised. The model involves several processes: input, intake, acquisition, access and output as shown in Figure 2.2 (Richards, 2002:38). Each of these stages of the process will be examined in more detail in an attempt to explore how input may lead to acquisition. This will then enable discussion of the role that grammar instruction might play in second language acquisition.

Figure 2.2 The IOO Model (J.C. Richards, 2002:38)



It has been mentioned that input is essential to acquisition but as Van Patten points out (1990:7) not all the input a learner receives 'goes in'. As was discussed earlier, according to information processing models, the brain has a limited capacity. We are constantly bombarded with stimuli but only a limited amount of the stimuli that we perceive can be attended to, in other words, we cannot attend to all the input we receive. The portion of any message that is attended to is the language that can be processed. This portion of the input is described as 'intake', a term first coined by Corder (1967). Van Patten (1990) has posited that learners attend first to linguistic

items which carry the most communicative value (usually lexical items). Those items which carry least communicative value, such as the articles in most contexts in English, will only be attended to when learners are able to understand the informational and communicative content of a message with ease.

Acquisition involves several processes including noticing (Schmidt, 1990) and discovering rules through innate knowledge, (Shortall, 1996). Intake must then be accommodated into the developing language system through restructuring (McClaughlin, 1990). The learner must then form hypotheses about the target language and try out different forms in communicative situations, a process often referred to in the literature as ‘hypothesis testing’. As was noted in section 2.2.2.3 this is thought to be a very important part of the acquisition process (Swain, 1995 and 1998).

The next stage, access, concerns ‘the ability of a learner to draw on his or her interlanguage system during meaningful communication’ (Richards, 2002: 43) while the final stage, output, relates to the observation of the language user in communication (Richards, 2002: 40-44).

This model neatly integrates concepts from a range of SLA theorists interested in the interaction between an individual and the language, in what Ellis (2000) calls the ‘psycholinguistic’ strand of SLA. Recently, however, there has been a growing awareness of the limitation of this model in that it does not consider the social aspect of language learning (see for example Block, 2003, Lantolf, 2000c). To explore the social nature of language learning it is necessary to return to the work of Vygotsky (1978 and 1986).

2.2.2.6 Sociocultural theory and second language acquisition

The sociocultural theory (SCT) of learning is based on the ideas of the Russian Vygotsky (1978 and 1986). According to Vygotsky (1978), learning develops as a result of interaction and interaction is mediated through the use of three main tools: material tools, interaction with others, and signs, the most significant sign being that of language. The ideas and concepts of SCT have been applied specifically to

second language learning (see Lantolf and Appel, 1994b and Lantolf, 2000c, Lantolf, 2006) and it is those that will now be discussed.

2.2.2.6.1 Mediation and the ZPD

The concept of mediation in language learning is explored in some detail by Lantolf (2000b). In this review of the research concerning mediated second language learning, Lantolf creates three broad categories: mediation by others in social interaction; mediation by the self through private speech; mediation by artifacts. Each of these will be discussed in turn but first it is necessary to introduce the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1978:86), for learning through mediation to take place, it must occur within the learners' ZPD. Basically, the ZPD is the difference in actual and potential levels of development of a child or learner. The actual level is the level at which the child can function independently. The potential level is that at which the novice (or child) can function with the help of an expert (usually a parent or teacher). The support given to complete a particular task is not merely to complete the task, but also to provide strategic instruction and is referred to as 'scaffolding' (see Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976 for a detailed discussion of scaffolding) but is also referred to in the SLA literature as 'collaborative dialogue' and 'instructional conversation' (Ellis, 2003:182).

2.2.2.6.1.2 Social Mediation

According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is mediated when an expert scaffolds a novice through their ZPD, in other words, the expert provides the necessary support for the novice to complete a task he would be unable to achieve independently. In the second language learning classroom the teacher can be viewed as the expert and the learner as the novice and so the teacher's role is to provide the scaffold for the learners and several studies have investigated 'teacher talk' in the classroom. What seems to emerge is that what Donato (2000) termed '*instructional talk*' might be less effective than '*instructional conversation*' (Antón, 1999, G. Cook, 1997, Sullivan, 2000, van Lier, 1996). When teachers engage in instructional talk the teacher stays

in control of the class and manages the interaction according to their own agenda. Instructional conversation, on the other hand, allows the learners to engage their own interests.

Vygotsky (1978:86) argued that assistance might also come from more capable peers. Peer scaffolding in language learning has been investigated by several researchers in relation to task-based learning which will be discussed in section 2.3.5.1, since it has particular relevance to research question 6 of this study, as one of the forms of interaction that may promote learning.

2.2.2.6.1.3 Mediation through private speech

The concepts of private speech will now be examined. Vygotsky (1987) believed that private speech, that is, speech which is not directed at an interlocutor, has an important function in helping us gain control over our mental processes. Private speech is also thought to be significant in second language learning (see Lantolf, 2000b for a complete review of relevant literature.). The most studied function of private speech in language learning is ‘rehearsal’. De Guerrero (1999:49) defines mental rehearsal as ‘*voluntary or involuntary activity by means of which students practise in their minds the language they have learned, heard, or read, or the language they will have to use in a future oral or written activity*’. Ohta (2001:13), in her longitudinal study of English speaking learners of Japanese, identified three types of private speech utilised by the learners from transcripts of recordings made during normal class time. She termed the three types ‘*vicarious response*’, ‘*repetition*’ and ‘*manipulation*’. ‘*Vicarious response*’ describes those occasions when a learner whispers an answer to a teacher’s question directed at another learner. ‘*Repetition*’, in this context, is not the type of choral repetition that is often heard in language classrooms, it is a form of ‘*covert repetition*’ (Ohta, 2001:54), a word, phrase or sentence repeated (usually in a whisper or low voice) after a teacher or peer. ‘*Manipulation*’ is a form of repetition which a learner might use to manipulate grammatical and morphological structures. For example, Ohta (2001:61) shows how a student broke down a compound word into smaller chunks and then repeated them to produce the target form.

2.2.2.6.1.4 Mediation through artifacts

Lantolf (2000b) mentions three categories of artifacts thought to be relevant to the mediation of second language learning: portfolios, tasks and technology. Based on their study, Donato and McCormick (1994:459) suggest that portfolios can enable students to develop learning strategies not specifically taught through '*critically examining their learning, discovering new strategic orientations to the task of learning to converse in a foreign language, exploring applications of their new knowledge*'.

The role of tasks and technology in mediating second language learning are of particular interest in this study. Tasks within a sociocultural framework will be discussed in detail later in this chapter and the mediating role of technology will be dealt with in chapter 3.

2.2.2.6.2 Activity theory

One final aspect of Vygotskian approaches to studying second language learning must now be mentioned, that of activity theory. Activity theory resulted from the work of Leontiev (1978) building on Vygotsky's ideas. According to Leontiev (1978) activity is motivated by a particular need, for example hunger. When that need is directed at a specific object (for example the decision to seek food), the need becomes a motive (Lantolf 2000a:8). There are three levels of activity: activity, action and operation and the action is strongly influenced by the motive. The following example from language learning can be used to illustrate this: two students may attend a language class. However, their motivation may be quite different. One may be attending because they need to learn the language for their job while the other might just have an intrinsic interest in the language. The way these two students behave (their actions) in the class will be strongly influenced by their motivation. Block (2003:102) neatly differentiates action, motive and operation as the what?, why? and how? of an activity. The significance of this to second language pedagogy will be discussed in section 2.3 in the context of task-based

language learning. Examples of activities include work, education and play (Lantolf, 2000a:13).

Vygotsky (1978) thought that play was particularly important in child development but SLA researchers have only recently begun to turn their attention to play in second language learning (see for example Broner and Tarone, 2001; Bushnell, 2008; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005; Cook, 1997; Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996; Sullivan, 2000). Broner and Tarone (2001:266) point out that language play is used in the SLA research to describe two different phenomena. The Vygotskian perspective on language play according to Lantolf (1997) has already been described in section 2.2.2.6.1.3, in other words, rehearsal. This is essentially a serious activity in that it is an activity carried out primarily for the purpose of mastering particular language forms. The other perspective on language play is that of Cook's (1997, 2000), which Broner and Tarone describe as ludic language play. The primary function of ludic language play is to amuse oneself or others. Cook (1997:227) identifies two types of language play: play with sounds and grammatical structures, and play which involves the creation of fictional worlds.

The role of rehearsal in second language acquisition has already been discussed, but how might ludic language play facilitate language development? It is thought that ludic language play may play several roles in second language development. Firstly, because of its inherently amusing nature, it is argued that episodes of language play are more likely to be memorised by learners engaging in it (Broner and Tarone, 2001 and Bushnel, 2008). Secondly, language play which involves double-voicing, that is when learners take on a fictional role, is thought to enable learners to master another register (Broner and Tarone, 2001 and Bushnel, 2008). For example, a student may pretend to be a teacher and employ language that they would not normally have the opportunity to use. Another possible role for language play is in the removal of affective factors which may inhibit language learning. In this way language play creates a '*low anxiety space*' allowing learners to experiment with the language (Bushnell, 2008). Broner and Tarone (2001) also suggest that language play may function to destabilise the interlanguage system, making it more open to potential development (see also Cook, 2000 and Tarone, 2000).

Language play therefore may have an important role in second language development but is yet under-researched, particularly in adult learners. Thus, in attempting to answer research question 6 of this study, episodes of ludic language play will be analysed. Since rehearsal is essentially a spoken phenomenon, however, this cannot be investigated using data collected from text-based CMC.

2.2.2.7 Is SCT compatible with other models of SLA?

So far two separate strands of SLA research have been described. Interactionist and cognitive theories belonging to the '*psycholinguistic*' strand of SLA (Ellis, 2000), while SCT and its accompanying Activity Theory belong to the second strand (Block, 2003). Block (2003) believes that psycholinguistic models such as the IIO model described earlier are too narrow in that they focus on the individual, and much of the research to support them has been carried out under laboratory conditions. Sociocultural theorists, however, focus on the social context of interaction as well as the individual. Although these two strands of SLA seem quite distinct, several researchers (including Ellis, 2000; Block, 2003 and Swain, 2000) suggest that they should not be seen as incompatible. Moreover, they stress that psycholinguistic models should not be dismissed outright in favour of SCT and suggest that a more productive approach might be to use concepts from SCT and Activity Theory in order to enrich psycholinguistic models. Swain (2000) for example, draws on SCT to broaden what she has termed 'output'. In this expansion, she includes '*collaborative dialogue*' (scaffolding) in which learners are engaged in constructing knowledge about language. Ellis's (2000) article demonstrates how the two basic strands of SLA and SCT can be applied in different ways to achieve the balance in teaching between planning and improvisation (see van Lier, 1996).

2.2.3 Summary

In this section, the most important concepts and ideas in the current SLA literature have been summarised in order to provide the background for the following section in which the discussion will move to the more practical consideration of language pedagogy.

2.3 From theory to practice

2.3.1 Introduction

As the previous section has shown, theories of learning, and second language learning theories in particular, are very complex. As no unified theory exists, it appears difficult to know how to apply this knowledge to pedagogical practice. However, Ellis (2005) and Lightbown (2000) assert that SLA evidence cannot be ignored and that there is a need to use it to inform language pedagogy, even if the suggestions which arise are only tentative ones (Ellis, 2005). The aim of the remaining part of this chapter is thus to review some of the recent approaches to language teaching and then to provide a rationale for the teaching approach applied in this study based on certain guiding principles revealed by SLA research. It will also highlight the weaknesses of this approach which have led to this study.

2.3.2 Approaches and methods of second language teaching

A number of approaches and methods of language teaching have evolved in the long history of language teaching and even a brief review of these is beyond the scope of this study (a full review can be found in Richards and Rogers, 2001). Therefore, the discussion will be restricted to one approach and one method which have, most recently, been most dominant in the field of language teaching: the audiolingual method and communicative language teaching (CLT).

The audiolingual method was extremely popular in the 1960s (Richards and Rogers, 2001:65). Teachers normally followed a structural syllabus and learners received input from dialogues. The dialogues were normally rather contrived to enable particular grammatical structures to be 'taught'. After listening to the dialogues, learners often had to listen and repeat what they heard. This was usually followed by a series of substitution drills to enable learners to practise the forms accurately. As mentioned in the previous section, this method was severely criticised by both theorists and practitioners. As a result, although elements of this approach are still practised in classrooms, the demise of the method overall has occurred (Richards and Rogers, 2001:65). Since the 1980s, the predominant approach to second language teaching, particularly English Language Teaching (ELT), has been that of

communicative language teaching (CLT) (Richards and Rogers, 2000 and Pica, 2003). Unlike the audiolingual method, CLT is not a prescriptive method, but rather an approach to teaching based on a set of principles (Richards and Rogers, 2001:172). Although the goal of both the audiolingual method and CLT was to develop communicative ability their models of language were quite different (Ellis, 2003:27). The audiolingual method had a model of language consisting of a set of linguistic systems, such as grammar and phonetics, whereas CLT was based on a functional model of language (Halliday, 1973) and a theory of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). As Nunan (2004:7), Ellis (2003:28) and Sauvignon (2005) point out, however, the CLT approach is not a unitary one and although many teachers purport to operate according to its principles, interpretations of it may and should vary significantly according to the local context. Nunan (2004:10) therefore prefers to describe CLT as a '*broad philosophical approach*'.

Task-based learning and teaching (TBLT) is an offshoot of CLT which Nunan (2004:10) describes as representing '*... a realisation of this philosophy at the levels of syllabus design and methodology*'. Ellis (2003:30) also notes that TBLT blurs the distinction between syllabus and methodological approach, as the task becomes the unit of a communicative syllabus. This study is situated in a classroom where the predominant approach to teaching and learning bears the characteristics of TBLT. The remainder of this chapter will therefore attempt to provide a rationale for the selection of this approach based on the previous theoretical discussions. However, before progressing further into a discussion of the complex relationship between theory and practice, it will be necessary to describe more precisely what is meant by TBLT.

2.3.3 Defining TBLT

Littlewood (2004) discusses at length the problematic nature of defining TBLT, since like CLT, it is appropriated and realised in different forms by different teachers. Skehan (1996:39) describes two realisations of task-based learning, weak and strong forms. Ellis (2003:28) refers to these as task-supported communicative teaching and task-based language teaching respectively. The task-supported approach (the weak form) can be compared to what is commonly called the PPP

(presentation, practice, production) paradigm. Teachers following this model are likely to follow a structural syllabus and employ tasks only at the end of the lesson to promote communication in the productive phase. Willis (1996a and 1996b) adopts the strong form and she quite clearly makes the distinction between this form and the weak or task-supported PPP (Willis, 1996a). In the weak form, the task is demoted to a minor supporting role to provide students with an opportunity to use the language “taught and practised” in the first two stages. In the strong form, the task is the central unit of learning. Since it is the strong form that is adopted in this study, from this point forward, therefore, it should be assumed that any further mention of TBLT is referring to this form. A rationale for this choice and a discussion of the relative merits of PPP and TBLT will follow, but first it is necessary to define exactly what is meant by ‘task’.

2.3.4 Definitions of ‘task’

Defining ‘task’ is no easy matter because as Ellis (2003) and Littlewood (2004) point out, no single agreed definition of a task has emerged either in the field of SLA or in language teaching. It seems that each researcher has designed their own definition to fit the context of the area that has interested them. For example, Gass (1997:153) limits her definition of tasks to those which ‘*involve some oral exchange among or between learners*’. This definition, although useful in her field of SLA, is too narrow for language teachers as it covers only one of the four skills. Three definitions by authorities in task-based language pedagogy will be considered:

A task is ‘.a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome. In other words, learners use whatever target language resources they have in order to solve a problem, do a puzzle, play a game, or share and compare experiences.’

Willis (1996a: 53)

‘.... a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focussed on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to

manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end.'

(Nunan, 2004: 4)

'A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes.'

(Ellis, 2003:16)

Within these definitions, tasks share several characteristics. Firstly, tasks can involve both learners' productive and receptive skills. Secondly, tasks have outcomes other than linguistic ones. Thirdly, task completion involves a focus on meaning rather than linguistic form. Finally, learners are expected to select their own linguistic forms in carrying out the task. These definitions of task clearly separate tasks from the traditional type of exercises commonly employed by language teachers. Such exercises include, for example, gap-fills in which students have to complete a sentence with a particular verb form or lexical item or the oral drills associated with the audiolingual method. These exercises have no outcome other than getting the right answer, a purely linguistic goal. (It should be noted here that the teacher/researcher does not wish to exclude traditional exercises and drills from a TBLT approach completely. In fact they may have a very important role, which will be considered in chapter 4.) With the plethora of definitions already in existence (for a review see Ellis, 2003 or Nunan, 2004) a personal definition would be superfluous. However, in this study, the word 'task' will be used only to describe pedagogical activities which bear the four characteristics shared by the definitions above.

2.3.5 The Relationship between tasks and SLA theory

The relationship between tasks in second language teaching and second language acquisition research is two-way. Tasks have been used to carry out second language acquisition research and theories of second language acquisition have been used to justify the use of tasks pedagogically (Ellis, 2003 and Willis and Willis, 2001). The aim of this section is to begin to explore that relationship, provide some theoretical support for a task-based approach but also highlight potential areas of weakness which prompted this study.

2.3.5.1 A rationale for TBLT

One of the main arguments for a task-based approach to language teaching and learning comes from the fact that it avoids the need to impose a structural syllabus. If Corder's (1967) theory of the built-in syllabus is correct, then the complex process of acquisition will proceed in a set order (see Ellis 2005). The Audiolingual Method and PPP paradigm both depend on the teacher selecting and imposing a structural syllabus which ignores the learners' readiness to acquire particular items. Task-based syllabi on the other hand are centred on tasks rather than forms or functions and the tasks allow learners the opportunity to engage in communication using the language of their own choice. In this way it is often argued that TBLT is more likely to take into account the learners' built-in syllabus (Skehan, 2002, Long, 2007).

Another justification for TBLT is that it provides learners with large amounts of input (Willis, 1996b) and in particular, interactionist led research has emphasised the role of tasks in producing 'comprehensible input'. The majority of these studies have focussed on the quantity of meaning negotiation that a particular task elicits with the belief that negotiation of meaning can lead learners '*to notice the gap*' in their linguistic knowledge (Gass, 1997) as well as promoting automaticity and restructuring (Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993). As well as input, Swain, (1985) showed that tasks provide opportunities for 'comprehensible output', allowing learners to test out hypotheses about the target language. Morgan-Short and Wood Bowden (2006) also suggest a role for tasks in providing output to develop L2 competence.

TBLT has also been studied from a sociocultural perspective (see for example Foley, 1991). According to Vygotsky (1978), learning develops as a result of interaction, which is justification in itself for a central role for tasks in second language learning. Many researchers working in a SCT framework have focussed on how tasks can provide opportunities for scaffolded learning within learners' ZPDs (Donato, 1994; De Guerrero and Villamil, 2000; Ohta 2001; Storch, 2001), particularly peer scaffolding. Donato (1994), for example, showed how learners provided support to their peers in what he called "collective scaffolding". His learners of French were participating in an open-ended task and one speaker was trying to produce the past tense form of a reflexive verb. No individual learner was able to produce the correct form but by working collaboratively they managed to construct it correctly. A study by de Guerrero and Villamil (2000), demonstrates how one student scaffolded another students' learning using a range of different mechanisms in the revision of a narrative text. Ohta (2000 and 2001) too, found many examples of peer-to-peer scaffolding and she had similar findings to Donato (1994) in that the terms 'expert' and 'novice' as proposed by Vygotsky (1978) are often fluid in second language learning. During the same task, one learner could be viewed as an expert, as he helps another learner with a vocabulary item for example, while later on in the task that 'expert' could be supported by the 'novice' to produce a complex form. What emerged from Ohta's (2001) study that was particularly interesting was that learners were able to assist their peers in producing forms that they were actually unable to produce themselves. Ohta (2001:79) attributes this to the differing demands that listening and speaking exert on learners. Listeners are more able to attend to errors made by their interlocutor, as they are not so burdened by the relatively higher cognitive demands of speaking.

Another form of social mediation that has been researched with respect to tasks is the use of the L1. Most of this has been in relation to *metatalk*, that is the talk that learners engage in when trying to make sense of a task (see for example Brooks and Donato, 1994). In the study mentioned earlier by de Guerrero and Villamil (2000), the students worked mostly in their native Spanish and this enabled them to talk explicitly about the language forms that were causing difficulties. De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) are strong proponents of allowing learners to use the L1 in this type

of task. Swain and Lapkin (1998) found three roles for the L1 as a mediational tool in their study of French immersion pupils working on a jigsaw writing task: to regulate the pupils' own behaviour in carrying out the task, to focus their attention on difficult linguistic forms and to generate and assess possible solutions.

Activity theory is another aspect of SCT that has been used to support TBLT. In TBLT, the task acts as both a work plan and a process (Breen, 1989). The teacher can select and implement the task but the learner can interpret it in his or her own way. As Foley (1990:92) explains, the learner is able to '*superimpose their own learning strategies and preferred ways of working upon classroom methodology*'. In this way, tasks can also provide the balance between planning and improvisation in the classroom (van Lier, 1996). This is an important characteristic of tasks and further studies relating to how different students interpret tasks will be described towards the end of this chapter.

Nunan (2004) has also pledged support for TBLT on the grounds of Experiential Learning theory and Kohonen's (1992) application of Kolb's (1984) model to language learning. Tasks can be implemented in a way that enables learners to engage in all four stages of the cycle, as will become apparent in chapter 4. Samuda and Bygate (2008) also include experiential learning in a range of general educational theories which they use to support tasks in second language learning. They argue that a task is a holistic activity which requires participants to use all aspects of their linguistic knowledge such as phonology, grammar, vocabulary and discourse and that it is only through such holistic activities that key processes in language development can take place. Van den Branden, Bygate and Norris (2009:11) also suggest a holistic role for tasks arguing that they can provide all the affordances required for successful language learning.

2.3.5.2 Criticisms of TBLT

Despite a large amount of support for TBLT, it is not without its critics and there are several issues which must be considered. Bruton (2002) rejects TBLT in favour of the PPP paradigm. He argues that the perceived value of TBLT is unfounded on two main grounds: in relation to tasks as a unit of syllabus and in terms of their value in language learning. In relation to the former issue, Bruton (2002:285), in accordance

with Seedhouse (1999), asserts that *'there are many instances of communication which cannot be termed tasks'* using the example of talking to your friend. Secondly, he argues that they are not appropriate to beginner levels *'unless some of the use of the L1 is expected and accepted'*. Regarding the second issue, Bruton (2002) and Sheen (1992, 1994) argue that there is a lack of hard empirical evidence to prove that tasks promote learning. In particular, Bruton (2002) mentions the possibility that tasks promote fluency at the expense of accuracy. The 'grammar gap' as it will be referred to here, (a term also used by Richards, 2002:38) is one of the central themes of this study and will be discussed in great depth in various sections of this thesis. Before beginning to address this question, however, it is important to counter Bruton's (2002) earlier objections.

His contention that tasks do not encompass the broad range of communicative situations that exist presents a rather limited view of a task. It would be very easy to design several tasks around the very situation he uses to illustrate his point. For example, learners could be asked to listen to two friends talking and identify the topic under discussion. A productive task could then be designed around that topic. To address the second point, there are many ways of adopting TBLT for beginner learners as Willis (1996b, 2009) and Willis and Willis (2007) have demonstrated. Moreover, a TBLT approach does not exclude the use of the L1 and as noted earlier, several researchers working in a Vygotskian framework actively promote it as a mediational tool (Brooks and Donato, 1994; De Guerrero and Villamil, 2000; Swain and Lapkin; 1998, Platt and Brookes, 2002).

Another criticism of TBLT is that certain types of tasks encourage students to produce 'impoverished' language, that is language which is highly lexicalised and syntactically limited (Duff, 1986:167; Lynch, 1989:124; Seedhouse, 1999). However, one could argue that this type of language would be representative of native speaker spoken interactions carrying out similar tasks orally. Spontaneous spoken language does not share the same characteristics of form, planned discourse and has many features which were traditionally viewed as 'ungrammatical' (Carter and McCarthy, 1995).

A further objection to TBLT is that the assumption that tasks will always encourage negotiation of meaning is simply not true. Foster (1998), believes that negotiation of

meaning is not a strategy that students in real classrooms adopt. She is critical of much SLA research which has focussed on subjects in laboratory conditions rather than real classrooms. Her study showed that students were more likely to adopt a '*pretend and hope*' strategy than a '*check and clarify*' (Foster, 1998:18-19) one. The latter, she suggests, might make students look stupid and slow the task down. One of the aims of this study is to explore this phenomenon further (research question 6).

The argument regarding the lack of evidence to show that tasks promote learning is difficult to refute directly. SLA research is extremely complex and SLA findings cannot yet be directly applied to pedagogy. However, as Skehan (2002) points out in his reply to Bruton (2002), the evidence for the beneficial nature of tasks outweighs the negatives. Moreover, the alternative to TBLT, the PPP paradigm promoted by Bruton (2000) makes several assumptions that are more easy to criticise. Before doing so however, it is necessary to explain several concepts.

Firstly, a distinction must be made between explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar (Ellis, 2005:214). Implicit knowledge is the kind of unconscious knowledge which native speakers usually draw upon when communicating spontaneously and which non-native speakers use when a target form has been acquired. Implicit knowledge includes formulaic expressions such as 'I don't know' as well as rule-based knowledge which allow us to construct novel sentences. Explicit knowledge is the conscious knowledge of language, which allows abstraction of the rules associated with a particular grammatical, phonological or lexical form (Ellis, 1993:93). For example, native speakers of English will employ implicit knowledge to use the present perfect to talk about experience as in the following utterance: 'I've never been to the US'. A non-native speaker, however, may have explicit knowledge of the rule that the present perfect is used to talk about experience but when under the pressure of performing in a real communicative situation, would be unable to produce that form. That is because although they have explicit knowledge of the form and function, this explicit knowledge has not yet become internalised as implicit knowledge.

This distinction is important since it is central to the Interface Hypothesis (Fotos and Ellis, 1991). The Interface Hypothesis provides three possible roles for grammar instruction in second language pedagogy, an issue which remains highly

controversial (Ellis, 2005 and 2006; Kumaravedivelu, 2006). Krashen (1981 and 1999) sees no need for grammar instruction at all, and as a result of his influence, grammar instruction became largely unfashionable in ELT for a long period. He believes that learning and acquisition are two distinct processes so that explicit knowledge can never lead to implicit knowledge. This theory is what Fotos and Ellis (1991:605) describe as the '*zero interface position*'. The interface position, on the other hand, posits that explicit knowledge can be converted into implicit knowledge provided learners are given sufficient opportunities for meaningful communicative practice (Dekeyser, 1998). Ellis (1991 and 1993) holds a weak-interface position, believing that explicit knowledge can, albeit indirectly, lead to implicit knowledge. As Ellis (2005:215) acknowledges, however, the jury is still out on the extent to which this is possible. A further position mentioned in Ellis (1997:48) is the Delayed Effect Hypothesis. This is supported by researchers such as Seliger (1979) who suggests that grammar instruction may not lead directly to acquisition but may facilitate the process.

It is now possible to return to a critique of Bruton's (2002) preference for the PPP paradigm. Firstly, the PPP paradigm is supported by the interface position which assumes explicit knowledge can be converted into implicit knowledge. The complex nature of language and language learning, however, suggests that such an explanation is too simplistic (Ellis, 1994). Secondly, it presupposes that linguistic elements can be taught and learned in sequence and does not take into account learners' built-in syllabus (Corder, 1967). Thirdly, PPP assumes that classes are homogenous and that all students are ready to learn what the teacher has selected to present and practise when, in practice, it is known that this is unlikely to occur. Many teachers have noted its ineffectiveness and this seems to be borne out by research (Norris and Ortega, 2000). In addition, it does not take into account learner differences and is essentially teacher-centred (Skehan, 2002). In contrast, TBLT, makes none of these assumptions and is essentially '*learner-driven*' (Skehan, 2002:294). As both Skehan (2002) and Ellis (2005) argue, although there is still no direct evidence that tasks promote learning, this should not lead to tasks being dismissed completely as there are strong theoretical grounds for its advocacy, particularly as the alternative is based on extremely dubious assumptions.

2.3.5.3 Summary

To sum up this argument, the potential advantages of a strong form of TBLT based on theoretical considerations heavily outweigh criticisms based on the direct lack of empirical evidence that it promotes learning. However, the question of the grammar gap has still not been sufficiently addressed and it is this issue which was the main motivation for this study. Further discussion of the issue will thus follow below.

2.3.6 TBLT and grammar instruction

Krashen's (1981) work led to a period in language teaching when grammar was extremely unfashionable. However, grammar is now '*being rehabilitated*' and recognised as an essential component of language learning (Burgess and Etherington, 2002). Skehan (1994), a leading proponent of TBLT, discusses the dangers of having no focus on form. He cites various studies which have shown that although there is the danger that grammar instruction can lead to overuse of studied forms, lack of instruction can lead to fossilisation. Schmidt's (1983) case study of a Japanese adult in Hawaii, for example, showed that this man had developed a relatively high level of communicative competence through his daily interactions with native speakers but had acquired very little grammatical competence. Higgs and Clifford (1982) also showed that fossilisation can occur when programmes of instruction focus on communicative fluency rather than linguistic accuracy. Ellis (2002) reiterates earlier work (Fotos and Ellis, 1991) in presenting a case for formal instruction. In terms of acquisition theory, evidence (e.g. Swain, 1985) has already been presented that learners in naturalistic settings do not achieve the same levels of grammatical competence as their native-speaker peers without formal instruction. Ellis (2002:19) summarises a body of evidence which shows that formal instruction leads not only to more rapid TL acquisition but also higher levels of ultimate achievement. In short, there now seem to be a consensus among both SLA researchers and language teaching practitioners that language pedagogy should contain a focus on form (Bygate, 1994; Ellis, 2005; Muranoi, 2000; Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2002; Skehan 1994 and 2003; Van Patten, 1990; Willis, 1996b and Willis and Willis, 2007), even if the means of that focus is still under debate.

Focus-on-forms or focus-on-form?

Before exploring the options for integrating grammar teaching into a TBLT framework, more general options for teachers operating under the umbrella of a communicative approach will be reviewed. First of all, a distinction must be made between what is commonly referred to in the literature as a 'focus on form' and a 'focus on forms' (a distinction first made by Long, 1991). A 'focus on forms' refers to the type of teaching based on a structural syllabus where grammatical forms were selected and then presented to learners. Learners would then practise these forms often in controlled activities and then be given opportunities for meaning-centred production. This is the model described earlier as PPP. Focus on form occurs, however, when classroom interactions are primarily meaning focussed and attention is shifted (by either teacher or learner) to specific linguistic forms. It should also be noted here that although 'form' is often used synonymously with 'grammar', in accordance with Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2002:419), in this study, 'form' will be used more generally to refer to grammatical, lexical, phonological and graphological forms. The reasons for rejecting a structural syllabus and the PPP paradigm have already been addressed in the previous discussion. This has led to some researchers advocating the focus-on-form approach (Long, 1991 and 1998; Doughty, 2001).

2.3.6.2 Integrating grammar instruction into a task-based approach

Both of the above types of focus can be integrated in to TBLT and some of the options for doing so will now be considered.

2.3.6.2.1 Traditional language exercises

One option is to employ traditional language exercises and activities. Nunan (2004) suggest this in a weak form of task-based learning. Even in the strong form, however, such activities are recommended although the nomenclature varies in the literature. For example, Estaire and Zanón (1994) propose the use of '*enabling tasks*' to act as a support for communication tasks whereas Ellis (2003:3) refers to such activities as '*exercises*'. According to Estaire and Zanón (1994), the purpose of enabling tasks is to provide students with the necessary linguistic tools to carry out a

communication task. Willis (1996b) and Willis (1996) also have a place for such activities as well as controlled repetition. Willis (1996b) uses the terms language awareness activities and meta-communicative tasks and unlike most other authors includes suggestions for work on phonology as well as grammar. The motive for using such activities is not to 'teach' the language, however, but to help motivate students by providing them with clear and achievable goals. In doing the activities, learners feel some sense of achievement, gain confidence and a sense of security (Willis, 1996b: 110).

2.3.6.2.2 Focussed tasks

Another approach to providing a focus on form in a task-based approach comes from Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) who recommend the use of focussed tasks. A focussed task is designed to elicit a particular form or function. For example, in Elementary Communication Games (Hadfield, 1985) there is a task called 'Where are my glasses?'. To complete this task, learners must describe to their partner where various items are in a room according to a picture they are given. It would be impossible to complete this task without using prepositions of place. Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) classify tasks according to the degree to which a particular form is necessary to carry out the task: task-naturalness, task-utility and task-essentialness. In the example task just given, prepositions would fall under the category of task-essentialness. Those items that would be useful but not essential would be categorised under task-utility ('is' and 'are' would be useful but not essential in the example task given). Those items that may occur would fall under the category of task-naturalness. Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2002:420) describe these tasks as a way of integrating a '*planned*' focus on form, as the specific linguistic forms have been predetermined. Clearly the main limitation of this approach is the difficulty of designing tasks which necessitate the use of particular forms. This issue has, however, begun to be addressed by some SLA researchers (see Pica, Kang and Sauro, 2006).

2.3.6.2.3 Incidental approaches

In direct contrast to a ‘planned’ focus on form, ‘incidental’ focus on form arises out of communication focussed on meaning between teacher and learner or learners and the forms under attention are not pre-determined (Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen, 2002:421). The range of options for the teacher which fall into this category will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3.7.

2.3.6.2.4 Consciousness-raising

Ellis (2003), Willis and Willis (1996 and 2007), are all proponents of consciousness-raising (C-R) tasks (see also Rea Dickens and Woods, 1988). Rutherford (1987:24) makes a clear distinction between C-R and traditional grammar teaching:

‘C-R is a means to attainment of grammatical competence in another language (i.e. necessary but not sufficient, and the learner contributes), whereas ‘grammar teaching’ typically represents an attempt to instil that competence directly (i.e. necessary and sufficient), and the learner is a tabula rasa.’

In a C-R task, the language becomes the content but learners use language communicatively to discuss a particular form. An example is provided by Ellis (2003: 18) in which learners have to devise a rule for the use of prepositions of place. A study by Fotos and Ellis (1991) shows that C-R tasks can bring about explicit knowledge of grammar as well as providing opportunities for meaning based interaction, with the caveat, however, that these tasks are perhaps more suitable for intermediate to advanced learners who have the level of proficiency to talk about grammar in the L2. The use of C-R tasks is supported by the weak interface position (Ellis, 1991 and 1993) and there is some evidence that learners find these kind of tasks useful and enjoyable (Mohamed, 2004).

2.3.6.2.5 The role of the teacher.

Samuda’s study (2001) showed how a skilful teacher can use ‘*knowledge constructing tasks*’ first to focus on meaning and then to gradually guide learners,

first implicitly, and then to an explicit focus on form. Johnson (1995:89) equates this with a form of scaffolding, with the teacher reformulating students' offerings and then the students repeating the reformulations. Samuda (2001) does not claim that this will have a direct effect on the learner's interlanguage but suggests that it could be a step in the right direction in the acquisition process. A practical example of this will be provided in chapter 5.

2.3.6.3 Summary

The above discussion has provided a brief overview of some of the literature addressing the grammatical accuracy issue. What it demonstrates is that there is no 'one size fits all' solution. A survey of British course books (Nitta and Gardener, 2005) highlights this pedagogical uncertainty. Many of those course books still follow the PPP paradigm when it comes to the grammar section, probably reflecting the beliefs about language learning and teaching still held by many teachers and students. This is often complemented, however, with C-R tasks, suggesting an attempt by course book writers to respond to the research perspective. This issue will be revisited with a more detailed discussion of the problem later in this chapter. First, however, literature regarding the implementation of a task-based approach to second language pedagogy needs to be considered.

2.3.7 Implementing a task-based approach

In this section a top-down approach to discussing task implementation will be adopted by looking first at the level of syllabus, then at a unit of work (several related lessons), and then at a framework employing tasks at the level of a lesson.

2.3.7.1 Syllabus design

The unit of the syllabus

Previous approaches and methods to language teaching have been based on what Breen (2001) describes as synthetic syllabi. For example, the audiolingual method employed syllabi which consisted of lists of grammatical forms. Later, communicative approaches adopted lists of language functions rather than forms (Breen, 2001). In a task-based syllabus, however, the basic unit is the task (Willis,

1996b, Willis and Willis, 2007; Nunan, 2004). Ellis (2003:229) suggests four stages in the construction of a task-based syllabus. The first stage is to determine the goals of the course, for example whether the course is aimed at teaching general English or English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Secondly, the general task types and their themes should be selected. Next, the tasks should be specified in detail and the various conditions of implementation considered. Finally, the tasks should be sequenced. One of the downsides of a task-based syllabus is that it may appear to students to be a random list of unrelated tasks. Estaire and Zanón (1994:83) stress that tasks should be closely related and coherently sequenced. Nunan (2004) achieves this by linking his tasks thematically and according to the macrofunctions (e.g. exchanging goods and services) and microfunctions (giving directions) associated with them. This highlights another advantage of a task-based syllabus over a synthetic syllabus in that these functions are recycled throughout the course. This continuous recycling, Nunan (2004:30) believes, allows opportunities for restructuring of the learners' language system. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this thematic approach to syllabus design has been adopted by the teacher of the module under investigation in this study.

Incorporating a grammatical focus in a task-based syllabus.

Ellis (2003 and 2002) offers two possible options for incorporating a focus on form into the syllabus. The first is an integrated approach where tasks are meaning focused and any work on form arises out of these. This integrated approach is that taken by most task-based practitioners (Willis, 1996b; Willis and Willis, 2007; Nunan, 2004; Estaire and Zanón, 1994). The other possibility, Ellis' (2002 and 2003) preferred approach, is to have two separate syllabi running in parallel, one task-based, the other based on specific linguistic items which have been shown difficult for learners to acquire naturally. The emphasis of the linguistic syllabus, however, is on 'awareness' rather than 'performance', unlike traditional synthetic form-based syllabi. Awareness takes two forms: awareness of forms from 'noticing' certain aspects of input and awareness in terms of explicit knowledge of grammar. How to incorporate a focus on form into a task-based approach was one of the

central issues driving this study and will thus receive more detailed attention in relation to the task-cycle in section 4.6.6.

2.3.7.2 Grading and sequencing tasks

Skehan (1994, 1996) offers a detailed discussion of the factors influencing the grading and sequencing of tasks. Working in a cognitive model of language learning, Skehan has focussed on the brain as a limited capacity processor. The implications of this for task-based learning is that there is always a trade-off between fluency and accuracy. As Skehan (1994, 1996, 2002) sees it, teachers need to create a balance among the three goals of task-based learning; fluency, restructuring of interlanguage and accuracy. The scheme he proposes takes into consideration code complexity (the complexity of both grammatical forms and lexical items), cognitive complexity (that is the actual content of the task), communicative stress and cognitive familiarity (that is how familiar the learners are with a particular type of task). Nunan (2004) talks about grading input (complexity of reading and listening texts, length, and genre, for example), learner factors and procedural factors (for example, the quantity and type of scaffolding that learners are offered) in his consideration of grading and sequencing tasks. One difficulty of this, however, is that learner and input factors are usually interdependent.

Clearly the grading and sequencing of tasks is a complex procedure and although there are many criteria for doing so (see a summary in Ellis, 2003:228), weighting those criteria is not possible with the present state of knowledge. What often occurs is that teachers grade tasks on an intuitive basis. Ellis (2003, 228-229) does not feel this is a major limitation of TBLT but notes the need for teachers to use these criteria to assess their intuitions after the task has been implemented. This is another reason for investigating tasks in this study.

2.3.7.3 The unit of work

A 'unit of work' in this study refers to the concept described by Estaire and Zanón (1994:12) as '*a series of class hours which are centred round a theme or interest area*' and is used by Nunan (2004) in a similar vein. Each unit of work involves the development of both students' productive and receptive skills. However, the

following discussion in this chapter will now centre only on productive skills and in particular, interactive tasks, since these are the focus of this investigation.

In this section, some of the factors to be considered when designing a task-based syllabus have been outlined. The next section will consider how tasks might be implemented in the classroom

2.3.7.4 The task cycle

The phrase task-cycle has been chosen specifically in this study to describe a sequence of classroom activities related to one specific task. In addition, because of the nature of this particular study, it relates to tasks involving learners' productive rather than receptive skills. That is not to say that receptive skills are to be ignored, but rather approached from a slightly different perspective. It should also be noted that the use of 'task cycle' here is not equivalent to that of Willis' (1996a and 1996b), as will become apparent later.

There seems to be a general consensus among the writers on task-based language learning and teaching that the task cycle should consist of three phases: pre-task, task and post-task (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996; Richards, 2002; Willis, 1996a and 1996b), although somewhat confusingly in Willis' (1996a and 1996b) framework, the task phase is described as the '*task cycle*'. Table 2.1 summarises some of the possible options suggested by the above authors. These are described in more detail below.

Estaire and Zanón (1994) and Ellis (2003) stress the importance of making learners aware of the objectives of a task and the steps that will be involved. In the pre-task phase it gives them a sense of purpose while at the end of the task cycle it should provide a sense of achievement. It also avoids the problem mentioned by Foster (1998) that students sometimes view tasks as 'play' rather than serious pedagogical tools, a scenario also experienced by the researcher. That is not to say, however, that learners should be discouraged from engaging in language play, because as noted earlier, language play is thought to have a potential role in second language

development (Broner and Tarone, 2001; Bushnell, 2008; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005; Cook, 1997; Sullivan, 2000).

Engaging students' interest in a topic as well as activating their lexical knowledge are techniques that most language teachers will already be familiar with and Willis (1996b) suggests several possible activities. For example, students could be asked to brainstorm words or phrases associated with a particular topic.

Table 2.1 A summary of the options for implementing a task

PHASE	EXAMPLES OF OPTIONS
Pre-task	Teacher explains aims and objectives of task Teacher activates students' interest in and knowledge of topic. Teacher pre-teaches important language items Students plan how to do the task Students and or teacher do a similar task Students read or listen to an example of a similar task being carried out
Task	<p>Teacher should consider task conditions/procedures such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participatory structure • group composition • time constraints • role of the teacher
Post-task	Students repeat the task. Students report on task. Students evaluate task.

Pre-task

The influence of planning time on task performance has been a topic of study for several researchers (see for example Crookes, 1989). Foster (1996) compared three different task types and the effects of guided planning and unguided planning on students' performance. They found that planning time did allow students to focus on form and produce more complex language even though some of the planners were less accurate (because they tried to produce more complex forms probably). These results were consistent with a later study by Skehan and Foster (1997) which also showed that planning time can influence accuracy, complexity and fluency and that there is a trade off between accuracy and complexity. Their results also suggested that the type of trade off was likely to be influenced by the task type. A further study by Foster and Skehan (1999) however, showed that teacher led planning could improve both accuracy and fluency. In this study both teacher-led and solitary planning both led to beneficial results whereas group planning showed no such benefits. The focus of planning, whether language or content based seemed to make no difference, with both having positive effects.

Yuan and Ellis (2003) compared pre-task planning and on-line planning (that is planning which occurs during the actual task phase). The on-line planners were distinguished by the fact that they were not given a time limit to completing the oral narrative task under investigation. The results suggested that on-line planning was more likely to influence accuracy and that pre-task planning was more likely to influence language complexity. They argue, unlike Skehan and Foster (1997), that the trade off is not between accuracy and complexity as both forms of planning led to students producing more complex language, but rather between accuracy and fluency. Clearly, if learners are given time during the task phase to access their explicit knowledge, this is going to reduce their fluency. It also seems that on-line planning affects syntactic rather than lexical variety. This holds with an information-processing model of language learning (see section 2.2.2.4). Content and vocabulary could be prepared during pre-task planning but on-line planners, who were not given planning time before the task, used their limited processing capacity to attend to grammar only.

Another study by Foster (2001) investigating planned and unplanned performance in tasks carried out by native and non-native speakers of English produced interesting results regarding the language employed by native speakers. She found that when the native speakers were speaking without having planned their discourse, they used a lot of highly lexicalised formulaic chunks. It is now widely acknowledged that formulaic expressions are important in language use and language instruction should focus on these as well as grammatical rules (Ellis, 2005:211).

Although the effects of planning are complex, the overriding evidence is clear: planning improves performance and that by varying the conditions under which students perform tasks teachers can provide opportunities to develop both accuracy and fluency. As Yuan and Ellis (2003:21) state '*asking learners to perform a task 'cold' is very challenging*' and therefore giving students time to plan may not be an option for the pre-task phase of the task-cycle, but rather a necessity.

Johnson (1995:75) conceptualises the pre-task phase as a form of scaffolding, with the teacher selecting and then evaluating the task to determine what support learners will require before the scaffolding can be removed and the learners get on with it. It has already been mentioned that learners need to be introduced to the topic to engage their interest and activate and develop their existing knowledge and vocabulary. Further examples of scaffolding activities will be presented below.

Another possibility for the pre-task phase is to expose learners to either a recording and / or a transcript of the task being carried out by fluent speakers of the TL (Willis, 1996b: 89-99) or for the task to be carried out by the teacher/whole group. The latter was a feature in the work of Prabhu (1987) who was one of the first proponents of task-based language learning. The advantage of this is that it lowers the cognitive load enabling learners to attend more to their language. An interesting study by Leedham (2005) showed the potential benefits of recording dyads of native-speakers and non-native speakers doing the same task. The transcripts were then made available to the non-native speaker learners to highlight discoursal features of the interactions. The learners were then able to perform a similar task paying closer attention to these features. Lee (2005) also employed transcripts of proficient speakers to train his/her young learners in the use of negotiation devices.

Task Phase

In chapter 2, the concept of ‘activity’ was introduced in the context of sociocultural theory. This has important implications for TBLT as well as providing a justification for the approach. It was shown that individual learners perform tasks in different ways and on different occasions (Coughlan and Duff, 1994). There are many factors which can affect their performance. Although some of these factors are outside the control of the teacher there are certain decisions about the way in which tasks are employed that can be made by the teacher, what Ellis (2003:249) calls ‘*task performance options*’. These options include participatory structure, composition of groups, time pressure and role of the teacher.

Participatory Structure

It is often assumed that a task-based approach involves the task being performed by pairs or small groups of students and the advantages of student-to-student interaction are well documented (for a full treatment of this topic see Jacobs, 1998). But as Ellis (2003) points out, this is not inherent in the approach. Tasks can also be performed by the whole class with either the teacher or a student leading it and perhaps this structure may be appropriate at other stages of the task-cycle. In fact there may be several disadvantages of pair and group work. For example, some learners may not feel comfortable working with a particular partner resulting in an ‘affective filter’² (Krashen, 1985). Willing (1987), working with ESOL learners in Australia found that pair work was one of their least favourite activities. Sullivan (2000) argues from a historical, social and cultural point of view that in some societies, the values that are embedded in teaching approaches which have a large emphasis on group and pair work actually conflict with those of that society. Her study took place in Vietnam which has a strong Confucian heritage. Confucianism encourages hierarchy rather than equality and is more concerned with the harmony of the group than the rights of the individual (Bond and Hwang, 1986). Sullivan

² According to Krashen (1981 and 1982) learners who are anxious, lacked confidence or motivation would not be successful in language learning because of an ‘affective filter’ which was a barrier to acquisition.

(2000) argues that a teacher led classroom can promote the kind of interaction believed to be important for second language development and that this in fact may be more appropriate in some cultures.

However, one of the main advantages of setting up tasks in pairs or small groups is that it increases significantly the amount of student talking time allowing for greater opportunities for negotiation of meaning (Long, 1996) and pushed output (Swain, 1985). Johnson (1995), drawing on sociocultural theory, asserts that student-student interaction can also play a role in students' social development, enhance their ability to work collaboratively and foster positive attitudes to the classroom (Johnson, 1995: 113). What is important then is that the composition of the group allows for effective collaboration.

Group composition and size

Group composition factors can be divided into the following categories: relative proficiency levels of learners, their gender, and nationality/mother tongue.

A common dilemma for many teachers, as well as deciding the size of groups, is managing the groups according to the relative proficiency of their members. Sociocultural theory would suggest that more proficient learners should be paired or grouped with less proficient learners so that the 'expert' may scaffold learning for the 'novice'. There are dangers in this, however, as Lynch and Maclean (2001:155) point out. More advanced learners may become frustrated or perhaps even worse, dominate discussions (Willis 1996b). Despite these concerns, Lynch and Maclean's study investigating the effect of task repetition showed that although the group under investigation was composed of students with a wide range of proficiencies, all the learners benefited in some (albeit different) ways.

Several studies (e.g. Swain and Lapkin, 2001) have investigated some of these factors and their effects on the frequency of negotiation of meaning but as Pica, Kang and Sauro (2006:303) point out, most of these studies show that the design of the task has a greater effect than the characteristics of the interlocutors.

The way in which the students work together may have an impact on their performance. Storch (2001) compared the interactions of three pairs while carrying out a collaborative writing task. Each pair carried out the task in a very different way. One dyad co-constructing the text in a collaborative manner while in the other two dyads Storch found that one of the students dominated. This study highlighted the importance of students within a group having a positive attitude to working together. In this case, the pair, which had the greatest difference in proficiencies actually collaborated better. This is where perhaps the teachers' knowledge of individual learners and their preferences for working with certain students can have more of a role to play than insights from research. This knowledge can enable the teacher to either make appropriate groupings or allow learners to self-select. Ellis (2003:271), states that the group as a unit must have a sense of permanence and cohesion suggesting that groups should be maintained rather than changed from week to week.

Several books on co-operative learning suggest that the optimum size for groups is four (Jacobs, 1998). However, decision-making tasks have been shown to take much longer when performed electronically than in the face-to-face mode. This difference increases significantly as the group size increases from three to four (Sproull and Kiesler, 1991). Therefore, groups performing tasks via the electronic mode might best be limited to three.

Imposing a time constraint

The study described earlier by Yuan and Ellis (2003:24) showed that when learners are not under the pressure of time they are more likely to pay attention to their linguistic form. This suggests that time limits should not be imposed on students carrying out tasks.

The role of the teacher

The teacher must also consider his or her own role during the task phase. It is generally considered advantageous for the teacher to monitor as unobtrusively as

possible to encourage group collaboration (Willis, 1996b) and to intervene only when a group obviously requires assistance (Jacobs, 1998).

Post-task phase

Having considered the factors for implementing the task phase, post-task possibilities will now be discussed. These include task repetition, report and task evaluation.

Task repetition

Several investigations have revealed the potential benefits gained from asking students to repeat a task (Bygate, 1996 and 2001; Lynch and Maclean, 2000 and Pinter, 2005). Two main benefits of task repetition have been reported in these studies. First, students experience decreased anxiety at the repetition stage as they are familiar with the task. Secondly, task repetition allows for a shift in attention from the content of the task to the language employed, in other words from fluency to accuracy. In order to avoid the risk of inducing boredom, however, both Lynch and Maclean (2001: 157) and Bygate (1996) recommend that partners be changed.

Report stage

Willis (1996b) and Willis and Willis (2007) recommend a report stage to redress the fluency/accuracy balance. During the report stage, students are given time to prepare either an oral or written report, which details the outcomes of the task. During the preparation of the report, the teacher acts as language advisor and students are able to attend more to accuracy than during the task itself. In this approach, the reporting, if oral, becomes a listening task for the other groups and if written, a reading task.

Task evaluation

According to Breen (1989:202) 'the evaluation which follows the completion of any task is the most important and potentially productive moment of classroom work'.

Task evaluation can be carried out by the teacher and should form a pivotal role in curriculum development (Nunan, 1998, Ellis, 2000, Estaire and Zanón, 1994) and a variety of instruments are at the teacher's disposal (see for example Estaire and Zanón, 1994:36). However, Breen's (1989) approach is much more learner centred, with evaluation carried out both by teachers and students. As Breen (1989:205) points out, 'all learners already critically evaluate the tasks they undertake' and task evaluation can become a useful language learning activity in itself. This can take one of two forms. One approach is to enable students to evaluate their own performance by providing them with transcripts of their interactions (Lynch and Maclean 2001:157). Lynch (2001) extended this idea further. The students in his study recorded and then transcribed their own oral performances. He reported not only a positive response to the procedure from the students but he also found that learners were able to notice and correct a good proportion of their own errors. Transcripts could also offer opportunities to develop autonomous learning skills, in particular reference skills (see Willis and Willis, 1996), and make instruction more learner-centred. Coulson (2005) used transcripts of recordings of his students doing oral tasks to encourage them to scaffold each other's learning. His study showed that scaffolding can lead to greater equity of interaction between learners and native or proficient speaker of the language.

Another approach is to use simple evaluation forms (see Estaire and Zanón, 1994 for some photocopiable examples). The focus of these can vary but one useful possibility is to raise students' awareness of their own learning styles, strengths and weaknesses and enable future goal setting (Breen, 1989). As Breen (1989:192) asserts, a task must account for learner differences, if it does not, it may inhibit learning rather than encourage it. Likewise, evaluation of the task must also take these factors into account.

2.3.7.5 Integrating a focus on form

Finally, the focus on form issue can be re-examined. It has already been stated that proponents of a task-based methodology are generally agreed that attention to grammatical (as well as lexical and phonological) form is desirable. Both theorists and practitioners, however, offer a range of, sometimes conflicting, advice as to how

this should be approached. As noted earlier, there is a range of options open to teachers such as C-R tasks and enabling tasks. Once the teacher has selected the method thought to be most appropriate to the teaching and learning situation, the decision must be taken as to which of the three phases above the focus should fit. As Bygate and Samuda (2007:208) point out, this is where the literature remains at odds.

Ellis (2003) sees C-R tasks as opportunities not only for form focus but also for meaning based interaction. As was mentioned previously, Ellis (2003) suggests that the teacher operates two syllabi in parallel, one syllabus based around communicative tasks with the other syllabus having a structural base. The structural syllabus is then implemented through the use of C-R tasks. Willis and Willis (1996) argue strongly that the focus on form should be discourse based (see also Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2005) and more importantly based on the discourse of the task. In their framework, C-R is placed firmly in the post-task phase. Estaire and Zanón's (1994) enabling tasks by very nature require that they be carried out before the task. Similarly, Nunan (2004) and Skehan (1996) assert that the focus on form should come before any meaningful interaction to increase the possibility that learners will use that form during the task. A 'planned' (Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen, 2002) focus on form, however, requires the task to be focused (Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993) so that the teacher knows which forms the learners will require. The difficulties of designing such tasks have already been discussed.

What seems to be lacking in the literature is discussion relating to the proficiency level of the learner and how this might affect grammar instruction. Celce-Murcia (1985 and 1991) addresses some of the factors which might affect the degree to which a focus on form is appropriate with the grid shown in figure 2.3. Ellis (2005:211) suggests tentatively that since formulaic chunks may play a significant role in second language acquisition (Foster, 2001) that it might be wise to focus on teaching these at beginner levels and delay grammar teaching until they reach higher levels or proficiency. Ellis (2003:237) also suggests that the higher the level of the learner the more explicit the focus on form should be. For the advanced, literate students in this study then, a focus on form is extremely important (see also Burgess

and Etherington, 2002). One of the aims of this study is to investigate what kind of focus on form the advanced learners in this study might benefit from.

There is general accord regarding the basic three stage implementation of pre, during and post task phases and that a focus on form should take place during one or more of these stages. Clearly, there is no prescriptive approach in TBLT to integrating (or not) a focus on form. The teacher does however, have a range of options to consider and will select from these the one or ones that she feels is most appropriate for her learners and teaching and learning context. The above discussion related to task-implementation in general terms and from the point of view of the literature will be used to guide the researcher and teacher to develop a task-cycle that would seem appropriate for her learners in the situated teaching and learning environment. This will be described in detail in chapter 4 of this thesis.

Figure 2.3 The importance of grammar (Celce-Murcia, 1991)

2.3.8 Investigations of Tasks in an SLA Framework

Having outlined a rationale for TBLT and reviewed some of the issues surrounding task-implementation, the next section of this chapter will now move on to discuss some of the studies which have sought to explore the relationship between task type

and second language acquisition, which is of particular significance for research question 6 of this study.

2.3.8.1 Classifying Tasks

As definitions of task have proliferated in different contexts, so have the ways in which they have been classified. A pedagogically focussed classification can be found in Willis and Willis (2007) and a review of various other classifications can be found in Nunan (2004) and Ellis (2003).

The four task types that will be compared in this study are based on the typology of Pica, Kanagy and Falodun (1993) (for reasons outlined below). Ellis (2003) describes this as a ‘psycholinguistic system’ as it is based on interactionist theories. Each task is categorised according to three characteristics: firstly, whether or not there is a required information exchange (interaction requirement); secondly, whether or not students are required to reach a single outcome (open or closed) and thirdly, whether or not there is only one possible solution or a number of possible solutions. The adapted typology is summarised in table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Typology of Tasks

Task Type	Interaction Requirement	Outcome	Outcome options
Jigsaw	required	closed	1
Problem-solving	not required	closed	1
Decision-making	not required	closed	1+
Opinion Exchange	not required	open	1+/-

A jigsaw task then is one in which each participant holds different information which must be exchanged in order to complete the task. A common classroom example of this type of task would be a spot the difference activity (see Ur, 1981 for examples). Students are required to reach a specific outcome i.e. find the differences, and the outcome is limited to the differences inherent in the pictures.

When completing a problem-solving task, participants are given the same information so there is no necessity for information exchange. However, interactants must work together to find a solution and usually there is only one 'correct' solution. An example of this would be a murder mystery where students are given clues to a murder and asked to deduce who the murderer was.

A decision-making task is similar to a problem-solving task in that participants have access to the same information. However, the number of possible outcomes is not limited to 1. A typical example of this is selecting the best candidate for a job.

Opinion exchange is unlike the other three tasks in that there is no requirement for participants to reach agreement. As the name suggests, it is an opportunity for students to exchange ideas and opinions, usually on a specific topic.

In Pica, Kanagy and Falodun's (1993) original typology, the information gap task was also included. In their definition, the information exchange was only one-way in that one participant held all the information to pass onto the other one. However, in most information gap activities roles can be reversed. There is thus a two-way exchange of information and so the characteristics of information gap resemble those of the jigsaw task. For this reason, the information gap has been omitted here.

2.3.8.2 Task-Type and SLA Research

Although task has been defined to encompass the teaching of both productive and receptive skills in the classroom, the task types described above are designed to promote interaction. They have been selected for investigation in this study for two reasons. Firstly, from a syllabus design perspective, they provide learners opportunities to engage in different types of interaction (Nunan, 1993:62). Secondly, although comparative research has already been conducted in the spoken mode (Gass and Varonis, 1985 and Pica, Kanagy and Falodun, 1993) such comparisons have not yet been fully researched in the text-based computer mediated mode.

It was mentioned earlier that much of SLA research has aimed to quantify the amount of negotiation of meaning emerging from the different types of task. The general consensus emerging is that closed tasks, which have a requirement for

information exchange and a limited number of outcomes, are more likely to elicit negotiation of meaning and thus be most beneficial in pushing acquisition forward. In the typology above then, jigsaw tasks are likely to be the most effective and opinion exchange tasks the least effective (Ellis, 2003 and Pica, Kang and Sauro, 2006).

Before reaching too many conclusions about the effect of task-type on interactions, the warning of sociocultural theorists drawing on activity theory must be heeded: that tasks cannot be taken as a constant. Each task participant will bring a different perspective and have a different motive for carrying out that task (Lantolf and Appel, 1994a). One of the most significant studies in this area was carried out by Coughlan and Duff (1994). Their results show not only how the same task can be interpreted completely differently by different research subjects, but also how the same subject can vary in performance at different times. They also highlighted the effect that the roles of the interactants can have on the activity generated by the task. As Coughlan and Duff (1994:190) so concisely explain ‘.....*second language data cannot be neatly removed from the sociocultural context in which it was created*’. Experienced teachers will surely be familiar with the scenario where students’ performance of a task does not match the teachers’ expectation. Gourlay (2005) observed how one class of students consciously ignored the teacher’s instructions for a task to suit their particular classroom culture. The outcome, however, was positive in that the teacher did not intervene and was later able to negotiate with students about how they might carry out such a task in future. This provides further support to the earlier quotation from Foley (1990) that TBLT offers a more learner-centred approach which can be adapted to and by the socio-cultural context. It does, however, have implications for both research design and for the implementation of tasks in the classroom (see chapter 4).

2.3.4 Summary

In this chapter the literature concerning theories of second language acquisition has been reviewed. An approach to second language pedagogy known as task-based learning and teaching has been described together with a rationale for this approach on theoretical grounds. The main criticism of this approach (lack of grammatical

focus) has been highlighted and several possible solutions have been discussed. The four task types which will form the focus of investigation in this study have also been outlined. In the next chapter the role of computers in language education will be explored. This will provide the necessary background for chapter 4, in which a model will be provided to show how the computer could enable teachers to plug the grammar gap identified in TBLT.

3. Computer Networks in Language Teaching

3.1 Introduction

The last two decades of the twentieth century will be remembered as a period of rapid technological change, a phenomenon often compared to the Industrial Revolution. We now live in what Castells (2000:14) referred to as an '*informational society*'. Computers have become an integral part of modern life in the developed world and for many young people a world without them is impossible to imagine. These technological developments have also revolutionised the way we communicate and as Graddol (2006:42) points out, the '*communications revolution*' has only just begun. The aim of this chapter is to consider the role of emerging technologies, communication technologies in education, in general as well as in language teaching, in order to situate this study into the wider context. Section 3.2 will explore the relationship between computers, education and literacy and argue that the three are inextricably linked. Section 3.3 will describe the changing roles of technology in language teaching and learning which mirror the methodological changes that have taken place historically in language teaching generally as discussed in chapter 2. This will lead into an analysis of the linguistic characteristics of computer-mediated communication which provides the background for research question 3 of this study. Section 3.6 will then review some of the studies investigating the potential benefits and drawbacks of CMC in education. Finally, section 3.7 will explore research which has employed CMC to further investigate some of the important questions of interest to SLA researchers and language teachers discussed in the previous chapter and which are of significance to this study.

3.2 Computers, education and literacy

The concept of literacy is intimately related to writing technology (Kern, 2000:223). Any definition of literacy is influenced by the socio-cultural values of the time and context. Being able to 'read and write' today is much more complex than it was even twenty years ago as we are faced with a constant stream of new media. A brief comparison of reading a book and reading on the Internet should illustrate this point. Reading on-line requires critical evaluation skills to navigate through the web of

pages connected by hyperlinks (Snyder, 1998c). It also requires the reader to be aware of the 'subtle implications' of each hyperlink (Burbules, 1998:110). In direct contrast, by the time you have started reading a book, much of the evaluation work has already been carried out by the editor or publisher. In addition, on the web, text is often secondary to other media such as audio or video. Understanding the interplay between the various media is another sub skill of critical reading (Kress, 1998). To encompass the diverse range of skills that are needed in modern society, literacy has both been renamed and redefined. For example, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) coined the term '*multiliteracies*' while Colombi and Schleppegrell (2002) use the term 'advanced literacy'. Halliday (2001) prefers to redefine literacy as '*using the current technology of writing to participate in social processes, including the new social processes that the technology brings into being.*' Whatever term or definition one uses, however, it seems that literacy, education, and computer technology are interdependent.

There has, however, been disapproval regarding 'effects' of technology on children's literacy skills. Texting is often criticised for inhibiting the ability to spell and computer games are dismissed not only for having no educational value but also for endangering social interaction skills (Merchant, 2001 and Ward, 2004). However, there is a growing body of research to indicate that, not only are the skills that children develop from, for example, computer games valuable, they are also crucial in other contexts (see for example Johnson-Eilola, 1998). Moreover, there is an increasing realisation that there is a very real danger of a *digital divide* opening up between students and teachers, with teachers struggling to keep up with their students in terms of their use and knowledge of technology (Snyder, 1998b:xxii and Smith and Curtin, 1998:211). This could result in students becoming disillusioned because of their teachers' lack of awareness of the changing world. In order to bridge this gap, it is necessary to provide students with learning opportunities which enable the development of multiliteracies in a variety of appropriate contexts, and to link learners' outside social world with classroom practices in order to avoid alienating them (Lund, 2006). The earlier example of text-messaging can serve to illustrate. Text-messaging is a real world skill and can encourage skilled and highly creative use of language (Crystal, 2008a). To criticize text-messaging is therefore to miss the point completely. Text-messages can provide teachers with a large amount

of authentic language data for classroom use. Students could be asked to rewrite a text-message into a formal e-mail, for example. Provided that learners are given examples of a variety of forms of communication and opportunities to consider appropriate conventions and register (Crystal, 2008b), new technology can enrich the learning experience or, as Merchant (2001:305) suggests, *'open new vistas of possibility'*.

Having argued that technology is integral to education, the question remains as how to implement it. In many contexts the computer has been viewed as an *'add on'* (Richards, 2005:60). For example, in many language-learning contexts, the weekly timetable often includes one *'CALL'* (computer assisted language learning) lesson a week scheduled in the computer laboratory. This lesson is seen as separate from the rest of the language curriculum. However, there is a growing realisation that this approach is unsatisfactory. As Richards states, teachers need to view computer technology as *'integrally connected to literacy learning in the wider sense of learning as a matter of accessing information, communicating and applying knowledge'* (2005:61), a view echoed by Garrison and Anderson (2003:122).

Educational policy makers in the UK are now recognising the need for an integrated approach to using technology in education. Two recent strategy documents from the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) (2005) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2005) are devoted to e-learning³. The aim of the HEFCE (2005:5) strategy document is *'to support the HE sector as it moves towards embedding e-learning appropriately'*. This has led to staff development programmes such as the Embedded Learning Technologies (ELT) and Exploring learning Technologies (XLT) accredited within the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) Professional Development Framework. One of the objectives of this study is to investigate how technology can be integrated into a sequence of language learning activities to fill the grammar gap in task-based language learning. The following chapter will illustrate the sequence of activities.

³ Garrison (2003:2) defines e-learning as *'networked, on-line learning that takes place in a formal context and uses a range of multimedia technologies'*

3.3 Computers and language learning

Having considered the relationship between computers and education in very general terms, the role of computers in language learning will now be explored more closely. In chapter 2 it was noted that there has been a shift in approaches to language teaching from what could be termed structural approaches, such as the audiolingual method, which aimed to ‘transmit’ linguistic features of the language, to a more holistic approach based on sociocultural theory, where language is seen as a tool for the mediation of learning, and communication is seen as one of the facilitators of language learning. These changes are also reflected in approaches to computer assisted language learning (CALL) and can be characterised in three main phases. In the first phase, CALL software provided drill and practice type exercises typical of those found in the audiolingual approach. The computer was characterised as the ‘*tutor*’ (Levy, 1997:194) providing immediate *feedback* to learners’ responses. During the following phase, the computer was viewed as a ‘*tool*’ (Levy, 1997:194), the tools including software such as word-processors, writing aids and reference tools, archival software and concordancers (Kenning, 1996:130). In the present phase, interaction has moved from human-to-computer to human-to-human communication, enabled by computer networks (Kern and Warschauer, 2000:7; Murray, 2000:416) or as Hampel (2006:106) puts it ‘*the technology has moved from CALL to computer-mediated communication (CMC)*’. It is computer-mediated communication (CMC) that is the central interest of this project and will now form the focus of our discussion.

Computer networks, and in particular the Internet, have had major effects on the way in which people can communicate. Research investigating the effects of these networks is wide-ranging, from the decentralisation of organisations (Sproull and Kiesler, 1991 and Ziv, 1996) to community protests (Gurak, 1996), and the emergence of virtual sex (Duel, 1996). The next section of this chapter will focus on the role of CMC in education and language learning but first it is necessary to define terms distinguishing two modes of CMC.

Networked communication is usually characterised as either asynchronous or synchronous. Asynchronous forms involve a delay between the “speaker” sending a

message and the audience receiving it, as occurs for example in e-mail and electronic discussion/message boards. Synchronous communication occurs in real time so that the sending and receiving of the message is almost simultaneous. Examples include IRC (Internet relay chat) and MOOs (see section 3.4). It is the latter, synchronous form that is enabled by *Lightweight Chat*, the Blackboard communication tool employed in this study and will therefore be the focus of the following discussion.

3.4 Synchronous forms of CMC

MUD (Multi-User Dimensions) is used to describe any text-based virtual spaces where participants can interact in real time with text. MOOs (MUDs Object Oriented) are types of MUDs but have virtual “objects” such as rooms and characters and usually involve some type of role playing game (Crystal: 2001:12). Internet Relay Chat (IRC) was developed in 1988 by Jarkko Oikarinen and first used in Finland (Werry, 1996:62). IRC consists of various ‘channels’ where groups of people can ‘meet’ and ‘chat’. Instant Messaging (IM) software, such as ICQ (I Seek You), AOL (America Online), Yahoo, Google Talk and MSN (Microsoft network) Messenger, is now extremely popular worldwide (Hardy, 2004). IM allows you to send ‘instant messages’ to your contacts and is widely viewed as a way of meeting and keeping in touch with friends. However, as well as its educational uses (see section 3.6) it is now being employed as a ‘*serious business tool*’ (King, 2004:1) by about 85% of all companies worldwide (Licari, 2005), with the Radicati Group (2007) predicting that the number of corporate IM users will increase from 67 million in 2007 to 127 million in 2011.

Jargon and acronyms abound in the technological world as the above paragraph demonstrates. Even a review of the literature limited to language teaching reveals the plethora of terms employed to refer to synchronous on-line communication. A summary of some of the terms used is shown in table 3.1 below.

The term selected for use in this project is ‘synchronous text-based interaction’ since it encapsulates the two most important features of this mode of communication: that it is text-based and that it occurs in real time. Most of the other terms do not take into account the rapid emergence of new computer-mediated voice-based

technologies (Hubbard 2004:58), nor do they reflect whether the interaction is synchronous or asynchronous.

Table 3.1 Terms employed to describe synchronous on-line communication

Term used	Researcher
CMC	Morris (2005) and Smith (2003)
Electronic discussion	Warschauer (1996) and Kung (2004)
MOO	Schwienhorst (2004)
Computer Assisted Classroom Discourse (CACD)	Ortega (1997)
Computer-assisted written conversations	Fernandez- Garcia and Martinez Arbelaz (2003)
Networked collaborative interaction (NCI)	Lee (2004)

How do synchronous text-based interactions differ from oral face-to-face interactions? This is one of the many questions researchers in several fields have tried to address. The next section will review some of the results that have emerged which should inform research question 3 of this study (what language structures and functions would the tasks elicit?).

3.5 Features of text-based synchronous CMC.

3.5.1 Discourse structure

The most noticeable feature of synchronous text-based interaction is that the structure of discourse is quite different to that of an oral face-to-face discussion. In face-to-face discussions there are certain conventions of turn-taking and topic selection that are essential for a successful and meaningful conversation. The adjacency pair model of conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974) where one turn (e.g. a request) elicits an appropriate response (e.g. agreeing to the request) cannot be applied to text-based synchronous CMC (Murray, 1989). Participants in online discussions may ‘speak’ at the same time and no one person can hold the floor or select speakers. Multiple topics may be under discussion at any one time and the first pair part of an adjacency pair may elicit no response, in other words, it may be ignored.

An outside observer reading the transcript of a face-to-face discussion would normally find it easy to follow with little inside knowledge of the speakers or topics. When faced with a text-based on-line conversation with similar knowledge, the seeming lack of structure and topic management to the discourse would lead the reader to many difficulties. When there is a large number of participants in an on-line discussion, even participants may find it difficult to keep up. Because of these difficulties, along with other linguistic and socio-cultural factors, synchronous text-based interaction participants have developed their own set of “writing” conventions and communication strategies to help them manage their interactions (Herring, 2001). The most common of these conventions will be discussed below.

3.5.2 Framing

Smith (2003:44) defines framing as ‘an attempt to clearly mark the end of old topics or the beginning of new ones.’ His study of language learners found that they employed this strategy frequently. He suggests two main reasons for this. Firstly, it was employed to overcome the difficulties of the structure of synchronous text-based interactions discussed previously. Secondly, he suggests that they used it to replace the prosodic features of speech (such as stress and intonation) which normally mark topic boundaries.

3.5.3 Addressivity

In a face-to-face conversation paralinguistic clues (such as making eye contact) would be used to signal who a particular message was directed to. In the absence of such clues, on-line participants often precede their message with the name, or nickname/alias, of the person they wish to address. This overcomes to some extent the difficulty of following several simultaneous conversations. Usually, where a person is not addressed directly, it is because the whole group are being addressed or the context is deemed by the sender to be sufficiently clear (Werry, 1996). Lotherington and Xu (2004:325) were surprised at the number of participants in their study who had several different names, another interesting socio-cultural convention of online interaction. Aliases are a common feature of on-line chats (Merchant, 2001:298).

3.5.4 Abbreviation

Werry (1996:50) observed 5 types of abbreviation in his study of two Internet Relay Chat channels (one in French and one in English). First of all, turns on average contained only 6 words. Whether or not these could be judged as shorter than face-to-face turns is questionable. In fact, reports have shown that turns are longer in synchronous text-based interaction than in face-to-face discussions (Warschauer, 1996a:19). Secondly, in Werry's (1996) study, interactants used syntactically reduced forms such as 'been' instead of 'have been'. Another feature of abbreviation was the use of acronyms (e.g. LOL meaning *laugh out loud*) and symbols or 'emoticons' such as ☺. Participants also deleted subject pronouns (e.g. *am off tomorrow* instead of *I'm off tomorrow*) and "clipped" words (e.g. *goin* rather than *going*) (Werry, 1996 and Lotherington and Xu, 2004:316-318). Smith (2003:43) and Lotherington and Xu (2004:317) also found that learners engaged in synchronous text-based interaction employed the strategy of substitution. In other words, they made use of abbreviated forms commonly used in text-messages such as *u* for *you* and *2* for *to* or *too*. Moreover, Merchant (2001: 302) observed that abbreviations are changed and developed on a regular basis. A list of common abbreviations, acronyms and emoticons can be found in Randall (2002) and Crystal (2004) and there are now online dictionaries such as NetLingo⁴ which deal specifically with this type of language.

3.5.5 Message splitting

Synchronous text-based interactions are fast-paced and require participants to type quickly to keep involved in the conversation. It is not surprising then that shortened forms are used and turn-length is kept to a minimum as is the case, though for slightly different reasons, of SMS (short messaging service or 'texting') language. To maintain their role in the interaction, participants 'split' their messages into manageable chunks and send these at intervals to show the receivers that they are still taking part. An informal convention used to show that an utterance will continue in the next message is '...' (Murray, 1989:323). A useful feature of some IM

⁴ Netlingo is available at: <http://www.netlingo.com/>

services such as MSN Messenger inform you that your interlocutor is typing a message.

3.5.6 Features replacing the prosodic and paralinguistic features of speech

The features described above have led several writers to describe the language used in synchronous text-based interaction as resembling speech (Collot and Bellmore, 1996:21; Kern, 1995:460 and Werry, 1996:56), although Crystal (2001:17-23) prefers to assign the term '*Netspeak*' to describe a functionally separate mode. Despite their similarity to speech, synchronous text-based interactions do not allow for the use of prosodic and paralinguistic features employed in oral face-to-face discussions. For example, speakers vary their stress and intonation patterns to emphasise important words. Synchronous text-based interaction users replace this by using capitalisation (e.g. Don't do THAT) and repetition of letters (e.g. *sooooo coooooo!*). Emoticons such as ☺ replace emotion usually expressed by speakers through stress and intonation (Kern, 1995:459; Kung, 2004:168; Lotherington and Xu, 2004:316; Smith, 2003:43 and Werry 1996:59). Actions and gestures can be incorporated into text chat by using asterisks on either side of the word. The most common examples observed by Werry (1996:59) were **hugs** and **handshake**. Pauses in conversation can be represented by punctuation (e.g. *so – what do you think?*).

3.5.7 Punctuation and capitalisation

Punctuation in text-chat is not employed following the conventions of traditional writing (Lotherington and Xu, 2004), instead it is used for emphasis (as mentioned above) and demonstrated in the following example from Lotherington and Xu (2004:321):

!!!...im comin too!!!!

3.5.8 Colloquial language

Another reason why the language of synchronous text-based interaction has been likened to speech is the high occurrence of colloquial language. Common expressions include 'nope', 'hiya' and 'yup' and the informal style of the colloquial

language is often similar to that of a particular discourse community e.g. Australian English (Werry, 1996) However, informality does not seem to be a requirement. For example, as Lotherington and Xu (2004:324) observed, one of the participants in their study regularly used much more formal language than his/her partner.

3.5.9 Code switching

Code-switching (blending one language with another language) is a common feature of bilingual and multilingual speakers' speech (Jenkins, 2003:15). In their study of Chinese and English online chat, Lotherington and Xu (2004: 323) found several examples of code switching, as many of the participants were bi- or multilingual. They also noticed the import of words from other languages such as Japanese.

3.5.10 Summary

The above description has demonstrated some of the main characteristics of synchronous text-based discussions. It should be pointed out however, that, because of the evolving nature of the technology, many of these features described have not become firmly established conventions (Lotherington, 2005 and Murray, 2004:477). In attempting to answer research question 3 of this study, further light may be shed on the extent to which these are used. In the next section of this chapter the literature relating to the educational value of synchronous CMC will be discussed.

3.6. Synchronous text-based interaction in education

3.6.1 A brief history

Although synchronous text-based interactions have long been popular among certain groups of users generally, their uptake in education has been relatively slower than that of e-mail because of the practical, technological problems (Paramskas, 2000:52). LAN (Local area networks) and the development of software specifically for educational purposes, however, have enabled teachers to have greater control over the environment and to provide their learners with new ways of learning and interacting. Batson (1988) was the first to develop software in an educational environment to facilitate communication among deaf students in the ENFI project at Gallaudet University. Other educational software includes INTERCHANGE used

by Bump (1990) with literature students and also widely used in the teaching of second and foreign language teaching (Kern, 1995:460). More recently VLEs (virtual learning environments) such as *Blackboard*, *WebCT*, *Moodle*, and *Lyceum* are employed at many Universities across the UK and the USA and as well as enabling synchronous text-based communication, now support a range of voice-based communication tools such as Horizon-Wimba⁵ (see Jenks, 2009, for a recent study investigating voice-based chat).

3.6.2 Synchronous text-based discussions and language teaching

The first reports of synchronous text-based interactions in second language teaching were from Beauvois (1992) and Kelm (1992). Since then, studies extolling the benefits of this new environment have proliferated, particularly from the United States. However, there is very little literature researching synchronous text-based interactions in ESL/EFL, particularly outside the US (Kung, 2004:166). The next section will examine some of the reported benefits as well as the potential downsides of using synchronous text-based interaction in an educational environment. Although much of the literature is related to second language learning, references will also be made to studies in other educational contexts.

3.6.3 Reported benefits of synchronous text-based interactions in education.

3.6.3.1 Equity of participation

The most widely reported virtue of classroom synchronous text-based interactions is that they afford more equity of participation than face-to-face discussions (Bump, 1990:55; Kern, 1995:465; Warschauer, 1996a: 20). It was noted earlier that the conventions of turn-taking do not mirror those of face-to-face interactions. No one participant can dominate the floor as can often happen in face-to-face discussions because in synchronous text-based interactions, contributions can be made almost simultaneously (Beauvois, 1997:64). Every teacher knows that there are certain students in the class who will sit back during traditional group and class discussions. The reasons for this may be cultural. For example, for Japanese students,

⁵ <http://www.horizonwimba.com/>

interruption is seen as impolite whereas Spanish students will happily talk over one another. Often, however, lack of participation in, or domination of a discussion, is a result of personality. Some students are just shy and/or may lack confidence in their own ability (Warschauer, 1996a:20). They may feel intimidated by students who appear to be more able, though are usually just more confident. The '*context-reduced*' nature of synchronous text-based interaction liberates these students and enables them to have their voices heard (Beauvois, 1997:64; Bump, 1990:55; Paramskas, 2000:59 and Smith, 2003:30). For some, it also provides a less stressful environment in which to communicate (Beauvois, 1997:64, Colomb and Simutis, 1996:210; Roed, 2003; Wallace, 1999). As Roed (2003) observed, learners' online behaviour as well as learners' perceptions of behaviour may differ completely from the traditional face-to-face classroom, a factor that teachers must take into consideration when preparing learners for online communication.

3.6.3.2 Quantity and quality of output

There appears to be a consensus that, generally, increased participation also leads to a greater quantity of student output (see for example Beauvois, 1997 and Kern, 1995). The effect of synchronous text-based interaction on the quality of output is less straightforward, however. Kern (1995:459) and Kung (2004:171) both report a decrease in quality. However, they seem mainly to refer to typing errors which result from the fast pace of the conversation. If quality of production is defined as the complexity and variety of language produced, then in fact synchronous text-based interactions have a positive effect (Beauvois, 1997:65; Kern, 1995:467 and Warschauer, 1996:21). Colomb and Simutis (1996:221) also observed that as students became more familiar with the mode of interaction, frequency of grammatical errors decreased. Lamy and Hampel (2007) argue that improved accuracy in synchronous text-based CMC may be the result of learners having more processing time than they would in face-to-face interactions which allows them time to monitor output. There is also evidence that text-based interaction can increase learners' attention to linguistic form (Zeng and Takatsuka, 2009). Rates of participation, as well as the quality and quantity of output will be investigated in relation to research questions 2, 3 and 4 of this study.

3.6.3.3 Interaction hierarchies

The writing on a computer screen is viewed by many students as less threatening than a face-to-face class discussion and allows them to express their opinions and feelings more openly (Bump, 1990:54-55). Moreover, control in whole class discussions is devolved from the teacher who becomes a facilitator rather than an instructor (Beauvois, 1997:65, Kern, 1995:469). Learners can thus have more control the discussion allowing more freedom to exchange ideas and initiate topics of interest. A comparative study of face-to-face and synchronous online discussions in peer-tutoring sessions also revealed that the on-line mode resulted in less hierarchical and more egalitarian interactions (Jones, Garralda, Li and Lock, 2006).

3.6.3.4 Permanent Recordings

In the previous chapter, the potential value of using transcripts of learner interactions was examined but the main drawback of having to transcribe oral interactions was also noted. On *Blackboard* (as with other educational software), synchronous text-based interactions can be recorded and archived, and hard copies printed out with a few clicks of the mouse. Using the transcripts for a focus on form is a way of making effective use of text-based CMC (Salaberry, 2000:35 and Tudini, 2003), as well as investigating students' interlanguage (Blake, 2000 and Tudini, 2003). Moreover, Toyoda and Harrison (2002:95) suggest that learners are more able, and more likely, to pay attention to linguistic form when they are reflecting on their own discourse recorded in the archive.

Face-to-face group discussions are ephemeral and it is virtually impossible for the teacher to monitor and assess in detail the performance of all groups. Reference to the transcripts of online discussions can overcome this problem, no matter what the size of the class. Transcripts can also be passed to other groups, provided learners are in agreement, to facilitate the sharing of ideas (Bump, 1990:56). For the purposes of this study and for other teachers involved in action research (see chapter 5) transcripts can be a way of looking and listening in on what learners do and say and increase their awareness of their competencies, both linguistic and strategic.

This can enable teachers to adapt learning activities and environments to meet their needs (Johnson, 1995:152 and Warschauer, 1997:478). It is this enduring quality of text-based CMC which was a motivational trigger for this study.

5.6.3.5 Text encourages more critical thinking

Garrison (2003:26) points out that text-based interactions may have further inherent advantages over spoken ones in that text encourages critical thinking and reflection which may lead to higher-order learning. This view is supported by previous studies (Bump, 1990:56 and Blanchette, 2001:48) which suggest that text-based interactions are more intellectually demanding.

5.6.3.6 Development of Speaking, Reading and Writing Skills

It has been suggested that synchronous text-based interactions can play a role in reading skills development (Paramskas, 2000) as interactants have to comprehend numerous incoming messages in order to compose rapid responses. Kern (2000:241) makes the point that synchronous text-based interactions encourage '*readerly writing*', in other words, students have to read in order to respond, and in order that their responses can be read.

As mentioned earlier the language of synchronous text-based interactions has been likened to spoken language (see also Smith, 2003: 39). Some authors have espoused the use of synchronous text-based interaction as a way of bridging the gap between students' spoken and written competencies (Warschauer, 1996a: 22 and Warschauer, 1999: 243). Abrams (2003) found that students who had participated in text-based synchronous CMC produced more language in a subsequent face-to-face oral interaction than their peers who had participated either in asynchronous CMC or other traditional classroom activities. The quality of the language (including accuracy) was not significantly different from the other groups, however. One of the aims of this study is to use synchronous text-based CMC to improve learners' accuracy in spoken language. The framework for doing so will be provided in the following chapter.

Sullivan and Pratt (1996) observed significant gains in students' writing abilities and students themselves have reflected that synchronous text-based interactions improve

their ability to develop arguments and their writing in general (Kern, 1995:469). This may be of particular importance for students who find traditional writing classes boring (Paramskas, 2000:59) and experience difficulties in getting started on their writing assignments. Studies show that students seem to find writing in synchronous text-based interactions more stimulating than traditional writing activities (Bump, 1990:54 and Skinner and Austin, 1999). Because students find it intrinsically motivating, they are more likely to spend more time on online tasks, even outside the class (Coniam and Wong, 2004). Colomb and Simutis (1996) and Warschauer (2002) also found synchronous text-based interactions useful in helping weaker academic writers as well as enabling students “...to experience academic writing not as a vehicle of information transfer but as a focal point and product of human interaction’ (Colomb and Simutis, 1996:222).

5.6.4 Potential drawbacks of text-based synchronous interactions

5.6.4.1 Exclusion of students with poor ICT skills

Although most researchers have cited equity of participation as a selling point of CMC, Colomb and Simutis (1996:212) have argued that synchronous text-based interactions do not guarantee equal access to the floor. They claim that although each participant has equal opportunity to send a message, there is no guarantee that that message will be read. Some students in their study became aware of this and explicitly asked other participants for comments on their message. However, the same study did also reveal that some students who were normally completely silent in the traditional oral class were actually some of the ones who participated most on-line. Another danger of synchronous text-based interactions was highlighted by this study. One student was particularly slow in formulating and typing her responses. This meant that by the time she was ready to send them, the conversation had moved on. Rather than sending her messages anyway, she just deleted them. This student had in effect, been ‘interrupted’ by the change of topic, so, in contrast to Graddol’s (1990:335) supposition, participants can be prevented from taking a turn. This phenomenon was recently investigated by Smith and Shauro (2009) in relation to quality and quantity of language output. They prefer to use the term ‘incursion’ to describe the situation when an interlocutor’s message appears during ones’ own construction of a message, since this may or may not lead to the writer deleting their

message. It is a feature of text-based CMC use which requires further investigation as it may have significant implications for learning, and more particularly for language learning.

5.6.4.2 Dehumanisation

Another reported drawback of synchronous text-based interactions include the ‘dehumanising’ effect of interacting with a screen (Bump, 1990). The former assumes that writing cannot reflect the personality in the way that speaking does. However, the earlier examination of the conventions used by experienced synchronous text-based interaction participants shows that this mode of communication can be equally expressive. Moreover, for less confident individuals, the non-threatening nature of CMC might free them to become even more expressive as well as give them the confidence to initiate topics of their own interest (Graddol, 1990 and Sotillo, 2000). Kern (2000) suggests that synchronous text-based interactions allow students to feel closer to their classmates and express themselves more freely. In addition, Paramskas (2000) believes that they may encourage the use of humour. These observations would seem to suggest that CMC, rather than being dehumanising, can actually promote social interaction.

3.6.4.2 Flaming

‘Flaming’ (sending a rude or aggressive message) is a phenomenon mainly associated with e-mail interaction (see Shapiro and Anderson, 1985) but it has also been observed in synchronous text-based interactions (Paramskas, 2000). Although Smith (2003) did find some examples of rudeness in his data these were far outnumbered by occurrence of explicit politeness strategies in his study. Clearly, students should be discouraged from negative forms of behaviour and cooperative learning should be encouraged (Ellis, 2003:141).

3.6.5 Changing approaches to CMC research in education

The previous sections have reviewed some of the earlier studies discussing the perceived benefits and potential drawbacks of CMC compared to face-to-face interactions in education. Within these approaches to research, there has been an

underlying assumption that using a computer automatically leads to singular effects such as those previously discussed. This is now considered overly simplistic (Kern, Page and Warschauer, 2004:254; Lamy and Hampel, 2007). More recent studies in this field have begun to investigate firstly, the affordances⁶ of CMC, what Hampel (2006:111) refers to as the '*constraints and possibilities for making meaning*') and secondly, factors such as anxiety, motivation and identity in relation to these affordances. At the Open University for example, researchers, have investigated the impact of task design on the affordances of multimodal environments in Lyceum (Hampel, 2006 and Hauck and Young, 2008). Although this is an important area of research, the aim of this study is not specifically to investigate the affordances of the technology but to use the technology to investigate approaches to language teaching. The next section of this chapter will therefore focus on previous research which has studied SLA in relation to synchronous text-based interactions.

3.7 Synchronous text-based interactions and SLA

3.7.1 Introduction

The previous section discussed some of the research investigating possible affordances of text-based CMC in education and language learning in general. The next section will examine some of the claims for synchronous text-based interactions specifically in promoting second language acquisition which is significant to this study in relation to research question 6.

Research investigating the role that synchronous text-based interactions might play in second language development has been conducted in relation to both interactionist theories of language acquisition and sociocultural theory. Section 3.7.2 below will examine interactionist led research and section 3.7.3 will examine research conducted within a sociocultural framework.

⁶ Gibson (1979:127) (cited in Lamy and Hampel, 2007:34) as follows:

'Affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.' The most key concept of affordance is that an object (or technology) does not itself contain an affordance. It is the relationship between the animal (or technology user) and the technology, more specifically what the user perceives to be an affordance. In addition, an affordance can be positive or negative.

3.7.2 Synchronous text-based interactions and interactionist theories

Many of the interactionist studies (Blake, 2000; Fernández-García and Martínez Arbelaiz, 2003; L. Lee 2001; L. Lee, 2002; O'Rourke, 2004; Pellettieri, 2000; Smith, 2004 Toyota and Harrison, 2002 and Tudini, 2003) have shown that synchronous text-based interactions can provide opportunities for negotiation of meaning. For example, Pellettieri (2000) demonstrated that tasks performed in synchronous text-based interactions generated a large amount of negotiation of meaning and instances of learners providing one another with corrective feedback. The textual nature of this mode of communication can result in making aspects of linguistic form more salient (and thus facilitate *noticing*) than spoken language (Lee, 2008) as well as providing the opportunity to read and re-read previous messages (Blake, 2000; Blake and Zyzik, 2003; Pellettieri, 2000 and Smith, 2004). Although the nature of synchronous text-based interaction is fairly fast paced, some reports do suggest that compared with oral interaction, synchronous text-based interactions afford more time to both comprehend and compose messages (Fernández-García and Martínez Arbelaiz, 2003:132). This may free processing capacity to allow learners to focus on form.

Another aspect of Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis which has been researched in the CMC mode is corrective feedback. Sotillo (2003) found evidence of students noticing and correcting one another's errors when engaged in online communication although she does not elaborate on the type of feedback. Morris (2005) investigated different types of corrective feedback used by children in a Spanish immersion system when participating in synchronous text-based interaction. He found that the children corrected 60% of their peers' errors, although most of these were lexical rather than syntactic errors. Of the errors which received corrective feedback, 60% were repaired immediately. The majority of errors were repaired following negotiated feedback, however, while recasts proved less effective. Sauro (2009) also used CMC to investigate different types of corrective feedback targeted specifically on the use of the zero article but her results did not provide evidence of one form of feedback being more effective than other. Research question 3 of this study is designed to investigate this phenomenon further.

Most of the above studies involved learner-learner interaction but Tudini's (2003) study involved learner to native speaker interaction. She found that negotiation occurred in over 9% of total turns although like Morris's (2005) and many other studies on negotiation, most of these were triggered by lexical items, with only 23% being triggered by morphosyntactic errors. However, some of the native-speakers in this study appeared very intolerant of grammatical errors and provided a large amount of negative feedback. This study did not investigate learner attitudes to correction but other research has shown the negative effect this may have on learners (Lee, 2008). This highlights one of the limitations of purely quantitative interactionist research since it does not consider important variables such as learner preferences and motivation.

A study by Smith (2003 and 2004) shows that task-based on-line discussions carried out by intermediate learners of English resulted in both short and medium term vocabulary acquisition. The learners were given pre-emptive input (through explanations of words predicted to cause difficulty) and negotiated input (explanations given after a comprehension or clarification check). Smith (2004) found that although both forms of input resulted in significantly high gains in learning, negotiated input was more effective. The study also claims to provide support for a more direct link between negotiation of meaning and second language acquisition.

To sum up, there seems to be a fairly substantial body of evidence to show that synchronous text-based interaction can provide opportunities, similar to those provided by oral interaction, for learners to engage in negotiation of meaning and produce 'pushed output'. In addition, the textual nature of such interactions may promote 'noticing', another process believed to be significant in second language acquisition (Schmidt, 1990). However, within SLA research generally, there is still a lack of evidence for a direct link between interactional modifications and language acquisition. The next section will review some of the studies investigating synchronous CMC in relation to sociocultural theory.

3.7.3 Synchronous text-based discussions and sociocultural theory

Lantolf (2000b) includes technology as an important mediational artifact and noted the need for more research in this area. In fact, CMC research in this area is growing, particularly in relation to the opportunities afforded by CMC for scaffolding and other cooperative learning strategies (Darhower, 2002; Lee, 2004 and 2008 and Warschauer, 1996b and 1997; Peterson, 2009; Zeng and Taktsuka, 2009). Most of these have investigated scaffolding from the perspective of learners supporting one another, through collaborative dialogue, to produce particular linguistic forms. Lund (2006), on the other hand, uses the term to describe the way in which one teacher was able to bridge the gap between traditional classroom discourses and practices with those more common in the social world of his learners.

Research on the social and cultural dimensions of CMC has also begun to proliferate as teachers realise the potential for communication across institutional and geographical boundaries. Much of this type of research involves telecollaboration projects which enable pairs or groups from different institutions and countries to interact via the computer. Initially, these involved e-mail communications (see for example Appel, 1999; Little and Brammerts, 1996 and Vinagre, 2005) but more recently synchronous text-based (see for example Belz, 2002) CMC and multimodal environments (Hauck and Youngs, 2008) have been researched.

3.7.4 Investigations of task type and synchronous text-based interactions

There are few studies investigating the effect of task-type when carried out by students in the text-based mode. Smith (2003:42) compared the use of communication strategies employed by learners when carrying out two different task types (jigsaw and decision making) but found no significant difference. Pellettieri (2000) compared five different tasks, although they were all similar to the jigsaw task in Pica, Kanagy and Falodun's (1993) typology in that they were convergent and had an element of information gap. The task that resulted in the most samples of negotiation of meaning was the one which was the most lexically and conceptually

difficult. These results seem to be more a reflection of the difficulty of the task rather than the type of task, however. Fernández-García and Martínez Aberlaiz's (2003:132) comparison of native and non-native speaker dyad interactions in the text-based and face-to-face modes found that little negotiation of meaning took place but attributed this to the fact that the task type was opinion giving. This type of task is, as the research on oral interaction has shown, the least likely to elicit modified interaction (Pica, Kanagy and Falodun, 1993). Research question 6 of this study is designed to investigate this area further.

3.7.5 The future of CMC research in language teaching

Initial research investigating synchronous text-based interaction in language learning focussed on easily quantifiable aspects such as participation and quantity and quality of output and other types of quantitative research carried out by interactionist researchers. Although valuable, much of it has not been conducted in real classrooms and virtually none of it in British ESOL/EFL contexts. This study is an attempt to fill that gap. At the beginning of the decade Kern and Warschauer (2000) noted that '*...to understand the full impact of new forms of interacting in the language classroom we must look beyond the texts of interaction to the broader contextual dynamics that shape and are shaped by those texts*' (Kern and Warschauer, 2000:15) To some extent this has been borne out since the next phase of research has seen a growing interest in the social and cultural aspects of this mode of communication.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has shown that technology is now viewed as an essential educational tool and computer literacy as a requirement for advanced literacy. The role of computers in language learning has shifted from providing the repetitive drill type activities associated with behaviourist models of learning to enabling human-human interaction, more in keeping with a Vygotskian view of learning. To understand the potential effect of this technology and to enable it to be embedded effectively in language learning programmes, more research is needed, particularly research that takes into account the socio-cultural factors of different learning contexts. The following chapter will combine some of the findings discussed in chapter 2 with

those from this chapter to construct a novel framework that will form the basis of the pedagogical intervention in the action research cycle of this study.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

A researcher normally begins a project with the research question or questions and then identifies the most appropriate methods to answer them rather than thinking at the level of paradigm (Richards, 2003:41). However, in doing so he or she will be influenced by his or her fundamental philosophical beliefs. This chapter therefore begins with a critique of different paradigms in relation to the aims and context of this study in order to situate the methodological approach taken within a paradigmatic framework. The approach adopted in this study, that of action research, is then described which leads finally to a discussion of the research design employed in this study.

4.2 Terminology

Before discussing various research paradigms it is useful to define the terms 'paradigm', 'approach' and 'method', since their use sometimes varies within the literature. Giroux (1981:49) states that '*a paradigm refers to the shared images, assumptions, and practices that characterise a community of scholars in a given field.*' Guba and Lincoln (1994:107) provide a more comprehensive definition:

'A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with the ultimates or first principles. It represents a world view that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do. The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness.'

Essentially then, a paradigm represents our fundamental beliefs about the world. These beliefs are ontological, that is about the nature of reality, and epistemological, about the relationship between the inquirer and knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:13).

An approach to research, on the other hand, is used in this thesis to refer to the overall approach that a researcher takes which employs a generally accepted set of research methods. The two main qualitative approaches, for example, in applied linguistics are conversation analysis and ethnography (Lazaraton, 2002 and 2003). Method refers to the actual ways in which data is collected, analysed and interpreted. In the following section the three main research paradigms associated with educational research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) will be discussed.

4.3 Positivism

The traditional approach to research adopted in the physical and biological sciences when applied to the social sciences falls within what is often referred to as the positivistic paradigm. Positivistic research involves finding evidence to support theories, and hypothesis testing, usually through tightly controlled experiments and statistical analysis. Positivism is based on the assumption that knowledge is there to be discovered through objective observation. Knowledge gained through inquiry is sought to be value-free. Positivism has however come under severe criticism in social sciences and in education (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:17; Richards, 2003:37). Educational philosopher Giroux (1981) rejected positivism and the culture of positivism in education because, in a positivist paradigm facts are detached from their social, political and historical context. Giroux argued however, that research can never be free from values and beliefs. He also asserts that positivism views knowledge as instrumental and as such has been misused in education to *control* all aspects of the classroom environment. In a similar vein, McNiff (2002:13) states that the epistemology of positivism is that '*theory determines practice*'. It is argued throughout this thesis that a more appropriate stance should be that for the teacher/researcher, theory should develop from practice (McNiff, 2002:13, Nunan, 1992, Burns, 1999, Edge, 2001; Ellis, 1997b and Hopkins, 2008).

Positivists believe that social phenomena are governed by the same predictable laws that control the natural world and can be reduced, controlled and measured in the same way but as Kincheloe and Berry (2004) argue, such research can never reflect

the complexity of such phenomena that exist in the lived world. For example, as mentioned in chapter 2, interactionist/psycholinguistic led SLA research which has been carried out within this paradigm has been criticised for not taking into account the social aspect of language learning emphasised by those working in the Vygotskian tradition (Block, 2003; Lantolf, 2000c). Moreover, there is evidence which shows that language learners in the classroom do not behave in the same way as those placed under controlled laboratory-like conditions (e.g. Foster, 1988). Another important feature of positivistic research is that it is deemed necessary for the researcher to be ‘outside’ of the research in order to make the research more objective and therefore reliable. This is what Pike (1967) termed the etic perspective. The purpose of this study is to test out a set of proposals in a real classroom which requires an ‘insider researcher’ (Widdowson, 1990). For all of the above reasons, a positivistic stance is incompatible with the researcher and context of this study. However, it must be acknowledged at this point that the researcher does not reject positivism per se. In fact, results from SLA research in the positivistic tradition have contributed to the development of the model for task implementation described in chapter 4. In this way, it has provided ‘*provisional specifications*’ to be tested out in the classroom (Ellis, 1997b:85).

4.4 Interpretivism

At the opposite end of the spectrum to the positivist/positivist paradigm is the interpretive paradigm. This grew out of social scientists’ dissatisfaction with positivism and its inability to provide an understanding of the complex mechanics of social actions and behaviour. In direct contrast to positivism, research within the interpretive paradigm focuses on the underlying meaning of social phenomena rather than their measurement. It accepts that reality is affected by the observer’s presence and there is an element of subjectivity. Since researchers may be part of what they observe and the value of their accounts is acknowledged, both emic and etic perspectives can be taken into consideration (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007: 33). Interpretive methodology relies heavily on qualitative data but not exclusively. In applied linguistic research, ethnographic studies of classroom research (e.g. van Lier, 1988) and conversation analysis (CA) sit comfortably within this paradigm. Although methods have emerged within the interpretive paradigm which have been

exploited in this study (see section 5.8), it does not account for teacher's/researcher's desire to solve everyday practical problems or develop educationally and professionally (Mc Niff , 2002:18). As Ellis (1997b:81) points out, interpretative research faces the same basic problem as experimental research in that researchers function as researchers not teachers and *'as such need to stand outside the situation they are researching and adopt a disinterested stance'*. Clearly, a teacher cannot adopt such a stance towards their own classroom.

4.5 Critical theory

There has been a movement against both of the above paradigms in education and the emergence of a third paradigm known as critical theory (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Critical theory *'regards positivist and interpretive paradigms as incomplete accounts of social behaviour by their neglect of the political and ideological contexts of much of educational research'*. Critical theory, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:26) *'has a deliberate political agenda'*. Kincheloe (2003) and Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) clearly situate action research within critical theory. However, in recent years action research in education has evolved along different lines with emphasis on different dimensions and values. Noffke (1997:307) thus prefers to describe it as a *'family of work'*. Before exploring further the notion of whether this study can be considered critical or not, some basic features of action research will be described and a rationale for adopting this approach will be provided.

4.6 Action research

In the introductory chapter, it was stated that the motivation for this study arose from a practical pedagogical problem and the teacher's desire to develop her understanding of how tasks might contribute to learning in a specific context. An approach to research which is characterised by having problem-solving aims is known as action research. Action research is not a new phenomenon. Its seeds were first sown by the work of educationalist John Dewey (see Crookes, 1993) and later the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946) (see Aldeman, 1993 for a review of his work). Recently, however, it has attracted renewed interest in education generally

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:241), in language teaching (Wallace, 1998) and more specifically in TESOL (Edge, 2001). In the following section of this chapter, action research will be defined and the literature considering the potential contributions an action research approach can make to deepening our understanding of language teaching and learning will be reviewed. How the approach employed in this study is congruent with an action research approach will be outlined. This will provide a framework for organising the next chapter, which describes the methods of data collection and analysis that have been employed.

4.6.1 The nature of educational research

Carr and Kemmis (1986:108) point out that educational research is distinctive from many other fields of research because it is based on a practical activity (teaching) rather than theoretical knowledge. Because of the complex nature of learning and the wide variety of teaching and learning contexts there remains a gap between theory and practice (Hopkins, 1993:72). One of the ways to bridge that gap is for teachers to engage in classroom research (Hopkins, 1993) and the case for this is now widely established in education as a result of earlier educational pioneers such as Stenhouse (1975) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1982).

The gap between theory and practice in second language learning is as wide, if not wider, than in the field of education generally, leading many SLA researchers to highlight the need for more classroom research (Allwright and Bailey, 1991; Brumfit and Mitchell, 1990b; Ellis, 1997a and 1997b; Hopkins, 1993; Somekh, 1993; van Lier, 1988). It can be used to test *'whether the generalisations provided by confirmatory [positivist] research or the understandings provided by interpretative research are applicable to particular classroom settings'* and in this way bridge the gap between technical knowledge, from pure SLA research, and practical knowledge, what teachers have observed from their own experience of teaching (Ellis, 1997:26).

Classroom research is not a particular method, however. Nunan (1992:91) describes it as a *'research context'* while van Lier (1988:13) suggests that *'its defining characteristic is that it focuses on the classroom as a source of data'*. A criticism of

the psycholinguistic strand of SLA is that it does not take into account the social aspect of learning (Block, 2003). Classroom research can provide a more holistic approach and perhaps facilitate our understanding of language learning in a Vygotskian framework (Donato, 2000:47, Johnson, 1992 and van Lier, 2000).

Action research is an approach to research that has emerged in education (Carr and Kemmis, 1986 and Somekh, 1993) and second language learning (Edge, 2001 and) to close the theory/practice divide. Before investigating how action research can facilitate this process let us consider several definitions of action research.

4.6.2 Defining action research

Cohen and Manion (1994:186) define it as '*a small scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention*'. Elliot (1991:69) describes it as '*the study of a social situation with improving the quality of action in it*'. Essentially then, action research involves the implementation of some kind of change in a specific social context with the aim of improving some aspect of activity within it. Although action research is not limited to the field of education, these factors make it intrinsically appealing to teachers who are involved in practical activity in defined social contexts. The next section will examine in more detail the features of action research in educational contexts.

4.6.3 Features of action research

Two important features of action research are that it is motivated by a 'problem' and that it is situated locally (Allwright and Bailey, 1991:44 and Wallace, 1998:15). Another characteristic is that it is cyclical in nature: a problem is identified, an action is implemented, the action is evaluated, the results are observed and reflected upon and then the cycle is repeated (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:186). Action research, like all classroom research, tends to be methodologically eclectic (van Lier, 1988:13) and is often carried out by the teacher. Hopkins (1993:47-58) proposes a set of principles for teachers engaged in action research and these are summarised below: It should not interfere with or disrupt the teacher's primary job of teaching.

The methods of data collection must be practical (e.g. not too demanding on the teacher's time).

The methodology employed must be one that is applicable to the particular situation in which a teacher is working.

The teacher must be committed to the research question that he or she is investigating.

The teacher must pay close attention to ethical standards in their research (e.g. by ensuring confidentiality of the subjects).

4.6.4 Advantages of action research

It has already been mentioned that action research can play a role in bridging the gap between theory and practice, but this is an important role, and one which merits expansion. This gap has led to a call for research which is inside-out (practice which leads to theory) rather than outside-in (theory leading to practice) (Nunan, 1992, Burns, 1999, Edge, 2001; Ellis, 1997 and Hopkins, 1997). Edge (2001:6) sums this up very effectively saying that '*the thinking teacher is no longer perceived as someone who applies theories, but as someone who theorizes practice.*' Edge (1998:572) equates the theorised practice of specific situations with '*praxis*' a term which Carr and Kemmis (1986:190) define as '*informed, committed action*'. Praxis is at the very heart of action research.

As well as facilitating such insider perspectives, action research can enable a form of professional development which encourages reflection and is empowering, in that it facilitates personal improvement (Burns, 1999, Crookes, 1993). Another advantage of action research is that it is '*flexible*' in that it can '*adapt to the social and political situation in which it is employed*' (Somekh, 1993:29). Action research can also take into account the unpredictability of human behaviour, a limitation of controlled experiments noted by Donato (2000:40) and Roebuck (2000:85), researchers working within a sociocultural framework.

4.6.5 Criticisms of action research

Action research is not without its criticisms. One of the main bases for its rejection lies in the fact that it does not meet with the standard criteria for a conventional experimental study. However, action research has evolved *because* conventional experimental studies cannot be carried out in complex social situations where the variables cannot be tightly controlled. As Hopkins (1993:37) points out, experimental designs involving the sampling of populations and control/experimental groups emerged from research in agriculture (Fisher, 1935), to investigate practices which would lead to higher crop yields. Interestingly, Stenhouse (1979:79) chooses to use an agricultural metaphor which clearly highlights the problematic nature of transferring such experimental models to education:

'The teacher is like a gardener who treats different plants differently, and not like a large scale farmer who administers standardised treatments to as near as possible standardised plants.'

An important feature of the traditional scientific design is the use of statistics to draw conclusions about general populations from the samples investigated. The main problem for educational researchers with this approach is that samples cannot easily be drawn in educational settings (Hopkins, 1993:39, Stenhouse, 1981:107). Ellis (1997:205) actually suggests that for teachers *'it is not statistical significance that matters but practical significance'* and goes on to quote Wells (1994:28)

'..action research undertaken as a mode of professional development has as its primary goal the personal and professional growth of the practitioner. Its value, therefore, should be judged less in terms of the 'quality' of the 'product' or the rigor of its methodology, and more in terms of the learning that results from the person carrying it out and the improvements that he or she effects in his or her practice as a consequence. In other words the principal criterion for evaluating a piece of action research is not the significance of its findings for others, but rather the value of the experience of undertaking it for the researcher him or herself.'

However, Wells may actually be devaluing action research with this statement. In fact, Burns (1999:24) suggests that most of the criticisms of action research may be

due to this primary concern with personal and professional development. Burns (1999) strongly asserts that teachers undertaking action research are involved in genuine research processes such as data collection and analysis and that they utilise many methods associated with more traditional approaches, a point similarly made by Hopkins (1993:147). The use of a variety of methods can actually serve to increase the validity of the findings (van Lier, 1999:14).

Another criticism of action research is that because it is so context-bound, the results it produces cannot be generalised (Applebee, 1987). However, as Wells (1994:25) points out, this does not take into account the goal of action research and, as previously discussed, although traditional research may continue to provide knowledge at a more abstract level, it does not fulfil a teacher's need to further her understanding of practice. Wells (1994) views action research in Vygotskian terms as an opportunity for learners (teachers/practitioners in this case) to develop their understanding of their practice through purposeful action and emphasises the importance of the process of action research rather than the product:

'...unlike most university-based research, teachers' action research does not seek for closure. Instead, its practitioners adopt inquiry as their fundamental stance as, through cycles of observation, reflection and action, they continuously work to develop their understanding and improve their practice.'

Wells (1994:25-26).

In contrast to Applebee (1987), Hopkins (1993:157) argues that action research can in fact produce hypotheses and concepts that are generalizable to some extent, provided that the methodology is sound.

Finally, an irrefutable criticism of action research is that it is impractical (Dornyei, 2007; Allwright, 2005) in the sense that most language teachers are already overburdened and simply do not have enough time to conduct systematic research. Experience of these problems has led Allwright (1991, 2005) to propose an alternative approach which he has termed '*exploratory practice*'. The emphasis in exploratory practice is on practitioners gaining deeper understanding of their

classrooms and learners rather than improving practice. This issue will be discussed further in chapter 9.

The previous discussion demonstrates that despite certain criticisms, there is a strong case for teachers to engage in action research both for their own professional development and as a way of bridging the gap between theory and practice. In the case of this study, the action research cycle offers several benefits. Firstly, it provides a very practical way of investigating how a specific group of learners perform a particular set of tasks in a CMC environment and how this might contribute to learning. This may provide some insights into how to plug the grammar gap identified by this and several other teachers and researchers in relation to TBLT. Secondly, the reflective nature of action research is particularly valuable in that it enables the teacher/researcher to re-examine her fundamental beliefs about language teaching and learning with a greater understanding of the theoretical issues leading to meaningful professional development. Moreover, in accord with Hopkins above (1993:167), there is the possibility that findings will be made that will have much wider significance for others in the field of language teaching. Finally, it may prove fruitful in identifying further areas of potentially valuable research.

4.6.6 The action research cycle

The action research cycle (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:186) begins with a problem. There are two central problems from which this study arose. The first was the problem of how best to implement interactive tasks using text-based CMC to enable a focus on form. The second was to evaluate several tasks and gain a greater understanding of how the tasks might promote learning. The following research questions were posed:

- Q1 Would the tasks motivate and challenge the students?
- Q2 Would students participate equally in completion of the task?
- Q3 What language structures and functions would the tasks elicit?
- Q4 What errors would the learners make? Could these be used as the basis of a structural syllabus?

Q5 Would the text-based nature of communication encourage learners to notice their own errors? Would learners be able to correct their own errors with or without scaffolding?

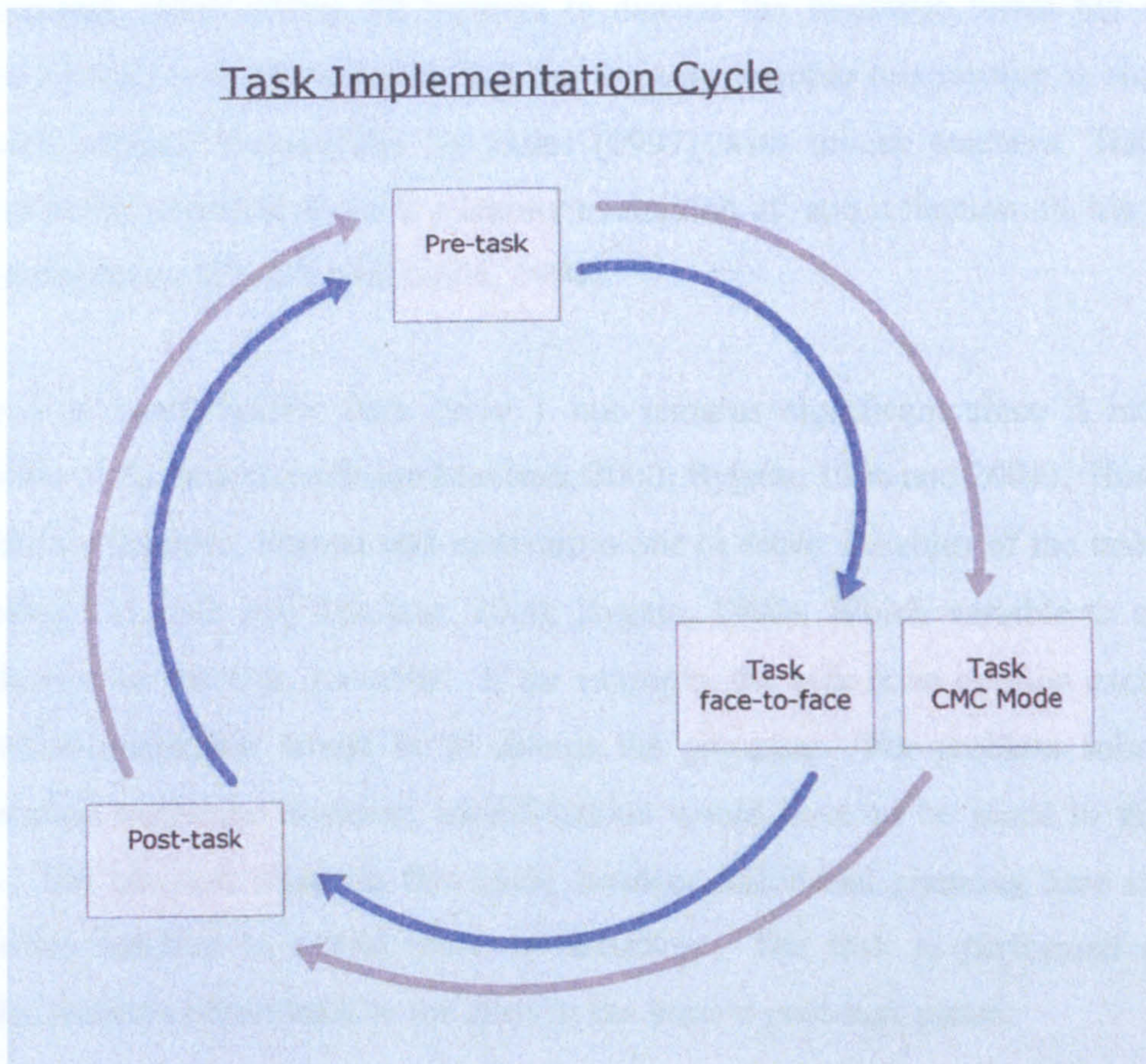
Q6 Would some tasks be more likely to elicit episodes of interaction thought to be significant in promoting second language acquisition?

The second phase of the action research cycle is intervention. A review of the literature related to task-based learning led to the formulation of the cyclical task-based framework described below and was used to guide the implementation of the tasks in the study.

The cycle developed and proposed by the researcher for the implementation of interactive tasks in the context of this study is shown in figure 4.1. The three stages of the cycle common in much of the literature still appear, but this framework is distinct both in its cyclical nature and in the fact that it contains two modes of interaction, electronic and face-to-face. In addition, there are two cycles for each task. The two cycles resemble Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle and afford opportunities for learners to use the language in a communicative way (*'concrete experience'*), reflect on the experience through evaluation of the task, relate *'theory'* to practice during the focus on form stage, and put the theory to the test (through repetition of the task). Each cycle will now be described in detail.

The initial cycle begins with some pre-task work in order to firstly, engage learners' interest and secondly, to scaffold learners (Johnson, 1995:75). The nature of this will vary from task to task but, based on the considerable research findings discussed earlier, should always involve planning time (Skehan and Foster, 1997; Skehan and Foster, 1999 and Yuan and Ellis, 2003). It must also be made clear to the learners what the aim of the task is as well as the different stages of the lesson (Estaire and Zanón, 1994 and Ellis, 2003).

Figure 4.1 Task implementation cycle



The cycle continues with the performance of the task by small groups of students and in this first cycle, the task is performed in the text-based electronic mode. Ideally, groups consist of three learners and no time limit is imposed. The teacher monitors learners unobtrusively only intervening when a student requests help.

The post-task phase involves an oral student report (Willis, 1996b) and a group evaluation of the task (Estaire and Zanón, 1994). The remaining activities in this phase take place in the next available class period. This allows the teacher to view and evaluate the transcripts of the interactions. Grammatical or lexical errors are highlighted and symbols used to categorise the errors (Knapp, 1972). During the next class period, students are provided with their transcripts with the errors highlighted and coded (Bartram and Walton, 1991:84, Leki, 1991) and work together in their groups to correct the errors using each other, reference tools (dictionary and

grammar books) or the teacher to mediate their learning (Lantolf, 2000b). In keeping with Wills (1996b:102) and Long, (2007:123), placing the focus on form in the post-task phase allows for learners to discuss the linguistic forms but in the context of their own discourse so that the form to meaning relationship is clear, an approach adopted successfully by Hales (1997) with trainee teachers. The final activity in the post-task phase is a learner evaluation of, and reflection on, his or her own performance (Estaire and Zanón, 1994).

Cycle 2 is much briefer than cycle 1 but remains significant since it involves repetition of the task (Lynch and Maclean, 2000; Bygate, 1996 and 2001). However, to maintain learners' interest and motivation one or more variables of the task must be changed (Lynch and Maclean, 2000; Bygate, 1996). Which variable to change will depend on the task, however. If for example, the task is an opinion exchange, the easiest adaptation would be to change the grouping. For problem solving or information exchange however, modifications would have to be made to the task itself. The pre-task phase in this cycle involves individual planning time only to encourage learners to attend more to accuracy. The task is performed orally. Finally, students report back to the class in the second post-task phase.

Evaluation was carried out using several data collection and analysis methods. These will be described in detail in the following chapter. Details of the reflections will appear in chapter 7 when the results of the evaluations are discussed and in more depth in chapter 9. Suggestions both for future pedagogical implementations as well as further research will be made in chapter 8.

4.7 Situating action research within a research paradigm

Having described the basic features of action research and discussed its value from the practical perspective of the teacher, it is now possible to return to the philosophical beliefs of this teacher/researcher. First, however, it is necessary to provide some historical background and to analyse some typologies of action research. As mentioned previously, action research in education grew out of the work of sociologist Lewin (1946) and educationalist Corey (1953) in the US while in the UK it was stimulated by Stenhouse (1975) and the '*teacher-as researcher*'

movement. Educational action research is now active in the USA (see for example Kincheloe, 2003), Australia (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000) and the UK (see for example Elliot 2008, Whitehead, 2008 and McNiff, 2002) and has the same basic philosophical assumption based on the idea of Habermas (1974) that '*a theory has no real value unless it can be demonstrated to have practical implications*' (McNiff, 2002:8).

Grundy (1987) identifies three modes of action research based on Habermas's (1972) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests. The three modes and their philosophical stances according to Grundy (1987:146-156) are summarised in the table below.

Table 4.1 Three modes of action research (Grundy, 1987)

Technical action research resembles the kind of positivistic research criticised by Giroux (1981) in the sense that its aim is to attempt to standardise and control educational practices. It involves research being carried out *on* teachers rather than *by* teachers. Practical action research on the other hand is likely to be carried out by teachers individually in their own classrooms or collaboratively with other researchers. It is the emancipatory form action research which sits most comfortably with critical theory because of its political nature.

Another perhaps more useful categorisation of action research is provided by Zeichner, 2001:276), citing Noffke (1997), who identifies 3 different motivations of educational action research. The first is to better understand one's own practices. The second is to produce knowledge that will be useful to others. Both of these would fit into Grundy's category of practical action research. The third motivation according to Noffke (1997) is to contribute to greater equity and social justice in schooling and society, which closely resembles Grundy's (1987) emancipatory action research.

The main point of contention within educational action research is however, whether action research should be carried out by the individual or by a group working collaboratively. This has led to two distinct camps within the field. In the first, are those who see that emancipation and empowerment can only be achieved through collaboration (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992). In the opposing camp are those who believe not only that emancipation and empowerment can be achieved by the individual (Whitehead, 1986, McNiff, 2002 and Kincheloe, 2003) but that the individual practitioner must remain at the centre of the enquiry (McNiff, 2002; Whitehead, 1985; Whitehead and Foster, 1984). In fact, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:304) and McNiff (2002) warn that the former stance may be in danger of removing action research from practitioners.

Having explored various modes of action research and the philosophical assumptions associated with them it is now possible to begin to discuss the philosophical underpinnings of this study. It is the researcher's belief that it is only through the individual's own research that professional development can take place. As McNiff (2002) and Kincheloe (2003) emphasise, teachers need to conduct out their own research in order to solve their everyday practical problems in the classroom. This is research as a democratic process. On the other hand, the traditional model of the external 'expert' researcher doing research on the teacher (Grundy's technical action research) is an undemocratic process which de-professionalises teachers. This mode of action research is therefore rejected. The action research in this study could therefore be described as practical action research with the main motivation of better understanding one's own practices but also to produce knowledge that may be useful to others. However, to what extent could it be considered political? McNiff

(2002:141) argues that '*action research is political in that its aim is to change, and change is bound to affect some part of the institution in which it is located*'. The researcher cannot claim that the aim of the research is to contribute to greater equity and social justice in schooling or society but would argue that the research is political in that changes to the curriculum may be implemented as a result of this research and in this way the teacher as researcher is exercising a democratic process (McNiff, 2002 and Kincheloe, 2003). Since the researcher is not only attempting to describe reality but is also seeking to change it, the research could be considered critical. (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994:147). This study is thus based on the following values: Firstly, theory has no value unless it can be demonstrated to have practical implications. Secondly, the teacher is a professional, who has the right as an individual to develop herself professionally and develop her own theories. Thirdly, the research may lead to changes in beliefs and practices. The extent to which an individual teacher can be empowered and emancipated by action research, however, while the present political and institutional hierarchies remain, is still under debate (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). This issue will be returned to in chapter 9.

4.8 Research design

Having discussed the approach taken and paradigmatic issues, the research design of this study will now be discussed. Perry (2005) characterises research design in applied linguistics along three continua: qualitative/quantitative, basic/applied and confirmatory/exploratory. This study must be considered applied in that it directly connected to the practice of language teaching. It is also essentially exploratory in that it seeks to gain a greater understanding of how students approach and perform tasks, it does not seek to provide evidence to support a particular hypothesis. The qualitative/quantitative distinction is more complex however and requires greater exploration.

4.8.1 Qualitative versus quantitative

Many people associate quantitative methods with a positivistic paradigm and qualitative methods with an interpretive paradigm. However, Miles and Huberman

(1994:41) argue that this is essentially an unproductive approach. Similarly, Perry (2005:74) believes that it is more productive to think in terms of a continuum with quantitative research situated at one end and qualitative at the other, and notes that most research in applied linguistics lies somewhere in between. Perry (2005:75) also asserts that the belief that qualitative research does not use any numbers or statistics is mistaken. A number of qualitative studies involve numbers in the form of frequencies of occurrence of certain phenomena and are analysed by statistical methods such as chi-square. The main difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that the former *'frequently uses sampling strategies to allow generalisation to large populations whereas qualitative research works to uncover information from information rich samples'* (Perry, 2005:75). In order to plot this study on the quantitative/qualitative continuum, further features of the research design shall be described.

4.8.2 Triangulation

As mentioned previously in this chapter, action research is often characterised by an eclectic use of methods and this study is no exception. This was essential in order for the teacher to gain a deeper understanding of how tasks might be implemented and how students perceive and perform them. However, it also allows for triangulation which *'adds rigor, breadth and depth'* to the study (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2). Denzin (1978, cited by Janesick, 1994:214-215) identifies four basic types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. This study employs all four of those types. Firstly, data is collected from four different sources: the transcripts of the on-line discussions, task evaluations (individual and group) and error correction sheets. Secondly, the data is interpreted from two different SLA perspectives: Sociocultural theory and interactionist SLA theory. Thirdly, other teachers were employed to evaluate some of the students' errors. Fourthly, the data is analysed using several different methods (see section 5.8.3). Janesick (1994:214) adds to this interdisciplinary triangulation. This study can also be considered interdisciplinary since it is informed by SLA, education, linguistics and ELT.

4.8.3 Methods of data analysis

4.8.3.1 Analysis of transcripts

The term discourse analysis is used to describe any form of analysis which looks at language which is higher than the level of sentence. McCarthy (1991:5) provides a broad but useful definition of discourse analysis: *'Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which is used.'* Discourse analysis is interdisciplinary field and offers the analyst a wide range of methods, models and traditions of analysis including CA (conversation analysis) (Sacks, Schlegloff and Jefferson, 1974), the IRF (initiation, feedback, response) model of classroom interaction (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). For reasons outlined in 3.5.1, neither of these models would be appropriate for CMC discourse. In addition, methods of analysis were required that would provide evidence for future pedagogical interventions in terms of syllabus and task design. For the purpose of syllabus design the researcher opted to carry out an analysis of the structures and functions learners used. In order to inform design and implementation of future tasks, error analysis was employed. The researcher also wished to attempt to bridge the theory gap divide by looking for evidence of 'learning' according to both the interactionist and sociocultural theories of SLA.

4.8.3.2 Functional and structural analyses

Similarly to discourse analysis, there are many ways of describing grammatical structures and language functions (see for example Jakobson, 1960; Halliday, 1973; Austin, 1962 and Searle, 1969). However, since this was a classroom study with a pedagogical focus, the system for describing these items was a pedagogical one, based on the ESOL Core Curriculum (DfES, 2001: 392-394) Level 2. More details of this will be provided in the next chapter.

4.8.3.3 Error analysis and language learning related episodes

As Cook (1993:22) remarks, although error analysis is often associated with theories of acquisition, it is in fact more a methodology for dealing with data and useful for teachers investigating learner language (see for example Green and Hecht, 1990). In

order to begin to solve the issue of the grammar-gap in a task-based approach to language learning and teaching, the researcher needed to investigate which types of errors were causing learners most difficulty and therefore both a quantitative and qualitative analysis were required. However, it should be noted that the quantitative analysis used only simple techniques such as counting and percentages, not complex statistical analyses associated with experimental methods. Since error correction is such a complex task, the researcher opted to employ the classification model developed by James (1998). Similarly, since the transcripts were being used to find evidence of concepts from theoretical models of SLA, pre-selected codes were employed (Foster, 1998). Qualitative sociocultural approaches were also applied.

4.8.3.4 Participation analysis

In order to investigate the participation of students, simple counting and percentage techniques were used to analyse participation quantitatively. The functional analysis as described above provided greater insights into learner participation. This was in a similar vein to Kahmi-Stein (2000).

4.8.3.5 Analysis of group and individual evaluations

A qualitative approach was employed to analyse these evaluations since they were in effect questionnaires with open-ended questions. Since the amount of data was small, no coding or matrix systems were necessary.

4.9 Summary

The previous section has demonstrated that when characterising the research design, this study can be considered mainly qualitative in terms of how the data is collected and analysed. Although some simple quantitative analysis is employed, this is the kind normally associated with qualitative studies within the interpretive paradigm not the sampling and complex statistical techniques employed by experimental quantitative studies situated within a positivistic paradigm. The researcher has

selected the most appropriate methods to solve practical issues associated with her own teaching of a particular module. Most of these methods are associated with an interpretive research paradigm and will be described detail in the following chapter. The fact that the literature review led to a model of task implementation and evaluation shows that project has already effected change. The researcher would argue that perhaps the most important outcome of this study is the development and empowerment of the individual teacher. These factors are characteristic of an action research approach, categorised by Grundy (1987) as practical action research. To what extent the study can be considered critical will be dealt with in chapter 9.

5. Methods of the Study

5.1 The participants

ESOL class

The class consisted in total of 13 students. However, this number was not stable throughout the period under study. One student joined the class late while another student withdrew from the programme. Several students did not participate in all the tasks due to absence from the class. This meant that only one group of students remained stable during the whole period of study.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the class consisted of EU students, immigrants to Britain and International students. The EU students included five students from Cyprus with Greek as their mother tongue (4 female and one male), a Hungarian female and one Spanish female student, a Castilian speaker and a female Portuguese speaker from Brazil with dual Italian/Brazilian nationality. Two male students, both immigrants to the UK, originate from The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Cameroon, speaking French as their mother tongue. The class also included two male Cantonese speakers from Hong Kong (both with International Student status) and one British female Cantonese speaker. This class performed the four tasks under investigation during their normal class time over the course of a semester.

Exchange students

Since the number of students in the class under investigation was relatively small, a group of volunteer exchange students were included in the design specifically to provide more generalisable answers to research question 2: what structures and functions would the tasks elicit? The researcher attended an exchange cohort meeting and invited students to participate in the research as a way of receiving more help with their English. Although the intention was to try to include groups of students with the same mother tongue, all students who volunteered were accepted. As the

size of the room was large enough to accommodate all those who volunteered, it would have been both unfair and unethical to exclude some students from a potential learning opportunity. This meant that a few groups were not homogenous in terms of their L1.

This class consisted of a total of 18 students: one group of Japanese speakers (all female), one group of Italian speakers (two male and one female), two groups of female Spanish speakers, a group of two Spanish speaking and one Greek speaking male, and finally a group of two German and one Italian speaking males.

Native-speaker volunteers

Data was also collected by Pearson (2009) from groups of native-speakers of English. This raw data was employed to provide deeper insights into the complex issue of errors under consideration in research question 4. Full procedural details, including ethical considerations, of how this data was collected can be found in Pearson (2009).

5.2 Ethics

Ethical considerations are paramount when conducting classroom research (Hopkins, 1993:221 and Wallace, 1998:51). Since the classroom procedures were undertaken as a normal part of the ESOL module, participants were asked to agree for their work to be considered in the research after the classes had taken place. The purpose of the research was explained to students and they were asked to sign the form in appendix I. Exchange students who volunteered, were asked to complete the form shown in appendix II and return it to the researcher before the data was collected. To ensure complete confidentiality, when analysing the transcripts all students were assigned a letter (representing a group) and a number. This enabled references to be made to specific students in the following chapters without breaching this promise.

5.3 General features of the teaching approach

In this section, general characteristics of the teaching approach will be described in order to fully contextualise the study. Teacher and learners beliefs, information

given to learners, approaches to learner autonomy and the embedding of technology will all be dealt with in turn in this section.

5.3.1 Teacher/learner beliefs

Teacher beliefs influence every aspect of the practitioner's work. Learner beliefs are thought to be an important factor in the relative success of language learners (Lightbown and Spada, 2001:35). When teacher and learner beliefs conflict there can be negative consequences (Yorio, 1986). Therefore, at the start of the semester the teacher engaged students in a discussion to uncover some of their beliefs and to explain to the students the rationale behind the approach that would be taken on the module. Some of these will be described below.

5.3.2 Explaining the task cycle

As was outlined in chapter 4, it is essential that students understand why they are doing a task and how they are going to learn. For this reason, before implementing the tasks, the teacher described the framework so that learners would understand the rationale for doing tasks. The role of errors in learning was discussed so that learners would see them as a natural and necessary part of the learning process and not feel discouraged or de-motivated when their errors were highlighted.

5.3.3 Developing learner autonomy

One of the aims of the ESOL module is to develop learner autonomy and this was discussed at the beginning of the semester. Central to this study was the idea that learners should be encouraged to correct their own errors but with scaffolding provided in the form of a peer, a reference source or the teacher. Before the tasks were implemented therefore, learner training in the use of dictionaries and grammar references was provided. Students were given a selection of utterances recorded from previous classes which contained some form of error. The errors were coded using symbols (see appendix III) and sometimes suggestions were provided as to where to find help. Students then worked with the students in their group to correct the errors.

5.3.4 Embedding technology in learning

The use of technology is embedded in this module and learners were introduced to the VLE in the first meeting. Students were shown how to navigate the environment and given brief tasks to introduce them to the communication tools, both the discussion board and *Lightweight Chat*. This meant that students were familiar with the tools before the tasks were implemented.

5.4 Implementation of the tasks

This section is divided into two parts. The first section describes the general procedures employed for implementing all four of the tasks under investigation. The second section describes detailed task-specific procedures.

5.4.1 General procedure

ESOL group

Each task was implemented as per the framework described in chapter 4 with students performing each task twice. Students were put into groups of three for the reasons outlined in chapter 4. However, as we discussed earlier, the number of students in the ESOL class was not stable with the result that for tasks two, three and four, some groups were composed of 4 students. The class carried out the initial task cycle in a computer laboratory in their normal timetabled session. Post-task evaluations, error corrections and the second cycle were carried out the following week in a traditional classroom. It should be noted that not all learners' errors were highlighted and coded in the transcripts for the fear it may be too de-motivating. However, the teacher tried to highlight the most important errors and an equal number for each student in a group. The four tasks were performed over the course of a 12-week semester.

During the first task cycle, groups performed tasks using Lightweight Chat on Blackboard and all interactions were recorded for analysis. The following week, groups were asked to evaluate the task using the form shown in appendix VI, adapted from Estaire and Zanón (1994). Then, transcripts of the interactions were returned to groups with error correction symbols. Students worked together to correct the errors on their own copies of the transcripts (for their own reference) but also on the error correction sheet provided by the teacher (appendix IV) for the researcher. Post-correction, individuals were asked to complete individual evaluation forms (adapted from Estaire and Zanón, see appendix V). Group evaluations, error correction sheets and individual evaluations were collected by the teacher for the purposes of analysis. Having described the general procedure, procedures specific to each task will now be outlined.

Exchange group

All of the above procedures were followed with the exchange group, the only exception being that data was collected over a 4 week period.

Native-speakers

Data collection procedures can be found in Pearson (2009).

5.4.2 Task-specific procedures

In the section below each of the four tasks will be described and specific procedures for implementing each task will be provided.

Task 1

This was a ‘spot the difference’ task adapted from Ur (1981) to accommodate 3 students. The pictures (shown in appendix VII) show Shakespeare sitting at a desk, quill in hand trying to write. The teacher introduced students to the task by finding out how much they knew about Shakespeare and explaining that they were going to receive similar but different pictures and that the aim of the activity was to describe

the pictures in detail to find the differences. No vocabulary was pre-taught as students were encouraged to use communication strategies to compensate for unknown words. In the task repetition stage, students carried out the task again but with the pictures modified slightly to maintain the information gap.

Task 2

This was a murder-mystery adapted from Hadfield (1987) (shown in appendix VIII) to accommodate the CMC mode. Students were introduced to the task by showing them a picture of Sherlock Holmes and eliciting/pre-teaching vocabulary associated with detective work such as '*suspect*' and '*motive*'. Students then read the case study (shown in appendix VIII) and asked to discuss (face-to-face) possible suspects and motives. Groups then fed back to the class and ideas were written on the whiteboard. This was the only focussed task so ideas were reformulated by the teacher to include modal verbs of deduction (in a similar way to Samuda, 2001) where it was felt natural to do so. The aim was to raise learners' awareness of these forms so they might use them during the task, although this aim was not made explicit to the students. In the task repetition phase, students were given a different mystery to solve taken from Cutting-Edge Upper Intermediate (Cunningham and Moor, 1999), shown in appendix IX.

Task 3

This was a decision-making task taken from Ur (1981), shown in appendix X. The aim of the task was for students to select one candidate from a list of five to be awarded a law scholarship. After introducing students to the task the teacher elicited criteria they might use in the selection process. Students were then asked to read information about the candidates and underline any unknown words. The teacher had predicted problematic vocabulary and prepared a matching exercise (also shown in appendix X) for students to complete with the help of electronic dictionaries and their peers. This was given to them after they had read the text and underlined any difficulties so that the words and phrases were clearly contextualised. In the task repetition stage, students were regrouped to compare and justify their decisions.

Task 4

Task 4 was an open-ended discussion related to the film 'Bowling for Columbine' (Moore, 2002). Pre-task work involved watching the opening sequence of the film. Students were asked to discuss the purpose of the opening sequence and comment on their reactions. The teacher elicited what they knew about the film and the real life events which led to it being made. Any gaps in their knowledge could then be filled in to ensure that students were aware of the main issues covered by the film. The CMC discussion task can be seen in appendix XI. Students were re-grouped to compare their discussions in the task repetition phase.

The previous sections have described both general and specific procedures for implementing the tasks in the classroom. The following sections will provide procedural information regarding data was collection and analysis.

5.5 Methods of data collection

In order to answer the research questions it was necessary to evaluate the tasks. Ellis (1997) describes three types of reflective task evaluation: student-based, response-based and learning-based. The aim of student-based evaluation is to ascertain whether students found the task enjoyable and useful (see Murphy, 1993, for an example) and usually involves questionnaires. Response-based evaluation (see Richards, Platt and Weber, 1985:289) is a way of assessing whether the learners responded to the task in the way that it had been designed to do. Learning-based evaluation is the most difficult type of evaluation to conduct, as its purpose is to determine if the task has facilitated learning. All three approaches to evaluation were conducted in this study. Each approach is described below in relation to the types of data collected. More detailed descriptions of the analysis procedures is provided in section 5.3.7.

Student based evaluations were collected via the group evaluation questionnaire (see appendix VI). Question 4 of this questionnaire was employed to determine whether or not the students found the task enjoyable and challenging (research question 1).

Response-based evaluations were conducted by collecting the transcripts of the student discussions. The online discussions were recorded using the recording

facility on Blackboard Lightweight Chat and the transcripts of the ESOL interactions were analysed to answer research questions 2 and 4. In order to identify core structures and functions (research question 3) the three sets of data were analysed. However, due to technical difficulties, the data elicited from exchange students performing task 2 could not be retrieved. In addition, native-speaker data was only available for tasks 3 and 4 due to the limitations of that study (Pearson, 2009). Table 5.1 summarises the number of transcripts collected for each task.

Table 5.1 Number of transcripts collected for each task

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
ESOL	4	3	3	3
Exchange	6	0	6	5
Native-speaker	0	5	0	4
Total	10	8	9	12

The learning-based response was also determined from analysis of the transcripts. The aim of this study was not to determine whether a particular intervention led to learning of a specific feature of language. However, the discussion in chapter 2 revealed that there are several processes which are thought to be beneficial in promoting second language acquisition. These include negotiation of meaning, scaffolding, language play and noticing. The transcripts of the ESOL and exchange groups were therefore analysed to find examples of scaffolding, negotiation of meaning and language play. In addition, although the individual evaluation (see appendix V) was employed as a pedagogical tool to encourage learners to reflect on their own performance it was also employed here as a research tool to ascertain if learners had noticed a ‘gap’ or a ‘hole’.

5.6 Methods of data analysis

This section will be organised according to the research questions.

Q1 – Would the tasks be challenging and motivating?

Question 4 of the group evaluation was used to investigate this question. The responses given were collated and analysed qualitatively for positive and negative responses.

Q2 – Would students participate equally in completing the task?

In order to determine whether students were participating equally during the tasks the number of turns was counted for each student and percentage turns were calculated. The term ‘turn’ is used here in the same vein as Murray (1989:324), in that it *‘refers to all that a sender intended so send as a whole unit’*. In most cases a turn is made each time a participant types some text and presses enter so it is a simple case of counting the number of times the student’s name appears in the transcript. However, in some cases, students familiar with the technology may segment longer ‘turns’ (sometimes using the ‘...’ convention) to maintain presence in the conversation. In these cases, a turn may be separated by another participant’s turn. Turns also included punctuation marks, such as ‘?’ or emoticons.

As well as a quantitative analysis of percentage participation, transcripts were also analysed for the nature of students’ participation and their ‘commitment to action’ (Murray, 1989), in other words, their contribution to the resolution of the task. The turns of each student were coded according to the 4 macro-functions of discourse described below. To do this, several copies of each transcript were made, one for each student in the group. All the turns made by each student were highlighted in one of four different colours according to the four different macro-functions. The number of turns for each macro-function could then be counted.

Q3 – What language structures and functions would each task elicit?

There are many ways of describing grammatical structures and language functions. However, since this was a classroom study with a pedagogical focus, the system for describing these items was a pedagogical one, based on the ESOL Core Curriculum (DfES, 2001: 392-394) Level 2⁷.

⁷ Level 2 of the ESOL Core Curriculum is the highest level, and students achieving this level are expected to be able to function in the British Education system.

Initially, the ESOL transcripts for each task were analysed to compile a list of all the structures and functions used for each task. When the functions list was compiled it became apparent that four main macrofunctions had been in operation: task completion, task management, social/cooperative and linguistic. A functional profile for each task was thus created based on these four macro-functions. All functions which were associated with completing the specific task were categorised in task completion. Giving or asking for descriptions, for example, were key task completion functions in task 1. Task management functions for task 1 included stating how many differences had been found. Social functions include those that have no informational content but are important in maintaining social relations (see Brown and Yule, 1983, for the distinction between transactional and interactional / phatic communication). Examples from the tasks include greeting, taking leave and joking. The only linguistic function was self-correction, for example when a student corrected a typing error they had made.

The exchange student data was then analysed using the functional profile. Any additional functions were added. The relative utility of each function was then calculated as follows: those functions that were used in 75% or more of the transcripts (i.e. in 6-8 out of the 8 transcripts available for each task) were classified as *core* functions. Those functions which were employed in 50-74% of the transcripts were classified as *frequent and useful*. Those functions that occurred in fewer than 50% of the transcripts and were deemed to be useful for completing the task were classified as infrequent but *useful*. Those functions that occurred in fewer than 50% of the transcripts but were not deemed to be useful for task completion were classified as *occurring but not useful*. The language used by each of the groups of participants to realise these functions was then analysed for each of the tasks. In addition, the ESOL transcripts were analysed for examples of specific CMC conventions as described in chapter 3. There were found to be six categories of conventions used. The number of each category used per group and per task was then quantified.

Q4 – What kind of errors would learners make?

To address this question a formal error analysis was carried out on the ESOL data. However, before we outline how the analysis was conducted, it is necessary to define

what we mean by 'error'. Lennon (1991) discusses at some length the problematic nature of identifying and defining error before arriving at the following definition:

'a linguistic form ,which, in the same context , would in all likelihood not be produced by the learner's native speaker counterparts'.

Lennon (1991:182)

This definition was adopted in this study. However, in an age when new Englishes are gaining prominence (Graddol, 2006:66) and there is a shift away from the native/non-native speaker distinction in TESOL (Graddol, 2006:114 and Holliday, 2005), it would be prudent here to defend the use of native-like norms. Since the learners involved in this investigation are studying in a British university and often in classes with native-speaking students, it seems not only acceptable but also entirely appropriate to use the language of their native-speaking peers as a desirable target and thus to define error on the basis of deviance from this target. (Lennon's (1991) subjects were also advanced learners in a British university.)

Having defined error, the process of error analysis used in this study as described by James (1998) will now be outlined. There are five stages in the sequence: detection, location, description, classification and counting. A description of how each of these procedures was followed will be outlined below although, it should be noted that stages two and three are largely subconscious processes.

Hard copies of the transcripts were used to detect the errors (it is more difficult to detect errors on screen than on paper, James, 1998:91) and any utterances which were deemed to contain errors according to the previous definition were underlined. It must be noted here that the punctuation conventions of CMC were employed as the base line rather than traditional writing conventions. For example, where a learner had begun a message without a capital letter or had finished a message without a full stop this was not considered an error. However, where it is likely that a native speaker would have used capitilisation for emphasis and the learner did not, this was considered to be an error.

Error detection can be a relatively subjective process and previous studies have demonstrated this (see James, 1998:91-92). Any utterances which could not conclusively be described as erroneous were collected and given to a group of colleagues who are experienced English language teachers. The teachers were asked to decide whether or not the utterances were erroneous according to the above definition, and if so, to reformulate them into more native-like utterances.

The purpose of this stage of the procedure is to 'point out' (James, 1998:92) the error. This as many teachers know is not as straightforward as it seems since not all errors are 'easily localisable' (James, 1998:93). It may be that the whole utterance is erroneous. This has significance for categorising errors (see below).

The purpose of describing errors is to enable one to talk about them other than intuitively, and is a prerequisite to counting and categorising them. There are several different systems for describing errors but a pedagogic system was largely used in this analysis. The reason for this was that the purpose of the analysis was to potentially use the results to construct a grammatical syllabus. For example, errors were described as '*prepositional*' errors or errors in '*passive*' formation.

The classificatory system used in this analysis is described in James (1998) as it appears to be the most comprehensive and appropriate available. It combines, and expands upon, two different systems described by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) to create a two dimensional system. In the first dimension, there are three levels of language: substance, text and discourse. Substance level errors include misspellings and typographic errors. James (1998:142) uses '*text*' as a synonym for '*usage*' and states that text errors '*arise from ignorance and missapplication of the lexico-grammatical' rules of the language..'* This level includes grammar (syntax and morphology) and lexis. The third and final level of errors is discourse level. Discourse errors include errors of coherence and sociopragmatic errors. Each of these will be explained in more detail below.

Table 5.2 Error classification system

	Substance		Text		Discourse
			Grammar	Lexical / Idiomatic	
	Typing	Spelling	Syntax	Morphology	
Omission					
Addition					
Misorder					

The second dimension is based on the way in which the target form is 'modified' by learners resulting in an erroneous form (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982:150). The types of modification include omission, addition or misorder. The resulting system is illustrated in table 5.2 and examples of the profiles can be seen in appendix XII

A template of this system was created in Microsoft Excel to enable an error profile for each group and each task to be constructed. All the errors which were detected, located and described in a transcript were input into the template. They were also colour coded according to the student that made them. Since the classification of errors is a complex process, it is necessary to provide more detail on how this was conducted. Each level of error will now be described in more detail.

Substance level errors

Substance level errors include spelling, graphology (in this study typographic) and punctuation. To distinguish between spelling and typographic errors was relatively simple. Typographic errors can normally be assigned to spatial or temporal errors as a result of using the QWERTY keyboard (see MacNeilage, 1964). Spelling errors are more likely due to the misselection of a common homophone (e.g. *weather* instead of *whether*, *too* for *two*) phonemic difficulties (e.g. *eyebrow* instead of *eyebrow*). In situations where there was any doubt, the error was classified as a spelling problem.

Text level errors

Text level errors include grammar and lexis. Grammatical errors were further categorised according to whether they were syntactic or morphological in accordance with the study by Bardovi-Harlig and Bofman (1989).

Syntactic errors

Syntactic errors include word order errors, errors in combining sentences (including complementation, relativization and coordination) and absence of major and minor constituents (subject, verb, object). With regards to the latter, it must be noted that ellipsis⁸ of some of these constituents is common in synchronous text-based CMC. Therefore, utterances which contained what appeared to be intentional, natural native-like use of ellipsis were not considered to be erroneous. For example, in the first task, one student said '*ok, another difference*', omitting '*we've found*'. This was considered native-like use of ellipsis. Examples of errors from the study are provided below to illustrate this the types of syntactic error mentioned above.

Example of word order error

how many you can see?

Example of errors in combining sentences

We should consider him to get the scholarship (complementation)

Absence of major/minor constituents

yes is the bee (missing subject '*it*')

Problematic cases

Several syntactic errors could not be easily fitted into the template as they required almost complete reformulation (one of the reasons Burt and Kiparsky (1972) refer to syntactic errors as '*global*' errors). These were allocated to a separate 'miscellaneous' category.

In normal conversation it is possible to make a question with a statement and rising intonation (and in text-based CMC by replacing the rising intonation with a question

⁸ ellipsis is the omission of a word or phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction but not necessary for understanding

mark). This made it difficult to decide if one particular utterance was erroneous or not:

In your picture you can see a bee?

However, as this student was making other word order mistakes it was decided to describe it as an error.

Morphological Errors

Morphological errors include errors in inflectional morphology (nominal and verbal) as well as grammatical functors (such as prepositions and determiners). This category also included all errors of tense, aspect, problems with active/passive voice and word class (Bardovi-Harlig and Borman, 1989:21).

Discourse Errors

Discourse errors include mainly problems of coherence and are more relevant to planned, written discourse. James identifies three types of coherence, one of which is relevant to CMC synchronous discussions: topical coherence. This requires that the message be relevant to the general topic or goal of the discussion. James (1998:273) also includes errors of style (genre fidelity) and what Austin (1962) referred to as '*infelicity*', that is language that is inappropriate, not because of a lack of linguistic competence but rather sociocultural incompetence. A simple example might be a learner addressing the teacher as 'Teacher', a polite form of address common in some cultures but inappropriate in Britain.

When counting errors it is important to distinguish between counting error token and error type (see Lennon, 1991). In other words, should repeated occurrences of the same error (tokens) be counted? In this study, although all tokens or errors were included in the task/group profiles, only types were counted for each task. To ensure that tokens of the same error were not counted, using copy and paste in Microsoft Excel, error profiles were created according to level of error and task. Examples can be seen in appendix XIII. In this way, for example, all the substance level errors for task 1 could be viewed simultaneously. Any tokens of the same error were then crossed out on hard copies of the profile and error types for each task counted.

When an error was embedded within another error, only the error at the highest level of *extent* would be included. Lennon, (1991:191) defines extent as '*the rank of linguistic unit, from minimally the morpheme, to maximally the sentence, which would have to be replaced, reordered, or supplied in order to repair production.*' For example, if an utterance was identified as having a syntactic error, any other errors within that utterance (such as spelling or morphology) were not included in the profile.

Error analysis in relation to function

The native-speaker data was analysed using a qualitative inductive approach in that the transcripts were analysed several times to identify emerging themes such as frequent occurrences of particular forms, functions or lexical items. These themes were then used to analyse the exchange data and re-analyse the ESOL data. Two overarching categories emerged. Firstly, several language items were frequent in the native-speaker data but infrequent or completely lacking in the learner data. These were categorised as '*missed opportunities*' following Baigent (2005). The second category involved language functions which seemed to cause learners difficulty. Having identified these categories further qualitative and quantitative analysis of the transcripts was performed using the following procedure for each language item / function identified. Firstly, every occurrence of the language item under consideration was highlighted in all three sets of transcripts. Then items were further coded inductively to facilitate both qualitative and quantitative comparisons between the different data sets.

Q5 Would the text-based nature of communication encourage learners to monitor their own errors? Would learners be able to correct their own errors with or without scaffolding?

Before describing how we attempted to answer this question it is necessary to distinguish between errors, mistakes and slips. Again, reference will be made to James (1998), drawing on the work of Edge (1989), for the definitions:

Slips, or alternatively lapses of the tongue of pen, or even fingers on a keyboard, can quickly be detected and self-corrected by their author unaided.

*Mistakes can only be corrected by their agent if their deviance is pointed out to him or her. If a simple indication that there is some deviance is a sufficient prompt for self-correction, then we have a **first-order mistake**. If additional information is needed, in the form of the exact location and some hint as to the nature of the deviance, then we have a **second-order mistake**.*

Errors cannot be self-corrected until further relevant (to that error) input (implicit or explicit) has been provided and converted into intake by the learner. In other words, errors require further relevant learning to take place before they can be self-corrected.

James (1998:83)

Slips

Typological errors are by nature 'slips' according to the above definition. Therefore, all typological errors were counted, as were the number of these errors that were self-repaired. Examples of self-repair of other types of error were also sought from the transcripts.

Mistakes and Errors

The correction sheets were used to investigate which of the errors learners would be able to correct. Both the number of erroneous utterances pointed out to learners and the number of those successfully corrected were totalled. These results were tabulated. However, it is important to make several points here. Firstly, since learners were working in groups and had access to reference tools as well as the teacher, mistakes and errors could not be distinguished between. However, those utterances that were not satisfactorily corrected could be assumed to be errors and would therefore suggest areas required for further instruction. It should also be noted that students were not made aware of all errors for fear of de-motivating them.

Noticing the gap and noticing the hole

The individual evaluation was designed with the pedagogical aim of encouraging learners to reflect on their own performance but was also used for research purposes (particularly questions 3 and 4) to see if individual learners were able to ‘notice the gap’ and ‘notice the holes’ in their interlanguage through their performance. A qualitative analysis of these evaluations was made.

Q6 Would some tasks be more likely to elicit episodes of interaction thought to be significant in promoting second language acquisition?

To measure the incidence of negotiations of meaning, ESOL and Exchange transcripts were coded as in Foster’s (1998) study for: confirmation checks, clarification requests and comprehension checks. To measure modified output, the transcripts were also coded for semantic modifications, morphological modifications, graphological modifications and syntactic modifications. The transcripts were also analysed to find examples of peer scaffolding and language play.

5.7 Summary

In this chapter the context of the study, classroom procedures and details of data collection and analysis methods have been described in detail. The results of the study will be presented in the next chapter.

6. Key Findings

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the key findings of the research will be presented and organised according to the research question being addressed. A discussion of these results in relation to relevant literature will follow in chapter 7.

6.2 Research question 1: Did the tasks motivate and challenge the students?

The responses from both the exchange students and the ESOL students were overwhelmingly positive for task 1. Words used to describe the task included *amusing*, *entertaining* and *challenging*. Some of the groups mentioned that it was quite difficult but in a positive sense because it pushed their English to the limits. The quotation from Group B below demonstrates this:

'It was good for us because we tried to describe the picture with the right vocabulary because our vocabulary is limited.'

The only comment about task 1 that could be construed as negative came from one of the ESOL groups, who mentioned there were too many differences to find in the limited time.

The evaluations of task 2 were also generally positive with ESOL students and most of the exchange groups finding it interesting and challenging. Some conflicting opinions emerged from the exchange data, however, with one group finding it too easy and another too difficult. Interestingly, both of these groups had the highest level of English. One suggested improvement for this task was that all the information be given at the start of the task.

The comments for task 3 were again, in the main positive with most students finding the task interesting. One group also commented on the new vocabulary that had been learnt. However, students in two of the groups did not seem to enjoy the task:

‘It was difficult to decide who should give the scholarship. It was somehow boring because didn’t really care who was going to take the scholarship’

‘One of us thought that was a bit boring because she doesn’t know how to explain her opinion in English. We think it was difficult because it’s a very subjective thing and we needed to give objective reasons. We should have had more information about the candidates’

Another group also suggested that more information be given about the candidates and one of the groups suggested that pictures of the candidates be provided.

All of the groups seemed to enjoy doing task 4. Typical comments included:

‘It was a very interesting and motivated task. It made us all want to talk about what we know.’

‘We liked the task. We don’t suggest any change.’

One of the reasons given by some of the groups for finding the task interesting was that it was a real world topic that had relevance to them. The following comment from group E illustrates this:

‘We had interest in this topic because there are many problems relating to TV game in Japan.’

The only suggestion for how the task could be improved was given by one of the exchange groups: they would have like to have watched the complete movie before taking part in the discussion. One comment could not easily be interpreted as being positive or negative:

‘We have talked in general because we didn’t have much information about the topic.’

6.3 Research question 2: Would students participate equally in completion of the task?

Table 6.1 shows the number and percentage turns for each ESOL student in each task. A mere glance at these results reveals that students did not participate equally among their groups. Group A, the only stable group throughout the study, appears to have the most equitable rates of participation. A functional analysis of group A's interactions, shown in table 6.2, however, reveals that although all students are working towards the task, managing the task seems to be shared by students A1 and A3. Student A2 only once makes a contribution to this area (in fact it is only an 'ok' to respond to another student). Generally, the findings from the functional analysis show that in each group, only one or two students contribute to task management and very few students employed social functions of the language.

Table 6.1 Participation rates – number and % turns

Task 1			Task 2		
Student	No of turns	% turns	Student	No of turns	% turns
Group A			Group A		
A1	46	36	A1	7	26
A2	40	32	A2	5	18.5
A3	40	32	A3	15	55.5
Total	126	100	Total	27	100
Group B			Group B		
B1	47	39	B1	10	28
B2	13	11	B2	8	22
B3	62	50	B4	18	50
Total	122	100	Total	36	100
Group C			Group C		
C1	28	43	D3	28	50
C2	28	43	C2	8	14
C3	9	14	C3	5	9
Total	65	100	D2	15	27
			Total	56	100
Group D					
D1	43	31			
D2	39	29			
D3	54	40			
Total	136	100			
Task 3			Task 4		
	No of turns	% turns		No of turns	% turns
Group A			Group A		
A1	17	46	A1	17	31

A2	10	27	A2	19	34
A3	10	27	A3	19	34
Total	37	100	Total	55	100
Group B			Group B		
B1	24	29	B1	13	36
B2	7	9	B2	10	28
B4	36	43	C1	13	36
C1	16	19	Total	36	100
Total	83	100			
Group C			Group C		
D3	31	44	D3	32	48
C2	22	31	C2	13	20
C3	4	5	C3	8	12
D1	14	20	D2	13	20
Total	71	100	Total	66	100

Table 6.2 Number of turns per student in relation to macro-function of discourse

Task 1	Group A			Group B			Group C		
	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3
Completing task	27	37	33	34	13	42	21	24	9
Managing task	9	0	6	4	0	5	5	0	0
Social/cooperative	2	1	0	5	0	6	1	1	0
Linguistic	2	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Total	41*	39	39	43	13	57	27	25	9
	Group D								
	D1	D2	D3						
Completing task	31	24	34						
Managing task	5	4	3						
Social/cooperative	5	2	6						
Linguistic	0	1	0						
Total	41	31	43						

Task 2	Group A			Group B			Group C			
	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B4	C2	C3	D2	D3
Completing task	7	5	10	9	7	12	6	5	5	15
Managing task	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Social/cooperative	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	6	7
Linguistic	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	7	5	15	9	7	15	5	5	14	13

Task 3	Group A			Group B				Group C			
	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	C1	B4	D3	C2	C3	D1
Completing task	13	10	10	13	7	12	22	22	13	4	11
Managing task	3	0	0	7	0	3	7	0	2	0	0
Social/cooperative	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	6	3	0	1
Linguistic	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	17	10	10	21	7	16	32	28	18	4	12

Task 4	Group A			Group B			Group C			
Macro-function	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	C1	D3	C2	C3	D2
Completing task	14	17	12	10	9	8	17	8	6	7
Managing task	1	1	1	1	0	4	1	0	0	0
Social/cooperative	1	0	0	1	0	0	12	2	0	6
Linguistic	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	16	18	18	12	9	12	30	11	6	13

* The number of turns shown here add up to 40, but there was one additional turn which had no function because it was an error on the keyboard.

6.4 Research question 3: What language structures and functions would the tasks elicit?

This section is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the findings from the functional analysis of the transcripts, the second part provides a summary of the findings from the structural analysis and the third part presents the findings related to the use of CMC conventions employed by participants.

6.4.1 Results of the functional analysis

Analysis of both the ESOL and Exchange student transcripts demonstrated that the tasks elicited a wide range of functions. Language functions expressed were mainly transactional functions, but some students also used a wide range of social functions. Twenty-one of the thirty-four functions listed in Level 2 Core curriculum were found in the transcripts.

In this section, key findings of the functional analysis for each task are summarised. In addition, functional templates for each task will be provided in the appendices. These will list all the functions used under the four macro-functional categories identified and the relative utility of each function. Examples for each function, taken directly from the data, are provided for illustration purposes. Where the name of a participant was used in the original data, this has been replaced with X or Y. Every effort was taken to select error free examples, but when this was not possible, * is used to indicate the presence of an error.

Task one elicited a limited range of task completion and management functions from the two groups of learners. Two core task completion functions were employed by

participants in task 1: giving general, specific and approximate descriptions of picture and comparing and contrasting the pictures. Only one other task completion function was frequently employed which was asking for general and specific descriptions. Core task management functions were related to summarising state of play and included stating when a difference had been found and how many differences had been found. The complete functional template for this task can be found in appendix XIV. Further findings related to how the four core functions were realised with respect to error production will be presented in section 6.5.

Exchange data for task 2 was not available so all the findings presented here are based on the functions used by the ESOL learners to perform the task. Five core task completion functions were identified. These included stating facts, agreeing and disagreeing with interlocutors, justifying, speculating and making deductions. The only core task management function employed was bringing task to a close. A range of other functions were utilised by learners but these were all infrequent. The complete list of functions with examples for task 2 are provided in appendix XV. Further findings from the analysis of native-speaker data relating to the core functions of speculating, making deductions and agreeing with interlocutors will be presented in section 6.5.

Task 3 elicited a range of core functions from ESOL and exchange students which included stating facts, suggesting recipients for the scholarship, justifying suggestions, agreeing with interlocutors and speculating about the future. Core task management functions included moving task forward, bringing task to a close and summarising state of play. The complete functional template for this task can be seen in appendix XVI. Further findings from the analysis of the core functions of suggesting recipients for the scholarship, speculating/making predictions about the future and task management functions are presented in sections 6.5.

Task 4 elicited three core task completion functions and one core task management functions from the two groups of learners. Stating facts, giving opinions and agreeing with interlocutors were the three core task completion functions identified and moving the task forward was the only core task management function utilised. Learners also made frequent use of functions such as justifying, hypothesising and

speculating. The complete template of functions for this task can be seen in appendix XVII. Further findings relating to the language used to perform the functions of giving opinions, agreeing with interlocutors, hypothesising and speculating, and task management functions are provided in section 6.5.

6.4.2 Structural analysis

The results of the structural analysis revealed that students used a wide range of structures and attempted a range of different complex sentence types and verb forms appropriate for this level (all the sentences types and the majority of verb forms listed in Level 2 of the ESOL Core Curriculum were found). The complete list of structures for each task and their relative utility can be seen in appendices XVIII to XXI.

6.4.3 Analysis of CMC Conventions

The types of CMC conventions used by ESOL learners and exchange students for each task are shown in table 6.3, while table 6.4 presents their distribution of use across the groups. Few examples of the CMC conventions discussed in chapter 3 were found in the ESOL transcripts. When they were found, they were used by only a minority of the students. Student B1, B3 and D1 for example, regularly used smileys (☺). These were used mainly in task 1 to express satisfaction at finding a difference. Student B3 also used one however, to soften a request for a peer to make a particular contribution. Student D2 used abbreviations such as *'every1'* and colloquialisms such as *'yup'*. Onomatopoeia included *'hehehe'* for laughter, as well as *'ah'*, and *'um'* to show that the participant was thinking. Student D1 was the one who made most use of repetition of letters for emphasis. Examples include *'yessss'* and *'yerrr'* to express satisfaction at finding a difference in the pictures.

The most commonly used convention in both data sets was the use of multiple question and exclamation marks for emphasis or intonation and a series of full-stops to express pauses. These accounted for the high frequency of use of punctuation by group I in task 3. In task 4, group J's use of punctuation conventions consisted mainly of multiple question and exclamation marks whereas group F's were the

result of one student's high frequency of use of a series of full-stops. The latter convention was also used several times to break up a turn, indicating that the turn was incomplete and the rest of the message was to follow.

Group J, while performing task 4, employed a high frequency of CMC conventions during an off-task episode of ludic language play (see section 6.7.3). Conventions used to replace stress and intonation patterns included multiple question and exclamation marks and capitalisation. Onomatopoeia was also employed to represent laughter with one student code-switching between English and Spanish representations of laughter using both *jaja* and *haha*.

Table 6.3 Types of CMC conventions used by ESOL and Exchange students

Task 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emoticons • abbreviations • punctuation to replace prosodic features of speech • onomatopoeia • repetition of letters • colloquialisms
Task 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • onomatopoeia to replace speech sounds • punctuation to replace prosodic features of speech
Task 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • onomatopoeia to replace speech sounds • punctuation to replace prosodic features of speech • emoticons
Task 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • onomatopoeia • punctuation to replace prosodic features of speech • emoticons • repetition of letters • colloquialisms

Table 6.4 Type and frequency of CMC conventions used by ESOL and exchange students

Task 1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Emoticons	3	13	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2
abbreviations	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
repetition of letters	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	3
onomatopoeia	0	1	0	3	0	0	1	4	1	10
punctuation	5	4	0	2	1	4	7	33	15	13
colloquialisms	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	8	0	0
Task 2	A	B	C							
onomatopoeia	0	0	3							
punctuation	0	0	6							
Task 3	A	B	C							
onomatopoeia	0	0	2	E	F	G	H	I	J	
punctuation	3	1	3	0	0	0	2	0	1	
emoticons	0	0	0	2	3	1	4	29	4	
Task 4	A	B	C							
onomatopoeia	0	0	1	E	F	G	H			
punctuation	0	0	3	0	2	0	0			
emoticons	0	0	0	5	16	2	2			
repetition of letters	0	0	0	0	1	0	0			

Table 6.5 shows that the native-speaker use of CMC conventions bears similarity to that of the learners in that some participants used them a lot, while others hardly employed them at all. AS made considerable use of ‘...’ for pauses, while JR made use of punctuation for a variety of functions. The most obvious difference was the native-speaker use of abbreviations such as *coz/coz*, *defo* for *definitely* and *c'mon* for *come on*. The learners did not make any use of these kind of abbreviations. The natives-speakers also used a variety of forms of *yeah*, *yup*, and *yep* as well as colloquialisms. These will be explored further in section 6.5. What was clearly absent from the native-speaker dataset was the use of emoticons.

Table 6.5 CMC conventions used by native-speakers

Task 2	AS	CD	JR	KL	AB
punctuation	21	1	9	2	10
onomatopoeia	5	1	1	6	0
abbreviations	7	1	2	2	0
actions	0	0	1	0	0
Task 3					
punctuation	9	2	9	3	
onomatopoeia	1	0	1	1	
abbreviations	2	1	1	1	

6.5 Research question 4: What errors would the learners make? Could these be used as the basis of a structural syllabus?

This section of the chapter will present the findings of this study in relation to errors and missed opportunities. The results from three different analyses will be given for each task. First of all, the findings from the error analysis of the ESOL transcripts will be provided. It should also be noted here that a selection of the error profiles created for each task can be seen in appendix XIII. Secondly, insights relating to errors arising from the functional analysis of all available data sets are presented. Finally, findings from the comparative analysis of the native-speaker and learner data sets will be given.

6.5.1 Errors from task 1 interactions.

6.5.1.1. Error Analysis of ESOL student data from task 1

Table 6.6 shows that the majority of errors made by the ESOL learners in this task were morphological and table 6.7 demonstrates that nearly all of these were problems with prepositions and determiners. Most of the prepositional errors were due to misselection. There were several difficulties with determiners when describing the pieces of paper. Most determiner errors were extremely varied

however, with the task profile demonstrating that many of these were specific to a few students. For example, student C2 seems to be over-using the definite article. Subject/verb agreement errors also seem only to be problematic for two particular students.

Table 6.6 Error analysis of task 1 interactions

Substance Level		Text Level		
Typographic	Spelling	Grammar		Lexis
		Syntax	Morphology	
17	22	28	78	27
10%	13%	16%	45%	16%

Table 6.7 - Frequency and type of morphological errors – task 1

Determiners	27
Prepositions	20
Nominal inflections	3
Auxiliaries	6
Pronouns	2
Adverbs	2
Subject/verb agreement	10
Tense	4
Word class	3
Countable/uncountable nouns	1

There appears to be no particular pattern emerging from the syntactic error profile although it is noticeable that group A made only three syntactic errors. Most of the errors are due to omission of sentence constituents or misordering. Student B1 seems to have particular difficulties with word order while student B2 made several omission errors.

Common lexical problems arose from naming the ink bottle/pot, speech bubble, and the dots following the bee. There was also some confusion between *above* and *on top of*. None of the students knew the word *quill* but most successfully managed to describe it as a *feather pen*, which was not considered erroneous. Another common problem resulted from attempts to describe the pieces of paper, with students using *sheets* or *papers* and various approximations of *crumpled up*.

6.5.1.2 Task 1 errors related to function

A functional approach to errors analysis provided interesting results. The function that proved particularly problematic in relation this task was comparing and contrasting pictures. Both the exchange and ESOL datasets highlighted the complex nature of performing this function which results from two inter-related factors. Firstly, the discourse structure of text-based CMC requires that participants must refer back to the utterance they are making comparisons with in order to avoid ambiguity. The expression used must repeat certain parts of the utterance they are making the comparison with. Extracts 1 to 4 exemplify learners doing this successfully. In extract 1, B2 conveys that her picture is the same as B1's picture by referring to the bin described by B1 as *that bin* and reporting that she also has it using *too*. In extract 2, F3 has to repeat the subject and verb used in F1's utterance to perform this function. In extract 3, student B1 is conveying the contrast between her picture and B2's picture by repeating the subject and positive form of the verb that B2 has used. In extract 4, F2 uses *Mine* to replace F3's *My Shakespeare*, ellipsis the verb *is* and uses *too* to show they are the same. Although many of the learners circumvented these difficulties by writing only yes or no to show whether the descriptions were the same or different, many errors did result. Extracts 5-7 illustrate some of the wide-ranging difficulties that learners had in performing this function.

Extract 1

B1: he as a bin full with pictures next to him on the floor

B2: I have that bin in my picture too

Extract 2

F1: there are some nails on the frontal side of the table

F3: yes there are

Extract 3

B1: on the top of his head can you see a been?

B2: What do you mean by been?

B1: Oops I am sorry I mean bee

B2: nope there isn't !

B1: in my picture there is

Extract 4

F2: My Shakespeare is bold!

F3: Mine too

Extract 5

E1: There is dustbin near the desk.

E2: yes, me too

Extract 6

B1: the eyes of Shakespeare is looking up and he is holding a feather pen in his right hand.

B3: so do in my picture.

Extract 7

A3: there is a pen in the box

A2: not to me

6.5.1.3 Missed opportunities in task 1

Although no native-speaker data was available for this task, it could be predicted that native-speakers might employ a lot of vague language when describing the picture. Some vague language was found in the student data but several missed opportunities were identified as students attempted approximate descriptions but without the use of vague language making their utterances sound rather unnatural. Examples of these utterances are shown in table 6.8 alongside possible reformulations using vague language. Another potential missed opportunity is the use of the discourse marker so far to summarise the state of play. An example of a student utterance reformulated using this marker is also shown in table 6.8.

Table 6.8 Missed opportunities for vague language and discourse markers

Student utterance	Reformulation using vague language
(it's) a box like a circle	it's a box like thing but kind of like a circle
something is flying but I can't see what it is	there's this sort of flying thing
the box looks like an apple	it looks a bit like an apple
(the sheet which is on the table) is like a rubbish	looks kind of like rubbish
(describing the eyebrow) is a short, turning	it's quite short, kind of turning
does the front of the table have little dots across	does the front of the table have like these little dots kind of going across
Student utterance	Reformulation using <i>so far</i>
Until now we found 3 differences	That's 3 differences so far

7.5.1.4 Impeding errors in task 1

None of the errors produced by the ESOL or Exchange groups did or would be likely to result in communication breakdown except for the lexical one shown in extract 8. It might also cause some amusement and embarrassment if spoken to a native-speaker. The students are trying to talk about Shakespeare's beard but do not know the word in English.

Extract 8

F2: he has a moustache down

F3: and knob?

F1: my man has a moustache

F3: a moustache down I think is a knob

6.5.2 Errors resulting from task 2 interactions

6.5.2.1. Error analysis of ESOL student data from task 2

It can be seen from table 6.9 that the errors produced by ESOL learners in task 2 were similar to those in task 1 in that the majority were morphological. Despite the fact that this was a focussed task, with modals of deduction being task-natural, only four of the morphological errors were connected to their use. Modals did, however,

seem to cause some syntactic problems with over-inclusion being the main problem. A typical example of this is: *'It must have been the vase the weapon'*. The continuous/simple aspect also caused a few problems to some students. Most of the other errors made were learner specific. Student A3, for example, made two attempts at the third conditional but was unable to form the verbs correctly. Again, it is noticeable that group A made only two syntactic errors. All the lexical errors made were learner specific.

Table 6.9 Error analysis of task 2 interactions

Substance Level		Text Level		
Typographic	Spelling	Grammar		Lexis
		Syntax	Morphology	
5	7	14	39	17
6%	8%	17%	48%	21%

Table 6.10 Frequency and type of morphological errors— task 2

Determiners	10
Prepositions	6
Nominal inflections	1
Auxiliaries	4
Pronouns	3
Tense	6
Word class	3
modal verbs	3
conditional verb forms	3

6.5.2.2 Task 2 error related to function

The functional analysis of the ESOL student data and the native-speaker data collected for task 2 revealed learner difficulties in expressing two core functions: introducing speculations and deductions and agreeing with interlocutors' ideas. Each of these will be summarised in turn below.

Introducing speculations and deductions.

The majority of students made effective use of the hedging expressions *I think/I don't think* to introduce their opinions with one occurrence of *I guess* also appearing

in the learner data. However, table 6.11 shows some inappropriate expressions identified in the learner data. Alongside these, more appropriate target expressions are suggested. Native-speakers also predominantly used *I think* to express this function but other expressions were also found in the data and are shown in Table 6.12.

Table 6.11 Unnatural sounding exponents used by ESOL Learners to introduce speculations and deductions:

Expression used	Target expression
In my opinion	I think
I strongly believe that	I (really) think
I do not agree that	I don't think that
I think (followed by negative statement)	I don't think that

Table 6.12 Exponents used by native-speakers to introduce speculations and deductions:

Expression used	Frequency
I (somehow) think/ don't think	19
I reckon	1
I still think	1
I don't see how	1
I can't really see how	1
I guess	1

Agreeing with interlocutors' opinions

The ESOL learners tended to focus on expressing their own ideas rather than agreeing and disagreeing with each other's contributions. Table 6.13 shows that when they did, however, they mainly used complete clauses and expressions commonly taught in published ELT material. The native-speaker transcripts in contrast, revealed a wide range of expressions for agreeing and disagreeing which were often elliptical in form, and consisted of various forms of *yes*. The full list of expressions used are shown in appendix XXII. Use of ellipsis by one learner could have avoided the production of the two unnatural sounding expressions as demonstrated in Table 6.14.

Table 6.13 Exponents used by ESOL Learners to agree and disagree with interlocutors' contributions.

Expression used	Frequency of use
yes	2
I agree with what X said	1
yes, it is possible	1
I agree with you, X	1
maybe you are right, X	1
it sounds logical	1

Table 6.14 Inappropriate expressions used by ESOL learners to agree and disagree with interlocutors' contributions.

Expression used	Target expression	Frequency used
Possibly I agree with you	possibly	1
I do not agree with the possibilities	I don't agree <with what you've said>	1

Missed opportunities in task 2

Comparison of the native-speaker and ESOL datasets for this task revealed that there were several potential areas for language development. Firstly, native-speakers used a much wider range of expressions to speculate and make deductions than the learners did. Moreover, the native-speaker transcripts contained a large amount of ellipsis, extensive use of a variety of discourse markers and a large amount of informal language including multi-word verbs, colloquial expressions and idioms. All of these were almost completely absent from the ESOL data. Findings of each of these linguistic features will be presented in more detail below. Finally, examples of native-speaker utterances which could be considered erroneous are included in this section.

Tables 6.15 and 6.16 show the frequency of grammatical and lexical exponents used to express speculation and deduction by native-speakers and ESOL learners respectively. The results demonstrate that all participants made extensive use of modal verbs and *maybe* followed by a clause to realise these functions. However, the native speakers used a much wider range of lexical phrases and the more complex progressive forms of modals of deduction. ESOL learners also produced a

relatively large number of errors with simple modal constructions. Further evidence of this is provided in section 7.5.2.

Table 6.15 Exponents employed by native-speakers to realise the functions of speculation and deduction.

Exponents used	Frequency of Use	% of dyads used by
must could might + be can't	14	100
might be + verb+ing	1	20
must could might + have + past participle of verb can't	17	100
must might have been + verb + ing can't	3	20
it could have been X that	1	20
seems to be/have been	2	20
seems like/sounds like	3	40
It's (almost) certainly/definitely	2	20
maybe + clause	14	100
...possibly.....	2	40
It's bound to be ..	1	20
It's (most) likely/unlikely that...	2	40
There's always the chance that	1	20
My money is on	1	20

Table 6.16 Exponents employed by ESOL Learners to realise the functions of speculation and deduction.

Exponents used	Frequency of use	Percentage of groups used by
must could might + be can't	14 (9)	33%
must could might + have + past participle can't	7 (1)	66%
It's (almost) certainly/definitely	2 (2)	33%
maybe + clause	6	66%
...possibly.....	1 (1)	33%

Note: Figures in brackets show frequency of inappropriate use of these forms.

Task Management Functions

Neither the ESOL learners nor the native-speakers devoted much attention to managing the task. The native-speakers however, used a greater range of expressions. Examples of expressions used by both groups can be found in appendix XXIII.

The native-speakers frequently employed ellipsis in their discussion. In fact, on average, 25% of all the native-speaker turns contained ellipsis. Table 6.17 shows the frequency of ellipsis and a summary of the types of ellipsis identified in the native-speaker transcripts can be found in appendix XXIV. Only two examples (2% of the turns) of ellipsis could be found from the ESOL learners' transcripts.

Table 6.17 Frequency of ellipsis in native-speaker discussions of task 2

Dyad	Frequency	% turns
JR	39	23%
KL	18	31%
AS	28	22%
CD	25	23%
AB	16	26%

Native-speakers used a wide range of discourse markers in task 2, a total of 20 in all. All five dyads used *and* and *but*, *so*, *ok* and *actually* were used by four of the five dyads. Group C of the ESOL learners also used a variety of discourse markers but group A and B used only *and* and *but*. When the proportion of turns containing discourse markers was calculated, it was found that 21% of turns contained discourse markers in the native-speaker transcripts and 17% of ESOL turns contained discourse markers. However, on average, only 11% of turns contained discourse markers in the transcripts of ESOL Groups A and B, whereas the transcript from ESOL Group C revealed that 23% of turns, on average, contained discourse markers. The following section will highlight some of the qualitative differences between learner and native-speaker use of discourse markers.

The function of the majority of discourse markers in both sets of data was referential. For example, in extract 9, B uses *and* as a coordinating conjunction to add another clause to T's. In extract 10, S uses *but* to introduce a contrasting idea to that of A and in extract 11, B uses *but* to add a contrastive clause to her previous utterance. In extract 12, J uses *cos* to provide R the reason why he thinks the victim was killed in answer to R's question.

Extract 9

T: they were wearing red

B: **and** red was found in the room

Extract 10

A: Well maybe he wanted the money straight away

S: **but** why would he jeopardise getting caught and killing for something he will get anyway?

Extract 11

T: his wife brought him the cup though

T: and she found him dead

B: yeah and it probably had poison in it

B: **but** someone had beat her to it

Extract 12

R: Why

J: **Cos** he was a cheating dog

The native-speaker data set also contained a large number of interpersonal discourse markers in contrast to the learner data which contained very few. The main functions of these were to acknowledge interlocutors' contributions and indicate attitudes. Extracts 13 and 14 show examples of *yep* and *yeah* being used to provide feedback to the co-participant. Learners on the other hand used *yes* and/or more formal expression such as *I agree with you* to respond to one another as demonstrated in extract 15. Extract 14 provides an example of *actually* being employed to indicate the participant's attitude to the content of the following utterance, which in this case is that she finds it strange or unexpected.

Extract 13

S: and I'm ruling out Susie for several reasons:

S: She doesn't smoke

A: *yep*

Extract 14

K: And if it was a dinner party why was he off in his study?

L: **Yeah actually** why is she bringing bedtime cocoa if they're entertaining?

Extract 15

C2: I don't think that it was his wife that killed Alec

C2: because she was the one that found him died

D3: Yes, anyway, **I agree with you** C2.

The most common structural discourse marker employed by learners and native-speakers was *so* to summarise the state of play. Another example of a structural discourse marker employed by native-speakers is *then* which was used by J, as shown in extract 16, to sequence events.

Extract 16

J: He could have dropped Alice and she moidered him as revenge

J: **then** Mrs C came in and found his body

The cognitive discourse markers *I mean* and *I meant* was used by several native-speakers to repair their utterances, as shown in extract 17, and elaborate on previous utterances, as shown in extract 18.

Extract 17

C: yeah I still think it was the maid

C: no **I mean** the wife

Extract 18

S: are we sure it's Mrs C then?

A: Well I guess it's most likely. **I mean** it says that Daniel and Mr F were watching TV til at least 11.05 but we don't know any more than that. From the evidence we have I think it's Mrs C.

The native-speaker data sets provided evidence for the multifunctional nature of the discourse marker *so*. As mentioned above, it was used primarily with the referential function of showing consequence and the structural function of summarising opinions. However, it was also used once with the structural function of opening the topic/discussion. In extract 19, for example, J uses *so* to introduce the consequence of R's previous utterance. In extract 19, the first *so* is employed by R to summarise information the participants have gleaned from the task so far. Similarly, in extract 20, K uses *so* to summarise what the participants had previously discussed. In extract 21, *so* is employed by student C2 to signal to her interlocutors that they should begin discussing the task.

Extract 19

R: ok. **so** we know he died between 11 and 11:15 when he was found

J: **so** it can't be Susie

Extract 20

K: Where was Mrs Fairfax though? His motive could be jealousy?

K: **So** we have 3 strong motives but what about opportunity and means?

Extract 21

D3: hi guys

C2: Hello! **So** people

D2: hello

The discourse marker *ok* was also employed by the native-speakers for a variety of functions. In extract 22, J uses *ok* to respond to R's previous utterance and therefore can be classified as interpersonal. In extract 23, *ok* is more difficult to categorise. It could be argued that B is responding to A's previous utterance and is therefore interpersonal. It could also be argued that it is functioning to bring the discussion to a close and elicit a conclusion from the interlocutor.

Extract 22

R: mrs crabtree, mrs fairfax and daniel all wore red

J: **Ok**, my moneys on Mrs C.

Extract 23

A: It also fits in with the fact that a lot of killers return to the scene of the crime to re-live it.

B: **ok**....who do we think did it?

Another form worthy of mention found in the native-speaker transcripts but absent from the learner transcripts was the historic present. As would be expected, all participants predominantly used the past-simple to re-tell the sequence of events surrounding the murder. However, at one stage of the discussion, one native-speaker participant employs the present simple (historic present) demonstrated in extract 24. This has the stylistic effect of making the story sound more dramatic which is a common technique in spoken story-telling. As the conversation continues, past forms of the verb are reverted to.

Extract 24

B: I think Mrs Fairfax went to confront mr crabtree about not turning up at the garden

B: he didn't know because he never received the letter

A: that sounds plausible, she **goes** in on the bounce as she **thinks** she has been spurned.

A: maybe he was writing a letter to say their affair was over. he **tells** her and she **gets** angry and **smacks** him with the nearest object..a vase.

Other forms found in the native-speaker data but not in the ESOL data were two forms used to describe plans that didn't materialise: *was about to* and *was going to*. In addition, the native-speaker transcripts were lexically dense and three particular aspects of lexis were identified in the native-speaker data which were almost completely absent from the ESOL data: multi-word verbs, idiomatic expressions and colloquial expressions. Findings from the analysis of each of these three aspects of lexis will be presented in more details below.

Native-speaker transcripts of task 2 contained an extremely high frequency of multi-word verbs. A total of 31 different multi-word verbs with idiomatic meanings and 14 with literal meanings were identified from the native-speaker discussions. The complete list of these verbs and their meanings are presented in appendix XXV. ESOL learners, however, used only one multiword-verb with idiomatic meaning, *get rid of*, and 4 with literal meanings. These are also shown in appendix XXV.

Native-speaker transcripts of task 2 contained a range of idiomatic expressions and a large amount of colloquial and non-standard language, none of which was identified in the learner dataset. These expressions are listed next to their meanings in context in appendix XXVI. Native-speakers also used 7 different synonyms for the word hit: *wallop, bludgeon, clobber, whack, bosh, bash, smack*. ESOL learners used only the word *hit*.

Native-speaker ‘errors’ identified in task 2 interactions

Several occurrences of forms were identified in the native-speaker transcripts that had they occurred in the ESOL data might have been deemed erroneous. In fact, one of these utterances had been found in the native speaker data and highlighted as an error. The sentence was: *X loved Y*. The teacher/researcher thought that the more appropriate expression would be *X was in love with Y*. Another example involved the choice between the past simple and the past continuous. One native-speaker wrote *She didn’t wear red*. Another wrote *they all wore red*. Had they occurred in the ESOL data they would almost certainly have been categorised as errors on the basis that the past continuous form of the verb would be more appropriate. However, clearly the native-speakers have chosen the past simple for a particular reason, possibly not to emphasise the action at the specific time of the murder but rather simply to focus on past states.

Multi-word verbs with literal meaning provided several other examples of what might be considered ‘erroneous’ native-speaker language use. Despite the fact that such expressions may occur in spoken language, it was felt that had they occurred in the learner data they would likely have been flagged as errors. Three of the five native-speaker transcripts contained multi-word verbs with a missing component. Table 6.18 shows all the examples and the missing components of the phrase.

Table 6.18 Multi-word verbs with component missing

Dyad	phrase	missing component
CD	come in ◊the front door jumped out ◊the window walked in ◊the front door	through of through
KL	went out ◊the window gone out ◊ the window	through through
JR	come in ◊ the window coming out ◊the window climb out ◊the window	through through through

6.5.3 Errors from task 3 interactions

6.5.3.1. Error analysis of ESOL student data from task 2

Table 6.19 Error analysis of task 3 ESOL interactions

Substance Level		Text Level		
Typographic	Spelling	Grammar		Lexis
		Syntax	Morphology	
20	25	23	46	39
13%	16%	15%	30%	26%

Table 6.19 reveals that morphological errors again outweighed syntactical errors made in task 3. In comparison with the previous task, however, a larger proportion of lexical errors were made. Many of these arose from the difficulty students had in introducing their opinions or decisions or from trying to paraphrase the input. In fact, many of the text level errors can be attributed to this. Some examples of erroneous expression found in the transcripts are given below:

Lexical

I think Albert Smith should **take* the scholarship because (✓ get/be awarded)

Carole is not **acceptable* (suitable)

Syntactic

I think we should consider him **to get* the scholarship (✓ for the scholarship)

I don't agree **with them* (✓ that they should get...)

Morphological

I vote **in* Edward Mbaka (✓ for)

Many of the syntactic errors are due to verb complementation. This also caused some problems for group A, who made many more syntactic errors here than in the previous two tasks. Table 6.20 shows again that the greatest proportion of morphological errors are due to determiners. It can be seen by referring to the profile that most of these errors have resulted from the omission of articles. Other common morphological errors came from modal verbs. Although there were only 7 types of modal error, there were many tokens of the same error. Typical problems

were caused by the overuse of *must* and use of *will* rather than *would* for hypothetical situations.

Table 6.20 Frequency and type of morphological errors– task 3

Determiners	17
Prepositions	6
Nominal inflections	1
Auxiliaries	4
Pronouns	2
Subject/verb agreement	2
Tense	4
Modal verbs	7
Adverbs	3
Total	46

Task 3 errors in relation to function

Functional analysis of the ESOL and exchange data sets revealed three functions which proved problematic for some learners: suggesting recipients for the scholarship, speculating and task management functions. The main findings related to each of these functions will be summarised below.

Suggesting recipients for the scholarship

Suggesting recipients for the scholarship is one of the core functions required to perform task 3 and as noted above, this function resulted in a large number of errors in the ESOL transcripts. Further analysis of both the exchange and ESOL data sets revealed two important themes. Firstly, the number of ways to perform this function was seemingly infinite, with more than one use of the same phrase being rare. Secondly, in terms of error, this function seemed to cause the exchange students significantly less difficulty. In order to illustrate this quantitatively, all the utterances used to perform this function were classified according to the following system:

OK – utterance both grammatically and lexically correct and would likely to be used by a native speaker in the same context

E - Utterance contained grammatical and/or lexical errors

U- Utterance contained no grammatical or lexical errors but unlikely to be used by a native-speaker in the same context

? – Unable to confidently assign the utterance to any of the above categories

The number of utterances in each category was then summed. As table 6.21 shows, only 31% of the phrases used by exchange students to perform this function were considered problematic whereas 65% of those used by ESOL students were.

Table 6.21 Quantitative analysis of errors occurring in phrases used to perform the function of suggesting recipients for the scholarship.

ESOL Students				Exchange Students			
OK	E	U	?	OK	E	U	?
26%	47%	18%	9%	63%	20%	11%	6%

Some examples of phrases used to perform this function which were deemed problematic are shown in extracts 25-27. Extract 25 was considered erroneous for several reasons. First of all, *take* does not collocate with *scholarship*. The most natural collocation would be the informal *get* but the more neutral *receive* would also be a common collocation. The second issue is the use of a negative statement after *I think* rather than the tendency in English to use *I don't think* followed by a positive statement. Thirdly, the use of *must* is problematic. *Must* has several functions in English (see Carter and McCarthy, 2006:655 for a summary) but is often used to convey obligation and indicate rules and laws. The more appropriate choice of modal verb here would be *should*, since the speaker is expressing a suggestion. This phrase could thus be reformulated as: *I don't think that X should get the scholarship*. This utterance was therefore assigned to the **E** category.

The phrase in extract 26 is perfectly formed grammatically. However, it is the use of *I believe* which sounds unnatural. It is unlikely that a native-speaker in this context would use *I believe* in this context. Although both *I think* and *I believe* are considered hedges, *I believe* in this context sounds too assertive. It was therefore assigned to the **U** category.

In extract 27, the utterance could not easily be classified. It was considered that a native-speaker would be more likely to use *I'd go for X* in this context but there is also the possibility that a native-speaker might use this present simple form to convey the immediacy of their thoughts, in other words to express a spontaneous decision. This utterance was therefore assigned to the ? category.

Extract 25

I think that X mustn't take the scholarship

Extract 26

I believe that the best person for the scholarship is X

Extract 27

I go for X

Making predictions and speculating about the future

Another core function worthy of further investigation was that of making predictions and speculating about the future. Both groups of students successfully used a range of forms to perform this function. These are shown in table 6.22. However, this function also elicited several types of error which are summarised in table 6.23.

Table 6.22 Forms used to make predictions and speculate about the future.

Form	Example
will/won't	he won't have enough time to spend on studying
maybe + will	maybe one day she'll know that
will probably	she'll probably be a very good student
first conditional	If he fails he will have another job to feed his family
when/once + present simple, will/won't + verb	once she gets married, she won't be able to..
may	she may never get married
BE going to	she isn't going to focus on learning
might	he might will use it for dirty purposes
could	he could go back to Africa
would/wouldn't	I'm sure he wouldn't like to go back to taxi-driving

Table 6.23 Examples of typical errors made in performing the functions of making predictions and speculating about the future.

Type of error	Example
<i>can</i> instead of <i>could</i> to express possibility	He can return to his native state
<i>present simple</i> instead of <i>will</i>	studying law is difficult for him
double modal (or possibly typing error)	he might will use it for dirty purposes
<i>maybe + cannot</i> instead of <i>might not be able to</i>	maybe he cannot combine his social life with his family
<i>will</i> instead of <i>present simple</i>	if X will get another mental breakdown nobody will profit

Task management functions

Students made varied use of the different task management functions and produced a range of different expressions, many of which were considered erroneous or unnatural. Some typical examples of such utterances and suggested reformulations are shown in appendix XXVII.

Missed opportunities

Another observation from the analysis of phrases used to perform the function of suggesting a recipient for the scholarship is that students rarely used *it* to refer to the *scholarship*. It could have been assumed that all participants would be able to understand this reference but it was rarely used. In the phrases used by the ESOL learners *the scholarship* occurred 15 times and was only replaced with *it* once. In the exchange dataset *the scholarship* occurred 5 times and was referred to as *it* once. Although native-speaker data was not available for this task, it is likely that most-native speakers would make more use of *it* rather than repeating the word *scholarship*.

6.5.4 Errors from task 4 interactions

6.5.4.1 Error analysis of ESOL student data

Table 6.24 illustrates the fact that task 4 interactions contained a much higher number and proportion of syntactic errors than the previous three tasks. Many of

these were the result of verb complementation difficulties. Many of the misorder syntactic errors were made by students in group C and most of these seem to arise from a difficulty in adverb placement. Students A1 and A3 also seem to be having difficulties with relative clauses, repeating the subject rather than replacing it with the relative pronoun. This seems to be a recurring problem for student C2 in particular.

Most lexical errors were student specific. The only common problem was the use of *take* rather than *get* or *acquire* to discuss the ease of which one can acquire guns in their respective countries.

Table 6.24 Error analysis of task 4 interactions

Substance Level		Text Level		
Typographic	Spelling	Grammar		Lexis
		Syntax	Morphology	
12	22	37	60	34
7%	13%	33%	36%	21%

The breakdown of morphological errors in table 6.25 below shows that again determiners are causing the majority of problems, with all of these being learner specific. The problematic modal verbs from task 3 also caused problems in this task, although were not as common. Another source of difficulty, particularly for student A1, seemed to arise from not using plural forms to talk about people and things in general.

Table 6.25 Frequency and type of morphological errors – task 4

Determiners	18
Prepositions	6
Nominal inflections	7
Auxiliaries	3
Quantifiers	1
Subject/verb agreement	7
Tense	4
Passive formation	1
Modal verbs	5
Word class	7
Total	60

6.5.4.2 Task 4 errors related to function

Analysis of the three data sets revealed several areas that would warrant further investigation. These included: expressions used to introduce opinions about the questions in the task, agreeing with interlocutors, task management functions, *if* sentences, uses of *would*, and cohesive devices. The findings of each of these will be presented in turn below.

Introducing opinions about the questions in the task.

Native-speakers used virtually without exception, the phrases *I think* or *I don't think* to introduce their opinions as shown in table 6.26. These phrases also featured extremely frequently in the ESOL and exchange data sets. The learners also used a range of other expressions, some of which were considered natural in English. Many others, however, were deemed to be problematic because either they contained grammatical errors or they sounded unnatural. Examples of the expressions used as well as those considered inappropriate are presented in appendix XXVIII.

Table 6.26 Phrases employed by native-speakers to introduce opinions about the questions in the task.

Expressions Used for Introducing Opinions based on the questions in the task	Frequency	Proportion of dyads used by
I think/don't think	12	100%
I don't agree <with that statement>	2	50%

Responding to interlocutors' statements

Although this function produced relatively few occurrences of inappropriate expressions from the learners, it has been selected for further discussion for another reason: the learner data revealed a wider range of expressions used to perform this function successfully than the native-speaker data, although it should be noted that direct comparisons should be made with caution because much more learner data was available. The expressions used by native-speakers to respond in a positive way

to utterances of co-participants were predominantly very short and frequently made use of the discourse marker *yeah*, as was found in the transcripts of task 2 discussions. However, *yeah* was rarely used by the learners, they instead employed the standard *yes* form. Learners also employed a wider range of more complex phrases to perform this function with few errors. A complete list of expressions used by the different groups of participants are shown in appendix XXIX. This appendix also shows the errors which learners made, one of which is illustrated in extract 28. Extract 29 illustrates the problematic nature of error analysis since the meaning of *I wanted to say this* is unclear. The context suggests that H2 is agreeing with H1 but it would be necessary to question the user of this utterance to confirm the meaning. Only one transcript, that of group J, contained any instances of participants disagreeing with their interlocutors. The examples found are shown in appendix XXIX.

Extract 28

J1: It's no possible to get a free gun of course

J2: you need to have a licence for using guns

J3: yes i agree on it

Extract 29

H1: yes, education I think is the most important

H2: your child ages

H1: the environment you live too

H2: I want to say this

H2: I wanted to say this

Task management

Few task management expressions were employed by the native-speakers. Since native-speakers had been sent the task as a Word document into the chat messaging area, their most frequent method of moving the task forward was to cut and paste the questions from this document. This method was used mostly (4 times) by one dyad but was employed once by another dyad. Each of the other phrases used to manage the task by native speakers, shown in appendix XXX, was used only once. The

majority of these expressions demonstrated ellipsis of the subject and verb whereas the majority of phrases used by learners to move the task forward consisted of complete clauses. These can be seen in appendix XXX. This function also elicited a number of inappropriate uses of language from learners also shown in appendix XXX. Two of these expressions could not easily be reformulated into target forms because there is no equivalent expression. The native speakers in this study did not directly refer to the statements probably because this was assumed to be shared information. Extracts 30 and 31 show the full utterance in which the expressions were contained. In fact, extracts 30 and 31 both demonstrate that the reference to the question is superfluous since the subsequent comments make it clear which question is being referred to.

Extract 30

H1: about the third question, I think that probably this is a result of the gun laws

Extract 31

G2: According to the second question I understand people saying that they want to defend their families

Missed opportunities

Comparison of the native-speaker transcripts with the learner transcripts for task 4 revealed several areas for potential language development. These included *if* sentences, uses of *would* and cohesive devices. Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

***If* sentences**

One of the core structures for task 4 was the *if* sentence and a large number of such structures was found in all three data sets. The native-speaker data set contained a total of seventeen *if* sentences. Fourteen of these could be categorised into the traditional conditional clauses taught in ELT grammar and course books. A summary of these can be found in appendix XXXI. Sentences which did not fit into these categories are shown in extracts 32-35. Extracts 32 and 33 could be

categorised as mixed conditionals as they contain features of both the first and second conditional. For example, the first clause in the sentence shown in extract 32 contains a question form with the present form of the modal verb *can*. The *if* clause which follows it contains a past simple verb. Extract 33 contains a present simple form of the verb in the *if* clause and *would* in the subsequent clause. Extract 34 demonstrates quite a complex structure since the *if* clause contains a further subordinate nominal clause, *all you've been exposed to*, which is functioning as the complement of the clause which follows. The sentence in extract 35 does not contain an *if* but is mentioned here because it conveys a similar meaning to a first conditional sentence. It could be reformulated thus: *If you give someone something for free that kills stuff then people will use it to well kill stuff*.

The learners also used traditionally taught conditionals. These are also shown in appendix XXXI. Two *if* sentences found in the exchange transcripts could not be easily corrected or categorised and these are shown in extracts 36 and 37 with suggested reformulations.

The most obvious difference between the native-speaker occurrences of *if* sentences and those of the learners was the inclusion of *then*. Of the 17 *if* sentences used by native-speakers, eight contained *then* in the result clause. An example is shown in extract 38. Only one occurrence of *then* used in this way was found in the learner data sets.

Extract 32

can you imagine anyone taking us seriously if we did that?

Extract 33

if someone comes into your house with a gun then maybe you'd also want one to protect yourself

Extract 34

I can see that this causes quite a stir especially if all you've been exposed to is the legalisation of weapons in your country

Extract 35

give people something for free that kills stuff and people are going to use it to ..well..kill stuff

Extract 36

H1: if a lot of people have guns don't mean they are in the right way to solve their problems

Reformulation: just because a lot of people have guns it doesn't mean it's the right way to solve their problems

Extract 37

J1: if without to get guns easily there are murders, imagine if we could have guns in our houses

Reformulation: if there are murders when it's difficult to get guns, imagine what it would be like if it was easy

Extract 38

if nobody had guns *then* it would be fine

Use of would

Analysis of the native-speaker transcripts revealed that the participants employed *would* to perform a variety of functions. A summary of these is shown in appendix XXXI. Three of the four examples which express the result of an imaginary situation are in fact the results of an absent *if* clause. The participant clearly assumes that the interlocutor understands that he or she is referring to the idea of guns being given away when opening a bank account. Learners, on the other hand, only used *would* as part of a conditional sentence or to express a preference with *rather*.

Cohesion

Native-speakers used a range of cohesive devices to perform task 4. These included reference words, ellipsis and substitution. Although learners also made use of reference words, the ESOL students, but not the exchange students, appeared to do so in a different way to the native-speakers. Ellipsis and substitution were rarely made use of by the learners. The following section will present data to illustrate these points.

Reference and substitution

An initial observation emerging from the analysis of native-speaker and ESOL learner transcripts in relation to cohesion was that the native-speakers seemed to be using reference devices differently to the ESOL learners. A quantitative analysis of all the pronouns and demonstratives referring either anaphorically to utterances in the interaction or exophorically to sentences from the task conformed this hypothesis. The analysis revealed that the pronouns and demonstratives used by native-speakers predominantly pointed either towards referents in previous turns, or were exophoric (78%). In contrast, the ESOL learners made use of reference devices to point backwards to referents within the same turn (71%). Examples of this phenomenon are shown in extracts 39 and 40. In extract 39, J uses *they* to refer to gun laws which is mentioned in question 3 of the task. In contrast, in extract 40, C2 uses *they* to refer back to *police* which is mentioned earlier in the same utterance. The ESOL learners often unnecessarily repeated the word *gun(s)* whereas the native-speakers used the pronoun *them* to refer to guns in general. ESOL learners also used these cohesive devices but usually to refer back to *gun(s)* within the same turn. Extract 41 illustrates this repetition.

Extract 39

J: *They* are very strict

R: extremely

Extract 39

C2: to have gun in my country you need to go to the police and ask permission.

They analyse your case

Extract 41

C2: In my country is very strict about to have a **gun**.

D2: In my country, it is impossible to get a **gun**

D3: Impossible?

D2: Yes, impossible.

D3: Any kind of **gun**?

C2: To have a **gun** in my country you need to go to the police and ask permission.
You need to prove that you really need a one.

C3: In my country, civil people are not allowed to carry **guns** without authorisation.
I find it completely ridiculous to get a free **gun** just from opening a bank account.

Ellipsis and substitution

As in task 2, the native-speaker transcripts contained a large amount of ellipsis. In addition, unlike the learners, native-speakers often substituted *one* for *gun*. Few examples of ellipsis could be found in the ESOL and exchange student data set however. To demonstrate missed opportunities for reference, ellipsis and substitution, extract 41 has been re-written using all three of the cohesive devices mentioned in this section. The result is shown in extract 42 below with the changes made highlighted in bold.

Extract 42

C2: In my country **they are very strict**.

D2: In my country, it is impossible to get **one**

D3: Impossible?

D2: Yes, impossible.

D3: Any kind **<of gun>**?

C2: **<to have one in my country >** you need to go to the police and ask permission.
You need to prove that you really need **one**.

C3: In my country, civil people are not allowed to carry **them** without authorisation.
I find it completely ridiculous to get **one** free just from opening a bank account.

6.5.5 Problematic detection of errors

The opinions of the group of teachers regarding the four problematic utterances are shown in table 6.27 below. The table demonstrates that, with the exception of the third utterance, there is not agreement among the teachers.

Table 6.27 Opinions of teachers regarding problematic utterances in task 1

Utterance	Number of teachers who thought the utterance erroneous	Number of teachers who thought the utterance not erroneous	Reformulations
the eyes of Shakespeare are looking up	4	1	Shakespeare is looking up(wards) (3) Shakespeare's eyes are looking up
there is a piece of paper with scribbles of writing	4	1	there is a piece of paper with writing on it there is a piece of paper with writing scribbled on it there's a piece of paper with scribbles on it He is scribbling something there's a piece of paper covered with scribbles
he has done many bad things in his life	0	5	
I think there is no such relationship	1	4	I don't see the connection

6.6 Research question 5 : Would the text-based nature of communication encourage learners to notice their own errors? Would learners be able to correct their own errors with or without scaffolding?

In order to answer these questions, the ESOL student data was analysed, first of all to find out if learners corrected their own errors while on task and secondly to find whether other errors could be corrected in the post-task stage. The findings of both investigations will now be presented.

6.6.1 Correction of slips

The number of typing errors (slips) made in each task, and the number and percentage of these that were repaired during task, are shown in table 6.28.

Table 6.28 Number of slips repaired for each task.

	<u>Task 1</u>	<u>Task 2</u>	<u>Task 3</u>	<u>Task 4</u>
Number of typing errors	17	5	20	12
Number of typing errors repaired	6	4	1	7
Percentage typing errors repaired	35%	80%	5%	58%
Other errors repaired	1	0	1	0

Generally, students did not repair slips as a result of typing. Only 6 students made any attempt to correct their own slips with student A3 and student B3 both very conscientious in the monitoring of their typing errors. Only two other types of slips were corrected throughout the four tasks both of which were content errors. An example is shown in extract 43.

Extract 43

A1: studying law is not his wife's idea

A1: sorry, it is his wife's idea

6.6.2 Correction of errors and mistakes

The number of errors pointed out to ESOL students and the number and percentage of these which were corrected successfully by students is shown in table 6.29. The results demonstrate that students were able to correct a large proportion of the errors that were highlighted by the teacher/researcher. The errors that students were not able to successfully correct are shown in appendix XXXII.

Table 6.29 Number of mistakes/errors pointed out to students and number/percentage successfully corrected

	Group A			Group B		
	<u>errors highlighted</u>	<u>successful corrections</u>	<u>% corrected</u>	<u>errors highlighted</u>	<u>successful corrections</u>	<u>% corrected</u>
Task 1	14	10	71%	17	15	88%
Task 2	15	15	100%	19	19	100%
Task 3	24	24	100%	32	30	94%

Task 4	36	29	81%	21	17	81%
	Group C			Group D		
	<u>errors</u> <u>highlighted</u>	<u>successful</u> <u>corrections</u>	<u>% corrected</u>	<u>errors</u> <u>highlighted</u>	<u>successful</u> <u>corrections</u>	<u>% corrected</u>
Task 1	11	9	82%	14	11	73%
Task 2	18	16	89%			
Task 3	20	15	75%			
Task 4	29	24	83%			

6.7 Research question 6 : Would some tasks be more likely than others to elicit episodes of interaction considered to be significant in driving the second language acquisition process forward?

6.7.1 Negotiation of Meaning

Table 6.30 shows the frequency of occurrences of modified interaction. These results reveal few instances of negotiation of meaning and, that the majority of these occurred during task 1. The answer to this research question is clearly affirmative. Moreover, all of the negotiations involved clarification requests triggered by difficulties with lexical items. A typical example is shown below in extract 2. A clarification request is made in lines 55 and 56, triggered by the description in line 48. The discussion continues, however, until a third student responds by explaining the meaning of the problematic items. The causes and implications of these results will be discussed in relation to the literature in the following chapter.

Table 6.30 Frequency of episodes of negotiation for meaning

Group	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
A	1	0	0	0
B	2	0	0	0
C	1	0	0	0
D	4			
E	2		0	1
F	0		0	0
G	1		0	0
H	1		0	0
I	1		1	0
J	2		1	0
Total	15	0	2	1

Extract 44

Line Student

No

- 48 C3 he carries a moustache and a beard
- 55 C2 moustache and a beard?
- 56 C2 what is that?
- 64 C1 moustache is the hair he has got above his lips and beard is the hair he has under his lips

6.7.2 Scaffolding

Only one instance of what could be termed peer scaffolding (other than the modified interactions described above) could be found in the transcripts. This occurred in task 1. Student D2, not knowing the phrase *speech bubble*, approximates with the word *column*. Later in the interaction, student D1 uses the phrase *speech bubble* (line 46), semantically correct despite the misspelling. Almost fifty lines later, student D3 uses *speech bulb*, suggesting that she has 'learned' this phrase from student D1, but as yet is unable to spell it correctly.

6.7.3 Language Play

Examples of ludic language play were found in both the learner and native-speaker data sets. Extracts 45 to 48 illustrate some of those identified in the learner

transcripts and will be described in more detail below. Examples of native-speakers' language play will be presented in the section that follows.

Extracts 45 and 46 are taken from the end of group I's discussion about the scholarship, task 3. Extract 45 shows an example of student I2 playing with form. First of all he plays with the sounds of *Daphne* and *dolphin* and makes an association between the apparent friendliness of this candidate and the friendliness of the animal. He then uses grammatical parallelism, using name + the + animal, to associate another candidate with another animal resulting in the phrases *Mbaka the pitbull*. I1 then joins in by adding *albert the marmot* and *Carol the broodmare*. There is clearly no transactional function of the language here, I2's purpose appears purely to amuse himself and his co-participants. Shortly after this transaction, all three students engage in semantic language play, as illustrated in extract 46. They merge the fictional world of the task with the real world by suggesting one of the fictional candidates becomes President of the USA. Although I1 appears to be trying to get the other students back on task, he responds to I3's utterance by making a humorous reference to Bill Clinton.

Extract 45

I1: Well mates we have to take a decision. I would suggest everybody writes a name and we count!

I2: *alea jacta est*

I2: *Daphne*

I1: *daphne*

I2 because she is so friendly and her name sounds like a dolphin, also a very friendly animal

I3: *daphne*

I1: I just had French at school – don't show-off I2!

I1: That's a good reason. We take the dolphin!

I3: i like that animal very clever!

I2: but i still think *Mbaka the pitbull* would have been the better choice

I1: So – and then there's *albert the marmot* and *Carol the broodmare*

Extract 46

I2: yes take her and make her the president of the united states, then we will have world peace and marijuana for everyone!

I3: It sounds good... peace love and smoke.....

I1: Don't be silly I2. Not everybody is Bill Clinton. but she probably will be a good lawyer, like her (grand-) parents

In extract 47, members of group C are discussing gun laws and the influence of the media on violence. D3 who is a mature female student teases D2 about being an easily influenced youth. Initially, she apologises in case her attempts at humour have been misunderstood and to remove any threat to face but when D2 continues the theme she continues by creating a fictional character for him as a gun touting youth easily influenced by violent movies. D2 responds humorously by promising not to shoot them but only because he does not have enough money to acquire a gun.

Extract 47

D3: violent movies do influence youth

D2: surely

D3: Like you, D3?

D3: You're a youth

D3: Sorry, it's stupid

D2: I like violent movies as well actually

D2: but I can control myself

D3: Aahh, that's what I meant

D3: But hopefully you won't shoot us after class will you?

D2: no, I have no money to buy a gun, and I won't do so

In extract 48, three female Spanish friends are approaching the end of the discussion about gun laws when J2 teases J1 for being romantic in lines 3 and 4. There is much laughter in the episode, which is represented by both the English and Spanish CMC conventions. Although J3 tries to get the other students back on task in lines 6, 8 and 10, she does join in with laughter in line 12. Then in line 15 however, she scolds J2 by lengthening her name using the CMC convention of repetition of letters.

Extract 48

J1: i grew with romantic films

J1: and now i am romantic

J2: HAHAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

J2: are you romantic really???

J1: yes, a lot

J3: hey girls!!

J1: what is the problem:

J3: we have to go on

J1: yes

J3: do you remember the task??

J1: you are right

J3: haha

J2: do you like red flowers and chocolates from your boyfriend???

J2: jajajajajajaja

J3: amaaaanda (not original name, referring to J2)

J2: ok

J2: sorry

Native-speakers at play

All the examples of the native-speaker language play occurred in task 2. Extracts 49 and 50 illustrate play with form. In extract 49 J uses the phrase *lady weapon*, two words which don't normally collocate in English. R responds by making another joke about gender differences. Extract 50 provides another example of J's creative use of language as he adds the suffix *ist* to make *affair* into a noun.

Extract 49

J: OK, my moneys on Mrs C.

J: She'd found the note from Alice

R: yeah. domestic dispute

J: She used the vase, a lady weapon

R: indeed. a man would have throttled him

Extract 50

R: hang about. alice is mrs Fairfax

J: Danny and Mrs C

J: Eureka!

J: She was the affairist

Many examples of semantic language play were found in the task 2 native-speaker transcripts. For example, in the last line of extract 51 A is imagining herself in the role of Sherlock Holmes. In extract 52, there is another reference by J to the fictional character Miss Marple. This is followed by R double-voicing, that is taking on the role of a policeman or detective. K performs a similar role in the third line of extract 53. Real and fictional worlds also merge in extracts 54 and 55 as the participants empathise with the fictional characters in the task as if they were real people. Extract 56 demonstrates the use of hyperbole to create amusement. The phrase *a lifetime of servitude* exaggerates the maid's position while the verbs *bludgeon* and *snap* have the connotation of suddenness and extreme violence. By suggesting that the weapon could be a jar of cocoa or a paperweight creates the feeling that the characters are actors in a farce.

Extract 51

B: ok... who do we think did it?

A: I think Mrs Crabtree, using the silver vase, after finding proof of her husband's infidelity

B: I concur!

A: i feel as though i should be stood in the Drawing room leaning on the mantelpiece with a pipe pointing at Mrs Crabtree

Extract 52

J: It's definitely Mrs C!!!

R: yup

J: Always go with your first hunch

R: guilty as sin

J: Even if you haven't got the evidence to back it up

J: That is why Mrs Marple was so ace

R: that's some great policing there young man

Extract 53

L: they must be quite well off to have a maid so maybe the son's done it for the money

L oops there is no son I mean brother

K: Your sacked as a detective!

L: why is the brother living with them that's a bit weird

L: small dinner party?

K: And if it was a dinner party why was he off in his study?

L: yeah actually why is she bringing bedtime cocoa if they're entertaining? rude bugger

Extract 54

L: I feel sorry for the maid still busy at 11 o'clock

K: me too!

K: Maybe she was tired of working all the bloody time and just bumped him off to get some rest?

Extract 55

K: Mrs Crabtree was jealous because she knew he was having an affair and the maid heard her come through the front door then into the kitchen. she could have killed him, gone out the window then let herself back in to make cocoa to cover her tracks and look like the grieving widow when she finds the body

L; He was a bit of a git telling her in a letter

K: At least it wasn't a text!

Extract 56

D: Maybe the brother and the maid did it

D: Maybe the maid was cranky after a lifetime of servitude and finally snapped and bludgeoned Alec to death with the ornament she was polishing

C: ok

D: weapon

D: Mrs Crabtree with the jar of cocoa

D: Or she saw it was a love letter and hit him with the paper weight

6.8 Summary

The key findings from the data analysis have been presented in this chapter. In chapter 7, these results are discussed in relation to relevant literature. This will enable suggestions for future pedagogic interventions to be made as well as recommendations for further research.

7 . Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The two main aims of this study were to investigate the potential of four different tasks for language learning and to determine a way of implementing a focus on form. In this chapter, the results presented in the previous chapter will be discussed in relation to relevant literature so that they may provide insights into these questions and lead to suggestions for future possible pedagogic interventions and further research. This chapter will be organised according to each of the research questions.

7.2 Research question 1: Did the tasks motivate and challenge the students?

The results from the student based response demonstrate that, on the whole, the tasks were both motivating and challenging for the students who took part in this study. As Brett (1996:204) warns, one must be careful of drawing conclusions from learner evaluations of this type as students may be unwilling to offend the teacher with any criticisms. However, the observations of the teacher would confirm that students appeared to be fully engaged in all four tasks and were not distracted from their computer terminals throughout the tasks. The amount of time that learners could spend on tasks was severely constrained for the ESOL learners because of the timetable. Since the exchange students carried out the tasks in the evening, more time was available and the teacher/researcher had to bring the task to a close as some of the students would have continued chatting for much longer.

The group evaluations suggested that the least motivating task was task 3. That some students felt that they lacked any strong feelings about who should receive scholarship is a fairly serious criticism. In addition, it is interesting to note that the Japanese group completed this task in 13 minutes whereas the other exchange groups chatted from between 29 to 35 minutes with an average of 33 minutes. One factor which would have influenced this was that only two Japanese students were present for task 3. However, what emerged from the data was that there was no disagreement between the students. Each student made a comment and the other

agreed. Japan is a collectivist culture (see for example Carlson and Nelson, 1994) where maintaining group harmony is seen as more important than individual beliefs. Therefore, this type of decision-making task may not elicit as much discussion from students in these particular cultures. To address both of these issues would be relatively simple, however. The task could be modified by adding a small role-play component, something that the teacher has already successfully used with other groups. Students are given role cards specifying who and why they should support a particular candidate, but are told not to divulge that information to other group members. This would hopefully make the task more meaningful and thus engaging for students.

The suggestion that colour pictures be used probably reflects the expectations of students in the digital age for more professional looking materials. Most teachers do not have access to colour photocopying but do have colour printers. Although many publishers offer free downloadable supplementary activities to accompany popular course books and photocopiable resource books, it would be useful to be able to buy digital copies of the actual books so that colour resources could be easily printed for learners.

One other comment about the task concerned the lack of time. This was felt to be problematic by the teacher for all the tasks conducted by the ESOL group. Since there was only one hour scheduled in the computer laboratory it was difficult to do the pre-task stage effectively and allow enough time for students to do the tasks. The teacher usually had to bring the tasks to a close earlier than she would have elected to do had time not been a constraint. The final lines of transcripts also reveal that there was a time pressure as students have to close the task and log out of the chat room in a hurried manner. While the University is relatively well-resourced in terms of ICT, scheduling of rooms and availability and allocation of resources will always be ongoing issues for teachers. Teaching rooms equipped with sufficient personal computers for each student are in great demand and are not always available at desired times. Moreover, at the time the research was conducted, there remained a separation of the audio laboratory from the computer laboratory. If the teaching of the four skills is to be fully integrated, and teachers are to have optimal flexibility, language teaching should ideally be conducted in digital laboratories with audio

recording capability such as the Sanako Digital Lab or with the Horizon-Wimba⁹ voice-based communication tools mentioned in chapter 3. Although the University now has these facilities, they are not always available.

Further evidence that the tasks are appropriately challenging for this group of learners both cognitively and linguistically is revealed from analysis of the transcripts. The error analysis demonstrated that learners are making slips, mistakes and errors, demonstrating that they are testing out hypotheses as well as being pushed to produce output at a level slightly beyond their present linguistic competence.

7.3 Research question 2: Would ESOL students participate equally in completion of the tasks?

This study clearly shows that although the discourse structure of text-based CMC has the potential to allow participants to contribute equally, there is no guarantee that that will occur, which corroborates with findings of Colomb and Simutis (1996:212). A more important finding, however, is that even when participation rates appeared to be similar, closer analysis revealed that contributions in terms of their functions were quite different. For example, in task 1 conducted by Group A, student A2 made no contribution in terms of managing the task, nor in social engagement, whereas his partners were quite active in these respects.

One of the most striking features of the results is the performance of student D3. This student has easily the highest rate of participation in each of the four tasks. This might suggest that the student is trying to dominate the discussion. However, the functional analysis is extremely revealing. This student uses by far the most social functions of language including encouraging others to participate, praising and joking with classmates. Her aim is clearly not to dominate but to facilitate cooperation and encourage group cohesion. For example, during task 1, she asks for a description of a specific part of the picture almost simultaneously with another student, who describes a different part of the picture. Rather than continuing with her own line of discussion, she moves the discussion back to the other student's

⁹ <http://www.horizonwimba.com>

theme and apologises. In task 4, she engages student D2 in an episode of language play related to his interest in video-games, which lasts several turns. Other teachers familiar with this student regard her as an excellent communicator. This shows that her online behaviour mirrors that of her normal face-to-face persona which is in contrast to the findings of Roed (2003) who found that some of his learners displayed very different behaviours in e-learning environments compared to those in the traditional classroom setting.

The participation results which are of most concern are those of students B2 and C3, who consistently have very low participation rates. The most likely explanation for this can be found in the knowledge that both these students arrived at the university never having used a computer before. As a result, both students had difficulty keeping up with the discussions due to their typing skills. However, when the quality and function of their turns was investigated other issues emerged. In task 1, for example, both students seem to have interpreted the task differently from the other students. Although the task requires concrete descriptions of the picture, both of these students offered more abstract descriptions. Despite encouragement from their fellow group members to modify their contributions, neither student did so. This can perhaps be explained in relation to activity theory and learner expectations (see Lantolf and Appel, 1994a for example). These students may have oriented themselves differently to the task based on their expectations of higher education. Perhaps they felt that abstraction was a skill more appropriate for tertiary study and had not expected to experience the game-like nature of this particular activity. These results corroborate previous studies (Coughlan and Duff, 1994 and Gourlay, 2005) which suggest that students interpret tasks according to their own cultural expectations and/or learning needs. This adds further support to Foley's (1990) argument that tasks can offer a more learner-centred approach to language learning.

Another perspective on the performance of students B2 and C3 in task 1, also drawing on socio-cultural theory, is that they lacked the strategic competence to carry out the task successfully. Platt and Brooks (2002) argue that strategic competence is a necessary part of the process of task engagement and it is only through task engagement that students are able to concentrate on the relevant information that needs to be shared to accomplish the task. Despite attempts by

peers to scaffold this competence, neither B2 nor C3 change their strategies and thus task completion proved difficult for the group.

When these students do task 2 and 4 however, their participation rates in terms of contribution to task have caught up with the other members of their group. However, it is noticeable throughout the tasks that all their contributions are focussed purely on task, they do not contribute to managing the task nor do they make any social use of language. Not once, for example did they use greetings at the beginning of the discussions even when another student had greeted them directly. On reading the transcripts it often appears that they are speaking to themselves. This could be explained in several ways. Firstly, perhaps they do not equate a text-based mode of communication with interactive language use. Another possible explanation is that they do not feel it necessary for 'social niceties' when engaged in classroom activities. It could also be a reflection of their social communication skills and/or personality. Student A2 was also consistently task-focussed. It is interesting to note that all these three students are male.

These findings have significant implications for language teachers and further highlight the value of recording and analysing students' interactions (Ohlshtain and Celce-Murcia, 2001: 722), as such observations are unlikely to be made by teachers monitoring several groups in a traditional face-to-face learning environment. Before discussing this issue further, it is useful to refer to comments made in this regard on the individual and group questionnaires. Although these evaluation tools had largely pedagogical rather than research aims, it was interesting to view students' comments. What emerged overwhelmingly from the group evaluations was the desire for students to be seen as a team. When answering question two about participation, all of the groups for all of the tasks wrote about '*sharing responsibility*' and '*working as a team*'. Even though it is clear from the results presented here that some students were participating more than others and in different ways, this was not noted. There are several possible explanations for this. First of all, the students may not have been aware of any differences. Secondly, they do not have the necessary analytical skills to evaluate their discourse. For example, they may not have had a complete understanding of the phrase *moving the task forward*. In task 1, however, when two particular students were clearly not participating as much as the others, this is highly

unlikely. The more likely explanation is that it would have been too face-threatening (Brown and Levinson, 1987) to point this out. The questionnaires demonstrate that all the students seem to be working very hard to foster positive group dynamics.

Several issues, from both research and pedagogical perspectives, have emerged from the above discussion. First of all, it highlights the fact that quantitative analysis of participation rates alone is of limited value in understanding how students have contributed to a task and this is now reflected in the recent changes in the CALL research agenda (Kern, Page and Warschauer, 2004:254; Lamy and Hampel, 2007). Secondly, related to the previous point, a Vygotskian approach to analysing interactions can provide valuable insights into how learners perform tasks.

From a pedagogical perspective, the above discussion has shown that teachers must be sensitive to the fact that CMC can exclude some students with poor ICT skills. In addition, some learners may feel uncomfortable in evaluating peer's performance. The findings also suggest that there may be some value in raising learners' awareness of the different ways in which they can contribute to a task-based discussion. Although task completion is the main aim of the task, students should be encouraged to use task management strategies and engage in interactional language use. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

7.4 Research question 3: What language structures and functions would the task elicit?

The tasks elicited a wide range of structures and functions appropriate to this level of study. Students used a wide range of complex sentence forms supporting other evidence which suggests that CMC encourages complex language (Kern, 1995 and Warschauer, 1996a). Core structures and functions were identified for each task as well as other potentially useful language. These provisional templates could be used by teachers to facilitate the design of both task-based and task-supported syllabi to avoid having to rely on their own intuitions, which are often incorrect (Cox, 2005). Since this data was collected in a very specific context from a limited sample, teachers could study other groups of students in different learning environments to test these provisional specifications.

Although students employed a wide range of functions when contributing to the task, only a limited number of the ESOL students engaged in social or task-management interaction. The group evaluations demonstrated that students had little awareness of this. This leads to the suggestion that it may be fruitful to provide some learner training in analysing discourse as well as awareness-raising of the value of social communication and language play even when carrying out classroom tasks (see Sayer (2005) for a possible approach). Moreover, all students need to be encouraged to participate in task-management. One strategy would be to appoint a different group leader for each task to provide all students with the opportunity to practise these functions.

The findings presented in the previous chapter also highlighted the range of different exponents used to realise particular functions but more significantly the context-sensitivity of appropriate exponent choice. This brings into question the validity of traditional approaches to teaching functions which involve presenting learners with lists of de-contextualised exponents for generic functions such as agreeing and disagreeing. A CA (Conversation Analysis) approach which identifies and analyses parts of an adjacency pair demonstrates that the language used to perform the function of agreeing in task 2 could be quite different from that used to perform a similar function in tasks 3 and 4. Inappropriate use by learners of commonly taught phrases such as *I strongly disagree with you* adds additional weight to this argument and will be discussed further in the following section related to errors. The researcher also felt that this approach, which focuses on meaning first and then the specific language used to convey those meanings, to be more fruitful than one that starts with the analysis of structures. Either way, however, a discourse approach to teaching structures and functions is essential if learners are to be able to use language appropriately.

The researcher was initially surprised at the rarity of CMC conventions used by the ESOL students. Although two students were not computer literate at the beginning of the semester, all the other students appeared to have a good level of ICT skills. It had been predicted therefore, that students would have made more use of these conventions reflecting previous studies of second language learners discussed in

chapter 3. In retrospect, this prediction was based on the assumptions that most young people communicate using Instant Messaging, that they do so in English and as a result are familiar with commonly used CMC conventions.

Task 1 elicited by far the most CMC conventions, probably reflecting the fact that this was the least 'serious' task and the one most resembling a game. Students who did make use of these conventions did so in all four tasks, however. The fact that most ESOL students used few if any of these conventions could be due to several reasons. Firstly, students may not be familiar with such conventions. Another reason could be that they felt it was inappropriate to use them in an academic setting. Alternatively, they may not have seen the need to employ them.

When the exchange student and native-speaker data were considered, another picture emerged. It seems that convention use was largely user specific with students in group H and native-speakers C and D for example making very little use of conventions while students in Group J and native-speakers A and S using a larger number as well as range of different conventions. In addition, the type of conventions used was often user specific. For example, some users employed punctuation largely to show pauses while others used it mainly for emphasis. The findings of this study seem to suggest that CMC convention use is therefore largely a matter of choice. The choice of whether or not to use conventions however, does rely on having a repertoire of conventions at one's disposal. This leads to the question of whether or not these conventions should be taught, an issue also raised by Loewen and Reissner (2009) whose study showed that students had a much more favourable attitude to their use than their teachers. Before moving to the pedagogic issues however, one more observation regarding the use CMC conventions should be noted. Several of the prolific users of such conventions were also the participants who engaged in language play. These include the students in group J, students I1 and I2 and native-speakers J and R. Both CMC convention use and language play involve creativity with the language, which is something teachers would surely want to encourage.

The above observations lead finally to the question: should CMC conventions be taught and if so to what extent? In chapter 3 it was noted that use of these

conventions is not stable (Lotherington, 2005 and Murray, 2004). New conventions are emerging on a regular basis which makes selection for teaching purposes difficult. As Lotherington (2005: 121) points out, the study of the language of digital communication is still in its infancy and many questions relating to pedagogical implications remain. However, if learners are to become literate in the twenty first century sense of the word (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Colombi and Schleppegrell, 2002 and Halliday, 2001) then it is argued here that they need at least to have a basic awareness of some of the most widely used conventions. Whether or not they use them is then a matter of learner choice. Reference tools such as the NetLingo dictionary and transL8it.com translator mentioned in chapter 3 may provide pedagogical resources for teachers in this respect. However, as mentioned previously, a discourse approach should be adopted where possible and giving learners access to transcripts of native-speaker CMC discussions may provide a useful starting point. It may also be interesting for learners to be given the opportunity to discuss the use of CMC conventions in their mother tongues.

7.5 Research question 4: What errors would the learners make? Could these be used as the basis of a structural syllabus?

The discussion of the findings in relation to errors will be divided into two parts. Firstly, the findings of the error and functional analyses of all three data sets in relation to each task will be discussed in order that suggestions for a structural syllabus can be made. The second part will address the overall findings in relation to error, with particular emphasis on the pedagogical implications.

7.5.1. Error analysis of task 1

This task produced a large number of morphological errors due to prepositions, which is unsurprising when the nature of the task is taken into consideration. Accurate use of prepositions of place is essential for successful completion of the task. The common confusion between *above* and *on top of* would lend itself to a consciousness-raising task. This would first involve matching pictures to descriptions. Then learners would be required to formulate a rule for the use of the

two expressions. Other prepositional difficulties could be dealt with similarly. Further areas of grammar revealed by the error analysis of this task which could form the basis of a structural syllabus include determiners as these provided the greatest proportion of morphological errors. Attention to lexical difficulties (and indeed the above structural problems) could be given immediately after the task in a report phase when students summarise the differences in the pictures.

From a functional perspective, both the exchange and ESOL student data revealed one main area of difficulty and two potential areas for language development. The main area of difficulty arose from comparing and contrasting one another's descriptions of their pictures. The examples provided in the previous chapter highlight the linguistic complexity of performing this function particularly when there are more than two participants in a text-based synchronous CMC environment. There are several suggestions for post-task activities focussing on this function. Mini-dialogues adapted from the transcripts could be used to create a gap-fill exercise. An example is shown in figure 7.1. This could be followed by a teacher-led drill using similar examples. Students could then conduct the drills in groups of three.

Although no native-speaker data were available for this task, two opportunities for further language development may lie in developing awareness of vague language and discourse markers for task management functions. Further research investigating native-speakers performing this task could provide useful data to identify useful forms as well as design appropriate materials and tasks.

Figure 7.1 Gap-fill exercise

Complete the gaps in the dialogue with an appropriate word or phrase.

- A: My Shakespeare has only got one eyebrow.
B: Mine's only got one eyebrow (1)
C: (2) hasn't, mine's got two eyebrows.

7.5.2 Error analysis of task 2

The analysis of the ESOL transcripts from task 2 was very illuminating in that all the ESOL groups made use of modals of deduction with very few errors. Although task-useful (according to the classification of Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993), the task could be completed without such verbs. This suggests that the pre-task work was successful in encouraging learners to use these particular forms although it must be noted that without data from a controlled experiment this cannot be assumed. Although only one ESOL student made attempts at producing the third conditional, both attempts being inaccurate, this form would be task natural and could be added to the structural syllabus.

The functional analysis of ESOL transcripts and native-speaker transcripts revealed several opportunities for further language development. Firstly, although both groups made similar use of modal constructions and *maybe* for speculation, native-speakers used a much wider range of lexical expressions to perform this function. Holmes (1988) noted the difficulty faced both by learners and native-speakers of expressing epistemic modality in English and emphasised the need for ELT materials to reflect the range of syntactic and lexical devices that are available in English to do so. Taking this into consideration, a potential post-task awareness-raising activity could involve learners reading native-speaker transcripts in order to identify different phrases used to speculate and make deductions. This could be followed up by an activity where learners assess a range of expressions used according to the perceived certainty of the speaker in order to establish new form-meaning mappings (Batstone and Ellis 2009).

Another interesting finding was the tendency of native-speakers to use hedges when speculating compared with some unnatural uses of phrases such as *I strongly believe* in the ESOL data. Corpus researchers have observed that these kinds of commonly

taught phrases for giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing are used very differently by native speakers compared to learners of English. For example, some studies have shown that the expression *in my opinion* occurs not only more frequently in learner corpora but also in different sentence positions (Hunston and O’Keefe, 2009). Native-speakers tend to use it in sentence medial position with the pragmatic effect of a hedge, whereas learners tend to use it in frontal position making their utterance sound more assertive. It has thus been suggested that these expressions are over-taught. The teacher/researcher in this study would argue that the problem lies more in the fact that such expressions are not taught in context. Awareness of these features of language can only be taught through a discourse approach which employs transcripts of interactions between proficient users of the language.

Closely related to this was the finding regarding response tokens (see O’Keefe, McCarthy and Carter (2007:148) for a discussion of corpus research related to response tokens). The native speakers in this study made frequent use of the response token *yeah* while the ESOL learners used more formal expressions such as *I agree with you* to respond to co-participants. Corpus research has shown that even highly proficient non-native speakers of English use *yeah* less frequently than their native-speaker counterparts (Prodromou, 2003:13). If learners wish to sound more native-like, although it should be mentioned that this cannot be assumed to be the case (learner goals will be discussed in detail in section 7.5.5), activities using transcripts of native-speakers could be employed to raise learner awareness of this feature. A simple counting task would highlight the pervasiveness of *yeah* in native-speaker interactions.

Another striking contrast between the learner and native-speaker data was the occurrence of ellipsis. The majority of native-speaker turns contained ellipsis whereas the learners’ rarely did. This is again similar to Prodromou’s findings (2003:13) that successful non-native users of English omit less than native-speakers.

As Carter (1998:49) observes, ellipsis is pervasive in native-speaker speech but is rarely dealt with even in advanced ELT coursebooks and is another feature of language which could make learners sound more native-like if adopted (see Baigent, 2005). To raise awareness of this feature as a post-task activity, the teacher could

highlight sections of the native speaker transcripts where ellipsis had occurred and learners could be asked to identify the ellipsed words or phrases. Learners could then be provided with extracts from their own transcripts and asked to identify words or phrases that could be omitted.

The findings also revealed that discourse markers represent another linguistic feature which might warrant attention in the post-task stage. The native-speaker data set contained a wide variety of discourse markers. ESOL group C also used a range of discourse markers but groups B and C used very few, making their discussions sound rather stilted. In addition, most of the markers used by learners had a referential function whereas the native-speakers used referential as well as more interpersonal markers. This corroborates the findings of a study of learners in Hong Kong by Fung and Carter (2007). As these researchers point out, the study of discourse markers and their function is still a relatively young but complex field. Both the findings from this study and the Fung and Carter study however, do provide evidence to suggest that learners require more awareness of interpersonal discourse markers. One suggestion for a post-task activity would be to select several of the discourse markers used by the native-speakers and ask learners to assign them to various categories according to their function.

The native-speaker discussions were distinct from the learners' particularly in terms of use of lexis. The native-speakers used a wide array of informal language including multi-word verbs, idiomatic expressions as well as many colloquialisms, while these features were almost completely absent in the learner discussions, again corroborating Prodromou's (2003) corpus research. O'Keefe, McCarthy and Carter (2007:47-57) use corpus data to illustrate the daunting task advanced learners have in developing their vocabulary from an upper-intermediate level to one which will enable them to comprehend most texts in English, since the words they need to know become increasingly less frequent. Many of the gaps in their knowledge will be lexical chunks and many of these will be idiomatic. O'Keefe, McCarthy and Carter (2007) discuss at some length whether and to what extent idiomatic language should be taught, since many learners of English may never interact with a native-speaker. The participants in this study however, are living and studying in a native-speaker environment and will meet idioms and phrasal verbs on a regular basis in everyday

interactions. There is also evidence that idioms are frequent in academic speech (Simpson and Mendis, 2003). In this case it is thus argued that the teaching of idiomatic language, including multi-word verbs is warranted. The goal however, may be limited to developing receptive competence. The next problem for the teacher lies in the selection of expressions to teach. Corpus research is beginning to identify the most commonly used multi-word verbs and their most common meanings in specific contexts (Simpson and Mendis, 2003; Trebits 2009) which should facilitate the selection process for materials designers. One of the essential characteristics of a successful approach to teaching idiomatic language must be providing examples in a context rich environment (Simpson and Mendis, 2003 and Trebits, 2009). In this study, the transcripts from the native-speaker discussions provide natural examples in such an environment. The selection process is in fact conducted by the task itself. A potential awareness-raising task which appeared to be successfully employed by Simpson and Mendis (2003) requires learners to match an idiomatic expression to an equivalent literal one and then compare their relative communicative effects.

Another interesting finding related to the use of multi-word verbs and idioms found in the native-speaker dataset is that few of them were used by more than one speaker. Simpson and Mendis (2003) also found that idiom use seemed to be more related to the individual user rather than the academic field or context. Since the sample of native-speakers in this study was extremely small, it would be interesting to conduct research with a much larger sample to further investigate this phenomenon in relation to the task.

In terms of colloquial items, it might be useful and interesting for learners to have receptive knowledge of phrases such as *ciggy*, *hubby*, *dodgy* and *fag end* since these are in everyday use in the local Merseyside area. The teacher could also comment on the prosodically conditioned morphological truncation process (see Honeybone, date unknown) which occurs in Liverpool English ('Scouse'), which gives rise to words such as *ciggy* from *cigarette* and *cozzie* from *swimming costume*.

A final observation from the task 2 native-speaker data worthy of mention was the occurrence of native-speaker 'errors'. This further highlights the complexity and

subjectivity of detecting errors. It also provides further support for a pedagogical approach which views grammar '*as choice*' rather than grammar as '*a linguistic straightjacket*' (Larsen-Freeman, 2002:117). In other words, grammar should be seen as a resource which users draw on to express specific meanings in appropriate contexts rather than as a set of linguistic rules to be applied.

7.5.3 Error analysis of task 3

This task elicited a number of ESOL learner errors from the use of modal verbs, particularly overuse of *must* and the use of *will* rather than *would*. These are common mistakes for learners of English and could provide the basis for a C-R task in the post-task phase of the first cycle.

Since many of the essential lexical items were provided in the input, a rather surprising finding was the large proportion of lexical errors in general. It was expected that learners would use the input in their own discussions but many errors arose from learners' attempts at paraphrasing the input. Whether this was because they were trying to avoid 'lifting' phrases directly or whether, because of the fast paced nature of the conversation there was no time to refer to the handout, it is not clear. This suggests perhaps that learners need explicit encouragement to use the input.

Both the error analysis and functional analysis revealed another rather surprising finding: the number of errors arising from introducing their opinions about who should receive the scholarship. The error analysis identified lexical, syntactic and morphological errors in utterances used to perform this function. This suggests that there is a case for the pre-teaching of such expressions, particularly as there is growing evidence of the significance of formulaic expressions in native and non-native speaker fluency (Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, and Demecheleer, 2006 and Foster, 2001) and their frequency in corpus data (O'Keeffe, McCarthy and Carter, 2007).

The functional analysis of the ESOL and Exchange data sets showed that the exchange students seemed to have less difficulty in suggesting recipients for the

scholarship. It also revealed that learners used a plethora of linguistic combinations to perform this function, some being deemed more natural than others. It must be acknowledged at this point that the process of evaluating the naturalness of these attempts was a decidedly subjective one. It is likely that other teachers could evaluate them very differently. Since this is a core function for task 3, it is recommended that learners are provided with appropriate expressions in the pre-task phase. This has two distinct advantages over a post-task error correction approach. First of all, the complexity and subjective nature of error analysis is avoided. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, it avoids the possibility of de-motivating learners. A suggested list of useful expressions for this task is shown in Figure 7.2 below, based on exchange student data. Future research could be conducted to collect native-speaker data in order to determine further examples. These could be ‘seeded’ into the pre-task input as one study has shown that learners do mine written input provided in the pre-task stage (Boston, 2008).

The functional analysis of ESOL and Exchange student transcripts also revealed errors associated with the function of speculating about the future, although many learners used a wide range of expressions appropriately. As noted earlier, expressing epistemic modality in English is extremely demanding for learners (Holmes, 1988) and there is a wide range of structural and lexical resources available for doing so which learners need first to be aware of. Suggested pedagogic interventions in the post-task phase based on these findings are thus threefold. Firstly, the teacher provides examples of speculations incorporating a variety of forms from the discussions (reformulated to remove errors, if necessary) and learners work in groups to assess the degree of certainty of the speaker in each case. Another awareness-raising activity could involve learners matching different forms used to express a similar meaning, again using examples from the discussion. Focussing more on production of the forms, learners could be asked to speculate on the future of each of the candidates, with the teacher writing ideas on the board, reformulating language when necessary. In this way, learners are given the freedom to express their own ideas with the teacher scaffolding their use of language.

Figure 7.2 Useful phrases for task 3

I think X should get the scholarship because
I don't think X should get the scholarship because
I think X is the best candidate because
I don't think X is a good/suitable candidate because

The findings revealed that learners made a large number of errors associated with managing task 3 and reformulations of some of these errors to more native-like targets were suggested in the previous chapter. One possible suggestion for a classroom focus would be to provide learners with a list of the reformulated expressions in the pre-task stage. This approach does pose a danger however, in that lists of disembodied items do not provide learners with information regarding their use in relation to the surrounding discourse and throughout this study the case has been made for a discourse approach to language teaching. In terms of the task management functions for this task, it could however be argued that some of the phrases identified as useful could function quite naturally in this task without modification. Alternatively, a discourse approach could be adopted but this would involve the use of transcripts of native-speaker discussions. Learners could be asked to find examples of phrases used to perform different aspects of task management.

7.5.4 Error analysis of task 4 interactions

Of all the tasks, this task resulted in the greatest proportion of syntactic errors which is probably a reflection of the fact that an opinion-giving task pushes students to express more complex ideas and thus attempt a range of different subordinate clauses within complex sentences. Areas for a grammatical focus based on this analysis included adverb placement and relative clauses as well as further work on determiners. The lexical error analysis also reveals that it might be beneficial to focus on the difference in meaning between *get* and *take* in the context of acquiring something.

Functional analysis of all three data sets for task 4 revealed similar findings to those of task 2 in terms of the language used by learners and native-speakers to introduce their opinions and to respond to their interlocutors. The data does seem to suggest that learners are overusing fixed expressions which are traditionally taught to perform the functions of giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing. These findings also seem to suggest that a discourse approach to teaching speaking/interaction, with an emphasis on teaching general discourse features such as hedges and response tokens, is likely to be more beneficial than traditional approaches which focus on specific functions such as agreeing and disagreeing.

Although there were some inappropriate uses of the expressions to introduce opinions and respond to interlocutors, some of the exchange students seemed to use a wider range of expressions than the native-speakers. Prodromou (2003) also found evidence that successful non-native users of English tend to use a greater selection of lexis. In this case, learner data could provide better models for other learners than native speaker data. This raises an important issue related to the selection of appropriate models for learners of English and will be further discussed in section 7.6.

Interestingly, few examples of disagreement were found in the transcripts. This task is therefore unlikely to be suitable for teachers wishing to give learners the opportunity to practice this function.

One of the most noticeable findings from the comparison of native-speaker and learner data was the frequent occurrence of *then* in *if* sentences used by native-speakers and its almost complete absence in the learner data set. Carter and McCarthy (2006:45) state that the function of *then* in these sentences is to add emphasis. The researcher is not aware of any language teaching material which introduces this use of *then* but the findings from this small study suggest that it is a feature which deserves attention.

Additional findings from this study concerning *if* and *would* clauses provide further support for Frazier's (2003) assertion that materials writers need to move away from the traditional approaches to teaching conditionals. Several of the examples of

would-clauses produced by native-speakers identified in this study were similar to those identified in Frazier's corpus in that they lacked adjacent *if* clauses. This study also found an example of what Van der Auwerea (1986:206), as cited by Frazier (2003:46), termed as conditional sentences of '*inducements and deterrents*' in which *if* is replaced with *and* or *or* at the beginning of the result clause (see extract 35 in the previous chapter). Examples from the native-speaker data collected in this study could thus be used to raise awareness of the different types of *if*-sentences found in English as well as the occurrences of hypothetical *would* where the *if* clause is either implied but not explicitly stated or occurs in a non-adjacent position. A C-R task could be designed which involved learners trying to categorise the *if* sentences and *would* clauses and then matching them to their appropriate function.

Native-speaker transcripts for this task were similar to those of task 2 in that they further revealed learners' missed opportunities in terms of cohesive devices such as reference, ellipsis and substitution. As was suggested for task 2, post-task activities could involve initially, awareness-raising of the features, and then followed by an exercise involving learners re-writing selected episodes of the discussions to include appropriate cohesive devices.

7.5.5 Error analysis overall

The error analysis produced results which corroborate Bardovi-Harlig and Bofman's study (1989) of university level ESOL learners in that the vast majority of grammatical errors were morphological rather than syntactic. This is in direct contrast to Lennon's (1991) study in which very few morphological errors were produced. The difference may be attributed to the several factors. Firstly, in Lennon's study, only four German exchange students were investigated. 'Advanced' is also a relatively subjective term and Lennon does not provide a clear definition. Also, the corpus studied was a spoken one, and elicited from a rather limited genre: picture narration. The Bardovi-Harlig and Bofman (1989) study, however, investigated a corpus of written work produced by 30 learners across five language groups: Arabic, Malay, Chinese, Korean and Spanish. The students had an approximate TOEFL score of 550, which is roughly equivalent to the IELTS score of 5.5 recommended for entry onto the ESOL programme in this study. This study is

closer therefore to that of Bardovi-Harlig and Bofman in terms of diversity of participants and range of language investigated, which may explain the similarity in results. The next section will attempt to interpret these results.

Bardovi-Harlig and Bofman (1989) hypothesised that syntactic features are more significant in communication and as a result most easily learned. Secondly, they likened syntactic and morphological features to the *resilient* and *fragile* features identified in Goldwin-Meadow's (1982) study of acquisition under *degraded learning conditions*. For example, children with deaf parents may have limited opportunities for input and output so we can consider their conditions for learning to be less than ideal. In this study, Goldwin-Meadow (1982) found that certain resilient features of language were like weeds, in that they grow with ease and without too much attention. In contrast, fragile features are like hot-house orchids, which must be carefully attended to. Fragile features such as prepositions and articles are notoriously difficult to learn (see for example Butler, 2002). However, if we are to assume that these features cannot easily be acquired without instruction, they cannot be ignored. Employing C-R tasks in the post-task phase (Willis and Willis, 1996) or as part of a separate structural syllabus (Ellis, 2003: 237) as mentioned in the examples above, is a way of doing this. To make the C-R tasks as relevant as possible to learners they could be built around the errors found in the communication tasks. Task 1, for example would provide the teacher with numerous examples of determiners and prepositions. Having performed the communicative task before doing the C-R task, the context is clearly provided and learners are more likely to be motivated to do what might otherwise seem a rather dry task. The study by Pica, Kang and Sauro (2006) demonstrates the potential of carefully designed information gap tasks designed to focus on some these most problematic features of language. More research of this type is clearly needed.

The error profiles also demonstrated that although some problems were common to several students, many of the errors identified were student specific. A two-pronged approach is therefore required. Designing a grammatical syllabus based on C-R tasks as outlined above could be used to focus on common problems while a more learner-centred approach is required to enable learners to work individually on their own specific difficulties.

What emerged from carrying out the formal error analysis as a researcher, rather than as a teacher *correcting* learners' errors, was the different perspective one has when one has time to read and re-read and reflect on the transcripts. Mainly as a result of time constraints, many of the errors selected for attention by the teacher were easily locatable morphological errors. However, as we have seen, in terms of communication these are probably the least important (Burt and Kiparsky, 1974). Many of the global/syntactic errors were overlooked as these require the most time and effort to deal with effectively. This highlights the complexity of the language teacher's job in providing learners with effective feedback. Moreover, with the benefit of hindsight, it became obvious that when giving feedback, it is important to provide learners with general comments (including positive ones!) on performance. Although the teacher regularly does this for formal pieces of writing, it was overlooked in this case. Such feedback could also be useful in raising awareness of the issues mentioned previously regarding participation.

It is interesting to note that a relatively small group of teachers could not agree on three out of four of the utterances that had proved difficult to assign as erroneous. This confirms the observation of James (1998:91) that the process of detection is relatively subjective. It also highlights the issue noted by Lennon (1991: 183) that is what is often characteristic of advanced learners production compared with that of lower level learners is that they contain '*nonnative-like features which are not necessarily erroneous*'. Lennon (1991:184) goes on to suggest that a '*continuum model*' might be more appropriate than a simple right or wrong approach to error analysis. Figure 7.3 shows how the first of the problematic utterances given to the panel of teachers fits into this model, though it should be mentioned that this too is a relatively subjective process and that native-speaker data may provide further insights.

Figure 7.3 An example of a nonnative-like utterance in Lennon's (1991:184) continuum model.

Shakespeare's eyes are looking up

Shakespeare is looking up

more native-like Shakespeare is looking upwards

The literature on error correction does not seem to provide teachers with any practical suggestions on how to deal with such utterances other than a reformulation by the teacher. One possible method might be to design a C-R task containing a range of grammatically correct options such as those in Figure 7.3 above and which requires learners to rank them according to their 'naturalness'. This would avoid learners feeling that their own utterances were grammatically 'incorrect' but also raise their awareness of the different language a native speaker might use. Salem (2007) also suggests a continuum model in terms of lexico-grammatical errors. Clearly, error analysis and correction are complex areas of teacher activity which require time and expertise. Further discussion regarding the implications of the error analysis in general will follow after discussion of the findings of research question 5.

7.6 Research question 5: Would the text-based nature of communication encourage learners to notice their own errors? Would learners be able to correct their own errors with or without scaffolding?

That most students chose not to repair their typing errors suggests that they were focussed primarily on meaning rather than form while participating in the chats. In addition, although the teacher was available to help learners express their ideas, students chose not to ask for support. The results from the analysis of error correction sheets however, demonstrated that students were able to correct the majority of errors when given transcripts of the discussions with errors highlighted by the teacher. Since support was available to them in the forms of their peers, reference tools and the teacher, it is not possible to distinguish between those utterances that contained errors and those that contained mistakes. Because of time restrictions and the absence of some students from the class in which error correction

took place, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from any analysis of those utterances learners were unable to correct. For example, more errors from task 4 may have been corrected had students had more time. In addition, some of the global errors that had been highlighted because their meaning was unclear could not be dealt with because the student who had made them was absent from the class.

The purpose of encouraging learners to correct their own errors was to afford them opportunities to notice the gap between their own output and the target forms. Since this task was carried out in groups, however, the individual questionnaires were designed as a research tool to demonstrate to what extent this had been successful. Unfortunately, these individual questionnaires did not elicit useful data for several reasons. First of all, there was insufficient time in class for students to complete the questionnaires, so they were asked to do them at home. Few students returned them to the teacher (a total number of 10 were received out of a possible 43). Those that were returned, however, revealed that students needed guidance on completing them. They also revealed the questionnaire was too blunt an instrument to foster either of the pedagogic aims of reflection or autonomy. For example, in answering the question about areas for improvement, most respondents wrote in very general terms such as '*grammar*' or '*vocabulary*'. A few were more specific mentioning '*tenses*' or '*prepositions*', but when asked about resources they would use to improve these aspects responses were again too general. The typical response was '*a grammar book*' or '*dictionary*'. Student D3 was perhaps the most successful in this respect as she mentioned her difficulty discriminating between '*yet*' and '*already*'. She then went on to use this difficulty as the topic of a mini research project in semester 2.

In terms of noticing the hole, those questionnaires returned for task 1 revealed that students had noticed gaps in their vocabulary. Student D2 also became aware of a new form during the error correction phase of task 2 - the future continuous. He noted in his task evaluation that he was uncertain of the difference between this form and the future simple. In order to improve the individual evaluations, more specific questions need to be included. Examples are given in figure 7.4.

At the time this study was conducted, the assessment for this module involved an examination carrying 60% of the final mark. Since then, the module has been

revalidated and the module tutor was able to remove the examination. This was to reflect the process rather than product approach to teaching and learning and to enable the module leader to expand the scope of the portfolio assessment used to develop and assess learners' writing. The individual task reflections could form part of this portfolio with the result that more class time and greater emphasis could more justifiably be devoted to encouraging this kind of reflection and promotion of independent learning.

Figure 7.4 Examples of questions to encourage learners to reflect

1. Write down five vocabulary items (words or phrases) that you learned from doing this task.
2. Write down one aspect of grammar that you need to work on (use an example from your transcript to illustrate.)
3. What resources are you going to use to work on this aspect? Be specific. For example, write down the name of the grammar book you are going to use and the relevant unit / page number.
4. Try to find examples of your responses to questions 1 and 2 from your listening or reading. Write them down here.

The efficacy of various methods of correcting students' written work is still under debate (see for example Bitchener and Knoch, 2009; Truscott, 2004) and is not likely to be fully resolved in the near future. In the meantime, language teachers have to make decisions about correction on the knowledge that is available. By using the transcripts in this way in the post-task phase, the teacher was able to shift the focus of the lesson from fluency to accuracy. Students were given the opportunity to notice the gap between their own language and the target language (Schmidt and Frota, 1986) which may lead to them noticing (Schmidt, 1990) the target forms in future input. Observations of students in the error correction phase suggested that *they* felt it was a valuable activity since all students were actively engaged in the task. A possible procedure for future pedagogical interventions is: in the post-task phase, students are given C-R tasks to raise their awareness of a form identified as problematic. They are then asked to find and correct their own errors.

Although the error analysis of the ESOL data and the findings discussed above have provided valuable insights into learners' interlanguage and possible future pedagogical interventions, the functional analysis of the three data sets provided a very different and arguably more pedagogically enlightening perspective on error. The initial error analysis focussed on what learners did wrong whereas the functional analysis focussed on learners' communicative purpose with the native-speaker data providing insights into areas for further language development. Taking into account the complexity, relative subjectivity and time-consuming nature of error correction, the present limitations of SLA research concerning the effectiveness of error correction as well as the possible de-motivating effect of error-correction, it could be argued that pedagogical interventions in the post-task stage which focus on developing learners' awareness of missed opportunities may be more beneficial to learners than those which focus on their errors. The initial approach to error analysis also tended to focus on sentence level rather than discourse level errors whereas the findings from this study provide clear support for a discourse approach to language teaching. Moreover, a discourse approach in which activities in the post-task phase employ examples of particular features of the language elicited from tasks they have already performed, will make the activities even more meaningful for learners (Toyoda and Harrison, 2002:95).

The error analysis resulted in another pedagogical issue being raised. One of the aims of this study was to develop a syllabus that would enable teachers using the four tasks under investigation to integrate a focus on form. In chapter 2, it was stated that the term focus on form would be used to refer to grammatical, lexical, phonological and graphological forms. Although the initial error analyses did take into consideration lexical problems, overall it was grammatical issues that were emphasised. In direct contrast, the evidence provided by the functional approach to error analysis highlighted a large proportion of lexical issues. In task 3 for example, many of the errors occurred when learners attempted to suggest recipients for the scholarship. This led to the pedagogical recommendation of providing learners with a variety of expressions in the pre-task phase. Other examples of linguistic forms which were identified in this study for a pedagogical focus and which could be considered lexical in nature include discourse markers, response tokens, idiomatic

expressions, multi-word verbs and vague language. These results highlight the issue of the relative importance of lexis and structure. Since this issue is a significant one in the field of language pedagogy, it will be discussed in more detail below.

As mentioned in section 7.5.3, there is evidence that both native-speakers and successful users of English rely on being able to access to a large number of lexical chunks to achieve interactive fluency (Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers and Demecheleer, 2006 and Foster, 2001) and several writers within the field of language pedagogy have been advocating a lexical syllabus for some time (Lewis, 1993 and 1997, Nattinger and DeCarrico, 1992, Willis 1990 and 2003). Taking into consideration the examples given above, this study certainly seems to provide some evidence to support this view in the context of developing interactive skills. Of course, task-type must also be considered as a variable. Only four tasks were investigated in this study and it is possible that other tasks might produce a larger proportion of errors which could be classified as more structural. As noted already, however, the task types were selected specifically because they had been shown to produce varying levels of meaning negotiation and syntactic complexity and results from this study seem to corroborate that to some extent (see section 7.7). Task 1 for example, being the jigsaw task, produced the only examples of negotiation of meaning. Task 4, which was an opinion-giving task elicited more syntactically complex language. Further studies investigating different tasks could shed more light on this area.

The relative importance of grammar and lexis according to learner and instructional variables was initially discussed in chapter 2. It was suggested, based on the ideas of Ellis (2005) and Celce-Murcia (1991), that grammar increases in importance relative to lexis as learner proficiency level increases. However, according to the same model, when developing speaking skills, lexis is more important than grammar. The data from this study cannot be described as spoken, but it is much closer to spoken language than written language, particularly in terms of how interactive or '*reciprocal*' (Cook, 1989) it is. In fact, many of the errors observed were related to interactivity (for example, response tokens). In this respect, formulaic expressions play a very significant role. Hence, in this study, instructional variables (e.g. task

and mode of interaction) appeared to have more impact in determining the relative importance of lexis/structure than learner variables (e.g. proficiency level).

Another observation related to lexis is that many of the missed opportunities identified in this study fall into the category of lexical chunks (e.g. vague language, idiomatic expressions, phrases for expressing epistemic modality). As mentioned earlier, O’Keefe, McCarthy and Carter (2007) point out that one of the greatest challenges for higher level language learners is increasing their lexical knowledge, particularly chunks. This is because new items are less frequent, occur in more specialised situations and are more idiomatic. This again suggests that the students in this study might benefit from a greater focus on lexis than might originally have been conceived.

Clearly both instructional and learner variables have an effect on the nature of the language output, the errors students produce and missed opportunities. What is constant in all cases however, is that forms, whether lexical or grammatical, can only be fully explained in relation to discourse and context. This supports Willis’s (2003: 223) argument that a ‘*pedagogic corpus*’ should be central to syllabus design. In this study, the texts in the pedagogic corpus are derived from the transcripts produced by learners and native-speakers performing the tasks. These texts help the teacher to identify to what extent the focus on form should be grammatical or lexical. The corpus produced by the participants performing the four tasks under investigation in this study has highlighted a more significant role for lexis than was initially expected and complements other teacher research investigating tasks and a lexical approach to language teaching (Hobbs, 2005 and Baigent, 2005).

On a more general level, this study has raised two related issues regarding notions of correctness and appropriate models for learners. The last decade has seen a growing movement in the world of EFL which rejects the idea that native-speaker language should be adopted as the target for learners of English on the grounds that most non-native speakers will only ever interact with other non-native speakers (see for example Jenkins, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2004). New varieties of English are being identified such as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and English as an International Language (EIL) and there is a belief in some quarters that these varieties are more

appropriate targets for most learners. This argument has strong validity in EFL contexts where learners are unlikely to ever interact with a native-speaker. In the context of this study, when learners are living and studying in the UK, the argument seems less strong but it still requires consideration. Teachers may have their own views on this (see for example Goh, 2009), but the learner perspective is surely at least as important. Timmis (2002) found evidence to suggest that learners still want to be native-like even in contexts outside English speaking environments. It would have been interesting to have surveyed learners in this particular context to elicit their views. This is an area that would definitely warrant further investigation.

There has also been a considerable growth in corpus research, particularly of spoken English, which has provided insights mainly into the features of authentic language and can guide teachers and materials writers in the selection of items to teach. There is now also some corpus research investigating non-native speakers of English which can also provide useful insights. This study, although based on a very small sample, has provided further evidence to support this research and to highlight the differences between native and non-native language. The question now is how to use that knowledge. It would also be useful to collect data on all the tasks from larger samples of both native-speakers and successful non-native users of English.

Related to what should be considered a target, is what should be considered an error. The definition of error adopted in this study was based on the native-speaker norm but this decision was based more on the lack of an appropriate alternative. Although researchers have begun to describe these new varieties of non-native speaker English, the work is still in its early days. Moreover, since the advanced learners in this study can already communicate successfully in most situations, it is assumed that their goal would be native-like proficiency, but this may not be the case. In addition, this study has identified examples of learner use of language that might provide more suitable models for other learners than native-speaker ones. Since error detection at this level is such a subjective process, Lennon's (1991) continuum of naturalness and/or Rühlemann's (2008) notion of appropriateness (2008:689) might be both more practical and more tenable for teachers of advanced learners than that of correctness.

7.7 Research question 6: Would some tasks be more likely than others to elicit episodes of interaction considered to be significant in driving the second language acquisition process forward?

The results regarding negotiation of meaning concur with previous studies comparing task type in the face-to-face mode (Pica, Kanagy and Falodun, 1993) as well as those studies investigating online discussions (Blake, 2000) which show that jigsaw tasks which require all participants to exchange information are more likely to promote negotiation of meaning. In this case, the jigsaw task elicited the majority of modified interactions. All of the modified interactions were triggered by lexical items essential to the completion of the task.

The very low frequency of negotiation of meaning support Foster's (1998) criticism of SLA research carried out under laboratory conditions. Although these results come from a small sample of students, they do suggest that students in real classrooms rarely negotiate meaning and when they do, it is usually triggered by lexical rather than grammatical problems (corroborating the findings of O'Rourke, 2004). It could be argued that since the students in this group have a relatively high proficiency level, breakdowns in communication rarely occur. Other text-based CMC studies of lower level learners have found evidence of form-focussed meaning negotiation (see for example Zeng and Takatsuka, 2009 and Loewen and Reissner, 2009). The error correction process, however, revealed that there were occasions when students had not understood another's message (for example, when they were unable to explain an utterance made by an absent peer). During the interaction, for whatever reason, they had chosen not to seek clarification. Taking into consideration the students' desire to encourage group collaboration revealed by the group evaluation, Foster's (1998:19) theory that students wish to avoid face-threatening behaviour seems a possible explanation. Another explanation is that text-based CMC encourages a focus on meaning rather than accuracy compared to the face-to-face mode as some studies have shown (see for example Loewen and Reissner, 2009 and Meskill and Anthony, 2005).

The example of scaffolding given in 6.7.2 is, in effect, a window on a student's developing interlanguage. Further evidence of a student's developing interlanguage can be seen in the transcript from task 1, group A. In line 36, student B2 uses the past simple to state that a difference has been found: '*we found a difference*' whereas in line 61, she uses the present perfect: '*we have found a difference*' which would be more natural in the context. She later (line 91) reverts to the past simple, however.

Like negotiation of meaning, the lack of occurrences of peer scaffolding during task performance might also be explained by the proficiency of the students. Students at an advanced level have the basic linguistic resources and communication strategies to get their meaning across. It is most likely that the majority of scaffolding occurred during the error correction phase interactions. However, since a recording and transcription of these interactions was beyond the scope of this study, it is not possible to provide evidence of this.

This study revealed several examples of learners actively engaging in language play. Task 2 seemed to encourage the native-speaker participants to use the language creatively, take on fictional roles and merge fact with fiction. Interestingly, it was the most proficient communicators in each of the groups that engaged in the majority of episodes of language play identified. Although the role of language play in second language acquisition is still a fairly new area of research, it is a natural feature of native-speaker interactive discourse (Carter and McCarthy, 2004). Language play also expands opportunities for learners to produce different types of output, it can improve interpersonal relationships and create a more supportive and stress-free learning environment (Broner and Tarone, 2001 and Bushnell, 2008). It seems logical therefore to encourage learners to see it is a creative way to use language and as something which is not only fun to engage in but also as something which can have beneficial effects on learning. This can be done by exposing learners to examples of both learners' and native-speakers' episodes of language play.

7.8 Summary

This chapter has discussed the main findings of this study in relation to other literature. The four tasks generally proved to be challenging and motivating for the

advanced students in this study. A variety of approaches to analysing the transcripts revealed the core structures and functions elicited by the tasks which can be used by other teachers to facilitate syllabus design. The transcripts revealed that the learners focussed predominantly on meaning during the task and therefore a focus on form would be required in the post-task. A variety of approaches to analysing the transcripts revealed several areas of structures, functions and lexis which could form the basis of post-task activities to make learners more native-like. The findings have also raised more general questions relating to concepts of errors and learner goals. In the next chapter, the main findings will be summarised and suggestions for future pedagogical interventions and further research will be made.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This study was conducted to investigate the use of four tasks performed by small groups of learners of English using text-based CMC as part of an action research project. In the first part of this chapter the main findings of the study will be summarised. Then, as part of the action research cycle, recommendations for future pedagogic implementations will be made and possible directions for future research will be suggested. Finally, the outcomes of the study in terms of contribution of knowledge to the field of English language pedagogy will be outlined.

8.2 Summary of findings

Test-based CMC and other communication technologies are now being used to provide learners with opportunities to learn in different ways and in geographical locations remote from one another. This study has shown however, that this technology is still useful as a research and pedagogic tool that can provide teachers with revealing insights into students' performance of classroom tasks more easily than a traditional face-to-face classroom could offer. Text-based CMC also offers an efficient way of collecting authentic corpora of native-speakers and proficient non-native-speakers doing language learning tasks. Analysis of such data can provide teachers with appropriate models of authentic language in use which could form the basis of classroom teaching material.

This study has revealed that the tasks were generally motivating and challenging for both groups of advanced learners under investigation although it did highlight the need for decision-making tasks to have personal relevance to students and the increasing expectation of learners for materials with a high quality of presentation.

Despite the potential of text-based CMC to allow students to participate more equitably in tasks, teachers and researchers must be careful about measuring participation purely in quantitative terms. This study showed that some students were particularly strong or weak in using social and task-management functions of

language, and that transcripts of text-based CMC discussions could be used to raise learners' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in this area.

Analysis of the language structures and functions produced by learners and native-speakers revealed both the range and repertoire of linguistic resources that the learners in this study had but also enabled the researcher to identify possible gaps in their knowledge and/or use. In addition, the data provided a list of core structures and functions for each task which could be employed by other teachers to facilitate syllabus design.

The transcripts revealed that learners focussed most of their attention on meaning while performing the tasks with only a few learners correcting their mistakes during task. The error correction sheets however, demonstrated that learners were able to correct many of their mistakes with the support of a peer, reference tool or teacher.

The error and functional analysis revealed common difficulties which could form the basis of a structural syllabus appropriate for these particular students. In addition, the native-speaker data provided insights into features of language which learners did not use, particularly discourse features, which could be added to this syllabus.

The transcripts provided a starting point for designing C-R tasks to develop learners' explicit knowledge of problematic linguistic forms. By highlighting errors in the transcripts, the teacher was able to provide opportunities for learners to notice a gap between their own current knowledge and more target-like forms. Students appeared to find the error correction phase useful and engaging. However, although the researcher acknowledges that there may be some benefits to this approach to error treatment, the overall findings of this study raised several issues related to errors. Firstly, errors are difficult to identify particularly at the advanced level and even the notion of appropriateness is a subjective one. Secondly, the SLA research to date still does not provide definitive answers to the *if, when, how many, which* and *how* questions of error correction that practising teachers must grapple with. As a result, if teachers want guidance in this area they need to engage in their own classroom research. The findings of this study of advanced learners living and studying in the target language environment suggest that that a post-task approach which develops

learners' understanding of features of language they have not used may be more beneficial than an approach which focuses on what they have done wrong. Examples from proficient users of English as well as native-speakers can provide models of such features and a variety of activities have been suggested to raise awareness and practice these features. This study has also provided more evidence to support a discourse approach to teaching linguistic forms which uses real examples of language in use.

From an interactional research perspective, the results from this classroom study also suggest that, at advanced level, it cannot be assumed that tasks will promote negotiation of meaning leading to grammatical modifications. If a task-based approach is adopted therefore, it is essential that a grammatical focus stage is implemented at some stage during the task cycle. It is argued here that for advanced learners the most appropriate stage for this to occur is in the post-task phase. Sociocultural theory provided an alternative perspective on language learning through the analysis of episodes of language play. It is predicted that scaffolded learning at this level would likely occur in the post-task focus-on-form stage.

Students in this study showed limited ability in being able to reflect on their own and others' performance. This may have been the result of the fact that the instruments used to encourage these processes were shown to be inadequate. Thus, if teachers want to encourage reflection as a necessary pre-requisite to autonomous learning, they need to scaffold the reflection process as carefully as they would any other learning activity.

8.3 Future pedagogic interventions

In terms of the action research cycle, the next phase involves five main areas of pedagogic intervention:

- additional pre-task work should be carried out. For example, pedagogical attention could be given to raising awareness of CMC conventions and phrases useful for carrying out the decision-making task could be pre-taught;

- the decision-making task should be adapted slightly to contain an element of information gap to make it more motivating for students;
- students should be provided with positive feedback after each task;
- appropriate activities to be used in the post-task phase for each task need to be designed, implemented and evaluated;
- individual evaluations should be redesigned to aid learner reflection and encourage autonomy, and the scope of the portfolio as an assessment tool developed accordingly.

8.4 Suggestions for future research

This study involved a small number of participants and so it cannot be assumed that the structural and functional profiles created would be the same when other students in different contexts performed them. Further research investigating these and other communicative tasks performed by different groups of students in different contexts could be carried out to discover if the tasks consistently elicited particular forms or functions to enable more effective design of task-based syllabi. Further research investigating how native speakers perform these tasks might also prove to be very illuminating. A corpus could then be developed which could provide useful material for both pre and post task work with learners.

Few examples of peer scaffolding occurred during the four tasks but it has been suggested that scaffolding is more likely to occur during the post-task phase. Future research involving the recording of this stage would be useful to investigate the extent to which it occurs.

It has also been suggested that the post-task phase of the task cycle may provide opportunities for learners to notice a gap in their linguistic competence. Further research could involve the recording and transcribing of students during the task repetition phase. This would provide evidence as to whether or not students were employing different forms. A longitudinal study, however, would also be needed to provide evidence of learners' developing interlanguage systems.

In terms of the action research cycle, the next stage would be to carry out the above pedagogical interventions and evaluate them. One of the main limitations of this study was the limited learner perspective. An important aspect to study would be learner goals. For example, it would be useful to investigate to what extent learners wanted to become native-like in their production. In addition, learners could also be asked to evaluate different post-task activities and express their attitudes towards various error treatments.

Another potentially useful area of study would be to investigate students' contribution to task after implementing activities to raise awareness of task-management and social functions of language.

Finally, since morphological features are the most difficult to teach and learn, more research is required into the design and effectiveness of tasks which raise learners' awareness of these features.

8.5 Contributions to knowledge

This study has contributed to knowledge in the field of second language pedagogy and SLA in several ways. Firstly, an innovative model of task implementation for advanced learners in which technology has been embedded has been developed. This model could be adopted by language teachers, teaching a range of levels of learners, in other contexts globally. It could also be used by other researchers to investigate tasks and/or second language acquisition.

Secondly, core structures and functions have been identified for each of the four tasks which should facilitate syllabus design for other teachers wishing to use these tasks. In addition to this, a large number of suggestions for the post-task phase for each of the four tasks have been made which can enable teachers to plan and implement form-focussed activities.

This study has contributed to a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the development of learner accuracy when teachers adopt a task-based approach in the second language classroom. It has widened the perspective on issues such as the

complex and subjective nature of error detection and treatment and it has raised questions concerning the selection of appropriate models for ESOL learners.

Finally, it has added to the growing body of evidence from SLA research concerning tasks and second language acquisition by providing further evidence that tasks encourage learners to focus predominantly on meaning.

8.6 Summary

This study has demonstrated the potential of synchronous text-based computer discussions in language teaching and research. The transcripts of learner interactions provide teachers with a more comprehensive way of monitoring learners' performance in terms of their contributions to task, social awareness as well as linguistic competence. Moreover, this study has provided tentative functional and structural templates for each task to accompany the task or topic based syllabus. Pre and post task activities have also been suggested to provide the necessary balance between fluency and accuracy in the communicative task-based classroom. As well as identifying areas for future pedagogic intervention, several areas for future research investigating tasks and their implementation have been suggested. In particular, there is a need for research which will provide evidence for the effect of different phases of the task cycle on learning.

9. Reflection

9.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to complete the final phase of the action research cycle: the reflection. This is perhaps the most significant stage of the action research process because as Kemmis (2001:92) states '*...practical action researchers aim just as much at understanding themselves as the subjects of a practice (as practitioners) as changing the outcomes of their practice.*' This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section will focus on reflection in relation to teacher action research. The second part of the chapter will use Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning to reflect on the overall learning experience of conducting this study. The chapter will conclude with an attempt to answer questions posed in chapter 4 related to the nature of this study.

9.2. Reflection on practice

Dewey (1933:9) defined reflective thinking as '*active, consistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends*'. Reflection then according to Dewey includes the critical examination of our beliefs. In order to do this as teachers, Farrell (2007:9) explains that it is necessary to first of all articulate these beliefs and then compare them to our actual classroom practices. Teacher beliefs are all the assumptions held, often unconsciously about students, academic material, theories of learning and approaches to teaching. They influence all aspects of teachers' work such as their behaviour and decision-making. Therefore, as Farrell (2007:9) argues, reflection cannot start until these beliefs have been articulated. Richards (2003: 21) provides another definition of reflection, describing it as '*an activity or process in which experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose.*' Taking into account the above definitions, in order to reflect, a teacher needs to articulate their beliefs, recount experiences which have led to these beliefs and then critically examine them. The following reflection is therefore structured as follows. Firstly, beliefs that are significant to this study will be articulated and the experience that has led to the

formation of these beliefs will be recounted. These will then be critically examined in relation to the findings of this study.

There are several beliefs that are of significance to this study: beliefs about approaches to teaching grammar, beliefs about the role of error correction in second language learning, beliefs about the nature of grammar, and beliefs about appropriate learner goals. Each of these belief systems will be articulated in the next section. My experiences both as a language learner and teacher have contributed to the formation of these beliefs and will thus be recounted.

9.2.1 Beliefs about approaches to teaching and learning grammar

When I did my initial Certificate in TEFL, I was trained to design language lessons (as opposed to skills lessons) using the PPP model. This served me very well in my early years as a teacher as it provided me with a lesson template that was easy to follow. Also, most of my early experience involved teaching lower level learners, and the model seemed to work well. For a long time I thought that PPP was the only way to teach. In addition, I enjoyed teaching grammar and the course books that I used were based mainly on a grammatical syllabus. Although I also did skills based work with my learners, in retrospect I believed that the grammar lessons were the most important lessons for learners.

Of course, as I became more experienced and completed further training (Diploma in TEFL and M.Ed.), I became familiar with other approaches, particularly TBL. In addition, my experience with higher level learners led me to question both the efficacy and efficiency of the PPP paradigm for many of the reasons discussed in chapter two of this thesis. In fact, I gradually started focussing less and less on grammar and more and more on skills development. As I mentioned in chapter 1, it was the realisation that I had gradually moved to an almost zero grammar approach with my advanced ESOL learners that led to the initiation of this study.

Both the literature review and the findings of this study have consolidated my belief that an approach which is predominantly meaning focussed but also involves an explicit focus on form is the most efficient. The best approach for that focus on form

with the advanced learners appears to be through consciousness-raising activities based in the post-task phase of the cycle.

While carrying out this study I have also begun to learn another language, Mandarin Chinese. As a learner, although I am interested in the structure of Chinese, I do not find it to be particularly complex compared with other languages I have studied. In terms of my goals, I want as much opportunity as possible to focus on meaning so that I can express myself. I therefore often experience frustration as a learner when I feel that my teachers are spending too much time focussing on explicit grammar instruction rather than meaning focussed activities. I have come to believe through my own reading, as well as evidence of my own learning, that accuracy will be acquired naturally as my interlanguage develops, although I still feel some time spent on explicit grammar work is necessary. My learning style thus reflects my teaching approach, that is one which focuses predominantly on meaning but which has some explicit grammar instruction.

My attitudes to error correction have also been influenced by my experiences as a language learner, a teacher, and my teacher training. As a language learner at school, I seem to remember having most of my errors corrected and did not question the appropriacy of such an approach: that is what teachers did. Later, while learning Spanish at an evening class, I recall a teacher correcting my use of the definite article: I had regularly been using *la* with *problema* instead of *el*. This is something that I felt sure I would not have noticed myself. I believed that had this error not been corrected it may have become fossilised. During my initial teacher training I 'learnt' that you should only correct errors as they occurred in the stages of the lesson which were focussed on accuracy while errors which occurred during fluency activities should be dealt with after the communication activity or not at all. I held the strong belief, for a long time, that learners learned from being corrected and it was the teacher's job to correct. As a language teacher, I have spent many hours correcting learners' errors in their written work and during communication activities have diligently collected learners' spoken errors for post-task correction work. I now question both this behaviour and these beliefs. Firstly, my own experience of learning Chinese suggests that I will eventually notice my own errors and correct forms will gradually be acquired. I am much more aware that my own learning

process is not a linear accumulation of structures. I am not averse to correction per se as a learner but I am more interested in someone helping me to express myself rather than correct what I have said or written. The literature review and findings of this study have also led me to question the efficacy of error correction. Certainly the research evidence from SLA is not conclusive. I am concerned about the possible negative effects of error correction yet I am also aware that learners have certain expectations regarding correction. This study has led me to conclude that there is still a place for post-task correction of specific errors. However, a more effective, efficient and less de-motivating approach to improve learners' language may be to implement post-task consciousness-raising activities based not only on learners' errors but also on missed opportunities.

9.2.2 Beliefs about the nature of grammar

When I began my teaching career my understanding and treatment of grammar was principally based on sentence level grammar and on descriptions of the written language. I was very focussed on tenses, mood and aspect. As I was studying for my diploma in TEFL I became more aware of discourse features of grammar, and gradually started to introduce them into my teaching, although this mainly occurred in writing classes. Through attendance at conferences and reading for my M.Ed., I became aware of recent research into the spoken grammar of English. Although fascinated by the area of study I was not sure if and how spoken features should be introduced to learners. Certainly, few course books were dealing with such features and my own attempts at creating appropriate materials seemed ineffective. This study has heightened my awareness of the features of spoken grammar used in text-based CMC and has generated practical pedagogical ideas for the classroom.

It was interesting that even when doing the initial error analysis of the ESOL data for this study, discourse errors did not emerge, probably because I was still focussed on sentence level errors. It was only when I analysed the native-speaker data and began re-analysing the learner data from a functional perspective that discourse features became significant. Many of the discourse features in fact were absent from the learner data, consolidating my belief that making learners aware of missed opportunities is at least as important as error correction in the post-task phase.

My reading for this study and my experience of learning Chinese has made me more aware of the lexical approach to teaching. Since Chinese lacks tenses, or any kind of morphological modifications, sentence structures or patterns constitute the only grammar to be studied. Evidence from my own learning and performance suggests to me that memorising chunks is an extremely effective and efficient way to learn and produce these patterns. The findings of this study and other corpus research leads me to believe that there are many chunks in English which would be useful for learners to learn but have largely been ignored by ELT course books which still tend to focus on traditional aspects of grammar such as tenses and aspects. A lexical approach to teaching is something I would like to learn more about and experiment with in my own teaching.

9.2.3 Beliefs about learner goals

Although unconsciously, when I initiated this study I had made the basic assumption that the goals of all advanced learners of English, particularly those living and studying in the UK should be to become more native-like in their production of the target language. The findings of this study have now forced me to seriously question that assumption. Some of the data drew my attention to the fact that native-speakers may not always provide the best models for learners. The questions of what that goal should be and where the best models can be found are still open to research and debate. The fact that this research has led me to question such commonly held beliefs among many teachers leads me to suggest, for reasons other than those mentioned previously in chapter 4, that this study could be considered critical.

To summarise so far, this study has consolidated my belief that a task-based approach to learning which focuses learners predominantly on meaning but which also uses post-task work to focus on language forms is the most efficient and engaging approach for many adult second language learners. This study has made me question my beliefs about the efficacy of error correction. I am still not convinced either way that correction does or doesn't work but I am leaning more towards an alternative approach which may still employ correction techniques but focusses more on exposing learners, through consciousness-raising activities, to

input which is at a higher level than they have been able to produce. I have been critical of the assumption that all learners should or want to become native-like in their proficiency, even those living and studying in the UK and finally I am less convinced that native-speakers can provide the best models for learners.

The above discussion has attempted to illustrate how my beliefs as a language teacher have changed during my lifetime and how this study has led me to examine some of them more critically. It has also heightened my awareness of the dynamic nature of a teacher's belief system which has particular significance to me in my work in teacher development. It is now one of the areas I would like to explore further. In the following section of this chapter I would like to reflect on my own learning during the research process itself as this has been another significant outcome for me in terms of my own development.

9.3 Reflection on learning

In chapter 2, Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning was described. Despite criticisms of this model, it remains a useful tool to facilitate reflection on learning and thus will be used here as theoretical framework to focus my reflections on my own experience as a learner rather than a teacher. The model is shown again in figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1 Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle

Although Kolb (1984) notes that the cycle can be approached from any one of the four points, I would like to begin at the first stage of the cycle. This is because this is where my research began, that is with concrete experience of my teaching. After reflecting on my own approach to teaching advanced learners (reflective observation) I observed that there was a limited focus on form. This led me to the literature on task-based learning and second language acquisition (abstract conceptualisation). For me, one of the most intellectually challenging aspects of this research was writing the first section of chapter 2 which outlines various theories of second language acquisition. There were two main reasons for the difficulty. Firstly, it is an extremely complex area of study and secondly, it was an area with which I was largely unfamiliar. Each draft of this chapter, and there were many, I would say represented the current state of my knowledge and understanding of the area and each re-draft of a section was the result of some internal *restructuring*, to use an SLA term. I would describe the final draft of the chapter as the product of a cyclical process of reading, drafting, reading and re-drafting which involved all four stages of Kolb's model.

The reason I began the literature review with theories of SLA was that I felt it necessary for me and my readers to understand the various theories in order to be able to provide the context for investigating task-based learning. Moreover, I felt it was necessary to outline the major theories in order to introduce the terminology and the simplest way of doing this seemed to be to describe them chronologically. As a consequence, at one stage, I felt that this section was rather too descriptive and lacked critical analysis. However, on further reflection, I realised that my aim was neither to critique nor add to SLA theory but rather to understand its relevance to the practical activity of language teaching. A critical approach, although desirable, was therefore not deemed necessary.

Once an extensive review of the literature had been conducted, I was able to design an appropriate model of implementation. By implementing the model and collecting and analysing the data I was, in Kolb's terms, actively experimenting. After analysing the data I was able to reflect again which led to some of the changes in belief mentioned earlier and also led to further reading and abstract conceptualisation.

The results from Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory, conducted on two separate occasions in 1997 and 2008, suggest that my learning style is an accommodator. In other words, I learn best from doing things and trying out new experiences. One of the most frustrating aspects of doing this PhD was having to concentrate on further data analysis and writing up rather than experimenting with new ideas in the classroom. This learning style was also reflected in my approach to doing research in that I conducted the research before reading the literature on research methodology. When I read the action research literature, it was very encouraging to find that many of my previous intuitions and implicit beliefs about research in education had already been made explicit by several authorities in the field. In other words, my practical professional knowledge could now be articulated in technical terms.

Due to summer teaching commitments there was a long gap between the initial data analysis of the ESOL data and the analysis of the exchange student data. This enabled me to reflect and evaluate the approach I had taken with the analysis, particularly the error analysis. I questioned the value of analysing the exchange data in the same way. This led me to use native-speaker data to guide the further analysis. The second approach to analysis was so much more revealing than the first approach so this period of reflective observation proved to be extremely valuable.

The ideas from the reading that have had a significant influence on me are those from Vygotsky. I was not familiar Vygotsky's work until I began this research. His concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding (collaborative dialogue) seem to me to be the keys to enabling teachers and researchers further our understanding of the learning process and in particular second language learning. When I consider my own second language learning experiences, it is the opportunities for social interaction and the presence of someone to scaffold my learning that I feel have been the most effective in promoting my language development. The most difficult aspect of being a researcher as an accommodator was the isolation and the lack of opportunities for collaborative dialogue. In a sense, opportunities for collaborative dialogue in research represent opportunities in Kolb's model to actively experiment with ideas and beliefs still under construction. One such opportunity arose last year when I was able to present some of my findings at

the Action Research Symposium at the IATEFL (International Association for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) conference. Sharing my experience with other English language teachers and action researchers and answering their questions helped clarify certain issues in my own mind.

Overall, I have learned many things and in many different ways from carrying out this research. Kolb's model does not represent a single cycle but rather a spiral of repeated cycles and each point in the cycle has been visited many times in the course of this study. However, just like Kolb's experiential learning cycle, the action research cycle is never complete. This study has raised more questions than it has answered and confirmed my belief that the more you know, the more you realise you don't know.

9.4 Conclusion

Finally, I would like to conclude by returning to the question posed in chapter 4 of this research: to what extent can an individual teacher be empowered and emancipated by action research while the present political and institutional hierarchies remain? (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) The following paragraph will attempt to answer that question in relation to this study.

When I began this research I was an ESOL teacher, researcher and teacher educator. Since then, the British government has made significant cuts to ESOL funding within the Further Education sector, the BA ESOL/TESOL programme which provided the context for this study was cut by the University, and all other ESOL provision within the University was sold to a private company, a situation which is being replicated in many universities in this country. I have therefore become one of those researchers and teacher educators who no longer teach. Most English as a second language teachers now working for private companies attached to universities in the UK now have little if any time to do research. Their role has been reduced solely to service providers. Since I no longer have an ESOL class to teach, the changes I would like to implement and further investigate cannot be carried out in my own classroom. For this reason I would argue that in this case individual action research cannot be considered emancipatory because of the hierarchical nature of the

institution. I have however, been one of the few fortunate ESOL teachers in this country who, by having a non-teaching semester, has been able to use this time to conduct my research. This has not been easy but for most English language teachers who have to teach for up to 46 weeks of the year there is very little opportunity for teacher development or research. I would agree with Dornyei (2007) therefore, that all institutions should give teachers more support to carry out their own professional development. As an individual action researcher, I cannot change *the* world or even the institution in which I teach but I can and have changed my own views and interpretation of *my* world as a teacher. The experience of doing action research may not have been emancipatory but it has certainly been empowering.

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Appendix I – Letter of Consent

Dear Student,

I am conducting research into the effect of task type on the interactions of learners of English in on-line discussions as part of a research degree (M.Phil.).

During your normal course of study you will take part in several on-line discussions. These discussions will be recorded and archived on Blackboard so that the transcripts can be used in class to analyse your own language. As part of my research, I would also like to use the transcripts to do further analysis. Although examples of your language may appear in the research, your name will not.

If you are happy for your language data to be used for this research, please sign the agreement slip below. However, should you prefer not to be involved in the research you have the choice to opt out at any time.

If you would like any further information about the project, please do not hesitate to ask, either in person or by e-mailing me at the following address:
Ingamaso@livjm.ac.uk

Best wishes

Amanda Mason
Lecturer in ESOL/TESOL

.....

I agree to take part in this research and understand that the data will be used only for the purposes of this research and will be treated anonymously.

Name

Signature

Appendix II – Letter of consent – Exchange Students

Dear Student,

I am conducting research into the effect of task type on the interactions of learners of English in on-line discussions as part of a research degree (M.Phil.).

To carry out this research I need to recruit student volunteers with different mother tongues. Should you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to take part in 4 on-line discussions in English and one follow-up session. The discussions will last approximately 30 minutes and will be recorded and archived on Blackboard. After the discussions, the transcripts will be analysed for the purposes of the research. However, copies will also be returned to you the following week in order to focus on various aspects of the language. This should enable you to improve your language skills. Although examples of your language may appear in the research, your name will not.

If you would like to participate in this research, please complete and sign the agreement slip below.

Should you require any further information about the project, please do not hesitate to ask, either in person or by e-mailing me at the following address:

A.Mason@ljmu.ac.uk

Best wishes

Amanda Mason
Lecturer in ESOL/TESOL

.....
I agree to take part in this research and understand that the data will be used only for the purposes of this research and will be treated anonymously.

Name Mother tongue(s)

Sex..... Other language(s)

Age Country of Origin

E-mail address..... JMU Test Level

I will be available on Thursdays from 5-7 on all the following dates:

13th October, 20th October, 3rd November, 10th November, 17th November.

Signature

Appendix III – Correction Symbols

Error Correction Symbols

punc	Punctuation – do you need a CAPITAL letter, . or ,?
ww	You have used the wrong word or phrase here. It is probably a matter of collocation. You could use an ordinary dictionary or a collocations dictionary to help you here.
?	Can you explain what you mean? I don't really understand what you are trying to say!
sp	Spelling – check it in your dictionary!
st	The style of word you have chosen is inappropriate here. Perhaps it is too formal or too informal. The dictionary may help you.
t	You have used the wrong tense here.
//	You need to divide your ideas into paragraphs
prep	You have used the wrong preposition. Can you use the dictionary to check which is the correct one?
<->	Can you use a connective to connect these ideas?
art	You have used the wrong article: a, the or zero.
vb	You have used the wrong verb form here – maybe you need to use the 'ing' form, for example.
wc	Word class. Maybe you need an adjective instead of an adverb, for example.
^	A word is missing - you need to add a word.
wo	Word order. e.g. <i>I usually go out on Saturdays</i> not <i>I go out on usually Saturdays.</i>

Appendix V – Individual Evaluation

Task Evaluation – Individual

Name: Task number:

1. To what extent are you satisfied with your performance in the task and your contribution to the group?

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2. To what extent are you satisfied with your English as used in the task?

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3. Are there any aspects of your English that you would like to work on? If so, what?

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4. What resources are available to you to work on these aspects?

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5. If you were to repeat the task, is there anything that you would do differently?

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Appendix VI – Group Evaluation

Task Evaluation – Group: Task number:

1. What were the aims of the task?

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2. To what extent did your group achieve these aims?

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3. Comment on the way your group worked together. Did one person dominate/not participate? Did one person seem responsible for moving the task forward/managing the task or was it a shared responsibility?

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4. Comment on the task itself. Consider interest, motivation, degree of challenge, level of difficulty. Would you like to suggest changes?

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Appendix VII – Task 1

From 'Discussions that Work', Ur, P. (1981)

Appendix VIII - Task 2

Appendix IX - Task 2 - Repetition

Appendix X - Task 3

Vocabulary

The following words are taken from the descriptions of the candidates for the law scholarship. Match the vocabulary on the left with its meaning on the right.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. has left-wing sympathies | 1. to become happy because you have done everything you want to do |
| 2. pliable | 2. irregular or uncertain. e.g one day it may be very very good but the next day it may be very bad. |
| 3. to fulfil yourself | 3. to fight in a war |
| 4. erratic | 4. money you give to someone in power to get what you want |
| 5. mediocre | 5. to be able to speak clearly and fluently and give a strong argument |
| 6. quick-tempered | 6. believes that wealth and power should be shared equally |
| 7. to see active service | 7. someone who is this gets angry easily |
| 8. bribe | 8. not very good |
| 9. eloquent | 9. easily influenced and controlled by other people |

Face-to-Face Discussion

Preparation

Task 1 - Group

You are members of a committee which offers scholarships to prospective law students. Work in your groups to decide on your criteria for selecting candidates for the scholarship.

Task 2 – Individual

Read the information given to you by your teacher about the candidates. Underline any words or phrases that you are not familiar with.

Task 3 - Individual

Consider each candidate in turn and think of reasons both why they should and should not receive the scholarship.

Computer-Mediated Group Discussion.

Discuss each candidate in turn comparing your reasons why each candidate should and should not receive the scholarship.

Once you have discussed each candidate try to reach an agreement on who should receive the scholarship. Prepare to report back your decision to the class with reasons.

The Law Scholarship (From 'Discussions that Work', Ur, P. (1981))

Albert Smith Aged 37, not of outstanding natural ability but very hard-working. Married with three children; until now a taxi driver. His applying was probably due largely to his wife's ambition. Albert made a good impression, but seems a little nervous at the whole idea of a law-school and the effects his new career might have on his social life and family. If he fails the scholarship he will go back to taxi-driving.

Basil Katz Aged 19, brilliant but not very hard-working. A likeable personality, of left-wing sympathies, has taken part in some more or less violent demonstrations and has been in prison at least once as a result. Lots of girlfriends, has a reputation for treating them badly. Very musical, has founded and runs a pop-group. Will probably make his career if he fails the scholarship, which would be a 'terrible waste' according to his school tutor who recommends him.

Carole Andersen Aged 20, a quiet, attractive girl, responsible and able, but rather pliable in character, engaged to be married to a doctor, would like her to finish her university studies before settling down. Her fiancé says: 'I want Carole to fulfil herself in every way, but of course once she is married, home and children will occupy her first and foremost.' Her parents cannot afford to finance the course.

Daphne Braun Aged 21, single, the daughter and granddaughter of lawyers. Enthusiastically Women's Lib., ambitious and career-minded. Academic record erratic, some very good results, some mediocre. Had a mental breakdown last year, was in hospital for three months but appears to have made a complete recovery. Fined recently for being in possession of marijuana. Parents cannot finance her studies. In character rather aggressive and quick-tempered, but generous, a good friend.

Edward Mbaka Aged 24, has been in the Army and seen active service. Divorced, no family. Highly motivated, wants eventually to go into politics. 'I want this course more than anything,' he says 'and only the scholarship can get it for me.' While in the army he was once found guilty of accepting bribes. Charming personality, fluent and eloquent speaker. A citizen of this country, but retains the nationality of his native African state, to which he may eventually return.

Appendix XI – Task 4

Group Discussion

1. How strict are the gun laws in your country? Would it be possible to get a free gun from opening a bank account?
2. During the film, many Americans assert that it is not only their right to own a gun but also their ‘responsibility as an American’ in order to defend their families. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
3. Michael Moore’s aim in this film is to provide a reason for the extremely high rate of gun related murders in the US compared to other developed countries. He suggests that it is in fact a result of the gun laws. Do you agree? Is there a direct relationship between the ease of which you can obtain a gun and the rate of gun crime?
4. During the film Moore discusses the argument that violent crime may be encouraged by certain aspects of popular culture such as such as the watching of violent movies, violent video games or music? Do you think there is any such relationship?
5. Do you think a violent society leads to violent crime or is violence the responsibility of the individual? What factors in a society may lead to violence?

Appendix XII – Error Analysis Profiles

Task 1 - Group A Error Analysis

<u>Key</u>	SUBSTANCE	GRAMMAR	TEXT LEVEL	LEXIS
Student A1	1A	GRAMMAR	1A	LEXIS
Student B1	Graphology	syntax	morphology	Sense realtions
Student C1	Spelling	Omission	Omission	Collocation
Omission	wich (which) (76) cloth(es) 121	Omission looks (like) he has been writing (103) one that writes on it (105/6) in the middle (of his head) (25)	Preposition	Omission exclamation (mark) 129
			<u>Nominal inflection</u> shakespeare('s) shirt (66) the head of Shakespeare (12)	
			<u>Determiner</u> he has (a) moustache (33) he has (a) beard (30) he has not moustche (34) not (a) boot (49) not (a) boot (50) it is (a) boot (52) looking on (the) table (58, 105) a (piece of rubbish) (101) *any (an)	

exclamation(129,141)
Auxiliary
he has not (34)

SUBSTANCE	GRAMMAR	TEXT LEVEL	LEXIS
Graphology	syntax	morphology	
Spelling			
Over-inclusion	Over-inclusion	Over-inclusion	Over-inclusion

hast (31)
sheet(e) (105)
think (121)

SUBSTANCE

TEXT LEVEL

GRAMMAR
syntax

Graphology
Spelling

morphology

LEXIS

Misselection

Misselection

Misselection

Misselection

Misselection *weather/ whether (52)

*too/two (75)

looking *on the roof (55)

sheets (23, 105, 122)

roung (96)

looking *on table (58)

box like a circle (24, 82, 95, 98)

eyebrow (111)

not *to/in mine (84)

sheets (28, 92, 95, 101, 113, 146)

*roof /ceiling (55)

*how... like/what (66)

box (79, 87)

*until now / so far (91)

Determiner

the other sides (on either side) (25)

he is wearing cloth on the shoulder area it is

big (73)

*letters/writing (146)

Pronoun

different to *me/mine (60,

84)

*me (mine) ether (132)

Adverb

me ehter (neither) (132)

VERBS

SV agreement

Tense/Aspect

*we found/ we've found (36, 91)

his feet touch each other (72)

Modality

Active/Passive

Count/Uncount
hairs (25)

Word Class

cylinder (cylindrical) (109)

TEXT LEVEL

SUBSTANCE

GRAMMAR

syntax

Graphology

Spelling

Misorder

tell me what is he saying (124)

Misorder

LEXIS

morphology

Misorder

Misorder

Miscellaneous

in my picture I see Shakespeare sitting on a chair (13)

Error or not?

his eyes are looking up (56)

- Task 1 - Group B Error Analysis

Key	SUBSTANCE	Group B	TEXT LEVEL	Group B
Student B1	Group B	Grammar	Group B	Lexis
Student B2	Graphology	syntax	morphology	
Student B3	Spelling			
Omission	Omission	Omission	Omission	Omission
	fot (L24)	on the floor (there is) a full bin (118)	<u>Preposition</u>	
	Shakespear (13, 27)	so do in my picture (16, 29, 48, 58, 125)	... more detail (43)	
	to (50)	the table (is) too small ...(95)	.. The bottom bit (4)	
	old fashion (81)	I think he looks(like he is) thinking (131)	<u>Determiner</u>	
	color (89, 90)	I do not (know) what it means (133)	legs of (55)	
	the 2 difference (83)		wooden pattern (55)	
			feather (81)	
			paper (112)	
			envelope (112)	
			3rd difference (141)	
Over-inclusion	Over-inclusion	Over-inclusion	Over-inclusion	Over-inclusion
	Over-inclusion been (53)			
	tabl:e (77)			
	describle (99)	there's a bubble saying (that) ':' (L10)		
	eyebrowns (142, 146)			
	cuop (148)			
Misselection	Misselection	Misselection	Misselection	Misselection
	cramble up (22)	mine has no colour *and/or pattern (90)	<u>Preposition</u>	
	strippy (32)		on my picture (L10, 21, 35, 36,) also (12)	
	signiture (75)		50, 73, 107, 120, 126, 137	
	:) (84)		with his hand (L14)	feather pen (L14, 144)
	there (92, 160) (they're)		full with (17)	scribbles of writing (19)
			the eyebrowns (160)	ink bottle (L20)

at the top (28)
determiner
 this funny bits (30)
 has *his got (85)
Article
 a ink bottle
 VERBS
S/V agreement
 eyes is looking (L13)
 there's this funny bits (30)
 his shoulders is (30)
 has got (55)
 there are envelope (112)
 are rubbish (120)
Tense/aspect
 we found (70, 83)
 we found (141)
Word class
 the 2 difference (83)

Misorder

only the two legs of the table I can see (33)
 how many you can see(45)
 you can see a been? (53)
 there (are they/) (160)
 has his got a collar on his outfit (85)
 I think he doesn't have it (151)
 In my picture not (150)

Misorder

messy (38)
 on the top of (53)
 trace (67)
 non really sense of tidness..(38-40)
 handing (81)
 feather (81)
 cup (112)
 up (160)
 the man is not(doesn't look) comfortable....(81)

Misorder

Error or not?
 The eyes of shakespeare is looking up (13)

Miscellaneous

his attitude in my point of vue is.(38-40)

doesn't give more space (95)

- Task 2 Group B Error Analysis

<u>Key</u>	SUBSTANCE	Grammar	TEXT LEVEL	Lexis
Student B1	Graphology	syntax	morphology	
Student B2	Spelling			
Student B4				
Omission		Omission Maybe (it) is Daniel (40)	Omission <u>Preposition</u>	Omission (prime) suspect (11)
		trying to (say) he killed himself (52) (it) is possibly to be (28)	<u>Article</u> (the) just (only) person (31) <u>Auxiliary</u> It might mrs Fairfax (22, 51)	
Over-inclusion	persone (31)	Over-inclusion	Over-inclusion	
			<u>Auxiliary</u> (she (14) Might have *been stolen (20)	
Misselection		Misselection maybe is Daniel *with Mrs Fairfax (40) (it) is possible *to be Mrs Fairfax (28) (it is possible that it was Mrs Fairfax)	Misselection <u>Preposition</u>	Misselection did (committed) (10) got (went) outside (29) just persone (31) (only) *tell us a reason (53)
			<u>Pronoun</u> he (it) (14)	

he killed him (self) (44)

agree (think) (14)

I haven't idea (27)

I possibly agree with you (26)

I do not agree with *the possibilities (33)

VERBS

SV agreement

Modal/auxiliary

Tense

hear (heard) 34

are smoking (41)

Passive

material (was) found (12)

quicker (24)

Misorder

Do you know who is Alice (16)
is possible also (28)

Why you don't agree (37)

Misorder

Miscellaneous

She could laugh (39)

Look the sentence before dying (56)

- Task 3 - Group C

Error Analysis

Key

Student C2
Student D3
Student D1
Student C3

SUBSTANCE 3C 3C

LEXIS
3C

TEXT LEVEL

GRAMMAR

Graphology
Spelling

morphology - 3C

Omission

Omission

agree that BK (should get)(63)
who will (you) vote for ? (99)
(he) is still a good choice (105)

Omission

Preposition

(an) honest person (18)

Omission

intelligent (47)
fo (56)
Dahne (107)

(I don't think any of them *should get....)

Over-inclusion Over-inclusion

waesnt (47)
awfull (77)
deiceded (87)
decided (98)

Over-inclusion

Over-inclusion

Article
(the) Edward (11, 93)
Modal

before (52)

might the only think that could (57)

Auxiliary

Does anybody is in (6)
might (will) use it (22)

Misselection Misselection

defenetly (44)
think (g) (57)
Nornet (8)

Misselection

Preposition
vote in (72)
vote to (81)

toc toc (4)
needs (?) (17)
person (26) (favourite?)
is not *adequate for (suitable)(35)

No, I don't agree *with them (66, 76)
(that they should get..)
I can't decide which (82/83)
(I can't decide between ,,and,,)

bably (78)

Determiner

in the (her) family (52)

Adverb

also (too) (46)

*too (such) honest person (18)

he might *be (become) (42)

did one mistake (46)

be negative (go gainst him) (57)

drawback of woman chaser (61)

agree (think) (63)

in the position (63/64)

there likely the same (85)

already (87)

my vote *is to Edward (89)

appreciable (97)

stay (stick) (105)

No, I don't *agree/think with them (66, 76)

she had more contact with laws (53)

he always administrates to his girlfriends (61)

the way he treats his girlfriends

Modal

We can (should/could) (105)

May be he can (20) (he might)

Pronoun

somebody (anybody) (64)

Tense

had an awful past (has had) (76, 77)

Misorder

Miscellaneous

his needs to finish the career (58)

to spend in benefits to .. (93/94)

Task 4 - Group B

Error Analysis

<u>Key</u> Student B1 Student C1 Student B2	SUBSTANCE	GRAMMAR	LEXIS
	Graphology Spelling	syntax	Sense realtions Collocation
Omission	corect (53) imature (55)	(it) is quite hard (7) (it) is not possible (20) in my country(to) get a free gun (25) (it) is impossible (16) it is impossible to get a gun a mature person is not the case (56) (This is not the case for a mature)	<u>Preposition</u> (on) the other hand (35)
			<u>Determiner</u> (the) last question (60) buy (a) gun (23)
	SUBSTANCE	GRAMMAR	LEXIS
	Graphology Spelling	syntax	morphology
Over-inclusion	gouvourment (42) (k)law (44) lasta (60)	any problem you have you can solve (it) (52) (but) only the gangs have guns (16) getting a gun (.it) is a good idea (35)	<u>Prepositions</u> <u>Auxiliaries</u> would be increase (47) <u>Determiner</u>

have (the) guns (17)
TEXT LEVEL

LEXIS

morphology

Misselection defense (35)
extend (t) (42) and *after (then) *taking it. (23)
to acquire a gun (about acquiring) 45)

Preposition

listen/hear (56)
costs (cause) 64
take (get) (22,23)
brings many troubles to a person (30)
films with violence (53)
we/ (let's) move on (49)

Modality

must/have to (9)
mustn't/shouldn't (53)

TEXT LEVEL

LEXIS

morphology

SUBSTANCE

GRAMMAR

syntax

Graphology

Spelling

defense (35)
extend (t) (42)

and *after (then) *taking it. (23)

to acquire a gun (about acquiring) 45)

SUBSTANCE

GRAMMAR

syntax

Graphology

Spelling

quiet (quite) (7)

Miscellaneous

In my country you do not need a licence it prohibited (18)
violence .crime (violent crime or violence and crime) (36)

Error or not?

I think there is no such relationship (59)

Appendix XIII – Error Profiles by Level and Task

Error Analysis		Task 3		Spelling	
Group A	Typo	Group B	Typo	Group C	Typo
Omission		Omission		Omission	
lawer (13, 60)		objetive (26)	mustn (59)	inteligent (47)	
use to (52)	Bsil (22)	forth (37)	marred (62)	Dahne (107)	fo (56)
		forth (40)	fluen (107)		
		eratic (84)	presiden (123)		
		scolarship (59)			
		characterists (99)			
		Over-inclusion		Over-inclusion	
		dasphne (43)	alla (60)	waesnt (47)	decided (98)
		citizen off (97)	finishe (67)	awfull (77)	
			scholarshijp (88)	deiceded (87)	
			ios (117)		
Misselection				Misselection	
thing (k) (60)	feet (feel) (14)	dicion (15)	wife;s (16)	defenety (44)	Nornet (8)
	bad (but) (22)	commitement (62)	resson (113)	think (g) (57)	bably (78)
	but (bad) 61)	wan't (66)	we (me) 115		
		diserve (57, 74)	ehat (122)		
		backroung (79)			
		sais (110)			
Misorder					
hard wroking (30)		laso (84) (also)			

Appendix XIV

Table 9.1 *Functional analysis of task 1 interactions*

Completing task	Examples	Task Utility
Giving general, specific and approximate descriptions of picture	he is sitting on a chair	C
Asking for general and specific descriptions of picture	do you have a fly in your picture?	F
Clarifying	I mean bee	I
Asking for clarification	What do you mean by bean?	I
Comparing and contrasting	same here	I
Speculating	maybe there is a difference in the.....	I
Task management	Examples	
<i>Organising task discourse</i>		
Opening task	so everyone	I
Moving task forward	carry on and find out the next difference	F
Bringing task to a close	Let's check	F
Suggesting task strategies	concentrate on eyes	I
<i>Summarising state of play</i>		
Stating a difference has been found	we have found another difference	C
Stating how many differences have been found	so 3 differences	C
Stating how many differences remain to be found	so nine differences left	I
Summarising state of play	so far it is the same except for bee	I
Asking for confirmation of state of play	ok how many differences do we have?	I

Key to Utility Symbols:

- C – Core
- F – Frequent and useful
- I – Infrequent but useful
- O – Occurring but not useful

Appendix XV

Table 9.2 Functional analysis of task 2 interactions

Function	Example	Utility
Task completion		
Stating facts/factual information	He has motivation and...	C
Asking for speculations	Who do you think did the murder?	I
Agreeing/disagreeing with interlocutors	Possibly I agree with you	C
Justifying	<because> they were both wearing red	C
Asking for justifications	tell us a reason	I
Speculating	I think Mrs Crabtree killed her husband	C
Making deductions	she could have left the room in the same way	C
Clarifying	Sorry I am trying to say he killed himself (B, L52)	I
Task management		
Opening task	who do you think did the murder	I
Moving task forward	see the new evidence	I
Bringing task to a close	so what is our conclusion?	C
Suggesting task strategies	none	I
Social/cooperative functions		
Greeting	hi guys	
Introducing oneself	my real name is x	
Encouraging others to participate	you should write something	
Expressing feelings about task	I'm confused now	
Giving praise	x is a talented Sherlock Holmes	
Showing you are thinking	um...	
Laughing	hehehe	
Linguistic		
Self repair	*couldn't be (A, L41)	

Key to Utility Symbols:

C – Core

F – Frequent and useful

I – Infrequent but useful

O – Occurring but not useful

Appendix XVI

Table 9.3 Functional analysis of task 3 interactions

Function	Examples	Utility
Task Completion		
Stating facts	he also has 3 children	C
Suggesting recipients for the scholarship	I think that Albert should take the scholarship	C
Asking for suggestions/opinions	What do you think?	I
Justifying	because he doesn't want to become a lawyer	C
Asking for justification	Why?	I
Agreeing with interlocutor	I agree with you	C
Disagreeing with interlocutor	I don't agree	F
Speculating/expressing future possibility	he might be motivated later, after starting the course	C
Comparing/contrasting candidates	I think she has the better CV	F
Task Management		
<i>Organising task</i> Opening task	ok, we are going to decide who can get the scholarship	F
Moving task forward	so we are going *to the Xth person	C
Bringing task to a close	so, we need to decide people	C
Reorienting discussion	we are talking about X not Y	I
Suggesting task strategies	I think we need to decide *with justice	F
<i>Summarising State of play</i> asking for concensus stating concensus	ok so we *are all agree at that one? so we have 1 vote *to X 1 to Y	C C
Social/cooperative		
encouraging others to participate	X? Y?	
giving praise	Good girl!	
Linguistic		
self-repair	sorry, it's his wife's idea	

Key to Utility Symbols:

- C – Core
- F – Frequent and useful
- I – Infrequent but useful
- O – Occurring but not useful

Appendix XVII

Table 9.4 Functional analysis of task 4 interactions

Functions	Example	Utility
Task Completion		
Stating facts	In my country gun laws are *stricted.	C
Giving opinions	I think that having a gun in your *possess it is very dangerous	C
Agreeing with interlocutor	yes, I agree with what X said	C
Justifying because they don't always know how to use them	F
Asking for elaboration/clarification	a law about what?	I
Hypothesising	If everyone had guns then...	F
Speculating	I guess this kind of movies can encourage young people to do something bad	F
Expressing likes/dislikes	I like violent movies	F
Describing past experiences and events	I lived in the USA	F
Task management		
Opening task	What do you think about the first question?	F
Moving task forward	Let's go to the second question	C
Bringing task to a close	ok come on let's go	I
Social/Co-operative Functions		
Greeting	Good afternoon	
Taking leave	bye	
Encouraging others to participate	X?	
Joking/teasing	like you, X?	
Giving praise	nice row, X	
Giving compliments	Nice man!	
Apologising	Sorry, it's stupid	

Key to Utility Symbols:

C – Core

F – Frequent and useful

I – Infrequent but useful

O – Occurring but not useful

Appendix XVIII

Table 9.5 List of structural forms produced in task 1 interactions

Sentence types	Example	Utility
Compound sentences with coordination (<i>but, and</i>)	he is sitting on a chair and in from of him he has a table	F
Complex sentences with:		
• adverbial clause (place)	he's *seat down on a chair with a table, where he is trying to write	F
• relative clauses	the other is in the box which looks like a circle	C
• non-finite clauses	there is a fly flying over the head of Shakespeare	F
• nominal clauses	Tell us what *can you see	I
Complex compound	I don't have exactly a bee but I see some following points above his head showing he is thinking too much	I
Verb forms	Examples	
Present simple have/have got	he has one pen	C
There is/are/ there isn't /there aren't	there is a man	F
There's no/there are no (for contrast)	there's no collar in mine	F
Present continuous	he is holding a feather	F
Present perfect continuous	he has been writing for a long time	O
Past simple	<I> got confused with the chair	O
Imperative	tell me about his pens	I
Passive voice	the table and chair are made of wood	I
I can see/can't see + noun	I cannot see *mustaches	I
I can see sb doing sth	I can see an old man sitting on a chair	I
Might be	it might not be line	I
Question Forms	Examples	
Wh question	What do you mean by bean?	C
Yes/no question	Do you have a fly in your picture	C
Reduced question	What signature?	F
Negative question	don't you have paper rubbish?	I
Declarative question	there's no feather on the table?	I
Indirect question	catchy??? who knows *what exactly means?	O
What does x look like?	*how does you cup look like?	I
Other forms	Examples	
Complex noun phrases	the hair he has got above his lips	C
Adverbials of place	next to him on the floor	C

Discourse markers	so he thinks it's a cup	C
Look like + clause	, looks he has been writing for a long time	I
Look like + noun	<they> look like lines	I
Seems to be + vb +ing / Seems like + clause	the table only seems to have to feet	I
Vague language	something is flying	I

Key to Utility Symbols:

C – Core

F – Frequent and useful

I – Infrequent but useful

O – Occurring but not useful

Appendix XIX

Table 9.6 List of structural forms produced by ESOL learners in task 2 interactions

Sentence types	Examples	Utility
Compound sentences with coordination	the murderer threw the vase from the window and it fell on the flowerbed	C
Complex sentences with the following types of subordinate clause:		
• nominal clauses	I agree with what X said	C
• adverbial clauses (reason, purpose, result, time, condition)	the murderer ran out from the window because it was open (reason) she put a cigarette close to the victim so that nobody will suspect her (purpose) When she got into the room she saw the letter (time)	C
• relative clauses	She is the one that heard the footsteps	C
Complex-compound	I think the maid would not be the murderer because a cigarette end was found and the maid is not a smoker	C
Complex-complex	maybe it's X because he wanted to get rid of his brother so he could get the money quicker	F
Cleft sentences	It's Daniel that wrote the letter	F
Verb forms		
Present simple	I have no idea who is the murder	C
Present continuous	I'm watching	F
Past simple X killed mr crabtree	C
Past continuous	they were both wearing red	C
If sentences	if they killed him mr crabtee *wont have the ability to change the will	F
Modals of speculation	it could be Daniel	C
Modals of deduction	she could have left the room in the same way	C
Should	you should write something	O
Would	that would be too simple	F
Passive voice	at the time the dead body was found	C
Imperative	tell us a reason	O
Question forms		

Indirect questions	*Do you know who is alice?	I
Negative questions	Why you don't agree?	I
Reduced question	Why?	C
Wh question	Who is the murderer	C
Subject question	Who might have stolen the vase?	I
Discourse markers	So what is our conclusion?	C
Phrasal verbs	Get rid of	C

Key to Utility Symbols:

C – Core

F – Frequent and useful

I – Infrequent but useful

O – Occurring but not useful

Appendix XX

Table 9.7 List of structural forms produced by ESOL learners in task 3 interactions

Sentence types	Example	Utility
Compound sentences with coordination (<i>but, and</i>)	Katz has got a good recommendation but his bad reputation does not make him a favourite	C
Complex sentences with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adverbial clause (reason, condition and time) relative clauses non-finite clauses 	<p>Once she gets married, she won't be able to spend enough time on her job (time)</p> <p>Albert is not acceptable because he is married with 3 children (reason)</p> <p>if this kind of person gets power, he might will use it for dirty purposes (condition)</p> <p>Basil is a young man who works hard being a lawyer you must be very responsible</p>	C F F
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> nominal clauses 	We are going to decide who can get the law scholarship	I
Cleft structures	the worst thing about Daphne is that that's what a lawyer needs.	C
Verb form		
Present simple	Basil Katz doesn't deserve the scholarship either	C
Present continuous	x we are talking about the second person	O
Present perfect simple	he has been in prison once	F
Past simple	he accepted bribes	C
Past perfect	I thought we had finished with Basil	O
BE going to	we are going to decide who can get the scholarship	I
First conditional	if he *fail he will have another job	F
Modal verbs:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> should 	Albert Smith should take the law <scholarship>	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> must 	we must do an objective evaluation	I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> may 	she may never get married	I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> might 	you might be right	I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cannot 	her parents cannot finance her studies	O
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can 	we can give her a chance	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> could 	I presume she could get the loan	F
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> will 	I think I will vote for albert	F
Passive voice	he was found guilty	F
Used to	she use* to get drugs	O
Question forms		

Wh question	Who do you prefer to take the scholarship?	C
Wh subject question	Who guarantees that he'll change?	F
Yes/no question	Do you agree?	C
declarative question	*everyone agrees that either Basil worth the scholarship?	I
Fixed tag question	*we agree not to give him, right?	I
Reduced question	Why?	C
comparatives	she has more positives than negatives	F
superlatives	she is the worst candidate	F
Other forms		
Multiword verbs	<i>rule out</i>	I
Discourse markers	<i>First of all</i>	I

Key to Utility Symbols:

C – Core

F – Frequent and useful

I – Infrequent but useful

O – Occurring but not useful

Appendix XXI

Table 9.8 Analysis of structural forms produced by ESOL and Exchange students in task 4 interactions

STRUCTURES	EXAMPLES	Utility
Sentence types		
Compound sentences with coordination	in US children are taking parent's guns and they are killing people	C
Complex sentences with the following types of subordinate clause		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nominal clauses 	they don't always know how to use them right	F
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adverbial clauses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ reason 	I think it is wrong to have a gun because by mistake you may kill somebody	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ result 	In my country people are not allowed to buy guns with the consequence that few people can commit crime	F
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ time 	the police have to return their guns to the police station when their duty is finished	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ concession 	although the government doesn't allow it on tv , the internet is very powerful	I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comment 	I think it's quite hard to own a gun	C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-finite 	the you see having a gun and killing someone as a normal thing	I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relative 	anyone who wants to buy a gun must get the licence	C
Compound complex	this statement is a complete nonsense and for that reason it is really questionable because this situation could lead to a sort of anarchy	F
Complex complex	If you waste your time playing video games especially when you are young, you lose the chance to develop other more important aspect of your character and personality, which are likely to let you	F

	become a worse person in the future	
Verb forms		
Present simple	In my country gun laws are strict.	C
Present continuous	children are taking parent's guns	I
Past simple	I agree with what X said	C
Past continuous	I was talking about x.....	O
Present perfect simple	I've never known anyone who had a gun	O
Passive voice	crime may be encourage by certain aspects of popular culture	C
Imperative	Don't be afraid of making a mistake	O
Modal verbs		
• should	they should start gathering them	I
• can/can't	you can be influenced by what you see	C
• may	they may be encouraged to kill	I
• will/won't	they will be more safe	F
• would/wouldn't	I would hate to live there	F
• could	this situation could lead to..	F
• must/mustn't	anyone who wants to buy a gun *must get the licence	O
Question forms		
Wh	What do you need to get that licence?	F
Yes/No	Do we know anything else	F
Reduced	no what?	F
Tag	...isn't it?	F
Subject question	Who has the responsibility?	F
Declarative	there are shops selling guns?	F
Other forms		
Be used to	everyone is used to violent movies	I
Get used to	people who live in a violent society get used to be* violent	I
Used to	the guys used to listen to marilyn manson	I
Comparatives	it's easier for them to get guns	F

Key to Utility Symbols:

C – Core

F – Frequent and useful

I – Infrequent but useful

O – Occurring but not useful

Appendix XXII

Table 9.9 Exponents used by native-speakers to agree and disagree with interlocutors' contributions.

Agreeing	Frequency Used	% of dyads used by
yes	7	60
yes indeed	1	20
yes that's a poss.	1	20
yeah	8	100
yeah I know	1	40
yeah true	1	20
yeah, I think so	1	20
yep	7	80
yep that's it	1	20
yeh	2	40
yeh ok	1	20
yup	3	40
ok	6	60
I concur	1	20
agreed	2	20
indeed	1	20
(that's) true	4	80
that's a possibility	1	20
yeah I was thinking that	1	20
I think so too	1	20
That's (kinda) what I was thinking (too)	2	40
bingo	1	20
[he] could have done	0	0
could be	1	20
perhaps/possibly	2	40
definitely sounds like something that could happen	1	20
most likely	1	20
that sounds plausible	1	20

Appendix XXIII

Table 9.10 Expressions used by native-speakers and ESOL Learners for managing the task

Function	Expressions used by native-speakers	Expressions used by ESOL learners
Opening task	what do you reckon, x? ok, are you ready? ..what are we meant to be doing?	so people.... who do you think did the murder?
Moving task forward	we could go on forever, let's move on. <shall we have a look at the> next one? Should we move on?	see the new evidence
Suggesting strategies	Let's eliminate people. Maybe we should wait and see what other evidence there is... Let's rule out We need to find out who Alice is We've just got the last bit of evidence, so let's see what happens Let's run down the checklist	
Bringing task to a close	so you think she did it with the vase? OK, who do we think did it? so is our theory that...? yeah, we think it was Mrs C with the vase	so what is our conclusion? What do you think X

Appendix XXIV

Table 9.11 Types of ellipsis employed by native-speakers during task 2

Part of sentence omitted	Example
Subject	<It> seems a little odd.
Subject + verb	<He was> possibly writing to his lawyer
Subject + verb + article	<it was a> domestic dispute
Article	<The> Only problem though
Main verb	no he didn't <go out>
Main verb + complement	cheating hubby <was the motive>
Main verb + object	I think Mrs C <did it>
adverbial	he was bumped off by someone he was going to exclude <from the will>
auxiliary verb	possibly an affair <was> rumbled
subordinate clause	we all know who died and where he was <when he died>
Question word + auxiliary	<what do> you reckon?
Clause	<It's hard to exclude any of them> except the maid

Appendix XXV

Table 9.12 Multi-word verbs with idiomatic meanings used by native-speakers in task 2.

Verb	Meaning
see someone off	kill someone
bump someone off (x5)	kill someone
set someone up	to make someone else appear guilty for a crime they did not commit
stitch someone up	to make someone else appear guilty for a crime they did not commit
hush up	to try to prevent other people from discovering something
rule out (x3)	decide that something is impossible or will not happen
stand someone up	intentionally fail to meet someone you had arranged to.
break something off	end a relationship
turn up	appear at a planned meeting
show up	Appear at a planned meeting
find out (x3)	discover
pay something off (x1)	pay back something you owe
go on (x2)	happen
end up	finally be in a particular situation or finish with a particular result
work something out	find an answer to a problem by thinking about it
get at	take revenge/deliberately make life unpleasant for someone
hang on (x2)	wait (let me think/check)
hold on	wait
hang about	is this a pv or discourse marker? not sure
fit in with	doesn't contradict other facts or evidence
fit into	play a part or role in a particular situation
back something up	prove something is true
go on (x2)	continue/keep going
come back to	return to a particular point in task/reconsider
run down	consider each point in turn in a list
point towards	make it seem like something is true
wrap around	hit at great speed/force
knock someone or something out of something	have someone removed from something
wash up (x2)	clean the plates and dishes after a meal
get up (x3)	stand from seated position
move on (x2)	continue with the task/next point

Table 9.13 Multi-word verbs with literal meanings used by native-speakers in task 2.

Multi-word verb	Frequency of occurrence
go back	1
wander around	1
go in	1
go out	5
come in	5
come out	1
walk in	1
climb in	1
climb out	2
jump out of	3
let someone (back) in	2
leave through	1
kill off	2
look at	1

Table 9.14 Multi-word verbs used by ESOL learners in task 2.

go/jump out of
throw sth out of somewhere
go out
jump through
get rid of

Appendix XXVI

Table 9.15 *Idiomatic expressions identified in native-speaker transcripts of task 2.*

Expression	Meaning in context
have something to do with it (x2)	be involved (in the crime) in some way
want sb out of the picture	want someone dead or out of ones life
be in on it	be involved (in the crime) in some way
try to make it look like (someone else did it) (x2)	try to implicate someone else in a crime
my money is on X	I think X did it
be at it	have an affair/sex
have it away with sb	have an affair/sex with sb
wouldn't hurt a fly	harmless
it's written all over her	she appears to be completely guilty
beat sb to it	do something before someone else does
get wind [of] something	find out something which is supposed to be a secret
be onto sb	suspect sb of doing something illegal or dishonest

Table 9.16 *Colloquial language found in native-speaker transcripts of task 2.*

Word/phrase	Meaning in context
guilty as sin	very guilty
defo	definitely
fag end	cigarette butt
ciggie/ciggy (end) (x3)	cigarette butt
soz (x3)	sorry
coz/cos (x5)	because
be in to	be going to
oh blimey	exclamation of surprise
nite	night
innit	isn't it
hubby	husband
dodgy business	illegal activity
cranky	bad-tempered
snap	lose one's temper
lose it	lose one's temper
nope	no
bonce (x2)	head
dump	end a relationship with someone
drop	end a relationship with someone
ages	a long time
top sb	kill someone
ace	really good

Appendix XXVII

Table 9.17 Examples of errors made in performing task management functions

Function	Examples of unnatural/erroneous utterances	Reformulations
<u>Organising task</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opening task • moving task forward • bringing task to a close 	<p>What do you think about the candidates? Let's go to start with the first candidate.</p> <p>Let's go ahead. We can start to speak about the next candidate. So we are going to the xth person.</p> <p>ok, who do you prefer to take the scholarship?</p>	<p>ok, who do we think should get it? ok, let's start by talking about x ok first of all let's look at X so let's talk about X next shall we talk about X next? so what do we think about X?</p> <p>so, we need to decide <who should get it> so, we need to come to a decision/make a decision so, who are we going for?</p>
Suggesting task strategies	<p>why don't we see the other candidates and then we decide. We can go on with the next one and we'll see I would suggest everybody writes a name and we count.</p>	<p>I think we need to consider all the candidates before we decide Let's talk about the others first and then decide I suggest we vote on it</p>
<u>Summarising state of play</u> asking for consensus stating consensus	<p>are we agree about our candidate? so do we choose X?</p> <p>Finally our candidate is x</p>	<p>ok so do we all agree on X then? so are we going to give it to X then? so we are going to give it to X then</p>

Appendix XXVIII

Table 9.18 Exponents employed by ESOL and exchange students to introduce opinions about the questions in the task.

Expressions used for introducing opinions based on the questions in the task	Frequency (ESOL students)	No of groups used by (/3)	Frequency (exchange students)	No of groups used by (/5)
I think/don't think	12	3	35	5
I agree that	1	1		
I disagree with that statement	2	1		
I agree to some extent	1	1		
I agree with the xth question	1	1		
yes, it's true but not completely			1	1
.....x, I think is			1	1
I don't agree at all with this statement			1	1
I agree <with this statement>			3	1

Table 9.19 Expressions used by ESOL learners and exchange students that were deemed inappropriate

Expression used	Target Expression	Frequency	No of groups used by (/8)
In my opinion	I think	1	1
I am highly agree with this statement	I completely agree (with this statement)	1	1
I (strongly) believe	I (really) think	2	2
I am agree/disagree (with that statement)	I disagree with that statement	2	2
I disagree about	I disagree <with that statement>	2	2
I totally agree with the increasing of gun crimes	I totally agree that the increase in gun crimes....	1	1
..... from my view, in my view/I think,	1	1
to this question I am disagree	I disagree with this question	1	1
I think the same that Michael Moore in this question	I agree with Michael Moore on this question	1	1
I agree on it	I agree <with that statement.	1	1

Appendix XXIX

Table 9.20 Expressions used by native-speakers to agree with co-participant

Expressions used for agreeing with an interlocutor's statement	Frequency of Use	% of dyads used by
yeah/yep	4	75%
I agree	4	75%
you're right	3	50%
indeed	2	50%
(that's very) True	2	50%
yeh I think you're right	1	25%
yeah I completely agree	1	25%
Defo	1	25%

Table 9.21 Expressions used by learners to agree with co-participant

Expressions used for agreeing with an interlocutor's statement	Frequency of occurrence	% of ESOL groups used by	Frequency of occurrence	% of exchange groups used by
yeah			3	40%
yes	5	100%	48	100%
(yes) of course	4	66%	3	40%
Yes I think this is true	1	33%		
yes, I agree with what x said	1	33%		
good point	1	33%		
(yes) I agree with you (X)	3	100%	4	60%
I agree with that (what you just said)	1	33%		
that's right	2	66%		
yes, exactly	1	33%		
sure	1	33%		
exactly			1	20%
yes you are right			3	20%
definitely			1	20%
yes, I think so			4	40%
yes, it is			1	20%
I understand what you mean			1	20%

Table 9.22 Expressions used by learners to agree with co-participant considered inappropriate

Expressions used inappropriately by learners	More appropriate target
I agree with you two	I agree with you both/both of you/the two of you you're both right
yes, i agree on it	yes, you're right
I wanted to say this	*I was going to say that
I definitely agree with you	absolutely/ I think you're absolutely right

Table 9.23 Expressions used to express an opposing view to interlocutor(s)

Expressions used	Frequency used
ok (followed by contrasting statement)	1
yes but (followed by contrasting statement)	6
but (followed by contrasting statement)	4

Appendix XXX

Table 9.24 Task management expressions used by the native-speaker dyads in task 4

Expressions used	Frequency used by native speakers	Frequency used by learners
Opening/Starting Task		
Have you read the questions?	1	0
ok so first question	1	0
shall we get going?	1	0
Moving task forward		
next one	1	0
I guess that takes us to Q2	1	0
Q3?	1	0
last question	1	0
what do you think about no x?	1	1
Bringing task to a close		
Are we done yet?	1	0
Let's quit	1	0
Shall we end there?	1	0

Table 9.25 Task management expressions used by ESOL and exchange students in task 4.

Appropriate expressions used by learners	Frequency used by learners
Opening/Starting Task	
What do you think about the first question?	1
first question	1
Moving task forward	
ok let's talk about the xth one	1
what do you think about the xth one	1
ok let's go/move on to the second question	3
shall we move on to	1
what about the xth question/ point no x?	3
question no x	1
Bringing task to a close	
ok/ come on let's go	2

Table 9.26 *Inappropriate language used by learners to manage task 4*

Moving task forward	Target form
we have to go on	I think we should move on
following question please	(Let's talk about) (the) next question
let to talk about the next one	let' talk about the next one
lets go on with the xth question	let's move on to the xth question
the next one/question please	next one
about the xth question	*
we move on to	Let's move on to
move to xth task	Let's move on to the xth question
according to the xth question	*
let's go to see the xth question/next one	Let's move on to the xth question
Bringing task to a close	
I think give up now	I think we should finish now
that issue could carry on til tomorrow, ...	we could go on forever
the end	let's quit/let's finish there
we better carry on this discussion tonight	we could carry on discussing this later

Appendix XXXI

Table 9.27 Traditional conditional if sentences used by native-speakers in task 4.

Verb Form	Example	Frequency
if + present simple, present simple (zero conditional)	I supposeif everyone has one then you also need one to	4
if + present simple, will/won't +verb (first conditional)	if the government doesn't create suitable laws people will run riot	6
if + past simple, would + verb (second conditional)	if nobody had guns then it would be fine	1
if + present simple, modal + verb	if people continue to hold this opinion then the situation can't be rectified	3

Table 9.28 If sentences used by ESOL and exchange students

Verb Form	Example	ESOL Frequency	Exchange Frequency
if + present simple, present simple (zero conditional)	if you live in a violent society, you belong to it	5 (1)	18
if + present simple, will/won't +verb (first conditional)	...if they have guns with them they will be more safe ..	3	2
if + past simple, would + verb (second conditional)	if people were not allowed to have guns they wouldn't be able to kill each other	2 (1)	9 (4)
if + present simple, modal + verb	if parents treat their children violently, it could be possible to grow criminals	1	9
if + present simple, present perfect	if they have a gun at home, their dream has become a reality	0	1

Note: The figures in brackets showing the number that were grammatically incorrect but could easily be corrected with a change of one of the verb forms.

Table 9.29 Functions of would expressed by native-speakers

Function of would	Example
Expressing result or feelings towards, imaginary situations	there would be total uproar here I think it would frighten anyone who even remotely trusts a bank They would be shut down I wouldn't feel at all comfortable about having a gun in the house
Speculating	Surely no one would believe you could get a gun in this country opening a bank account Why would a gun be an incentive?
Expressing preference with 'rather'	I'd rather leave it to the police Why would a gun be an incentive? I'd rather get

Appendix XXXII – Examples of errors students were unable to correct successfully

<u>Error</u>	<u>Attempted correction</u>	<u>Target</u>
Task 1		
there are sheets too	there are paper too	there are sheets of paper/ there is paper
there are hair on the other sides	he has got hair on both sides	he's got hair on either side/ both sides of his head
there is difference in eyeblow	there is a difference in the eyebrow	there is a difference in his eyebrows
me ether	me eithe	mine neither
cramble up	crumble up	crumpled up
holding feather	holding the/a feather	holding a feather
he is almost nake head	he is almost bald head	he is almost bald
he is dressing clothes...	he wears...	he's wearing clothes...
moustash	no attempt	moustache
stripped	no attempt	striped
turning	turning one	curved
Task 2		
It might have been the vase the weapon	It might have been the weapon the vase	The vase might have been the weapon
because she and Daniel have an affair	because she and Daniel had an affair	because she and Daniel were having an affair
Task 3		
Basil worth the scholarship	Basil deserve the scholarship	Basil deserves the scholarship
good enough so she can get	so she shouldn't get	good enough to get
he achieved some experience	he have had some experience	he gained some experience
became better	become better	has become better
I don't agree with them	I don't agree either them	I don't agree either

I can't decide in the middle of Albert and Edward	I can't decide I am between Albert and Edward	I can't decide between Albert and Edward
in benefits to the position	no attempt	(meaning unclear)
Task 4		

Appendix XXXIII – Sample Transcripts

Task 2 – Group C

Amanda Mason: Who do you think did it? What was his or her motive? What was the murder weapon? When did he or she have the opportunity? 20-Oct-2005 11:41:07 BST

Amanda Mason left the session 20-Oct-2005 11:41:18 BST

Student D2 joined the session 20-Oct-2005 12:32:29 BST

Student C2 joined the session 20-Oct-2005 12:33:18 BST

Student C2 left the session 20-Oct-2005 12:33:18 BST

Student C2 joined the session 20-Oct-2005 12:33:40 BST

Student D3 joined the session 20-Oct-2005 12:33:57 BST

Student C3 joined the session 20-Oct-2005 12:34:28 BST

Student D3: hi guys 20-Oct-2005 12:34:30 BST

Student C2: Hello! So people... 20-Oct-2005 12:35:06 BST

Student D2: hello 20-Oct-2005 12:35:20 BST

Student D3: It might have been the vase the weapon 20-Oct-2005 12:37:46 BST

Student D3: ?? 20-Oct-2005 12:37:51 BST

Student D3: A vase is can be heavy enough to kill someone. 20-Oct-2005 12:38:43 BST

Student D3: hey guys!!! Are you here? 20-Oct-2005 12:39:16 BST

Student D2: i m here 20-Oct-2005 12:39:25 BST

Student D3: I am only talking to myself.. 20-Oct-2005 12:39:28 BST

Student D2: no, i m watching# 20-Oct-2005 12:39:38 BST

Student D3: thanks darling 20-Oct-2005 12:39:41 BST

Student D3: you should write something 20-Oct-2005 12:40:06 BST

Student C3: It must be his wife the murderer . 20-Oct-2005 12:40:11 BST

Student C2: I don't think that it was his wife that killed Alec 20-Oct-2005 12:40:23 BST

Student D3: Why? 20-Oct-2005 12:40:31 BST

Student D2: i think the maid would not be the murderer because a cigarette end was found and the waid is not a smoker 20-Oct-2005 12:40:52 BST

Student C2: because she was the one that found him died 20-Oct-2005 12:40:55 BST

Student D3: Yes, anyway, I agree with you, Student C2. It would be too simple. 20-Oct-2005 12:41:07 BST

Student C3: she must have done it by jealousy . 20-Oct-2005 12:41:17 BST

Student D3: And the simple sollutions are not about Sherlock Holmes. 20-Oct-2005 12:41:33 BST

Student D2: may be his wife is the murderer because her husband meet someone else and his husband gives all the money to his brother but not her 20-Oct-2005 12:43:38 BST

Student D2: see the new evidence 20-Oct-2005 12:44:27 BST

Student C3: i,ve changed my mind . Now it must be Mrs Fairfax the murderer . 20-Oct-2005 12:45:57 BST

Student D2: yes 20-Oct-2005 12:46:05 BST

Student D2: good 20-Oct-2005 12:46:11 BST

Student D3: Why?? 20-Oct-2005 12:47:10 BST

Student D2: um... 20-Oct-2005 12:47:36 BST

Student C3: I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT HAPPENED WHEN SHE WENT OUT . 20-Oct-2005 12:47:51 BST

Student D3: No, I guess it could have been Daniel.. 20-Oct-2005 12:47:55 BST

Student C2: I think that the murderer was the maid Susie because she was the one that left the play just in the time that suppose he was killed 20-Oct-2005 12:48:21 BST

Student D3: ahh, maybe you`re right Student C3!! 20-Oct-2005 12:48:26 BST

Student D2: because mr. crabtree met a girl called alice, but it is not mrs. crabtree 20-Oct-2005 12:48:34 BST

Student C2: and also because she could stay with the Daniels' money 20-Oct-2005 12:48:49 BST

Student D2: i m confused now 20-Oct-2005 12:50:05 BST

Student D3: me too 20-Oct-2005 12:50:31 BST

Student D3: I have no idea 20-Oct-2005 12:50:39 BST

Student D3: Who is the murder... It`s too difficult for me... 20-Oct-2005 12:51:12 BST

Student C2: but Mrs Fairfax didn't have time to do that 20-Oct-2005 12:51:38 BST

Student D3: Why?? 20-Oct-2005 12:51:49 BST

Student D3: She had enough time to do thid 20-Oct-2005 12:51:59 BST

Student D3: When she went out the fresh air. 20-Oct-2005 12:52:16 BST

Student D3: Maybe she jumped through the window 20-Oct-2005 12:52:34 BST

Student D2: so what is our conclusion?? 20-Oct-2005 12:52:36 BST

Student D2: i have no idea who is the murderer 20-Oct-2005 12:52:50 BST

Student D3: And she could have left the room in the same way. 20-Oct-2005 12:52:53 BST

Student D2: oh no... we have no conclusion 20-Oct-2005 12:53:05 BST

Student D3: Because she and Daniel have an affair 20-Oct-2005 12:53:12 BST

Student D3: So she wanted to get rid of her husband. 20-Oct-2005 12:53:42 BST

Student C2: definely was the maid Susie, she was controlling everybody who was coming in and out of the house 20-Oct-2005 12:53:44 BST

Student D3: Student C2 is a talented "Sherlock Holmes"! 20-Oct-2005 12:54:12 BST

Student C3: the murderer deifnitely is Mrs Crabtree, because she might not have wanted her husband to donate anything to her brother-in-law . 20-Oct-2005 12:55:13 BST

Student C2: heheh 20-Oct-2005 12:55:16 BST

Student D3: It sounds logical... 20-Oct-2005 12:56:38 BST

Student D3: What do you think Student D2? 20-Oct-2005 12:56:49 BST

Student D3: Student D2? 20-Oct-2005 12:56:56 BST

Student D2: actually, no... idea... 20-Oct-2005 12:57:27 BST

Student D2 left the session 20-Oct-2005 13:00:03 BST

Student C2 left the session 20-Oct-2005 13:00:06 BST

Student C3 left the session 20-Oct-2005 13:00:15 BST

Student D3 left the session 20-Oct-2005 13:00:49 BST

Task 3 – Group A

Amanda Mason left the session 09-Nov-2005 14:11:17 GMT

Student A3 joined the session 10-Nov-2005 12:19:47 GMT

Student A2 joined the session 10-Nov-2005 12:20:14 GMT

Student A1 joined the session 10-Nov-2005 12:30:32 GMT

Student A1: Hello, we are going to decide who can get the law scholarship 10-Nov-2005 12:35:57 GMT

Student A1: First of all, let us look at Albert Smith 10-Nov-2005 12:36:17 GMT

Student A2: A.Smith is not acceptable because he is married with 3 children, so he won't have enough time to spend on studying. Also, it was not his decision to join the law scholarship. 10-Nov-2005 12:36:22 GMT

Student A3: In my opinion Albert Smith should take the law because he is hard-working person but I think he must not take the scholarship because he doesn't really want to be a lawyer, his wife wants him to be and this is very bad. However he is already a taxi-driver so if he fails he will have another job to feed his family 10-Nov-2005 12:37:46 GMT

Student A1: Yes, studying law is not his wife's idea. Considering his ability and career background, I can say studying law is difficult for him 10-Nov-2005 12:38:42 GMT

Student A1: sorry, it is his wife's idea 10-Nov-2005 12:38:53 GMT

Student A1: so, we agree not to give him, right?# 10-Nov-2005 12:39:40 GMT

Student A2: right 10-Nov-2005 12:39:50 GMT

Student A1: How about Basil Katz? 10-Nov-2005 12:40:10 GMT

Student A3: Basil Katz is a young man who works hard but he did many bad things in his life. Being a lawyer you must be very responsible because you have to solve other people's problems 10-Nov-2005 12:41:32 GMT

Student A2: B.Katz is not acceptable because he isn't very hard-working and he treats his girlfriends badly. Also, he has been in prison once. 10-Nov-2005 12:42:19 GMT

Student A3: yes 10-Nov-2005 12:42:28 GMT

Student A1: In my opinion, he is a talented person. Although some bad images of him, not hard working, treat girlfriend badly, He is still young and I believe this is because of his immature behaviour. He can change if he determines to 10-Nov-2005 12:44:07 GMT

Student A1: I think we should consider him to get the law scholarship 10-Nov-2005 12:44:31 GMT

Student A1: do you agree? 10-Nov-2005 12:44:52 GMT

Student A2: no. Who guarantees that he'll change? 10-Nov-2005 12:44:59 GMT

Student A3: About Carole Anderson I think she is very good for the scholarship

because she is very responsible and able but I think his fiance claims that when Carole become a mother she it is better for her to give up law. 10-Nov-2005 12:45:32 GMT

Student A2: C.Andersen is not acceptable, because once she gets married, she won't be able to spend enough time on her job. 10-Nov-2005 12:46:27 GMT

Student A1: yes, she may be suitable. I can see she has motivation but we have to think she may give up her studies easily 10-Nov-2005 12:46:49 GMT

Student A1: should we take this risk to give her a scholarship 10-Nov-2005 12:47:23 GMT

Student A2: we may let her join... we don't bother about her life after the scholarship. she may never get married 10-Nov-2005 12:48:18 GMT

Student A3: Daphnie has the best cv but She was very naughty in her life..She use to get drugs etc 10-Nov-2005 12:48:23 GMT

Student A2: The worst thing about D.Braun is that her parents cannot finance her studies... 10-Nov-2005 12:49:43 GMT

Student A1: Daphine is young, we can give her a chance 10-Nov-2005 12:50:10 GMT

Student A3: yes this is very bad for her 10-Nov-2005 12:50:11 GMT

Student A1: That's why she apply for scholarship because no financial support from the family 10-Nov-2005 12:50:59 GMT

Student A3: yes maybe..what about Edward Mbaka? 10-Nov-2005 12:51:03 GMT

Student A3: I thing he has the ability to become a lawer but accepting bribes this is really but 10-Nov-2005 12:52:41 GMT

Student A1: I wont give him. he accepted bribes 10-Nov-2005 12:52:49 GMT

Student A2: yes 10-Nov-2005 12:52:50 GMT

Student A3: ok who do you prefer to take the scholarship? 10-Nov-2005 12:53:11 GMT

Student A1: lawyer is just, fair 10-Nov-2005 12:53:19 GMT

Student A1: I will choose to give to Daphne Braun 10-Nov-2005 12:54:23 GMT

Student A2: C.Andersen and E.Mbaka are the two who can join 10-Nov-2005 12:54:36 GMT

Student A3: yes me too I think she has the better cv 10-Nov-2005 12:54:43 GMT

Student A1: 2 against 1 10-Nov-2005 12:54:56 GMT

Student A2: yes. C.Andersen is the best 10-Nov-2005 12:55:10 GMT

Student A2 left the session 10-Nov-2005 12:55:30 GMT

Student A1 left the session 10-Nov-2005 12:55:32 GMT

Student A3 left the session 10-Nov-2005 12:56:32 GMT