"Studying Abroad"

Towards understanding the acquisition of a second academic culture among postgraduate international EFL students.

Submitted by

Kerstin Heilgenberg

Institute of Education, University of London

Abstract

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The importance of international students to British universities has received increasing recognition over the last decade. Their integration and, to a certain degree, their satisfaction as paying customers have become essential for universities. To understand their experiences, scholars have researched international students, for instance from a literacy perspective. Extensive research into various areas of second language acquisition and social aspects of language learning has furthered our understanding in this area. Here, academic literacy in general and academic writing in particular have become a noted focus. However, the multitudes of factors of "Academic Culture" that influence students' success in a university programme abroad have not been researched extensively.

The focus of this study is the acquisition of a "Second Academic Culture". This encompasses the practices and norms of various student activities including group work, awareness of authority and power distances. This study analyses the different elements of academic culture and the acquisition of a second academic culture empirically by examining international students who came to the UK for postgraduate studies at the Park Royal College (PRC). Prior to their arrival in the UK they had acquired the academic culture of their home university through an undergraduate degree.

The theoretical frameworks applied in this study are Communities of Practice and Activity Theory. Communities of Practice, as a learning theory, provides insight into the learning situation for students within their learning community. Activity Theory emphasises the object-orientedness, mediation and contradictions *within* the students' activity systems and *between* them.

By analysing the students' experiences, this study brings forth the multi-faceted composition of academic culture. Through its empirically grounded and theoretically reflective insights, this research contributes to our understanding of the international student experience at the PRC in particular and of second academic culture acquisition in general.

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Dedicated to our children Anna and Tom.

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Disclaimers/ Declarations

Anonymity

The subsequent dissertation is based on empirical work conducted at a specific university in the United Kingdom. The particular details of the empirical settings are not essential for the integrity of this research.

Throughout this dissertation, the university is referred to as "University of Britain", or "UoB" for short. The institute that hosted the empirical study is referred to as "Park Royal College" (PRC), and the study was partly conducted at the Centre for Academic Literacies Support (CALS). Moreover, individuals and locations have been anonymised to comply with the University of London's ethics requirements.

Citation Style

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Word Length

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Chapter 1: Studying abroad

Introduction

Students from abroad are a relatively "small" (Pine 2006, p. 106) but very important group for Higher Education (HE) Institutes in the United Kingdom (UK). In 2003/2004, approximately 300,000 out of the total of 2.25 million students were reported to have come from abroad to study in the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2010). Of these, about one third came from within the EU, mostly from Germany, France, Ireland and Greece. The lion's share of students from abroad is represented by those from countries outside of the EU, mostly from China, India, the United States, Nigeria, Malaysia and Pakistan. Students from abroad made up almost 50% of all full-time postgraduates in the UK, with more than 37% from outside the EU (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2010). These students add a high degree of diversity to the student population in the UK and "constitute a very significant proportion of the research student population whose work is vital to maintain and renew our academic communities [in the UK]" (Dame Burslem 2004, p. 5).

This diversity on UK's campuses not only enriches the environment for all staff and students, but also has many direct and indirect benefits for HE in the UK. The sheer number of students from abroad, for instance, ensures that the broadest possible range of courses can be offered (Böhm, Follari et al. 2004) at a quality that would otherwise be unsustainable (UK Council for International Student Affairs 2010). This diverse study environment also opens up "the education systems to new knowledge and ideas" and provides "an essential underpinning of those studies and disciplines which are essentially comparative and international in character" (Joint Working Group of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth and UKCOSA 2000, p. 7). Of course, another very real benefit to HE and the UK in general is the fee income generated by students from abroad, the employment they create within HE institutions and their contribution to the UK economy overall.

Data so far suggest that the student experience in the UK is a positive one, but Dame Burslem warns that this is not to lead to complacency (2004). Three important trends support her position. First, immigration data from the Home Office Quarterly Statistical Summary suggest that the number of students leaving their home countries to study

abroad is on the rise, but an estimate of how many more students come to the UK each year is impossible since the visa categories have changed over recent years (UK Council for International Student Affairs 2010). Second, the choices for alternative learning destinations are also increasing, with more and more options in other English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, Canada and the US). Recent OECD figures further suggest that "European neighbours are already catching up" (Dame Burslem 2004, p. 6) by offering courses in English. A third challenge is presented through the improvement of technologies that enable students to take courses and pursue degrees online. As "students have yet again more choice and easier or better access to learning and knowledge, [they become] much more powerful" (Stiasny 2008, p. 36). An educational system that relies on its students from abroad must pay particular attention to how it treats its students in this quickly changing environment.

Students respond to these changes in a number of ways, but those who go abroad often do so with ambitions of "improving their future life chances by gaining new skills and qualifications, improving their English in particular, developing their independence and experiencing, perhaps for the first time, a truly international and multicultural environment" (Pine 2006, p. 6). In addition experiencing personal growth, many see going abroad as an opportunity to increase their employability in general (Naidoo 2007), or within the UK in particular after the completion of their degrees. Yet others might come because their home countries do not offer enough postgraduate programmes or only programmes that are not as reputable or as specialised as those offered by universities in the UK (Kaufman and Goodman 2002).

Recent developments

Student mobility

Education policy in the UK has changed since this empirical study was conducted. As a result, institutional practices and student numbers have also changed. Since 2004, the enrolment of students who have come to the UK to attend publicly funded higher education institutions has increased, and an estimate of over 400,000 is widely-used (for instance by Stiasny and Jones 2008) compared to approximately 2 million domestic students (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2010). Students from abroad now make up more than 50% of all full-time postgraduates in the UK, with approximately 44.0%

coming from outside the EU (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2010; UK Council for International Student Affairs 2010). This shift points to an increase of postgraduate students from outside of the EU vis-à-vis those from within.

Immigration policy

Despite efforts to increase the inflow of students from abroad in recent years, current changes to the UK immigration policy appear to be directed at reducing the total number of students coming from abroad. Home Secretary Theresa May argues that these changes will protect the interests of the UK's world class universities, leading independent schools, public Further Education colleges, and legitimate students. For instance, in response to concerns that have amassed that unskilled migrants abused the student visa route and entered the UK not to study but mainly to work, institutions will need to be accredited before sponsoring students into the country (Ravichandran 2011). This is "an attempt to protect legitimate students from poor-quality colleges" (Baker 2011). Furthermore, UK Border Agency officers will be able to refuse entry to students who cannot speak English without an interpreter, or who they deem to be clearly below the minimum standards (Ravichandran 2011). Additionally, only non-EU graduates with "offers from sponsoring employers of skilled jobs with a salary of at least £20,000 will [still] be able to stay" (Baker 2011) – others will need to leave the UK.

It is my contention that these changes, which might lead to a 25% reduction of students from abroad (Tapsfield 2011) will lead to an exclusion of potentially highly skilled students. For instance, I share Ravichandran's worries that

> The central premise of the post-study work visa was that highly skilled graduates would be able to stay behind without a job offer, for a limited time, to obtain employment without the long and tedious hassle of having to obtain a work permit. In addition it let international students postpone worries about jobs and higher education until after graduation, and focus on their studies. But the government has gone ahead, making the UK a much less attractive option for study and work. (Ravichandran 2011)

Current policy changes, promoted as improving the conditions of serious students, might also undermine the efforts in the UK of getting the most highly qualified individuals to pursue higher level studies (including post-doctorate fellowships that might not be remunerated at £20,000). The recent developments of the UK's immigration policy and the changes in the enrolment of students from abroad over the last few years are highly

interesting topics, and I find it important to mention them in a Ph.D. dissertation that deals with "studying abroad". Nonetheless, these developments are clearly outside of the scope of this study, and with its data collected in 2003/2004, any of the events unfolding today are not pertinent for the discussions in this dissertation.

The focus and motivation of this study

Events of my own past, however, are important relevant factors that motivated this study. During my own academic career, I attended universities in three countries. After having studied English literature at a German university, I attended a Canadian university as an exchange student. I assumed that the differences between the two academic worlds would be negligible, since both were English medium faculties with a similar canon of literature. In hindsight it is unsurprising that I was ill prepared for the experience. My assignments were graded very low, classroom discussions were conducted differently, and students were expected to reproduce material rather than producing critical work. It took me almost three months to understand what was asked of me in Canada. A few years later, I moved to the UK to complete a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). I was, once again, a student in a different university in a new country, but this time the work was more practice oriented. Additionally, as a PGCE student-teacher I also had to make the transition from the highest tier of a secondary school system in rural Germany (Gymnasium) to inner-city schools in London. Although I should have been better prepared than I was for my previous move abroad, the differences were just as challenging. I was once again ill prepared for the new experiences and it took a long time for me to "acculturate".

As a student and as a student teacher, I was not aware of exactly how these experiences were shaped or why I was finding my moves so difficult. In the UK, I also helped manage a large postgraduate hall of residence for students from abroad, and the fact that everyone else suffered more or less the same pains was somehow comforting. The reality that others did not understand the nature of the differences to their previous universities either, and that nobody was prepared by home or host universities for these challenges made the experience seem normal. But at the same time, this stirred a desire in me to be able to understand and to articulate why and how many of us were experiencing "academic culture shock". When I then tried to find studies that would help explain this phenomenon, I found none that really addressed the issue. It is the collection of these

experiences, combined with my plans to continue to work with postgraduate students from abroad and the evidence of a gap in research on the topic that motivated this study of "academic culture".

The case

The choice of the empirical setting was influenced by the previous experiences of the students. I was particularly interested in examining those who had already attended a university in their home country, and as a result, had acquired this "academic culture" phenomenon that interests me, shaped by language, certain teaching styles, writing styles, interactions etc. through their undergrad studies. The choice of subjects was guided by the experiences I gained and observed among my peers during my studies abroad. Consequently, in this study, I selected a postgraduate programme that included English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students from abroad who were introduced to a "second academic culture".

The 2004 intake of the MA TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of Others Languages) programme at the Park Royal College (PRC) provided an opportune setting. This one-year programme had one of the highest enrolments of students from abroad at the PRC. The programme included tutors, and full-time and part-time students from the UK and from abroad. All were involved in the classroom observation and all students were asked to complete a questionnaire. It is important to note, for the context of this study, that PRC is a research-intensive institution that is highly regarded far beyond the borders of the UK. The MA TESOL is a programme of very high academic standards, where students are required to work with cognitively demanding, theoretical constructs. This institutional context provides an important background for the understanding of academic culture and second academic culture acquisition during the MA TESOL.

Since the aim is to research second academic culture in relation to EFL speakers, the close link between language and culture played a particular role. Language in this research is seen as social practice and its use "in discourse as *enacting* social roles and *representing* cultural perceptions and misperceptions" (emphasis in original, Kramsch 2003, p. 21). Accordingly, EFL speakers from abroad were selected for this study to assure that they were not only new to the academic culture but also that cultural aspects engrained in the English language were unfamiliar to the participants. Eleven participants were investigated more closely through interviews. These came from Japan, Korea,

Macao, China and Taiwan and had English as a foreign language (EFL). Their motivation for attending MA TESOL varied; for example, some were sent by their employers and others wanted to take a year off to study in the UK. The motivation of my interest in this study raised the following important research questions, which were investigated in the MA TESOL setting.

Research question

The main purpose of this research is the identification of aspects of academic culture and how postgraduate international English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students acquire the elements of this new, second academic culture. Hence, this research aims to find answers to the following research question:

How do postgraduate international EFL students acquire a second academic culture?

This primary research question guides the organisation of this research and dissertation. It furthermore points to two secondary research questions, including:

What are the elements of academic culture?

What are the influencing factors for the acquisition of a second academic culture?

Unpacking "academic culture"

A conceptualisation of "Academic Culture" can be broad or narrow. A broad approach would aim at investigating Higher Education (HE) with the goal of building theory that could be replicated or validated (e.g., by examining the impact of funding in HE on the performance of students from abroad). Especially in light of the recent immigration developments, such theory could have been interesting; however, my study adopts a narrow focus, aimed at understanding the habitual practices specifically within the MA TESOL programme. As such, this study is exploratory in nature, and its ambition is not to

define Academic Culture *a priori*, but to develop an improved understanding on the basis of the findings. The objective is to seek a deep understanding of the activities involved in the empirical setting through rich, qualitative work. Even though this study's objective was not to produce generalisable findings, it is my contention that it nevertheless lead to conclusions that have a transferable value, and that can be applied more widely. Beyond the context of this study, the value that this research offers lies in its findings' potential usefulness for other studies aimed at improving our understanding of academic culture and international student experiences.

Academic culture in the literature

The population of researchers who discuss the importance of academic culture is small, but scholars agree that "the notion of culture [...] is crucial to accounts of academic activities" (Hyland 1997, p. 19), and that it is taken for granted that each community "has its own specific culture" (Hyland 1997, p. 19). However, despite its importance, the phenomenon of academic culture is often dealt with only tangentially, without further definition (e.g., Barbier 2004).

Across these publications the terminology is used loosely and inconsistently, and it can be observed that the view on academic culture varies according to disciplines in which it is studied, the time of publications and the individual author's interpretation. Often academic culture is equated with university culture, although, as Clark argues, a particular university is not a consistent unit, but rather consists of many small and different worlds (1987). Becher and Trowler (2001, p. xiv), in their work on the way academics conceptualise knowledge and knowledgeability, refer to academic cultures as the "tribes" and disciplinary knowledge as their "territories" within universities. Ylijoki (2008) takes this view further and claims that from a cultural perspective "socialization into the values, norms, basic assumptions and practices of one's own disciplinary community" (2008, p. 76) are the most significant aspects of academic culture. Hyland stresses the close connection between academic culture and discourse communities. For Hyland "an ideological schema, which controls its self-identification, knowledge, goals and conduct and which is expressed in the conventional actions of its members, particularly in their systematic use of language" (Hyland 1997, p. 19) defines this distinctive culture within a discourse community. Cortazzi and Jin hone in on the overseas student situation and claim that "culture is seen in terms of principles of expectations and interpretations which

are often taken for granted and therefore overlooked" (1997, p.76) by incoming international students. For the authors, a distinction between three kinds of cultures in the context of communication and learning exists, where:

> Academic culture refers to the cultural norms and expectations involved in academic activity. A culture of communication refers to expected ways of communicating and of interpreting others' communication in a cultural group. A culture of learning refers to cultural beliefs and values about teaching and learning, expectations about classroom behaviour and what constitutes 'good' work (Cortazzi and Jin 1997, p.76)

The studies above seem to share a similar tacit understanding of academic culture as "[...] ways of *doing* that are closely bound up with beliefs about *how* we know about the world" (adapted from Hermerschmidt's definition of Academic Literacy 2000, p. 13). However, different constituent elements (e.g., theories of acculturation, educational psychology, identity formation, professional literacies etc.) formed the contexts of their studies (on academics, international students, intercultural communication etc.). All of these are of tremendous importance. However, given the focus of this study, academic literacy research mattered most strongly.

This research focuses on postgraduate EFL students from abroad. Postgraduate students face unique challenges, and the required level of sophistication of language proficiency, context knowledge and world knowledge are strongly connected to their ability to read and write. Without wanting to introduce the findings of this study already, a few key issues are worth mentioning at this stage. Participants from abroad spent between 10-30 hours, averaging around 22 hours per week, (data taken from questionnaire) on the required course readings. The reading times of the home students in comparison averaged seven hours per week. Similarly, students from abroad spent a significant amount of time working closely with texts, looking up vocabulary, re-reading sections and annotating material. In addition, writing in English often required copious amounts of time for composing drafts, redrafting, using dictionaries and thesauruses.

To assure a tight focus for framing academic culture research, work in academic literacy was deliberately chosen as the constituent element most pertinent to a study of EFL students from abroad, who spend the majority of their time with reading and writing in the academic field.

Academic literacy research

In order to ground research of academic culture as a formative context for studying abroad, this study consults work on academic literacy. Studies in this field that have "fore-grounded the relationship between language and learning in Higher Education" (Lea 2005, p. 193) provide important insights into the relationship of academic culture and learning in Higher Education.

Social approaches to literacy form the broader context of academic literacy. Street (1995) used the term "social literacies" to highlight the plurality of literacy as a social practice. "If literacy is a social practice, then it varies with social context and is not the same, uniform thing in each case" (Street 1999, p. 37). Since literacy can vary, multiple literacies have been researched under the umbrella of New Literacy Studies (Street 1984; Gee 1990). This encompasses that literacies, as social and situated practices with cultural resources (Böck 2010) change according to temporal and local contexts, specific cultural practices (Street 1999), different communities even within close regional proximity (Heath 1983) or by the types of literacies, e.g. Street's (1984) study of schooled literacy, Qur'anic literacy and commercial literacy in an Iranian Village. Literacies are seen as "socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses (or, as members of Discourses)" (Lankshear and Knobel 2006, p. 64). Lea and Street (2006) identified three main, non-exclusive models, including a study skills model, an academic socialisation model and an academic literacies model.

The study skills model regards literacy as an individual and cognitive skill and assumes that "students can transfer their knowledge of writing and literacy unproblematically from one context to another" (Lea and Street 2006, p. 368). The difficulties that students encounter when transferring their skills from one context into another are often problematic.

The academic socialisation model, on the other hand, presumes that students are introduced through acculturation to the "ways of talking, writing, thinking, and using literacy that typified members of a disciplinary or subject area community" (Lea and Street 2006, p. 369). Drawbacks of this model lie in the assumption that academy is governed by a homogenous culture and that institutional practices, such as the processes of change or the exercise of power, are often not theorised (Lea and Street 2006).

The academic literacies model also focuses on "meaning making, identity, power, and authority, and foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular academic context" (Lea and Street 2006, p. 369). Although this may not seem very different from the academic socialisation model, it views the acquisition process as "more complex, dynamic, nuances, situated, and involving both epistemological issues and social processes, including power relations among people, institutions, and social identities" (Lea and Street 2006, p. 369).

Several specific aspects of academic literacies are more frequently researched than others. The three most widely researched topics appear to be academic writing, literacy skills and the difficulties of adult learners returning to education after years in the work force (Lea 1998; Oshima and Hogue 1999; Creme and Lea 2003). In the English as a foreign language (EFL) context, extensive research has mainly been undertaken on academic writing, often in combination with identity development (Cummins 1989; Kutz, Groden et al. 1993; Belcher and Braine 1994; Sternglass 2004). Those who look at literacy skills in the context of learning foreign languages discuss studying abroad as a complementation to classroom language learning (Coleman and Klapper 2005). For example, students who have studied English in their home country often use and improve their newly gained language skills during temporary stays at host universities. However, Collentine and Freed (2004) suggest that the learning context of studying abroad does not necessarily influence the second language acquisition more positively than participating in an immersion programme. Kinginer and Blattner suggest that this depends on the individual, and that language acquisition of those studying abroad is "related both to issues of identity and to the learners' history of participation and socialization in the [target language] contexts" (2008, p. 222). In general, the majority of research concerned with studying abroad focuses on evaluating language acquisition (e.g., Freed 1995) and on the development of "grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, pragmatics or learning strategies" (Block 2007, p. 147). This dissertation presents a different picture and views "studying abroad" with an educational and cultural lens. It emphasises that language acquisition is not the only gain from a stay abroad and takes into consideration the aspects of socialisation and participation in the target language context.

Cultural-historical UK context of "studying abroad"

The trajectory of studying abroad in the UK setting is reviewed next to provide a rationale for the use of some important cultural-historical constructs and terms throughout this dissertation. This section is not intended to provide a fully comprehensive coverage of the topic, to add a detailed analysis of student migration, to raise new issues or to provide a critique. The intention is solely to provide more context for this study by introducing an overview of the recent key terms, trends and thematic developments.

The first terminology that requires attention relates to the notion of "international students" in UK Higher Education, as this might suggest that it includes all students who are in fact not from the UK. So far, this dissertation has deliberately talked about "studying abroad" as an important umbrella term for two different types of non-UK students today and consciously avoided using the term "international student" (other than in the research question). For the remainder of this dissertation, the terminology needs to be more precise. In the UK, students from abroad are separated into students from European states and students from other countries (often referred to as "overseas" students). To simplify the often ambiguous use of the term "international" in the HE context, and to recognise "wide variation in institutional practice as to whether the same services are offered to EU and non-EU students" (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2010, p5), this dissertation adopts the terminology accepted by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2010). Accordingly, from this point forward "international students" refers to non-EU students.

This separation affects international students, and HE institutions in an important way. After an unsuccessful attempt of introducing cost-covering tuition fees for all students from abroad in the 1970s, in 1980 "full cost" tuition was introduced for "international students", not for those from EU member states. As stated by the UK Council for International Student Affairs:

> All international students at state funded institutions (universities and colleges) are required by law to pay no less than the full cost of their education. (Private colleges obviously set their own fees to cover their costs or to generate profits).
>
> Whilst UK (and EU) students therefore pay just over £3,000 annually for an undergraduate course (with institutions receiving the balance from funding agencies), non EU students pay the entire costs themselves with fees typically between £8,000 and £15,000. (2010, p. 2)

Overall, this change lead to lost revenue due to a reduced influx of international students from poorer countries. It took more than four years, until 1984, for the numbers of international students to reach the numbers that had been attending UK universities in the late 1970s.

Outside of the UK, the opportunity of capitalising on international students had not been exploited to the same extent. Many continental European governments had not even considered having foreign students pay full tuition, as the rationales behind their programmes remained more related to matters of foreign policy than cost-recovery. In the 1980s, the FCO Chevening Scholarship scheme was introduced and HE institutes and the British Council started to market their services on a larger scale overseas (Stiasny and Jones 2008). With English as the modern academic lingua franca, UK universities were at an advantage vis-à-vis European, non-English speaking institutes. Marketing their services successfully abroad and offering well-renowned degrees resulted in a high influx of international students.

Throughout the 1990s, increased student mobility drove education as an export commodity in other countries as well. Leading English-speaking countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US started to compete ferociously in the burgeoning market. In an earlier section of this dissertation, I introduced the focus and motivation of this study and talked about my personal experiences as an international EFL student as influential for my choice of the research topic. It was during this rapid growth phase of marketing to international students in English speaking countries that I first went to Canada for my studies.

In the 2000s, competition for international students also increased with Asian Tiger economies and European countries offering courses in English (Stiasny and Jones 2008). In its publication 'Vision 2020' the British Council predicted further growth in this industry (as quoted in Stiasny and Jones 2008) and Tony Blair's Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) offered government support and legitimacy to the UK's global marketing campaign (Stiasny and Jones 2008).

As a result of these three-decade-long developments, the purpose of the university as a solemnly academic and scholarly institution had changed. Two white papers on the topic of competitiveness (Waldegrave 1993; HMSO 1994) discussed matching university education and training to labour market demands, nonetheless they failed to include the importance of "studying abroad" from a national perspective. The recent release of the

following figures by the UK Council for International Student Affairs, however, points to the significance of international students to UK HE institutions and to the overall economic contribution these individuals make.

> A figure of £2.5 billion is estimated to be earned by universities from [their] fees alone with another £2.5 billion spent by international students on goods and services in local communities, giving a total of some £5 billion. (UK Council for International Student Affairs 2010, p. 2)

> When income to private sector colleges is added, a 2007 report by the British Council ('Global Value – the Value of UK Education and Training Exports') estimated that the total value of international students to the UK economy was £8.5 billion. (UK Council for International Student Affairs 2010, p. 2)

> The vast majority of UK universities and colleges therefore now derive substantial income from international students and for the majority, without it, it is difficult to see how they would continue to survive and prosper. (UK Council for International Student Affairs 2010, p. 2)

Interestingly, while there is a cap on "home" (UK and EU) students through limited funding available from the UK government and its funding bodies, there is "no cap on the number of international students who can be accepted, as they are paying (at a minimum) full cost fees and facilities can therefore be expanded as numbers increase" (UK Council for International Student Affairs 2010, p. 2).

In summary, in an increasingly competitive environment, understanding the experiences of UK's international students – those paying the full cost of their education and contributing positively to the variety of courses offered, to employment at tertiary institutions and overall to the UK economy – is becoming more and more important. These issues, economic and otherwise, matter immensely. They not only matter to the international students (paying full fees) and the universities (collecting them), but as they shape the overall classroom and university context, these issues have an important direct and indirect impact on the real and perceived experiences of all those involved (e.g., tutors, home students). The ways in which institutions manage these international students therefore play a crucial role for everyone. The fact that international students today are a financial force and a financial factor that should be taken serious by universities, in combination with my personal experience as an international EFL student (where I was not always taken serious) and a lack of research available that examines the experiences of students like me, motivated this study. Inspired to improve our

understanding of the international student experience, a conceptualisation of "academic culture" is proposed in this dissertation.

Significance of the study

The setting of the research allows for a unique study. The participants were carefully selected international students who had not previously studied or lived away from their home country and were, therefore, new to the academic culture at PRC. Prior to their arrival in the UK they had acquired the academic culture of their home university through attaining an undergraduate degree.

In somewhat similar research the selection of participants has often been based on one individual student (Sternglass 2004), or on many students from the same cultural background (Morita 2002). However, the focus of this study is not on national culture at all. The research does not concentrate on students with a shared cultural background (e.g. the Japanese experience in the MA TESOL), on the national culture differences (e.g., when Japanese students come to the UK), or on the national culture of the host university (e.g., the experience of coming to the UK).

Although most of the existing research places a direct emphasis on national culture, academic culture, as discussed here, is a construct that is tied directly to the experiences of students in specific learning environments. Academic culture, then, is different for each university. However, this research does not focus on "academic culture at PRC", since academic cultures could vary across, or even within, the institution's faculties. Likewise, this study does not concentrate on following individual students enrolled in different faculties at PRC, since its goal is not to contrast and compare academic culture across faculties.

With the ambition of examining the very nature of academic culture and second academic culture acquisition, the choice was made to focus on students in a particular programme at PRC, the MA TESOL.

In this light, this research focuses specifically on how postgraduate international EFL students experience and acquire their second academic culture. This experience is likely to be shaped by three main factors. First, students' AC1, the academic culture they grew used to during their undergraduate studies at their respective home universities. Second,

the SAC, the second academic culture within the MA TESOL, a specific academic programme at PRC. Third, the differences between the two academic cultures.

It is important to note that neither AC1 nor SAC are seen to be free of national culture influences, but this study concentrates on how academic cultures are shaped by attitudes, values, goals, and practices within the respective academic programmes.

In terms of theoretical contributions, innovation resides in the connection of findings from Activity Theory (AT) and Communities of Practice (CoP). The exact contributions of this powerful amalgamation of the two theoretical frameworks unfold in the detailed analyses of the Chapters 4-6, and are discussed in Chapter 7. As a rule, CoP describes the newcomer to a community but does not allow for the explanation of change within an existing community. It focuses on the analysis of the learning of the newcomer, and less so on the learning within the community. Learning and the resulting change are "[...] presented as a fundamental property of CoP, but it is [they are] not particularly theorised" (Lea 2005, p. 188-189). This presents an opportunity for AT for analysing the contradictions, the changes and the forces within an existing community, and its activity system.

The emphasis on reflectivity provides a novel methodological contribution to this study, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. While maintaining the ethnographic traditions of interviewing and observing, the students were also asked to keep reflective learning diaries. During the interviews students also reported reflectively on their experiences. In addition to the use of diaries, I apply a multi-level reading approach to all empirical data, a tool usually used within the feminist tradition. This promised to postpone the interpretation of the material and allowed me to extend my work on a descriptive level of analysis.

Organisation of the dissertation

Chapter 2 outlines the two main theoretical approaches of this research, Engeström's AT and Wenger's CoP. It highlights how the Acquisition Metaphor and the Participation Metaphor are intertwined with the respective theory. The use of metaphors within the theoretical approaches is discussed to underscore how language and understanding are influenced. A possible combination of both theoretical approaches is presented before moving on to the next chapter.

The methods of inquiry and the empirical case study are described in Chapter 3. This includes the participants, the methods of data collection, the procedures applied to their analysis and my role as a researcher.

In Chapter 4, an analysis of activity factors takes place leading to a better understanding of academic culture. The contradictions within, and between, individual systems are highlighted as sources of expansive cycles and, consequently, learning.

Chapter 5 and 6 operationalise CoP within the empirical setting. Chapter 5 explores aspects such as practice, meaning and the community, while Chapter 6 focuses on identity as the second constituent elements of CoPs.

Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the findings and novel contributions for theory and practice and allows for a discussion of lessons learned in the format of an analysis of neighbouring activities of the role of the university and of the tutors, but also in the general context of second academic culture. Limitations and inspirations for future research are collected and presented at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 2: Theoretical lenses for studying academic culture and its acquisition

Introduction

In the last chapter, I introduced the main area of interest for this study. I outlined how the changing dynamics and the increasing competition for students from abroad emphasise the importance for UK universities to become more knowledgeable about their students' experiences (Andrade 2006) and the need to investigate the degree to which these continue to be positive (Dame Burslem 2004). To understand these experiences, this research focuses specifically on the identification of aspects of academic culture and how postgraduate international EFL students acquire the elements of their second academic culture.

In this chapter, I introduce two complementary metaphors to illustrate how these student experiences take shape through both acquisition and participation (Sfard 1998). For these metaphors, I then identified Activity Theory (the interpretation of Engeström 1987) and Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) as harmonising theoretical lenses through which the complexity of academic culture and its acquisition can be examined. Although both theories emerged out of research in education, "the relationship between the two frameworks is surprisingly underdeveloped and deserves attention" (Fuller, Hodkinson et al. 2005, p. 53). Such a combination promises to be useful since all key authors concentrate on socially and culturally constructed behaviour, with Wenger and Lave's focus more on the subject in the community and Engeström, who agrees that "an activity system is a complex and relatively enduring 'community of practice' that often takes the shape of an institution" (Engeström, Engeström et al. 1995, p. 320) considering the cultural-historical activity itself as a unit of analysis. Together, they form a powerful foundation "in which communities of practice and activity theory both converge and diverge as frameworks" (Fuller, Hodkinson et al. 2005, p. 53) for addressing the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, for framing appropriate research methods (in the next chapter), and for analysing the findings (in chapters 4 to 6).

This chapter proceeds by introducing the value of metaphors. It then links Acquisition and Activity Theory, before outlining Participation and Communities of Practice. Both theoretical frameworks are presented with some challenges that could be identified a

priori. Critiques that emerged out of the empirical study are discussed later, in Chapter 7. The choice of merging both theories is presented before this chapter concludes.

Metaphors

The meaning of metaphors varies depending on the discipline. According to Cameron (2002), in literature the metaphor is one of the main figures of speech. Through language, ideas and images are brought together in unexpected ways. Applied linguistics and linguistics have paid little attention to metaphors, and Cameron notes "the new discipline of cognitive linguistics has grown up with metaphor as an underpinning construct, providing a foundation for thought and conceptualisation. Cognitive linguistics has shifted the locus of attention from metaphor in language to metaphor in the mind, or 'conceptual metaphor'" (Cameron 2002, p. 2). It was Reddy (1979), who in his "conduit metaphor" so explicitly stressed the pervasiveness of metaphors and their role not only in language but more importantly in thinking. He employs the concept of metaphors in language use to gain insights into human methods of conceptualising and thinking in general. Language about language is structured, according to Reddy, by the following three complex metaphors: first, "Ideas (of meaning) are objects"; second, "Linguistic expressions are containers" and last, "Communication is sending". In a proper sentence these three metaphors read as follows: the speaker puts ideas, here objects, into linguistic expressions, here containers, and sends them along the conduit to the receiver. The receiver grabs the idea from the container. In the English language there are more than one hundred expressions that account for this metaphor (Reddy 1979), for example:

> It's hard to get that idea across to him.
> I gave you that idea.
> Your reasons came through to us.
> It's difficult to put my ideas into words.
> When you have a good idea, try to capture it immediately in words.
> Try to pack more thought into fewer words. (Lakoff and Johnson, p. 10)

Detecting the hidden meaning of these metaphors is extremely difficult. The unaware speaker, who might not think of metaphors at all, is unlikely to make the connection between these examples and the conduit meaning. The conduit metaphor projects the notion of communication onto the notion of transport (Sfard 1998, p. 2) (e.g., "reasons *coming*", "*getting* ideas *across*"). These types of metaphors are anchored deeply in the way of our thinking and in our language. "Reddy showed, for a single, very significant

case, that the locus of metaphor is thought, not language, that metaphor is a major and indispensable part of our ordinary, conventional way of conceptualising the world, and that our everyday behavior reflects our metaphorical understanding of experience" (Lakoff 1992, p. 204). [1]

A metaphor is, consequently, more than just a figure of speech. It allows for a reification of a complex issue in just one expression. This study adopts Sfard's Acquisition and Participation metaphors (Sfard 1998) as mechanisms for structuring different ways of thinking that are seen as elemental for understanding how international EFL students acquire a second academic culture. The Acquisition Metaphor regards learning as the acquisition and accumulation of knowledge, which stress the development of ideas or construction of meaning. The Participation Metaphor does not see learning as "receiving something", but "as an active involvement in an ongoing process of learning" (Millner 2010) that is "inevitably situated in a particular context, embedded in a particular culture, and mediated by a particular community and idiom" (Millner 2010) (Table 1).

Acquisition Metaphor		Participation Metaphor
Individual enrichment	Goal of learning	Community building
Acquisition of something	Learning	Becoming a participant
Recipient (consumer), (re-)constructor	Student	Peripheral participant, apprentice
Provider, facilitator, mediator	Teacher	Expert participant, preserver of practice/discourse
Property, possession, commodity (individual, public)	Knowledge, concept	Aspect of practice/discourse/activity
Having, possessing	Knowing	Belonging, participating, communicating

Table 1: "The metaphorical mappings" (Sfard 1998, p. 7)

[1] As an aside, I agree with Lakoff and Reddy but the implications for non-native speakers are even more consequential than just identifying "the locus of metaphor". The crux is that language and thinking are shaped by metaphors, and when we learn a different language we don't automatically learn the methaphorically-shaped thinking.

The two different views on knowledge and on the process of gaining knowledge "hidden" in the two metaphors "present the competing trends in our present conceptualization of learning" (Sfard 1998, p. 4). To explicate the thinking embedded in the two metaphors and to show how they are aligned with certain theories allows for a dialectical approach to both. The two metaphors are discussed and appropriate theoretical frameworks are presented next.

The Acquisition Metaphor

Much of the current literature employs the Acquisition Metaphor. It is important to note that acquisition here is not linked to Second Language or Second Culture "Acquisition", but relates more generally to "the act of gaining knowledge" (Merriam-Webster 2009).

Within the Acquisition Metaphor knowledge is viewed as an entity that becomes "sellable" or "tradable" and can be accumulated in the learner's brain. Piaget and Vygotsky looked at learning as concept development. The aim of learning is to add more cognitive concepts to the existing concepts. From the learner's perspective, knowledge is perceived as items that can be put into a container. The human brain functions as a receptacle. The Acquisition Metaphor focuses on the individual mind and the internalisation of knowledge, which is crucial for the study of the object to be acquired in Second Language Acquisition.

This notion of learning through acquisition is found on a variety of theoretical playing fields including constructivism, interactionism and socio-cultural theories (Sfard 1998, p. 8). Constructivism is attributed to Jean Piaget, who suggested that through the two processes of accommodation and assimilation the individual learner constructs new knowledge (Bhattacharya and Han 2001). Interactionism is based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development. His theory is, according to Rogoff (1990), independent of the outside social world and the process of cognitive development is an individual, not a social process. For this study, the cultural aspects of academia are highly social in nature, and interactionism is therefore not a suitable approach. In contrast to Piaget's theory, Vygotsky stresses the effect of the mediation of the outside world. The Vygotskian approach functions as the core of socio-cultural theory. The latter is most applicable if the focus is on the learner as a complex human being with a history and set in a specific context, as is the case for this research.

Socio-cultural theory

Wertsch et al. state that "the goal of a socio-cultural approach is to explicate the relationships between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical situation in which this functioning occurs, on the other" (1995, p. 3). Drawing on the work of psychologists such as Wertsch, as well as on the work of cultural psychologists such as Bruner (1990) and Cole (1990), a clear picture of what the socio-cultural approach represents can be created. Bruner argues that "instead of viewing culture as some kind of 'overlay' on biologically determined human nature in which the causes of human behaviour were assumed to lie in that biological substrate", research should be guided by the idea that "culture and the quest for meaning within culture are the proper causes of human action" (1990, p. 20). For my research this view is essential. Cultural psychology has drawn on Vygotsky's (1978) ideas and is one of the antecedents of socio-cultural theory, as it has influenced education and, therefore, language teaching.

Although the antecedent cannot be traced in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), socio-cultural theory itself has been introduced into the field of SLA a few decades ago. This theory allows a distinctly different view of SLA than theories usually favoured in the literature. The view differs so much in comparison because, according to Matsuoka and Evans (2004), the so-called mainstream SLA theories are based on positivism or post-positivism and are realistic in both, their ontology and epistemology. The notion that only a realistic approach is possible would not allow me to look at the different effects that the cultural, historical, and language learning background has on students learning a second academic culture.

In contrast to the so-called mainstream approach, socio-cultural theory enables the researcher to view the acquisition process from wider perspectives as "the task of socio-cultural analysis is to understand how mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context" (Wertsch 1998 p. 3). The notion that humans are information processors in a narrow perspective is difficult to maintain in the practical field. Humans do come with a learning history and are influenced by not only their history but by their learning environment and their attitude towards learning. They are also influenced by the attitude the receiving community offers towards them. These social interactions of learning are categorised by Kirschner (2006, p. 11) as "interactions between all participants and artefacts in the teaching and learning environment". These take place in four formats: as external dialogue ("interaction with others"), as internal

dialogue ("interaction with oneself"), as the "confrontation between external and internal dialogue" including the social relationships that arise as a result of this, and as "the interaction between the individuals and others with the learning, training, and social environment" (Kirschner 2006, p. 11). Therefore learning does not depend only on input but on various other interactional aspects, too, which socio-cultural theory takes into consideration. For the purpose of my research it was important to further push the already explored boundaries to apply socio-cultural theory to the field of Second Culture Acquisition.

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896 – 1934): Foundations of Activity Studies

As mentioned above, the socio-cultural theory of mind is based on Vygotsky's approach. In the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s, Vygotsky worked with his students and colleagues on a psychology that was based and anchored in Marxism (Wertsch, Rio et al. 1995). The fundamental, shared idea of universal human rationality and progress was common to this group of researchers. Rationality was believed to be accessible to all humans to varying degrees, and Vygotsky and his colleagues were describing forms of mental functioning within genetic domains and ontogenesis. This aspect is elaborated more closely as it is one of the key issues discussed later.

What is striking is that Vygotsky was so far ahead of his time. His work was slow to be translated. The first work was not translated until 1962, the next in 1971. Western researchers, such as Wertsch, have developed Vygotsky's thoughts through the 1980s and key issues of socio-cultural theory, presented in the following sections, have further developed since.

Mediation

The first key issue is mediation. "An underlying assumption of such research is that humans have access to the world only indirectly, or mediately, rather than directly, or immediately" (Wertsch, Rio et al. 1995, p. 21). Mediation takes place by symbolic means. It is the introduction or use of a substituting device, which allows humans to create a link between the world and the mind. The substituting devices are used to establish a mediated relationship between the world and us. Vygotsky reasoned that symbolic tools empower humans to organise and control such mental processes as attention, problem-solving and others. Symbolic tools are artefacts that are created by human culture.

The most prominent tool is language. Vygotsky states that the human mind is a system in which the properties of the natural brain are organised into a higher, or culturally shaped, mind through the integration of symbolic artefacts into thinking.

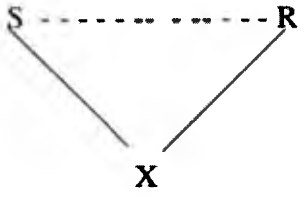

Figure 1: Stimulus-Response Triangle (Vygotsky 1978, p. 40)

Mediated, or indirect, forms of behaviour are shown as an S-X-R triangle. Vygotsky introduced X as the intermediate link between the stimulus (S) and the response (R) (Vygotsky 1978, p. 40). In current literature the mediation model appears as displayed in Figure 2 below:

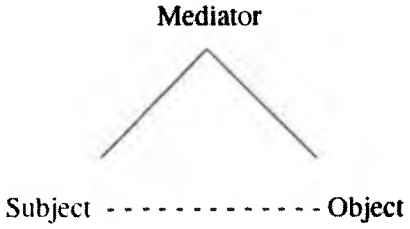

Figure 2: Mediation Model

In the context of this study the role of language as mediator is crucial because the communication with new social surroundings takes place in the second language. Vygotsky says that the brain is culturally organised through the integration of symbolic artefacts into thinking. If we see language as a cultural artefact it implies, for international students, that the first language influences their thinking. A gap seems to exist if communication takes place in the second language and thinking still follows the organisation of the first language. The area of interest is how students are bridging the gap in knowledge of the second academic culture. So far we've looked only at the mediation function of language but socio-cultural theory looks at more issues that help in addressing this problem.

Regulation, scaffolding, and the zone of proximal development

The second key issues following mediation are a closer inspection of regulation, scaffolding, and the zone of proximal development. Regulation is divided in self-regulation for the mature and skilled individual, and other-regulation. Self-regulation indicates that the learner is able to function autonomously while other-regulation indicates that the learner is likely to be a child or unskilled individual learner under guidance. Regulation usually takes place through the mediating use of language. New knowledge is appropriated through collaborative talk. The learner gains access to a shared consciousness through talks and the new knowledge will eventually sink into the learner's individual consciousness. The process of collaborative talk, or supportive dialogues, is known as scaffolding. For a learner there is always an area where he is not fully functional on his own but where he can achieve the outcome as long as he has been given the relevant scaffolding. This area is known as the zone of proximal development.

Scaffolding is part of the AM since it promotes learning of a commodity through a provider and a recipient. Although the metaphorical use of the scaffolding is convincing in the context of learning, it raises the question of what the scaffolding consist of for the second language speaker trying to acquire a new aspect of the second academic culture. Supportive dialogue is applicable for parts of this new culture. Academic writing style, for example, is very likely to be taught in class and the teaching and discussing can be regarded as supportive talk. The student will be able to master the next level of academic writing if the task is pitched at the right level within the zone of proximal development. However, there are aspects of the second academic culture that cannot be taught in the same way and it is difficult for the tutor to find tasks for certain topics. One such area is student behaviour in group-work. In addition, it is impossible for the tutor to gauge the students' knowledge of this "skill" and find a task that is within the zone of proximal development. This issue is addressed again later in the dissertation.

Genetic domains

The third key issue is known as genetic domains. Vygotsky argued that cultural artefacts are inherited over generations and that the study of higher mental abilities is necessarily a historical study. In Mitchell and Myles (1998) the four genetic domains of interest are described as follows.

The first is Phylogenesis, which describes the knowledge and learning that has been acquired by the human race over consecutive generations. Another domain is the socio-cultural history, which looks at the different types of symbolic tools developed by human cultures. Ontogenesis describes the learning of an infant as an individual; how children appropriate mediational means, especially language. Learning is seen as an activity that is, at the beginning, social. It later becomes an individual process. Learning remains, even for the adult learner, a process whereby the expert first teaches the novice learner. Afterwards the novice learner is able to carry on as an individual learner. Microgenesis is the label for this local contextual learning process. It is central to socio-cultural accounts of second language learning.

According to Wertsch, del Rio, et al. (1995) Vygotsky wrote, in the year before his death, that the central fact of our psychology is mediation. The focus changed when Vygotsky's colleagues carried on with his work under the heading of Activity Theory.

Alexei Nikolaevich Leont'ev (1903 – 1979): Hierarchical Model of Activities

The aspects mentioned in socio-cultural theory are united under the umbrella of Activity Theory (AT). AT was developed by Vygotsky's successor A. N. Leont'ev. In contrast to Vygotsky the focus changed from mediation to action and activity. The activity notion was already traceable in Vygotsky's idea that the mind is not the activity of the biologically given brain but that it is a functional system formed when the brain's electrochemical processes come under control of our cultural artefacts. Foremost among these is language. Formation and activity matter, rather than structure. According to Wertsch, del Rio, et al. (1995) there are two points of compatibility between Leont'ev and Vygotsky. Vygotsky never explicitly formulated a theory of activity but he always focused on processes that have most of the attributes of what Leont'ev later called "action". The second point is made by Zinchenko (1985) when he argued that "tool-mediated action" is a preferable analytic unit for Vygotsky in light of theoretical advances since the latter's time.

Leont'ev furthered these constructs by proposing a series of conceptualisation of the social context in which individual learning takes place. "Activity is defined in terms of socio-cultural settings, in which collaborative interaction, inter-subjectivity and assisted performance occur" (Donato and McComick 1994, p. 455). An activity can be portrayed at three different levels, which are in a hierarchical order. Activity has a motive/ objective

or a need, actions are goal oriented, and operations are being influenced or even controlled by the conditions of execution (Figure 3).

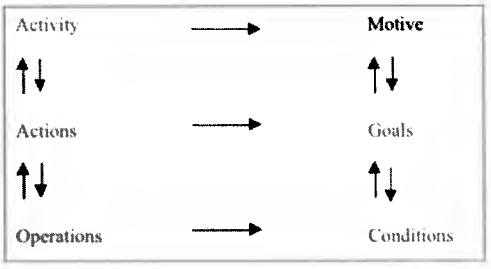

Figure 3: Hierarchical Model of Activities (Leont'ev and Hall 1978)

Level	Oriented towards	Carried out by
Activity	Needs and motives	Community
Actions	Goals	Individual or group
Operation	Conditions	Routinised human or machine

Figure 4: The Hierarchical Structure of Activity

Activity

The level of activity is the highest level of analysis (Figure 4). It is defined as "the social institutionally determined setting of context based on a set of assumptions about the appropriate roles, goals, and means to be used by the participants in that setting" (Lantolf and Appel 1994, p. 17). In essence, activity means to be 'doing something' that satisfies a biological or culturally constructed need. An example of a biological need is thirst. A culturally constructed need is to be literate within a certain culture. As soon as a person goes to the kitchen to get a drink or to spend time on literacy the needs become motives. Motives are only recognised in specific actions. These specific actions must be "goal directed (hence, internal and meaningful) and carried out under particular spatial and temporal conditions (or what are also referred to as operations) and through appropriate mediational means" (Lantolf 2000, p. 8).

Actions

Actions constitute the second level of analysis (Figure 4). At this level the activity is subordinated to a specific goal. The concrete goal is often composed of a number of sub-goals, which are not physical objects "but phenomena of 'anticipatory reflections'. These "permit one to compare and evaluate intended and actual outcomes of activity before the activity is concretely operationalised" (Lantolf and Appel 1994, p. 19). Actions can be part of different activities. If the researcher observes somebody going to the store to shop for groceries, the activity could have various motives and therefore it could be part of different activities. It could be part of shopping to satisfy the personal need for food but it could also be that the person is doing someone else a favour.

Operations

On the lowest level of an activity we find operations (Figure 4). Operations are influenced by the circumstances and conditions in which an action is carried out. They determine the "means, physical or mental, through which an action is carried out" (Lantolf and Appel 1994, p. 20). Operations are unconscious and, to a certain extent, automatised.

Leont'ev uses the example of driving a car to illustrate the hierarchy of activities (Leont'ev and Hall 1978). Applied to the cultural setting of this study, driving, as a collective activity occurs according to social norms and legal regulations. A new driver, for instance, consciously manoeuvres a vehicle by thinking about traffic rules and steps required for accelerating and changing gears. His actions are goal-oriented. As the novice gains experience, these actions become operations, and the driver no longer thinks about the specific steps required as long as the underlying conditions remain the same. However, should these conditions change, for example by moving to a new country, the driver's actions become conscious again so that he can successfully drive in the new environments (for instance moving from right-hand traffic to left-hand traffic in the UK). Accordingly, as illustrated in Figure 3, actions and operations demand different levels of consciousness and can change if the underlying conditions change.

Yrjö Engeström (1948 –): Activity Systems Framework

Engeström expanded Vygotsky's original representation to a triangular model of Activity Systems (Figure 5). Vygotsky's model reflects learning at the individual level. Inspired by Leont'ev, Engeström's system reflects on the collaborative and collective nature of human activity by adding rules, communities, and division of labour. Engeström's extension through his model of Activity Systems is also known as Third Generation Activity Theory, or EAT (Engeström Activity Theory). For simplicity and readability, Engeström's work be referred to as AT for the remainder of this dissertation unless specifics of his work are discussed vis-à-vis "traditional" activity theory.

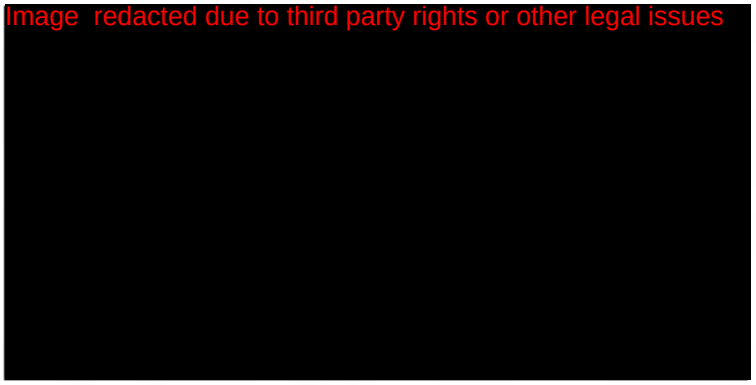

Figure 5: The Triangular Model of Activity Systems (Engeström, 1987)

The triangle shows the connection between the six components within the system that describe the activity in the pursuit of transforming an object into a desirable outcome (visible through the arrow leading the entire activity towards the construct of outcome. The lines and sub-triangles indicate the interconnectedness. Many of these triangles are discussed throughout the following chapters of this dissertation.

By the time AT became more widely known in an international context, a variety of traditions needed to be negotiated. AT has to provide "conceptual tools to understand dialogue, multiple perspectives, and networks of interacting activity systems" (Engeström 2001, p. 6).

AT may be encapsulated in five principles (Engeström 2001):

1. The unit of analysis is the activity system.
   A collective, artefact-mediated, and object-oriented activity system, seen in its narrow relations to other activity systems, is taken as the prime unit of analysis.

Goal-directed individual and group actions as well as automatic operations are relatively independent but subordinate units of analysis.

2. The multi-voicedness of activity systems.
   An activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, traditions and interests. The division of labour creates different positions for the participants. The participants carry their own diverse histories, and the activity system itself carries multiple layers and strands of history engraved in its artefacts, rules, and conventions. It is both a source of trouble and a source of innovation, demanding actions of translation and negotiation.
3. Historicity.
   Activity systems take shape and are transformed over lengthy periods of time.
4. The central role of contradictions as sources of change and development.
   Contradictions are not the same as problems or conflicts. Contradictions are historically accumulated structural tensions within and between activity systems.
5. Expansive learning cycles as possible form of transformation in activity.
   Contradictions can generate disturbances and conflicts but also innovative attempts. As the contradictions escalate, some members of the activity system start to questions the status quo and a transformation that can change the activity altogether can take place. If these contradictions are too strong, they might even lead to the discontinuation of the activity altogether.

Motivation, as one of the key premises of Activity Theory, is further discussed in more depth in Chapter 6. There are two other key premises of AT that need to be emphasised: contradictions and transformation. Contradictions are structural tensions within and between the components of the activity system; they show how tensions can arise within the nodes of the students' activities (e.g., when different tools contradict each other), between nodes (e.g., when rules and tools clash) and between their activities and those of others (i.e., neighbouring activities). This key premise is further described and applied in "analysis through contradictions" (p. 97). Transformation of the object, in this case knowledge and skills, is the aim of the activity. The process of transformation is a process of learning that constitutes the improvement of the object into the desired outcome.

The acquisition of these new skills is described as an expansive learning cycle; the cycle is composed of two phases: initial internalisation, which allows the novice to observe and

to be trained, and later externalisation, which is marked by discrete individual innovations. The expansive cycle helps to comprehend the acquisition of academic culture.

Application and Criticism of Engeström's Activity Theory Framework

AT and Engeström's Activity Theory Framework is not without criticism. For instance, two special issues in Educational Review (Edwards and Daniels 2004; Martin and Peim 2009) investigate AT. Papers in the earlier issue "Using sociocultural and activity theory in education research" (Edwards and Daniels 2004) questions if, and how, AT provides an applicable framework that can be operationalised particularly for education studies. In "Critical perspectives on activity theory" (Martin and Peim 2009), authors examine AT more generally, especially with a focus on how the theory has developed over time.

Marxist roots and Transformation

These two editions, along with the works of other scholars, examine AT in the context of its *Marxist roots* (Flint 2009; Hardcastle 2009; Peim 2009). Here, Engeström's interpretation of Vygotskian thought is questioned "in terms of its lack of engagement with the philosophical tradition it claims to inherit and its misappropriation of the Vygotskian legacy" (Peim 2009, p. 167). *Transformation*, or expansive learning, in the context of Engeström's "ethic of improvement" (Martin and Peim 2009, p. 132) is also discussed widely (Edwards and Daniels 2004; Steinnes 2004; Flint 2009; Peim 2009). Steinnes (2004), for instance, points to a flaw in AT's linear logic that suggests that expansive cycles lead to positive transformation and to improved activities. She argues that such "programmed, controlled, managed transformation might be delimiting" (Martin and Peim 2009, p. 132) and that in reality transformations are often unpredictable. Similarly, Flint (2009) highlights that EAT focuses on a "stabilized description of a system" (Martin and Peim 2009, p. 137), whereas in the Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development, activity is not stable but bordering somewhere between the present and the "possible" or the future.

Historical and current macro-social power relationships

Scholars including Boag –Munrow (2004), Edwards and Daniels (2004), Popova and Daniels (2004), Hartley (2009), Peim (2009) and Avis (2009) highlight the shortcoming

of "managing theoretically and empirically the implications of *historical and current macro-social power relationships* where the unit of analysis is the local system" (see also Daniels 2004; Martin and Peim 2009, p. 133). In other words, they criticise how the constructs of macro-social power relations in activities in current developments of AT are ill-aligned with the historical setting in which AT was originally conceptualised, and even that EAT misses an account "of the political context" altogether (Martin and Peim 2009, p. 134). I agree that EAT only concentrates on the local activity system and does not focus on the macro-social power relationships and therefore the political context. However, since these relationships are important to this particular activity and since they "shape and position the elements of local activity systems" (Martin and Peim 2009, p. 135), the historical and political context has been presented as a backdrop to the study in the Introduction.

Popularity

Interestingly, since the publication of two other papers that are highly critical of EAT and have proclaimed that "Activity theory is a dead end for cultural-historical psychology" (Toomela 2000) and that "Activity theory is a dead end for methodological thinking in cultural psychology too" (Toomela 2008), Engeström (2009) has responded to many of his critics' arguments by pointing towards the increasing popularity of Activity Theory and EAT from 2000-2005[2] (see Figure 6) (Roth and Lee 2007, p. 188).

[2] NB: This shows the popularity of AT at the time of the data collection for this Ph.D. dissertation. No comparable data could be located for the period after 2005.

Figure 6: Four indicators of the increasing interest shown in cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) over the past three decades (from Roth and Lee 2007, p. 188)

Since 2005, AT has been used as an analytic lens in Education research in general (Barab, Evans et al. 2004, p. 132; Edwards and Darcy 2004; Twiselton 2004; Edwards and Fox 2005; Leadbetter 2005; Russell and Schneiderheinze 2005; Daniels, Leadbetter et al. 2007; Daniels 2009), also at the Institute of Education (Oliver and Pelletier 2006; Roussou, Oliver et al. 2008; Hardcastle 2009).

In this Ph.D. dissertation, the application of EAT in a straightforward fashion was not possible, and a number of limitations of EAT called for a more inventive use of the framework. As mentioned above, these are only described here and discussed in more detail after the analysis of the findings of the empirical study.

Subject

For instance, I agree with Edwards and Daniels (2004) and Pachler, Bachmair et al. (2010) that the construct of the individual is treated without the necessary depth and join criticism of "the theory's ambivalence over conceptualisations of *agentic action*"

(Edwards and Daniels 2004, p. 108), arguing in favour of a stronger focus on the subject (Pachler, Bachmair et al. 2010).

Community

Another main point of criticism for my empirical context was the limited attention EAT placed on *how* individuals interact in a collective setting. The construct of community in EAT is only a placeholder, without the depth that would allow researchers to examine such important elements as membership etc. Similarly, in my empirical context, language as a highly complex and important formative constituent of the international students' experiences is only treated as a tool, similar to all other tools, in EAT.

Section summary

Activity theory offers many very useful approaches (e.g., tool mediation, object-orientedness, and the "contradictions" within and between nodes of an activity that are further discussed in the analytical chapters) to studying the MA TESOL programme and examining Academic Culture. In this dissertation, AT is to be interpreted as a framework "of assumptions rather than providing a complete explanation in its own right" (Scaife, Rogers et al. 1997, p.10), and in this research it is not treated as an all-encompassing theory but as a framework onto which other useful lenses can be added. For instance, in the chapters that follow, identity is used to analyse the subject in greater depth, and language is investigated in more detail.

Most importantly, though, the focus on second academic culture cannot only be examined through acquisition, but as a socially-shaped phenomenon requires more focus on the behaviour within the wider social context. The reasons for applying AT are clearly stated above; however, Activity theory by itself is not a useful framework to focus on a socially-shaped phenomenon and although adherents of socio-cultural theory in general and AT in particular argue for a process of emergent learning in interaction with peers, teachers and context, neither has challenged the paradigm of knowledge acquisition itself. The notion of knowledge as 'something' that can be accumulated and passed on has rarely been touched upon. Although the mediation tools may lead the researcher closer to *how* cultural learning takes place, it does not enable us to create a clear picture of what happens *when* learning takes place. A closer look at the Participation Metaphor, and

combining EAT with a suitable community participation lens, promise to add value to this process of knowledge acquisition.

The Participation Metaphor

The Participation Metaphor stresses the contextualisation and engagement with others in its attempt to investigate the *how*. This is in contrast to the Acquisition Metaphor (AM) that focuses on the *what*. The Participation Metaphor (PM) deals with learning as a process of becoming a member of a given community. At first sight, Participation does not appear to be a metaphor at all, and Sfard describes the figurative function of the concept of participation as: "Participation is almost synonymous with 'taking part' and 'being a part', and both of these expressions signalise that learning should be viewed as a process of becoming a part of a greater whole" (1998, p. 6).

Within the concept of the PM the focus is not on knowledge but on knowing. Knowing implies action. This shift in the choice of key words can be observed in other central parts of the learning discussion as well. The interpretation of learning itself changes and within this change "the permanence of *having* gives way to the constant flux of *doing*" (emphasis in original; Sfard 1998, p. 6). This concept of 'doing' in a social setting is described in Communities of Practice as an "encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities" (emphasis in original; 1998, p. 4).

Communities of Practice

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) espouse this theory of learning. Just as for every other learning theory, a set of assumptions exists for CoP, which need to be looked at before the details of the theory can be discussed. The first assumption takes for granted that humans are social beings. Second, knowledge, presumably, is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises, and knowing is seen as an active engagement in the world. The last assumption presupposes that meaning entails the individual's relationship with the world as a meaningful experience. Meaning, in this sense, is the final outcome of learning.

Learning then, is a process situated "in the context of our lived experience in the world", "a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human

beings capable of knowing" (Wenger 1998, p. 3). This social participation takes for granted the involvement in a community and as a result in the practices of social communities. This allows that participation also implies the construction of identities in relation to these communities. What we do, who we are, and how we interpret what we do, is sculpted by participation.

The theory of learning encompasses the following aspects:

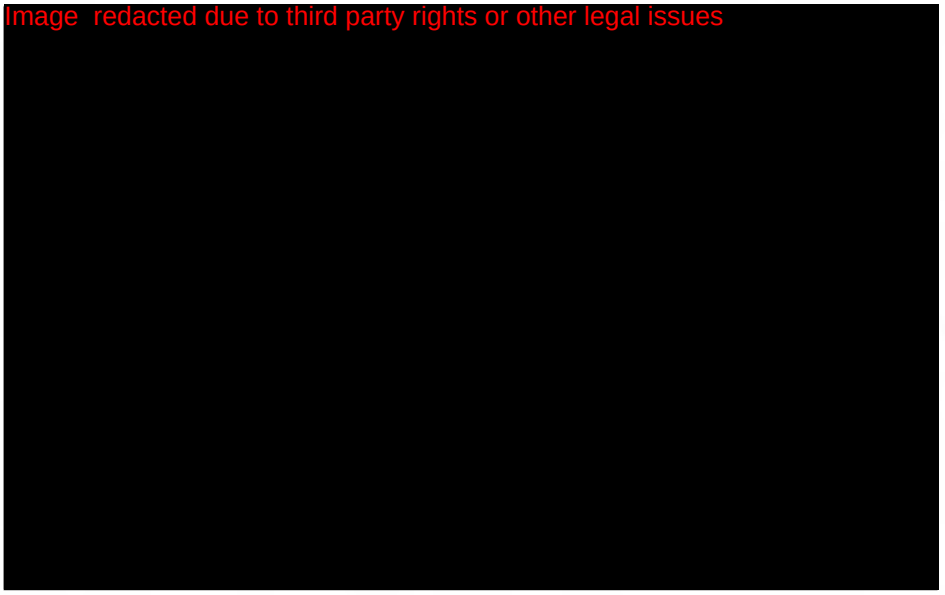

Figure 7: The Theory of Learning (Wenger 1998, p. 5)

The following descriptions of the components are taken from Wenger. *Meaning* is seen as a way of talking about our changing ability to experience life, and the world, as meaningful. To talk about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action is the *practice* component of learning. The social configuration, in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognisable as competence, is the *community*. *Identity* is looking at how learning changes who we are. It creates personal histories of becoming, in the context of our communities.

These components are so closely interconnected that they can be moved around and the figure, and theory, still makes sense. So far everything discussed seems very familiar, and while the phenomenon of communities and participation is of course not recent, CoP, as a

term, is. The attractiveness of this theory is Wenger's intended use of CoP as a thinking tool and as a vocabulary of concepts that describe this familiar phenomenon.

In the following section I discuss each part of the theory of learning in more detail, occasionally adding other authors' opinions on the four categories of learning: practice, meaning, community and identity.

Learning as doing – practice

Practice is always social practice and the "concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do" (Wenger 1998, p. 47). A notion of culture as practice includes explicit and tacit aspects, the represented and the assumed.

The explicit is the more obvious and rather expected side of the concept of practice. It includes "language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts" (Wenger 1998, p. 47). These aspects are made explicit through practice and they are made explicit for a variety of reasons.

However, that is not everything that the concept of practice represents. It also encompasses "the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognisable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared world views" (Wenger 1998, p. 47). None of these have to be mentioned but many of these aspects are present in CoPs. It is not only the presence of these aspects that is of importance. Moreover, it is the crucial function they take on when it comes to the achievement of the CoP's enterprise. Both tacit and explicit knowledge are discussed more in Chapter 5.

Learning as experience – meaning

Practice as a process allows humans to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful. Meaning is the crucial term and meaning matters to students. Wenger does not refer to the meaning that can be found in a dictionary or in a philosophical discussion. "Practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life" (Wenger 1998, p. 52). If that is so, the location of meaning needs to be addressed. Meaning encompasses three basic concepts. Meaning is located in the *negotiation of meaning*. The latter involves the

interactions of participation and reification, which form a duality that is fundamental to the human experience of meaning and thus to the nature of practice.

The way Wenger uses participation is equivalent to the common use of the word. "Taking part" easily comes to mind for the process of participation. However, participation also refers to "the relations with others that reflects this process" (Wenger 1998, p. 55). Wenger further explains these relations by stating, "when we engage in a conversation, we somehow recognise in each other something of ourselves, who we address. What we recognise has to do with our mutual ability to negotiate meaning. This mutuality does not, however, entail equality or respect" (Wenger 1998, p. 56). It describes the social experience of living, related to membership in social communities and with active involvement in social enterprises. Wenger's understanding of meaning is exemplified in the following quote:

> [...] we project our meaning into the world and then we perceive them as existing in the world, as having a reality of their own [...] whereas in participation we recognise ourselves in each other, in reification we project ourselves onto the world, and not having to recognise ourselves in those projections, we attribute to our meanings an independent existence (Wenger 1998, p. 58).

Learning as belonging – community

Wenger explains, "that associating practice and community does two things.

1. It yields a more tractable characterisation of the concept of practice - in particular, by distinguishing it from less tractable terms like culture, activity, or structure.
2. It defines a special type of community – a "community of practice" (1998, p. 72).

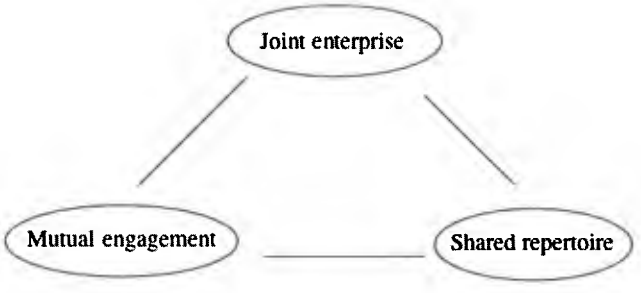

Figure 8: Community of Practice (Wenger 1998, p. 73)

A community of practice is defined by three elements:

1. Joint enterprise: negotiated enterprise; mutual accountability; interpretations; rhythms; local responses
2. Mutual engagement: engaged diversity; doing things together; relationships; social complicity; community; maintenance
3. Shared repertoire: stories; styles; artefacts; tools; actions; historical events; discourses; concepts (Wenger 1998, p. 73).

What may be especially important for the international student community is the notion of imagined communities. Many international students are in the UK for only a limited period of time and their ties to another community remain intact. This community is not tangible and the relationship is not build on actual engagement. Instead as Wenger describes imagination as "a process of expanding oneself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the word and ourselves" (Wenger 1998, p. 176). It may be presumed that the imagined community remains an influence on participation in the so-called new community.

Learning as becoming – identity

Identity is of interest in this discussion because the identity of students living abroad is strongly influenced by the second language setting. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) discuss participation and the (re)construction of selves in such second language contexts. The initial stage is loss of the old identity, starting with the loss of one's linguistic identity, loss of all subjectivities, loss of the frame of reference and the link between the signifier and the signified, loss of the inner voice and first-language attrition (2000). Subsequently, the stage of recovery of a one's identity includes the appropriation of others' voices, the emergence of one's own new voice, often in writing first, followed by reconstruction of one's past (translation theory) and, finally, the continuous growth 'into' new positions and subjectivities (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000, p. 162).

The examples presented in Pavlenko and Lantolf's article highlight these stages convincingly. I would stress, however, that I do not believe that everybody undergoes these stages consciously. One important aspect of consciousness relates to the differences of private and inner speech, which are accounted for in different ways. According to the

Piagetian theory of child development, the fact that children engage in private speech is evidence of children's egocentrism (Vialle, Lysaght et al. 2005). However, in socio-cultural theory private speech is seen as the child's growing ability to regulate its own behaviour. For Vygotsky private speech becomes inner speech. Inner speech is the use of language to regulate internal thought without any external articulation. According to Vygotsky private speech reflects an advance on the use of language as used by a child. At the early stage language is social and interpersonal and these properties of language are echoed in inner speech. Inner speech therefore is the tool of thought for the self-governing individual.

Inner speech, as a concept, is very important for this study. It is often challenging for students in their second language (L2) to voice an opinion. Inner speech, though, functions as a tool of thought for these students, and enables them to follow discussions and arguments. Inner speech allows people to make sense of the world they experience and allows them to mediate the relation of a person to the world. It helps in organising these relations.

The previous section notes that participation applies to the mutual ability to negotiate meaning. "In this experience of mutuality, participation is a source of identity. By recognising the mutuality of our participation, we become part of each other" (Wenger 1998, p. 56). If the existence of inner speech is lacking it does not allow for the kind of participation described here. Therefore we are cut off from one important source of identity. Non-existence can also mean that following a discussion in the second language is too tiring and that students "switch-off". Clearly then, identity development in the second language is only possible in the stages of recovery described by Pavlenko and Lantolf. In addition to identity in practice, the concept of identity covers participation and non-participation, as well as modes of belonging, identification and negotiability.

Wenger's learning discussion does not mention the importance of speech and language as such, and there is no mention of the issues of second language speakers at all. However, Cummins focuses on the influence of culture on language and stresses the importance of culture for the development of identity. The ways in which identities are negotiated in the classroom are strongly influenced by the assumptions regarding culture and language held in the wider society (Cummins 1996, p. 13). Cummins' research is situated in a high school and attitudes and stereotypes of some cultures are possibly more prominent than they might be in a highly international university setting. Nevertheless, there are

stereotypes and expectations regarding various cultural backgrounds and participants experience these prejudices. Some classes allow students to (re)negotiate their identity in the host country setting and, as Cummins explains, "empowerment derives from the process of negotiating identities in the classroom. Identities are not static or fixed but rather are constantly being shaped through experience and interactions" (1996, p. 15).

Another researcher who focuses on second language acquisition theory is Peirce (1995). This is most notable in her 1995 publication in which she criticises her discipline for looking at the individual language learner in isolation rather than the learner in the context of social and power relations that are embedded in the context. Social identity and investment are crucial for the understanding of the learner's interactions in the target language.

As can be seen, identity is rather complex and entails issues of practice, meaning, and community. It draws together all aspects of learning and highlights the interconnectedness of the issues discussed in Wenger's learning theory. Identity is an over-arching topic, but at the same time central. Identity is at the core of the learner's experience and due to its central role, it is discussed in a separate, later chapter.

Application and Criticism of CoP

The communities of practice approach focuses on the social interactive dimensions of how learning is situated in "communities of communities" (Seely Brown and Duguid 1991, p.54) and how knowledge is held, transferred and created (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) in groups. The construct of communities of practice, although it has its roots in education, has been used and discussed extensively among knowledge management scholars not only in education but also in management and organisational studies.

Numerous knowledge management studies (e.g., Rosander 2000) discuss collections of individuals in similar community-like forms of cooperation. One criticism of communities of practice is that nearly all other informal community-constellations, such as networks (Granovetter 1983; Adler and Kwon 2009), intensional networks (Nardi, Whittaker et al. 2001), knotworks (Engeström, Engeström et al. 1999), and communities of interest (Fischer 2001) are in fact communities of practice. However, the main observations from looking at community-type formations include that there is a multitude of overlapping publications addressing collaboration among individuals and groups, often

without clear definitions. What they have in common is that the locus of control and the boundary of collaboration in these works is either the institution or the community of people, but not both. Similarly, existing research either looks at personal or practice-based relationships, but not both. In the MA TESOL setting, all of these attributes mattered, and communities of practice was the construct that most closely matched these requirements.

Beyond justifying the choice of communities of practice vis-à-vis other constellations, CoP is not without its criticism. For instance, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder recognise some of the shortcomings in one of their more recent publications by acknowledging that "[...] the very qualities that make a community an ideal structure for learning – a shared perspectives on a domain, trust, a communal identity, long- standing relationships, an established practice – are the same qualities that can hold it hostage to its history and its achievements" (2002, p. 141). For instance, a community of practice can become "an ideal place for avoiding learning" (Wenger, McDermott et al. 2002, p. 141). Other points of criticism that are raised for CoPs include the treatment of power, trust and predispositions participants bring into the community.

Power and trust

In her article on "Limits to Communities of Practice" Roberts argues that meaning and knowledge may be merely a reflection of the community's dominant source of *power* (2006), rather than the result of an effective negotiation among members based on experience and skill, and she quotes that 'dynamics of power, mastery and collective learning are inseparable' (Blackler and McDonald 2000, p. 848). Similarly, the degree of *trust* among community members determines how willing or reluctant they are to share knowledge. The nature of relations thus shapes the success of knowledge sharing in the community of practice.

At the MA TESOL, the community was not organised in a hierarchical fashion where different power distributions would affect the shaping of meaning. All participants were students who started at the same time. This is not to say that issues of power could not develop much in a similar way the community needed to develop and establish trust among members over the course of the programme. However, the MA TESOL did not adhere to a formal hierarchical strata, but was a "harmonious and trusting organizational

environment in which workers are given a high degree of autonomy" (Roberts 2006, p. 629) that was favourable to meaning making and knowledge sharing.

Predispositions

Roberts further illustrates that meaning in communities of practice is mediated through preferences and *predispositions* that individuals bring into the community (2006). Through negotiation, the entire community also develops preferences and predispositions that influence if and how knowledge is shared and new meaning is created. While this may have implications in the short run, the risk is that over time, communities of practice may become resistant to change.

These arguments come out of the knowledge management literature, with a focus on developing communities of practice most effectively from an institutional perspective. In this context, predispositions may have a negative impact on the innovativeness within communities, on how likely members are to challenge current identity and practices and break with established institutional routines. For this study, predispositions are not negative. My focus, however, is on understanding exactly how these predispositions (through prior academic culture) manifest themselves in the acquisition of a second academic culture.

These general points of criticism concerning power, trust and predispositions, as valid as they might be for communities of practice from a managerial, firm perspective in a business environment, do not present significant downsides for the academic study of the MA TESOL. On the contrary, they are at the heart of the investigation. Nonetheless, a number of CoP challenges presented themselves in the context of my study. These are simply identified here, and will be discussed in a later section on contributions to theory.

Time horizon

In the case of the MA TESOL, a one-year programme is investigated. Students are entering the programme simultaneously, with no students staying in the programme for the next intake. Therefore, one might argue, that this community exists of newcomers only, with the only experts being the course tutors and other staff. However, these experts do not necessarily equate old-timers in the CoP context, as tutors and staff have a different "practice" and do not belong to the community of students.

Apprenticeship

The notion of apprenticeship suggests that academic culture is learned from members of the community, who are experts and have been members of the community for an extended period of time. Based on the "all newcomers" problem identified above, this study needed to review the notion of old-timers and whether an apprenticeship model can actually exist.

Community boundaries

My study focused on a discrete group of students (MA TESOL), but of course individuals belong to any number of communities of practice. As some practices overlap, so do some of the communities, all of which might contribute to second academic culture acquisition without necessarily featuring strongly into the research project and the data collection methods.

Section summary

Communities of Practice is a useful lens for understanding behaviour among participants of the MA TESOL setting. Through mutual engagement, these individuals establish norms and build collaborative relationships and through a joint enterprise they create a shared understanding of what binds them together in the MA TESOL "domain". Through the interaction of the participants, this Community of Practice develops a shared repertoire of procedures and resources from which they draw throughout their time in the MA TESOL programme, and which shape how they negotiate and acquire their second academic culture.

Combining Acquisition and Participation through AT and CoP

The PM cannot replace AM, simply because the new metaphor, PM, does not cover all the ground that the AM covers. They are, rather, mutually subsidiary. Sfard states:

> [...] each [metaphor] has something to offer that the other cannot provide. Moreover, relinquishing either the AM or the PM may have grave consequence, whereas metaphorical pluralism embraces a promise of a better research and a more satisfactory practice. The basic tension between seemingly conflicting metaphors is our protection against theoretical excesses, and is a source of power (Sfard 1998, p. 10).

Lantolf and Pavlenko agree with Sfard that the Participation Metaphor is not a replacement for the Acquisition Metaphor. They confirm that the PM is a "complement to the older metaphor, since, "[...] it makes visible aspects of second language learning that the Acquisition Metaphor leaves hidden" (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000, p. 156). The following quote by Rogoff on participation sums up the difference between the two metaphors as "a process of becoming, rather than acquisition" (1995, p. 142). Block summarises Rogoff's view in his discussion of education and SLA and suggests, "that the traditional Acquisition Metaphor is insufficient to account for some aspects of learning and that it should be complemented (but not replaced) by the Participation Metaphor that would account for these aspects" (2003, p. 104). Even though Pavlenko and Lantolf argue for the effectiveness of the coexistence of the two metaphors agree that: "having two different perspectives at our disposition allows us to engage productively in the study of learner languages, on the one hand, and in the study of language socialisation on the other. As our chapter focuses on the latter, we chose the PM metaphor as more appropriate for the analysis we wish to develop" (2000, p. 156). Indeed, there are research endeavours where one metaphor is more appropriate.

Block (1999) argues for polytheism, the belief in multiple realities, rather than monotheism in SLA research. "A move towards the study of the metaphors, which frame research and eventually lead to decisions about practice, is needed in SLAR [Second Language Acquisition Research], which has only begun to address the philosophical underpinnings of its research programmes" (Block 1999, p. 147). Block stresses that it is not always necessary to explore the metaphors but that one has to keep in mind that the framing metaphors remain behind the research conducted.

One other aspect, where the importance of metaphors is explicit, is the discourse of teachers and learners. Block has highlighted some common metaphors in this context and concludes that EFL teachers on the one hand "no longer wish to identify themselves with the old model for the delivery teacher and the passive student" and the learner on the other hand "might or might not know how to take on the new, more independent role which has been assigned to them" (1992, p. 52).

I present the reader with a combined version of the two. Participation in the learning activity, 'becoming' as a process of identity formation and hence Participation Metaphors are at the heart of CoP. AT, on the other hand supports the notion that knowledge can be transmitted, taught and acquired and hence supports the Acquisition Metaphor.

Having discussed the Acquisition Metaphor and the Participation Metaphor along with their respective theories, the following section examines the effectiveness of employing both approaches together. Depending on the focus of a study, one theory may be used as an extension of, or an amendment to, the other.

AT itself is useful but I find Engeström's extension to an activity system a more useful concept because it allows for a wider application. I believe that the activity system offers an analytical tool through the discussion of mediators as well as contradictions.

CoP enables the researcher to look at the larger community and not just the individual activities. The temporal aspect causes slight difficulties because CoP mainly portrays the situation of a newcomer to an existing community. In the case of this study the structures of the community and the programme already existed but the students are new to the programme. The learning experience that takes place within a community where everybody is new is not as easily analysed. Engeström addresses this difficulty:

> The problem here is in the temporal dimension. The theory of legitimate peripheral participation depicts learning and development primarily as a one-way movement from the periphery, occupied by novices, to the centre, inhabited by experienced masters of the given practice (Engeström 1999, p. 12).

Wenger may not have covered the temporal dimension to the full extent, but he addresses issues of the retrieval of old-timers who are, for example, mocking the newcomers. Despite the partial coverage of the developments over time I agree with Engeström that the process of participation is covered in a rather one-dimensional fashion. Engeström pinpoints aspects that seem to be missing from Wenger's theory. These include "movement outward and in unexpected directions: questioning of authority, criticism, innovation, initiation of change" (Engeström 1999, p. 12). Practices are not always stable and contradictions can evolve even in a well-established community. Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wenger (1998), in his succeeding work, do not offer explanations for the contradictions within communities. AT can fill some of these gaps in the CoP approach and it extends understanding for the tensions and contradictions within a community.

For the reasons explained I employ both theoretical approaches. Despite complementing each other, they fall short of a sufficient explication of motivation. Wenger's learning theory of CoPs presupposes that members of a community are motivated to share their knowledge and to work together; however, the construct of motivation behind these actions is left untouched in the theory. In AT, motivation is a primary pillar of the theory

that drives transformation of objects into outcomes. However, an activity is carried out on the level of the collective or community. But communities "do not act. Individuals always realize the practices in concrete ways" (Roth and Lee 2006, p. 32). Motivation is treated mostly at the collective level, and does not allow insights beyond emerging contradictions that help explain why an individual's actions are pursued or not. To overcome this shortcoming, the Chapter 6 describes motivation in more detail by drawing from sources besides AT and CoP. This specific combination of the two theories, AT and CoP, is probably unique to my case, but I am not attempting to create a new theory. The application of both theories in this combination and the analysis of the shortcomings of these theories may, hopefully, be of use as a starting point for other research projects.

Chapter summary

In this chapter the importance of metaphors in theories of learning was emphasised and the implications of metaphors for the day-to-day understanding of acquisition and participation were discussed. The Acquisition Metaphor can be found in socio-cultural theory, according to which Vygotsky's concept of tool mediation is key. Of equal importance are regulation, scaffolding and the zone of proximal development. AT builds on Leont'ev's influential idea that the focus is not on mediation as much as on action and activity. Engeström extends their findings by adding rules, community and division of labour to the original representation and the idea of activity systems and neighbouring activities. Despite points of criticism, EAT is a useful framework that is popular among education researchers, particular at the time at which this study was conducted. EAT is employed here as a framework onto which other lenses will be mounted in the following chapters to understand the acquisition of a second academic culture in the MA TESOL programme.

The Participation Metaphor encompasses CoP, Lave and Wenger's theory of learning (Sfard 1998). Learning has implications for each keyword, e.g. practice, meaning, community and identity. Learning implies doing and this practice is viewed in a historical and social context. Meaning making is a crucial aspect of learning as experience. The identity of the learner develops but remains in constant flux and learning is regarded as a journey of becoming. Identity forms through the community. Within the community learning is experienced through belonging. Again, despite criticism, CoP is a framework that adds important terminology to a discussion of individual and group behaviour that is

at the heart of a study of second academic culture acquisition in the MA TESOL programme.

In addition, this chapter highlighted the close connection of the two approaches, and the value of combining these (Fuller, Hodkinson et al. 2005) to build a powerful foundation in which they come together and move apart as frameworks. Their combination is appropriate for the pursuit of the research questions outlined earlier, and will inform the research methods described next and the lenses applied to the empirical context in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodological framework

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduced the experiences of international EFL students when they come to the UK as postgraduate students as the main area of interest for this study. How they acquire the elements of their second academic culture became the guiding research question. In Chapter 2, I then presented two complementary metaphors to illustrate how these student experiences take shape through both acquisition and participation (Sfard 1998, p. 79). Activity Theory (the interpretation of Engeström 1987) and Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) were introduced as complementary theoretical lenses through which the complexity of academic culture and its acquisition can be examined.

In this chapter, both the research questions and the theoretical underpinnings played a pivotal role in selecting case study as an appropriate methodology and for defining suitable data collection methods.

This chapter first describes my choice and justification of the case study approach for this study. The chapter then proceeds with the actual case, followed by sections on data collection (with methods and sources) and data analysis.

The choice of case study methodology

The main purpose of this research is the identification of aspects of academic culture and how international English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students acquire the elements of this new, second academic culture.

In the English language the term "culture" has proven to be a difficult concept (Williams 1983). According to Kramsch "[...] culture can be defined as membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings" (1998, p. 10). This view on culture is complemented by Skelton and Allen, who argue that "any one individual's experience of culture will be affected by the multiple aspects of their identity - race, gender, sex, age, sexuality, class, caste position, religion, geography, and so forth - and it is likely to alter in various circumstances" (1999, p. 4). The concept of culture has manifested itself in groups and communities as cultural practices (concrete patterned actions) that "exist at a collective level" (Roth and Lee 2006, p.32); however, it

is not the collective that acts, but "individuals always realize these practices in concrete ways. Because practices and structures (rules, tools, symbols, language) are characteristic of societal living, their lifespan is not tied to any individual and are preserved [in the community]" (Roth and Lee 2006, p. 32). The individual's realisation of these practices and structures, influenced by her identity and experience, brings about change and produces and reproduces culture. Producing and simultaneously reproducing culture constitutes the dialectical approach.

This dissertation adopts such a dialectical approach to culture, where "culture is seen as a concrete universal" of "structurally related symbols and artefacts and a complex of patterned actions (i.e., practices)" (Roth and Lee 2006, p. 32). It is because culture is so involved that scholars have found it difficult to agree on a precise definition. It is for the same reasons that providing a simple definition of academic culture is impossible in the context of this research. Consequently, nowhere in this dissertation will I say "culture/ academic culture is defined as ...", but rather offer an impression of academic culture that can be "gleaned only as an overall perspective" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 8) in the context of the MA TESOL.

Studying such a highly cultural, historical and institutional situatedness calls for a socially oriented approaches that follows constructivism (Block 1996), in which an objective reality is denied. Instead, "[...] realities are social constructions of the mind, and [...] there exist as many such constructions as there are individuals (although clearly many constructions will be shared" (Guba and Lincoln 1998, p. 43). Denying the existence of an objective reality indicates a relativist ontological position (Guba and Lincoln 1998) with multiple individual realities and a "non-reducible plurality" (Bernstein 1983, p. 8) of contexts. A concept, e.g. truth, is understood by a relativist as "relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture" (Bernstein 1983, p. 8). Following constructivism, a closer look at individual realities is needed in this research on academic culture, strongly linked to contexts, particularly relational contexts that describe complex interpersonal ties and meanings shaped by history, emotion, mind-sets etc.

Justification

As suggested above, the nature of this study and the guiding research question and subquestions are explorative in nature. The construct of "academic culture" on which the

research questions focus is influenced by and influences the context of the study. The case study choice of method was appropriate for such an empirical inquiry "[...] that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin 2003, p. 13). Yin's seminal work further supports that the choice of my research questions and the empirical context were appropriate for the case study method:

> The form of the research question: How and why questions can be answered by case study research whereas quantitative questions like how many and how much are rather used for quantitative methods like surveys and archival analysis.
>
> The control an investigator has over actual behavioral events: Case study analysis does not require control over the investigated behavioral element as for example experiments do.
>
> The focus on contemporary instead of historical data: Case studies are predominantly used to investigate on contemporary phenomena. (Yin 2003, p. 8)

All of these criteria were fulfilled in my research endeavour. Research was conducted within the learning environment at PRC, where academic culture does not take place in a confined space but is embedded in the context of the activity system and the community engagement.

However, the guiding research questions focus specifically on second academic culture acquisition among postgraduate international EFL students. The analytical lenses chosen outline that such a phenomenon is specific to the individual involved in the activity and the community that develops. For this reason, academic culture cannot be examined across different activity systems, or in other words across cases and communities that follow different rules, hierarchies etc. Since the activity system operates on the local level of the MA TESOL and not on a national or regional level of understanding academic culture, the practices of academic culture of the MA TESOL need to be explored within a suitable methodology.

It is for these theoretical considerations and the fact that a "[...] qualitative case study of a single programme may be a case study" (Patton 1990, p. 385) that the research was conducted within a single Master's programme at PRC. This choice agrees with Eisenhardt (1989, p. 534) as an appropriate method "for understanding the dynamics present within a single setting" and a way to study the "[...] particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances"

(Starke 1995, p. xi). Yin's (2003, p. 13) interpretation of the appropriateness of case study methodology for specific settings also supports the choice of the MA TESOL programme as a setting that a) offers many more variables of interest than data points (here elements in the activity systems and CoP) for examination, b) relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge, and c) benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

Nonetheless, despite the appropriateness of case study research for the research questions and the empirical context, a number of challenges of the methodology need to be considered.

Challenges of trustworthiness

Social constructionists view the world in a multifaceted way, and the "trustworthiness" of a study is measured by various criteria. These include a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, a historical and cultural specificity where categories and concepts are dependent on historical and prevailing cultural conditions, and the assumption that different social constructions invite different actions to be taken by human beings (Burr 1995).

The aim of this case study is to establish a critical position towards taken-for-granted knowledge and to focus on the cultural and historical embeddedness of knowledge in social interaction in the MA TESOL. The study is situated in a socially constructed paradigm where it is impossible to search for just one objective truth. The nature of the task is consequently not to detect or discover the "truth", but to describe and to analyse the situation from various perspectives. Under the heading of trustworthiness a number of criteria enable qualitative researchers to justify their methods of inquiry (Burr 1995). Lincoln and Guba present four constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability that allow qualitative research to approach "truth value" (1985, p. 290). In this research study, trustworthiness was confirmed through techniques of prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member-checking, thick description, inquiry audit and reflexivity (see Table 2).

Trustworthiness through (issue)	Confirmed through (technique)
Credibility	Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member-checking
Transferability	Thick description
Dependability	Inquiry audit
Confirmability	Reflexivity

Table 2: Trustworthiness of the MA TESOL case study

Credibility

The credibility of the study refers to confidence in the 'truth' of the findings (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). It describes the way the researcher "represents multiple constructions adequately" and assures that these are also "credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 296). Lincoln and Guba introduce prolonged engagement, persistent observation and member-checking among other techniques for establishing credibility. Prolonged engagement "[...] is to render the inquirer open to the multiple influences - the mutual shapers and contextual factors - that impinge upon the phenomenon being studied" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). I spent sufficient time in the classroom and with interviewees to become oriented to the situation and to understand the context. "If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 304), and through such persistent observation I was able to identify and focus on those characteristics and elements in the MA TESOL setting that were most relevant to the acquisition of academic culture. However, member checking is the "[...] most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 304). In my study, I checked data I collected and my interpretations with participants on an ongoing basis, mostly in the context of in-person interviews.

Transferability

Transferability of a qualitative study aims to show that the findings have "applicability" in the sense of a working hypothesis, not a conclusion (Lincoln and Guba 1985), that needs to be interpreted again in light of other contexts, times, settings, situations, and people (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). Transferability is established by "thick descriptions"

(Geertz 1973; Denzin 1989). According to Geertz, the determining question is whether thick description sorts, for example, winks from twitches and real winks from mimicked ones (1973, p. 4). The meaning of, for example, an observed wink needs to be set in context and needs to be understood correctly by the researcher. In contrast, thin description only provides superficial data (e.g., a twitch as an involuntary movement of an eyelid). The interpretive dimension of this study relates to how the case study data, especially in the context of member checking, unveiled "patterns of cultural and social relationships [...] in context" through such thick descriptions.

Dependability

Dependability describes the concept of consistency or reliability in qualitative research, both in terms of process and product (Golafshani 2003). A dependability test with an external researcher is to unveil if the data are accurate and whether or not the findings, interpretations, preliminary results, summary of preliminary findings and conclusions are supported by the data (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). This inquiry audit took place for my research during my doctoral school "Methodology" course, where my study and my data sets were used as sample material for the entire course.

Confirmability

The final construct of trustworthiness is confirmability. This refers to the degree to which the researcher can demonstrate the neutrality of the research interpretations or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Hoepfl 1997). "Subjectivity arises when the effect of the researcher is ignored," (Malterud 2001, p. 484), which turns this methodological issue into "a commitment to reflexivity" (Malterud 2001, p. 484). I assessed my involvement in the study and the degree to which my own value system influenced the inquiry during all steps of the research process in my researcher's diary. In order to "expose and explicate" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 186), my inquiry audit in my Methodology course also included a confirmability audit section in which I shared my assessment of my value systems for the research.

The MA TESOL case study explores the behaviour, perspectives and experiences of the people in the programme (Holloway 1997). The trustworthiness of this research was discussed according to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility (through techniques as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member-checking), transferability (through thick description), dependability (through an inquiry audit) and confirmability (through reflexivity).

After justifying case study as an appropriate methodology for this research, and discussing how its believability and confidence in the findings was assured through a number of techniques, it is now time to introduce the case before addressing both methods of data collection and analysis.

The case: MA TESOL at PRC

The case study was conducted by drawing from selected students of the 2004 intake of the MA TESOL programme at the Park Royal College, University of Britain. The MA TESOL was chosen for various reasons. Preference was given to a one-year programme with a high percentage of international students. In addition, an appropriate programme needed to be one, which did not focus mainly on issues relevant to the UK. If the programme had a strong content focus on the UK it is usually the case that students would consider staying in the UK to find employment. I was interested in finding a programme where it was quite likely that the students would return to their home country upon completion of their studies because then, the students are considered sojourners, coming to the UK only for academic purposes. The sojourner identity is important because the mindset of someone coming to study for one year and of someone, who is coming for a lifetime, is potentially very different. The MA TESOL programme fulfilled all the research requirements for this case study.

The MA TESOL is a one-year Masters and it is organised differently for each of the three terms. The first term consisted of mandatory classes only, which included "Describing and Analysing Language", "TESOL and Applied Language Studies Research Seminar" and "Basic Research Skills". The first two courses were taught in a seminar style consisting of short lectures and in-class work. Research skills were taught in a series of lectures. If the students were inexperienced as teachers or had no teaching background they had to take "Issues and Options in Language Teaching", a seminar style class. If they

were experienced teachers the course "Key Concepts in Language Teaching and Learning" was designed for them. This was also taught in a seminar format.

The second term offered students two choices of option courses from a wide selection. In the third term, students who chose to write a report (10,000 words) had one course to complete. The students who opted to write a thesis (20,000 word) were not expected to take any classes during the summer.

Some students of the MA TESOL programme were unable to fully satisfy the English proficiency entry requirements. These individuals were admitted to the MA programme subject to the successful completion of a pre-sessional course, which they took prior to the start of the first term. The pre-sessional course is designed for students whose TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Testing System) scores are slightly below the benchmark for university admittance. Depending on their score, they had to attend a one, two or three-month pre-sessional course. The focus of the course is not on English language teaching only, but also on English for academic purposes, especially on writing conventions, developing critical thinking skills, and on familiarising the new students with various teaching styles and methods. Many of the international TESOL students were involved in the pre-sessional course and, since students gathered a vast amount of information on academic culture during these months, it was essential to start the data collection with the pre-sessional course.

Data collection

Methods

As discussed above, the case study method, as an appropriate approach for understanding the dynamics of a complex phenomenon present within a single setting (Eisenhardt 1989), supports the study of the MA TESOL to educate the development of the construct of "academic culture".

Yin argues that "the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence; documents, artefacts, interviews and observations" (Yin 2009). This study's aim of understanding and developing of the construct of academic culture hinges on the examination of structures, activities and community behaviour, which in turn needs to

draw from a number of data collection methods and sources. However, since a researcher should not adopt a "naively 'optimistic' view that the aggregation of data from different sources will unproblematically add up to produce a more accurate or complete picture" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), the choices of data sources and instruments used for my case study was deliberately based on my research questions:

How do postgraduate international EFL students acquire a second academic culture?

Courses in the MA TESOL programme were *observed* in order to collect data on how contradictions unfold in the classroom when participants engage with the second academic culture (according to the acquisition metaphor). Observations also provided data on how interaction among participants changed and how different individuals were approached as experts over time (participation metaphor). Field notes were taken and a researcher's diary was kept that included reflections of the observations and summaries of the field notes. The credibility of this data was checked for trustworthiness through member-checking in interviews. The majority of data for this question came through in-depth interviews that generated thick descriptions of the students' experiences when acquiring the second academic culture. A *questionnaire* helped collect data about how many hours international EFL students versus home students spent with reading, writing and engagement in student groups etc.

What are the elements of academic culture?

Data related to academic culture was collected through observation, for example, by witnessing the difference in behaviour of participants working in different groups. Patterns emerged, and it was possible to confirm these in follow up interviews when students could also elaborate on the experience of second academic culture acquisition. Moreover, interviews with participating students enabled me to query contradictions between their home academic cultures and the host culture in the MA TESOL programme. Observation and interview data were then investigated through the analytical lenses, which helped flesh out the elements of academic culture. A learning diary that students were supposed to keep was intended to help add more reflective thought, but as

described more below, learning diaries were not kept as intended and the method became useless.

What are the influencing factors for the acquisition of a second academic culture?

Here, both observations and interviews played an important role again. What mattered strongly was how behaviour and responses changed over time. For instance, when along a trajectory of observations, students focused less on issues of academic culture and more on academic content, academic culture acquisition might have progressed. This observation data was followed up through interviews with the students. Interviews with tutors also shed light on the factors that influenced second academic culture acquisition.

Thus, my primary and secondary research questions directly guided me in choosing lesson observation, interviews, diaries and a questionnaire as data collection instruments. The main purpose of the previous paragraphs was to link research questions and methods. The following sections will now add more detail to these methods and how they were used to collect data in the empirical setting.

Lesson observation

During the three months of the pre-sessional course, from July to September 2004, I spent many hours (20 hours per week) as a non-participant observer in the classroom. I remained a non-participant observer during the autumn term of the MA TESOL programme. During the spring term it became impossible to follow the MA TESOL since students had various option classes to choose from and were not together as a class anymore.

Since I spent many hours in the classroom, the students soon became accustomed to my presence. I sat at the back of the classroom and it seemed that students often forgot that I was sitting there. There was no eye contact or any turning around to make contact with me. The lecturers were more aware of my presence. I was within their sight and although could not avoid the observer paradox by being a "fly on the wall", I did acknowledge it when in the confirmability criterion (through reflexivity) for trustworthiness and in my data analysis.

My presence during break-time allowed me to have casual conversations with the students. From these conversations I was able to ascertain the students' backgrounds and

previous experiences. This unobtrusive form of inquiry enabled me to get a sense of which students might be suitable for my study; since I was looking for students, who had never lived or studied abroad and had English as a foreign language it was important for me to obtain this type of information in a timely manner. Through observation and time spent in the class, a relationship of trust developed quickly between the students and myself. Trust was necessary so that students would engage in the study in the first place and felt comfortable talking to me during interviews.

I was also able to gain an insight into the different sessions the students were attending and was able to draw on this knowledge to address specific aspects of classroom situations during interviews. Most of the data collected during observation were followed up during interviews. Although a point of saturation was reached after a few weeks it was essential to know what took place in the classroom, not just from descriptions of the students, but also from my first hand observation. By saturation I mean that after a certain period I did not observe new phenomena, but repetitions of the same phenomena in different contexts or with different participants. The value of the input from observations was immense and it triggered numerous valuable discussions and lines of inquiry.

Interviews

Interviews are a particularly rich source of data and the method of in-depth interviews generates thick descriptions of the students' experiences. The focus on particular issues in in-depth interviews enables an exploration of a specific topic and provides the insights into this topic from the interviewee's perspective. The interviews with my participants took place every four to eight weeks during term time. The duration of the interviews was dependent on the workload of the students.

The interview process is "a meaning-making endeavour embarked on as a partnership between the interviewer and his or her respondent" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006, p. 119). In this study, a series of semi-structured interviews (Merton, Fiske et al. 1990) with participants were conducted with open-ended questions, usually in a conversational style. Despite the conversational character, I had prepared the questions that I wanted to ask, and I tried to keep the elaborative sessions short, between an hour and ninety minutes for each in-depth interview.

Some questions I included in my interviews are: How do you feel about the first two weeks of classes? What was difficult? What was easier than you expected? In contrast to

your home country, how do students participate in class? How do students and lecturers interact? Would you ask questions in class? If no, why not? Would you see the course tutor during office hours or would you contact her by email? These kinds of questions allowed for descriptive data as well as explanatory data. The motivation for this type of interview was twofold. First, the participants followed a tight programme of study and I did not wish to interfere more than necessary and take a lot of their scarce time. However, I needed the participants to explain their experience in the finest nuances. Second, I often simply needed the students to corroborate certain facts I had observed in class for a thick description. I sometimes wanted the participants to elaborate on their feelings, emotions and experiences and I worded my questions carefully without hinting at the outcome that I might have had in mind or the outcome I may have assumed.

Three participants, Hui, Xiao and Su, who had been acting as respondents turned into excellent informants. As sources that could provide me with invaluable inside information, they allowed me to gain "... access to a setting [that] involves establishing relationships with central figures" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006, p. 202). Interviews with these three participants took much longer than with the other participants. The insights and reflections they provided me with are dominating the interview data. Interviews with some of the other participants ended up being generally shorter and reached a saturation point sooner than expected. These participants are featured rarely in the interview data in this dissertation.

I recorded semi-structured interviews with the tutors once but I often discussed issues regarding the case with them before, during and after classes. In the recorded interviews, I revisited some of the issues we casually discussed so that I was able to use this information with the tutors' consent. For this reason, I only interviewed tutors at the very end so that I could include material from all previous classes. The individual tutors are not differentiated by name in my study and their data are presented as "course tutor information" unless students mentioned them by name in the interviews. In these cases, tutor names were anonymised as Jill, Anne and Peter.

I interviewed these tutors not only in their role as course tutors but also as personal tutors of the MA TESOL programme. It was interesting to see the different interpretations of the role of the personal tutor in the eyes of the students and the tutors themselves.

Many remarks tutors made before and after class and even during interviews were prefaced with comments such as "Just between you and me" or "This is off the record".

These non-disclosure agreements are a typical problem if one is researching one's "backyard" (Glesne and Peshkin 1992), where affiliations based on trust cloud the relationship of researcher and research subject. Moreover, because the relationship and content exchange might be based on shared experiences in the past, it might make less sense if presented outside of this established context and actual dialogue. Similarly, the remarks shared by two people who know each other is likely different from the statements made at all to an unfamiliar interviewer or observer. Therefore many of the tutors' comments are not featured verbatim in the dissertation. However, the non-confidential insides I gained from tutors during observations and interviews were revisited in interviews with students.

Researcher's diary

Diaries allow a reflective position towards experiences and observations. Although the entries may not be coherent and may not take place at regular intervals, a diary offers notes along a chronological path. I kept a researcher's diary during the time of data collection, which, as was previously discussed, played an important role for the trustworthiness of the study. Here I identified preconceptions I brought into the project, based on previous personal and professional experiences, and "prestudy beliefs about how things are and what is to be investigated" (Malterud 2001, p. 484), which were discussed in my methodology course.

In addition to these entries, I also recorded my field notes of the lesson observations. With great effort, I kept my field notes separate from my research diary, but I soon fell to writing both kinds of entries in the same note book, but under different headings. The time I spent in the classroom was most fruitful in terms of ideas and inspirations, and many entries were made while I was observing classes. The diary functioned as a record of interviews and observations, but also of personal values and how ideas developed and the design of the interview structure was shaped and formed over time.

Here is one example from my diary that shows that my observations influenced my interview questions:

> "Su seems very quiet in key concepts. Group-work with two native-speakers in her group. Compare with the other course, check where she chooses to sit, follow up in interview, ask whether she chooses to sit with native speaker, how she sees her role in group work, ask her what

> has changed, she was very outspoken and self-assured in the pre-sessional course." (Researcher's diary, beginning of first term)

The focus here shifted from observing the individual to the surrounding; in this case it shifted towards the group. For the design of the study this lead to observing particular students in groups across various courses in the MA TESOL programme. Other key aspects emerged in a similar way, such as the importance of study groups, the relationship with the course tutor, and the grounded understanding of subject knowledge.

Learning diaries

A few participants decided to keep learning diaries, and those without teaching experience were required to keep a learning journal for one of their MA TESOL classes. According to Bailey and Ochsner (1983) diary studies can be helpful to learners and researchers as they evaluate themselves and their frustrations, as well as their language learning techniques. For these learning diaries, the format was very open and no further instructions regarding the content of the diary were given. Some of the participants who kept learning diaries wrote in English, while others did not. Understandably, they did not want to go through the extra effort of translating their content into English for the sake of this research study. Other students kept two diaries, one in English and one in their first language.

At the beginning of the programme, students promised to share their learning diaries with me, but when I asked students to provide me with their work, only three of the eleven participants offered selected diary entries to me. For others, there was not enough time to keep a diary, and some admitted that the information provided in the diary was made up or copied from other classmates. Saori explains,

> "You would know after two sentences that I did not write it. You know from our interviews that almost nothing is true for me what is written in there." (Interview, end of first term)

The few legitimate diary entries I received by email from a few of the participants were too short, infrequent and generally not very reflective. For these reasons, the method was abandoned.

Questionnaire

Towards the end of the first term I handed out a questionnaire (see Appendix B) to all the students in the course, not only to the participants. The main purpose of this questionnaire was to gain an insight into the composition of the student population and into their experience of working in multinational groups.

I take this opportunity to portray the MA TESOL population in more detail and to describe the questionnaire. The first questions established that the programme consisted of 13 home students, six students from other EU countries (which are technically home students too) and 18 overseas students. Within this entire programme population only seven students were male and only seven students had no teaching experience. Study groups were popular by the end of the first term and at least 50% of the students were members of a study group. The time spent on the course reading varied between five hours per week up to 30 hours and averaged 15 hours.

I also asked students to indicate, on a Likert scale from one to five, what was easy and what was rather difficult for them. They had to grade the following tasks: contacting tutors, contacting personal tutors, finding a study group, managing time, working in groups in class, speaking in front of the entire class, speaking in front of your group during group work, understanding the content of classes, forming a *critical* opinion.

The final item on the questionnaire was a short answer question to which students commented in detail on their learning experience in the MA TESOL and on their experiences working in multinational groups.

To summarise, the methods used include lesson observation, interviews, my researcher field-notes and research diary, and a student questionnaire.

Main sources / participants

In terms of sample size, I evaluated the suitability of all international EFL students of the MA TESOL programme as participants for this study. These suitability requirements were a) that they should be international EFL students, b) who had never studied abroad, so that they had never been exposed to a foreign academic culture and c) did not intend to stay in the UK after their studies. I considered all 18 international students but some of them had English as their first language, one other student had been a student in the UK prior to the beginning of the programme and others knew from the beginning that they

wished to stay in the UK because of their respective partner's work. Through these criteria, eleven students were identified. All of them were exposed for the first time to the UK university system and all participated in this study. Interestingly, with the exception of one student, all the participating students were required to take the pre-sessional course as an entry requirement.

The participating students were from China, Japan, Macao, Korea and Taiwan. Eleven students fit my criteria and agreed to participate in the study. Teaching experience varied from very little (four week practica) up to twenty years. The age range of the students was from twenty-one to forty-five years. There were two male participants. The following insertion introduces the participants most often portrayed in the study. The information has been kept vague to protect the anonymity and nonidentifiability of the participants. However, enough information is given so that the reader may form an impression of the participants' situation and background.

Hui from China

Hui was sent by her employer, a private university in China, to attend the MA TESOL course. She had worked at that university for a couple of years, teaching English listening and English grammar classes. She had previously studied English, with native speakers, but had never left China prior to attending PRC. Hui was in her twenties at the time of the study.

Su and Xiao from Macao

Both attended an English medium high school in their home country. They studied to become teachers and completed their teaching practicum but had never taught in a full-time position. Both were in their early twenties.

Suyoung from Korea

Her background was in accounting and she only took the occasional optional English class. She came with her husband to the UK and decided that the MA TESOL would be a useful degree for her. Suyoung had virtually no background knowledge and her English language ability was very low in comparison to most other students. She was aware of this and tried to overcome this problem. However, after difficulties at the beginning of the

course the tutors quickly recognised her ability to understand new concepts and to offer interesting ideas. Suyoung was in her late twenties.

Ling from Taiwan

A few years of high school teaching experience and good communication skills enabled Ling to make the most of her time in the UK. She had a passion for languages and cultures and enjoyed the freedom of being a student after years of work, a chance, as she said not many women in her country have in their late twenties.

Tomo from Japan

Tomo came with her husband to the UK. She had been a college lecturer for ten years and a high school teacher for an additional ten years. Tomo taught English in both settings.

Mei from China

Mei was the only person who had never been abroad and still qualified for the MA TESOL programme without the condition of passing the pre-sessional course. She also had only the teaching experience from her practicum and no further work experience.

Saori from Japan

Saori was one of the youngest students and had obtained no teaching experience aside from her practicum.

Other participants were important sources of this case study. These included, in the order presented next, other students, course tutors and personal tutors, the PRC and CALS, and members of Student Support Services at PRC.

The composition of the MA TESOL highlights the specificity of the fellow students in the context of the international EFL students. The fellow home students in this programme were often part-time students, some of whom had spent time abroad to gain more teaching experience in teaching English as a foreign language. Therefore, the academic culture was influenced by the international students and fellow students who were acutely

aware of the difficulties of living abroad and who had studied second language learning theories.

The course tutors and the personal tutors of the students were also part of the case study. The course tutors delivered the lectures and marked the assignments. The role of the personal tutor was that of an adviser for academic and personal difficulties. Both, the course tutors and the personal tutors were part of the context that informed the individual and collective student experience.

The Park Royal College, University of Britain, is a postgraduate institution with a variety of Masters programmes and a large doctoral school. Teaching and research are open to various fields of education. As well, a large support structure exists around the actual teaching and research programmes, including CALS (Centre for Academic Literacies Support) that offered the pre-sessional course discussed in this case study. CALS has a central role because students who passed the pre-sessional course only with difficulties are required to attend in-sessional classes offered by CALS during the first term. A few lecturers who taught during the pre-sessional course were offering the CALS classes and workshops during term time. Students were familiar with CALS and were not hesitant to ask for help with academic problems.

An additional group of people was interviewed who were not directly involved in the MA TESOL programme but were there to support students in general. In total four interviews were conducted at the beginning of the term with staff in the registry, the international student co-ordinator, and library staff and the MA TESOL course administrator. The data gained from these interviews functioned mostly as background information during the interviews with the participating students.

In accordance with the university's ethical guidelines, all the participants signed an informed consent form.

Timing

The various methods were employed over a time of ten months (see Table 3 below). Observations during the Pre-sessional course were conducted from 9am-4pm, Monday through Thursday, for a total of eight weeks. Observations in the MA TESOL programme were conducted for three hours per day, Monday through Thursday, for the duration of the first term. A total of 46 interviews were conducted at the beginning of the pre-

sessional course, at the beginning and end of the first term of the MA TESOL programme, and then again in March and at the end of the second term of the MA TESOL programme in May. For more a more detailed breakdown, please refer to Appendix A: Interview schedule.

Questionnaire	Students										
Researcher's Diary	ongoing										
Interview	Students, Personal Tutors, Staff		Students & Staff	Students	Students & Tutors			Students		Students	
Observation	Pre-sessional	Pre-sessional	MA TESOL	MA TESOL	MA TESOL						
method	**Aug**	**Sept**	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**	**Jan**	**Feb**	**Mar**	**Apr**	**May**	
date			**2004**					**2005**			

Table 3: Research Timing

Ethical considerations

My relationship with the participants was influenced by various factors. On a very general basis the participating students did not know me well at the beginning of the study. I talked to every non-native speaker in the programme. By non-native speaker I refer to students who have English as a second or other language; a native speaker in contrast has English as first language. In these casual conversations with the non-native speakers I discovered whether they had ever studied or lived abroad before coming to PRC. The students I approached for participation in the study agreed, without hesitation, to do so.

As a researcher with these students, I wore many hats. Some of the participants, particularly during the pre-sessional course, regarded me as an *insider*, as a person that has valuable insight into university life in the UK and the Park Royal College in particular. Their consideration of my personal role addressed "[...] the personal biography of the researcher and how that might be shaping events and meanings" (Marshall and Rossman 1995, p. 118). It was obvious that my role as a researcher was one of privilege as I had gained experience from studying abroad in previous years. Also I was already a student in the UK, unlike the participants who were new to UoB. Moreover, as I was enrolled in a MPhil/Ph.D. programme, I was considered a senior

student to the participants. My experience allowed me to understand the conventions of the university easily.

The relationship between the students and myself needed to be based on *trust and reciprocity*. Since there were very few incentives for them to participate in this study, it was very important that the students were under the impression that I would assist them as much as possible. Cameron, Frazer et al., recognised this significance by noting that "it is important to point out that the questions we asked - whether and how research could be used to the benefit of both researcher and researched - is in some ways an obvious concern for any social scientist to have while at the same time it is a delicate matter and not at all straightforward" (1992, p. 2). I assured that the students received the help and advice they were seeking by referring them to the respective resources at the university. Another benefit for the students was the opportunity to reflect. Most of the participants made a point similar to Xiao:

> "it is very good for me to talk about what I do because it makes me more aware of what I do." (Interview, beginning of first term)

The main incentive for the students, then, was to have someone who listens with patience and sympathy. If participants had to cancel an appointment with me they were certain to clarify that they wished to carry on with my research. I was very impressed with their consideration and awareness of the extent to which I relied on their participation for my data collection.

The risk of having a relationship built on trust with research subjects was that some participants started to view me not only as a researcher but also as a *friend*. In recognition of the risk this relationship might pose for my research, when asked for help and personal advice I had to decline. The ambition of my methodology was not to construct case study research through the lens of an experimental method, with intervention, manipulated treatments and randomised controls (Gerring 2007), but to conduct non-participant observation (as discussed above). Accordingly, the risk was that my input might have shaped and manipulated their responses in in-depth research discussions related to their difficulties in understanding the academic context, and possibly limited some of their own, self-guided learning and understanding. Moreover, there was also the risk of developing a personal connection to the students and their personal situations, which would have likely influenced my interpretation of their responses.

The observations I carried out relied on different kinds of relationships and were at times shaped simply by my *physical presence* in the learning environment. "How people respond to the presence of the researcher may be as informative as how they react to other situations" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, p. 15). Most of the participants did not respond directly to my presence during the in-class observations. Some raised the topic during the subsequent interviews and elaborated on the shared experiences, asked for my feedback. The course tutors seemed to be more aware of my presence, likely because I was in their line of sight most of the time. Occasionally, the tutors approached me during a lesson or during group work to explain the meaning of the task or to check with me if I thought everything was going well. Most tutors commented on my presence as "making no difference" to their teaching, when asked directly. However, at other times during the interviews, some commented differently, e.g. one tutor said "I find it very helpful to have you in my class because I can discuss the lessons with you". Another tutor commented, "Of course, classroom situations do develop differently and I do teach differently and check my material twice before going in because I know that someone else will be in my classroom – I do all of this, without even intending to do so". The last statement highlights particularly well that there is always a difference between a regular, unobserved class and an observed class, since "the very act of observation itself affects the phenomenon under study and creates the Observer's Paradox"(Shanmuganathan 2005).

Data analysis. What happened to the data collected?

Data analysis "is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds on grounded theory" (Marshall and Rossman 1995, p. 111). The efficiency of my data analysis depended greatly on the way I managed the material. Managing my data was a complex task because of the sheer volume of data from interviews, observation etc.

To bring order, structure and interpretation to the mass of data, I needed "[...] organize it, break it into manageable units, synthesize it, search for patterns, discover what is important and what is to be learned, and decide what I [you] will tell others" (Bogdan and Biklen 1992, p. 153). For this, I followed Hoepfl's (1997, p. 55) process of organising data, identification of themes, evaluation and interpretation, and developing a storyline.

These stages of analysis that are not necessarily linear, can occur simultaneously and repeatedly.

Organising the data

Hoepfl argues that "sitting down to organize a pile of raw data can be a daunting task." (1997, p. 55). I kept all the recorded interviews (46 recordings, 1748 minutes (~30 hrs in total) in a digital version as computer files, which allowed me to access each interview at any point. I listened to every interview multiple times. For me, listening was an excellent medium. Transcripts of interviews lose many valuable insights, such as tone of voice, slight hesitations, the ease or difficulty to describe something, and many other features that speech can convey.

I paid careful attention to separate description from interpretation. Patton stresses that presenting solid descriptive data is a key element of qualitative analysis. This description has to be done "in such a way that others reading the results can understand and draw their own interpretations" (1990, p. 375). This sounded straightforward to me but when I started to realise how interwoven those two aspects of presenting data and analysing data were, I focused more on the strict separation. Analysis and interpretation were even more interwoven because data collection and analysis took place in a simultaneous and continuous fashion, but the "overlapping of data collection and analysis improve[s] both the quality of data collected and the quality of the analysis so long as the evaluator [was] careful not to allow these initial interpretations to distort additional data collection" (Patton 1990, p. 378).

Transcribing the interview data was an insightful process. I started by transcribing most of the initial interviews I conducted as verbatim transcriptions, but soon realised the "[...] verbatim transcription brings home to you that much of what people say is redundant or repetitive" (Gillham 2000, p. 71). I became acutely aware that transcribing all the interviews would result in many redundant transcripts. After listening to all the interviews a first time, I could identify emerging themes. I then listened to the recordings over and over to develop an understanding in, and on, the participants' terms (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). I then selected and transcribed data to "[...] identify substantive statements - statements that really say something" (Gillham 2000, p. 71). This selection was driven by the focus of Doucet and Mauthner's (1998) multi-level voice-relational approach. In the recordings, I first listened for content and plot but also my responses to the narrative. In

the second round of listening, I focused on the voice of the "I", and particularly for changes between "I" and "we", "they" etc. (see below for more detail on the voice-relational approach). Transcribing and listening with the literature review and the theories in mind became an increasingly meaningful part of the data analysis and it did not turn out to be just a clerical duty. I preferred to transcribe by hand, not computer, I could annotate faster and more easily on paper, and if the transcript itself still seemed unfinished I could still edit it further, without needing access to a computer.

Identifying themes

The identification of themes aims to create descriptive categories for the qualitative evidence. Patton describes the way in which categories emerge either through inductive analysis, if the patterns, themes and categories emerge out of the data, or as the researcher imposing categories on the data. I focused mostly on the former, for instance by letting categories emerge out of the data in the transcripts.

Here, I focused once again on the voice-relational approach that was recommended in my methodology course at IoE. Based on the voice-relational approach's multi-level readings, I conducted three readings of the interview transcripts.

Reading 1: Focusing on content and plot but also my responses to the narrative.

Reading one enabled me to understand my participants' stories and "what was going on" in terms of their interpretation of the MA TESOL programme. The second part of this first reading allowed me to take a closer look at my response to the narrative. The issue of reflexivity appears at various parts in this chapter. In terms of the reading one, reflexivity requires "explicit recognition of the fact that the social researcher, and the research act itself, are part and parcel of the social world under investigation" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, p. 234). In the readings, I needed to focus on my responses and how they relate to my previous experiences. For example, my background in English literature with a major focus on cultural, minority and feminist studies has strongly shaped my personality as a researcher. Also, my social location in terms of gender, age, class, ethnicity, and seniority has been taken into consideration when it comes to my relationship with the respondents. My institutional context during the Ph.D. studies provided me with specific research training in various areas. The first reading of the transcripts functioned as a safeguard against my own assumptions and interpretations by

highlighting and tracking my social position and my feelings towards the narrative of the respondent (Brown and Gilligan 1992).

Reading 2: Reading for the voice of the "I"

The second reading focused on the respondent. I looked at the choice of pronouns, "I", "we" and "they" etc. (Doucet and Mauthner 1998) in the transcripts. Of special interest was the shift between pronouns. I appreciated this level of reading in particular because it delayed the stage of interpretation and allowed additional time to complete the descriptive stage. Agency is expressed in detail in this reading. I asked a colleague to undertake some cross-coding for me to ensure the validity of the coding process. My colleague pointed out that my interpretations of some statements were probably due to my awareness of the overall situation of the interviewee. Through this process of cross-coding the necessity of the first reading became more imperative.

Reading 3: Reading for the categories

The first two readings are the staples of the voice-relational approach. Reading three can be conducted as a reading of the researcher's own choice, depending on the topic under investigation (Doucet and Mauthner 1998). I read a third time to develop categories. I used colour coding for the different themes and congregated what participants said so that it was possible to group "[...] together answers from different people to common questions or analysing different perspectives on central issues" (Patton 1990, p. 376). Categories "to identify the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting" (Marshall and Rossman 1995, p. 114) emerged early in the process and were relatively easy to filter out through coding. I then employed the participants "voice" from their quotes to find titles for these themes, for instance speaking in class, community, and hard work.

Evaluating and Interpreting data

Patton advised checking to see if the participants recognised the analyst's construction, which I did through the member-checking process described above. This process of evaluation is ongoing. Through "testing emergent hypotheses" (Marshall and Rossman 1995, p. 116) or "verification" (Hoepfl 1997, p. 56), categories or themes were discussed during the interviews. This also allowed me to evaluate my understanding of how the

categories and themes are linked in order to "assemble the big picture" (Hoepfl 1997, p. 55). This interpretation meant to go beyond the level of description to illuminate and attach significance to what has been discovered by making connections, constructing order, looking at rival explanations, and finding conclusions (Patton 1990).

I found Schlechty and Noblit's (1982) three forms of interpretation useful for this process, as illustrated through the examples below:

- "Making the obvious obvious" (Schlechty and Noblit 1982, p. 288) means that researchers need to "confirm what we know [that] is supported by data" (Patton 1990, p. 480). For instance, common knowledge among researchers and MA TESOL tutors includes that, by and large, international EFL students participate less in in-class discussions. This was confirmed across many of the observations in my study.

- "Making the obvious dubious" (Schlechty and Noblit 1982, p. 288) requires to "disabuse us of misconceptions" (Patton 1990, p. 480). In my research, for example, one of the tutors commented that the next intake of MA TESOL "will need to have higher language proficiency so that they are able to complete the task of a critical review". The misconception was that higher language proficiency will allow for better comprehension of the task. However, in a separate interview Su commented, "No, it has nothing to do with my level of English, I went to an English medium high school, I do understand the task. It has to do with the idea of criticality, I did not get it for a very long time and I have never done anything like it before".

- "Making the hidden obvious" (Schlechty and Noblit 1982, p. 288) denotes to "illuminate important things that we didn't know but should know" (Patton 1990, p. 480). In this study, quotes similar to the tutor's and to Su's outlined how the meaning of criticality and the expectations that go along with the task of critically reviewing at the MA TESOL were mistakenly built only on language proficiency without regard to previous exposure (or the lack thereof) to criticality in different academic cultures.

Developing a storyline: report writing as an analytic process

More traditional literature views the writing-up stage as a separate process from the analysis process itself (Marshall and Rossman 1995). For me, this was not the case.

Writing was part of the analytical process that started when I wrote field notes from observations, took notes in my researcher's diary, transcribed interviews, wrote parts of chapters and re-wrote them again and again. New insights kept appearing, and I am convinced that "[w]riting about qualitative data cannot be separated from the analytic process" (Marshall and Rossman 1995, p. 117).

Marshall and Rossman (1995) described the analytic process of writing further, and stressed that the choice of words is important to summarise and reflect on the complexity of the data. Choice allows the researcher to shape the report and to interpret the data further than just analysing through categories. However, the choice of words cannot be safeguarded against by academic rigour.

To develop my arguments, I first presented my participants' perspectives and worldviews through the reoccurring and striking themes that emerged out of the interviews and observations (Taylor and Bogdan 1984). Second, in my use of AT and CoP, I also connected practice (the reality of social phenomena) to theory and vice versa.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I present my choice of case study methodology to illustrate my "major aim of being true to the worlds of the people in the setting by showing explicitly *how* and on *what basis* I [the researcher] is writing about those worlds, and *which* data I am [she is] using for *what* purpose" (Holliday 2002, p. 126). After introducing relevant works that support my choice of case study methodology, I discuss the trustworthiness as a possible limitation of case study research, and address the "believability" of my study in terms of its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. After introducing the case, I first present my data collection methods in the context of my research question(s), and then in the context of the empirical setting to show how these methods were employed. With a similar focus, I then outline my data sources before I present my data analysis through sections on organising data, identification of themes, evaluation and interpretation and lastly, report writing as an analytic process.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Language and Activity Systems

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the results and findings of the AT investigation of the international EFL student experience at the MA TESOL. The chapter begins with placing the analysis more directly within the existing work on the acquisition of language and culture. Specifically, the complex involvement of first and second language with first and second culture (acquisition processes) helps substantiate the choice of contradictions within activity systems for the focus of the research questions. This chapter proceeds to describe the central activity before investigating four levels of contradictions along with the negotiation of both language and culture in the empirical case. The findings from this analysis are then presented through Engeström's construct of expansive cycles.

Culture and Language

> Language processing is something that *you do*. Culture, on the other hand, is in many ways who *you are*. (Libben and Lindner 1996, p. 6)

Culture has been described as socially distributed knowledge in the fields of anthropology and cultural psychology (Lave and Wenger 1991). Consequently, culture is not described anymore as a mental property that resides in an individual but much rather as knowledge that exists within and between people. This does not mean that knowledge is divided but much rather that cognition is "distributed - stretched over, not divided – among mind, body, activity and culturally organised settings (which include other actors)" (Lave 1988). This social distribution implies that knowledge does not only exist in the mind of a person but also in the tools that are used and in the joint enterprises in which people engage.

Therefore, the unit of analysis cannot be an individual. "It is difficult to resist the temptation to let the unit of analysis collapse to the Western view of the individual bounded by the skin" (Hutchins 1995, p. 289). In this regard, this study adopts an activity systems approach in which all constituent elements are shaped by their respective cultural-historical trajectory. Moreover, since "culture is an interpersonal process of meaning construction"(Kramsch 2003, p. 21) and therefore the "speaker and hearer jointly construct it in their efforts to find a common ground of understanding" (Kramsch

2003, p. 21), culture (academic culture) needs to be experienced as a difference. When Bakhtin discusses the learning of culture, he stresses the interlocutors need to be different. This in turn means that learning of culture relies not only on seeing the word with someone else's eyes (since that would only mean duplicating what the other person sees) but also on enriching one's own distinct view with these newfound perspectives. Accordingly, only the difference between two cultures, in this case first and the second academic culture, allows highlighting the elements of academic culture.

In this context, language plays an important role. It both allows for cohesion between people to overcome the above-described diversity between cultures but also is culturally-laden when it "comes to us with many decisions already made about point of view and classification" (Duranti 1997, p. 32). For international EFL students, English as a common language also needs to be acquired so that it can mediate their interaction with people, but also with books, course content etc.

The acquisition of a second language and a second culture

Second culture acquisition is often subsumed under the umbrella of language acquisition, but there are tremendous difficulties if one were to treat both as equal in the acquisition process. It must be considered that two languages can function entirely separate from each other with no, or minimal, interference. For example, a speaker of Mandarin and English is able to use one language exclusively and to separate clearly one language from the other. However, culture is not distinguished into two separate sets that can be easily switched, like languages. Even though a native English speaker has mastered the Mandarin language to the highest degree, he might still not understand some of the cultural aspects. Culture is something that describes who we are; it is not a skill like a language. Byram and Feng comment on this problem in an approach undertaken by Sercu; "this approach [by Sercu] assumes however that culture acquisition can be treated in the same way as language acquisition. It may not be quite so simple, though, because of the difficulty of delineating the 'object' to be acquired, which is much easier with language" (2004, p. 163). In addition to the difference between language and culture, the learner has already acquired a first culture and cannot, therefore, be treated as a tabula rasa. This is problematic for culture learning but not for language learning. The notion that learning a language will automatically enable the learner to grasp the culture is extremely misleading.

For the participants of this study the consequence was that the students' level of English was appropriate for an MA programme. This was established through TOEFL scores and other entrance requirements. However, the level of English does not ensure the students' understanding for the cultural component of the SL and SC setting.

In the study, students came to the PRC to earn a degree from a British university that is well recognised in their home countries. Gaining the necessary academic skills was the stepping-stone for the students to achieve the desired outcome of passing the course. The academic skills that needed to be learned were manifold, depending on the individual. Empirical data revealed the various needs, e.g.:

> "My academic English writing is not very good." (Suyoung, interview, beginning of first term)
>
> "I don't understand European students' way of thinking, it is difficult to work with them and try to think in the English way." (Su, interview, second term)
>
> "I need to improve my academic English, my colloquial English is quite good." (Ling, interview, beginning of first term)
>
> "My focus is on understanding Western educational philosophy, so very different from China." (Hui, interview, second term)

Language has to be seen in the light of its cultural context, in this case in the particular context of the academic surroundings at the PRC. For instance, some participants were struggling with understanding Western concepts of argumentation in general and with trying out this new concept in English, a second language (SL) to them, in particular. Tomo explains:

> "Structuring an argument is something I believed I knew well but now I find out that I have to present my arguments in a certain order and that I need to bring in counter arguments. It is still not clear how to use these to strengthen my point, I do understand the idea behind it but I can't write that in a convincing way in English." (Interview, end of pre-sessional course)

The Western concept of argument was part of the new culture that students were exposed to, and although they might have understood the meaning of each word, they may not have understood every cultural connotation of these words. An interesting example is the acquisition of the linear logic of an academic essay in the context of educational studies in the UK. The participants' choice of words was correct, the syntax was correct and the ideas were interesting. However, the ways some of the participants structured their

arguments were confusing to a reader from a Western tradition. The reader is used to a different type of argumentation and logic, as Ling explained in a comment on her writing:

> "My tutor wants me to write in a certain way but it is not my way." (Interview, beginning of first term)

Su made a similar comment:

> "English writing style patronises the reader." (Interview, end of first term)

She further explained that the reader likes to think for herself and likes to make connections that are not expressed to the point that they are blatantly obvious. These two comments highlight the notion that required learning goes beyond the level of language learning and is part of academic culture. Ling's comment shows that her writing style is not just the style used in her first language (L1) but also her way of giving voice to her writing. She had not understood at this point that her tutor was asking her to write in a "proper" academic style. Ling assumed that it was her personal style that was insufficient but it did not occur to her that the chosen style was not appropriate. Her tutor was asking her to acquire one more aspect of the academic culture, in this case an aspect of academic writing. Su's comment also demonstrates how deeply rooted her understanding of her L1 writing style is, and how this influences her L2 writing. She criticises the English style for being patronising and she implicitly defends her L1 writing style as being 'better' by not being patronising. Both examples stress the importance of the L1 style and the difficulty of accepting the L2 style. As can be seen from both examples "[c]ulture [...] is in many ways who you are" (Libben and Lindner 1996, p. 6). Consequently, it is extremely difficult to absorb changes that go beyond the use of correct grammar, vocabulary and syntax, to differentiate between L2 acquisition and C2 acquisition. Lea comments that students usually master the academic discourse after a while but "little account of the way in which, for students, issues of personhood and identity are embedded in both language use and literacy practices within the academy" (2000, p. 103). For the students of this study it was, however, essential to gain these skills and to overcome identity issues to reach the desired outcome.

Second culture acquisition (SCA) is not theorised specifically in the literature. If it is mentioned at all it is as a definition by example and a vague categorical division. There are, however, cognitive considerations of SCA. These are presented by Lantolf (1999) as 'culture and mind', 'lexical concepts and their formation', 'inner speech and cultural

appropriation', 'research on lexical concepts in a second language' and 'metaphor, culture and mind'. These categories are interesting and can shed some light on the acquisition process, although the categories are cerebral and cognitive ones. The findings here are described as follows:

> Although the evidence is not overwhelming, it does seem to be possible for some adults under certain circumstances to restructure, to some extent at least, their conceptual organisation, whereas for others, as in the case of classroom learners, reorganisation does not seem to be a likely alternative. (Lantolf 1999, p. 45)

Other researchers commented similarly on other aspects of SCA, saying that only a few students gain cross-cultural understanding from studying languages and spending time in the host country (Kordes 1991; Kramsch 1991).

These findings are similar to the experience of lecturers and staff working with international students. Peter, a tutor, commented:

> "Some students understand immediately what's asked of them, others need more time and some do not understand it at all." (Interview, end of first term)

The actual acquisition process is not illuminated sufficiently in any of these studies. For the acquisition of 'culture' the research community needs to find frameworks and paradigms different from language learning. Since culture is rarely taught explicitly in the L1 context, it is never clearly expressed that this is part of the own culture and not part of the universal human culture. It is never explained that this part of culture is unique to the local community, region or nation, or that while one part of the culture may be shared with a neighbouring country, another part of the culture is unique. Since these cultural differences are quite opaque, learners of a second language are often not even aware that there are fundamental cultural differences aside from the superficial aspects of customs, dress codes, and eating habits.

An underlying paradigm stresses that the awareness of having a first culture is different from the awareness of having a first language. This seems a very deterministic approach to culture; however, the intention is not to define culture narrowly, but to highlight the difference in approaches to understanding language and culture. From a learner's perspective, this means that while we are often naturally equipped with a number of pedagogical tools for understanding and learning new languages (e.g. studying vocabulary, applying grammar), we have no such tools for learning new cultures. From a

teaching perspective, when preparing students to go abroad, the L2 teacher generally teaches language and occasionally cultural aspects but the latter are often of an anecdotal nature or are presented as superficial features of the host culture.

A question that arises at this point is whether a second culture could be taught prior to the students' arrival at, in this case, PRC. Teaching a culture is difficult because the subtle cultural conventions are not described in textbooks and a teacher is only able to teach culture if he has lived in the target country. Teaching academic conventions to students who are planning to go to the PRC requires a teacher to be aware of British conventions and practices at the PRC. If, for instance, a teacher was a student in the United States as an undergraduate student, his knowledge might not be so useful to students newly enrolled as Masters students at the PRC. The target C2 is probably best taught on site, so that students coming to the new L2 setting can reflect on aspects that are cultural in their own L1 context, and how that is different from the new L2 context. This comparison and contrast method enables students to differentiate between first culture (C1) and second culture (C2), so far described as the context of L1 and L2.

It is important to keep in mind that it is not the intention that the C2 student becomes a member of the C2 but much rather that the student becomes an intercultural communicator, aware of his or her C1 and able to understand the C2. In my researcher's diary (November entry) I commented:

> Hui works with two native speakers. She talks with them even after the tasks and when the class has finished – ask her about this class in interview next week - particularly what she was talking to the two native speakers about.
>
> Hui (interview, end of first term): I asked them about their relationship to the tutors. I asked how often they contact her and I asked how often they visit her office hours. I told them about my relationship with my tutor as a student in China and my view on my tutees at my university in China now. I try to understand the difference between the relationships here and in China.

This process of comparing between PRC and the home university allows the student to analyse, compare and contrast a new situation in a meaningful manner. A closer look at second academic culture in the context of the participants of this study follows.

Acquisition of a second academic culture

As outlined above, culture and language are of general interest for learning. But of particular interest for this study is the way in which academic culture is nested in the different layers of culture. Language contains cultural information and it bears a cultural function.[3]

There are many influences that feed into academic culture and highlight once again its situatedness. There is the national culture and the more overarching trans-national culture. The latter may well be North American, South East Asian, or European. On this overarching level one may observe similarities in, for example, the university systems or the general philosophy of thought. The difference between a collectivist and individualistic society are tremendous when it comes to students' behaviour in a seminar. Within this, the national culture determines aspects of academic culture through such things as political constraints on universities or the traditional position of universities in the country's history. Criticality is an ability that is not expected of all students and often it is not desired at all. Within one country there are regional, or urban and rural differences. These are often determined by the economic situation of the area. These aspects may also be determined by the number of universities in the area (specialised universities). This continues with cultural differences from faculty to faculty (discourse community), from programme to programme (who are the most reputable authors), and even within that, from lecturer to lecturer (personal preferences of, for example, qualitative and quantitative approaches). Academic culture is situated in various layers and levels of culture in general.

An extensive body of research is available on cultural differences in general, with some work designated to learning styles. Older research tends to present a stigmatised view of the 'Asian learner', whose learning style is compared, for example, to the Australian learning style:

[3] A substantial body of research tackles the question whether language contains culture or merely reflects culture but this issue is not of concern to the matter at hand.

Asian	Australian
Rote learning is common	Evaluative learning is preferred
Non critical reception of information	Critical thought is expected
Students work hard to learn everything	Students selectively learn the central concepts as well as detail
Few initiatives are taken	Independent learning and research are rewarded
A willingness to accept one interpretation	Student are encouraged to apply general principles to specific situations and to test various interpretations
Overall concepts are seen as important to understanding	Analytical thinking is encouraged. Students are expected to support opinions with logical argument.

Figure 9: Comparison of Asian and Australian learning style, as adapted by Ramburuth and McCormick (2001) from Philips (1990, p. 772)

Ramburuth looked beyond the generalisations and found that Asian learners are able to achieve both surface level learning and deep understanding at the same time. Hofstede (1997) looked at cultural dimensions such as high versus low power distance, individualism versus collectivism, as well as three other dimensions. In the same year Trompenaar (1997) published a book on value orientation, focused on seven dimensions. Particular attention was paid to universalism versus particularism, and individualism versus collectivism.

Students need to become intercultural communicators, but without reciprocal arrangements between the host and the guest. The host, in this case the PRC, expects the student to find a way to learn the local rules as quickly as possible. However, I am convinced that students, who have an understanding of intercultural communication and an awareness of the different cultural dimensions, will find it easier to adjust to the new environment as they are more aware of the differences. There is extensive material published on intercultural communication, mostly for the business setting.

There is some work published on the acquisition of culture, very little work on the acquisition of a second culture and almost nothing on the second academic culture. The area of linguistic anthropology focuses on culture acquisition in the wider sense. The areas of "developmental pragmatics" (Ochs and Schieffelin 1979) and "language socialisation" (Heath 1983; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Watson-Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 1986; Heath 2010) focus on children's' competences of communication and on

"understanding the relation of language and culture in human development" (Ochs 2002). Hymes discusses participation and states

> a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. This competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other code of communicative conduct (1972, p. 278).

This places a strong focus on being a member of a speech community and, as Duranti comments, "to be a competent speaker of a language means then to be able to do things with that language as part of larger social activities which are culturally organised and must be culturally interpreted" (1997, p. 20).

The acquisition of a second culture is dealt within one particular piece of work by Libben and Lindner (1996). They made an attempt at explaining the differences in the acquisition of a language and of a culture. They argue that there are central aspects of our culture, including intermediate and peripheral aspects. The central aspects such as honour, friendship, and justice, cause stress if they are not consonant between C1 and C2. Peripheral aspects, such as eating habits or greetings, are more superficial and do not cause stress because 'it does not matter' if these have to be changed since they are not at the core of the culture. Libben and Lindner's proposition that culture acquisition is guided by stress reduction becomes a major premise for the way in which acquisition is discussed in this chapter. For the authors, stress reduction for specific dissonant aspects takes place in various ways: first, by abandoning C1 to create space for C2, second, by adapting some of C2 and keeping a little bit of C1 and third, by merging both to a C3. Fourth, one might stick to C1 and ignore C2, or use C1 or C2, depending on the situation at hand. All four possible solutions seem likely to happen and are not out of the ordinary. This is particularly true if one considers families who are from mixed cultural backgrounds, or immigrated to a new country. The family members would be able to behave according to C1 in a family setting and C2 in public/ school situations. For this study, Libben and Lindner's work suggests that the acquisition of a second academic culture is also guided by reducing the stress the students experience when coming to PRC. The outcomes are similar, with four possible ways in which students can treat their AC1 and the SAC; however, some are clearly more complex than others. All four, though, would suggest that for students to acquire the SAC, they would need to go through a process of reducing the stress, the tensions between AC1 and SAC.

In this section the distinction between SLA and SCA was discussed and the implications for the acquisition of a second culture were highlighted. The situatedness of academic culture within other layers of culture was illuminated. However, Libben and Lindner do not provide a practical model that would allow for the identification of potential stress areas, and their study does not allow for a deeper understanding of how this acquisition process may take place. As argued earlier, an activity systems approach is chosen to analyse the acquisition of culture, and to examine specific areas for investigating Libben and Lindner's *stress* points and how these are overcome by international EFL students in this study. Accordingly, their central activity system needs to be defined next.

The empirical activity system

Activity theory allows a look at learning in a very structured fashion. In this chapter the individual level components and mediation introduced briefly in Chapter 2 are discussed in more detail. The activities under investigation consist of subjects (individually and collectively), an object at which their efforts are aimed and mediators that enable the entire activity. In the figure below (a representation of Figure 5) it can be seen that the entire triangle consists of various small triangles. Recalling the principles outlined earlier, the three corner points of tools, rules and division of labour are mediators; for instance the tools mediate between subject and object (Vygotsky 1978), and the rules govern the relation between the subject and the community.

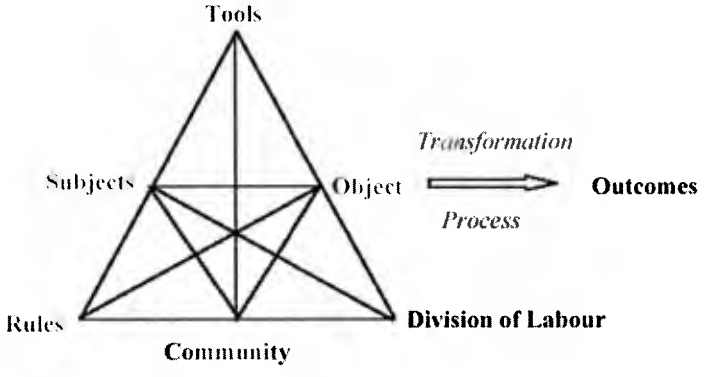

Figure 10: Activity Systems (representation of Figure 5)

In this section, Engeström's Activity Triangle System is applied to the empirical setting. The purpose is manifold. First, by representing the acquisition metaphor, as outlined in Chapter 2, the activity theory perspective promises to shed light on how students learn about a second academic culture. Second, for responding to the research questions

outlined for this study, AT further promises to help identify elements of academic culture. Third, Engeström's Activity Triangle System's focus on contradictions helps analyse the degree to which the postgraduate international EFL student experience is a positive one (as suggested as important in Chapter 1), and fourth, by investigating the reduction of level 1-4 contradictions between AC1 and SAC, Engeström's expansive cycles construct promises to unveil insights into how students acquire a SAC.

The central activity

In Engeström's conceptual development of Activity Systems, he extends his framework beyond the constructs of mediation and the subject-activity-object and calls for more attention to "the components of the mediating 'third' factor, activity" (1988, p. 473) to recognise the collective and interactive nature of any activity. In this sense, Engeström suggests the use of the Activity Systems framework in which all components interact and together shape the entire activity. For this empirical study, the ensuing activity system (Figure 11) consists of postgraduate international EFL students as the subjects of the activity who participate in the MA TESOL to obtain a recognised degree from a reputable university (outcome). Although their motivations may have differed, e.g. some needed the degree for a promotion at work, others wanted to increase their teaching expertise, all participants wanted to pass the MA TESOL. Reaching their desirable outcome required the *transformation* of their current skill set (e.g. teaching skills, understanding of second language acquisition theory), the *object* of the activity, into those necessary for successfully passing the degree requirements. All of the participants' efforts were oriented towards this object and its transformation. *Tools* included physical tools such as computers, books and classrooms but also psychological tools, for example subject matters covered in class and language, spoken and written. *Rules*, both implicit (e.g. arriving on time for classes) and explicit (e.g. delivering materials on posted deadlines), governed the activity. *Division of labour* included the respective roles and responsibilities of students, lecturers, personal tutors etc.

Subjects act as individuals, but they also interact in their respective *communities*. Activity functions on a collective level, and societal and cultural constraints influence the decisions of the individual.

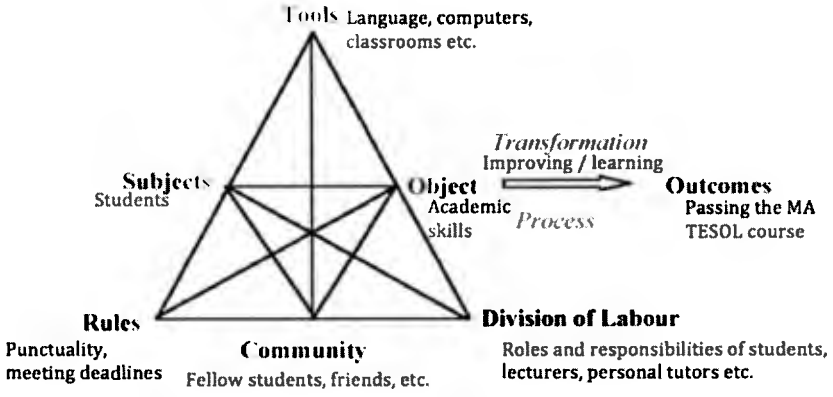

Figure 11: Empirical Central Activity System

Analysis through contradictions

A closer look at the Empirical Activity System above reveals a number of interconnections between all the nodes of the system. Engeström bases his construct of contradictions on this notion of interconnectedness and interactivity in each activity systems. These contradictions are not conflicts that necessarily exist in real life, but rather tensions in the system that shape how people behave etc. Contradictions then are expressions of tensions that govern how people pursue their desired object transformation. This is not to say, however, that contradictions cannot develop into conflicts.

Contradictions, according to Engeström (1987), exist on various levels within the network of activity systems. They change how the various participants interact within an activity system, or how individuals mediate their actions and operations. Contradictions lead the activity system through expansive cycles (discussed in detail at the end of this chapter) that introduce possibly small changes or even change the activity altogether. Four levels of contradictions offer such learning potential:

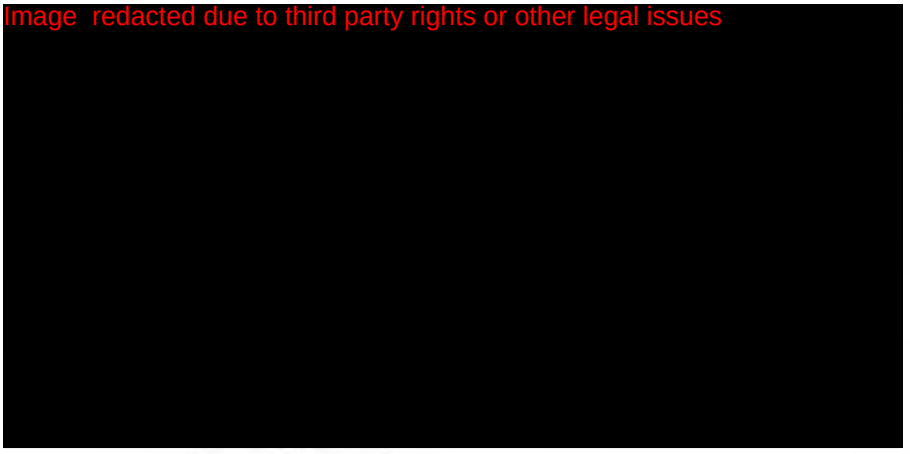

Figure 12: Four Levels of Contradictions (Engeström 1987, p. 79)

For students, any contradiction might appear as a negative at first, as an obstacle that makes their life at the new institution difficult. But contradictions also help explain how students' activities change over time. For universities, contradictions as analytical tools can be applied to understanding students and improving programmes accordingly. Most importantly for this study, from a research perspective, contradictions present invaluable learning opportunities. They "reflect a source of development or represent the presence of unfamiliar elements whose study is necessary so as to establish the kind of new developments that are taking place within an activity system" (Mwanza 2002, p. 65). Here, contradictions point towards how the MA TESOL provides an environment that places participants in situations of tensions and contradictions. For this study of SAC acquisition, contradictions are remarkably important and beneficial. I propose that extending Libben and Lindner's argument (i.e., culture acquisition is guided by stress reduction) through examining the MA TESOL students' negotiation of contradictions across all four levels of contradictions offers insights of how they acquire a second academic culture.

Level 1 Contradictions

Level 1 contradictions are primary inner contradictions (double nature) within each constituent component of the central activity (e.g. when rules contradict each other). (Engeström 2003). The empirical study unveiled a number of level 1 contradictions affecting the second academic culture acquisition at MA TESOL. In particular, these relate to the constituent elements of subjects and rules.

Internal contradictions within subjects

During interviews, international EFL students reported that they felt differentiated from native speaker MA TESOL students on a number of occasions, for instance:

> "I have to think about everything in a task very carefully since I am not so familiar with specific terms. Being critical to me meant to write down what I thought about the article but my friend [home student, native speaker] told me that's not enough. I needed to back up my opinions with quotations' from other researchers. I felt stupid that I did not know [that] and was embarrassed." (Ling, interview, end of first term)

The contradiction between native and non-native speakers was manifested in the degree to which they could rely on academic literacy, here the understanding for the meaning of criticality in the academic literacy context, as part of unconscious operations. International EFL students could not easily draw from their academic literacy skills, but rather had to consciously focus on using the appropriate skills correctly. Even those international EFL students with a high command of the English language could not rely on their proficiency within the MA TESOL. In the activity, actions, operations tripartite, the conditions were still unfamiliar to them, requiring conscious effort on literacy rather than content for many task completions. The ease with which different types of students (native speakers vs. international EFL) relied on their literacy skills created tensions between them.

On the individual level, an important level 1 contradiction emerged:

> "I want to participate in class, I want to be involved and I want to be a good student but I don't manage to do that. I did much better in the pre-sessional course. Now I don't say anything anymore." (Saori, interview, end of first term)

Empirical materials that outline the trajectory of the individual international EFL student, from high performer to struggling student, are important for the acquisition process. However, AT does not provide an appropriate lens for analysing the individual on that level; hence identity is given more attention in Chapter 6.

Internal contradictions within rules

Rules mediate the activity; they influence the relationships between all of its constituent elements. For understanding the impact of rules, it is necessary to understand how these are structured and how they are manifested differently for those familiar with the activity

(for whom the rules and conventions seem obvious and ordinary and have become the standard or norm) versus those, like the international EFL students who had previously been a member of a community with possibly divergent rules.

Plenty of examples for level 1 rule contradictions emerged from the data. For instance, Peter, a tutor, commented on international EFL students going home over Christmas:

> "When they go home they don't come back on time. That creates problems." (Interview, end of first term)

Subsequently, I asked students if they were planning to go home over Christmas and whether they would be back on time. Mei (interview, end of first term) commented:

> Mei: "No, the trip is so expensive and it is so far, I will be back four days after the term started."
>
> Interviewer: "Have you done the same thing in China, returned late from vacation for classes?"
>
> Mei: "No, but I have never been on vacation so far away."
>
> Interviewer: "Do you think that it would be ok in China to return late?"
>
> Mei: "No, I don't think so."
>
> Interviewer: "Do you think it is ok here?"
>
> Mei: "I did not think about it, I know my friend did the same thing and everyone knows that going to China is expensive."

To international EFL students, the rule that governs the attendance at the beginning of term time seems rather optional, and it appears they believe they can exercise a high degree of discretion over when they return to PRC. I observed similar behaviour at the beginning of the seminars:

> Suyoung and Su arrive late, Anne [tutor] does not comment on it, ignores it, passes them today's handouts without comments. (Observation notes, October)

Some students arrived on time, and others arrived late. The difficulties caused by rules as mediators are manifold. Primarily, for the discussion of academic culture differences, it appears that rules that are of particular importance for international EFL students were subsumed under the rules for the entire MA TESOL intake. In other words, a general set of rules exists that governs the entire activity for all students, but an explicit set of instructions for international EFL students (with a different AC1) that outlines the relative importance of each rule and the severity of violating rules is missing. The assumption of

rule producing neighbouring activities is that all students understand the rules similarly (and interpret them as they were intended to be understood), or that they comprehend the implications of not following the rules through reactions from their peers and instructors. The empirical data showed that this, too, can be an ill-assumption. When international EFL students arrived late for the seminars, especially in repeat occurrences, some tutors (and fellow students) were visibly annoyed and upset. However, the cues they sent to the students were not received, let alone interpreted as important. My observation notes show:

> Anne [tutor] seems annoyed that Miyu and her friend arrive late. She stares at them for a short moment and continues her lecture. Students giggle and sit in the back of the class. Anne ignores them and continues teaching without giving them the necessary handouts (which she had given out at the beginning of the class). (October, observation notes)

and

> Student arrives late, tutor walks over to pass the handout to the late arrival, sighs and says, "so where was I, ah, yes...." (November, observation notes)

These observations extend to other rules for the activity, e.g., submitting a first draft. Anne commented:

> "Some students submitted extremely rough drafts, they were not even complete. I did not provide feedback on these, since students must be able to improve their writing on their own to write a first full draft in an acceptable style." (Interview, end of first term)

Students expected to discuss their early work with their tutors, but the tutor just commented that they needed to submit a complete version before any feedback could be provided. The underlying rule is that a first draft submitted to the tutor has to be a complete piece of work to the best of the student's ability and not a rough draft as some participants assumed. This suggests that international EFL students either are not at all aware of the existence of a rule, or of its importance, or of the consequences of violating it. Another possibility, of course, is that inconsistent responses from the tutors sent mixed signals to the international EFL students. For instance, some tutors simply ignored late arrivals, which may have suggested that they condone the rule.

The tension that existed within the set of rules also suggests that contradictions existed between subjects and rules, or in the sub-triangle of rules as mediators between subjects and community or division of labour, as illustrated in the examples given. While some

rules were bent slightly, such as in arriving late for a seminar, other rules of attendance were bent more severely. A student returning late from holidays is an example of the latter. However, it is the primacy of the contradictions *within* rules (based on transparency and explicitness) that gives rise to the problematic nature of the relationships *between* the nodes of the activity systems.

Level 2 Contradictions

Level 2 contradictions occur between the constituent elements of the central activity. The study of the empirical case through the activity systems lens revealed important level 2 contradictions, most notably in the context of subjects using language as tools, the contradictory role of language as both a tool and object, and the relationship of subjects to individuals from other strata of the hierarchy.

Contradiction between students (subjects) and language (tool)

A straightforward contradiction based on students' command of the English language emerged in the data throughout the study. For instance:

> "I came here assuming that I needed to study a lot. I thought, that I needed to learn a lot for my classes. But now I find that I need to learn in terms of English for academic purposes and I don't make enough progress or not fast enough." (Saori, interview, end of first term)

Granted, EFL students are by definition not native speakers of English. However, passing the English language requirements for the admission to PRC suggested to them that their language skills should be sufficient. In contrast, what they experienced when they arrived was that their language skills required substantial improvement. In AT terminology, students felt that they had been lead to believe that given the conditions at MA TESOL, they should be able to use their existing language rather unconsciously (as operations). In reality, upon arrival, it turned out that they had to spend an unexpectedly high amount of time with language improvement (goal-oriented actions). This shift in focus and the accompanying time and effort required stood in stark contrast to their ambition of focusing on their main content-oriented activities at MA TESOL in two ways. First, students often did not know how to use language (their main tool) and could not complete the tasks to the desired level of performance. In fact, good students in their home

countries who complained that they were no longer good students at MA TESOL believed language to be a main contributor.

> "Reading takes up a lot of my time and I am never sure whether the concepts are difficult to understand to native speakers, too, or whether it is my English that makes the reading[s] too difficult." (Suyoung, interview, end of first term)

Second, the considerable language-based work that was required had a negative impact on the transformation in the central activity.

> Students from abroad spent on average 22 hour on their readings. The highest number was 30 hours per week spent on reading. (Data taken from questionnaire)

This further reduced the time available for content-specific work and contributed negatively to the already reduced level of performance, especially when compared to native speaker peers.

Contradictory role of language as tool and object

Not only the contradiction between subjects and technology affected the learning activity, but also the duality of language subsumed throughout the activity. In the context of content learning, language was clearly a mediator, possibly the most important tool that students employed in their pursuit of the transformation of the object into the desirable outcome. Nonetheless, for EFL students, the use of the tool (i.e., the command of the language) was not at a stage where it could be used unconsciously (as an operation in the tripartite). Students could not simply read texts, but often needed to work very consciously, as goal-oriented actions, on comprehending material. The same was true for any tasks related to conversation, composition etc. as evident in the following empirical evidence:

> Saori: "I need to work on my academic English to become a good English teacher in Japan. I hope that this course and the time here will help." (Interview, end of pre-sessional)

> Xiao: "Working with only the English language is familiar to me but still working in an English environment without having the option of checking in my first language is still different." (Interview, end of second term)

> Ling: "If everything is only in English, every book, every discussion, every theory, every conversation with my neighbour and so on, it is something that I needed to get used to." (Interview, end of second term)

Xiao and Ling describe the use of the English language as the language of all mediating tools. Accordingly, language assumed a dual role for EFL students in the MA TESOL, as the focus (object) of their studies and as a tool in their pursuit. The important contradiction here emphasises that the activity was immensely hindered by students' need to shift between operations and actions (e.g., when they needed to look up terms), but also by the contradictory nature of language as a tool and object of their work. In the bigger picture of neighbouring activities (as described below), this meant that they were asked to work *with language*, or ideally fully unconsciously *through language*, but often had to work *on language* first. As a level 4 contradiction, this tension manifested itself in many ways, for instance in the role that language assumed for native speakers, tutors and EFL students. Students found it very difficult to view language simply as a tool (as outlined above); however, for tutors it was also difficult to view language as an object (since the object of their activity was subject matter content). The different perspectives were often incongruent, and hindered the transformation of the central activity.

Contradictory relationship of students (subjects) and tutors (division of labour)

Broadly speaking, the division of labour within the activity outlines the relationship of individuals, where these are "above", "below", or "at the same level" as others and exercise different degrees of power and authority. Empirical data showed that the way in which hierarchy at the university level was conceived by postgraduate international EFL students, according to their AC1, was often quite contradictory to the way hierarchy governed interaction at PRC.

Participants encounter various problems in trying to understand the importance of differences related to hierarchical roles and responsibilities and the division of labour. For instance, the following data highlight an issue for Saori:

> Saori: "I went to see my personal tutor right away to ask for help with my room. I have never shared a bathroom and I did not know that I would have to share a bathroom in halls of residence here. I did not like it and I wanted to move out but administrator said that I cannot move out. So I asked him for help."
>
> Interviewer: "What did he tell you to do?"
>
> Saori: "He said he can't do anything. I think, he did not want to do anything because it is complicated to find a new place"
>
> Interviewer: "Did you speak to the accommodation office again?"

Saori: "No, I wanted him to speak to them to explain but he didn't."

Interviewer: "So what did you do?"

Saori: "Nothing, I still have the same room because he did not help me talk to the accommodation office. He could not be asked to deal with it." (Interview, beginning of first term)

When asked about administrative requests during an interview, Peter shared:

"One of my tutees came to me and complained about the situation in halls of residence. She felt that shared bathrooms were unacceptable and she wanted to move somewhere where she had a private bathroom. I told her I could not help with this type of problem; she needed to talk to the accommodation office." (Interview, end of first term)

Students were not aware of their responsibilities in organising accommodation. They assumed that their personal academic tutor would assist with administrative tasks and were upset when they were pointed in the direction of the accommodation office. The impression on the students was that the tutor "could not be asked to deal with it". However, understanding that the tutor was not at all in a position to help took a long time. Once these different roles of the tutor became clearer, students called the accommodation office themselves.

But even in more academic settings, the uncertainty about the division of labour, roles and responsibilities lead to important contradictions between students and tutors. For instance, Suyoung assumed that her tutor would discuss the work with her until they developed a topic for the essay together. She explains:

"I had a strange experience during my tutor's office hour. I had three possible topics for my paper and told her about it. She asked me very complicated questions but I had just started in the topics so I could not answer them. She did not tell me which topic she liked best and how I can develop it. She said I should come back next week with an outline. So now I still have no topic and she does not help me to choose." (Interview, end of first term)

The tutor was appalled by the poor preparation of the student when she attended his office hour. Anne explained her view on Suyoung:

"She came to my office hour and was not prepared at all. She had not even decided on a topic and was not able to discuss very basic questions around these topics. I suggested that she might want to come back once she has finalized her outline. I think she just came to the office hour because she thought that she should come to see me. This happens quite often, students think that they have to attend every office hour but they

> don't have questions to ask or material to discuss." (Anne, interview, end of first term)

The expectations of the student to receive help even in the initial stages contradict the expectation of the tutor, who believes that her help should only be required at the later stages of the writing process. Similarly, Saori sent an email to her instructor:

> "It was about critical writing but I did not get a response. I felt that my question was not worthy of an answer or something." (Interview, end of second term)

When asked if she could have asked somebody else, Saori seemed a bit puzzled and replied:

> "She is my tutor she should help me with this." (Interview, end of second term)

The lack of a response from the tutor to her email denoted that her questions were not worthy of reply. It did not occur to the student that she might need to direct this type of question to someone else. Hierarchical strata, and different roles and responsibilities lead to influential contradictions that outlined difficulties of comprehending interaction protocols. In another instance, Hui experienced a similar problem. She commented on tutorials at a later, more experienced stage:

> "Every time I want to go to the tutorial I should prepare some questions. How can I do those questions? They might be silly questions just to keep in contact." (Interview, end of first term)

Even though Hui understands that the conventions demand that she be prepared for a tutorial, she is unsure how to prepare for tutorials. This uncertainty reflects her idea of a tutorial, which is influenced by her first culture. She comments:

> "Here we do not receive as much guidance as in China. I just have not met my tutor so much because he is busy." (Interview, end of first term)

Hui is aware that the tutor is busy but she tries to find a way to see her tutor more frequently. If the student attempts to develop questions just to build a relationship with the tutor, the hierarchical expectation of "being prepared for the tutorial" are violated.

Some students also expected their tutors and teachers to take more of an overarching, almost paternal responsibility because of their status as teachers. Su, from Macao, believed the supervisor should be a caring father figure who does offer not only support in terms of academic issues, but also in personal matters. She believed:

> "The personal tutors should be more caring, they should be more like fathers and not only talk with me about university but should ask about life in general. No one has asked me if I made any friends or if I like my room or if I like the food, nothing personal at all. My tutor in Macao knows everything about me, my family, everything, probably more than my parents." (Interview, end of first term)

One tutor, Peter, commented on the contradictory nature of hierarchies during a discussion regarding students addressing tutors by their first names. He talked about one of the participants who respected him highly and addressed him always by his last name and bowed when leaving the room, whereas she behaved in the Western way and addressed other tutors by their first names. Peter commented:

> "For me, these are sometimes quite ingrained ways of responding and so it is in a way their identity, it is not a linguistic problem really." (Interview, end of first term)

When queried about this in an interview, the student Suyoung responded:

> "When I want to express great respect for a person I only know my home country way to do that." (Interview, end of first term)

Even though the hierarchy is clear to both sides, the way to express respect as part of enforcing or affirming the hierarchy is difficult for the participant. In general, students often expressed insecurity about relationships. When asked, at some time during the first term, about her relationship with module tutors, Mei explains:

> "I do not hate them, I do not like them, and I do not really know them. I do not know what the teachers want, if they want closer relationship or not. So I do not know if I want a closer relationship. If they want closer relationships, you need more time to get closer. That costs time and they do not seem to have time." (Interview, end of first term)

Saori commented on similar problems, although she actually liked her tutor (in comparison to tutors in her AC1):

> "I had a few chances to talk to him in tutorials. I feel closer to him than to any teacher in Japan. But I still have the feeling that I cannot ask him a lot of questions because he is very busy." (Interview, beginning of second term)

Participants are uncertain or even have an inappropriate conception of the division of labour. Their expectations contradict the views the tutors have regarding their own part in this division. But division of labour in the sense of hierarchy also affected how activities are carried out among students, on what would appear to be the same level of the

hierarchy. An interesting problem occurred occasionally when participants, who come from a strictly hierarchical society, assume that they will receive help or respect because of their higher status in their home culture based on their age. Tomo, an older student from Japan, particularly struggled with the difficulties of not receiving the respect she thought she deserved based on her age. A higher status, granted by maturity, is very common in universities in Japan, and Tomo was used to this form of respect. She found that:

> "Western ways of discussion cause me more difficulty than I thought." She explained further: "If a more experienced student speaks and makes a statement, considerably younger students would only contradict in rare occasions and in a subtle way and not directly confront the older." (Interview, beginning of first term)

It can be seen, from these examples, that the division of labour is a fairly rigid system to which the participants must adapt. Unlike the rules, where it could be observed that some could be bent or ignored (e.g., late arrivals after holidays), the hierarchy cannot be bypassed easily. It appears rather fixed, static, and not negotiable, and although hierarchy can be acknowledged in different ways (e.g. student bowing out of respect), students' ability to adapt is critical. Misconceptions of hierarchy and roles are significant level 2 contradictions, and reducing the stresses between the conditions of the students' prior experience in their home country and the conditions that govern interaction at the MA TESOL is paramount for their acquisition of the second academic culture.

Level 3 Contradictions

Engeström also offers level 3 contradictions. They describe contradictions "between the object/motive of the dominant form of the central activity and the object/motive of a culturally more advanced form of the central activity" (Engeström 2003). In theory, for this case this could be the comparison with another MA TESOL course at another university and the object/ motive of that course. If these objects are not similar but are adopted by the PRC MA TESOL there could, very likely, be a contradiction. However, this was not the focus of the study, and such tertiary contradictions between the object/motive of the dominant form of the central activity and the object/motive of a culturally more advanced form of the central activity did not emerge in the empirical data.

Level 4 Contradictions

Frictions do not only exist internally, in other words within the elements of central activity of students or between them. They are manifested within the wider activity systems of the university context. A broader look at relevant activities now invites a discussion of contradictions between activities of the students, the MA TESOL Programme and the University of Britain. Four types of such level 4 contradictions, an important addition of Engeström to the works of Leont'ev, describe contradictions between the central activity and the so-called neighbouring activities. There are four kinds of neighbouring activities:

> The 'neighbour activities' include first of all the activities where the immediately appearing objects and outcomes of the central activity are embedded (let's call them object-activities). Secondly, they include the activities that produce the key instruments for the central activity (instrument-producing activities), the most general representatives being science and art. Thirdly, they include activities like education and schooling of the subjects of the central activity (subject-producing activities). Fourthly, they include activities like administration and legislation (rule-producing activities). Naturally the 'neighbour activities' also include central activities which are in some other way, for a longer or shorter period, connected or related to the given central activity, potentially hybridizing each other through their exchanges. (Engeström 1987, p. 39)

The level 4 contradiction that features most strongly in the data related to the multiple roles of the student (central activity vs. object-activity) and the variance of language learning activities (central activity vs. tool producing activity).

International student: subject or object? (Central activity vs. object-activity)

Before discussing neighbouring activities, it is important to remember that the students were the *subjects* of their own central activity. They used tools (e.g. books, language) to transform a psychological object (their skill sets) into a desired outcome (i.e. passing the MA TESOL). Of course, tutors were also subjects of their own activities. In their object-activity, the tutors' focus was to turn students into more educated students. Tutors used tools, including books and language to teach content, in other words to enable this transformation of *objects* (here students) into the intended outcome of the activity.

The diversity of roles the international EFL students were required to adopt (i.e., subject and tool) featured in the empirical data in the following ways:

> "I sometimes find it difficult to understand what it is that the tutor expects me to learn. I complete all the readings and the assigned exercises but I don't see how they help me with the critical review. I am not sure what it is they want me to learn and how to apply that to the tasks." (Su, interview, end of first term)

This level 4 contradiction outlines the tension that existed between learning the language and using it appropriately in the context of the studies of the central activity and the strict focus of the object-activity on content. In Activity Theory terms, international EFL students are primarily concerned with conscious goal-based actions ("I need to understand all of the words and terms in this text properly"). However, tutors expectations are that academic language skills are executed in the unconscious, as operations in the tripartite of activities, actions and operations. For tutors, learning content mattered most for the transformation of the student in the MA TESOL. Here, the subjects' multiple roles present a dilemma, where the overarching stress that demarcates their experience is that focusing on one role most often can only come at the expense of the other. For the most part, the data showed that the central activity was primary (need for comprehension of language etc.), and the object-activity, much to the disappointment of the tutors, came second.

The variance of language learning activities (Central activity vs. tool producing activity)

There is not just one tool-producing activity, and international EFL students learn language in a number of settings and through a number of activities, before and after their arrival at PRC. The variety of such tool producing activities encompasses regular English classes in students' home countries or in English speaking countries, CALS English classes at PRC, extra tutorials, lectures and seminars. Other activities not only include conversations with native speakers, study groups and with fellow students, but also listening to English on TV and reading the popular press. All of these activities produce and influence language as a tool used in the central activity, and although these effects can be positive, they can also present contradictions. For instance, Ling commented one day that she could now have fluent conversations with her friends in her residence:

> "This is a great improvement for me but it does not help me as much in class as I thought it would. Actually, I have to concentrate more and it is almost more difficult to decide which words are formal enough and which of the new expressions I learned are kind of slang and informal." (Interview, end of first term)

An improvement of English as a language for conversation does not necessarily favour international students' academic English proficiency. In fact, the new tools that Ling gained contradict the formal English language skills she required.

Comments on the CALS courses are similar. Here, tool producing activities, not only of language but also of academic literacies in general, are at a discord. Saori commented that she learned many new skills in her courses, but sometimes was unsure if her tutors are in agreement with her CALS instructors. For instance, she commented that while some CALS classes start with basic skills, class tutors expect advanced skills immediately. This causes contradictions because the tools are initially designed for lower ability tasks than the tools that are actually required. Although interviewees agree that these contradictions are usually temporary, they also agree that they are quite frustrating.

In summary, many contradictions featured in the empirical data. For the study of the acquisition of a second academic culture, these are invaluable, as they not only point to the importance of different elements of academic culture, but also highlight which tensions needed to be overcome for the acquisition of the SAC. In order to shed more light on this process, these contradictions are now discussed in the context of Engeström's expansive cycles.

Expansive cycles

Engeström's extension of previous activity theory models (by Vygotsky and Leont'ev) added explicit elements of community, rules, and division of labour to emphasise the social and collaborative nature of human activity. His focus on expanded, object-oriented activity systems also formed the basis for the object-based expansive transformation into a desirable outcome, based on Vygotsky's work on zones of proximal development (see Chapter 2). For Engeström, "a full cycle of expansive transformation may be understood as a collective journey through the zone of proximal development of the activity" (2001, p. 137), a cycle which he illustrates through phases of internalisation and externalisation (Figure 13). According to Engeström (1999, p. 383), the expansive cycle "begins with individual subjects questioning the accepted practice, and it gradually expands into a collective movement or institution".

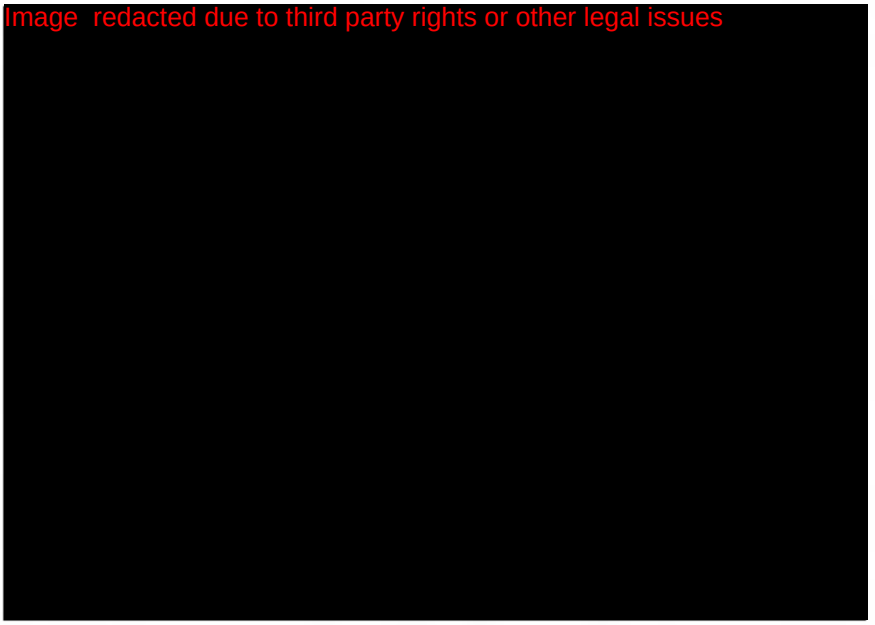

Figure 13: The Expansive Cycle (Engeström 1999, p. 34)

As the figure above shows "the expansive cycle of an activity system begins with an almost exclusive emphasis on internalisation, on socialising and training the novices to become competent members of the activity as it is routinely carried out" (Engeström 1999, p. 33). Taking in the surroundings and the new routines at PRC is the first step for all the participants. The next phase moves from mainly internalisation away and "creative externalisation occurs first in the form of discrete individual innovations" (Engeström 1999, p. 33). In this process, expansive cycles include an ideal-typical sequence of epistemic actions, including questioning and analysing the situation, modelling and examining the model, implementing the model, reflecting on the process and consolidating the outcomes into a new, stable form of practice. Next, I analyse how international EFL students acquired a second academic culture in the MA TESOL programme through these steps of the expansive cycle.

Questioning and analysing the situation

At the beginning of the expansive cycle, individuals question, criticise or reject some aspects of the accepted practice and existing wisdom (Engeström 1999). This step is frequently accompanied by feelings of uncertainty and confusion, which was certainly the case for the activity I studied. For instance, Saori comments:

> "At first, I was quiet during the pre-sessional course but after two or three weeks I started talking in class because I want to improve and I

need to engage. I told myself, you have to say something at least once a day." (Interview, end of pre-sessional)

It is striking, though, that whenever I asked the question "how does that differ from your home country?" the most common answer was akin to "quite different". In fact, most students agreed on a general difference, but were at first not able to explain how their experiences differed (between AC1 and SAC). Here, particularly two participants, Miyu and Yuuta, who have not been featured in this dissertation previously offer interesting perspectives. I excluded them so far because the data I gathered from them reached a very early saturation point. However, at this particular stage, their information and the fact that they did not have much to say become illustrative and insightful. Miyu, from Japan, had just finished her teacher training in Japan and had no teaching experience. My researcher's diary notes on her in the pre-sessional course read as follows:

> "First impression of Miyu: not excited to be here, knows that she needs to improve her English and must spend time abroad to do so, necessary evil. Her friend took the MA TESOL the year before and said it was easy. Seems disconnected from other pre-sessional students. Spends break time reading. Does not speak in class but is not shy." (Researcher's diary, pre-sessional, August)

In the interview at the end of the pre-sessional Miyu commented on some of the aspects mentioned in my notes:

> "I find the questions asked in class either too easy and don't want to answer them or I have no idea how to answer them.... I don't want to make friends on the pre-sessional course because they are not native speakers. I have some Japanese friends, they are nice and I talk with them. I want to improve my academic English but we do not get enough exercises in the pre-sessional course, not enough grammar. I don't think the readings are useful. I hope the MA TESOL is better and my personal tutor will help me, too." (Interview, end of pre-sessional)

Overall, Miyu was not engaged in the pre-sessional course. She simply rejected the new practices and seemed to regard the programme as a nuisance. Miyu mentioned that she was sure that she would not have problems with her English on the MA TESOL and she was unsure why she had to take two months of the pre-sessional course. In other words, she questioned the very nature of the course and the rationale for her participation, but she did not analyse her new surroundings in great depth. This was also evident in a later interview, when I questioned Miyu about differences between PRC and her university in Japan. She commented:

> Miyu: Not so different, quite similar. Students do what they have been asked and attend classes.
>
> Interviewer: What kind of assignments do you have at your university in Japan? Are they more difficult here than in Japan?
>
> Miyu: Kind of the same, more difficult in Japan.
>
> Interviewer: And class discussions, what are they like?
>
> Miyu: Not much different from the ones here. (Interview, end of first term)

Most of the other participants answered these questions by describing big differences, a few just acknowledged the fact that it is "just different". However, Miyu, even with guiding questions, was not able to realise the differences, let alone analyse them. This provides substantial problems for her solving the contradictions at hand, and ultimately for her acquisition of the second academic culture.

> Obviously an expansive cycle is a developmental process that contains both internalisation and externalisation. The new activity structure does not emerge out of the blue. It requires reflective analysis of the existing activity structure – one must learn to know and understand what one wants to transcend. (Engeström 1999, p. 33)

Of course, the individual identification and analysis step takes place for students at different times. However, at this stage, most students had in fact questioned, criticised or rejected some aspects of the practices at MA TESOL. They then proceeded to analyse the practices of the new activity with the aim to find out causes or explanatory mechanisms. Their analyses evoked "why?" questions and explanatory principles of a "historical-genetic" nature (which seeks to explain the situation by tracing origins and evolution) or an "actual-empirical" focus (seeking to explain the situation by constructing a picture of its inner systemic relations) (Engeström 1999). Again, those who navigated this step unproblematically added less to my analysis than those who encountered setbacks. Yuuta is the second student who did not feature in this dissertation previously. However, his difficulties expressed in his short answers during interviews add an interesting angle to understanding this stage of the expansive cycle: the analysis of a new academic culture can be very difficult.

My first impression notes of Yuuta:

> He is very eloquent, likes to discuss all sorts of matters, good self esteem, engages others in group work, natural leader, gets along with everybody. (Observation notes, pre-sessional, August)

Yuuta, however, when asked about difficulties related to academic culture was not as talkative as he usually was. In the first interview at the beginning of the first term I asked him to explain the difference between his Japanese university and PRC.

> Yuuta: "It's just different."
>
> Interviewer: "How is it different?"
>
> Yuuta: "I don't know, but it is definitely different."
>
> Interviewer: "I have never studied in Japan or even been to Japan, try to explain it to me."
>
> Yuuta: "I can't, I would have to think about it."
>
> Interviewer: "That would be interesting to me, please try to think about the differences and explain them to me next time." (Interview, beginning of first term)

I commented on this interview in my researcher's diary:

> Yuuta seems to be unaware of any academic cultural differences and proceeds as he is used to. He does not seem to take any of the questions I ask him in this regard worthy of consideration. I am always so concerned not to compromise my own data by asking questions that guide towards a better understanding of the necessity to understand academic cultural differences, but this danger does not seem to be warranted since the less reflective students do not seem to notice. (Researcher's diary, October)

This assumption was confirmed in my next interview with Yuuta:

> Yuuta: "I am still not able to describe the differences between PRC and my university in Japan." (Interview, end of first term)

At the end of the second term I asked him:

> Interviewer: "How are you doing in your elective courses? I remember that you were excited about these since your first term did not go so well."
>
> Yuuta: "My grades are bad, I don't think I will have to do anything in the summer here anymore, I will probably just forget about it and find a job."
>
> Interviewer: "What happened?"
>
> Yuuta: "I worked hard and I did not even find things difficult. I did everything that my personal tutor and the course tutors asked me to do but..."

Interviewer: "Are you relying on your tutors to tell you what to do?"

Yuuta: "Yes, I trusted them and I was sure that if I do everything they asked me to do, I would be ok but that does not seem to be enough now." (Interview, end of second term)

Neither Miyu nor Yuuta finished the MA TESOL, at least not during the one year time period that I followed the programme. Essentially, both students struggled very much with mastering the first two stages of the expansive cycle. They either truly assumed that the differences did not exist or were not worth pondering, or they were incapable of examining and explaining the situation on the grounds of different origins and evolutions of academic practices compared to their home institutions. In any event, both were unable to construct a picture of the MA TESOL's inner systemic relations, of its particular academic culture.

Students who were more successful at these first two stages, those who questioned the new practices and analysed them on the grounds of their historical and empirical basis primarily engaged with issues regarding level 1 contradictions, as described in the preceding section. The empirical data revealed most strongly that at the early stages of internalisation, subjects were trying to understand the rules that governed their second academic culture at the MA TESOL, and their relative position compared to other subjects.

Modelling and examining the new model

International EFL students then used their newly found explanatory relationships to construct a simplified model of the new practices. They attempted to develop an understanding and find solutions to the contradictions they have analysed between their first and second academic culture and the respective differences in practices. In some cases, where the differences were small, the modelling was straightforward. In other cases, "as the disruptions and contradictions of the activity become more demanding, internalisation increasingly takes the form of critical self-reflection - and externalisation, a search for solutions, increases" (Engeström 1999, p. 33).

Part of examining the new model includes testing the new "working" models and modifying them if needed. At this stage, many of the level 2 contradictions that were not identified earlier seemed to come to the fore. For instance during one of our first interviews, Hui referred to a subject-tool contradiction when she said:

> "I am not quite sure if I understand critical thinking. Does it mean to criticise the author? I will need to read more about critical thinking." (Interview, end of pre-sessional)

For Hui, this reflective perception suggested a change to her own practices to overcome the contradiction. In another case, she was less reflective. In my observation notes I commented:

> Hui works in a group of five, only one other Chinese student is in her group. They finish their task quickly and start talking. I can hear discussions about teaching at different places. Anne asks to stop the discussions - Hui is not happy. She is not reporting back for her group and looks disengaged. (Observation notes, November)

However, Hui then shared with me that rather than rejecting the practice new to her, she turned to others for a solution (and essentially wanted her SAC to become more like her AC1). Hui suggested to her module tutor:

> "We should do something else in class, something more that allows us to work together and at he same time exchange and share our experience." (Interview, end of first term)

Many experiments with the new models failed at first, and when some flaws and limitations of the new model were discovered their underlying analyses were revisited to reduce the contradictions relating to new practices and the second academic culture. Students, for example, started to work in study groups, and Suyoung explained:

> "We always get together and we all had read the readings but most of us did not understand it. So the only native speaker in our group was explaining everything and became kind of teacher. That was unfair to her and we decided that we all prepared a section of the reading and explained our part to the group." (Interview, end of first term)

Nonetheless, other model-shortcoming were not identified or corrected. For instance, for the subjects under investigation, their analysis of the rules at MA TESOL yielded a model in which some rules apparently could be bent slightly (e.g., arriving late to class), while others could be broken (e.g., returning on time from holidays). The lack of effective corrective action for the international EFL students suggested to them that their behaviour was acceptable and should belong to the model they implement.

Implementing the model, reflecting and consolidating

At this stage, the expansive cycle is no longer only about the individual. As students experiment more and more with the models they develop to solve their contradictions, the

expansive cycle slowly but steadily expands into a collective movement in the social setting of the MA TESOL. In many cases, the ill-designed models that were not corrected in the previous phase are now implemented, and are followed for the remainder of the MA TESOL programme (e.g., it was not made clear to the students that punctuality and returning from holidays on time mattered a great deal, so they continued to arrive at their discretion).

Based on the inherent differences between their academic cultures, students did not pick up on the tutors' clues and gestures and did not recognise the contradictions that emerged. Reflection was not always possible when the problems were unknown. However, tutors also avoided "effective conflict", where they could have made clear beyond a doubt that a student's model was inadequate, for instance by explicitly discussing that certain rules must be followed and by setting, sharing and following through with consequences. Without such opposition, the newly developed practices were not discouraged, and became part of the students' new, stable form of practice.

Through consolidation, the group of students chose which practices to adopt and which to discard for their new models. "Externalisation [,] reaches its peak when a new model for the activity is designed and implemented. As the new model stabilises itself, internalisation of its inherent ways and means again becomes the dominant form of learning and development" (Engeström 1999, p. 33). As the practices changed and became more established, they could easily contradict stable, neighbouring activities. At this stage level 4 contradictions became an influential force in the central activity. For instance, the contradictory nature of the international student as subject or object (in the central activity vs. object-activity) and the variance of language learning activities (in the central activity vs. tool producing activity) (see section above) emerged when the expansive cycle had reached its peak and became a dominant model that was followed by international EFL students in the MA TESOL programme.

The expansive cycle is a valuable tool for analysing how international EFL students in the MA TESOL programme negotiate the stresses and contradictions (level 1-4) they encounter when they acquire their second academic culture at PRC. Individual steps of the expansive cycle are epistemic goal-oriented actions in the expansion, where "action time corresponds to 'time's arrow' and activity time to 'time's cycle', in the terminology of Stephen Jay Gould (1987)" (Engeström 1999, p. 33). However, this does not mean that

the activity is compounded by many individual actions. The whole is far more than the sum of its parts and the interconnectedness cannot be expressed by enumerating all the individual actions. The implications for the second academic culture acquisition process overall are discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, the analysis and findings of the AT investigation of the international EFL student experience at the MA TESOL were presented. At its outset, the chapter introduced literature relevant for understanding acquisition of language and culture. Research on the complex involvement of first and second language with first and second culture (acquisition processes) was included. Specifically, Libben and Lindner's proposition that culture acquisition is guided by stress reduction was seen as an appropriate premise that aligns well with AT's focus on contradictions and expansion. This chapter then proceeded to describe the central activity system before investigating four levels of contradictions along with the negotiation of both language and culture in the empirical case. The level 1 contradictions that featured strongly in the empirical data specified how internal contradictions existed within rules (where international EFL students were subsumed under the general rules for the MA TESOL) and within subjects (where substantial differences were reported between subjects). Level 2 contradictions between the elements of the central activity system that featured strongly in the data included those between students (subjects) and language (tool), where the command of language that was required by entrance exams, and expected to be sufficient by the students prior to their arrival was not enough for the transformation of the central activity. A related level 2 contradiction focused on how, for international EFL students, language was both a tool *with* which they had to work and an object *on* which they had to work. The third level 2 contradiction that played a critical role in the central activity affected the relationship between students (subjects) and tutors (division of labour), where the contradictions between the roles and responsibilities international EFL students associated with tutors strongly clashed with the ones tutors assumed in the MA TESOL. All level 2 contradictions presented difficult obstacles for students to overcome, but from a research perspective they pointed to elements of academic culture and process-wise to how second academic culture is acquired. Level 4 contradictions that influenced the central activity related to the variance of language learning activities (between the central

activity vs. tool producing activity). Here, instrument producing neighbouring activities, specifically learning colloquial English outside of the classroom disagreed with what was required in the classroom (in terms of academic English proficiency). Another level 4 contradiction outlined how international EFL students were subjects of the central activity and objects of an object-activity, and how the contradictory nature of this role diversity placed them in an adverse situation for pursuing the transformation of their central activity.

The contradictions within and between elements of the activity systems illuminated the problems that international EFL students were encountering in the MA TESOL in a systematic approach. The description of the expansive cycle then allowed for an understanding of how the contradictions were overcome beyond the findings of Libben and Lindner's study. In particular, the four levels of contradictions outlined where to look for tensions, and the specific steps of the expansive cycle helped examine how students went through phases of internalisation and externalisation, through individual and collective efforts of dealing with stresses and developing models they could apply throughout the MA TESOL. The combination of contradictions and expansion allowed for an improved understanding of elements of academic culture and SAC acquisition.

Chapter 5: Analysis of community factors

Introduction

In the last chapter, I employed Activity Theory to help flesh out some of the elements of academic culture and second academic culture acquisition. This chapter presents a major shift in the analytical angle, away from a direct focus on how knowledge is treated as a commodity that is transmitted in MA TESOL activities, and towards a participation lens that adopts a practice and community-oriented view of academic culture.

As outlined in Chapter 2, this chapter analyses the experiences that students face when aspiring to participate in academic communities. I apply the terminology and conceptual framework provided by Wenger in his theory of CoP. The learning and acquisition of the second academic culture is portrayed from various conceptual and theoretical angles in the specific context of this CoP. In Chapter 2, four learning categories of practice, meaning, community and identity were introduced (see Figure 14 below). In this chapter, the first three are independently analysed in detail.

The section on *practice* describes "how things are done" and pays particular attention to the way in which CoPs involve both explicit and tacit elements. The section that discusses *meaning* builds on this understanding and sheds light on how to make sense of "what is done". In the context of CoP, it looks primarily at how a tension in the duality of participation and reification manifested itself in the acquisition of SAC among the international EFL students, and the section entitled *community* examines the social fabric that enables learning through mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire.

As a social theory of learning, CoP characterises social participation as a process of learning and knowing. The understanding of knowledge and knowing as it emerges from the understanding of learning in CoP is part of the analysis in this chapter.

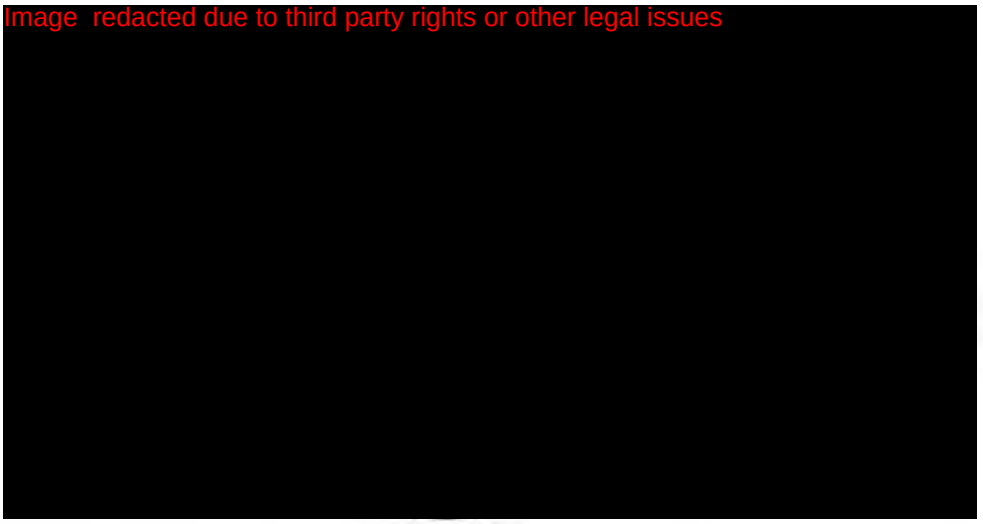

Figure 14: The Theory of Learning (Wenger 1998, p. 5)

Identity, as the fourth major component of CoP's learning categories is addressed in Chapter 6, as it functions more as a lens through which the previous three can be examined.

Practice – learning as doing

A CoP describes a group of people who share an interest in a particular domain, which creates a common ground for their engagement, guides their learning and gives meaning to their actions. Within this domain, their specific interest defines their practice more narrowly by what members do (i.e., what they practice), and how their focus on practice-based core knowledge determines why members join, how they share their know-how and how the community develops. As Wenger states, this "[...] concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do" (1998, p. 47). For the MA TESOL, the focus on CoPs as a means to exchange not only explicit knowledge, but also its tacit counterpart, the know-how that is not so easily articulated, is most important. With a focus on decreasing the learning curve of international EFL students who need to acquire the SAC, explicit elements should be acquired unproblematically, whereas one would assume that tacit ones present more challenges. To understand how learning occurs in this context, this section looks at how these newcomers acquire their SAC through practice

and participation and examines how situated learning of hard and soft, structured and less structured, represented and assumed, explicit and tacit knowledge take place.

Explicit practices

For international students, "language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts" (Wenger 1998, p. 47) should be relatively easy to acquire. These constructs are the explicit topics of the MA TESOL, covered in guidelines, lectures and seminars. If students employ them erroneously, their incorrect use can be rectified in the classroom and through corrections of work students submit.

Despite being considered an explicit aspect of practices, the empirical data revealed that language required an enormous amount of attention and effort among international EFL students. Data from the student questionnaire illustrated that students from abroad spent on average 22 hours per week on assigned reading material, with a maximum of 30 hours per week. Findings from the interviews confirmed that language matters a lot to practice. Cummins' work on categorising academic language proficiency along the dimensions of cognitive demand and context embeddedness adds clarity to why and where students experienced practice-based problems with this explicit component. In the figure below (similar Cummins 1984, p. 57) the resulting four categories are illustrated.

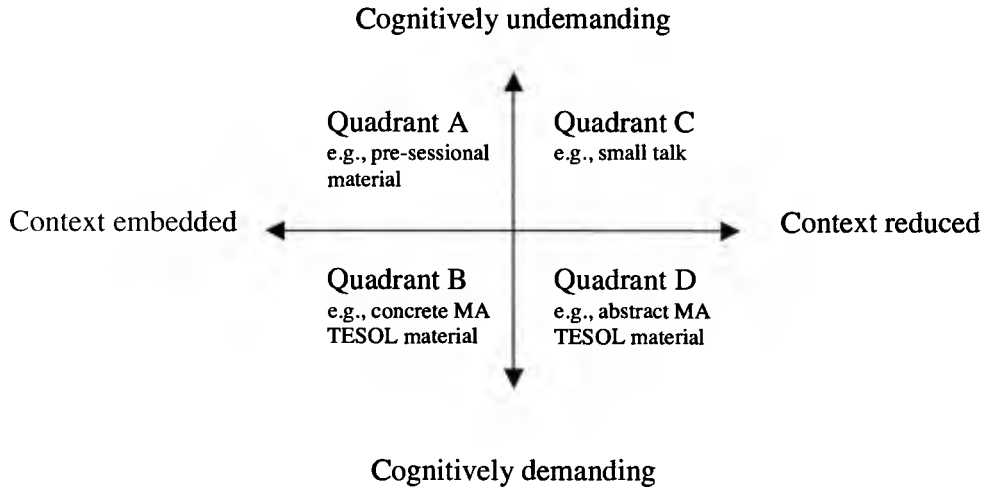

Figure 15: Academic Language Proficiency (adapted from Cummins 1984, p. 57)

Academic language proficiency, in this case, refers to the ability to make complex meanings explicit in either oral or written modalities by means of language itself, rather

than by means of contextual or paralinguistic cues (e.g. gestures, intonation) (Cummins 1996). Language is one of the examples that, although described by Wenger as explicit, causes problems for international EFL students. Although their level of language proficiency may be high, the theoretical ability does not always translate well into practice in terms of reading comprehension or articulating their thoughts in writing. Granted, this is difficult for native speakers, too, but in the case of their use of academic language, international EFL students experience substantial problems, e.g., with identifying which words belong to which register and which words are inappropriate.

> Academic success depends on students comprehending the language of text. The language of text is found only in books. [...] Thus, students' knowledge of academic language and their ability to use academic language coherently in their own writing is crucially dependent on the amount and variety of what they read (see Krashen (1993), for a comprehensive review of the research in this area). Expressed differently, the most important instructional activities to accelerate second language learners' academic progress involve providing ample opportunities, encouragement, and incentives to read and write extensively in a variety of genres. (Cummins 1996, p. 81)

The empirical data show that international EFL students in the pre-sessional course and the Masters programme experience a journey across three of the four quadrants. When they start in the pre-sessional course, the materials (reading, writing etc.) are practice-based, they are cognitively undemanding (relatively speaking) and context embedded. Students seemed to enjoy how language proficiency was introduced in Quadrant A. Here, they learned that they needed to adjust their academic writing and work on their academic writing competencies. For instance, as Hyland (2002) agrees, international EFL students are instructed to write in an impersonal style, creating anonymity and to provide quotes from various textbooks to show that this advice is very common. Through a corpus analysis of academic texts written by expert writers in different disciplines, Hyland found that the writer's identity was more present in the texts of the humanities and social sciences than the hard sciences. Consequently, academic discourse conventions vary between disciplines. For instance, the effects of the pronoun application and other stylistic features of explicit writer presence is an explicit feature that is taught in the pre-sessional course for use in the MA TESOL programme. Yet, when students "graduated" to the MA TESOL programme, they found the use of the explicit tools they learned in the pre-sessional course difficult, despite their explicit nature. Although participants were able to ease themselves into the academic conventions during the pre-sessional course,

they found the requirements regarding its conventions overwhelming, particularly during the first term, as Saori shared:

> "Now [during the MA TESOL] everything is so serious, so demanding, so strict. Before, during the pre-sessional I was much happier and I think, I worked harder and the tasks were more appropriate for me." (Saori, interview, beginning of first term)

Similarly, in an exercise essay-writing, writing criteria were specified in the instructions as undeniably explicit concepts of the practice. For example, in the first essay assignment students had to complete in their first MA TESOL module, the importance of writing a summary with a critical stance towards the position taken in the text was outlined by the tutor. However, the module tutor, Anne, expressed her surprise:

> "The instructions were very clear, to write a summary and to take a critical stance. Some students did not summarise, others did not take a critical stance. It is difficult if even simple instructions are not being followed." (Interview, beginning of first term)

From the tutor's perspective, it must have been unexpected that students were not able to follow this set of, in the tutor's view, unambiguous instructions. Clearly, even an explicit task can be misinterpreted or be problematic. Hui commented on her first essay:

> "I thought it would not be difficult until I got back the comments on my first draft. I could not see the shortcoming... but they are really serious. I think I can understand all her [the tutor's] comments; most of them were on the conventions of academic writing and on a more critical approach. It's strange because I was critical but I did not understand that I needed to back up my opinion with other people's opinions on the topic. I just wrote what I thought about the text." (Interview, beginning of first term)

Hui understood the words and the task at hand. However, she was not aware that to voice a critical opinion required calling on authorities in the field.

Even explicit aspects can be obstacles for the participants of this study. The explicit nature of these obstacles allows tutors to explain in detail what the required tasks entail and how tutors expect these tasks to be tackled and completed. Hui was able to understand what was expected of her after she received feedback from her tutor for her first draft. Even though misinterpretations take place within the realm of explicit issues, these can be addressed, corrected, discussed and explained and therefore set straight within a short time.

Students also reported that group work was affected by their command of academic language. In my observation notes from the beginning of the first term I commented:

> Group work. Ling and Su don't speak in their group – maybe tired? Group consists of Ling, Su and home students (native speakers). Very different behaviour compared to pre-sessional course, both used to be talkative, active participants. (Observation notes, beginning of first term)

I followed up on this in our next interview and Ling commented:

> "Yes, I was tired but not because I didn't sleep. I am tired of not being able to say what I want to say because of my English. So I just sit and listen and feel stupid compared to the other students." (Interview, beginning of first term)

Su added that she feels ignored by others because of her English and she stressed that particularly native speakers and European students cause her to feel inferior. A little later in the interview, she added that group work with people, who had been teachers for many years, cause her the same feeling. To sum up, the situations where the feeling of inferiority hindered students to express their views or opinions were group work with more experienced people, and group work with European students who were dominating the discussion. Feelings of inferiority were also raised when talking with tutors and with supervisors. One tutor explained:

> "Students, who are usually engaged and talkative with their friends in class are often very quiet in office hours. When I ask them if they understand my questions they usually say yes. Xiao said the other day that she is worried about her English when she is talking to me. I assured her that her English is fine but she was still not as talkative as she is in class." (Interview, end of first term)

When I asked Xiao about this conversation in our next interview she said:

> "I always worry to make grammar mistakes, even though I know that my English is usually quite good. But when I talk to teachers I feel like a little child on stage and I cannot speak my mind, just facts I know for sure." (Interview, end of second term)

Xiao's emphasis on the importance of the presence of teachers for her ability to speak correctly is an indicator for how different social power-relations affect language use. The power-relation is reified in the choice of words and the ability to express an opinion fluently. Language carries this power as a reified connotation of the status a person has in a group of people. The importance of social power is therefore discussed in the context of identity formation in chapter 6.

In the context of explicit practices, Xiao's example in comparison to others' illustrates that their experiences varied. For instance, Su added that a large proportion of the group-work in Jill's class was based on the students' own experience and the situation of teachers in their home country. To her, the students were not only students; they also became experts on the teaching in their home countries, where their knowledge exceeded that of the lecturer. Cummins comments on this strategy and says the "activation of prior knowledge is a crucial way in which teachers can validate culturally diverse students' background experiences and affirm their cultural knowledge" (Cummins 1996, p. 78).

International EFL students experienced a number of shifts of practice during their tenure at PRC. Along the axes of cognitive demand and context embeddedness, they started with practices that were, relatively speaking, low in both categories. Competencies were trained within the context of their study environment with a focus on learning appropriate explicit behaviour for the MA TESOL. When these students "graduated" to the MA TESOL, both of these areas were changed, and most of their new practices focused on applying the pre-sessional tools for learning abstract, cognitively demanding content. During their acquisition of the second academic culture, the shift between the AC1 and the setting of the pre-sessional course was the first adjustment; however, the fact that another major shift would disrupt their newly established practices when they moved into the MA TESOL was unforeseen. In fact, many reported that they experienced fewer problems in the MA TESOL when the practices in the classroom were more closely aligned with the practices they had come to know in the pre-sessional course. For instance, Jill's class environment mentioned above was regularly attributed as a favourable learning environment based on its ability to make complex explicit theoretical constructs compelling for the students' work context (in Quadrant B, in the figure above).

Tacit practices

Prior knowledge consists of explicit and tacit practices, and while some are content related, others are concerned with academic cultural practices. Some students arrive in the UK with a sound understanding of explicit concepts such as second language learning theories. A main concern is their ability to match their understanding of the content with appropriate English language competencies. For these students, "[...] prior knowledge plays a major role in helping to make the second language input comprehensible"

(Cummins 1996, p. 75), and its impact was regularly reported by students during interviews. Su comments:

> "My first modules were easier for me since I had a lot of knowledge in these areas from my home university. It was easy because my only worry was to express myself properly." (Interview, second term)

The background knowledge allowed her to focus more on the language issues and less on content. The context for the content was already provided in her previous education. Cummins notes that "prior knowledge represents one central aspect of what students bring to the learning situation that makes input more context-embedded and comprehensible" (1996, p. 76). However, this does not suggest that ease of studying should be equated with a preference for it. Although the first modules eased Su's way into the new academic culture, she commented on her second term (without any background knowledge):

> "I think I benefited a lot because it is a pleasure for me so that I will go to the library and work very hard to figure it out what the theory is about. I enjoyed the second term for that reasons, I liked the challenge." (Interview, end of second term)

Xiao, on the other hand, had similar experiences but dealt with, and evaluated them differently.

> "The second term is very difficult in class. I didn't understand many concepts. Last term I had background information, but this term is hard." (Interview, end of second term)

The value of prior knowledge in terms of understanding the content is evident, but the personal experiences varied drastically between the two students. Another student, Suyoung, began with extremely limited prior knowledge. She said that she could not draw on any background knowledge in any area except grammar:

> "My background is in accounting and I audited some English literature classes and some linguistic courses and one of the linguistic professors provided me with everything to come here. I have big problems and I might not pass the course but I learn a lot." (Suyoung, interview, end of first term)

So far the examples of prior knowledge are of a rather explicit nature. But many examples regarding prior knowledge related to the notion of second academic culture acquisition that are more difficult to articulate, that cannot easily be imparted by a teacher or tutor. These tacit practices that were developed during an international EFL student's

prior academic career, in the AC1, are those that are hidden within "the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognisable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared world views" (Wenger 1998, p. 47). In contrast to explicit practices, tacit aspects can not only vary to a higher degree between academic cultures, but they are also more difficult to teach, pass on, share etc. One student, identified as an international student on the questionnaire, commented:

> "I enjoyed learning to view the world through different eyes, learning about different theories and hearing other people's opinions. I enjoyed it but it challenged me on a different level, somewhere close to the core of my beliefs." (International student, questionnaire)

Xiao used the term "appropriate" to address tacit aspects as she described the following situation:

> "Some classmates here say something very simple in very big words and I listen to that and I am not quite sure what contributions are appropriate or not." (Interview, beginning of first term)

Tomo described the reactions in class as more spontaneous, aggressive, and active than in Japan. She elaborates:

> "I think first, I need time before I answer a question. I feel that other students in the course start talking without thinking it through. They just talk what comes to their mind. I like that, but it is strange to me and it might be bothersome to others." (Interview, end of first term)

Although Tomo enjoyed how others were participating, she was uncertain whether their approach was suitable. Despite the fact that she liked the spontaneous participation, she thought that it was a burden for some of the others in the class. Clearly, the tacit features may cause insecurity regarding which behaviour is correct or incorrect.

Dealing with a supervisor and detecting subtle cues caused difficulties for Su:

> "I am afraid I will be annoying if I talk to them too much about my topic because it is not fair to other students if the tutor gives me extra time to talk to me." (Su, interview, second term)

Implicitly, Su was asking just how much of the tutor's time is appropriate to discuss a report. At that point she had seen her supervisor once and was extremely worried, to the point that she started crying. Although she was at a stage where she considered submitting her report late, she did not want to take up her tutor's time because this might negatively affect other students. My lesson observations show that her tutor explicitly

stated that students should come to see him if they encounter problems. Su argued, however, that in the PRC everyone seems very busy, and that students must learn to help themselves. Su's understanding of when and how often she should see her tutor was considerably different from what the tutors might have meant when they said that they were busy. Mei, too, stated that when she had difficulties and serious questions she was unsure if she could ask the teacher:

> "But I never know whether it is proper or not. With classmates it was a little bit easier because I told them that they needed to tell me if I bother them too much. I can't say that to a teacher because teachers have to be polite." (Interview, second term)

Mei was aware that she may not have fully understood the conventions and asked for help from her classmates. Being aware of the difference in relations with tutors, she refrained from using the same strategy and tried to realise for herself how much time was appropriate to spend with her tutor.

Another aspect that was new to Mei was taking her own notes.

> "In China" she explained, "I borrowed my good friends notes. But here I don't know if I can ask someone for his or her notes. People might be offended or consider it strange, so I don't know." (Interview, end of first term)

The subtleties of what to ask for, and what not to ask for, are circumvented by not asking at all. Mei relied on herself and worked independently.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

As has been seen in the discussions of tacit and explicit knowledge, classification can cause difficulty in the discussion of knowledge. Wenger also points out that classification is useful because the contrast raises our awareness of the differences between the two types. "Classifying knowledge as explicit or tacit runs into difficulties, however, because both aspects are always present to some degree. [...] When it comes to meaningful knowing in the context of any enterprise, the explicit must always stop somewhere" (Wenger 1998, p. 69). However, though

> [...] researchers recognise that there is knowledge that is difficult to articulate and capture, most are still approaching the problem from a representationalist point of view. They are exploring ways of representing the unrepresentable – trying to make soft knowledge hard. Viewing knowledge as soft/hard duality and mapping it to Wenger's

> (1998) duality gives a clearer view of why this is perhaps the wrong route to follow. (Hildreth and Kimble 2002, p. 24)

Having discussed knowledge to this extent I emphasise that the novelty in knowledge creation and sustainability of knowledge in CoPs lies in the process of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) (Lave and Wenger 1991). LPP implies that a newcomer to a community in most cases participates peripherally at the beginning. In my observation notes, this peripheral participation can be traced for many students:

> Tomo is very quiet in her group of mostly native speakers. She must know the answer for the task. Why does she not speak up? (Observation notes, October)

> Tomo works with a small group of native speakers. She talks quite a bit during the group discussion but she refuses vehemently to present. (Observation notes, October)

> Group work, Soari, Lin and Tomo and two native speakers in one group. Tomo leads the discussion and presents for her group. (Observation notes, December)

In an interview Tomo commented on my first observation

> "I do not say much in class or in groups. I am very quiet. I have to get used to the difference in group behaviour." (Interview, beginning of first term)

Tomo's participation in groups changed over time from peripheral observer to active member. She describes her situation as that of a newcomer, who has to become acquainted with new group work situations and who has to learn the "group behaviour" appropriate for the MA TESOL. Through this process the newcomer moves upward in the ranks until he or she reaches full membership in the community. The aspect of specific interest here is the fashion in which knowledge is passed on from so-called old-timers in the community to the legitimate newcomer. Through participation and observation the newcomer learns not only the explicit and well-explained aspects of the tasks within the community. Through participation the newcomer learns tacit knowledge that usually cannot be passed on by instruction or illustration. These tacit aspects are passed on through participation in the community.

It remains to be seen to what extent international students, as sojourners, can expect to enter into this maze of histories shaping the culture and community of the programme.

> If we accept that learning comes about through experience and interaction with our milieu, then it is not difficult to accept that learning

> will involve both explicit and tacit knowledge. However, it is important at this point to re-emphasise the key attribute of knowledge: that it exists in people's heads. Once explicit knowledge has been committed to paper, (or any other medium) it becomes information. (Hildreth and Kimble 2002, p. 24)

LPP allows one to look at learning without having to go through the classification of reification and participation or tacit and explicit knowledge. It clarifies that, initially, participation can take any form that allows for learning to take place. The notion of legitimacy and peripherality is important for a discussion of practice, and will be discussed in more detail in the context of identity formation, in chapter 6.

Section summary

Practice can only be fully understood if its tacit and explicit aspects are recognised. For a successful learning experience, as well as the acquisition of a second academic culture, both play a tremendous role. By and large, tacit practices, those that are "soft" and difficult to articulate, are seen as hard to share and learn. In contrast, explicit practices, those that can be codified and studied, are seen as comparatively straightforward. Language, as an example of the latter, has shown how for the international EFL students, an explicit part of practice has presented many problems, both in terms of their subject-matter studies but also in the context of understanding and acquiring their second academic culture. Especially when students progressed from the cognitively undemanding (relatively speaking) and context embedded pre-sessional course to the cognitively demanding and context reduced MA TESOL programme, the increasing importance that language played in understanding the tacit elements of the second academic culture added interesting insights for second academic culture acquisition.

Meaning – learning as experience

The interconnectedness of practice and meaning is a key construct of communities of practice, where "practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life" (Wenger 1998, p. 52). Practice more or less describes the way in which we do things, which gives meaning to how we experience our surroundings and interact with the world around us. According to Wenger (1998), we negotiate meaning, which involves the interaction of participation and reification. The duality of participation and reification is essential to the experience of meaning and consequently, essential to the concept of practice.

The duality of meaning as participation and reification is clarified further in the example of the use of language in face-to-face interaction:

> Words as projections of human meaning are certainly a form of reification. In face-to-face interactions, however, speech is extremely evanescent; words affect the negotiation of meaning through a process that seems like pure participation. As a consequence, words can take advantage of shared participation among interlocutors to create shortcuts to communication. It is this tight interweaving of reification and participation that makes conversations such a powerful form of communication. (Wenger 1998, p. 62)

This example elucidates the meaning of reification and participation in general. The duality of these constituent processes that makes up the negotiation of meaning within a CoP (Hildreth and Kimble 2002) is discussed after the terms are introduced in more detail.

A duality of participation and reification

Wenger defines *participation* as "[...] the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities, [...] a complex process that combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging and active involvement in social enterprises [that can] involve all kinds of relations, conflictual as well as harmonious, intimate as well as political, competitive as well as cooperative" (Wenger 1998, p. 55). Meaning-making, however, is only possible with the constituent other part of negotiation, namely reification.

Reification in general means to give concrete shape to something that is abstract. Wenger employs the concept of reification to "refer to the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'" (Wenger 1998, p. 58). Wenger's intention is to cover various processes under the term reification. This is much more than a dictionary definition of reification would cover and includes processes such as "making, designing, representing, naming, encoding, and describing, as well as perceiving, interpreting, using, reusing, decoding, and recasting" (Wenger 1998, p. 59). Reification describes the negotiated meanings that words obtain if they are used in a specific context, but also the meaning of concepts and terminology. The negotiation of meaning takes place when, through participation, the understanding of certain terms are reified. For example, a term is defined during class time and various definitions are drawn

together. During the discussion the meaning of that term is reified and carried through future discussions.

The *duality of participation and reification* is of utmost importance to the negotiation of meaning. The figure below outlines how experiencing the world through the negotiation of meaning takes shape, and how this meaning-making is only possibly through the interplay of participation and reification.

Figure 16: The Duality of participation and reification (Wenger 1998, p. 63)

In this context, Hildreth and Kimble (2002) argue, and they quote Wenger (1998), that the duality is much like the duality of knowledge that is neither hard nor soft, but both hard and soft at the same time. It is the weights of each in the balance that determines whether there is an equilibrium or if meaning manifests itself more through participation or reification:

> If participation prevails - if most of what matters is left unreified - then there may not be enough material to anchor the specifities of coordination and to uncover diverging assumptions. This is why lawyers want everything in writing. (Wenger 1998, p. 65)
>
> If [however] reification prevails - if everything is reified but with little opportunity for shared experience and interactive negotiation - then there may not be enough overlap in participation to recover a coordinated relevant or generative meaning. This helps explain why putting everything in writing does not seem to solve all our problems. (Wenger 1998, p. 65)

For the case of the international EFL student experience under investigation here, the tension within this duality provides important insights for the acquisition of their second academic culture. It is important to note that participation here is not necessarily to be equated with classroom participation (e.g., answering or asking questions related to content), but to participation within the community (e.g., among members of the CoP). It is a coincidence that the community under investigation only met in the classroom setting, and that this is where community participation and reification took place.

Etiquette and interaction with the tutor

International EFL students arrived with a protocol for interacting with instructors that was very much shaped by their AC1. Suyoung told me about Korea,

> "Student don't say anything in class. The professors don't care if we understand the material or not, they just keep on talking." (Interview beginning of first term)

She was very dissatisfied with Korean professors because they were not concerned whether students follow along in class and understand the content. Lectures were, according to her, so unimportant that students would sit in the class and chat with friends. In her AC1, students had to study and learn on their own. Suyoung's next comment about her SAC should be seen in the light of her cultural background:

> "I don't have confidence about speaking in class. So I just listen to what other people say. So I am just quiet during class and nothing changed during all of the first term." (Interview, end of first term)

In a previous interview Suyoung had said that she would adjust quickly and would soon participate in class. She explained:

> "It just take a little bit of time to get used to how others interact and to find a way for all of us to work together. It is so sad if I don't talk in class when I really want to." (Interview, beginning of first term)

Classroom interaction was not clear to Suyoung, and this practice as part of her SAC needed to be further negotiated so that she understood what was expected. Similarly, it was important for international EFL students that others understood their AC1 context so that they could understand why international EFL students behaved the way they did. For international EFL students, this practice needed to remain open for negotiation through continued participation in the community. For AC1 students, however, the etiquette and

interaction with the tutor required no further negotiation, and the balance was tipped in favour of reification.

> "Home students usually have a clearer understanding of the relationship between tutor and students and they focus on their work when they come to my office hour. I can sit down with them and discuss their first draft and we will finalize that stage of the development of their assignment right away. With international students it is different, I usually try to explain why we have certain conventions and what they mean. By the end, international students leave and we have not worked as closely with their text since there were many aspects that needed to be discussed first." (Tutor interview, end of first term)

In other cases, the etiquette and interaction with the tutor as part of the practice within the realm of the MA TESOL was based on continuing participation. In my observation notes, this phenomenon of international EFL students desire to contribute in class but inability to get the tutor's attention was present, but so was the opposite:

> Tutor asks a question, nobody wants to answer (I think the question might be too easy...) Some students (Suyoung, Hui, Ling) look at the tutor, hoping to be chosen. Neither one of them puts their hand up but since nobody else has their hands up, they seem to expect that eye contact should be indication enough. The tutor does not choose, answers the question, and carries on. (Observation notes, middle of first term)

To the international EFL students, this unsuccessful attempt at contributing to class suggested that the interaction with the tutor, as part of their practice, still needed to be negotiated, or refined, within the community. However, in a different setting, Xiao from Macao said:

> "[...] once I nodded my head and Peter picked up on it and said, "Ah, Xiao seems to have something to say". It came unexpected but I do feel that he sees me. Maybe, I will prepare more now. That is motivating." (Interview, end of first term)

Interestingly, when I asked Peter, he commented:

> Peter: "I don't ask students to answer a question if they don't put up their hand."
>
> Interviewer: Not even when they look at you or nod their heads?"
>
> Peter: "No." (Interview, end of first term)

Nonetheless, in my researcher's diary I have another record where Peter does ask the students directly:

> Mei has completed the exercise first and looks up. Peter looks at her, sees that she is already done and asks if Mei could read her first answer. (Observation notes, end of first term)

This is a useful example of a practice that does not appear to be highly reifiable. In terms of the meaning for the practice, the students accepted a high level of ambiguity, where there were no clear rules if, for instance, raising a hand would mean being asked to contribute. Similarly, a nod did not always mean that a student wanted to share her answers. It seems that the discretion was confusing at first, but soon became part of the everyday practice on the MA TESOL, where students and teachers used different gestures to signal their desire to contribute.

Oral Participation

Asking questions is a big part of any CoP, and the degree to which this practice is encouraged very much depends on the degree to which the know-how is either explicit or tacit. For international EFL students, both mattered a lot, as described earlier. Especially given that different academic cultures are prohibitive or supportive of oral participation, the degree to which international EFL students believed this practice warranted in-depth negotiation could be understood. Saori, for instance, commented on the difference in oral participation and asking questions, as she perceived it, between Asian and European students.

> "I think the idea of asking questions in class is different for Asian and European students. One European student asks questions all the time and Asian students in the class laugh or giggle about that. For Asian students, asking questions in front of the class is very unusual. This student asks many questions so we think that is kind of odd or too much. But I think, European people think differently." (Interview, end of first term)

It is frequently assumed that international students do not participate to the same degree as home students because they are insecure about their language proficiency. Tutors commented:

> "It is difficult to speak in front of a whole class in the first place and in a foreign language, it is particularly challenging", "I would not dare to speak in a classroom in a foreign language if I had just arrived there" , "English language proficiency is the biggest obstacle for oral participation." (Tutor interviews, end of first term)

This was the overall opinion of the four tutors when asked why international students often participate less in in-class discussions. Interestingly, all tutors related their opinion to the lack of the international EFL students' command of the English language. To them, and to members of the AC1, this suggests that the practice of asking questions can be reified, and that once international EFL students get more control of the English language, they will also ask questions and volunteer to speak more in class.

I asked Xiao if the English language was the problem, which she denied. I also asked whether she would say more in class if it were conducted in the English language but only with students from Macao. Her answer was:

> "Yes a lot more, I would feel more comfortable." (Interview, end of first term)

Many international EFL students frequently referred to themselves as remaining quiet in class. In a MA TESOL classroom where some students participate and others (those with a significantly different AC1) do not, there is a disequilibrium that is not language-based. In fact, this supports that their practice-based knowledge (from their AC1) has not been invited into any participation for negotiation, but rather that a reification of oral participation in the classroom already existed when they arrived. Cummins observed and analysed this phenomenon in a study that took place in a high school.

> The message to be internalised was that students' language, culture, and previous experience have no place within this school or, by extension, within this society. To be accepted within the mainstream society, represented by the school, required that students become invisible and inaudible; culture and language should be left at home. (Cummins 1996, p. 2)

What Cummins describes here as becoming invisible and inaudible causes problems for the international students and creates a less positive experience for them. Xiao explains,

> "I feel a little bit stressed to speak my opinion in class. It is a difference from the pre-sessional course. In pre-sessional course I felt so happy to say my opinion, there is no right or wrong, but now I don't know. In these two classes it seems like if you have to say something you really have to say it with a point or confidence. You feel kind of pressured to say something, especially in the research class, that qualifies you as a student here, not just something silly where the others don't know what you are talking about." (Interview, beginning of first term)

It is significant that Xiao changed from an orally participating student in the pre-sessional course to a more or less inaudible student in her first term. The striking information Xiao

conveys here is that she felt the need to participate to qualify as a student, or in other words to meet the criteria of a member of the community of practice.

Section summary

So far in this section on meaning, learning as experience has been analysed as the complementary duality of reification and participation. Both parts exist in each practice, but to different degrees. They are necessary to experience learning as meaningful. Within the practices examined, different kinds of dualities emerged from the data, where either reification or participation prevailed. First, etiquette and interaction with the tutor were rooted within the history of PRC, and the fact that the norms were highly reified provided problems for international EFL students who still needed to negotiate an appropriate way to interact with their tutors. In this context, students quickly learned that some elements are more reified than others. For instance, for international EFL students, it was important that their AC1, where there was no talking to the tutors during class, was at least made known to their peers and tutors. Ideally for them, their background should have been included in the negotiation of the practice. Conversely, the fact that some practices were not reified, and in fact included a high degree of discretion and ambiguity, was accepted by international EFL students (e.g., nodding could mean two different things at different times), and they continued to negotiate meaning on a case-by-case basis with their tutors. Most particularly, though, was the importance of oral participation. Although non-oral participation may be sufficient to experience learning as meaningful, participants felt pressured into oral participation. Tutors believed that their unwillingness to participate stemmed from their inability to express their thoughts appropriately in the English language. However, their continued silence during class was deeply rooted in their AC1; and there was no chance for negotiating the practice of oral participation as this, too, was to a high degree reified even before the students arrived at PRC.

Community - learning as belonging to communities

CoPs represent groups of people who have a common interest and practice with the goal of engaging in learning related to their field. This learning process takes place as members of the community rely on a structure based on mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger 1998, p. 72)(see Figure 17).

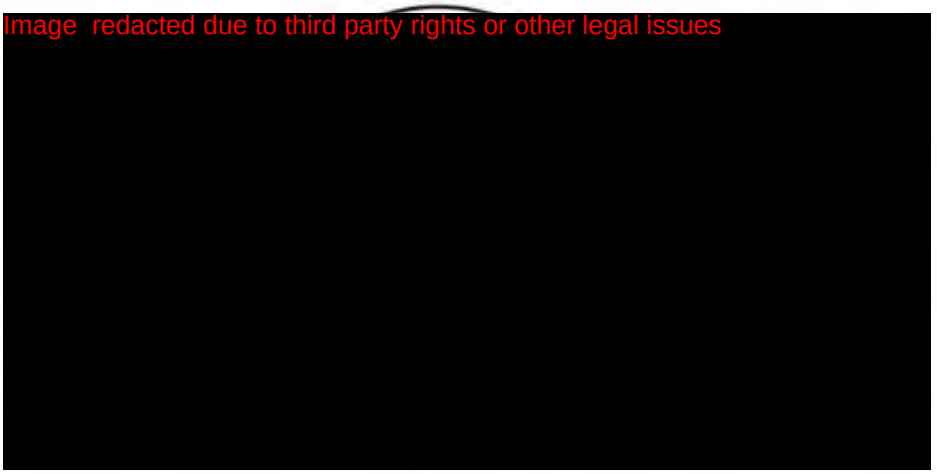

Figure 17: Dimensions of practice as the property of a community (Wenger 1998, p. 73)

Mutual engagement

Figure 18: Mutual Engagement in detail (Wenger 1998, p. 73)

Particularly through their interaction in the community, members develop cooperative relationships that rely on co-constructed rules of engagement, or norms. This mutual engagement forms the social fabric that is at the very core of the community. Such relationships do not develop overnight, but require "together-time" for the participants. Hui noted:

> "There is not enough time set aside in class to get to know your classmates and to …." (Interview, beginning of first term)

She did not finish the sentence but concluded in hesitation. She experienced difficulties in expressing what it was that she was missing. For Hui, the intrinsic nature of the need to get to know her classmates and to be able to work with others seemed self-explanatory.

At a later point in the interview, she returned to the topic, addressing it from another interesting angle:

> Hui: "I think we can do something more than that in Anne's [pseudonym for a tutor] class".
>
> Interviewer: "More varied teaching styles or more in terms of content?"
>
> Hui: "I think we need some more chances to communicate with the tutor. It is not only in the classroom although I can send an email to her but I think it is more helpful if we can communicate face to face just like you and me. Sometimes classmates need to communicate. Class time is not enough time to communicate. Sometimes classmates need to communicate to share what they know. I don't criticise the teaching procedure or the method of teaching. I am just wondering if there is anything more that we can do to gain our different goals. Classmates have their own needs and their own levels of English proficiency." (Interview, beginning of first term)

Hui describes the need for time to communicate as a necessity for a successful learning experience. She attempts to reach targets and goals and, despite the fact that these goals might be individualised and the needs may vary, she sees the importance in sharing time and in students working together to fully appreciate and include the "engaged diversity" every community consists of for the development of its norms. "Indeed, what makes engagement in practice possible and productive is as much a matter of diversity as it is a matter of homogeneity" (Wenger 1998, p. 75). All the differences, such as English proficiency, knowledge, experience, culture, and many others in the MA TESOL group, enable a give-and-take relationship and mutual engagement in the programme. This mutual engagement enables the productivity and is fuelled by the wide variety of the explicit and tacit knowledge (discussed earlier) that each member contributes to the community. Hui refers also to her role in certain aspects of the community by referring to group work in the community:

> "As the adviser to the spokesperson of the group, I do not feel confident to speak up for my group, but I do think that my role as adviser is important." (Interview, end of second term)

An academic community likely experiences difficulties in the way engagement unfolds. If, as Hui described, there is not enough opportunity for discussion, the knowledge development may be cut short before it could take advantage of the resources that the members of the group, as a whole, represent. The argument that engagement in practice thrives on diversity and not just on homogeneity (Wenger 1998) supports that time and

space are particularly important for developing and nurturing relationships in CoP, where mutual relationships are experienced differently. Community usually has a positive connotation. However, the relationships can be positive or negative, supportive or obstructive, motivating or demotivating, encouraging or daunting. Su mentioned that while she felt intimidated by dominant group members, she felt supported by fellow Asian students of the same cultural background. Similar comments were made anonymously by other international students in the short-answer section of the questionnaire distributed to the entire group of MA TESOL students. Comments read as follows:

> "Working in multinational groups is interesting but sometimes can cause some misunderstandings, particularly while analysing some tasks. It can be an obstacle." (International student, questionnaire)
>
> "Actually, I learned a lot among these international students." (International student, questionnaire)
>
> "Interesting to work in groups form various countries. Difficult when some try to impose their strong opinions." (International student, questionnaire)
>
> "It's also very great to work with someone who is from other countries. We learn things from each other and, most importantly, we are trained to be more flexible in all aspects in some ways." (International student, questionnaire)

Participants are connected to other members of the community in diverse and complex ways, where relationships can adopt many different shapes. In the empirical data above, these are mostly straightforward; however, in other interviews the complexity of the relationships and need for community maintenance became more obvious.

The work of "community maintenance" (Wenger 1998, p. 74) requires work and effort, but it is an essential part of any practice. Ling, for example, wanted to send Christmas cards to friends in her class as well as to people she admired. By acknowledging other people's effort Ling strengthens the communal spirit. There are various roles assigned to people, or people themselves may take on a function in the community. These roles may be organisational or practical, for instance through individuals in class who reliably remind others of work due, homework to be done, phone calls to be made, and books to be borrowed from the library before it closes. Although the maintenance work is not necessarily recognised by the other group members, it is necessary to transform "mutual engagement into a community of practice" (Wenger 1998, p. 74).

Joint enterprise

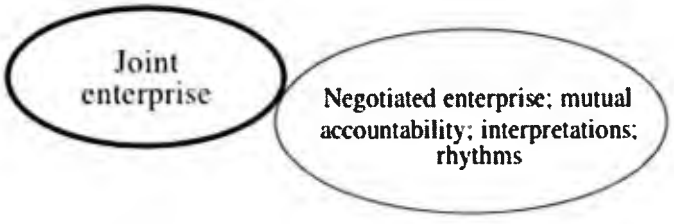

Figure 19: Joint Enterprise in detail (Wenger 1998, p. 73)

Mutual engagement is about building norms and relationships in the community. The construct of a joint enterprise relates to how, through their interactions, community participants create a shared understanding of what ties them together. Much like the norms, this common understanding is the subject of on-going negotiation by community members.

A joint enterprise is the core and keeps a community of practice together through solving differences in opinion etc. as part of the development of a shared understanding. MA TESOL students are engaged in the joint enterprise of learning in which it is important to find a common way to learn together, to coordinate the different goals and deal with differences.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, an enterprise is also shaped by mutual accountability.

> These relations of accountability include what matters and what does not, what is important and why it is important, what to do and what not to do, what to pay attention to and what to ignore, what to talk about and what to leave unsaid, what to justify and what to take for granted, what to display and what to withhold, when actions and artefacts are good enough and when they need improvement or refinement (Wenger 1998, p. 81).

This mutual accountability refers to the collective responsibility of the community towards generating results and achieving success (Katzenbach and Smith 1993). For the MA TESOL students, this mutual accountability suggests that individuals not only accept

their individual roles within the community, but also their responsibility to work towards a common purpose to create a supportive learning environment.

In the student community of the MA TESOL mutual accountability exists among participants. As we heard from Su, European and native speakers did not often provide positive, supporting experience in group work. Ling shared some of Su's experiences, but she also had examples of very good collaboration between European and Asian students.

> "There are native speakers who lead the discussions and only discuss with other native speakers. We will never know what they are talking about. Because we did not understand the step between the basics and the advanced and they did not take us along. I like Tania (a native speaker) a lot because she cares about my feelings; she asks 'Do you understand? Are you ok? You don't say so much today, What do you think?'." (Interview, end of second term)

Tania demonstrates how mutual accountability can be exercised by checking on her group members, making sure they are ok, and ensuring they can follow the discussion. Here it becomes obvious how one person can change the dynamics of the class. In this case Tania's role enabled the international students to be mutually engaged in the shared enterprise of learning. Ling reported only her side of the relationship, but one may assume that it is mutual.

Suyoung's example describes the experience of being in a study group with European students meeting outside of class time:

> "In my study group there were four European students. We discussed a lot what the words mean and I think they got bored and three European students left. One English student stayed and she became kind of teacher and that was ok. But only one session was like that and then we changed to be fairer to her. Everybody prepared just a few pages of the assigned readings and than explained to the rest what it is about and prepared a handout. So that works so that she does not have to teach all the time. I can make good progress if I listen to them. Before I go to my study group I practice my presentation at home. For international students it is really necessary." (Interview, end of first term)

Ling commented on the same study group.

> Ling: "My life was so sad because I studied too much. Now I joined a study group and life is getting better. We share the workload, everybody prepares a summary and a handout for everybody, after the discussion we feel clear about it; collaborative learning helps a lot. When we need to present to other people in the study group sometimes it's good and sometimes really bad. Last week I did a lousy job because I could not make myself clear to other people."

Interviewer: "Did you really understand the text?"

Ling: "No, not at all, but I could not understand even though I studied hard, that's why it did not work. I really feel sorry for them, they all prepared so well and they didn't get anything from me. But this week I got a better part to prepare and I enjoyed that. I could explain to other people. We also have a plan to go out and celebrate next week. We feel so good, so happy, that we don't have to read this week; every week we suffered until now." (Interview, end of first term)

Suyoung describes how the study group communally negotiated the practice they wanted to pursue. She explained how the first session influenced the negotiation of the joint enterprise with respect to the role of the native speaker. The heterogeneity of the community here is used as an advantage; the students take over responsibility for a certain part of the reading and they are also accountable for that part. Ling regretted that she could not better present her part and she was aware that she had disappointed her group. She felt the pressure of being held accountable and knew that she had not fulfilled the expectations of her group.

Shared repertoire

Mutual engagement refers to how members establish norms and build collaborative relationships as the basis of the social fabric on which the community develops. A joint enterprise relates to how participants build a mutual accountability and a collective responsibility of the community towards generating results and achieving success.

The remaining element that defines the structure of a community of practice relates to how participants co-construct a shared repertoire of communal resources that are employed in the pursuit of their joint enterprise (see Figure 20).

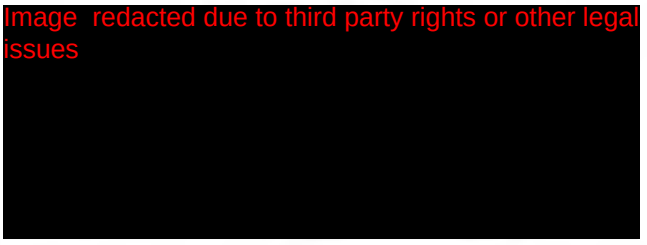

Figure 20: Shared Repertoire in detail (Wenger 1998, p. 73)

A shared repertoire then refers to a pool of resources for negotiating meaning. This pool of resources is filled over time, sometimes as "by-products" of literal and symbolic

meanings and tools, that "belong to the practice of a community pursuing an enterprise" (Wenger 1998, p. 82). The repertoire accordingly reflects a history of mutual engagement and it remains inherently ambiguous (Wenger 1998, p. 83).

The international students in the previous section commented positively on their experiences in their study group. They actively participated in a group and were aware of why the reading was divided among the students. They were also aware of why each of them had to prepare their own part. This strategy developed because it enabled the students to cope with the heavy workload and it facilitated learning. Each person in the group was mutually engaged in the design of the programme for the study group and was able to relate to it.

The repertoire of a practice remains, according to Wenger, inherently ambiguous. This implies that, for example, the learning strategy applied in the study group can be used as a resource in other situations and the meaning in the new situation has to be renegotiated again. Ambiguity represents the re-negotiability of an element of the repertoire that allows the element to be meaningful and relevant in a new situation. For instance, international students in the pre-sessional course had acquired this specific learning strategy of shared reading and introduced it to the members of their first-term study group. In my researcher's diary, I commented on the interview with Suyoung:

> Students draw on their experience from the pre-sessional course, apply the shared reading strategy they learned and take a burden off the native speakers. They added a written summary, which each person had to write for their section of the reading. In case that they do not present well enough, at least the reading is available to their group members. (Researcher's diary, middle of first term)

It is interesting to observe how this element of the repertoire is renegotiated between the new members. The students added a feature to the element from the repertoire, because in the pre-sessional course they were not asked to provide a written summary for their group members. Wenger highlights "the real problems of communication and design then is to situate ambiguity in the context of a history of mutual engagement that is rich enough to yield an opportunity for negotiation" (Wenger 1998, p. 84). In the example of the study group, the native speaker of the group took on the role of a teacher, but the other students in the group were not satisfied with this arrangement. Therefore, the arrangements were renegotiated and probably changed a few times. This is a good example of the resourcefulness of mutual engagement. Communication took place to address the problem

of the different roles of each member and members agreed that mutual engagement was necessary. The ambiguity of the learning strategy as an element was used to negotiate new and meaningful ways of implementing the strategy.

The repertoire contains various elements, including words, gestures, routines, ways of doing things, etc. Words are a strong element, especially in the context of international students. Usually language issues were addressed by students in the interviews only when the students could not follow the conversations or had problems understanding their content. These kinds of problems need to be addressed and "resolved only when [they] interfere with mutual engagement" (Wenger 1998, p. 84). From the previous examples one can see how the problem of not understanding may interfere with participation, and therefore with mutual engagement. It also becomes obvious that the problem does not have to be addressed by the person who does not understand, other group members may address it as well. In the case of Ling and Tania, Tania as a native-speaker checked on Ling. She enabled learning for her group member, even though she was the only person of the group paying attention to Ling's silence. The two of them solved the problem through mutual agreement.

Participants often commented on the shared repertoire as something they were not a part of and that they did not understand. Concepts, routines, and words that are not defined in the group through mutual engagement emphasise the potential non-membership in a community. I address the membership issue at a later stage, in connection with identity. Aside from the historical non-participation in the negotiation, ambiguity should be regarded as an enabling force within the system. If ambiguity is addressed, it does not only allow to resolve a problem; it even allows for new meaning to develop, and it is a driving force in the production of new meaning. If, however, it is not addressed, meaning making is deprived of this essential element of CoP.

At the beginning of the section on community, three areas are identified. These are: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Having discussed each of these in detail, and having shed some light on the connections between them, I would like to give emphasis to the problem that is caused if the repertoire of the community is not fully shared by all members. Again, words and concepts are essential, particularly in their negotiated meaning. If words come with a certain connotation, European group members would likely agree on these connotations without discussing them. These connotations cannot be taken for granted, though, when group members from other cultures are

involved. If participants do not have access to the elements of the repertoire, they cannot mutually engage and the enterprise will be jeopardised. If group members are left out, the enterprise is no longer a joint enterprise. The community, in this case, misses out on the contribution of these members. In addition, the negotiations of the repertoire are cut short so that the occasions for the production of new meanings during these negotiations are reduced.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, the features of a community of practice were analysed. I have examined practice, meaning and community. It started out with an outline of how the international EFL students' practices changed from a context embedded, cognitively undemanding pre-sessional course to a cognitively demanding and context reduced MA TESOL programme. The chapter then proceeded to examine practice, and analysed how not only tacit but also explicit practices were experienced as difficult to acquire by international EFL students. It stressed the function of language in practice, as well as the influence of prior knowledge on the learning experience. A look at meaning, or learning as experience, enabled the analysis of participation and reification. In the last section the interplay of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire within a community was discussed.

A constant theme throughout the discussion of practice has been human relationships as "interactions that take place between students and teachers and among students [that] are more central to student success than any method for teaching [...]" (Cummins 1996, p. 1). This comment summarises the insights gained in this chapter. Legitimate Peripheral Participation allows for the learning of tacit and explicit knowledge. Meaning making takes place through a balance of participation and reification, and the negotiation of a joint enterprise, mutual belonging and shared repertoire are influential community dimension for second academic culture acquisition in the MA TESOL.

Identity, as another very important CoP construct, is such an essential part of the international student experience, because it relates to each of the three aspects discussed in this chapter. Identity is part of how we do things, it is part of how we participate and through which meaning making takes place, and analysing the interconnections between practice and identity forms the core of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Analysis of identity – learning as becoming

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the level of the identity as the important continuation of the analysis of practice from the previous chapter. The main premise is that a dual relationship exists between the two, one in which practice informs identity and identity informs practice, as discussed in section 1. This section looks in more detail at how identity matters as a negotiated experience of self, as community membership, as learning trajectory and as the nexus of multi-membership. Together, these subsections help connect practice to identity. In the subsequent section, I discuss the constructs of participation (and non-participation) as formative elements of identity development, and analyse how the participants of the MA TESOL programme experienced the modes of belonging (engagement, imagination and alignment). Informed by these identity components, the last section looks at how identification and negotiability across the different modes of belonging shape forms of community membership and ownership of meaning, each respectively affecting communities and economies of meaning.

A dual relation between practice and identity

The value of studying abroad and gaining new experiences has been recognised for many years, as evident by the student mobility statistics introduced in chapter 1 in general and the increasing focus on enrolment of international students in the MA TESOL programme in particular. But studying abroad has been considered not only invaluable for developing a well-rounded education but also important for students' personal development. This chapter provides the identity perspective to the practice discussed in the previous topic. For this reason, cross-references and comparisons to the content from the previous chapter help illustrate the duality of practice and identity, where one is the formative context of the other, and where understanding both is essential for understanding the international student experience in the MA TESOL. While Chapter 5 examined practice as a matter of negotiating meaning through participation and reification, this chapter analyses how identities take shape as negotiated experiences of selves.

As scholars agree that "identity work occurs in the company of others" (Block 2007, p. 27), they give weight to the argument that communities of practice shape the identities of

individual students, which in turn shape the overall community of practice. In the previous chapter, practice was analysed through dimensions of a community shaped by mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. This chapter extends this perspective by looking at the importance of membership, and multi-membership, for identity.

Similarly, the previous chapter looked at practice through a shared history of learning. This chapter examines identity as a learning trajectory that occupies a central position in the discussion of social learning. In this context, it must be seen as a feature that remains fluid at all times, constantly influenced by the individuals as well as by the community. "What else is an identity but the performances, verbally and nonverbally, of a possible constellation of attitudes, beliefs, and values that has a recognizable coherence by the criteria of some community?" (Lemke 2002, p. 72). The aspect of recognizable coherence is taken up by other researchers, for example by Butler (2004), who discusses 'norms of recognition', which are norms that allow us to be 'intelligible' to others and to "ascribe to us a particular identity or subject position" (Block 2007, p. 27). Ochs highlights that "the contextual dimension of social identity comprises a range of social personae, including, for example, social roles, statuses, and relationships, as well as community, institutional, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, and other group identities" (2002, p. 109). Several of these aspects have been discussed in the previous chapter, for example through tightly interweaving roles and community factors. Here, the focus is placed on the learning trajectories of the individual's identity (see Figure 21).

Practice	shapes	**Identity**
Negotiation of meaning	shapes	Negotiated experience of self
Community	shapes	Membership
Shared history of learning	shapes	Learning trajectory
Boundary maintenance	shapes	Nexus of multi-membership

Figure 21: Parallels between practice and identity (adapted from Wenger 1998, p. 150)

Applying the "identity lens" is of great importance since many parallels exist between practice and identity. Practice, meaning and community are influenced and shaped by

identity and, vice versa, these aspects shape identity. Identity formation is therefore at the core of a CoP, and is seen as a fluid construct that reacts with practice in an on-going process. The analytical focus of this chapter is therefore on how a change in identity occurs when international students enter into this maze of practices that shape their new community and their second academic culture (and its acquisition) during the MA TESOL programme.

Identity as negotiated experience of self

The previous chapter discussed practice through the negotiation of meaning in terms of participation and reification. This chapter suggests that the ability to reflect and to evaluate critically the host as well as the home culture after a period abroad has strong implications on how students' identities take shape as negotiated experiences, as "socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language" (Block 2007, p. 27). The "identity lens" allows a focus on how the negotiation of meaning recurs in the negotiated experience of self.

> In the same way that meaning exists in its negotiation, identity exists – not as an object in and of itself – but in the constant work of negotiating the self. It is in this cascading interplay of participation and reification that our experience of life becomes one of identity, and indeed of human existence and consciousness (Wenger 1998, p. 151).

Complicating the process of second academic culture acquisition is the fact that newcomers, who desire to participate in the community, often expect that access will be immediately available to them. However, the MA TESOL is a unique community setting, where all students in the programme are newcomers. From an identity formation perspective, it might therefore be more appropriate to refer to the participants of this study as sojourners. They arrive in the UK to take the MA programme and after eleven months they usually return to their home countries. This has important implications for how their selves develop as part of the identity argument. From a practice-perspective, this too has important consequences. At the end, they are certainly not newcomers anymore, but they are also not the old-timers that remain in the community and provide their expertise to then newly arriving students.

As they learned more about the content of the MA TESOL and the context of the second academic culture, the participants of this case provided contributions of many kinds to

their CoP. How their contributions were valued by the other members was important to them. In the context of practice, if their ideas were not heard, their ideas could not be reified. From an identity perspective, the data showed that the experience of not being able to voice an opinion in the new academic context created a feeling of uneasiness. Su explained:

> "If I do want to say something in my group and I don't get a chance to say it, it makes me feel like an outsider, someone who does not belong and is not wanted. This is a very different experience for me compared to my school at home. I was always the first to answer a question or to volunteer for something and I felt good." (Interview, end of first term)

It is frequently assumed that this inability to speak in the SAC context is caused by language difficulties, but Su and Xiao had attended an English medium university in Macao. Both students stressed that the level of comfort in the classroom and with their classmates mattered for their participation. In both cases it was not the second language setting that caused them difficulty, but the setting in the second academic culture, the new environment, and the "intimidating" classmates. Both students described how they negotiated their participation, and therefore the 'self', in different course modules. The fact that the self needs to be negotiated in every module of the programme forms a key issue in understanding identity in the context of communities of practice. Giddens (1979), as quoted by Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 53), argues against the popular idea of static identity by promoting its fluid and flexible nature. Lave and Wenger (1991) add that the individual and his or her identity are negotiated by factors that are neither private nor public; they are monitored and influenced constantly. As a consequence, identity is not only manipulated by previous experiences but also by one's current surroundings. Therefore, identity remains in constant flux, as "long term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991, p. 53). Accordingly, the experiences made in one MA TESOL module will be manifested in each student's identity, and while the experiences can be transferred to another course module, identity needs to be newly negotiated.

Xiao describes her experience in Jill's class:

> "I enjoy working in Jill's class since I feel I know something about the topic and I have always something to say. However, once I show up for the research seminar on Wednesday night, I feel so lost and I often do not know why I go there; I don't understand anything anyways and need to read up on it afterwards." (Interview, end of first term)

The research seminar follows a lecture style whereas Jill's class is very interactive and stresses students' prior knowledge, acknowledges their cultural knowledge, and Jill and the other students demonstrate an interest in each other's background experiences.

Cummins talks about the classroom as a place where a community of sharing is being created, where "identity is being negotiated in ways that motivate students to express their growing sense of self and participate actively in the learning process" (1996, p. 78), but this does not explain how tensions between classrooms (and identities) develop, and how such developments are both difficult but also necessary for the negotiation and acquisition of a second academic culture at the MA TESOL. Cummins' notion of a growing sense of 'self' is a useful terminology. For the international EFL students, this growing sense of self relates to the trajectory of an identity of a sojourner student to one who is recognised as competent member within the community of practice.

Identity as community membership

Chapter 5 examined practice through community dimensions of mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. This chapter looks at the importance of membership for identity, and indirectly for practice. Students obtain membership in a community through participation as newcomers with the goal of becoming recognised by other members of their community as 'competent':

> When we are with a community of practice of which we are a full member, we are in familiar territory. We can handle ourselves competently. We experience competence and we are recognised as competent. We know how to engage with others. We understand why they do what they do because we understand their enterprise to which participants are accountable. Moreover, we share the resources they use to communicate and go about their activities (Wenger 1998, p. 152).

Wenger describes the usual student experience at a home university. From the data of this study, it emerged that in their AC1, students had achieved that level of competence and membership. For instance, Suyoung recollects that in Korea her professor came to her after a class session and asked her to elaborate more on one specific topic she mentioned in her exam. This experience made her feel:

> "...very special and ever since I was very interested in this subject matter." (Interview, beginning of first term)

From my data analysis I could see that students, after their first or second term at PRC, were able to experience the positive impact of competence in study groups that were organised by students themselves. This was evident, as well, in group-work. However, even there, although they had experienced membership in one seminar or another, or in one study group or another, students may not have become full members of their academic community.

Encountering the unaccustomed

In the context of first and second academic culture, it is likely that students experience the opposite of being recognised as competent. When faced with different practices, instead of the feeling of competence that was part of their identity in their AC1, the feeling of incompetence has an adverse effect on their identity trajectory. At PRC, "the boundaries of [their] community manifest as a lack of competence along the three dimensions" (Wenger 1998, p. 153) of mutuality of engagement, accountability to an enterprise, and negotiability of a repertoire.

> We do not quite know how to engage with others. We do not understand the subtleties of the enterprise as the community has defined it. We lack the shared references that participants refer to. Our non-membership shapes our identities through our confrontation with the unfamiliar. (Wenger 1998, p. 153)

Encounters with the unaccustomed were reported, or at least mentioned, by every one of the participants. As the following examples show, instances of not being fully competent were at times seen as favourable, but generally regarded as negative from learning, community and second academic culture perspectives:

> "Learning on the MA TESOL is very different from the learning way I am used to, I find it beneficial to take part in various discussions." (International student, questionnaire)

> "In Japanese classrooms, we listen to the lecture quietly and we do not ask questions in front of classes. We do not have a discussion. So it's difficult for me to do discussion." (International student, questionnaire)

Students complained and stressed their experience of not understanding the conventions, the contexts, and the way communication develops. Competence and the associated membership in a community develop slowly and the reasons for becoming more competent are manifold. In our last interview, Xiao wished to discuss her dissertation again, this time it was not in relation to her personal tutor but in relation to international

students and supervisors. She explained that the first time she met her supervisor she could not speak and was very insecure because he rushed in and did not have a lot of time:

> "I could not say anything, I could not speak at all. He seemed so strict, so annoyed by having to come in for the supervision." (Interview, end of first term)

But in one of our later interviews she described her experience this way:

> "One good thing is now when I talk with my supervisor I can speak ok. Much, much better and at long last." (Interview, end of second term)

I asked how that happened and she explained:

> "My supervisor arrived late last time for the meeting, so for that reason I was sitting in a room, very calm. Before he arrived I got time to tidy up my mind and than I have gone through this great effort and calm situation before he arrived and because, I think, he was late he was nicer so he smiled more and made funny jokes so making the atmosphere more relaxing. I was more prepared and sent him the things to discuss for that meeting and I got prepared and read some books so for that reason I think I can speak because I have some things on my mind. I didn't understand why, but suddenly I was ok to talk to him." (Interview, end of second term)

Xiao had found a way to talk to her supervisor. She felt more competent than she had in previous meetings. Xiao felt competent about what she had prepared, which enabled her to talk to her supervisor without anxiety. She was even able to discuss issues from his area of expertise without feeling obstructed by the hierarchical difference.

I address the issue of social power at the end of this chapter, within the context of identification and negotiability, but it is important at this point to stress that power relations are important markers of identity and of being recognised as competent. In our final interview Xiao analysed the issue of supervision again, sublimely addressing issues of power and difference in understanding the role of a supervisor with a focus on competence.

> "In terms of Asian culture I think if students are not strong minded enough they will do what their supervisor wants them to do instead of what they really want to do. One thing is, I feel, many of them feel not confident to negotiate with the supervisor and they have to be more prepared, at least to be told. I don't know now how but something has to be done to make the best use of the supervisor." (Interview, third term)

I asked Xiao whether she thought it had not been made explicit enough that students could negotiate with supervisors. She answered:

> "Yes, I knew that before but now I understand that the role of the supervisor is to make what I want work, and not I say one hundred things and let him pick one thing that works. That is one thing I have learned." (Interview, third term)

Xiao's statement was very important, especially in comparison to her previous interviews. She categorised Asian students but separates her self from "them" by saying that while she has learned to be strong-minded, most Asian students had not. They must be more prepared. Xiao's identity had developed and changed. She had become competent, confident, and was recognised by others for her success. In another interview, Saori, from Japan, referred to Xiao as an "A" student who had done things right. Saori tried to learn from her as a role model. She began to compare what Xiao was doing to what she was doing herself.

The experiences of the international EFL students relate to competence and membership on a number of levels. Competence itself is a complex phenomenon as it relates to CoPs. It includes mastering skills (the practice) in a fairly objective fashion, but also relates to feeling competent (as a measure of identity), and being regarded or recognised as competent by community members. The membership itself appears to carry a lot of weight, too. International EFL students worked hard to gain membership based on competence within their EFL community, but also within the wider community at the MA TESOL. The apparent hierarchy within these communities seems to matter, too, but it has to be taken in consideration that it is not possible to be intensely involved in many communities simultaneously. In this case, the learning trajectory of the individual student suggests that once a student is a competent member of the MA TESOL community, she is no longer intensely involved in the community of international EFL students.

Identity as learning trajectory

The topic of practice was looked at as a shared history of learning in the previous chapter. For the identity perspective of this chapter, it is crucial to keep in mind that the participants of this study, and their identities, were under enormous pressure during the MA TESOL. Identity in practice in this chapter has so far been described as being in constant flux. If we participate in various forms, and with various levels of intensity of involvement in different communities of practice, these different types of participation

form a trajectory along which our identity develops. Since identity develops constantly, our trajectories cannot be seen as fixed courses either. For instance, the acquisition (learning) trajectory of the international EFL students' second academic culture and their identity formation were shaped by the MA TESOL experience and the existence of their AC1. Their learning trajectories describe a continuous motion that gathers momentum or slows down at times. They generally do not follow a predestined path; in fact, students' trajectories spanned a wide range of identity influencing routes. Their motivation, for instance, was important for their identity development and participation in the community. While a few participants struggled during the course of their programme and just wanted to pass (e.g., Saori and Su), other students aimed for excellence (e.g., Xiao and Hui). "(T)hese different trajectories give them very different perspectives on their participation and identities at work" (Wenger 1998, p. 154).

Upon arrival, the participants were newcomers to a community. Although the community did not exist previously, the structures of the programme were already in place and were tightly connected to the academic community. At the beginning of the course, the newcomers were on an inbound trajectory, with their "identities invested in their future participation, even though their present participation may be peripheral" (1998, p. 154). Hui's learning trajectory is described by herself in a different context. When asked "What did you think when your employer send you to study in the UK?" at the beginning of the first term, she replied:

> Hui: "When I was sent by my employer it was quite clear that I needed to be a very good student. I also knew that I needed to learn the ways of Western universities. So my goals were to study hard and be involved so that I could learn about everything else." (Interview, end of first term)

In the final interview she commented:

> "I had hoped to be more involved with faculty, but otherwise I achieved my goals." (Interview, end of third term)

My observation notes show that Hui managed to be engaged in almost all group work discussions, but not so much in whole class discussions. She looked for opportunities to speak to faculty outside of the classroom in office hours and one tutor commented:

> "Hui is extremely bright and is doing very well in my class." (Interview, end of first term)

Her work was recognised and her inbound learning trajectory will likely extend even beyond the MA TESOL course in her subsequent work-life in China. The contrary, however, is also possible. Sometimes the students would undertake long-term peripheral trajectories out of necessity or out of choice. An example of a peripheral trajectory would be the involvement of some students in CALS academic writing workshops. Suyoung commented:

> "I really like the writing workshop. It helps me a lot." (Interview, beginning of first term)

Like Suyoung, many students were very enthusiastic at the beginning and were on an inbound trajectory for the CALS writing workshop community. After a while, however, these students realised that they could only ever be involved on the periphery because their MA TESOL community took up most of their time. Suyoung noted:

> "I know I should put more work in for [the] writing workshop but I have too much work to do for my other classes." (Interview, end of first term)

This conflict of involvement resulted in peripheral participation out of necessity. Other students chose to be only moderately involved in some group-work because they felt excluded by other study group members. In my observation notes this can be traced, too:

> Group work- Hui, Saori, 4 native speakers. Hui tries to speak several times but one male home student is extremely dominant and she stops trying. Saori did not speak at all. (Observation notes, beginning of first term)

In these and similar situations the effect of not being recognised as competent results in peripheral participation out of choice. Some students did not feel competent and were struggling in most classes and groups. Saori, for example, who participated peripherally in most groups, commented:

> "I can't talk, I do not always understand the concepts and theories so I just listen [to] other[s]." (Interview, end of first term)

The difference between Hui's and Saori's experience lies in the unsuccessful attempt versus not attempting at all, which leads to two very different interpretations of peripheral participation out of choice. For Saori, the impact of her AC1 influences her participation and guides her to peripherality whereas Hui's pervious experience as a university instructor strengthens her desire to participate. In Hui's case, accepting peripherality is

related to her AC1, in which "conflict is being avoided and so is controversy wherever possible" (Hui, interview, end of second term).

Overall, the participants struggled to apprehend new situations, concepts, ideas, and working techniques to advance on their chosen trajectory. "Understanding something new is not just a local act of learning. Rather, each is an event on a trajectory through which they give meaning to their engagement in practice in terms of the identity they are developing" (Wenger 1998, p. 155). The empirical data showed many examples of how students' second academic culture acquisition trajectories developed in sequences of events. Xiao, for instance managed to advance the relationship to her supervisor from anxious to confident. However, others needed longer and relied more on role models to understand the new academic culture. Without guidance, through community work or specific mentors, they may have not reached the same level of familiarity with the new academic culture, or at least not within the same time period. From the data it was evident that trajectories develop in different directions, with some leading more or less directly to the centre of the CoP while others continue to move along the periphery.

Identity as nexus of multi-membership

"Our membership in any community of practice is only a part of our identity" (Wenger 1998, p. 158). Some international students who lived in residence, for instance, had dinner together, participated in bible groups or worked part-time. However, in many instances international students had only a few communities in the host country, and the learning community of the MA TESOL was the most important community for them. In the discussion of identity it is not only the learning community that matters but also the combination of other communities and the learning community. Wenger explains: "An identity is thus more than just a single trajectory; instead, it should be viewed as a nexus of multi-membership" (1998, p. 159). The trajectory of an identity depends, then, on all the communities, not just the learning community. In addition, international EFL students remain members of previous communities, and their prior academic culture, in terms of their learning histories. This could be at their former university or work place. Each participant of this study had to tend to a nexus that required some work to reconcile different forms of membership. "In particular: [...] elements of one repertoire may be quite inappropriate, incomprehensible, or even offensive in another community" (Wenger

1998, p. 160), suggesting that there may be controversies that cannot be resolved and indicating that reconciliation is an ongoing process.

Reconciliation takes place through mutual engagement, and it can be observed in various levels of involvement. Mutual engagement can also exist in a community that is defined in a wider sense. Below, Xiao uses a wide range of support:

> I came here for the dissertation because I already had written a report for my last degree. When I saw my personal tutor he asked me a few questions, regarding my teaching experience, degrees and so on. He came to the conclusion that my knowledge was not very wide and my teaching experience very limited, so he suggested that I should write a report and take another class in the summer to widen my horizon. I am still thinking can one more module widen my horizon? I have done reports before and I asked my professor in Macao for advice, because they have known me for four years. They asked me to choose for myself. (Interview, end of second term)

Xiao did not rely solely on her PRC tutor but asked for help from her former professors as well. She found additional support from sources she trusted more. This example shows that reconciliation is not always harmonious and that every time we make a decision we take a stance towards the acute situation. The various memberships coexist with each other and any kind of coexistence requires reconciliation, whether harmonious or not. Reconciliation, to a large extent, takes place as social work and, therefore, multi-membership is also categorised as such. However, the nexus of these multi-memberships highlights the personal notion of identity, because the work of reconciliation is unique to each person. For the participants reconciliation implies managing AC1 and SAC in a manner that enables them to recognise differences and to adapt accordingly. The experience of international students must reconcile often-contrary positions of their AC1 and SAC, and the way the student is able to combine these showcases identity formation and stresses the individuality of identity formation. Identity is always a result of various factors that are reconciled in a distinctive, individual way.

An identity, even though aspects of it might be formed in a specific community of practice, is not just local to that community. In a community of practice a person tries to envision how this practice fits into a larger scheme. The omnipresence of both local and global mindsets, and their interplay, shape identity in practice. It matters, for example, how the degree awarded from the host university is received in the labour market in the home country and how the learning fits into the larger picture of the students' perspective. It is important, then, that the nexus of multi-membership needs to incorporate the

different memberships, experiences, and trajectories of the students, and, on a slightly more abstract level, the notion of local and global perspectives.

So far this discussion has addressed three aspects of identity in practice. The first was the necessity of being recognised as competent. The second aspect was the importance of learning trajectories for the development of identity. The final aspect discussed was the work of reconciliation and the impact of the local and the global on the nexus of multi-membership. All these aspects affect identity and the reflection on our experiences keep identity flexible and in constant flux.

Section summary

Learning consists not only of memorising and the ongoing acquisition of new factual knowledge and skills, it "transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity" (Wenger 1998, p. 215). Other authors, such as Lea (1998) and Sternglass (2004), addressed the impact on the students' learning experience and identity of learning how to write in an academic style; however, they only discussed the impact on identity for individual students, not as members of communities. In this study of the MA TESOL context, learning that took place in CoPs developed through the experience which newcomers bring to the competence already anchored in the MA TESOL programme. This is an interesting alternative to the approach taken by Wenger, where newcomers are primarily learners, but not teachers. The international students in this study bring a wealth of experience from the different communities and academic cultures they were previously involved in. It seems that as sojourners, they all have identities of newcomers and old-timers at the same time.

Focusing on the experience aspect of a well-functioning learning community it may be necessary to provide alternative forms of participation for learning. As expressed explicitly by the majority of the participants in this study, participation matters for their learning experience and their SAC acquisition. In a flexible learning community with a strong core, a variety of patterns of participation is possible. The strong core will sustain the community and its changing identity.

Aspects of identity are expressed in trajectories, not necessarily in the personal learning trajectory, but in the trajectories the learning communities offer. Wenger stresses two aspects of identity in learning trajectories: First, the members' past is integrated into the community's past, which is possible for the acquisition of academic culture as long as

participants are given the opportunity to share their views and understandings with the rest of the community. Second, trajectories of participation are opened up to "place engagement in its practice in the context of a valued future" (Wenger 1998, p. 215). For the participants this implies that the practices of the SAC need to be viewed as part of completing the MA TESOL to, for example, gain meaningful employment.

The multi-membership of the members of a community can go unnoticed in a community if multi-membership is not encouraged by the practice of the community. Reconciliation as part of multi-membership is, then, only possible if it is enabled by a community aware of the problematic and difficult task that reconciliation might be for some of its members. A CoP that includes the nexus of multi-membership of its members into their endeavour allows the nexus to become part of the shared learning experience.

The nexus of multi-membership was important to the international students of this study because they were aiming to reconcile their memberships of their first academic communities (AC1) with the SAC of the MA TESOL. Instead, I often observed them as non-participants in seminars. Their explanation was that their views and their experience was of no interest and was not relevant to the discussion. Whether their impression was true or not is of little relevance. The fact that the participants of the study had the impression that their views and their nexus were not important caused enough doubt that these students would not participate in some of the discussions. If the learning community does not sufficiently provide opportunities for reconciliation of multi-membership and neglects to incorporate a growing percentage of the nexus of multi-membership, the learning communities bypass the enrichment of practice and the loyalty and commitment of the members of the CoP.

Participation and belonging

This section examines how identity shapes practice (and vice versa) through the relationship of participation and non-participation and through different modes of belonging. Each part has significant implications for learning and for the international EFL student experience in the MA TESOL programme.

Identities of participation and non-participation

As argued throughout this chapter, identity is a core element of community work. In the context of community involvement, the degrees to which individuals participate and belong clearly matter. But so does the degree to which individuals in the community do not participate, as "we not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through the practices we do not engage in" (Wenger, 1998, p. 164). This suggests that both participation and non-participation play an important role, not only as stand-alone constructs but more importantly as dependent on each other. In this context, "non-participation, in a reverse kind of fashion is as much a source of identity as participation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 164). Students' identities, and their relations within their CoP are therefore shaped by the combination of their participation and non-participation within the community.

Identities of participation and non-participation depend on the situatedness, or position, of the individual within the community. The core argument posits that "in a landscape defined by boundaries and peripheries, a coherent identity is of necessity a mixture of being in and being out" (Wenger 2007, p. 165), and suggests that (non-)participation only matters significantly when it concerns communities that are desirable for individuals. For the international EFL students, there are plenty of CoPs that relate to practices that are unimportant to them and as a result have no implications on their identities. The MA TESOL community, however, is possibly the most important community for the acquisition of the second academic culture, and the degree to which the students' participation and non-participation relate to each other matters a great deal.

In this sense, where they are located within the community plays an important role. Communities can be compared to concentric circles, the largest of which would be the outer boundary of the community. Within the boundary is the margin, followed by the periphery and the core. Where students in a community are located depends solely on how their participation, or non-participation, changes over time as a result of their peripheral and marginal interaction engagement with the community.

Peripherality, in this context denotes limited membership in a CoP, where "some degree of non-participation is necessary to enable a kind of participation that is less than full. Here, it is the participation aspect that dominates and defines non-participation as an enabling factor of participation" (Wenger 1998, p. 165). Peripherality can develop in two trajectories; one trajectory sees peripherality as the starting point for an inbound

trajectory (for full participation), the other trajectory remains at the periphery but is an enabling form of non-participation. There are a variety of causes for peripheral non-participation. As we saw in the previous section, multi-membership might be one reason for non-participation in one CoP because the practice in question might conflict with the practice of another CoP. A further reason may be that an international student is just acquiring the repertoire of the CoP and that acquisition takes time.

The student, however, is on an inbound trajectory. Overall, peripherality has a positive connotation since non-participation contributes to the learning trajectory as long as non-participation and participation "interact to define each other" (Wenger 2007, p. 165). For instance, when new arrivals do not comprehend how others collaborate in the MA TESOL, this clearly impacts their participation in the programme. However, their non-participation is an opportunity for learning, leading hopefully to full participation in the near future.

In contrast to peripherality there is *marginality*, which has a negative connotation. Marginality is "a form of non-participation [that] prevents full participation. Here, it is the non-participation aspect that dominates and comes to define a restricted form of participation" (Wenger 1998, p. 166). Non-participation is regarded as problematic as it leads to a marginal position or, on an outbound trajectory, it leads to non-membership.

It is interesting in the case of the participants of this study to take a closer look at the reasons for non-participation and at the various levels of social relations involved. Wenger discusses three main sources for non-participation, namely trajectories with respect to specific communities of practice (where individuals remain in a marginal position in the community, for instance based on age compared to others), boundary relations and the demands of multimembership (where communities are defined in contrast to others), and the position of communities within broader constellations of practice (where the community in question might be in a marginal position related to other communities or institutional arrangements). In this section I look closely at the boundary relations that featured strongly in the empirical data, the three narratives of non-participation based on Su's, Xiao's and Hui's experience.

Su depicted herself as an Asian student who had difficulties participating in groups where English or European students were present. She explained that the other students' English was usually better and they also understand each other's ideas and concepts more easily. Xiao addressed problems of Asian students from a more distant perspective, stressing that

she was no longer a part of the Asian student community. Both students displayed specific social relations where boundaries between existing CoPs lead to dual identities of participation in one and non-participation in the other community. The defining feature of one group is opposing that of the other group and marginalisation is unavoidable. An example that outlines this problem is that one cannot be a vegetarian and a carnivore at the same time; boundary crossing becomes almost impossible. In Su's case she felt part of the CoP when she worked with non-native speakers, but it was impossible to be an active group member when there were European, or native-English speakers in her group. Considering the sojourner nature of Su's time abroad she was unable to adapt to her European classmates and start participating in this new environment, she was in a marginal position if she was in a group of European and/or native-English speakers. She became frustrated with herself and with her group members. For her identity, this meant that she became a marginalised student.

For Xiao, the problem arose in a different form. She was in-between both groups and spent most of her time working on her own. She was caught between her peers from Asia, some of whom she had known prior to her arrival in the UK, and her 'new' peers of native-speakers. For a period of time, Xiao was caught in the periphery of both groups. However, this was only an interim state because her trajectory was quite clear. She wanted to participate in the new community, while not abruptly breaking the ties with her Asian peers.

The coexistence of participation and non-participation is present not only within CoPs, but it is also prevailing in practices that vary between previous CoPs. Hui, who is from China, experienced difficulties understanding the rules of plagiarism. In a discussion it became apparent that, for her, anything that had been published and was publicly available was communal property. Although she followed the rules of the Western world and acknowledged her sources carefully, she was still not convinced that the Western practice was correct. She felt torn between participation and non-participation, and the coexistence of the two practices was not being negotiated, but she had to obey the Western rules and decided to participate. Hui was not free to choose or to negotiate in this case. By not following the rules she may have been expelled and this would have lead to non-participation.

In Hui's experience, the academic community at PRC was not interested in her views on plagiarism. However, for Hui resistance implied marginalisation on an outbound trajectory and due to various restraints she was not free to choose.

Even the acknowledgement of discussing different views on plagiarism would have likely satisfied her need for negotiation and would have allowed her to contrast the different views on plagiarism of her AC1 and SAC. However, this space for discussion was never provided. The recognition of previous experience by the teacher or the community is of utmost importance. In both cases the teaching and within that, the recognition of the difficulties, would have probably changed the students' experiences. It is not necessary to develop endless techniques and strategies for good teaching, as it is not the techniques, but the recognition of competence, that matters. Cummings elaborates on teaching techniques as follows:

> Much more fundamental is the recognition that human relationships are central to effective instruction. This is true for all students, but particularly so in the case of second language learners who may be trying to find their way in the borderlands between two cultures. They frequently do not have either the means or the desire to go back to their original culture but don't yet have the language skills or cultural understanding to participate fully in their new culture. For students to invest their sense of self, their identity, in acquiring their new language and participating actively in their new culture, they must experience positive and affirming interactions with members of that culture. (Cummins 1996, p. 73)

This quote precisely identifies the connection between recognising students as competent in their own cultural settings, and acknowledging this competence by bridging the differences between the two cultures. Students struggle to accept new cultures while suffering some loss of their previously acquired structures.

The examples from this study and from other research have shown that non-participation has various causes and, depending on the circumstances, affects identity differently. Non-participation can include slowly adapting to a new environment, experiencing little acceptance, and resistance. In some cases, students can make a conscious choice, as Hui did, to obey the rules or to marginalise themselves. Once again, non-participation is not problematic and it might even be a desired behaviour as a starting point. The trajectory makes the difference.

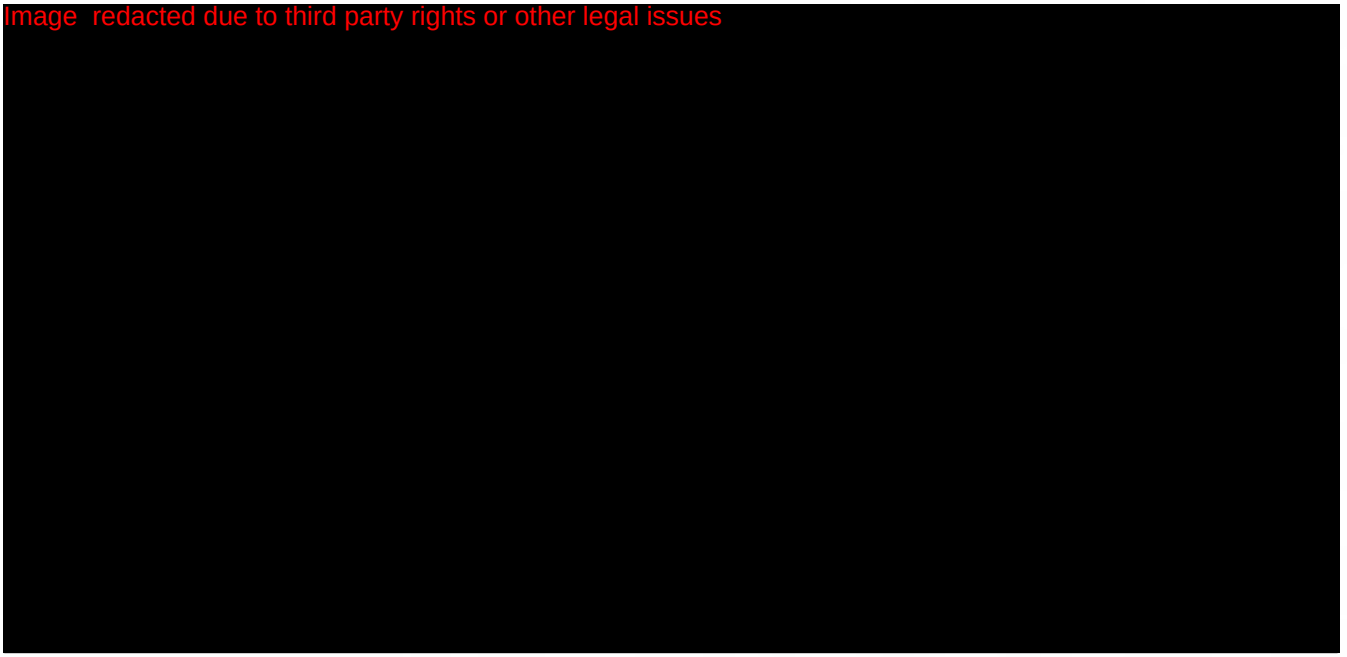

Figure 22: Modes of Belonging (Wenger 1998, p. 174)

To make sense of how identities take shape in a community context, participation and non-participation matters. But so does the way in which individuals belong to a community, beyond simply arguing that this depends on their engagement (Wenger, 1998). Looking at Xiao, Su, and Hui it is necessary to examine *how* they belonged to the community. Wenger's discussion of identity and belonging is helpful in understanding the various possibilities of belonging. Distinct modes of belonging, besides the already introduced notion of engagement, include imagination and alignment (Wenger 1998) (Figure 22).

Engagement

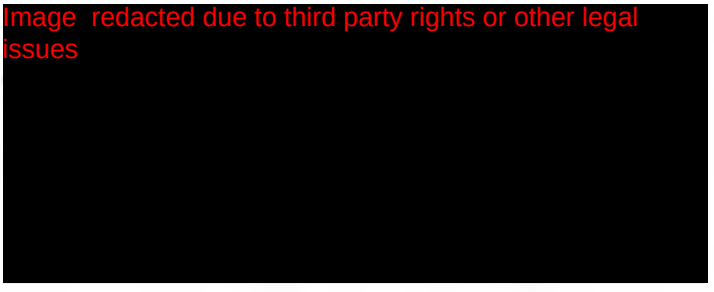

Figure 23: Engagement (Wenger 1998, p. 174)

The engagement of students in their CoP has been discussed in detail in the previous section on mutual engagement (in Chapter 5). In summary, it refers to how individuals

participate in the activities of their community together, how they form relationships and how these relations reflect who they are. This primarily means being actively involved in collective meaning negotiation, the formation of trajectories, and the development of shared histories of practice.

Imagination

Figure 24: Imagination (Wenger 1998, p. 174)

Imagination refers to the construction of an image for the community, and how one fits within it. Imagination allows one to create "pictures" within a larger context in order to be able "to reflect upon options and possibilities" (Wenger 2007, p. 227). This shapes the ways in which members will interpret their participation and influence within a community. Wenger gives a poignant example of two stonecutters to illustrate the notion of imagination. Both are asked what they are doing.

> One responds: 'I am cutting this stone in a perfectly square shape.' The other responds: 'I am building a cathedral,' both answers are correct and meaningful but reflect different relations to the world (Wenger 1998, p. 176).

Students, too, are affected by what they think about the practices they perform. The experience of what they are doing at the MA TESOL, and therefore their sense of identity, is different depending on their imagination, on their ability to 'see' what they are doing in a context beyond the present situation, beyond space and time. This does not suggest that imagination is the same as fantasy or escapism, in a pejorative sense, but in the sense of "creating a picture that was not obviously there" (Wenger, 177).

Xiao, for instance, spent an interim period torn between the group of Asian peers and the native-speaking community. The importance of belonging to the new group was not only the motivation to belong, to learn, and to bring her insight to that group. Xiao was also motivated by the fact that she wanted to stay in the UK for a longer period to pursue a

further research degree. Her trajectory extended beyond the MA TESOL programme and by "seeing herself" doing something in the future led to imagination, another form of belonging.

In the case of the participants of this study, Su's non-participation offers another interesting example that can be viewed in the light of imagination as a mode of belonging. Her focus lay beyond her present situation, it included her past and future. The present was only a means of reaching a future goal in her home country. Su was very aware that her stay in the UK was for a limited period of time. The ties to her Asian community in the UK and at home were important to her and the old bonds from the past remained intact. She clung to her classmate from her home university and tried to speak to her in their native tongue, even in class.

One could argue that Hui's situation was similar. Her studies were sponsored by her employer and she knew that she would return to work in the same place for a few more years. However, the trajectories of Hui and Su were different. Hui was sent by her employer to gain new knowledge to enable her to teach English major students at her University. Su, on the other hand, needed the degree to find a better teaching post in a secondary school. She left the UK for a short time to take part in job interviews. She was hired for a position and had to start working prior to the end of her programme. She jeopardised her final report to start working in her home country. The degree no longer mattered because she had obtained the job she wanted. During her stay in the UK, her imagined community was that of professionals in her area in her home country, the community she envisioned belonging to.

The modes of belonging are not exclusive, they contribute to each other. In Su's case her belonging to an imagined community prevailed over successfully ending the Masters programme. Su's goal was reached before the programme ended and therefore the acquisition of the SAC was not needed anymore. At the beginning of her second term Su started to apply for positions and her focus was shifting from learning and acquiring the SAC to imagining herself in her new position. Imagination is not tied to mutual engagement, which caused Su to be at a loss at PRC. Su strove for engagement with her community at home but this striving took place only from her side. It was not mutual because engagement did not exist in the imagined community. Her belonging to the MA TESOL was mostly forged by alignment with the programme to complete her goal of obtaining a degree from PRC.

Alignment

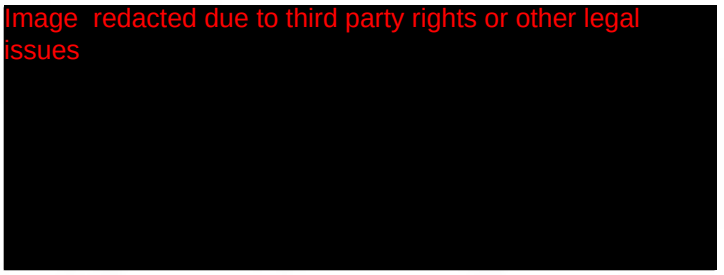

Figure 25: Alignment (Wenger 1998, p. 174)

Alignment relates to how individuals ensure that their activities, methods or frameworks are in line with those of their community peers. Alignment is a measure undertaken to "fit" within their broader structures and contribute to the joint enterprise. In Hui's case we can trace alignment as the salient mode of belonging. Hui, though not convinced of various issues at Western universities, aligned with the rules and regulations at the PRC. The function of alignment becomes more apparent in the following quote.

> [T]hrough alignment, we become part of something big because we do what it takes to play our part. What alignment brings into the picture is a scope of action writ large, of coordinated enterprises on a large scale, not inherent in engagement or in imagination. (Wenger 1998, p. 179)

Alignment, in this case, allows for a connection where the EFL students take action to align their energy and effort, for example, with the rules and regulations at the host university. Alignment also allows not only to work with people in a specific practice, but also to connect that practice to a bigger enterprise. For the participants aligning with educational standards and following the styles and discourses that are proposed in this area enables participation in a broad system. The motivation behind it is not decisive; just the fact that following certain rules and using specific discourses as an enabling factor is the work of alignment.

The work of alignment entails processes, such as negotiating understandings, finding common grounds but also convincing others by using authority and power and proposing stories of identity and walking boundaries, uniting and reconciling different perspectives (Wenger 1998). These influence SAC acquisition. If participants are involved they understand these processes better and are able to reconcile their perspectives with those of others. If EFL students are not involved, these processes do have a negative counterpart, a trade-off. One could argue that Hui's experience and practice in her community of practice at the Western university is coined by accepting prescriptive rules, procedures

and discourses. Due to the prescriptive nature it disables the members of the community to negotiate understandings. The members of the CoP do not have the opportunity to situate themselves in the bigger picture. For Hui, that implies that she has to wipe the slate clean and accept without negotiation the new rules, discourses and procedures. However, she is able to imagine how her experience will benefit her when she returns to teach at her home university.

Imagination and alignment each have their negative counterparts. The negative counterpart for imagination is the risk of losing touch with the community in the here and now. This can cause a feeling of being uprooted from one's identity and losing participation in social engagement. It is impossible to say that one's version of belonging is healthier for one's identity than the others (Wenger 1998).

This section has shed light upon the different modes of belonging (engagement, imagination and alignment) as they pertain to the experience of the international EFL students and their acquisition of their second academic culture. It is impossible to argue that one is better, or worse, than another mode in terms of identity, but it is still important to differentiate between the three forms of belonging. To analyse non-participation it is necessary to be able to understand how the modes of belonging vary, but also what kind of participation emerges when these 'mind-sets' coexist. The resulting combination of the different modes of belonging stresses the differences these modes cause for the learning experience, and also outlines how their complementary strengths and weaknesses are influential elements of identity-formation.

In Xiao's case we are looking at a combination of engagement and imagination. She anchored her learning strongly in the practice of the present institution. Xiao envisioned herself staying longer in the UK and becoming a scholar. She removed herself far enough from groups of Asian students to reflect on what 'they' do and what she herself does. I have referred to Xiao in previous chapters of my analysis as a reflective student. Wenger refers to a reflective practice when he discusses the combination of engagement and imagination. "Imagination enables us to adopt other perspectives across boundaries and time, to visit "otherness" and let it speak its own language" (Wenger 1998, p. 217). In the analysis of Xiao's learning experience this understanding of 'otherness' was achieved from both sides over the course of her studies. At the beginning Xiao was able to analyse carefully what was different from her home university and how learning differed and was

regarded differently. Closer to the end of her programme she positioned herself by describing what 'they', in this case other students from Asian backgrounds, were, contrary to her, unable to accomplish. Her perspective on learning had shifted once she understood that learning is regarded differently at the PRC. In her final interview she reflects on this concept:

> "I understand that the role of the supervisor is to make what I want work, and not I say one hundred things and let him pick one thing that works. That is one thing I have learned. It took me a long time to understand but this way is different way of learning and I like it. More independent, more of my thinking and not so much repetition from books and lectures." (Interview, third term)

Her reference to more independent studying and producing her own thoughts hints also at an empowered student who has gone through an identity shift. Her identity provided space to adopt the new perspectives, which she had gained through reflection and through excursions into other areas of experience. These were often boundary experiences and challenges.

Another combination that functioned in Xiao's favour is that of engagement and alignment. This combination is strongly connected to multi-membership with the intention of bringing various positions together and aligning them. "The need to coordinate practices through mutual engagement translates into an exploration of boundaries that can serve to expand the possibilities for learning and identity on both sides" (Wenger 1998, p. 218). In this way, it is possible to change one's perspective and change the view of competence in oneself and in others. Learning takes place as one tries to understand others and their ideas, as well as in changing one's own perspective. As soon as Xiao tried to understand how multi-membership was possible for herself, she observed what others did in contrast to herself. She distanced herself from everyone to realign her own ideas and perspectives with what was possible and beneficial for her learning. Boundary experiences are necessary for this kind of learning, which often takes place in the periphery. Identity in multi-membership may be seen as a space in which we can align and realign learning and experience so that identity becomes the space for flexibility in social relations.

For Hui the learning experience was marked by alignment and imagination. Each member of the community has a "big picture" in mind. Together with others, Hui worked towards this big picture and made the big picture part of who she was, a part of her identity.

Imagination anchored in alignment allows us to ground ideas in what we are doing. For Hui, it was salient to gain as much insight into Western universities as possible and as part of that she acquired the SAC, since it is essential to the community's "big picture". The power of imagination in this combination lay in the bonding between the ways the imagination is reflected in the activity of alignment.

Section summary

In the first part of this section, marginality and peripherality were discussed. This differentiation shows its full impact as soon as the discussion turns towards learning. At the core of a community, where all the members have full participation, non-participation is rarely the case. However, the wisdom of a CoP is not necessarily concentrated at the centre of the practice; it is often located at the margins. Community and identity form a duality that is reflected in two kinds of marginalities. These are the marginalities of competence and the marginalities of experience (see Wenger 1998). To further learning, the aim is to turn the knowledge located in the margin into peripheral wisdom. The aim is to create flexible identities to enable learners to be participants and non-participants and make it possible to change marginalities into peripheral wisdom. True knowledge creation in the community takes place only if the practices located at the centre interact with peripheral practices, so that new experiences can be gained from this interaction, and give rise to new knowledge generation.

For the MA TESOL community, this learning perspective implies that non-participation needs to be interwoven into the practice in which the SAC can be acquired, but not as a static feature. Rather, the identity of the members situated at the margins must be nurtured within the MA TESOL into an enabling version of non-participation situated in peripherality, not marginality. This change enables core members and peripheral members to interact, and through their interactions to reveal and harness the unrealised potential of the community.

In terms of modes of belonging, and discussing *how* individuals become part of a community, the combination of the three modes (engagement, imagination and alignment) allows learners to see the broader picture, to ground learning in a solid basis, and to be flexible and resourceful in their view of the world.

Identification and negotiability

Wenger argues that participation and non-participation are shaped by the community, but so does the individuals' ability to "shape the meanings that define these communities" (98, p. 188). In this context, identities form based on a tension between "our investment in various forms of belonging and our ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts" (1998, p. 188). Identity formation as a dual process consists of identification and negotiability, which can both give rise to participation and non-participation based on the modes of belonging introduced above (i.e., engagement, imagination and alignment).

In this context, *identification* is the bond that holds a group together, it provides experiences and material for developing identities "through investment of the self in relations of association and differentiation" (Wenger 1998, p. 188). For example, recognizing that participants are part of a learning community and that they are making an effort to be part of the community accentuates the identification of the participants with their learning community.

On the other hand, *negotiability* "determines the degree to which we have control over the meanings in which we are invested" (Wenger 1998, p. 188). It includes the individual's ability, capacity and legitimacy to help shape the meanings that matter in the community. For example, this can occur through negotiating what it means to be a group, what it means to belong to this specific group and what kind of identity is required or desired in this group or even needed to produce this specific group in the first place.

Figure 26 includes the modes of belonging and illustrates that identity is constructed though the two processes of identification and negotiability. Both identification and negotiability can give rise to identities of participation or non-participation (Nedi and Nafalski 2011), which are here discussed in terms of the modes of belonging previous introduced.

Figure 26: Wenger's Social Ecology of Identity (1998, p. 190)

Identification

The process of identification is concerned with how individuals identify themselves "as someone" or "with someone or something". In this context, Wenger refers to identification as more than a relation between people, but "between participants and the constituents of their social existence, which includes other participants, social configurations, categories, enterprises, actions, artefacts and so forth" (1998, p. 192). Many participants of this study, for instance, identified themselves *as* international students and *with* the MA TESOL programme at PRC. But identification also refers to how "we need to differentiate between 'achieved' or 'inhabited' identity – the identity people themselves articulate or claim – and 'ascribed' or 'attributed' identity – the identity given to someone by someone else" (Blommaert 2006, p. 238). Some relevant examples of these two perspectives were: the international student, the non-native speaker, and the experienced professional versus being labelled as a non-native speaker, an Asian student, or a good student. Wenger concludes that identification "refers to the constitutive character of our communities and our forms of membership (and non-membership) for our identities" (1998, p. 192). Consequently, identification needs to be viewed through engagement, imagination and alignment as these have implications for participation and non-participation, as outlined above, and in their combination these lead to different forms of memberships.

Identification through *engagement* refers to how individuals simultaneously invest themselves in what they do and in their relations with people. In the context of engagement, this act of doing does not necessarily suggest that participants are aware of how their work affects their identification with the community, or how they belong to the community. Engagement requires us to work on competence, trajectories, and reconciliation, but this work does not strike us as being an explicit act of identification. Students in the study seemed to take engagement, in the sense of a need for community involvement, for granted. However, their trajectory could be disrupted positively, or negatively. For instance, students who underachieved or overachieved might identify with the community differently and change their participation or non-participation accordingly.

Xiao experienced overachievement when she received an A on one of her very first assignments and she started to envision herself as a Ph.D. student at the PRC. Based on her good grade, and her ambition for future studies, she started to invest more of her time in community participation. Even though the following assignments were not so successful, her focus of continuing as a Ph.D. student remained for a long period of time. A negative example, on the other hand, was provided by Suyoung:

> "I still need to gather all my strength to just answer an easy question. I now always only answer with one sentence and am happy to be done." (Suyoung, interview, end of second term)

Through her inability to participate fully, she remained a marginal member in the community for a while. She could not follow or participate in a conversation or respond appropriately to a subtle cue. Her peripheral participation did not translate into a full membership, and became part of her identity. A few other participants also had negative experiences when speaking in front of the entire class. In the weeks after these negative experiences, it took extra effort to participate.

A community of practice allows for great social support as the members give and receive when they engage with the community. In contrast, for the very same reasons, some members may miss out on the mutuality of giving and receiving, which situates members of the community at the margin. Marginality, therefore, has the potential to be very constitutive for identities.

Identification through *imagination* features two main concepts. First, participants identify with a broader community, e.g. international students in the UK, by imagining that there

are other students like themselves who have similar problems and experiences. Imagination for identification therefore required a broader category that individuals may want to belong to, which allows them to visualise themselves and others together. This visualisation then drives their participation in the community. Imagination, in this case, can work as an association connecting to others and expanding identification beyond engagement.

Second, through imagination participants can dissociate themselves from certain groups, possibly leading to non-participation. Xiao, for example, attempted to dissociate herself from the group of Asian students. In saying that a particular group has certain characteristics that one does not share, the dissociation becomes apparent and affects the students' community membership. Identity, in this case, is built upon the dissociation of the self.

Identification can also take place through *alignment*, for example, if one aligns oneself with a dominant group member by submission, or if one identifies with the work of a colleague who is as dedicated as oneself. Aligning with the rules of the Western academic world allowed Hui to be part of a larger community. By doing so, she aligned herself not only with the rules of the university, but also with her personal growth because she became part of this larger picture by situating her activities in the context of Western academia. For Hui, being an "A" student meant not only to fulfil the requirements of her employer and sponsor, but it also became important for her personal success. The degree of alignment of both students affected their participation in the community, their identities and indirectly their membership in the CoP.

Negotiability

Across all modes of belonging, the processes of identification (whether through participation or non-participation) helped the students define which meanings mattered to them. They did not, however, illustrate how the students were able to negotiate these meanings. Before discussing how negotiability mattered in the MA TESOL, it is important to note that, for instance, a high degree of identification does not mean a high degree of negotiability, or vice versa. For example, international EFL students could participate in defining the meanings for their community, but that does not suggest that they automatically identified with the CoP to a high degree. In contrast, some students

could identify deeply with the community, yet have very little say in the negotiability of its meanings.

Wenger argues that negotiability refers to the "ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration" (Wenger 1998, p. 197). In this context, the different meanings (as well as the students' identities) are shaped by their ability to take responsibility for negotiating meaning across the different modes of belonging. The structural relations and social configurations in which the values of the meanings participants produce are referred to as economies of meaning. These broad economies emphasise "1. the social system of relative values, 2. the negotiated character of these relative values, 3. the possibility of accumulating "ownership of meaning" [that is, the ability to take responsibility for negotiating meaning], 4. the constant possibility of such positions being contested, 5. systems of legitimation that to some extent regulate processes of negotiation" (Wenger 1998, p. 199). Belonging to an economy of meaning, in the context of the modes of belonging, then suggests that this can, possibly to different degrees, include engagement, imagination and alignment. Interestingly, while one might assume that the community of practice for international EFL students in the MA TESOL would centre on engagement, both imagination and alignment also played a critical role in how they negotiated meaning and, as a result, how their identities took shape.

In the following section modes of belonging are viewed through the identity lens of negotiability. Each mode can be expressed as participation or non-participation. Together, the resulting different identities of participation and non-participation congeal, through the ownership of meaning, into the overall economies of meaning that correspond to the process of negotiability.

First, negotiability and *engagement* can lead to an identity of participation if the community adopts one's ideas. If, on the other hand, the suggested ideas are not adopted, engagement in combination with being ignored is reflected in an identity of non-participation. This seemed to be the development that Su's engagement in native-speaker groups had taken. She said that her opinions were of little interest to the rest of the group and so she stopped trying to explain. In the end she did not participate at all.

Second, an identity of participation may be developed through *imagination*. Imagination, in the context of this study, describes substitute experiences through parables, stories, or other memorable ways of expressing our imagined participation (Wenger 1998). Non-

participation prevails if the members of the community assume, or imagine, that they have not been told or introduced to the entire practice. They assume that somebody else knows why issues are handled in a certain way. Hui and her issues with plagiarism are one example where she tried to explain how copyright is understood in her culture. But being placed within the SAC she did not fully understand the reasoning but followed the rules, imagining that someone else introduced the rules with meaningful intention. Hui's example leads us to alignment.

The last mode of belonging, *alignment*, can be reached through various processes. These processes include negotiation, persuasion, inspiration, trust and delegation. Only if these processes are situated within shared ownership of meaning will they lead to participation. The participants of this study were not able to recognise these processes explicitly, but they judged their tutors and fellow students against these measures. For instance, participants commented:

> "Some tutors are very inspiring and keep me motivated." (Hui, interview, end of first term)

> "I always trust Peter [tutor] that he will not ask me a question in class if I do not volunteer, even though he asked other students on the spot." (Xiao, interview, end of first term)

Participants also commented on the classroom atmosphere with different tutors, saying that they felt stressed in one class and relaxed in another. In the case of "literal compliance, proceduralisation, violence, conformity and submission" (Wenger 1998, p. 205), alignment takes place but the negotiability is extremely reduced, leading to non-participation.

Influential factors of identity formation

Besides identification and negotiability, social power and motivation are key constructs that play important roles in the composition of identity (and therefore practice). Social power, as an external factor, influences identification as well as negotiability with a strong formative effect on participation and non-participation. Motivation, as an internal factor, helps explain if, why and how participants are driven towards second academic culture acquisition.

Social Power

Identification and negotiability are permeated with issues of power relations. "Power thus has a dual structure that reflects the interplay between identification and negotiability" (Wenger 1998, p. 207), and the theme of power relations and power-related issues can be traced in all forms of participation and non-participation.

In this context, social power acts on all levels of a CoP. During the process of identification, members of a CoP exercise their power to accept or reject a new member to the community. The newcomer then engages in the power struggle to be recognised as competent. The process of negotiation, then, involves issues of power. The CoP has the power to accept or reject the ideas or the engagement of a member, which leads to participation or non-participation. If the member belongs only by imagination the engagement is not mutual and issues of power are non-applicable. Alignment on the other hand is constituted by power relations. "[B]ecause alignment concerns directing and controlling energy, it likewise concerns power: the power over one's own energy to exercise alignment and the power to inspire or demand alignment" (Wenger 1998, p. 180).

The importance of power relations becomes apparent in Hui's case. Her social status at her home university boosted her confidence besides the fact that she was very young. As she regarded herself an equal to the lecturers at her host university she had been more engaged. Her confidence was strong enough to visit lecturers outside of class to discuss their teaching style and to make suggestions of how class time could be structured more efficiently. Hui identified with the professionals and regarded herself as an equal, who was in a position to negotiate with fellow academics. She experienced power early on in her stay at PRC because her suggestions were applied in the class. This example stresses the impact of power when identification and negotiability coexist in a balanced way.

Another example stresses the impact of power when identification and negotiability are out of balance. Su's example demonstrates that "the ways in which identities are negotiated in the classroom are strongly influenced by the assumptions in regard to culture and language in the wider society" (Cummins 1996, p. 13). The wider society refers here to the academic community at the university. I used Su's comments previously, but in the context of identity and power it takes on a different meaning.

> Maybe they [European students] have a conception that Asian students tend to be shy and don't really want to get actively involved in the

> activity. But actually, sometimes, I sit in a group of half Asian, half European students. I think that they tend to discuss in their own group, actually we are in the same group, but they tend to divide in two groups and it gave me the feeling oh, they don't want to hear me. So some time I will feel frustrated about it, there is no point in denying that. (Interview, end of second term)

Su describes the imbalance between her commitment and her identification with her CoP. In this example, she refers to an in-class discussion when her voice was not heard in the discussion and her group members did not encourage her to voice an opinion. Su had the impression that the economy of meaning of her "Asian group" was less valuable than those of other groups. Su felt frustrated about the "Asian" part of the negotiation having been ignored, and during the interview she became quite angry. In her learning journal, she stressed that she did not want to be "sitting there in silence". Su had developed from keen and enthusiastic in her pre-sessional course and her first term to a student, who at the end of her stay, only focused on her imagined community in her home country. While Su was accepted in her pre-sessional setting, in her regular MATESOL courses she experienced a phenomenon of "identification without negotiability" that Wenger describes as "powerlessness, vulnerability, narrowness, and marginality" (1998, p. 208). As a result, she turned towards her imagined community.

The quintessence of identity formation is that identification is constitutive because it "gives us material to define our identities; negotiability enables us to use this material to assert our identities as productive of meaning; and we weave these two threads into the social fabric of our identities" (Wenger 1998, p. 208).

Motivation

Besides social power, motivation plays a key role in the identification and negotiability as part of the composition of identity (and therefore practice). Interestingly, both Activity Theory and Communities of Practice do not discuss motivation in much detail. In Activity Theory, motivation is assumed either as a driver in the pursuit of a particular transformation, or in the context of reducing tensions based on contradictions within or between activities. AT would profit from a more substantive approach to how individuals are motivated. Similarly, CoP's discussion of identity formation would benefit from a more detailed account of what drives both, identification and negotiability, as well as participation and non-participation.

To add more clarity, I refer to Dörnyei's (2005) work as an insightful lens for understanding identification and motivation in the sense of the students concept of self. In his work on understanding motivation in the context of second language learners, Dörnyei stresses that language is more than a communication code; "it is also part of the individual's personal 'core', involved in most mental activities and forming an important part of one's identity" (2005, p. 94). In the context of identity, Dörnyei's "whole-person perspective" (2005, p. 94) extends beyond second language learners and presents a very suitable perspective for examining the role of identification and the learners' representation of selves.

These so-called *selves* mediate and control their ongoing behaviour and are at the centre of a dynamic interplay between action and self. This interplay, in turn, is regulated by motivational self-mechanisms (2005), of which the construct of *possible selves* plays an important role for this study. Perhaps in the shape of visions, self-images or imaginations of students performing an action or achieving a goal, these possible selves have a powerful motivational effect. They offer the "most powerful, and at the same time the most versatile, motivational self-mechanism, representing the individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become and what they are afraid of becoming" (2005, p. 99). Wenger exemplified this notion of imagination as "playing scales on a piano, and envisioning a concert hall" (1998, p. 176). In this sense, they can be "possible selves" (Dörnyei 2005, p. 99) whose aspiration may lead to the "translation of goals into intentions and instrumental actions" (Markus and Ruvolo 1989, p. 213).

Dörnyei (2005) builds on Higgins' work (1987) on possible selves, including

> (a) the *actual* self, which is your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) believes you actually possess;
>
> (b) the *ideal* self, which is your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) would like you, ideally, to possess (i.e., a representation of someone's hopes, aspirations, or wishes for you); and
>
> (c) the *ought* self, which is your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) believes you should or out to possess" (p. 320-321).

In addition to these positive outlooks, the motivational force behind these self images becomes stronger if they are offset by the negative image of what happens if the desired goals are not reached (Dörnyei 2005, p. 100).

Wenger's (1998) stonecutter story provides a suitable link between a discussion of selves (as part of identity), motivation (through self-discrepancy theory described below) and learning. In the story outlined in the previous imagination section, one stonecutter describes his work as 'I am cutting this stone in a perfectly square shape', whereas another responded 'I am building a cathedral' (Wenger 1998, p. 176). This, in Wenger's work is an example of imagination as "a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves" (1998, p. 176). The two different visions of the stonecutters, or their respective perspectives on their possible selves, directly affect each stonecutters' motivation to pursue his work and shape his ongoing learning (Kanno and Norton 2003).

Learning in this context, is driven, or motivated, by the desire to reduce the difference between the real self and the possible self. According to Self Discrepancy Theory, "we are motivated to reach a condition where our self-concept matches our personally relevant self-guides" (Higgins 1987, p. 321). To relate the possible selves to the learning context, Dörnyei refers to these self-guides as motivational "academic self-guides" (2005, p. 100), which also played an important role in the student subjects of this study.

When Mei was asked towards the end of the first term where she saw herself once the course was finished, she replied:

> "I need to pass this course to have a chance to get a good teaching position in China in a good school." (Interview, end of first term)

Mei's ideal academic self guide was similar to Su's. The motivating vision of accepting a respectable teaching position in China required the MA TESOL degree as a stepping-stone. Mei's vision of seeing herself as a teacher in a good school was a well developed self-guide, motivated by a specific possible self, that allowed her to align with the requirements of the MA TESOL. The discrepancy between her actual self, a student without a degree from a reputable UK university, and her possible self, a student with a degree from a UK university, motivated her to complete her MA TESOL course. The motivational state was even more powerful since a feared possible self of becoming a teacher in a less desirable school in China was lurking in the expressed desire to be in a good school in China.

Ling commented in the in the interview at the beginning of the first term:

> "Once the course is finished, I am planning to go to France to study there for a term or maybe a year to improve my French and to learn

> about France. I enjoy studying and I am so fortunate to take this much time at this stage of my life to do so. After that I will have to go back to work in Taiwan." (Interview, beginning of first term)

Ling's ideal academic self-guide was that of a person who appreciated and enjoyed the opportunity of studying and learning in new cultural contexts and foreign language settings. Her possible self was well developed as a learner of languages and cultures. Seeing herself gaining these new experiences highlighted the discrepancy between her actual self as a person with a perceived knowledge deficit, and her possible self, a more knowledgeable person. The possible ideal academic-self required, and in fact motivated the completion of her work in the UK.

However, some of the participants did not seem to have a clear or well developed self-guide of possible selves, or at least not one they could verbalise. Of course, not everyone is expected to have an ideal or an ought self guide but this "lack of desired self guides would, then explain the absence of sufficient motivation in many people" (2005, p. 100). Towards the end of the first term Saori, for instance, was asked as well where she saw herself once the course was finished. She provided the following response:

> "I do not know if I will pass the course in time. Probably, I need extra time. After the course I go back to Japan and look for work, any kind of work." (Interview, end of first term)

Saori did not have a well developed self-guide through which the learning during the course became meaningful. For her, obtaining the degree was not strictly related to work. In an earlier interview she had mentioned that she was not sure if she wanted to be a teacher at all, and that she only wanted to finish the course because she was not sure what else she would like to do. Saori saw herself as a student who worked on course material only for the sake of completing the course, but without a clear vision of herself using what she had learned or achieved for her future professional life. One might argue that her aspiration and therefore her possible self might be seen in the goal to complete the course; however, having a goal or an aspiration, according to Markus and Nurius (1986), only effects the behaviour in a motivational way if the goal has been developed into a clear and specific possible self. Therefore, Saori's underdeveloped possible self is not motivating her behaviour to pursue her MA TESOL course to the same extend as a clearly developed possible self potentially could.

As indicated in some of the student responses, these self-guides play a substantial role in the effort of understanding community belonging. In the previous section entitled

"Participation and belonging", the different modes of belonging (engagement, imagination, and alignment) were discussed in detail. Wenger emphasised the equality of these forms of belonging, with none being superior to another and no combination being more favourable than another. Norton (2001), however, explains that imagination paired with alignment is superior to imagination on its own, which does not always result in an action to reach the possible self.

The combination of the two factors helps understand Mei's (mentioned above) and Su's (mentioned in the previous section) behaviour. I will focus on Su, since her case is explained in more detail. Su belonged to two communities, one real (MATESOL students in the UK) and one imaginary (teachers in her home country). Her motivation to finish the course was based on the alignment not only with her real community, but also with the rules and regulations of her imagined community. Su understood that she needed to obtain her degree from the UK to find a position as a teacher in her imagined community of teachers in her home country. She was required to coordinate her "energy and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises" (Wenger 1998, p.174), but also to align with the requirements of the host university to fulfil her hopes for her acceptance into her imagined community.

The interaction of identification and negotiability, through the modes of belonging of engagement, imagination and alignment, help understand how identities are shaped, and how these in turn help shape practices and communities of practice. The notion of one's own or others' visions of oneself, through possible selves or any other form of well-developed self-guides, adds the driving force that connects motivation and action. Conversely, as also presented through the self-guides and identity of some students, alignment without the imagined self does not offer the same effect in the context of discrepancy theory on motivation (Wenger, 1998), and thus on students' learning and on the acquisition of their second academic culture.

Social ecology of identity

Identification and negotiability, alongside the other constructs introduced in this chapter, can be summarised as the basic building blocks of a relatively complex social ecology of identity (Wenger 1998) (see Figure 27 on p. 187). By including the notions of social power and motivation, this ecology illustrates how forms of membership (through identification) and ownerships of meaning (through negotiability) affect the development

of the identity of the person, and indirectly, the notion of community and economies of meaning at the heart of each CoP.

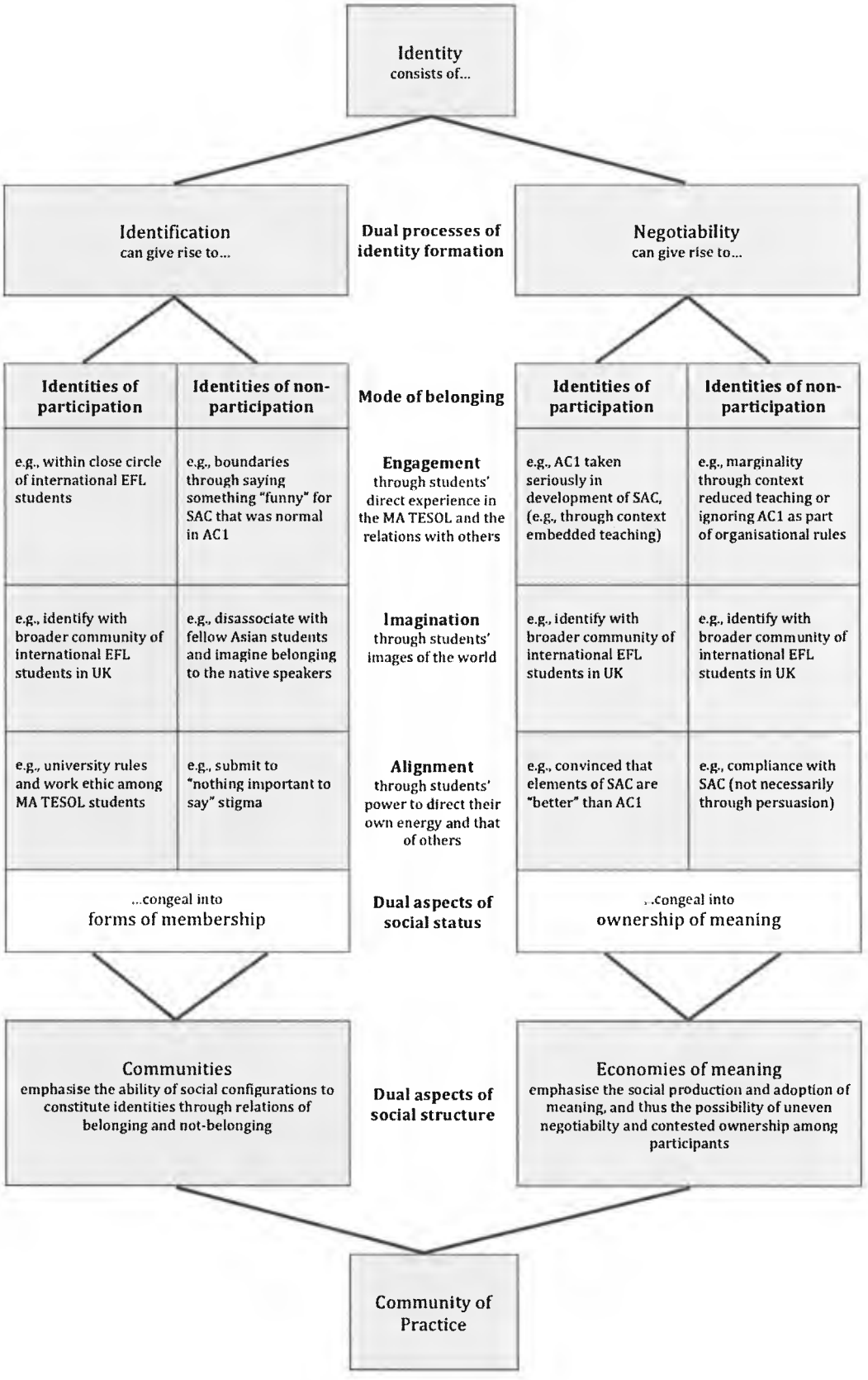

Figure 27: Social Ecology of Identity (adapted from Wenger 1998, p. 190)

The acquisition of a second academic culture is therefore affected by identification, negotiation, motivation and social power. Learning is indicated through, for example, the negotiation or creation of membership, new forms of participation, and the changing of roles and positions. While the students need to concern themselves with creating new rules for their mutual engagement etc., they also need to be mindful to ensure that the processes within their community are not limited by their own rules and regulations.

Learning in this case study takes place to a large extent on the identity level. Identities change and evolve during the international EFL students' time at PRC, and their learning about their second academic culture evolves through negotiating new meaning and creating space within the own identity for this new knowledge. It resembles an empowerment that "[...] derives from the process of negotiating identities in the classroom [that are] not static or fixed but rather are constantly being shaped through experience and interactions" (Cummins 1996, p. 15).

Over time, students develop the ability to switch between two academic cultures, as much as they could change from one language to the other. However, learning or acquiring the second culture takes place through stretching, changing, questioning and developing their own identity. This differs if the negotiation is cut short and the student only aligns with the rules and regulations to pass the programme. Similarly, a connection with an imagined community that is strong, impacts the identity-formation based on non-mutual negotiation quite strongly.

The traditional stay abroad, which intended to add the finishing touch to an education, had this growth of identity in mind. The notion of students managing challenging situations, understanding new concepts, working towards success in a new environment, and decentring their view on their home culture are all aspects of the here described change through a focus on identity development.

Chapter summary

The previous chapter focused on practice and this chapter's focus is on identity, with the main premise that a dual relationship exists between them. Accordingly, practice informs identity and identity informs practice. This first part of this chapter looked at how identity matters as a negotiated experience of self (vs. the practice-based negotiation of meaning), as membership (vs. the practice-based community), as learning trajectory (vs. the

practice-based shared history of learning) and as the nexus of multi-membership (vs. the practice-based boundary maintenance). Together, these subsections connected practice to identity. Among its many findings, this section highlighted how international EFL students, as sojourners, adopt a dual identity of newcomers (new to their SAC), but they also, as old-timers, bring a wealth of experience from the different communities and academic cultures in which they were previously involved. In the context of the nexus of multi-membership, these international EFL students were aiming to reconcile their memberships of their first academic communities (AC1) with the SAC of the MA TESOL. In some, but not all cases, this was supported by their learning community when it sufficiently provided opportunities for reconciliation of multi-membership. In others, where incorporating the nexus of multi-membership was neglected, the learning communities bypassed the enrichment of practice and the loyalty and commitment of the members of the CoP, and hindered the acquisition of the SAC.

The second section discussed the constructs of participation (and non-participation) as formative elements of identity development. The core notion was that each is important, especially as the two interact to define each other. The international EFL students' identities, and their relations within their CoP are therefore shaped by the combination of their participation and non-participation within the community. Peripherality and marginality were employed as participation lenses. Peripheral participation can have a positive connotation, for instance, students' participation on the periphery (while they are still learning the second academic culture) can lead to full participation once they are versed in the SAC. Marginality, however, is a form of non-participation that prevents full participation. I presented evidence of both in the MA TESOL.

The section of modes of belonging analysed engagement (through students' direct experience in the MA TESOL and the relations with others), imagination (through students' images of the world) and alignment (through students' power to direct their own energy and that of others). Through these lenses for analysing belonging, this chapter described how individuals became part of a community.

This chapter's last section combined and used many of the previously developed constructs, and presented a holistic social ecology of identity. It focused on the two processes of identity formation: identification and negotiation. The international EFL students go through a process of identification (i.e., they built identities through investments of their selves in relations of association and differentiation) within the CoP,

based on how they develop identities of participation or non-participation through engagement, imagination and alignment. Overall, these solidify in the different forms of belonging (peripheral and marginal), and their inbound or outbound trajectories. At the same time, international EFL students go through a process of negotiability, along the same dimensions of (non-) participation for each mode of belonging, which collectively determine the degree to which students have control and ownership over the meanings in which they are invested.

The processes of identification and negotiability form the social structures of communities and economies of meaning, respectively. Together, theses form the crux of the identity-forming context of their community of practice. The acquisition of the international EFL students' second academic culture within their CoP was strongly influenced by their shared practices (as discussed in the previous chapter), and by their social identity defined through identification and negotiability. How identity matters for SAC acquisition, as an important element of the success of the international EFL students' experience, was analysed through a series of lenses in this chapter, and summarised in the end through the social ecology of identity.

Chapter 7: Discussion and concluding comments

Introduction

After looking at the MA TESOL case study in detail through the lenses of AT and CoP, this final chapter draws together the main conclusions from each lens in five sections.

In the first section, I bring together the main conclusions from the previous chapters. I review their research findings, focus on the contributions of the two theories to answering the research questions and discuss their meaning in the context of academic culture and second academic culture acquisition.

In the second section of this chapter, I return to the theories used and I present the theoretical contributions of using both AT and CoP. Here, I also discuss how each theory was useful for answering the questions asked, and how through the process of the analysis, certain drawbacks of the theoretical frameworks emerged.

The third section draws on the findings of this research to outline how the construct of academic culture and second academic culture acquisition presents important practical implications and contributions. This section connects particularly well with Chapter 1, which outlined the importance of international students for higher education in the UK and presented a call-to-action for constructs useful for examining whether the international student experience at UK higher education institutions is a positive one.

In section four, I acknowledge limitations of this study and outline a platform for future research before concluding with some final comments in section 5.

Main conclusions of this research

Chapter 1 introduced the increasing importance of international EFL students for the welfare of higher education in the UK[4]. Factors were presented that undeniably support that without students from abroad, among others the financial wellbeing of the institutions, the quality of their teaching, the variety of subjects offered and the diversity of thoughts exchanged would suffer tremendously. As the competition for students from

[4] NB: this research preceded the recent changes to the tuition fee structure in the UK.

abroad increases, so does the need to understand whether their experience at UK institutions is a positive one. This backdrop, combined very much with my personal interest based on my own experience as a student from abroad, motivated the research of a construct I termed "academic culture". The conceptualisation of "Academic Culture" adopted a narrow focus, aimed at understanding the habitual practices specifically within the MA TESOL programme. As such, this study was explorative in nature, with an ambition not to define Academic Culture *a priori*, but to develop an improved understanding on the basis of the findings. With this aspiration, at the outset of this dissertation, the following question and subquestions were raised:

How do postgraduate international EFL students acquire a second academic culture?

This primary research question pointed to two secondary research questions:

What are the elements of academic culture?

What are the influencing factors for the acquisition of a second academic culture?

The answers were presented by highlighting the findings gained from the application of both theories to the empirical study. However, as outlined in Chapter 1, this dissertation adopted the perspective that academic culture, much like culture in general, is so involved that it is impossible to agree on a precise and narrow definition. Consequently, no such definition can be found in this dissertation, and impression of academic culture and the acquisition of second academic culture can be "gleaned only as an overall perspective" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 8) in the context of the MA TESOL. By adopting this approach, I am not at all trying to evade the complicated task of answering the research questions in a way the reader might expect at the end of a dissertation. I am confident that those who read this document in its entirety agree that no single definition of academic culture would do the experience of the postgraduate international EFL students during the MA TESOL justice. Nonetheless, in order to reconnect with the research questions, this

section synthesises the main findings of the two theoretical lenses presented in the analytical chapters.

While the primary research question clearly aims to shed light on an activity, the secondary question (A) looks for elements and mediators that describe it, while (B) focuses on the formative context that shapes the student experience and enables a reflective approach leading to acquisition. Clearly, these components cannot be separated, and the two lenses chosen helped answer the questions to different degrees. Accordingly, the next section discusses the main contributions of the theories to both research questions collectively.

Contribution of the two theories to answering the research questions

Elements of Academic Culture emerged in both theories. In some cases, these elements were more of a structural nature; in others they were more the result of identification and negotiability of individual international EFL students during the MA TESOL. Both theories contributed strongly to responding to the research question. Based on the complexity of academic culture and its constituent elements, it is no surprise that the *acquisition of second academic culture* is a highly complicated process. Activity Theory and CoP both added important insights to the elements of AC and to forming an understanding of how postgraduate international EFL students acquire their second academic culture at PRC.

Activity Theory

Activity Theory provided a theoretical structure for six components of Engeström's Activity Systems, where the object of the activity was the learning on the MA TESOL course and the outcome was the passing of the course. Other less obvious and less discussed objects of this activity are the acquisition of the English language, versatility in the English academic world and the experience of living and mastering a life abroad. As international EFL students navigated the PRC practices new to them, the data showed that they relied most heavily on tools as the mediators between themselves as subjects and the community of the activity system. As shown in this research, a common misconception among tutors was that high language proficiency should grant new participants an immediate understanding of the tools used in this academic community and the academic culture at PRC. However, further evidence showed that higher language proficiency only

assisted students to a certain extent, beyond which understanding was acquired through participation within their second academic culture. This research study further departed from the common wisdom by highlighting that all tools are defined by the community and, therefore, are culturally specific. Consequently, tools are influenced by culture as well as language. Both build an inseparable context for the activity. But of course, rules mattered, too, including hard rules around plagiarism and softer rules on punctuality, although which were hard and soft was not always clear to students. These rules mediated between the subject and the community; participants are not always aware of all the rules. Activity Theory further suggested that the relation between the subject and the community is not only mediated though rules, but also through division of labour. In this study, the students' understanding of the tutors' role was often incongruent with the actual role of an academic tutor, as discussed more below. Similarly, the understanding of hierarchies in the classroom varied tremendously depending on the participants' cultural backgrounds. Despite their desire to reduce the contradictions through negotiating and changing the rules or through discussing and negotiating the division of labour, the participants had to learn to adhere to the structured forms of the MA TESOL programme.

In Activity Theory, the notion of contradictions was certainly the strongest contributor to responding to the research questions. Level 1 contradictions that featured strongly in the empirical data revealed first that substantial differences existed between students, based not only on their language abilities but also on their degree of familiarity with the academic culture at PRC. For some, the differences between their AC1 and their SAC were substantial, for others it appeared more negligible. This level 1 analysis also showed how rules that should have been made explicit for international EFL students, as far as this is possibly, were instead subsumed under the general rules for all MA TESOL students. This was of course most needed where AC1 and SAC differed substantially.

Level 2 contradictions unveiled how the command of language that postgraduate international EFL students were required to fulfil the entrance requirements prior to their arrival was not sufficient for the MA TESOL. For many, a very large share of their study time was taken up by language-related work, which showed that for postgraduate international EFL students, language was both a tool *with* which they had to work and an object *on* which they had to work. This was made particularly difficult, as shown as a level 4 contradiction, by the variance of language learning activities in which international EFL students participated. For instance, colloquial English learned outside

of the classroom often clashed with what is required in the classroom in terms of academic English proficiency. With the limited time that was available for these students, the effort they had to spend on language negatively impacted their time available for content-related studies, and of course for negotiating their SAC in the context of the MA TESOL. For instance, one issue that was repeatedly voiced was the relationship between students and tutors, where the contradictions between the assumptions that international EFL students held for the roles and responsibilities of a tutor strongly clashed with the ones tutors actually assumed in the MA TESOL.

The four levels of contradictions are immensely important for understanding the acquisition of SAC; however, the use of expansive cycles was really needed for a strong contribution to understanding the SAC acquisition process. The use of expansive cycles exposed how international EFL students in the MA TESOL programme negotiated the stresses and contradictions (according to Engeström's four levels of contradictions discussed in Chapter 4) they encountered when they acquired the second academic culture during the MA TESOL. For Engeström, "a full cycle of expansive transformation may be understood as a collective journey through the zone of proximal development [based on Vygotsky's work] of the activity" (2001, p. 137), where students pass through phases of internalisation and externalisation. For the construct of academic culture, it was also seen as suitable that expansive cycles begin with the behaviour of individuals and gradually expand into a collective movement or institution. At the beginning of their expansive cycle, international EFL students frequently questioned, criticised or rejected some aspects of the accepted practices at PRC and the SAC. Many international EFL students experienced feelings of uncertainty and confusion, but not all were able to question the practices new to them on the grounds of the second academic culture basis. Those who got "stuck" in this step were unable to acquire the second academic culture and failed to pass the MA TESOL programme during the time of this research.

Those more successful at the beginning of their expansive cycle then used their newly found explanatory relationships to construct a simplified model of the new practices. They attempted to develop an understanding and find solutions to the contradictions they had encountered between their first and second academic culture. In some instances, mostly when differences between academic cultures were small, this modelling was straightforward. In other cases, "as the disruptions and contradictions of the activity become more demanding, internalisation increasingly takes the form of critical self-

reflection - and externalisation, a search for solutions, increases" (Engeström 1999, p. 33). Of course, not all of the students' models were an appropriate representation of the practices at PRC and of the SAC that governed them. When international EFL students received non-confirming feedback (either explicitly or implicitly), their models were adjusted for a better fit. When this feedback was lacking, the previously developed models, right or wrong, were indirectly confirmed and became part of the international EFL students' more permanent picture of their SAC. For instance, many of the international EFL students developed a model in which rules apparently could be bent slightly (e.g., arriving late to class), while others could be broken (e.g., returning on time from holidays). The lack of effective corrective action for the international EFL students suggested that their behaviour was acceptable under the umbrella of their SAC.

When these models take shape, as students develop more and more solutions to contradictions they encounter at PRC, the SAC forms as a collective movement. International EFL students, as a group, now consolidate which practices to adopt and which to discard for their new models. The SAC becomes stabilised. Of course, the degree to which their previous experiments with their "working models" received feedback or were corrected has a direct impact on the stable form of the SAC. As a result, when the expansive cycle had reached its peak and a dominant SAC was formed that was followed by international EFL students in the MA TESOL programme, the practices accepted by international EFL students could easily contradict stable, neighbouring activities. Although not a direct focus of this research, this process of SAC development, and acquisition, helps explain how different groups can develop within the MA TESOL, and possibly why tutors can generalise "international students" and their practices.

CoP

Although AT proved invaluable for identifying many elements of academic culture and of the process of second academic culture acquisitions, it did not provide a lens for understanding either the subject or the community that were mediated. CoP offered a better look at the subject and the community.

In the context of this research, practices at PRC are at the heart of the new experiences international EFL students collectively build. Their importance, however, can only be fully understood if both tacit and explicit aspects are examined and studied in light of the students' prior knowledge as a formative factor that makes their second academic culture

comprehensible. For a successful learning experience, as well as the acquisition of a second academic culture, these factors played a tremendous role. CoP confirmed AT's findings that Language, as an example of the explicit part of practice, proved to be problematic for the international EFL students, both in terms of their subject-matter studies but also in the context of understanding and acquiring their second academic culture. This was particularly clear when examining student and community trajectories from the, comparatively speaking, cognitively undemanding and context embedded pre-sessional course to the cognitively demanding and context reduced MA TESOL programme. While the pre-sessional course related students' prior knowledge to the academic writing skills they needed to acquire for the MA TESOL, language was a comparatively minor component of their second academic culture acquisition. This quickly changed, though, when students "graduated" to the MA TESOL programme. Here, they found the use of the explicit tools they learned in the pre-sessional course very challenging, despite their explicit nature. Although participants were able to ease themselves into the academic conventions during the pre-sessional course, they found the requirements regarding its conventions in the MA TESOL overwhelming, particularly during the first term. In terms of second academic culture, the shift of practices between the AC1 and the setting of the pre-sessional course was the first step in the SAC acquisition; the shift from pre-sessional to MA TESOL was the second. While this trajectory eased the students into many of the practices at PRC, in some other cases the transition from the context-embedded and cognitively less demanding pre-sessional to the context-reduced and cognitively demanding MA TESOL was perceived as too difficult, and international EFL students experienced many SAC acquisition problems.

In contrast to explicit practices, tacit aspects were of course to a higher degree dependent on differences between academic cultures. International EFL students experienced particular problems with adopting the practices around class participation, e.g., when to speak and when to remain silent, when and how to approach tutors, and what to ask of them etc. The increasing importance that language assumed in understanding the tacit elements of the second academic culture added interesting insights for second academic culture acquisition.

The interconnectedness of practice and meaning provided a key construct for understanding how the negotiation of students in communities for their practices gives meaning to how they experience their surroundings. Within the practices examined, two

different kinds of dualities emerged from the data. First, etiquette and interaction with the tutor were rooted within the history of PRC. For instance, the requirement that students participate orally was an important part of the academic culture at PRC. In many cases, international EFL students remained silent during class, which was deeply rooted in their AC1. These SAC practices were already highly reified before the international EFL students arrived, which precluded them from negotiating an appropriate way to interact with their tutors. Certainly, this fixedness of some elements of academic culture had important implications for SAC acquisition. On the other hand, some practices were not reified, and allowed for a continued negotiation of meaning between international EFL students and their tutors (e.g., nodding could mean two different things at different times). This flexible element of academic culture, too, had important effects on SAC acquisition.

The community of students in the MA TESOL determined and negotiated mutual engagements, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement was stressed as the most important feature to tap into the diversity of the classroom. In recognition of the community as an invaluable resource, international EFL students asked for more time to get to know each other and to understand each other's differences within a community. It is important that time is provided to 'do things together', for maintenance work necessary to facilitate the functioning of a group. This form of engagement is the groundwork for the members of the community that drives the negotiation and acquisition of second academic culture. The joint enterprise of learning needed to be negotiated, too, because students did not necessarily have congruent views on learning. This process of negotiation enabled the group members to acquire academic culture through a shared activity. Not only were the students involved, but so were others, particularly the tutors. This involvement highlights the mutual accountability of the enterprise. Tutors helped students understand and make sense of the new learning experiences, their SAC. At the same time, international EFL students were made accountable, particularly for self-organised learning activities, such as working in groups during and after class. The shared repertoire provided the tools for the joint enterprise. Described as a pool of resources, the shared repertoire contained, for example, shared study skills for group work. It also contained words, routines, concepts and other artefacts. Interestingly, the shared repertoire offered resources, which were ambiguous and needed to be renegotiated every time they were applied to a new situation. These tools were a major aspect of learning for international EFL students and for the acquisition of their SAC. In cases where not all

members of the community were familiar with certain concepts of the shared repertoire, their inability to relate often lead to their marginalisation in the community.

Mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire elements are deeply cultural, and to be able to develop and acquire them as part of their SAC, international EFL students had to learn how to engage in the community of the MA TESOL. Participants in study groups learned "understanding and tuning their enterprise" (p. 95) continuously until they found a way in which, for instance, native and non-native speakers could engage, become, and hold each other accountable to that enterprise. In the study group enterprise students were able to learn more about and "try out" the elements of academic culture: tools and representations were produced and adopted, for example the shared reading method was modified to suit all participants and different interpretations of the readings were discussed; terms were redefined, for example in discussions around critical thinking; stories were told of students or siblings, who had taken the MA TESOL course in previous years; and routines were co-created by students just to be broken and re-created again.

Not in all cases were international EFL students able to engage in joint enterprises and with shared repertoires. Those who were less successful in terms of SAC acquisition suffered from marginalisation and continued peripheral existence. Students experienced and described their position in the community as that of an outsider and as a person, who does not belong to the community properly. This suggests that, in practice, academic culture is not inclusive, but that not all students will find a way to utilise opportunities for engagement, for learning and understanding the repertoire and for the creation of a joined enterprise.

The main premise that a dual relationship exists between the practice and identity, one in which practice informs identity and identity informs practice, was most insightful for the research questions. The analysis of identity turned out to be a significant contribution to understanding academic culture and SAC acquisition. Individual lenses, all with an identity focus, concentrated on the negotiated, socially constructed experience of self, where community membership, learning trajectory and as the nexus of multi-membership focus on how the negotiation of meaning recurs in the negotiated experience of self. In the context of SAC acquisition, students frequently reported that their inability to speak in the classroom was very much a result of the SAC context, rather than a language issue. This raised the notion of motivation as an important factor for identity formation,

community participation, and indirectly SAC acquisition. The general idea is that students are motivated by "their growing sense of self and participate actively in the learning process" (Cummins 1996, p. 78). This was extended by motivational self-mechanisms (Dörnyei 2005), or more specifically the construct of *possible selves*. These lenses were particularly important for analysing how students' visions, self-images or imaginations, as motivational drivers, translated into community work and SAC acquisition.

The look at identity further highlighted how international EFL students, discussed as sojourners in this context, adopted a dual identity of both newcomers (new to their SAC), but also as old-timers who offer a wealth of experience from the different communities and academic cultures of their past. The analysis of the nexus of multi-membership revealed how these international EFL students had to reconcile their memberships in their first academic communities (AC1) with the SAC of the MA TESOL. In some, but not all cases, this was possible. In others cases, with no opportunities for reconciliation of multi-membership, the learning communities missed out on the enrichment of practice and the loyalty and commitment of the members of the CoP, which obstructed the development and acquisition of the SAC.

Elements of participation (and non-participation) as they interact to define each other were examined as formative for identity development. This analysis allowed a look at how international EFL students and their relations within their CoP were shaped by the combination of their participation and non-participation within the community; both possibly leading the students on inbound and outbound trajectories. Modes of belonging (i.e., engagement through students' direct experience in the MA TESOL and the relations with others, imagination through students' images of the world and alignment through students' power to direct their own energy and that of others) allowed a look at how individuals became part of a community.

After discussing many of the elements of CoP as an analytical framework, the holistic social ecology of identity proved to be a highly useful construct by focusing on Wenger's (1998) two processes of identity formation, namely identification and negotiation. The identification perspective concluded that international EFL students experience a process of identification (i.e., they built identities through investments of their selves in relations of association and differentiation) within the CoP based on how they develop identities of participation or non-participation through engagement, imagination and alignment. These congeal in the different forms of belonging (peripheral and marginal), and their inbound

or outbound trajectories. Simultaneously, international EFL students go through a process of negotiability, along the same dimensions of (non-) participation for each mode of belonging, determining collectively the degree to which students have control and ownership over the meanings in which they are invested. Together, the processes of identification and negotiability are at the heart of the identity-forming context of their community of practice, and, along with their shared practices, these two CoP parts contributed greatly to the research questions and to the more general understanding of academic culture, community and SAC acquisition.

Contributions to theory

The application of the two theories, CoP and AT was the central point of the metalevel discussion of the analysis. At the onset of this Ph.D. thesis I made the case that the combination of the findings of the two theories would be worthwhile. Having applied AT and CoP to analyse the depth of activities and communities, the two theories were appropriate choices. However, this is not to say that they were without shortcomings, some of which were identified a priori, and some of which emerged in the data analysis.

One primary difference between the two theories lies in the function of each. Engeström's activity systems, used to build understanding of human activities as complex, socially situated phenomena, is a very tidy framework for analysing second academic culture acquisition during the MA TESOL. Learning, in this context, however, is a messy process, and capturing its messiness through six constituent elements and their interaction is difficult. Learning, especially in the presence of various different subjects from culturally diverse backgrounds, is multifaceted, especially when it relates to content learning and learning about SAC. Capturing the overall activity system under examination through evolving elements of subjects, objects, mediating tools, rules, community and division of labour is challenging. Especially when individuals are at the heart of the research question is an analytical lens that focuses on the activity, not the individuals as the unit of analysis problematic. In a similar vein, AT's focus on contradictions and how these existed within, and between, the cornerstones of the system was very useful though, as it allowed for an understanding of where problems occurred, or might occur, and in which way cultures differed. In many cases, the notion of contradictions resembles the notion of tensions in CoP, and a valuable extension of CoP might be to look at how different levels of tensions (similar to those for contradictions for

AT) affect community work. However, AT did not provide solutions to the identified problems and it ignored the individual's more specific characteristics, such as their plans and wishes, and their identity, even within its otherwise very beneficial use of expansive cycles. AT's expansive cycle adds the longer-term perspective to the acquisition process, indicating that the newcomers would initially observe and, as the contradictions increase, more frequently externalise their views. Once the new paradigm stabilises, externalisations become less frequent. However, if the critical reflection does not take place to the necessary extent and a student reaches the stable paradigm or model too soon, AT does not explain how these situations take place or how they can be avoided. Here, CoP explains the different trajectories of imagination, alignment, engagement, and identities as possible reasons why students may, or may not, fully acquire the academic culture. Another limitations of the expansive cycle offered by AT can be seen in the way it is portrayed as a smooth process. From my experience during this research, acquisition has often been serendipitous and sporadic, catapulting the students into a new level of understanding without a gradual process. In addition, the externalisation does not necessarily occur for all subjects, which makes this model less useful.

Moreover, activities as such do not carry meaning; even in Engeström's (1999) socio-cultural grounded activity system the actions do not carry meaning on their own even though they are embedded in a socio-cultural context. To make the activity system more meaningful it is necessary to analyse the subject and the community further, including the abovementioned messiness of the trajectories of individuals within communities etc. The analysis of the community even provides a further understanding of some of the tools of the community. A connection between the tools and artefacts of the community described in CoP and the tools of the activity system emphasises the value of using both theories as complements for each other. CoP showed in which way the individual depends on the community and how identity is formed according to the community and the individuals' trajectories. The here employed combination of the findings of both theories was most useful to describe the activity and its context in sufficient detail.

But of course CoP has its limitations, too, many of which have been discussed in Chapter 2. The community of the MA TESOL students discussed here could easily be seen as a community of practice, but the all-newcomer problem persisted throughout the analysis. Similarly, the fact that all new-comers were also already experts was problematic in the context of the apprenticeship model employed throughout the CoP framework, governed

that novices learn from old-timers, and not vice versa. The focus in CoP on identity, too, would benefit from more attention to social power and motivation to help explain why and how individuals participate in communities. The identity of the sojourners also complicated CoPs notion of the reproduction of communities and continuity across generations. Another aspect that is diminished in CoP is the tremendous importance of reflexivity. Although it is mentioned, it is not incorporated into the integral processes leading to acquisition. However, AT stresses it and allows, as mentioned above, for it to be part of the analysis in the expansive cycle.

Some of the shortcomings of AT have been addressed by the combination of the findings with CoP's, and vice versa. Together, the proposal of using both turned out to be valuable for answering the questions that motivated this research. For theory, this means that Activity Theory alone (focus on fixed motivation) could not explain SAC Acquisition appropriately without the complement of CoP (flexible identity transformation), and vice versa. The weakness of one theory in many cases was the other theory's strength. For future research (see below), a combination of both theoretical frameworks a priori would be interesting, as opposed to a combination of their findings, post hoc.

Practical Contribution: beyond the immediate community of students

Activity Theory calls for a holistic view of activities, and CoP presents a collective lens that describes how individuals meet, form groups and maintain communities. Together, these two theories complement one another well, and allow the researcher to investigate complex community activities. Despite the shortcomings listed above, both theories were useful and provided interesting practical contributions.

Superimposing AT's analytical tools of contradictions onto the communities of the MA TESOL outlines, where potential and real frictions exist between different parties and their respective practices. More importantly, these point to practical opportunities for programme improvement for MA TESOL and advancements for the administration of the university. Especially during a time of increasing international and EFL student enrolment, as illustrated in Chapter 1, such improvements offer important contributions.

These frictions do not only exist internally, in other words within nodes of central activity of students or between nodes and mediators. They are manifested within the wider activity systems of the university context. A broader look at these neighbouring activities

now invites a look at contradictions between activities of the students, the MA TESOL Programme and the University of Britain.

Students' Central Activity

Before discussing neighbouring activities, it is important to remember that the students were the subjects of their own central activity. They used tools (e.g. books, language) to transform a psychological object (their skill sets) into a desired outcome (i.e. passing the MA TESOL). In the central activity the second academic culture is situated in the practice of the community. Participation in this community allows the acquisition of this second academic culture.

MA TESOL and the Activity of the Tutors

Similar to the students, the tutors were also **subjects** of their own activities. They also used **tools**, including books and language, to transform objects into their desired outcome. In this case, however, these **objects** were the students whose education was the intended **outcome** of the activity.

The **community** of TESOL tutors and the wider community of the university, in which the tutors are working, is the setting for this activity. Again, the community is working in accordance with the local academic culture and tutors are able to work within this culture easily. **Division of labour** and rules mediate between the community and the tutors; this is a mediation process that is well established and the academic culture is well known to all participants. On the other hand, the division of labour and the rules also mediate between the community and the object of the activity, the students.

Contradiction **between student and tutor activities**

A striking contradiction can be observed in terms of the positioning of the students when moving from the students' central activity to the tutors' neighbouring activity of the MA TESOL.

First, regarding students as objects leads us back to the Acquisition Metaphor where students are viewed as receptors/ receptacles of knowledge (see Chapter 2, p. 32). Students as subjects in the central activity in combination with CoP are shaped by their own identity, by their trajectory and many other factors. It is now important that the

students are not again seen as a wildcard in this neighbouring activity, but rather as the students with their unique identities of the central activity.

The multimembership and the knowledge grounded in their experiences enables students to contribute to the new setting, including the classroom environment. The metaphor of a receptacle suggests that students will be taught, or filled with knowledge, but have nothing to contribute to the teaching activity. The contradiction of the students' position in the two activity systems highlights the problematic conception of the role of the student. In the neighbouring activity system the view of students as objects stresses the globalising conception of teaching students. To change this dilemma, it is necessary to employ AT to highlight the contradictions and to show the interconnectedness, as done above. However, to solve these contradictions, the extension of CoP becomes necessary.

Strong mediation between the community and the object is essential. Regarding students as community members, as highlighted in CoP, means mutual engagement, a shared repertoire and a joined enterprise. During these modes of engagement, the international background of the EFL students is valued. In practice, internationalisation entails the provision of these opportunities within the community, however, not all students are able to form an opinion on each topic as soon as they start a programme. Nonetheless, they likely benefit from ensuing discussions and from their peripheral participation, and enter an inbound trajectory in the community.

When students are shifted from the object position to being part of the community, then the object changes from 'students' as objects of the activity to 'teaching students' as the object. Students increasingly adopt the role of subjects, alongside the tutors, in an activity that fosters co-teaching and appreciates students' prior experience and skills. In this neighbouring activity system the role of the second academic culture as tool is the pivotal aspect that allows students to move from the objectified position into the full membership of the community. An understanding of the second academic culture enables students to be involved in the community.

The Role of the University

Students are important and so are programmes and tutors. Overall, a university's activity is not motivated by teaching students; that is the role of the tutors. The university pursues its higher-level activities, motivated by research assessment exercises, high scores on competitive rankings, competing for international representation, etc. To achieve these

aims, many areas have to be attended to, such as research and publication, academic services, teaching, and lastly, enrolment.

The role of the students becomes important in the research they conduct and in the teaching and mentoring they experience. The quality of their research is judged by others but the teaching at university is judged by students themselves. From a student recruitment and retention perspective, student satisfaction is of great interest to the university.

For international students the acquisition of the SAC is essential for their participation, involvement and integration in the academic community, which enables students to engage in a satisfying experience at the host university. Identity plays a major role in participation and, as we have seen in the ecology of identity, economies of meaning are important for the student's experience. Their understanding or meaning making is of value to the community.

The university has a strong interest in fostering the international students' understanding of their academic culture. If international students understand the SAC, they can be used by the university as well calibrated tools, for instance for teaching evaluation.

Furthermore, students become ambassadors for their alma mater. In many cases, they directly promote a specific programme or the university in general, and become important individuals who can help secure continued student enrolment. International students are of particular interest with regards to tuition, so specific interest should be paid to international student satisfaction. In other cases, alumni represent their universities indirectly, and help build and maintain the reputation of their former institute, which can affect funding, industry contacts etc.

Contradiction between student and university activities

The shifting position of the students from the subject of Engeström's central activity (students learning in the MA TESOL) to the object of the neighbouring activity of the MA TESOL programme (tutors turning students into more educated students) is carried further in the neighbouring activity of the university, in which the students become tools. In the example above, international students become tools (ambassadors) for the university in their international outreach activities.

If the university employs students as tools a shift is necessary; students need to become subjects in the activity of ambassadorship. This implies that the university takes up an enabling role and supports international students consciously so that they portray the university in a favourable light. Once again, that takes for granted that the students were involved in academic activities, which require a sufficient understanding of the academic culture at their programme at PRC.

The causality between the three activity systems highlights that the second academic culture is important not only to students but also to the tutors, the MA TESOL programme and the university. The object of all three systems (student's central activity system, tutor's neighbouring, subject-producing activity system and university's object-activity system) is different, and so are their desired outcomes, but all of them require that students successfully acquire their second academic culture.

Limitations and future research

This study has answered the research questions for the case of the MA TESOL at PRC by providing an impression of academic culture and second academic culture acquisition. The objective was not to provide a narrow definition of academic culture elements, but to offer an overall perspective (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) based on the findings of the two theoretical frameworks applied. Although the findings of this study have made substantial contribution to the understanding of academic culture and the acquisition thereof, the generalisability of the findings is limited by the specific context in which the empirical case was set. This is not seen as a limitation of the study, but rather as an attribute of the case study methodology chosen. In this light, further research in other universities, regions, countries etc. would enrich the insights gained so far.

The main limitations of each of the two theories were already discussed in the respective chapters, and addressed in the previous sections of this chapter. An emphasised strength, but possibly also a limitation of this study, was its direct focus on the international student experience, with comparatively little attention paid to the home-student experience. The focus of the study was not to compare the two, but more time spent with home students might have added further insights for the understanding of academic culture and second academic culture acquisition. Similarly, a stronger focus on the neighbouring activities might have added more to the findings. Other support systems might become apparent that have been neglected in this study.

I am still convinced that a focus on different nationalities (determined by ethnicity) would not have been beneficial for this study, since it would stereotype the students more than it would yield factual insights. As seen in this study the two students from Macao had very different experiences. Identity, as the nexus of memberships, is so unique to the individual that it cannot be generalised on the basis of country of origin. Nonetheless, a look at comparing how students from different "cultures" experience second culture acquisition might be interesting, and might move the research topic forward.

The choice of the term Second Academic Culture Acquisition was made to frame the topic in contrast to the well-established study of Second Language Acquisition, and findings from the former promise to fuel interesting discussions with the latter. For example, the term SLA often refers to acquiring a third language and some research has been completed on the difference between acquiring a second language versus acquiring a third language. It would be of interest to see if the acquisition process for a third academic culture changes compared to the acquisition of a second academic culture. If further research were to indicate that the acquisition process remains similar for a second and a third academic culture, the term foreign academic culture acquisition might be more appropriate.

Another interesting aspect is the mobility between disciplines within the same university or country and the mobility within the same discipline between different universities. Research in this area would highlight other features of academic culture and the potential obstacles caused by it.

Concluding comments

At the outset of this dissertation the relatively under-researched domain of academic culture in Higher Education was introduced. In the context of the popularity of the UK as a study destination of students from abroad, and their impact on the Higher Education sector specifically and the overall economy more generally gave weight to a study that investigated not only academic culture, but also how a second academic culture is acquired. The topic of this dissertation responded to a personal interest of the researcher, and to a number of calls for research that investigates whether the experience of students from abroad is a positive one.

The proposal of using Activity Theory and Communities of Practice to study the case of the MA TESOL programme at PRC turned out to be an interesting choice. It enabled two lenses, and multiple findings that would not have been possible with either one of the theoretical frameworks alone. In terms of methods, this case-study research set out to collect data from a variety of sources, but for the most part relied on observations and interviews.

This final chapter returned to the research questions raised in the first chapter that focused on the elements of academic culture and the acquisition of second academic culture. It summarised the findings of the three analytical chapters, discussed how they responded to the research questions, and how they contributed to theory and practice.

Most certainly, from the perspective of the researcher, this study has been a very exciting and rewarding journey. In retrospect, it shed light on my own studies as an international EFL student, it allowed me to go back in time and revisit my own experiences, good and bad, and look at them through the two theoretical lenses, so to speak. Most certainly, my time as a student abroad who had to acquire her own second academic cultures in Canada and in the UK would have been different had I known about SAC. For my practice as a university teacher, the implications are clear. I continue to investigate academic culture and SAC acquisition in the course I teach, and I assure that I include the lessons I continue to learn in all of my classes.

I remember how excited I was when I started my research in 2002. When I look at student experiences and institutions today, I believe the topic is just as relevant as it was nine years ago. I continue to promote taking academic culture and second Academic culture acquisition serious. It is my hope my research will inspire others to do so, too.

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