UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Exploring the Role of Conversational Involvement in L2 discourse: A Case Study of Chinese L2 Learners' Casual Conversations with Native Speakers of English

By

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ABSTRACT

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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF CONVERSATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN L2
DISCOURSE: A CASE STUDY OF CHINESE L2 LEARNERS' CASUAL
CONVERSATIONS WITH NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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This study explores the affective role of NS (native speaker)-NNS (non-native speaker) interaction in second language (L2) learning. The theoretical ground underpinning this study is the acquisitional role of NS-NNS interaction in L2 learning. It is reasonable to assume that L2 learners start with a willingness to communicate with the target language group (WTC). However, the intention to perform a behaviour does not guarantee its occurrence because circumstances may intervene. Although the connection of acquisition theory to social psychological factors is made in current second language acquisition (SLA) research, the changing nature of these factors is not emphasised. Little attention has been given to the possibility of changes in L2 learners' WTC as influenced by the dynamic process of the NS-NNS interaction itself, such as L2 learners' (in)ability to achieve conversational involvement.

The research is case study based and involves three Chinese competent learners of English. The investigation of small number of participants allows for in-depth analysis set in context, and the possibility to explore the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse at a micro level in a study-abroad situation. Research methods such as questionnaires, interviews and NS-NNS conversations recorded in naturalistic settings were employed to collect data over an eight-month period. The investigation of the subjects' overall L2 experiences suggests a possible connection between L2 learners' WTC and learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction, and reveals the subjects' own standards for 'good and meaningful conversations'. Conversation analysis, on the other hand, identifies different patterns of conversational involvement in topic discussion between the NNS group and the NS group, as revealed under the following types of topic genre: 'observation', '(personal) information seeking/providing', 'opinion seeking/providing', 'story-telling', 'chat' topics and 'gossiping'.

The social functions of these topic genres in forming and reshaping social identity and interpersonal relations among the participants are thus discussed, which contributes to the understanding of the common complaints found among Chinese L2 learners, such as 'the lack of common topics with native speakers' and 'the lack of depth of the conversation with native speakers'. This leads to the theoretical construction of the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse. Based on the empirical data, I argue that L2 learners' inability to participate in a conversation not only reduces their perceived L2 competence, but also results in a sense of 'no shared common ground with native speakers', both of which are likely to reduce L2 learners' self-confidence and consequently, to increase L2 learners' self-perceived social and psychological distance (SPD) from the target language group.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are commonly used throughout the thesis:

C1, C2, etc.   NS-NNS conversation 1, NS-NNS conversation 2, etc.

L1   first language

L2   second language

NS   native speaker

NNS   non-native speaker

SLA   second language acquisition

SPD   social and psychological distance

WTC   willingness to communicate with the target language group

Exploring the role of conversational involvement in L2 discourse: A case study of Chinese L2 learners' casual conversations with native speakers of English

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The role of social interaction in second language acquisition (SLA), particularly the importance of L2 learners' opportunity to interact with native speakers, has been well documented. Starting with Ferguson's (1975) pioneering studies of the phenomenon in the 1970s, this line of research has integrated studies carried out in sociolinguistics and linguistic ethnography in the last two decades. The focus on face-to-face conversation between L2 learners and their native interlocutors features as one dimension of this strand of research, which, combined with general studies in conversation analysis, has enormously broadened the traditional view of how second language acquisition takes place. Under the interactionist approach, active participation in conversations means that learners have the opportunity to receive and produce comprehensible language and to collaborate in the building and maintenance of the conversation through constant meaning negotiation (e.g. Goffman, 1974; Swain, 1995; Pica et al., 1996). Socioculturalists, however, have taken this view further, arguing that it is through such active participation in socialising with the target language group that L2 learners develop and exercise their interactional competence (e.g. Hatch, 1983; Wertsch, 1991, 1994; Lantolf, 1994, 2000).

While differences exist between the interactionist approach and the sociocultural approach regarding the role of NS (native speaker)-NNS (non-native speaker) interaction in SLA, they nevertheless come up with similar conclusion that NS-NNS interaction is an adequate and necessary condition for SLA (Holliday, 1993; Pica, 1994; Long, 1996; Pica et al., 1996). This acquisitional role of NS-NNS interaction in SLA has naturally instigated a rich body of inquiries investigating the contexts and conditions under which NS-NNS interaction takes place, such as L2 learners'

willingness to communicate with the target language group (WTC) (e.g. MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre et al., 1998). It is reasonable to assume that second language learners start with a willingness to communicate. However, as Ajzen (1988) notes, the intention to perform a behaviour does not guarantee its occurrence because circumstances may intervene between intention and action. One such interference can come from L2 learners' actual conversational performance, such as the degree of their conversational involvement. Underlying this proposition is the social constructionist view that self identities are created and re-created on the level of discourse through choice of language, topic management and the presentation of self (Kramsch, 2003: 129; also see Gumperz, 1982; Meeuwis, 1994; Ochs, 1993; Scollon, 1996).

The assumption that learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction affects L2 learners' WTC is also based on my own experience of being a language learner, particularly one who has struggled in conversing with native speakers over the years. Before I came to the UK five years ago, I thought I would have little problem in interacting with native speakers with a degree in English plus three years' daily contact with the language as an English teacher. My confidence was immediately challenged once I set foot in this country. Many times, I found myself getting lost in a conversation with native speakers, and at the same time, feeling too embarrassed to admit it. There were also moments that I feared talking to native speakers in a group, if I was the only non-native speaker present. Nothing could make me feel more of a stranger than watching people talking and laughing without knowing what was going on! Worse, I could still feel puzzled even with the explanation being offered, because I didn't share the sociocultural knowledge necessary to activate the information. Now, five years later on, I am certainly a more competent speaker of English with more knowledge about the target country and its culture, but meanwhile, more curious about what precisely a language is and where the contexts of interaction should be positioned in SLA research.

My experience was certainly not unique. Before this study was carried out, I had informally interviewed some other Chinese students studying in the UK, and found similar concerns. Most of these students had a high expectation of the language environment in the target country where the target language is natively spoken, and thought their English would improve enormously in the UK. Although the actual

language experiences varied individually, a general disappointment was found among the students in terms of their contact with the target language group. As one interviewee pointed out: *'I haven't got many opportunities to talk to native speakers, but even if I do, I don't know what to talk about with them'*. Some Chinese students, not surprisingly, found themselves socialising mainly with other Chinese students. This isolation from the target language group, not only prevents Chinese students from participating in the various discourses of the target language that are necessary for improving their interactive competence, but can also lead to negative attitudes and stereotypes of the native speakers (Tajfel and Fraser, 1990).

Based on Schumann's acculturation model (Schumann, 1978a), the amount of actual NS-NNS contact is affected by the social and psychological distance between L2 learners and the target language group. This social and psychological distance is generally regarded as the result of a number of social factors, such as 'domination versus subordination, assimilation versus adaptation versus preservation, attitude as well as the various affective factors that concern the learner as an individual' (McLaughlin, 1987: 110). While the acculturation model is well grounded, there is an increasing awareness of the dynamic process of NS-NNS interaction itself as the cause for the social and psychological distance between L2 learners and the target language group.

Taking the view that language represents an individual's role in constructing the social and cultural world he/she inhabits (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992; Levinson, 1983), socioculturists and social constructionists see social identity as constructed and negotiated on the micro level of everyday interaction. Norton (2000), for example, has examined the relationships between L2 learners and the social world in which they are living. Particularly, Norton explored the inequitable relations of power that limit the opportunities that L2 learners have to practice the target language outside the classroom, based on earlier studies in social psychology, such as Potter and Wethrell (1987), Edwards and Potter (1992), and Giles and Coupland (1991). According to Norton, L2 learners' ability to participate actively in a conversation strengthens their sense of belonging to the same community group; their inability to get involved in a conversation, on the other hand, challenges their social identities (2000).

Yet, despite the existing studies carried out to investigate the dynamic nature of social identity as constructed through social interaction, L2 learners' actual talk with their native speakers has not been given the attention it deserves. Much less has been done to explore how the social and psychological distance between L2 learners and the target language group is socially constructed through turn-by-turn verbal exchanges, which in turn, affects L2 learners' WTC. Where L2 learners' conversational involvement in NS-NNS conversations does attract attention, individual differences are considered as playing a major role. Seldom has any effort been made to examine the 'black box' of the conversation itself to see what is happening, and thus to raise the further question 'why it is happening in this way?'

While the actual conversations between L2 learners and the target language group remain an area of mystery, an increasing number of studies have explored the affective role of NS-NNS interaction in L2 learning, particularly regarding L2 learners' WTC. Contrary to the traditional view that associates WTC with personality factors such as introversion, reticence and shyness, MacIntyre (1994) developed a model that describes WTC as affected by a combination of contextual variables. Under this model, L2 learners' self-confidence is perceived as actively constructed through their conversational performance, such as their self-perceived communicative competence and the lower degree of communicative anxiety. If, according to Pellegrino (2005: 8), L2 learners constantly reassess their L2 competence based on the particular words they use, the lilt of their intonation, and even the precision of their pronunciation, then the question is: What is the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations?

It is under such a research context that this study set out to examine Chinese L2 learners' casual conversations with native speakers, hoping to achieve a better understanding of the 'common concerns' shared among Chinese L2 learners:

(1) Why is there nothing to talk about with native speakers?
(2) Why is it hard to hold a conversation at a deeper level with native speakers?

In order to investigate the above questions, it was necessary to know what happened during the NS-NNS conversations on the one hand, and Chinese L2 learners' own standards and criteria for 'good and meaningful conversations' on the other hand. Thus, two lines of research were conducted throughout the study to explore learners' L2 experiences at a micro level and under the larger social context of study-abroad situation. L2 learners' WTC was investigated with the research tools such as questionnaires and in-depth interviews that have been used widely in attitudinal research. The purpose of this was to elicit L2 learners' own interpretations of their L2 experiences, and consequently, to establish any possible link between L2 learners' conversational involvement and their WTC. At the micro level, actual NS-NNS conversations were recorded in naturalistic settings. Eggins and Slade's (1997) study on casual conversations proved most inspirational for formulating the particular approach I took to analyse the NS-NNS conversations concerned in this study. Based on their insightful analysis of speech genres, I developed the concept of 'topic genre' as an appropriate analytic device to explore L2 learners' conversational involvement at different levels. L2 learners' conversational involvement was first quantified and then interpreted qualitatively under the various topic genres identified in this study, such as 'observation', '(personal) information seeking/providing', 'opinion seeking/providing', 'story-telling', 'chat' topics and 'gossiping'.

In exploring the topic genres contributed by L2 learners both as an ethnolinguistic group and as individuals compared to their NS interlocutors, I will be offering an explanation of how L2 learners' conversational involvement affects L2 learners' self-perceived social and psychological distance from the target language group; and in so doing, an attempt is also made to either formulate, or, to confirm the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse based on existing theories.

1.2 Significance of this study

Although the call for a reconceptualisation of the study of second language acquisition as a more balanced field between social and cognitive approaches is still strong, there is, on the whole, an increasing number of studies that have viewed language as a social construct (for excellent reviews of SLA research, see Larsen-Freeman, 2002 and Block, 2003). For example, research on speech genres, ethnography of speaking, and sociolinguistics has irrefutably established and documented the reflexive relationship between language use and social context, asserting that the understanding of language as communication cannot be independent of the sociocultural contexts under which the language is developed and used. Researchers who take a social perspective of L2 learning challenge the cognitive approach and its framing of L2 learning as a process of message transmission and reception (e.g. Rampton, 1997; Firth and Wagner, 1997). Instead, they view language learners as social beings who struggle to participate in the target culture. These individuals, according to Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000: 155), 'have intentions, agency, affect, and above all histories' that are bound to interact with their L2 learning.

The debate between the two research orientations has undoubtedly broadened the whole field of SLA research as a discipline. However, the philosophical differences between the social approach and the cognitive approach do not necessarily mean the exclusion of the one by the other. In fact, a number of researchers have realised that both approaches have a role to play in explicating the processes entailed in learning a second language (e.g. Sfard, 1998; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000; Breen, 2001). The relationship between the two research orientations is clearly stated by Pavelenko and Lantolf (2000: 156): While cognitive approach focuses on the individual mind and the internalisation of knowledge, which is crucial for the study of the *what* in SLA, social approach stresses the process of socialisation and the participants' engagement with the sociocultural contexts in its attempt to investigate the *how*. Having both approaches at our disposal thus provides the opportunity to study the phenomena concerned in SLA from different perspectives.

It is not the intention here to present an extensive review of the literature, but rather to underline the fact that over time, multivariate models of second language learning are called on to account for the cognitive, affective, and situational variables that interact with each other to affect language learning in both quantitative and qualitative ways. In the mainstream field of SLA, however, theorists have not adequately addressed the interrelationship between L2 learners and the larger social world in which they are living. While in recent years there has emerged the need among some of the SLA researchers to examine L2 learners' access to the target language group as social beings whose social identities are constantly negotiated, they have seldom done so at a discoursal level, nor have they sought to link their findings to existing acquisitional theories. Consequently, the boundary between the social aspect of L2 learning and the cognitive aspect has been widened rather than narrowed.

The study of L2 learners' conversational involvement, and the investigation of its role in forming and reshaping social identity and interpersonal relations through turn-by-turn utterances have therefore been conducted in this research. Gardener and MacIntyre point out: 'The major characteristic of the informal context is that it is voluntary. Individuals can either participate or not in informal acquisitional contexts' (1992: 213). In what way learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction affects L2 learners' WTC, therefore, has a social consequence that is no less important than the study of language itself. To place the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction under the wider context of SLA research, the study also provides the opportunity to describe, explain and predict second language learning by integrating interactive, sociocultural and social psychological theories that typically have been independent of each other in SLA research.

1.3 Structure of this thesis

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical grounds for this study: the acquisitional role of NS-NNS interaction in SLA, and the proposition of L2 learners' WTC as a possible result of learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction. It starts with a discussion of the two theoretical approaches applied in studying NS-NNS interaction – the interactionist approach and the sociocultural approach. The claims made under both approaches lead to the conclusion that NS-NNS interaction is a sufficient and necessary condition for L2 learning. Equally important are the conditions under which NS-NNS interaction takes place, such as L2 learners' WTC. The introduction of concepts such as *social and psychological distance* and *communicative self-confidence* makes it both necessary and possible to explore the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations.

Chapter 3 provides the relevant theoretical approaches to the study of casual conversations. Particularly under discussion are Conversational Analysis (CA) and Critical Discourse Analysis, and their implications for analysing topic genres for the research purposes of this study. Based on existing studies on casual conversations, four types of topic genre are identified for discussion, including 'story-telling', 'observation', 'opinion-making' and 'gossiping'. A 'chat' topic, though not qualified for genre description in a strict sense, is accepted as the fifth genre in this study. The social significance of these topic genres in shaping and reforming social identity and interpersonal relations between conversational participants is also discussed, justifying the study of NS-NNS conversations as a valuable site for achieving a better understanding of L2 learning as social and cultural behaviour.

Chapter 4 presents the methodological frame of the study. It provides the rationale of choosing case study as the overall research design, followed by the introduction of the two parallel lines of enquiry required by the nature of this study. The first line of enquiry, the research on WTC, involves collecting data through questionnaires and interviews at different stages of the case study. Recorded conversations between the NNS subjects and their native interlocutors in naturalistic settings constitute the other line of enquiry. This chapter also provides the methods for data analysis, including the analytic strategies for coding interview responses and the analytic devices developed for

analysing conversational involvement. The data analysis was an on-going process. For example, the immediate analysis of the questionnaire responses made it possible to raise specific questions about the subjects in the follow-up interviews. In a similar way, the findings obtained from the previous interviews were compared with the newly emerged data. Where a change of attitudes among the subjects occurred, I was able to elicit the reasons in their own words.

Chapter 5 presents the findings based on the first line of enquiry: research on the subjects' WTC. Analysing the subjects' responses to the interviews at different stages of this study reveals the changing views among the subjects regarding their WTC. Comparing each subject's L2 experiences over time brought insight into the link between the subjects' WTC and their actual talk with native speakers. The critical analysis of the subjects' L2 experiences from their own points of view provided access to the subjects' own standards and criteria for 'good and meaningful conversations'.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from the other line of enquiry: an in-depth description and analysis of the six NS-NNS conversations recorded in naturalistic settings over an eight-month period. Conversational data were broken into smaller conversational units, based on the analytic devices and procedures discussed in Chapter 4. The main purpose of this chapter is to unveil *what* is inside the 'black box' of the NS-NNS conversations. Comparing the participants' conversational involvement as two ethnolinguistic groups at a broad level, I draw attention to the different patterns of conversational involvement between the NNS group and NS group, suggesting the different conversational tendencies and agendas between the two groups. I then examine the participants' conversational involvement under each individual topic genre in detail and in context, leading to the conclusion that the NNS subjects' social position as L2 learners was to a large degree actively constructed through their 'information seeking' and their responses to the 'personal enquires' raised by their native interlocutors. The NS group's authoritative position as the native speakers, on the other hand, was constructed through their 'information providing', and their active involvement in most 'observation' topics.

Chapter 7 examines the individual differences among the three NNS subjects and explores *how* the varying degrees of learner involvement forms and reshapes the subjects' social relations to the target language group, which in turn, feeds back into

their conversational performance. With insights obtained from both lines of enquiry, as revealed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I revisit the subjects' conversational involvement under the different types of topic genre, not as an ethnolinguistic group, but as individuals who differ in personality and behaviour. Based on their own standards and criteria for 'good and meaningful conversations', I provide the answers for the research questions and explain why the NNS subjects in this study feel that they 'have no shared common topics with native speakers' and that 'the talk with native speaker cannot be held at a deeper level'. I then argue that L2 learners' sense of 'no shared common ground with native speakers' is both forming and formed by their actual contact with native speakers, such as learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations. As such, the findings provide new perspective to existing WTC model by developing a dialogical description of 'self-confidence', the key construct to understand how learner involvement forms and reshapes L2 learners' self-perceived social and psychological distance from the target language group, which in turn, affects their WTC.

Chapter 8 provides the reflection and the contributions of this study. In an effort to relate the findings to the larger context of SLA research, I address the strengths of this study and the need to explore learner involvement in naturalistic settings where language students in study-abroad situations are concerned. Taking the Chinese L2 learners in this study as an example, I argue that, like immigrant groups who struggle to gain the legitimate language of the target language community, language students' ability to get involved in NS-NNS conversations also creates and responds to their opportunities of communicating with the target language group. However, language students can choose to isolate themselves from the target language group, leaving disappointing memories of their experience of studying abroad. Therefore, language teachers should be encouraged to address the students' communicative needs by investigating their practical needs for using the language outside of the classroom settings. The most important implication, however, is for the language learners, who are encouraged to learn about the target culture and the target language group with a purpose. This is based on the understanding that the sociocultural knowledge of the target language group will enable L2 learners to construct their own 'self' in their own favour during NS-NNS interaction. The limitations of the study are also discussed, as well as the theoretical implications for further studies.

Chapter 2. Situating the role of learner involvement in SLA research

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the research context for studying learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction. Two fields of research are called into discussion: the acquisitional role of NS-NNS interaction in SLA under the interactionist approach and the sociocultural approach; and the social psychological aspects of SLA based on Schumann's acculturation model. In doing so, this chapter introduces the concept of WTC (willingness to communicate) regarding its relevance to the study of learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction.

Thus, this chapter offers the rationale of studying learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction. But, from a different perspective, it also outlines the journey I have gone through to approach this specific research topic. Initially, I was concerned about the acquisitional processes involved in NS-NNS interaction. I had observed NS-NNS conversations taking place in various naturalistic settings and tried to understand how and why such social interaction facilitates L2 learning. Of course, most of the time, I observed my own conversations with native speakers. For example, I would feel delighted if a good conversation had been held, during which my conversational participation was active, and my world views were shared by my native interlocutors. At other times, when I only managed to maintain the minimal verbal exchange with native speakers, I wondered if any acquisition had happened at all. Gradually, when such 'minimal verbal exchange' was not unusual in my L2 experiences, I started to look at the social aspects of L2 learning and asked myself: Why did I enjoy this particular talk with native speakers but not the other? In seeking for the answer, I unconsciously foregrounded my research on the claim that 'NS-NNS interaction provides the necessary condition for both the quality and the quantity input required for L2 acquisition', a theory that has been essential with the mainstream SLA research.

In the following sections, I will explore to what degree this study is linked to the current theories within the field of SLA research, and to what degree the studies in social psychology have informed the particular approach I undertook in this study to explore learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations.

2.2 Studies on the role of NS-NNS interaction in SLA research

It is important to start this section with an understanding of what it means to be a native speaker. It is assumed that only those exposed to a language in early childhood are native speakers of that language. Although there are indeed so-called exceptional learners who start learning a second language in later life and who do somehow attain native-like mastery, it is generally held among L2 researchers and practitioners that later exposure cannot produce a native speaker. Such a view does not deny the possibility that differences can be identified among birthright native members who speak with different accents, and sometimes, with different grammars (Ross, 1979), and that a person may become a native speaker of two languages if he/she was exposed to two languages in early childhood. However, for the case study involved in this study, the general view of a native speaker as 'having learnt the language in early childhood' is adopted, without the need to go into the deep debate that has been held among some sociolinguists under different research contexts (e.g. Davies, 1991).

This section thus traces the development of different views on NS-NNS interaction and its relevance to studying learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction. The role of NS-NNS interaction in second language acquisition is examined. Particularly under discussion are the two currently active models of SLA research: *the interactionist approach* and *the sociocultural approach*. The claims they make and the empirical evidence they offer form the theoretical basis for framing WTC as one of the essential conditions for SLA, providing the rationale for investigating the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations.

The role of interaction in second language acquisition has been widely acknowledged. To a considerable extent, this line of research is developed under the interactionist approach, which emphasises the role of interaction as a 'provider of input' to learners.

This focus has its origins in Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis – the hypothesis that the cause of second language acquisition is input that is understood by the learner (Krashen, 1980). Long, in the early 1980s (e.g. 1983a), proposed that one way input is made comprehensible is through 'interactional modification'; that is, through modifications to learners' input as a consequence of their having signalled a lack of comprehension. In line with this research, studies on interaction have been carried out in various contexts, such as peer interaction in classrooms, as well as social interaction in naturalistic settings. For example, Lightbown and Spada (1990), Doughty and Williams (1998), and others have explored how interaction provides opportunities for learners not only to negotiate the message of the input, but, in doing so, to focus on forms as well. Other researchers, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) and Nassaji and Swain (2000), just to name a few, have explored the nature and type of feedback that will be most helpful to learners during interaction at different stages of their acquisition of a language form. It is under such a research context that investigation of NS-NNS interaction has emerged as a particular line of research in its own right. Lying in the centre of the discussion under the interactionist approach is the focus on *negotiation*, as Section 2.2.1 presents.

2.2.1 The interactionist approach to NS-NNS interaction: focus on negotiation

To a large degree, this 'interactionist' perspective is based on earlier studies along the cognitive approach that concerned primarily with understanding language learners as autonomous individuals, and language learning as information processing and restructuring through practice (McLaughlin, 1987; McLaughlin and Heredia, 1996). Cognitive researchers are interested in the learner's mind as a processor of information and the way complex behaviour builds on simple process. Language learning in this view is seen as the movement from the controlled processing of information held in short-term memory to the automatic processing of information held in long-term memory via repeated activation. The change that actually takes place as a result of this ongoing process of controlled to automatic processing is called 'restructuring'. The concept of 'restructuring' proves convincing to account for *fossilization*, a phenomenon that is well documented in SLA studies. That is, when a controlled process becomes automatic prematurely and before it is native-like, fossilisation takes place, and is likely to remain in the learner's interlanguage, giving rise to a stable but erroneous

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construction (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). However, the general principles underlying cognitive approach do not explain why some information is easier to be processed than others. More specifically, as Gass asks: Why are some aspects of language noticed by the learners and others not? (1988, in Block, 2003: 27). What was needed was the investigation of the actual interactions in which learners were engaged, during which input was negotiated between L2 learners and their interlocutors to increase its comprehensibility (Long, 1983a, 1996). Studies carried out along this line of research are generally regarded as following an *interactionist approach.*

The central concern among interactionists is the role of negotiation in SLA, such as its ability to provide input and output processes that are necessary for SLA. Thus, under this perspective, the role of NS-NNS interaction is examined in two directions: 1) the nature of negotiation in SLA; 2) NS-NNS interaction as preferable to NNS-NNS interaction in terms of the quality input it provides for SLA.

2.2.1.1 The nature of negotiation

One of the earliest theoretical grounds for the role that negotiation plays in SLA, and probably the one most widely espoused, is the comprehensible input theory (e.g. Krashen, 1980; Long, 1983b, 1985). Pica (1994: 502) states that, 'SLA theories all assume that learners draw on L2 input as data for their learning', and it is difficult to see how acquisition can take place when the input is not comprehensible. Exposure to L2 input is not sufficient for learners to be able to access and internalise the L2 input. The input must be made comprehensible if it is to assist the acquisition process. One important way in which input is made comprehensible is through negotiation; that is, through 'exchanges between learners and their interlocutors as they attempt to resolve communication breakdowns and to work toward mutual comprehension' (Pica et al., 1989: 65). As they negotiate, they work linguistically to achieve the needed comprehensibility, whether adjusting its syntax, or modifying its form and meaning in a host of other ways. Experimental studies have confirmed that when non-native speakers signal non-understanding, native speakers modify their message to render them more comprehensible (Gass and Varonis, 1985; Doughty and Pica, 1986; Pica et al., 1987; Pica, 1993).

Meanwhile, with more studies being carried out investigating the process of negotiation and with more empirical evidence to rely on, the original function of interaction in negotiating comprehensible input was added a role of output. The proposal that comprehensible output has an important role in acquisition process was first put forward by Swain (1985), who noted that it is possible to understand the meaning of an utterance without reliance on or recognition of its morphology or syntax. On the other hand, as she further explained, to produce an utterance that can be understood often requires specific morphology and syntax to convey its meaning. Swain thus claims comprehensible output as another facilitative condition for language acquisition based on the following specific roles it plays: Firstly, it provides the opportunity to test out hypotheses about the target language and to receive negative input (Swain, 1985); Secondly, it 'may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing' (Swain, 1985: 249); Thirdly, output problems may be a trigger for noticing (Swain, 1995; Schmidt & Frota, 1986).

Learners' attention to L2 form, as required in comprehensible output, has strengthened, if not confirmed, the assumed facilitating role of negotiation in second language acquisition, 'with comprehension seen as the "entrance requirement" for access to form, and modified production as a context for learners to draw on their current system of interlanguage forms' (Pica, 1994: 501). The possibility that negotiation ultimately leads to acquisition is supported by existing cognitive theory.

In Gass's framework for SLA, (1988, 1997), the key elements of input, interaction and output are seen as linked by a series of cognitive acts:

> Once input kicks off the entire process, there is an apperception stage, where concepts such as attention, noticing, and information parsing are introduced to account for how the mind copes with the massive amount of linguistic input to which it is exposed when an individual is engaging in a conversational interaction (Block, 2003: 95)

When input becomes comprehended, often, through negotiation of meanings between L2 learners and their interlocutors and, when the mind begins to assimilate this new information into existing knowledge structure, the crucial moment of acquisition is claimed to be happening. Negotiation of meaning, in this sense, is regarded as a

necessary condition for second language acquisition, as elaborated by Long (1996) in his more recent study:

Negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS or more competent interlocutor, facilitator, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways. (Long, 1996: 451)

Pica (1996) also adds that 'even if negotiation cannot meet language learners' needs completely, it appears to offer them a great deal of lexical and structural data on what is in the L2, and for this reason, warrants further study in regard to its role in language learning' (ll4-15). Of course, negotiation research is not limited to NS-NNS interaction only, if it can be argued to have begun with *foreigner talk* phenomenon (Ferguson, 1975). In fact, the question whether there exists a greater amount of negotiation of meaning in interaction between non-native speakers (NNS-NNS) than between native speakers and non-native speakers (NS-NNS) has never stopped attracting attention among language researchers.

2.2.1.2 NS-NNS interaction vs. NNS-NNS interaction

Varonis and Gass (1985) suggest the importance of NNS-NNS interaction in its allowance of greater opportunity for negotiation of meaning than either NS-NNS or NS-NS interactions. In their study, they attempted to both 'depart from and build upon' previous research investigating NS-NNS interactions, through a consideration of the nature of interactions between NNS-NNS (1985:71).

Holliday (1993), however, suggests that the validity of NNS-NNS pairwork as a source for input leading to acquisition of L2 forms is questionable. His study questioned whether NNSs could supply each other with modified input about the grammatical forms of an L2 while practicing typical communicative language teaching pairwork tasks. Holliday found that NNS-NNS interactions contain few grammatically correct, target-like cues for potential L2 syntactic acquisition. Similarly, in their study of how language learners' interactions address the input, output, and feedback needs of L2 learners, Pica et al. (1996) found that although NNS-NNS interaction addresses some of these needs, it does not provide the same quantity and quality of modified input, in

terms of conformity to L2 target-like syntax, as NS-NNS interaction does. Thus, NS-NNS interaction is preferred in terms of the quality input it provides.

However, the interactionist view of SLA is not without question and challenge. Its description of communication as a mere process of sending and receiving of linguistic tokens, and its inability to account for the sociocultural contexts of interaction, are particularly the target of criticism.

2.2.2 The major critique of the interactionist approach

Under the interactionist approach, the predominant focus of research has been placed on identifying ways in which learners produce comprehensible input and comprehensible output with negotiated interaction as a most vital source of data (Pica, et al., 1989: 84). Studies of L2 interaction reflect this theoretical orientation by defining the negotiation process as message transmission and reception (Pica, 1987; Doughty & Pica, 1986; Pica, et al., 1989).

However, to frame the study of L2 interaction in the message model of communication masks fundamentally important mechanisms of L2 development and reduces the social setting to an opportunity for 'input crunching' (Donato, 1994). In the end, the social context is impoverished and undervalued as one of the factors affecting L2 acquisition. The message model is limited in its ability to explain social interactions. The problem with this theoretical orientation is that it only superficially recognises the influence of the social context on individual linguistic development. More specifically, it claims that although individuals are socially situated, the processes of L2 acquisition remain the struggle to receive, analyse, and incorporate input into developing linguistic systems. The development of interlanguage remains an abstract, solitary process hidden in the heads of individuals rather than concretely available in the social relationships among learners. Further, by focusing on the negotiation moves that have already taken place, the message model leaves no space for exploring the various contexts of the interaction, for example, the ones under which negotiation fails to happen.

The need for reassessing assumptions and beliefs concerning the role of interaction in L2 development is more urgent with studies of naturalistic adult second language acquisition, requiring taking L2 learners' sociocultural backgrounds into consideration. Researchers along the sociocultural approach object the view that social interaction provides opportunities to supply linguistic input to learners who develop solely on the basis of their internal language processing mechanisms (see the discussion in Donato, 1994: 38). Rather, they support the view that L2 learners' sociocultural knowledge is part of what consists of L2 learners' communicative competence, which is acquired through social interaction with the more competent speakers of the language.

2.2.3 The sociocultural approach to NS-NNS interaction

The sociocultural approach is, in large measure, based on the theoretical insights of Vygotsky (1978, 1981, 1986) on the psychology of learning as well as on the more current work of others, such as Wertsch (1991, 1994), Wertsch and Bivens (1992), Wertsch and Tulviste (1992). The sociocultural approach challenges the nature of competence under the cognitive tradition and posits, that all behaviour is fundamentally pragmatic, organised around the regularities that arise from recurring exposure and mutual alignment to our socioculturally significant communicative practices.

The sociocultural approach also presents a theory of language development that differs from cognitive tradition. According to the sociocutlural perspective, individual development (including language development) begins in the social relationships both framing and framed by extended participation in our communicative practices, and proceeds from these to the psychological; that is, from intermental to intramental activity (Vygotsky, 1981). This movement from social to the psychological is guided by experienced participants (Wertsch, 1991, 1994; Wertsch & Biverns, 1992). Through time and experience in practices with others, especially with more experienced members, the less experienced participants learn to recognise what is taking place, and to anticipate the likely unfoldings and typical consequences of the uses of the resources. They also become more proficient in understanding the sociocultural importance of the practices and their values and goals, and the roles they and the others are appropriated into playing (Vygotsky, 1978). This view is predicated on the conviction that language, as social and cultural practice, is acquired and learned through social interaction

(Wagner-Gough & Hatch, 1975; Halliday, 1978:18; Gass & Varonis, 1985:150; Ellis, 1990: 99; Yano, Long & Ross, 1994:192-193). According to Wardhaugh (1985), learning a new language from a textbook or in situations far removed from contexts in which the language is used offers learners no assurances that they will actually be able to converse with speakers of that language. Therefore, an essential part of being competent in a language is knowing how native speakers use the target language in going about their ordinary lives – 'a competence which, though it may be described in part by trained observers, may be acquired fully only by becoming a participant in the community of users' (Wardhaugh, 1985: 61-62).

Indeed, the research on culture transfer in L2 use has provided evidence that the contact with native speakers is important, and even necessary for second language acquisition. An example in case is the pragmatic fossilisation common to language learners, which, according to Romero Trillo (2002), is an unfortunate result of language learning in settings where the natural socialisation with native speakers is limited, such as under EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. Romero Trillo (2002) developed a hypothesis about foreign language development process along a 'binary track': the formal vs. the pragmatic track. The formal track relates to the grammatical and semantic rules required for the competent use of a given language; the pragmatic track, on the other hand, relates to the social use of language in different contexts and registers. Native speakers of a language would develop both tracks simultaneously by means of natural language contact, and thus would establish a mutual relationship between both communication tracks. L2 learners in a non-target language environment, however, would develop the formal and the pragmatic tracks through formal instruction. The difficulty, therefore, is that the pragmatic track linked to the cognitive, affective, and sociocultural meanings expressed by language forms, is difficult to implement in educational syllabuses. Sociocultural theorists thus argue that, despite the learning opportunities provided through NNS-NNS interaction under EFL contexts, the quality of the input is doubtful in terms of the sociocultural meaning it transmits. They, therefore, posit that an essential strategy or a prerequisite for developing pragmatic competence is interaction with competent speakers of the target language (Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei, 1998: 233).

However, studies have also shown that the socialisation with the target language group presents a problem or difficulty itself to some language learners, such as Chinese learners of English concerned in this study. In Salter-Dvorak's (2004) recent study to identify Chinese learners' communicative needs, all her subjects expressed the concern that they found it difficult to converse with their fellow British students. Unable to interact initially with native speakers or get involved in the various discourses in the target language group, they shun contact and are likely to limit their socialisation among their own culture group in the future. Research suggests that such alienation from the target language group not only limits their opportunities of using English in various situations, but also leads to negative attitudes and stereotypes of native speakers (Tajfel & Fraser, 1990). For example, some Chinese learners, based on their previous experience of talking to native speakers, regarded native speakers as *'unfriendly to Chinese people'*, and would not seek opportunities to speak to them, if not avoid them completely. Gardner (1985: 84) observes: 'If attitudes and motivation influence how well someone learns a second language, is it not equally possible that the experience of learning a second language influences attitudes and motivation?' Thus, the question posed here is: Is it possible that Chinese L2 learners' willingness to communicate with the target language group (WTC) is partly the result of their previous experience of NS-NNS contact?

In the next section, I present some general studies on language socialisation, and their implications for understanding Chinese L2 learners' language experiences in the target language country as a particular cultural group.

2.3 Socialisation and language development

The theory of language socialisation is rooted in the belief that language and culture are not separable, but are acquired together with each providing support for the development of the other (Mitchell and Miles, 2004). Language socialisation researchers, such as Ochs and Schieffelin, are interested in how and why young children are apprenticed through language into particular childhood identities and activities and how novices across the life span are socialised into using language and socialised through language into local theories and preferences for acting, feeling, and knowing, in

socially recognised and organised practices associated with membership in a social group (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). Originally conducted to understand first language development, this line of research has gradually appealed to second language acquisition researchers who are concerned to develop a more integrated perspective on language learning, probably, under the current rapidly changing environment for L2 learning socially, culturally and economically.

2.3.1 Studies on second language socialisation

Most of the existing studies on second language socialisation have focused on young children who are learning a new language. In Pallotti's (2001) study, for example, a five-year-old Moroccan girl, Fatma, was followed over a period of eight months in an Italian nursery school. Taking an ethnographic approach, the researcher showed how Fatma developed her Italian gradually through the process of becoming a conversational participant in this new language. She did this by making conversational contributions that are relevant and interesting to other participants. Most interestingly, Fatma was found to appropriate words and phrases already produced by others in her utterances, providing the evidence that the novice in a new language can be guided to become an accepted participant through constant socialisation with the target language group members.

However, there are also empirical studies showing that some L2 learners are more successfully than others in establishing themselves as accepted participants in their socialisation with the target language group members. Consequently, this affects the extent to which they gain further conversational and language learning opportunities. Such a view of second language socialisation has featured especially strongly with adult L2 learners, who are situated in the target language country either to reside or study for a certain period of time. Language learning for these adult L2 learners, represents not only the process of gaining a skill to help them to survive in their daily lives, but also the process of becoming 'legitimate peripheral participants' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and gaining access to resources that are available within the community of practice.

The *community of practice*, is proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), who were unsatisfied with the notion of *speech community* that has been traditionally used among ethnographers of communication (see Hymes, 1972). The notion of community of practice aims to explain processes of interaction and development among changeable and dynamic groups and situations (Mitchell and Myles, 2004: 241). Under this notion, different individuals may be peripheral members or core members of a given community of practice, decided by the varying degrees of their access to the 'repertoire of negotiable resources' accumulated by the community (Wenger, 1998: 76).

In Norton's (2000) study, one of the participants, Eva, was viewed as a relatively successful L2 learner. Eva was a Polish girl who had just recently immigrated to Canada when the investigation started. According to Norton, Eva won her 'legitimate speaker' position through her participation in the various activities that are recognised and accepted by the community of practice, such as joining in conversations about holidays and even getting her boyfriend to offer lifts to fellow workers on social outings. It is also likely that through these activities that Eva developed her own opportunities for practising English with more competent speakers of the language. Thus, learning itself is socially situated, and involves 'increasing participation in communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 49), alongside experienced community members who already possess the necessary resources.

Research on second language learners who are also immigrants in their newly adopted countries has constituted an important part of the general study on second language socialisation. They have provided interesting data for theory building, leading to research assumptions about language socialisation taking place under different learning environments, such as Chinese L2 learners of English in a study-abroad context. In the section that follows, some background information about Chinese L2 learners is provided. A brief depiction of their general L2 experiences in the UK is also offered, indicating that the struggle of becoming 'legitimate speakers' of the community of practice is not that much different among language students as from the immigrant groups who have to learn and use the target language for their daily survival.

2.3.2 Studies on Chinese learners of English

According to Pellegrino (2005), language teachers and students have long believed in the power of study abroad for second language learning (p. 1). They have good reasons to think so, as what this thesis has tried to do so far is to underpin the role of NS-NNS interaction in L2 learning. For one thing, the extensive social interaction with native speakers in the target language country cannot be duplicated in the classroom, which is essential under the sociocultural approach and the theory of language socialisation I discussed earlier in this chapter.

The studies of Chinese L2 learners of English have almost become a phenomenon on its own in recent years, resulting from an increasing number of Chinese students coming to the UK to pursue further study every year. Though issues of concern vary among these studies, the findings they provide have generally broadened the understanding of Chinese L2 learners as a cultural group. Among them, a number of studies have noticed that despite the high level of linguistic skills among Chinese advanced learners of English, they have much less confidence in their communicative competence.

Studies along this line have paid special attention to the lack of sociocultural awareness among Chinese learners of English. In one study conducted by Jin and Cortazzi (1993) on 'cultural orientation and academic language use', a group of Chinese post-graduates who were studying at British universities were asked about their knowledge of the English language, British culture and the knowledge of British culture which they had obtained from their learning experience in China. Data were collected in the form of questionnaires, and revealed overall, 'the Chinese students, prior to departure, felt far more confident about their knowledge of language than they did about their knowledge of British culture, society, the educational system and British research methods' (Cotazzi & Jin, 1993: 88).

Pragmatic failures feature as one of the areas where sociocultural awareness is very much required among Chinese L2 learners. Ardent (1996), for instance, compares Chinese and American participants in their relative frequency of complaint performance and avoidance and attributes the differences to the differing socio-pragmatic decision-making strategies of the two groups of speakers. In another study, Liao and Breshnahan

(1996) conducted a contrastive pragmatic study of American English and Mandarin refusal strategies. Their findings show that Taiwanese and Americans differ in their formulaic expressions and strategies in refusal, due to their differing perceptions of sociocultural values and modes of politeness.

It is comforting to see that these studies were conducted in line with current SLA theories, particularly under the interactionist approach that regards L2 learner's ability to use various conversational management devices as one of the crucial strategies to prevent and repair breakdowns in communication and to sustain the conversation. What has seldom been done, however, is the investigation of Chinese L2 learners' opportunities of communicating with native speaker while studying and living in the target language country, one of the most important conditions for L2 acquisition.

It is often taken granted that once an L2 learner is in an authentic language learning environment, the opportunities of using the target language to communicate with native speakers will naturally emerge. Such an assumption, as I believe, results from the inadequacy of research on language students' L2 experiences abroad in general, and their interaction with native speakers as social beings in particular. It fails to recognise that unlike classroom learning, L2 learning in study-abroad situations is more of a learner-direct mode. As Pellegrino (2005) notes, without the constant guidance and influence of a language professional, these L2 learner need to take great initiative in spontaneous language use for communication with native speakers. While most of the existing studies on NS-NNS conversations have examined how confirmation checks, comprehension checks, clarification requests, repetitions, and questions affect the pattern of interaction, there is lack of report of how variability in language-use patterns affects the very images that L2 learners present themselves and the social and psychological distance they feel from native speakers.

Consequently, although L2 learners' willingness to communicate with the target language group (WTC) is described as a rather reliable predictor of frequency of communication in L2 (MacIntyre and Charos, 1996; MacIntyre & Clement, 1996; Yashima et al., 2004), we know little about how Chinese L2 learners' actual contact with the target language group affects their WTC, which in turn, decides the opportunities they have to practise their L2.

In the next section, I shall review the relevant discussions on WTC. With insights drawn from social psychology, communication literature, along with attitudinal studies that have been carried out in SLA research, I present the social constructionist view of 'social identity' and 'self-confidence' as useful constructs to help to conceptualise the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations in this study.

2.4 Willingness to communicate (WTC)

Block (2003) observes, the amount of work investigating the social aspects of second language learning has been growing in recent years, reflected by a number of studies that have drawn 'directly and explicitly on social theory' (p.2). These studies have also, to a different extent, addressed L2 learners' attitudes, as well as the notion of 'identity', and thus contributed to the understanding of language learning as a social practice (e.g. Norton, 2000; Pellegrino, 2005).

The earliest integration of affective and attitudinal variables into SLA theory was started almost 30 years ago, among which the most prominent and well-developed framework is that of Gardner (1985), who proposed what he terms a 'socio-educational' model of language acquisition. For Gardner, acquiring a second language is different from learning any other subject typically encountered in school in that it involves taking on the patterns and behaviours of a cultural community other than that shared by the students. For that reason, one's attitudes towards the target language group and beliefs about language learning will help determine individual differences in success. Based on Gardner's socio-educational model, studies have been carried out to examine student beliefs, opinions, and affective dispositions toward the study of second languages. SLA researchers have also explored the various learning contexts, such as specific language classroom activities and cooperative group learning for pedagogical implications. More recently, research has extended beyond the classroom settings to explore L2 learners' general experiences of learning the language in the target language country (Bremer et al., 1996; Norton: 2000; Pellegrino, 2005). One such area to be discussed here is L2 learners' willingness to communicate with the target language group and its implications for SLA research.

Willingness to communicate (WTC), originally conceptualised with reference to first or native language (L1) communication, was introduced to the communication literature by McCroskey and Baer (1985), building on the earlier work of Burgoon (1976) and others. McCroskey and Baer conceptualised WTC as the probability of engaging in communication when free to choose to do so. L2 learners clearly leave their language learning experiences with certain attitudes and perceptions that differ from those with which they began. Schumann (1978b), based on his acculturation model, has linked L2 learners' WTC to one particular factor - the social and psychological distance (SPD) between L2 learner and the target language group. Regarding second language learning as a process of acculturation, Schumann claims that the degree of SPD determines the frequency of the contact between L2 learners and the target language group, which in turn, decides the degree to which L2 learners acquire the second language (Schumann, 1978b). It is then predicted that the degree to which L2 learners succeed in socially and psychologically adapting or acculturating to the target language group will determine their level of success in learning L2.

Scuhmann's acculturation theory proved influential in SLA research following its appearance in the 1970s, as it was one of the few attempts made to take the social and psychological variables into account and to explore their roles in second language acquisition (see the reviews in Block, 2003; Mitchell and Myles, 2004). More importantly, the acculturation model has instigated a new line of research that subsequently moved on to examine how social identity and the boundaries of intergroup interfere with intergroup interaction (e.g. Giles and Coupland, 1991). However, Schumann's acculturation model is not without ambiguity. Schumann was challenged for making no effort to establish the link between acculturation and acquisition. Attitude and SPD are seen to control behaviour, but there is a lack of elaboration of how they are related to second language acquisition process that is widely recognised among mainstream SLA researchers. The concept of WTC is thus introduced to fill this gap, which links Schumann's acculturation model to existing SLA theories, such as the interactionist theory and the sociocultural theory. In other words, SPD affects second language acquisition by determining L2 learners' WTC, the sufficient and necessary condition for meaning negotiation and socialisation.

The concept of WTC also questions the traditional view of the social variables that affect SPD and the conception of 'self identity'. For example, until recently research on the relationship between language and social identity has tended to treat the latter as a *priori* given and an independent construct that can be invoked to account for variations in language use (for a detailed discussion, see Ochs, 1993). Constructivist approaches including practice theory (Bourdieu, 1977), sociohistorical psychology (Vygotsky, 1978) and conversation analysis/ethnomethodology (Sacks, 1992; Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Drew & Heritage, 1992), however, have led researchers to examine social identity not as a direct consequence of static attributes such as age, occupation, country of birth, skin colour, native language, and so forth. Instead, they view the realisation and formation of social identity as a process of continual negotiation through ongoing activities and interaction with other persons and objects.

It is not my intention here to provide a historical view of the different conceptions of social identity across disciplines, as this study is not an investigation of L2 learners' social identities as the end, but rather, a useful analytic device to help to conceptualise the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations taking place in naturalistic settings, in which L2 learners' SPD is formed and reshaped through their actual use of the language.

The context of social interaction in Heritage's view (1984), is both *indexical* and *reflexive* (for a similar view, also see Ochs, 1996). It is indexical because it is created by the talk itself, and reflexive in that it creates the talk on the other hand. In sum, interaction is accomplished between participants in such a way that it creates and recreates the interpersonal relations between the participants. The essential role of language in the enactment of social action and communication is no less effective in L2 discourse. Although most people would agree that exposure to the target language group can promote favourable attitude change, it is unlikely that simply partaking in NS-NNS interaction will produce positive attitudes.

In the next section, I examine some relevant studies on the actual contact between L2 learner and the target language group. The discussion in Section 2.4.1 suggests the causal link between L2 learners' WTC and their actual contact with the target language

group. The discussion of 'communicative self-confidence' in Section 2.4.2 leads to the conceptualisation of the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse in Section 2.5.

2.4.1 The nature of NS-NNS contact

Studies have shown that mere contact with the target language group does not necessarily lead to language improvement of L2 learners, and in fact may be quite counter-productive, causing negative feelings such as increased tension, hostility and suspicion among the L2 learners towards the target language group (Bochner, 1982; Byram, 1989; Norton, 2000). Despite the difficulty of assessing the nature of interaction that has led to research limited both in scope and quantity, a few studies have provided the evidence suggesting that L2 learners' WTC is possibly the by-product of the interaction itself. Underlying this assumption is the social constructionist view of NS-NNS interaction as forming and reshaping L2 learners' SPD from the target language group.

An earlier example is the Heidelberg Research Project for Pidgin German (1976, in McLaughlin, 1987: 113-114). In this project, 48 Italian and Spanish immigrant workers were studied as they acquired German without formal instruction. According to the findings, leisure contact with Germans was found to have the highest correlation with syntactic development (other social factors under investigation include age upon entering Germany, contact with Germans at work, length of education, mother tongue, and sex), suggesting that social proximity is a critical factor. The individuals who had the highest contact with Germans were those who had German partners. Subjects who had little contact with Germans only exchanged greetings and had brief conversations with Germans in shops.

A combination of social and psychological factors is found to account for the acquisition differences among the subjects. For example, having a German partner fosters a high level of learning because of the possibility for extensive social proximity and access to input from a native speaker. It is also possible that having a German partner increased the prestige of non-native speakers and thereby enhanced their opportunities to gain access to other Germans. However, what remains unknown in acculturation theory is the dynamic process of NS-NNS interaction itself, such as how

L2 learners co-construct the conversation with their native interlocutors once the contact is maintained. In other words, it is unclear how the social psychological distance between the learner and the target language group is affected by the NS-NNS interaction itself, resulting from the constant identity negotiation between L2 learners and their native interlocutors.

As Acton (1979) points out, it is not objective conditions, but what the leaner perceives that forms the learner's reality (in McLaughlin, 1987: 126). That is to say, the social and psychological distance that affects learners' WTC is rather a perception formed and reshaped by their previous experiences of contact with the target language group. This perception is constantly shifting as the experiences change. According to McLaughlin (1987), it is possible that the line of causality, rather than going from attitude to second language acquisition, goes in the opposite direction (p.126). Successful learners may be more positively disposed toward the target language group because of their positive experience with the language, such as L2 learners' ability to achieve a higher degree of conversational involvement in NS-NNS interaction.

Regarding the role construction through on-going conversation, Wilson (1989) has cautiously pointed out the need to look at conversation as a particular speech event. For Wilson, a conversation is defined as a situation where an equal speaking right is shared among the conversational participants. In a similar way, Bremer et al. (1996) have examined how one of their Italian informants actively maintained conversational involvement through making general and impersonal comments during a typical service encounter with an English speaking clerk working for an estate agent. By comparison, the interaction between the other Italian informant and the same native speaker developed into a typical gate-keeping encounter in which the native speaker dominated in both topic and turn-taking. Bremer et al didn't set out to examine the linguistic aspects of L2 learning in their ethnographic approach to analysing cross-cultural misunderstandings. However, the implication they have drawn sheds some light on the nature of NS-NNS interaction in general:

> (Here) difficulties both in understanding and in becoming a conversational partner compound each other. They help to produce a context which not only reflects the social structure but itself becomes a factor that contributes to the shaping of social reality. Contact feeds stereotypes just as stereotypes structure contact. So, in an

ethnically stratified society, negative ethnic stereotypes are confirmed and further constrain opportunities for learning. (Bremer et al., 1996: 14-15)

Learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations, therefore, not only constitutes the very site for using and practising the target language through meaningful interaction with native speakers, but also creates further opportunities for learning. It is possible that one of the Italian L2 learner's ability to maintain a longer conversation with his native interlocutor may result in a higher level of communicative competence and increased self-confidence. Consequently, these self-confident learners are more likely to seek for further opportunities of interacting with native speakers arising from a series of reasonably pleasant L2 experiences. On the other hand, being unable to establish one's social role as a co-conversationalist may threaten one's 'self-image', and worse, increase the social and psychological distance between L2 learners and the target language group.

The social constructionist view of L2 learners' self-confidence as constantly negotiated through their actual contact with the target language group is essential in formulating the role of learner involvement in this study. A further example is offered in Pellegrino's study, in which she discusses how L2 learners fail to present to others images that are accurate and acceptable in their L2 discourse, and how the reduced self-confidence of L2 learners' affects the construction of their social identities as a consequence (Pellegrino, 2005).

It is based on the discussion above that I now proceed to explain what I mean by 'self-confidence' in this study, and its relevance to the study of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations.

2.4.2 Self-confidence and learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations

Self-confidence, as described by Clement (1980, 1986), includes two key constructs: perceived competence and a lack of anxiety. For Clement, these constructs represent relatively enduring personal characteristics. In a similar way, Spolsky (1989: 115) has argued that 'there is a specific kind of anxiety that in the case of many learners

interferes with second language learning', and considers 'this anxiety' most often happens to L2 learners' listening and speaking practices.

However, as MacIntyre et al. (1998) point out, it is likely that some situations will entail more confidence than others, primarily depending on characteristics of prior L2 contact in these specific situations. There are many variables that have the potential to change a learner's self-confidence in using the target language. The degree of acquaintance between communicators, the number of people present, the formality of the situation, the degree of evaluation of the speaker, and other factors can influence a learner's self-confidence. This *communicative self-confidence* is distinguished from trait-like self-confidence in that it is more of a result of a particular situation and thus in nature more of a momentary feeling.

The communicative self-confidence is an essential concept in explaining the quality contact L2 learners have with their native interlocutors. This is because the quantity aspect of the contact as presented in Schumann's acculturation model is not sufficient to account for the dynamic relationships between second language acquisition and social psychological variables. What is inside the 'mysterious black box' of the interaction process will help to explain why some learners enjoy and are always seeking for opportunity to communicate with the target language group, while others avoid it. The communicative L2 self-confidence that results from one particular situation, even though it may consist of only one of the factors on which to base the learner's judgement on his/her future contact with the target language group, is undoubtedly an influential one, according to the WTC model developed in MacIntyre et al. (1998)'s study.

Speilberger (1983) considers communicative anxiety to be the transient emotional reaction defined by feelings of tension and apprehension, accompanied by autonomic nervous system arousal. Communicative anxiety varies in intensity and fluctuates over time, and anything that increases communicative anxiety will reduce one's self-confidence and, therefore, one's WTC. Communicative competence refers to the feeling that one has the capacity to communicate effectively at a particular moment. Communicative anxiety and lower level of communicative competence are interrelated to each other, which may be caused by many situational factors such as interpersonal

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tension, increased number of people listening, and the inability to meet the communicative demands present at that moment. Partial support for this position comes from a test of full model of SLA by Gardner and his colleagues (Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997). The investigators used a revised version of Gardner's socio-educational model to test the effects of various factors on L2 achievement with a group of French learners. They found that anxiety was a result of both language achievement and motivation as part of a larger construct that included L2 learners' perceived ability. Gardner et al's (1997) study didn't examine NS-NNS interaction particularly. However, its implication that L2 learners' communicative competence interferes with one's anxiety, which in turn affects one's self-confidence applies to current study.

In a more recent study on immigrants' L2 experiences, Norton's data suggests that 'there is a variety of ways in which anxiety and self-confidence influences the extent to which learners create and respond to opportunities to practice the target language' (2000: 122). In another study conducted by Norton and associates (1993), they argue that L2 learners' actual conversational performance affects their self-confidence:

> ...if learners control the rate of flow of information in a communicative event, the locus of control will be in their favour and they will be relatively more confident about their language skills than in communicative events in which the locus of control is not in their favour'. (Norton et al., 1993: 123)

It would be interesting to investigate what Norton et al. mean by 'the locus of control', if allowed more space. What can be suggested here, nevertheless, is the role of conversational involvement, or, more precisely, the role of conversational dominance in constructing the sense of 'being in the control' in social interaction. It is thus assumed, when the intention to participate is already made, the degree of the L2 learner's conversational involvement in NS-NNS interaction affects the way how the learner perceives his/her communicative competence. It is the perceived competence that interferes with the learner's self-confidence, rather than the actual communicative competence the learner has. Therefore, it is possible that the more conversational involvement the learner has achieved in NS-NNS interaction, the more competent he/she feels as both a language learner and a conversationalist, the more self-confidence he/she becomes.

The psychological effect of learner involvement on L2 learners can also be traced where coherence and involvement are considered as the goal of the interaction, and possibly, the result, such as in casual social conversations – when discourse succeeds in creating meaning through familiar strategies. Kasper and Rose observe (2001):

> Communicative action includes not only using speech acts (such as apologising, complaining, complimenting, and requesting), but also engaging in different types of discourse and participating in speech acts of varying length and complexity. (Kasper and Rose, 2001: 2)

Conversational participants, in this sense, are regarded as 'social actors', who have to attend to their interpersonal relationships through the very conversational behaviours they perform, regardless whether they are involved in L1 or L2 discourse. According to Bateson (1972), the ability of getting actively involved in a conversation sends a metamessage of rapport between him/her and the communicators, who thereby experience that they share communicative conventions and inhabit the same world of discourse. On the contrary, if the ability to perceive coherence is essential to a sense of being-in-the-world, the inability to get involved in conversation 'drives people mad' (Tannen, 1989:13). The negative emotional reaction is, in a sense, unavoidable if we follow Jaszczolt's (1996) view that each interactant has the freedom to create assumptions and meanings and that emotions are liable to interfere with discourse interpretation.

Although studies on learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations are limited, research has been carried in areas such as ethnography and conversation analysis, exploring the social functions of casual conversation in constructing and reshaping social identity and interpersonal relations. In the next chapter, relevant research approaches to analysing casual conversations are presented, which will set the foundation for the methodological framework for this study.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has presented different views on the role of NS-NNS interaction in second language acquisition. Two SLA models have been closely examined: the interactionist approach and the sociocultural approach. The discussion of the claims made by both approaches and their underlying theoretical foundations has led to the conclusion that NS-NNS interaction is a sufficient and necessary condition for SLA. Under the

Figure 2.1: The conceptual mapping of the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations as part of SLA research

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┌─────────────┐                        ┌──────────────┐
│ Affective   │◄──────────────────     │ Acquisitional│
│ role of     │                        │ role of NS-NNS│
│ learner     │                        │ interaction  │
│ involvement │                        └──────────────┘
└─────────────┘                          ↙        ↘
  ↙        ↘                    ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
┌──────────┐   ┌─────────┐      │ Interactionist│  │ Sociocultural│
│competence│──►│ anxiety │      │ theory        │  │ theory       │
└──────────┘◄──└─────────┘      └──────────────┘  └──────────────┘
  ↘        ↙                           │                │
┌──────────────┐               ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
│ self-confidence│             │ meaning      │  │ socialisation│
└──────────────┘               │ negotiation  │  └──────────────┘
       │                       └──────────────┘
   ┌───────┐                          ↘        ↙
   │ SPD   │                    ┌──────────────────────┐
   └───────┘                    │ NS-NNS contact as a  │
       │                        │ sufficient and       │
   ┌───────┐                    │ necessary            │
   │ WTC   │────────────────────►│ condition            │
   └───────┘                    └──────────────────────┘
```

interactionist approach, NS-NNS interaction is perceived as providing the quality linguistic input through negotiation, while sociocultural perspective emphasises the process of socialisation through NS-NNS contact. Figure 2.1 provides the conceptual mapping of the discussions in this chapter and formulates the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse as affecting L2 learners' WTC, the condition for L2 learning based on acquisitional theories.

On the right hand and inside the dotted line is the structure outlining the importance of studying NS-NNS interaction in SLA. That is, the acquisitional role of NS-NNS interaction has naturally led to investigation of the conditions under which NS-NNS contact takes place. One such condition to be examined in this study is L2 learners' WTC, lying at the bottom of the other structure on the left hand. Therefore, it is through the concept of WTC that the affective role of learner involvement is made relevant to the acquisition theories in SLA. According to the causal link between learner involvement and WTC, a higher degree of learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction promotes L2 learners' self-confidence, which in turn, shortens L2 learners' perceived social and psychological distance (SPD) from the target language group and improves their WTC. The changing nature of WTC consequently affects L2 learners' actual contact with the target language group: their willingness to communicate means they may take the initiative to seek the opportunities to communicate with the target language group; their unwillingness to communicate, on the other hand, may lead to avoidance of such opportunities once they arise. Thus, this study is about second language learning not as the acquisition of a new set of grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms, but as a struggle of participating in the symbolically mediated lifeworld (see Habermas, 1987) of another culture. It is in this sense that L2 learners' ability to achieve conversational involvement should be considered as an essential part of what consists of their communicative competence. This is because, what L2 learners ultimately learn in L2, is decided by the opportunities they create and respond to practice the target language under the larger social context.

This view of L2 learners as active constructors of their own social identities has led to the discussion in Chapter 3, in which the social functions of casual talk is examined. Drawing on insights from CA (conversation analysis) and CDA (critical discourse analysis), I developed the concept of 'topic genre' as the appropriate analytic device for examining the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse as conceptualised in Figure 2.1 in this chapter.

Chapter 3. Research approaches to analysing conversational involvement in casual talk

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I introduced the broader research context of this study. The conceptualisation of the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse as part of SLA research provides the rationale to investigate NS-NNS conversations taking place in naturalistic settings, not to examine the linguistic features of L2 learning, but to explore the social contexts under which L2 learners create and respond to opportunities for learning. Bremer et al (1996) observe:

> The wish to learn will have little impact without repeated opportunities to communicate interculturally and, in most cases, a pressing need to do so and speakers' willingness to adjust co-operative principles (Grice, 1975) to an intercultural setting. (Bremer et al., 1996: 104)

For Bremer et al, L2 learners' WTC is likely to create opportunities for learning, but the construct of 'WTC' itself is not always stably maintained among L2 learners, affected by their previous contact with the target language group. Consequently, L2 learners either choose to look for opportunities for learning, or avoid further contact with the target language group based on their self-perceived social and psychological distance (SPD) from the target language group. Eggins and Slade argue that, in a casual conversation, it is the degree of affective involvement and the orientation to affiliation that makes our judgement of the SPD we have from our co-conversationlists (1997: 52-54). However, it is not simply that the more we get involved in a conversation, the better feeling we would have. This is because the quantity of conversational involvement does not necessarily lead to the feeling of emotional involvement. As I will argue in this chapter, the sense of SPD between conversational participants is also decided by the nature of the talk, such as their conversational involvement under the various types of topic genre.

This chapter thus discusses the relevant theoretical approaches that show how the micro analysis of NS-NNS conversations should be integrated into the field of SLA research to allow a broader view of L2 learning. With insight from conversation analysis (CA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA), I have developed the concept of *topic genre* as the appropriate analytic device for studying the role of learner involvement in this study (Section 3.3.5). Drawing on inspiration from Eggins and Slade's (1997) thorough study on casual conversation, five common types of topic genre are introduced: 'story-telling', 'observation', 'opinion', 'gossiping' and 'chat' topics. I then argue that the different social functions of these topic genres in forming and reshaping social identity and interpersonal relations in casual conversation will bring insight into the common concerns shared among Chinese L2 learners of English studying in the UK:

(1) Why is there nothing to talk about with native speakers?
(2) Why is it hard to hold a conversation at a deeper level with native speakers?

3.2 Casual conversation

Although there is no lack of research on social interaction in current literature, drawing data exclusively from 'everyday casual conversational settings', the concept of 'casual conversation' is rarely clearly defined. The common view that regards 'casual conversation as the base or simply the external frame within which internal variation applies' has often led to the impression that the smaller conversational units or procedures can be validly studied without saying anything about the larger unit, the conversation itself (Wilson, 1989: 2). Intuitively, at least, a casual conversation seems to be equivalent to any social interaction in everyday settings, during which various modes of conversational units, features and genres appear. This view of casual conversation, however, is only partial. The composite view of casual conversation may make some sense to understand casual conversation as a particular type of speech event, it does not give credit to the unique structures it has and the specific functional purposes it serves, as the discussions in this section present.

3.2.1 Defining casual conversation

Casual conversations are talks held in naturally occurring situations. That is, the conversations are authentic and spontaneous, occurring in real contexts in the everyday lives of the participants (Eggins and Slade, 1997). However, this broad definition is far from satisfactory because it didn't specify the boundary between a casual talk and a functional talk such as telephone calls to emergency services or interaction taking place at a service counter. Therefore, rather than specifying what 'casual conversation' is, Eggins and Slade (1997) set out to define casual talk by examining what it is NOT. In other words, the 'causal conversation' analysed in this study is defined functionally and, at least initially, negatively, as talk which is NOT motivated by any clear pragmatic purpose:

> ....we regard the process of exchanging meanings as functionally motivated: we interact with each other in order to accomplish a wide range of tasks. Very often we talk to other people to accomplish quite specific, pragmatic tasks: we talk to buy and to sell, to find out information, to pass on knowledge, to make appointments, to get jobs, and to jointly participate in practical activities. At other times we talk simply for the sake of talking itself. An example of this is when we get together with friends or workmates over coffee or dinner and just 'have a chat'. It is to these informal interaction that the label *casual conversation* is usually applied. (Eggins and Slade, 1997: 6)

Although Eggins and Slade find it difficult to define 'causal conversation' in an explicit way, they find it less difficult to actually identify a casual talk from a functional talk. Based on their empirical study, they list a few areas that causal conversation can be distinguished from functional or pragmatically oriented talk:

- The number of participants varies: It is often the case that causal conversations involve several participants; functional talks, such as taking place at transaction encounters, are more likely to involve only two interatants;
- Functionally or pragmatically motivated texts tend to be short: While participants in pragmatic encounters negotiate in order to achieve exchange closure, casual conversationalists are frequently motivated to do just the opposite, that is, to keep exchange going;
- The different levels of formality: While casual talk exhibits informal characteristics such as colloquial expressions of agreement, pragmatic or

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functional talk is normally conducted in a serious tone and is accompanied by various expressions of politeness (e.g. Would that be...? Thanks very much, Just a moment) (Eggins and Slade, 1997: 20-21).

In a similar way, Lakoff (1982) has compared ordinary conversation with functional talk such as persuasion and lecture talk. Although Lakoff didn't specify his term 'ordinary conversation', his observation can be applied to the 'causal conversation' defined in this study at large, including:

> ....OC (ordinary conversation) is reciprocal: any participant has the same conversational options as any others, and if one can ask a question and expect an answer, so can the others; if one can ask a particular type of question, or make a certain sort of statement, the other has the same privilege in turn, and if one can refuse to answer, so can the other. Violations of this principle do, of course, occur in OC, but when they do, participants feel a rule has been violated, that the conversation is making them uncomfortable, while nonreciprocity in a lecture is expected and reasonably comfortable. (Lakoff, 1982: 27)

Lakoff's assumption that conversationalists have equal options or rights regarding their conversational behaviour in casual conversations is essential to highlight the nature of casual conversation as a particular speech event, as different from other speech events, such as interaction taking place in classrooms and in courtrooms (for similar view see Wilson, 1989: 8).

Such a position in defining a casual conversation is not without challenge, as every social activity is inevitably under the influence of social rules, whether they are transparent or hidden. However, if we put all types of talk on a continuum in terms of the degree of rules to be followed, casual conversation will be positioned on the left end indicating the least restraints from rules, for example, compared with a lecture talk or a formal interview. Further, there is the issue of the capability of getting involved when one intends to do so. There is a tendency to take it for granted that once a conversation starts, conversational involvement exists, that interlocutors are cooperating, and that once a communication difficulty arises, the interlocutors will work together to 'negotiate the meaning'. This 'taken-for-granted' involvement is questioned even among socially and linguistically homogeneous groups, let along among interlocutors who are from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The notion of cultural

homogeneity is only an idealisation that is never completely realised as individuals reared in the 'same culture' can exhibit regional, ethnic, age, gender, class, and other social and individual differences. However, as Gumperz and Tannen jointly argue (Tannen and Gumperz, 1979), the level on which differences occur, and the depth of misunderstandings, are far more extreme in the case of broadly cross-cultural communication.

Therefore, in order to understand why Chinese L2 learners in this study find that 'there is not much to talk about with native speakers' and that 'it is hard to talk at a deeper level with native speakers', it is important to understand Chinese L2 learners' own interpretations of what constitutes 'a good and meaningful conversation', and to examine what has exactly happened during NS-NNS conversations. All of this has raised the question that being under what circumstances conversationalists feel emotionally involved in a casual conversation. It is not the case that conversationalists achieve emotional involvement by simply contributing to the topic initiation and topic development in the course of a conversation, nor is it natural that certain topics flow out of the conversation while the others don't. Rather, conversational topics are produced in diverse situations or in a variety ways that will affect how conversationalists construct their social identities and interpersonal relations.

Eggins and Slade (1997) argue that, 'although casual conversation sometimes, and probably most of the time, appears aimless and trivial, it is in fact a highly structured, functionally motivated, semantic activity' (p.6). Far from lacking the usual characterisations of social interaction, such as the constituting role of institutional talk in forming and recreating social identities, casual conversation is also a critical linguistic site for constructing who we are, and how we relate to the world that we are living in. In other words, casual conversation has an important role in negotiating such important dimensions of our social identity as 'gender, generational location, sexuality, social class membership, ethnicity, and subcultural and group affiliations' (ibid.). It is the formation of SPD between conversational participants that this study sets out to explore, which has no less social significance where L2 learners are involved.

3.2.2 Filling the gap in current literature on casual conversation

Despite its centrality in our daily lives, casual conversation has not received as much attention from linguists as written texts or formal spoken interactions. Although there are studies that have investigated some selected features of causal talk, such as turn-taking or the occurrence of particular discourse units, they have seldom done so beyond sentence level, nor have they explored L2 learners' conversational involvement in casual conversation as an arena where a better understanding of second language learning can be achieved.

Labov (1972) and Schegloff's (Schegloff, 1986) commitment to studying everyday language as the 'best data' is in line with the earlier interest in 'phatic communion' (Malinowski, 1923, reprinted in 1972) within the discipline of sociolinguistics, which has subsequently led to the study of *small talk* across several traditions, including semantics and communication studies. Coupland's recently edited book on small talk shows that 'simple, desultory conversation has a significance that is anything but marginal' (2000: 4). However, it is important to note that, although *small talk* and *casual conversation* may have appeared interchangeable in some publications, I take the position that while small talk is a generic phenomenon that can be realised under a variety of conversational contexts and speech events, casual conversation is more of a speech event itself, a claim I made in Section 3.2.1.

Thus, as agreed by Coupland (2000), it would be too limiting to equate small talk with everyday conversation: for one thing, small talk has specific functions within 'specialist' or 'institutional' settings (p.4). On the other hand, although it seems natural that a casual conversation starts with small talks, such as inquiry about health and comment on weather, casual conversation does more than just 'phatic talk' in a sense that people do sometimes chat to inform and to express deep thoughts, hence the concern among Chinese L2 learners about the 'depth' of their talk with native speakers that has initiated this study. It is difficult to conceptualise what people mean by 'a deep conversation', as its connotations can vary across individuals and cultures. However, just as a small talk, by its name, indicates a mode of social talk that is short, minor, and aimless, a deep talk can be perceived otherwise. Thus, if phatic talk, such as small talk, is recognised as a form of action, serving 'to establish bonds of personal union between

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people brought together by the mere need of companionship' (Malinowski, 1923: 151), we wonder what a long conversation with deep thoughts being exchanged with other people does for us. However, the general interest in small conversational units or features among conversational analysts means that, casual conversation, as a particular type of speech event with its own defining rules, structures and social functions, is often not given the attention it deserves.

The paucity of research on casual conversations has inevitably resulted in the inadequacy materials for teaching casual conversation to learners of English as a second or foreign language. The general view is widely held that once L2 learners master the linguistic codes, they would be fully prepared for using the target language for social purposes with the target language group. Therefore, when the conversation is not going as expected, L2 learners tend to doubt their language competence, and worse, form negative attitudes towards the target language group.

The lack of attention to causal conversation for an area of study on its own has started raising questions, as Fairclough (1995a) asks:

> How can it be that people are standardly unaware of how their ways of speaking
> are socially determined, and of what social effects they may cumulatively lead to?
> (Fairclough, 1995a: 36)

While the various social functions of casual conversation might be obvious to Fairclough under his critical discourse analysis, they are not always perceptible to less critical eyes, and perhaps, much less so to the conversational participants themselves. Eggins and Slade (1997) have discussed the paradox of casual conversation in their study. They suggest that the apparent triviality of casual conversation disguises the significant interpersonal work it achieves as interactants enact and confirm social identities and relations. The paradox lies in the fact that 'casual conversation is the type of talk in which we feel most relaxed, most spontaneous and most ourselves, and yet casual conversation is a critical site for the social construction of reality' (ibid.: 16). The relaxing nature of casual conversation leads to a very common perception by those who participate in such talk that it is trivial and that 'nothing happens'. However, evidence of analysis suggests that conversation is anything but trivial: it constructs social reality, and it requires different levels of knowledge, linking the micro patterns

of the conversation to its wider sociocultural contexts. Analysts of casual conversation must try to understand how this enormous feat of invisibility is achieved. Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggest that it is the essential 'casualness' of chat that does it:

> The great part, if not all, of everyday conversation maintains subjective reality. Indeed, its massivity is achieved by the accumulation and consistency of casual conversation – conversation that can *afford to be* casual precisely because it refers to the routine of a taken-for-granted world. (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 172-3) (emphasis in original)

This raises the question of just what is meant by 'casualness'. Berger and Luckmann point out that to see the taken-for-granted background of everyday life, we need to problematise it in some way. How, then, can we problematise, or denaturalise, the casualness of casual conversation to discover what is going on?

Fairclough (1995b) suggests the method of critical analysis for 'denatualising' casual conversation by describing causal talk in an explicit, systematic and, necessarily, technical way (p.38). Practically, an 'explicit and systematic' way of analysing casual conversation is not possible. However, following the recent development in discourse analysis, it is possible to establish analytic models that are relevant and effective enough to examine NS-NNS conversations taking place in naturalistic settings. In the next section, some relevant approaches to analysing casual conversation are discussed, laying the theoretical ground for developing 'topic genre' as the appropriate analytic device for analysing learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations.

3.3 Research approaches to studying casual conversation

According to Eggins and Slade (1997: 23), although casual conversation has generally received limited attention, conversation as a general label for spoken interactive discourse has been more fortunate. In fact, conversation has been analysed from a variety of perspectives, with sociological, philosophical, linguistic and critical semiotic approaches all making important contributions towards our understanding the nature of spoken discourse. In this section I briefly review the major approaches applied in conversational studies, such as conversation analysis (CA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Their implications for analysing casual conversations, as well as their

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disadvantages in answering the particular research questions raised in this study are discussed.

3.3.1 CA (conversation analysis) as a research method in language research

The early conversation analysts, sociologists such as Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, and their successors, combined a concern with following a rigorously empirical methodology with the ethnomethdological aim of finding methods for making the commonsense world visible. In the study of talk, this meant: 'an insistence on the use of materials collected from naturally occurring occasion of everyday interaction' (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984: 2).

Thus, a major contribution of CA has been to make everyday interaction a worthy subject of academic research. Not only have their 'discoveries' about conversation drawn attention to the many insights to be gained from its detailed analysis, but they have also offered a powerful way of thinking about casual talk, by emphasising that it is a dynamic creation of interacting and co-operating participants:

> The discourse should be treated as an achievement; that it involves treating the discourse as something 'produced' over time, incrementally accomplished, rather than born naturally whole out of the speaker's forehead....The accomplishment or achievement is an interactional one...it is an ongoing accomplishment, rather than a pact signed at the beginning. (Schegloff, 1982: 73)

Since the late 1970s when conversational interaction was viewed as a necessary and sufficient condition for second language acquisition (e.g., Hatch, 1978, 1983; Long, 1983a), a number of researchers have turned their attention to the relationship between conversation and SLA. The importance of the study of conversation for SLA research stems from the role of conversation as communicative units in context and as indicators of comprehension and production processes. Fine (1988) observes: 'By examining discourse in second language acquisition, crucial information about the ordering and integration of specific cognitive processes in second language acquisition can be obtained' (p.2-3).

CA has also provided a different approach to certain analytic issues. First, it rejects the use of investigator-stipulated theoretical and conceptual definitions of research questions. Instead, conversation analysts attempt to explicate the relevance of the parties to an interaction. Secondly, conversation analysis gives particular attention to the details of the temporal organization of, and the various interactional contingencies that arise in the unfolding development of action and interaction. In important ways, the sense of intelligibility of an action is provided by its location in an ongoing series of actions, which provides important perspectives to look at how a particular topic is co-constructed by conversational participants. Thirdly, the perspective taken by CA leads to a different understanding of the concept of rules than that held by other research traditions. Rather than a theoretically given form of explanation for human conduct, CA treats rules as situationally invoked standards that are a part of the activity they seek to explain. That is to say, conduct is produced and understood as responsive to the immediate, local contingencies of interaction. What an interactant contributes is shaped by what was just said or done and is understood in relation to this context. Over the course of an interaction, the context continually changes: each contribution provides a new context for the next.

The sense of context has been an essential part of the research carried out under the approach of Ethnography of Speaking, as its advocate Hymes has clearly pointed out: to understand conduct we need to know the type of occasion, who is interacting with whom, where and when (Hymes, 1972). For example, our understanding of conduct as lecturing and note-taking is derived from the fact that the participants are instructor and students and a lesson is taking place in a classroom. The approach taken by CA, however, is different. Rather than treating the identities of the participants, the place, the occasion, etc., as givens, conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists recognize that there are multiple ways to identify parties, the occasion, etc. and that the identifications must be shown to be relevant to the participants. A person may speak as a member of a seminar and then, in some next utterance, as a woman – and be taken as so doing by others. Furthermore conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists maintain not only the identifications of who, what, where, etc., are part of producing and understanding conduct but that the conduct helps to constitute the identities of the participants, the type of occasion, etc., as they are. That is, the context is in part brought into being by the actions people produce. By speaking 'informally', one not only is responsive to an

'informal' setting but also helps to constitute the setting as 'informal'. This perspective has provided important implications for analysing the NS-NNS conversations in this study. For example, although the participants may bring with them expectations of what the conversations would be like, what had contributed to their perceived 'reality' was nevertheless decided by their conversational performance in the actual conversations.

Conversation analysis thus treats the conduct of everyday life as sensible, as meaningful, and as produced to be such. It is further assumed that meaningful conduct is produced and understood based on shared procedures or methods. People's conduct is not wholly idiosyncratic. If it were, coordinating activities with others, especially previously unknown others, would be impossible. However, it is a routine feature of our everyday lives that we can interact and coordinate our conduct with others. CA's goal is to explicate the shared rules or methods interactants use to produce and recognise their own and other people's conduct.

A rule is a precept which social actors follow, or else choose to flout. However, the function of conversational rules is different from that of rules of grammar, in the sense that the former is *prescriptive*, since it represents regularities to guide conduct rather than being a hypothesis about conduct. Conversational units, on the other hand, are the component parts of conversational data defined by conversational rules. Whether it is the grammatical conception of a rule, or the functional approach to a rule, in each case, 'the basic aim is to predict the surface distribution of forms' (Edmondson, 1981: 107). It is even supposed by some conversation analysts that speakers 'know' the rules of conversation in the same unconscious, involuntary way they know syntactic rules, and that the rules themselves are similarly invariant. Labov and Fanshel (1977), for example, claim that these rules are 'compelling' – that is, we unconsciously have to conform to them. In the work of some linguists this orientation reaches the extreme point where it is clear that their goal is nothing less than a 'grammar of conversation', as Edmondson (1981) puts it:

> It should be possible to formulate a set of discourse formulation rules which would recursively enumerate an unbounded number of interactional structures. (Edmondson, 1981:190)

Different taxonomies have since been applied to conversational units in the literature, including Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) hierarchical ordering of functional units based on *moves*, Edmondson (1981)'s notion of *illocutionary act* as the basic conversational unit, and the principle of *adjacency pair* by ethnomethodologists. These approaches, although theoretically different from each other, they nevertheless assume that conversational partners are governed by *rules* in putting conversations together and in governing the surface distribution of forms. What concern this study are the *rules* conversationalists follow to achieve conversational involvement as they work together to co-construct conversational topics.

3.3.2 Conversational topic as the basic unit for studying conversational involvement

On the first page of the Introduction to his book *Discourse Strategies*, John Gumperz (1982) observes,

> Once involved in a conversation, both speaker and hearer must actively respond to what transpires by signalling involvement, either directly through words or indirectly through gestures or similar nonverbal signals. (Gumperz, 1982: 1)

Conversational involvement, according to Gumperz, is the basis of all linguistic understanding. For Gumperz, involvement describes an observable, active participation in conversation. It is comparable to what Goodwin (1981) calls 'conversational engagement' and Merritt (1982) calls 'mutual engagement': an observable state of being in coordinated interaction, as distinguished from mere co-presence. Tannen (1989), however, holds a different view. According to her, what may seem at first like a self-evident claim that it takes more than one person to have a conversation, is actually a more subtle and significant one: 'that conversation is not a matter of two (or more) people alternately taking the role of speaker and listener, but rather that both speaking and listening include elements and traces of the other' (1989: 12). Listening, in this view, is therefore an active not a passive enterprise, requiring interpretation comparable to that required in speaking.

The above claims have shown that 'conversational involvement' can be interpreted in different ways to serve different research purposes. The 'conversational involvement' used in this study is more based on Gumperz's definition than that of Tannen's. That is, the participants' conversational involvement in this study is measured by their verbal contribution in terms of the total number of words uttered. Naturally, it becomes important to define the boundary based on which participants' conversational involvement can be identified and measured.

It is in this sense that conversational topic is chosen as the appropriate conversational unit to examine the issue of conversational involvement. First of all, conversational topic provides the boundary to study a segment, in which conversationalists' verbal contribution can be quantified in terms of words uttered. Secondly, the structure, or the procedures involved in topic construction makes it possible to examine how conversational involvement is achieved or otherwise. For example, although one person at a time is given the responsibility for developing a topic, topical talk is nevertheless a collaborative activity in the sense that the other may produce questions, invitations, continuers, and so forth, to keep the line of talk going. Therefore, the lack of conversational involvement from one particular participant may invite questions regarding: 1) this participant's intention; 2) the social and psychological effects this 'lack of involvement' may produce.

But what is exactly a 'conversational topic'? Although the notion of 'topic' is frequently used and referred to in discourse analysis literature, the basis for the identification of 'topic' is rarely made explicit (Brown and Yule, 1983: 70). The intuitive way of using 'topic' as describing the unifying principle which makes one stretch of discourse 'about' something and the next stretch 'about' something else is far from satisfactory for some discourse analysts (Maynard, 1980). Similarly unclear is the notion of 'topic' given by Keenan and Schieffelin (1976) as the 'question of immediate concern'. The latter is criticised for its inability to account for the fragments of conversational discourse that has more than one single proposition. As pointed out by Brown and Yule (1983: 74), there are a potentially large number of different ways of expressing 'the topic' of even a short written text. In the terms used by Tyler (1978: 452), the 'topic' can only be 'one possible paraphrase' of a sequence of utterances. This is agreed by

Schegloff (1972), who has made a general point about topical talk, in remarking that if one looks to where an object or activity is identified in conversation:

> ...there is an alternative set of formulations for each such object or activity, all the formulations being in some sense, correct (e.g. each allowing under some circumstances 'retrieval' of some referent)....Rather than saying 'they fit the topic,' or are 'appropriate to the topic,' it may be preferable to say that in their co-selection they, at least in part, 'constitute' topic. (Schegloff, 1972: 80)

What Schegloff has revealed here is two-fold: the difficulty to study conversational topics on the one hand, and the possibility of identifying a 'topic' from a conversational fragment on the other hand. In other words, topicality is an achievement of conversationalists, something organised and made observable in patterned ways that can be described. Thus with CA, attention is directed to the *structure* whereby topicality is produced in conversation. Topicality, then, is a matter not only of content, but is partly constituted in the procedures conversationlists utilise to display understanding and to achieve one turn's proper fit with a prior speaker. It is in this sense that Nelson and Gruendel characterise dialogue as 'an extended series of turns during which a single topic or set of related topics is sustained or changed according to conversational rules' (1979: 75). In order to achieve conversational involvement at any particular moment, one has to talk 'topically' depending on that particular conversational context, making his/her remark relevant. When individuals, objects, etc., are not known to one participant, he/she might initiate a series of fairly predictable exchanges directed at clarifying and locating the referent about which some claim is being made.

The procedures participants utilise to achieve formal turn-by-turn talk, and the work they do to repair its absence, are not patterns intrinsic to conversation in a particular natural setting. Rather, they represent ways that members will construct their conversations topically in any 'make-talk' situations in their daily lives, such as parties, passenger terminals, on public transportation, etc., or whether the interactants are newly-introduced or well-acquainted. However, it is important to note that causal conversations taking place in naturalistic settings differ greatly from other forms of talk, such as institutional talk, interview, and so on. It is based on these differences that critical discourse analysis (CDA) is introduced, having recognised the limitations of CA in analysing conversational topics in casual conversations.

3.3.3 Limitations of applying CA approach to analysing conversational topics

CA has recognised that topic management is a distinct, though interrelated, aspect of conversational organisation. In asking how people manage to get their topics made 'mentionable' in a conversation, Schegloff and Sacks (1973), and later others, (e.g. Maynard, 1980) have developed an account of topic placement and topic fitting which shows the interaction of local and overall conversational structure with topic. Through notions such as 'step-wise topic progression', 'topic shift', and 'topic change', CA has tried to categorise the apparently 'natural' or smooth procedures speakers use to progress from one topic to another (Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Maynard, 1980; Jefferson, 1984).

However, CA work has in general focused more on micro structural issues than on the larger, macro structure of conversation. Thus, although Sacks (1992: 17-32) discusses some of the characteristics of extended talk, i.e. talk that 'goes on over more than a single turn' (ibid: 18), his account deals with the micro features of the talk, rather than with the overall structure of such segments. It is perhaps also for this particular reason, conversational involvement has not received enough attention in CA, simply because the issue of conversational involvement inevitably requires studying conversational data beyond the turn-taking level.

Therefore, it is not difficult to perceive the analytic problem faced by Jefferson and Lee (1992) in their study on 'trouble talk', as they find it hard to examine 'a certain shape' that can be sensed from their conversational data by applying the traditional approaches in CA. They argue:

> We had a strong, if vague, sense of trouble talk as a sequentially formed phenomenon, a seed collection of elements which might constitute the components out of which a trouble-telling 'sequence' could be constructed, and a set of categories which might distribute the components across appropriate speakers. In short, we had the basis for a trouble-telling sequence. (Jefferson and Lee, 1992: 522)

By claiming a 'particular sequence' in trouble-telling based on their empirical data, Jefferson and Lee have presented a different perspective to examine the global text structure of causal conversation. They feel there are ideal types or 'templates' (ibid: 524)

based on which a talk is organised and recognised by the conversational participants. They acknowledge that these 'templates' are regularly disrupted by participants as they negotiate their way through the structure. However, the fact that in reality conversationalists often depart from these 'templates' does not deny the possibility that such 'templates' exist and can be described. In fact, the reason that we can recognise these deviations is precisely because there is an underlying abstract structure to each sequence type. In a similar vein, we recognise a conversational topic not just because of the topic change devices used by the conversational participants, nor simply the fact that it is a talk about 'something'. We also sense the sequence pattern of each individual topic, and in so doing, make our verbal contribution relevant both in terms of the content and the structure. This sequence pattern, also termed 'genre' in some literature, has an important role to play in revealing the social functions of casual talk in constructing social identity and interpersonal relations between the conversationalists.

In the next section, the concept of 'topic genre' is developed based on existing studies on 'genre', which justifies the choice of conversational topic as the basic conversational unit to study learner involvement both at a micro level and at a macro level to address the relationship between language and its larger social context.

3.3.4 Topic genres under CDA (critical discourse analysis)

The particular research approaches I undertook to study learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations also drew inspirations from critical discourse analysis (CDA), developed from studies in systemic functional linguistics. Under the systemic functional model of language, conversation is viewed as both purposeful behaviour and a process of making meanings. More specifically, researchers along this line have analysed conversations as involving different linguistic patterns which both enact and construct dimensions of social life (Halliday, 1994; Eggins, 1994; Eggins and Martin, 1995). To bring this idea further, critical discourse analysts view the micro interactions of everyday life as the realisation of macro social structure. According to Fairclough, the principle provocalist of CDA, it makes little sense to study verbal interactions without exploring the global social structures:

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'Micro' actions or events, including verbal interaction, can in no sense be regarded as of merely 'local' significance to the situations in which they occur, for any and every action contributes to the reproduction of 'macro' structures. (Fairclough, 1995b: 34)

Working closely with the relationship between discourse and power, Fairclough launches a strong critique against CA and other approaches for only describing the local organisation of sequences or speech events, without studying the social work such sequences and speech events achieve in maintaining social structures. Consequently, conversation is viewed as constructed by conscious and independent social actors who are co-operatively working towards 'shared goals' through homogeneous interactions. Such a view denies the fact that each conversational participant has his/her own history and ideology that inevitably interfere with his/her social conversations. The problem is, most of the conversational participants are unaware of the ideological/macro structural implications (re)produced through their micro encounters. Thus, although Chinese learners feel 'there is nothing to talk about with native speakers', and that 'the talk with native speakers cannot be held at a deeper level', they seldom look at their conversations with native speakers critically to explore the underlying implications. The description of Chinese learners' conversational involvement in conversational topics at a micro level may reveal 'what is happening' during the conversational interaction. However, such description does not naturally lead to the understanding of how social identity and interpersonal relations are formed and reshaped through the on-going interaction.

The approach taken under CDA to establish the link between the micro interactions of everyday life and their realisation of the macro social structures is the viewing of language as social semiotic. In particular, CDA's perspective on *genre* proves resourceful in analysing conversational involvement in this study, as 'genre' is defined as 'a socially rectified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity (Fairclough, 1995a: 14). This particular type of social activity, according to Bakhtin (1986), is organised by following certain conversational structures to achieve particular social goals:

even in the most free, the most unconstrained conversation, we cast our speech in definite generic forms, sometimes rigid and trite ones, sometimes more flexible, plastic and creative ones.... We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and when hearing others' speech, we guess its genre from the very first words; we predict a certain length and a certain compositional structure; we foresee the end; that is from the very beginning we have a sense of the speech whole. If speech genres did not exit and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible. (Bakhtin, 1986: 78)

Bakhtin thus claims that the lexical, grammatical and compositional structures of particular genres are a reflection of the specific context of communication and he has identified genres as 'relatively stable types' of interactive utterances with definite and typical forms of construction. In other words, texts are looked at not only for the textual regularities they display, and thus the generic conventions they flout, but also for the social significance they incorporate. The application of genre analysis in my study, therefore, is to examine the structural distribution of conversational topics among the participants with the purpose of exploring the social meanings beyond the textual level.

While recognising that there are generic conventions in text, both Fairclough and Kress stress the need to see genres not as fixed and rigid schema but as abstract, ideal categories open to negotiation and change. As Kress (1987) argues:

Genres are dynamic, responding to the dynamics of other parts of social systems. Hence genres change historically; hence new genres emerge over time and hence, too, what appears as 'the same' generic form at one level has recognisable distinct forms in differing social groups. (Kress, 1987: 42)

Following a CDA tradition, Kress (1985) emphasises the social function of discourse in forming and reshaping social power. However, he has claimed that conversation is that with the 'least or no power difference', for example, as compared with an institutional talk, since:

In a conversation the participants all speak 'on their own behalf' and take turns on their own initiative, without being directed by any one member of the group. That is, the distribution of power in the interaction is such that the genre of conversation does not provide for any one participant to assume a differentiated directing role. (Kress, 1985: 25)

One result of this power equality is, he suggests, that the 'mechanisms of interaction', by which he seems to mean the turn-taking procedures, are less foregrounded, allowing the content to be most salient. In contrast, he points out that in genres in which power is unequally distributed (his example is educational genres), the reverse applies. The unequal power foregrounds the interactive conversation, thereby rendering least salient the content or substance of the interaction (Kress, 1985: 25).

Kress's claim that casual conversation represents the genre 'which is formally least about power' is under challenge. For example, Eggins and Slade (1997) have shown with empirical data that causal conversation can be a struggle over power only that the struggle goes 'underground', being disguised by the *apparent* equality of the casual context. However, this challenge is not to deny the salient position of content in causal conversation pinpointed by Kress. Rather, the disagreement arises regarding to what degree conversational content is more salient than other features of the conversation, which as I argue in this study, is mainly decided by the particular conversational context in discussion. With NS-NNS conversation as the main concern, in which the Chinese L2 learners are arranged to meet the native speakers for the first few times, it is natural to assume that the talk itself plays an essential role in shaping social identity and interpersonal relations. It is one of those conversations after which the participants' judgement of their conversational performance depends on what they have talked about and how they have conducted the conversation. It is exactly to this point that the concept of *topic genre* is developed in this study as the appropriate analytic device to explore the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations.

But, how exactly does conversational involvement under a particular topic genre affect the construction of social identity and interpersonal relations between conversational participants? In order to answer this question, it is important to explain: 1) what I mean by 'topic genre' here; 2) the types of topic genre commonly identified in casual conversations; and 3) the social functions each topic genre is performing in causal conversations.

3.3.5 Topic genres in casual conversations

The concept of *topic genre* is developed based on the observation that conversational topic, as a particular conversational unit, has its own distinctive discourse structure. We recognise a conversational topic not only because it is about 'something', not 'something else', but also, based on the discourse patterns it presents. Very often, such patterns can be discerned at the very beginning of a topic, immediately after the topic initiation is made. For example, the utterance that 'yesterday I went to the post office' indicates the start of a new topic, which also suggests that a story-telling may follow. However, whether this topic initiation will indeed proceed into a story-telling or otherwise into a 'gossiping' text has to be negotiated with other participants. Or it may turn out to be just a 'chat' segment.

A 'chat' segment is given a special meaning here, indicating verbal exchanges that cannot be classified into any genre, although it constitutes an individual topic on its own. These 'chat' segments are those where structures are managed locally with highly interactive, short turn-takings between conversationalists. The concept of 'chat' is thus mainly constructed to be distinguished from the 'chunk topic' that has a global or macro-structure, where the structure beyond the exchange is more predictable, and as a result, a certain genre can be applied to.

The 'chat' segment as a conversational genre has in the past attracted increasing attention among conversational analysts. It is certainly an area of interest in its own right. But, its significance also lies in its highly interactive structure that makes the analysis at a micro-level possible, describing the move-by-move unfolding of talk. The chunk segments, or the chunk topics in this study, on the other hand, need an analysis which can capture the predictable macro or global structure, as well as their social functions that may differ from 'chat' segment under different conversational and sociocutlural contexts. Therefore, it is important to note that 'chat' used in this study is not a topic genre in its strict sense, simply because it does not contain any predictable sequence or pattern that is required for a genre. However, its social function as a particular type of topic is not to be ignored: people chat not just to 'kill time', but rather to clarify and extend the interpersonal ties that have brought them together.

The complexity and perhaps, the unpredictability of any causal talk has decided that both 'chat' segment and chunk text be taken into consideration if a more thorough description of causal conversation is to be achieved. Although a 'chat' topic is not qualified for genre description under the specific definition in this study, it is a *genre* on its own, which makes it an equal part to be examined along the topic genres to be discussed next.

The topic genres that are commonly identified in casual conversation include 'story-telling', 'observation', 'opinion' and 'gossiping', and 'chat' topics. Two strategies are used to classify conversational topics under the different types of genre:

(1) One of the distinctive characteristics that make a topic appear belonging to a particular genre is the possibility to predict its constituent stages. Thus one way to classify a chunk topic is to identify the constituent stages and to explain how they relate to each other in constituting the whole. This involves functional labelling the generic stages within a topic, and asking how each stage contributes towards achieving the overall social purpose of the genre. The principle Eggins and Slade (1997) follow to label the stage is when 'those turns or groups of turns are fulfilling a function relative to the whole' (p. 233).

(2) Where the boundaries between constituent stages are not obvious, the semantic and lexico-grammatical features of a topic are examined for 'evidence'. Details of the relevant semantic and lexico-grammatical features are offered in Chapter 4 as part of the analytic procedures developed for this study, supported with empirical data.

These two strategies are complimentary to each other. For example, although identifying the schematic structure of a genre is a major part of genre analysis, it cannot be performed accurately without analysing the semantic and lexico-grammatical realisations of each stage of schematic structure. For a systematic generic analysis, semantic and grammatical justification for differentiation of text stages needs to be provided. This is because different topic genres very often reveal different lexico-grammatical choices. This detailed language analysis is an essential aspect of genre analysis; it is not useful to conceive of genres simply in terms of their generic structure.

In the following sections, the definition for each topic genre is provided, followed by an explanation of the generic structure under each category. Examples are also provided as I explore the ways in which topic genres allow conversational participants to negotiate social identify and interpersonal relations, and as a result, to shape their SPD from the target language group on the basis of difference.

3.3.5.1 'Story-telling'

The first topic genre to be discussed is 'story-telling'. Story-telling is very common in casual conversation. It provides conversationalists with a resource for assessing and confirming affiliations with others. Besides its normal function of entertaining and amusing the audience, story-telling also gives the participants the opportunity to share experiences and to display agreement and shared perceptions. Stories involve both representations of the world (e.g. narrating a sequence of events located in time and place), and reactions to those events (e.g. sharing an attitudinal response). In stories, we tell not just what happened, but also how we feel about it. Thus, in stories, values, attitudes and ways of seeing the world are created and represented.

Labov and Waletzky (1967) argue that fundamental narrative structures are evident in spoken narratives of personal experience. Although their analysis is based on narratives collected in interviews (and thus not examples of spontaneous conversation) decades ago, their findings shed light on the analysis of narrative occurring in spontaneous conversation today. They were concerned with relating the formal linguistic properties of narratives to their function. They argue that the 'overall structure' of a fully formed narrative of personal experience involves six stages as presented in the following formula (1967: 32-41):

(Abstract) ^ Orientation ^ Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^ (Coda)

The above formula provides a description of the constituent stages of 'story-telling' text in a linear sequence and the symbol ^ is placed between them to indicate how they are ordered with respect to one another. The stages within the brackets ( ) are optional, occurring only in instances of the genre. Thus, in this structure the Abstract and Coda are optional; and both the Orientation and Evaluation may be realised either before or as

part of the Complication and Resolution respectively. Apart from these variations, the stages must occur in this sequence for a text to be classified as a 'story-telling' topic.

Labov and Waletzky's analysis was the first attempt to offer a functional description of narratives of personal experience and the strength of their analysis lies in its clarity and applicability, as they explained the functional purpose of each stage:

- Abstract: The purpose of the abstract is to provide a summary of the story in such a way that it encapsulates the point of the story.

- Orientation: The purpose of the orientation is 'to orient the listener in respect to place, time and behavioural situation.

- Complication: The purpose of the complication is to present temporally sequenced events which culminate in a crisis or problem. It is the main section of a narrative.

- Evaluation: The purpose of the evaluation is to reveal 'the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative'.

- Resolution: The purpose of the resolution is to show how the protagonist's actions resolve the crisis.

- Coda: The purpose of this concluding stage is to make a point about the text as a whole. It can be 'a functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment'. (Labov and Waletzky, 1967: 39)

Stories are a reflection of people's identities and these representations then, in turn, shape the way the world is. As Johnstone (1993) puts it:

> Talk and worlds are connected in a variety of ways. Talk is certainly often about the world and reflects what the world is like. At the same time, though, worlds are created in talk. This is in fact most obviously true of narrative talk, since stories, by means of introductory abstracts, summary codas, and other linguistic devices, explicitly take teller and audience out of the 'story world' in which their conversation takes place into a 'tale realm' in which the narrative takes place. (Johnstone, 1993: 68)

3.3.5.2 'Observation'

The second type of topic genre is 'observation'. 'Observation' topics are a type identified by Martin and Rothery (1986). They deal with events or things and factuality is what matters. In our daily lives, we constantly make observation with or without our knowing. It is fair to say that our understanding of the world we live in is based on observation. We see things and hear things everyday through various medium; and as social beings, we also feel the need to share these observations with other people. Like the 'story-telling' discussed above, how we share similar observations and how we feel about these observations have a significant role in shaping social identity and interpersonal relations.

An observation is made on a fact and normally a comment follows. Hence, the obligatory elements of structure are:

Observation ^ Comment

As observation can be made locally and non-locally, and thus two types of 'observation' can be identified from casual conversations. *Local observations*, as the term suggests, are those made on events, objects or people that are within the immediate physical setting and within the immediate action of conversation as they occur. This term is developed to identify the socially adaptive character of talk in naturally occurring situations. Speakers are not seen as simply producing strings of syntax, but as responding to what is happening or appearing at that one particular moment. From this perspective, an essential aspect of local observation is the initiation of a topic focusing on what is to be observed at that moment, such as a discussion on the TV programme that has just appeared on screen.

Non-local observation can be anything that comes to the speaker's mind. It can be a description about an event, a place, a person or simply narration about what is happening in our daily lives, such as bringing up a newsworthy topic. Shared observation relates people to each other, as the evaluative comments reveal people's values and attitudes, and thus, shape and reform the interpersonal relations among them.

The most obvious difference between 'observation' topics and 'story-telling' topics is probably the fact that the former involves no time line of events and so are not classified as 'story-telling' texts. A chat can also be distinguished from an 'observation' by the particular social roles they each plays. While an 'observation' topic normally involves detailed description or discussion of a particular issue and requires attention from the participants, a chat consists of utterances that are more spontaneous to serve the functional purpose of the social talk, that is, to get the conversation going. It is the fact that everybody is talking that matters most, rather than what is being talked about.

3.3.5.3 'Opinion'

An opinion is defined by Schiffrin as 'an individual's internal, evaluative position about a circumstance' (1990: 244), and as such, 'opinion' topics are those that propose, elaborate, defend and exchange opinions about people, things or events. They are expressions of attitude, and not of fact. The generic structure of opinion texts, as identified by Horvath and Eggins (1995) is:

Opinion ^ Reaction ^ (Evidence) ^ (Resolution)

Once the opinion is given the interactant is required to react. Where disagreement occurs, the speaker will almost certainly provide evidence for his/her opinion and after an exchange of opinions the interactants need to reach a resolution of some sort before the text is closed. Social conflict, such as in form of disagreement and challenge, is perceived by Schriffrin as demonstrating the solidarity of a relationship – simply because they display the ability of that relationship to confront each other, a behaviour normally avoided between strangers or acquaintances (Schiffrin, 1990: 256). One important way for displaying social conflict is the expression of personal opinions. The empirical evidence came from Eggin and Slade's (1997) study: their findings suggest that casual talk involving participants who are close and familiar frequently has a confrontational orientation; in casual talk involving less intimate participants there is an orientation towards consensus.

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3.3.5.4 'Gossiping'

The last topic genre to be discussed is 'gossiping'. Gossip has been used in many different ways in literature. In the most general sense it can refer to any 'idle' chat about daily life; or it can be used more specifically to refer to conversations between two or more people about another person behind his/her back. Based on Eggins and Slade's definition, the 'gossip' used in this study describes talk which 'involves pejorative judgement of an absent other' (1997: 278). More specifically the focus is on talk which is meant to be confidential (or at least not reported back to the third party), and is about an absent person who is known to at least one of the participants.

Gossiping is one of the most commonly occurring and socially significant genres in casual conversation. According to Eggins and Slade (1997), the fact that we can designate something as gossip in our everyday experience, and that we can recognise certain sorts of conversation as gossiping, suggests that it does have a distinctive and characteristic linguistic structure and that, like 'story-telling' topics, it is a genre in its own right.

In fact, some 'gossiping' texts may contain narration similar to story-telling or observation. The difference is, a 'gossiping' topic normally has a more intense interpersonal orientation: it is the evaluation of the people being gossiped about which appear to be what motivates the conversation. On the other hand, although a 'gossiping' topic may appear 'chatty' with part of its text, it differs from a 'chat' topic in terms of its distinctive focus on a particular person. The sharing of an opinion about an absent third person (often a friend) is potentially face-threatening and therefore there needs to be explicit or tacit approval given for the gossip to proceed. The approval is indicated by all participants sharing in the gossip, at the very least by asking questions or using assessments or newsmarkers to indicate interest and involvement. It is in this sense that gossiping is regarded as a highly interactive genre.

This is not to suggest a lack of interaction of feedback from listeners in other types of topic genre. In a sense, all casual conversations are interactive. However, gossiping appears to have a greater potential to keep the conversation going than, for example, 'story-telling' texts by asking questions or providing more details. It is possible, for

example, for the participants in the conversation all to contribute to the gossip, each building up layer upon layer of evidence to reinforce the negative judgement. Gossiping is inherently dialogic: speakers who work together collaboratively to construct the discourse. Therefore, in terms of the degree of interactivity within a topic genre, the following continuum is constructed to provide an overview:

'Story-telling'   'observation'   'opinion'   'gossiping'   'chat' topic

At the far left side of the continuum is 'story-telling', representing the least interactive genre among all, while 'chat' topic on the far right side shows it requires the most active co-construction from the conversational participants, which often means frequent turn-changes with short utterance per turn.

It is not a coincidence that this cline also positions topic genres as either more or less amenable to generic analysis. According to Eggins and Slade (1997: 270), the two factors that can influence the adequacy of a generic description are: the degree of interactivity of the genre and the degree to which interpersonal or experiential meanings are foregrounded. Just as a 'chat' topic is too interactive to follow any structural pattern, the less interactive nature of a 'story-telling' topic means it is more likely to occur with a more consistent structure. Therefore, at the left pole of the cline I place the 'story-telling' genre which displays a clearer generic structure, while at the right-hand pole I place 'chat' that does not qualify for generic analysis as discussed earlier in this section. The text types in the middle of the cline ('observation', 'opinion' and 'gossiping') tend to be more highly interactive than story-telling; for example, with interpersonal meanings highly foregrounded.

Essentially, the five genres (including 'chat' topics) reviewed above are all about affirming and reconfirming friendships and in this they reflect the primary goal of casual talk, which is to establish and maintain relationships. However, they do this in quite different ways. Stories are about sharing unusual experiences, thereby confirming what is considered usual, affirming ways of understanding the world, as well as new worlds being collaboratively constructed and negotiated. Observation is more about sharing the common experiences to affirm group affiliations. Opinion seeking or providing involves sharing opinions and judgements while gossiping, on the other hand,

places judgements specifically about a person's behaviour or physical attributes, and by doing so implicitly asserting appropriate social values and norms. In this way, both opinion and gossip reinforce and maintain the values of the social group.

As speakers of a language, we know how to structure these language activities in ways that are appropriate to our cultural contexts. For example, we know how to make the stories interesting, entertaining or worth telling. A genre analysis is concerned with the description of these linguistic activities. It provides semantic and grammatical explanations for classifying and grouping texts with similar social purposes into text types, but it also offers analytic devices for the explanation and description of why and how texts are structured in different ways according to the different social goals they are achieving. The adoption of topic genre analysis in this study, therefore, makes it possible to critically evaluate the meanings conversational participants make in NS-NNS conversations, and the social roles and realities they construct through the on-going social interaction.

To sum up, the strength of a generic approach is that it stresses the relationship between language and its social context, between the linguistic realisation of a text and its social and cultural function. However, conversational involvement is not always evenly distributed between the participants within a topic, because people may have something to say on one topic, but not the others. Where the Chinese L2 learners in this study achieved conversational involvement, it is important to ask 'why' and 'how', to compare it with the areas where they are perceived as less active conversationalists.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the relevant approaches to analysing casual conversations. Particularly, I have explored how CA approach and CDA approach provide the resources for studying learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations in this study. Under the influence from CA, conversational topic is chosen as the appropriate conversational unit for coding and analysing learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations; CDA, on the other hand, provides the analytic devices for exploring the social significance that underlies the different types of topic genre in casual conversations. The rules of genres may constantly be broken in real talk to serve the

changing nature of the conversational contexts. But this is not to deny the existence of such genres, and the various social functions of genre in shaping and reforming social identity and interpersonal relations between conversational participants. Topic genres, such as 'story-telling', 'observation', 'opinion seeking/providing', 'gossiping', and 'chat' topics are not integral parts of casual talk, nor of any other types of social interaction. Rather, the emergence of each topic genre is a co-production of various factors, and it is exactly the search for such emergence that this study sets out to examine the conversational involvement performed by each individual participant, based on the following sub-research questions:

- What topic genres were favoured by the NNS subjects in this study? And under what topic genres did the NS participants contribute most? Why?
- What are the implications for formulating and confirming the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations, as conceptualised in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2.1)?
- What are the implications for understanding Chinese L2 learners' statements that 'there is nothing in common to talk about with native speakers' and that 'the conversation cannot be held at a deeper level'?

The significance that transpires in this chapter is the L2 learner's active role in forming and reshaping the social and psychological distance from the target language group as a result of constant identity negotiation through NS-NNS interaction. Their involvement in conversational topic has an important say in their identity negotiation, as Zuengler (1989) points out:

'In addressing conversational topic, we are not simply looking at what it is that interlocutors talk about. Topic must not be viewed as a superficial, categorical construct independent of the conversation. The fundamental importance of topic is that it *situates* a speaker' (1989: 184)

In Zuengler's (1989) understanding, speakers have cognitive and/or affective relationships to particular topics, which can shape their conversational roles. In other words, how the speakers talk about a topic, and how active or not their roles as compared with their interlocutors under a particular topic genre, will significantly influence their perception of the social identity they each holds. It is in this sense that

the study on learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations also informs our understanding of conversational dynamics and role-taking in general.

In Chapter 4, I will present the methodological framework of this study. Based on the discussions in previous chapters, two lines of enquiry are introduced: research on the subjects' WTC at the macro level, and the micro analysis of NS-NNS conversations recorded in real time. Chapter 4 also provides the rationale of the research methods chosen under each line of enquiry, as well as the analytic devices and procedures for data analysis.

Chapter 4. Methodological Framework

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, I discussed the relevant approaches to analysing learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations in this study. While discourse approaches such as CA and CDA have provided the analytic resources and devices for exploring learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations, they do not offer access to L2 learners' WTC, or their own perceptions of their L2 experiences. Thus, although the micro analysis of learner involvement under the various types of topic genre may reveal how conversational topics are co-constructed between L2 learners and their native interlocutors, it does not naturally lead to the link between the findings and the research questions. After all, how L2 learners feel about their actual talk with native speakers is based on their own interpretations of what constitutes 'a good and meaningful conversation'. Thus, in order to understand why Chinese L2 learners felt that 'they have no common topics to talk about with native speakers', and that 'the conversation cannot be held at a deeper level', it is necessary to examine learner involvement from Chinese L2 learners' own points of view. Such a view, as I believe, is not readily available as the direct consequence from any individual talk with native speakers, but rather, results from the accumulation of L2 learners' previous contact with native speakers. Therefore, along with the NS-NNS conversations recorded in real time, another line of enquiry was carried out to investigate L2 learners' WTC.

I understand that a full assessment of L2 learners' WTC is beyond the scope of this study, as I have no intention to move the focus on L2 learners' actual talk with native speakers to their general experiences. However, research on L2 learners' WTC proved resourceful for the study in the following ways: 1) It provided opportunities for L2 learners to talk about their L2 experiences, and very often, these L2 experiences related to their contact with native speakers; 2) Where L2 learners' WTC had changed, I was able to raise specific questions about the possible reasons. The purpose of this line of research, therefore, was to establish what in L2 learners' own eyes 'a good and meaningful conversation' was, and as a result, to apply these judgements to examine the conversational data obtained from the recorded NS-NNS conversations.

This chapter presents the methodological frame of this study. It provides the rationale and justification for choosing case study as the overall research design. It also introduces the research methods under the two lines of enquiry that ran parallel throughout this study, followed by the analytic devices and procedures employed under each line of enquiry in Section 4.6 and Section 4.7. Section 4.8 discusses the validity and reliability of the study. Section 4.9 provides the summary of the chapter.

To apply the NNS subjects' own standards and criteria for 'good and meaningful conversations' through the first line of enquiry, the examination of the conversational data is hoped to illuminate the two research questions of this study:

(1) Did the NNS subjects in this study feel that there was nothing to talk about with native speakers? If so, or not, why?
(2) Did the NNS subjects in this study find it hard to hold a conversation at a deeper level with native speakers? If so, or not, why?

4.2 Case study

The choice of *case study* as the research paradigm of this study was decided by the research purposes of this study. First of all, it allowed the combination of the two lines of enquiry running parallel in this study, providing opportunities to examine learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations from different perspectives across space and time. Based on the theoretical assumption that L2 learners' WTC is affected by their previous contact with the target language group, possibly by the conversation itself, the research on L2 learners' WTC was hoped to establish the link between WTC and L2 learners' actual talk with native speakers by using L2 learners' own words. The abstract, multi-dimentional feature of WTC means any single measure or method adopted to explore the issue carries the risk of representing only a segment of a more intricate psychological construct. Thus, by studying a particular case over time with the research tools of questionnaire and interview, I aimed to understand the subjects' experience of communicating with native speakers from their own points of view.

Analysing NS-NNS conversations recorded in naturalistic settings on the other hand made it possible to examine the subjects' experiences from a distance, thus with more objectivity. Realising that the critical elements of a conversation is sometimes beyond conversationalists' awareness, critical discourse analysis is crucial in unveiling the social functions of a talk by bringing the 'unusualness' out of a usually mundane talk.

The investigation of learner involvement in L2 discourse under the research paradigm of case study also justifies the use of retrospective interview alongside conversational analysis. Generally speaking, retrospective interview is not a research method conversational analysts would suggest to use. One of the claims made by conversational analysts is their ability to discover the methodical procedures used by conversational participants to accomplish interaction tasks. Thus, what is oriented to by conversational participants is also available for observation by conversational analysts. In practice therefore, conversational analysts are not encouraged to make assumptions regarding the participants' motivations that are beyond the demonstration by participants themselves through turn-takings. However, the concerns of this study are not limited to the understanding of the conversational methods used by participants only. The adoption of a case study thus makes it possible to combine multi research methods to examine the complexity that involved in this study. With retrospective interview, I was therefore able to explore the social meanings constructed by participants' conversational involvement through such turn-takings. That is, L2 learners' conversational performance needs to be studied and understood in their own terms (cf. Garfinkel, 1967) to gain the internal reliability of data analysis (see Gumperz, 1982:134).

4.3 Research on WTC

The purpose of research on L2 learners' WTC was to explore how L2 learners' actual contact with native speakers may have affected their self-perceived social and psychological distance from the target language group (SPD). However, access to the psychological impact of the discourse is by no means direct. Always, this psychological process is not to be observed by the researcher, not even by the subjects themselves. Therefore, questionnaire and interview are considered as two essential ways in this study to get to know the subjects and to learn about their experiences and feelings.

4.3.1 Questionnaire

Gathering data by means of questionnaires has been a tradition in L2 motivation and attitude research, relying heavily on surveying methods. The responses have usually been processed by means of various descriptive and inferential statistical procedures, as any attempt to measure motivation, an unobservable construct, requires the making of inferences from some observable indicator. Although these indicators can, in theory, include the individual's overt behaviours, almost all motivation assessment uses some sort of 'self-report' measures, that is, elicits the respondent's own accounts from which to make inferences (Dornyei, 2001).

During the past 70 years, social psychology has developed several methods to make self-report measures of attitudes reliable and valid, and these techniques can also be adapted to assessing more general beliefs and values. Because of the strong social psychological influence on L2 motivation research, the use of scaling techniques is now an established practice in the L2 field with one scaling techniques becoming particularly popular: *Likert scales*. Likert scales consist of a series of statements, all of which are related to a particular target (e.g. the L2 community), and respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with these items by marking one of the responses ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. After the scale has been administered, each response option can be assigned a number for scoring purposes (e.g. 'strongly agree' = 5, 'strongly disagree' = 1).

As such, questionnaire is normally categorised in the literature as a quantitative method, especially where the purpose of the survey is looking for statistical significance (Yin, 1988). The choice of a case study means the use of questionnaires in this study is serving a different purpose. Instead of providing numbers for statistical analysis often involved in quantitative studies, the subjects' responses obtained in this study are meaningfully interpreted based on the researcher's own experience as an L2 learner who shares the same culture with the subjects. The aim of this initial data analysis is to provide prompt questions for the in-depth interview that follows.

It is thus considered that the use of questionnaires does not change the qualitative nature of the enquiry. Two types of questionnaires are administered in this study: Background Information Questionnaire (BIQ) and Questionnaire on L2 experiences (QL2). As its name suggests, the purpose of BIQ is to learn about the subjects and to set the boundary of the case study at the very beginning of the study. QL2, mainly based on the second part of the BIQ and designed on Likert scales, is used at different stages of the study. QL2 items raise general questions about the subjects' L2 experiences, such as their confidence in English, the frequency of their interacting with native speakers, and their perception of a number of learning strategies in terms of their usefulness in improving their English, including NS-NNS interaction.

4.3.2 Interview

The research method of interview has been widely used in social practice today. The role of interview, in its various forms such as news interviews, talk shows and documentaries, alongside research interviews has been summarised as producing 'our contemporary cultural experiences and knowledge of authentic personal, private selves' (Rapley, 2004: 15). In a similarly way, Atkinson and Silverman (1997) view face-to-face interview as enabling a 'special insight' into subjectivity, voice and life experience.

The investigation of language learners' L2 experiences is not new in SLA research. As Block (2003: 131) reports, a number of SLA researchers have used methods such as diary recording and personal narratives to study the various aspects involved in language learning (e.g. Schmidt and Frota, 1986 and Campbell, 1996). Although the earlier practice was more interested in documenting the linguistic features of language learning across time and space, there has recently emerged a trend to adopt the narrative approach to study L2 learning as a social practice, informed by social theory (e.g. Block, 1998; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). The epistemological position underlying the narrative approach is the perception of L2 learners as social actors whose social and cultural identities are constantly formed and reshaped through their social interaction with the target language group.

The description of WTC as a dynamic construct influenced by participants' actual contact with the target language group has decided that this study is following a social approach, and that L2 learners' own account of their L2 experiences through interview is likely to provide the access not only to what happened in NS-NNS conversations, but also to what they *think* about these NS-NNS conversations.

That is, by conducting interviews at different stages of the investigation, I was looking for the evidence necessary to establish the link between L2 learners' actual talk with native speakers and their WTC. The purpose of this qualitative interview is thus not to discover how many, and what kind of, people share a certain characteristic. Rather, it is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world. How many and what kind of people hold these categories and assumptions, is not the compelling issue. It is the categories and assumptions, not those who hold them, that matter.

Interviews, according to Rapley (2004), 'are by their very nature, social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and prospective) accounts or versions of their past (or future) actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts' (p.16). Therefore, it is important to consider the context under which an interview happened when analysing and interpreting the data - how the interaction produced the comments made, and particularly, how specific versions of reality are co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee. Interviewer conduct, in this sense, is perceived as playing an active role in shaping the data to be collected. The most talked-about features concerning interviewer conduct in current literature are *rapport* and *neutrality*.

It is now well documented that, whatever prescriptions interviewers follow, they must work to establish the rapport with their interviewees. In other words, they 'must communicate trust, reassurance, and even, likeableness' (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992: 108). This is one gloss of the 'ideal' that nearly all texts on interview methods share. Put simply, if the interviewee feels comfortable, they will find it easier to talk to you.

The second ideal is *neutrality*. There are a range of perspectives in regard to interviewer neutrality. While the principle of neutrality in interview is perceived as 'essential practice' by some researchers (e.g. Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992; Weiss, 1994), the non-

neutral position of the interviewer is viewed by others as an unavoidable result of the interaction itself (e.g. Gubrium and Hostein, 2002: 15). As Hostein and Gubrium (1995, 1997) argue together, 'being neutral' in any conventional sense is actually impossible – interviewers are always active in the sense that they have overarching control of the talk. They guide the talk and decide what questions to ask, and when and how to ask. However, it is possible for the interviewer to ask non-leading questions and carefully not to reveal his/her personal thoughts and interests to the interviewee.

There is also a third perspective that regards the narrative of non-neutral interviewing as a growing practice responding to the broadening view of the nature of social sciences. For example, Fontana and Frey (1994) argue:

> ...as we treat the other as a human being, we can no longer remain objective, faceless interviewers, but become human beings and must disclose ourselves, learning about ourselves as we try to learn about the others. (Fontana and Frey, 1994: 373-4)

Researchers along this line are encouraged to explore the subjects' thoughts, ideas and experiences on the specific topic, and if relevant, to offer their own thoughts, ideas and experiences for comparison as well.

Based on the discussion above, the issue of neutrality was moderately defined in my own study. That is, all through the interviews, I tried not to ask any leading questions or to put my own views on my interviewees. Although there were previously prepared questions, the interviewees were allowed space to talk at length. My interview questions were constantly adjusted as new themes and topics emerged. Meanwhile, I felt that my own experience as an L2 learner who came from the same culture as the subjects' made it almost impossible not to share and understand my interviewees' experiences. As a result, I took a non-neutral stand by offering my responses towards some specific situations. This revealing of the researcher's own story is considered as an important strategy to establish the reciprocity between the interviewer and the interviewee. As Johnson claims, by disclosing some aspect of the 'self' of the interviewer, the interviewees will feel more at ease and this will lead to rapport (Johnson, 2002). What should be put under caution in this approach, though, is the degree of such non-neutral

position; that is, 'whether, when, and how much disclosure makes sense' in reference to each specific interaction (Reinharz and Chase, 2002: 288).

4.4 Enquiry at a micro level: Learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations

4.4.1 Recorded NS-NNS conversations

All the conversations in this study were audio-recorded due to the very transient nature of conversation taking place in a naturalistic setting. First, without back-up audio data, certain features of the details of actions in interaction are not recoverable in any other way. Second, a recording makes it possible to play and replay the interaction, which is important both for transcribing and for developing an analysis. Third, a recording makes it possible to return to an interaction with new analytical interests.

However, getting access to the subjects' private conversations with native speakers presents a problem itself. Even if the access is allowed, questions are raised as to what degree this recorded conversation can be defined as 'naturalistic' when the participants are aware of the existence of a video/audio recorder. That is to say, it is difficult to record a truly natural NS-NNS conversation without the possibility of breaching ethical norms. Therefore, I chose to arrange the NS-NNS conversations as an alternative. It is arguable whether conversations like these – set up by the researcher, reveal the characteristics inherent in naturalistic settings, where the participants' willingness to converse has to be negotiated in the first place.

However, Turner (1967) has argued that situations like this – learners out of their regular learning environments – are themselves social situations requiring ordinary social communication and thus 'constitute legitimate sources of naturalistic data, like any other standardised cultural scene' (p.28). According to Reichman (1990), the linguistic domain as a domain of orienting behaviour requires at least two interacting organisms with comparable domains of interactions, so that a cooperative system of consensual interactions may be developed in which the emerging conduct of the two organisms is relevant for both. It is possible that in an organised setting the dyads are

aware of the research purposes and the recording devices, and as a result, either to feel uncomfortable with the situation or 'strive' to match the assumed research expectation. However, the sheer nature of any social conversation as requiring mutual engagement means, i.e. what to say and how to behave in a conversation, are inevitably the result of the co-construction of the participants. That is to say, the participants have to, and on most occasions, are able to assess the situation and the emerging conduct to make their conversational behaviour relevant for both. By doing so, the participants are 'making the situation', one of the important characteristics of any casual conversation.

4.4.2 Retrospective interview

The use of retrospective interview to study cultural representations is based on the theory of activity, a component of sociocultural theory. The theory of activity is predicted on the belief that people are uniquely constructed individuals, and that human activity is a complex process, determined by the context and the goals and sociocultural history of the participants (Roebuck, 2000: 79). For example, conversation can be viewed as 'a matrix of utterances and actions bound together by a web of understanding and reactions' (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 30). Thus, by conducting retrospective interviews, L2 learners are given the opportunity to interpret their linguistic performance and possibly, to reveal the psychological processes that are not accessible to outsiders. For example, where learner involvement is identified as statistically significant in terms of the number of words contributed on one particular topic, questions can be raised to elicit the subjects' views regarding their communicative self-confidence as a result.

4.5 Getting access to the case study

The case study was conducted during an eight-month period of time, during which three sets of questionnaires and interviews were administered with the subjects, alongside the six NS-NNS conversations recorded in naturalistic settings. Although the two lines of enquiry were equally important to the research purposes of this study, the nature of the data being collected had decided slightly different time schedules. For example, NS-NNS conversations were not organised and recorded until Week 3. This was based on

the consideration that the access to NS-NNS conversations would be easier to obtain if I had established certain mutual trust and rapport with the subjects through questionnaire and in-depth interview during the first two weeks. The timetable for data collecting, as well as the research methods used under each line of enquiry, is provided in Appendix 2.

Getting access to the case study was an important element in initiating the study. The conditions of entry, as they were constantly negotiated between the subjects and myself, not only provided the opportunities to study the case, but also set the limits for many of the subsequent decisions that I had to make.

The three subjects, who were given pseudonyms as Cheng, Lin, and Wong respectively in this study were taking an MA course in English Language Teaching at the same university where I was doing my Ph.D study. Having already known the lecturers on the course and been familiar with the environment proved to be enormously helpful. For example, I was able to obtain some basic information about the subjects, such as their teaching backgrounds and the approximate length of stay in the UK of each student. Such information made it possible to establish the initial boundary of the case, and as a result, to devise particular questionnaire items that could target the specific aspects of each subject. Meanwhile, I was allowed to attend the MA course as one of the Ph.D students at the time, which provided the convenience to approach the students personally.

Thus, although the access was officially permitted and the three students were given formal notice beforehand, my actual approach to the subjects was kept informal: I was first introduced as a Ph.D student to the MA class during my attendance at one of the MA units. I then approached each student individually afterwards, and explained my intention of having them as my subjects. In order to avoid any possible bias to the validity of the data, the aim of the study was explained as my general interest in NS-NNS interaction, particularly where Chinese learners were involved. Besides asking the students to fill in the Background Information Questionnaire (BIQ), I also took the opportunity to chat with the students. Not surprisingly, knowing that I did a similar course three years ago, I was thrown with questions about various aspects of the course, instead of enquires about my study. Sharing the same nationality, the same language,

and similar experiences with these students had helped to shorten the distance between us. I was surprised how soon during the introductory meeting that the students had started talking about their general experiences in the UK, such as their difficulties in finding the right places to shop, their surprises at British people's politeness, and so on. At the end of this first contact, I felt a certain rapport and trust had been established, and the students agreed to be interviewed the following week.

However, it was not until the next meeting set for the interview, that the formal permission from the students was requested. This is because I was concerned that the intrusive nature of the audio-recording of some of their conversations with native speakers would have put them off, if I had brought the issue up the first time I met them. The interviews and retrospective interviews that I would require over time also meant precious time taken out of their busy schedule of study. Thus, I felt the permission would be easier to get if time was allowed for me and the subjects to get to know each other better. The rather informal interview with each student was regarded as another opportunity to build up the mutual trust.

After Interview One in Week Two, all the three students were presented a copy of the standard Ethics Protocol (see Appendix 1) that listed the purposes of the study, the requirements on the students as subjects, as well as their rights during and after the study. They all agreed to participate in my study and signed the form.

4.6 Data collecting and analysing for investigating the subjects' WTC

This section provides the procedures of data collecting under one of the parallel lines of enquiry: research on the subjects' WTC. Two methods of data collecting were conducted, including questionnaire and interview. This section also describes the way how interviews were analysed by employing opening coding and theoretical comparison that are traditionally practised in qualitative data analysis.

4.6.1 Background Information Questionnaire (BIQ)

BIQ is based on the questionnaire designed and used by Hyland (2004) in her recent study on Chinese students' out-of-class English language learning in Hong Kong context. With some adaptations to the original form, BIQ was conducted during my introductory meeting with the three subjects (A full description of the questionnaire items is provided in Appendix 3). As an exploratory case study, the data analysis was an on-going process. The students' reply to BIQ was immediately analysed, and further set the boundary of the case under study. Analysing BIQ also provided the necessary information for addressing more personal questions about each subject in the follow-up interviews, such as their language experiences and attitudes towards interacting with native speakers.

The questionnaire is described in English, and was piloted on three Chinese students before it was handed out to the three subjects. It consists of two parts. The first 10 questions are closed items with answers either to be written down by the respondent or to be chosen from the multiple choices. For example, the subjects were required to write down their scores on IELTS test and the lengths of their stay in the UK.

The subjects' responses on the first part of the questionnaire provide useful general information about the subjects in terms of the following aspects: (1) Educational background (2) Proficiency level of English (2) Length of residence in the UK (3) Age (4) Gender. The results are summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: General information about the subjects

	Lin	Cheng	Wong
Age	29	24	24
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Educational background	Diploma in English Teaching	Bachelor's degree in English Education	Bachelor's degree in Education
Proficiency level of English (Based on IELTS score)	6.5 (taken in Year 2003)	6.0 (taken in Year 2003)	6.0 (taken in Year 2004)
Length of stay in the UK	1 Year	7 Weeks	6 Weeks

The subjects were also asked about their purposes of doing this MA course. Along with the multiple choices provided, space was allowed for the subjects to write down any extra reasons if they are not on the list. The last item in the first part of the questionnaire is made up of four statements that describe four levels of English competence, as shown in the example. The respondents were required to choose one that best described their level of English competence:

a. My English is weak and I need to improve it considerably
b. My English is reasonably good, but I still have a lot to learn
c. My English is good, but there is still some room for improvement
d. My English is nearly as good as a native speaker and I don't think I need to develop it further

(Questionnaire item 10, BIQ)

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to enquire about the subjects' previous language experiences as well as their attitudes towards the usefulness of different activities in improving their English, including talking to native speakers. The subjects were also asked to assess their confidence in different aspects of English competence, such as their knowledge of English grammar, British culture, British people and their knowledge of using English in a classroom setting as compared to communication for social purposes.

These are statements carefully worded on *Likert scales*. The subjects were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements. For a statement such as 'I rarely had opportunities to talk to native speakers', the subjects can choose from 'strongly disagree' to 'uncertain', and to 'strongly agree' on the other end of the continuum. Because Lin had already been in the UK for one year when this study started, she was given a slightly different questionnaire, with one more item enquiring about her language experiences in the UK (see Questionnaire item 14, BIQ in Appendix 3).

4.6.2 Setting the boundary of the case study: Initial data analysis of BIQ

The information obtained from analysing the subjects' responses to BIQ further defined the case. Although individual differences exist, the following similarities were found among the subjects:

(1) The three subjects were identified as competent L2 learners.

This category was based on the IELTS scores of the subjects as well as their educational backgrounds. IELTS, fully named *International English Language Testing System*, is designed to assess the language ability of candidates who want to study or work where English is the language of communication. According to the official website of the British Council, IELTS conforms to the highest international standards of language assessment (accessed on 08/08/2006). Test takers' language skills are evaluated on a scale from 0 to 9. Although the entry score for entering a British university varies depending on individual universities, the British Council provides the information that, generally speaking, students with a score of 6.0 or over are considered as qualified for exemption from a further language course once they are accepted by a British university. IELTS test is made up of four parts, examining candidates' language skills on listening, reading, speaking and writing. To set the entry score as 6.0 or over is based on the understanding that candidates who achieve such scores are competent L2 learners who are able to deal with their study and life in the UK. Students who achieve a score of 7.0 and over are normally considered as exceptionally good, and the proportion of numbers is small.

Lin achieved 6.5 in IELTS test, while both Cheng and Wong got 6.0. They all met the general requirement for MA study as competent language learners. Although the three subjects had slightly different educational backgrounds, they had all taught English back in China. Lin did a diploma in English Teaching and had taught English in a secondary school for nine years; both Cheng and Wong graduated in 2003 with a Bachelor degree in English Education and Education respectively. Cheng taught English at a secondary school for one year, and Wong taught at a primary school for one year.

It has been pointed out that without any target language vocabulary and without some rudiments of grammar, an L2 learner cannot begin to communicate with native speakers of the target language (Schmidt and Frota, 1986). This is because the ability to carry on conversations is not just a reflection of grammatical competence. The L2 learner must nominate topics for conversation, recognise topics nominated by native speakers, and respond relevantly, and so on. Therefore, to focus on Chinese competent L2 learners and to keep the interference of linguistic difficulties to its minimum, this study hopes to shed more light on the co-construction of conversational topics between the subjects and their native interlocutors.

(2) The three subjects shared a similar L2 learning environment, decided by a similar educational background mentioned above, and by the lengths of their stay in the UK.

Both Cheng and Wong had been here for just under two months when this study started, and both had one month of intensive English course offered by the Language Centre at the University. Lin had already been in the UK for one year, during which time she attended a language school. Lin's longer stay in the UK than the other two subjects was taken into consideration in data analysis. However, she was not considered as differing a lot in terms of the general L2 learning environment in which she learnt her English. This is because all the three subjects had spent most of their time (at least 8 years under the current Chinese educational system) learning English in China, with only a short period of time (from two months to one year) being exposed to the target culture (for an overview of the Chinese context of English learning, see Appendix 4). Although it is still a question whether L2 learners will eventually 'think in L2', L2 learning environment as a crucial factor affecting L2 acquisition has been widely acknowledged in SLA research. Therefore, by taking the subjects' L2 learning environment into control, it increases the external validity of the case study as a particular group that represents a larger group of people with similar L2 experiences.

(3) All the three subjects chose 'to improve English' as one of the purposes of doing this MA course.

In Questionnaire item 10, the subjects were asked to choose the statements that best described their current level of English. Both Lin and Cheng considered their English as 'reasonably good, but still have a lot to learn'. Wong chose the least positive one, which reads, 'my English is weak and I need to improve it considerably'. Not surprisingly in Questionnaire item 11, all the three subjects took their knowledge of English grammar as a strong point, compared to listening and speaking, which fits into the general definition of Chinese learners of English. According to Ng and Tang (1997), the emphasis on grammar and structure still popularly practised in language classrooms in China has led to the criticism that 'students became almost deaf and dumb, and had little ability to speak and understand English after years of learning' (p.67). Consequently, most Chinese students would like to take the opportunity to improve their English once they set foot in a country where English is natively spoken.

It is interesting to point out that Lin, after being in the UK for one year, was the one who expressed least confidence in her knowledge about British culture and British people. Wong chose 'uncertain' for the question, while Cheng thought she was confident in her knowledge of British culture and people. This has naturally raised the question 'to what degree are the self-assessment and judgement of the subjects' to be accepted as valid evidence?'

(4) The three subjects were female adult learners aged between 24 and 29.

A case study, like research of all kinds, has conceptual structure. It is usually organised around a small number of research questions and invites attention to ordinary experience in natural habitats in order to examine the issue(s) under study, or to understand the case. The choice of what case to study is often decided by the different theoretical assumptions the researcher has. Choosing three adult Chinese L2 learners in this case study was therefore based on my interest in NS-NNS interaction, particularly regarding the role of conversational involvement in affecting L2 learners' self-perceived social and psychological distance from the target language group. The different

demands on adult L2 learners in social interaction as compared to first and second child learners, has been extensively explored by Hatch (1983):

> Topics in adult discourse cover an incredibly wide range when compared with those involved in child first and second language learning, and the conversational ambitions of adult learners are complex and abstract. In the case of adult second language learners, there is also pressure to respond in conversation intelligently, to say something coherent and reasonably interesting, both to protect one's own good image of oneself (face) and to minimise as much as possible the conversational burden that must be carried by native speakers. (Hatch, 1983: 128)

The distinction between adult learners and child learners has made the study on adult learners a special area of research in its own right. This is because adult learners bring into the conversation not only their intention to learn, but also their own values and beliefs as mature social beings. As reported in Norton's (2000) study, the history and cultural background of an adult L2 learner's presents as much challenge as the opportunity for L2 learning. To focus on female learners instead of a mixture of both male and female learners was to reduce the complexity involved in gender differences in NS-NNS interaction.

(5) All the three subjects had certain amount of time of using English in their daily life, although the purposes varied.

Lin's opportunities of using English were mainly limited to teaching, while Cheng and Wong had comparatively more chances of talking to native speakers for social purposes. Wong's contact with native speakers came from the intensive English course offered by one of the language centres in China, where the teaching was undertaken by some native-speaking English teachers. She attended the course for three months before she came to the UK. In Cheng's case, her part-time job with an international corporation made it possible to use English to socialise with some of her British colleagues.

4.6.3 Follow-up interview

It was based on this initial understanding of the case that follow-up interview with each subject was organised in the following week. The findings obtained from BIQ provided an important source for me to raise specific questions about each individual subject.

Although a common question like 'what is your purpose in taking this course?' was addressed to all the three subjects, there were adaptations on the other aspects of the subjects. For example, Cheng and Wong had chosen a different answer regarding their self-perceived competence in English. Cheng chose 'My English is good, but there is still some room for improvement', which enabled me to ask Cheng to further explain the areas that she felt confident in using English, and vice versa. Wong, on the other hand, expressed her worry about her English ability, as she regarded her English as 'weak and I need to improve it considerably'. Therefore, Wong was asked to interpret what she meant. Such a clarification is important, as it has been aware in social science research that questionnaire responses cannot always been taken at its face value, because the respondents may have a different interpretation from the researchers by choosing one particular answer. The advantage of having a follow-up interview is to allow the space for the respondents to offer their own interpretations of their choices. The interview ended up with an open question asking each subject to reflect upon their previous experiences of contact with native speakers, either in the UK or in China, depending on the lengths of their stay in the UK. The sensitive nature of the enquiry into the subjects' attitudes towards L2 learning, particularly towards their previous experiences of interacting with the target language group meant the interview questions had to be carefully worded. Direct questions such as 'how did you feel about the native speaker you spoke to?' were avoided where it was possible. Instead, I asked what happened during their talk with native speakers, and often, the subjects themselves proceeded to describe their attitudes and feelings afterwards. In order to make sure that the interpretation was well grounded, I also felt it was necessary to administer the interview in the way each subject would feel mostly comfortable to talk. Questions were adjusted in each individual interview to suit the subjects' personal needs. As Stake points out:

> Qualitative case study seldom proceeds as a survey with the same questions asked of each respondent; rather, each interviewee is expected to have had unique experiences, special stories to tell. (Stake, 1995: 65)

As a result, the interviews were conducted with each of the three subjects individually, each at a different time with slightly different procedures. The interview with Lin was conducted in English at her request. I was initially concerned about the language constraint on Lin when she talked in English rather than her first language that we both

share during our interview. But once the interview began, my worry started to disappear: Lin was well spoken with the language and was very good at expressing how she felt and thought regarding her L2 experiences. To take the interview as an opportunity to practise her English, Lin had also considered me as a more competent language learner than her and somebody whom she was interested to talk to and to learn from. My decision to conduct the interview in English, therefore, was a gesture to respond to this trust that Lin showed on me. The interview took the form of conversation, during which the interview questions were randomly distributed during the talk, driven by the talk itself.

The interviews with Cheng and Wong were conducted in Chinese, the first language that I share with them. It followed a question-and-answer form, with me asking the leading questions, while at the same time, allowing sufficient space for my interviewee to provide her version of explanation. The interviews with Lin and Cheng were tape-recorded with notice given in advance. The interview with Wong was squeezed out of her lunch break in one of the seminar rooms at the University. With other students sitting around and talking, Wong felt intimidated by the tape-recorder. She required the interview be conducted in an informal way. Therefore, I gave up the tape-recorder, and chatted with here while she ate her lunch. With the notes I took during the talk, I made sure that I documented the interview while the memory was still fresh and vivid in my mind. The transcripts and notes for the interviews can be found in Appendix 5.

4.6.4 Questionnaires on L2 experience (QL2) and follow-up interviews

Besides BIQ, two other sets of questionnaires were conducted with the three subjects in February and May respectively, each with follow-up interviews. A complete form of QL2 can also be found in Appendix 3.

QL2 is an adapted version of BIQ. The same as BIQ, QL2 is described in English and was piloted with the same group of students. The questionnaire items include general questions about the subjects' L2 experiences, such as their confidence in English, the frequency of their interacting with native speakers, and their perception of a number of learning strategies in terms of their usefulness in improving their English, including NS-NNS interaction. It is natural to assume that changes in response may take place with

some of the questionnaire items as compared to those of BIQ conducted at the very beginning of the study. Therefore, once such changes were identified, questions were raised to elicit the subjects' own explanations for the changes in the follow-up interviews. For example, based on the comparison between Lin's response to BIQ and QL2 conducted in February, I was able to ask Lin why she thought she had improved her knowledge of British culture and people.

By the time the second and the third interviews were conducted, I had established a closer relationship with the subjects, who, by this time, had also got used to being recorded. Therefore, all the six individual interviews were tape-recorded. Five of them were conducted in Chinese. The third interview with Lin started with Chinese, but then switched to English at the requirement of Lin, who took the occasion as another opportunity to practise her English. The subjects also appeared to be more comfortable with the questions being raised. This was reflected by the transcripts for Interview Two and Interview Three that generally showed more detailed responses from the subjects than they did in Interview One. Particularly in Interview Three, the transcripts were neatly organised in typical question-answer form, but with highly spontaneous elaborations form the subjects.

A full transcription of each interview was made, and the transcripts are provided in Appendix 5. For interviews that were conducted in English with Lin, her words are presented exactly as they were, including hesitations, false starts and pronunciation errors. Where interviews were conducted in Chinese and translation was required, these conversational features are not represented, mainly because the subjects were much more fluent in expressing themselves in their first language than in English.

4.6.5 Analysing the interviews

How researchers analyse qualitative interviews is inextricably linked to their specific theoretical interests (Rapley, 2004: 27). As such, the approach I took to analyse my interviews was based on the particular question I asked: What are the subjects' own standards and criteria for 'a good and meaningful conversation'? This allows the open coding of the subjects' responses by identifying general categories of information contained in the responses (e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, after reading and

rereading each interview transcript, I was able to compare the subjects' responses at different stages of the study, and to raise particular questions where changes of view or attitude took place, such as:

- In what way did the subjects' actual L2 experiences affect their attitudes towards the target language group?
- What explanations were given by the subjects themselves accounting for their perceived social and psychological distance from the target language group?
- In what way are these explanations related to learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations?

The analysis, therefore, was carried out at both a descriptive and analytic level. The descriptive analysis involved listening closely to what the interviewees were saying, and understanding their interpretations of their L2 experiences. This procedure normally prevents researchers from looking for interpretations according to their own theoretical assumptions. It also allows researchers to consider alternative explanations for the research questions. Thus, although I had the assumption in mind that learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction affected the subjects' attitudes and opinions about the target language group, I was prepared to consider any possible explanations given by the subjects. At this initial stage, it was important to allow the data to speak for themselves. This level of analysing involved categorising the data based on the following information provided:

(1) The subjects' account of their experience of communicating with native speakers;

(2) The subjects' explanations for their difficulties/confidence in communicating with the native speakers;

(3) The subjects' descriptions for 'good and meaningful conversations'.

Following this principle, Lin's comment that '*I think it's very difficult to, to talk deeply with native speakers*' (Lines 40-41, Interview One) was coded into the first category, while her next utterance that '*maybe, there are some racial problems, some racial thing...*' (Line 41, Interview One) was coded into the second category. Lin's other

comment that '*I can get some information from my Chinese friends*' (Line 68, Interview Two) then fell into the third category.

The analytic level of data analysis was to qualitatively interpret the subjects' versions of explanations. In order to look for the underlying messages, the question to guide the analysis at this stage was not so much 'what have the subjects said?' but 'why did they say so?' As Strauss and Corbin (1998: 97) clearly point out, to do justice to our subjects and to give them a proper 'voice', we must be able to stand back and examine the data beyond the surface level. Therefore, each subject's interview responses at different stages of the study were compared. Particularly, I tried to understand their attitudes towards speaking to native speakers in their own terms with the conversational contexts in mind. Rather than accepting Lin's view that talking to native speakers is '*time-consuming*' (Line 42, Interview Two), I looked critically into Lin's experience of interacting with native speakers, as well as Lin's own standards for 'a worthwhile conversation'.

At this level of analysis, I took caution not to take the data as read, or to let the subjects' biases, beliefs and assumptions intrude the analysis, especially where the explanations appear self-contradictory. This is not surprising considering that interview constitutes a social occasion on its own, and thus how the interviewer and the interviewee co-construct the discourse is also decided by the immediate context, such as how the question is presented and what was talked about previously and so on. Contradictory answers were given by Lin in Interview Two regarding her confidence in talking to native speakers. The first occasion took place when I asked Lin whether she was confident in speaking to the few native speakers on her MA course, and she commented: '*Yes. If I have to give you a mark out of 5, I will say 4*' (Line 61, Interview Two). This is different from the answer given by Lin on Questionnaire item 2 in QL2, where she chose the statement that she was uncertain about her confidence in talking to native speakers. This seeming confusion, however, was quickly clarified with Lin's example of the specific context in which she was not confident: '*If I happen to be there when those nurses are talking among themselves in the staff room...*' (Lines 130-131, Interview Two) and '*if several of them speak at the same time among themselves, I will have difficulty understanding what they are talking about. But it is okay if they speak to me individually*' (Lines 133-135, ibid.). That is to say, the subjects' self-assessment of

their L2 experiences can not be accepted without further questioning the standards they set for making such judgement.

In a similar vein, the subjects' self-perceived difficulties of interacting with the target language group were subject to qualitative interpretations, as a true depiction and understanding of one's own language experiences is rarely possible. One way of cross-checking the data obtained from the interviews was to record and analyse some of their actual conversations with native speakers, occurring in real time. In so doing, I was able to examine the issue of learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction from a different perspective, either to reinforce, or to invalidate the subjects' own explanations with empirical evidence.

In the next section, I will present the other line of enquiry of this study: learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations. I will describe how I recorded the NS-NNS conversations, and how these data were analysed based on the analytic devices that were particularly developed for the research purposes of this study.

4.7 Data collecting and analysing at the micro level: Learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations

4.7.1 Recording NS-NNS conversations

Six NS-NNS conversations were audio recorded during the eight-month period of time alongside the other line of enquiry on the subjects' L2 experiences in general. All the six conversations involved participants who had either newly met or were just acquaintances, decided by the nature of this particular case study. As L2 learners who came to a foreign country to further their study, the subjects in this study were constantly experiencing new things and new people. Social interaction with the target language group constituted not only a part of their social life, but also an important way to improve their English. However, it remained their own decision to choose whether to communicate with native speakers or not when opportunities arose. It was the common complaints found among Chinese L2 learners that that had initiated this study, such as 'there is nothing to talk about with native speakers' and that 'the conversation cannot be

held at a deeper level'. Therefore, to examine the subjects' initial contact with the target language group as featured in these six conversations, this study was hoped to achieve a better understanding of the social context required for L2 acquisition in a natural learning environment. This is not to deny the possibility that close relationships can be formed between Chinese L2 learners and the target language group, or that under different contexts, they can hold intimate conversations that are no different from those held among the same cultural groups. But it is those who failed to form such close relationships with the target language group may avoid further contact. As a result, a critical analysis of what is happening during their initial contact with the target language group is significant in its own right.

The choice of the four participating native speakers was decided by their availability. Three of the native speakers were friends of mine. They were given the pseudonyms as Tony, Jane, and Helen in this study. Tony and Jane were a couple, both retired from the same six-form college a few years before the recording took place. They also had both undertaken teaching in China before. Helen was a retired teacher from a high school. When my data collecting preparation started in September, 2005, I had already introduced a few Chinese students to them, knowing that they were genuinely willing to talk and help Chinese students. Therefore, being introduced to Cheng, Lin and Wong at their own houses was accepted as a rather normal social occasion. In each case, I had asked the native speakers whether I could bring some students to their houses for tea. When the invitation was granted, I then proceeded to explain that such meetings would be audio-recorded and could be taken as part of my research, but at the same time, made it clear that the recording was not compulsory if they were not comfortable to do so. Very kindly and generously, the native speakers I had contacted all agreed to the recording arrangement, and I made sure that they were fully informed how long the recording may last before each individual meeting. The fourth participating native speaker was given the name of Steve, whom I met through a seminar at the University. Steve had just done a similar MA course as the subjects, and was proceeding to his Ph.D study. Steve was interested in Chinese culture and was happy to talk to Chinese students.

The six NS-NNS conversations were arranged at the convenience of the participants, regarding the time and the venue. An overview of the six recorded NS-NNS conversations is provided in Table 4.2, showing the number of participants in each talk, the nature of each conversational setting, the venues, and the duration of each talk.

Table 4.2: An overview of the six recorded NS-NNS conversations (A full description of the recording contexts of the six conversations is also provided in Appendix 6)

	Participants	Occasion	Venue	Duration of the transcribed talk
C1	NNS: Lin, Cheng, Ping NS: Tony	Tea talk	Tony's house	25'51"
C2	NNS: Lin, Cheng, Wong NS: Steve	Informal talk	One of the seminar rooms at the University	11'09"
C3	NNS: Lin, Cheng, Wong, Bin, Ping NS: Tony, Jane	After-dinner talk	Tony's house	18'13"
C4	NNS: Lin, Ping NS: Tony	Tea talk	Tony's house	26'36"
C5	NNS: Cheng, Wong, Ping NS: Helen	Tea talk	Helen's house	49'23"
C6	NNS: Cheng, Wong, Ping NS: Tony, Jane	Before-dinner talk	In Tony and Jane's garden	42'40"

Among the six NS-NNS conversations, Tony was the only native speaker who participated in more than three talks. The three Chinese subjects, on the other hand, had all participated in more than three talks. Their presence at these conversations was purely based on their availability at the time, affected by personal circumstances. Initially, I attempted to arrange one-to-one NS-NNS conversations. The plan was aborted because neither Cheng nor Wong was confident enough to go ahead with the talk on their own without peer support, though they were willing to have the opportunity to practise their English with the other two.

The fact that the native speaking participants and the non-native speaking participants were newly-met dayds in C1, C2, and C6 does not disqualify the 'causal' nature of the conversation. There is no single variety of causal conversation and that there are a

number of important contextual dimensions which impact on the type of casual conversation that the participants are engaged in. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that C1, C2 and C6 may show differences from the other recorded conversation in which the participants were more of acquaintances than strangers. For instance, the participants may employ different conversational strategies or use different topic genres, or even use different types of words, as Wardhaugh (1985) puts it,

> It is quite apparent that for many people conversation is a difficult art and that a considerable part of the difficulty arises from fundamental inhibitions and prescriptions about initiating conversations, particularly with strangers'.
> (Wardhaugh, 1985:116-117)

This difference in terms of familiarity among the participants across the conversations was taken into account in data analysis. However, this is not to reduce the validity of the study. Rather, having two different conversational contexts at disposal makes it possible to explore research questions from different perspectives. For example, it is widely recognised that the degree of familiarity among the participants can affect the content of the talk. According to Eggins and Slade (1997), telling embarrassing incidents is more likely to happen between friends than between strangers, because of the risk of looking the fool on the story-teller's side. Thus, it is interesting to know how such interpersonal relations are actively constructed through everyday social talk, which in turn, affects L2 learners' social and psychological distance (SPD) from the target language group.

Among the six recorded conversations, it is worth mentioning that C2 stands out as different from other five conversations based on the following features:

- Age difference: The age gap between the subjects and the native speaker(s) is much smaller in C2 than in other five conversations. The native speaker, Steve, is in his early 30's, while all the other native speakers, including Tony, Jane and Helen, are all retired teachers in their 60's.
- Difference in social context: While the other five conversations all involved social occasions such as having dinner and tea at one of the native speakers' house, C2 took place in a seminar room where they met merely for the talk.
- As a result of the different social contexts, the recording length of C2 varied from the other five conversations. While in all the six conversations the

participants were in charge of when to finish the talk, the participants were offered an estimated length of recording time in advance. The participants were told that roughly 40 minutes of recording was required in the other five conversations, with only 20 minutes in C2, though often the case was, that conversations continued when the recordings ended, because they had developed into social occasions in their own right.

Again, I argue that these differences between C2 and other NS-NNS conversations do not reduce the validity of the data. Rather, comparing the subjects' conversational performance in C2 and other conversations makes it possible to ask interesting question such as:

- Did the subjects show differences regarding their conversational involvement?
- Did the topic genres appeared in C2 show distinction from those appeared in other talks?

Such comparison adds perspectives to the findings and contributes to the theorisation of the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse. That is, with different contexts under investigation, the role of learner involvement can be examined from different perspectives, either to confirm my earlier research assumptions (see the discussion in Chapter 2), or to formulate new theories.

It is difficult to tell to what degree the presence of these recording devices affected the participants' conversational behaviours. For example, knowing that their conversation is being recorded, the participants may choose to avoid a sensitive topic, while still observing the principle of talking relevantly. But, one of the advantages of doing a case study is the improving trust and rapport between the researcher and the subjects as time goes on. The period of time involved in a case study not only reveals something about the subjects, but also 'situates' the subjects in a sense that they get used to the researcher and the study itself. As happened in this study at the very beginning, the subjects were very conscious about being recorded both in the interviews and in their conversations with the native speakers. However, by the time C3 took place, the

subjects had accepted the recording as part of the research. They even had fun out of it, especially if they were left in charge of the recording devices. For the last three conversations, the subjects actually contributed to the recording process by recommending better ways of doing it. As a result, Lin brought her MP3 player to C4, and Cheng brought her digital recorder to C5 and C6. They both experimented with the recording devices carefully with me before the actual recording took place.

4.7.2 Retrospective interviews

Retrospective interviews were conducted with the three NNS subjects after the recorded NS-NNS conversations. These interviews took place in a rather informal way. Twice, the opportunities I had to elicit Wong's view of her conversational performance were on our way home immediately after C5 and C6 were recorded. I felt it was both natural and appropriate to do so. It was natural because as a social occasion in its own right, we felt the need as social beings to chat about what had just happened. It was appropriate in a sense that the salient features of the talks could be described in detail with emotion, almost without me asking sensible questions, such as 'what do you think of the native speakers you talked to?'

Other retrospective interviews were conducted by phone, when immediate face-to-face chat was not available. In each case, I would have probing questions written in front of me. At times, I had to balance the advantages and the disadvantages of 'being there' with the subjects. Although my observations made it possible to ask specific questions about the subjects' conversational performance, I had to take caution not to make any pre-assumptions. For example, Cheng's revelation that she was not very confident in C5 came as a surprise for me, as she appeared very active in C5, compared to Wong (see the sample transcription notes in Appendix 7). The nature of phone talk means these interviews were informal.

The lengths of these interviews varied, decided by the particular talk involved, and the participants present. Sometimes, the access to the data was affected by unpredictable factors, such as the subjects' personal circumstances and moods. The subjects seemed to have little to say about C1 and C6, almost for the opposite reason. Lin and Cheng both appeared shy in C1 during their first contact with Tony, and in fact, their first invitation

to visit a native speaker's house. They found it hard to express how they felt about the talk. This is the same with C6, where Cheng and Wong offered little elaboration on their feelings, only with the following comment: 'I enjoyed it (the talk) very much, I just enjoyed, don't ask me why, because I don't know' (Wong: Retrospective interview on C6).

The retrospective interviews were all conducted in Chinese. They were not tape-recorded because of the informal nature of these talks. Note-taking was adopted instead. These retrospective interviews provided useful resource to achieve the reliability of the data analysis, where my instinct may appear to be subjective otherwise.

4.7.3 Transcribing NS-NNS conversations

This is not a study on language as linguistic codes; rather, the study aims to explore the social meanings conveyed by language in use. Thus, the method of transcription adopted for this study follows the principles set forth by sociologists of language (see, for example, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974; refer to Appendix 8 for a description of the transcription key and conventions used). These are that the system should be simple to use, easy to learn, and avoiding phonetic and grammatical detail. For the purposes of this study, significant pauses, simultaneous (overlapping) speech and latching are indicated, so that the signals for conversational involvement such as turn taking, including interruptions, can be easily identified. As a consequence of the audio-recording, participants' nonverbal behaviours were not available for analysis.

The transcripts were carefully checked by a native speaker. Where words or sentences did not make sense under particular conversational contexts, we both would go back to the audio data and listened to the conversation again and again, until we reached the agreement that the transcription had honestly represented the conversational data. This was particularly so with the NNS subjects' utterances. Compared to their native interlocutors, the NNS subjects appeared more unpredictable with their utterances, considering that they were not speaking in their first language. The principle I followed was: non-standard pronunciation or incorrect pronunciation features were not represented in the transcripts. Exceptions, however, were made when such features caused understanding difficulties. For example, although Lin's pronunciation of

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'suggest' sounded very much like 'address' in the audio data, I used the correct word 'suggest' in the transcription, judged by the conversational context. However, in another case, Cheng's incorrect pronunciation of 'crematorium' was kept as it was in the transcription. This is because the made-up word 'crematery' used by Cheng caused the break-down of the communication. The subsequent effort made by the participants to clarify the misunderstanding resulted in a fully developed conversational topic (Topic 16 in C1), thus, worthy of further investigation in its own right.

The transcribing of each conversation had a different starting point depending on the actual conversational contexts. It is understood that normally an orientation stage is needed for a recorded conversation like this, including the introduction of the participants to each other, and sometimes, 'here and there' talks made by the host or the hostess to comfort their guests. The general rule was to start from where the orientation stage had finished and a steady flow of conversation appeared to start, decided by the content, the tone, and the speed of the utterances. For example in C5, although the recording started before Cheng and Wong were greeted by Helen at her doorway, the transcription did not begin until Helen had seated her guests around the table, with the food displayed, and the tea ready. Full transcription for C1 is provided in Appendix 9.1 as the sample transcript, as a large number of extracts were quoted from C1 to exemplify the process involved in data analysis. Transcripts of the other five conversations are not included in the Appendices, but available if required. Where I felt the exemplification of the data analysis and the presentation of the findings were not complete without locating the conversational topic under its conversational context, full transcript is also provided for that particular conversational topic in Appendix 9.

Based on the discussion in Chapter 3, the conversational unit used in this study to examine learner involvement is *conversational topic* (see Section 3.3.1.1). The introduction of *topic genre* in Section 3.3.2 provides the analytic device for examining leaner involvement in NS-NNS conversations. The following sections, therefore, present an account of the analytic procedures involved for describing and analysing the participants' conversational involvement at different levels.

4.7.4 Describing the analytic procedures for studying learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations

Coding conversational topics from the six NS-NNS conversations consists of the first part of the analytic procedures designed for studying learner involvement in this study. Other stages include quantifying the participants' conversational involvement in terms of the number of words they contributed to each conversational topic (Section 4.7.4.2), categorising the coded conversational topics into different topic genres (Section 4.7.4.3), and the qualitative interpretation of the participants' topic initiations (Section 4.7.4.4). A framework of the analytic procedures is provided in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Conceptualising the analytic procedures
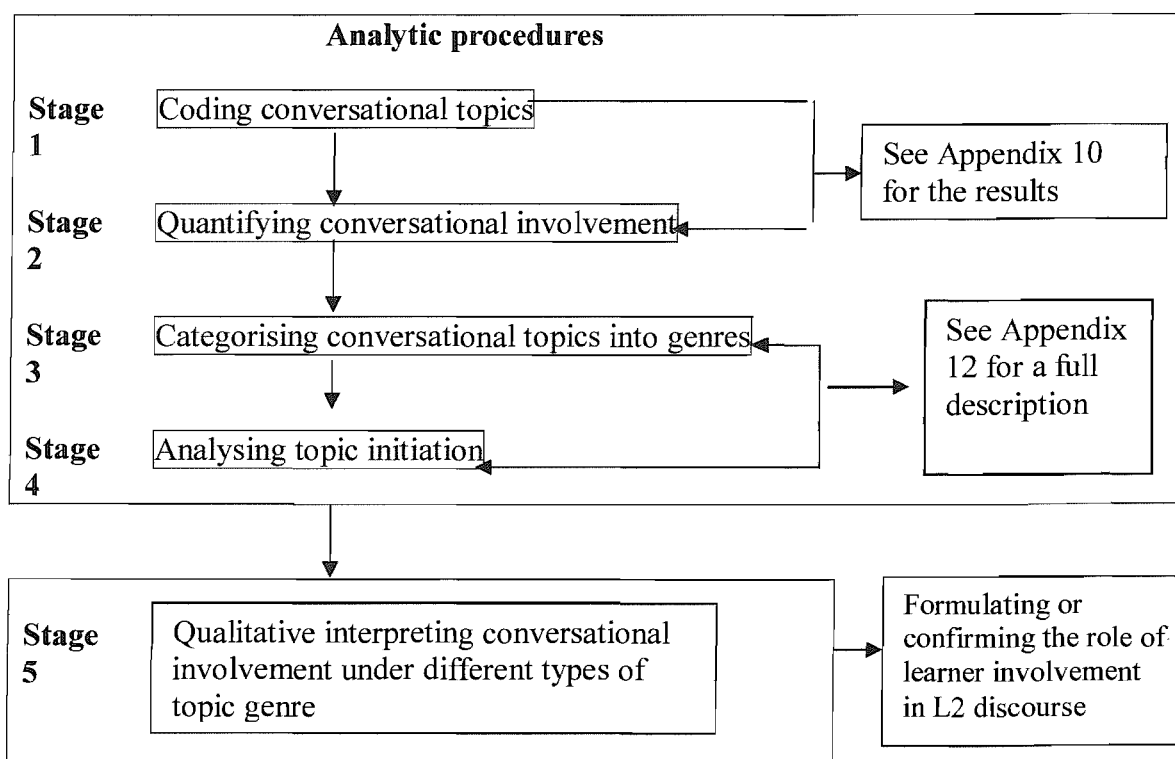
It is important to note that, although I have presented the conversational data analysis as a linear process consisting of distinct stages, the actual research work was much messier. While it was true that the nature of the conversational involvement was not accessible without the quantifying data obtained from the previous stages, there had always been the need to go back to check the reliability of my earlier analysis. Nevertheless, a linear account of the research process is useful for the readers to find their way through this

lengthy and rather tedious data analysis. This section thus describes how I fragmented each NS-NNS conversation into meaningful smaller conversational units.

4.7.4.1 Conversational data analysis at Stage 1: Coding conversational topics

The six NS-NNS conversations are defined as casual talks because no specific goals were set for the talks. The casualness of the talks is also marked by the variety of topics covered, such as 'fireplace', 'weather', 'going to places', 'buying organic food' and so on. Each conversation was coded into a number of conversational topics in sequential numbers. The length of the talk does not always correspond to the quantity of conversational topics developed by the conversational participants, reflecting the differences among talks decided by the nature of each talk and the participants involved. The complete list of the coded conversational topics in each talk is provided in Appendix 10.

Both the topic-shift signals and the content under discussion were taken into consideration in coding the conversational data into conversational topics. Topic-shift signals used in this study include pauses and either individualised or general topic-marking devices such as:

(1) Topic initiation questions:

   - So, so tell me how is England?
   - So how about Southampton? Have you been outside of Southampton?

(2) Some statements can function as a topic-marking device, for example, the talk on 'English as an international language' was started by Cheng's comment that 'Just because English is an international language, it is so popular in the world' that bears little relevance to the previous utterance.

(3) Other topic-shift signals include structural evidence for topic introduction or change, such as:

- Let's go back to... (a topic)
- Did I tell you... (a topic)

Where no obvious pauses or topic-shift signals could be located, the coding was based on the content under discussion. Examples are the talks on 'fireworks', 'pronunciation' and 'Chinese language' in C1, where a clear and consistent focus can be identified in each individual fragment. They are clearly separable from other fragments on the basis of logic and content.

However, confusion can be aroused regarding the conditions under which a sub-topic qualifies as an individual topic. For instance, the case of Michael Jackson was mentioned twice in C6 during the talk about the jury service in England. However, only on one occasion did the same theme develop into an individual topic on its own. The contexts and the contents of the two occasions are provided in Extract 4.1 and Extract 4.2 respectively.

Extract 4.1 (C represents Cheng; W represents Wong; T represents Tony; J represents Jane) *

1239	T:	You could get some horrible murder case that goes on for months, you
1240		know.
1241	J:	[Yeah
1242	**C:**	**[Such as the the case of Michael Jackson.**
1243	J:	[Yeah! Yeah!
1244	T:	[Yes, (you're right!)
1245	C:	Is he guilty or not guilty?
1246	T:	We don't have anything [like that
1247	W:	[Yeah
1248	C:	It's uh
1249	J:	In the America, after the - after that, the juries can talk to the press and
1250		the TV.

(Extract from C6))

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* these abbreviations for names also apply to other extracts in the discussion; other abbreviations include: L for Lin; B for Bin; P for Ping

Extract 4.1 starts from the talk on 'the working system of the jury service' (Lines 1239-1241, Topic 65 in C6). In Line 1242 (emphasised in bold), Cheng offered the case of Michael Jackson as an example to support Tony's view expressed in Line 1239. The talk could have followed Cheng's direction when she made the further attempt to bring more attention to the case of Michael Jackson in Line 1245. However, Cheng lost the opportunity when Jane brought in a new relevant topic – 'different law practices between American and England', starting from Line 1249. This is not the case in Extract 4.2, where Cheng's effort to talk about the case of Michael Jackson resulted in a fully developed topic.

Extract 4.2:

```
1475   C:   I just couldn't understand why Mike Jackson is unguilty. For..wha- what
1476        kind of evidence?=
1477   J:   =For not guilty?
1478   C:   For not guilty, yeah.
1479   P:   So he is [not guilty? I didn't watch them.
1480   C:            [Maybe
1481   T:   He is not guilty.
1482   W:   [He is not guilty.
1483   P:   [He is not? Okay.
1484   T:   That's apparently (what they say)
1485   C:   Maybe, may-
1486   T:   Well [( )
1487   P:        [But you don't know. How can you tell?
            ....
```

('The case of Michael Jackson', Topic 77 in C7)

Different from Extract 4.1, Cheng's intention to bring 'the case of Michael Jackson' into the conversation was acknowledged by her co-conversationalists (see the lines emphasised in bold). More significantly in Line 1484, Tony, the native speaker, elaborated on the subject, and by doing so, helped to construct the topic into a small discussion among the participants.

Comparing Extract 4.1 and Extract 4.2 shows some principles based on which the conversational data were coded into conversational topics. However, confusion was unavoidable in qualitative analysis of casual conversations involved in this study. The decision of treating parallel topics and sub-topics as individual topics for data analysis was, however, more of a practical concern than following the analyst's logic judgement.

That is, coding the conversational data into smaller units allow more accurate analysis of the participants' conversational involvement. One important criterion I had followed was to keep the consistency of coding across the data.

4.7.4.2 Conversational data analysis at Stage 2: Quantifying conversational involvement

Although the conversational data were not gathered with the purpose of being directly counted or measured in an objective way, subsequent processing and analysis required certain aspects of qualitative data to be quantified, such as the amount of talk contributed by the participants. In a broader sense, conversational involvement includes both verbal utterances and non-verbal contribution such as facial expressions and gestures. However, the quantifying data used in this study are mainly based on the participants' verbal contribution. That is, within each conversational topic, the participants' conversational involvement was measured in terms of the total number of words they uttered. This consists of the second step of the data analysis, and the results for the quantified data can also be found in Appendix 10. The quantified data include the total number of words of each topic, the participant's verbal contribution in each individual topic, both in words number and in terms of the percentage of that contribution.

As typical to a casual talk, abbreviations were used very often by the participants, particularly by the native speakers, such as 'it's', 'she's', and so on. An abbreviation like this was counted as one single word in this study. Participants' repetitions in their utterances, either with a word or a sound, were treated separately. So a sentence such as 'it's, it's, it's artificial' was counted as four words. Fillers such as 'mm', 'ah', were counted individually. Where the symbol ( ) was used in transcription to indicate an unidentifiable utterance, it was counted as one word, regardless of the actual number of words uttered.

Based on the quantified results from the above analysis, the participants' conversational involvement was further categorised into the following four types: *NNS dominance, NNS active involvement, NS dominance*, and *'others'*. It is reasonable to assume that the native speakers on average had more to say than the three subjects during the six NS-

NNS conversations, considering their higher ethnolinguistic status. For this particular reason, the mere fact of a native speaker taking a dominant position in a talk does not necessarily exclude the possibility of the NNS subjects being perceived as active conversationalists. In other words, NS dominance is subject to a different interpretation here, which represents a higher amount of talk on the native speaker's side with little or no signals for back-channelling from the NNS subjects. Therefore, the following principles were applied in coding the participants' conversational involvement:

(1) **NS dominance:** NS dominance positions are granted in this study only when all the participating NNS subjects' conversational involvement is rated below 10% regarding the number of words they each contributed;

(2) **NNS dominance:** Similarly, considering the ethnolinguistic status of the three NNS subjects, as compared to their native interlocutors, topics with a verbal contribution of over 50% of the total words uttered in each topic from any one of the participating NNS subjects are regarded as significant, and are therefore, marked as NNS dominant;

(3) **NNS active involvement:** When one of the participating NNS subjects is making a verbal contribution between 10% and 49.9% regarding the number of words she uttered, the topic was coded into the category of 'NNS active topic';

(4) **The 'others' category:** Under the category of 'others' are the topics in which all the NNS participants were found to be non-active, each with a verbal contribution below the percentage of 10%. These are also the topics that do not qualify as an NS dominance type, because there was verbal contribution made by other participants, whose conversational roles cannot be ignored. These were the occasions when the conversation included more participants than just the NNS subjects and their native interlocutors. As I participated in most of the conversations, this 'others' category mainly indicated my own conversational performance, coded under the name of Ping. C3 is an exception, in which the 'others' could also be Bin, Cheng's boyfriend.

In Table 4.3, four conversational topics are taken from C1, each representing one type of conversational involvement that fits into the descriptions above. However, as argued in Chapter 3, the mere fact of getting involved in a talk does not necessarily lead to the participants' feeling emotional involvement. Therefore, based on the quantification of

the data at Stage 2, qualitative analysis was applied at Stage 3 and Stage 4 to explore the possible link between topic initiation and conversational involvement under the different types of topic genre, and its significance in understanding the NNS subjects' (non)dominant roles in some of the conversational topics.

Table 4.3 Descriptions of the four types of conversational involvement defined in this study [*]

Type of conversational involvement	Conversational topic (examples)	Cheng	Lin	Tony	Ping
NNS dominance (Cheng)	C's likes about studying in England (278)	**224 (80.6%)**		54 (19.4%)	
NNS active Involvement (Lin)	Fireplace (256)	23 (9%)	**64 (25%)**	121 (47.2%)	48 (18.8%)
NS dominance (Tony)	The weather in Africa' (164)	2 (1.2%)	10 (6.1%)	**152 (92.7%)**	
Others (Ping)	Animals in the New Forest (83)	5 (6%)	4 (4.8%)	59 (71.1%)	**15 (18.1%)**

4.7.4.3 Conversational data analysis at Stage 3: Categorising the conversational topics into different types of topic genre

The purpose of this section is to present some techniques for categorising conversational topics into different types of genre, the third step involved in the analytic process to explore learner involvement in NS-NNS conversation. In order to do this, I need to examine the linguistic behaviour of the participants' to identify the grammatical resources that were used to construct a particular speech genre.

Based on the discussion in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2), the conversational topics were grouped into the following genre types: 'story-telling', 'observation', 'opinion-seeking', 'gossiping', and 'chat' topics. 'Opinion-providing' was also used as an adapted version

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[*] the Arabic numeral in the second column represents the total number of words uttered by all the participants; the Arabic numeral in the other columns represents the number of words contributed by each participant in that particular topic; the percentage in the brackets indicates the proportion of that contribution takes in that topic among the participants

of 'opinion-making', and the two were coded as the same type of topic genre rather than two individual ones. Where the topic did not constitute a chunk topic, and where quick turn changes took place between the participants, it was considered as a 'chat' topic. In Appendix 11, I present a detailed description of the principles I followed in categorising conversational topics into the different types of topic genres. The genre of 'gossiping', though difficult to identify due to its subtle nature at the semantic level, rarely appeared across the six NS-NNS conversations.

After the initial analysis of C1, a large number of chunk topics were left unclassified because they did not fit into the above five types of topic genre both in terms of the content of the talk and regarding the sequencing patterns of the moves. This is especially true in C1 and C6 in which the NNS subjects were first introduced to the native speaker(s). These are the talks where general and personal information were exchanged. This type of chunk topic has not received enough attention in the literature because most of the existing studies are focused on causal conversations between friends and colleagues, rather than newly-met dyads. As a result, *'information-seeking/providing'* texts are not well featured where genre is concerned.

While most of these 'information-seeking' topics were genuinely initiated out of the participants' intention to get to know each other better, some 'information-seeking/providing' texts were provided to fill the 'conversational gap' when no other interesting topics seemed to appear. At a grammatical level, 'information-seeking/providing' topics normally start with WH-questions. Sometimes, they start with statements that provide knowledge gaps to be filled. At a semantic level, 'information-seeking/providing' topics contain information exchanges. One feature that typified most of these NS-NNS conversations was the linguistic assistance provided by the native speakers when the NNS subjects appeared to be struggling with their L2 use. Topic 3 in C1 is such an example, in which Tony was teaching Cheng and Lin a new word 'Nagging' (refer to Lines 52-68, Appendix 9.1). The same goes to Topic 16 in C1, when an effort was made to clarify a word uttered by Cheng, which turned out to be "Crematorium" (see Lines 252-298, Appendix 9.1).

Sometimes, the local resource provided the focus of the talk, which was then initiated into an 'information providing/seeking' topic. An example is offered here:

Extract 4.3

573	B:	What kind of wood is this?
574	T:	Oh, it's all different kinds. Um...this one with white ( ), I think they call
575		it birch
576	B:	Birch?
577	T:	Silver birch, because
578	B:	Ah yes, is it very tall, very straight?=
579	T:	=Yes, yeah yeah.
		(3.5)
580	B:	AI HUA <Chinese pronunciation for 'birch'>
581	C:	AI HUA, Oh...

('The make of the cupboard', Topic 24 in C3)

In the example above, Bin's enquiry about the wood was originated from his observation of a cupboard made of such wood in the room. This had naturally led to Tony's information providing, starting from Line 574. Generally speaking, however, this 'information' can be about anything. A distinction is thus made in this study between *general information seeking* and *information about personal detail*, such as the participants' interests, educational backgrounds, and travelling schedules, and so on. This is because 'personal information seeking' can carry different social significance from other types of information exchange under particular conversational contexts. As a result, two new topic genres are added to the existing four chunk topic genres: 'information seeking/providing' and 'personal information seeking/providing'.

Extract 4.4 shows a typical example of 'general information seeking' provided by Cheng, and Tony, the native speaker, took the role as the information-provider:

Extract 4.4

171	C:	I'm quite interested in the New Forest, New Forest landscape. Can you
172		um, tell us something about that place?
173	T:	Have you not, you've not seen it?
174	C:	No.
175	T:	[(We must do) that sometimes.
176	C:	[It's just, just lot of people tell me it's a very beautiful place to see.
177	T:	Well... it's very big. It's, it's, there are, lots of, lots of walks. Do you like
178		walking?
179	C:	Yeah, yeah.

('The New Forest', Topic 10 in C1)

The topic started with both a statement and a question, followed by Tony's acknowledgement tokens that he understood the question, and that he was prepared to provide the answer, as shown in Line 173 and Line 177.

Grammatically, 'personal information-seeking/providing' texts use more personal pronouns than 'information-seeking/providing' texts, as the former involves addressing direct questions about a particular person. Normally, these personal pronouns are in the first and second forms, such as 'I', 'we' and 'you', as emphasised in Extract 4.5 with bold characters. This rule also applies to the family members of the speaker. For example, when a speaker is providing information about one of his/her family members, either by using this person's name or by addressing him/her in the third personal pronoun, the topic is coded as 'personal information providing', rather than general 'information providing' .

Extract 4.5 was coded under the category of 'personal information-seeking/providing', because the conversation involved an enquiry about Tony's working background that was considered as personal rather than general information:

Extract 4.5

432	C:	So how many years have **you** taught? In school?
433	T:	In school?
434	C:	Maybe [( )
435	T:	[Well, it wasn't actually in school. It was, was a
436	P:	A college.
437	C:	[Oh, college.
438	T:	[A six-form college, yeah, a pre-university college, ( )
439	C:	So **you** still teach in China in the college?
440	T:	Well=
441	C:	=At the university?
442	T:	Not really, because… you know these foundation courses?
443	C:	Oh, yes, I know.
444	T:	Okay=

('Tony's teaching history', Topic 24 in C1)

At times, I found it hard to make distinction between 'information-providing' texts and 'observation' texts. Both 'observation' and 'information-providing' can involve narration or a description about something. Extract 4.6 offers a glimpse of such confusion:

Extract 4.6

238	T:	But the forest is, is full of walks. If you like walking, it's really interesting.
239		This weather, you know you can get a good coat,
240	C:	Yeah, I know, [you have to… put it on the head=
241	T:	[and ( )
242	T:	=That's right, you put them on the head, and then, boots, some strong
243		shoes, and then you can ( )
244	C:	When I was studying in the pre-sessional course, we always walked from
245		Romero Hall – do you know Archer's Road?
246	T:	[Archer's Road? Yes, right.
247	C:	[Archer's Road. From Archer's Road to this um, to Avenue Campus.
248		Maybe it takes us, 20, or 30 minutes, everyday, to go the campus, and
249		come back for 30 minutes. I like it. I think it's doing some exercises.
	C:	<laughs>

('Walking as an exercise', Topic 14 in C1)

As one may argue, Tony's utterance about 'walking in the forest' and Cheng's mentioning of her 'daily walk to campus' can be both 'observation' and 'information-providing'. However, a further interpretation of the two speakers' intentions reveals that the above topic is more about sharing some observations between them than filling information gaps. In casual talk, an 'observation' can be initiated into the discussion as 'information-providing, if the speaker has the knowledge that such a topic is new to his/her audience, such as a piece of news the speaker picked up from TV the night before. However, it remains as 'observation' if the speaker is simply using the information to make a point, or to express an opinion/attitude. For an 'information-providing' topic, on the other hand, the information is taken as it is – to inform others of things that they don't know, or at least, appear not knowing. As shown in Extract 4.6, instead of asking further questions or accepting what was told, Cheng was sharing a common experience with Tony by saying 'yeah, I know, you have to… put it on the head' (Line 240). Then in Lines 247-249, Cheng offered her own experience to support the observation that '(walking) is doing some exercises' (Line 249). In so doing, she had contributed to Tony's initial observation that 'walking in the New Forest is interesting', and thus, had helped to co-construct the topic into an 'observation' type of text.

Coding difficulty also arose where 'opinion-providing' and 'observation' were not clearly cut in a topic, see the following example:

Extract 4.7

299	T:	Italian is a good language for you.
300	L:	[Yeah?
301	C:	[Really?
302	T:	Because every single word in Italian, it ends with a vowel you know.
303	L:	Yeah, we [have
304	T:	[<giving examples of two Italian words>, that sort of things, its'
305		um, it's...it's easy to say

('Italian language is good for Chinese learners', Topic 17 in C1)

Tony introduced the topic by saying 'Italian is a good language for you' (Line 299). As the adjective word 'good' is so often related to people's attitudes and opinions, it is not surprising to make the assumption that the topic was to develop into an 'opinion' type of text. However, what has made the topic an 'observation' lies in the fact that the factual information Tony provided in Line 302 carries more weight than the comment that 'Italian is a good language'. This interpretation was made based on the conversational context created by the previous topic and the next immediate topic, in which pronunciation issues were the focuses of talk. In Topic 16, Tony helped Cheng to pronounce the word 'crematorium', and in Topic 18, the focus was on Chinese sounds, both relating to the theme of 'pronunciation' (for full transcript, see Lines 252-337 in Appendix 9.1).

Not all the talks starting with the local resource developed into 'observation' topics. In Topic 11 in C2, Cheng initiated the talk about Steve's laptop, which was laid on the table. Cheng asked Steve how long he had owned the laptop. As required, Steve offered the answer: 'This one is new, I got it about (three), about one month ago' (Line 163, Topic 11 in C2). However, the text that followed didn't proceed into further talk on the laptop. Instead, Wong teased Steve by saying that he was showing off by carrying his laptop around. Cheng didn't make any further comment on the laptop either, as she quickly initiated another topic that had little relevance to the laptop. It is not sure whether Cheng had intended to elicit any information or to make any observation about the laptop, because it happens very often in casual talk that our initial thought or attempt can be interrupted as the conversation changes direction with the interference from

another speaker. Thus, judging from both the grammatical and semantic structure, Topic 11 in C2 was coded as a 'chat' topic instead of an 'observation' text.

Where more than one topic genre appears within one topic, the text was carefully examined and in some cases, the topic was re-coded, and where possible, into two individual topics. In most cases, the existence of a second genre or more constitutes an integral part of the topic that cannot be coded into an independent topic. For example in Topic 21 in C4, although the topic was coded as an observation, it also contained 'opinion-seeking', when Tony asked Lin whether she minded doing the compulsory exercises during the time she attended secondary school. This topic remained as an 'observation', because on the whole, it tended to describe the fact that 'students in China are required to do morning exercises' instead of seeking or providing attitudes and opinions. Thus, the judgement of a particular topic genre was made based on the outline of the whole text, rather than a fragment of it.

All through the coding and analysis, I tried to code one topic under one genre, unless doing so meant misrepresenting the nature of the topic, such as the co-existence of 'story telling' with other topic genres. This normally takes place when the participants turned to story-telling to make a point, as Extract 4.8 shows:

Extract 4.8

306	L:	I think, the, the most frequently (appeared) pronunciation in Chinese is /a/.
307		I think many, many nouns or many words contain this /a/, [/a/, /a/ sound.
308	T:	[Yeah, yeah,
309		that's right.
310	T:	I'll tell you a story if you like it. I was in Guangzhou, Okay? And I wanted
311		to get the train to Hong Kong. I went to the rail way station to buy a ticket,
312		( ) And...tried to buy a ticket, she understood, she said, um what
313		(happened) to me, like, "/so-lau/!"
		....

('Chinese pronunciation', Topic 18 in C1)

In Line 306, Lin initiated the topic by making an observation about Chinese sounds, which was then elaborated by Tony with his story-telling starting from Line 310. As discussed previously, the change of topic genre very often indicates the boundary between two adjacent topics, decided by both the content and the structure of the two conversational fragments. The story started by Tony in Extract 4.8, however, did not

match such a description, as Tony showed no intention to change the topic; rather, he co-constructed the talk on 'Chinese pronunciation' with Lin. He did so by using story-telling as an effective strategy to catch the attention of his audience. Although on the whole, Topic 18 remained as an 'observation', the distinctive discourse structure of 'story-telling' and its implication for the particular social role taken by the story-teller meant single-genre coding of the topic was at the risk of misrepresenting the nature of the talk. It was in this sense that Topic 18 was coded as a combination of 'observation' and 'story-telling'. Conversational topics coded in this way were also found in C1 (Topic 20), C3 (Topic 13) and C5 (Topic 25). Topic 49 in C5 offered an example in which story-telling also appeared under the context of 'personal information seeking/providing' (for a full description of genre analysis, refer to Appendix 12).

4.7.4.4 Conversational data analysis at Stage 4: Analysing topic initiations

Having coded the conversational data into the four types of conversational involvement in Section 4.7.4.2 enabled me to compare the NNS participants with the NS participants as two ethnolinguistic groups at a very broad level. The concept of 'ethnolingustic group' has often been used in the literature to define a human social unit that shares the same language and culture, and uses the same criteria to differentiate itself from other social groups. While in reality one cannot expect to find human societies perfectly matching this theoretical construct, native speakers of English who were born and raised in the UK do show similarities among themselves in a way that Chinese learners of English approximate their own definition as a cultural group. Among the common characteristics that typify one social unit as different from the other, linguistic affiliation is often recognised as one major and salient component of ethnic identification, although not the only one, and not invariably. For the purposes of this study, it was thus considered that the notion of 'ethnolinguistic group' would provide a reasonable, if not infallible, means of exploring the different conversational patterns between the NS participants and the NNS subjects, if there were indeed any.

To start with, I was able to obtain an overview of the distribution of conversational involvement among the participants, regarding two conversational features: topic genres and topic initiations. I was curious about: 1) The types of topic genre under which the NNS participants had more chance of taking the dominant role; and 2) The possible link

between topic initiation and conversational involvement. For the second assumption, I decided to further look at the participants' topic initiations. I did this by numbering all the conversational topics initiated by each participant across the six NS-NNS conversations. This made it possible to explore the conditions under which NNS subjects' topic initiation succeeded or failed to lead to active involvement. Where more than one topic genre appeared within the same topic, an effort was made to examine how such multi topic genres affected the nature of the talk, and the participants' conversational involvement.

Not all the topic initiations were successfully negotiated into the talk. An example is Topic 65 in C5 when Helen's 'personal information seeking' about Lin and Wong immediately proceeded into an 'observation' made by her. This may explain why NNS active involvement was not achieved. It is possible a topic initiation fails to be taken up by the participants in social talk, either due to local distraction, or the unpleasant/embarrassing nature of the talk that such a topic initiation may result in. However, such divergence was rare in the conversational data, reflecting the social roles of the participants as polite hosts and guests, each struggling to maintain the co-operative principles described by Grice (1975). That is, each conversational participant should make his/her conversational contribution 'such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purposes or direction of the talk exchange in which he/she is engaged' (Grice, 1975: 45).

Analysing the participants' topic initiations provided me with the resource to make the initial assumptions about the participants' conversational tendencies. The critical analysis at this stage was to explore the various relationships between topic initiation and conversational involvement. The conclusions I drew from this stage of analysis, therefore, enabled me to ask further questions, such as: Why did the participants' topic initiations not always lead to their active conversational involvement?

4.7.4.5 Conversation analysis at Stage 5: Qualitative interpreting conversational involvement

It is based on the results and implications drawn from the previous stages that the qualitative interpretation of the participants' conversational involvement was applied. At this stage, the participants' conversational performance was regarded as more than just mechanical acts to fulfil the task of staying relevant or involved (if the quantitative analysis at the previous stages left the reader with such an impression). Their topic initiations and their choice of the topic genres were meaningfully interpreted, presenting the participants as social beings whose social identities and interpersonal relations were constantly shaped and reformed through social interaction at the micro level. What the qualitative interpretation aims to achieve, therefore, is to either formulate or confirm the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse as conceptualised in Chapter 2.

Table 4.4 offers a glimpse into the approaches I took to decode a casual talk into small meaningful categories and units and sums up the analytic procedures involved in studying learner involvement in this study. The data are taken from C1, and they represent all the conversational topics initiated by Lin (a full description of all the participants' conversational involvement is provided in Appendix 12).

Table 4.4 Description of conversational data and the analytic symbols used
C1: Lin

18	Chinese pronunciation (220)	observation/story-telling (T)	NNS (L) active involvement (13.6%)
20	Learning French (246)	observation/story-telling (T)	NS dominance (85.8%)
23	The retirement age for teachers (51)	opinion providing	NNS (C/L) active involvement (13.7%/29.4%)
27	The course provided by the teaching company (56)	(observation)/information providing (T)	NNS (L) active involvement (21.4%)
31	Enquiry about the name of the company (interrupted) (25)	information seeking/providing	

A qualitative interpretation of the data in Table 4.4 offers the following relevant information about Lin's conversational involvement in C1:

(1) Topic initiation: The first column in the left reveals all the conversational topics initiated by Lin in C1, with the numbers indicating the sequential location in the original data. That is, Topic 18 in C1 was started by Lin, and the talk Lin intended to contribute was on 'Chinese pronunciation', which resulted in a number of 220 words in total. It also shows that altogether, Lin made the attempt to initiate 5 topics in C1.

(2) Topic genre: The second column in the table then tells how each topic was developed, e.g. whether it was taken up by the participants into a fully developed topic or it faltered, indicated by the total number of words contributed by the participants. The topic genres listed in the third column reveal something about the structural patterns of each topic. Thus, based on the genre coding principles discussed in Section 4.7.4.3 in this Chapter (also see Appendix 11), we may expect to find description ('observation') and recount of things ('story-telling') in Topic 18, while in Topic 23, we can make the guess that attitudes were what matters; The capitalised letters in the brackets are the abbreviations of the participants' names. The description of 'observation/story-telling (T), therefore, indicates that Tony had also contributed to the topic construction by telling a story. The bracketed 'observation' in Topic 27 indicates the change of genres within an individual topic. That is, although Lin made the effort to make an observation, the subsequent text was coded as 'information providing' based on the structure and the content of the talk. Such a description is helpful for understanding why Lin failed to achieve conversational dominance without sacrificing the significance underlying the effort she made to share views with Tony in C1.

(3) Conversational involvement: The last column on the far right provides the quantifying figures of conversational involvement. It reveals not only the percentage of Lin's conversational involvement in each individual topic, but also the type of conversational involvement. Again, taking Topic 18 as an example, the table shows that Lin had made a verbal contribution of 13.6% of the whole topic, and her conversational involvement was coded as 'active'. In contrast, Topic 20 shows NS

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dominance, with the participating native speaker taking the dominant position high up to 85.5% of the total conversational involvement. In other words, either Lin or Cheng (the other participating NNS subject in C1) had failed to achieve more than 10% of the total conversational involvement to qualify as 'active' conversationalist. The blank space left in the table indicates that Topic 31 was not included for analysing conversational involvement because of its short length (only topics with total words over 30 were considered for analysing conversational involvement).

To sum up, the social function of topic genre in forming and reshaping social identities and interpersonal relations provides the appropriate analytic device to explore topic initiation and conversational involvement, and most importantly, the links between the two. With the in-depth description of the data and the vigorous analytic methods employed, the findings are hoped to answer the following group of sub-research questions:

- Under what types of topic genre did the participants' topic initiation lead to their active involvement?
- Under what types of topic genre did the participants' topic initiation fail to lead to their active involvement?
- What are the implications for understanding the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations?

4.8 Validity and reliability of the study

Wolfson (1988) claims, 'the choice of looking at speech behaviour in the researcher's own speech community should be understood to be purposeful and critical to the analysis' (p.21). This is because the insights one has into one's native language and into the behaviour within one's own speech community permits a level of analysis which is far deeper than that which can be reached by an outsider. This 'native perspective', not only had initiated this study in the first place, but also proved to be vital in the data analysis at an early stage, during which assumptions or sub-assumptions were constantly formed and reformulated. To a larger degree, the initial analysis of the

subjects' conversational performance was based on my own understanding of how the subjects themselves see and experience the world.

However, this advantage of sharing the same background with my subjects can be problematic, if not well managed. The intimate contact with the subjects through the case study means I was not just a researcher in their eyes. I was also a fellow student whom they occasionally ran across at a lecture or a seminar, and, a friend with whom they gradually felt relaxed to talk about their feeling and emotions. The mutual trust and rapport I had built up with them across the eight months made the sometimes 'daunting' job of data collecting enjoyable. However, this intimate contact with the subjects also meant it was important not to influence them in a way that they might say things just for the benefit of my research during interviews. For example, immediately after the second NS-NNS conversation was recorded, Lin apologised to me because she didn't say much during the talk. Underlying her apology was her assumption that I was looking at conversational involvement, which I was. She had also thought that, the more she become involved in a conversation, the better evidence she could provide for my research. This latter assumption, however, was not the case. The message here was, not to treat the subjects' responses in the interviews as direct validation or refutation of my own assumptions or inferences. Eliciting instances from the subjects' L2 experiences and analysing their actual conversational performance in NS-NNS conversations, therefore, provided important sources for triangulation. The subjects' own descriptions for what constitutes 'a good and meaningful conversation' were thus not taken unconditionally as 'the truth'. Rather, I looked critically into their accounts of stories and instances to draw my own assumptions and conclusions. Interview, in this sense, was treated as yet another source of data and insight which could be cross-checked with evidence gained from other sources to increase its reliability (Fielding and Fielding, 1986: 43).

The justification of the arranged NS-NNS conversations as 'naturalistic and casual' talks was made previously in Section 4.4.1. By quoting both Turner (1969) and Reichman (1990), I argued that any social conversation constitutes a social event on its own. As the subjects and their native speakers made the effort to observe the co-operative principles (Grice, 1975), e.g. to talk relevantly and co-operatively, they became less aware of the recording instruments. As one of the guests invited by the NS

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hosts, I was present at five of the recorded NS-NNS conversations with the only exception in C2, where the participants were arranged to have an informal chat in a seminar room at the University. With my interest in learner involvement in L2 discourse, I took the position of being a passive participant in a sense that I avoided initiating conversational topics or taking the conversation over through elaboration. The principle was not to affect the on-going conversation with my own research assumptions. However, at times, I felt the need to contribute to the talk, not as a researcher, but as a social being who wished to share her own personal experiences. In a similar way, the boundary between an arranged conversation and natural social talk blurred for my subjects and their native interlocutors once the topics began to flow. More than once, one of the NS participants stopped in the middle of a talk, and said to me: 'Ping, sorry for not including you into the talk'. The NS hosts' good intention to look after their guests in social settings like this reveals their unawareness of my other position as a social researcher who was doing her job.

Above all else, the reliability of the arranged NS-NNS conversations as the appropriate 'site' for studying learner involvement in this study is embodied in the data themselves. Besides the full transcript for C1 provided in Appendix 9, a large quantity of conversational data from the other five talks were also quoted for exemplification, and thus, open for the reader to draw their own conclusions.

The lack of well formed models for coding conversational topics and categorising topic genres in the literature was also compensated by the in-depth description of the coding and analytic procedures, with conversational data situated in context. The originality of this study has decided that my categorisation of the topic genres must be well grounded, and I did this by identifying grammatical and semantic features that were comparatively better developed in general conversational studies (see Eggins and Slade, 1997), evidenced with conversational data. Where different conversational patterns appeared in my own data, or where coding difficulties evolved, they were clearly stated in the discussion, offering the opportunity for the reader to examine the coding process I went through, and thus relate their own conclusions to mine. The transferability provided by thick description in case studies is well acknowledged among qualitative researchers (e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985). And according to Mason (1996), the sharing of 'raw

data' and the coding/analytic dilemma of the researcher is important in qualitative studies to evoke understanding or empathy from the reader.

The employment of a holistic approach to the conversational data analysis set further standard for the quality of the study. Unlike some other qualitative studies that may choose 'slices' or 'segments' of their data to base an argument, the analysis of data in this study was both thorough and critical. It was thorough because all the conversational topics from the six talks were coded and analysed. While the identification of similar patterns was exciting, effort was also made to examine the anomalies, that is, where the depiction did not fit into the general categorisation. Rather than taking the anomalies as they were, I investigated the data critically to look for the underlying implications. Very often, the occurrence of these anomalies resulted from different conversational contexts, and the discussion of the variance in the data, in this sense, helped to strengthen the argument rather than providing the contradiction.

Finally, the evaluation of the methodology would not be complete without discussing the ethical issues involved in this qualitative study. Ryen (2004: 235) notes, 'fieldwork is an arena where trust, empathy, rapport and ethics are closely linked'. As such, I felt it was necessary to acknowledge the ethical dilemmas I had faced, and to explain the strategies I employed to tackle these issues. For example, although the students' initial motive to participate in the research may have come from the possibility of meeting native speakers, it was important that the three students were aware of my intention to record their conversations with native speakers as part of my research. The nature and purposes of the research were also revealed to them to a certain degree, that is, I was interested in NS-NNS conversations, and that the study would take a few months. The formal permission from the students with a signed copy of the standard ethics protocol (see Appendix 1) was more intended to inform them of the rights they had throughout this study than the responsibilities they were expected as participants. These rights include the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of any recording data, and the promise not to reveal their real names in any public report. I also took the responsibility to remind my subjects of these rights during and after the study. The closer relationship I had gradually built up with my subjects through this case study meant it was necessary to stick to the ethical codes so that my subjects would not feel that their friendship 'was taken advantage of'. Thus, in each individual recording

session, including during follow-up interviews, I made it clear to my participants that they could always ask to stop the recording if they felt uncomfortable with what they had just said, or were about to say next. Such interruptions had never actually happened, partly because the participants enjoyed the talk so much that they almost forgot about the recording, or, partly because my subjects were interested in how I would analyse their own talks with native speakers so that I could help them with their English. My subjects' expectation of this study as an opportunity to improve their English was natural, as I was unclear about what to get out of these NS-NNS conversations myself at the very beginning. As an exploratory case study, my focus on topic genres only came with a substantial quantity of data already being obtained, the revelation of which, however, was considered as inappropriate in order to avoid any possible bias to the data. This did not mean that as a friend I was not allowed to comment on their conversational performance as required. The discussion of how a second language was learned and facilitated had in fact become very common to our many informal meetings. In this way, I would like to think that I had lived up to my subjects' trust and expectation, and at the same time, observed the ethical codes necessary to maintain the standard of the quality of this study.

4.9 Summary

Discourse analysis is used exclusively in this study in a qualitative way, including the analysis of interviews under the first line of enquiry, and conversational analysis under the second line of enquiry. This is because discourse analysis studies are at their best when they examine a particular community in depth. Discourse analysis produces great insights when rich contextual information can be factored into the analysis of each individual episode. This focus on detail has decided the case study as the appropriate research design, under which the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations can be explored through the examination of the interviews, and the conversational data at the micro level.

It is in a large sense that all case studies are about 'individuals'. This case study will not tell us a lot about whether Chinese L2 learners are going through similar language experiences in the target country as a whole. But rather, it brings insight into what is

going on with one particular group under the particular context. While the resources and strategies with which the subjects co-constructed the conversations with their native interlocutors may be common to other Chinese L2 learners, what is important about this single case are the meanings given by the participants through the discourse analysis. These meanings are not independent from the context, nor indispensable from the sociocultural background from where the subjects came. Therefore, understanding the meanings given by the subjects through discourse analysis ultimately provide the channel to reach a larger population.

Human communities and cultures are often more interesting for what is unique to them than for what they all have in common. Through the analysis of the individual instances, this study was intended to gain a deeper understanding of the active role of learner involvement in shaping L2 learners' self-perceived SPD, which in turn, may have a long lasting effect on L2 learners' WTC. In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I will discuss the findings obtained from the two lines of enquiry respectively.

Chapter 5 Findings from the interviews: The subjects' WTC

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings based on the first line of enquiry: research on the subjects' WTC through questionnaire and interview. Three rounds of interviews were conducted at different stages of this study. The questions raised in Interview One were based on the subjects' response to BIQ (Background information questionnaire). Interview Two and Interview Three were based on QL2 (Questionnaire on L2 experience) with the main focus on the subjects' current L2 experiences. Comparing the three rounds of data led to the search for a possible link between the subjects' WTC and their conversational involvement in NS-NNS conversations. The findings are presented at two levels: the descriptive level and the analytic level. Section 5.2 presents the findings at a descriptive level, giving voice to the subjects regarding their L2 experiences. At the analytic level in Section 5.3, a critical analysis of the findings is offered with the aim to read beyond the words of the subjects, and in so doing, to reveal what constitutes 'a good and meaningful conversation' from the subjects' own perspectives. Section 5.4 summarises the chapter.

5.2 Descriptive analysis at Level One: The subjects' L2 experiences of speaking to native speakers

As MA students who were doing an intensive course in a foreign country, the three subjects were constantly under pressure from study, which meant they had limited time using English for social purposes. Where opportunities appeared, the experiences varied, resulting in different attitudes regarding their willingness to communicate with the target language group. This section therefore discusses the similarities and differences among the subjects in terms of their L2 experiences across the eight months' period of time. Analysing the three rounds of questionnaires and interviews brought insight into the following aspects of the subjects' L2 experiences:

(1) The subjects' motivation in improving their English;

(2) Their perceived communicative difficulties in speaking to native speakers;

(3) Their own interpretations of their improvement made in English over time;

(4) Their attitudes towards speaking to native speakers.

A high motivation of learning English was identified among the three subjects, who regarded interacting with native speakers as a good opportunity to practise their English. However, there was also evidence showing that talking to native speakers was not always a positive experience. These actual contacts with native speakers may have affected the subjects' attitudes towards native speakers, which in turn, decided their WTC.

At the descriptive level, a large quantity of the subjects' own words are quoted with the aim to provide readers with a taste of what was happening during the case study (for a full view of the interview transcription, refer to Appendix 5). With a thick description of the raw data, readers are encouraged to draw their own conclusions, and in so doing, to gain a better understanding of the analytic process I undertook. The quoted interview data are italicised in the discussions, so they can be easily distinguished from the conversational data used exclusively in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. The number orders from the original data are kept so the reader can easily refer to the interview contexts (in Appendix 5) under which these comments were made.

5.2.1 Motivation in improving English

All the three subjects, Lin, Cheng, and Wong can be regarded as highly motivated L2 learners, who believed a higher level of English competence could greatly benefit their future career. Lin had already spent one year in a language school in the UK. She moved on to take an MA course because she hoped to meet more challenge and improve her English to a higher level. Cheng was glad that this MA course had covered some linguistic aspects of English, which she thought would be helpful when she went back to English teaching in the future. Wong was the only person who wasn't sure whether she would end up a full-time English teacher in the future. However, according to Wong, *'a high level of English will always be an advantage'* (Lines 11-12, Interview One).

The findings, however, reveal a lack of confidence among the subjects in communicating with native speakers. They showed, to a different degree, their concern over not being able to 'express freely' what they wanted to say. A typical comment was offered by Cheng:

17   *There are two aspects about it. On the one hand, I hope to improve my*
18   *academic skills, as I already mentioned. On the other hand, I would like to learn*
19   *more about the daily use of English to improve my communicative ability, such*
20   *as my spoken English, my pronunciation, and the issue of how to use the*
21   *language more authentically.*

(Cheng: Interview One)

Cheng particularly worried about how to express herself *'fluently and more clearly during communication'* (Lines 72-73, Interview One). Although Wong considered listening as the area she would mostly like to improve, she pointed out that *'speaking is also one of my weak points'* (Lines 17-18, Interview One).

The subjects' motivation in improving their English was maintained in Interview Two, though the areas for improvement varied among the three subjects. For Cheng, her worries remained the same: she wanted to improve her grammar so she could write *'like a native speaker'* (Line 6, Interview Two); she also wished to speak more fluently *'with a bit of a British accent'* (Line10, Interview Two). Lin's motivation in improving her English was expressed indirectly through the interview. She talked about teaching Chinese to an elderly English lady. And she found it very useful when this lady helped her with her English during the lesson. She was also very grateful that she had now got a few people she knew who could help her with her English, though she wouldn't bother developing a deeper friendship with them. Wong was least confident about her English among the three subjects, based on her self-assessment in the questionnaire. So naturally, her motivation was high, as she confirmed to me that she looked for opportunities to speak to native speakers. She talked about the effort she made, such as applying to stay with a host family at Christmas, and her plan to move into a host family after June (refer to Lines 41-44, Interview Two).

While all the three subjects agreed that talking to native speakers could provide opportunities to practise their spoken English, they perceived the practice itself as the source of their communicative difficulties, as I will present next.

5.2.2 Perceived difficulties in communicating with native speakers

Generally speaking, in three broad areas the subjects identified the potential communicative difficulties in speaking to native speakers, relating to their linguistic incompetence, the content and the structure of the conversation, and interpersonal relations. Although shared views existed between Lin and Wong, individual differences were found among the three subjects. Cheng, particularly, held a different view from Lin and Wong regarding the 'cultural differences' between her and native speakers. The findings also show a tendency of changing views among the subjects over time.

5.2.2.1 Linguistic incompetence

According to Cheng, her difficulties in communicating with native speakers came mainly from the linguistic aspects of the language, rather than the content of the talk that concerned both Lin and Wong. She explained, '...if I found myself keeping on making errors during the communication, such as using the wrong tenses or plurals, or choosing the wrong words, I would get very upset.' (Lines 63-66, Interview One)

Also absent from Cheng's response was the worry about the sociocultural differences between her and native speakers. She admitted the existence of differences, but she was not really experiencing 'cultural shock', as she pointed out:

28   *I mean, we can communicate with each other. They understand what I mean, and*
29   *so do I. Communication for social purposes is important for learning English. So*
30   *it would be good to make more friends, especially with students from different*
31   *countries.*

(Cheng: Interview One)

Therefore for Cheng, communicating with native speakers was important for learning English. There were frustrations, but they were more of linguistic difficulty than the lack of common cultural background between her and the target language group that concerned both Lin and Wong.

5.2.2.2 Interpersonal relations

In Interview Two, Wong perceived her language behaviour as being affected by interpersonal relations, as she told me:

9   ...it depends on myself, or, depends on other people. If, like, the person I mentioned
10   the other day, if our conversation is relaxing, and I can feel at ease, it is possible
11   that I will talk more. For example, I talked a lot with the host family I have just
12   been to; but for some people, if I have nothing to talk about with them, I will
13   probably say little.

(Wong: Interview Two)

But what did Wong mean by 'depending on other people'? Was the criterion based on other people's physical looks, personalities, or social status? Wong's comment in Line 10 provides the implication; that is, how Wong reacted to the conversation may depend on the nature of the talk, as she could speak more if the conversation 'is relaxing'. This is in line with the research assumption that social talk forms and reshapes the interpersonal relations. Wong may have realised the importance of interpersonal relations in affecting her communicative behaviours, but she may not perceive the possibility that this interpersonal relation, as well as social identity, are formed and reshaped through the micro level of talk itself. The evidence can be gained through the qualitative analysis of the subjects' WTC in the next section.

5.2.2.3 The content and the structure of the conversation

According to the subjects, the third area of communicative difficulties came from the content and the structure of the talk, affected by the different sociocultural backgrounds between the subjects and their native interlocutors. It is here the subjects' own views of their conversational performance were provided. Where 'the

lack of shared topics' and 'the lack of depth of the talk' are mentioned in the following discussion, the words are highlighted with bold characters to indicate the potential evidence for the link between conversational involvement and WTC.

When directly asked to describe her weak point in her English, Lin regarded 'vocabulary' as the obstacle lying between her and her native interlocutors, as revealed here:

28   *Yeah, I think the most thing, the most obstacle for us, to speak to many people, to*
29   *others, to native speakers, is not anything else, not grammar, just vocabulary.*

(Lin: Interview One, with Lin's own words in English)

However, as I probed the question further, Lin contradicted her previous comment on vocabulary as the only obstacle in talking to native speakers. Instead, she gave the following story, which expressed her worry about 'what to talk with native speakers' and her assumption of the problem as lacking common cultural background:

40   *I think **it's very difficult to, to talk deeply with native speakers.** Maybe, there are*
41   *some racial problems, some racial thing. Then I think is the personality. I didn't,*
42   *didn't, I'm quite, not very open to others. And another thing is, maybe I **can't***
43   ***find very interesting topics to talk about with them.** If we talk about some*
44   *general topics that I've talked about that for years, so I don't want to come back*
45   *anymore. If talk some deeper subjects, maybe I haven't got that common cultural*
46   *backgrounds, or some history backgrounds, so, maybe, I'm afraid it won't go*
47   *anywhere.*

(Lin: Interview One, with Lin's own words in English)

The evidence Lin offered was her previous experience of talking to the nurses at the hospital, where Lin had a part-time job. Lin talked about her difficulty in understanding the nurses when they were talking in a group, though it was okay if the nurses were speaking to her individually. Therefore, Lin's confidence in talking to native speakers depended on the conversational situation. She was confident talking to the few native speakers she knew through her academic study, such as the lecturers and her peer students. Her contact with them, however, was little, because Lin found there were *'no topics to talk about'* (Line 59, Interview two).

Similar comments were found in Wong's story, who considered 'the lack of common topics' was one of the obstacles of talking to native speakers:

18   ... I had opportunities of using English while I was in China, especially during
19   the intensive English training course in Beijing. I was on good terms with one of
20   the teachers there. He introduced me to some of his friends who were native
21   speakers of English. **But sometimes I didn't know what to talk about with them.**
22   My teacher even gave me some topics to prepare before we went out. But it just
23   didn't work out. I suppose I was too lazy to do the practice.

(Wong: Interview One)

Therefore, Wong was not sure about the usefulness of speaking to native speakers in her case. She made it clear that she wasn't denying the benefits of speaking to native speakers for language learning. Rather, she contributed her uncertainty to the two problems that are commonly found among Chinese L2 learners: 'the lack of common topics' and 'the difficulty to talk at a deeper level' with native speakers, as revealed here:

25   I was not sure about talking to native speakers. I don't mean that these
26   opportunities are not beneficial for language learning. **But I don't know what to**
27   **chat with them. The conversation won't go any deeper as I would like it to.** I
28   guess this is because I haven't had enough input to converse with them, such as
29   the sociocultural backgrounds those native speakers share among
30   themselves.

(Wong: Interview One)

Similar to Lin, Wong felt that the cultural differences between a native speaker and herself may have affected both the quality and quantity of the talk.

As a contrast to Lin and Wong, Cheng didn't feel much 'cultural shock' when interviewed for the first time (refer to Lines 27-28, Interview One). Her concern over the linguistic aspects of her English as potential communicative barriers between her and native speakers remained in Interview Two. According to Cheng: *'problems came only when I didn't have the right words to express myself"* (Lines 50-51, Interview Two). However, a different view was offered when I asked Cheng how she could improve her communication with native speakers. Cheng offered the following comment:

91　*I think, in order to improve the communication skills, there are two things to*
92　*watch. First, it depends on* **how much you know about the background**
93　**information, as well as your knowledge of the society and its culture.** *If you have*
94　*more contact with them, and learn more from it, it becomes natural that you will be*
95　*more at ease to communicate. Then there is your own ability of the language itself,*
96　*say, you will feel more comfortable if you can express yourself freely and fluently.*

(Cheng: Interview Two)

Cheng's emphasis on the importance of the sociocultural knowledge of the target language group was in contrast to her previously expressed opinion. This change of view thus provides the evidence that Cheng's self-perception of the distance from the target language group may have been increased, rather than reduced after three months, if she felt any at the beginning. The sociocultural differences between the subjects and the target language group featured most strongly during the last interview, when the subjects interpreted their improvement over time.

5.2.3 The subjects' own interpretation of their improvement in English

In Interview Three, the subjects were asked about the improvement they had made so far, rather than the areas in which they would like to improve. As the findings show, all the three subjects felt that their English had been improved over time.

Cheng felt that she was now much more confident with her academic use of English, because she used academic vocabulary almost every day. Her frustration came from using English for social purposes. She said she sometimes found it difficult to find the right words to express herself in a daily life situation. Lin felt that she had made progress in listening, but not in her spoken English. Wong was much less impressed by her progress in English so far, compared to Cheng and Lin. She said she could communicate with other international students, but felt that she often made a lot of grammatical mistakes. In terms of speaking to native speakers, her lack of confidence remained. However, some progress was made, as Wong explained:

13　*I still don't feel very confident, but better than before. Before, I didn't feel willing*
14　*to communicate – no, it's like,* **I didn't know what to talk about with them. Now, I**
15　**know what to say, and, I am able to use some topics...***Probably it is because Steve*
16　*was in my group, and sometimes I would talk with him.* **Perhaps because we had**
17　**some common topics to share, so I could feel more relaxed.**

(Wong: Interview Three)

Thus, according to Wong, knowing what to talk about with native speakers made the

communication easier and more relaxing. What is also revealed here was Wong's

improved knowledge of the target culture and target language group. She believed that

'the more you know about their cultural background, the more it facilitates the

communication' (Lines 35-36, Interview Three). She then went on to offer the

following example:

36　*... For example, again about the voting, I used to have no interest at all. Then,*
37　*because I watch TV, and also I was told that this was a very important event in this*
38　*country....That day, you know, I had a bit of talk about it with Cathy* (pseudonym),
39　*then in the afternoon, I had a meeting with Jean* (pseudonym for one of the tutors),
40　*who said she had to' vote' after the meeting. I remember feeling lucky that I had*
41　*already knew this event, otherwise, I wouldn't have understood what she meant by*
42　*'vote' under that context. I might have taken it as something else.*

(Wong: Interview Three)

Wong's view that the sociocultural knowledge of the target language facilitated

communication with native speakers was shared by Cheng and Lin. According to

Lin's response to the questionnaire, her knowledge of British culture and people had

improved, which she believed to be helpful in her communication with native

speakers. She said:

7　*I think,* **having known a little more about their culture made it possible to know**
8　**what is appropriate to talk about and what is not when interacting with native**
9　**speakers. You can also lead the conversation into deeper discussion if you know**
10　**what they are interested in.**

(Lin: Interview Three, with Lin's own words in English)

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In a similar way, Cheng talked about how watching TV provided an insight into the target culture, and provided the resource for conversational topics:

67 I think watching TV here has really helped, from which I learned about their own
68 ways of living, like how they go about their daily lives, such as their houses, how
69 they decorate their houses, how they look after their gardens.... **Then when you**
70 **have the opportunities to talk to a native speaker, you will have something to**
71 **talk about, because you know what they like...**

(Cheng: Interview Three)

It may sound natural that people would like to learn about the culture of the foreign country where they are currently staying. However, what is significant here is the subjects' shared view that such sociocultural knowledge facilitated their communication with the target language group. More specifically, they believed their improved knowledge of the target culture had made conversation with native speakers easier. Coming with the view was also the realisation among the subjects that there had indeed existed the sociocultural differences between them and the target language group. In what way these self-perceptions of their L2 experiences may have affected their WTC constructs the focus for discussion in the next section.

5.2.4 Attitudes towards speaking to native speakers among the subjects

In this section, the subject's attitudes towards speaking to native speakers are explored. The subjects' attitudes, including their change of views across the three interviews, are presented in separate sub-sections. As such, each subject is treated as a unique individual, with their voices situated in their unique L2 experiences.

5.2.4.1 Lin

Lin made it very clear that she preferred to make friends with Chinese people, because *'it is not easy to get on with people from other countries'* (Lines 61-62, Interview One). She also disliked the idea of making friends with native speakers just for the sake of learning English, as the interview extract shows:

69 **Lin:** *Mm, actually I didn't want to use that effort to practise my English. I think,*
70 *at the same time, you lose many things. I don't want to,*
71 **Researcher:** *Lose many things?*
72 **Lin:** *Like, if you want to make friends, you, the meaning you want to, the real*
73 *thing you want to get, the confidence from them, or something makes you very*
74 *comfortable. Making friends, the purpose is not just to practise English.*

(Lin: Interview One, with Lin's own words in English)

Thus, according to Lin, because it was not easy to make friends with native speakers, or probably with other foreigners as well, she was not prepared to approach them simply for the reason that such contact provided opportunities of practising English. However, she admitted that she looked for opportunities to speak to native speakers when she first came to the UK (see Line 78, Interview One). She added that speaking to native speakers was helpful at the beginning, but not now, when she had been here for one year. She explained: *'If you just came here, I think it will help. As I said, just some basic topics'* (Lines 85-86, Interview One).

Lin's view that she had few common topics to share with native speakers remained in Interview Two. As a result, Lin didn't regard speaking to native speakers as the best way of improving her English, because it was: *'very time-consuming, not a short-cut'* (Line 42, Interview Two). Lin didn't have much contact with native speakers in her daily life, and she didn't look for opportunities to speak to native speakers either. When asked how she felt about her experience of talking to the native speakers at a recent party, where I was also present, Lin replied:

64 *It's okay to talk with them, but I think...mm... it is not that kind of real talk. It is*
65 *like, you don't really want to exchange information, or to communicate with them.*
66 *There isn't much that you can talk at a deep level with them.*

(Lin: Interview Two)

Lin's comment leads to the question: if Lin had no topics to talk about with native speakers, and if, *'there isn't much that you can talk at a deep level with them'*, what are the standards for 'a good and meaningful conversation' for Lin? Lin's own explanation was whether she could get useful information from the communication or whether the communication carried certain purposes (refer to Lines 68-72, Interview

Two). As a comparison, Lin explained why she found it different when talking to her Chinese friends:

68   *I can get some information from my Chinese friends, maybe, because we have*
69   *similar situations, and we talk about our needs, such as buying air plane tickets.*
70   *Or, if we are on the same course, we would talk about our study, or I would*
71   *discuss how to spend the coming holidays with my flatmates.*

(Lin: Interview Two)

To justify her reluctance in looking for opportunities to talk to native speakers, Lin said: '*...because we only know each other a little bit, so, if I can get anything by socialising with them, I can equally achieve this by socialising with my other friends'* (Lines 77-79, Interview Two). Underlying this statement was Lin's self-perception of the social distance from the target language group, as *'there is no overlapping part between my social circle and theirs'* (Line 73, Interview Two).

Lin's change of attitude appeared in Interview Three when she described British people as *'quite nice, compared to Chinese people'*. Seeing the surprise on my face, Lin explained:

41   *Mm, it's difficult to compare, actually. They are quite nice, and they have nice*
42   *personalities, I have to put in this way. But I prefer to make friends with Chinese*
43   *people though. But they have nice personalities, I have to say. They are not caring*
44   *too much about relationships, or whatever you say.*

(Lin: Interview Three, with Lin's own words in English)

Thus, despite the fact that Lin had little social contact with native speakers, her attitude towards them was positive. She also commented: *'if I got chance to speak to them, they are very nice'* (Line 56, Interview Three). But, the problem for Lin was: *'you can't grab everybody to talk'* (Lines 57-58, Interview Three). That is to say, although Lin's preference of making friends with Chinese people remained, she left the impression that she would like to communicate more with native speakers once she had the opportunities, as revealed here:

58   *If I have many English flatmates, or many classmates, or workmates, that's fine.*
59   *But the other situations that I can get contact with them is, I look for opportunities,*
60   *which could be, like you said, Open House, or some dance, some pub, but I don't*
61   *like to know strangers.*

(Lin: Interview Three, with Lin's own words in English)

Therefore, according to Lin, it was her personality rather than her attitudes towards the target language group that were acting as a barrier for her to look for opportunities to speak to native speakers. She made it clear during Interview Three that she preferred talking to native speakers because she found it difficult to understand some people's accents, such as the English spoken by Turkish people and Koreans. Lin also felt the misunderstandings were less with native speakers than with other international students. But Lin didn't have a lot of opportunities to use English for social purposes. The reason according to Lin was the lack of native speaking friends. Lin was certainly not alone in this language learning situation. As I discussed earlier in Chapter 2, although studying and living in a target language country presents L2 learners 'input-rich' learning context, the opportunities to interact with native speakers do not come naturally. Without the constant guidance and support of a language profession that is common to classroom learning context, L2 learners in study-abroad situations are often left on their own in their L2 learning. The difficulty to maintain social contact with native speakers, therefore, not only deprives L2 learners' opportunities to use the language for social purposes, but is also likely to result in L2 learners' self-perceived SPD from native speakers, as evidenced by Wong and Cheng's experiences.

5.2.4.2 Wong

Wong had acknowledged the usefulness of speaking to native speakers in improving her English. But, she was not sure whether she would like to take these opportunities. Such an attitude was based on her previous contact with native speakers in China, as she expressed similar concerns as Lin, such as her uncertainty of 'what to say to them' and 'how to hold topic discussion at a deeper level'. But, she revealed a more positive attitude towards speaking to native speakers than Lin in Interview One. For example, she attributed her lack of 'input' as one of the reasons for the communication difficulties, which made her believe that once more input had been gained, she would

be able to converse better with native speakers. She also thought that she hadn't made the best opportunities she had to speak to native speakers. She commented:

32   *Sometimes I was just too lazy to do so, or too tired to go out with them (native*
33   *speakers). But sometimes, I think I just didn't jump at those opportunities.*

(Wong, Interview One)

Wong's positive attitude about the usefulness of talking to native speakers in improving her English stayed in Interview Two. Similar to Cheng, Wong thought talking with native speakers could help with her pronunciation and intonation, so she would have less of a Chinese accent in her English. She was willing to talk to native speakers, and had looked for opportunities to do so. For example, she was considering moving into a host family so she could have more opportunities to use English on daily basis (refer to Line 44, Interview Two).

However, when interviewed the third time, about three months later after Interview Two was conducted, Wong talked about her preference of communicating with other international students, rather than with native speakers. Wong cherished the opportunities of using English in her daily life, but most importantly, she enjoyed these talks with other internationals students. She felt that she could talk about everything with them, and had a lot of fun. This was in comparison with her change of view regarding her willingness to talk with native speakers, as Wong said:

71   *Maybe I was more willing to talk to native speakers before. At that time, I felt that*
72   *I had to take the opportunity to talk to them. But now, for example, if you don't like*
73   *to talk to me, why should I talk to you? It is true, you know, I don't think I should*
74   *force myself just because of the sheer purpose of practising my English.*

(Wong: Interview Three)

Based on the above comment, it is reasonable to assume that a conversation meant more than just the opportunity to practise English for Wong. The underlying message was that the contact with native speakers was not as relaxing as she would like it to be, as reflected in her attitude towards native speakers:

77   *They are very polite. How to put it? It can be very nice to socialise with them,*
78   *because they are very considerate of how you feel. Like last time at the 'Open*
79   *House' programme, they gave me a lift when they knew that I had to go back on*
80   *my own. But I personally feel that their friendliness and kindness are based on*
81   *their good nature and good manners as well-educated social beings. It is not that*
82   *easy to make close friends with them. That's how I perceive it. They did it because*
83   *they thought they should.*

The above comment reveals Wong's self-perceived distance from the target language group. This had possibly resulted in her reluctance to talk to native speakers, a contrast to her WTC expressed previously in Interview Two (refer to Lines 39-51, Interview Two).

5.2.4.3 Cheng

Cheng regarded 'communication for social purposes' as an important way for learning English, and thought *'it would be good to make more friends, especially with students from different countries'* (Lines 29-31, Interview One). She also considered *'the process of learning as a process of communicating and accumulating knowledge'* (Lines 52-53, Interview One), so she could learn from her mistakes that occurred during her interaction with native speakers. Her concern over the linguistic aspect of the language, particularly, the intonation and pronunciation led to her reservation in talking to native speakers who had accents. At the end of Interview One, Cheng told me how she planned to improve her English in the future:

76   *Firstly, I think it will be very useful to attend social activities and make new*
77   *friends, I mean, when the pressure of study isn't too much. It would also be*
78   *helpful to have some native speakers around where we live. That's why I'm*
79   *moving <laughs>.*

(Cheng: Interview One)

The benefit of speaking to native speakers, according to Cheng, was to learn their ways of expressing things, as well as to imitate their intonation and pronunciation (refer to Lines 57-59, Interview One). Before the interview, I was informed that Cheng was moving out from her current accommodation. One of the reasons for this was the lack of an authentic L2 learning environment there, as there were no native

speakers sharing in the flat. It is in this sense that Cheng was regarded as showing a willingness to communicate with native speakers.

Cheng restated her willingness to communicate with native speakers in Interview Two. She felt that her English had been improved through her contact with native speakers, as she explained:

56 *I think this (speaking to native speakers) is a bit like swimming – if you leave it for*
57 *many days, next time when you enter the swimming pool, you will feel very*
58 *uncomfortable with the water; on the other hand, if you go swimming everyday,*
59 *you will get more comfortable.*

(Cheng: Interview Two)

A change of attitude towards native speakers, however, was shown in Cheng's responses in Interview Two, as she felt that some of the native speakers were not very friendly (refer to Line 64-67, Interview Two). Cheng was still willing to talk to native speakers, only for the sake of improving her English. Also different from Interview One was Cheng's favour in 'attending lectures and seminars' as the most efficient way of improving her English.

Cheng didn't look for opportunities to communicate with native speakers. She said she simply took the opportunities when they emerged naturally. This was different from Lin's case, who did not look for opportunities even though she didn't have much contact with native speakers. However, the higher tendency of using the target language in Cheng's daily life than in Lin's did not result in a positive attitude towards native speakers of Cheng's. On the contrary, Interview Three featured a similar attitude: Cheng was willing to speak to native speakers for the sake of improving her English, despite the fact that she 'still' didn't like them (refer to Line 123, Interview Three). Cheng said, *'except a few who are close and nice to me, I don't like the English'* (Lines 125-126, Interview Three). It is interesting to note that Cheng preferred to speak to the younger generation. According to her, the older generation may have already had some fixed ideas and opinions about the Chinese. Comparatively, the younger English were simpler and more direct, therefore, easier to make friends with.

Cheng's negative perceptions of some of the native speakers she had contact with are in line with my earlier claim that the mere contact with the target language group does not always promote favourable feelings. L2 learners' negative language experiences, such as the lack of openness among some of the native speakers towards L2 learners' own cultures, may produce counter effects.

To sum up, all through the study, the subjects had maintained their motivation to improve their English. While all the subjects would like to improve their English for social purposes, their attitudes towards speaking to native speakers varied across the three interviews. In the following discussion, an overview of the findings is provided to compare the subjects' WTC across the different stages of the study. The purpose of this is to provide a critical analysis of the subjects' own perceptions of their L2 experiences, as well as to explore how their actual talk with the target language group had possibly shaped the self-perceived social and psychological distance between the two.

5.3 Critical Analysis at Level Two: Exploring the possible link between the subjects' WTC and their actual talk with native speakers

In section 5.2, the subjects' descriptions of their L2 experiences are presented. Four general categories of L2 experiences were generated from the data. These are: the subjects' motivation in improving their English; their perceived communicative difficulties in speaking to native speakers; their own interpretations of their improvement made in English over time; and their attitudes towards speaking to native speakers. In this section, a critical analysis of the subjects' L2 experience is provided, with the aim to explore the interrelationships among the categories. In particular, I discuss in detail how the subjects' changes of attitude towards speaking to native speakers were likely the result of the following two factors:

(1) The subjects' actual contact with native speakers;
(2) The subjects' own standards and criterion for 'good and meaningful conversations'.

5.3.1 Actual contact with native speakers

The discussion in this section provides comparisons of the subjects' L2 experiences across the three interviews. The differences among the subjects reflect the fact that each subject is a unique individual with their unique personalities and life experiences. However, despite these variances, the three subjects revealed 'the lack of common topics' and 'the lack of depth in their talk with native speakers'.

5.3.1.1 Interview One

Both Cheng and Wong had been here for less than two months when this study began, and they both regarded talking to native speakers as one important way of practising their English. This provided a contrast to Lin, who admitted that she looked for any opportunity to speak to native speakers when she first came to UK. One year on, however, Lin changed her attitude and considered speaking to native speakers 'not very useful for improving English now'. This change of attitude could be a result of a combination of reasons. According to Lin, there were other ways of improving her English, such as attending lectures and seminars. She also watched TV and occasionally read newspapers. As a result, she did not particularly look for opportunities to interact with native speakers. However, further analysing the interview with Lin revealed that the change of WTC in Lin could also be affected by her previous negative experience of interacting with native speakers.

For example, Lin was clear about her unwillingness to 'make foreign friends just for the purpose of practising English'. The underlying message, as confirmed by Lin's own words, was her difficulty in 'getting on well with' native speakers and other foreigners. Lin offered the following possible reasons:

- Difficulty of holding deep discussions with native speakers;
- 'Racial problems';
- Her own personality – not open enough;
- Not knowing what to talk about with native speakers.

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These reasons were not independent from each other. Not knowing what to talk about and the difficulty of holding deep discussions with native speakers were obviously not in line with Lin's interpretation of 'friendship'. According to Lin:

72   ...if you want to make friends, you, the meaning you want to, the real thing you
73   want to get, the confidence from them, or something makes you very
74   comfortable.

(Lin's own words in English)

Lin's emphasis on 'openness' in talks among friends made it reasonable for her to assume the difficulty of making friends with native speakers when there was not much to talk about. As a result, she looked to the reasons why native speakers were not open enough and concluded 'racial distance' as one of the factors. In other words, not sharing common topics with native speakers and not being able to talk at a deeper level with them not only put Lin off looking for further opportunity of interacting with native speakers, but may have also affected Lin's self-perceived distance from native speakers. This may explain why after one year of staying in the UK, Lin was the least confident about her knowledge of the target culture and the target language group among the three. Lin's unwillingness to communicate with native speakers contrasted greatly to her motivation to practice English in other ways. For example, she required to use English to talk to me in the interview. Also according to Lin, she had asked other Chinese students to speak to her in English wherever it was possible.

Cheng, on the contrary, expressed her confidence both in her knowledge of the target culture and the target language group. Her attitude towards speaking to native speakers was positive, and she would like to make more foreign friends if possible. Cheng's self-perceived confidence can be explained. First, as Cheng revealed, her opportunities of using English for the time being was mainly limited to speaking to her English classmates and the international students living in the same Hall of Residence at the University. Thus, it was likely that the talks were related to academic or institutional topics. Her previous positive experience of socialising with English colleagues in China had also contributed to her WTC. Similarly, while situated in China, her English colleagues would discuss things with her which were more concerned with China, rather than rooted in their own culture. As a result, Cheng

didn't feel much 'culture shock'. It is worth noting the different standards each subject applied to judging their interpersonal relations with native speakers. While Lin was looking for friendship, or something deeper, Cheng valued the functional aspect of the language for information exchange: *'I mean, we can communicate with each other. They understand what I mean, and so do I'* (Lines 28-29).

Wong was very positive about the usefulness of speaking to native speakers. The reasons why she didn't make the most of the opportunities she had were similar to Lin's: 'the uncertainty of what to talk about' and 'the difficulty to hold a deeper conversation'. However, Wong attributed the problems to her own lack of 'input', rather than the social and psychological distance between her and native speakers.

It remains unknown, however, whether these different perceptions of their L2 experiences among the three subjects were simply a reflection of their different lengths of stay in the target country. Is it possible that Cheng's confidence in using English for socialisation had something to do with this 'initial stage', during which topics were familiar and very much institutionalised? Or, would Wong change her attitude regarding her WTC after she had more contact with native speakers? The answers will be provided later in this chapter.

5.3.1.2 Interview Two

A change of attitude towards the target language group was found in Lin, who chose to say that the English people were friendly and hospitable. She also found that the nurses with whom she had some contact 'seem to be okay now', because she can turn to them if she had any questions. However, she also told me that she didn't want to get emotionally involved with them. And, the reasons given by Lin were: *'I have to make a lot of effort'* and *'I have to spend a lot of time'* (Lines 147-148). This has led to the question: What effort did Lin need in order to develop a deeper relationship with the target language group, such as the nurses mentioned above?

As discussed earlier, Lin's interpretation of friendship depended on the fact whether they shared common topics or whether they could hold conversations at a deeper level. Such views were confirmed in Interview Two, which led to her unwillingness to look

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for opportunities to talk to native speakers. Therefore, it was likely the fact that Lin found no common topics to share with the nurses at the hospital had affected Lin's perception of the distance between them. Lin's comment on how she interacted with the nurses provided the evidence. That is, she felt less confident when the nurses were talking among themselves than when the nurses were speaking to her individually. Thus, it was her inability to get involved in the conversation rather than the mere fact of the contact with the target language group that had shaped Lin's perception of the distance from them. For Lin, the lack of conversational involvement meant the lack of common topics between her and the target language group, which inevitably also affected her perception of the depth of the talk as a result (for further discussion refer to Chapter 7).

An equally key factor for Lin's self-perception of the distance was the lack of emotional involvement in a conversation. This explains why Lin liked the elderly lady to whom she was giving Chinese lessons on a weekly basis. She said: *'the more...the more, we get together, the more I like her'* (Lines 92-93). Lin felt that the elderly lady liked her, and considered this as a very important factor for why they got on so well. Therefore, it is interesting to know the standards Lin applied to interpreting the interpersonal relations between her and the elderly English lady. Analysing her talk revealed the following possibilities: the elderly English lady's willingness to help her with her English, and the fact that they exchanged useful information about each other's cultures. Particularly, the elderly English lady's interest in China had resulted in not only the quantity of conversational involvement from Lin, but also the confidence of Lin to talk about things she was familiar with.

In a similar way, Cheng's change of attitude regarding the usefulness of speaking to native speakers was likely to be the result of her insufficient contact with the target language group. This did not contradict Cheng's claim that she, *'had frequent contact with native speakers'* (Line 13), as Cheng herself explained that the contact she had was mainly limited to the people who lived around her, such as the native speakers on her course and other international students. But, she didn't have much contact with people from other fields of society. Therefore, Cheng's favourable feeling towards her native-speaking lecturers was in contrast to her negative attitudes towards 'other people' of the target language group. These 'other people' were those from outside of

the academic field, with whom she had identified a cultural gap, and felt she would never be integrated into their social circles. Cheng's self-perceived distance from the target language group was also based on how these 'other people' reacted to her. Cheng offered the following example:

64   ....However, when I'm interacting with people outside of my academic field, you
65   know, the people in the street, such as the people I met during my travelling, you
66   can feel the kind of hidden caution against you.

Cheng's perception of the social and psychological distance from the 'other people', and her actual lack of contact with them may have led her to turn to more passive ways of learning English, such as watching TV. It is interesting to quote Cheng's comment on the benefit of watching TV:

44   Watching TV is also very helpful to English learning, especially if you are
45   watching those dramas telling the stories of normal people. They are not very
46   interesting, however, that's how British people talk. If you watch TV a lot,
47   gradually, you will naturally feel that you're living in an authentic environment.

It may sound strange that watching TV made Cheng feel that she was living in an authentic environment when she actually lived in the target country, where the language was spoken daily. The underlying statement, however, was Cheng's lack of 'quality contact' with the target language group. This may explain why Cheng would always ask the British people about their social and cultural customs whenever she had the opportunity. Cheng may genuinely be interested in the culture of the target country, but her emphasis on learning about the target culture was also based on the realisation that such knowledge helped with her communication with native speakers (referring to her comments in Lines 91-95).

In Interview One, Wong was not sure about whether she would like to talk to native speakers. This view had obviously been changed, when she revealed in Interview Two that she was willing to talk to native speakers, and had looked for opportunities to do so. She was very positive about her experience of visiting a host family during the Christmas holidays. The examples she offered suggested that good conversations had been carried out between her and the native speaking host, which made the whole experience pleasant. She said that she had talked a lot, mainly 'due to the host's

kindness' (Lines 17-18). This 'kindness of her host's', according to Wong, included asking the right questions and raising interesting topics. For example, Wong said that the conversation had covered 'every aspect', such as 'life, family and fox hunting' (referring to Line 15). Wong had particularly elaborated on one topic that she found interesting:

63   Mm, oh, we were talking about in China, no, the Japanese girl said she didn't want
64   to get married, saying that remaining unmarried was now normal, and even
65   popular in Japan. But she also mentioned that there might be some people who
66   didn't like the idea.

For Wong, it was the sensitivity of some of the topics covered that day that made it different from a lot of other talks she had with other native speakers. She explained:

77   But sometimes there are other, like other English people. They might ask me all
78   kinds of questions as well, but I might not want to talk at all.

Being able to talk about something 'sensitive' or 'deeper' may have changed Wong's attitude towards the target language group as a whole, as she revealed:

91   I used to think that English people are stiff and serious, but now I would add
92   another feature to it: they can also be humorous. But the same as in China, you
93   meet both good and not so good English people.

What is revealed here is the possibility that the NNS subjects' attitudes towards the target language group can be affected by their actual contact with the target language group, more precisely, by what was talked about during the conversation and how the conversation was carried out.

To sum up, similar findings were found in Interview One and Interview Two. All the three subjects maintained their motivation in improving their English. Wong regarded talking with native speakers as very important in language learning. As a result, she looked for opportunities to speak to them. Her experience of having pleasant conversations with native speakers had very likely resulted in her positive attitudes towards the target language group as a whole. Cheng showed her concern about the barrier lying between her and the English people from outside the academic field in Interview Two. The perceived distance she had from them may explain why she

regarded watching TV as an important way to connect her to the real world that she was living in. Lin's improved positive attitude towards the target language group was also based on her actual contact with them. She felt that they were more approachable than she had thought, and found they were helpful with her English. However, the same as in Interview One, she didn't want to get emotionally involved with them for similar reasons: the lack of common topics and the lack of depth of the talk in her conversation with the target language group. In other words, what Lin was looking for from a good conversation was the emotional involvement from the participants, as well as the quantity of the involvement.

5.3.1.3 Interview Three

According to Cheng: '*except the few who are close and nice to me, I don't like the English*' (Lines 125-126). That is to say, Cheng thought other English people were not nice enough. Cheng's opinion was based on her daily observations. For example, she thought she was not fairly treated by the administration staff at the University simply because she was an international student. She also felt that outside of the academic field, the English showed little interest in Chinese culture, as she commented:

137 *They regard you as no different from Japanese and Korean people. They would*
138 *say: 'So, you are from China', sort of pretending to be surprised. They appear*
139 *friendly, but they have no interest whatsoever.*

On the contrary, Cheng found the English people she met at the Open House (a programme organised for international students to visit a local resident's house) were 'nice and friendly'. For Cheng, they represent the people who had some ideas about China and who were willing to learn more about Chinese culture. Another example of 'being nice and friendly' was shown by a mature English student in Cheng's flat, because he was willing to chat with Cheng about her study and her life. Therefore, Cheng regarded native speakers' interest in her as an individual and in Chinese people as a cultural group as one of the prerequisites for carrying out a meaningful conversation. She explained:

157 ...*because you feel that you are respected, as a result, you would want to*
158 *communicate, such as talking about your culture, your backgrounds and*
159 *something more personal about yourself. On the other hand, when you feel that*
160 *you are ignored and not given enough attention, you will find any attempt to talk*
161 *is meaningless.*

The communicative obstacles lying between her and native speakers, according to Cheng, came from the sociocultural differences between her and the target language group. She commented:

77 ...*After all, you are not living in the same social world as the foreigners do, and*
78 *there is not much common stuff to share with. So it is not always easy to find a*
79 *topic that you both can feel at home to talk about.*

To have similar experiences was also important for a better communication with the target language group, claimed by Cheng. Given the time, Cheng said she would make the effort to create the conversational contexts under which they could *'feel relaxed'* and *'talk about everything'* (Line 108). For example, she would join in with a walking club, and go out with English people. She believed that gradually she could *'develop a deeper relationship'* with them, and make it easy to *'talk about almost everything'* (Lines 109-110).

Cheng found talking to other international students in English equally helpful with her English. Although their sociocultural backgrounds varied, Cheng somehow found these other international students were *'frank and sincere'* (Line 118). Comparatively, the English people were *'conservative in interaction'*, who *'won't tell you things in a frank, direct way'* (Lines 115-116).

In terms of her opportunities for using English for social purposes, Wong's response was positive. However, her contact was limited to the other international students on her course. Wong liked the fact that she had to speak English with them all the time. More importantly, Wong enjoyed their company. According to her, they got on very well, and could talk about everything. This had very possibly resulted in Wong's preference for talking to other international students rather than talking to native speakers.

Wong also spoke to her French flatmate in English. She felt relaxed speaking to her, because *'she is very nice'* and the fact that *'she is willing to talk'* (Line 62). She said that they talked about anything, such as study and travelling, and *'even the differences between English people and American people'* (Line 65). By using 'even', Wong may intend to stress the significance of the topic, so as to compare with the banal dialogue she had had with others.

For Wong, the benefit of talking to native speakers was that she could learn about the local news and the local culture. This was the same as talking to other international students to learn about their cultures. Wong thought such opportunities provided her with different ways of thinking.

These languages experiences of the subjects, as well as their changing attitudes towards speaking to native speakers have very much revealed two unfortunate realities faced by L2 learners under study-abroad contexts, at least for the Chinese students concerned in this study: 1) the opportunity to interact with native speakers while live and study abroad should not be taken for granted; and 2) the learner-directed nature of L2 learning in the target language country means some learners may benefit from the authentic environment better than others, depending on personality differences and situational factors. Wong's decision to socialise with other international students may still provide her with some opportunities to use English for social purposes, but the value of going to a target language country to improve one's language is challenged. Such a challenge raises further questions where some Chinese L2 learners resort to their own cultural group for socialisation while studying abroad.

To sum up, this section has examined one particular aspect of the subjects' L2 experiences: their actual contact with native speakers. A comparison of the subjects' attitudes over time shows a causal link between the subjects' WTC and their actual contact with native speakers. Both Cheng and Wong started with a willingness to communicate with native speakers. However, their perceptions of the potential communicative difficulties with native speakers, as well as their attitudes towards native speakers, changed over time as a consequence of their actual contact with native speakers. Such a tendency reflects the possibility that learners' self-perceived social and psychological distance from the target language group was actively formed

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and reshaped through their social talks with them. Lin's unwillingness to communicate with the target language group revealed in Interview One also fits into this description. Lin had looked for opportunities when she first came to England one year before. Her actual contact with native speakers, however, made her question the usefulness of talking to native speakers in improving her English, when 'there is not much to talk about with them'.

It may sound too ambitious to apply the above findings to Chinese L2 learners as a whole. What is possible, however, is the examination of each subjects' own interpretation of what was 'a good and meaningful conversation'. The subjects' L2 experiences may vary greatly from each other, and from time to time. Their beliefs in what consisted of a good conversation, however, remained a rather stable construct. The standards or criteria each subject employed to judge their actual contact with native speakers are offered in the next section. A comparison among the three subjects was aimed to explore their beliefs and values both as a cultural group and as individuals.

5.3.2 The subjects' interpretations of 'good and meaning conversations'

5.3.2.1 Lin

Lin's own interpretation of the communicative difficulties between her and native speakers had possibly resulted in her self-perception of the distance from native speakers. Being unable to achieve the emotional involvement that Lin had expected from a conversation, Lin chose not to speak to native speaker just for the sake of improving her English. Lin, however, showed a tendency of changing her attitudes towards native speakers during the third interview. She described British people as 'nice' to talk to, if she had the opportunity (refer to Line 56, Interview Three). According to Lin, her improved knowledge of British culture made it possible to know *'what is appropriate to talk about and what is not when interacting with native speakers'* (Lines 7-9, Interview Three). This background knowledge also provided Lin with the necessary resources to *'lead the conversation into deeper discussion'* (Line 9, ibid.). Therefore, it was likely that Lin's positive experiences of speaking to native speakers had affected her WTC, as well as her attitude towards the target language

group as a whole. A critical analysis of Lin's comments across the three interviews reveals the following criteria, based on which Lin may judge her actual talk with native speakers as 'good and meaningful conversations':

- Sharing common topics with her native interlocutors;
- Her ability to hold discussions at a deeper level with her native interlocutors;
- Native speakers' willingness to make friends with her;
- Communicating to exchange information about daily needs;
- Native speakers' willingness to help her with her English.

5.3.2.2 Cheng

Cheng's WTC had been maintained all through her study. For Cheng, 'using English for social purposes' was both the end and the means, as she found that talking to native speakers could always help to correct her mistakes. What had changed over time was Cheng's attitude towards native speakers. During the first interview, Cheng admitted the differences between herself and native speakers, but she didn't think such differences had set barriers for communication. Instead, Cheng contributed her communicative difficulty to the linguistic imperfection of her English. This was to be contrasted to Cheng's response in Interview Two and Three, during which she emphasized the importance of the knowledge of the target culture. Particularly during the third interview, Cheng talked about how watching TV helped her learn about the target culture, which in turn, had informed her of what to talk about with native speakers. If Cheng's earlier claim about her confidence in the target culture was genuine, her self-perception of the distance from the target language group was increased, rather than reduced after eight months of stay. She made it clearly in Interview Three that she didn't like British people, except the few around her. The following reasons were offered by Cheng to account for her change of attitude towards native speakers:

- The sociocultural barrier between Cheng and native speakers;
- Cheng's difficulty to find a topic that she and her native interlocutors could both feel at home to talk about;

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- The lack of interest in Chinese people among some of the native speakers - Cheng felt that some of the native speakers were not friendly and genuine.

Cheng had the most contact with native speakers among the three subjects. As a result, Cheng was able to offer some examples of the positive experiences she had with native speakers, which provided the empirical evidence for the affective role of social talk in forming and reshaping her perceived distance from the target language group:

- Her roommate's willingness to chat with her about her study and her life;
- Exchanging personal details with the native speakers on her course;
- Taking about TV programs with the native speakers on her course;
- The friendliness of the people Cheng met at the Open House, who had some ideas about China and who were willing to learn more about Chinese culture.

For Cheng, native speakers' interest in Chinese culture and her as an individual was essential for a meaningful conversation. She felt that she was respected if people showed genuine concern over her study and life. However, was it not also true that these were the areas that Cheng was familiar with, and as a result, was confident to talk about with native speakers? In a similar way, spending time watching TV may have provided Cheng with the necessary resource and confidence to hold discussion with the native speakers on her course. But, at other times, when familiar topics were absent, Cheng looked to the sociocultural differences for explanation. This may explain why Cheng's self-perceived social and psychological distance from the target language group was increased rather than reduced the longer she stayed.

5.3.2.3 Wong

The same as Lin, Wong expressed her worry about 'the lack of common topics' and 'the lack of depth in the conversation' with native speakers during the first interview, based on her previous experiences in China. Therefore, Wong was not sure about whether she would like to interact more with native speakers or not. However, Wong also believed that if she had more input in the future, she would be able to communicate better with native speakers.

During the second interview, Wong made it clear that she had looked for opportunities to speak to native speakers. Wong's description of her L2 experience at a host family at Christmas brought some insight into the criteria she held for 'good and meaningful conversations':

- The relaxing atmosphere of the conversation;
- The kindness of her host, with whom she spoke a lot;
- The sensitivity of some of the topics.

During the third interview, Wong agreed that having learned more about British culture and people had facilitated her communication with native speakers. However, a change of attitude towards speaking to native speakers can also be perceived from Wong's comment, when she said that she now preferred to socialize with other international students instead of native speakers. Similar to Lin, Wong was unwilling to talk to native speakers just for the sake of learning English. What was revealed here was Wong's self-perceived distance from native speakers, based on the observation that: *'it was not that easy to make close friends with them (the English people)'* (Lines 81-82, Interview Three). Wong also felt the generation gap between her and her English peers. As a contrast to her reserved view about speaking to native speakers, Wong's enthusiasm in socializing with other international students provided further evidence that the subjects' WTC was possibly the result of the social talk itself:

- Wong's having a lot of fun talking with the international students on her course;
- Wong's French flatmate's willingness to talk, and more importantly, the fact that they had talked about the differences between English people and American people.

Wong's elaboration on one of her positive experiences with native speakers also showed that the social and psychological distance between the subjects and native speakers could be affected by what had been actually talked about, rather than with whom they were interacting. It related to Wong's on-line chat with one of the native speakers on her course. Wong considered him as having *'a very nice personality'* (Line

90, Interview Three), because he had answered all her questions, including some sensitive ones (refer to Lines 91-94, Interview Three).

Thus, although the subjects may each had applied different criteria in interpreting 'a good and meaningful conversation', they had all considered the quality of the talk equally important as the quantity of the talk. The lack of shared common topics between the subjects and their native interlocutors not only limited the depth of the talk, but also created the social and psychological distance between the two. For Cheng, for example, native speakers' lack of interest in talking about her own culture was perceived as showing no respect to her as an individual. Similarly, Wong regards the content of the topic as affecting her conversational performance. The qualities of 'being frank and direct' in a conversation, and the freedom of 'being able to talk about everything' were also valued by the subjects. In contrast, not having much to say on a topic between the subjects and their native speakers strengthened the sense of the sociocultural differences between the two, which in turn, may have affected their WTC.

However, what remained unclear were the 'meanings' given by the subjects to terms such as 'common topics' and 'the depth of a conversation'. Although frequently used by the subjects, clarification of these terms was not offered. Equally unknown were the types of topic that the subjects would like to, or, had the ability to talk about. It is in this sense that conversational analysis was regarded as complementary to the interviews conducted previously, a method recommended by Cohen (1984). This is because, subjective reports in the interview have suggested things to look for in the recorded data, and phenomena initially identified from the conversational transcripts have often been illuminated by comments in the interview. Thus, by examining the interacting process of NS-NNS conversation in the next chapter, particularly the subjects' conversational involvement under the various topic genres, I will explore the following issues:

(1) In what way did the six NS-NNS conversations fit into or fail to fit into the subjects' own criteria for 'good and meaningful conversations' as revealed in the discussion?

(2) As part of their overall L2 experiences, did the subjects' conversational performance in these six NS-NNS conversations reflect their descriptions that 'they don't share common topics with native speakers', and that 'the conversation cannot be held at a deeper level'? If so, how?

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the findings obtained from the first line of inquiry: the interviews on the subjects' WTC based on the questionnaires. The descriptive analysis at Level One shows that changes of attitudes towards speaking to native speakers were found with the subjects at different stages of the study. The Chinese L2 learners in this study had started with a willingness to communicate with the target language group. In Interview One, Cheng and Wong showed a shared positive attitude towards the target language group. Cheng and Wong also believed in the usefulness of speaking to native speakers in improving their English. Their change of view regarding their WTC subsequently, however, may indicate that the actual contact with native speakers had increased their self-perceived social and psychological distance from native speakers. Such a view may explain why Lin, after one year of stay in the UK, remained the most sceptical person about the usefulness of speaking to native speakers among the three in Interview One. Also under change was the shared recognition among the subjects of the sociocultural differences between them and the target language group. This fits into the social constructivist view that social identity and interpersonal relations are created and reshaped through the micro level of daily social interaction. That is to say, Chinese L2 learners did not come to England with the knowledge or the belief that there would exist social and psychological distance between them and the target language group. Such knowledge was realised gradually through their contact with the target language group. Thus through the critical analysis at Level Two, the subjects' own standards and criteria for 'good and meaningful conversations' were discussed, which leads to the search for the meanings of terms such as 'common topics' and 'the depth of talk' in the next chapter.

Chapter 6. Findings from the conversational data: Examining conversational involvement under topic genres

6.1 Introduction

Conversational participants clearly use language to assess the level of affiliation, and monitor their own projections of affiliation correspondingly. Pellegrino (2005) argues:

> All elements of language help define language users' image to those around them: not only the ideas that they express, but the words that they choose, the syntax of their sentences, the lilt of their intonation, and the precision of their pronunciation. (Pellegrino, 2005: 8)

The one under investigation in this study is the social function of topic genre in shaping and reforming social identity and interpersonal relations in social talk, as featured in the six recorded NS-NNS conversations. This chapter thus, presents the findings from a comprehensive analysis of the six NS-NNS conversations recorded over an eight-month period. Based on the analytic devices and procedures discussed in Chapter 4, the conversational findings are discussed at two levels. At the first level, participants' conversational involvement was measured in terms of the amount of talk they contributed. Conversational topics were then categorised into four types: NNS dominance topics, NNS active involvement topics, NS dominance topics, and the 'others' category. The quantified data allowed me to explore topic genres at the second level, demystifying the 'black box' of NS-NNS conversations by revealing what the NNS subjects and the NS participants tended to talk about as two ethnolinguistic groups.

In section 6.5, I provide the qualitative interpretation of the participants' conversational involvement under each individual topic genre, in detail and in context. The discussion leads to the conclusion that the NNS subjects' social position as L2 learners was to a large degree actively constructed through their 'information seeking' and their responses to the 'personal enquires' raised by their native interlocutors. The NS group's authoritative position as the native speakers, on the other hand, was constructed through their 'information providing', and their active involvement in most 'observation' topics. As such, this study provides the opportunity to consider how principles and theories from social psychology inform the study of learner involvement in NS-NNS interaction,

and to what extent naturally-occurring data from the six recorded NS-NNS conversations may fruitfully inform theories of second language learning.

6.2 Conversational involvement: The quantifying results

In this section, I provide a broad view of the participants' conversational performance under the four types of conversational involvement defined in Chapter 4: *NNS dominance, NNS active involvement, NS dominance, and the 'others' category*.

6.2.1 Introducing 'functional topic' and 'under-developed topic'

As the six conversations varied regarding participants, the lengths of talk, as well as the contexts under which the talks took place, the quantifying of the data across the six conversations was likely to produce misleading results. Therefore, the participants' conversational involvement was examined and discussed within each individual talk. C2 was the shortest conversation among the six talks. With 11 minutes and 9 seconds in length, C2 produced 29 topics in total. The longest conversation analysed was C5: with a transcription of 49 minutes and 23 seconds, it had 69 topics in total. C5 was recorded during a tea meeting, and plenty of snacks were offered on the table. This had naturally initiated frequent *functional* talks (8 topics in total in C5) when the host invited her guests for more food, as shown in the example:

Extract 6.1 (H represents Helen; P represents Ping*)

338	H:	Come on, Ping, eat some more.
339	P:	No, I'm fine. I'll have some strawberries.
340	H:	Yes, do, do. Do you want me to bring some ice cream?
341	P:	No, no, I'm fine.
342	H:	The cream is here=
343	P:	=Yes I'll put [some cream.
344	H:	[Which is, as I say, is ( ), it's a little bit, it's more the um, and
345		this, you might need sugar as well, but
346	P:	Oh, should be all right.

(Table talk, Topic 21 in C5)

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* the abbreviations also apply to other extracts used in the discussion; other abbreviations include: C for Cheng; L for Lin; W for Wong; T for Tony; J for Jane; S for Steve; B for Bin

Similarly, Two functional talks were found in C2 (including the orientation talk in Topic 1), and one in C6. These functional talks were not included for analysis. Also not included for analysing conversational involvement were the under-developed topics. *'Under-developed topics'* were those with a total number of words under 30. In casual talk, instead of proceeding into recognisable topics, some of the initiated topics can be interrupted in the middle, and never get mentioned again. Most of the time, it happens when the focus of the talk is transferred to one of the mentionables that have emerged out of the current talk. It is in this sense that an under-developed topic is also called a 'transitional topic', indicating its functional role in providing the emerging topic, rather than developing into a full topic on its own. An example was found in C1:

Extract 6.2

250	T:	So where do you live now?
251	C:	I'm living, I'm living, <laughs> near the Crematery.
252	**T:**	**The...cemen**
253	C:	Crema- Crematery
254	T:	What do you mean?
255	C:	Crematery, [do you know?
256	T:	[Crema-? Hang on

(Extract from C1)

In Line 250, Tony, the native speaker, initiated a topic eliciting personal information about Cheng (Topic 15 in C1). Cheng responded with an answer. However, instead of building up the topic through elaboration on the current focus, Tony shifted the topic to one of the mentionables in Cheng's utterance, which created an individual topic on its own. As it occurred, starting from Line 252 (emphasised in bold), the talk proceeded into a pronunciation issue on 'crematorium', interrupting the flow of the current focus on 'the place where Cheng stays'. Thus, Topic 15 was coded as an under-developed topic, consisting of only Line 250 and Line 251. The reason for not including under-developed topics for analysing conversational involvement was due to the short length of the fragments. With a few words uttered from all the participants, it does not make sense to measure participants' conversational performance in terms of the quantity. However, unlike functional talks that were excluded from analysis all through the study, under-developed topics were considered in analysing participants' topic initiation. Despite the fact that these topics were not fully developed, the underlying intentions of

the speaker in initiating such topics in the first place were worthy exploring in their own rights

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6.2.2 Distribution of conversational involvement among the participants as two ethnolinguistic groups

An overview of the participants' conversational involvement as two ethnolinguistic groups is presented in Table 6.1. It must be pointed out that the term 'fully developed topics' were not used as against the term 'under-developed topics' in the table. This is because any topics were qualified for analysing conversational involvement as long as their lengths allow; that is, with total words over 30 uttered by the participants. This does not, however, mean these topics were fully developed in their functional sense. They were worth analysing simply because their lengths enabled the analyst to code participants' conversational involvement with meaningful quantified evidence.

Table 6.1 The participants' conversational involvement as two ethnolinguistic groups [*]

	Under-developed topics	Topics included for analysis	NNS dominance	NNS active involvement	NS dominance	Others
C1	2	34	5 (14.7%)	19 (55.9%)	7 (20.6%)	3 (8.9%)
C2	5	22	4 (18.2%)	17 (77.3%)	1 (4.5%)	
C3	1	24	1 (4.2%)	7 (29.2%)	5 (20.8%)	11 (45.8%)
C4	0	31	7 (22.6%)	20 (64.5%)	2 (6.5%)	2 (6.5%)
C5	5	56	10 (17.9%)	22 (39.3%)	12 (21.4%)	12 (21.4%)
C6	1	75	15 (20%)	38 (50.7%)	12 (16%)	10 (13.3%)

Examining the percentage of conversational involvement between the NNS participants and their native interlocutors suggested some differences across the six conversations. The discussion of these findings is hoped to provide a broad picture of the distribution of the participants' verbal contribution between the two groups.

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[*] the Arabic numeral represents the number of topics; the percentage in the bracket indicates the proportion of distribution each type of conversational involvement takes in that particular conversation

Among five out of the six conversations, the NNS subjects had a fair share of the conversational involvement. They were generally regarded as active conversationalists based on the definition of 'active involvement' in this study. These are C1, C2, C4, C5 and C6. For example in C1, although the two NNS subjects (Cheng and Lin) only dominated 5 topics, they showed 'active involvement' in 19 topics out of the 34 topics. The same tendency applies to C5, with 10 NNS dominance topics and 22 NNS active involvement topics. This was more so in C2, C4 and C6, where the NNS subjects in total dominated a higher number of topics than their native interlocutors. The relatively fewer NS dominance topics among these three talks also meant that the NNS subjects were 'active' most of the time even though they were not taking the dominant role of the talk. In C4, the NNS subject's (Lin) status as an active conversationalist was unquestionable, as she alone dominated 7 topics, while Tony, the native speaker, only took the dominant position in 2 topics. Among the rest of the topics, Lin stayed 'active' in 20 out of the 22 topics. This was also true with C6, in which the two NNS subjects (Cheng and Wong) dominated 15 topics, to be compared with the 12 topics dominated by the two native speakers (Tony and Jane). Although C2 showed a similar tendency with the native speaker (Steve) taking dominant role in the least number of topics (4.5%), the fact that all the three subjects had participated in the talk with only one native interlocutor must be taken into account when examining the conversational performance of the two groups.

The only conversation in which the NNS group seemed to be less active conversationalists was C3. C3 also had the most number of participants involved. It was a typical after-meal talk, where people sat around the fireplace in the sitting room and had a chat. The people present included Cheng, Lin, Wong, and the two native speakers who were also the host and hostess, Tony and Jane. Also present were Ping (myself) and Bin, Cheng's boyfriend. Almost in any casual talk that requires two-way communication, conversational involvement is distributed among the participants. It is, therefore, natural to assume that the more participants there are, the less percentage of conversational involvement is distributed to each individual participant, as was the case in C3. Nevertheless, the lack of 'active involvement' from the three NNS subjects in most of the conversational topics (16 out of 24 topics) in C3 was regarded as extraordinary, considering that NNS active involvement was used in its weak sense in that any conversational involvement over 10% from one of the three subjects would be

coded as 'active' in this study. This was to be compared with Bin, who alone was active in 7 topics out of the 24 topics in total.

To sum up, the above results have shown, at the surface level and with a very broad view, the conversational tendencies between the NNS group and the NS group regarding their conversational involvement across the six conversations. It can be concluded at this stage that the NNS subjects, as a group, were regarded as active conversationalists in most of the conversations. In fact, they were very active in C2 and C4 with a low percentage of NS dominance of 4.5% and 6.5% respectively over the topics. Although in C6, NS dominance takes a higher percentage of 16% with a further percentage of 13.3% going to the 'others' category, the NNS group were regarded as playing a 'very active' role because of the higher percentage of NNS dominance over that of their native interlocutors'. The NNS group played a fairly active role in C1 and C5 with a percentage of NS dominance at 20.6% and 21.4% respectively. Although in C3 NS dominance shows a similar figure of 20.8%, there was a further percentage of 45.8% under the 'others' category indicating 'non-NNS active' involvement. Therefore, the conversational involvement of the NNS subjects as a group was perceived as 'non-active' in C3.

While the above findings have compared the NNS subjects' conversational involvement with that of their native interlocutors' as two distinctive ethnolinguistic groups, the results did not tell us anything about the nature of each talk, nor the conversational context under which each conversational topic took place. As discussed in previous chapters, a speaker's ability to get involved in a talk requires not only the intention, but also the resources to enable him/her to do so. Thus, in order to understand the participants' conversational involvement as it was, both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied to analyse each individual conversational topic across the six NS-NNS conversations. The first set of data to be presented here are the topic initiations distributed between the two groups.

6.3 Topic initiation

People do not just co-construct in a talk, they also produce new focuses or mentionables. Some of these new focuses are successfully negotiated into fully developed topics while

others falter. While disagreement exists in terms of how a speaker manages to successfully introduce a new topic into the conversation, it is generally agreed that topic initiation reflects a speaker's interest in the topic. It is possible that a topic is initiated to achieve a certain social function that has little to do with the speaker's interest in the topic itself. For example, a new topic may be brought in, simply to distract people's attention from the current focus, either because it is too sensitive or causing embarrassment. On most occasions, however, people initiate a topic to say something or make a point that is relevant under that particular context. Following this logic, it can be assumed that the speaker who initiates the topic will most likely be the person to develop the talk, unless the topic initiation aims at eliciting information from the others.

In Figure 6.1, I present the distribution of topic initiations between the NNS group and the NS group in each individual conversation, and provide a broad view of the tendencies between the two groups to get involved in the conversations. In cross-examining the findings obtained from Table 6.1 in Section 6.2.2, the analysis aims to explore the possible links between topic initiation and conversational involvement.

Figure 6.1: Topic initiations between the NNS group and the NS group across the six conversations

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
NNS	17	18	8	6	18	31
NS	16	9	9	21	36	34

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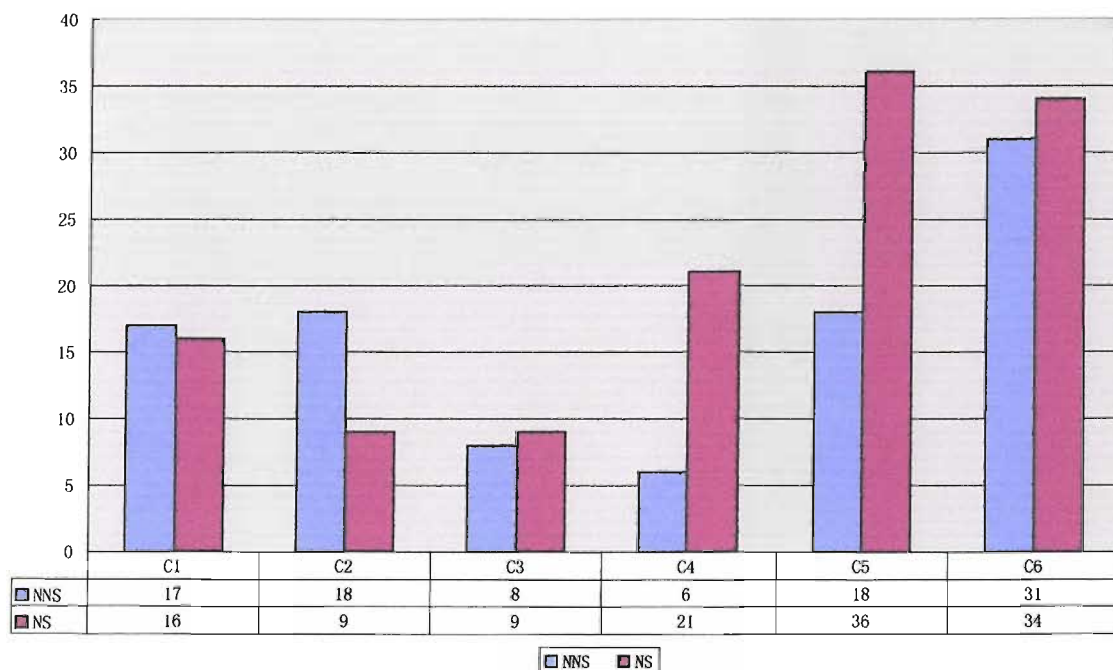
Comparing the findings in Figure 6.1 with those obtained in the previous section produced the following conclusions:

(1) The NNS group had initiated more topics than the NS group in both C1 and C2. This may explain why in Table 6.1 that the NNS group were found active in C1, and 'very active' in C2. Having initiated topics that the subjects were interested in, or were able to talk about, they were more likely to follow the flow of the conversation and make their share of contribution on topic development.

(2) Compared with C1 and C2, C5 and C6 showed a slightly different picture. The NNS group's conversational involvement was coded as 'very active' in C6, 'fairly active' in C5 earlier. A quick look at Figure 6.1, however, showed that the NNS group made less topic initiations in C5 and C6 than their NS interlocutors. That is to say, the NNS group not only achieved active involvement in their own initiated topics, but also in the topics initiated by other participants. In total, the NNS group showed active involvement (including NNS dominance) in 57.2% of the topics in C5, while the NS group did 21.4%, and Ping did 21.4% (referring to Table 6.1 in Section 6.2.2). Similarly in C6, the NNS group managed to stay active (including NNS dominance) during 70.7% of the total topics, while the NS group did 16%, and Ping did the other 13.3%. The improved ability of the NNS subjects to get actively involved in C5 and C6 may suggest that holding a conversation, like other language skills, may improve over time.

(3) In C3, the NNS group did not differ much from the NS group regarding the number of topic initiations, as the NNS group contributed 8 topics, and the NS group made 9 topic initiations. Despite the fact that the NNS group had similar share of topic initiations, they had, however, only proved to be dominant in one topic, and active in 7 topics, resulting in the lowest participating percentage among all the six conversations. That is, in 16 topics out of the total 24 topics in C3, the three subjects remained 'non-active'.

(4) C4 was an opposite case of C3. Only one NNS group member, Lin, and one NS group member, Tony, participated in C4. Lin only contributed a small portion of the topic initiations compared with Tony. However, Lin was found 'very active' throughout the conversation. She dominated 7 topics, and remained active in 20 other topics, while Tony only took the dominant role in 2 topics, and Ping, being active in 12 topics. This, leads to an interesting question regarding the conditions

under which the subjects could achieve active involvement without active topic initiation.

An overview of the findings above showed that the participants' topic initiations did not always lead to their conversational involvement. C1 and C2 proved a positive link between topic initiation and conversational involvement. That is to say, the fact that the NNS group initiated more conversational topics in C1 and C2 may have resulted in their overall active conversational involvement. Such a positive link between topic initiation and conversational involvement, however, did not apply to the other four conversations. Therefore in the next section, the concept of *'topic genre'* is introduced to explore how topic initiation revealed the underlying intentions of the speakers, which in turn, affected participants' conversational involvement, such as NNS dominance, NNS active involvement and NS dominance.

6.4 Topic genre

In order to understand the nature of the talk, and thus, the underlying social role of causal talk in forming and reshaping social identity and interpersonal relations, the conversational topics were coded under different types of topic genre. Based on the coding devices and the analytic procedures discussed in Chapter 4, the following types of topic genre are identified from across the six conversations: 'information seeking/providing', 'personal information seeking/providing', 'observation', 'opinion seeking/providing', 'story-telling', 'gossiping' and 'chat' topics.

6.4.1 The distribution of topic initiations under the various topic genres between the NNS group and the NS group

Topic initiation proved an important analytic device employed in this study to identify and code a topic genre. For example, the utterance that 'I have seen some kind of baby ducks' indicates the potential of an observation, while question raising such as 'where are you living' would most likely develop into a 'personal information seeking/providing' topic. Thus, analysing the nature of topic initiation under the seven topic genres reveals not only the topic initiator's intention to get involved in the talk, but also the underlying social meanings he/she tries to convey under that particular

conversational context. Figures 6.2 and 6.3 show the distribution of topic initiations under the various topic genres between the NNS group and the NS group.

Figure 6.2: Topic initiations under the various topic genres contributed by the NNS group *
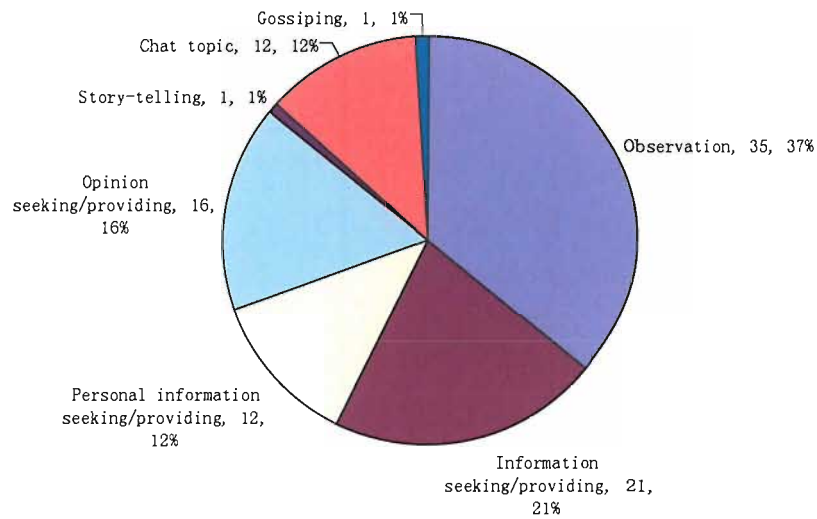
Figure 6.3: Topic initiations under the various topic genres contributed by the NS group
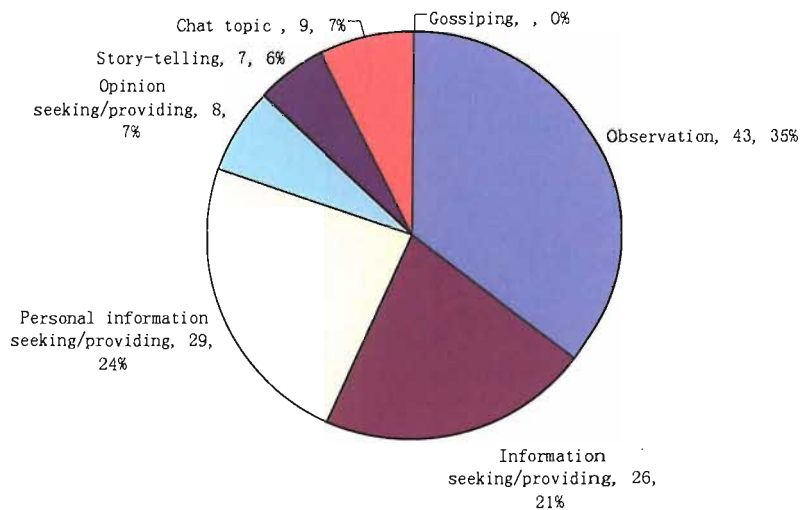
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* the Arabic numeral stands for the quantity of conversational topics initiated by the participants as two ethnolinguistic groups under each topic genre; the percentage represents the proportion of distribution each topic genre takes among all

Comparing the two figures above showed the following tendencies of topic initiation of the two groups, including both similarities and differences:

Similarities between the NNS group and the NS group:

- Both the NNS group and the NS group contributed a large number of 'observation' topics. With a percentage of 37% and 35% contributed by the two groups respectively among all the genres, both the NNS group and the NS group showed a tendency to make observations.
- Both groups initiated a fairly large number of 'information seeking/providing' topics. This category of topic genre boasted the second most initiated by the NNS group, and was the third most started by the NS group.
- The genre of 'gossiping' was almost non-existing across the six conversations. Only one 'gossip' genre emerged from Figure 6.2, reflecting the nature of the talks as carried out between participants who were newly met or mere acquaintances.

Differences between the NNS group and the NS group:

- The NS group seemed to be more interested in 'personal information' than the NNS group were. As Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3 show, the NS group had contributed 24% of their topic initiations seeking and providing personal information, while the NNS group had only initiated 12% of the topics under the same genre.
- The NNS group had initiated more 'chat' topics than the NS group across the six conversations.
- A higher percentage of 'opinion seeking/providing' is shown in Figure 6.2 than in Figure 6.3, revealing a higher tendency among the NNS group than the NS group to initiate opinion-related topics.
- Story-telling, as one of the most common genres in intimate social talks, was rarely started by the NNS group across the six NS-NNS conversations. In contrast, the NS group had slightly larger share of contribution in story-telling.

On the whole, the native speakers across the conversations initiated more topics than the NNS subjects. The NS group outnumbered the NNS group in 'observation', 'information seeking/providing', 'personal information seeking/providing', and 'story-telling'. The only topic genres under which the NNS group seemed to show more interest than their NS group were 'opinion seeking/providing', and in 'chat' topics, though with a total number much less impressive than the others. We have already known from the previous discussion that the participants' topic initiations did not necessarily lead to their active involvement. What remain unknown was the way how a topic initiation developed into a full conversational topic and how the co-construction of the participants affected their conversational involvement.

In order to answer these questions, NNS dominance and NS dominance are examined respectively in the next section.

6.4.2 Topic genre and conversational involvement

The previous discussions have shown some tendencies of topic initiations among the participants as two ethnolingusitic groups. For example, both groups had initiated a significant number of 'observation' topics, indicating their intentions to make a point. On the other hand, the different patterns between the two groups under the topic genre of 'personal information seeking/providing' may suggest that the two groups had different conversational agendas, decided by the specific social role each participant took under the particular conversational context.

However, the mere fact that an NNS subject had initiated a topic did not guarantee her dominant or active role in that particular topic. What also mattered was the nature of the topic which, on most occasions, was foremost decided by the nature of the topic initiation. The analysis of the participants' conversational involvement under the seven topic genres, therefore, was aimed to examine how the nature of conversational topic affected participants' conversational involvement. All the 'under-developed' topics with a total number of words under 30 were not included for discussion. What makes this study interesting was the participants' conversational involvement in topic construction. Where the topic was not fully developed was thus considered as less relevant.

A comparison of the two groups' conversational dominance under the different types of topic genre is provided in Table 6.2 and Table 6.3.

Table 6.2 NNS dominance and topic genres (Total number: 42)

	Observation	Information	Personal Information	Opinion	Story telling	Gossip	Chat
C1	1	1	1	2			
C2	1			1	1		1
C3		1					
C4	1		5	1			
C5	7		2	1			
C6	7		5	1		1	1
Total number	**17**	**2**	**13**	**6**	**1**	**1**	**2**

Table 6.3 NS dominance and topic genres (Total number: 39)

	Observation	Information	Personal Information	Opinion	Story telling	Gossip	Chat
C1	3	1		1	2		
C2				1			
C3	2	2		1			
C4					1		1
C5	5	2	3		2		
C6	5	4	1				
Total number	**15**	**9**	**5**	**3**	**5**		**2**

The above tables show the distribution of NNS dominance topics and NS dominance topics under the various topic genres identified in this study. Although in each conversation, the number of NNS participants overtook or at least equalled (such as in C4 and C6) that of the NS group, the result that the NNS group dominated more topics (42 against 39) was a surprise, considering the NNS participants' complaint that 'there is nothing to talk about with native speakers' (refer to the findings obtained from the interviews discussed in Chapter 5). In both groups, the participants' dominance over 'observation' topics was obvious with the highest percentage, only to be challenged by 'personal information seeking/providing' topics contributed by the NNS group. As it happened, the result also fits into the positive link between topic initiation and active conversational involvement, as both the NNS group and the NS group were found to have started the largest number of 'observation' topics (refer to Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3 in Section 6.4.1).

However, the participants' conversational performance varied under the other types of topic genre between the two groups. Figure 6.4 draws a clearer picture comparing the two groups' conversational dominance under the different types of topic genre as two ethnolinguistic groups.

Figure 6.4 Topic dominance and topic genres between the NNS group and the NS group [*]

	Observation	Information	Personal information	Opinion	Story-telling	Chat topic	Gossiping
NNS group	17	2	13	6	1	2	1
NS group	15	9	5	3	5	2	
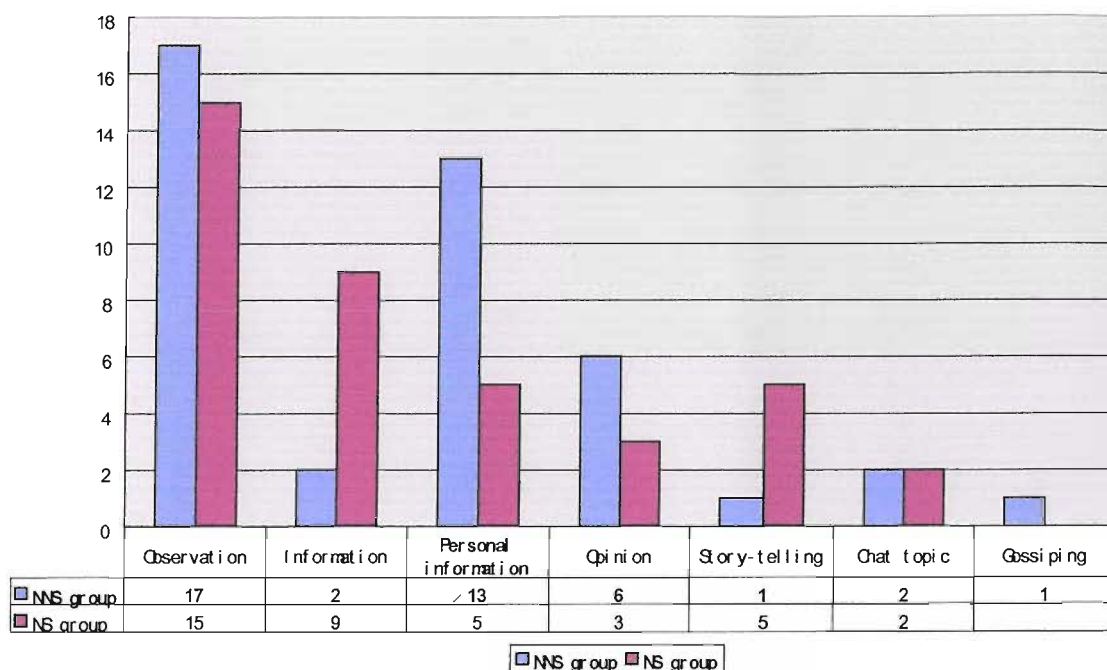
By comparing the two groups' conversational dominance under the different topic genres, the following conclusions were drawn:

(1) While the NNS group dominated more 'personal information seeking/providing' topics, the NS group showed a tendency to dominate 'information seeking/providing' topics. This presented an interesting contrast to the tendencies among the two groups regarding their topic initiations. Previously, the NS group were found to have started more 'personal information seeking/providing' topics than the NNS group, while the NNS group initiated similar number of 'information seeking/providing' topics as the NS group.

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[*] the number in the table represents the quantity of conversational topics each group dominated under each topic genre; 'information', 'personal information' and 'opinion' are the abbreviations for 'information seeking/providing', 'personal seeking/providing' and 'opinion seeking/providing' respectively

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(2) The NNS group in total took the 'dominant' position in 6 'opinion seeking/providing' topics. Under the same topic genre, however, NS dominance only appeared in 3 topics. Such a result was in line with the participants' topic initiations, as more 'opinion seeking/providing' topics were initiated by NNS group than the NS group.

(3) 'Story-telling' was one of the genres where the two groups showed distinctive difference. The nature and structure of 'story-telling' naturally lead to the dominant role of the story-teller. The result that the NNS group had only dominated one 'story-telling' topic reflected the fact that the NS group, on the whole, told more stories than the NNS subjects in this study. That is to say, a positive relation between topic initiation and active conversational involvement was also found under the topic genre of 'story-telling'.

To sum up, although the NNS group and the NS group shared some tendencies regarding their conversational performance across the six NS-NNS conversations, they showed more differences as two ethnolinguistic groups. For example, the two groups showed different interests in what they wanted to talk about, as reflected by their intentions to initiate different types of topics (see the discussion in Section 6.4.1 this chapter). An overview of the findings revealed that a positive link between topic initiation and active involvement existed under certain topic genres, but not the others. This made it possible to raise the following specific questions for the qualitative analysis of the conversational data in the next section:

- Under what topic genres did the participants' topic initiation lead to their active involvement?
- Under what topic genres did the participants' topic initiation fail to lead to their active involvement?
- What are the implications for understanding the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations?

In order to answer these questions, the participants' conversational involvement as two ethnolinguistic groups are examined in the next section, with evidence drawn from the conversational data situated in their conversational contexts.

6.5 Qualitative analysis of topic genres: Exploring the social functions and meanings of topic genres under different conversational contexts

The qualitative analysis of the different types of topic genre was intended to explore the underlying intentions of the participants as two ethnolinguistic groups, as well as the various factors affecting the NNS subjects' conversational involvement across the six conversations. Based on the observation that the participants' topic initiations did not always lead to their active conversational involvement, the first two topic genres to be examined here are 'information seeking/providing' and 'personal information seeking/providing'.

6.5.1 'Information seeking/providing'

It can be observed from Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3 (see Section 6.4.1) that both the NNS group and the NS group had initiated a fairly large number of 'information seeking/providing' topics in total. However, the two groups differed greatly in terms of the number of conversational dominance over these topics. Among the NS group, the participants initiated 26 'information seeking/providing' topics, and managed to dominate 9 in the end, which showed the second most prominent position among all the genre types dominated by the group. The NNS group, on the other hand, showed a different case: they initiated 21 'information seeking/providing' topics in total, but only managed to be dominant in 2. Excluding the three under-developed topics with total words under 30, the topics were further categorised as either 'information seeking' or 'information providing', depending on the nature of the topic initiation, as shown in Table 6.4:

Table 6.4 Distribution of 'information seeking/providing' topics between the NNS group and the NS group

		NNS group (total number of topics: 20)	NS group (total number of topics: 24)
Topic initiation	Information seeking	17	2
	Information providing	3	22
Topic dominance		2	9

Analysing the nature of these 'information seeking/providing' topics provided an obvious contrast between the NNS group and the NS group. While in 22 out of the 24 topics (91.7%) the NS group started the topic by taking the initiative to provide information, only in 3 out of the 20 topics did the NNS group did the same. In the following, I will discuss each type of 'information seeking' and 'information providing' to search for the social meanings they carry in casual conversations. Extracts from the conversational data are offered to provide the conversational contexts under which 'information seeking/providing' were co-constructed. In so doing, I aim to explore how such uneven distribution of 'information seeking' and 'information providing' between the NNS group and the NS group affected the forming and reshaping of social identities among the participants, as well as the participants' conversational involvement.

6.5.1.1 The NNS group's 'information seeking'

The analysis of the conversational data showed that, generally speaking, four types of information were sought by the NNS subjects in their conversations with their native interlocutors. These were information about *local places*, *British culture and traditions*, *local food*, and enquiries about *daily observations*. These four types of information seeking were not evenly distributed across the six conversations. Rather, the type of information sought in each individual talk varied depending on the particular participants and the conversational context involved.

6.5.1.1.1 Information about local places

Seeking information about local places appeared mainly in C1, during which Cheng asked three questions about three different local places, each leading to an individual topic, as each had its own focus with distinctive discourse structure. Extract 6.3 provides an example to explore how an 'information seeking/providing' topic was typically initiated and co-constructed by the conversational participants:

Extract 6.3

171	C:	I'm quite interested in the New Forest, New Forest landscape. Can you
172		um, tell us something about that place?
173	T:	Have you not, you've not seen it?
174	C:	No.

```
175  T:   [(We must do) that sometimes.
176  C:   [It's just, just lot of people tell me it's a very beautiful place to see.
177  T:   Well... it's very big. It's, it's, there are, lots of, lots of walks. Do you like
178       walking?
179  C:   Yeah, yeah.
180  T:   I mean long-distance [walking.
181  C:                        [Yeah, yeah, yes, I like.
182  T:   Oh, ( ) because (.) you've been once or twice, [Ping,
183  P:                                                  [Yeah
184  T:   haven't you been with us?
185  P:   Three times I think
186  T:   Yeah, there's, there's – it's a very popular thing for people, [( )
187  P:                                                                  [(Do some)
188       cycling or
189  C:   Ah...
190  T:   You can cycle as well, but walking, people... my sort of age, shall we say,
191       (younger perhaps), but=
192  C:   =Yeah
193  T:   It's a very nice thing to go out and walk around, you see.
```
('The New Forest', Topic 10 in C1)

The example shows the discourse structure that 'information seeking/providing' genre typically follows. In Lines 171-172, Cheng introduced the focus of the topic, and in doing so, she also decided the direction of the topic flow by inviting Tony for an answer, or, for a description in this case. Tony's responses were relevant and informative, as he provided what he thought would be useful and interesting for Cheng. He informed Cheng that the New Forest was 'very big' (Line 177), and people did walking and cycling there (refer to Line 177 and Line 190). Cheng's active involvement in this topic was shown by the frequent back-channels she made between Tony's utterances. In Line 181, she overlapped with Tony, which was perceived as a strong signal for showing interest. There was a moment that topic shift appeared to be possible when in Line 177 Tony had tried to elaborate on one of the mentionables – walking in the New Forest. But Ping's utterance in Line 187 brought the focus back to the New Forest, when she mentioned another popular thing to do in the New Forest - cycling. The topic ended with Tony's comment that 'it's a very nice thing to go out and walk around, you see' (Line 193).

Similar discourse structures can be found in the other three topics, though the lengths of the talks varied depending on the conversational contexts. For example, the talk on another place, 'Chichester' was cut short when Tony, the information provider, changed the topic by introducing a new topic, 'walking as an exercise'.

What characterises these four topics is the social function of 'information seeking/providing' genre in shaping the participants' social identities under these particular contexts. To take Topic 10 in C1 as an example, by seeking information about the local place, Cheng had positioned herself as a new comer to this city. Tony, on the other hand, was regarded as the person who could provide the needed information as a local, and as a native speaker. Such a role construction inevitably affected the distribution of the subsequent conversational involvement among the participants. That is to say, by eliciting information from Tony, Cheng naturally gave up her opportunity to take the leading role in the talk, which explained why her topic initiations did not lead to conversational dominance.

6.5.1.1.2 Information about British culture and traditions

The two examples under this category came from C3, recorded in February, 2005. These were Cheng's enquiries about Christmas celebrations. In Topic 19 in C3, Cheng started the topic with her question:

Extract 6.4

440   C: In this Christmas we saw a kind of special plant for, to celebrations, the
441   festival, what is that?
(Extract from 'Holly for Christmas decoration', Topic 19 in C3)

This question had initiated a negotiation of what this plant could be, and then it was decided that it was holly that Cheng was asking about. Based on this clarification, Tony took the role of being a native speaker of English and offered the spelling of 'holly' to Bin, Cheng's boyfriend, who was also a Chinese student. Further, Tony and Jane tried to explain why holly was used for Christmas celebration, as shown in Extract 6.5:

Extract 6.5:

```
          ...
493   T:   Oh yeah yeah. Why is that? Do you know?
494   J:   I don't know. I suppose you see it in winter, don't you? It has=
495   B:   =Yes, I think
496   T:   Of course with leaves all year around.
497   B:   Symbolises (wealth)
498   J:   Yeah
499   T:   One of the only trees that's still got this,
500   C:   [Oh...
501   J:   [maybe, so it's Christmas thing. Winter plant.
502   C:   Oh I understand.
503   T:   I think that's ( )
```
(ibid.)

From the dialogue above, we can tell that both Tony and Jane were not quite sure about the reasons why holly was important for Christmas. Nevertheless, they fulfilled their roles as the information providers, as Cheng responded in Line 502: 'Oh, I understand'. Immediately following Line 503, Cheng announced another question about yet another plant used in Christmas celebration. It appeared to be mistletoe. Both questions were based on Cheng's observations, but they were different from the 'daily observations' in a sense that different social purposes were served. By asking about British culture and traditions, Cheng unconsciously confirmed her social identity as a Chinese student who came from a different culture and traditions. This was to be contrasted with the NNS subjects' conversational dominance in providing information about Chinese culture and traditions that will be discussed later.

6.5.1.1.3 Information about local food

As what to talked about was affected by the conversational contexts, it came not as a surprise that the two 'information seeking' topics about local food were found in C5, a talk recorded around the tea table with food displayed. Cheng and Wong were the two NNS subjects in C5. The first question was raised by Cheng about the butter. Realising that the two guests had little knowledge about butter, Helen kindly provided some general information. What was interesting about this topic was Cheng's non-active involvement throughout the topic, despite the fact that she started the topic. Wong's contribution to the topic made it remain as one of the NNS active involvement topics, but Wong had in total only contributed 11.6% of the talk, while 79.6% of the verbal

utterances were made by Helen. Twice, Helen maintained a long turn as a result of lacking back-channels from her co-conversationalists. As one of the participants, and a Chinese student myself, I was unable to make any comment, because I had little idea about what Helen was talking about. I only managed to utter 'mm' to indicate my attention in Line 154, as shown here:

Extract 6.6

```
150   H:   That is Lurpak, which is the Danish, Danish butter. They do it in a block of
151        butter, or they do their pack what they call spreadable, which is butter.
152        They obviously put something into it, make it softer, because butter is so
153        incredibly hard to spread.
154   P:   Mm
155   H:   I've got butter in the fridge, and you know, English butter, and if you left it
156        in the fridge, and then want to dispread it, it's just big lumps. So... you can
157        get this Lurpak spreadable, which is butter, we spread like margarine.
158        Because, you are talking about flora which is marga[rine, isn't it?
```
(Extract from 'Different types of butter', Topic 11 in C5)

Analysing this topic has raised the question regarding the prerequisites for getting involved in a conversation. Although the mere existence of an 'information seeking/providing' topic is based on the need to fill knowledge gaps, the talk itself is the result of the co-construction among the participants. Cheng's lack of back-channels in this topic was likely due to her inability to make sense of Helen's words, which may in the end enlarge the knowledge gap, rather than narrow it down. Based on this assumption, Wong's higher active involvement in Topic 10 in enquiring about the local food 'scotch pancakes' could be explained by her knowledge of the topic as well as her understanding of what was going on during the talk (for a full transcript of Topic 10 in C5, see Appendix 9.2). Wong back-channelled Helen twice with the word 'yeah' (Line 120 and Line 129); on two occasions (Line 126, and Lines 136-138), she made comments on what Helen had said, and in so doing, co-constructed with Helen in terms of what to be followed next, as Helen proceeded to clear Wong's doubt that what they were having now were indeed pancakes.

6.5.1.1.4 Enquires about daily observations

Under the category of 'daily observations' were enquires about anything that did not belong to the other three sub-categories. The term 'daily observation' here indicated the shared experiences between the participants. The information provider under this category was regarded as somebody with the needed knowledge based on his/her previous life experiences, rather than his/her ethnolinguistic identity as the native speaker. As the questions were made upon daily observations, it became important for the participants to know what was shared between them. Therefore, it was not a coincidence that such enquiries appeared in C6, by which time, the NNS subjects had lived in England for at least eight months.

If 'information seeking/providing' topics are characterised by the need to fill the knowledge gap, enquiries about daily observations intend to establish the common ground through the negotiation of 'the unknown'. That is, by raising questions about what was observable in daily life, the NNS subjects in this study were actually revealing what they knew about that part of life of the NS group. Topics coded under this category included 'pigeon as food' (Topic 19), 'differences between ponies and horses' (Topic 28), 'the selection of the juries' (Topic 64), 'becoming a judge in England (Topic 76). The transcript for 'pigeon for food' is provided here for further discussion:

Extract 6.7

325	C:	I can buy some kind of wild pigeons in the supermarket.
326	T:	Really? (You can do that!)
327	J:	Oh, really?=
328	C:	=So I just wonder where can they get it? Maybe catch it! <laughs>
329	W:	It's [it's normal to eat this kind of birds,
330	J:	[I haven't seen that for sale
331	W:	[wild bird?
332	T:	[People...
333	J:	[No, it's not normal.
334	T:	[( ) pigeons? No. It was in the past. Because I think that's why people
335		brought them here first. They used to have a (.) little pigeon house, you
336		know,
337	C:	[Oh
338	W:	[Okay
339	T:	then they would take..., but you would need a lot of them to make
340		[(a meal)
341	P:	[Yeah, not much meat.

('Pigeon for food', Topic 19 in C6)

Extract 6.7 also offers an example showing how the focus of the topic was sometimes negotiated among the conversational participants. Cheng started the conversation with her observation that 'I can buy some kind of wild pigeons in the supermarket' (Line 325). However, before the topic proceeded along this direction, a new direction was initiated by Wong, who asked whether it was normal to eat pigeons. Wong's topic initiation was successful, as it set the focus of the topic (Lines 332-341). Although the talk on pigeon was originally motivated by the local observation that a pigeon had suddenly appeared in the garden, not far from where the participants were sitting, Cheng and Wong's ability to extend the talk by brining new directions into discussion should not be taken for granted. Such an ability, probably, was based on their improved knowledge that pigeon in this country did not belong to anybody, as well as the perception that people here did not kill pigeons for food. It is in this sense that we say 'enquiries about daily observations' also aim to confirm what the speaker already knows, besides eliciting information. In a similar way as the other three types of 'information seeking', the NNS subjects' enquiries about daily observations made the NS participants the information providers, who thus took the leading role of the talk.

6.5.1.2 The NS group's 'information providing'

Based on the findings that 24 'information seeking/providing' topics were initiated by the NS group, and that in 22 out of the 24 topics the NS group had started as the information providers, it is interesting to examine the nature of the information provided across the six conversations.

The two most frequent types of information provided by the NS group were linguistic help and knowledge about British culture and traditions. In 5 topics, the NS participants offered linguistic information to their NNS co-conversationalists, including two pronunciation corrections on the NNS participants' utterances. One took place in C1 when Tony had difficulty understanding Cheng's pronunciation of the word 'crematorium' (Topic 16). Then in C6, Cheng's mispronunciation of the word 'Edinburgh' (Topic 13) provided the source for a new topic.

Playing with words for fun was also found under this category. In each case, the topic was initiated by Tony, who may think these words and phrases were interesting and useful for the NNS subjects to know, such as 'nagging' (Topic 3 in C1), 'steal the milk out of your tea' (Topic 14 in C3), and 'road hog' (Topic 18 in C3). The choice of which words and phrases to talk about, however, was not made by accident. Rather, they emerged out of the particular conversational contexts. For example, Tony's introduction of 'road hog' in C3 was based on the previous talk on the usage of 'hog' in English language, brought up by Bin. Similarly, the discussion on 'different tea cultures' in Topic 13 in the same conversation led to the initiation of 'stealing the milk out of your tea' as the new focus for the next topic. Nevertheless, the nature of such talks both reflected and shaped NS-NNS conversations as a special type of talk that was different from the casual talk held among the same ethnolinguistic members. By providing the linguistic assistance, the native speakers' expertise knowledge on the language was confirmed, so were the NNS subjects' social identities as L2 learners.

6.5.1.3 The NS group's 'information seeking'

The NS group sought information from the NNS group too, although on the whole, this was regarded as far less impressive than their roles as information providers. Across the six conversations, only in C5 did Helen show the intention to elicit information from the NNS subjects. In Topic 68, Helen asked the NNS subjects whether they had public parks in China. But by using terms that the Chinese NNS participants were not familiar with, such as 'open spaces' and 'municipal gardens', Helen's question led to confusion, as shown in Extract 6.8:

Extract 6.8

```
1240   H:   Do you have open spaces where
1241   C:   Yeah, [yeah
1242   H:         [municipal gar[dens are beautifully laid out? Yes,
1243   C:                       [it's a kind of
1244   C:   Mm, maybe we call it balcony.
             (1.0)
1245   C:   Oh, balcony,
1246   P:   What do you [mean?
1247   C:               [No no no, YANG TAI
1248   P:   WO ZHI DAO, yeah, that's balcony, what did you say? [Do we have a...?
1249   C:                                                        [Balcony
```

```
1250   H:   Municipal gardens which are,
1251   P:   No
1252   H:   like council gardens, you know down...
1253   P:   Oh...
1254   H:   Southam[pton park
1255   P:            [Park!
1256   P:   We have parks.
1257   H:   Right=
1258   P:   =Public [parks, GONG YUAN
1259   H:            [Public parks.
1260   P:   Public [parks
1261   C:            [Oh, you mean it's open area, but it's=
1262   P:   =for everybody
1263   C:   Um, it's the same, it's the same, another part of the flat.
1264   P:   No no no, it's public garden, GONG YUAN
1265   C:   Oh...
1266   P:   Yeah, okay
1267   H:   Do, do you have that in your city, should have quite a big public [park,
1268   C:                                                                    [Yes we
1269        have
             ....
```
(Extract from 'Public gardens in China', Topic 68 in C5)

Topic 68 in C5 provides one of the many sources for cross-linguistic misunderstanding. The different semantic meanings the participants gave to 'garden' were identified as the reason for the misunderstanding. While Helen meant 'public park' with the word 'garden', Cheng was taking it in its narrow sense, that is, the open space in one's house for growing plants and flowers. As the flats in China do not normally have a garden, Cheng naturally turned to 'balcony' as the alternative for 'garden' under the Chinese context. This leads to the assumption that, to take the role as the information provider, the NNS subjects would have to possess both the worldly and the linguistic knowledge needed. But it was not simply the case that Cheng didn't know the words such as 'garden' and 'open space'; rather, she interpreted the words based on her own life experiences.

Romero Trillo (2002) points out, an important part of L2 learning is the acquisition of new forms of discourse. But to be able to do so, L2 learners need to recognise to what extent their discourse is that of their surrounding environment. This is to say, under EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, what makes up learners' L2 knowledge is the interrelationship between what teachers and L2 learners bring to classrooms and how the language is actually used and understood in their own sociocultural context.

Following this logic, it would be interesting to explore what the NNS subjects would like to talk about when given the opportunity.

6.5.1.4 The NNS group's 'information providing'

Among the 20 topics initiated by the NNS group, the NNS subjects were found to take the initiative to provide information only three times (refer to Table 6.4 in Section 6.5.1). In Topic 9 in C3, Cheng provided information on 'Chinese tea', followed by Wong's elaboration on 'traditional function of Chinese tea' in Topic 11 in the same talk. The third example appeared in Topic 24 in C5, in which Cheng talked about 'the history of English learning in China'. Although it sounds common sense that L2 learners would provide information about their own culture and traditions, seldom have we examine the structure of the discourse to explore how L2 learners' topic knowledge helps to establish their roles as the information providers, and the effects upon L2 learners as social beings as a result.

The worldly knowledge of the topic is a prerequisite for providing information. However, in the case of L2 discourse, L2 learners also need the linguistic knowledge to process the information in a way that is acceptable to their native interlocutors. This linguistic knowledge of L2 learners', represents not only the symbol for the worldly knowledge, but also the social world in which L2 learners inhabit. In other words, what L2 learners are capable of 'doing' in their L2 discourse, is ultimately a reflection of their own life experiences. Thus in Extract 6.9, Cheng and Wong's familiarity with Chinese tea culture was regarded as providing both the confidence and the resource for them to take the role as the information providers.

Extract 6.9

117	J:	Wherever you go on a Chinese trip, they take you to buy some tea!
118	C:	Yeah, yeah! Of course, they they can earn a lot of money on that.
	J:	<laughter>
119	C:	Actually if you buy the tea in a shop, it's a normal shop, it's it's quite
120		cheaper.
121	J:	Yes.
122	C:	But if you buy in the special place, it's too expensive, yeah.
123	W:	But the tea di- um um divided into um different kinds of tea.
124	T:	Yeah.
125	C:	I-

```
126   W:   Someone pick up, um pick pick up the tea...
127   B:   Mm
128   W:   from tr- from the tree before raining, Chinese [special days,
129   T:                                               [Oh yes that's right.
130   W:   it's more expensive than [others.
131   T:                            [I see.
            (2.0) <the sound of pouring tea into tea cups>
132   W:   That's that tea is very tender, very tender.
133   T:   I see.
```
('Chinese tea', Topic 9 in C3)

Although Jane started the topic on Chinese tea, it was actually Cheng who set the direction of the topic development by saying that tea could be very expensive in China (Line 118) Therefore, this topic was regarded as initiated by Cheng, who proceeded to explain the 'tricky' rules of buying Chinese tea in China (see Lines 119-122). However, Cheng's explanation was not accepted by Wong, who claimed that the prices were decided by the variety of the tea. The topic could have developed into a discussion between Cheng and Wong, in which case, the topic would be coded as 'observation' rather than 'information providing'. An overview of the discourse structure, however, revealed that Cheng and Wong had more likely approached the issue from a different perspective with the purpose to provide a better picture of the topic. They had both regarded the native speakers as the audience and the beneficiaries of the information about Chinese tea culture. The evidence can be found when Wong said the expensive tea leaves were picked up 'from the tree before raining, Chinese special days' (Line 128). With only the transcription and the audio-tape, it was difficult to tell whether Wong was talking to Tony or Jane. However, by emphasising 'Chinese special days', Wong had unconsciously shaped her role as 'an expert' on her own culture. Further, based on the rule of 'adjacency pair', it was reasonable to assume that the listener was Tony, as he overlapped with Wong in Line 129 to show his interest and attention. Later in Line 131 and Line 133, Tony's utterance 'I see' confirmed the sense of the 'information providing' genre of the topic, as the boundary between the information provider and the information beneficiary was clearly identified here.

As the information providers, both Cheng and Wong were found to be active in the talk. Regarding the total words they uttered, Cheng contributed 38.6% of the talk, while Wong contributed 39.5% of the talk (the description of the conversational data can be found in Appendix 12). The NNS dominant status of the topic, as discussed above, was

decided by the topic knowledge of the speakers. However, what was equally important, probably, in shaping the NNS subjects' roles as information providers were the interest and attention shown by their native interlocutors set in context. For example, immediately after Topic 9 in C3, Tony started a new but relevant topic on his 'tea trip in China' (for the full transcript of Topic 10, see Appendix 9.3). He described the trip during which he and Jane were the only foreigners who didn't understand what the guide was talking about. He was also genuinely surprised that Chinese people spent a lot of money buying expensive tea in the shop with the comment that '(it's) such a luxury' (Line 165). In doing so, Tony reshaped his role from the information beneficiary to a co-conversatoinalist who was sharing similar observations with Cheng and Wong. This newly established empathy shown by Tony made it natural to invite further elaboration from the NNS subjects who had 'something' to say about the topic. Therefore, it came not as a surprise that in Topic 11 Wong introduced another topic on Chinese tea, though with a new direction - 'traditional function of Chinese tea'. Wong's utterances were frequently back-channelled by Tony with words such as 'yeah', 'right', 'okay', and so on. Tony also raised question when the information was not clearly made to show his attention and interest in what Wong was talking about.

To sum up, the NNS subjects' ability to provide information in L2 discourse was foremost decided by their worldly knowledge of the topic that had sifted through their life experiences. But not everything they knew provided an appropriate topic. This is because any conversation is a result of the co-construction of the conversational participants. What to talk about is not just a personal choice in this sense. Rather, the NNS subjects had to make the judgement based on the conversational context. As the findings show, where the NS participants showed an interest in Chinese culture, there was always a tendency for the NNS subjects to achieve conversational dominance or active conversational involvement by providing the information needed.

Compared to the NS group, however, the number of 'information providing' topics initiated by the NNS subjects was far less impressive. Overall, the NNS subjects showed a tendency to seek information from the NS group, resulting in an uneven distribution of conversational dominance between them and the NS group. This explains why the NNS subjects' active topic initiation did not lead to their active conversational involvement. By seeking information about 'the unknown', such as the local places and

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British culture and traditions, the NNS subjects offered their NS interlocutors the opportunity to take the dominant role of the talk. Also by doing so, the NNS subjects actively shaped the NS participants' social roles as the more experienced and more knowledgeable conversationalists. Such a view, as I argued in previous chapters, may have affected the NNS subjects' self-perceived social and psychological distance from the NS group. This observation will be further examined in the discussion under the next category of topic genre – 'personal information seeking and providing'.

6.5.2 'Personal information seeking and providing'

Excluding the three under-developed topics, the NS group and NNS group had altogether initiated 38 'personal information seeking and providing' topics. Comparing the two groups' conversational dominance over 'personal information seeking/providing' topics shows the most interesting results. Although the NNS subjects as a group, only initiated 12 'personal information seeking/providing' topics, they took the dominant role in 13 topics, which was one of the highest percentage among all the topic genres they dominated. The NS group, on the other hand, showed the opposite: they, as a group, initiated the second most number of topics (26) under this category, but only in 4 topics did they appear dominant over the talk. The distribution of 'personal information seeking/providing' topics between the NNS group and the NS group is shown in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5 Distribution of 'personal information seeking/providing' topics between the NNS group and the NS group

		NNS group (total number of topics:12)	NS group (total number of topics: 26)
Topic initiation	Personal information seeking	8	17
	Personal information providing	4	9
Topic dominance		13	4

Examining the conversational data showed these differences between the NNS group and the NS group reflected most strongly the social identities of the participants. It can only be natural for the NNS groups to ask general questions about the language, culture and traditions of the target country where the NNS subjects were visiting, while for the NS group to provide such information. This had indeed shaped the distribution pattern of 'information seeking/providing' topics between the two groups as discussed above. With 'personal information seeking and providing', the situation was different. The large number of personal questions raised by the NS participants may reveal their genuine interest in the NNS subjects as individuals. In all the conversations recorded, the NNS subjects and their NS interlocutors were either newly met or just met for the second or third time. So naturally there was the need for the participants to get to know each other by asking personal questions. However, as the term 'personal question' was broadly defined in this study, it was necessary to examine what types of 'personal questions' had been raised by both groups.

6.5.2.1 The NS group's 'personal information seeking'

Among the personal questions raised by the NS participants, enquiries about the places where the NNS subjects had been to appeared most common across the six conversations. In 5 out of the 26 topics, the talk started with the NS participants' interest in this particular information. The first such question was raised by Tony in C1, when he asked Cheng and Lin whether they had been to any other places besides Southampton. It was a safe way to keep the conversation going, and an interesting topic in its own right under that context, considering that Cheng had just arrived in the UK. Cheng's dominant role in Topic 8 provided the evidence that Cheng was happy to talk about the places she had been to. In fact, Cheng was not simply responding to the question. She was also co-constructing with Tony by elaborating and making comments on the topic, as shown in Extract 6.10:

Extract 6.10

```
138   T:   So how about Southampton? Have you, been outside of Southampton?
139   C:   Yeah. I have been I have been to Brighton, and Bath, and Bristol, and...
140        Oxford, and Isle of Wight. That's it.
141   T:   Oh, that's=
142   C:   =And I'm planning to New Forest, maybe, in May 2005. Yeah, and I, I
```

```
143             still want to visit Bournemouth, then maybe Portsmouth.
144     T:      Okay=
145     C:      =I want to go around
146     T:      Oh
147     C:      Around Southampton. I like travel.
148     T:      [You do?
149     C:      [Very much, yeah.
```
('Going to places', Topic 8 in C1)

In Lines 142-143, Cheng helped to build up the conversation by providing extra information. Then in Line 145, Cheng commented that she 'wants to go around'. This attitude of Cheng's was in line with her 'information seeking about places' discussed in the previous category. Interestingly, the NNS group's touring experiences also provided the topics in C4 and C6 when the NNS subjects had been here for a while. For example in Topic 7 in C4, knowing that Lin had now finished all her lectures, Tony asked whether she had any plans for travelling around the country. Similarly in Topic 4 in C6, Jane asked Cheng whether she had been to anywhere in the country. One of the common features shared by these topics was the active conversational involvement from the NNS subjects, if not conversational dominance all the time. Thus, it was reasonable to assume that 'personal information seeking' about the places the NNS subjects had been to was a safe topic in NS-NNS conversations: it was always 'something' that the NNS subject could talk about, despite of the individual differences and the different conversational contexts involved.

Other 'personal information seeking' topics initiated by the NS group included enquires about the NNS subjects' daily lives, such as their courses (e.g. Topic 7 and Topic 8 in C5), career plans in the future (e.g. Topic 8 in C5), their dissertation writing (e.g. Topic 23 in C4), the part-time jobs they had (e.g. Topic 28 in C4), and so on. Ironically, these personal enquiries were not really 'personal' if we interpret the word in its narrow sense that equals 'intimate'. This led to the assumption that 'personal information seeking' may be used by the NS group as a strategy to invite talk from the NNS subjects, and thus, to fulfil their social roles as the hosts. Such an assumption was based on the observation that some of the 'personal information seeking' topics bore little relevance to their previous topics.

Examining the conversational context under which Topic 8 in C1 (see Extract 6.10) was initiated provided the empirical evidence for the assumption. In Topic 7 in C1 (for a full transcript of this topic, see Lines 122-137 in Appendix 9.4), Tony told a story about 'the weather in Africa'. Tony's conversational dominance was obvious, as his utterances had taken 92.7% of the talk. Although Lin back-channelled with words 'oh' and 'mm', her conversational involvement was minimal. At the end of the story, Tony's comment that 'they thought I was very strange' (Line 137) received no feedback from his co-conversationalists. Instead, a significant silence of 2.8 seconds appeared before Tony changed the topic by asking a personal question about the NNS subjects, as revealed in Line 138 in Extract 6.10 above. As it happened in Extract 6.10, Tony's question successfully invited active involvement from the NNS subjects in the new topic. 'Personal information seeking', in this sense, was given the functional role of filling the conversational gaps by the NS participants.

6.5.2.2 The NNS group's 'personal information seeking'

Compared with the NS group, the NNS group showed less initiative in raising personal questions. The 8 topics coded under this category fell into the following two types: *enquiries about the NS participants' trip to China*, and *enquiries that had emerged out of the conversational context*.

6.5.2.2.1 Enquires about the NS participants' trip to China

Just as the places the NNS subjects had been to in the UK provided the source for the talk, Tony and Steve's trips to China also proved to be something safe and interesting to talk about. For example in C4, the conversation transcription began about 5 minutes after the talk between Lin and Tony started, when Lin asked Tony for how long he had stayed in China for his recent trip there. Two other examples included 'Steve's short stay in China' in C2, and 'Tony's trip in China' in C6. Interestingly, although the questions involved personal information providing from the NS participants, all the three topics showed active conversational involvement from the NNS subjects.

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6.5.2.2.2 Enquires that had emerged out of the conversational context

This type of 'personal information seeking' topics initiated by the NNS subjects was marked out to provide the contrast to those initiated by the NS group, the purpose of which was to fill the conversational gaps at times and to invite conversational involvement from the NNS subjects. A typical example of this type of enquiry is shown in Extract 6.11 when Cheng asked a personal question about John, Helen's son, in Line 862 (emphasised in bold):

Extract 6.11

```
                ....
858   H:   Yes John, and Jo. They [went to university here.
859   P:                          [And they stayed then
860   H:   And then they [met, they stayed and married, yeah
861   P:                 [Yeah
862   C:   So... how is he going now? What is he doing?
863   H:   He is a teacher.
864   C:   Oh! Really? So his major is, subject is teach=
865   H:   =Maths.
866   C:   Oh!
867   H:   He did... he did Economics,
                ....
```
('John's career choice', Topic 49 in C5)

'So' is a recognisable discourse maker with both semantic and functional meanings that can be realised at sentence and discourse levels. It conveys a meaning of 'result', as a contrast to *because*, which conveys a meaning of 'cause' (Schiffrin, 1987: 201-202). With examples from his own conversational data, Schiffrin (1987) shows that the use of *so* in different conversational contexts can mark different causal relations between sentences and larger discourse units. One of which that appeared here was the speaker's intention to use some piece(s) of information as a warrant for an inference (ibid.), as shown in Extract 6.11. By using the discourse marker 'so' in Line 862, Cheng sought to confirm what was now shared information.

Speakers do not come into a conversation with a full supply of knowledge and metal-knowledge about shared information. Rather, the establishment of shared knowledge evolves as different domains of knowledge become relevant to current topics, and as newly assumed common ground appears. 'So', therefore, is often used in discourse to

mark the boundary where 'the unshared background information becomes shared' (see Schiffrin, 1987). By acknowledging what was previously said, and by raising question(s) based on the newly emerged information in Line 862, Cheng achieved the role as a co-operative conversationalist: she was attentive to what Helen had said about John, and was willing to make contribution on the topic. Meanwhile, by making a response as an inference warranted by Helen, Cheng actually returned the floor to Helen, who was put in a position to offer further information.

A similar pattern also appeared in Topic 24 in C1 on 'Tony's teaching history', and in Topic 43 in C6 on 'Helen's future granddaughter'. Not a coincidence, these two topics also started with the conjunctive word 'so', indicating a strong causal relationship between the current focus and the previous one, as emphasised in bold in Extract 6.12 and Extract 6.13:

Extract 6.12
    432   C: **So** how many years have you taught? In school?
('Tony's teaching history', Topic 24 in C1)

Extract 6.13
    715   C: **So** you have got three grandsons?
('Helen's future granddaughter', Topic 43 in C5)

The relevance of the topics to the previous focuses of the enquiries, and the lack of significant pauses led to the conclusion that the NNS subjects were genuinely interested in the information they were seeking. The fact that they were able to establish the common ground through the unknown may produce emotional involvement as well as verbal conversational involvement. This was in contrast with the NS group, who elicited personal information about the NNS participants at times to invite their conversational involvement

6.5.2.3 The NNS group's 'personal information providing'

The NNS group's 'personal information providing' only appeared in C4 and C6, and NNS dominance was found in all the four topics under this category. The information provided by Lin in Topic 8 in C4 was a follow-up talk of the previous topic initiated by Tony inquiring about her travelling plan. In order to understand how the genre of 'personal information providing' forms and reshapes social identity and interpersonal relations between conversational participants, the conversational contexts under which the other three topics were initiated are provided here for discussion, all by Cheng in C6.

In topic 8 in C6 (the full transcript for Topic 8, including its conversational context, is provided in Appendix 9.5), Cheng talked about her short stay in London. Prior to the topic, Tony asked Wong whether she had been to London visiting all those tourist places. While Wong was listing the tourist sites she had visited, Cheng made the claim that she had stayed in London near the British Museum (Line 147, Appendix 9.5). In doing so, Cheng not only successfully achieved conversational involvement in the conversation, but also managed to transfer the focus of the talk from Wong to herself. If topic initiation indicates one's intention to introduce something interesting and worth mentioning, or, simply to fill the conversational gaps, then how to find the right time to introduce a new but relevant topic requires both conversational competence and confidence. Conversational competence is used here to indicate one's understanding of the conversational context, as well as the appropriate strategy to introduce the new focus to fit into the existing context. As mature social beings who are constantly involved in social talks in their L1, L2 learners are believed to have this conversational competence. What they may lack in their conversations with native speakers is the confidence to apply their conversational competence to their L2 discourse. However, analysing the NNS subjects' topic initiations across the six NS-NNS conversations suggested that their confidence in using the appropriate conversational strategies could be improved over time.

In Extract 6.14, Cheng introduced 'Bin's plan to be a judge in China' (Line 1396). It fitted into the broad context under which the court system in England was discussed. Immediately prior to the topic was the talk on 'the working system of the jury service', which led to Jane's observation that 'he (the judge) has to be fair, because the other

prosecutors are listening as well' (Line 1392). This was followed by Cheng and Ping's back-channelling with words 'yeah, yeah' and 'mm mm'. A pause of 1.5 seconds can be observed before Cheng provided the personal information that 'So Bin is just thinking about going to be a judge...' (Line 1396), as emphasised in bold in the extract:

Extract 6.14

1392	J:	But [he has to be fair, because the other prosecutors are listening as=
1393	C:	[Yeah yeah
1394	J:	=well.
1395	P:	Mm mm.
		(1.5)
1396	C:	**So Bin is just thinking about going to be a judge (.) [after**
1397	J:	[Really?
1398	T:	Is he? (Oh gosh)
1399	J:	Uhm...
1400	C:	Because we have a lot of um, what to say that, FA YUAN ZHEN ME
1401		SHUO? <Chinese pronunciation for 'how to say "the court" in English>

(Extract from C6)

With the conjunctive word 'so' in Line 1396, Cheng was not only filling the conversational gap, but also introducing a topic with the understanding that the new topic was relevant to the current concern. She developed the topic by offering the explanation for Bin's choice. When the talk drifted away in Topic 74 (see Lines 1420-1436 in Appendix 9.6) to focus on something more general about the court practice, Cheng went back to 'Bin's career choice' (see Lines 1437-1443 in Appendix 9.6), and thus started another topic on Bin. In terms of the words uttered, Cheng was dominant in the three topics she initiated, reflecting the positive relation between topic initiation and conversational involvement. It was therefore concluded that Cheng had 'something to say' and had made her intentions clearly. Thus, what was distinctive about Cheng's conversational performance in C6 was the emotional involvement she had shown. By taking the initiative to provide personal information under the appropriate contexts, Cheng had established her conversational role as a co-conversationalist who actively contributed to the topic development. This was different from the NNS group's active involvement in topics where the absence of their conversational contribution would otherwise break Grice's co-operative principles, such as in 'personal information seeking' topics initiated by the NS group.

6.5.2.4 The NS group's 'personal information providing'

On the whole, the NS group provided less personal information than they did with general information providing. The exception was found in C5, in which Helen showed a high tendency to provide personal information. In 7 topics, Helen brought personal information into the conversation, such as 'the family connections to teaching profession', 'the expecting of a baby girl in the family', her sons' careers, and so on. Both individual difference and gender difference needed to be taken into consideration if Helen's conversational performance was to be compared with Tony's. Analysing the conversational contexts of these topics suggested that Helen may be genuinely interested in what she was talking about. Such a judgement was made based on the observation that most of these topics had emerged out of the current conversational contexts with no significant pauses between the topics. Extract 6.15 shows how Helen took the conversation floor back after she started with a question to invite conversational involvement from the NNS subjects:

Extract 6.15

```
838   H:          [Right, and you, the same, in the same...?
839   W:   Mm I live in Montefiore, and [well,
840                                      [Montefiore?
841   W:   yes, well it's in... West Essex Lane.
842   H:   Yeah. My son, my oldest son was in Montefiore when he first came to
843        university here.
844        ....
```
(Extract from 'John used to stay in Montefiore', Topic 48 in C5)

It was obvious in Line 838 Helen was asking a personal question about the place where Wong lived. However, when Wong provided the answer, the turn was returned to Helen, who quickly set the direction of the topic development by talking about how her son came to stay in the same hall more than fifteen years ago. Although Wong achieved active involvement through her conversational contribution at the beginning, Helen's dominant role through the topic was obvious, as she proceeded to provide the following information about John:

Extract 6.16

....

```
850  H:   Yes, Nineteen... eighty-eight, [he came to the university here
851  W:                                    [Nineteen eighty-eight
852  C:   Well, [it's quite early
853  H:         [And...
854  H:   Yes, so...
855  P:   Which one? Which one?
856  H:   That was John.
857  P:   Oh, John, I see.
858  H:   Yes John, and Jo. They [went to university here.
859  P:                          [And they stayed then
860  H:   And then they [met, they stayed and married, yeah
861  P:                 [Yeah
```
(ibid.)

Of course, Ping's role in co-constructing the topic with Helen was not to be ignored. By raising question in Line 855 and making comment in Line 859, Ping showed her interest in the topic, and meanwhile, contributing to the development of the topic. However, Ping's active involvement as against Cheng's non-active involvement in this topic was not simply a personal choice. The question 'which one?' in Line 855 indicated the possibility that Ping may have already met the sons. Her further comment that 'they stayed then' in Line 859 had in fact confirmed this assumption, as it revealed Ping's knowledge of the fact that John and Jo had settled down in Southampton. Thus, Ping's ability in co-constructing the topic with Helen was mainly based on the shared knowledge between her and Helen as a result of their previous contact.

Cheng and Wong's ability to elaborate on Helen's talk was on the other hand restrained by the fact that there was little shared personal knowledge between them and Helen. This was very likely the case with another 'personal information' topic initiated by Helen:

Extract 6.17

```
611  H:               [And he is due to have a little sister.
612  W:   Oh!
613  P:   Yeah, yes yes
614  H:   Two weeks to go=
615  P:   =So it's confirmed to be a girl?
616  H:   It's going to be a girl, we think. We're almost certain.
617  P:   You would love it, because=
```

618   H: =Paul will. Um I I think I will. But I'm getting – having three sons, and
619   then...
                 <laughing in the background>
('The expecting of a baby girl in Helen's family, Topic 35 in C5)

In Line 615, Ping's utterance showed her previous knowledge about the matter and also her surprise at the updated information that the baby would be a girl. The word 'so' here indicated a consequence or a result of something previously unknown. Ping's confidence in making the comment in Line 617 also showed her understanding of the significance of having a baby girl in Helen's family. Wong back-channelled once in Line 612. Cheng made no conversational contribution. In fact, only in 2 out of the 7 topics under this category did the NNS subjects appeared as active conversationalists. This was not surprising considering the nature of the topics and the fact that both Cheng and Wong shared little background knowledge about each other.

However, if exchanging personal information helps to reduce the distance between conversational participants, it was wondered how it functioned otherwise when the NNS subjects showed little conversational involvement. As happening in our daily lives, we frequently update our friends about what is going on in our lives. The information itself is important, but more significant is the fact that we are 'in the know'. It is in this sense that the social and psychological distance between people can be formed and shaped by how much personal information they know about each other.

On the whole, the NNS group's conversational dominance in 'personal information seeking and providing' was obvious. Such a result reflected the NS group's social roles as the hosts who constantly invited their guests for talk by showing interests in their lives. The conclusion was based on the observation that among the 13 topics dominated by the NNS group under this topic genre, 9 topics were elicited by their NS hosts. During the retrospective interview with Helen conducted by phone, she offered the following comment:

'They are very nice people, very delightful people to talk to, very friendly. I have enjoyed it, but I'm afraid that I have overtalked. But they seemed to be reticent to ask questions. I did stop and pause once or twice to let them talk, but they didn't seem to be in a position to ask questions or to talk, so I just asked them questions to keep the talk going.'

(From the Retrospective Interview on C5)

Therefore, although the NNS subjects appeared to be active conversationalists regarding the words they contributed in 'personal information seeking/providing' topics, they did not choose to do so. Just like their NS hosts who were trying to keep the conversation going, the NNS subjects were also fulfilling their own roles as the polite guests to respond to what was required upon them. This was found to be different from 'observation' topics, in which the subjects felt some 'common ground' was shared with their native interlocutors, as I will discuss in the next section.

6.5.3 'Observation'

'Observation' topics were among the most topics initiated by both the NNS group and the NS group. The NS group had, on the whole, started more 'observation' topics than the NNS group across the six conversations. However, examining the participants' conversational performance across the six conversations was unable to taken into account the individual conversational contexts, under which NS dominance and NNS dominance took place. For example, comparing the high proportion of NNS dominance in 'observation' topics in Figure 6.4 (Section 6.4.2) with the high tendency among the subjects to make observation overall in Figures 6.2 and 6.3 (Section 6.4.1) may support the positive link between topic initiation and conversational involvement, it conceals the variances across the six conversations between the NNS group and the NS group. This is because the NNS group's conversational performance on 'observation' topics varied a lot across the six conversations, as shown in Figure 6.5.

Figure 6.5 Topic initiations of 'observation' topics across conversations [*]

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
NNS	3	3	1		11	17
NS	6	1	3	9	9	15
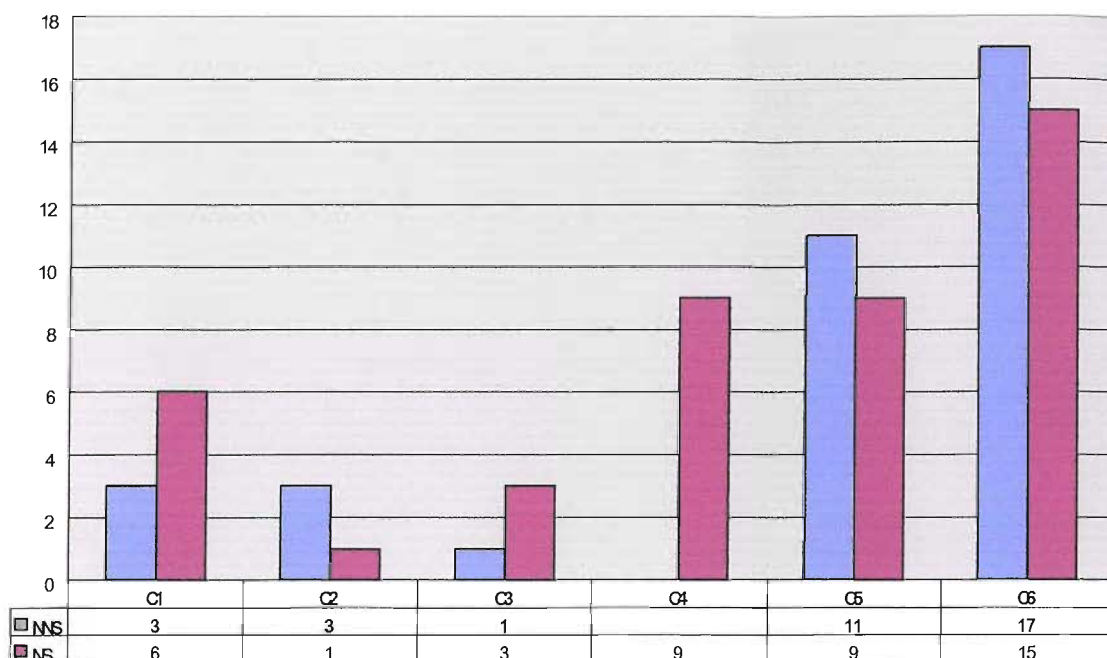
According to Figure 6.5, the NNS group initiated 3 'observation' topics in C1, constituting 18.7% (3/16) of the total topics initiated by the NNS group. This was to be compared with C6, in which almost 50% (17/36) of the topics initiated by the NNS group were intended to make an observation. The NNS group in C6 had started more 'observation' topics than the NS group. The same pattern was found with C5, in which the NNS group showed a strong tendency to observe. Out of the 18 topics initiated by the NNS group, 11 topics were coded under the category of 'observation' topics. The higher number of topic initiation in C5 and C6 under this particular genre may result from the longer length of the last two conversations, as compared to C1, C2 and C3. What made C5 and C6 significant, however, were the varying natures of these 'observation' topics, decided by the NNS group's accumulated knowledge of the target culture group over time.

The qualitative analysis of the findings showed that most of the observations initiated by the NNS subjects bore close relevance to the conversational contexts. That is to say, these 'observation' topics did not emerge out of nowhere. Rather, they were the co-product of conversational contexts among the participants. Cheng's local observation made in C2 was such an example. In Topic 27, Cheng found it very funny to see a

[*] the Arabic numeral indicates the quantity of 'observation' topics initiated by the participants as two ethnolinguistic groups in each NS-NNS conversation

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picture of chicken bones on Steve's laptop. It was a photo Steve took during his trip to China, possibly, during his meal in a Chinese restaurant. The topic made perfect sense because what had been talked about previously was Steve's extraordinary experience in a Chinese restaurant, where the fish was fished alive in the pool. The photo itself provided the reliable source for Cheng to make a point: she found it funny that Steve had taken such pictures. This had immediately led to a discussion about the different food cultures between China and the UK based on the participants' daily observations. In fact, it was not an accident that the topic was elaborated by Lin, when she said, 'you don't even want the bones in the dishes' (Line 364). Such an observation, although sounds common sense to British people, may only come with time for an outsider. Lin's ability to make the comparison between the two cultures was likely to be the result of her much longer stay in the UK than the other two NNS subjects.

A more typical example of 'observation making' was Wong's topic initiation on 'gay demonstration in Brighton' in C2. Extract 6.18 shows how Wong's motive to bring out this particular issue was 'inspired' by the conversational context:

Extract 6.18

```
113   S:    What they normally do, if it's a big, big big event, where they can ( ) lots
114         of people, they… close the roads in London for example.
115   W:    Yes, [I ]
116   S:         [A big one, they close all the roads.
117   W:    I know, because Brighton is city of gay. So <laughs> I know one day,
118         thousands of gay, and went to street to, to do the same thing.
119   S:    Mm
120   L:    What's the result?
```
(Extract from C2)

The bolded words in Lines 117-118 show where Topic 6 starts. Prior to this was the discussion on 'the general regulations on public demonstration' (Topic 5 in C2). Thus, the new topic initiated by Wong was, to some degree, also a diversion of the previous topic. To develop a talk from the more general issue to the more specific, or vice versa, has been widely recognised among conversation analysts as common strategies adopted by conversationalists. It reflects not only the participants' willingness to talk, but also the common ground shared between them. Lin's utterance in Line 120 was intended to invite further talk from Wong. With Wong's explanation of what happened during that

gay demonstration in Brighton, the transition of the topic from the previous one was completed. Wong's topic initiation in this case, had put her in a position to take the dominant role. But, her active involvement was also based on her knowledge of the issue.

However, not all the 'observation' topics initiated by the NNS subjects resulted in NNS active conversational involvement. Two observations made by Lin in C1 and one observation made by Wong in C3 ended up with NS dominance. Such results provided contrast to the NNS group's conversational performance in C5 and C6. First, a positive link between topic initiation and active conversational involvement can be observed in C5 and C6. More precisely, none of the 'observation' topics initiated by the NNS subjects showed NS dominance. Second, a wider range of topics were introduced by the NNS subjects, including talks on movies, gardening programmes on TV, doing exercises, the law systems in England, and so on. There were also observations made on daily life, such as 'the baby ducks on campus' and 'the sports facilities' at the University.

By comparison, Tony showed a consistency over his attempt to start a topic with 'observation'. Tony was the only NS speaker who participated in four conversations. Therefore, he was the only NS participant whose conversational performance can be compared with the NNS subjects over time. Across the four conversations that Tony participated in, the number of 'observation' topics was the highest initiated by Tony among the various types of topic genres, except in C3, in which he initiated more 'information seeking/providing' topics.

But, how did the NNS group's growing ability in making observations in C5 and C6 fit into the research questions? According to the discussion above, making a sensible observation inevitably requires shared information or knowledge, or at least, shows the speaker's intention to look for common ground. The similar concerns shared between the NNS subjects and their native interlocutors, such as the enthusiasm for doing exercises shared between Wong and Jane, may help to reduce the perceived social and psychological distance between the two. Rather than 'L2 learners' who were always seeking for information, the NNS subjects may perceive themselves as co-conversationalists who were just having a good chat with friends. The NNS group's

active involvement throughout C5 and C6 on the other hand, reflected their ease and confidence as equal social beings. The changing patterns shown in the 'observation' topics contributed by the NNS group across the six conversations may suggest that the NNS subjects' conversational competence had increased over the time, based on their accumulated knowledge of the target language country and people.

Making observations is certainly among the most common conversational strategies used in social talk. However, people also seek for opinions, tell stories, or simply gossip together. How many observations to make, and how many gossips to share, are mainly decided by the perceived social and psychological distance between the conversationalists. In the sections that follow, effort is made to examine the other types of topic genres in this study, although they were much less impressive in terms of the total numbers across the six conversations.

6.5.4 'Chat' topic

As discussed in Chapter 3, the word 'chat' was used here differently from its more general meaning that 'a chat could be anything'. The 'chat' topics in this study indicated conversational fragments that did not fall into any genre, because they did not have any identifiable patterns in terms of the discourse structure. Three types of 'chat' topics appeared in the six NS-NNS conversations: *local observation, teasing,* and *information seeking.*

6.5.4.1 Local observation

Chatting about the local observation is one of the most common types identified in casual talk. It differs from the 'observation' topic in a sense that it is smaller, and much more interactive. The fact that a 'chat' topic does not have a distinctive discourse structure on its own does not object the possibility that it has a focus, though this focus is more difficult to be identified in some 'chat' topics than others. The only 'chat' topic appearing in C3 belonged to this type, when Cheng made a comment on the good quality of the Chinese tea served on the table. Similarly, Tony's chat on the recording Ping was doing in C6 was clearly a response to the recording instruments on the table.

6.5.4.2 Teasing

Strictly speaking, teasing is a genre on its own. It was coded under 'chat' topic in this study because of its 'chatty' nature with quick turn changes shared among the participants. As to tease somebody means making fun of him or her with some cleverly worded tricks, teasing normally takes place among people who are familiar or close. Consequently, people use teasing as a strategy to shorten the distance, as was the case in Extract 6.19:

Extract 6.19

486	C:	=I, I know that course.
487	T:	Do you? Really?
488	C:	Somebody recommended me to learn that foundation course.
489	T:	(Is that right?)
490	C:	Yeah.
491	**T:**	**You might've [been in my class.**
492	C:	[I know that,
493	C:	Maybe \<laughs\>
494	T:	Are you sure you are not - No, no, you are not.
495	C:	No!
		\<all laugh\>
496	T:	I would've remembered.
497	C:	I didn't go.
498	T:	Yeah. It's [very expensive.

('Cheng and the course', Topic 28 in C1)

Although in Line 486 it seems that Cheng was providing some personal information, the genre of the topic changed when Tony said 'you might've been in my class' (Line 491, emphasised in bold). With another utterance in Line 494, the sense of teasing was achieved. This had caused laughs from all the participants as the result of the shared understanding that Tony had teased Cheng with his pretended doubt whether Cheng had been sitting in his class. Laughing was regarded here as a strong signal for making the assumption that genuinely pleasant feelings were brought out from the participants at that particular moment. Teasing may have also reshaped the participants' perception of their conversational roles. It is possible that through the teasing, Tony had reduced his authoritative position as the native speaker and the information provider to a co-conversationalist. However, not a coincidence, only one chat was found in C1, when Cheng and Wong were introduced to Tony for the first time. The general tone of C1 can

be described as 'polite, respectful and informative.' This was to be compared with the tone that was more 'playful and social' found in C2.

C2 differed from the other five NS-NNS conversations in many ways. Among the three occasions when the NNS subjects met the NS participants for the first time (others included C1 and C4), C2 had the least '(personal) information seeking/providing' topics. The distribution of topic genres in C2 is shown in Figure 6.6:

Figure 6.6 Distribution of topic genres in C2 [*]

	C2
☐ Observation	4
■ Information seeking/providing	5
☐ Personal information seeking/providing	3
☐ Opinion seeking/providing	4
■ Story-telling	1
☐ Chat topic	7
■ Gossip	0
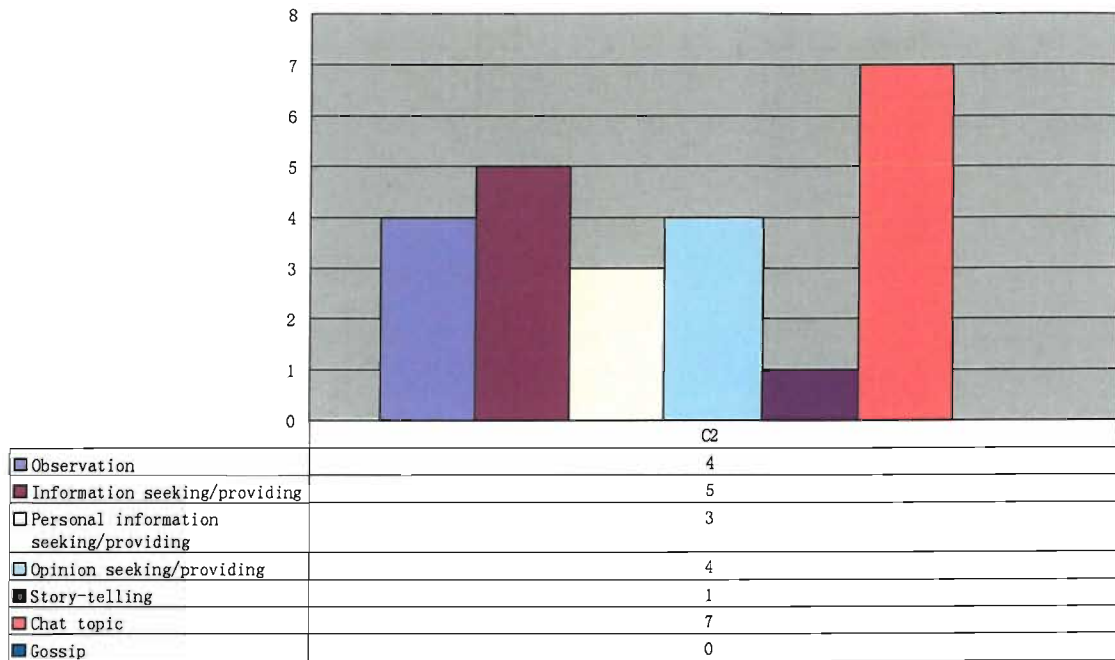
Among the 24 genres identified in C2 (with two genres co-existing in Topic 2 and Topic 10), 7 'chat' topics were found, resulting in the highest percentage among all the six conversations. These 'chat' topics were in line with the general conversational structure of C2, in which topics were picked up and dropped off in quick succession, producing the shortest topics in average in terms of the words uttered in total. For example, almost half of the topics were found with no more than 60 words contributed by the participants, including the 7 'chat' topics. Two teasing 'chat' topics were found, although Extract 6.20 can also be coded under the category of 'information exchange', as shown in the example:

---

[*] the Arabic numeral indicates the quantity of conversational topics initiated by all the participants under each topic genre

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Extract 6.20

```
161   C:    How long have [you got the notebook?
162   S:                [My wife
163   S:    This one is new, I got it about [(three), about one month ago.
164                                    [Oh, thank you, yes <unrecognisable speaker>
165   C:    Oh, so I think this one [is quite <laughs>
166   W:                          [So you show it, you show it here.
167   S:    <laughs> No! just I, I carried it around a lot. My baby.
168   W:    Oh
```
('Steve's notebook', Topic 11 in C2)

In above extract, Cheng started the topic by asking Steve about his notebook. However, Wong's teasing on Steve in Line 166 (emphasised in bold) was obvious and significant, changing the overall tone of the talk. It was followed by Steve's defence in the next turn. His calling the laptop his 'baby' matched the teasing tone of Wong's, and in so doing, had helped to establish his conversational role as a peer rather than a native speaker or an information provider that was so often associated with the native speakers in this study.

The other 'teasing' chat took place in Topic 20. Again, the person who started the teasing was Wong, who joked that the panda shown on the picture was Steve's wife, as shown in Extract 6.21:

Extract 6.21

```
265   W:                      [Is this your wife? <laughs>
266   S:    <laughs> No
267   C:    Okay, where where is your wife? <laughs>
268   S:    That isn't my wife, is it?
269   W:    Your
270   S:    Try to [find (one)
271   W:          [first wife <laughs>
272   S:    (This one), Panda? (1.0) It's good, it's good. I'm really interested in China.
273
274   W:    Oh...
```
('Photos of Steve's wife, Topic 20 in C2)

Besides the 'teasing' type of 'chat' topics in C2, there were two chats emerged out of the local observations, both triggered by the photos on Steve's laptop. Three other 'chat' topics were coded as aiming for 'information exchange', a type not to be found in other conversations, as the discussion in the next section shows.

6.5.4.3 Information seeking

'Chat' topics for 'information seeking' may appear similar to 'information seeking/providing' topics, only that an understanding was reached by all that the information itself was less important than the social role it played, that is, to keep the conversation going.

To take the same example shown in Extract 6.20, Cheng initiated the chat by asking how long Steve had got his laptop for. With the answer offered by Steve in the next turn, Cheng made a comment in Line 165. This resulted in Wong's teasing on Steve as discussed above. The 'chatty' nature of the topic was mainly decided by the fact that Cheng, the topic initiator, had quickly changed the focus of the topic in Line 169 and raised a question that was completely irrelevant to what had been previously talked about. This sudden change of the topic, however, did not appear to stop the flow of the conversation for two reasons. First, there was no significant pause existing between Line 168 and Line 169. Second, the sudden change of topic fitted into the general pattern of C2, as the whole conversation was characterised by the localness and trivialness of the talk, with the participants paying little attention to the detail of the focus. Extract 6.22 shows how one topic was quickly picked up and dropped off by the participants that had typified C2:

Extract 6.22

215	S:	Yeah, this is my wife. \<laughs\>
		(3.5)
216	C:	Have a look
217	S:	Have a look?
218	**C:**	**How [about the wedding pictures?=**
219	W:	[Yes, yes...
220	W:	=The pictures!
221	S:	( )
222	W:	The wedding, the wedding pictures
223	S:	I haven't got any on here.
224	W:	Oh...
225	C:	Okay, just your wife. So curious.
226	S:	I've [got things from China here=
227	W:	[Oh...
228	S:	= [actually.
229	W:	= [I'm curious about it.
230	S:	Where are you from in China?=

```
231   W:   =What's, what's that? Is that Chinese food?
232   S:   Duck feet.
233   W:   Oh...!
234   L:   What's that?
235   C:   Wow...
236   S:   Duck [feet
237   C:        [it's a food of ( )
238   S:   Sichuan.
239   L:   Oh
240   C:   Oh! Have you to, have you been to Sichuan?
241   S:   Yeah, I have been to Chengdu.
242   C:   I'm from Chongqing.
243   S:   Is that what you – are you from Chongqing?
244   C:   Yeah.
245   S:   Okay.
246   C:   Mm
247   S:   Oh, okay.
```
(Extract from C2)

Line 218, Line 231, and Line240 (emphasised in bold) each represents the starting point of a new topic. The first topic among the three was negotiated between Steve and Cheng. Cheng's curiosity in Steve's wedding photos expressed in Line 218 set the focus of the chat, as it provided the source for Wong and Steve's responses in the following turns. This topic didn't go anywhere even though both Cheng and Wong restated their curiosity in Line 225 and Line 229 respectively, as Steve quickly moved to talk about other things. This was only matched by Wong's utterance in the next turn, who ignored Steve's question but instead, started a new topic based on the local information: the picture of duck feet on Steve's laptop. Thus, without any signals to indicate the topic change, the talk had jumped from 'Steve's wedding pictures' in Topic 15 to 'duck feet' in Topic 16 (Line 231). Although Topic 17 (starting from Line 240) may bear some relevance to Topic 16 in a sense that it was developed out of one of the mentionables in Topic 16, the 'chatty' nature was decided by the lack of details of the topic. In Line 240, Cheng expressed her surprise that Steve had been to her hometown, Chengdu. However, Steve's response was minimal. Although he raised a question to acknowledge the information provided by Cheng, Steve showed little interest in elaborating on the topic. As a result, this topic was quickly dropped.

It is fair to conclude by now that one of the standards to code a 'chat' topic was the lack of attention to the focus of the talk given by the participants. This was obviously not in line with the co-operative principles observed by Grice (1975), who claims that conversational participants always make their verbal contribution relevant and sufficient, unless they feel they can afford not to. Examining the conversational context of C2 suggested that Steve's social identity may have played an important role in shaping the conversational roles of the participants. First, Steve was the only native speaker who was at a similar age as the NNS subjects. While Steve was in his early 30s, the age of the three NNS subjects vary from 25 to 29. Second, having done a similar MA course as the NNS subjects and having actually talked about his study experiences before the transcribed talk, Steve may have created a peer feeling among the participants. This peer feeling may explain why C2 appeared to be chatty as a whole, compared to the other NS-NNS conversations, with the highest percentage of 'chat' topics among all the topic genres. People tend to feel more relaxed and less attentive when talking with peers, particularly if they are also close friends, simply because they can afford to do so without being taken as flouting the co-operative principles.

Similar chats were coded in C4, C5 and C6 as 'information seeking'. However, differences were found between these 'chat' topics and those found in C2: while in C2 information seeking and providing may have ended up as chats due to the insufficient attention given by the participants, the 'chat' topics in the last three conversations were more of 'information exchange', with the purpose to update each other.

6.5.4.4 Information updating

In C5, there were two 'chat' topics started by Helen, with another two initiated by Ping. Except one chat in which Helen teased Wong about 'her inability to talk with food in mouth', the other three were carried between Helen and Ping. By the time this recording was made, Helen and Ping had already become friends and were meeting for social purpose on a regular basis. Therefore, it is interesting to contrast the chats in C5 with those appeared in C2. Analysing the three 'chat' topics between Helen and Ping in C5 showed a pattern of 'information updating' that was so commonly identified among acquaintances and friends. Extract 6.23 provides a typical example:

Extract 6.23

1157	P:	=Did you [go to the Chelsea?
1158	H:	[In the Chelsea
1159	H:	No. I didn't go=
1160	P:	=Why you didn't go?
	C:	<laughs>
1161	H:	Every year I say I'll [go,
1162	P:	[Yeah, but I mean
1163	H:	and I was going to go [to... the national, the - oh which one was it, the
1164	P:	[Mm
1165	H:	Gardener's World live,
1166	P:	Okay [okay, I see.
1167	H:	[cause they've got one this month. Then there's another one at
1168		Hampton Court. [And I had all the phone numbers to phone up for my
1169	P:	[Right
1170	H:	tickets, and I still haven't done it. So, I'll say next year.
		<Cheng and Wong laugh>

('Helen's failure to visit garden shows', Topic 63 in C5)

In Extract 6.23, Ping started the chat with 'personal information seeking'. However, Ping was not just seeking information as the NNS subjects did across the six conversations: she was actually updating the information that she had already known. By asking Helen whether she had been to the Chelsea Garden Show, Ping showed her knowledge of the show, and her awareness of Helen's interest in the show. In so doing, Ping had identified herself as an 'insider', as compared to the other two NNS participants who knew little about Helen's life and the world in which she lived. Such an observation can possibly explain why 'information updating' only appeared in C5 and C6, each taking place between Ping and the native speakers who were acquaintances with each other.

In C4, C5 and C6, there were 'information updating' chats that can also be coded as 'newsworthy' topics. In C6, Wong had started two chats, and in both cases, she updated the other participants with what she had done recently. The information she provided, such as 'her plan to see Van Gogh's paintings' and 'her boy-conditioning' class, was not really 'information' intended to benefit her audience. Rather, it was something Wong considered as worthwhile to talk about, because it was something new or unusual. In a similar way, Tony's mentioning of 'his going away' and the fact that he had seen the movie talked about by other participants in C6 were regarded as 'newsworthy' topics. The only two 'chat' topics found in C4 were contributed by Tony with two

'newsworthy' topics, one about his 'missing out' on his Chinese exam, and one on Ping's part-time job in a bookshop.

To sum up, although all the 'chat' topics may serve the same function to get the talk going in a conversation, each of the above subcategories carried different social roles in shaping and confirming the social identities and interpersonal relations of the participants. Chats made on the local observation were found across the six conversations, very possibly because it required the least shared experience and knowledge. Teasing signifies a relaxing atmosphere under which the participants are close and confident enough to make fun out of each. It is therefore significant that Wong teased Steve twice in C2, while there was no teasing made by the NNS subjects on their native interlocutors in other conversations. It was not a coincidence that 'information updating' and 'newsworthy topic' only took place in the last three conversations. The purpose of chatting for information updating is more social than functional, as it reveals the degree of intimacy between the participants depending on the nature of the information being updated. Although 'newsworthy' topics do not necessarily involve shared experience or knowledge between the participants, what is valued as 'news' is very much depending on what they have already known about their conversational partners. Thus, it was natural that 'newsworthy' topics appeared in C4 and C6, in which the NNS group and the NS group had already met for a few times by then.

6.5.5   'Opinion seeking/providing'

The findings under this category showed a tendency among the participants to follow the positive link between topic initiation and active conversational involvement. This was because most of the topics were started with opinion providing rather than opinion seeking. On the whole, the NNS group initiated more 'opinion related' topics than the NS group. Among the 16 topics initiated by the NNS group, 10 of them were 'opinion providing' by nature. The NS group on the other hand, were found to seek opinions in 7 topics out of the total number of 8. It was not a surprise, therefore, that the NNS group were found very active under this category. NS dominance only occurred in 3 topics. This was to compare with the 6 topics dominated by the NNS group, as shown in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Distribution of 'opinion seeking/providing' topics between the NNS group and the NS group

		NNS group (total number of topics: 16)	NS group (total number of topics: 8)
Topic initiation	Opinion seeking	6	7
	Opinion providing	10	1
Topic dominance		6	3

Two broad types of opinions were offered by the NNS subjects: *talks about one's feelings and attitudes in general* and *comments made on daily observations*.

Talks about one's feelings and attitudes were found in C1, including Cheng's attitudes towards studying in England and her perception of the distance between Chinese students and the English students. Also belonging to this particular type were personal preferences expressed by the NNS subjects, such as Topic 4 in C1, in which Lin claimed her preference to the English weather than that in her hometown.

Comments made on daily observations tended to appear in the last three conversations. For example, two such topics were found in C4 and another two appeared in C6. Although the focuses of the topics varied, they were all born out of the conversational contexts and showed close relevance to the previous topics. This type of opinion offering, therefore, showed the NNS group's attention and conversational involvement on the one hand, and their willingness to share their world views on the other hand. Wong's opinion offering in Extract 6.24 was such an example:

Extract 6.24

```
733   W:   But, that um [that um body conditioning class, I think is for everyone.
734   J:                    [(Too noisy) to do your exercises.
735   J:   Yeah.
736   W:   I, I have seen some...um some very um older older women or men
737        [also attend this class.
738   J:   [Yeah
739   J:   Yeah
740   W:   I think it's not very, how to say, very JI LIE DE <Chinese pronunciation
           for "intensive">
741   P:   It's, not very intense.
```

```
742    J:    Right.
743    W:    Intense exercise.
744    P:    No, it's not.
```
('Body-conditioning class is for everyone', Topic 42 in C6)

Opinion offering is an important way to present one's self, especially if the opinions are made on some common issues. It can bring the participants closer where the views are shared. But it can also be face-threatening if disagreement happens. In Line 733, Wong expressed her opinion that body conditioning class was for everyone. This was to respond to Jane's opinion in the previous topic that Gym was only for young people with its loud music. Examining the verbal exchanges between Wong and Jane showed that the participants' ability to make a point required the appropriate conversational context, as well as the knowledge to make the point convincing. The knowledge Wong was based on was her own experience with the body conditioning class. The same as in my earlier discussion on 'observation' topics, the fact that the NNS group offered more opinions on daily observations in C4 and C6 may have also resulted from their improved sociocultural knowledge of the target language country and people.

The tendency among the NS group to seek opinions from the NNS subjects was not a coincidence. To seek opinions from someone indicates a sense of authority, as different from the 'information seeking' discussed previously. This may explain why opinion seeking is more likely to be made by the superior than the inferior. Opinion seeking is seldom found among the peers. The more relaxed conversational atmosphere means that peers more often choose to provide their opinions without being sought for. It is between people who are not acquainted enough that opinions are sought to bridge the knowledge gap, or simply, the conversational gap. For example, In Extract 6.25, Helen asked Cheng and Wong about their personal preference on cooking (see Line 1024), which was considered as less face-threatening than seeking opinions on world views:

Extract 6.25

```
1024   H:    And, and do you, do you like cooking or...?
1025   W:    Um, mm...not [<laughs>
       C:                 [<laughs>
1026   W:    I just cook, just for, I have to eat something=
             ....
```
(Extract from Topic 56 in C5)

Similarly, Steve asked Lin about her attitude towards English food in C2:

Extract 6.26

368	S:	Do you like English food? It's terrible, isn't?
369	L:	No, no, not terrible. Some of them are quite nice.
370	S:	Really?
371	L:	Mm.
372	S:	Shall I turn this off? ( ). Yeah, I want to go up to China soon.

('S's enquiry about the students' attitudes towards English food', Topic 26 in C2)

The question was spontaneous, as a contrast was made in the previous topic between Chinese food and English food. But it was also functional in a sense that it was something to talk about to get the talk going. This was based on the observation that Steve quickly moved to another irrelevant topic without going to details when Lin said that 'some of them (the English food) are quite nice' (Line 369). Therefore, 'opinion seeking' carried a similar role as '(personal) information seeking' at times, that is, to invite the NNS subjects for conversational involvement, only that it could be more face-threatening sometimes. It was perhaps for this exact reason that the NS group chosed to ask about the NNS subjects' personal preferences rather than their views on some sensitive issues.

6.5.6   Other types of topic genres

Compared to the above topic genres, the other two topic genres such as 'story-telling', and 'gossiping' were given much less prominent positions across the six NS-NNS conversations. Overall, much fewer 'story-telling' topics and 'gossiping' topics were initiated by both the NNS group and the NS group. Only two gossips emerged from the six conversations, one in C4 initiated by Ping, and one in C6 started by Wong.

12 'story-telling' topics were found across the six conversations, including the ones that co-existed with other types of topic genres. For example in C1, Lin started the topic on 'Chinese sounds' as an observation, as shown in Extract 6.27:

Extract 6.27

306   L: I think, the, the most frequently (appeared) pronunciation in Chinese is /a/.
307   I think many, many novels or many words contain this /a/, [/a/, /a/sound.
308   T: [Yeah, yeah,
309   that's right.

(Extract from Topic 18 in C1)

From Tony's utterance above, we can see that Tony shared the observation made by Lin. To further elaborate on the issue, Tony chose to tell the following story:

Extract 6.28

310   T: I'll tell you a story if you like it. I was in Guangzhou, Okay? And I wanted
311   to get the train to Hong Kong. I went to the rail way station to buy a ticket,
312   ( ) And…tried to buy a ticket, she understood, she said, um what
313   (happened) to me, like, "/so-lau/!"
                 ….

(ibid.)

Overall, Topic 18 was an 'observation' in nature. The story told by Tony was only a strategy to show his shared view as Lin's; that is, the Chinese people's tendency to confuse certain sounds due to the influence from their own language. A similar example was found in Topic 13 in C3, when Wong introduced 'the different tea cultures' into the conversation. In order to describe how the Germans found it unacceptable to put milk into tea, Tony told his own experience and caused a laugh among the participants. In fact, most of the stories told across the six conversations had the dramatic effects of amusing the audience. Stories are dramatic in nature, otherwise, they are not worthy telling. To make it even more dramatic, stories are told following a distinct discourse structure (see the discussion in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2.2 and the discussion in Appendix 11.1). It is this discourse structure that makes story-telling a unique topic genre, even if it is told as a subordinate part of a larger discourse unit (for a similar view, see Schiffrin, 1987: 195). The rather strict components a story has, including *orientation, complication, evaluation* and *resolution*, also mean that higher language ability is required to tell a good story. This may explain why almost all the stories were told by the NS participants in this study. The dramatic effects of story-telling in getting the attention from the audience and in amusing them in the end may bring a sense of achievement to the story-teller as a conversationalist. The fact that the NS participants

had contributed 11 stories, and had dominated most of the talk during their story-telling can only further confirm their authoritative position as an ethnolinguistic group.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a thorough discussion of the conversational findings including: 1) the quantification of the participants' topic initiations; 2) the quantification of the participants' conversational involvement; and 3) the qualitative analysis of the nature of these conversational topics under the various topic genres. The examination of the participants' topic initiations provided the necessary source for making assumptions about the participants' conversational intentions. However, the mere fact of a speaker's topic initiation does not always lead to his/her active conversational involvement. Whether the positive link exists between topic initiation and active conversational involvement is also decided by the nature of the topic being initiated. Based on the discussion in this chapter, the following conclusions were drawn:

(1) Across the six conversations, the NNS group's initiative in seeking information from the NS group was obvious, as the number of topic initiations under this category consists of the second most among all, only to be outnumbered by 'observation'. These topic initiations, however, did not always make the NNS subjects the active conversationalists. Rather, the information gap between the NNS group and the NS group may have shaped the NNS subjects' self-perceived social and psychological distance from the NS group. That is to say, through the information seeking, the NNS subjects had confirmed their social identities as L2 learners who were new to the target culture as well as to its language, while the NS group's social identities as the more authoritative interlocutors were established on the other hand. This was further confirmed by the fact that the NS group had also taken the initiative to provide information.

(2) The mere fact of active conversational involvement did not lead to emotional involvement. As the findings showed, a number of NNS dominance topics appeared in 'personal information providing' topics. The NNS subjects' active involvement invited by the NS group may have achieved the functional role in keeping the

conversation going. However, the NNS group's perception that 'there is nothing to talk about with them' may not be changed.

(3) A large number of NNS topic initiations fell into the category of 'observation. It was also one of the topic genres that showed a constantly positive link between topic initiation and active conversational involvement. Observation making is based on conversational participants' shared knowledge of the world in which they live. As such, the NNS groups' ability to achieve active involvement in 'observation' topics may have helped to reduce their self-perceived social and psychological distance from the NS group. However, the fact that most of such 'observation' topics appeared only in C5 and C6 suggested that the shared common ground between the two groups only came over time, based on the NNS subjects' increased sociocultural knowledge of the target culture and the target language group.

(4) Comparing C2 and other conversations showed how the conversational contexts may have affected the NNS subjects' conversational involvement. The fact that the native speaker, Steve, was at a closer age as the NNS subjects, and that he was also a student who did a similar course the year before may have reduced the NNS subjects' self-perceived social and psychological distance from him. These were reflected by their conversational performance: the talk flowed naturally among the participants, characterised by the quick changes of topics and the lack of pauses between turns; the NNS subjects appeared active all though the conversation. Only once did NS dominance take place, when Steve was asked for his opinion on free speech. In terms of the topic genres, C2 featured the highest number of 'chat' topics initiated by the NNS subjects, indicating the relaxing atmosphere of the conversation. However, as I have argued in previous chapters that social identity and interpersonal relations are constantly formed and reshaped through social talk, it was possible the NNS subjects' perception of Steve as a peer was realised through the actual talk itself.

(5) The lack of 'chat' topics in other conversations except in C2, and the less impressive number of 'gossiping' and 'story-telling' topics across the six conversations reflected the nature of these talks as held among people who were not close to each other.

The discussion in this chapter has, therefore, brought insight into the actual interactional process of NS-NNS conversations that has often been left unexplored in SLA research. It reveals that, although social interaction with native speakers provides the adequate and necessary condition for L2 acquisition, the process of such social interaction can be a struggle for L2 learners, whose social identities are constantly reassessed and reshaped through the on-going interaction. In what ways the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse fits into the theoretical framework conceptualised in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.1) thus provides the main concern for the next chapter.

While the above findings have compared the participants' topic initiation and conversational involvement under the various topic genres as two distinctive ethnolinguistic groups, the results showed little about each participant as an individual conversationalist and social being. This, at times, could cause misleading impressions. For example, although in C1, the NNS group were regarded as playing a fairly active role in the talk, Cheng was found to be the person who was doing most of the talk. Among the 5 NNS dominance topics, Cheng was the dominant speaker; among the other 23 NNS active topics, only in 5 topics did Lin appear to be 'active'. That is to say, Cheng was the active NNS conversationalist in C1 while Lin was not.

In a similar way, to compare the conversational performance of the NNS group with that of the NS group failed to take into account the varying number of participants involved in each individual group. In C2, the NNS subjects' conversational involvement appeared 'very active'. However, such a result may simply reflect the higher number of NNS participants in C2 than the NS group, as all the three NNS subjects participated in C2, with only one native speakers present. Nevertheless, the fact that the NNS group had dominated 4 topics and were active participants in another 17 topics out of the total 22 topics provides interesting data in its own right. What concerns this study is not the result, but rather the question of 'how did the NNS group manage to stay "active" almost all through the conversation in C2?' This leads to the need to explore the individual role each NNS participant played in C2, regardless of the overview of their performance as a group.

Further, the findings in this chapter did not naturally lead to the understanding why the NNS subjects felt 'there are no shared common topics with native speakers', and that 'the talk with native speakers cannot be held a deeper level'. Each NNS subject had her own interpretation of what constituted 'a good and meaningful conversation', according to my discussion in Chapter 5. Therefore, without applying the NNS subjects' own standards and criteria for 'good and meaning conversations', the interpretation of the NNS subjects' conversational performance was at the risk of being mainly subjective. So was the interpretation of the forming and reshaping of the NNS subjects' self-perceived social and psychological distance from the target language group as a result of the on-going interaction. It was based on such concerns that each subject's conversational involvement was also examined. The individual differences among the three subjects allowed me to explore the role of learner involvement from different perspectives, and to understand each subject's conversational involvement from their own points of view in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7. Framing the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the individual differences among the three NNS subjects regarding their conversational involvement under the various types of topic genre. Although the three NNS subjects expressed similar concerns about speaking to native speakers, their reasons for making such claims varied (see the discussion in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2). For Lin, a good and meaningful conversation meant shared common interests, and the ability to hold a discussion with some depth. She also valued information exchanges that concerned her daily life. Agreeing with Lin that her talk with native speakers lacked shared interests and depth, Wong considered 'having fun' and 'having a relaxing atmosphere' as equally important for a good conversation. One of the positive experiences Wong had in interacting with native speakers was described as 'during which sensitive topics are discussed'. In a similar way, Cheng found it difficult to find topics that she and her native interlocutors both 'felt at home to talk about'. For Chen, her native interlocutor's interest in Chinese culture and respect in her as an individual provided the prerequisite for a good and meaningful conversation. Thus, it is interesting to apply these standards to assessing and interpreting the NNS subjects' conversational performance in the six recorded NS-NNS conversations.

Such an approach is also necessary, as the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations is no less dynamic than the formation of social identity itself under the social constructionist view. The understanding of the NNS subjects' actual talk with native speakers, therefore, is not possible without revealing what happened on the one hand, and how it was perceived by the NNS subjects on the other hand. The retrospective interviews with the participants provide another valuable source for validating the qualitative interpretation used in this study.

By examining the conversational involvement patterns between the NNS group and the NS group as two ethnolinguistic groups in Chapter 6, I have presented a broad picture of *what* happened in the NS-NNS conversations. In this chapter, therefore, I would like to demonstrate *how* each individual subject's conversational involvement under the different types of topic genre both reflected and helped to construct their social identities as L2 learners through the on-going NS-NNS conversations. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to provide a synthesised analysis of the findings provided in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

First, the NNS subjects' conversational involvement across the six NS-NNS conversations is revisited, not as an enthnolinguistic group, but as individuals who differ in personality and behaviour. With the subjects' own standards and criteria for 'good and meaningful conversations', their topic initiations and conversational involvement under the different types of genre are then explored in their own terms. Where contradiction seems to appear, such as the NNS subjects' 'very active' status in C2 as a contrast to their 'non-active' involvement in C3, the conversational data are examined in detail and in context. The understanding of these 'anomalies' is believed to add vigour to the analysis (Silverman, 2005: 215-219). As such, the discussion of the NNS subjects' conversational performance across the six NS-NNS conversations will bring insight into the following two concerns shared among the NNS subjects: 1) the lack of common topics with native speakers, and 2) the lack of depth of the talk with native speakers.

Finally, I argue that, as one part of their overall L2 experiences in the target language country, the NNS subjects' conversational involvement across the six NS-NNS conversations provides an important source to frame the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse, such as its role in actively constructing L2 learners' perceived L2 competence and the level of shared common ground between L2 learners and the target language group, both affecting L2 learners' self-confidence.

7.2 Individual differences among the three NNS subjects regarding their conversational involvement across the six NS-NNS conversations

The functional roles of topic genres in forming and reshaping social identity and interpersonal relations were discussed in Chapter 6. With the exemplification from the conversational data, I showed how the use of a particular topic genre may have affected the participants' role construction. However, without knowing exactly how the subjects felt about their own conversational performance, my interpretations can, at most, remain tentative assumptions. It is with such acknowledgement that in this section, the NNS subjects' conversational involvement under the different types of topic genre is explored from their own perspectives, with reflections elicited from the retrospective interviews.

Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 show the total number of topic initiations made by the three NNS subjects in each individual conversation in which they participated. An effort is also made to examine the distribution of these initiated topics under the three types of conversational involvement: *NNS dominance*, *NNS active involvement*, and *NS dominance*. That is, I am interested in how these topics were constructed after being initiated by each NNS subject. As shown in C1 in Table 7.1, Cheng took the dominant role in 3 topics, and was active in 8 topics. Only in one topic did the native speaker show dominance in terms of the total words uttered. Under the 'others' category are under-developed topics and topics that the three types of conversational involvement do not apply. So, for example in C2, the one topic in 'others' represents an under-developed topic, while in C6, the two topics include one under-developed topic and one topic in which Wong was the active conversationalist instead of Cheng.

Table 7.1 Cheng: Topic initiation and conversational involvement *

	No of topics initiated	Dominance	Active involvement	NS dominance	Others
C1	12	3	8	1	
C2	9		8		1
C3	4		4		
C4	(Not available)				
C5	15	6	9		
C6	17	6	9		2

---

* the Arabic numeral stands for the quantity of conversational topics initiated by each NNS subject in each individual NS-NNS conversation

Table 7.2 Lin: Topic initiation and conversational involvement

	No of topics initiated	Dominance	Active involvement	NS dominance	Others
C1	5		3	1	1
C2	2	1	1		
C3	0				
C4	6	2	4		
C5	(Not available)				
C6	(Not available)				

Table 7.3 Wong: Topic initiation and conversational involvement

	No of topics initiated	Dominance	Active involvement	NS dominance	Others
C1	(Not available)				
C2	7	2	2	1	2
C3	4	1	0	1	2
C4	(Not available)				
C5	3		2		1
C6	14	5	9		

Analysing and comparing the tables above provide the following observations:

(1) Amongst the three subjects, Cheng appeared to be most active in bringing new topics into talk. With all the conversations, Cheng initiated more topics than the other NNS subjects present with the only exception in C3. In fact, Cheng had initiated the second most topics in C1, C4, C5 and C6, equally most in C2 in the conversation with Steve, but not in C3. This variance in Cheng's conversational performance makes it interesting to examine C3 in its own right.

(2) Lin made the least number of topic initiations among the three subjects in C1, C2 and C3. Not once did Lin initiate a topic in C3. Lin's topic initiation in C4 was not significant either. Among the 31 topics, only 6 topics were initiated by Lin, and the rest were initiated by the only other NS participant, Tony. However, as the earlier results showed (refer to Table 6.1 in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.2), Lin was playing a very active role in C4 as she dominated 7 topics and was found to be active in another 20 topics, compared with the 2 topics dominated by Tony. Thus the question

is: What had actually happened in C4 to enable Lin to achieve her 'very active' status?

(3) Wong had a fair share of the topic initiations among the participants across the conversations. However, in C5, Wong's role in taking the initiative was put under question. Among the 61 topics, Wong only initiated 3 topics, resulting in a proportional percentage of only 4.9% among the participants. This leads to the need to examine Wong's conversational performance in C5, and the underlying implications, if there are any.

(4) Both Cheng and Lin's conversational performance showed a positive link between topic initiation and active conversational involvement. Cheng initiated the largest number of conversational topics, and according to the figure (see Table 7.1), these topic initiations of Cheng's had led to her conversational dominance or active involvement. One topic initiated by Cheng in C2 was dropped before it qualified as an analysable topic. The same went to Topic 12 in C6 on 'the reason why Rose is in Edinburgh'. The only two topics in which Cheng failed to achieve active involvement were Topic 19 in C1 and Topic 53 in C6 (coded under the category of 'others'). In Table 7.2, Lin in total initiated 13 topics across the four conversations she participated in, which resulted in her conversational dominance over 3 topics and active involvement in the other 8 topics. Only in one topic (Topic 20 in C1) did NS dominance happen.

(5) In C5 and C6, Wong's topic initiation led to her active conversational involvement or conversational dominance. However, her conversational performance failed to match the positive link between topic initiation and active conversational involvement in C2 and C3. In C2, although Wong managed to dominate two topics and to stay active in another two topics, she was found 'not active' in the other 3 topics. That is to say, in these 3 topics she initiated, Wong failed to achieve 10% or over to be qualified as an active contributor. The same tendency showed in C3, where among the 4 topics initiated by Wong, one topic proceeded into NS dominance topic, and two topics fell into the 'others' category.

The above observations reveal different tendencies among the three NNS subjects regarding their willingness to talk under various conversational contexts. As the findings from the interviews show (refer to Chapter 5), the three NNS subjects did not come to the target language country with the knowledge that the sociocultural differences between them and the target language group would cause communicative barriers. Their change of attitudes towards native speakers over time, however, suggests that their self-perception of the social and psychological distance (SPD) from the target language group was more likely realised and confirmed through their actual contact with native speakers. The qualitative analysis of the subjects' conversational involvement under the different types of topic genre in Chapter 6 (Section 6.5) provides evidence that the subjects had looked for common ground to share with their native speakers through topic initiation and topic elaboration. Occasionally, they were found to have achieved such a goal through successful negotiation of 'common topics', sometimes, with some depth. But, most other times, the subjects struggled to identify themselves as equal conversationalists in NS-NNS conversations, resulting in their sense of 'lacking shared common ground with native speakers', as revealed in Sections 7.3 and 7.4.

7.3 The lack of common topics between the NNS subjects and native speakers

This section aims to shed light on the first research question of this study: Why did the NNS subjects feel there is nothing to talk about with native speakers? Starting with Cheng and Lin's conversational involvement in C1, I explain how individual variables, such as the varying lengths of stay in the target language country, different personalities, and different L2 experiences among the three subjects may have affected their choice of topic genres and their subsequent conversational involvement. Drawing on the subjects' own standards and criteria for 'good and meaningful conversations', I argue that the mere fact of getting involved in a conversation does not naturally increase L2 learners' self-confidence as co-conversationalists. What is equally important in forming and reshaping L2 learners' interpersonal relations with native speakers is the nature of the talk, such as their (in)ability to share views about the world in which they live. Thus, although the NNS group appeared active in five of the six NS-NNS conversations, their

perception that 'they don't have much to talk about with native speakers' may remain, decided by their conversational performance under the different types of topic genre.

Lin initiated the least topics among the three subjects. Where Lin did start a topic, she showed a tendency to make observations or to express opinions, rather than to seek information. According to Lin, she found it difficult to 'find very interesting topics to talk about with native speakers'. There were certainly things she could talk about, but the fact that she had talked about them so many times made her reluctant to bring them into discussion again. Lin didn't specify what 'these topics' were, but by using 'basic topics' to describe the conversations she had with native speakers, Lin possibly indicated 'information seeking' topics such as enquiries about the local places, the local culture, and so on.

Lin's language expectation is not unique. It has been many years now since Hatch (1983) made the point that fluent conversationalists in a second or foreign language need a wide range of topics at their disposal. According to Hatch (1983), although initially L2 learners may want to talk about, or even depend on 'canned topics', such as how long they have been in the country, their reactions to the country, what school courses they are taking, their occupation and so on, they need to move beyond the stage where discourse is predictable with familiar and practised topics.

Following this logic, we may ask whether Cheng's confidence expressed in Interview One in using English for socialisation had anything to do with this 'initial stage', during which topics were familiar and very much institutionalised (refer to the discussion in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2.3). As it happened, although Cheng was very active in initiating topics in C1, her contribution of topics mainly fell into two types of topic genres: 'information seeking' and 'opinion providing'. Cheng enquired about the weather in England and some local places. Under the category of 'opinion providing', Cheng talked about what she liked and disliked about England, topics that L2 learners were often asked about when living in the target language country. In other words, although Cheng appeared active in 4 of these topics and even dominant in one topic, the authoritative position of Tony as the information provider was foremost decided by the nature of the topic genre itself, so was Cheng's social position as an L2 learner who was anxious to learn about the target culture and the target language group.

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Again in C3, Cheng enquired about the two plants used at Christmas for decoration: holly and mistletoe. What had changed over time was Cheng's self-confidence in the target culture, as she gradually felt the barrier between her and the target language group. That is to say, the fact that Cheng was active in initiating conversational topics did not establish the common ground between her and the target language group. The knowledge gap reflected in 'information seeking/providing' topics was likely to reveal differences rather than similarities between Cheng and her native interlocutors.

Common ground is described as 'shared knowledge and beliefs which form the backdrop to situations of communication and permeate every act of interpretation' (Littlewood, 2001: 189; also see Clark, 1996). Conversationalists do not enter a conversation with a priori definition of what is shared between them. Rather, the sense of common ground is gradually established while the conversationalists work together to initiate and construct conversational topics. Thus, an L2 learners' inability to make sense of the native speaker' utterances in a conversation not only reduces his/her communicative competence, but also challenges his/her self-perceived 'self'. This may explain why three months after Interview One, Cheng felt the need to learn about the target culture to facilitate her communication with the target language group. Such a view was even stronger in Interview Three, during which Cheng talked about how watching TV provided her the resource for topics with native speakers (refer to Chapter 5, Section 5.2.3). Indeed, Cheng's ability to share her observations in C5 and C6 proved that, once effort was made, common ground can be mutually established between the subjects and the target language group.

Wong's conversational involvement on the whole was less active than Cheng. Such a comparison was obvious in C5 where Cheng initiated 15 topics and dominated 7, while Wong only initiated 3 topics, and showed dominance in 2. Wong's dominant role in Topic 56 was a result of Helen's enquiry about her attitude towards cooking. Similarly, in Topic 7, the fact that Wong was dominant was due to Helen's enquiry about her course study at the university. Wong's conversational performance in C5 thus reflects the earlier discussion that under certain topic genres, such as 'personal information seeking/providing', the NNS subjects may appear active without making the effort to initiate topics.

When interviewed after C5 was recorded, Wong told me that she didn't know what to talk about during the conversation. Cheng had constantly contributed to the conversation by talking about the gardening programmes she watched on TV, and was responded to by Helen and Ping (me) who were both interested in the gardening topics; Wong, on the other hand, felt left out. Wong said she didn't watch TV very much, and didn't know about those TV programmes, and as a result, she knew nothing about those topics.

As the findings in Chapter 6 show, the tendency among the NS group to raise personal enquiries about the NNS subjects remained rather stable among the seven topic genres identified in this study. In fact, out of the total number of 42 topics dominated by the NNS subjects, 13 of them were achieved by the NNS subjects to respond to their native interlocutors' enquiries (refer to Table 6.2 in Section 6.4.2). It remains unknown that if given the choice, the NNS subjects would have chosen to talk about themselves, as they did with 'personal information seeking/providing' topics. What can be concluded here, however, is the implication that despite the quantity of learner involvement under the topic genre of 'personal information seeking/providing', the assumption that shared common topics exist between the subjects and native speakers is under question.

It is true that an equally large number of NNS dominance topics went under the topic genre of 'observation', providing the evidence that certain common ground had indeed been established between the NNS subjects and their native interlocutors. 'Observation' also featured as one of the topic genres that presented a constantly positive link between topic initiation and active conversational involvement (see the discussion in Chapter 6, Summary section). L2 learners are therefore encouraged to take the initiate to make observations, and in doing so, to actively construct the common ground between them and the target language group. However, L2 learners' ability to contribute to 'observation' topics requires not only the linguistic knowledge of the language, but also the topic knowledge to be shared with their native interlocutors. This may explain why in C1, Cheng and Lin's 'observation making' in Topic 19 and Topic 21 respectively did not lead to their active involvement. This forms a contrast to the subjects' conversational performance in C6, in which Cheng and Wong secured their 'active involvement' status in all the 'observation' topics they each started.

As revealed through the retrospective interviews, both Cheng and Wong had genuinely enjoyed the chat with Tony and Jane in C6, and would like to talk to them more in the future. It was likely that the more the subjects learned about the target culture and the target language group, the more common topics were shared. Thus, it was not a coincidence that the NNS subjects were found to make more observations in C5 and C6 than they did in C1 or C3. Cheng's TV watching had certainly provided her with the resource to hold the conversational floor in C5, which as a result, made Cheng a co-conversationalist in C5, rather than an 'L2 learner' position taken by Wong.

However, the realisation that they need to make an effort to have a good and meaningful conversation may have, on the other hand, confirmed the sociocultural differences between the subjects and the target language group. This may explain why when interviewed eight months after the study started, the subjects' SPD from the target language group was increased rather than reduced. That is to say, regardless of the fact that the subjects had more to talk about with native speakers based on their accumulated knowledge of the target culture, their self-perceived SPD from native speakers may lead to their continuing belief that they 'share no common topics with native speakers'. Such a perception, had inevitably affected the NNS subjects' view on the 'lack of depth' in their conversations with native speakers.

7.4 The lack of depth of talk between the NNS subjects and native speakers

Although questions may be raised regarding the meaning of 'depth' used here, the lengths of conversational topics certainly mattered. In this section, I provide an overview of the conversational topics across the six NS-NNS conversations, with each measured regarding the total words uttered by the participants. The discussion will provide the answer for the second research question of this study: Why did the NNS subjects feel they cannot hold a deeper conversation with native speakers?

The average amount of words per topic across the six NS-NNS conversations is provided in Table 7.4. In order to limit the interference from situational factors such as caused by the different conversational settings, the quantification of the data did not

include functional topics and under-developed topics. Comparing the lengths of the conversational topics across the six talks allowed me to explore 'the depth of the talk' at a less abstract level; that is, I was able to identify the conversational topics with total words above the average in each talk.

Table 7.4 Average amount of words per topic across the six NS-NNS conversations

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
Average number of words per topic	124	83	118	135	133	102

Comparing the average number of words per topic across the six NS-NNS conversations, as presented in Table 7.4, does not show much difference. Although the average length of the conversational topics in C2 shows a number much smaller than that in C4, it is not that different from C6. C4 and C5 are particular close with an average number of 135 and 133 per conversational topic respectively. Nevertheless, the fact that C2 contains the smallest topics on average reflects the nature of C2 as more 'chatty' than other talks, as discussed previously. The proximity among the others may, on the other hand', reflect the similar conversational settings under which these talks were recorded; that is, around tea tables while tea and drinks were served.

The numbers in Table 7.4 make it possible to single out the conversational topics with total words above the average from those below the average. For example, 14 topics in C1 appear to have words above the average number of 124, while the other 21 topics are shorter with words below the average. It is the longer topics that I will go into discussion with, as 'the depth of the talk' is naturally related to conversational participants' verbal contribution in terms of the words they utter. For the convenience of the discussion that follows, these topics will be called 'above-average topics' hereafter. Table 7.5 provides the number of above-average topics across the six NS-NNS conversations. Also included in Table 7.5 is the distribution of NNS dominance, NNS active involvement and NS dominance under these topics.

Table 7.5: Participants' conversational involvement in above-average topics [*]

NS-NNS conversations	NNS dominance	NNS active involvement	NS dominance	Others
C1 (14/40%)	1 (7.1%)	7 (50%)	6 (42.9%)	
C2 (7/31.8%))	1 (14.3%)	5 (71.4%)	1 (14.3%)	
C3 (9/37.5%))	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	6 (66.7%)
C4 (14/45%)	6 (42.9%)	8 (57.1%)		
C5 (25/44.6%))	4 (16%)	12 (48%)	9 (36%)	
C6 (32/42.7%)	7 (21.9%)	17 (53.1%)	3 (9.4%)	5 (15.6%)

On the whole, C2 shows the smallest proportion of above-average topics among the six conversations. According to Table 7.5, these above-average topics only take a proportion of 31.8% of C2, while the biggest proportion goes to C4, in which 45% of the talk can be coded as 'above-average' topics, regardless of the topic content. This is in line with the fact that C2 has the smallest conversational topic on average compared with other talks. The quick change of topics in C2 without going into detail may indicate the subjects' reduced SPD from Steve, as C2 shows the highest percentage of active involvement from the NNS subjects. I have discussed earlier (see Chapter 6) how the subjects' perception of the SPD may have been affected by, first, the conversational setting, and second, by the nature of the talk. However, is it not also true that the subjects' ability to participate actively in C2 was also attributed to the shorter length of the topics, requiring less production load on the subjects linguistically and conceptually? Such an observation provides the explanation why the NNS subjects appeared very active in above-average topics in C2. As shown in Table 7.5, only in one above-average topic did NS dominance take place.

The NNS subjects' active involvement in C2 forms a contrast to their conversational performance in C1, as they were less active with above-average topics in C1, despite the fact that on the whole, the NNS subjects were regarded as playing an active role. In other words, although Lin and Cheng had together dominated 5 topics (referring to Table 6.1 in Chapter 6), only 1 topic falls into the category of being 'above-average'.

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[*] the Arabic numeral represents the total number of above-average topics appeared under each category, while the percentage stands for the proportional distribution of each category

By comparison, Tony, the native speaker in C1, had dominated 6 above-average topics, under which Lin and Cheng appeared 'non-active' with each contributing less than 10% of the talk in words. Except in Topic 21, in which Tony tried to explain why he was interested in Chinese students' attitudes about living in England, 5 other above-average topics involved either 'observation making' or 'story-telling'. Cheng and Lin, on the other hand, seemed most likely to maintain their active involvement under the category of 'information seeking/providing' and 'opinion providing'.

Lin's longer stay in England may result in the difference in her choice of topic genres as compared with Cheng. Rather than seeking general information from Tony, or talking about her attitudes towards studying in England, Lin made the effort to initiate 'observation' topics in C1. In 3 topics among the total 5 topics initiated by Lin, Lin started with an observation, such as her perception of the Chinese sounds in Topic 18 and her observation that English people don't need to learn a second language in Topic 20. Both topics developed into a long talk with a total of over 200 words contributed by the participants. However, examining the two topics shows that in both cases, Tony had taken the topic over through story-telling, and shown dominant position in one. This explains why Lin's topic initiation did not lead to her active involvement in Topic 20, as pinpointed earlier (Section 7.2). Such results are in line with Lin's own account of her L2 experience with native speakers, as she explained:

45   *If talk some deeper subjects, maybe I haven't got that common cultural*
46   *backgrounds, or some history backgrounds, so, maybe, I'm afraid it won't go*
47   *anywhere.*

(Lin: Interview One)

Indeed, as discussed previously (Chapter 6, Section 6.5.3), the speaker's ability to initiate an 'observation' topic and to make further contribution on the topic is based on his/her shared knowledge or experiences with other participants as a result of their shared world of living. Lin's topic initiation on daily observations may indicate her intention to look for common ground between her and Tony. However, the fact that Tony had taken over to be the active speaker may have confirmed her earlier belief that she could not hold a deeper conversation with native speakers.

C5 shows a very similar pattern to C1 regarding the NNS subjects' conversational involvement in above-average topics. In total, Cheng and Wong dominated 10 topics in C5. However, only 4 of them had extended beyond the average length with words over 133. Helen, the native speaker, had maintained her dominance in 9 above-average topics out of the total number of 12. Again, these 9 above-average topics mainly fall under the category of 'observation' and 'story-telling'.

That is to say, although a number of above-average topics exist in C1 and C5, and indeed, some of them have the potential of provoking deep thoughts through 'observation making' and 'story-telling', the NNS subjects' perception that 'they cannot hold a talk at a deeper level with native speakers' may not be changed, because of the significant number of NS dominance compared to NNS dominance.

C4 features the largest proportion of NNS dominance in above-average topics. Among the 14 above-average topics, Lin, the only NNS subject had dominated 6 topics, while Tony, the only native speaker dominated none. This leads to the conclusion that Lin had a fair share in these larger topics. Analysing the nature of these topics shows four of them involved detailed personal information provided by Lin to respond to Tony's enquiry. Twice, Lin achieved her dominant role by talking about the dissertation she was undertaking at the time. Tony's interest in Lin's travelling plan and her sport-playing at high school had also offered Lin the opportunity to talk at length. Again, by asking personal questions about Lin, Tony succeeded in inviting conversational involvement from Lin to fulfil his social role as the host. The fact that there were only three people participating in C4 (including Ping, myself) also had an important effect upon the distribution of conversational involvement among the participants. Tony's interest in Lin's life and study, for example, would not be possible if there had been other NNS subjects present. In fact, Tony was determined to encourage Lin to talk in C4, as he had actually prepared some questions in advance to ask Lin, written on a piece of paper. Lin, on the other hand, enjoyed the attention given by Tony and was happy to talk about her study and life, producing topics with words above the average number.

As clearly stated by Cheng, a good conversation consisted of talks in which the native speakers were willing to chat about her culture and background, and something more personal. This is because, the native speakers' attention to her as both an individual and

a social being shows their respect, which was the prerequisite for a meaningful conversation. What is equally true, though, is the possibility that talking about the 'known', such as one's life and one's own culture provides L2 learners with both the confidence and the resource for achieving conversational involvement in NS-NNS conversations, as revealed in Lin's conversational dominance in above-average topics in C4. However, the risk of achieving conversational involvement in 'personal seeking/providing' topics is, they easily fall into the category of 'general topics' that L2 learners don't want to talk about again and again.

The NNS subjects' evaluation of their conversational performance in C3 was consequently affected by the fact that the NNS subjects were coded as 'non-active' overall. Although NS dominance only appeared once among the 9 above-average topics, the three NNS subjects were 'non-active' in 7 of these topics, leading to their perception that they could not hold a deep discussion with native speakers, only to be further confirmed by Bin's 'deep discussion' with Tony and Jane in above-average topics, coded under the category of 'others' in Table 7.5.

It was not a coincidence that only Lin achieved a high percentage of conversational involvement in C2 under the topic genre of 'story-telling', which subsequently led to a talk on 'free speech and public demonstration'. This was then followed by a deep discussion between Lin and Steve on 'the general regulations on public demonstration' in Topic 5, featuring the co-existence of several topic genres, including 'information seeking/providing', 'observation', and 'opinion providing'. This was one of the few topics where the coding caused confusion. It was an unusually long topic, especially so for C2 with a total words of 368. I kept the topic as a whole, as I felt only by doing so, can I present Topic 5 as a deep discussion between Lin and Steve, a characteristic that was not typical for the NS-NNS conversations in this study. It is beyond the depth of the thesis to go into detail about how this deep discussion was achieved turn by turn between Lin and Steve. However, Lin's preference over 'observation' topics and her ability to co-construct the topic at a deep level reflects the fact that she had spent one year longer than the other two subjects in the target country.

In a similar way, the increased number of above-average 'observation' topics contributed by Cheng and Wong in C6 indicates that deep discussions with native speakers can gradually be achieved, as a result of their accumulated knowledge of the target culture. Among the 36 above-average topics in C6, NS dominance only appeared three times, with another 5 topics categorised under 'others'. That is, NNS active involvement was achieved in 28 above-average topics, including 7 in which NNS dominance took place. The significance of C6 also lies in the fact that, like Topic 5 in C2, the coding of the conversational topics was very difficult to make.

While in C1, the boundary of conversational topics was easy to identify with irrelevant adjacent topics, sometimes typified by pauses between turns, C6 featured large fragments of talk with coherent topics. It is interesting to examine how the talk on 'the law system in England' extended into a deep discussion with topics built up on the various aspects of the issue. It is even more interesting to see how Cheng and Wong achieved active involvement during the discussion, despite the fact that they both had little knowledge about the topic.

The discussion started from Topic 63 when Jane initiated the talk on the jury service she did for the court. It was then extended into a discussion on 'how the juries are selected' in Topic 64, enquired by Wong. In a similar way, like a chain reaction, the topics that followed were elaborations made on the immediate previous topics, though with a different sub-focus, as shown in Figure 7.1. Such topic development is termed as 'stepwise construction' under CA, as compared with the 'parallel development' between Topic 66 and Topic 67 (refer to Figure 7.1). Wong's topic initiation in Topic 67 is significant, as by doing so, she showed her interest in the discussion, and made the contribution as well. Following Topic 67, the conversation took a slight change of direction, as the participants moved on to talk about the practicality of the jury system, such as the inconvenience caused to students, or to people who had jobs to go to.

The point here is: all these topics are relevant to each other in a way that they are one aspect of the focus on 'the law system in England'. They were coded as independent topics because each had its own concern, sometimes characterised by different topic genres. But nevertheless, they qualify as one part of the 'deep discussion' on 'the law system in England'. At times, Tony and Jane acted as the information providers, but it

was the constant comments and back-channels made by Cheng and Wong that had co-constructed the talk into a deep discussion. This has led to the conclusion that the information gap between L2 learners and their native interlocutors do not necessarily reduce L2 learners' self-confidence. Learning through communication is why the interaction with native speakers proves important for L2 learners. However, in what way native speakers' willingness to cater for L2 learners' communicative needs affects L2 learners' conversational involvement, as it was the case with C6, needs further investigation.

Figure 7.1 Schematic framework for topic construction in C6 (from Topic 63 to Topic 67) *
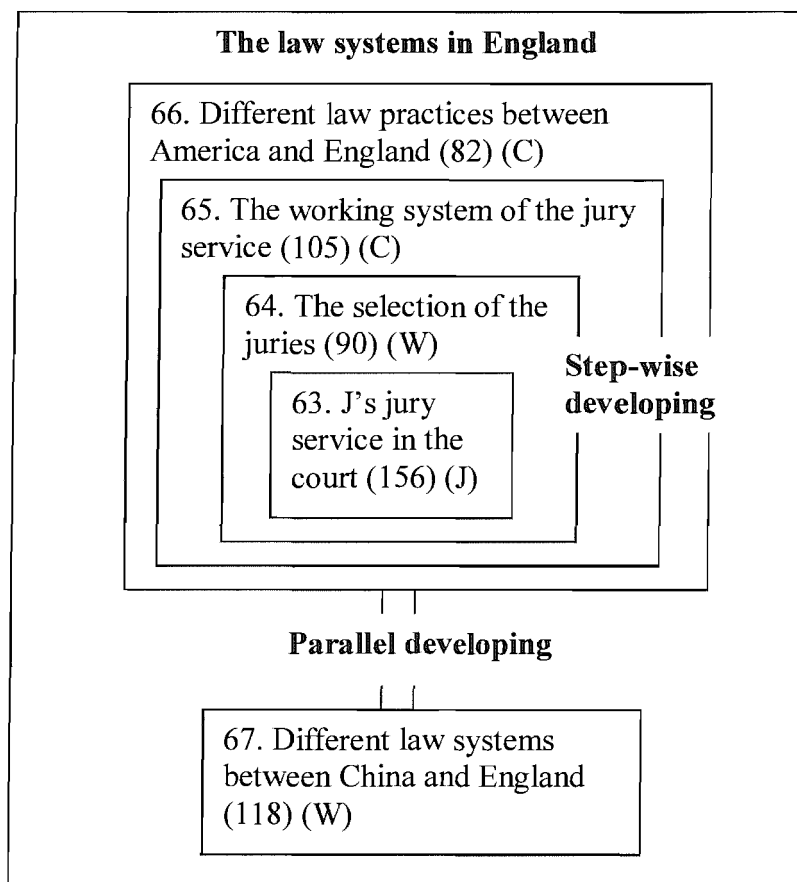
The law systems in England

66. Different law practices between America and England (82) (C)

65. The working system of the jury service (105) (C)

64. The selection of the juries (90) (W)

Step-wise developing

63. J's jury service in the court (156) (J)

Parallel developing

67. Different law systems between China and England (118) (W)

To sum up, an effort has been made in this section to draw a picture of how the NNS subjects' perception that 'they can not hold a deeper discussion with native speakers' was actively constructed through their conversational involvement under the different types of topic genre. But, as the discussion went on, I realised that such a goal was not achievable, as the conception of 'deep discussion' was as dynamic as the concept of 'common ground', each affected by the specific conversational contexts. What I was able to show through the discussion was the situational influence upon the NNS subjects' conversational involvement. Firstly, the native speakers' willingness to talk, and at times, their intention to encourage the NNS subjects to talk proved essential to produce talk 'at a deeper level' between the two. Secondly, despite of the native participants' willingness to communicate in all these six NS-NNS conversations, the NNS subjects' ability to hold deeper discussions was constantly challenged. Thirdly, although the NNS subjects appeared very active in C2, the fact that C2 features the shortest conversational topic in average may disqualify C2 as a good and meaningful talk.

7.5 Theoretical construction: Framing the role of learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations

In previous sections, I explained how the NNS subjects' self-perception of 'the lack of common topics with native speakers' and 'the lack of depth of the talk with native speakers' was formed through their conversational involvement under the particular types of topic genre, which had consequently increased their SPD from the target language group. However, to simply frame the role of learner involvement as confirming and strengthening the sociocultural differences between L2 learners and the target language group will only lead to the theoretical simplicity that has provoked this study in the first place. That is, being L2 learners and being Chinese do not necessarily lead to Chinese students' vulnerable positions in their social interaction with native speakers. In fact, if the actual contact with native speakers only function to realise the so-called *priori* social identities of L2 learners', the description of their WTC as an important condition for L2 learning would have to be redefined. Such a perspective also ignores the dialogical nature of 'self-confidence', the key construct in conceptualising

the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse, as discussed in Chapter 2 (refer to Figure 2.1).

What I would like to do in this section, therefore, is to explore how L2 learners' self-confidence is both affecting and affected by learner involvement in L2 discourse, influenced by situational variables such as L2 learners' self-perceived L2 competence and the level of common ground shared between them and the target language group, as framed in Figure 7.2

Figure 7.2 Dialogical description of 'self-confidence'[*]
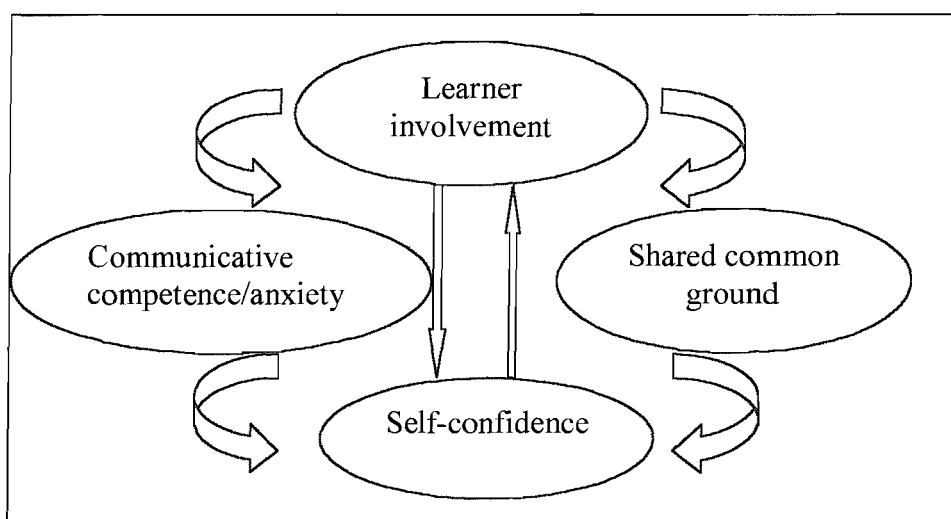
This framework outlines the interrelationship between L2 learners' conversational involvement in L2 discourse and their self-confidence. The arrows that point either way between conversational involvement and self-confidence indicate their mutual influence. That is, L2 learners' self-confidence not just results from the on-going NS-NNS interaction, but also 'situates' L2 learners in a way that it can either encourage or reduce further conversational involvement. It is based on this dialogical description of 'self-confidence' that I examine Wong's active involvement in C6 in the next section, leading to the conclusion that although learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations proves to be a struggle for most L2 learners, it is achievable under the appropriate conversational context, and as a consequence, increases L2 learners' self-confidence.

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[*] the line of influence is indicated by the arrow direction.

7.5.1 Wong's active conversational involvement in C6

In C6, Tony started Topic 5 with a typical 'personal information seeking' question by asking Wong whether she had been travelling anywhere in England. This question was typical in a sense that it had been used exclusively by the NS hosts across the six conversations to invite their guests for conversational involvement. Rather than providing the answer in its literal way, Wong skilfully changed the topic genre into an 'observation' by talking about the seminar she attended in London the day before, as shown in the following example:

Extract 7.1

67	T:	Have you, Wong, been to... any of these trips?
68	W:	Umm...I just came from... London (.) yesterday.
69	T:	Really?
70	W:	Yes - no, just for one day, just for, um I I attended um a seminar,
71	T:	Okay

(From 'the Seminar in London', Topic 5 in C6)

Wong then started giving details about the seminar, back-channelled by other participants who showed their interests in what was going on. Cheng, particularly, had co-constructed the topic by explaining the topic of the seminar, and in so doing, Cheng helped to develop the topic into a small discussion among the participants. It is possibly under such an atmosphere that Wong felt that some 'common ground' had been established, as she closed the topic with her cheeky personal opinion:

Extract 7.2

102	W:	But the duration is so long, from nine o'clock until... five o'clock.
	J:	<laughs>
103	W:	So, actually I want to escaped, actually < laughter>, but, but no one go
104		out. So I just stayed there [<laughter>
	J:	[<laughter>

(ibid.)

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Jane's laughing caused by Wong's remark may not provide the sufficient evidence that she was on Wong's side regarding Wong's attitude towards the seminar. It had, however, further relaxed the atmosphere, making it comfortable for Wong to chat about her other plan to visit the National Gallery in Topic 6.

Topic 6 was coded as a 'chat' topic, because there was no clearly identifiable discourse structure for the discussion. The topic jumped from Wong's plan to see Van Gogh's paintings, to the painter's name, and then to the painter himself. The talk thus fits into the definition of a 'chat' topic in the sense that everything can be talked about to get the conversation going, and then nothing really matters. Wong offered her reason for wanting to see Van Gogh's painting at the end of the chat, and closed the topic. An overview of the topic shows that all the participants had contributed to the chat, with Wong taking the dominant role. Wong's ability to initiate a 'chat' topic, and to share her views with other participants had possibly increased her self-confidence, which may have in turn, reduced her self-perceived SPD from Tony and Jane, the host and the hostess.

Later in C6, Wong brought in another 'chat' topic about the body-conditioning class she attended. The topic fitted into the current conversational context as the previous topic was focused on the 'sports facilities at the University'. But more importantly, it was something worth talking about. As it happened, what followed were a series of relevant talks on 'doing exercises', including Wong's opinion offered to Jane that 'body-conditioning class is for everyone' (Topic 42).

What can be suggested from Wong's conversational involvement in C6, therefore, was her self-confidence in initiating topics and her willingness to participate in topic discussion. Wong's active conversational involvement in C6 as compared to her 'non-active' involvement in C3 may be explained by her increased shared background knowledge with native speakers over time. However, such a reason is hardly acceptable to account for her non-active involvement in C5, recorded only a week's time away from C6. C5 was of course different from C6 regarding the conversational contexts, such as the different participants involved, and the different settings under which the two conversations were recorded. However, what also strikes as important are the varying natures of the conversational topics covered in C5 and C6. While in C5, Wong

acknowledged that she had little to say about TV programmes, she had certainly known much better what to talk about in C6. The fact that she achieved conversational involvement at the very beginning of the conversation may have immediately shaped or reformed her social identity and the interpersonal relations between her and the native speakers. In C6, she appeared not as an L2 learner talking to a native speaker, but rather, a co-conversationalist who made equal contribution to the conversation based on her common knowledge and experience, as reflected in the talk on Van Gogh's paintings. The chatting nature of Topic 6 and the laughs her talk brought about in previous topics had all together created a relaxing atmosphere, a necessary condition for Wong to talk a lot, according to Wong's revelation in Interview Two (see discussion in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2.3). Such role construction had very likely increased her self-confidence, with which she 'dared to' initiate more topics that she was interested in, such as 'doing exercises', the movie she watched, and her interest in dancing, etc. As the findings show, Wong achieved active involvement in all the topics she initiated in C6, and managed to dominate in 5 of them. This also explains why the only 'gossiping' topic across the six talks was initiated by Wong, when she exclaimed her admiration for Richard Gere, the leading actor in the movie 'Shall We Dance?'

The constructive view of self-confidence thus adds new perspective to our understanding of NS-NNS interaction in general, and the role of learner involvement in particular. If, L2 learners' active involvement increases their self-confidence, and that the increased self-confidence will encourage further conversational involvement from L2 learners, the opposite can also be true, leading to the vicious cycle in L2 learning: L2 learners' 'non-active' status in NS-NNS conversations is likely to reduce their self-confidence, which as a result, can deprive them of further opportunity to use L2. As Baker and MacIntyre (2000) observe:

> Positive experiences communicating in the second language not only reduce anxiety, improve perceived competence, and enhance willingness to communicate, but also can increase the motivation to participate in similar experiences in the future (Baker and MacIntyre, 2000: 71-72)

There are many variables that have the potential to produce positive L2 experiences. What this study has shown, therefore, is how one of the variable, learner involvement, affects L2 learners' perceived competence in L2, which in turn, affects their

communicative self-confidence. Such a construction of the role of learner involvement is found most relevant to account for the NNS subjects' 'non-active' involvement in C3.

7.5.2 The NNS subjects' 'non-active' involvement in C3

According to previous findings, C3 was the only conversation in which the NNS subjects as a group appeared 'non-active'. Among the 24 topics, the three subjects were found to be active only in 8 topics, including one NNS dominance topic contributed by Wong. The two native speakers, Tony and Jane, showed dominance in 5 topics, and the remaining 11 topics fell into the 'others' category.

Bin, Cheng's boyfriend, only initiated 3 topics, but managed to be active in 7 among the 24 in total. Quantitatively, this was not impressive, as Cheng actually appeared active in 8 topics (including the topics initiated by other participants). It is the nature of these topics that marks the difference between Bin's conversational involvement and that of Cheng's. Although Bin had sought general information, he was found to share views in 5 'observation' topics, including those that required the sociocultural knowledge of the target culture. For example, Bin was able to talk about 'fox-hunting' in Topic 16, while Wong failed to achieve over 10% of the conversational involvement regardless of the fact that she initiated the topic. Bin's knowledge about the topic made it possible for him to make comments and to provide new mentionables. For instance, Bin was able to bring into the discussion the recent events related to the issue, such as fox-hunting supporters' protest in front of the Houses of Parliament. In so doing, Bin appeared to be a co-conversationalist who was having a discussion with his native interlocutors, rather than an L2 learner who was the beneficiary of the information provided by the native speakers. At least, this was how the three subjects perceived it.

During the retrospective interviews, all the three subjects were impressed by Bin's active involvement in C3. Wong admitted that she had difficulties in understanding some of the topics in C3. She said:

> *I found myself more at ease talking about personal life, you know, the likes and dislikes in our daily lives. My knowledge in Politics and Economics is very limited. That's why on our way home, I kept asking Bin about some of the things he talked.*
(From the Retrospective Interview on C3)

For the three NNS subjects, Bin's active involvement not only reflected his wider range of knowledge, but also his English competence. Cheng felt most strongly about the gap between her and her boyfriend regarding English competence. Bin had already been in England for more than one year at the time when C3 was recorded. And, according to Cheng, Bin had made amazing progress with his English. In fact, Cheng almost felt embarrassed to see the increasing gap between her English and Bin's English, as she did her first degree in English studies, while Bin did his in Law. Cheng admitted that such perceived gap had at times kept her from talking in front of Bin and his friends.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986: 128) have addressed the negative effects engendered by one's sense of incompetence in L2 use:

> Because complex and non-spontaneous mental operations are required in order to communicate at all, any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic....(Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986: 128)

Although the above comment was made regarding L2 learners' feelings of loss in social or intellectual status, it can be extended to predict the consequence caused by L2 learners' failure to make sense in a particular topic discussion.

Similarly, Lin attributed her non-active involvement in C3 to Bin's talkativeness. She felt that Bin had so much to talk about that it made it impossible for others to participate in. Her tone was blaming, but like Wong and Cheng, she also agreed that Bin was an excellent conversationalist as well as a better English speaker.

Bin's active involvement, therefore, had affected the subjects' conversational performance in several ways. Bin's willingness to talk and his ability to take turns to achieve conversational involvement inevitably limited the opportunities for the three subjects to have their share of talk. What is also significant, however, is the psychological effect it had upon the three subjects. That is, the subjects' inability to get involved in a conversation, as compared to Bin's active involvement, may have reduced their self-confidence, which consequently, led to their unwillingness to talk in order not to show this 'gap'. As McCroskey and Richmond (1991) jointly argue:

Since the choice of whether to communicate is a cognitive one, it is likely to be more influenced by one's perception of competence (of which one is usually aware) than one's actual competence (of which one may be totally unaware). (McCroskey and Richmond, 1991: 27).

On the other hand, the subjects' 'non-active' involvement most of the time during C3 made them observers of what was going on. Wong, for example, made the following comment on Bin's conversational involvement as a co-conversationalist:

I think whether the native speakers are willing to talk to us depend on how much we know and how much we can talk about. They (Tony and Jane) had obviously enjoyed talking to Bin, because he knew so much about different things. So it was just like a normal chat between them.

(From the Retrospective Interview on C3)

By saying that Bin was having 'a normal chat' with the native speakers, Wong indicated her difficulty in holding 'a normal chat' with native speakers herself, a feature that may apply to many other Chinese L2 learners studying in the UK, and a perception in line with their common concerns that they have nothing to talk about with native speakers and that the talk with native speakers cannot be held at a deeper level. However, to take Bin as an example, the mere fact that the subjects came from a different sociocultural background did not necessarily lead to their disadvantageous position in NS-NNS conversations. This is not to deny the sociocultural influence upon intercultural communication, but rather, to emphasise the dialogical nature of 'self-confidence' as actively constructed through the on-going social interaction itself, and the possibility for L2 learners to co-construct conversational topics in their own favour by acquiring the necessary knowledge repertoire, such as the sociocultural knowledge of the target language group.

While the causal relation between L2 learners' perceived competence and their conversational involvement in L2 discourse fits into the framework in Figure 2.1, based on established theories (see the discussion in Chapter 2, Section 2.4), the description of learner involvement in L2 discourse as also affecting the level of common ground shared between L2 learners and the target language group is missing. In a sense, this partial understanding of the role of learner involvement was inevitable at the beginning

of the study, reflecting the paucity of interdisciplinary studies where L2 learners' WTC is concerned. As I have argued in Chapter 4, without inspiration from CA and CDA, and without insight from studies undertaken in social psychology, a holistic approach to studying learner involvement in L2 discourse could not have been possible, or, the investigation may produce misleading results. That is, the mere action of getting involved in a conversation does not always increase L2 learners' self-confidence. As my findings show, the NNS subjects' social identities as L2 learners were strengthened rather than changed where they managed to achieve active involvement in NS-NNS conversations, such as in 'information seeking/providing' and 'personal information seeking/providing' topics.

It is exactly to this point that I argue for a more social approach in studying WTC, and the need to examine learner involvement in L2 discourse as part of SLA research. My subjects' concerns that 'they don't know what to talk about with native speakers' and 'that their talk with native speakers cannot be held at a deeper level' therefore, reflect their daily struggle in establishing the common ground with the target language group. This has indeed explained why Cheng considers native speakers' willingness to learn about her own culture and background as the prerequisite for a good and meaningful conversation. With both the worldly knowledge and the cultural knowledge of the topic, L2 learners are more likely to secure conversational involvement and increase their communicative competence. More importantly, the expertise knowledge of one's own culture creates a sense of shared common ground between L2 learners and the target language group. The subjects' active involvement in C2 is such an example, in which a number of China-related topics were negotiated into the talk.

7.5.3 The NNS subjects' interest in China-related topics in C2

Starting from Topic 15, C2 can be coded as a talk on China, as each individual topic was related to China in one way or another. In 4 out of the 13 topics, Cheng initiated topics on Steve's Taiwanese wife, resulting in 3 'chat' topics and one 'opinion-providing' topic. Other topics included talks on 'Chinese food', 'Steve's trip to China', 'the highest buildings in Taipei and Shanghai', and 'a Chinese restaurant' where the customers were encouraged to fish themselves to provide the meal. All these 13 topics featured NNS active involvement.

The NNS subjects' ability to get involved was obvious, even though Steve started three topics as 'information providing'. In Topic 24, for instance, Steve mentioned the building currently under construction in Shanghai. From what were uttered, Steve seemed to know more about the building than the three subjects. However, Lin managed to achieve her active involvement through question raising and commenting, as shown here:

Extract 7.5

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        ....
322  S:  So this is going to be the new highest building=
323  L:  =So haven't, hadn't finished?
324  S:  No.
325  L:  So you know much, you [know more than us.
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(From 'A new tall building being built in Shanghai', Topic 24 in C2)

By acknowledging that Steve knew more than them about the building in Shanghai in Line 325, Lin showed the self-perceived authoritative position she was taking with these China-related topics. This self-confidence of the NNS subjects', as well as the sense of 'common ground' established along the talk, may explain why the NNS subjects appeared very active in C2, providing the evidence that L2 learners can take the discourse to their own advantage under the appropriate conversational contexts, and thus confirming the mutual influence between learner involvement and L2 learners' self-confidence, as framed in Figure 7.2.

7.6 Summary

In this chapter, I explained how learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations had affected role construction among the conversational participants and the formation of self-confidence of the subjects, supported by empirical data. Such a conclusion is in line with the social constructionist view that social identity and interpersonal relations are formed and reshaped through the micro level of social talk, particularly, through the sense of, or lack of, shared common ground between the conversational participants.

In answering the two research questions, each individual subject's topic initiations and conversational involvement under the different topic genres were examined across the six NS-NNS conversations. The findings that the NNS subjects overall were found to have achieved high conversational involvement in providing personal information, rather than participating in 'deep discussion' in 'observation' topics leads to the conclusion that the mere quantity of conversational involvement does not always generate a sense of shared common ground between the conversational participants.

The subjects' conversational involvement in C3 confirms the general view held among WTC researchers that, as a result of L2 learners' inability to get involved in NS-NNS conversations, their self-perception of their L2 competence can be reduced, leading to decreased self-confidence among L2 learners (e.g. MacIntyre,1994; MaCroskey and Richmond, 1991). The subjects' active conversational involvement in C2, on the other hand, shows that, L2 learner can actively co-construct the conversational context with their native speakers, under which they are confident enough to introduce topics that they are interested in, or, are capable of talking about. Cheng and Wong's ability to make observations in C6, as well as their ability to develop these 'observations' into deep discussions, provides the evidence that over time L2 learners' conversational involvement in NS-NNS conversations can be improved through their accumulated knowledge of the target culture. Such a perspective, as I will discuss in the next chapter, provides important implications for both language teachers and learners who are concerned with the relationships between language and its larger social context.

However, as I also pointed out in the discussion, the realisation that L2 learners have to make an effort to establish some common ground with the target language group may also confirm L2 learners' self-perceived SPD from the target language group, which in turn, affects their WTC. Therefore, further studies are needed to explore to what degree learner involvement in L2 discourse proves most effective in increasing L2 learners' perceived L2 competence and their sense of shared common ground with the target language group.

Chapter 8. Reflection and Implications

8.1 Introduction

In this study, I have demonstrated how my subjects' self-perceived social and psychological distance (SPD) from the target language group was structured to a large extent by their actual talk with the target language group, which in turn, may have affected their WTC. There are many different ways that L2 learners create and respond to their opportunities of communicating with the target language group. My decision to explore learner involvement in NS-NNS conversations emerged from the common comments made by Chinese learners of English studying in the UK: the lack of shared common topics with native speakers, and the lack of depth in talk with native speakers. Using both the interviews with the subjects (Chapter 5), and a thorough investigation of their conversations with native speakers (Chapter 6), I have constructed the interrelationship between learner involvement in L2 discourse and L2 learners' self-confidence at a discoursal level.

While the role of learner involvement in affecting L2 learners' perceived communicative competence is well acknowledged among WTC researchers (see the discussions in MaCroskey and Richmond, 1991; MacIntyre 1994; Baker and MacIntyre, 2000, just to name a few), the role of active involvement in creating the sense of 'shared common ground' between L2 learners and the target language group is missing. Consequently, studies on L2 learners' actual contact with native speakers may lead to partial understandings. As my findings show, the quantity of learner involvement in L2 discourse under the topic genres of 'information seeking/providing' and 'personal information seeking/providing' may have increased L2 learners' perceived L2 competence, the assumption that their SPD from the target language group has been reduced is questionable. Drawing on social theory and general studies in discourse analysis (CA and CDA), I argue that a vigorous construction of the role of learner involvement is not possible without looking at *what* happened during the NS-NNS interaction, and *how* these L2 experiences are perceived by L2 learners on the other hand, who 'have intentions, agency, affect, and above all histories' (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000: 155). Such a perspective reflects the social constructionist view that the

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image of self is created and recreated on the micro level of everyday social discourse, which in turn, may either limit or create further opportunities for such interaction (Bremer et al., 1996; Norton, 2000).

Through the reflection in this chapter, I will revisit the key concepts and issues that have emerged from this case study with the purpose to establish their relevance to existing theories and assumptions in SLA research. In doing so, I hope to evaluate both the strengths and the limitations of this study regarding its contribution to the understanding of L2 learning as a social practice. Based on the theoretical implications provided in Section 8.2, Section 8.3 provides the practical implications for both language teachers and learners. Section 8.4 summarises the thesis.

8.2 Evaluation and contributions of the study

The reflection I would like to make in this section involves both re-situating my study as part of SLA research based on the insights from the findings, and the effort to establish my study as a unique case study which provides a different perspective for studying the process of L2 learning in context. To start with, the discussion addresses the need to apply rigorous methods in CA (conversation analysis) and CDA (critical discourse analysis) to the investigation of NS-NNS conversations taking place in naturalistic settings, and the significance of using 'topic genre' to explore learner involvement in this study.

8.2.1 Methodological implications

Adult L2 learners differ from children L1 learners in many ways. For example, being a competent speaker in their own language, adult L2 learners know how to introduce a topic, make a quest, tell a story, or engage in an argument. Where social events carry different sociocultural meanings under different language contexts, it is often just a matter of time before L2 learners manage to acquire the appropriate etiquettes. However, what is ignored in most cross-cultural studies is the realisation that adult L2 learners also need to be aware of the knowledge repertoire shared among the members of the target language group, and the difficulty of achieving conversational involvement in

topics initiated by native speakers. Adult L2 learning in this sense, is not that different from child L1 learning that requires social interaction. The paradox of adult L2 learning, therefore, lies in the fact that although social interaction constitutes the necessary and sufficient condition for L2 learning, the condition itself is not easily accessible for L2 learners (for a similar view, see Perdue, 1982, Bremer et al, 1996, Pellegrino, 2005).

However, without obtaining access to the 'mysterious black box' of the NS-NNS interaction itself at the micro level, and without understanding L2 learners' experiences in the target language county from their own perspectives, any theorisation or assumption of social interaction is at a higher risk of being partial and subjective. The design of two parallel lines of enquiry under the research paradigm of case study, therefore, provides a research design that future studies can modify and build upon to investigate other aspects of NS-NNS interaction.

The term 'topic genre' is developed in this study with the understanding that a better view of L2 learners' conversational involvement in NS-NNS conversations cannot be achieved without setting the boundary of the conversational unit, and without looking at exactly what has been talked about between L2 learners and native speakers. While there is no lack of studies on speech genre in conversational studies, it is on the whole an area ignored in SLA research, possibly based on the assumption that L2 learners' ability to master genres in L2 is very much constrained by their competence in the language, which as a result, raises questions on the validity and reliability of the data being collected. For example, although Eggins and Slade (1997) made a thorough examination of casual conversations, and their discussion has provided one of the most inspirational sources for the particular research approach I have taken (see the discussion in Chapter 3), they have included neither 'information seeking/providing' nor 'personal information seeking/providing' as valid sites for studying the social function of genre in casual conversations. This is hardly surprising, considering that their data were collected exclusively from native speakers of English under the Australian context, and that their concern was therefore, limited to that particular group. However, the social function of speech genre in shaping and reforming social identity and interpersonal relations in NS-NNS conversations is no less significant than that between native speakers. The identification of topic genres that appeared characteristic

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of NS-NNS conversations in this case study, therefore, provides important implications for both SLA researchers and SLA practitioners.

This study has thus demonstrated how the approaches under CA and CDA can be integrated into SLA research, not only to examine the particular linguistic features and to reveal the cognitive processes in L2 acquisition, but also to explore L2 learning as a social practice. This balance is necessary, as there is an increasing awareness of the need to incorporate both the cognitive approach and the sociocultural approach to explore how different variables 'come into dynamic contact' during the process of L2 learning (Wertsch, 1998; also see Ellis, 2000; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000).

Following from the above discussion, I now address the need to rethink the role of 'target culture' in L2 learning in the next section. How much L2 learners know about the target culture not only affects their understanding of the target language, but also their opportunities to socialise with the target language group, the very condition for quality and quantity input required for L2 acquisition. This has led the discussion back to the early question I asked myself: Where should the contexts of interaction be positioned in SLA research (Chapter 1)?

8.2.2 Rethinking the role of sociocultural knowledge in L2 learning under a conversational context

With insights from discourse analysis that have been recently developed in SLA research, I argue that a full understanding of what consists of 'communicative competence' cannot be achieved without reference to the larger social world in which L2 learners live and use the language for social purposes.

The lack of 'gossiping' and 'chat' topics in most of the recorded NS-NNS conversations may simply reflect the fact that the NNS subjects and the NS participants were new acquaintances rather than established friends. What is significant is the lack of 'observation' topics in C1, C2 and C3, as compared to the subjects' active involvement under 'personal information seeking/providing' in these same talks, where they were able to secure conversational involvement by talking about themselves, or things that they were familiar with. Their inability to initiate 'observation' topics, or to achieve

conversational involvement once an observation was made by the NS participants, therefore, indicates the information and knowledge gap between the subjects and the target language group.

The data from my study suggest that there were a variety of ways that learner involvement had influenced the extent to which my subjects created and responded to the opportunities to achieve conversational involvement in the recorded NS-NNS conversations. Bremer et al. (ibid.) have taken this view further by claiming that the business of starting, maintaining and leaving the interaction is part of the process of understanding (1996: 15). Underlying this claim is the assumption that conversational participants have to maintain a level of conversational involvement to achieve at least a partial understanding. While agreeing with Bremer that conversational involvement is equally important in achieving understanding, I take the position that understanding consists of the very prerequisite for conversational involvement.

The three subjects in this study represent competent L2 learners who are able to get involved in meaningful conversation with native speakers, although they constantly showed their concern over the linguistic mistakes they made. As evidenced with conversational data, all the three subjects in my study were confident and fluent in talking about their lives and their studies in the target language. However, the subjects' confidence and fluency were likely to be topic related, or genre related, revealing a lack of common ground between the subjects and the target language group. This is because the discourse resources that L2 learners can rely on are very often culture-specific, including the particular information involved under different genre contexts, such as 'story-telling' and 'observation'. Thus, in order to follow rules of conversations and achieve conversational involvement as co-conversationalists in NS-NNS conversations, L2 learners have to first recognize the shared conceptual frameworks under which relevant information has been gathered up.

I therefore suggest that theories of 'communicative competence' should extend beyond an understanding of the appropriate rule of use in a particularly society to include an understanding that language is socially constructed at the discoursal level, such as topic construction and genre generating shared among the target language group. The sociocultural knowledge of the target language, in this sense, is regarded as the means

to the end, rather than the end itself. The acculturation model that conceptualises L2 learning as a process of becoming a member of a particular community may apply to immigrant and ethnic groups as featured in Norton and Bremer et al's studies. In the case of language students in study-abroad situations, I found Michael Byram's concept of intercultural competence (ICC) more suitable to address their practical needs (Byram, 1991, Jensen, 1995).

Recognising L2 learners' role as 'social actors' in intercultural communications, Byram and his associates brought a new perspective to what constitutes L2 learners' 'communicative competence' (Roberts, et al. 2001). With ICC, L2 learners are encouraged to gain insight into the experiences of the target language group's, not to relinquish their own culture or traditions, but to better interpret their native interlocutors' behaviours, and to critically view the differences between them and the target language group. As my data suggest, L2 learners' ability and willingness to stand between own and target culture also created opportunities for learning. Through active involvement in NS-NNS conversations based on their increased knowledge of the target language country and group, L2 learners not only increase their chance of negotiation and modification of their input and output in a meaningful way, they are also likely to be more willing to communicate with the target language group in the future as confident intercultural speakers.

In the next section, I proceed to discuss how the empirical findings from this case study contribute to practical implications for both language teachers and learners.

8.3 Implication for language teachers and learners

I remember that when I presented a paper titled *'Language Learner as the Ethnographer'* almost 4 years ago in a seminar at school, I was passionate about the notion of 'intercultural competence' used by Byram, and his suggestion that L2 learners should go about learning the targe culture to bridge the cultural differences between them and the target language group (Byram, 1991). Similarly, Jensen (1995) advocates the need for L2 learners to learn the routine of the target language group in order to adopt the role of mediator in the new culture. But, the aim for intercultural competence

among L2 learners is not without challenge. First of all, I was unable to avoid the questions of 'what is exactly culture?', and 'how culture is acquired?' My confusion was furthered when one Chinese student asked: 'Why should I learn about their culture when I can communicate with them with the linguistic knowledge I have?'

My inability to deal with these essential questions consequently affected my construction of 'language learners as ethnographers', as the ambiguity of what language learners should do to qualify as 'intercultural speakers' looked as uncertain as the notion of 'culture' itself. This was not helped by the framework constructed by Byram and associates (Roberts, et al., 2001), who showed more concern over conceptualising the importance of intercultural competence, rather than providing a description of how sociocultural differences actually affect the opportunity for learning. Thus, although they have written a book length report offering guidance on how L2 learners do their ethnography in L2 learning, they did not address the very challenges L2 learners are faced with as a particular social group.

Such ambiguity, as I have now realised, was an inevitable consequence of the lack of empirical studies on L2 learners' actual contact with native speakers taking place in naturalistic settings. Without a first-hand description of what has been talked about between L2 learners and native speakers, and without an understanding of L2 learners' language experiences from their own perspectives, it is doubtful how much we, as language researchers and practitioners, can draw a clear picture of how SLA is facilitated in a study-abroad situation.

The depiction that learner involvement under different topic genres forms and reshapes L2 learners' self-confidence does not tell us anything about how exactly language is learned or acquired. What we can inform L2 learners about, however, is the dynamic formation of social identity through social interaction, which in turn, affects their SPD from the target language group. More precisely, my findings suggest that, by making observations, sharing stories, and perhaps just by taking the initiative to chat, L2 learners can actively construct their own 'self' in their own favour during their L2 discourses with native speakers. L2 learners are particularly encouraged to initiate 'observation' topics, where a positive link between topic initiation and active involvement was identified in my findings, and through which a sense of 'shared

common ground' can be generated. However, not all my subjects' attempts to share their observations were successful. For example, Wong's topic initiation of 'fox hunting' ended up in her 'non-involvement' status in C3, because she did not possess the needed knowledge repertoire to make her conversational contribution. L2 learners are thus encouraged to learn about the target culture and the target language group with a purpose; that is, they are gaining the access to legitimate discourse constructed by the dominant group (for more discussions, see Bourdieu, 1977; Norton, 2000).

It is perhaps true that L2 learners can communicate with native speakers without making any effort to learn about the target culture. However, the quality of such 'communication' is questionable, which throws further doubt on how such contact facilitates L2 learning, if we take the position that L2 learning is a social practice, and that an L2 learner' social identity is socially constructed through active participation in the target language community, ideally, with a sense of shared common ground with the target language group.

Language teachers, therefore, have the responsibility to draw L2 learners' attention to the need to learn the target culture. In Norton's study, it took some time for her participants to realise the importance of the knowledge of the target culture in their L2 discourse with native speakers, and thus required their ESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) courses to cover cultural practice (Norton, 2000: 136). In the case of language students, such as the Chinese participants featured in this case study, who only spend 1-2 years in the target language country, by the time they realise the sociocultural influence on their L2 learning, sometimes in a disappointing way, it is already the time to go home.

Many of these L2 learners are not well prepared. According to Pellegrino (2005), although EFL (Teaching English as a Foreign language) teachers encourage their students to go abroad or make friends with native speakers, they often do not adequately prepare them to deal with common social, psychological, and cultural barriers. Having not set foot in the target language country, it is likely that these EFL teachers are not aware of the power relationships their students will be faced with while studying and living abroad. It is also true, however, that EFL teachers' knowledge of the cultural differences is too limited to be able to provide the appropriate guidance and suggestions.

The task of preparing L2 Learners for their communication with native speakers outside of the classroom has come to the ESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) teachers. Norton has argued that ESL teachers should take seriously the experiences of language learners and to understand the opportunities they have for communication outside of the classroom. However, as Norton also acknowledges, it is almost impractical for ESL teachers to achieve such a goal considering that each student comes with his/her own history, experiences and expectations. What ESL teachers are able to do, in my view, is to make the student aware of the cultural differences and the possibility that such cultural differences may stand as communicative barriers.

In other words, the students should be encouraged to be language ethnographers themselves and to maximise their interactive opportunities based on their own understanding of what constitutes 'communicative competence'. This is in line with the findings provided by Yashima et al., who claim that L2 learners should work hard 'to secure their places in the new environment (L2 learning environment)' and 'to change the dynamism of interaction' by themselves rather than 'leaving them to the empathy/control of partners in intercultural interactions' (2004: 122). In my data, the opportunities the Chinese subjects were given to talk about their own culture and things they were familiar proved essential to construct their social positions as co-conversationalist, and to increase their self-confidence. However, it is equally important to know that the responsibility of creating such opportunities lies more in L2 learners than their native interlocutors in study-abroad situations.

8.4 Evaluation of the case study as a particular site to understand L2 learners' language experiences

Since my interest in NS-NNS conversations started almost five years ago, a number of research projects have been reported and published investigating L2 learners' language experiences in the target country. The recently emerged interest in the dynamic relationship between L2 learning and its larger social context within the area of SLA research has provided a timely inspiration for this study. For example, the intimate description and analysis of L2 learners' language experiences in Norton's (2000) study has given me the confidence to present my own case study with the belief that my

subjects' unique L2 experiences will shed some light on the role of interaction in L2 learning in general, and the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse in particular. The choice of a particular case, on the other hand, makes it different from other similar studies on L2 experiences in a number of ways. The particular participants and the particular conversational contexts involved, for instance, have decided that the construction of social power is only minimally featured in this study.

This is not to say that the issue of power relation is not interfering with social interaction at the micro-level through turn-by-turn verbal exchanges, nor applying to Chinese L2 learners as a cultural group. In fact, as revealed in my data, the subjects felt that the target language group were not friendly to Chinese people. For example, at the beginning of this study, Lin felt native speakers had 'racial prejudice' against her. Almost six months later, Cheng talked about how 'other people' (people outside the academic world) showed little respect to her cultural background. Norton (2000) has argued:

> Without incorporating theories of power in SLA, the nature of participation in communication events may not only remain undefined, but unexplained. (Norton, 2000: 109)

While agreeing with Norton that it is important to incorporate notions of power into theories of SLA, I consider my subjects as distinguished from the immigrant participants concerned in Norton's study in one important way. While Norton's study involved L2 learners who were immigrant groups who had come to settle down in the target language country, and whose existence relied on their social relations to their new social community, my subjects were students whose stay in the target country was generally between 1-2 years. Their relation to the target country can be defined as 'travellers who are having some different life experiences in a foreign country'. My subjects acknowledged their differences from the target language group, but also regarded such differences as one of the reasons why they were here. Their willingness to learn about the target culture and the target language group was featured in their conversations with the native speakers through 'information seeking'. The native participants on the other hand, had taken the responsibility to be the host and the hostess, and were genuinely trying to impress their guests with hospitality. In so doing, they had helped to construct the egalitarian relationships between them and the NNS subjects. It

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was exactly this lack of power pressure that made the role of learner involvement a particularly salient factor in constructing the participants' self, supporting my earlier discussion on the role of conversational content in forming and shaping interpersonal relations in casual conversation (see the discussion in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2) Therefore, what makes my subjects different from Norton's, lies very much in the fact that my subjects could 'afford' to isolate themselves when confronted with power pressure, or 'when the experiences are not pleasant' (Bremer et al. 1996). Wong's comment in Interview Three may summarise the social situations that Chinese students have defined for themselves while studying and living in the target language country:

71   .... *Maybe I was more willing to talk to native speakers before. At that time, I felt*
72   *that I had to take the opportunity to talk to them. But now, for example, if you*
73   *don't like to talk to me, why should I talk to you? It is true, you know, I don't think*
74   *I should force myself just because of the sheer purpose of practising my English.*

(Wong: Interview Three)

Similar to the immigrant participants in Norton's study, my subjects' motivation to improve their English remained eight months after they started their MA course at the University. While in Norton's study, the immigrant participants' willingness to communicate with the target language group was not deterred by their negative experiences, the NNS subjects in my study sought for alternatives to practise their English. For example, Lin revealed in Interview Two that she chose not to speak to the nurses at the hospital, where she held a part-time job and insisted on learning English on her own. Cheng, on the other hand, regarded watching TV as an alternative to improve her understanding of the language, as well as her knowledge of the target culture and people.

'Being allowed' to stay away from the target language group has in a way justified my earlier claim that the six NS-NNS recorded conversations comprised one part of the subjects' overall L2 experiences. My friendship with the subjects remained when my data collection completed in late June, 2005. I was informed that their social contact with native speakers was limited to the necessary transactional encounters in their daily lives, and to the tutorials with their native speaking tutors. Being busy with their course work was of course one major reason why their time for socialisation had been reduced

on the whole. However, it was also likely that such alienation from the target language group had resulted from the subjects' self-perceived SPD from the target language group, increased through their actual contact with them.

In this case study, I did not describe how the NS group judged their non-native interlocutors. Although some retrospective views were elicited informally from the NS participants regarding the NNS participants' performance, the NS group's conversational involvement, on the whole, was not given the same degree of analysis as the NNS group. The reason for not involving the NS participants as part of the case study was to retain the 'naturalistic' nature of these NS-NNS conversations. Although I arranged the meetings as a mutual friend of the two groups, five of the six NS-NNS conversations were recorded when the native participants sincerely invited the NNS subjects for tea, or for dinner in one instance. Thus, as promised, these meetings were kept as normal social occasions for the NS participants in order to reduce any pressure that would have otherwise been caused.

What this study is able to show, however, is that even with the native speakers' willingness to talk to the three subjects, the ideal description of 'natural language learning as an open and stimulating environment' is still under question. This is because what L2 learners can do with their L2 discourse is ultimately affected by how much they share with the target language group as social beings, as well as their knowledge of the language itself. The notion of 'common ground' is only a relative conception, as it is constantly negotiated between L2 learners and their native interlocutors. However, it is likely that the more effort L2 learners make in learning about the target culture, the more common topics can be co-constructed, sometimes with more depth, in NS-NNS conversations.

8.5 Limitations of this case study

As a case study, the generalisation of the findings and conclusions to a larger group is limited by the small number of participants in this study. Although I examined the NNS subjects' conversational involvement across the six NS-NNS conversations as both individuals and a group, I was unable to explore the sociocultural significance that

underlies their beliefs and values about what constituted 'a good and meaningful conversation'. In a similar way, with the small number of Chinese participants involved, caution must be taken in extending the findings to all Chinese students as a cultural group. However, the conceptualisation of the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse makes it possible to formulate assumptions about the cultural patterns to be examined among a larger number of participants in future studies.

The need to test the conversational involvement patterns identified from a case study with a larger number of participants is not to reduce case study to merely the initial stage for quantitative research as some researchers would like to claim. I have already argued fiercely that one of the strengths of a case study lies in its ability to study the issue in depth and in context, instead of its applicability in the general sense. However, the defensive position of a case study should not prohibit any effort to combine qualitative research with quantitative measures of larger populations either. Therefore, it would be interesting to apply the culture-specific topics identified in this study to a larger population, and to examine whether similar results would be obtained; in this case, whether the subjects' conversational involvement patterns under the different topic genres would apply to other similar groups of Chinese ESL learners. It would also be interesting to explore, given no constraints on the language, what topics Chinese students tend to bring into their conversations among themselves: Do they like gossips more than native speakers do? Or, would they favour making observations about their daily lives? The list could go on.

It is also necessary to note that there are other ways to explore the role of learner involvement in L2 discourse. The examination of topic genres in casual conversations is decided by the particular theoretical approaches that I took. Future studies should investigate how other situational variables, such as gender, status and familiarity among the conversational participants, also affect learner involvement. The fact that all the native interlocutors involved in this study were willing to talk to the subjects, and some were interested in learning about Chinese people and Chinese culture means the findings cannot be applied to any NS-NNS conversations in naturalistic settings. The theories here are based on the experiences of a single group of three Chinese L2 learners studying in a particular country at a particular time. Naturally, detailed aspects particular to Chinese and British cultures will remain specific to this group or other

similar groups. However, the implications drawn from this study sheds some light on other study-abroad situations.

8.6 Summary of this thesis

After years of hard work, finally it comes the time to organise all the pieces together and to let the work go as a complete thesis. However, the word 'complete' can only be used in its superficial sense; that is, the eight chapters have been put together, each making part of the research process, with the final two chapters drawing the conclusion to the research questions and summarising the thesis. The journey of discovery that has accompanied this study can hardly be described as 'coming to an end'.

My sincere thanks go to all the participants in this study. For the three NNS subjects, I also owe them an apology, for not being able to finish my data analysis before they left the UK. I remember how curious they were about my study; and on many occasions, they asked me how I thought about their conversations with the native speakers, and how they should improve their English. Lin was the most supportive one among the three, simply because her longer stay in the UK made her a better observer of Chinese students' L2 experiences in the target language country than the other two, and thus appreciated my 'research puzzles' about NS-NNS conversations.

As a researcher, I took the responsibility not to reveal my research assumptions to my subjects throughout the data-collecting period. It was natural though, as I was not sure about what I was looking for, or what I could get from the data. At that stage, I was as puzzled as Lin, who felt there was something characteristic to NS-NNS conversations that made her L2 experiences unsatisfactory, but didn't quite understand why. I was probably more sensitive than my subjects about my own L2 experiences, and my instinct told me that my insufficient knowledge of the target culture always set the barrier in my conversations with native speakers. It was only a hunch of course, but I felt almost amoral not to share it with my subjects when I was asked for suggestions on how to better communicate with native speakers. As a consequence, it was perhaps not a coincidence that all the three subjects had chosen in the last interview to comment on their increased knowledge of the target culture, and the fact that such knowledge made

them better conversationalists in NS-NNS conversations. Their comments were featured in their conversational performance, such as Wong and Lin's active involvement in 'observation' topics in C6. However, it was rather naïve to have assumed that my subjects would choose to achieve active conversational involvement just because I wished them so. It is to this point that I take the position that the quality of the study was not jeopardised, although I might have influenced my subjects in some way by being a friend who shared their concerns about L2 learning.

A few months ago, a native speaker did me a favour to proof-read this thesis. When we went through the points together, he would suddenly exclaim: 'Oh, yes! I know, I know...'; Another time, he just smiled, and said to me reflectively: 'We were doing that as native speakers, weren't we?' This 'tingling' feeling, is what I expect to find in my readers, whether they are L2 learners or native speakers. To reveal what is unaware through critical analysis of the ordinary and the mundane is what makes research matter. There are many 'truths' about L2 learning, and all the vigorous studies that have been carried out to search for 'truth' contribute to our understanding of L2 learning as a social practice, though rather a complicated one. I hope this study has just done that.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.

Standard Ethics Protocol

The purpose of this study is to explore NS–NNS interaction in second language learning with its specific focus on Chinese ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. I would be very appreciated if you are willing to participate in this research project.

The study involves no special experiments on you or any disturbance to your normal life and study. The whole study will last a few months, during which you will be expected to help in the following ways:

1. Three sessions of questionnaires will be administrated at different stages of the study;
2. Regular interviews;
3. Some of your conversations with native speakers will be recorded. These conversations will either be organized by the researcher with your permission, or to be recorded with your assistance in other naturalistic settings.

I would also like to assure you that as a participant in this study you have several very definite rights:

1. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary;
2. The recordings will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher herself;
3. If the excerpts of the interviews and the conversations will be made part of the final research report, under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that you agree to participate in this study.

_____(signed)
_____(Printed)
_____(dated)

Appendix 2.

Data collecting timetable

Research Methods / Research Purposes / Time Schedules	Researching on the subjects' WTC	Conversation Analysis
Oct. 20th, 2004 (Week 1)	Getting access to the subjects: Background Information Questionnaire (BIQ)	
Oct. 29th – Nov. 3rd, 2004 (Week 2)	Follow-up interviews, with each lasting about 15-20 minutes, two were tape-recorded (Interview One)	
Nov. 3rd, 2004 (Week 3)		NS-NNS conversation 1 (C1) Participants: Lin (NNS), Cheng (NNS), Tony (NS) and Ping (researcher) Occasion: Tea talk, Venue: Tony's house Duration: 25'51"
Nov. 3rd - Nov. 5th, 2004 (Week 3)		Retrospective interviews on C1
Nov. 11th, 2004 (Week 4)		NS-NNS conversation 2 (C2) Participants: Lin (NNS), Cheng (NNS), Wong (NNS) and Steve (NS) Occasion: informal conversation Venue: one of the seminar rooms at the University Duration: 11'09"
Nov. 15th – Nov. 19th, 2004 (Week 5)		Retrospective interviews on C2
Feb. 7th- Feb. 11th, 2005 (Week 17)	Questionnaire on the subjects' L2 experiences (QL2) Follow-up interviews, with each interview lasting about 15 to 20 minutes, all tape-recorded (Interview Two)	
Feb.11th, 2005 (Week 17)		NS-NNS conversation 3 (C3) Participants: all the three

		NNS subjects, Tony (NS), Jane (NS), Bin (NNS, boyfriend of Cheng), and Ping (researcher) Occasion: after-dinner talk Venue: Tony's house Duration: 18'13"
Feb. 11-15th, 2005 (Week 17 and Week 18)		Retrospective interviews on C3
May 9th – 13th, 2005 (Week 30)	Questionnaire on the subjects' L2 experiences (QL2) Follow-up interviews, with each interview lasting about 15 to 20 minutes, and all tape-recorded (Interview Three)	
June 6th, 2005 (Week 34)		NS-NNS conversation 4 (C4) Participants: Lin (NNS) and Tony (NS) Occasion: tea talk Venue: Tony's house Duration: 26'36"
June 7th, 2005 (Week 34)		Retrospective interviews on C4
June 15th, 2005 (Week 35)		NS-NNS conversation 5 (C5) Participants: Cheng (NNS), Wong (NNS) and Helen (NS) Occasion: tea talk Venue: Helen's house Duration: 49'23"
June 15th- 17th, 2005 (Week 35)		Retrospective interviews on C5
June 17th, 2005 (Week 35)		NS-NNS conversation 6 (C6) Participants: Lin (NNS), Wong (NNS), Tony (NS) and Jane (NS) Occasion: before-dinner talk Venue: In Tony and Jane's garden Duration: 42'40"
June 17th, 2005 (Week 35)		Retrospective interviews on C6

Appendix 3.

3.1 Background Information Questionnaire (BIQ) *

Please fill in the blanks or tick the items where appropriate

(1) Name: _____

(2) Age: _____

(3) Sex: Male_____   Female _____

(4) Educational background:

    a. Bachelor's degree
    b. Master's degree
    c. Others (please specify_____)

What is the course/subject for your highest degree?

_____

(5) When did you graduate from college/university?

_____

(6) Have you taken any TOFEL or IELTS test?

    a. Yes
    b. No

If yes, could you please tell me your scores?

		Day/month/year
TOFEL_____	Date of taking the test____/_____/____	
IELTS_____	Date of taking the test____/_____/____	

(7) How long have you been in the UK?

___ day(s) ____week(s) ____month(s) ____year(s)

(8) Is this your first time in this country?

    a. Yes
    b. No

If no, then how many times have you been to the UK?

____time(s)

For about how long all together?

    a. Less than a week
    b. 1 week to 1 month

---

* adapted version from the questionnaire devised and used by Hyland, F. (2004)

c. 1 month to 6 months
d. 6 months to 1 year
e. More than a year

For what reasons: (choose more than one if appropriate)

a. Exchange scheme
b. Language course
c. Visiting friends or relatives
d. Holiday
e. Working
f. University course requirement
g. Other

(9) What is your purpose in taking this course? (choose more than one if appropriate)

a. To obtain a higher educational qualification
b. To gain more knowledge in this area
c. To improve English
d. Other reasons

If you choose 'other reasons' for question 9, what are they?

_____

_____

(10) Which of the following statements best describes your current level of English?

a. My English is weak and I need to improve it considerably
b. My English is reasonably good, but I still have a lot to learn
c. My English is good, but there is still some room for improvement
d. My English is nearly as good as native speakers and I don't think I need to develop it further

(11) Can you describe your confidence in each of the following aspects of English?

	Very confident		Uncertain	Not very confident at all	
Knowledge of the British culture	5	4	3	2	1
Knowledge of the British people	5	4	3	2	1
Using English in a classroom setting	5	4	3	2	1
Communication for social purposes	5	4	3	2	1

(12) Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your previous English learning experience before you started the course.

	Strongly agree		uncertain	Strongly disagree	
I rarely used English	5	4	3	2	1
I used English a lot in my work or for other academic purposes	5	4	3	2	1
I used English a lot for social purposes	5	4	3	2	1
I rarely had opportunities to speak to native speakers	5	4	3	2	1
I spoke to native speakers a lot for social purposes	5	4	3	2	1
I looked for opportunities to use and improve my English in everyday life	5	4	3	2	1
I avoided using English except when it was really necessary	5	4	3	2	1

(13) Please indicate how useful you think these activities will be for improving your English?

	Very useful		uncertain	Not useful at all	
Lecture and seminar discussion	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with native speakers outside of the classroom	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with other international students	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with Chinese friends in English	5	4	3	2	1
Watching TV programmes	5	4	3	2	1
Reading newspapers and magazines	5	4	3	2	1
Reading academic books and articles	5	4	3	2	1
Watching videos/DVDs/VCDs	5	4	3	2	1

N.B: Extra questionnaire item for Lin, who had already been in the target language country for a year when this questionnaire was conducted

(14) Please indicate the frequency you used English in the following situations.

	Very often		Sometimes		Almost never
Lecture and seminar discussion	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with native speakers outside of the classroom	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with other international students	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with Chinese friends in English	5	4	3	2	1
Watching TV programmes	5	4	3	2	1
Reading newspapers and magazines	5	4	3	2	1
Reading academic books and articles	5	4	3	2	1
Watching videos/DVDs/VCDs	5	4	3	2	1

3.2 Questionnaire on L2 learning experiences (QL2)

(1) Which of the following statements best describes your current level of English?

a. My English is weak and I need to improve it considerably
b. My English is reasonably good, but I still have a lot to learn
c. My English is good, but there is still some room for improvement
d. My English is nearly as good as native speaker and I don't think I need to develop it further

(2) Can you describe your confidence in each of the following aspects of English?

	Very confident		Uncertain		Not very confident at all
Knowledge of the British culture	5	4	3	2	1
Knowledge of the British people	5	4	3	2	1
Using English in a classroom setting	5	4	3	2	1
Communication for social purposes	5	4	3	2	1

(3) Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your previous English learning experience since you started the course.

	Strongly agree		uncertain		Strongly disagree
I rarely used English	5	4	3	2	1
I used English a lot in my work or for other academic purposes	5	4	3	2	1
I used English a lot for social purposes	5	4	3	2	1
I rarely had opportunities to speak to native speakers	5	4	3	2	1
I spoke to native speakers a lot for social purposes	5	4	3	2	1
I looked for opportunities to use and improve my English in everyday life	5	4	3	2	1
I avoided using English except when it was really necessary	5	4	3	2	1

(4) Please indicate how useful you think these activities are for improving your English?

	Very useful		uncertain	Not useful at all	
Lecture and seminar discussion	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with native speakers outside of the classroom	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with other international students	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with Chinese friends in English	5	4	3	2	1
Watching TV programmes	5	4	3	2	1
Reading newspapers and magazines	5	4	3	2	1
Reading academic books and articles	5	4	3	2	1
Watching videos/DVDs/VCDs	5	4	3	2	1

(5) Please indicate the frequency you used English in the following situations.

	Very often		Sometimes	Almost never	
Lecture and seminar discussion	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with native speakers outside of the classroom	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with other international students	5	4	3	2	1
Speaking with Chinese friends in English	5	4	3	2	1
Watching TV programmes	5	4	3	2	1
Reading newspapers and magazines	5	4	3	2	1
Reading academic books and articles	5	4	3	2	1
Watching videos/DVDs/VCDs	5	4	3	2	1

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Appendix 4.

Chinese Context of English Learning

4.1 Limitations on culture learning

Originally, China felt no need of the West, and in fact deliberately avoided all contact for fear of cultural contamination. Early in the last century when English teaching was first featured in the syllabus of schools, the method of teaching was traditional, with emphasis on reading and translation. There was much grammar and vocabulary learning, with pronunciation learned by imitation and repetition. Then after 1949, the goal of English learning was clearly stated as being to serve the New Republic. Textbooks were chosen or written to suit the country's own situation, in which the sociocultural dimension of the language was little featured (Boyle, 2000). The goal of language learning was limited to literature reading and the preparation for tests.

The initial progress in ELT (English Language Teaching) in China took place when English became part of the college Entrance Examinations. The Ministry of Education issued guidelines for textbook makers, requesting that English textbooks should include materials on the Western culture, and also listening and speaking practice as well (Ji, 2002). However, there are still some limitations on ELT education in China. First, there is a lack of qualified foreign language teachers who have experience of residing in Western countries. The lack of cross-cultural awareness common among most language teachers means that the teaching practice is focused on English grammar and vocabulary, on linguistic phenomena rather than on reading the content itself. Thus, it is no surprise to see a Chinese student who has a very satisfactory mark on his English examination cannot express himself well in English with his foreign peer. There is a popular saying about this extravagant way of learning English as 'dumb and deaf' English (Ji, 2002).

In the early 1990s, CLT (Communicative language teaching) was first introduced by SEDC (State Education Development Commission) to Chinese language classrooms, responding to the 'communicative move' as demanded by Chinese L2 learners.

Functional items were listed to prepare students for communication in different social settings. More authentic materials, either audio or video, were introduced to the classroom. In some classrooms for advanced learners, cultural knowledge of the target country and people was required as the fifth skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The functional approach frequently used in CLT was believed to help 'produce and understand language which is appropriate to specific social situations' (Tarone & Yule, 1989: 68). Instead of drills to practice the English present progressive, for example, there are drills to practice how to ask for permission. However, the danger lies in the underestimation of the complex processes involved in natural interactive use of language with the implication that a predictable relationship exists between each communicative function and specific linguistic expressions.

Yet, despite the lack of cross-cultural awareness in English teaching and learning practice, teachers and students have to face another reality under the current higher educational system: the grammar-focused examination pressure (Liao, 2000).

4.2 The English testing system in China

Under the current four-year programme of higher education in China, college students must sit the CET (College English Test) Band 4 at the end of their second year. Failure would result in their access to higher levels being denied. As a national test for all college students, it is undoubtedly putting similar requirements on language teachers, whatever curriculum they might be adopting. The tests comprise listening comprehension, reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary, and guided writing. The format is very similar to that of the TOEFL. The relatively high level of language competence it stands for has made the qualification one of the standards for would-be employers to refer to. Thus some students will set CET Band 6 as the next target after they get a Band 4 certificate.

Although this testing system has ensured language learners' linguistic competence, especially in grammar and reading, it does not fit the call for CLT approach for preparing students for face-to-face communication in real situations. On the other hand, under the standard curriculum, reading seems to take up the bulk of the students' time. In Zhang's research, Chinese language learners have little exposure to any English reading materials other than their textbooks (Zhang, 2001). Classroom learning and interaction with the language teacher and with their peers provide the main way of using the target language. This may best explain the sociocultural gap in terms of language use between Chinese L2 learners and native speakers. As Bell points out, 'students may have a high level of English language, but of a variety more appropriate for intranational use in their own country than in the host country' (Bell, 2000: 2).

Appendix 5.

5.1 Interview One: Follow-up interview on BIQ *

5.1.1 Interview with Cheng (30/10/04, translated from Chinese into English)

1   **Researcher: What are your main purposes for taking this MA course?**
2   **Cheng:** Originally, my reason for coming here was my boyfriend. He came to
3   UK a year before to do his postgraduate study. So to be honest, I didn't really
4   know what this course was for. But since I started it, I think I'm more sure about
5   one thing. That is, I hope this one year of study will benefit my profession in the
6   future, I mean, not hugely, but in some way, lay a solid base for my knowledge
7   in this field, such as how to research and basically, how to teach English. I
8   would also like to learn more about the language itself. I found the unit
9   *Describing language* very useful, because it explains the basic structures and
10   elements of language. These were the aspects that I wasn't sure about before
11   during my own teaching, so this course offers a good opportunity to tackle these
12   weak points of mine. For example, at least, I know how to improve my
13   understanding of English.
14   **Researcher: <referring to Cheng's reply to BIQ> In Question (10), you**
15   **describe your current level of English as 'reasonably good, but still a lot to**
16   **learn', so what do you mean by 'still a lot to learn?**
17   **Cheng:** There are two aspects about it. On the one hand, I hope to improve my
18   academic skills, as I already mentioned. On the other hand, I would like to learn
19   more about the daily use of English to improve my communicative ability, such
20   as my spoken English, my pronunciation, and the issue of how to use the
21   language more authentically. The academic aspect includes learning more
22   research methods, and generally broadening the range of my understanding in
23   language teaching. I need to read more.
24   **Researcher: In Question (11), you describe your knowledge of British**
25   **culture and British people as confident. Can you explain why?**
26   **Cheng:** It is based on my contact with my English classmates. There are of
27   course differences between us, but I don't think there exists that much 'culture
28   shock'. I mean, we can communicate with each other. They understand what I
29   mean, and so do I. Communication for social purposes is important for learning
30   English. So it would be good to make more friends, especially with students
31   from different countries.
32   **Researcher: You mentioned here in Question (12) that you used English a**
33   **lot in work as well as for social purposes in China, so can you explain a bit**
34   **more?**
35   **Cheng:** Using English for social purposes? Yes, that's due to my part-time job
36   with an international company that involves communicating with foreign
37   consulting experts and government officials in English. We also had foreign
38   exchange students at our school learning Chinese. I made friends with them and
39   practised my English with them. So in terms of motivation, I would say that 'I
40   looked for opportunities to use and improve my English in everyday life'.
41   **Researcher: Can you tell me about your responses to Question (13)? Which**

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* In total, 8 full transcripts for the interviews are provided here, obtained from the three rounds of interviews at three different stages of this study. The first interview with Wong was not recorded, therefore, the researcher's transcription notes are offered instead of transcript. The questions raised by the Researcher (Ping) are emphasised in bold.

42 of the following activities do you think you found useful for improving your
43 English?
44 **Cheng:** Yes, but first, can I say something about the choices you listed here?
45 Because I don't think lecture should be categorised together with seminar. There
46 are differences between the two. I don't think going to lectures helped me a lot
47 with my English. I was only accepting things at a lecture, and there is no
48 communication or discussion with other people, and not much chance of
49 expressing myself either. It was more about listening. Then at the end of day, I
50 wasn't sure about how much I've understood or how much I've learned.
51 Seminars are different. It offers the opportunity for us to communicate with each
52 other. I think the process of learning is a process of communicating and
53 accumulating knowledge.
54 **Researcher: Do you regard speaking to native speakers as one of the useful**
55 **ways of improving your English?**
56 **Cheng:** Generally speaking, yes, but it depends whether this native speaker has
57 an accent with his/her English or not <laughs>. The best thing about talking to
58 native speakers is you can learn their ways of expressing things. You can also
59 improve your intonation and pronunciation by imitating them.
60 **Researcher: You have several native speakers of English on this MA course,**
61 **so how do you feel about your contact with them? Did you feel confident**
62 **speaking to them?**
63 **Cheng:** I'm afraid not very confident. Sometimes, if I expressed myself very
64 well, I would feel confident; but on the other hand, if I found myself continually
65 making errors during the communication, such as using the wrong tenses or
66 plurals, or choosing the wrong words, I would get very upset. But I do learn
67 from my mistakes. So the next time I spoke to them again, I would try not to
68 make similar errors again. I think this is actually how we build up our
69 confidence.
70 **Researcher: Can you understand them (the native speakers on the same**
71 **course) most of the time?**
72 **Cheng:** Yeah. I haven't got any problem with listening. My worry is how to
73 express myself more fluently and more clearly during communication.
74 **Researcher: Have you thought about how you are going to improve your**
75 **English in the future?**
76 **Cheng:** Firstly, I think it will be very useful to attend social activities and make
77 new friends, I mean, when the pressure of study isn't too much. It would also be
78 helpful to have some native speakers around where we live. That's why I'm
79 moving <laughs>.

5.1.2 Interview with Lin (26/10/04, conducted in English)

1   **Researcher: What did you do before you came here?**
2   **Lin:** I was an English teacher at a junior high school, for 9 years.
3   **Researcher: This is your first time in England. You have been here for more**
4   **than one year, so what did you do during that year?**
5   **Lin:** In a language school, in the city centre.
6   **Researcher: Was it good?**
7   **Lin:** Not bad.
8   **Researcher: Do you think you've improved your English a lot?**
9   **Lin:** Mmm, yeah, because, it's my first time to come to a foreign country to
10   learn English. Yeah, it should be improved, should be helpful.
11   **Researcher: What are your purposes for taking this course?**
12   **Lin:** Mm, one purpose, I think, to get this degree is a good thing to ( ). Another
13   thing is, if you don't learn something very questioning, very challenging, you
14   won't improve a lot.
15   **Researcher: What do you mean by this?**
16   **Lin:** If I've just stayed in a language school, maybe I'll, stay at the same level as
17   where I was. Because you haven't got much challenge.
18   **Researcher: So what sort of challenge are you expecting?**
19   **Lin:** I mean, coming to England, to meet a great environment, to meet more
20   people, who are at a higher level.
21   **Researcher: <pointing to the questionnaire> you found your English is**
22   **reasonably good, but you still have a lot to learn. In what aspects are you**
23   **expecting to improve? – listening, speaking, reading or writing?**
24   **Lin:** I think it should be vocabulary.
25   **Researcher: Mm, interesting. Can you give me an example?**
26   **Lin:** For example...<thinking>
27   **Researcher: During reading, or listening, or**
28   **Lin:** Yeah, I think the most thing, the most obstacle for us, to speak to many
29   people, to others, to native speakers, is not anything else, not grammar, just
30   vocabulary.
31   **Researcher: So you would like to improve a lot. But, if you have enough**
32   **vocabulary, you would be able to communicate very well with native**
33   **speakers particularly?**
34   **Lin:** Yeah.
35   **Researcher: You have a lot of confidence in English grammar, don't you?**
36   **Lin:** Yeah.
37   **Researcher: What is interesting here, is you've been here for more than one**
38   **year, then you say that your knowledge of British culture is not very**
39   **confident. Why is that?**
40   **Lin:** I think it's very difficult to, to talk deeply with native speakers. Maybe,
41   there are some racial problems, some racial thing. Then I think is the personality.
42   I didn't, didn't, I'm quite, not very open to others. And another thing is, maybe I
43   can't find very interesting topics to talk about with them. If we talk about some
44   general topics that I've talked about that for years, so I don't want to come back
45   anymore. If talk some deeper subjects, maybe I haven't got that common cultural
46   backgrounds, or some history backgrounds, so, maybe, I'm afraid it won't go
47   anywhere.
48   **Researcher: What do you think might be the racial reasons for that?**

49 **Because you don't sound very positive about it. Can you think of any**
50 **examples?**
51 **Lin:** I didn't have some exact experience about that. I just think, normally,
52 because Chinese population is very large, and everywhere, you can see Chinese
53 people. Because we are foreigners than others, people from other countries, so
54 many of our classmates did do some bad things and gave them some bad images,
55 especially when they were working, sometimes, do, they are not, because they
56 are, we are poor, and sometimes we just find some shortcuts, to achieve
57 something. So we lose some, we lose,
58 **Researcher: So they don't have much trust in us.**
59 **Lin:** I prefer to make friends with Chinese people.
60 **Researcher: You prefer?**
61 **Lin:** It is easy to get on with them. Not easy to, to get on with people from other
62 countries. I think, some people make foreigner friends, just want to practise
63 English. I don't think it is worth.
64 **Researcher: When you first came here, did you think in the same way? Like**
65 **when you first came here, did you tell yourself, 'no, I'm not going to make**
66 **any English friends?'**
67 **Lin:** Mm
68 **Researcher: Or did you think so after this one year?**
69 **Lin:** Mm, actually I didn't want to use that effort to practise my English. I think,
70 at the same time, you lose many things. I don't want to,
71 **Researcher: Lose many things?**
72 **Lin:** Like, if you want to make friends, you, the meaning you want to, the real
73 thing you want to get, the confidence from them, or something makes you very
74 comfortable. Making friends, the purpose is not just to practise English.
75 **Researcher: Do you look for opportunities to use and improve your**
76 **English? We've actually covered that. So you didn't look for opportunities**
77 **to speak to native speakers?**
78 **Lin:** When I just come, I looked for. But at the moment, I am not.
79 **Researcher: Do you think you are avoiding opportunities of using English**
80 **unless it is necessary?**
81 **Lin:** Mm, I'm not avoiding that, but I'm not looking for opportunities, either.
82 **Researcher: You do think lecture and seminar discussions are useful, but**
83 **you are not quite sure about speaking to native speakers. So you don't think**
84 **that it will help you with your English?**
85 **Lin:** No. If you just came here, I think it will help. As I said, just some basic
86 topics.
87 **Researcher: But if you can, you know, establish some good relationships**
88 **with somebody, and then you can go further each time on your topic, then**
89 **you have something, I mean, in common to talk about. Do you think that**
90 **will help or not?**
91 **Lin:** If it is with some classmates, it will be helpful, because you have the same
92 knowledge background. If you talk about, for example, in a restaurant, maybe
93 you don't understand each other, maybe he doesn't want to talk about education,
94 or teaching at university, and you don't want to talk about pub or this kind of
95 thing...
96 **Researcher: Ok. If you do speak to native speakers, what are the possible**
97 **situations?**
98 **Lin:** When I'm doing my shopping, or seeing my Doctor.

5.1.3 Interview with Wong (03/11/04, translated from Chinese into English)

<The interview was not tape-recorded, note-taking was applied instead>

1 I graduated in 2003 in Education. I Got a job teaching Chinese at a primary
2 school, and in the meantime, I do part-time English teaching. English is not my
3 expertise, though I think my level is all right to meet the demands of teaching
4 those primary school pupils.

5 I didn't like English before. I wasn't planning to get a job as an English teacher
6 either. It was by some misunderstanding that I joined this MA course in English
7 Language Teaching. To be honest, I was applying for an MA course in
8 Education, which wasn't successful. Instead, I was accepted on this course.
9 I don't know what I am going to do with this degree. I am not sure whether I
10 would want to be an English teacher in the future. I probably will look for jobs
11 that are more related to education itself. But whatever the choice is, a higher
12 level of English will always be an advantage.

13 My attitude towards English has changed now. I think this happened while I was
14 attending the intensive English training course offered by the New Oriental
15 School in Beijing, during which time, I watched a lot of western movies and
16 started to understand their sociocultural backgrounds better.

17 I would mostly like to improve my listening ability. Speaking is also one of my
18 weak points. I had opportunities of using English while I was in China,
19 especially during the intensive English training course in Beijing. I was on good
20 terms with one of the teachers there. He introduced me to some of his friends
21 who were native speakers of English. But sometimes I didn't know what to talk
22 about with them. My teacher even gave me some topics to prepare before we
23 went out. But it just didn't work out. I suppose I was too lazy to do the practice.

24 I think lectures and seminar discussions are useful for improving English,
25 especially for academic uses. I was not sure about talking to native speakers. I
26 don't mean that these opportunities are not beneficial for language learning. But
27 I don't know what to chat with them about. The conversation won't go any
28 deeper as I would like it to. I guess this is because I haven't had enough input to
29 converse with them, such as the sociocultural backgrounds those native speakers
30 share among themselves. Compared to other students, I think I always have the
31 opportunity of speaking to native speakers, such as my flatmate and her friends.
32 But I don't think I have made the most of it in terms of language learning.
33 Sometimes I was just too lazy to do so, or too tired to go out with them. But
34 sometimes, I think I just didn't jump at those opportunities. I need more input to
35 be able to converse better with them, I suppose.

5.2 Interview Two: Follow-up interview on QL2

5.2.1 Interview with Cheng (07/02/05, translated from Chinese into English)

1   **Researcher: You said here <pointing at the questionnaire form> that 'your**
2   **English is reasonably good, but still a lot of room to improve', so what are the**
3   **aspects of the language that you would like to improve?**
4   **Cheng:** There are two aspects about it. Academically, I would like to do more
5   reading and to improve my writing skills. I especially want to make an
6   improvement on grammar, so I can write almost like a native speaker. Because the
7   way I expressed myself is more Chinese than English. Besides, I need more
8   attention to the references I used in my thesis writing. In terms of English speaking,
9   I'm not satisfied with myself. It is so difficult to be able to speak fluently and at the
10   same time with a bit of a British accent. So I need to make a lot more effort.
11   **Researcher: You still have a lot of confidence in your knowledge of British**
12   **people and British culture, can you explain this a bit?**
13   **Cheng:** It is based on my frequent contact with them.
14   **Researcher: You also said here that you are confident in communicating for**
15   **social purposes, who do you normally communicate with?**
16   **Cheng:** The people I communicate with include the people who live around me,
17   both native speakers and other international students. There are also native
18   speakers from my course. Besides talking about studies, we talk about our own
19   lives, interests and all kinds of hobbies.
20   **Researcher: Are there any particular people with whom you socialise most?**
21   **Cheng:** Particular people? Mm, mm, yes, such as Kate, and Cathy <pseudonyms>.
22   **Researcher: You don't live close to them, do you?**
23   **Cheng:** No. But we have lectures almost every day, so I see them everyday.
24   Sometimes we chat.
25   **Researcher: So when you are together with Kate and Cathy, do you normally**
26   **talk about studies, or about other stuff?**
27   **Cheng:** Sometimes we talk about studies, sometimes just free chat. So I would say
28   both.
29   **Researcher: You don't think you are looking for opportunities to practise**
30   **your English, do you?**
31   **Cheng:** No. Because I don't think that I had looked for opportunities to
32   communicate with others. I simply took the opportunities when they emerged
33   naturally. I haven't got the time and the abilities. I could have pursued the
34   opportunities, for example, to look for people to talk to, to make friends, and to
35   attend all kinds of societies and activities. But the fact is, I came here to gain
36   academic knowledge, so I had to spend a lot of time on reading, and meantime,
37   putting more effort to digest and understand what I read.
38   **Researcher: You consider attending lectures and seminars as an important**
39   **way of improving your English, why?**
40   **Cheng:** I think the most beneficial aspect about attending lectures and seminars is
41   to make what you've learned your own knowledge. Then you have some ideas,
42   which for example, through presentation, would be questioned by others. So you
43   have to communicate. I think this is the most efficient way of improving English.
44   Watching TV is also very helpful to English learning, especially if you are
45   watching those dramas telling the stories of normal people. They are not very
46   interesting. However, that's how British people talk. If you watch TV a lot,

47   gradually, you will naturally feel that you're living in an authentic environment.
48   **Researcher: So you don't find talking to native speakers, such as Kate and**
49   **Cathy, difficult?**
50   **Cheng:** No. I think I was fairly fluent. Problems came only when I didn't have the
51   right words to express myself. I couldn't speak like the native speakers, who have a
52   lot of vocabulary at their disposal, and who can constantly choose different words
53   to use.
54   **Researcher: Do you like talking to them?**
55   **Cheng:** Yes, very much. I can feel my English being improved after my contact
56   with them. I think this is a bit like swimming – if you leave it for many days, next
57   time when you enter the swimming pool, you will feel very uncomfortable with the
58   water; on the other hand, if you go swimming everyday, you will get more
59   comfortable.
60   **Researcher: But what do you mean by saying 'that you don't like the English**
61   **people?' Are you talking about something different?**
62   **Cheng:** Yes, they are two different aspects. I would say that I like English and my
63   study, and have a favourable feeling towards our lecturers. I especially like the
64   study atmosphere here, the environment for learning English. However, when I'm
65   interacting with people outside of my academic field, you know, the people in the
66   street, such as the people I met during my travelling, you can feel the kind of
67   hidden caution against you.
68   **Researcher: Does that depend on the situation? You don't feel that they all**
69   **behave the same way, do you?**
70   **Cheng:** Not all, but somehow you can feel that there is no way that you can be
71   integrated into their lives and a huge barrier is lying between you and them.
72   **Researcher: So have you got a lot of chances of interacting with these people, I**
73   **mean, the English people who are not within your academic field, who are**
74   **neither your classmates nor lecturers?**
75   **Cheng:** Not many.
76   **Research: Not many, okay…. It is not surprising if you don't have a part-time**
77   **job.**
78   **Cheng:** Sometimes I go to see my boyfriend. They've got some native speakers of
79   English there, who I can talk to. They are nice people, but again, they are students
80   and lecturers. So I really don't have much contact with people from other fields of
81   society.
82   **Researcher: How do you find your communication with the people you are**
83   **familiar with, such as the people on your course and your lecturers?**
84   **Cheng:** There's not much difficulty. I feel quite at ease.
85   **Researcher: Are you willing to learn more about their culture?**
86   **Cheng:** Yes. I'm in fact very interested in their culture, such as the culture of food
87   and other social and cultural customs and festivals. If given the chance, I would
88   always ask the British people how they spent their festivals.
89   **Researcher: What do you think can help you communicate better with native**
90   **speakers of English, or help you better express yourself?**
91   **Cheng:** I think, in order to improve the communication skills, there are two things
92   to watch. First, it depends on how much you know about the background
93   information, as well as your knowledge of the society and its culture. If you have
94   more contact with them, and learn more from it, it becomes natural that you will be
95   more at ease to communicate. Then there is your own ability of the language itself,
96   say, you will feel more comfortable if you can express yourself freely and fluently.

97 Researcher: Are there specific examples that you want to talk about? I mean,
98 you might have some good experiences, or some negative experiences?
99 Cheng: I can't remember any. I didn't pay extra attention to that.

5.2.2 Interview with Lin (11/02/05, translated from Chinese into English)
1   Researcher: Compared to your choice of your knowledge of British culture
2   and people last time, you think you have improved by choosing a different
3   answer now. Is that right?
4   Lin: Yes, after this course, because not everybody can get the degree.
5   Researcher: Does that mean you are now more familiar with the native
6   speakers on your course, and with the English people in a general sense?
7   Lin: Mm.
8   Research: Through the course?
9   Lin: Because I had little contact with the English before. There is relatively more
10   contact now.
11   Researcher: Contact with whom?
12   Lin: Like the students I used to work and study together with, and through them, I
13   got to know some other people as well.
14   Researcher: Here, you chose to say that you are uncertain about the chances
15   you had to use English for social purposes? So what are the usual situations
16   when you have to use English?
17   Lin: At lectures.
18   Researcher: Have you got any opportunities to use English outside of the
19   classroom?
20   Lin: Outside? I teach Chinese to an elderly English lady.
21   Researcher: Are there any other occasions?
22   Lin: Sometimes I talked to my flatmates in English.
23   Researcher: Regarding whether you looked for opportunities to use and
24   improve your English, you chose 'strongly disagree'. Can you explain?
25   Lin: Yes, I strongly disagree. I don't look for opportunities, but I don't mind if
26   they come...I don't think that's a kind of criterion...
27   Researcher: So you don't think that you are avoiding using English, do you?
28   Lin: No, not at all.
29   Researcher: How do you find these activities in terms of their usefulness in
30   improving your English?
31   Lin: Lectures are very useful, especially in improving listening. But I don't watch
32   stuff like DVDs. I seldom watch TV. It's like, um, there aren't particular things
33   that I can focus on.
34   Researcher: Do you think that going to lectures only can meet your needs for
35   improving your English?
36   Lin: Because I was concentrating. Sometimes I listen to the radio, or watch TV,
37   but seldom do I sit down and listen carefully, because it's a bit of a waste of time.
38   Only through concentration, can you improve your English.
39   Researcher: How do you find talking to native speakers in terms of its
40   usefulness for English improvement?
41   Lin: Oh, it's okay for you to pick up some, some basic language forms, but I don't
42   think you can rely on that, because it is very time-consuming, not a short-cut.
43   Researcher: What do you mean by 'time-consuming'?
44   Lin: For example, if I have to spend a lot of time talking to native speakers
45   besides my lectures and my part-time job, I won't have time to my self. If I had an

46   English boyfriend, of course there will be an environment in which I can both
47   develop the relationship with him and practise my English. But if I spend a lot of
48   time talking to them just for the reason of practising English, I think the result is
49   less effective than reading. I might just learn some new vocabulary on my own.
50   But it would be better if you can talk to them while you're doing something else.
51   **Researcher: Right. You already mentioned that you don't have much chance**
52   **of using English outside of the lectures, so how is your contact with the few**
53   **native speakers on your course?**
54   **Lin:** There's not much.
55   **Researcher: Is that because of the school holidays, and also the fact that**
56   **everybody has been busy with the course assignments?**
57   **Lin:** Mm.
58   **Researcher: But if you do talk to them...**
59   **Lin:** No topics to talk about.
60   **Researcher: Do you feel confident in talking to them then?**
61   **Lin:** Yes. If I have to give you a mark out of 5, I will say 4.
62   **Researcher: Are you willing to talk to them. I know you had a party recently,**
63   **how do you feel about talking to them?**
64   **Lin:** It's okay to talk with them, but I think...mm... it's not that kind of real talk. It
65   is like, you don't really want to exchange information, or to communicate with
66   them. There isn't much that you can talk on a deeper level with them.
67   **Researcher: Is that different from talking to your Chinese friends?**
68   **Lin:** I can get some information from my Chinese friends, maybe, because we
69   have similar situations, and we talk about our needs, such as buying air plane
70   tickets. Or, if we are on the same course, we would talk about our study, or I
71   would discuss how to spend the coming holidays with my flatmates. So these are
72   all the talks with certain purposes. But it is different to talk with them, because
73   there is no overlapping part between my social circle and theirs.
74   **Researcher: Because you don't know each other very well perhaps?**
75   **Lin:** Mm, there's not much contact with them. Not much time to do this either.
76   **Researcher: That's true.**
77   **Lin:** Sometimes I think the things I get..., because we only know each other a little
78   bit, so, if I can get anything by socialising with them, I can equally achieve this by
79   socialising with my other friends.
80   **Researcher: But do these 'other friends of yours speak English?**
81   **Lin:** Yes, they do, like the students on my course, the ones who I get on well with.
82   We talk about study, essay writing, as well as what units to choose, and so on. I
83   prefer to talk with them, because, at least, we may end up sharing similar ideas.
84   But it is different to discuss these with native speakers, as they have different
85   perspectives, so it is difficult to take their opinions. Of course they have the
86   advantage regarding their language, but I don't think I can necessarily learn things
87   from them. Moreover, the content, the content is not what I want either.
88   **Researcher: So how is your contact with the lady to whom you are giving**
89   **Chinese lessons?**
90   **Lin:** It's good.
91   **Researcher: Is she an easy-going person?**
92   **Lin:** Very much so. The more... the more, we get together, get, get, with, the more
93   we stay together, the more I like her <Lin says in English>
94   **Researcher: Can you explain why?**
95   **Lin:** Because we get on very well with each other. First of all, she likes me very

96   much. I think this is a very important factor, at least to me. Also, talking with
97   her... mm, she has a very nice personality. Sometimes, I translate some texts from
98   Chinese into English, because I want her to learn more about our language. But if
99   I didn't express myself very clearly or appropriately, she will point it out, which I
100   found very useful.
101   **Researcher: Do you chat with her besides teaching Chinese?**
102   **Lin:** Yes, we do.
103   **Researcher: So what do you talk about?**
104   **Lin:** Mm...for example, the other day there was some 'business Chinese', and she
105   said she didn't like 'business Chinese', instead, she liked poetry. Then she told me
106   what programmes she had watched, but they were difficult to understand for
107   foreigners.
108   **Researcher: She liked Chinese poetry? That must be very difficult for her.**
109   **Lin:** Yes, very difficult, especially those old poems.
110   **Researcher: Yes, the ancient ones.**
111   **Lin:** But, she had used 'old poetry', and she said she preferred poetry to 'business
112   Chinese'.
113   **Researcher: Will she ask you for information about China?**
114   **Lin:** She will. If there is any background information involved, I will always
115   explain to her. She will tell me things as well if she knows that I will be interested.
116   Like I mentioned her taking part in the demonstration last time, remember?
117   **Researcher: So it was her whom you were talking about! I see.**
118   **Lin:** She will go again next week. Sometimes she talked about her daughter and
119   her son.
120   **Researcher: You think the English people are friendly and hospitable, did**
121   **you choose the same answer last time?**
122   **Lin:** Probably not.
123   **Researcher: Why?**
124   **Lin:** Because, they seem to be okay, the more you know them. It depends on who
125   you are interacting with. Like the nurses at the hospital where I work, they seem to
126   be all right now.
127   **Researcher: You said that you were not very certain whether you were**
128   **confident or not in talking to native speakers, although you agree on other**
129   **statements, can you say more about it?**
130   **Lin:** If I happen to be there when those nurses are talking among themselves in
131   the staff room...
132   **Researcher: Do you chat with them?**
133   **Lin:** Yeah, but sometimes, if several of them speak at the same time among
134   themselves, I will have difficulty understanding what they are talking about. But it
135   is okay if they speak to me individually. Sometimes, I will ask them questions, but
136   if I feel tired, I will just find myself a space and take a break.
137   **Researcher: okay...**
138   **Lin:** But now I know that if I have any questions, I can turn to them, whereas
139   before, I had to always go to my teachers at the language school depending on
140   their availability. Now it's like, if I want to ask some questions, there are always
141   people there from whom I know I can ask for help.
142   **Researcher: Can you give me an example?**
143   **Lin:** Like the elderly lady, and the nurses at the hospital. We are getting on all
144   right, so they can always help me with my questions.
145   **Researcher: But is it more difficult to develop some deeper friendship with**

146 **them?**
147 **Lin:** But I don't want that, which means I have to make a lot of effort and spend a
148 lot of time. I don't want to get involved emotionally either. It is okay to keep this
149 simple contact, when you know that they can help you with some simple
150 questions.

5.2.3 Interview with Wong (07/02/05, translated from Chinese into English)
1 **Researcher: You chose to say that your English is weak, the same choice you**
2 **made last time, can you explain why? Don't you think that you have made**
3 **some progress so far?**
4 **Wong:** There is some progress, but the next choice that 'my English is reasonably
5 good' does not sound right either. Maybe, my writing has improved a little, but I
6 won't describe it as satisfactory.
7 **Researcher: In terms of using English in communicating, do you feel that you**
8 **are more confident?**
9 **Wong:** A little more confident, but it depends on myself, or, depends on other
10 people. If, like, the person I mentioned the other day, if our conversation is
11 relaxing, and I can feel at ease, it is possible that I will talk more. For example, I
12 talked a lot with the host family I have just been to; but for some people, if I have
13 nothing to talk about with them, I will probably say little.
14 **Researcher: So what did you talk about with your host family?**
15 **Wong:** Every aspect – life, family, mm, hunting, you know, fox hunting.
16 **Researcher: Again? OK.**
17 **Wong:** But I think the reason why I talked that much was mainly due to my host's
18 kindness.
19 **Research: Because he asked you questions?**
20 **Wong:** Yes, he asked me questions. But also, he probably knew that I was nervous,
21 so he is, is kind of ...
22 **Researcher: Kind of knowing how to ask questions?**
23 **Wong:** Yeah, yeah.
24 **Researcher: Would you describe how your opportunity of using English is**
25 **now in your daily life?**
26 **Wong:** I sometime talk to my flatmates, like the Turkish and the French girl in the
27 flat.
28 **Researcher: Do you have the time to chat with them?**
29 **Wong:** Yesterday...as long as nobody has got the assignment to do, we'll have time
30 to chat.
31 **Researcher: Do you feel any differences between talking to them and talking**
32 **to native speakers of English, like the English girl Jenny in your flat?**
33 **Wong:** There are differences. Talking to Jenny, mm, she probably, mm, talking to
34 Jenny is okay, but how to say, sometimes she can talk very fast. Sometime she
35 slows down her speed, considering... but she seems to like watching TV very much
36 recently. <laughs> As soon as she is back, she switches on her TV.
37 **Researcher: Do you still think that you looked for opportunity to improve**
38 **your English?**
39 **Wong:** Yes, I think so.
40 **Researcher: Do you have any examples?**
41 **Wong:** To look for opportunity? Like applying for a host family to stay with for
42 Christmas, and...
43 **Researcher: Spending the time with an English host family? Oh yes, of course.**

44　**Wong:** I, I may consider moving into a host family after June. I'm just considering
45　it. I may, but I'm not quite sure, because I know staying with an English family
46　does not necessarily mean...
47　**Researcher: It depends on with whom you are staying with.**
48　**Wong:** That's right.
49　**Researcher: So you would like to interact with native speakers, given the**
50　**opportunities?**
51　**Wong:** Yes.
52　**Researcher: In what way do you find speaking to native speakers useful?**
53　**Wong:** You can learn...mm, I think if you talk a lot with them, you can imitate
54　their pronunciation and intonation, so at least you won't have a Chinese accent.
55　**Researcher: The Chinese accent will still be there, but gradually....**
56　Wong: But there will be less. What else...? Probably to learn some new words?
57　**Researcher: Certainly, like the words that we don't normally use.**
58　**Wong:** Yes, like the word 'sentimental' mentioned by my host. At first, I didn't
59　know what it was. 'Duo Chou Shan Gan' <Chinese pronunciation for
60　'sentimental'>. There is also an English phrase 'couch potato'. He calls his son
61　'couch potato', because he is sitting on the sofa and won't move.
62　**Researcher: Did you talk about something else interesting?**
63　**Wong:** Mm, oh! We were talking about in China, no, the Japanese girl said she
64　didn't want to get married, saying that remaining unmarried is now normal, and
65　even popular in Japan. But she also mentioned that there may be some people who
66　don't like the idea. Then our host said this phenomenon was called 'being left on
67　the shelf' here.
68　**Researcher: Sorry, what did you say?**
69　**Wong: On the shelf, means being put on the bookshelf, at the highest level,**
70　**that's what he said.**
71　**Researcher: Okay. It seems that you talked about everything.**
72　**Wong:** That's right. Normally you won't talk about such sensitive topics. But that
73　day, we were all willing to talk about them.
74　**Researcher: It depends on the people you're talking to, right? Like yesterday,**
75　**I went to see an English friend of mine. She asked me almost anything, and I**
76　**felt comfortable to talk about them too. Yes, I think it depends.**
77　**Wong:** But sometimes there are other, like other English people. They might ask
78　me all kinds of questions as well, but I might not want to talk at all.
79　**Researcher: Is that true?**
80　**Wong:** I think so. It's like when you are interacting with Chinese people, you will
81　still have your preferences, you might want to talk more with one person, but not
82　with another.
83　**Researcher: You mentioned that you were nervous in talking to native**
84　**speakers, do you still feel that way or do you feel more confident now?**
85　**Wong:** I think, now, probably... I don't know. But I still feel a little nervous in
86　talking to people.
87　**Researcher: Are you worried that you may not have things to talk about?**
88　**Wong:** Yes, but I even worry about it when I'm with other Chinese people, so I
89　think this is actually normal.
90　**Researcher: So how do you feel about English people in general?**
91　**Wong:** I used to think that English people are stiff and serious, but now I would
92　add another feature to it: they can also be humorous. But the same as in China, you
93　meet both good and not so good English people.

5.3 Interview Three: Follow-up interview on QL2

5.3.1 Interview with Cheng (11/05/05, conducted into English from Chinese)

1   **Researcher: What do you think of your current level of English? Let me look**
2   **at your choice of the answer to this question.... You think you have improved,**
3   **so can you tell me in what aspects you think you have made some progress?**
4   **Cheng:** I think my listening and speaking have both improved, also my writing
5   ability. I have definitely made progress on my reading skills after reading so many
6   books. So the progress is everywhere really. But there is still some room for
7   improvement, such as in my writing. I still make grammatical mistakes, which I felt
8   has greatly affected the quality of my assignments. I might have scored higher if I
9   had expressed my ideas in a better way with a higher level of English.
10   **Research: How about your speaking?**
11   **Cheng:** I've now got more confidence in my speaking. I used to feel nervous and
12   panicky when using English, worrying that I might say something inappropriate. I
13   also had to concentrate on what others were saying, then think hard before I opened
14   my mouth. I feel now I can speak more fluently, though not necessarily accurately,
15   because I still make some grammatical mistakes on occasion. But certainly I can
16   communicate better with other people.
17   **Researcher: What do you think has helped you improve your ability to**
18   **communicate with other people in English?**
19   **Cheng:** How did I improve my English? There are two aspects about it. First, we
20   had a lot of lectures, almost everyday, so we had a lot of contact with the lecturers
21   and other students. We were also given quite a lot of opportunities to speak at a
22   lecture - of course, you have to try your best to take these opportunities. I like our
23   lecturers, so I have the motivation to talk and to express my opinions and ideas. I
24   also like to watch TV, whenever I have the time. Because I watch them everyday,
25   those soap operas, and...sometimes I watch *Hollyoaks* at 6:30 pm; sometimes I
26   watch those popular programmes at 9:30 pm, like *Footballers' wives*. I watch some
27   entertaining programmes as well. Like recently, I have kept up with a programme,
28   which tells how a company decides on...
29   **Researcher: You mean *the Apprentice*?**
30   **Cheng:** I don't know. They've got some groups of people. Every time, some
31   people are voted out, eventually there would be only one person left, who will
32   take the job. The groups were given a task each time, and they need to report back
33   their progress with real sales figures. I feel I have learned a lot from that
34   programme.
35   **Researcher: In terms of using English in a classroom setting, the language**
36   **involved is mainly academic only based, so how about your ability in using**
37   **English for social purposes?**
38   **Cheng:** Yes, you are right. I feel there are obvious differences between these two. I
39   do get quite familiar with academic use of the language, because I use academic
40   vocabulary almost everyday, so I have relatively less difficulty in expressing
41   myself. But in daily life situations, I sometimes find it difficult to find the right
42   words to express myself.
43   **Researcher: You chose here that you had some opportunities to interact with**
44   **native speakers, so what are the likely situations?**
45   **Cheng:** Those are mainly the chances to talk to the few native speakers on my
46   course, such as Cathy, Kate and Tim <pseudonyms>. There is also a native speaker

47 in my flat, and I sometimes chat with him. He is doing a study in Hearing. He is a
48 doctor, and came from Reading. He's already worked for 5 years, so he's older than
49 most of us. He is a very kind person, because I found him willing to chat with me
50 about my study and my life.
51 **Researcher: What are the likely topics?**
52 **Cheng:** I talked quite a lot about study, assignments with Cathy, and sometimes we
53 update each other about the boyfriends we have. She told me that she was very
54 pleased that her boyfriend had got a short-term job in England. Also, because I had
55 a presentation to do with Cathy, we had some discussions together. With Tim, I
56 think the talk was more about TV programmes. I asked him about *Big Brother*
57 programme, because I don't know...I asked him about the standards that are being
58 used to choose the winner. It seemed strange why this person, neither pretty nor
59 handsome, ended up as the winner. So according to Tim, this programme has been
60 on for quite some time, and has almost become a tradition. Then we moved on to
61 talk about some other programmes, some of which were equally popular in China,
62 such as *Happy Dictionary*, you know, the kind of games that when people get the
63 answers right, they get rewarded.
64 **Researcher: You chose here to say that you are very confident with your**
65 **knowledge of the British people and their culture, so can you describe how this**
66 **knowledge may have affected your communication with native speakers?**
67 **Cheng:** I think watching TV here has really helped, from which I learned about
68 their own ways of living, like how they go about their daily lives, such as their
69 houses, how they decorate their houses, how they look after their gardens.... Then
70 when you have the opportunities to talk to a native speaker, you will have
71 something to talk about, because you know what they like...
72 **Researcher: Yes, you may not know a lot about them, or probably can only**
73 **talk about things at a surface level, but it means that you can pick up**
74 **something from this talk, and use what you've learned next time when another**
75 **opportunity comes.**
76 **Cheng:** Yes, that's very true. But there are obstacles as well. After all, you are not
77 living in the same social world as the foreigners do, and there is not much common
78 stuff to share with. So it is not always easy to find a topic that you both can feel at
79 home to talk about.
80 **Researcher: But are you willing to talk?**
81 **Cheng:** Of course, I am. If I were not under so much pressure from my course, I
82 would be very glad to make friends with foreigners. The more contact you have
83 with them, the more chances you are given to practise your English. But in my
84 case, I have to do a lot reading on my own, so I don't always have the time.
85 **Researcher: So you found such interaction with native speakers very helpful in**
86 **improving your English?**
87 **Cheng:** Yes, I think I've made the right choice to have moved out from Bencroft
88 Accommodation Hall to my current place, where people around me are all
89 foreigners. I have to use English everyday, like in the kitchen. Although they're not
90 all native speakers of English, they speak good English. For some of them, English
91 is almost their second language, if they came from a former colony of the British
92 Empire. They have a strong accent, though. But, still, you can learn a lot from
93 them.
94 **Researcher: that's good, very good. So, generally speaking, you had some good**
95 **experiences of using English. How do you think of your experiences of**
96 **interacting with native speakers? Did you find them useful in some particular**

97 way?
97 **Cheng:** You learn a lot from communicating with English people, especially the
98 stuff that you can't learn from TV. You can listen to their pronunciation, and learn
99 their slang, and those colloquial words. Also, the more you talk to the English, the
100 more confident you will become, and the easier it is to understand them.
101 **Researcher: What do you think, according to your own experiences, can make**
102 **you a better communicator if given the opportunity to interact with native**
103 **speakers?**
104 **Cheng:** If you want to develop a deeper relationship with them, given the
105 opportunity, I think you need to have similar experiences that the English have. For
106 example, if I had time, I would join in a club, such as a walking club. English
107 people love climbing. I would like to join them, and go out with them. When you
108 are out in the wild, you would feel very relaxed, and tend to talk about everything.
109 Gradually, you can develop a deeper relationship with each other, which then
110 makes it easier to talk about almost everything. By then, there would be no such
111 'cultural boundary' between us.
112 **Researcher: Do you feel any differences between talking to the English and**
113 **talking to other foreigners?**
114 **Cheng:** Yes, I think there are some. English people are quite individual minded,
115 like they are rather conservative in interaction. They normally won't tell you things
116 in a frank, direct way. They are really reserved. Talking to other international
117 students is different. For example, you may meet people who came from totally
118 different sociocultural backgrounds, but you feel that they are frank and sincere.
119 **Researcher: Do you have a preference, given the opportunity to interact with**
120 **the English, and with other international students?**
121 **Cheng:** I don't mind. Both opportunities are helpful to me.
122 **Researcher: How do you feel about the English in a general sense?**
123 **Cheng:** I still don't like them very much
124 **Researcher: You don't like them? Why?**
125 **Cheng:** Except the few who are closer to me, and who are nice to me, I don't like
126 the English. There are various factors. For example, I feel some English people
127 working at the library are not friendly to international students. Also at the
128 reception desk in the Residential Hall, people are not very nice to us international
129 students. What made me more angry are the people working at the Accommodation
130 Office. Not only are they unfriendly, but also they won't respect your application.
131 It's like they know that you have no choice but to accept their offer. They appear to
132 be friendly and nice, but in fact, they don't respect your needs at all. They just put
133 you wherever they feel like.
134 **Researcher: How do you feel about interacting with people outside of the**
135 **academic fields?**
136 **Cheng:** Outside of the academic fields, there are few people who have an interest
137 in Chinese culture. They regard you as no different from Japanese and Korean
138 people. They would say, 'So, you are from China', sort of pretending to be
139 surprised. They appear friendly, but they have no interest whatsoever.
140 **Researcher: Can I put it in this way: you don't particularly have a liking**
141 **towards English people, but you still regard the opportunity of interacting**
142 **with them as important in improving your English? And you don't mind**
143 **making friends with them if possible, is that right?**
144 **Cheng:** Yes, with the younger English people. There are differences if you are
145 interacting with some older people, middle-age English people. They, sort of, have

146 already had their own ideas and opinions about the Chinese. The younger English,
147 they are simpler and more direct, so easier to make friends with.
148 **Researcher: Have you got some particular experiences that you want to talk**
149 **about?**
150 **Cheng:** Not really, I have almost no contact with the English outside my circle of
151 life recently. The English people I met at the 'Open House' are all very nice and
152 friendly. They are a typical example, who have some ideas about China and who
153 are willing to learn more about Chinese culture.
154 **Researcher: Yes, I suppose they would ask you some questions about China,**
155 **which provides topics for discussion. Do you feel more confident to talk about**
156 **things that are related to your own culture?**
157 **Cheng:** Yes, yes, because you feel that you are respected. As a result, you would
158 want to communicate, such as talking about your culture, your backgrounds and
159 something more personal about yourself. On the other hand, when you feel that you
160 are ignored and not given enough attention, you will find any attempt to talk is
161 meaningless.

5.3.2 Interview with Lin (10/05/05, partly conducted in Chinese and partly in English)

<Note-taking, translated from Chinese into English>
1 **Researcher: Do you think you have improved your English since you started**
2 **the course? If so, how?**
3 **Lin:** I think my listening has developed, but not my writing and spoken English.
4 **Researcher: In what way do you think (the lack of) knowledge of the British**
5 **people and the British culture affects your communicating with native**
6 **speakers?**
7 **Lin:** I think, having known a little more about their culture made it possible to
8 know what is appropriate to talk about and what is not when interacting with
9 native speakers. You can also lead the conversation into deeper discussions if you
10 know what they are interested in.
Lin>
11 **Researcher: Do you think you have got enough chances of practising your**
12 **English? If so, why or why not?**
13 **Lin:** No. I haven't got many chances in work and study. But in daily life, I have a
14 lot of thing to do, and also, I have some limitations, have no, no...no many friends,
15 native speakers.
16 **Researcher: What are the most likely topics, I mean, once you have the**
17 **chance of talking to native speakers?**
18 **Lin:** I think the topics depending on the situations. Haven't got prepared ones. It's
19 much depending on what I'm just interested in that moment. I'm not artificially
20 want to talk to them. I just, if, if I have something to know.
21 **Researcher: But are there particular topics that you are interested, or, you**
22 **would like to talk about?**
23 **Lin:** I think I have. But I can't think of any now. But, for example, when I went to
24 one of my flatmates' room, the other flat actually, and he had a diving suit hanging
25 there, so I just asked him something about that. But I didn't prepare something to
26 talk.
27 **Researcher: Do you feel there are differences between talking to native**
28 **speakers of English and talking to other international students?**

29 **Lin:** I prefer English, the native speakers. And the second, is the Asian people,
30 like Asian speakers, like Indians. I'm quite used to Indian accent. Also Thai
31 maybe, but not Turkish, or not, some of the Korean people, I couldn't understand.
32 **Researcher: Why do you prefer to speak to English people?**
33 **Lin:** One reason is maybe their pronunciation is quite clear. They know I'm a
34 foreigner, maybe they will adjust their language to me; and another thing is, if I
35 say some different word, or difficult word, maybe I just happen to think of that
36 word which is helpful in that context, they can understand, but some non-native
37 speakers, maybe they happen not to know that word.
38 **Researcher: So how do you think of the British people in a general way?**
39 **Lin:** They are quite nice, compared to Chinese people.
40 **Researcher: Compared to what? Chinese people?**
41 **Lin:** Mm, it's difficult to compare, actually. They are quite nice, and they have
42 nice personalities, I have to put in this way. But I prefer to make friends with
43 Chinese people though. But they have nice personalities, I have to say. They are
44 not caring too much about relationships, or whatever you say.
45 **Researcher: You think they are approachable?**
46 **Lin:** Mm, yeah, yeah, easy-going, and they don't have that kind of thinking. They,
47 we, we Chinese people, if you talk to some strangers, they will think: why do they
48 talk to me, do they have some special purposes? For English people, I don't think
49 they had that. Maybe they have a lot foreigners here.
50 **Researcher: Do you think that they would like to talk to you if you want to**
51 **talk to them?**
52 **Lin:** Depending on how the relationship is.
53 **Researcher: I've noticed that you said you haven't got much chance of talking**
54 **to native speakers, but on the other hand, you did find them nice and**
55 **approachable. Can you talk about it?**
56 **Lin:** If I got chance to speak to them, they are quite nice. But the things, you can't
57 grab everybody to talk. If I have many English flatmates, or many classmates, or
58 workmates, that's fine. But the other situations that I can get contact with them is,
59 I look for opportunities, which could be, like you said, open house, or some dance,
60 some pub, but I don't like to know strangers.
61 **Researcher: Is there anything you would like to talk about, about your recent**
62 **experiences of talking to native speakers?**
63 **Lin:** My experience is, I pay more attention to my pronunciation. I used to think,
64 think, maybe it is not easy to change accent. But sometimes I found out my
65 difficult pronunciations, some vowels, like [i], is my difficult one. I tried to pay
66 attention to.

5.3.3 Interview with Wong (10/05/05, translated from Chinese into English)

1   **Researcher: Why do you think that your English is weak?**

2   **Wong:** Although I've had a lot of opportunities of using English, my English is still

3   poor. There is some improvement, but it is still poor. I can communicate with

4   people, like with other international students, but I made a lot of grammatical

5   mistakes. Sometimes, I had to use a very lengthy sentence to express myself. I know

6   there are simple ways to do it, but I always use long sentences. Also, I can't, like if I

7   am reading a novel, or watch a VCD, there are some good sentences which I just

8   remembered at the time being, then forgot afterwards when I need them in my daily

9   life communication. I may have some improvement in writing, after doing so much

10   on my assignment. My listening is just so-so. It is better than before. At least, I feel

11   much easier to manage the lecture. But it is not satisfying.

12   **Researcher: Do you feel confident in talking to native speakers of English?**

13   **Wong:** I still don't feel very confident, but better than before. Before, I didn't feel

14   willing to communicate - no, it's like, I didn't know what to talk about with them.

15   Now, I know what to say, and, I am able to use some topics...probably it's because

16   Steve (pseudonym) was in my group, and sometimes I would talk with him. Perhaps

17   because we had some common topics to share, so I could feel more relaxed.

18   **Researcher: Do you think that you have now gained more knowledge about the**

19   **British people and their culture than when you first came here?**

20   **Wong:** Yes, I think so.

21   **Researcher: Do you feel that the knowledge of the British people and culture**

22   **affect you communication in some way?**

23   **Wong:** I used to think that their culture differs a lot from our own culture, but now,

24   I think we are all human beings, and we share similar things really.

25   **Researcher: But is it possible this understanding came from the fact that you**

26   **have now known more about their culture and their way of life?**

27   **Wong:** Yeah, that's right. Like last time when I talked about 'voting' with Cathy at

28   lunch time. I initiated this topic, but then it occurred to me that this might not be

29   appropriate, so I asked Cathy whether it is okay to talk about voting, and she said it

30   was fine. But to be honest with you, I don't know what exactly 'British culture' is. I

31   feel that different people have different ways of living, so it really depends on the

32   individual person.

33   **Researcher: Do you think your knowledge of the background information**

34   **affects your communication in some way?**

35   **Wong:** I think the more you know about their cultural background, the more it

36   facilitates the communication. For example, again about the voting, I used to have

37   no interest at all. Then, because I watch TV, and also I was told that this was a very

38   important event in this country....That day, you know, I had a bit of talk about it

39   with Cathy, then in the afternoon, I had a meeting with Jean (pseudonym for one of

40   the tutors), who said she had to 'vote' after the meeting. I remember feeling lucky

41   that I had already knew this event, otherwise, I wouldn't have understood what she

42   meant by 'vote' under that context. I might have taken it as something else.

43   **Researcher: How do you think of the usefulness of using English for social**

44   **purposes in improving your English?**

45   **Wong:** In terms of interacting with the native speakers of English, I think the

46   benefit is that I can learn about the local news and the local culture. Similarly,

47   talking to other international students help me know a little about their culture,

48   which I think in turn provides me different ways of thinking.

49 **Researcher: Do you think you have got enough chances of using English?**
50 **Wong:** Yes, I think I have, though not particularly with native speakers. You know
51 May (pseudonym), the Japanese girl. We both live in the same accommodation hall,
52 and we go to the Sports Centre together sometimes. It is a lot fun. We had to use
53 English all the time. She is a very nice person. There is also Jenny (pseudonym),
54 from Taiwan. We get on very well. Socialising with them means that I have to use
55 English, but also, there is a lot of fun as well. I sometimes talked to the French girl
56 in my flat. The other day we had a party, and we were all trying to learn how to
57 cook pancake from her.
58 **Researcher: So you must feel some improvement in your English, since you are**
59 **using it all the time.**
60 **Wong:** Really? I don't know. But I don't worry too much about starting a
61 conversation. Like as long as I can express myself while talking to them, I feel fine.
62 Mainly it is because she is very nice, the French girl, she is also willing to talk.
63 **Researcher: So what are the normal topics?**
64 **Wong:** Anything, such as study, travelling.... At the party, we even talked about the
65 differences between English people and American people. For example, American
66 people are more direct, while the English are more reserved. The French girl was
67 saying that even if she wasn't dressed smartly, the English would still give good
68 comments.
69 **Researcher: Do you feel any differences between talking to native speakers and**
70 **talking to other international students?**
71 **Wong:** Almost the same. Maybe I was more willing to talk to native speakers
72 before. At that time, I felt that I had to take the opportunity to talk to them. But now,
73 for example, if you don't like to talk to me, why should I talk to you? It is true, you
74 know, I don't think I should force myself just because of the sheer purpose of
75 practising my English.
76 **Researcher: What do you think of English people in a general way?**
77 **Wong:** They are very polite. How to put it? It can be very nice to socialise with
78 them, because they are very considerate of how you feel. Like last time at the 'Open
79 House' programme, they gave me a lift when they knew that I had to go back on my
80 own. But I personally feel that their friendliness and kindness are based on their
81 good nature and good manners as well-educated social beings. It is not that easy to
82 make close friends with them. That's how I perceive it. They did it because they
83 thought they should.
84 **Researcher: Do you feel the same way about your English peers?**
85 **Wong:** No, I feel there is generation gap between us and them. That's true. The
86 elder English people are always nicer. They are polite, and they know how to help
87 you. But for the younger generation, having fun is the most important thing.
88 **Researcher: How about the native speakers on your course?**
89 **Wong:** I had a long chat on line with Tim once. I just came back from Scotland, so I
90 asked him loads of questions. I think he had a very nice personality. He managed to
91 answer all my questions. In fact, he is quite direct. You know, I had asked some
92 sensitive questions. For example, I heard that English men prefer not to have
93 English girlfriends, because they think English girls are always taking the control.
94 So I asked him about it, and he said 'it is true'.

Appendix 6.

Recording contexts of the six NS-NNS conversations

Conversation 1 (C1): Cheng and Lin were arranged by Ping (the researcher) to have afternoon tea at Tony's house. The conversation recorded here took place before the tea was served, during which the participants were introduced to each other and a free chat naturally followed. A tape recorder was placed on the coffee table, covered with a magazine. The recording lasts 45 minutes, until the tape finishes on one side, and 25 minutes and 51 seconds of which is transcribed.

Conversation 2 (C2): Steve, the native speaker, was arranged by Ping to have a chat with the three Chinese students. Steve had previously given a talk about his study in front of the MA students, so Lin, Cheng and Wong all knew that Steve did the same MA course the year before, and that he was now pursuing his Ph.D study. The conversation was tape-recorded in one of the seminar rooms at the University. After a brief introduction, the participants were left on their own to talk. They were seated in a circle with the tape recorder put on the table in the middle, covered with a magazine. No instructions were given regarding what to talk about. However, the three students were suggested not to limit their talk to seeking study advice from Steve. The whole conversation lasts 27 minutes, and 11 minutes and 9 seconds of which is transcribed here, taken from the middle of the recorded conversation.

Conversation 3 (C3): Tony and his wife, Jane, invited Cheng, Lin, Wong, and Ping to their house for dinner. Cheng's boyfriend, Bin, was visiting her that week, so he was invited to come along. This conversation took place after the dinner. All the guests were sitting around the fireplace in the sitting room, with drinks served by the host and the hostess, who also participated in the talk. The conversation was tape-recorded. The conversation lasts 44 minutes. The transcribed conversation is taken from the beginning part of the talk, and is 18 minutes and 13 seconds in length.

Conversation 4 (C4): Lin and Ping were invited to have afternoon tea at Tony's house. By then it had been Lin's third time to visit Tony. The recorded conversation took place before the tea was served. A tape recorder was placed on the coffee table, covered with a magazine. Meantime, Lin had brought her own MP3 player that has a recording

facility. It was hung around Lin's neck. The advantage of using an MP3 player is its capability of obtaining digital data that can be input directly into a computer for future presentation. The source of the transcription comes from the recording from the MP3 player. The transcription starts five minutes after the recorded conversation, and is 26 minutes and 36 seconds in length.

Conversation 5 (C5): Cheng and Wong were arranged by Ping to have afternoon tea at Helen's house. Cheng and Wong had not met Helen before. All the participants were sitting around the dinner table. Tea and snacks were offered by Helen, who constantly invited her guests to more tea. Three recording devices were used: a tape recorder was placed underneath the dinner table; Wong had an MP3 player hanging around her neck, which had a recording facility; Cheng also brought her own digital recorder, and it was placed on one side of the table. The source of the transcription comes from the recording from the MP3 player, started before Cheng and Wong met Helen. The transcription, however, did not start until 16 minutes later, when Helen had seated her guests around the dinner table, with the food displayed on the table, and the tea ready. The transcription is 49 minutes and 23 seconds in length.

Conversation 6 (C6): Tony and Jane invited Cheng, Wong and Ping to their house for a barbecue night. It was still early in the afternoon, and warm enough outside, so everybody was sitting in the garden and talking. In order to catch every participant's voice across the big garden table, three recording devices were used, with each placed at one end of the table, including a tape recorder, one MP3 player and Cheng's digital recorder. The source of the transcription comes from the recording from the MP3 player. It started the minute when the host and the hostess greeted the guests at the door step. The guests were then led to the garden and seated, and it is from here the transcription starts, with 42 minutes and 40 seconds in length.

Appendix 7.

Sample transcription notes for retrospective interviews

The sample transcription notes provided here are taken from the retrospective interview with Cheng 15/06/05 on C5 (NS-NNS conversation 5) (interview questions are highlighted in bold)

Context: the retrospective interview was conducted by Ping (the researcher) by phone, two hours after C5 was recorded. In C5, Helen had a conversation with Cheng and Wong at her own house. All the retrospective interviews with the NNS subjects were not recorded, with the understanding that the interviewees would be more at ease to talk in depth about their feelings, emotions and attitudes without the recording facilities in sight. The transcription notes presented here are for the interview with Cheng only. It was translated into English from Chinese.

Ping: How do you feel about the talk? Did you enjoy it?

Cheng: I think it was good. I enjoyed it.

Ping: Really? I thought you didn't. Because when we came out, you and Wong were saying how tired you were.

Cheng: Yes, I enjoyed it very much. She was so nice, and we had some common topics to talk about. I was tired, but it was mainly due to my hard work last week, nothing to do with today's talk. She was very talkative, obviously. I found the most difficult part of the conversation was turn-taking. I think it is something to do with social power. I have recently read about 'politeness strategies' and 'face-threatening' in conversation. So I think that because they have a higher social status than us, as a result, we showed our respect by waiting for the turn, instead of taking the initiative to interrupt. But now I realise that for English people, they don't mind very much if you interrupt them. They don't think that is a kind of disrespect.

Ping: Were you confident about your English?

Cheng: Not very much. There were many difficult words I didn't understand. She was so talkative, and she talked so much. I can only guess at what she was saying sometimes.

Ping: But were you confident about your talk, I mean, as a kind of socialisation?

Cheng: Mm, I think so. I didn't feel uncomfortable. I didn't feel there were that many cultural differences between us. I was just enjoying talking, and not paying particular attention to those language rules, because there was so much to talk about.

Ping: If given the opportunity, are you willing to talk again with Helen?

Cheng: Yes, I am. She is such a lively person. I'm sure that I can find something more to talk about with her. I think I know how to interact with foreigners if I want, it is just that I have not got enough motivation now. This has something to do with my previous experiences. When I was at college, we had some exchange students from America and from other countries. And I made friends with them. At the beginning, I felt there was nothing I could talk about with them. But gradually, I realised how to open up the conversation. Because you have to know what they like. I took them out, watching videos and movies with them. They liked the movies that I liked, so there was something to talk about. Gradually, we talked about different things, and they didn't regard me as a foreigner anymore.

I think I've learned from the course. Because I didn't know having a conversation can be this interesting. There are some techniques as well. It's your social identity. Like, when you are not participating, you will feel you are not valued, which will make you have doubt about your self-confidence.

<Then Cheng told me of an example that happened to her the other day on the campus>

The other day, I was watching a group of ducks at the university. A middle-age man came and talked to me. I think he was trying to explain to me there were several new ducks born, and how they were fed. I think he is a cleaner. But I didn't understand him at all. He spoke very quickly. It made me feel very bad about my English.

Ping: Did he have a strong accent?

Cheng: I think so, but my boyfriend was at such ease talking to him, that it made me lose my confidence completely. I didn't know what they were chatting about, but I had to pretend that I understood. Because it was too embarrassing to see that his English was better than mine.

Ping: But isn't it challenging to talk to people like him, who would speak at his normal speed, regardless of whether you are a foreigner or not?

Cheng: Yes, you are quite right. For the native speakers you took us to communicate with, I think they all had previous experiences of talking to non-native speakers, so they knew how to talk to us, and what questions to ask. They are very educated as well. It is different to interact with people who are not well educated. But at the moment, my priority is my own study. There is too much to read.

Appendix 8.

Transcription key/conventions for transcribing the six NS-NNS conversations

Symbol	Meaning and description
.	certainty, completion, with falling intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at the end of a declarative sentence)
no end of turn punctuation	implies non-termination, with no final intonation
?	uncertainty with rising intonation followed by noticeable pause (as at the end of an interrogative sentence)
,	Parcelling of talk or breathing time with continuing intonation: may be slight rise or fall in contour (less than "." or "?"); may be followed by a pause (shorten than "." or "?")
!	'surprised' intonation or animated tone
(0.4)	pause, time gap in four tenths of a second
(.)	Brief pause or time gap
...	sound is held, or short hesitation within a turn (less than three seconds), i.e. yes...; noticeable pause or break in rhythm without falling intonation
( )	untranscribable talk
(the rain)	transcriber's guess
=	latching, one sound seems tied to the next
[	point of overlapping
< laughs>	descriptive comment
/a/	Phonetic transcription
<laughter> without attributing to particular individuals	unrecognisable source

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Fillers

Following established usage, the most commonly used fillers are represented orthographically as follows: (see Eggins and Slade: 1997: 3; Schiffrin, 1990)

Filler	Meaning
um	hesitation, doubt
umm	hesitation, doubt, but sound is held slightly longer than 'um'
mm, mhm	agreement, acknowledgement
eh	query
oh	reaction – what Schiffrin (1987) describes as an 'information management' marker
oh!	an exclamative particle, suggesting surprise, shock, disappointment, etc.
ah	similar to oh, can be taken as an 'information management' marker at times
aah!	exclamation of emotion, such as excitement or pain
uh-ha!	similar to 'aah', a quasi-linguistic particle used to express exclamation of emotion (as used once by Bin in C3)
uh-ha	without the exclamation mark '!', 'uh-ha' is used to indicate acknowledgement, (mainly found in C4 by Lin)

Extra notes on transcription

- Turn numbers are shown in Arabic numerals: 1, 2, 3;

- Descriptive comments are not given line numbers, see the example here:

```
38   C:   So you needn't heater (.) you needn't um buy the heater, um, you mean
39        this one?
          (1.0)
40   T:   Um...no, the, the other room, of course, there is a gas fire. It's so easy,
41        you just turn it on.
```

- Chinese words are translated in brackets following the words where it is necessary.

Appendix 9.

9.1 Transcript for NS-NNS conversation 1 (C1)

Participants:
C: Cheng (Chinese student) L: Lin (Chinese student) P: Ping (Researcher)
T: Tony (Native speaker)

Context:
Cheng and Lin were arranged by Ping (the researcher) to have afternoon tea at
Tony's house. The conversation recorded here took place before the tea was served,
during which the participants were introduced to each other and a free chat naturally
followed. A tape recorder was placed on the coffee table, covered with a magazine.
The recording lasts 45 minutes, until the tape finishes on one side, and 25 minutes
and 51 seconds of which is transcribed.

1	P:	\<points to the fireplace> Do you still have lots (.) of wood left?
2	T:	Oh, gosh, yeah, you know, well, you know, the day we went out and
3		brought it back in the car boot.
4	P:	Tony bought the wood from the New Forest.
5	L:	Mm
6	C:	Oh
7	P:	So… he can use those wood for, you know, the winter whole winter.
8	L:	The first time, my first time to see the real fireplace [in a house.
9	T:	[Is that right?
10	L:	Yeah, [because many people
11	P:	[Where?
12	P:	In where?
13	C:	Is it first time?
14	L:	But my first time to see the real fire[place,
15	C:	[Me too.
16	L:	because, in some houses they changed to electro[nic one.
17	T:	[Oh, yes, yes, that's right.
18	P:	But in pubs, did you see some [fireplaces in the pubs?
19	T:	[In pubs? Yeah.
20	L:	No, I just see the, the, the, the electronic ones. I can see the flames, but
21		it's, it's, it's artificial.
22	T:	Oh, yes, it's gas, isn't it? That's right.
23	L:	Mm, yeah.
24	T:	Well… to be honest um, Jane, that's my wife Jane, she she is saying, 'I
25		can't be bothered with all this mess and sweeping, and soot"
26	L:	Mm
27	T:	So… why don't we get the gas?
28	P:	Yeah.
		(1.0)
29	L:	Mm
30	P:	You don't like that? \<laughs>
31	T:	There's nothing nicer than in the winter when you can hear the rain
32		coming down [outside, wind blowing, and you just sit there, [( )
33	C:	[Yeah…
34	L:	[\<laughs>
35	L:	Yeah=
36	T:	= read a nice book. It's=\<laughs>

37	L:	=Yeah, yeah, Yeah.
38	C:	So you needn't heater (.) you needn't um buy the heater, um, you mean
39		this one?
		(1.0)
40	T:	Um…no, the, the other room, of course, there is a gas fire. It's so easy,
41		you just turn it on.
42	L:	Yeah
		(1.8)
43	T:	For a moment there, I thought you, when I was talking about my wife,
44		you said something: "So you don't need to 'hit her'?"
45	L:	<laughs>
46	T:	I don't hit my wife!
		<all laugh>
47	T:	Understand?
47	P:	Oh, I see, the pronun[ciation.
49	T:	[So, that's why I [looked at you a little bit
50	C:	[Oh….sorry, sorry.
		<laughter from Ping and Tony>
51	P:	"Heater", "hit her", yeah
52	T:	Hit my wife? ( ) You know you know that word 'nagging'? (.) To nag
53		someone?
54	L:	To nag [someone?
55	T:	[To nag someone, you keep on asking, asking, asking, and in the
56		end, they give in, and give you what you want.
57	L:	Oh, oh.
58	T:	That's called 'nagging',
59	L:	"Nagging", [oh.
60	C:	[Oh
61	T:	N-A-G, G-I-N-G
62	L:	"Nagging", [oh, oh, oh. That's, that's a useful strategy. <laughs>
63	C:	["Nagging"
64	T:	Oh, yes. ( ) Especially with children, "Dad, can I have…" ["No", "Please
65		dad, can I have"=
66	L:	[Yeah
67	L:	=Oh, yeah [<laughter>
68	T:	[It's okay <laughs>
		(1.5)
69	T:	So, gosh. (.) So tell me about England then?
70	L:	I like it, especially the weather, wea- the, English people always complain
71		about the weather, too mu- too too much rain. But, compared to the
72		hometown, um my hometown, I think, I like it, much better. I think it's
73		much better than the (.) the one we got.
74	T:	You think so? (1.0) [but of course it's
75	C:	[But I like sunshine, I like sunshine very much.
76	T:	You do?
77	C:	And do not like winter here. It's very, it's very cold. And when it was
78		raining, I feel very unconvevient, inconvenient.
79	T:	Mm. (.) But um… in the north of China, gosh, it's very cold
80	L:	Yes, 20 below.
81	T:	Ohh! We'll never, never… What's the coldest we get here? Maybe, minus

82		5 or 6? But only for a day or two.
83	P:	Because somebody – Chris did mention about, twenty years ago,
84		Southampton, you know, you could see snow this high.
85	L:	Yeah
86	P:	And in Southampton, but now, [you know, it's so, [so rarely see snow at=
87	L:	[Yeah
88	T:	[No, it's
89	P:	=Christmas time. That's the changes of global warming!
90	L:	Global warming <laughs>
91	T:	Well, yeah yeah yeah. (Think about) when we, ( ) 16 years, say, we've
92		been here now, only once, it really snowed. Just this much.
93	L:	[Mm
94	C:	[Oh
95	T:	But a big excitement you know. But…
96	C:	But do you think this winter comes, is it snow?
		(2.2)
97	C:	Maybe? Oh [maybe
98	P:	[Maybe
99	T:	[You want it to?
100	C:	Yeah. I want=
101	T:	=You want?
102	C:	Yes, I never seen that.
103	T:	Oh, [I see
104	L:	[Oh, really?
105	C:	Yeah. [I'm, I'm living in Chongqing. So…
106	T:	[You never (seen that)?
107	T:	Oh, yeah, in that city, of course. (.) Well, you can easily see snow if you
108		um…
109	P:	Go to the north
110	T:	Go to the north!
111	P:	Go to Scotland.
112	C:	Oh…
113	T:	Oh, not, not as far as Scot[land, just northern England, or
114	C:	[Maybe I can travel.
115	T:	Birminghan, maybe, or somewhere like that?
116	C:	Maybe Manchester?
117	T:	Oh, definitely Manchester. (1.0) The trouble is um (the rain). You see we
118		are like English people now, we're talking about weather, aren't we?
		<all laugh>
119	L:	Oh, yeah.
120	T:	But it's umm…it's always different, so it's something to talk about, (1.6)
121		when you meeting people for the first time, discuss the weather (for
122		instance) (1.8) When we lived in Africa
		(0.8)
123	L:	You lived [in Africa?
124	T:	[Did I tell you we, I was, we were teachers you see, [so we=
125	C:	[Oh yeah
126	T:	=had taught in different countries and (1.0) years ago, we went to Africa,
127		of course, middle of Africa, where on the equator, it's zero latitude. And…
128		(1.0) it never changes all through the year, the sun's shining every day

	C:	<laughs>
129	T:	All through the year. And, you know, it rains, half of the year only at
130		night, generally. So, you never talked about the weather.
131	L:	Oh
132	T:	And I remember one day – only been there for a while, I came out of the
133		school, and I thought: "Oh it's, a very nice day."
134	L:	<laughs> but it's the same!
135	T:	It's the same, exactly the same <laughs>. No difference, you know=
136	L:	=Mm=
137	T:	=They thought I was very strange.
		(2.8)
138	T:	So how about Southampton? Have you, been outside of Southampton?
139	C:	Yeah. I have been I have been to Brighton, and Bath, and Bristol, and…
140		Oxford, and Isle of Wight. That's it.
141	T:	Oh, that's=
142	C:	=And I'm planning to New Forest, maybe, in May 2005. Yeah, and I, I
143		still want to visit Bournemouth, then maybe Portsmouth.
144	T:	Okay=
145	C:	=I want to go around
146	T:	Oh
147	C:	Around Southampton. I like travel.
148	T:	[You do?
149	C:	[Very much, yeah.
150	T:	Have you um, travelled much on bus? You know, you can, because
151	C:	I go with, I go with the classmates [in - when I was at pre-sessional=
152	T:	[Okay
153	C:	=course, we take the coach from the school, from the university.
154	T:	[Oh, yes, that's right.
155	C:	[( ) they organised us to other places.
156	T:	Oh, that's (nice). But on the ordinary buses, the long distance buses, [you=
157	C:	[Yeah
158	T:	=know, because you are – oh I guess you are under twenty-five, aren't
159		you? Get a student [( ), you can get a student um,
160	C:	[Really? Yeah, I know. You [mean young person's
161		card?=
162	T:	[get a student
163	P:	=You can still get [one even if you're above twenty-six.
164	T:	[Student's card.
165	T:	Oh, no=
166	P:	=As long as you are still a student
167	T:	Oh, I see, yes yes yes, a student, oh…good.
	P:	<laughs>
168	T:	Oh, that's [good, that is good, yeah.
169	P:	[A student! <laughter>
170	T:	Oh, dear.
171	C:	I'm quite interested in the New Forest, New Forest landscape. Can you
172		um, tell us something about that place?
173	T:	Have you not, you've not seen it?
174	C:	No.
175	T:	[(We must do) that sometimes.

176	C:	[It's just, just lot of people tell me it's a very beautiful place to see.
177	T:	Well... it's very big. It's, it's, there are, lots of, lots of walks. Do you like
178		walking?
179	C:	Yeah, yeah.
180	T:	I mean long-distance [walking.
181	C:	[Yeah, yeah, yes, I like.
182	T:	Oh, ( ) because (.) you've been once or twice, [Ping,
183	P:	[Yeah
184	T:	haven't you been with us?
185	P:	Three times I think
186	T:	Yeah, there's, there's – it's a very popular thing for people, [( )
187	T:	[(Do some)
188		cycling or
189	C:	Ah...
190	T:	You can cycle as well, but walking, people... my sort of age, shall we say,
191		(younger perhaps), but=
192	C:	=Yeah
193	T:	It's a very nice thing to go out and walk around, you see. You see animals
194		( )
195	P:	And then you see those animals, donkeys? And horses.
196	C:	Is, is Swans?
197	T:	Wild? Yeah.
198	L:	They just pass by.
199	T:	You have to be a little bit careful of them. Because they they, they don't
200		worry about people.
201	C:	Oh, yeah
202	P:	(They just walk freely everywhere)
203	T:	But you shouldn't go up to them and touch them, because they are wild,
204		you know, (when you) misunderstand them, they can bite you. Be a little
205		bit careful.
	P:	<laughs>
206	T:	(They are okay) (2.5) But...there're a lot of them, hundreds
207	P:	Mm, mm
208	C:	Do you know a place, which is called Lymington? Lymington, where is it?
209	T:	Lymington? It's... (2.0) 20 minutes' drive from here. [( )
210	C:	[Oh, it's, it's a small
211		town? [Small town?
212	T:	[Yes, a small town. Very touristy.
213	C:	[Oh.
214	T:	[Lots, lots of visitors. Lots of little... teashops, cafés and things.
215	C:	So the Student Union wants to organise us students to go that place. I just
216		want to know whether it is worth of going.
217	T:	[Oh, it is OK.
218	P:	[( ) It's like a very typical English town.
219	T:	English[...
220	P:	[Yes, English [( )
221	P:	[English tourist town.
222	C:	Okay.
223	P:	The shops. Very - What do you call the shops? Independent shops, not the
224		chain shops.

225	T:	Oh, yes, that's right.
226	P:	Selling different styles [of things.
227	T:	[Individual shops, like all the shops used to be,
228		[of course,
229	C:	[I know.
230	T:	before chain stores.
231	C:	And how about Chichester? Chichester?
232	T:	Chichester? Yeah, that's a little bit further way along coast towards
233		Brighton. (1.0) Chichester=
234	C:	=Oh, towards Brighton.
235	P:	Excuse me <Ping walks out>
236	T:	Um…have a map I'll have a map, I'll show you later on if you like but…
237	C:	Okay.
238	T:	But the forest is, is full of walks. If you like walking, it's really interesting.
239		This weather, you know you can get a good coat,
240	C:	Yeah, I know, [you have to… put it on the head=
241	T:	[and ( )
242	T:	=That's right, you put them on the head, and then, boots, some strong
243		shoes, and then you can ( )
244	C:	When I was studying in the pre-sessional course, we always walked from
245		Romoreo Hall – do you know Archer's Road?
246	T:	[Archer's Road? Yes, right.
247	C:	[Archer's Road. From Archer's Road to this um, to Avenue Campus.
248		Maybe it takes us, 20, or 30 minutes, everyday, to go the campus, and
249		come back for 30 minutes. I like it. I think it's doing some exercises.
	C:	<laughs>
250	T:	So where do you live now?
251	C:	I'm living, I'm living, <laughs> near the Crematery.
252	T:	The…cemen
253	C:	Crema- Crematery
254	T:	What do you mean?
255	C:	Crematery, [do you know?
256	T:	[Crema-? Hang on
257	C:	Do you know that place? Bencraft? Bencraft Court? Um Bassett? Bassett
258		[Green Road.
259	T:	[Bassett, Bassett Green Road, yes.
260	C:	Yeah, yeah.
261	T:	But I can't get the word you were saying. Creamery? Crematorium?
262	C:	Yes, Crematorium!
263	T:	Crematorium. Okay. Sorry=
264	C:	=Sorry. [My pronunciation is not that great.
265	T:	[Where they…they burn dead people.
266	T:	That's okay. That's all right.
267	C:	Because it's my first time that I have learned that word.
268	T:	Okay. Yes. Sorry, it is my English
269	C:	No no
270	T:	Cause there's Creamery, which is a milk place where they…they make
271		milk and stuff, that's=
272	C:	=How do you pronounce it? /Krama-terim/
273	T:	/Kremə-/

274	C:	/Kremə-/
275	T:	/Kremə-/.../-to:riəm/
276	C:	/Kremə-to:rima/, /Kremə-to:rima/
277	T:	( ) It's very hard for you=
278	C:	=Oh yeah
279	T:	Because I notice, um
280	C:	/Kremə-to:rima/=
281	T:	when I...when I was teaching in China
282	L:	It's a name of...of a road?
283	C:	No, it's a name [of a place.
284	T:	[a name of place
285	C:	HUO ZHANG CHANG <Chinese pronunciation for "crematorium">
286	L:	[Oh...
287	T:	[It's where they burn dead people, [they burn the body. (1.5) But...oh=
288	L:	[Oh...
289	C:	[Oh, yeah, yeah
290	T:	=um the language thing was you know, a lot - we had a lot of words I
291		realise now, you know (.) that end with a consonant like um
292	C:	Yeah
293	T:	"Not", ["cream"
294	L:	[Mm, mm mm
295	T:	you know, and it's very hard I think for Chinese students to [do this=
296	C:	[Yeah, yeah
297	T:	=because, you don't have them, do you, always (end with vowels).
298	C:	Yeah
299	T:	Italian is a good language for you.
300	L:	[Yeah?
301	C:	[Really?
302	T:	Because every single word in Italian, it ends with a vowel you know.
303	L:	Yeah, we [have
304	T:	[<giving examples of two Italian words>, that sort of things, its'
305		um, it's...it's easy to say
306	L:	I think, the, the most frequently (appeared) pronunciation in Chinese is /a/.
307		I think many, many nouns or many words contain this /a/, [/a/, /a/ sound.
308	T:	[Yeah, yeah,
309		that's right.
310	T:	I'll tell you a story if you like it. I was in Guangzhou, Okay? And I wanted
311		to get the train to Hong Kong. I went to the railway station to buy a ticket,
312		( ) And...tried to buy a ticket, she understood, she said, um what sounded
313		to me, like, "/so-lau/!"
314	L:	/so-
315	T:	/so-lau/!
316	C:	Oh, [/so-, so-lau/
317	T:	[/so-, so-lau/, /so-lau/ is it? <murmuring> You know but in the end, it
318		meant, I went to buy a ticket, she said it was "Sold-[Out"! "Sold-=
319	L:	
		["Sold Out"!
320	T:	=[Out!"
321	C:	[Oh...
322	T:	No tickets left, you see

323	L:	[Mm...
324	C:	[Oh
325	T:	But the last...
326	C:	Yeah
327	T:	/d/ and /t/ (.) you know that's missing in it.
328	P:	"Sold out", oh...
329	T:	Oh, dear me, yes, it's very
330	C:	It's some kind of Chinglish, Chinese English.
331	T:	Well, oh, dear. But it's so difficult, isn't it? I mean, the two languages, I
332		think, [they are so different. I'm I'm so amazed, you know, that you can=
333	C:	[Yeah
334	T:	=do it. You know, umm...people (.) complain - teachers also, "oh...this..."
335		you know but you try it in Chinese!
	T:	<laughs>
336	T:	You know, because both people go to teach English. You know, and they
337		say, "Oh, these students [are ( )"
338	C:	[Just because English is an international language,
339	T:	=Yeah=
340	C:	=it's popular [in the world.
341	T:	[It's so amazing, isn't it?
342	C:	Yeah
343	T:	An accident of history, I guess, it's (1.0) Because, the trouble is, it's not
344		real English, is it? It's American
345	C:	Yeah
346	T:	I guess, which is the main thing, because all the relatives we have, (1.0)
347		we have an American...chap, married to one of our daughters, and a
348		French chap married to Jane's sister. So they all have to learn English, you
349		see. French men in particular - He is a very nice chap, and I like him very
350		much. But, but he hates having to learn English.
	P:	<laughs>
351	T:	Because he is a scientist, you see.
352	C:	Mm
353	T:	And all, all his research papers, and all his work has to be put into English,
354		in order to publish internationally.
355	C:	Yeah
356	T:	And the French are very proud of being French, you know. (2.0) They
357		were...always in history, competing with the English, ( ) so they are very
358		proud, and they hate (to learn English) (2.0) I guess, you could say we are
359		lucky ( )
	C:	<laughs>
360	L:	You don't need to, to learn any foreign language.
361	T:	But we learned French in school that was the, you know, if you, if you in
362		my days, if you learned any language at all, it would be French.
363	L:	Mm mm
		(1.0)
364	T:	Because they are nearest to us, I guess.
365		Mm mm <unrecognisable speaker>
366	L:	Maybe French, French was very strong at that moment.
367	T:	Yes, but... yes, it's a funny thing: now... my youngest son, James – I
368		must show you some pictures in a minute if you're interested. But... he is

369		a student now, same, same as – well, a bit younger than you.
370	C:	Oh?
371	T:	He is in his second year of a degree course.
372	C:	Oh
		(1.0)
373	T:	He is doing it in Canada, in… (what's that again?) Montreal, is it? Where
374		they, they speak French as well as English. Did you, did you know there is
375		a part of Canada…Quebec! They call it, and [they don't speak English (at
376		all)
377	L:	[( )
		(1.5)
378	T:	And…so he has to use his French at school.
379	C:	Yeah, okay
380	T:	Because um… his French cousins (.) his relatives, we used to say to him,
381		"Come on now, you have, you know, French speaking cousins, you must
382		learn French at school!" "Oh… why bother? They all speak perfect
383		English!"
384	P:	Do they?
385	T:	They do actually, oh, yeah, pretty [(good English)
386	P:	[Because their mother is English.
387	T:	Um, so it makes him very lazy, makes, this makes us all very lazy. You
388		know, Why bother?
		(3.0)
389	T:	Can't be helped.
	P:	<laughs>
390	P:	That's true, really.
		(1.6)
391	T:	So, tell me something…. Tell you what, tell me something… you like
392		about England, then tell me something you don't like about England.
393	C:	Oh, it's like a kind of [interview.
394	T:	[A kind of, no, just for interest, because I'm only
395		interested, you see=
396	C:	=Yes, I know
397	T:	Because um…(.) I, I… it's certainly happened recently that there were so
398		many Chinese students [now.
399	C:	[Yeah.
400	T:	And I now - I see them walking around all the time, ( ) in the shop and
401		little jobs and things
402	L:	Mm
403	T:	And…(.) always together, you know, three or four, mainly together.
404		And… I just think: are they happy here? And I always wonder, because
405		you can never tell.
		<laughter>
406	T:	I mean…, I imagine, I never know: it could be very lonely, if you
407	C:	Yeah
408	T:	Is [that right?
409	C:	[How do you, do you think about Chinese students?
410	T:	[How do I think about?
	L:	[<laughs>
411	C:	Yeah

412	L:	( ) them [back! <laughter>
413	T:	[What?
414	C:	Because you, [you
415	T:	[Here in England?
416	C:	Because you have the experience with Chinese students, maybe in China
417		or here. How do you think about?
		(1.3)
418	T:	Changing all the time, I think, it's just me now.
419	C:	Changing?
420	T:	Um...three years ago now it would be, wouldn't it? I retired when I was
421		sixty, sixty years old.
422	C:	So [before
423	L:	[(I think) it's early. That's five years earlier than the normal retired
424		years.
425	T:	Umm...(.) these days I think, teaching is such a hard job, okay?
426		[Everybody here have you all agreed?
427	C:	[Yeah, I think so, I think so
428	T:	Teaching, especially in [school
429	L:	[definitely.
430	T:	So... most people think should be sixty, or even before that.
431	L:	Mm
432	C:	So how many years have you taught? In school?
433	T:	In school?
434	C:	Maybe [( )
435	T:	[Well, it wasn't actually in school. It was, was a
436	P:	A college.
437	C:	[Oh, college.
438	T:	[A six-form college, yeah, a pre-university college, ( )
439	C:	So you still teach in China in the college?
440	T:	Well=
441	C:	=At the university?
442	T:	Not really, because... you know these foundation courses?
443	C:	Oh, yes, I know.
444	T:	Okay=
445	C:	= But, you mean here is some relationships between the university with
446		the university in England?
447	T:	Yes
448	C:	Between China, [China,
449	T:	[That's right, yeah
450	C:	And then just um taught some foundation course, after they finish the
451		course, the students will come to England to learn some further study.
452	T:	Yeah, yeah, that's right
453	C:	Oh, I knew that=
454	T:	=But the thing was, there were lots of companies there,
455	C:	yeah
456	T:	Teaching companies. There was... what did they call that? "Anglo-
457		Chinese Education Association". It was started a few years ago, by... a
458		Chinese chap who was in Manchester University. <turns to the Ping> I
459		told you this before, [didn't I?
460	P:	[Mm

461	L:	Manch[ester
462	T:	[He was in Manchester University, did a business studies course,
463		you see. So he went back to China, and said: "Right, I am going to start
464		business you see, umm and so of course he had links with the university in
465		Manchester, and…so he set up this company…and teaching really. He, he
466		got in touch with the local school, and rented some classrooms and some
467		offices and so on. (1.2) Then he (.) hired some teachers from Britain, to
468		go over there and teach. But of course the parents pay… fees, [and then he
469		paid the teachers.
470	C:	[Lots of
471		money, yeah
472	T:	And of course, I think he made a nice profit [( )
473	L:	[I think that's a good way to
474		earn money
475	T:	Well, you see it was wonderful really, because he made this business out
476		of nothing, really. You know what I mean?
477	L:	Yeah.
478	T:	There's nothing to start with. Um… and of course, it grows, grows, and
479		grows.
480	L:	Yeah, learning English is very popular right now in China=
481	T:	=That's it, you see. But he also did… some science in mathematics,
482		science in business ( ). Then the… arrangement was: if they pass, if the
483		students pass this course, they will go straight to Manchester University
484	L:	Oh, mm
485	T:	If their English is okay, and they ( )=
486	C:	=I, I know that course.
487	T:	Do you? Really?
488	C:	Somebody recommended me to learn that foundation course.
489	T:	(Is that right?)
490	C:	Yeah.
491	T:	You might've [been in my class.
492	C:	[I know that,
493	C:	Maybe <laughs>
494	T:	Are you sure you are not - No, no, you are not.
495	C:	No!
		<all laugh>
496	T:	I would've remembered.
497	C:	I didn't go.
498	T:	Yeah. It's [very expensive.
499	P:	[Why should you go to [that course?
500	C:	[Yeah, I think
501	P:	It's for entering the university in Britain!
502	C:	That will um take place of the IELTS test, if you finish the course=
503	T:	=Yes, that's right, exactly, you don't ( )
504	C:	In the foundation, in the foundation, you needn't to pay, to pass another
505		test before you enter the university. It's a good way, ILTS is very difficult
506		for ( )
507	T:	Really, yeah, yeah, okay. But…very expensive, though=
508	C:	=Yeah=
509	T:	=for Chinese parents. [(My goodness, this)

510	L:	[I think so
511	T:	[Because they do,
512	T:	[SHI WAN <Chinese pronunciation for 'RMB one hundred thousand' >
513	T:	they do the visa and all the kind of [paper work
514	C:	[Yeah.
515	T:	Anyway he made profits, so of course, them, this is just me talking [( )
516	C:	[Yeah,
517		I think so
518	T:	The business, was making a lot of money. Because the, the idea is, "oh,
519		more students, more profits", so of course the numbers grew, grew and
520		grew. Now he has... hundreds, five centres. Chongqing [has one of the
521		centres?
522	C:	[Yeah, I think so.
523		Five centres.
524	T:	Yeah, I'll try to remember. Um... Guangzhou ( ), Chengdu...Qingdao?
525		(2.5) And Chongqing? No, no, Beijing, of course ( )
526	L:	Did you say Anzhou? Anzhou? The school? What's the name of that?
527	T:	The school? Oh...
528	L:	The company?
529	T:	"ACE", they call it, "Anglo-Chinese Education..."
		<the door bell rings>
530	L:	"Anglo-Chinese Education"
531	T:	Excuse me <walks to the door to answer the door> Anglo-Chinese
532		Education...<thinking> Anglo-Chinese Education <murmuring>
		<Lin and Cheng laugh>
533	T:	Hang on, [( )
534	P:	[That's okay.
		<The participants starts to talk in Chinese while Tony is out to answer the
		door. It lasts for 1 minute and 16 seconds>
535	T:	Sorry, I forgot on Wednesday there is a chap who um...
536	P:	Oh, have you got another meeting?
537	T:	No no no no! He, he is (.) um... do you know this story about "organic
538		food, organic vegetables and things'?
539	P:	Mm mm
540	T:	Everybody now is starting to buy this and, you buy vegetables and fruit,
541		and stuff that has not been sprayed with insect killer or anything. Umm,
542		and that's just organic, no chemicals.
543	L:	Not modified.
544	T:	It's more expensive, a little bit more expensive. But...Jane, again, my
545		wife, Jane, (I'm sure you'll see her) she suddenly decided this is much
546		more healthy [if you, so this chap brings in some vegetables, you know
547	L:	[<laughs>
548	C:	Oh
549	T:	And...
550	P:	[( )
551	T:	[They are, well, he just delivers it, it just comes, you know, he just comes
552		every Wednesday.
553	L:	This, door-to-door selling?
554	T:	Oh no, not not - well, it's an agreement. We, we just pay so much every
555		week, automatically from the bank. They just bring the box. They look

556		very different there, you know, because they are not perfect, you see,
557		because the [insects have eaten them a bit, and, ( ) you know.
558	L:	[I see, I see.
559	T:	But, they do taste nicer. ( ) What were [we talking about?
560	C:	[So
561	C:	let's, let's go back to the an-, [an-
562	T:	[To the ACE, yes yes yes [that's right.
	T:	<laughs>
563	C:	[You ask the
564		question, you ask the question to us: "what's the likes and don't, dislikes?"
565	T:	Oh, yeah, yeah, okay.
566	C:	Shall I, shall I [say first?
567	T:	[Yeah, yeah, do, do!
568	C:	I think what I like is something in the academic field, the academic field,
569	T:	Mm
570	C:	academic field. When I came here, I feel it's quite different. Um it's a kind
571		of, um, um in the surface, it looks something relax. It's not very, I mean,
572		strict. But you have learned a lot of things.
573	T:	Mm.
574	C:	It's different atmos – classphere,.
575	T:	Mm
576	C:	oh, classroom.
577	T:	Mm
578	C:	When you are studying in the classroom, you talk with your classmates
579		and talk with teachers. It's quite different. When we are studying in China.
580		We, we can only sit inside of the class, and listen, listen all the time.
581	T:	But is that fair though, because you are older now, maybe the universities,
582		you know, the universities in China are different to schools?
583	C:	But I think... not very different. I still - when I was studying in the first
584		degree in Southwest Normal University, um the class is not very
585		interesting. Teacher always kept talking. I think (.) and um especially here,
586		in the technology of computers is very advanced, such as you can sign in,
587		or you can register in the Blackboard, you can find whatever you want,
588		about the message, about the information, about the course. Um it's very
589		good for your self-study.
		(2.0)
590	C:	[I feel it's very amazing I come here. That's, that's my feeling about it.
591	T:	[( )
592	T:	Yeah, you like it here, okay.
		(1.5)
		<laughter from the participants>
593	T:	Must be something [it's not
594	C:	[But, but I think, um living here is quite difficult for
595		us. I mean, something, such as, um you have to cook by yourself. You
596		have to, find something to do that makes you not be lonely.
597	T:	Mm
598	C:	You will not feel lonely.
599	T:	Mm
600	C:	And it's very far from the parents, your friends. Maybe it's kind of
601		difficulty you have to face.

602	T:	Well, eventually, most people do but, gradually. For you, it's a big shock,
603		isn't? It is a big change.
604	C:	Yeah.
605	T:	I used to say to the students you know, the boys especially, because it is (a
606		bit mixed) you see. Um... I said (to everybody): "Can you cook?"
607	C:	Yes, [I can
608	T:	[They laughed: "Of course I can't cook, you know. Mom does all
609		that", whoever!
610	C:	Oh yeah <laughs>
611	T:	Well find out how to cook. "What's your favourite dish?" "Oh..." "Learn
612		how to make it. Because you know I said to them "In England you can buy
613		all those spices and [( ) and then you can cook for yourself."
614	C:	[Yeah, that's from the Chinese market
615	T:	And then you can cook for yourself. They all laughed at it. They didn't
616		believe it.
	C:	<laughs>
617	T:	But it's a great thing, because I used to say to them, "Cause the English
618		students do it as well I think, the old ones, (if you know what I mean).
619		(1.0) And they graduated, they, they sort of go, a group of people, maybe
620		eight people, two of them will cook a meal you see. ( ) and then the next
621		two will do the next meal in the next week, so you will have a nice meal
622		(.) perhaps every week, but it's a different, way of doing.
623	C:	I think here is some culture shock between Chinese students with some
624		Europe students. Maybe, they are, sometimes they can keep something in
625		mind, not speak out. Sometimes I feel students a little bit conservative.
626	T:	Sorry, say it again. [Which students?
627	C:	[Con- Conservative.
628	T:	English students you mean?
629	C:	I mean, European stu[dents
630	T:	[European students!=
631	C:	And maybe some British students. They are not easy to make friends, or to
632		be very close with, with them. I mean, here is a distance. You always feel
633		it's a distance between you and them.
634	T:	Yeah [( )
635	C:	[It's not easy to enter the society, I mean.
		(2.5)
636	T:	It's it's not a lack of – it's not unfriendly though, you know. It's not
637		unfriendly, because, cause En- English students say to me: "It's very hard
638		to get to know Chinese students, because they are always going around in
639		a gang. They are always in a group of Chinese [students, you [can't=
640	C:	[Yeah [yeah
641	T:	= break into the [( ), so it's a kind of, (.) you know. I suppose it's difficult.
642	C:	[I think
643	T:	But...
		(1.5)
644	T:	Is it any different now to ( )
645	L:	[Maybe
646	T:	[A year ago? Is it easier?
647	L:	Yes, I think so.
		<Tony carries on talking about his Chinese students>

9.2 Transcript for 'Scotch pancakes', Topic 10 in C5[*]

115	W:	What's that?
116	H:	Oh, those are just called 'scotch pancakes'.
117	P:	Oh pan[cakes
118	H:	[They're kind of, they' re kind of bread, but sweet. And you just
119		put butter on. Would you like to try one?
120	W:	Yeah.
121	H:	( ) Children, children love them.
		<Cheng and Wong laugh>
122	H:	Do, do put your strawberries to the side, and then you can put it on your
123		plate, and you'll be okay. Yeah, so...
124	C:	I think [why they just like the
125	W:	[This is pancake?
126	W:	But it is different from [English pancake.
127	H:	[Yeah, it is not like the French, mm... what, and
128		English pancake's very very thin,
129	W:	yeah
130	P:	[Mm
131	H:	[and made with the batter. This is thicker batter, and you put it, you cook it
132		on them, mm, how can I say? I've never kind of made - Dave's mother
133		used to make them a lot, um, just hot plate, just pour a little bit on. So it's
134		made in a similar way, but you don't eat them hot.
135	P:	Okay
136	W:	but that kind of pancake is very big, [the shape, is as as as same as the pan,
137	H:	[Yes, that's right.
138	W:	[but this is very small
139	H:	[That's right, just spread out a little bit, and then cooks, yes, yeah. But they
140		are kind of bread, I suppose, really, and...

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[*] C represents Cheng; W represents Wong; H represents Helen; P represents Ping

9.3 Transcript for 'Tony and Jane's tea trip in China', Topic 10 in C3 *

133	T:	I see. (1.5) There are so many different kinds, um...we went on some of
134		these small trips by coach, touri- tourist you see. But we would be the
135		only foreigners on the bus
136	C:	oh
137	T:	Jane and I.
	J:	\<laughs\>
138	B:	They call it=
139	B:	=So we couldn't understand anything)
140	T:	[They call it [( )
141	C:	[They want you to ( ) or [most the same?
142	B:	[Do you want any crisps?
143	T:	Well it's funny because [they, you know we we listen to them=
144	J:	[No, thanks \<refuses the crisps offered by John\>
145	T:	=explaining the different kinds of tea, we we don't under[stand.
146	J:	[Thank you.
147	T:	And...we're okay.
148	B:	Yes?
149	T:	Oh thank you \<John is offering some crisps\>
150	B:	How much is it?
151	T:	Sorry?
152	B:	This one, I put it here.
153	T:	Oh thank you.
154	J:	Thank you.
155	T:	And I said "Oh it's very expensive, so give me the smallest tin". \<all laugh\>
156	B:	You know, just bought to try, you see.
157	C:	Yeah
158	B:	And then I see all these Chinese people, I mean, they're... buying,
159		hundreds, hundreds of [Kuai=
160	C:	[Oh...
161	B:	=[for this tea.
162	W:	=[Yes yeah...
163	T:	Really, I mean, it's
164	B:	Yeah=
165	B:	=such a luxury=

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* C represents Cheng; W represents Wong; T represents Tony; J represents Jane; B represents Bin; P represents Ping

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9.4 Transcript for 'The weather in Africa', Topic 7 in C1

122	T:	....When we lived in Africa
		(0.8)
123	L:	You lived [in Africa?
124	T:	[Did I tell you we, I was, we were teachers you see, [so we=
125	C:	[Oh yeah
126	T:	=had taught in different countries and (1.0) years ago, we went to Africa,
127		of course, middle of Africa, where on the equator, it's zero latitude. And...
128		(1.0) it never changes all through the year, the sun's shining every day
	C:	<laughs>
129	T:	All through the year. And, you know, it rains, half of the year only at
130		night, generally. So, you never talked about the weather.
131	L:	Oh
132	T:	And I remember one day – only been there for a while, I came out of the
133		school, and I thought: "Oh it's, a very nice day."
134	L:	<laughs> but it's the same!
135	T:	It's the same, exactly the same <laughs>. No difference, you know=
136	L:	=Mm=
137	T:	=They thought I was very strange.
		(2.8)

9.5 Transcript for 'Cheng's stay in London', Topic 8 in C6 *

138	T:	=So have you seen anything of London yet? But, the sort of historical
139		buildings, tourist places. Have you had a chan[ce to see?
140		[Yeah yeah yeah. National
141		Gallery, and British Museum.
142	T:	Oh...okay=
143	J:	=Very good!
144	W:	And, big Ben! Bell.
145	J:	Mm
146	**C:**	**I think, I have stayed there, because Bin's accommodation in university,**
147		college of University of London, um is quite near to British Museum.
148		[So I just visit there [everyday because I have no places to go. <laughs>
149	J:	[Oh, really? [oh...
150	C:	And [there is free.
151	J:	[I thought he was in Bristol.
152	C:	Um, Bristol is quite, yeah, Bristol, I have visited the Suspension Bridge.
153	J:	Yeah. But I thought Bin was in Bristol.
154	C:	Yeah yeah, before before he moved into Bristol, he has a language course
155		in [UCL.
156	J:	[London? Right, oh UCL, yeah.

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* the line in bold indicates the starting point of Topic 8; C represents Cheng; L
represents Lin; W represents Wong; T represents Tony; J represents Jane

9.6 Transcript for 'Becoming a judge in England' (Topic 74), and 'Bin's other career choice' (Topic 75) in C6 *

1420	J:	I think in England you would have to be a lawyer [first.
1421	P:	[First yeah=
1422	T:	=Generally yeah, but
1423	P:	You have to have a lot of experience then=
1424	J:	[=Then be a barrister.
1425	W:	[=So in China…you don't need to be a lawyer, you can be a judge?
1426	J:	Strai[ght away.
1427	P:	[It sounds a bit [strange
1428	J:	[Mm
1429	C:	It it decide, it depends on yourself. [If you want to be a judge, but the=
1430	P:	[okay
1431	C:	=income of a judge is a little bit lower [than a lawyer.
1432	P:	[Okay <laughs>
1433	J:	Mm
1434	C:	And It's quite challenging, yeah
1435	J:	Mm
1436	P:	I see
1437	**C:**	**And the other choice for him is to be a um tutor in university.** And at
1438		the same time to do a part-time job for the lawyer.
1439	J:	[Mm
1440	T:	[Yes
1441	C:	So it depends
1442	P:	That's good.
1443	C:	the kind of situation.

Appendix 10.

10.1 Complete list of conversational topics in C1 (36 in total) *

The following abbreviations for names are used (this description applies to all the six NS-NNS conversations)

	Full names
C	Cheng (NNS subject)
L	Lin (NNS subject)
W	Wong (NNS subject)
T	Tony (NS participant)
S	Steve (NS participant)
J	Jane (NS participant
H	Helen (NS participant)
B	Bin (NNS, Cheng's boyfriend)
P	Ping (myself, the researcher)

Topics	Participants	Cheng	Lin	Tony	Ping
1	Fireplace (256)	23 (9%)	64 (25%)	121 (47.2%)	48 (18.8%)
2	"Hit her"/ "Heater" (56)	3 (5.4%)		44 (78.6%)	9 (16%)
3	"Nagging" (75)	2 (2.7%)	19 (25.3%)	54 (72%)	
4	Weather (95)	30 (31.6%)	47 (49.5%)	18 (18.9%)	
5	Temperatures (116)	1 (0.9%)	8 (6.9%)	67 (57.8%)	40 (34.5%)
6	Possibility of seeing snow this coming winter (119)	35 (29.4%)	4 (3.4%)	72 (60.5%)	8 (6.7%)
7	Weather in Africa (164)	2 (1.2%)	10 (6.1%)	152 (92.7%)	
8	Going to places (72)	56 (77.8%)		16 (22.2%)	
9	Travelling by bus with student fares (142)	42 (29.6%)		79 (55.6%)	21 (14.8%)
10	The New Forest (144)	44 (30.6%)		91 (63.2%)	9 (6.3%)

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* In each table, the conversational topics are arranged in terms of their sequential order appearing in the conversation. The second column offers the complete list of the coded conversational topics, together with the total number of words contributed by the participants. The quantifying results for the participant's conversational involvement in each individual conversational topic are also offered, both in word number and in terms of the percentage of contribution.

11	Animals in the New Forest (83)	5 (6%)	4 (4.8%)	59 (71.1%)	15 (18.1%)
12	Lymington (133)	49 (36.9%)		53 (39.8%)	31 (23.3%)
13	Chichester (41)	9 (22%)		30 (73.1%)	2 (4.9%)
14	Walking as an exercise (116)	68 (58.6%)		48 (41.4%)	
15	The place where C is living (transitional) (13)	7		6	
16	"Crematorium" (234)	72 (30.8%)	10 (4.3%)	152 (64.9%)	
17	Italian language is good for Chinese learners (35)	1 (2.9%)	4 (11.4%)	30 (85.7%)	
18	Chinese pronunciation (220)	14 (6.4%)	30 (13.6%)	173 (78.6%)	3 (1.4%)
19	English as an international language (170)	16 (9.4%)		154 (90.6%)	
20	Learning French (246)	4 (1.6%)	21 (8.5%)	211 (85.8%)	10 (4.1%)
21	T's interest in how the Chinese feel about living in England (128)	12 (9.3%)	1 (0.8%)	115 (89.8%)	
22	T's opinion of Chinese students (75)	34 (45.3%)	3 (4%)	38 (50.7%)	
23	The retirement age for teachers (51)	7 (13.7%)	15 (29.4%)	29 (56.9%)	
24	T's teaching history (61)	29 (47.5%)		30 (49.2%)	2 (3.3%)
25	The foundation course (54)	46 (85.2%)		8 (14.8%)	
26	The founding of the teaching company in China (201)	5 (2.5%)	11 (5.5%)	184 (91.5%)	1 (0.5%)
27	The course provided by the teaching company (56)		12 (21.4%)	44 (78.6%)	
28	C and the course (52)	22 (42.3%)		30 (57.7%)	
29	The benefits of the course (101)	50 (49.5%)	3 (3%)	34 (33.6%)	14 (13.9%)
30	Profit making of the company (80)	10 (12.5%)		70 (87.5%)	
31	Enquiry about the name of the company	16		9	

	(interrupted) (25)				
32	Organic food (195)	1 (0.5%)	11 (5.6%)	174 (89.2%)	9 (4.6%)
33	C's likes about studying in England (278)	224 (80.6%)		54 (19.4%)	
34	C's dislikes about studying in England (87)	61 (70.1%)		26 (29.9%)	
35	Cooking for oneself in England (195)	11 (5.6%)		184 (94.4%)	
36	Distance between Chinese students and English students (187)	90 (48.1%)	5 (0.5%)	92 (49.2%)	

10.2 Complete list of conversational topics in C2 (29 in total)

Topics \ Subjects	Cheng	Lin	Wong	Steve
1 Attitudes towards England (41) (orientation topic)				
2 Free speech and public demonstration (159)		131 (82.4%)	1 (0.6%)	27 (17%)
3 L's opinion towards free speech (63)		42 (66.7%)		21 (33.3%)
4 S's opinion towards free speech (146)	3 (2.1%)	6 (4.1%)	2 (1.4%)	135 (92.5%)
5 General regulations on public demonstration (368)		151 (41%)	3 (0.8%)	214 (58.2%)
6 Gay demonstration in Brighton (75)		9 (12%)	43 (57.3%)	23 (30.7%)
7 S's enquiry about gay phenomenon in China (13) (Transitional)		4		9
8 S's Chinese competence in Chinese (55)	7 (12.7%)	8 (14.5%)	22 (40%)	18 (32.7%)
9 Functional talk (sending email to Wong) (24)				
10 The different use of the words 'gay people' in Chinese and English (65)	31 (47.7%)	5 (7.7%)	7 (10.8%)	22 (33.8%)
11 The notebook of S's (48)	15 (31.2%)		9 (18.8%)	24 (50%)
12 The journey S has to make to come to the University (106)	35 (33%)		7 (6.6%)	64 (60.4%)
13 W's bus journey to the campus (44)	14 (31.8%)		22 (50%)	8 (18.2%)
14 The places where	19	5	9	25

	the students live (58)	(32.8%)	(8.6%)	(15.5%)	(43.1%)
15	The Wedding pictures of S's(57)	14 (24.6%)		15 (26.3%)	28 (49.1%)
16	Photo of duck's feet as a dish in China (22)	6 (27.2%)	3 (13.6%)	8 (36.4%)	5 (22.7%)
17	C's relation to the place where the photos were taken (31)	14 (45.2%)			17 (54.8%)
18	Attitudes towards the food on the photos (36)	15 (41.7%)		5 (13.9%)	16 (44.4%)
19	S's business trip to China(46)	16 (34.8%)		4 (8.7%)	26 (56.5%)
20	Photos of S's wife (37)	6 (16.2%)		8 (21.6%)	23 (62.2%)
21	S's short stay in China (36)	10 (27.8%)	13 (36.1%)		13 (36.1%)
22	The photo of S's wife (45)	19 (42.2%)	1 (2.2%)	3 (6.7%)	22 (48.9%)
23	Taipei 101, the tallest building in the world (99)	7 (7.1%)	45 (45.5%)	2 (2%)	45 (45.5%)
24	A new tall building being built in Shanghai (97)	9 (9.3%)	18 (18.6%)		70 (72.2%)
25	(back to) The photo of S's wife (15)	10 (66.7%)	3 (20%)		2 (13.3%)
26	A funny restaurant in China (99)	11 (11.1%)	8 (8.1%)	1 (1%)	79 (79.8%)
27	Bones in dishes (74)	19 (25.7%)	15 (20.3%)		40 (54.1%)
28	S's enquiry about the students' attitudes towards English food (20)		11 (55%)		9 (45%)
29	S's intention to go back to China soon (25)	7 (28%)		2 (8%)	16 (64%)

10.3 Complete list of conversational topics in C3 (25 in total)

Topics \ Subjects	C	L	W	B	T	J	P
1 T's preference for Cadbury Chocolate (50)	3 (6%)				47 (94%)		
2 Whisky sold in China (86)				19 (22.1%)	64 (74.4%)		3 (3.5%)
3 Personal tastes towards whisky (73)					25 (34.2%)	3 (4.2%)	45 (61.6%)
4 The addition of Ginger Ale to whisky (58)	6 (10.3%)			17 (29.3%)	3 (5.2%)	5 (8.6%)	27 (46.6%)
5 Small cans of Ginger Ale (64)	3 (4.7%)		2 (3.1%)	23 (35.9%)	36 (56.3%)		
6 Ginger Ale (87)	13 (14.9%)		4 (4.6%)	18 (20.7%)	35 (40.2%)	4 (4.6%)	13 (14.9%)
7 Jane's attitude towards Whisky (19)			9	4		6	
8 The Chinese tea on the table (43)	14 (32.6%)	2 (4.7%)		20 (46.5%)	7 (16.3%)		
9 Chinese Tea (114)	44 (38.6%)		45 (39.5%)		10 (8.8%)	15 (13.1%)	
10 T and J's tea trip in China (131)	12 (9.2%)			1 (0.8%)	113 (86.3%)	5 (3.8%)	
11 Traditional function of Chinese tea (121)	20 (16.5%)		73 (60.3%)	6 (5%)	14 (11.6%)		8 (6.6%)
12 Tea as a nice gift in Chinese culture (87)			3 (3.4%)	32 (36.8%)	9 (10.3%)	9 (10.3%)	34 (39.1%)
13 Different tea drinking cultures (262)	10 (3.8%)	1 (0.4%)	21 (8%)	3 (1.1%)	137 (52.3%)		90 (34.4%)
14 "Steal the milk out of your tea" (169)	1 (0.6%)	9 5.3%	7 (4.1%)	18 (10.7%)	115 (68%)	15 (8.9%)	4 (2.4%)
15 The man in the New Forest (47)					39 (83%)		8 (17%)

16	The prohibition of fox-hunting by law (434)	2 (0.5%)		12 (2.8%)	82 (18.9%)	104 (24%)	195 (44.9%)	39 (9%)
17	"Hog" (154)				53 (34.4%)	88 (57.1%)	6 (3.9%)	7 (4.5%)
18	"Road hog" (126)	1 (0.8%)		2 (1.6%)	4 (3.2%)	84 (66.7%)	5 (4%)	30 (23.8%)
19	Holly for Christmas decoration (280)	73 (26.1%)		1 (0.4%)	45 (16.1%)	97 (34.6%)	27 (9.6%)	37 (13.2%)
20	Mistletoe for Christmas celebration (102)	32 (31.4%)				69 (67.6%)	1 (1%)	
21	The plant of mistletoe (78)	1 (1.3%)			31 (39.7%)	27 (34.6%)	19 (24.4%)	
22	The start of Christmas celebration in England (70)	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)		1 (1.4%)	23 (32.9%)	39 (55.7%)	5 (7.1%)
23	Prince Albert and the Osborne House on Isle of Wight (120)	1 (0.8%)				16 (13.3%)	63 (52.5%)	40 (33.3%)
24	The make of the cupboard (43)	3 (7%)			17 (39.5%)	23 (53.5%)		
25	Visit to Isle of Wight (52)	14 (26.9%)			5 (9.6%)	14 (26.9%)	19 (36.5%)	

10.4 Complete list of conversational topics in C4 (31 in total)

Topics \ Subjects		Lin	Tony	Ping
1	T's trip to China (59)	15 (25.4%)	44 (74.6%)	
2	T's visit to his Chinese friends (65)	19 (29.2%)	46 (70.8%)	
3	T's work colleagues in China (60)	14 (23.3%)	46 (76.7%)	
4	The reason for T's visit (109)	12 (11%)	97 (89%)	
5	The completion of a course (199)	85 (42.7%)	113 (56.8%)	1 (0.5%)
6	T's 'missing out' on his Chinese exam (61)	3 (4.9%)	53 (86.9%)	5 (8.2%)
7	L's travelling plan (226)	110 (48.7%)	85 (37.6%)	31 (13.7%)
8	L's schedule to stay over in London (163)	107 (65.6%)	33 (20.2%)	23 (14.1%)
9	L's dissertation (168)	124 (73.8%)	44 (26.2%)	
10	The solitary lives of the two Chinese students in Bristol (345)	86 (24.9%)	186 (53.9%)	73 (21.2%)
11	The Chinese boy (43)		9 (20.9%)	34 (79.1%)
12	The poor communicative ability of the two Chinese students (75)	11 (14.7%)	64 (85.3%)	
13	(Back to) The Chinese boy (148)	31 (20.9%)	38 (25.7%)	79 (53.4%)
14	The Chinese girl (73)	4 (5.4%)	35 (47.9%)	34 (46.6%)
15	The difficulty of being independent at a younger age (167)	106 (63.5%)	61 (36.5%)	
16	Gaining confidence for the Chinese students in their second	14 (13.6%)	89 (86.4%)	

	year (103)			
17	The dilemma of studying abroad at a younger age for Chinese students (63)	25 (39.7%)	10 (15.9%)	28 (44.4%)
18	The difficulty of learning a second language (112)	2 (1.8%)	109 (97.3%)	1 (0.9%)
19	L's secondary school study (131)	62 (47.3%)	69 (52.7%)	
20	The influence of teachers' attitudes on students (95)	29 (30.5%)	65 (68.4%)	1 (1.1%)
21	The playing of sports at L's secondary school (182)	147 (80.8%)	33 (18.1%)	2 (1.1%)
22	Physical exercises in Chinese secondary schools (342)	67 (19.6%)	243 (71%)	32 (9.4%)
23	(back to) L's dissertation (169)	131 (77.5%)	38 (22.5%)	
24	The movie-watching of the two Chinese students (236)	89 (37.7%)	147 (62.3%)	
25	Travelling to learn (139)	48 (34.5%)	87 (62.6%)	4 (2.9%)
26	Part-time jobs for students (164)	64 (39%)	97 (59.1%)	2 (1.2%)
27	Part-time jobs for students in England (68)	7 (10.3%)	60 (88.2%)	1 (1.5%)
28	L's part-time job (70)	37 (52.9%)	30 (42.9%)	3 (4.2%)
29	P's job in a bookshop (83)	28 (33.7%)	41 (49.4%)	14 (16.9%)
30	The high cost of employing people in England (129)	14 (10.9%)	109 (84.5%)	6 (4.6%)
31	The (un)cleanliness of the streets in cities (143)	83 (58%)	57 (39.9%)	3 (2.1%)

10.5 Complete list of conversational topics in C5 (69 in total)

Topics	Subjects	Cheng	Wong	Helen	Ping
1	C's language competence (126)	62 (49.2%)	1 (0.8%)	63 (50%)	
2	The sandwiches on the table (87)		2 (2.3%)	56 (64.4%)	29 (33.3%)
3	Shopping for cooking sauces in supermarkets (63)	30 (47.6%)	1 (1.6%)	14 (22.2%)	18 (28.6%)
4	The use of cooking sauces in different cultures (104)		48 (46.2%)	56 (53.8%)	
5	Personal likes on cooking (110)	26 (23.6%)	3 (2.7%)	78 (70.9%)	3 (2.7%)
6	Table talk (44)	2 (4.5%)	4 (9.1%)	38 (86.4%)	
7	The course study of C and W's (41)		24 (58.5%)	17 (41.5%)	
8	C and W's career plan after the course (105)	4 (3.8%)	48 (45.7%)	53 (50.5%)	
9	H's family connection to teaching profession (72)	1 (1.4%)		61 (84.7%)	10 (13.9%)
10	Scotch pancakes (215)	7 (3.3%)	37 (17.2%)	171 (79.5%)	4 (1.9%)
11	Different types of butter (181)	15 (8.3%)	21 (11.6%)	144 (79.6%)	1 (0.6%)
12	(Dis)likes of dessert (164)	55 (33.5%)	6 (3.7%)	50 (30.5%)	53 (32.3%)
13	Table talk (eating coffee cake) (87)	1 (1.1%)	16 (18.4%)	66 (75.9%)	4 (4.6%)
14	Paul (72)			55 (76.4%)	17 (23.6%)
15	Paul's steward duty at Wimbledon (146)	6 (4.1%)	2 (1.4%)	135 (92.5%)	3 (2.1%)
16	A privilege to work at Wimbledon (198)	9 (4.5%)	3 (1.5%)	153 (77.3%)	33 (16.7%)
17	The movie "Wimbledon" (182)	98 (53.8%)	16 (8.8%)	39 (21.4%)	29 (15.9%)
18	Tennis and Tennis	9	9	202	8

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#					
	players (228)	(3.9%)	(3.9%)	(88.6%)	(3.5%)
19	Table talk (H is inviting her guests for more sandwiches) (75)	35 (46.7%)	4 (5.3%)	36 (48%)	
20	H's enquiry about C's career plan (29)	9 (31%)		20 (69%)	
21	Table talk (67)			46 (68.7%)	21 (31.3%)
22	C's teaching job in the future (25)	7 (28%)		18 (72%)	
23	W's teaching job in the future (166)	4 (2.4%)	45 (27.1%)	117 (70.5%)	
24	The history of English learning in China (189)	85 (45%)	15 (7.9%)	83 (43.9%)	6 (3.2%)
25	Foreign language learning for the English (196)	10 (5.1%)	3 (1.5%)	183 (93.4%)	
26	The speaking speed of native speakers (145)	104 (71.7%)		41 (28.3%)	
27	Accents can make communication difficult (229)	11 (4.8%)	20 (8.7%)	174 (76%)	24 (10.5%)
28	Table talk (H is offering more tea to her guests) (124)	14 (11.3%)	7 (5.6%)	88 (71%)	15 (12.1%)
29	'Devon is beautiful' (50)	45 (90%)		5 (10%)	
30	H's relation to the sea (129)	8 (6.2%)		121 (93.8%)	
31	Holidays in Cornwall (247)	28 (11.3%)	12 (4.9%)	207 (83.8%)	
32	H's enquiry about the places that C and W have been to (transitional) (21)	10		11	
33	W's inability to talk with food in mouth (70)	26 (37.1%)	2 (2.9%)	42 (60%)	
34	Photos of H's grandsons (133)	36 (27.1%)	2 (1.5%)	64 (48.1%)	31 (23.3%)
35	The expecting of a baby girl in H's family (56)		1 (1.8%)	40 (71.4%)	15 (26.8%)

36	H's birthday trips (transitional) (36)		1 (2.8%)	34 (94.4%)	1 (2.8%)
37	H's younger appearance than her real age (28)	5 (17.9%)	6 (21.4%)	15 (53.6%)	2 (7.1%)
38	Driving through Longleat Park in a minibus (113)	6 (5.3%)	6 (5.3%)	97 (85.8%)	4 (3.5%)
39	The location of Longleat Park(33)			19 (57.6%)	14 (42.4%)
40	Monkeys in Longleat Park (58)	2 (3.4%)		39 (67.2%)	17 (29.3%)
41	Other animals out in Longleat Park (46)	3 (6.5%)		34 (73.9%)	9 (19.6%)
42	The danger of car-damage caused by monkeys (203)	10 (4.9%)	3 (1.5%)	178 (87.7%)	12 (5.9%)
43	H's future granddaughter (99)	13 (13.1%)	19 (19.2%)	64 (64.6%)	3 (3%)
44	Bringing up three boys in H's family (105)	3 (2.9%)	1 (1%)	101 (96.2%)	
45	The names for H's future granddaughter (95)	5 (5.3%)		79 (83.1%)	11 (11.6%)
46	Glen Eyre Hall where C stays (259)	121 (46.7%)	13 (5%)	117 (45.2%)	8 (3.1%)
47	Another building in Glen Eyre (169)	33 (19.5%)		136 (80.5%)	
48	John used to stay in Montefiore (111)	4 (3.6%)	22 (19.8%)	66 (59.5%)	19 (17.1%)
49	John's career choice (258)	32 (12.4%)		224 (86.8%)	2 (0.8%)
50	Teaching training course for new graduates (269)	14 (5.2%)	14 (5.2%)	179 (66.5%)	62 (23.1%)
51	H's second son's career as a teacher (105)	14 (13.3%)	1 (1%)	81 (77.1%)	9 (8.6%)
52	H's teaching history (135)	13 (9.6%)	1 (0.7%)	111 (82.2%)	10 (7.4%)
53	Peter's career changing (131)	7 (5.3%)	3 (2.4%)	118 (90%)	3 (2.3%)
54	Table talk (H is			21	3

	inviting P for more food) (24)			(87.5%)	(12.5%)
55	Self-catering (105)	70 (66.7%)	22 (20.9%)	13 (12.4%)	
56	Attitudes towards cooking (69)	2 (2.9%)	43 (62.3%)	24 (34.8%)	
57	The catering experience of John's (179)		30 (16.8%)	143 (79.9%)	6 (3.4%)
58	Table talk (H is inviting her guests to more tea) (61)	5 (8.2%)	8 (13.1%)	40 (65.6%)	8 (13.1%)
59	The gardening program on TV (194)	133 (68.6%)	17 (8.8%)	44 (22.7%)	
60	The other gardening program on TV(127)	4 (3.1%)	1 (0.8%)	118 (92.9%)	4 (3.2%)
61	H's TV watching of 'Gardeners' World' (22)	1		15	6
62	(back to) C's gardening program on TV (172)	119 (69.2%)		44 (25.6%)	9 (5.2%)
63	H's failure to visit garden shows (88)			69 (78.4%)	19 (21.6%)
64	Chelsea garden show (71)	2 (2.8%)	1 (1.4%)	60 (84.5%)	8 (11.3%)
65	Gardening as a national hobby (73)	17 (23.3%)	1 (1.4%)	38 (52.1%)	17 (23.3%)
66	The rapid development in gardening industry (215)	7 (3.3%)	5 (2.3%)	202 (94%)	1 (0.5%)
67	C's wish to have her own garden in China (71)	64 (90.1%)		7 (9.9%)	
68	H's enquiry about public gardens (parks) in China (161)	46 (28.6%)	10 (6.2%)	60 (37.3%)	45 (28%)
69	Paying to go to parks in China (104)	7 (6.7%)	52 (50%)	34 (32.7%)	11 (10.6%)

10.6 Complete list of conversational topics in C6 (77 in total)

Topics / Subjects	Cheng	Wong	Tony	Jane	Ping
1 Weather	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	19 (18.6%)	30 (29.4%)	50 (49%)
2 T's going away (47)	10 (21.2%)	2 (4.3%)	33 (70.2%)	2 (4.3%)	
3 James (50)	1 (2%)		31 (62%)	5 (10%)	13 (26%)
4 C's going to places (111)	71 (64%)	1 (0.9%)	11 (1%)	27 (24.3%)	1 (0.9%)
5 W's seminar in London (218)	22 (10.1%)	165 (75.7%)	30 (13.8%)	1 (0.5%)	
6 W's Plan to see Van Gogh's paintings (130)	7 (5.4%)	76 (58.5%)	21 (16.2%)	7 ((5.4%)	19 (14.6%)
7 W's sightseeing of London (39)		12 (30.8%)	24 (61.5%)	3 (7.7%)	
8 C's stay in London (89)	67 (75.3%)			22	
9 Rose (121)	27 (22.3%)	1 (0.8%)	27 (22.3%)	44 (36.4%)	22 (18.2%)
10 Rose's job (1) - energy saving (92)	4 (4.3%)	1 (1.1%)	76 (82.6%)		11 (12%)
11 Rose's job (2) - recycling rubbish (239)	16 (6.7%)	39 (16.3%)	118 (49.4%)	47 (19.7%)	19 (7.9%)
12 The reason why Rose is in Edinburgh (transitional) (16)	13		3		
13 '/edinbərə/' (47)	17 (36.2%)	4 (8.5%)	15 (31.9%)	11 (23.4%)	
14 '/rediŋ/' (45)	22 (48.9%)	3 (6.7%)	5 (11.1%)	2 (4.4%)	13 (28.9%)
15 Other pronunciation issues (72)	6 (8.3%)		44 (61.1%)	17 (23.6%)	5 (6.9%)
16 Northampton (77)	23 (29.9%)	18 (23.4%)	20 (25.9%)	16 (20.8%)	
17 '/pliməθ/' (55)	2 (3.6%)	4 (7.3%)	6 (10.9%)	32 (58.2%)	11 (20%)
18 The pigeon in the garden (31)	6 (19.3%)		13 (41.9%)	4 (12.9%)	8 (25.8%)
19 Pigeon as food (102)	24 (23.5%)	12 (11.8%)	50 (48%)	12 (11.8%)	4 (3.9%)

20	Racing pigeon (131)	28 (21.4%)	12 (9.2%)	63 (48.1%)	17 (13%)	11 (8.4%)
21	Baby ducks (83)	31 (37.3%)	10 (12%)	11 (13.2%)	9 (10.8%)	22 (26.5%)
22	Swan on nest (89)	4 (4.5%)	7 (7.9%)	10 (11.2%)	54 (60.7%)	14 (15.7%)
23	Swan eggs (118)	10 (8.5%)	1 (0.8%)	59 (50%)	23 (19.5%)	25 (21.2%)
24	The location of the swans (143)	1 (0.7%)	6 (4.2%)	47 (32.9%)	89 (62.2%)	
25	The disappearance of baby ducks (42)	22 (52.4%)	2 (4.8%)	7 (16.6%)	11 (26.2%)	
26	Baby horse (87)	2 (2.3%)	37 (42.5%)	13 (14.9%)	30 (34.5%)	5 (5.7%)
27	The ownership of the ponies in the New Forest (40)			34 (85%)		6 (15%)
28	Differences between ponies and horses (83)	2 (2.4%)	17 (20.5%)	41 (49.4%)	22 (26.5%)	1 (1.2%)
29	The ownership of the horses in the New Forest (46)			42 (91.3%)		4 (8.7%)
30	Horse-selling (122)	4 (3.3%)	10 (8.2%)	27 (22.1%)	62 (50.8%)	19 (15.6%)
31	Riding horses (62)	1 (1.6%)		12 (19.4%)	7 (11.3%)	42 (67.7%)
32	Fox-hunting (180)	52 (28.9%)	1 (0.6%)	104 (57.8%)	4 (2.2%)	19 (10.6%)
33	C's witness of real fox (108)	80 (74.1%)	10 (9.3%)	9 (8.3%)	5 (4.6%)	4 (3.7%)
34	T's experience of seeing a fox (66)	2 (3%)	1 (1.5%)	37 (56%)	23 (34.8%)	3 (4.5%)
35	W's experience of seeing a fox (102)	1 (1%)	25 (24.5%)	2 (2%)	71 (69.6%)	3 (2.9%)
36	P's wish to see a real fox (93)	6 (6.5%)		27 (29%)	17 (18.3%)	43 (46.2%)
37	James' being back at the house (39)	7 (17.9%)		9 (23%)	13 (33.3%)	10 (25.6%)
38	Sports facilities at the University (75)	38 (50.7%)	20		7	10
39	W's body-conditioning class (118)	6 (5.1%)	46 (39%)	16 (13.6%)	46 (39%)	4 (3.4%)
40	Doing exercises (97)		51 (52.6%)	21 (21.6%)	25 (25.8%)	
41	J's gym-going once (72)		1 (1.4%)	13 (18%)	33 (45.8%)	25 (34.7%)

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42	Body-conditioning class is for everyone (62)		45 (72.6%)		10 (16.1%)	7 (11.3%)
43	Doing Yoga (89)	1 (1.1%)	61 (68.6%)	5 (5.6%)	9 (10.1%)	13 (14.6%)
44	Pilates (195)	11 (5.7%)	8 (4.2%)	2 (1%)	95 (48.7%)	79 (40.5%)
45	J's experience of doing Yoga in China (227)	14 (6.2%)	31 (13.7%)	20 (8.8%)	131 (57.7%)	31 (13.7%)
46	Dancing at the back of the stage (74)	1 (1.3%)	27 (36.5%)			46 (62.2%)
47	Irish dancing (53)		3 (5.7%)	26 (49%)	22 (41.5%)	2 (3.8%)
48	W's interest in all kinds of dancing (36)		13 (36.1%)	5 (13.9%)	7 (19.4%)	11 (30.6%)
49	The movie "Shall We Dance?" (90)	22 (24.4%)	37 (41.1%)	2 (2.2%)	3 (3.3%)	26 (28.9%)
50	Richard Gere, the movie star (50)		27 (54%)	6 (12%)	9 (18%)	8 (16%)
51	T's claim of seeing the movie (64)	18 (28.1%)	2 (3.1%)	19 (29.7%)	25 (39.1%)	
52	J's two relatives who are dancers (109)	3 (2.8%)	1 (0.9%)		96 (88.1%)	9 (8.3%)
53	Different forms of dancing (154)	13 (8.4%)	43 (27.9%)	6 (3.9%)	63 (40.9%)	29 (18.8%)
54	Dancing program on TV (95)	33 (34.7%)		34 (35.8%)	19 (20%)	9 (9.5%)
55	Ball room dancing (89)	9 (10.1%)	9 (10.1%)	33 (37.1%)	31 (34.8%)	7 (7.9%)
56	W's chance to go to a Ball once (155)	25 (16.1%)	98 (63.2%)	6 (3.9%)	20 (12.9%)	6 (3.9%)
57	Running group (192)	15 (7.8%)	38 (19.8%)	23 (12%)	13 (6.8%)	103 (53.6%)
58	Host talk (T's time plan for dinner) (33)	1 (3%)		18 (54.5%)	4 (12.1%)	10 (30.3%)
59	Conversation recording (61)	6 (9.8%)	14 (23%)	33 (54.1%)		8 (13.1%)
60	Recording instruments (149)	32 (21.5%)	10 (6.7%)	37 (24.8%)	7 (4.7%)	63 (42.3%)
61	The story of Paula and her mobile (195)	72 (37%)	3 (1.5%)	79 (40.5%)	32 (16.4%)	9 (4.6%)

62	T's trip in China (99)	26 (26.3%)	10 (10.1%)	40 (40.4%)	22 (22.2%)	1 (1%)
63	J's jury service in the court (156)	13 (8.3%)	8 (5.1%)		117 (75%)	18 (11.5%)
64	The selection of the juries (90)	1 (1.1%)	15 (16.7%)	25 (27.8%)	49 (54.4%)	
65	The working system of the jury service (1) (105)	27 (25.7%)	1 (1%)	14 (13.3%)	57 (54.3%)	6 (5.7%)
66	Different law practices between America and England (82)	22 (26.8%)	1 (1.2%)	9 (11%)	43 (52.4%)	7 (8.5%)
67	Different law systems between China and England (118)	68 (57.6%)	36 (30.5%)	9 (7.6%)	2 (1.7%)	3 (2.5%)
68	'Doing this jury system is expensive' (130)	2 (1.5%)	36 (27.7%)	56 (43.1%)	25 (19.2%)	11 (8.5%)
69	The inconvenience for people who are working to do the jury service (217)	10 (4.6%)	1 (0.5%)	15 (6.9%)	179 (82.5%)	12 (5.5%)
70	T's experience of being called once (76)	3 (3.9%)		51 (67.1%)	13 (17.1%)	9 (11.8%)
71	Philip's being called for the jury service once (87)	2 (2.3%)	2 (2.3%)	5 (5.7%)	70 (80.4%)	8 (9.2%)
72	The working system of the jury service (2) (138)	2 (1.4%)	19 (13.8%)	5 (3.6%)	95 (68.8%)	17 (12.3%)
73	B's plan to be a judge in China (142)	104 (73.2%)	8 (5.6%)	7 (4.9%)	15 (10.6%)	8 (5.6%)
74	Becoming a judge in England and China (98)	33 (33.7%)	15 (15.3%)	3 (3.1%)	21 (21.4%)	26 (36.7%)
75	B's other career choice (39)	35 (89.7%)		1 (2.6%)	1 (2.6%)	2 (5.1%)
76	Becoming a judge in England (176)	8 (4.5%)	25 (14.2%)	50 (28.4%)	86 (48.9%)	7 (4%)
77	The case of Michael Jackson (123)	29 (23.6%)	5 (4.1%)	48 (39%)	8 (6.5%)	33 (26.8%)

Appendix 11.

Principles for categorising conversational topic genres

11.1. Story-telling

Although the 'story-telling' genre seems to have the most distinctive discourse structure,

confusion arose when it came to analysing the actual conversation data, as shown in the

following extract:

```
365          ....
366   L:     Maybe French, French was very strong at that moment.
367   T:     Yes, but... yes, it's a funny thing: now... my youngest son, James – I
368          must show you some pictures in a minute if you're interested. But... he is
369          a student now, same, same as – well, a bit younger than you.
370   C:     Oh?
371   T:     He is in his second year of a degree course.
372   C:     Oh
             (1.0)
373   T:     He is doing it in Canada, in... (what's that again?) Montreal, is it? Where
374          they, they speak French as well as English. Did you, did you know there is
375          a part of Canada...Quebec! They call it, and [they don't speak English (at
376          all)
377   L:                                                                    [( )
             (1.5)
378   T:     And...so he has to use his French at school.
379   C:     Yeah, okay
380   T:     Because um... his French cousins (.) his relatives, we used to say to him,
381          "Come on now, you have, you know, French speaking cousins, you must
382          learn French at school!" "Oh... why bother? They all speak perfect
383          English!"
384   P:     Do they?
385   T:     They do actually, oh, yeah, pretty [(good English)
386   P:                                          [Because their mother is English.
387   T:     Um, so it makes him very lazy, makes, this makes us all very lazy. You
388          know, Why bother?
             (3.0)
389   T:     Can't be helped.
      P:     <laughs>
390   P:     That's true, really.
             (1.6)
```

('Learning French', Topic 20 in C1)

At the first glance, this topic cannot be coded as 'story-telling', because it does not

contain obvious temporal sequencing events that typify most stories. But it does not

belong to other types of topic genres either. A more careful examination of the text,

however, reveals the necessary stages that qualify a text as 'story-telling'. To start with, Tony's utterance in Line 367 introduces the *abstract* stage of the story. By saying 'yes, it's funny thing: now... my youngest son, James ....' Tony was trying to capture the attention of his listeners, meanwhile, he was orientating his listeners by introducing the principal character of the story – his son, James. More details about James were offered, which extended the orientation stage in Line 371, and from Line 373 to Line 376. But the culmination of the orientation didn't appear until Tony's introduction that 'so he has to use his French at school' (Line 378). Compared to the orientation part of the story, the *complication* and the *resolution* stages were presented in a less dramatic way, as revealed in Lines 380-383. The *evaluation* stage that followed marked the ending part of the story, as Tony expressed his opinion and attitude: 'Um, so makes him very lazy, makes, this makes us all very lazy. You know, Why bother' (Lines 387-388)?

By comparison, to code other topics that involved a clearly stated time line of events was easier. An example is the coding of 'weather in Africa' in C1, in which the different stages of the story-telling can be easily identified by the set of conjunctives and clauses used (the different genre stages are marked out, and the conjunctive words and clauses are also highlighted in bold for emphasis):

Coda
120 T: But it's umm...it's always different, so it's something to talk about, (1.6)
121   when you meet people for the first time, discuss the weather (for instance) (1.8)

Orientation
122   **When** we lived in Africa
          (0.8)
123 L: You lived [in Africa?
124 T: [Did I tell you we, I was, we were teachers you see, [so we=
125 C: [Oh yeah
126 T: =**had taught** in different countries and (1.0) years ago, we **went** to Africa,
127   of course, middle of Africa, where on the equator, it's zero latitude.

Complication
128   **And** (1.0) it never changes all through the year, the sun's shining every day
          C: <laughs>
129 T: All through the year. And, you know, it rains, half of the year only at night,
130   generally. So, you never talked about the weather.
131 L: Oh
132 T: And I remember **one day** – only been there for a while, I came out of the
133   school, and I thought: "Oh it's, a very nice day."

Resolution
134   L: \<laughs\> but it's the same!

Coda
135   T: It's the same, exactly the same \<laughs\>. No difference, you know=
136   L: =Mm=

Evaluation
137   T: =They thought I was very strange.
              (2.8)

(Weather in Africa, Topic 7 in C1)

The above constituent stages proved useful devices to code 'story-telling' texts.
However, I found it hard to accommodate the actual conversational data by sticking to
the rules. Eggins and Slade (1997) make it clearly that *complication* constitutes the
main stage of a story with an emerging crisis or problem. This leads to the confusion in
coding the actual data, as quite a few topics from the data were found following a time
line of sequences that typify a story genre, only that they did not seem to have a crisis or
problem. These narrations are normally descriptions about processes, as shown in the
example, in which Tony told how the teaching company was founded by a Chinese man
graduated from Manchester University:

              ....
462   T: [**He** was in Manchester University, **did a business studies course,**
463   you see. **So he went back to China,** and said: "right, I am going to start
464   business you see, umm and so of course he had links with the university in
465   Manchester, **and...so he set up this company...**and teaching really. He,
466   he **got in touch with the local school,** and **rented some classrooms and**
467   **some offices** and so on. (1.2) **Then** he (.) **hired some teachers** from
468   Britain, to go over there and teach. But of course the parents pay... fees,
469   [and **then he paid the teachers.**
              ....

('The founding of the teaching company in China', Topic 26 in C1)

As shown in the example, there is no crisis or problem emerging out of the text.
However, the description has followed a distinctive structure with clearly stated
sequencing events. Semantically, the text is full of conjunctives and simple past tenses,
as normally appeared in story-telling. In other words, Tony had provided an account of
how this Chinese teaching company was founded with a principal character, a location,
a series of events and a consequence (indicated in bold). Therefore, although there does

not seem to involve a *complication* and a *resolution* stage, the account is regarded as a story-telling in its own right.

11.2. Opinion seeking/providing

Where the topic is started with a question like 'how do you think about...?', it has the potential of falling into the category of 'opinion-seeking'. Topic 21 in C1 is an example, in which Cheng asks Tony for his opinion of Chinese students:

```
409    C:      [How do you, do you think about Chinese students?
410    T:    [How do I think about?
       L:    [<laughs>
411    C:    Yeah

              ....
418    T:    Changing all the time, I think, it's just me now.
419    C:    Changing?
420    T:    Um...three years ago now it would be, wouldn't it? I retired when I was
421          sixty, sixty years old.

              ....
```

('Tony's opinion of Chinese students', Topic 21 in C1)

Cheng's topic initiation in Line 409 falls into the description above, that is, Cheng can be regarded as seeking an opinion by saying: 'How do you, do you think about Chinese students?' With Tony offering his opinion that '(Chinese students are) changing all the time' in Line 418, this topic qualifies as an 'opinion-seeking/providing' text.

Sometimes, this type of topic can start with a statement which is opinion-related. In Topic 33 in C1, Cheng talked about what she liked about studying in England (see Appendix 9.1). Although some negotiation was involved in topic initiation, Cheng's turn that 'I think what I like is something in the academic field, the academic field' (Line 568) set the record for the direction of the topic development. As it turned out, this topic proceeded into an 'opinion-providing' text with more opinions and explanations offered by Cheng. Again in the immediate next topic, the text was coded as 'opinion-making' because Cheng started with the structure 'I think...' (Line 594), and also based on the fact that in the following turns she was allowed to clarify her opinion.

However, not all topics starting with 'I think...' were coded into 'opinion-providing' genre. In the next example, Lin made such utterance:

306	L:	I think, the, the most frequently (appeared) pronunciation in Chinese is /a/.
307		I think many, many nouns or many words contain this /a/, /a/, /a/ sound.

('Chinese sounds', Topic 18 in C1)

By using 'I think' in Line 306, Lin seemed to offer an opinion while she was actually trying to present a 'fact' that 'Chinese pronunciation has many /a/ sounds' for discussion. As it turned out, the text successfully developed into an 'observation' topic, despite of an inserted 'story-telling' text in the middle contributed by Tony to exemplify Lin's observation.

11.3. Observation

As discussed in Chapter 3, two types of 'observation' topic exist in casual talk. One type that can be easily identified from the conversational data is the 'local observation' topic. It includes observation made on anything within the immediate physical setting or within the immediate action of conversation as it occurs, such as the talk on 'fireplace' in C1, talk on 'ginger ale', the drink Tony offered to his guests in C4, and so on.

The non-local observation, comparatively, requires more effort. Any chunk topic that provides large portions of narration and description without any identifiable sequencing events has the potential to be coded as an observation. But to be actually able to qualify as an 'observation' topic, the functional interpretation of the text is also needed. This step of analysis was crucial at times when I had to distinguish an 'observation' from another type of topic genre, 'information-seeking/providing' (see the discussion in Chapter 4, Section 4.6.4.2)

11.4. 'Chat' topic

A typical 'chat' topic is quoted from C2:

265	W:	[Is this your wife? <laughs>
266	S:	<laughs> No
267	C:	Okay, where where is your wife? <laughs>
268	S:	That isn't my wife, is it?
269	W:	Your
270	S:	Try to [find (one)

```
271  W:            [first wife <laughs>
272  S:   (This one), Panda? (1.0) It's good, it's good. I'm really interested in China.
273
274  W:   Oh...
```

('Photo of Steve's wife', Topic 20 in C2)

The participants in the text were found chattering away, and the topic could end anywhere. For example, in Line 272, Steve went back to his previous talk on his visit in China after just a few short utterances exchanged about his wife. The same discourse pattern goes to Topic 22, in which Steve's wife became the brief focus of the talk again:

```
282  W:   =Oh! And wife?
283  S:   Yeah
284  C:   Is that your wife?
285  S:   This is Taipei 101. [Do you know Taipei 101?
286  L:                       [Ah
287  C:   I think she looks so similar, oh familiar. Maybe I have saw her before?
     W:   <laughs in the background>
288  S:   No, I don't think you have seen her. She hasn't been here.
289  C:   Oh...
          (3.0)
```

('The photo of Steve's wife 2, Topic 22 in C2)

Again, Steve gave the impression that he was not concentrating on what was going on, as he didn't answer the question raised by Wong and Cheng. On the other hand, Cheng ignored Steve's question in Line 285, as she made her comment on Steve's wife in Line 287. This is not to say that a chat is characterised by having no particular focus to be distinguished from the chunk topics discussed above. It is true, however, in a chatting context, participants are allowed to show less attention to others, simply because what is going on in the talk is less important than the fact that the conversation is still kept going.

Detailed descriptions of the participants' conversational involvement across the six NS-NNS conversations are provided in six individual tables here, revealing their tendencies in topic initiating, their choice of topic genres, and their contribution in each individual topic regarding the total words they uttered. The topics grouped in each table share the same topic initiator. For example in C1, all the conversational topics started by Cheng are listed together, followed by others. Topic genres are provided in the third column, indicating the natures of the topics in discussion. In the fourth column on the far right side shows the type of conversational involvement: Where any of the participating Chinese students' conversational involvement is rated above 50% (including 50%), the topic is coded as 'NNS dominant', and is marked in red; where the participating Chinese students' conversational involvement is rated below 10%, the conversation is coded as 'NS dominance', and is marked in bold; where a topic claims neither NS dominance nor NNS dominance, the conversation topic is coded as 'NNS active'. The 'others' type applies to conversational topics when either Ping or Bin's conversational involvement is rated as 10% or over in 'non-NNS active involvement' topics

The following abbreviations for names are used:

	Full names
C	Cheng (NNS subject)
L	Lin (NNS subject)
W	Wong (NNS subject)
T	Tony (NS participant)
S	Steve (NS participant)
J	Jane (NS participant
H	Helen (NS participant)
B	Bin (NNS, Cheng's boyfriend)
P	Ping (myself, the researcher)

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Appendix 12.

12.1 Description of the participants' conversational involvement in C1

Cheng (C1)

6	Possibility of seeing snow this coming winter (119)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (29.4%)
10	The New Forest (144)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (30.6%)
12	Lymington (133)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (36.9%)
13	Chichester (41)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (22%)
19	**English as an international language (170)**	**Observation**	**NS dominance (90.6%)**
22	T's opinion of Chinese students (interrupted) (75)	Opinion seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (45.3%)
24	T's teaching history (61)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (47.5%)
25	The foundation course (54)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C) dominance (85.2%)
28	C and the course (52)	Chat	NNS (C) active involvement (42.3%)
33	C's likes about studying in England (278)	Opinion providing	NNS (C) dominance (80.6%)
34	C's dislikes about studying in England (87)	Opinion providing	NNS (C) dominance (70.1%)
36	Distance between Chinese students and English students (187)	Opinion providing	NNS (C) active involvement (48.1%)

Lin (C1)

18	Chinese pronunciation (220)	Observation/Story-telling (T)	NNS (L) active involvement (13.6%)
20	**Learning French (246)**	**Observation/Story-telling (T)**	**NS dominance (85.8%)**
23	The retirement age for teachers (51)	Opinion providing	NNS (C/L) active involvement (13.7%/29.4%)
27	The course provided by the teaching company (56)	(Observation)/Information providing (T)	NNS (L) active involvement (21.4%)
31	Enquiry about the name of the company (interrupted) (25)	Information seeking/providing	

Tony (C1)

2	"Hit her"/ "Heater" (52)	Local observation	Others (P: 16%)
3	"Nagging" (75)	Information providing	NNS (L) active involvement (25.3%)
4	Weather (95)	Opinion seeking/providing	NNS (C/L) active involvement (31.6%/49.5%)
5	Temperatures (116)	Observation	Others (P: 34.5%)
7	**Weather in Africa (164)**	**Story-telling**	**NS dominance (92.7%)**
8	Going to places (72)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C) dominance (77.8%)
9	Travelling on bus with student fares (142)	Information providing	NNS (C) active involvement (29.6%)
14	Walking as an exercise (116)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (58.6%)
15	The place where C is living (transitional) (13)	Information seeking/providing	
16	"Crematorium" (234)	Information providing	NNS (C) active involvement (30.8%)
17	Italian language is good for Chinese learners (35)	Observation	NNS (L) active involvement (11.4%)
21	**T's interest in how the Chinese feel about living in England (128)**	**Opinion seeking**	**NS dominance (89.8%)**

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26	The founding of the teaching company in China (201)	Story-telling	NS dominance (91.5%)
30	Profit making of the company (80)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (12.5%)
32	Organic food (195)	Information providing	NS dominance (89.2%)
35	Cooking for oneself in England (195)	Observation	NS dominance (94.4%)

Ping (C1)

1	Fireplace (256)	Observation	NNS (L) active involvement (25%)
11	Animals in the New Forest (83)	Information providing	Others (P: 18.1%)
29	The benefits of the course (101)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (49.5%)

12.2 Description of the participants' conversational involvement in C2

Cheng (C2)

8	S's competence in Chinese (55)	Opinion providing	NNS (C/L/W) active involvement (12.7%/14.5%/40%)
10	The different use of the words 'gay people' in Chinese and English (65)	Observation/Chat	NNS (C/W) active involvement (47.7%/10.8%)
11	The notebook of S's (48)	Chat	NNS (C/W) active involvement (31.2%/18.8%)
12	The journey S has to make to come to the University (106)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (33%)
15	Wedding pictures of S's (57)	Chat	NNS (C/W) active involvement (24.6%/26.3%)
17	C's relation to the place where the photos were taken (31)	Chat	NNS (C) active involvement (45.2%)
21	S's short stay in China (36)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C/L) active involvement (27.8%/36.1%)
25	(back to) The photo of S's wife (15)	Opinion providing	
27	Bones in dishes (74)	Local observation	NNS (C/L) active involvement (25.7%/20.3%)

Lin (C2): 2

2	Free speech and public demonstration (159)	Story-telling/information seeking/providing	NNS (L) dominance (82.4%)
5	General regulations on public demonstration (368)	Information seeking/providing/observation/opinion-providing	NNS (L) active involvement (41%)

Wong (C2)

4	S's opinion towards free speech (146)	Opinion seeking/providing	NS dominance (92.5%)
6	Gay demonstration in Brighton (75)	Observation	NNS (W) dominance (57.3%) NNS (L) active involvement (12%)

13	W's bus journey to the campus (44)	Chat	NNS (W) dominance (50%) NNS (C) active involvement (31.8%)
16	Photo of duck's feet as a dish in China (22)	Chat	
18	Attitudes towards the food on the photos (36)	Opinion seeking/providing	NNS (C/W) active involvement (41.7%/13.9%)
20	Photos of S's wife (1) (37)	Chat	NNS (C/W) active involvement (16.2%/21.6%)
22	The photo of S's wife (2) (45)	Chat	NNS (C) active involvement (42.2%)

Steve (C2)

1	Attitudes towards England (41)	Orientation talk (not included for analysis)	
3	L's opinion towards free speech (63)	Opinion seeking/providing	NNS (L) dominance (66.7%)
7	S's enquiry about gay phenomenon in China (13) (Transitional)	Information seeking	
9	Sending email to Wong (24)	Functional talk (not included for analysis)	
14	The places where the students live (58)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (32.8%)
19	S's business trip to China (46)	Information providing	NNS (C) active involvement (34.8%)
23	Taipei 101, the tallest building in the world (99)	Information providing	NNS (L) active involvement (45.5%)
24	A new tall building being built in Shanghai (97)	Information providing	NNS (L) active involvement (18.6%)
26	A funny restaurant in China (99)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (11.1%)
28	S's inquiry about the students' attitudes towards English food (20)	Opinion seeking/providing	
29	S's intention to go back to China soon (25)	Personal information providing	

12.3 Description of the participants' conversational involvement in C3

Cheng (C3)

8	The Chinese tea on the table (43)	Chat	NNS (C/B) active involvement (32.6%/46.5%)
9	Chinese Tea (114)	Information providing	NNS (C/W) active involvement (38.6%/39.5%)
19	Holly for Christmas decoration (280)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (26.1%)
20	Mistletoe for Christmas celebration (102)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (31.4%)

Wong (C3)

7	Jane's attitude towards Whisky (19)	Opinion seeking/providing	
11	Traditional function of Chinese tea (121)	Information providing	NNS (W) dominance (60.3%) NNS (C) active involvement (16.5%)
13	**Different tea drinkingcultures (262)**	**Observation/Story-telling (T/P)**	**NS (T) dominance (52.3%)**
16	The prohibition of fox-hunting by law (434)	Information seeking/Observation (B)/Opinion providing (T)	Others (B: 18.9%)

Bin (C3)

5	Small cans of Ginger Ale (64)	Local observation	Others (B: 35.9%)
17	"Hog" (154)	Information seeking/providing	Others (B: 34.4%)
24	**The make of the cupboard (43)**	**Information seeking/providing**	**NS dominance (53.5%)**

Tony (C3)

1	T's preference for Cadbury Chocolate (50)	Opinion providing	NS (T) dominance (94%)
2	Whisky sold in China (86)	Observation	Others (B: 22.1%)
10	T and J's tea trip in China (131)	Observation	NS (T) dominance (86.3%)
14	"Steal the milk out of your tea" (169)	Information providing	Others (B: 10.7%)
15	The man in the New Forest (47)	Chat	Others (P: 17%)
18	"Road hog" (126)	Information providing	Others (P: 23.8%)
22	The start of Christmas celebration in England (70)	Information providing	NS (J) dominance (55.7%)

Jane (C3)

21	The plant of Mistletoe (70)	Observation	Others (B: 39.7%)
25	Visit to Isle of Wight (52)	Personal information seeking	NNS (C) active involvement (26.9%)

Ping (C3)

3	Personal tastes towards whisky (73)	Observation	Others (P: 61.6%)
4	The addition of Ginger Ale to Whisky (58)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (10.3%)
6	Ginger Ale (87)	Observation/Information providing (T)	NNS (C) active involvement (14.9%)
12	Tea as a nice gift in Chinese (87)	Observation	Others (B: 36.8%, P: 39.1%)
23	Prince Albert and the Osborne House on Isle of Wight (120)	Observation	Others (P: 33.3%)

12.4 Description of the participants' conversational involvement in C4

Lin (C4)

1	T's trip to China (59)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS active involvement (25.4%)
2	T's visit to his Chinese friends (65)	Opinion seeking/providing	NNS active involvement (29.2%)
3	T's work colleagues in China (60)	Information seeking/providing	NNS active involvement (23.3%)
8	L's schedule to stay over in London (163)	Personal information providing	NNS dominance (65.6%)
20	The influence of teachers' attitudes on students (95)	Opinion providing	NNS active involvement (30.5%)
31	The (un)cleanliness of the streets in cities (143)	Opinion providing	NNS dominance (58%)

Tony (C4)

4	The reason for T's visit (109)	Information providing	NNS active involvement (11%)
5	The completion of L's course (199)	Observation	NNS active involvement (42.7%)
6	T's 'missing out' on his Chinese exam (61)	Chat	NS dominance (86.9%)
7	L's travelling plan (226)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS active involvement (48.7%)
9	L's dissertation (168)	Personal information seeking	NNS dominance (73.8%)
10	The solitary lives of the two Chinese students in Bristol (345)	Observation	NNS active involvement (24.9%)
12	The poor communicative ability of the two Chinese students (75)	Observation	NNS active involvement (14.7%)
15	The difficulty of being independent at a younger age (167)	Observation	NNS dominance (63.5%)
16	Gaining confidence for the Chinese students in their second year (103)	Observation	NNS active involvement (13.6%)
18	The English teacher in China (112)	Story-telling	NS dominance (97.3%)
19	L's secondary school study (131)	Opinion seeking/providing	NNS active involvement (47.3%)

21	The playing of ports at L's secondary school (182)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS dominance (80.8%)
22	Physical exercises in Chinese secondary schools (342)	Observation	NNS active involvement (19.6%)
23	(back to) L's dissertation (169)	Personal information seeking /providing	NNS dominance (77.5%)
24	The movie-watching of the two Chinese students (236)	Story-telling/Observation (T)	NNS active involvement (37.7%)
25	Travelling to learn (139)	Observation	NNS active involvement (34.5%)
26	Part-time jobs for students (231)	Opinion-seeking/providing	NNS active involvement (30.7%)
27	Part-time jobs for students in England (68)	Observation	NNS active involvement (10.3%)
28	L's part-time job (70)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS dominance (52.9%)
29	P's job in a bookshop (83)	Chat	NNS active involvement (33.7%)
30	The high cost of employing people in England (129)	Observation	NNS active involvement (10.9%)

Ping (C4)

11	The Chinese boy (43)	Gossip	Others (P: 79.1%)
13	(back to) The Chinese boy (148)	Observation	NNS active involvement (20.9%)
14	The Chinese girl (73)	Observation	Others (P: 46.6%)
17	The dilemma of studying abroad at a younger age for Chinese students (58)	Observation	NNS active involvement (43.1%)

12.5 Description of the participants' conversational involvement in C5

Cheng (C5)

3	Shopping for cooking sauces in supermarkets (63)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (47.6%)
5	Attitudes towards cooking (110)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (23.6%)
11	Different types of butter (181)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (W) active involvement (11.6%)
12	(Dis)likes of dessert (164)	Opinion providing	NNS (C) active involvement (33.5%)
17	The movie "Wimbledon" (182)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (53.8%)
24	The history of English learning in China (189)	Information providing	NNS (C) active involvement (45%)
26	The speaking speed of native speakers (145)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (71.7%)
29	'Devon is beautiful' (50)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (90%)
34	Photo of H's grandsons (133)	Local observation	NNS (C) active involvement (27.1%)
43	H's future granddaughter (95)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C/W) active involvement (13.1%/19.2%)
49	John's career choice (258)	Personal information seeking/providing/ Story-telling (H)	NNS (C) active involvement (12.4%)
59	The gardening programme on TV (194)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (68.6%)
62	(Back to) C's gardening programme on TV (172)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (69.2%)
67	C's wish to have her own garden in China (71)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (90.1%)
69	Paying to go to parks in China (104)	Observation	NNS (W) dominance (50%)

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Wong (C5)

4	The use of cooking sauces in different cultures (110)	Observation	NNS (W) active involvement (43.6%)
10	Scotch pancakes (215)	Information seeking	NNS (W) active involvement (17.2%)
37	H's younger appearance than her real age (28)	Chat	NNS (C/W) active involvement (17.9%/21.4%)

Helen (C5)

1	C's English proficiency (126)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (49.2%)
6	Table talk (44)	Functional topic (not included for analysis)	
7	The course study of C and W's (41)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (W) dominance (58.5%)
8	C and W's career plan after the course (105)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (W) active involvement (45.7%)
9	H's family connections to teaching profession (71)	Personal information providing	Others (P: 13.9%)
13	Table talk (87)	Functional topic (not included for analysis)	
15	Paul's steward duty at Wimbledon (146)	Information providing	NS dominance (92.5%)
18	Tennis and tennis players (228)	Information providing	NS dominance (88.6%)
19	Table talk	Inviting for more food	NNS (C) active involvement (46.7%)
20	H's enquiry about C's career plan (29)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (31%)
21	Table talk (67)	Inviting for food	Others (P: 31.3%)
22	C's teaching job in the future (25)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (28%)
23	W's teaching job in the future (166)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (W) active involvement (27.1%)
25	Foreign language learning for the English (196)	Observation/Story-telling (H)	NS dominance (93.4%)
27	Accents can make communication difficult (229)	Observation	Others (P: 10.5%)
28	Table talk (124)	Inviting for more tea	NNS (C) active involvement (11.3%)

30	**H's relation to the sea (129)**	**Observation**	**NS dominance (93.8%)**
31	Holidays in Cornwall (247)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (11.3%)
32	Places that C and W have been to (transitional) (21)	Personal information seeking	
33	W's inability to talk with food in mouth (70)	Chat	NNS (C) active involvement (37.1%)
35	The expecting of a baby girl in H's family (56)	Personal information providing	Others (P: 26.8%)
36	**H's birthday trips (transitional) (36)**	**Personal information providing**	**NS dominance (94.4%)**
38	**Driving through Longleat Park in a minibus (113)**	**Story-telling**	**NS dominance (85.8%)**
41	Other animals in Longleat Park (46)	Observation	Others (P: 19.6%)
42	**The danger of car-damage caused by monkeys (203)**	**Story-telling**	**NS dominance (87.7%)**
44	**Bringing up three boys in H's family (105)**	**Observation**	**NS dominance (96.2%)**
45	Names for H's future granddaughter (95)	Personal information providing	Others (P: 11.6%)
46	Glen Eyre Hall where C stays (202)	Information providing	NNS (C) active involvement (46.7%)
47	Another building in Glen Eyre (226)	Information providing	NNS (C) active involvement (19.5%)
48	John used to stay in Montefiore (111)	Personal information providing	NNS (W) active involvement (19.8%)
51	H's second son's career as a teacher (105)	Personal information providing	NNS (C) active involvement (13.3%)
53	**Peter's career change (131)**	**Personal information providing**	**NS dominance (90%)**
54	Table talk (24)	Functional topic (not included for analysis)	Others (P: 12.5%)
55	Self-catering (105)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C) dominance (66.7%) NNS (W) active involvement (20.9%)
56	Attitudes towards cooking (69)	Opinion seeking/providing	NNS (W) dominance (62.3%)
57	The catering experience of John's (179)	Observation	NNS (W) active involvement (16.8%)

58	Table talk (H is inviting her guests to more tea) (61)	Functional topic (not included for analysis)	
60	**The other gardening programme on TV (127)**	**Observation**	**NS dominance (92.9%)**
61	H's TV watching of 'Gardeners' world' (22)	Chat	
64	Chelsea garden show (71)	Chat/information providing	Others (P: 11.3%)
65	Gardening as a national hobby (73)	(Personal information seeking)/Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (23.3%)
66	**The rapid development in gardening industry (215)**	**Observation**	**NS dominance (94%)**
68	Public gardens (parks) in China (161)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (28.6%)

Ping (C5)

2	Table talk: The sandwiches on the table (87)	Comment on the food	
14	Paul (72)	Chat	Others (P: 23.6%)
16	A privilege to work at Wimbledon (198)	Observation/Information providing (H)	Others (P: 16.7%)
39	The location of Longleat Park (58)	Information seeking/providing	Others (P: 42.4%)
40	Monkeys in Longleat Park (58)	Information seeking/providing	Others (P: 29.3%)
50	Teaching training course for new graduates (264)	Observation	Others (P: 23.1%)
52	**H's teaching history (135)**	**Personal information providing (H)**	**NS dominance (82.2%)**
63	H's failure to visit garden shows (88)	Chat	Others (P: 21.6%)

12.6 Description of the participants' conversational involvement in C6

Cheng (C6)

8	C's stay in London (89)	Personal information providing	NNS (C) dominance (75.3%)
12	The reason why Rose is in Edinburgh (transitional) (16)	Personal information seeking/providing	
14	'/Rediŋ/' (45)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (48.9%)
16	Northampton (77)	Observation	NNS (C/W) active involvement (29.9%/23.4%)
21	baby ducks (83)	Observation	NNS (C/W) active involvement (37.3%/12%)
25	The disappearance of baby ducks (42)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (52.4%)
32	Fox-hunting (180)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (28.9%)
33	C's witness of real fox (108)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (74.1%)
38	Sports facilities at the University (75)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (50.7%)
53	Different forms of dancing (154)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (W) active involvement (27.9%)
54	Dancing program on TV (95)	Opinion seeking/providing	NNS (C) active involvement (34.7%)
62	T's trip in China (73)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C/W) active involvement (26.3%/10.1%)
65	The working system of the jury service (1) (124)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (33.1%)
66	Different law practices between America and England (82)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (26.8%)
73	B's plan to be a judge in China (142)	Personal information providing	NNS (C) dominance (73.2%)
75	B's other career choice (39)	Personal information providing	NNS (C) dominance (89.7%)
77	The case of Michael Jackson (123)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (23.6%)

Wong (C6)

6	W's Plan to see Van Gogh's paintings (130)	Chat	NNS (W) dominance (58.5%)
19	Pigeon as food (102)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (C/W) active involvement (23.5%/11.8%)
26	Baby horse (87)	Observation	NNS (W) active involvement (42.5%)
28	Differences between ponies and horses (83)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (W) active involvement (20.5%)
35	W's experience of seeing a fox (102)	Observation	NNS (W) active involvement (24.5%)
39	W's body-conditioning class (118)	Chat	NNS (W) active involvement (39%)
40	Doing exercises (97)	Observation	NNS (W) dominance (52.6%)
42	Body-conditioning class is for everyone (62)	Opinion providing	NNS (W) dominance (72.6%)
49	The movie "Shall We Dance?" (90)	Observation	NNS (C/W) active involvement (24.4%/41.1%)
50	Richard Gere, the movie star (50)	Gossip	NNS (W) dominance (54%)
56	W's chance to go to a Ball once (155)	Observation	NNS (W) dominance (63.2%)
64	The selection of the juries (90)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (W) active involvement (16.7%)
67	Different law systems between China and England (117)	Observation	NNS (C) dominance (57.6%) NNS (W) active involvement (30.5%)
76	Becoming a judge in England (176)	(Information seeking)/Observation (J)	NNS (W) active involvement (14.5%)

Tony (C6)

2	T's going away (47)	Chat	NNS (C) active involvement (21.2%)
5	W's seminar in London (218)	(Personal information seeking)/ Observation (W)	NNS (W) dominance (75.7%) NNS (C) active involvement (10.1%)
7	W's sightseeing of London (39)	Personal information seeking	NNS (C) active involvement (30.8%)
9	Rose (121)	Personal information provding	NNS (C) active involvement (22.3%)
10	**Rose's job (1) - energy saving (92)**	**Information providing**	**NS (T) dominance (82.6%)**

11	Rose's job (2) - recycling rubbish (239)	Observation	NNS (W) active involvement (16.3%)
15	**Other pronunciation issues (72)**	**Observation**	**NS (T) dominance (61.1%)**
18	The pigeon in the garden (31)	Local observation	NNS (C) active involvement (19.3%)
27	The ownership of the ponies in the New Forest (40)	Information providing	Others (P: 15%)
29	**The ownership of the horses in the New Forest (46)**	**Information providing**	**NS (T) dominance (91.3%)**
34	**T's experience of seeing a fox (66)**	**Observation**	**NS (T) dominance (56%)**
36	P's wish to see a real fox (93)	(Personal information seeking)/Observation	Others (P: 46.2%)
45	J's experience of doing Yoga in China (227)	(Observation)/ Story-telling (J)	NNS (W) active involvement (13.7%)
47	Irish dancing (53)	Observation	Others (P: 3.8%)
51	T's claim of seeing the movie (64)	Chat	NNS (C) active involvement (28.1%)
55	Ball room dancing (243)	Information providing	NNS (C/W) active involvement (10.1%/10.1%)
59	Conversation recording (61)	Chat	NNS (W) active involvement (23%)
60	Recording instruments (149)	Observation	NNS (W) active involvement (21.5%)
61	The story of Paula and her mobile (195)	Information providing (updating)	NNS (C) active involvement (37%)
68	'Doing this jury system is expensive' (130)	Observation	NNS (W) active involvement (27.7%)

Jane (C6)

4	C's going to places (111)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (C) dominance (64%)
13	'/edinbərə /' (47)	Information providing	NNS (C) active involvement (36.2%)
17	**/Pliməθ/ (55)**	**Observation**	**NS (J) dominance (58.2%)**
20	Racing pigeon (131)	Observation	NNS (C) active involvement (21.4%)
22	Swan on nest (89)	Observation	Others (P: 15.7%)
23	Swan eggs (118)	Observation	Others (P: 21.2%)

24	The location of the swans (143)	Information seeking/providing	NS (J) dominance (62.2%)
43	Doing Yoga (89)	Personal information seeking/providing	NNS (W) dominance (68.6%)
44	Pilates (195)	Observation	Others (P: 40.5%)
52	J's two relatives who are dancers (109)	Observation	NS (J) dominance (88.1%)
63	J's jury service in the court (156)	Information providing	NS (J) dominance (75%)
69	The inconvenience for people who are working to do the jury service (217)	Observation	NS (J) dominance (82.5%)
71	Philip's being called for the jury service once (87)	Personal information providing	NS (J) dominance (80.4%)
74	Becoming a judge in England and China (98)	Observation	NNS (C/W) active involvement (33.7%/15.3%)

Ping (C6)

1	Weather (102)	Chat	Others (P: 49%)
3	James (50)	Chat	NS (T) dominance (62%)
30	Horse-selling (122)	Observation	Others (P: 15.6%)
31	Riding horses (62)	Observation	Others (P: 67.7%)
37	James' being back at the house (39)	Chat	NNS (C) active involvement (17.9%)
41	J's gym-going once (72)	Chat	Others (P: 34.7%)
46	Dancing at the back of the stage (74)	Observation	NNS (W) active involvement (36.5%)
48	W's interest in all kinds of dancing (36)	Chat	NNS (W) active involvement (36.1%)
57	Running group (192)	Information providing	NNS (W) active involvement (19.8%)
70	T's experience of being called once (76)	Personal information seeking/providing	NS (T) dominance (67.1%)
72	The working system of the jury service (2) (138)	Information seeking/providing	NNS (W) active involvement (13.8%)