

THE CONSTRUCTION OF FRAME IN GROUP DIALOGUE JOURNALS: OPPORTUNITIES TO SHAPE CONTEXT

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This paper presents a qualitative study of the use of group dialogue journals in a first-year composition course for nonnative speakers of English. Students approach the journals with different, sometimes competing, interpretations of the discourse event. With every successive entry in the group journal, students engage in a process of negotiating their various interpretations, or frames. The study examines the mechanisms by which this social construction of frame takes place and sheds light on the ways students can determine their own purposes for writing.

INTRODUCTION

This study is part of a larger investigation of group dialogue journals that began informally as a series of observations. I was teaching first-year composition to native English speakers at the University of Arizona and had assigned group journals as part of the course. Group journals are extended, written interactions among small groups of students, including or excluding the instructor. The purpose of the journals is primarily to provide a relatively low-risk forum for authentic, unevaluated communication (Staton, et al., 1988; Peyton and Reed, 1990).

In my composition classes, first with native English speakers and later with nonnative speakers, I had students writing in groups of three or four. The first person in each group was to write about any topic, keeping in mind that the audience consisted of the other students and me. That person passed the journal to the second person in the group, who then wrote a response and/or started a new topic and passed the now longer journal to the third person. When all members of the group had written in the journal, the cycle continued with the first person, who responded to all previous entries. By the end of the semester, one such collective journal might be 60 pages long.

My observations of the journal communication led me to notice a number of interesting phenomena. Students were using the opportunity provided by the journals to negotiate meaning in complex ways. They were constructing their entries in such a way that indicated a sophisticated understanding of their rhetorical situation. Students were in varied relationships with different members of their audience and were astute observers of their audience's various needs. In addition, many of them developed a greater sense of ownership toward the journals than they did toward their other course assignments.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine how participants in these collaborative journals approached the task with varying interpretations of the assignment. Students negotiated those interpretations, thus shaping their own contexts for writing. Using the concepts of *context* (Kramsch, 1992a; 1992b), *frame* (Goffman, 1974), and *footing* (Goffman, 1981), which will be discussed in the next section, I will analyze the joint construction of frame in the group dialogue journals of two first-year composition classes for nonnative English-speakers at the University of Arizona.

Context, Frame, and Footing

Hymes (1972) notes a number of components of speech that are interrelated, and he mnemonically uses the acronym SPEAKING to describe this set of components. These stand for the following:

- S = Setting
- P = Participants
- E = Ends (goals and outcomes)
- A = Act sequence (message form and message content)
- K = Key (tone or manner)
- I = Instrumentalities (codes, registers, etc.)
- N = Norms of interpretation and interaction
- G = Genres (categories such as poem, letter, commercial, lecture, etc.)

All of these components work together in a discourse situation (broadening the concept here to include writing) to determine the nature of the context and the appropriateness of language used in that context.

Hymes' work contributed greatly to the understanding of the relationships between language use and the sociocultural aspects of context. His notion of SPEAKING, however, does not include a thorough understanding of the dynamic, active role of language users as constructors of both language and knowledge. A social constructionist perspective of context sees both language and language users as shapers of context. When speakers or writers use language, they adopt a particular position in relation to the audience (Bakhtin, 1981). They do not simply respond to an already existing relationship between the participants--they help to create that relationship through their language choices. Thus, not only is meaning negotiated, but so is the context itself. Part of the recent attention given to learners in second language acquisition research stems from the recognition of their active participation in the shaping of context, a process known as "contextual competence" (Kramsch, 1992a). Context includes not only the ways in which factors such as the speech event and characteristics of the participants influence language choices, but also the ways in which participants' language choices themselves constrain and enable further language choices.

Kramsch (1992a) offers a five-part redefinition of context that accounts for the complex of factors that comprise a given context. These include both linguistic, cultural, and situational constraints on language choices and the role of the participants themselves in shaping the communicative situation. It is first necessary to describe each of the five parameters of context that constrain and open options for language users (Kramsch, 1992a). These are 1) internal, 2) external, 3) interactional, 4) cultural, and 5) intertextual.

The *internal* context includes the linguistic context (i.e., what has preceded an utterance syntactically) as well as the propositional content and illocutionary force of what is said. For example, saying "on one hand" leads the audience to expect that "on the other hand" will soon follow. The *external* context includes many of the components of Hymes' SPEAKING. These are aspects of the situation, e.g., the relative status of the participants, the speech event, the setting, etc. The *interactional* context is the parameter that constitutes the basis for this paper. It can be broadly defined as the way participants create the context themselves through the choices that they make. These choices are constrained in large part by the expectations and intentions of individual speakers or writers. In the case of group journals, individual perceptions of the purpose of the journal will lead participants to make written language choices which reflect those perceptions. Those language choices, in turn, will indicate to the other participants what the communication event is and will limit the choices available to them. The fourth parameter of context is *culture*, or "the community store of established knowledge" (Kramsch, 1992a). The cultural context and the external context are closely related. The configuration of particular elements of a communicative situation is influenced by cultural beliefs. The setting of a religious service, for example, is determined by a cultural system that attaches meaning to that particular setting. Finally, context includes the *intertextual* context, which includes prior "texts" to which the participants have been exposed.

While these five parameters of context are by no means discrete categories, it is not the purpose of this paper to reexamine these parameters. Rather, it is to understand the importance of the interactional context. The present study illustrates the process by which the interactional context in group journals is created.

One of the most important ways in which the participants in this study shaped the interactional context was through their framing of the discourse event. A frame is the way a person organizes the experience at hand (Goffman, 1974). The particular interpretive frame people have for a given discourse event will constrain and open language choices available to them. Thus, there are two senses of "frame"--an interpretive sense and an "active" sense (D. M. Johnson, personal communication). When people make language choices, they "frame the event" (i.e., as a story or a sermon) based upon their "(interpretive) frame for the event." Goffman (1974) noted that we often talk about "the current situation," which assumes that all participants know and agree upon what the event is. However, what the interactants perceive as "the current situation" may be quite different (Goffman, 1974, p. 9). One interactant, for instance, may interpret a given event as a joking exchange, while the other may interpret the same event as an argument. They act on those differing perceptions in a number of ways, one of which is in their linguistic choices.

An example from the data collected for this study is useful at this point. As will be further described, some students in my first-year composition classes began the first entry in their journals by writing their names in the top, right-hand corner of the page and writing the date directly under their names. These students did not address their journals entries to the other members of the group, nor did they sign their names at the end of their entries. It was clear from this (and from other characteristics of their writing) that they perceived the journal to be similar to a homework assignment, rather than as a letter or a diary. By making these language choices, they actively framed the event according to their interpretive frame.

One aspect of the concept of frame is Goffman's notion of *footing* (1981). Footing is a speaker's (or writer's) "alignment," or stance, toward the other participants. Participants adopt a particular footing through direct address or lack of address, or by indicating their position implicitly or explicitly. In my own class, when I, as a group journal participant, write, "Fei, it would be great if you could do some type of research project [for the next assignment in our English class] related to chemistry," I am directly addressing one student. As Goffman, puts it, I am "chilling the involvement of other participants" (1981, p. 133). Moreover, by suggesting a topic for a research project, I am making salient my role as the instructor. In a subsequent sentence in the same entry, I write, "By the way, I didn't know you had a host family." Here, I am not only changing topic but also changing footing. While I am still addressing the same student, I am writing with a different voice--that of an equal conversational partner, and not that of a teacher. A change in footing is one strategy that people use to indicate a change in their interpretive frame for the event. In the example above, I am framing the event first as a forum for a teacher-student conference and then as a mutual conversation among status-equal participants. Thus, the concept of footing will play a minor, but not insignificant, role in this discussion of the construction of frame.

Setting and Participants

The participants in the study were 36 students in two sections of English 107, the first-year, first-semester course in English composition required of all international undergraduate students at the University of Arizona. The students were from 18 different countries. I taught both sections and used essentially the same syllabus for both. The class met three times a week for 50 minutes each time. Only a few of the students knew each other before the semester began. In addition to the group journals, there were three graded essays, each of which went through at least two drafts before being submitted for a grade, two required writing conferences and a number of short homework assignments. Each journal was given a grade at the end of the semester, based primarily on consistency of participation, but individual entries were not evaluated.

Mention should be made here of my role as both participant and researcher. Clearly, my position as the teacher of the class being studied has some bearing on the interpretation of the data. However, my participation in the interactions allows me a unique perspective. Because I interact frequently with the students, I can observe indications of their attitudes toward the journal that an outside observer probably would not notice. I may also be in a better position to understand what students may have intended by certain phrases because of my familiarity with their interim grammars.

Data Collection

I photocopied the journals and, at the end of the semester, collected all of the original copies of the journals. On the third week of class, I asked--but did not require--students to sign a permission sheet allowing me to use their journals in my research. I had students fill out a questionnaire that was designed to elicit their perceptions of the purpose of the journal and to receive suggestions about how I could better manage the journal activity in the future. They filled out their questionnaires in the second to last week of classes. The questionnaires were used primarily for corroboration of the discourse analysis, and not as a subject of the analysis. Because the purpose of this paper is to examine the process of negotiation that occurs in the journals, it is the writing in the journals themselves that provides the primary focus of the analysis.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FRAME

Initially, the students and I had varying perceptions of the purpose of the journal--what the discourse event was--and, by extension, what genres of writing were appropriate. In other words, we framed the discourse in different ways. Those frames changed as conflicting interpretations were negotiated by some or all of the participants.

It may be necessary at this point to distinguish between frame and genre. I am using "frame" here to refer to interpretations and constructions of the group journal as a larger discourse event. "Genre" refers in this paper to any of a number of categories of written discourse that are characterized by certain features. These features mark a new purpose as well as a new relationship between author and audience. A change in genre is not simply a change in topic. For example, the topic "education in the US" could be the focus of a monologic, descriptive narrative, a conversation, or an argumentative essay. Features that indicate one or another of these genres may be the degree of passive voice, the use of first and second person pronouns, the amount of detailed description, or the variety of speech acts. Within a given discourse event, there are usually several genres that are appropriate. The group journal, as it is perceived by a given member of the group, is a discourse event. One may frame the discourse event as a forum for discussion of broad topics (e.g., education, the 1992 presidential election, Middle Eastern politics) or as a series of informal, relatively personal letters, the purpose of which is to get to know the other group members. A genre might be a discussion of a particular topic, a conversation including suggestions for how to organize the journal, or a narrative of a recent event.

In this study, participants constructed their own frames for the journal event upon hearing my initial framing of the activity. On the fourth class meeting of the semester, I introduced the journals and the classes formed groups. In both classes, the students knew who their audience was. In my introduction of the journal activity in class, I framed it as a "written conversation among four or five people." I told the students that I would be a member of every group. I left the topics up to the first writer in each group and suggested several ways to start. They could address the journal to all of their group members and sign their names at the end, as in a regular letter, although this was not required. I also assured them that grammar, spelling and organization were not important and that it was only important that they participate consistently and write about things that they were interested in. I used the words "letter," "journal," "topics," and "conversation," which led students to particular interpretations of what the discourse event was.

Because of the unstructured nature of my description, students were understandably unsure of how to begin. However, one of my goals was that they have the opportunity to determine the purpose for themselves and write with those self-determined purposes in mind. They attended to different elements of that description, additionally drawing on their own expectations of what the journal would be like, in order to interpret and construct the event.

One clear indication that different students began the journal with different interpretations of the event was in their use of or lack of direct address at the beginning of the journal. Of the 12 journals, ten began with some form of greeting or address and two did not. Even those students who addressed the journal directly to the other group members used different forms, including "To everybody," "Shamsul and Gail," "Dear Han and Lei," and "Hi Guys!" (All excerpts from

students' writing are in their original form.) These students seemed to be attending, at least at the beginning, to my framing of the event as a letter and seemed to exhibit a clear awareness of their immediate audience.

The students who did not begin with a form of address framed the event in a very different way and are worth some discussion. One of them, Mei-Ping, a woman from Taiwan who had had experience writing in personal journals, framed the event as something similar to a diary. Her first entry was as follows:

9/9

Today we introduced ourselves to get knowing each other. You-chin Wen, a cute girl from Taiwan, wants us to call her You-chin. Tarik, with mustache, is from Saudi Arabia....Furthermore, I would like people to call me Mei-Ping or Mei.



Mei-Ping

The audience for her writing is not clear. It is written in the first person, but makes only third person references to the other members of her group. The genre in most of this entry is the reporting of an event. In the last sentence, Mei-Ping is making a direct request but indirectly--i.e., using the declarative form "I would like" and the word "people" rather than "you." Her interpretive frame for the event changed dramatically in her second entry, after she read the entries of her group-mates. This change will be shown later in this paper.

The other student who did not address his audience, Robbie, born in the US into a Chinese-speaking family, apparently attended to the word "topics" in my introduction and interpreted the journal as a place to write about general topics. He was one of the students described on page 113 who wrote their names and the date at the top of the page. Robbie was initially writing a homework assignment. This was also clear in his first sentence: "The US public education is one of the largest public education system in the world." This very broad, general sentence is typical of an introduction to a first-year college essay. He adopted an "imposed writing assignment" voice, never addressing his fellow journal writers. In the questionnaire, he wrote that he initially "thought the journals would be on issues, ideas, and thoughts." Interestingly, as the competing frames in his journal were negotiated throughout the semester, his perception of the journal changed so much that later (perhaps several weeks later) he erased his name on his first entry and signed his name at the end. He was apparently adjusting to the interactive frame that developed later. Other students began their journals by introducing themselves or by making a general comment about the journal or the class. These students framed the journal as a conversation among new acquaintances or potential friends. An example is the very casual, conversational first entry by Pablo, a student from Mexico. He labeled the journal, "The Community Journal," at the top of the page and then wrote an entry that included markers of conversation such as, "Well what can I say" and "You know what I mean?" This type of initial framing usually went unchallenged.

In other groups, however, there was a great deal of negotiation of what genres were appropriate in the journal, given their differing frames for the event. One such group was Mei-Ping's group, which I will refer to as Group A. Mei-Ping wrote the diary-like entry reproduced above. The following are excerpts from the first four entries of their journal, one written by each member (the three students and me):

9/9

Today we introduced ourselves to get knowing each other. You-chin Wen, a cute girl from Taiwan, wants us to call her You-chin. Tarik, with mustache, is from Saudi Arabia.... Furthermore, I would like people to call me Mei-Ping or Mei.



Mei-Ping

9/11

First draft due today. Everyone brought his essay in the classroom. And so did I. I changed my essay with Laura first. After class, I brought another one's essay home. I forgot her name. She's from Taiwan, too.

Hey everybody....As you are both from Taiwan, I think it's a good idea if you began writing (talking) about your country, and especially the weird strange (odd) traditions. to Gail,

Tell us about where you came from. why did you choose to teach and what's the problems you face teaching foreign students? I would like to others to write more than this and keep a discussion going on.

*Yours,
 Tarik*

 Sept. 16, 1992

Hi, everybody!...Well, since Tarik asked, I'll tell you that it's hard to tell you where I'm from. I grew up mostly in the Southwest...and then I went to college in Ohio.

...I too would like to know something about Taiwanese culture. And Saudi Arabian culture. Have any of you had cultural conflicts, being in the US?

--Gail

The similarity between the first entries of Mei-Ping and You-chin is striking. Both students are for the most part reporting events. Neither begins with a greeting; neither directly acknowledges the audience. Mei-Ping shows that she is aware of her audience at some level with her request that "people" call her by her first name and with her drawing of a "smily face." However, there seems to be no particular awareness of the audience in most of her entry. Furthermore, the omission of articles and auxiliary verbs in You-chin's first sentence indicates a specific frame for this event. Her grammatical accuracy in other writings reduces the possibility that these omissions signal a lack of grammatical competence. Rather, like Mei-Ping, You-chin seems to perceive the journal as a kind of diary in which the writer simply records, but does not reflect upon, events of the day.

Tarik's entry reveals a dramatic shift in frame. The genre of writing he produces is conversational. He begins with a casual greeting and uses direct second-person pronouns, as in, "As you are both from Taiwan...." This explicitly dialogic genre is in direct contrast to the simple narrative in his partners' first journal entries. Tarik rejects the frames offered by Mei-Ping and You-chin and now frames the journal as a series of letters. The purpose of the journal for him seems to be to get to know the others through discussions of personal and cultural experiences.

My first entry indicates that my frame is similar to Tarik's. I respond to Tarik's suggestions and continue the conversational genre that he used. My tacit agreement with the frame Tarik presented surely helped to persuade the other two group members to abandon their original interpretations. When Mei-Ping wrote in the journal a second time, there was great excitement in her writing. She began her second entry as follows:

Well! I think that I have many things to talk about, such as the special customs & traditions in Taiwan. Also, I cannot wait to tell everybody about my experience in teaching foreign students Chinese since I had read Gail's response....

At the end of this two-page entry--note the contrast to her first five-sentence entry--she writes,

"Tarik, can I tell my another topic next time? I need to stop now. 😊 zzz Mei-Ping"

Her apparent relief about being able to use a more conversational genre of writing here indicates her willingness to participate in the joint construction of this frame. You-chin responds in a similar way, with a greeting and a response to Tarik's question about Taiwanese culture.

This written exchange exemplifies the social construction of frame. Different people offer different interpretations of the appropriateness of particular genres of writing, given their frames for the event. All of the members then come to agree upon a satisfying, collective interpretation. They come to this agreement through their choices in each entry, which limit and open options for subsequent entries.

Mei-Ping, You-chin, and Tarik were certainly not the only group that began with conflicting frames for the journal as a discourse event. Group B, consisting of Robbie, discussed on page 115, Nguyen, and Ahmad, also had to negotiate conflicting frames for the journal. The frame that was jointly constructed, however, by the end of the semester was quite different from that of the other journals in either class. Below are excerpts from their first entries (like the other excerpts in this paper, spelling, grammar, and punctuation are all as they are in the originals):

Robbie Y. 8/31/92

The U.S. public education is one of the largest public education system in the world. There is trouble with the U.S. public education sysstem [sic] during 70's and 80's. The system is to old to survive a 90's generation....We must use the eideas of new schools and new techoniques that we created into work....

*Nguyen P.
Group journal
8/31/92*

Well, I agree with you on some points. However, the U.S schools and education system are truthfully not that bad; besides some criticized problems that you pointed out, there are many good points for the U.S education system. Comparing the U.S schools to the schools of many countries in the world, we obviously see that the U.S students have more freedom and creativity.... By loosening their stresses, U.S students can take their education easy but effectively and be more creative. Those are the main purposes of an effective education system.

*Ahmad
09-4-92*

Gail, Robbie, Nguyen

Although the subject being discussed is an essential one, I don't find it appealing to me. I think that there are subjects that are more interesting to me to make those journals more exploitable.

It is a good chance if everybody gave us a chance to know him more (This is totally optional!) with regard to which country he has lived and what the sturcture of his family is. What regim is governing his, home country.

her

Ceirtain things like hobbies and sports of interest. And then, Having known each other to some extent, we can discuss broader subjects like education.

I'd like every body to study my suggestion and give me an answer....

Ahmad

September 7, 1992

Hello, gentlemen!

Oh, so many things to say! First, I want to say that I like A's suggestion about getting to know each other.

Well, you know a little about me already. I grew up in the Southwest....

In response to the education system question (which I'm really interested in...sorry, Ahmad): Although I would rather be a student in this country than in any other country, I do think there are major problems with education in the US....

Well, I've written enough for now, I guess.

Gail

Like Mei-Ping's first entry in Group A's journal, Robbie's first entry in Group B's journal indicates a non-interactive frame for the journal event. The genre he produces at the beginning is similar to an argumentative essay. He uses a rather disembodied voice and makes choices that frame this journal as a series of homework assignments for discussion of general topics. He writes his name at the top, does not sign the entry, and sticks to discussion of a single topic throughout the entry. His first sentence, "The U.S. public education is one of the largest public education systems in the world," is recognizable as a typical, overly general introduction to an expository or argumentative essay.

The frame that Nguyen presents reveals the beginning of the process of negotiation. He constructs a frame that includes elements of Robbie's frame as well as more interactive elements. While Nguyen similarly stayed on the same topic throughout the entry and wrote his name at the top of the paper, the genre he is using has changed. The use of "Well" at the beginning is a clear indication that he is not framing the journal as a series of mini-essays. He uses second-person references and writes, "I agree with you," and thus marking his writing as interactive. This is a different type of discourse from the one Robbie introduced. Nguyen saw the journal as interactive, and yet he is accommodating to some degree to Robbie's interpretation of the purpose of the journal. His attempt to frame the journal in a new way was tentative.

Ahmad's decision to alter the frame was not at all tentative. The negotiation continues more dramatically, not only because he found the topic of education unsatisfying, but also because he had a different understanding of the genres of writing that were appropriate in the journal. He addresses his group-mates at the beginning and makes a number of suggestions for the direction the journal could take. His entry is meta-communicative--that is, he is referring to the discourse itself. He maintains some distance from the individual members of his audience by using third-person references, as in "I'd like every body to study my suggestions...." However, his awareness of the composition of his audience is clear. He signs his name at the end of the entry, signaling his framing of the journal as a series of letters.

As with Mei-Ping's group, my role in the negotiation of competing frames may have strongly affected the frame that was eventually agreed upon. With my conversational tone, my use of first- and second-person pronouns, and my responses to every topic raised in previous entries, I made clear my confirmation of Ahmad's frame as the one that most agreed with the frame that I brought to the activity--informal, dialogic, written interaction. It may be that the others' "compliance" was due to the weight that my frame carried, because of my implicit authority as the teacher.

Robbie's and Nguyen's second entries show differing degrees of willingness to accept Ahmad's and my more interactive frames. Their second entries follow:

9/11/92

Gail, Nguyen, Ahmad

Here's your suggestion, Ahmad. I was born in San Francisco, California in 1972. I grew up here in Tucson. My parents come from Canton, China....I'm interested in advanced subjects like Cosmology (the study of origin and structure of universe), the fourth dimension, and parallel universes. There are a lot of strange things in astronomy.

*The U.S education system is one of largest in the world. U.S. students scored low in standardized tests in math and science than other countries. We want the U.S. to be number #1 in math and science. Are we forcing our students to be Einsteins?...
P.S. I hate sports, except basketball.*

*Happy Moon Day
(Beginning of Mid-Autumn)
Robbie*

[Nguyen's second entry:]

09/14/92

Well, how do I tell you about me? Anyway, I came to Tucson 2 and 1/2 years ago. My father has lived in Tucson since 1982, then he brought my family here....

My favorite sports is tennis. I play pretty well tennis and enjoy the game.... Besides everything, I'm a video game addict. The slot, it is where my money goes.

Nguyen's entry now consists of a much more informal, letter-like genre. He has almost completely adopted the frame that Ahmad and I presented. He does not, however, sign his name or write his name at the top of the page. He may not be ready or willing to frame his writing in the journal as informal enough to merit a "friendly" signature.

Robbie's entry, on the other hand, reveals a frame in transition. The first part of his second entry is a response in both topic and genre to Ahmad's and my entries. Here, he indicates his willingness to participate in the negotiation. He addresses Ahmad directly and gives a short self-introduction. The second part, however, is a repetition of his earlier topic--US public education--as well as a return to the essay-like genre in his first entry. This second attempt at a discussion of education relies upon the same relatively disembodied voice that was apparent in his first entry. It is interesting that he even begins the second paragraph with a sentence almost identical to his first sentence in the journal: "The U.S. public education is one of the largest public education system in the world." He does not, in his continuation of the topic of education, respond to anything that Nguyen or I wrote about that topic. Although his desire to write about education seems to be based on a genuine personal concern, Robbie is not ready to give up his original frame.

This journal continued to become more responsive and personal as each member added an entry. There was a continual negotiation of frames, leading eventually to the construction of a unique discourse event. This was the only journal in either class that developed into an extended written conference about a student's writing. In his second entry, Robbie mentioned that he was interested in parallel universes. After several requests from all of his partners, Robbie began to explain parallel universes. For the next month's worth of entries (i.e., three rounds of writing), we drew out longer and clearer explanations of parallel universes from Robbie discussing the issue in quite some depth. He gave a class presentation and wrote his final research paper on the subject. As Ahmad said on November 13, two months after Robbie's initial mention of the topic,

I think the hottest discussion in our journal was the last one. It was genuine and constructive. Now I can see how the journal was able to suggest a [research] topic for Robbie.

In Robbie's final entry of the semester, he reveals a dramatic shift in his framing of the journal:

I guess this is my last entry. Thank you Nguyen, Ahmad, and Gail for the great topics and everything.

*Happy Thanksgiving,
Robbie*

As was discussed in an earlier section, footing plays a minor role in determining genres. As participants change their alignments with respect to other participants, they also change the genre to some degree. In Ahmad's second entry, he addresses each member individually and then changed footings and titled his new section, "About Myself." Here is an excerpt from that entry:

Gail, Robbie, Nguyen *Sep, 16, 1992*

Hello everybody!

1st, I'd like to thank everybody for the good response to my suggestion.

Now I feel more comfortable to write to each of you in more details.

Robbie: Physics/Astronomy is an extremely interesting subject. I hope you all the best in your major...

Nguyen: Your major and your goal are both very humane. I hope to see you one day, maybe when I go back home, in the media for having introduced a new medicine to the world....

*And finally Gail: Your detailing gave courage to everybody to speak about him self...
About Myself*

I also come from a dispersed family....

Regarding the education, I think I agree with Gail....

Ahmad began this entry with an inclusion of everyone in the audience. Note his use of "everybody" and "each of you." He then changes footing and explicitly addresses each of us individually, thus "chilling the involvement of other participants" (Goffman, 1981, p. 133). The genre, however, is essentially the same. When he suddenly begins a new section and gives it a title, he changes genres from something similar to a dialogic letter to a slightly more monologic, essay-like piece of writing. That he changes footing is clear in his use of personal pronouns. In the individualized sections, he used second-person pronouns, as in "I was amazed by your response." In the more monologic section, he uses the third person, indicating that his audience now includes the whole group: "Regarding the education, I think I agree with Gail." Thus, changes in footing coincide to some degree with changes in genre.

It is not being argued here that all of the genres and frames in group journals are socially constructed. While some students agreed (or, as in one case, vehemently disagreed) with others' suggestions and altered their frames accordingly, others resisted such negotiations. They ignored the topics presented in previous entries, barely responded to their partners, and seemed to be involved merely in fulfilling the assignment. There may be a number of factors involved in this resistance, including personality factors and students' own purposes in writing in the journal. However, this was rare. Most of the students perceived the journal as an opportunity to participate in the social construction of discourse.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

As we have seen, the writers of these group journals shape the interactional context. Kramsch (1992a) claims that because language contributes to the shaping of context, language learners are learning to be contextually competent. The group journal, because of the opportunities it presents for the negotiation of not only meaning but also frame, is a pedagogical tool that allows learners to develop this contextual competence. By constructing and reconstructing frames for the entire discourse event, learners play a significant role in the shaping of the rhetorical context.

While many researchers urge increased "communicative" activities that allow students the opportunity to negotiate meaning, these are often task-based activities with pre-determined goals. Learners do not have equal access to the negotiation of meaning if they cannot determine their own purposes for the negotiation. Writing teachers who ask that students develop a sense of purpose in their essays are not truly allowing the writers to "own" the purpose. Group journals, limited though they may be, allow them to construct and reconstruct the task as they see fit.

Moreover, group journals, particularly those that include both students and teachers, provide opportunities for increased audience awareness. Realizing that students can change footings and genres allows them a number of resources for negotiating meaning for two or more audiences at the same time (Heath and Branscombe, 1985). Exposure to a number of writer/audience relationships is a key to writing development (Britton, et al., 1975). Group journals also offer a way to deal with the multiple and potentially conflicting voices that exist within each learner (Kramsch and von Hoene, in press).

In their social construction of the discourse event, learners are contributing to construction of knowledge. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) discuss psychological development in terms of the relationships among voice, self, and knowing. The model they describe proceeds from silence to received knowledge to--ultimately--constructed knowledge. Being a "constructed knower" depends on an understanding of the ways humans are connected in a web of relationships. Allowing language learners opportunities to see their own role as essentially connected to the role of others in the discourse may help them understand that they are constructors, and not simply receivers, of knowledge. By studying a discourse event that depends upon the social construction of frames, we may gain deeper insights into the mechanisms by which this social construction of knowledge takes place.

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the notion of footing did not play a major role in this investigation, it is related to the notion of *voice* (hooks, 1989, and Bakhtin, 1981), which is of greater significance in constructivist investigations of psychological development (Belenky, et al., 1986), multicultural education (Sleeter, 1991) and composition (Spellmeyer, 1993). We construct different voices in different discourse contexts to position ourselves in relation to others (hooks, 1989, and Bakhtin, 1981). The ways that students construct voices in the group journals will be a topic of further investigation. It seems clear that negotiation of meaning cannot take place unless there are multiple voices taking part in the negotiation.

There is clearly a great deal of room for research in this area. From the present investigation, we can see that the degree to which learners are willing to participate in the negotiation of frame is not uniform. It may be interesting to examine the factors that influence those differences in participation. Is the willingness to participate related to the degree to which a student has a sense of ownership of the writing task? How can we encourage students to take more control of the purposes for writing? Is there a relationship between student control over the task and the quality of writing?

Of course, it is also important to ask what observable benefits students gain from increased classroom opportunities for social construction of discourse events. There were obvious social benefits in my own classes. Often, students that were placed together at random at the beginning of the semester became close friends by the end. There were also benefits for some students in terms of their writing. Some students who were not effective writers in their graded essays were able to write clearly and effectively in the group journal. While anecdotal evidence for this abounds, it is necessary to conduct more extensive investigations into the relationship between the group journals and the students' ability to communicate effectively in other contexts.

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