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# Student Initiation of Academic Interaction and Language Background: A Comparison of NESB and ESB Students in Tutorials

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**S**tudies of the academic experiences of NESB (non-English-speaking background) tertiary students have identified issues concerning studying in a second language, the processes of academic and cultural adjustment, and approaches to learning. This case study draws these together in the context of the role of language, culture and dialogue in learning, specifically through student-initiated participation in the oral academic interaction of tutorials. A constructivist approach is taken in relation to both the nature of language and learning, and the method of investigation, which used observations followed by interviews. Only the study's first stage is described in this paper. It involved observation and recording of NESB and ESB (English-speaking background) students in tutorials. Analysis of exchanges initiated by students using a systemic linguistics approach allowed description and comparison of the initiations on the basis of language background.

## **Increasing NESB students**

The presence of NESB students in Australia's higher education system has increased dramatically over recent decades. In the mid-1980s Neumann (1985) was considering the needs of NESB students in terms of immigrants, second-generation immigrants, and overseas students. Less than twenty years later, internationalisation of the tertiary education sector in Australia has witnessed a tenfold increase in the number of overseas students (DEST, 2004). This phenomenon is taking place in universities where learners are participants in "a range of modes of instruction requiring students to take a more active role in the learning process (where) the ability to participate in and follow academic discussions can be critical" (Basturkmen, 1999, p. 63). It was recognised decades ago that NESB students were experiencing problems participating in spoken academic discourse (Bilbow, 1989; Bradley & Bradley, 1984), and it remains an issue "of broad significance across disciplines in tertiary settings" (Hellmundt, et al., 1998, p. 333). Tapper (1996, p. 30–31) concluded the need existed for descriptions of "how international students actually participate in academic oral interactions ...(and)... whether there are differences in non-native speaker participation...whether they initiate exchanges, and if so, what types of exchange patterns are involved". This paper reports the first phase of a study designed around a research question drawn directly from the questions posed by Tapper (1996): What are the differences between NESB and ESB

(English speaking background) students in their initiations of academic interaction in tutorials? The study takes the approach that the language used by students can reveal some understanding of how students are approaching learning, as well as some insight into active cognitive engagement in the social construction of knowledge. The student initiation is an easily identifiable indicator, in both presence and absence, of voluntary participation in oral discourse, observable by both the researcher and the students themselves, and, in the study's second phase (not reported here), facilitating student accounts of their actions.

### **NESB students and English language education**

The English language proficiency of international students in Australian universities has been investigated for at least thirty years (e.g., Bradley & Bradley, 1984; Hay, 1972; see Nixon, 1993, for a review). Phillips (1990, cited in Light & Cox, 2001, p. 18) reported "the most frequently heard observation (on the subject) from academics was that international students had inadequate English for coping with the multiplicity of tasks of tertiary education". English language proficiency across all four language macro-skills has been shown to be "a strong predictor of both course satisfaction and good results for NESB students studying in Australia" (Purdie, 2000, p. 120), and many international NESB students, despite satisfying English language requirements to gain entry to an Australian university, find their level of proficiency a serious obstacle to satisfactory academic performance (Coley, 1999, p. 7). Many studies (e.g., Burns 1991; Neumann, 1985; James & Devlin 2001; Mullins, et al., 1995; Barker, et al., 1985; Mulligan & Kirkpatrick, 2003) report that a majority of NESB students consider themselves to be experiencing some degree of difficulty participating in various aspects of oral academic discourse, many regarding it as a serious problem.

There is a belief widespread among teachers at all levels of education in Australia that many NESB students, and especially those from Asian backgrounds, engage in surface, or reproductive learning (Burns, 1991; Cameron & Meade, 2002; Nixon, 1993; Purdie, 2000; Samuelowicz, 1987; Volet et al., 1994). This is attributed to education in systems where questioning, argument and critical reflection are not congruent with cultural attitudes of deference towards teachers and the authority of texts, and teaching methods are based on passive absorption of knowledge rather than interaction. This raises two issues central to the situation of NESB learners: the relationships between culture and discourse, and between language and learning. The exchanges typical of the discourse of teaching and learning can be considered a speech genre, or, perhaps, a collection of genres found across a variety of learning experiences, that have been learned as the language itself was learned—through participation in culturally situated social interactions (Bakhtin, 1986). This set of genres permits participation in the discourse of the classroom, a discourse that performs as the medium of negotiation of new or more subtle understandings (Hicks, 1996, p. 105). Both NESB and ESB students bring their culturally and linguistically specific knowledge to the tutorial experience. It is not unreasonable to suggest NESB students are likely to experience additional difficulties in using their knowledge to develop new understandings in a different cultural setting. Barker et al (1989, p. 83) found that NESB students in their study were very aware of the

expectation to participate in academic interaction, but that "this behaviour was not expected in their home culture ... (and) ... they felt they did not have the English competence, the confidence or knowledge about how to participate actively in tutorials". This reference to competence, rather than proficiency, draws attention to that aspect of language ability where the knowledge of appropriate usage in specific social situations—the discourse and sociolinguistic competence NESB students may be lacking—is of greater importance than the grammatical or syntactic competence they may indeed possess (Edwards & Westgate, 1994, p. 21).

This relationship between culture and discourse is further complicated for many NESB students in the context of education systems that promote and value active learning, and interaction in classrooms. Anderson (1997, cited in Biggs, 1999, p. 85) describes 'good' tutorials as those that "promote active learning ... facilitate good debate, open out the quieter students ... and provide a focus for discussion and interaction". The emphasis on interactivity stems from cognitive theories that learning is a process of construction of new knowledge resulting from the interaction of old and new information, mediated by cultural tools such as language (Watkins, 1996, p. 4). Nystrand, et al., (2001), acknowledging the work of Bakhtin (1984), make epistemological distinctions between monologic and dialogic classroom discourse. In the former the teacher operates as if they "possess a ready made truth (while in the latter) teachers treat students as potential sources of knowledge and opinion" (Nystrand, et al., 2001, p. 4) in the co-construction of a shared understanding.

Knowing is thus not so much a state as a process, and as such is helped by social interaction ... talk is central to this view of learning and knowing, being the primary medium of interaction, and because it helps learners to make explicit to themselves and others what they know, understand and can do (Edwards & Westgate, 1994, p. 6).

### **Why discourse analysis?**

In such a context, participation in academic discourse can be seen to play a role in the learning of students, and analysis of the language used by students provides an insight into that participation. Speakers tailor utterances in response to context and participant/s to make meanings understood; they speak with their audience in mind. Objective 'information' is not exchanged, but subjective meanings shaped by the situation and the participants (Bakhtin, 1986). The work of Halliday (1978, 1985, 1994) provides an ideal discourse analysis framework for study of these subjective meanings. In a functional understanding of language use, student initiations are part of a culturally situated social activity. The tutorial is a social system created/realised through and in a language system that begins with the extra-linguistic cultural and situational contexts of the tutorial classroom, its generic discourse structures, and the participants involved. These contexts are linguistically realised in the meanings and lexico-grammar that make up the unique content of the exchanges in any tutorial. This content can be described through an analysis of the three functions of language; the ideational function that accounts for the experiences and goals of the participants, the interpersonal function that encodes the relationship between participants, and the textual function that organises the language into a coherent text, in this case a spoken exchange (Halliday, 1994). Halliday (1994, p.

xxv–xxvi) argues the strength of functional linguistics as a tool for spoken discourse analysis, stressing the unconscious nature of spoken language, the resultant unconscious grammatical choices, and the "unconscious rather than conscious slices of meaning" encoded.

### **Why the student initiation?**

Initiation/response/(optional feedback), or IR(F) is considered to be the basic interactional sequence (Mehan, 1988; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). The voluntary student initiation has been identified for specific study for a number of reasons. In the discourse of the tutorial, the initiation is an utterance responding to, and mindful of, at least one 'other' (Bakhtin, 1986). It is the most recent in a chain of utterances, composed to be meaningful in that chain in the context of formal education, where participants have come together to interact with no other purpose, in theory, than the construction of new or developed understandings. The student initiation is an observable indicator of active participation in the process, where student knowledge or understanding is shared in the building of understandings that reside in the shared social reality of the tutorial. Conversely, the absence of student initiation is observable; both behaviours are significant. Dillon (1988, pp. 9–10) attempted to focus on differences in learning when teachers or students ask questions, and concluded "when students ask, learning follows the answers." Student initiations that do take place are open to a linguistic analysis that allows description of three simultaneous meanings, or functions: the matter being discussed; the relationship between the participants and the personal commitment the speaker invests in an utterance; and the relationship to a previous utterance/s.

### **NESB student initiation in the discourse of the university tutorial**

Early research suggested tertiary students initiate oral academic interaction infrequently (Tapper, 1996). Tapper (1996, p. 30) asserts "there is little in the literature on (university) classroom discourse about exchange patterns ... (and) ... little is known about whether students who are non-native speakers participate in the exchange patterns of (university) discourse in different ways from native English speakers." Research into exchange patterns of NESB tertiary students has focused on EAP/ESP classrooms and content-based language-learning classrooms (eg., Musumeci, 1996; Wajnryb & Crichton, 1997; Wiessberg, 1993), or postgraduate students in seminar or supervision meeting contexts (Basturkmen, 1999, 2002; Cargill, 2000; Furneaux et al., 1991), rather than students in mainstream content classrooms (Tapper, 1996, p. 31). Basturkmen's (1999) study of NESB and ESB student-student exchange patterns in MBA seminars identified two types of student initiation, elicitation of information and of confirmation, but did not compare NESB and ESB students. Tapper's (1996) case study of university undergraduate discourse exchange patterns in four academic contexts included eight NESB students. Tapper reported the frequency of NESB student initiations, but did not compare NESB and ESB initiations, or categorise initiations other than as offers and questions. Renshaw and Volet (1995) observed first-year Singaporean Chinese students interactions compared with Australian students in the same groups. The Singaporean students identification of English as their first language means their study may reveal

more about the influence of educational and cultural background than language background. Three broad types of participation were identified: 'student-regulated', 'tutor-initiated', and 'tutor-regulated'. It was found there were "no differences in the total quantity or types of participation, (that the) average student from both groups engaged in only two or so instances of interaction in any tutorial" (p. 215), and Australian students exhibited both the highest and lowest levels of interaction.

### **Method**

The study as a whole works within an interpretative paradigm, applying a research strategy flowing from the constructivist-based interpretivist epistemology that Blaikie (2000) describes as abductive. "The abductive strategy involves constructing theory that is grounded in everyday activities, and/or in the language and meanings of social actors" (Blaikie, 2000, p. 117). This study argues that the meanings the participants construct of their social reality are encoded in the language they choose to use to interact in the social situation of the tutorial, and that these meanings are accessible through a discourse analysis using a systemic functional linguistics framework. The research takes a case study approach, focussing on "the investigation of a relatively small number of naturally occurring cases" (Hammersley, 1992, p. 185). In Eckstein's (1975) classification of the uses of case studies, this study is heuristic, allowing the researcher "to arrive at a preliminary theoretical construct ... (that) ... is unlikely to constitute more than a clue to a valid general model" (p. 104) of the participation of NESB international students in academic interaction.

### **The participants**

Data was collected from two classes that were selected on the basis that:

- the course was delivered, in English, in the form of a tutorial, to native English speakers and NESB students who had demonstrated the required English language proficiency, and
- NESB students were in their first year of study in an Australian university.

One class consisted of fourteen NESB students and six ESB students. The other consisted of ten NESB students and eighteen ESB students. Thus, across the study, numbers of NESB and ESB students were the same. Selection of participants was in accordance with the Human Research Ethics Manual (Griffith University, 2004) and a Human Research Proposal was submitted and approved before the study commenced.

### **Data collection and analysis**

The data collected for analysis are discourse moves, rather than complete exchanges. This is where data reduction has begun, and can be explained in terms of functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994), the discourse analysis tool applied in the study. It has already been argued that the tutorial in an Australian university is a cultural context. This study focuses on a specific situation in that context, i.e. spoken exchanges that are part of a whole-class interaction, and these can be described in terms of the mode, tenor and field of the context of that situation. In terms of mode, data collection included the place of utterances in the sequence of the text, i.e. the speaker preceding a student initiation, and

the audience, or 'other' to whom the initiation is addressed. Relationships between the utterances of participants in the academic discourse are revealed in the lexico-grammar at the textual level, where thematic patterns reveal the "foregrounding and continuity in the organization" (Eggins, 1994, p. 78) of the discourse. The study has chosen to examine in particular those occasions when a student voluntarily initiates an exchange i.e., an elicitation, delivered with the expectation of a response, placing some 'other' in the role of responder. This situation was judged to occur in three circumstances:

- (i) Unprompted initiations, i.e., the initial elicitation made without any external prompting (including instances where a hand is raised and the speaker waits to be nominated or asked to speak).
- (ii) The follow-up initiation or re-initiation (Basturkmen, 2002, p. 237–239) occurs when the response to the first elicitation is unsatisfactory or prompts another question.
- (iii) Prompted initiations, i.e., voluntary initiation in response to an open elicitation from the teacher or other student (Tapper, 1996, p. 33), where a tutor or other student poses a question without nominating a respondent, or has called for questions.

Although the status of student utterances in the form of reporting from small groups was unclear, they were included in the data collected to permit analysis of aspects of tenor such as polarity and modality.

The tenor of discourse is the function of language to do with exchange (Halliday, 1994, p. 68–71). In tutorials both tutor and students will be using language primarily in the exchanging of, i.e., the giving and demanding of, information. (Use of the term 'information' is not incompatible with the constructivist rejection of the transmission model of learning. The demanding and giving of information can be seen as moves in dialogic exchanges where co-construction of new understandings is taking place.) The initiation can be understood in this context as a demand for information in the form of a response, even if it is simply the information that the responder agrees, and in that sense as elicitations. It is helpful here to use Basturkmen's (1999, p. 66–69) distinction between elicits of information and elicits of confirmation in conjunction with functional descriptions.

- (i) Elicits of information function as requests to another speaker to supply missing information about which the speaker does not have assumptions, generally realised as 'who, what, when, how, etc' questions. Halliday describes 'wh-' interrogatives as functioning to identify what it is the questioner wishes to have supplied (1994, p. 85). The speaker knows there is something they do not know, and confess their ignorance in order to satisfy this need.
- (ii) Elicits of confirmation function as requests to another speaker for information/ideas about which the speaker has assumptions and for which the speaker is seeking confirmation. These forms allow speakers to contribute ideas and information using varying levels of commitment that Basturkmen (1999, pp. 67–68) describes as weak and strong. This general distinction can

be made more sensitive, as Basturkmen does to some extent, using the functional descriptors of interpersonal meaning in a text:

- *Polarity*: Basturkmen argues positive polarity realises a weak commitment to a proposition. Halliday (1994, p. 88) explains this as the consequence of the finite, that part of the clause that proposes the existence of the subject using a temporal verbal operator, e.g., is, was, has, can, etc, being placed in thematic position, and acting as a request for confirmation of polarity. Basturkmen sees negative polarity as strong, implying a greater commitment to the proposition or point of view expressed.
- *Modality*: Modality encodes a commitment to a proposition somewhere between positive and negative, expressed through modal verbal operators signifying degrees of probability and /or usuality, e.g., can, might, could, or through modal adjuncts, e.g., *probably, certainly, sometimes, seldom* (Halliday, 1994, p. 89). Modality expresses the degree of certainty, and thus the commitment of the speaker to the proposition, the certainty of their understanding or knowledge. Modality can be expressed positively and negatively, e.g., *could, couldn't*. Halliday's (1994, p. 76) categories of high, median and low modal verbal operators lend themselves well to analysis of a speaker's commitment. Basturkmen (1999, p. 68) singles out the modal tag question, e.g. *does it? wouldn't it?*, as significant in analysing the strength of commitment, in particular the strongly negative modals that are assertive, and almost challenge the listener to disagree.
- *Ellipsis*: Voluntary initiations in response to an open elicitation may be statements or questions. Responses to 'wh-' elicitations often ellipse all other clause elements beside the answer to the question. The previous speaker often establishes mood, and intonation can signal the mood without the presence of a mood block (Halliday (1994, p. 93). If the ellipsed mood block is declarative, Basturkmen classes such statements as strong elicitations, demonstrating some commitment to the proposition, but delivered in expectation of a reply. Presentation of two statements as alternatives is regarded as demonstrating a lower level of commitment to both propositions, classed as weak (Basturkmen, 1999, p. 68). If intonation reveals the ellipsed mood block is interrogative, then the utterance is a request for confirmation of polarity, demonstrating a weak commitment.

Lastly, the discourse field was defined as matters to do with the business of studying the course, including (1) the subject matter, (2) assessment matters, and (3) procedural matters.

A coded inventory of initiation features was developed from this conceptual framework and used to generate a data collection instrument that was completed during non-participant observations of two tutorials for each class, a total duration of approximately nine hours. Marginal remarks were recorded when and where appropriate. The tutorials were audio-taped to permit subsequent transcription and verification, and closer analysis.

## Findings

The data collected total well over three hundred instances of NESB and ESB student initiation of interaction. However, if reporting from group work is excluded, the great majority of initiations came from five or six students in each class. Thus the findings that follow are based on the participation of this minority of students, both ESB and NESB. The implications of non-participation are considered in the discussion that follows a summary of the three aspects of the context of situation—mode, tenor and field.

### Mode

Exchange patterns in the oral text of the discourse in both classes were dominated by the tutor. Initiations of both NESB and ESB students in both classes, with no more than two or three exceptions in each tutorial session, followed tutor utterances in the sequence of exchanges. Likewise, student initiations were almost invariably then followed by another tutor utterance. ESB students produced three initiations for every two produced by NESB students. The sequencing of interactions in the text in terms of the three types of initiations revealed some variations between the NESB and ESB students, and also between the two classes. In the case of NESB students, prompted initiations outnumbered unprompted initiations by three to two in both classes. Re-initiations by NESB students were similar in frequency in both classes, occurring in about one in seven exchanges, but significantly more frequently in association with unprompted initiations. In only two cases did these exchanges extend to a second re-initiation.

The findings for ESB students were not so clear. If data from both classes is combined, unprompted initiations were more frequent than prompted initiations, but only by a ratio of about six to five. Re-initiations by ESB students occurred in about one in four every initiations, with many exchanges extending to two or more re-initiations. In the context of the two classes, the two groups of ESB students performed very differently. In the class of eighteen ESB students and ten NESB students, the type and number of initiations produced by the two groups was almost identical, i.e., on average, the NESB students produced more initiations. In contrast, in the class of six ESB students and fourteen NESB students, ESB students produced almost four times the number of initiations per student compared to the NESB group, with re-initiation occurring in about one third of exchanges.

### Tenor

For this study, description of the data in terms of tenor is the most complex and difficult of the three aspects of context. The problem lies with longer utterances where mood and polarity may change, perhaps as students construct a series of elicits, or they introduce, support or justify their initiation. In brief, there were marked differences between elicits produced by NESB and ESB students, both in type, and in the polarity and modality in elicits of confirmation. These differences were similar in both classes.

*Elicits of information:* ESB students produced almost three times as many elicits of information as their NESB counterparts, but it is noteworthy that for both groups these elicits were often followed, or preceded by often lengthy introductions or justifications. Some students followed elicits of information with interrogative elicits of confirmation using positive polarity, or in some instances, alternatives. Overall, elicits of information

comprised about one in ten NESB students' initiations, but one in five of the ESB students'.

*Elicits of confirmation:* NESB students produced almost twice as many declarative elicits of confirmation as interrogative elicits of confirmation, while ESB students produced five interrogative for every four declarative elicits of confirmation. NESB students produced only one negative interrogative, and no negative modal tag questions. ESB students, on the other hand produced eight negative interrogatives and two negative modal tag questions.

### **Field**

With only a few exceptions, student initiations were to do with the subject matter being studied in the tutorial. One NESB student produced two unprompted initiations concerning assessment. About one in ten of all ESB initiations were to do with procedures and assessment.

### **Discussion**

The dominance of the lecturer/tutor in exchanges seems to indicate unwillingness, for whatever reason, on the part of both ESB and NESB students to directly engage other students in academic interaction in the whole-group context, although they may be regarded in many of the initiations to be 'others' to whom the utterance is addressed. Marginal notes were made during data collection to the effect that even when students were reporting on group work, the 'other' from whom a response was expected appeared to be the tutor. The whole-group discourse of the classroom consisted, in this sense, of a series of dyadic interactions. This raises questions about the approaches of students to learning. Are they tending to seek a reproductive transmission of 'knowledge' from the tutor, rather than engaging in active restructuring of their own understandings? The second phase of the study in which students are offered the opportunity to account for their actions in an interview may provide insight into this aspect of the discourse.

An area of clear difference, however, was the tendency of NESB students to produce prompted initiations, which may reveal a preference for waiting to be invited to participate in the discourse, while ESB students do not feel so constrained. It can be argued the unprompted initiation reveals an active engagement in the social construction of knowledge or understanding, perhaps prior knowledge being renegotiated or confirmed, and further, that re-initiations are also an indication that this co-construction is taking place. If this is the case, the data produced in this study suggest NESB students are not participating as actively in learning through academic interaction in tutorials as are ESB students. The prompted initiation may be responsible for similar cognitive activity, but a significant difference is the fact that many of the exchanges of this type observed in the study are in fact tutor-initiated IRF sequences with known answers. It is worth noting here that both tutors offered numerous opportunities for questions and comments, sometimes failing to prompt any initiation, and one of the tutors sometimes repeating the offer two or three times before a student did initiate. Again, student accounts of behaviour obtained through interview may assist in describing and understanding behaviour.

The marked difference in the initiations by ESB students in the two classes highlights the limitations of the study, and draws attention to the range of individual and collective

factors that may influence interaction in the tutorial. Just to begin, broad issues such as class sizes, differences in tutor teaching styles, and the nature of the student populations in the two courses cautions against generalisations based on case studies such as this.

The tenor of the discourse offers insight into the relationships between the speaker and the proposition they are uttering, and the speaker and the others to whom the utterance is addressed. Broadly speaking, the data indicates NESB students are less willing to take risks than are the ESB students. Relatively little use of elicits of information can be understood as a reluctance to admit ignorance of, or failure to understand, some aspect of the subject matter of the tutorial. It is interesting that many elicits of information are preceded or followed by an attempt by the student to answer their own question, or by a display of other knowledge. Both NESB and ESB students in the study produced utterances of this kind. That the majority of NESB student elicits of confirmation are declarative indicates a preference for initiations where the student feels reasonably confident the proposition is not open to question. ESB students, on the other hand, are much more prepared to take risks, through both positive interrogatives where their commitment to the proposition is weak, and there is a greater possibility of error, and negative interrogatives and negative modal tag questions, where very strong commitment to a proposition is seen as assertive and perhaps even confrontational. The data suggest NESB students prefer to 'play it safe' with things they feel they already know.

It may not seem surprising that the discourse field lay almost wholly within the academic subject matter. Anecdotal suggestions in the literature that NESB learners are 'shallow' in their approach to learning were not confirmed in this context by initiations referring to assessment. However, that only one NESB student raised assessment issues in the whole-group context does not mean these matters were not a concern for NESB students. It may be that they chose to approach tutors in private, or, as many were observed to do, at the end of tutorials. ESB students, on the other hand, used the whole-group situation to initiate several exchanges on the subject, but were not observed, with only a few exceptions, to approach the tutor after class. Similarly, no NESB student initiated interaction on procedural matters, while several ESB students requested repetition or clarification of instructions, required readings, etc. Whether this reveals reluctance on the part of NESB students to take up tutorial time with matters outside the academic content of the tutorial, or is related to issues of risk-taking or face in requesting assistance, or simply means they experienced no need, may be resolved by pursuing these questions in the interview.

The second phase of the study will also provide the opportunity to address the issue of those students, both NESB and ESB who, although they were observed to engage in small group work, took no active role in the whole-group interaction. In theory they fulfilled the role of 'others' in many of the initiations of other students, and in the utterances of the lecturer/tutor, but whether and to what extent they experienced a need to initiate, and/or whether the initiations of other students fulfilled these needs will be explored through interviews with participants.

## Conclusion

Without doubt, a multitude of general and individual factors influence the participation of any student in the oral academic discourse of tutorials. NESB students cannot be considered as an homogeneous group, but this study focuses on two factors they experience in common: learning in a non-native language, and in an education system operating on culturally-based discourses and understandings of learning that may be very different from their own culture. A significant finding of the study is the failure of many students in the study, both NESB and ESB, to participate at all in the academic interaction. Analysis of the language used by students who did participate suggested the NESB students were less prepared than the ESB students to take risks in their initiation of academic interaction. They avoided both those discourse acts that revealed a lack of knowledge and/or certainty, and those that introduced, unprompted, their own knowledge into the classroom interaction. They preferred to wait for prompts before participating in the classroom discourse, and when they did so, indicated a strong commitment to the proposition of the utterance. The second phase of the case study aims to address the issues raised in this paper. At this stage, differences between students in their initiation of academic interaction on the basis of language background suggest the tentative conclusion that NESB students in this study are not taking full advantage of opportunities to engage in the active co-construction of knowledge and understanding.

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