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Accounts From an Online Reading Group for English Language Teachers Worldwide: A Case Study on Dialogue and Online Interaction

Thesis

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Accounts from an online reading group for English language teachers worldwide: a case study on dialogue and online interaction

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is

made, and that it has not been previously submitted to the Open University or to any other

institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.
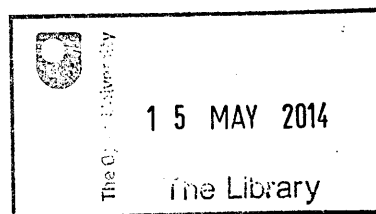
For my son, Eduardo

Abstract

New technologies have increased access to written texts, while creating new ways of reading and of sharing responses. Yet, despite the centrality of reading in language learning, and the expanding use of computer technology in English Language Teaching (ELT), many questions concerning the integration of these two fields of knowledge remain unanswered. This study explores a global online discussion forum which links over 1,400 ELT professionals and students of TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages). The *ELT Online Reading Group* makes literary works in English available to participants in over 75 countries and, by facilitating asynchronous discussion, contributes to their professional development. This study investigates readers' responses to literary texts and their comments on such texts. It adopts Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue and heteroglossia as the theoretical framework for the analysis of data collected from the forum. The forum posts are complemented by an online survey and by semi-structured narratives provided by selected Group members. The data are analysed in terms of compositional features, interactive patterns, and participants' accounts of group participation. The findings suggest that readers engage in dialogue with literary texts by making use of the language and features of the fictional narrative in the composition of their comments. The findings also suggest that the internal dialogue that Bakhtin observes in the novel is also present in the fabric of the texts which participants create in order to discuss literary works in the Group online environment. The thesis concludes with some reflections on the validity and limitations of this study, and a discussion of its possible implications for ELT professionals, educators and researches working on various disciplines in social sciences, arts and humanities.

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List of Acronyms

BANA	Britain, Australia and North America
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BC	British Council
BNC	British National Corpus
CA	Conversation Analysis
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DP	Discursive Psychology
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
NNS	Non-Native Speaker
NS	Native Speaker
ORG	Online Reading Group
OU	Open University
OUP	Oxford University Press
TESOL	Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Key Terms

Addressivity and Answerability: An utterance or word is always addressed *to someone;* it anticipates an *answer* and always generates a form of *response* (Irvine, 2013, online).

Chronotope: time/space; 'particular combinations of time and space as they have resulted in historically manifested narrative forms' (Holquist, 2002, p.109).

Computer Mediated Communication: the process in which human communication occurs through networked telecommunication systems. It is divided into synchronous and asynchronous modes. In synchronous communication, participants are online simultaneously. In asynchronous communication there are time constraints on exchanging messages and responses, as in the ORG.

Dialogue/Dialogic/ Dialogism: 'Every level of expression from live conversational dialog to complex cultural expression in other genres and art works is an ongoing chain or network of statements and responses, repetitions and quotations, in which new statements presuppose earlier statements and anticipate future responses' (Irvine, 2013, online).

Heteroglossia (or Polyphony): 'Speech and complex cultural discourse in all our genres (novels, scientific descriptions, art works, philosophical arguments, for example) is mixed through and through with *heteroglossia* (an other's speech, and many others' words, appropriated expressions) and are necessarily *polyphonic* ("many-voiced," incorporating many voices, styles, references, and assumptions not a speaker's "own")' (Irvine, 2013, online).

Intertextuality: a way of accounting for the roles of literary and non-literary material in a given text without resorting to the traditional notion of authorship (see Allen, 2000 and Kristeva, 1980).

Lurking: the act of accessing a synchronous or asynchronous discussion and read other participants' messages without contributing with a spoken or written response.

Reflectivity and reflexivity: the processes of looking inwards and critically thinking about how your experiences may have influenced your thinking and actions (Taylor and White, 2000).

Transgredience: 'the degree of outsidedness' towards another person. 'Transgredience is reached when the whole existence of others is seen from outside not only their own knowledge that they are being perceived by somebody else, but beyond their awareness that such an other even exists' (Holquist, 2002, p.32-3). Complete transgredience is unachievable.

Chapter 1 Overview

1.1 Introduction

Throughout human history, people from various cultures and civilizations have gathered together in groups to read books or have books read to them (Manguel, 1996, pp.247–59). The first organized reading societies appeared in England at end of the eighteenth century (Hartley, 2002, p.18) and from then onwards these groups of readers, usually called *reading groups* or *book clubs*, have reached other countries around the world, particularly proliferating among women in America (Long, 2003). At the end of the twentieth century, the development of mass communication, new forms of media, and the Internet made possible to extend the concept of collective reading from groups of people who gathered together to read books behind walls (Manguel, 1996, pp.225–35) to include 'public events' which are potentially accessible to large numbers of people interested in reading and discussing the books they read (Hartley, 2002, pp.1–13).

This research concerns *reading* and *online interaction*. It is an investigation of readers' responses to literary texts and their comments on such texts posted to an online discussion forum. It focuses on the multi-layered relationships between texts and their readers in the *ELT Online Reading Group* (British Council/BBC, 2009), while considering the permeability of such relationships to possible influences from various external factors (Figure 1.1).

Besides the posts to the forum, participants' accounts of their membership of and participation in the ELT Online Reading Group (henceforth referred to as 'the Group' or the ORG) were analysed to establish possible connections between such accounts and (a) the literary texts, (b) online interactions in the Group, and (c) the nature of the medium where such interactions took place.

Readers' previous reading experiences

a literary text read in the Group

Other texts read outside the Group

Readers' time and space contexts

a reader's response to the literary text

another reader's response to the literary text and/or to a previous reader's response

Readers' previous online forum participation experiences
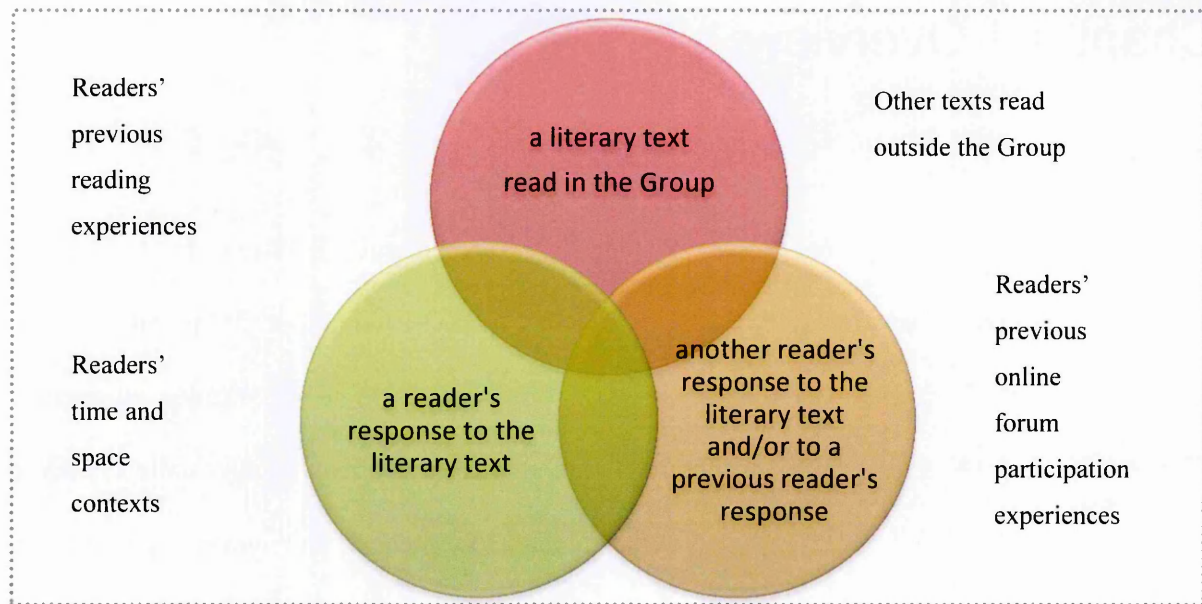
Figure 1.1: Relationships between readers and texts.

This chapter starts by discussing the importance of understanding how readers construct their responses to literary texts when posting on online environments and examines how this study can possibly contribute to the current understanding of the distinctive features of such responses. It then outlines my theoretical understanding of the problem and the methods used to address it. This is followed by my rationale for conducting this investigation and definitions of key concepts referred to in this study. The chapter concludes with an exploration of how educators and English language teaching (ELT) professionals can potentially benefit from the findings of this study and how the approach, methods and coding used for data analysis may benefit researchers working on different fields.

1.2 The problematics of this study

Reading is not only one of the objects of this investigation, but also the means by which it was possible to conduct it. The very existence of this study is intrinsically dependent on the acts of reading performed by the participants and the researcher in the research setting. According to Manguel (2011, p.ix), reading is the 'most human' creative activity because it 'defines our species' as the one which is capable of 'finding narratives in everything'. The

acts of writing and reading, in their various forms, make possible to trace the history of civilizations (Cavallo and Chartier, 1999). Furthermore, through history, reading became such a pivotal activity that we can no longer function as organized societies without it, for our most basic needs, such as food, shelter, health, transport and communication depend - at different levels - on our ability to read. Crucial as reading is, it does not come as a natural aptitude, such as vision or speech (Wolf, 2008, p.11). Learning how to read is a complex process that requires high level of cognitive processing of orthographic, semantic, graphemic and phonological components (Hillis and Rapp, 2004) and which demands conscious learning effort, concentration and practice. In the field of foreign and second language teaching and learning, reading is also a fundamental ability to be developed and perhaps one of the most complex skills to be taught (Bernhardt, 2010).

New communication technologies have brought written texts to new media thus creating new modes of reading (Coiro, 2003) and making literature more widely available to readers via the Internet (Carroli, 2011; Hayles, 2010; Hartley and McWilliam, 2009; Sedo, 2011a). Besides providing access to information and reading resources, computer technology has also played the role of facilitating communication among its users. In this role, computer mediated communication (CMC) has been used for many years to promote language learning (Aviram and Eshet-Alkalai, 2006; Goodfellow, 2004) as well as professional development through participation in online communities (Duncan-Howell, 2009). Despite the centrality of reading in language learning (Macalister, 2007; Waring, 2008) and the expanding use of computer technology in ELT (Clandfield, 2010; Dudeney, 2007a; Dudeney, 2007b; Sharma and Barrett, 2007; Stanley, 2013; Walker and White, 2013), there are still aspects concerning the integration of these two fields of knowledge that remain underexplored. For instance, there are still questions about how exactly readers construct their responses to texts in the process of reading and discussing literature online. Published research currently available still has not clearly identified the distinctive features of readers' responses to texts when posting

comments to online literature forums. To my knowledge, so far, there has been no academic research on the extent and the ways in which such responses are related to the contact participants have with literary texts and with the online environment in which interactions with other readers occur.

This study proposes to address this gap in the existing knowledge in the field of computer mediated reader-response to literary texts, so that teachers and academics may explore new ways in which the combination of literature with CMC can possibly promote learning at various levels and in diverse contexts.

1.3 Clarification of terms

In this study, *literary texts* are the short stories, poems and extracts of novels read and discussed by Group members in an asynchronous online forum. Because of copyright regulations, most texts made available to the Group come from the body of eighteenth to early twentieth century literature, either written in English or translated into English. However, some late twentieth and early twenty-first century texts are also available (Appendix A).

In the context of this investigation, *narratives* are understood to be the research participants' accounts of their experience as Group members and also their accounts of the reading and professional experiences they relate to their participation in the Group. Such accounts may be embedded in the posts to the forum and/or in the semi-structured narratives some participants wrote specifically for research purposes. Further information on the semi-structured narratives can be found in Section 4.5.

Group interactions include the interaction among Group members as well as the interactions between these members and the Group coordinator, who plays the role of the reading group facilitator.

Apart from specific threads opened to support face-to-face reading groups in Mozambique, the *Digital Literacy Project* in Malaysia, and language teacher education (TESOL) classroom activities and discussions in a teacher college in Argentina, all the other interactions mentioned above are exclusively *technology-mediated*. This fact is relevant in terms of the mediational tools available to participants, the possibilities and constraints of the online environment, and the development of new forms of literacy (Lamy and Hampel 2007, pp.31–48). Moreover, the British Council/ BBC website not only gives the Group a worldwide exposure and reach, but also ties it to institutional rules, priorities, policies and also, the public image of both institutions. Such association, for instance, creates copyright constraints, which are the main reason for the restriction in the kind of text available for publication in the Group webpages.

1.4 Rationale and methodology

The rationale for this study is two-fold. First, my personal interest in the role of reading literature in the professional development of English language teachers and the desire to explore how new technologies can promote it. Secondly, the wish to better understand the interactions taking place between readers and texts and among readers when commenting on the texts in the ORG, which could not be fulfilled by the available literature in the field at present.

This research project springs from my professional involvement with literature and online English language teachers' networks through my work in various projects with the British Council and the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL). One of these professional networks is the *ELT Online Reading Group,* which is an electronic version of a face-to-face reading circle and which was created with the support of the British Council in August 2007; much before I could conceive the possibility of becoming a researcher. As a reader and as a person who has learnt foreign languages

mostly by reading literature in the target languages, my interest in the development of reading skills and my willingness to promote the reading of literature among other ELT teachers served as starting points for the creation of the ORG and for the design of this study.

In my professional experience, it is not uncommon to hear teachers in face-to-face events of various sorts, and also on online forums devoted to reading and literature in ELT, commenting on how little their students read outside the classroom and how little currency literature has with language learners, especially if they are young (British Council, 2013). Frequently, these comments are based on teachers' own anecdotal experience and perceptions of their students' engagement with pleasure reading. Yet, supposing that there is some degree of truth in such perceptions, poor reading habits do not seem to be found only among learners. I have also frequently heard teachers saying that they do not read much literature themselves because they do not have time for that due to their busy professional lives, while admitting that they actually often lack motivation to engage with pleasure reading in English. It poses the question of how much teachers can expect students to read extensively when they do not have the habit of reading themselves. Such considerations and the wish to promote extensive reading among English language teachers led me to create the ORG, which remains, until this date, the only online reading group devoted exclusively to ELT professionals worldwide, most of whom are non-native speakers of English.

Non-systematic observation of forum posts in the ORG discussion board prior to the start of this investigation made me realize that Group members used a variety of compositional techniques and writing styles to express their ideas about the literary texts and construct their replies in the forum. It also seemed to me that Group members' replies to each other were more carefully constructed and denoted more personal engagement than the kind of interaction I had observed in other professional fora I have moderated. However, at the time these were mere perceptions, uncorroborated by empirical evidence from research on similar settings and without any theoretical background to sustain them. When I was given

the opportunity to conduct this research, I set myself the tasks of reviewing the literature in the field and trying to find a theoretical explanation for the events I had casually observed in the ORG forum.

Reading is central to this investigation and also central to English language teaching. An indicator of the importance of reading in ELT is the vast literature on *reading skills* dealing with both the theoretical (e.g. Carrell, Devine and Eskey, 1988; Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2005), and the more practical aspects of teaching reading to language learners (e.g Hudson, 2007; Nuttall 2005). The large body of publications in the area is exemplified by the current catalogues of the two most traditional UK ELT publishers: Oxford University Press (OUP, 2013) has 179 titles under the heading 'reading skills' and Cambridge University Press (CUP, 2013) lists 88 titles. There is also a good amount of professional literature in the areas of extensive reading (Extensive Reading Foundation, 2013) and the teaching of literature in English language learning (Bassnett and Grundy, 1993; Bredella and Delanoy, 1996; Brumfit and Carter, 1986; Carroli, 2011; Collie and Slater, 1987; Hall, 2005; Lazar, 2008; McRae, 1997; Parkinson, 2000; Whiteson, 1996; Widdowson, 1981). In spite of such abundance of resources to help teachers deal with reading and with the teaching of literature in ELT, there are virtually no wide circulating publications, as far as my knowledge goes, devoted to examine the role of extensive reading and reading literature in English language teacher initial teacher training (ITT) and in continuing professional development (CPD). Moreover, although there are a number of TESOL courses (British Council, 2013), both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, which include modules on English literature, publications in general tend to focus on aspects of *teaching* it and pay little attention to the student-teacher as a *reader*.

As with professional literature on reading skills, there are plenty of publications on the use of CMC in language teaching and learning (Lamy and Hampel, 2007) and how computer technology can help learners develop their language skills as well as promote

educators' and practitioners' professional development (Kear, 2010). Nevertheless, once again, I could not find publications which focus on reading and discussing literature online among English language teachers, perhaps due to the uniqueness of this research setting. My search for answers to the questions of how English language teachers engage with reading and how they respond to literary texts in online environments was unsuccessful. Neither could I find publications that dealt specifically with how ELT teachers interact with others in online environments when this interaction is triggered by the reading of literature. This study aims thus at making a small contribution to bridge these perceived gaps in the field.

As for the theoretical background, the reading I did on discourse analysis during the Masters of Research programme at the Open University (OU) started to slowly form the basis for the analysis of the phenomena I had observed. Further reading during the initial phases of this investigation made me consider the hypothesis that the multiplicity of compositional strategies and writing styles I had informally observed in Group members' replies could perhaps be explained by Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981).

The difficulty in operationalizing these concepts in the research design resided mainly in the fact that I could not find a well-established taxonomy based on Bakhtin's thought to analyse the data. Following the steps of other researchers whose work is grounded on Bakhtinian theory (Lensmire and Beals, 1994; Matusov, 2007; Maybin, 2001), I decided to adopt categories that emerged from the features Bakhtin observed in the composition of the novel and then apply them to texts in principle composed to discuss works of literature.

1.5 Relevance and possible implications

This investigation was undertaken in the hope that by looking at the distinctive features of participants' posts and narratives of group participation, we may understand what triggers readers' cognitive and affective engagement with texts, not only online but also offline. This understanding may have some practical implications for educators working in the field of

foreign and second language teaching and learning, particularly in terms of the development of reading skills. It may also have implications for teachers working with literature in the context of language learning. The findings of this research may be relevant for an assessment of the viability and usefulness of establishing online reading groups as tools to promote reading, writing and professional talk among ELT teachers as part of formal initial language teacher training and CPD programmes, as well as in informal professional development initiatives. They may also contribute to a re-evaluation of the role of literature in language teacher education and the employment of alternative methodological approaches to the integration of technology mediated communication, literature and language in educational contexts.

The development of analytical categories based on Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia used in this study may prove to be a viable and suitable alternative for other researchers interested in using discourse analysis. The distinct, but encompassing, analytical categories devised to interpret the data in this investigation may be employed by other researchers concerned with possible compositional connections between two or more selected written texts or other similar sets of data. They may, hence, be considered as a 'dialogic' taxonomic scheme to be adopted and adapted by academics doing research in a variety of multidisciplinary fields of knowledge, such as education, linguistics, history, literature studies and other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 has provided an overview to this study and discussed the importance of seeking a more in-depth understanding of participants' responses to texts in the online reading group. It included a clarification of key terms and the rationale for conducting this investigation along with a brief explanation on the approach to data analysis adopted. It concluded with some

thoughts about the relevance of this study and how it can possibly benefit educators and academics working in similar fields of knowledge.

Chapter 2 is the literature review. It starts by discussing some theories of reading and moves on to focus on reading as a dialogic process. It then deals with the nature of literary texts and the cognitive and social functions of narratives. It also focuses on the relationships between English literature and English language teaching and traces the formation and development of reading groups. It concludes with a reflection on computer mediated communication (CMC) in the context of English language education and ELT teacher education.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the methodology. It discusses the theoretical framework of this investigation, considering the ontological, epistemological and axiological positions I have taken. It then presents the research framework and methods. This is followed by an examination of texts as discourse taking into consideration various traditions in discourse analysis. It concludes with a discussion on research assessment criteria and considerations on the ethics of research.

Chapter 4 starts with more detailed information on the research setting and the participants sampling. It describes the quality control processes adopted and the processes of data collection and analysis for each one of the data sets collected, namely, the forum posts, the semi-structured narratives and the online survey.

Chapter 5 opens with general considerations on the data analysis and proceeds with a presentation of the research findings in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 6 consists of a discussion of the findings in the light of Bakhtin's theoretical framework and the literature review. It concludes with considerations on the relevance and implications of this study for the ELT and the research communities. It also discusses the limitations of this investigation and suggests some possible future lines on enquiry.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into four main sections which reflect the aspects related to the phenomenon investigated in this study: the acts of reading and discussing literature performed by English language teaching professionals in an online environment. The first part discusses *theories of reading*, from understandings of the cognitive reading processes, to reader-response theory, while the second presents the view of *reading as a dialogic process*. The third section deals with *language and literature*. It starts with an exploration of the notions of literature and literariness which is followed by a reflection on the cognitive and affective roles of narrative and storytelling in the construction of human perceptions of ourselves and the world. It then provides a concise account of the relationships between English literature and English language teaching and traces the formation and development of reading groups both in face-to-face and online contexts. The fourth part deals with *computer mediated communication* (CMC) in the context of English language education and ELT teacher education, focusing on online professional networks. The chapter concludes with the research questions that emerged from my observations of the research data and from this literature review.

2.2 Theories of reading

According to Manguel (1996, p.7), reading, 'as much as breathing, is our essential function.' Although he does not reduce the act of reading to words on a page, he does advocate the primacy of the written word, and the consequent act of reading it, as a way of giving coherence to the world. Crucial as reading is for modern societies (Brandt, 2009), biologically speaking it is far different from breathing since the human body does not have an

in-built apparatus especially devoted to it and reading is not an essential activity for our biological survival. Moore (2008, p.3) points out that 'we were never born to read' and if we do it, it is because human inventiveness led the development of written forms of communication that made use of the human brain's 'extraordinary ability to make new connections' and shape our experience of the world. In the context of this research, reading the written word is the 'essential function' that gives coherence to Group participation, mediates the interactions between research participants, makes possible for them to create new cognitive connections, and affects their accounts of Group experience, as discussed in Chapter 5.

2.2.1 Reading and interpretation

Montgomery et al. (2007, pp.7–12) suggest that the reading process consists of different analytical steps: analysis of structure (grammar and vocabulary), analysis of discourse entities that help us to 'guess the meaning' of the structural elements, and the 'general process of meaning making'. Such division of reading into discrete stages may give the impression that reading is a linear process that moves from decodification to interpretation to critique when, in fact, these different levels inform each other and readers can go back and forth through different texts mentally tracing and retracing their reading steps when making sense of the signs, interpreting information and examining the text critically. According to Eagleton,

> As we read on we shed assumptions, revise beliefs, make more and more complex inferences and anticipations; each sentence opens up a horizon which is confirmed, challenged or undermined by the text. (2008, p.67)

Decoding, interpretation and critique are here seen as phases that inform each other and occur simultaneously in the reader's mind in a continuous flow in any direction (Figure 2.1).
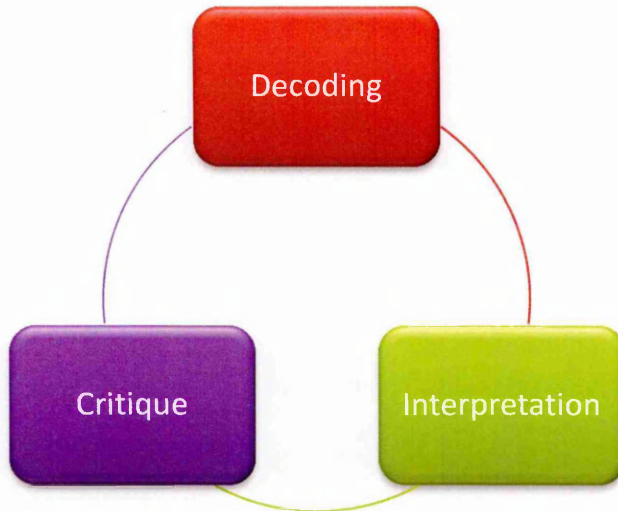
Figure 2.1: Phases in the reading process.

DECODING

Decoding is the act of considering and scrutinizing written symbols. Reading is only possible because we are capable of establishing a connection between a given sign and its conceived meaning, or what in Saussurean terms (Saussure and Wade 2013, pp.65–78) would be called the relation between the signifier and the signified. According to Montgomery et al. (2007, pp.29–37), reading is also possible because we have an understanding of the grammar rules embedded in a text, which means that the writer and its readers share the same linguistic codes and are able to decipher the combinations of signs on the page or on the screen.

The process of making sense of the sign is particularly important for this study because the vast majority of Group members do not have English as their first language and some of them first became literate using a different writing system than the Roman alphabet. However, decoding does not depend exclusively on the sharing of the same alphabetical, lexical and grammatical codes. Being able to recognize signs in English is insufficient: there is still the issue of how Group readers interpret these signs and what connotations and associations they create in the process.

Relevance theory (Wilson and Sperber, 1986) is a cognitive theory of communication proposed in the 1980s and which sees utterance interpretation as a two stage process that includes a decoding phase that provides input to a main inferential phase. The linguistic encoded form is then understood in context and used to construct a hypothesis about the speaker and/or writer's communicative intention. However, Wilson and Sperber (2012, p.150) later revised their initial ideas and admitted that the distinction between decoding and interpretation is not clear-cut and that 'linguistic decoding is not the only source of input to inferential comprehension.' This can be illustrated by a post to the discussion forum where the reader clearly states her difficulty in interpreting the meaning of an idiom even though there are no words in it that could be considered difficult in terms of lexis if taken in isolation.

> *I didn't understand an expression in the text: "It was an immense relief to the mother to get rid of Phatik. She had a prejudice against the boy, and **no love was lost between the two brothers**. (...)"I don't understand what that expression (in bold) means. Can anyone help me?* (P23 in T16)

Although the poster seems to have linguistic capability enough to express herself, comment quite fluently on other aspects of the text in this and other posts, and apparently understand complex lexical items such as 'get rid of', she was not able to establish the connections and make the associations between the signs (words) in the expression in bold and their idiomatic meaning. As Voloshinov (1986, p.11) argues, a sign to be decoded exists in the external world as an image, a colour, a sound and must be experienced by the reader with all the connotations and associations that such physical embodiment brings to the reading consciousness. No sign is neutral since it carries in it a series of meanings that are the result of its associations with other signs and with what they signify in a continuous process of adaptation and permeation of meanings. Decoded signs still need to have their associations interpreted.

INTERPRETATION

The discussion of the process of interpretation and 'the site' of meaning is particularly relevant to this study because the analysis of the posts in the forum has shown that research participants tend to adopt different interpretive approaches to their comments. Some posters tend to focus on the assumed intentions of the authors and/or base their analysis on biographical information; others focus on the language in the text; while others prefer to share their emotional responses to the stories and poems. However, data also show that most participants seem to adopt an eclectic stance towards the interpretation of literary texts and may shift the focus of their comments from post to post or write hybrid posts where two or more kinds of analytical stances are present.

Interpretation is understood here as a 'theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions' (Ramberg and Gjesdal 2013, online). Interpretation, also called *Hermeneutics*, has its roots in the elucidation of the Biblical text. The act of reading was seen in the early history of Western philosophy and theological thought as an act of uncovering the ultimate Truth through the interpretation of the Word (Augustine and Chadwick, 2008, p.186). According to Gadamer (2008, pp.55–6), it is Augustine who first claims the universality of hermeneutics by describing the 'mystery of the Trinity by means of innumerable variations on the word and the dialogue as they occur between men.' In doing so, Augustine establishes a connection between a transcendental source of meaning, existence, language and interpretation. For Augustine, the source of superior knowledge and meaning is God and human history is an ethically oriented master narrative whose interpretation cannot be a matter of individual opinion. Interpretation of the Word must, thus, be the prerogative of authoritative Christian exegetes who are able to see 'within the interpretive discourse the iconic relation between words in sacred texts and external spiritual truths' and therefore, uncover the 'hidden meanings, figurations and indirect language' and deliver them 'as the speech/truth/Logos of the text' (Gadamer, p.91).

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Ramberg and Gjesdal (2013, online) argue that modern hermeneutics had its beginnings with Luther's emphasis on inwardness making it possible for each reader to 'question the authority of traditional interpretations of the Bible' and challenging them to make the truths of the text [their] own'. They argue that after Luther,

> our understanding of a text does not consist [any longer] in a faithful adoption of the predominant or authorized readings of the time. It is up to the individual reader to stake out her own path to the potential meaning and truth of the text. Reading now becomes a problem in a new way. (2013, online)

Similarly, Walder (1990, p.52) states that 'modern hermeneutics is to a large extent derived from specifically [sic] German thought about how to interpret the Bible.' German philosophers in the Romantic period were particularly concerned with the problem of 'making sense of the texts handed over to us from the past' (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2013, online) and had their writings profoundly influenced by philology and history, as well as the philosophical writings of Hegel (Hegel and Woods, 1991) and Kant (Kant, Guyer and Wood, 1999). It was also German philosophy and metaphysics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that profoundly influenced the work of Bakhtin (Holquist, 2002, p.16), whose philosophical concepts form the theoretical framework of this study. German thinkers, such as Schleiermacher (1998), Heidegger (1927), and Gadamer (2008), have contributed to the development of hermeneutics from a methodological and didactic way of looking at texts into a philosophical discipline and the study of symbolic communication.

However, the fact that hermeneutics as a discipline has changed though time does not necessarily mean that early philosophical and theological traditions have ceased to resonate in people's attitudes to reading or affect their perceptions of the validity of an individual's interpretation of a text. When discussing the adequacy of interpretations, Hirsch (1967, pp.128–39) states that indeed 'all interpretations are different' but to be valid they should not be totally incompatible for 'understanding is autonomous' and independent of interpretation and occurs 'entirely within the terms and properties of the text's own language and the shared

realities which that language embraces'. For him, although interpretations vary from age to age and from interpreter to interpreter, understanding and meaning are intrinsic to the text.

Fish (1982, pp.172–3) takes issue with Hirsch and argues that 'meanings are not extracted but made and made not by encoded forms but by interpretive strategies that call forms into being.' He argues that

> [b]oth the stability of interpretation among readers and the variety of interpretations in the career of a single reader would seem to argue for the existence of something independent of and prior to interpretive acts, something which produces them. (1967, p.168)

For Fish (p.171) this 'something' is the interpretive strategies employed by members of an 'interpretive community' who construct properties and assign meanings to text 'prior to the act of reading and, therefore, determine the shape of what is read'. Scholes (1985, p.150) concedes that 'interpretation does enter the reading process at a very early point', and notes that it is constrained by 'prior acquisitions as language, generic norms, social patterns and beliefs'. However, he contradicts Fish and argues that 'a text is bound to its language; it exists as a text only in and through its language' (p.152) and that 'the reader's choice in "making" meaning are in fact severely limited by the writer's previous choices of what marks to put on the page' (p.154).

Much before Hirsch and Fish, Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) had already disputed the idea that the correct interpretation of a text depends principally on the author's objectives and biographical background and questioned the notion that the reader's task was to uncover the author's intention. They concede that the 'author's intellect might be the cause of a poem', but refute the idea that it should be the 'standard for judging the poem' (Lamarque, 2006, p.178). They term such interpretive practice 'intentional fallacy'. The readers' job in an anti-intentionalist stance is to recover meaning through a text linguistic structure instead of the author's psychology or biography. The impact of the concept of intentional fallacy cannot be

underestimated for it questions interpretive practices deeply rooted in scholastic hermeneutics.

On the other hand, Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) also dispute the idea that the meaning of a text, or at least the judgement of its value, would be in the effect it produced on readers or on their interpretation and response to it, which they called the 'affective fallacy'. The concept of affective fallacy dismisses interpretive practices based on the Romantic subjective idea that the meaning of a text is not there to be discovered, but is, instead, the product of the power of the reader's imagination which gives meaning and vitalizes the fixed and dead letter (Coleridge, 1817). For Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946), and New Critical theorists, both intentional and affective fallacies should be avoided and texts should be interpreted based on their thematic and stylistic language features, without referring to any outside context, whether relating to the author, history or the reader. Their approach 'treated poems as aesthetic objects' examining 'the interaction of their verbal features' (Culler,1997, p.165) and seeing them as the locus of textual meaning.

According to Abrams (1999, p.131), '[a] radical departure from the traditional author-oriented views of a determinate intended meaning occurs in a number of *structural* and *poststructural* theories' (emphasis in the original) albeit with considerable differences among them. Such departure led to deconstruction and reader-response criticism with their focus on the reader.

Iser (2000, pp.2–4) summarizes the three main trends in interpretation. First, 'there have been and still are types of interpretation that claim universal validity for their assumptions'. For him, both the interpretation of the grand narrative of religious texts and most forms of ideology critique, such as Marxist theory (p.2), believe they have the monopoly of interpretation and assume that their reading has the status of undeniable truth. At the other end of the scale, there is what Iser calls 'oppositional discourses'. This line of interpretation rests on post-colonial and critical discourses which challenge mainstream

interpretations with the objective of 'gaining recognition for their [own] agenda and of striving for power' (p.4). A third trend is what Ricoeur (2004) sees as the *conflict of interpretations*, with each side trying to assert their superior understanding over the other and, in the process, revealing the flaws and limitations of their presuppositions. Disputing the possibility of ever finding meaning contained in a literary text at all, Sontag (2009, p.6) claims that 'interpretation is based on the highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of items of content' that can be arranged into 'a mental scheme of categories'.

CRITIQUE

A third level of reading is that of the critique where a higher order of questions is formulated and issues such as writer's assumptions, textual representations, knowledge production, power relations and implications are addressed and analysed. According to Lankshear (1997, p.45), reading should be a critical process where readers achieve an understanding of the ways texts 'portray a view of the world and position the readers to read and interpret that portrayed world in particular ways'.

For Gadamer (2008, pp.18–43) any textual interpretation is bound to a complex fabric of interpretations that comes to us through time. In other words, our interpretation is not ours alone but brought to us by a tradition of interpretations that influence our views of what the meaning of a text is. Habermas (1986) contests Gadamer's stress on the authority of interpretive tradition arguing that such emphasis leaves little room for judgement and reflection and proposes an analysis of not only the way history and tradition influence interpretation, but also an analysis that subjects tradition itself to evaluation. He argues that the interpretation of a text must be accompanied by a critical theory of the society in which the text is interpreted. Ricoeur seems to adopt a compromising position between Gadamer and Habermas. According to Ramberg and Gjesdal (2013, online), Ricoeur also believes that 'the hermeneutic act must always be accompanied by critical reflection. Yet he does not find

that this requires a leaving behind of the field of tradition and historical texts' but stresses that 'the text itself may open up a space of existential and political possibilities.'

This practice of reading the text against itself to expose its assumptions and internal conflicts while questioning its apparent unity and coherence is what characterizes the poststructuralist and deconstructionist critique (Abrams, 1999, p.55). For Derrida (1998, p.163), we can never demonstrate a fixed and decidable meaning for there is no ultimate referent outside the text that can serve as a foundation for interpretation and that determines the meaning of any written or spoken utterance. Moreover, there are internal forces in the utterance that undermine any possible definite meaning. Therefore, at the level of critique, the reader's task is to *deconstruct* the text, identifying (a) paradoxes and contradictions at verbal level, (b) shifts or breaks in continuity in terms of focus, time, tone, point of view, and attitude, and (c) moments when the adequacy of language to communicate meaning is called into question (Barry, 2002, pp.74–9).

Although all readers have to necessarily go through the decoding of the text, data shows that interpretation and critique vary to a considerable extent (Section 5.2.3). As Jauss (1990, p.79) argues, each reader's response to a given text is the result of the reader's 'horizon of expectations' and how such expectations are confirmed, confronted or challenged by the text and, possibly, by other readings.

2.2.2 Reader-response criticism

Both Fish (1982) and Jauss (1990) are proponents of a line of criticism that puts the readers at the centre of the reading process and focuses on their experience of the text. As Abrams (1999, p.256) states, reader-response criticism 'does not designate one critical theory' but critics' 'turn from the traditional conception of a work as an achieved structure of meanings to the ongoing mental operations and responses of readers.' This study is an investigation of

readers' responses to literary texts and to other texts created by Group members and, therefore, a more detailed examination of reader-response theory is crucial to our understanding of the data discussed later.

Iser (1993, p.5) maintains that 'the meanings in literary texts are generated in the act of reading; they are the product of a complex interaction between text and reader' and that 'different readers at different times have always had differing apprehensions' of texts. He recognizes that such a statement makes it appear that all meanings are 'individualistic' and that the 'preconditions' of the reader's experience are 'certainly provided by the text, but we as readers also play a part in the creation of this impression.' He points to the inherent fictionality of literary text creation and argues that the literary text 'establishes its reality by the reader's participation and the reader's response' (Iser, 1993, p.7). Frye (1964, p.104) also sees the role of the reader as complementing the poet's role and states that 'we need two powers in literature, a power to create and a power to understand.'

When Fish (1982) argues that the meaning of a text is assigned by the interpretive strategies employed by an interpretive community, he is denying the equality of the two powers and, conversely, establishing the primacy of the reader above text and the writer, albeit recognizing that such communities are unstable since 'interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learnt' (p.172). What Fish does not seem to explain in his *Interpreting the Variorum* (1982, pp.147-73) is how communities produce these meanings and how they learn. Furthermore, although he recognizes that diverging interpretations may occur because individuals belong to different interpretive communities, he seems to imply that inside a given community, interpretation is uniform and readings unified (Scholes, 1985, p.153).

The supremacy of the reader over the author is quite dramatically articulated by Barthes (1977, p.148) when he states that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author'. Barthes argues that the literary culture has been 'tyrannically centred on

the author' in the sense that criticism has traditionally tried to find the explanation of a work in 'the voice of a single person' (p.143). Montgomery et al. (2007, p.170) maintain that in fact Barthes is not denying that texts have been penned by certain historical individuals but attempting to counter-act the tendency in literary criticism to 'use the notion of the author, and his/her supposed intentions, to limit the interpretative possibilities of reading'.

Although Foucault cannot be strictly considered a proponent of reader-response criticism in the way Fish is, for example, he is also concerned with the status of authorship and of what an author's work actually is (Foucault, 1990, p.263-8). Like reader-response theorists, Foucault also puts into question the notion of the author, but asserts that the author as a function still remains and directs his critique to how readers' responses to texts are somehow conditioned by the images and concepts they associate with particular authors. Foucault's argument seems very close to Barthes' but while it is true that there are a number of parallels between their positions, there are also considerable differences between them (Wilson, 2004). While Barthes tries to free the text from the figure of the author, Foucault argues that 'a number of notions that are intended to replace the author' (Foucault, 1990, p.265) actually tie the text to 'author-function' (Wilson, 2004, p.349). Foucault then discusses the function of the author's name, which he sees performing the roles of allowing us to 'group together', 'define', 'differentiate from and contrast to' a number of texts and establish relationship among texts. Moreover, in Foucault's view, 'the author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse. If the whole concept of authorship is brought into question, names should cease to be seen as signifiers of unified entities and instead be considered as ways of attributing to an individual the discourse that is in fact 'an object of appropriation' (Foucault, 1990, p.269) from the discourse of others. In this aspect, Foucault comes close to Bakhtin for whom the author must 'become the *other* to himself' and shift from his 'own discourse to the discourse of the other' (Patterson, 1988, p.19).

Reader-response criticism, in its various facets, developments, arguments and counter-arguments, displaces the author as the sole authority and creator of the text by contesting both its authority and unity and giving to the reader a prominent role in the construction of meaning and of the text itself. However, if the author is a contested figure, it begs the question of who the reader is.

2.2.3 Further considerations

Besides philosophical considerations on reading, neuroscience attempts to explain what happens inside a reader's brain. Reading involves activating mental schemata (Cook, 1994), i.e. the reader's mentally stored previous knowledge and experience, in a deliberate effort to make sense of the information provided by the text and make inferences about textual silences, or lack of information. Studies on reading conducted in the field of neurosciences show that reading changes our schemata because it physically changes the brain. New neuropaths are created between different regions of the brain and there is an increase in mass in specific areas related to language and visual input (Goswami, 2007, pp.198–202; Wolf, 2008, pp.5–18). Connectionist models of word reading propose a computational model of the process that involves activating 'units of input pattern', such as the spelling of a word, 'letting activation pass to the output units', such as pronunciation, via neural connections between them (Seidenberg, 2005, p.239) to explain how reading is based on the activation of neural networks.

Neuroscience and connectionism, however, do not fully address the question of how individuals select, filter and appropriate external input. Socio-constructivist theory suggests that such processes depend on the social, cultural and educational contexts in which they occur, i.e., reading and literacy are socially and culturally situated (Rueda, 2010, p.88). Family and education backgrounds, age, gender and the communities to which people belong all impact on the way people choose, sort, acquire and make sense of information. For socio-

constructivists, knowledge is socially constructed and advances through communication and collaboration (Kear, 2010, p.12). In other words, reading is a series of mental processes undeniably bound to the social-historical contexts where individual readers are situated. As Holquist (2002: 49) points out, '[m]eaning comes about in both the individual psyche and in shared social experience through the medium of the sign.'

Despite going through similar reading processes, different readers still generate different understandings of a text for they bring unique schemata to the act of reading. Readers adopt different codes to make sense of signs, attribute different meanings and values to the same signs, adopt different approaches to interpretation in different occasions and contexts, and create some intertextual connections while ignoring others. This investigation is based on the notion that the meanings attributed to the texts read, produced and discussed in the research setting are partially the result of the complex relationships between those texts and the myriad of other textual experiences readers bring with them. It approaches reading as a process of dialogue between authors, texts and readers.

2.3 Reading as a dialogic process

The choice of a Bakhtinian approach to the data analysis in this study is based on the understanding that the interactions happening between texts and readers in the online environment play a role in participants' responses to texts and their narratives of Group experience. It reflects my understanding that texts and readers are in 'conversation' with each other and that the creation of meaning depends on this dialogical relationship.

Before discussing Bakhtin's theories, it is important to bear in mind that although he has made significant contributions to various areas of thought, Bakhtin was not, in principle, a linguist, an educator or a discourse analyst. Bakhtin himself calls his eclectic approach 'philosophical' for it moves 'on the borders' of linguistics, philology, literary studies and

'any other particular kind of analysis' (Bakhtin in *Estetika*, p. 281, cited in Holquist, 2002, p.14). According to Holquist,

> "Bakhtin's philosophy" is a pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge; more particularly, it is one of the several modern epistemologies that seek to grasp human behaviour through the use humans make of language. (2002, p.15)

Bakhtin was profoundly influenced by classical and German philosophy, especially Neo-Kantianism. He also had a great interest in science, especially in studies of the central nervous system, as well as in the new physics of Bohr and Einstein (Holquist, 2002, pp.2–5) and drew on Einstein's Theory of Relativity to develop two of his key theoretical principles: dialogue and chronotope. Because Bakhtin's concepts are in a liminal sphere of various disciplines, his ideas have been borrowed by scholars in various fields of knowledge (Maybin, 2005, p.64) and have been particularly relevant for researchers working in a wide-range of multidisciplinary studies in the areas of language and literacy (Ball and Freedman, 2004).

In this study, I draw mainly on Bakhtinian notions of *dialogue* and *heteroglossia* to conceptualize the interactions between participants in the online reading Group discussion forum. They serve as the theoretical framework for the analysis of readers' narratives of Group participation and their responses to the literary texts when constructing their forum posts. Bakhtinian notions of *chronotope* and *answerability* are also pertinent to this study. As Bakhtin himself drew in diverse fields of knowledge to build his 'philosophy', I draw on his concepts to study participants' textual interactions mediated by the reading of literature and examine their composition of novel technology-mediated textual forms.

2.3.1 Language and dialogue

To be able to understand the concept of dialogue in Bakhtin, we must first look at his understanding of language. For Maybin (2001, p.64), the two fundamental notions permeating all Bakhtin's writings are the view that 'language originates in social interactions

and struggle' and that the 'traditional linguistic transmission model of communication' should be replaced by a 'more interactive and reciprocal notion of how language works.'

Bakhtin's main literary preoccupation was the novel. When considering literature, the general tendency is to associate the novel with the sort of literary text that, in English literature, emerged with Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (Watt, 1987) and flourished with Austen and the Brontës, up to contemporary writers, such as Amis and McEwan (Eagleton, 2004). However, as Holquist argues in the introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*,

> "novel" is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system. (...) Bakhtin comes very close to naming Socrates the first novelist. (1981, pp. xxxi–xxxii)

Bakhtin (1981, p.12) sees the novel as the only literary genre fully receptive to 'the new cultural and creative consciousness' living in an 'actively polyglot world' where 'new relationships are established between language and its object'. For him, 'the novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice' (p.261), combined into a higher unity, where 'a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices [are] artistically organized' (p. 262).

Although Bakhtin sees this linguistic stratification as 'the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre', he also very clearly states that 'this internal stratification [is] present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence' (p.263). In fact, one of his most influential essays on the novel is the one that focuses on discourse in general and extensively deals with the problem of language. In the 'Discourse in the Novel,' he rebukes traditional stylistics which, in his view, 'is not concerned with living discourse' but 'bogged down to stylistic trivia' which ignores 'the social life of discourse outside the artist's study' (p.260). Writing in the 1930s, Bakhtin argues that,

> Philosophy of language, linguistics and stylistics, i.e., such as they have come down to us, have all postulated a simple and unmediated relation of speaker to his unitary

and singular "own" language, and have postulated as well a simple realization of this language in the monologic utterance of the individual. (1981, p. 269)

Bakhtin acknowledges that linguistics has recognized the 'reciprocal influencing and intermixing of languages' in discourse, but argues that this is still seen as a 'mechanical' occurrence that is 'unconscious and determined by social conditions' and reflected in 'abstract linguistic phonetic and morphological elements' (1981, p.275). Modern linguistics, with which Bakhtin was almost certainly familiar (Clark and Holquist, 1984, p.20), is understood to have emerged with the work of Saussure. Saussure argued that 'signs are arbitrary, possessing meaning not because of a referential function but because of their function within a linguistic system as it exists at any one moment in time' (Allen, 2000, p.9).

For instance, Saussure's answer to Juliet's question (*RJ*, II,ii,1-2) of how a word can truly represent the essence of something (Shakespeare, Wells and Taylor, 2005) would be that indeed a *rose* could be called by any other name without having its nature or perfume changed. What we conventionally call a *rose* is a sign (*signifier*) which is arbitrarily given to a form (*signified*) (Saussure and Wade, 2013, p.67). Besides its arbitrary nature, Saussure also argues that the sign is *differential*. For Saussure, each sign consists of nothing but difference from every other sign in a language system. The sign *rose* only makes sense and exists as an entity because it differs from the sign used to designate a *violet* and any other flower. Without the differential point of reference, signs do not make sense. Individuals make use of the linguistic structures and elements (*parole*) given to them by society, but do not have agency to change them. Signs can be arranged superficially in different combinations, but the system of a particular language, which Saussure calls *langue*, is kept by the social forces that uphold these arbitrary connections (Kress, 2001, p.30). Barthes defines the concept of *langue* as

> the social part of language, the individual cannot himself either create or modify it; it is essentially a collective constraint which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate. (1984, cited in Allen, 2013, p.9)

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Saussure replaces the philological approach to linguistics by a view of language as a social experience to be studied from the point of view of the individual speaker, uttered from a particular point and from a unique perspective. Saussure sees in the language of the speaker an 'inner duality' that is 'similar to Bakhtin's self/other distinction' as it simultaneously consists of features that are unique to the speaker 'and features that he or she shares with others' (Holquist, 2008, p.44). However, Saussure distinction between *parole* and *langue* creates a duality and an emphasis on difference and opposition that can only be resolved by suppressing the duality through the shared social aspect of language that creates a form of unit (p.46). For Saussure, a final unity in meaning can be achieved by social interaction. Bakhtin, on the other hand, emphasizes difference but also simultaneity rather than opposition. For him, there is no final, unified meaning for a living word for it is always open in signification or negotiation with other words. He argues that

> [n]o living word relates to its object in a singular way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there is an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme (...) The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex relationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.276)

The implication of such argument is that, for example, besides not being a violet, a *rose* can also be referred to as a *flower*, a *Rosa*, *a woody perennial bush of the family Rosacea*, and a number of other denominations and definitions that can possibly bring to the minds of both speakers and listeners a host of symbolic and metaphoric meanings in virtually every culture and literary tradition (OED, 2013). Bakhtin talks about a dialogical environment where words exist.

Most of Bakhtin's argument is directed towards the analysis of 'the dialogic orientation of the word' and its 'new and significant artistic potential in discourse' that finds

its 'fullest and deepest expression in the novel' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.275). However, he also clearly states that,

> The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of *any* discourse. It is the natural orientation of any living discourse. (1981, p.279, emphasis in the original)

Dialogue is the concept that permeates all Bakhtin's work. It is his image for a reconceptualization of epistemology that takes into account the developments of scientific thought in the nineteenth century. It is especially shaped by Kant's views of the non-identity of the mind and the world (Brook, 2013) and Kantian understanding of space and time (Janiak, 2012). For Bakhtin, existence is dialogical because meaning is the result of the relationship between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space and time. Dialogue is Bakhtin's 'metaphor' for his understanding of how knowledge is created in mediation, in an ongoing 'conversation' between not only individuals, but also between political and ideological bodies (Holquist, 2002: 21). Bakhtin believes in,

> the dialogic nature of consciousness, the dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human existence is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life. (1984, p.293)

As living beings, our opinions, language and individual consciousness 'lie on the borderline between oneself and the other' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.293), which means that our very consciousness depends on our relation with others. This *dependence* on the other is crucial since understanding can only exist where there is diversity in human perception. Holquist (2002, p.36) explains this dependence through the metaphor of two people facing each other across a table. 'Although they share an external space and time' and are able to both see certain things, like the table between them, there are other things in the same encounter they do not perceive, like the wall behind each of them. To be able to see a more complete picture of the room, they *depend* on the perception of the other, and to have an even more

encompassing view, there is the need of a third person watching this encounter and being able to look at both.

It is the contention of this study that, in the light of this encompassing understanding of dialogue, interactions among research participants are potentially dialogical because it is through the encounters they have with the texts and posts in the forum that they are able to see certain things that are not possible for them to see as individuals in the space and time where they are situated. Moreover, the views and perceptions which participants encounter in the texts and posts they read are also intrinsically unique. The views of the others on a given text are then perceived and demand a response; even if this is response is not actually written as a reply. For Bakhtin,

> In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement. To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. (...) it is in this way, after all, that the various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social "languages" come to interact with each other (1981, p.282).

If life and language acquire meaning in dialogic relation, similarly, reading can be seen as an active process of 'conversation' between the text and the reading-self. The text and the reader cannot be understood as opposite entities, neither can one have primacy over the other; they can only exist simultaneously in the process of reading. It is in the process of filling in the gap between the reading-self and the text that decoding, interpretation and critique take place, and knowledge and meaning are, thus, created. Reading, from a Bakhtinian perspective, is a dialogic process.

To this extent Fish (1982) is right in claiming that meaning is constructed with others, but his concept of 'interpretive community' seems to be static as communities in Fish seem to be pre-determined by socio-historical forces and resistant to other interpretations, other

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communities, and to the text itself. When Scholes (1985) contends with Fish and calls our attention to the fact that a reader's interpretation is to a certain extent limited by the text itself, he is advocating an approach to reading that brings the text into the 'conversation' and into the process of understanding through the response a reader gives to it.

Ricoeur (1981, pp.146–7) dismisses the idea that reading is an instance of dialogue because, for him, there is no exchange between the writer 'through his work' and the reader. For him the book divides the act of writing and the act of reading into two sides between which there is no communication. In Ricoeur's point of view, dialogue is 'an exchange of questions and answers' which occurs when there is a connection between the voice and the hearing of both interlocutors. Ricoeur is especially concerned to draw a difference between the act of writing and speech. Bakhtin's idea of dialogue is far more encompassing. He contests the idea of seeing dialogue only in 'compositional form in the structuring of speech.' For Bakhtin, the word itself is internally dialogic as dialogism 'occurs in a monologic utterance as well as in the rejoinder'; it 'penetrates its entire structure, all its semantic and expressive layers' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.279).

2.3.2 Heteroglossia and intertextuality

When Bakhtin argues for the 'internal dialogism of the word' (p.279), he is saying that in any utterance there is a multiplicity of meanings and forces in action. He calls it *heteroglossia*. According to Holquist (Bakhtin, 1981, p.xix-xx), 'in any utterance of any kind' there is the interaction 'between a mode of transmission' that is a 'more or less fixed system' and 'the power of the particular context in which the utterance is made' to 'refract, add to, or in some cases, even subtract from the amount and kind of meaning in the utterance'. Bakhtin calls these two contending tendencies, *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces.

For Bakhtin (1981, p.270) every language is subject to 'forces at work' in the 'verbal-ideological evolution of specific social groups.' The centripetal forces 'serve to unify and

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centralize the verbal-ideological world.' They impose limits to language; guarantee 'a certain maximum of mutual understanding', and create a system of linguistic norms that we recognize as 'correct language'. Conversely, centrifugal forces serve to disperse, decentralize and stratify language. They create a multiplicity of meanings and linguistic possibilities. These forces do not exist as opposites but simultaneously and 'every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as centripetal forces are brought to bear' (p.272).

This mixture of languages, subject to internal dialogic forces, is also manifested in 'all devices in the novel for creating the image of a language', which Bakhtin then reduces to three broad categories: hybridization, dialogized inter-illumination, and dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981, pp 359-366). However, he is quick to say that these categories are only 'theoretically' separated but are in effect 'always inextricably woven together into the unitary artistic fabric' (p.358). Barthes (1977, p.159) also uses the metaphor of 'fabric' and alludes to the fact that etymologically the word *text* is 'a tissue, a woven fabric' and that, 'a text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (...) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (p.146). Barthes' view of the text as 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' (p.147) resonates with Kristeva's concept of intertextuality. Kristeva's (1980) notion of *intertextuality* is an attempt to blend Saussure's notion of the non-referential nature of the sign with Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia and carnival (Allen, 2000, p.6). For Kristeva (1980, p.65), a text is an 'intersection of textual surfaces (...) a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context'.

Although Bakhtin and Foucault 'did not engage in the sort of interchange that would open up issues of influence' (Patterson, 1988, p.5), there are similarities in the way they see

the notions of authorship and language. When Foucault poses the question on the nature of the author, he argues that,

> It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, (...) all discourses endowed with the author function do possess this plurality of self (...) since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subject-positions (1990, pp.272-3).

This is close to Bakhtin's (1981, p.278) view of the writer when he argues that 'the prose writer witnesses as well the unfolding of social heteroglossia surrounding the object, the Tower of Babel mixing of languages that goes on around the object'. The text is the 'focal point for heteroglot voices among which [the writer's] own *voice* must also sound' (my emphasis). Writing is, hence, made of a multiplicity of voices that are interwoven in the form of an intertextual fabric that we call *text*. What reader-response criticism does, in its various forms, is to try to bring the voice of the reader into this heteroglot multiplicity.

Reading can then be seen as the tension-filled space where the mediation process between the multiple voices of the reader and the multiple voices of the author/text take place. Reading is the dialogic process between both the text and the reader's heteroglossic selves occurring in a certain time and space where knowledge and meaning are created. This understanding of both writing and reading establishes the grounds for all the analysis of the research data to be found in Chapter 5.

2.3.3 Chronotope and answerability

Time and space are key notions for the understanding of dialogism. Bakhtin (1981, p.84) gives the name of *chronotope* to 'the process of assimilating real historical time and space in literature'. Bakhtin uses chronotope to describe the flow of time and spatial location in the fictionalized narrative and thereby understand literary genres and determine the 'image of man in literature' (p.85). He admits he is 'borrowing' the term from Einstein 'as a metaphor'

for his own literary analytical purposes but does not intend to use it to deal with 'other areas of culture' (p.84).

Bakhtin's understanding of time and space is drawn from Kant who 'defines space and time as indispensable forms of any cognition.' However, he differs 'from Kant in taking them not as a "transcendental" but as forms of the most immediate reality' (p.85). Contrary to Kant, Bakhtin believes that meaning is always *situated* in a unique time and space. According to Holquist (2002, p.152), 'situation is a site that is defined by its relation to elements other than (...) merely temporal and spatial factors,' as time and space 'also have values attached to them'.

Moreover, for Bakhtin, chronotope is not only a literary category since real-life itself is an event that is always narrated from one point of view and for our existences to be 'more than random happening' (Holquist, 2002, p.25) we impose the categories of time and space to create narratives and give meaning to our existence. Dialogism, therefore, perceives 'being as an event and human being as a project, or a deed, the deed of having constantly to make judgements' (p.152).

In bringing together not only time and space but also value, chronotope becomes a term that has ethical implications. In Newtonian physics time and space are homogeneous, absolute and always articulated from a metaphysical point of view. Newton (1999, p.941) argues that God 'endures always and is present everywhere, and by existing always and everywhere he constitutes duration and space'. Value is, consequently, also absolute and pre-determined. With Einstein, space and time cease to be absolutes; they become relative in the sense that things can only be observed from a particular perspective in time and space and, hence, 'there is no such a thing as a fixed interval of time independent of the system to which it refers' (Clark and Holquist, 1984, p.70). At the moment that events are perceived and situated in a specific time and space, they also acquire a specific value. As Holquist notes,

> A point of view is never complete in itself; it is rather the perception of an event from a particular place locatable only as opposed to any other place from which the event might be viewed. Values are sculptured out of time and space. (2002, p.163)

In spite of time and space being unique for each individual, we also share them with others. For Bakhtin separateness and simultaneity cannot be overcome and are fundamental conditions of our existence. Because life and language are shared, they always address the other and the other cannot fail but respond to them, sooner or later, in one way or another. This is, in simple terms, what Bakhtin calls *answerability*:

> Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive... Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker (p.68). Each utterance refutes affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account (1986, p.91).

For Bakhtin, the need to respond includes inevitably the responsibility to do so. Levinas (1979) shares with Bakhtin the view that language and life only have meaning in dialogic relationship with the other. It is my 'unique and irreplaceable proximity to the other which defines my significance' and, therefore, 'no one and nothing can assume my responsibility and offer the word and the self that are mine to offer' (Patterson, 1988, p.99).

As Bakhtin borrows Einstein's concept for literary analysis, in this study I am also borrowing chronotope to look at how participants situate their narratives and comments in the discussion forum in terms of time and space and examine the values they attribute to texts. The notion of answerability is also relevant to my analysis of the interactions happening in the online time/space environment.

2.4 Literature and language

The starting point for the analysis of the data in this study is the literary text. It is against the short stories, poems and novel extracts published in the Group that participants' posts are examined. Since literature plays such a pivotal role in this study, it is important to examine

what 'literature' is considered to be, the mimetic functions that narratives perform, and how discourse analysis can help us understand the organizing features of participants' responses to literary texts.

2.4.1 The concepts of literature and literariness

The question of what literature is has been asked by a number of philosophers, such as Aristotle and Plato, since antiquity. Sartre (1988), in a seminal work published just after the end of the World War II, establishes a close relation between imaginative literature, philosophy, politics and ethics. He rejects the notion of 'art for art's sake' and insists on the 'social responsibility of the artist and the intellectual in general' since he believes that 'writing is a form of acting in the world' (Flynn 2013, online). We can see in Sartre's concern with literature and commitment echoes of Bakhtin's notion of answerability and Levinas ideas on the individual's unique responsibility.

Culler (1997, pp.18–41) argues that the question, in terms of literary criticism, is not relevant at all since both literary and non-literary texts can be studied in the same way from the theoretical and philosophical points of view. Secondly, features that have been thought to characterize literary texts have also been found in non-literary discourses. Culler argues for difficulties in answering the question of what literature is and illustrates his point by mentioning the autobiographical aspects of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Culler's choice of example is telling because *Jane Eyre* is considered one of the most representative novels in English literature and it depicts the combination of styles and the internal stratification of languages that Bakhtin sees as the essential pre-requirement for the novel as a genre.

Besides considering the compositional units of a literary text, linguists have also tried to formulate a theory of literature integrating it into language. Jakobson (1987, pp.15–16) opposes the separation between the history of literature and 'the description of a literary system as a static pattern' and argues that a work of art must have a 'dominant' focal

component that specifies it in terms of literary period and genre. Bakhtin (1981, p.288) shares with Jakobson the view that form carries meaning and that lexicological, semantic, and syntactic characteristics of language 'will knit together with the intentional aim and with the overall accentual system inherent in one or other genre.' However, in other aspects Bakhtin and the Formalists such as Jakobson disagreed substantially. For the Formalists, 'the text is a sum of its devices' and to have meaning it should be considered as a complete whole, whereas for Bakhtin a text is also an utterance and to have meaning an utterance cannot be completed and should remain open to dialogue with other utterances (Clark and Holquist, 1984, p.188).

According to Onega (2006, p.263), Jakobson's main contribution to modern literary theory is his concept of *literariness* and his identification of metaphor and metonymy as the 'two main rhetorical figures' as models for organizing discourse. Jakobson calls literariness the particular structural organization of language that he sees as the defining feature of literature. Widdowson (1981, pp.156–9) also sees literariness in terms of structure and states that conventional kinds of discourse are 'linear,' follow a 'conventional code,' and conform to 'normal linguistic features' that mediate 'ordinary social interaction' whereas poetic language is non-linear, contradictory, disruptive, deviant language that is unlike 'normal language'. Both Jakobson and Widdowson focus on language structure in poetry when discussing literariness.

Poststructuralists contest the view that literariness can be defined exclusively on the basis of textual property. Culler (1975, p.175) believes that the 'conventional expectation' of the reader is more important than both formal pattern and linguistic deviation to determine literariness. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson (2008) show that although metaphor and metonymy are certainly features of literary discourse, they are also present in all kinds of text and in fact permeate all our conceptual systems. Eagleton (2008, p.9) also approaches the issue of what literature may be from the perspective of the reader's expectation, but shifts the

discussion from the linguistic conventions to the value-judgment standpoint. He maintains that,

> by and large people term 'literature' which they think is *good* (...) not necessarily in the sense that writing has to be 'fine' to be literary, but it has to be *of the kind* that is judged fine: it may be an inferior example of a generally valued mode (2008, p.9). (Emphasis in the original)

As Eagleton (2008, p.9) points out, 'nobody would bother to argue that a bus ticket is an inferior example of literature', but people do contend about how fine a particular piece of work by a specific writer is. The value attributed to a particular literary work by scholars and literary critics is the most important factor determining whether that work should be part of *the canon* or not.

The expression *the canon* is quite telling in itself. Firstly, there is the issue of singularity. The use of the definite article 'the' implies that there can only be *one* canon: one single body of literary works that are considered fine and influential in shaping a particular culture. Secondly, there is the word 'canon', which is borrowed from biblical studies and gives religious overtones and an aura of transcendental authority to the body of selected works (Kermode, 1990, pp.28–9). The idea of the canon as unique, unified and harmonious has been contested by some critics who see it as an ideological construction (Ray, 2009); and by others who see it as having always been a contested territory that is only apparently and artificially uniform and which should serve as a point of reference for the discussion of non-canonical works (Butler, 1990, pp.23–6).

While conceding that the literary canon, in any culture, is 'objectionable because formed at random or to serve some interests at the expense of others,' Kermode (1990, pp.30–31) believes that there is no way of escaping it because the canon is the way we have to preserve and organize the works we consider valuable. In his words, 'the canon, in predetermining value, shapes the past and makes it humanly available, accessibly modern.' Eagleton (2008, p.10) also sees the canon as 'a *construct*, fashioned by particular people for

particular reasons at a certain time' but he does not see it as something permanent and immutable. On the contrary, for him, the value attributed to works of literature is 'transitive' because we interpret literature, 'to some extent in the light of our own concerns'. For him, for example, although it is unquestionable that Shakespeare is currently sanctioned by most scholars and critics as part of the canon, he is so, and will only remain so, while his works resonate with our concerns as readers. As Eagleton points out,

> [a]ll literary works, in other words, are rewritten, if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them, indeed there is no reading of a work which is not also a re-writing. No work, and no current evaluation of it, can simply be extended to new groups of people without being changed, perhaps almost unrecognizably, in the process; and this is one of the reasons why what counts as literature is a notably unstable affair (2008, p.11)

When most of the works available to readers in the Group can be considered as belonging to the current canon of English literature, it is important to bear in mind that readers come from a wide range of cultures and literary traditions and may have various views about the value and status of these texts. On the one hand, it is possible that some participants may question their standing as 'canonical' whereas to others it may even come as a surprise that the position in the canon of some well-established authors, such as Shakespeare or Austen, can be subject to debate at all.

2.4.2 On narratives

There are historical difficulties in finding an encompassing term to refer to 'the art that uses language unaccompanied [by music], either in prose or in verse' (Aristotle and Heath, 1996, p.4). According to Aristotle (p.3), although there are compositional differences in terms of media, object and manner of expression, such works of art all share a common feature: they 'are all (taken together) *imitations*'. Regardless of their canonical status, genre, and individual assessments of how 'fine' they are, works of literature, to a greater or lesser extent, imitate life. Kearney (2002) makes a comprehensive analysis of the role of stories in human

history and in the construction of self. For him stories make the transition 'from nature to narrative, from time suffered to time enacted and enunciated' that transformed us from a merely 'biological life' to a 'truly human one' (p.2). From the Greek myths to contemporary fiction, narratives have been an integral part of people's lives in different cultures around the world. Kearney points out that,

> Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so in fact, for while food make us live, stories are what make our lives worth living. They are what make our condition *human*. (2002, p.3)

Arendt (1958, cited in Kearney, 2002a, p.4) argues that the 'chief characteristic of specifically human life... is that it is always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story.' She echoes Bakhtin (1981, p.211) who sees life, 'both human and natural' as a 'great single event' that 'emerges in its multiple sides and aspects' that are 'all equally indispensable and significant' and which make sense when the imposed categories of time and space transform them in a coherent narrative. Kearney (2002, p.129) believes that the struggle for narrative coherence is not simply a way of dealing with 'chaos and confusion' but a result of the fact that human life is '*always already* an implicit story' (emphasis in the original). When Aristotle (Aristotle and Heath, 1996, p.13) lays down the basic concepts of tragedy, he makes it clear that tragedies imitate the wholeness of human life as we know it and, consequently, both life and narrative follow the same pattern of beginning, middle and end.

Drawing on Greek philosophy, scholastic writing and twentieth century phenomenology, Kearney (2002, pp.129–56), analyses what he considers the five 'enduring functions of storytelling': plot or *mythos*, re-creation or *mimesis*, release or *catharsis*, wisdom or *phronesis* and ethics or *ethos*. For Levi-Strauss (1978, pp.11–15), stories are offspring of some basic universal myths. Myth and stories have the functions of (a) creating a common basis for communicating and sharing feelings and experience; (b) containing and fashioning

our internal impulses allowing us to live in society, (c) filtering our experiences and (d) requiring from us an evaluative, moral position. Storytelling is a communicative act that is always shared and carries in itself an intrinsic ethical position. As Kearney states,

> The story is not confined to the mind of the author alone (the romantic fallacy regarding the primacy of the author's original intentions). Nor is it confined to the mind of its reader. Nor indeed to the action of its narrated actors. The story exists in the interplay between all these. Every story is a play of at least three persons (author/actor/addressee) whose outcome is never final. That is why narrative is an open-ended invitation to ethical and poetic responsiveness (2002, p.156).

Kearney's idea of a story as the 'interplay' between more than two agents and his notion of 'responsiveness' are akin to Bakhtin's notions of dialogue and answerability. Like Bakhtin, he also stresses the importance of time and space and argues that when someone tells a story, listeners and readers always interpret it and respond to it from where they are now, in terms of where they come from and where they are going to (p.4).

When responding to texts and replying to other posters in the discussion forum, research participants frequently resort to narrative mode and often connect the plots and characters in the literary texts to their own past and present stories of personal and professional experiences. The fact that participants are not only readers of stories but also, to a certain extent storytellers themselves, raises the issue of how realistic and/or fictional their narratives can be considered. Even the most realistic story is inescapably a fictionalized construction as not even historians, despite a necessary assertion to veracity, can claim being able to describe events as they *actually* happened (Lerner, 1988, p.60). The two main reasons for the innate fictionality of any piece of writing are the mimetic function of narratives and the concept of chronotope

As Aristotle (Aristotle and Heath, 1996, p.3) tells us, every narrative is an 'imitation of an action.' Although we see life as a series of events organized as a story, this story does not really materialize as narrative until it is *told*, until it is verbalized. Life has to be captured in language to become a narrative; however, no natural language can fully recreate an event

without mediating it ideologically. By ideology here I simply mean a system of beliefs, 'the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power structure and power-relations of the society we live in' (Eagleton, 2008, p.13). Narratives are all mimetic because every telling is a re-telling, a language-mediated re-creation that 'sustains a connection between fiction and life while also acknowledging their differences' (Kearney, 2002, p.132).

The second main reason for the inescapabilty of fictionalization in narrative is the notion of chronotope of both the writer and of the 'I' in the narrative. The represented event can never be identical in time and space to the real event it represents. According to Bakhtin,

> If I relate (or write about) an event that has just happened to me, then I as the *teller* (or writer) of this event am already outside the time and space in which the event occurred. It is just as impossible to forge an identity between myself, my own "I," and that "I" that is the subject of my stories as it is to lift myself up by my own hair. The represented world, however realistic and truthful, can never be chronotopically identical with the real world it represents, where the author and creator of the literary work is to be found (1981, p.256).

As Bakhtin (1981, p.250) argues, 'the chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied.' The view of storytelling as an essentially communicative act that necessarily leads to a response that is always located in a certain time and space illuminates my understanding of research participants' narratives and the interactions happening in the online Group. My standpoint for the analysis of participants' comments to the forum is that their accounts are, as any other narrative, subject to a greater or lesser degree of fictionalization since 'all stories are true and yet not true' (Owen, 2001, p. xii).

2.4.3 Literature and language teaching

Since most research participants have learnt English as a foreign or second language, an analysis of the historical - time and space situated - developments in the approaches to literature as a discipline cannot be dissociated from a brief analysis of approaches to literature in language teaching and learning in general. As written texts have become more easily

available throughout the centuries in the West, reading has also become more wide-spread among populations contributing to the growth of literacy, reading habits and also language learning. These connections are relevant to the research context and to an understanding of participants' perceptions of their online reading experiences in the Group.

English literature as a distinct academic subject was first introduced at University College London in 1828 and consisted of 'the study of English language, merely using literature as a source of linguistic examples' (Barry, 2002, pp.12–13). Kings' College, London introduced literature studies in 1831; in 1840 F. D. Maurice was appointed Professor and introduced the study of English literature as a way of educating the middle-classes, which for him represented the essence of Englishness. The study of English literature is also closely connected to the growth of the working classes since London 'degrees were taught by licence at universities in major industrial cities' in the north. It is no mere coincidence that the institution of English studies coincides with the growing influence of the middle and urban classes and with the rise of the novel. According to Bakhtin,

> The novel is the only developing genre. It is the only genre that was born and nourished in an era of world history and therefore is deeply akin to that era, whereas the other major genres entered that era as already fixed forms. (1981, p.4)

At the time of the institution of literature degrees at London, and later at Oxford (1894) and Cambridge (1911), Britain was at the height of its industrial development and of its imperial power. For the founders of English studies, literature should be a vehicle for the promotion of ethics, moral principles, the general enhancement of mind, and cultivation of human universal values. When English literature became a fully-fledged academic subject, prose and poetry were promoted as a means of personal growth, intellectual and moral advancement and a way of infusing the middle-class with a sense of belonging to a nation with a rich cultural heritage (Barry, 2002, p.13). However, literature, especially the novel, has a complex relationship with established power and cannot be simplistically reduced to a role of

ideological control and imperial propaganda. The novel 'was born at the same time as modern science, and shares its sober, secular, hard-headed, investigative spirit, along with its suspicion of classical authority' and for this reason, not a few commentators at the time considered the novel 'a trashy piece of fiction fit only for servants and females' (Eagleton 2005, p.7). In Bakhtin's (1981, p.4) words, 'the novel has an unofficial existence, outside "high" literature.'

Perhaps a more acceptable explanation for the rise of the novel, and of English literature as a whole, is given by Bakhtin, and echoed by Kermode (1990, p.31) and Kearney (2002), when they state that we need narratives to make sense of the world and of our existence. They argue that, for a number of socio-political and economic reasons, the biblical narrative lost its force and resonance over the centuries in the West and it had to be substituted by other narratives since people cannot live without stories. Eagleton (2008, p.16) also attributes the rise of English literature to the 'failure of religion' to 'provide the social "cement", affective values and basic mythologies by which a socially turbulent class-society can be welded together.' Literature, hence, becomes a substitute for religion in a society more and more secularized and carries this 'ideological burden from the Victorian period onwards.' Although, in principle, we can accept Eagleton's statement as true, it may sound as if the growth of English literature was an ideological programme imposed on the masses. Even if we accept that, the plan would have failed if the new narratives had not resonated with readers.

Although the history of English language teaching (ELT) can be traced back to the fourteenth century when English began to be taught as a second language to French speakers in England (Howatt 2004, 9-17), the modern history of ELT coincides with the growth of the Empire and the development of the novel. According to Howatt (p.127), by the end of the nineteenth century, 'the English language had found a place to hang its hat in every port, from Gibraltar to Fiji and beyond'. Although there were considerable differences between

settlement colonies and 'the ones where the British presence had political and economic purposes' only, the provision of English language teaching still displayed a 'quite consistent pattern of governmental' and also religious missionary provision (pp.127-9).

Because of this past ideological burden the teaching of English literature, at home and overseas, has been frequently linked to the expansion of the British Empire. Likewise, English language teaching has been linked to the British colonial past and the current role of the English language in the globalization process (Graddol, 2006). However, before becoming the subject of study in England, English literature had already appeared as a subject in the curriculum in educational institutions overseas, particularly in India as early as 1816 (Viswanathan, 2004) and Sri Lanka (Canagarajah, 1999a) as a way of teaching English language and 'culture' or, from the point of view of some, as a way of promoting the Empire's moral, political and religious values in the colonies (Pennycook 1998, pp.72–5; Phillipson 1992, pp.109–71). Canagarajah (p. 207) takes issue with the linguistic imperialist standpoint and argues that such an understanding of language and literature fails to acknowledge how individuals accommodate language diversity, mediate 'linguistic and cultural conflicts' and negotiate domination in the construction of their 'pluralised identities'. However, Canagarajah is not clear about the mechanism by which this mediation and negotiation take place and seems to locate the site of resistance to discourse in the individual consciousness, albeit socially constructed/shaped. From a dialogic perspective, resistance and accommodation are possible because 'all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only in the relation' (Holquist, 2002, p.21) between the reader of the colonial discourse and the texts presented to them. An awareness of the unique ideological positions of English language and literature and their roles in the construction of non-native readers' identities should always inform our analysis of the social interactions in the Group and the readers' responses to the literary texts.

Historically, approaches to literature in English language teaching have responded to methodological and pedagogical changes that are largely the result of wider socio-historical changes and also the influences exerted on ELT educators and authors by different currents of thought in literary criticism (Hall, 2005, pp.47–127). For instance, from the end of the Second World War until the 1970s the teaching of English underwent changes that, in one way or another, responded to the profound political transformation that occurred in the post-war world (Crystal, 2005; Howatt, 2004; Mugglestone, 2008).

From the 1970s onwards English language teaching and teacher education were dominated by discourses that advanced practical approaches to language, communicative competence and the teaching of language for specific, practical and functional purposes. Studies and papers published in the late 1980s and 1990s indicate a return of literature to English language teaching and learning. It is in that period that most books on using literature in language learning were published (Brumfit and Carter, 1986; Collie and Slater, 1987; Cook, 1994; Lazar, 2008; McRae, 1997). This is also the period in which most resource books with activities using story-telling, poetry and drama were more widely promoted by publishers and teacher trainers (Bassnett and Grundy, 1993; Maley, 1989, 1995). They were largely influenced by the humanistic approach to language teaching (Moskowitz, 1994; Stevick, 1993; Underhill, 1989), which has strong roots in the personal growth and moral development model and in Romantic subjectivism. More recent approaches to the use of literature in English language learning vary greatly and include intercultural awareness and literary engagement approaches influenced by deconstructionism and post-colonial theory (Canagarajah 1999; Holliday 1994; Holliday 2005; Pennycook 1998; Pennycook 2010). Hall (2005) provides an extensive account of present research, pedagogical approaches and teaching practices in the field of literature and English language teaching.

In spite of the fact that it is possible to identify the historical periods of emergence of such teaching trends, their adoption in English language education is neither progressive nor linear. For example, there may be contexts nowadays in which the 1970s functional approach to ELT is still dominant. Besides that, such diverse approaches mentioned above are not mutually exclusive and some teachers may opt for hybrid versions since teachers' personal choices are likely to be informed by not only by their previous educational and professional experiences (Borg, 1999), but also by institutional constraints and demands.

2.4.4 Reading groups

The widespread availability of printed material is quite a new historical phenomenon. In the West, it started with the invention of print in the sixteenth century making it possible to reproduce texts at a faster rate and lower cost making the written word more affordable and accessible to individual readers (Abel, 2012). The translation of the Bible into vernacular languages also contributed to the expansion of the phenomenon of book ownership as for the first time any person capable of reading would potentially be able to have their own copy of the holy text. This had profound social, cultural and religious implications and fundamentally shaped the relationship between texts and readers. According to Greenblatt (2005, p.86), the early Protestant printed guides acquired intensity and power never before achieved by manuscripts mainly because of their 'distance from the scribal hand, production of relatively large quantities, mechanisms of distribution far distanced from the author and printer, [and] refusal of subordination to a ritualized verbal transaction.'

In England, the Elizabethan 'school revolution,' implemented as a matter of national policy to disseminate the English Bible, created a new cultural environment where more individuals in society were able to read, so 'by the middle of the seventeenth century as many as 60 per cent of men in large towns of the South and at least 30 per cent in the country as a whole could read' (Greenblatt, 1982, p.97). To these new readers, the Bible ceased to be a

'network of occult signs' to become the divine word addressed directly to the reader to strengthen the reader's faith' (p.102). Individual reading became possible and in the following centuries the practice of individuals reading alone and silently would become the norm. This was certainly not the case before the advent of printing. Throughout the Middle-Ages, reading was a shared, communal experience. Since illiteracy was then the norm and few people owned books (Sedo, 2011b, p.3), in towns and in the countryside people gathered together around 'travelling entertainers and troubadours' to listen to stories being read aloud.

The medieval practice of shared reading, however, never completely vanished and the popularity of Dickens' public readings in late nineteenth century, for instance, corroborates that (Hawksley, 2011, pp.110-11). This is also attested by the creation and spreading of *reading groups*, also called *literature circles* or *book clubs*. Reading groups could be simply defined as groups of people who regularly, or irregularly, meet to discuss the books they read. A survey conducted in 2001 on reading groups in the UK by Hartley (2002, p.18) cites the Bristol Friendly Reading Society, created by twenty-four males in 1799, as 'one of the longest-running reading groups' in the country. Although reading groups started as a mainly male enterprise, things have changed in terms of gender. Her survey revealed that most people who belonged to reading groups were women and 'all-female groups account for 69 per cent of the groups' (p.25). In America, reading groups have historically been a female venture and after the Civil War, 'white-women book clubs spread from the urban centers in the Northeast across the American continent to the West' (Long, 2003, p.34). Kooy (2006) also focused on gender and investigated book clubs to explore how women teachers conceptualize their professional development through reading and narratives. This study does not deal with a possible gender factor affecting posters' compositions because, first and foremost, it would require a considerable shift towards gender studies in the orientation of this research and also because membership data and participants' usernames do not always allow us to identify members' biological sex.

Hartley's (2002) survey disclosed a wide variety among reading groups in terms of composition, objectives, mode of interaction, reading selection, frequency of meeting, patterns of participation and whole group dynamics. Nonetheless, they emphasize that the social interactive aspect is shared by almost all groups since 'a reading group isn't just about reading; it is about reading in a context, a context which is fostered by the group, and which in turn affects the whole experience of reading' (p.22). They also looked at a number of reading groups overseas and concluded that 'English-speaking reading groups throughout the world mix incomers and nationals to the benefit of both' (p.104). They conclude by saying that,

> Reading groups are about reading in the community rather than the academy. (...)
> This is embedded reading, where the book thrives in a live cultural and social
> environment, and its characters and concerns offer a collective alternative life for the
> group. (2002, p.138)

Hartley's work has been criticized by Sedo (2011b, pp.7–8) who, despite recognizing that the publication 'provides useful background for an understanding of the cultural, social and educational roles of book clubs', argues that it lacks critical academic analysis and states that it ignores human complexities and the complexities of the relationships between books and readers. Sedo (2003) conducted her own survey on reading groups collecting data mainly among Canadian and American readers. Her research, besides focusing on the gendered aspect of membership, also considered the differences and similarities between face-to-face and online reading groups. She concluded that for both kinds of groups 'the popularity of book clubs lies in the idea that people want to regain a sense of community, and that sharing ideas about books is one way to do that' (Sedo, 2003, p.85).

Although Swann and Allington (2009) also intended to investigate both face-to-face and online reading groups, their research was eventually limited to a face-to-face reading group in Scotland. Their study aimed to 'provide an example of how "ordinary readers" (...) interpret and evaluate literary texts' (p.247). They drew on sociolinguistics to provide an

analysis of spoken interaction in the reading group under investigation, and concluded that 'where participants appear to make reference to their subjective responses to texts, this often has the function of presenting evaluations of those texts in mitigated form.' They also observed that in the discussion of texts, participants directly invoke their own and others' knowledge and past experiences and identified 'a significant amount of co-construction in which interpretations are collaboratively developed' (p.262).

The potential for learning that reading groups offer has not been ignored by educators who have been using face-to-face reading groups in diverse educational contexts both in schools and in further education for the development of literacy, reading strategies, critical reading, literary reading and for a plethora of other educational purposes (Daniels, 2002; Hartley, 2002; McMahon and Raphael, 1997; Raphael, Pardo and Highfield, 2002). For instance, Levy (2011) examines the connections between literature reading circles, developmental reading and basic writing in classrooms in a community college in New York, while Sacamore (2013, p.117) reflects on how literature circles can be used 'as a vehicle for nurturing personal and critical responses to text'. Cumming-Potvin (2007) conducts a case study with a grade-7 boy in Australia to investigate the role of scaffolding in literature circles to facilitate the development of critical reading skills, whereas Duncan (2009) explores the roles of reading circles to advance adult reading in formal adult education in London.

Reading groups have also been used in English language teaching to promote extensive reading in foreign and second language acquisition (Extensive Reading Foundation, 2013) and recent research in the field tends to support the claim that participating in reading groups can be beneficial to language learners in a number of aspects. For example, working with Vietnamese learners Shelton-Strong (2012, p.222) argues that, as long as appropriate scaffolding is provided, literature circles can 'foster learner autonomy, while providing opportunities for focused extensive reading and collaborative, purposeful discussion' and serve as 'platforms to promote collaborative and multidimensional learning'. Beglar et al.

(2012) claim that Japanese university EFL students showed great gains in terms of reading rate and reading comprehension by taking part in pleasure reading groups. The concept of reading groups has also been explored by some ELT publishers who support their creation as a way of exploring their Graded Readers series (Macmillan, 2013; Oxford University Press, 2013) in classroom-based discussion groups.

With the growth of the Internet, the idea of reading groups has also been extended to the online environment. According to Sedo (2011c, p.105), 'a simple search on "book clubs" on Google.com yields more than fifteen million hits' with many of these reading groups being hosted by mainstream media 'linked to their home pages, and/or mediated through broadcast' even though their 'commercial associations and affiliations may not be immediately apparent.' Sedo's findings are analogous to the results produced by a similar search I conducted on 'online reading groups' on Google UK in May 2013. It generated over one million hits and showed that such groups vary considerably and include online discussion forums hosted by local libraries, publishers, bookshops and retailers, as well as mainstream media, such as national newspapers.

Figure 2.2 shows the data collected on 26 May 2013 and include electronic fora only: WHSmith Richard & Judy and local libraries webpages to support face-to-face reading groups were excluded from the findings since the objective of the search was to identify reading groups that existed solely in the online environment. The ORG appears in the fifth position in the list. Unlike the ORG, all the other online reading groups listed in Figure 2.2 are mainly designed for people who have access to physical copies of books in their lists of recommended reading, either by acquiring them or borrowing them from libraries. Neither do they explicitly target non-native speakers of English. Superficial readings of posts in the other online forums listed by Google in my search reveal that contributions vary greatly in length, level of formality and depth of analysis both from group to group and within groups depending of the book discussed.

	Name	URL
1	Guardian Reading Group	http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/series/reading-group
2	Reading Circle	http://www.readingcircle.co.uk/resources.html
3	Book Talk	http://www.booktalk.org/online-reading-group.html
4	GoodReads	http://www.goodreads.com/
5	ELT Online Reading Group	http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/group/elt-online-reading-group
6	Bex-Read	http://bex-read.blogspot.co.uk/
7	Penguin Reader's Group	http://readers.penguin.co.uk/
8	The Telegraph Book Club	http://my.telegraph.co.uk/groups/book-club/
9	You Reading Group – Mail Online	http://www.youreadinggroup.co.uk/BerteShopWeb/home.do
10	LitLovers	http://www.litlovers.com/

Figure 2.2: Top ten Google UK listings for "online reading groups" accessed on 26 May 2013.

Considering the widespread phenomenon of online forums devoted to the discussion of works of literature, there are relatively very few academic studies on reading groups and communities. The lead on research into online reading groups has been taken by academics working largely in the Canadian literary culture (Beyond the Book, 2013). Fuller and Sedo (2013) investigate how mass media, especially the internet, have been promoting shared reading and the development of a contemporary reading culture in America and in the UK. Sedo (2011b) analyses authority and moderation in a virtual reading group dedicated to reading Young Adult Fiction in a commercial website created by a teacher where the majority of members were females apparently living in the US but with some readers also in Australia, Canada and the UK. She claims that, besides providing a space where some readers may feel more comfortable to express their opinions than in face-to-face environments, 'online book clubs can provide space for specialized interpretive communities, or reading genres' and as

well as 'enhance one's membership in a face-to-face club by providing fodder for book discussion.'

In fact, the use of online forums to support digital story telling projects (Hartley and McWilliam, 2009) involving literature in educational contexts, as well as face-to-face reading circles, tends to be much more frequent than solely online reading groups and most research in the field of online reading groups is done in these contexts. For instance, Tobin (2012) draws on the concept of the reading circle lesson to embrace digital storytelling and multimedia and discusses how digital storytelling can provide a framework for the creation of video adaptations of the texts students in a middle school in America have to read in class. The relationships between reading practices and a 'variety of technological developments' have also been studied by academics working in diverse countries, from China to Africa (Lang, 2012). Literature discussion forums have also been used by educators working on distance learning and blended learning in higher education institutions. In such cases, the discussion forums tend to serve as a means for providing students with a medium for the discussion of course content and/or as a tool for assessment of students' progress throughout the courses (Lancashire, 2009).

Much rarer are literature and research on reading groups among English language teachers. Working in Japan, Fenton-Smith and Stillwell, (2011) applied the concept of reading groups to explore how English language teachers engaged with ideas in texts; however, instead of literary texts, their reading group members discussed professional literature. Lima and Lamy (2013) discuss the social and professional development interactions taking place in the same online reading group that is the subject of this investigation but, as far as my knowledge goes, there is still a considerable gap in published academic research on online literature reading groups devoted to English language teachers who chiefly depend on the internet as their means of interaction and as the main source of reading material.

2.5 Computer mediated communication (CMC)

According to Ess (2009, pp.15–16) the advancement of information and communication technologies in the 1990s created a rift between print and screen, with 'enthusiasts' proclaiming 'the impending end of the book, along with the disappearance of "bricks-and-mortar" schools.' Hamilton et al. (2004, p.844) also mention this simplistic dualistic vision that sees technology as capable of, on one hand, delivering a 'golden future' and, on the other hand, spelling the end of teachers and teaching. Similarly, it is not uncommon to find ELT practitioners complaining how new technologies and the internet have led to a decline in reading and in the interest in books among the young generation, more specifically, among English language learners (IATEFL and British Council, 2013.)

Alternatively, the internet could be seen as a 'vast library' where literary works, as well as primary and secondary sources, archives, rare texts and documents are widely available to a greater number of readers (Browner, Sears and Pulsford, 2000, pp.4–6). The basic assumption behind the creation of the ORG was that this potential availability as well as the communication technology tools available at the time could be explored to promote reading and engagement with literature, facilitate access to reading resources and promote information exchange, collaboration and interaction (Hamilton et al., 2004, pp.847–8).

The present study examines how readers construct their own textual responses to literary texts in the ORG discussion forum. However, a reader's response to a literary text is only one of the forms of textual interaction taking place in the Group. Equally important are the forum exchanges among members and how the electronic medium mediates these contacts. As Lamy and Hampel emphasize, interactions do not occur in the void but through *mediational tools* which, in the case of this study, are the English language, 'the software and the hardware participants have at their disposal' (2007, p.32). Furthermore, the time frame of participants' posting and replying, their degree of familiarity with the website and personal IT skills may also have a bearing on their levels of Group participation and ability to write their

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responses to texts in the forum. Participants' access to computers and internet connection availability and speed may be influential factors as well, as discussed in Chapter 5.

There are a number of studies on CMC in English language teacher education (Arnold and Ducate, 2006; Delfino and Persico 2007; Ditfurth and Legutke, 2002; Duncan-Howell 2009; Green and Tanner, 2005; Hirvela, 2006; Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Nunan, 2002; O'Keeffe and Farr, 2003; Pérez Cañado, 2010), but most research on the field is undertaken in the context of higher and distance education (Alavi, 1994; Dahlgren, Larsson and Walters, 2006; Forrester, Motteram, Parkinson and Slaouti, 2005; McLoughlin and Luca, 2002). There are also investigations in the context of primary and secondary education (Coiro, 2003; Condie and Livingston, 2007; Knowlton, 2000), and on foreign language learning (Lam 2000; Lamy and Hampel 2007; O'Dowd 2007). Although this study draws on aspects of CMC already investigated by other researchers, it places the discussion in the context of an online reading group for English language professionals who work in a wide variety of contexts and circumstances. Moreover, it focuses on aspects of reader-response to texts and online interaction which are not dealt with by the literature currently available in the field of CMC in ELT teacher education.

2.5.1 Reading and 'talking' online

Warschauer (1997, p.172) cites 'text-based and computer-mediated interaction' as one of the most distinguishing features of CMC. Dahlgren (2006, p.81) also stresses the largely textual nature of online communication and how these written exchanges build relationships and identities in relation to 'the roles and positions students take' in online environments. In spite of technological advances that allow for voice and video interaction, most online communication still occurs through the medium of the written text, both on more conventional asynchronous fora, such as Yahoo Groups, or via relatively recent social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter.

One of the intrinsic characteristics of the written text is that it can remain available for later reading and replying. Lamy and Goodfellow (1999, pp.43–5) see asynchronous conferencing as 'particularly well-suited' to promote 'reflectiveness and interactivity, as well as the "provision of comprehensive input" and the opportunity for productive practice' because it gives participants time to 'reflect, review and consolidate' language and concepts as they can work on the learning material at their own pace. Wade and Fauske (2004, pp.139–60) also mention asynchronicity as one of the factors that foster online dialogue since it gives participants time to think, form and edit responses, its permanence in textual form giving greater control to the reader and allowing 'for silences and contemplation'.

In the ORG, a reply in the discussion forum is not only a reader's direct response to text but also a prospective 'conversation' act about the text. As in face-to-face reading groups, the act of reading presupposes engaging in 'talking' about the text read since posters know that their comments are always open to other replies where their arguments can be reinforced and/or contested and where meaning may have to be negotiated. Although the main purpose of the ORG is not specifically teaching and learning, such interactions have a potential learning dimension and data from the survey shows that 57.9% of respondents joined the Group expecting it to help them improve their language skills (Appendix F, Table 9). Data from forum posts and semi-structured narratives also show that participants see the group interaction as a means to learn about literature and about other members' cultures (Section 5.5).

Lamy and Hampel (2007, pp.19–28) summarize the two theoretical positions that may 'inform research and practice in educational computing'. The *cognitive model* is strongly influenced by Krashen's input hypothesis (1981) in which input is seen as most effective when 'it is part of interaction with others' (Lamy and Hampel, 2007, p.21). In the interaction process learners have to negotiate meaning and modify language in order to 'increase input comprehensibility.' In the cognitive model, not only are computers seen as platforms for

interaction and vehicles for meaningful input, but also as tools that give learners the 'opportunity to produce comprehensible output' (p.22). On the other hand, *sociocultural theory* 'attempts to reconcile the analysis of psychological processes with the fact that individuals are "situated" in social, institutional and cultural settings' (p.24). Sociocultural theory is influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1980, p.90), who believes that 'learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers.' According to Lamy and Hampel (2007, p.28), although collaborating virtually is a quite different process than interacting face-to-face,

> [b]uilding collaborative language learning communities via computer networks is seen as a way of developing not only learners' linguistic skills but also cultural understanding and critical awareness.

In this study, I propose Bakhtin's concept of dialogue and heteroglossia as a third theoretical position to inform our understanding of the interactions in the ORG. I argue that in the process of constructing their textual output as responses to texts in the technology-mediated setting, participants engage in dialogue with the literary texts and texts written by other posters. Participants socially construct meaning by intertwining other voices and consciousnesses with their own. This seems to be quite similar to Vygotsky's sociocultural approach since both Vygotsky and Bakhtin emphasize social, cultural, and historical mediation in learning. Yet, according to Matusov (2011, p.100), there are 'irreconcilable differences' between them (Figure 2.3).

For Bakhtin, interaction and learning do not occur by simple assimilation of other people's voices and consciousness that leads to mutual understanding and agreement. Conversely, dialogue and learning can happen precisely because there are inconsistencies, contradictory voices, and gaps between what participants understand. According to Matusov (2011),

The goal of education is not to make students have the same understanding as the teacher, but rather to engage them in historically valuable discourses, to become familiar with historically, culturally, and socially important voices, to learn how to address these voices, and to develop responsible replies to them without an expectation of an agreement or an emerging consensus. (2011, p.115)

Vygotsky's sociohistorical approach	Bakhtin's dialogical approach
• Deeply instrumental, defining consciousness through activity mediation • Implies the potential transparency through the development of shared mediation in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) • A gap in mutual understanding is seen as a deficit that has to be bridged for learning to occur by setting a developmental goal that leads to mutual understanding and growing intersubjectivity through agreement • A child learns through the mediation of the educated other in the ZPD until mutual understanding, self-determination and independence is achieved.	• Essentially ontological, defining consciousness though responsiveness, addressivity and relationship with the other • Based on the fundamental principle of the non-transparency of human consciousness • A gap in the mutual understanding between people is a necessary condition for dialogic, humane communication, and for the entire human relationship as people cannot, and even must not, fully know each other for learning to occur • A child, and *any person*, learns in dialogue –each participant in the 'conversation' contributes something new, interesting, and important. Deep learning occurs with ontological engagement in the joint problem.

Figure 2.3: Differences between Vygotsky and Bakhtin, based on Matusov, 2011.

The idea of 'valuable discourses' may be compared to what Gilbert and Dabbagh (2005, p.6) call 'meaningful discourse'. They define it as the 'ability of learners to demonstrate critical thinking skills' by 'relating course content to prior knowledge and experience', 'interpreting content through the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of others' understanding' and 'making inferences'. Their research is also set in an asynchronous forum but, unlike the ORG, it is used to expand in-class discussions about course topics and readings with online dialogue.

Cooney and Stephenson's (2001, pp.38-9) review of research on learning in online environments identifies 'dialogue' as quite a frequent theme, but it also reveals that dialogue

is often approached as structured exchanges among participants which, to be successful, requires the moderator to provide a list of clearly defined questions that steer the conversation and keep posters focused on the topic. However, this view of 'dialogue' as a series of questions and answers and exchanges bound to the time-space context of a particular online interaction is far from the Bakhtinian ontological concept of dialogue adopted in this study.

2.5.2 Online time and space

Tsatsou (2009, p.13) notes that most literature in media and globalization studies argues that 'electronic media have altered the importance and nature of spatial and temporal gaps.' Although Tsatsou does not limit the discussion to online interactive environments, his review of the two main conceptual approaches to the analysis of time and space in electronic media can be a useful starting point to discuss the concept of chronotope in the ORG.

The first conceptual approach is the notion of *time-space distanciation* (Giddens, 1986) which presents technological evolution as a means for 'universalization and liberalization of time and space.' According to Tsatsou (2009, p.14), time and space distanciation theory sees non-electronic communications as 'shaped by local or inter-local contexts' and limited by the 'temporal and spatial span' in which it takes place, whereas electronic means of communication 'separate time from space, facilitate social interactions that are disembedded from spatial and temporal contexts.' This theory is contested by Harvey (1990, p.302) who proposes the notion of *time-space compression,* where the 'aggregation of spaces, cultures and symbols redefine, but do not make extinct, the temporal and spatial order of social life we have known so far.' Tsatsou (2009, p.15) then proposes the alternative notion of *time-space mediation,* where time and space are 'both essentially compressed and significantly distanciated.' For Tsatsou (2009),

Different media forms and usages give rise to divergent perceptions of distance, duration and mobility in multiple contexts, mediating, re-mediating, defining and negotiating variable understandings and experiences of time and space (2009, pp.15-16).

In this study, I employ the notion of time-space mediation proposed by Tsatsou, but I consider it also applicable beyond electronic communication. In the medium of the book, the written word is constantly available in a physical space, the page, as long as the material copy remains. In the act of reading, three different time-space contexts come into contact: the chronotope of the reader, the chronotope of the writer and the chronotope of the characters. For example, there is me, the reader, in my house in Leicester in 2013 reading *Macbeth*, which was written by William Shakespeare living in Elizabethan London, and which tells the story of a Scottish king who supposedly lived in the eleventh century. The book is the mediation tool that makes it possible for these different chronotopes to come in contact with each other.

In an asynchronous discussion forum, the written word is constantly available in a virtual space, in this case the ORG website, as long as the platform remains live. In the act of reading and discussing a text online, further time-space contexts are added to the equation. Readers can also become posters and what they write will be read by other members of the Group who live in different places around the world and who may come into contact with a comment on the forum at any time, from the moment it is published online to any time in the future. For instance, my post about *Macbeth* may be read by someone in India on the same day I post it as well as someone in Argentina in two or three years' time. The online environment is the tool that mediates the contact between all these different chronotopes and makes the dialogue between them possible.

There is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and into the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and

for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will some day have its homecoming festival. (Bakhtin in *Estetika*, p. 281, cited in Holquist, 2002, p.14)

When face-to-face reading groups meet to discuss a text, their dialogue is not limited to the discussion among readers in a room, since it can extend to other dialogues these readers may have already had in the past or may have in the future with other people. The same phenomenon happens in the Group asynchronous discussion forum, but its dialogical scope is also augmented by the fact that the discussion is not restricted to those posting but also includes those who choose not to engage in the conversation directly. The electronic media, in the context of this study, links a multiplicity of chronotopes and potentializes the direct reach of the dialogues happening in the Group in terms of time and space.

2.5.3 Online communities

In broad terms, a *community* could be defined as 'a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common' (OED, 2013). In this sense the ORG can be seen as a community since its members interact in a shared virtual space and have the common characteristics of being all connected to English language teaching and interested in literature. Communities, however, can be categorized and defined in different ways according to different criteria, such as the profession, interests and language their members share.

Wenger (1998, pp.4–5) proposed the concept of *communities of practice* which is based on the assumption that learning is the result of active social participation in the '*practices* of the social communities' that in turn leads to the construction of '*identities* in relation to these communities' (emphasis in the original). Both practice and identity are key components of Wenger's social theory of learning, along with *meaning* and *community,* all of which are

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'deeply interconnected and mutually defining' (p.5). His theory is that learning is an integral part of our lives and it occurs in the various communities to which we belong (p.8) 'through our engagement in actions and interactions' that are embedded 'in culture and history' (p.13). Learning is not seen as a separate activity but something that occurs at all times. It can be intensified at time when our familiarity with situations is shaken as problems and challenges are posed to us and force us to engage in new practices to be able to respond to them. Moreover, 'even failing to learn what is expected in a given situation usually involves learning something else instead' (Wenger, 1998, p.8). Lave and Wenger (2002) call *situated learning* the learning happening in a particular context and social situation.

Situated learning is not a new concept. Considering learning a response given to a particular problem in a certain situation is close to the notions of *answerability* or *responsiveness*. For Bakhtin, life is an utterance, a response by someone in a certain time-space situation (chronotope) given to someone else in another time-space situation. There is no moment or place in life that is not a *situation* (Bakhtin, 1990). Life is dialogical because we are naturally oriented towards a response. We cannot fail but answer to the other and to the world, even if we refuse to answer. That is why some form of learning *always* takes place.

> In so far as human beings are organisms, they cannot help but pay attention to life. Life will not let me be inactive, no matter how dormant I may appear (relatively) to be in the eyes of the others. I cannot be passive, even if I choose to be, for passivity will then be the activity of choosing to be passive. My relation to life in all its aspects is one of intense participation (Holquist, 2002, p.153).

This view of learning has profound implications for the discussion of interactions in online communities and their perceived learning outcomes, not only in terms of written responses in the fora but also of how we see lurking, which can be defined as the act of reading or observing an ongoing online discussion without actively taking part in it. Lurking is, in essence, a participant's decision not to produce a language-based response to other posters. Lurking can be easily mistaken for lack of response and failure of learning in a community,

such as the ORG, where language is the main means of communication and its members' main professional concern.

Communities have also been defined in linguistic terms. The fact that members of the ORG are all speakers of English, albeit with different levels of language proficiency, and possibly making some use of the ELT professional jargon, may lead to the question whether the ORG can be considered a speech community. Wardhaugh (2011, pp.118–134) traces the historical definitions of *speech community* and the difficulties of coming to a consensus on what it actually constitutes. Swales (1990, p.24) argues that the concept of speech cannot be adopted as 'an exclusive modifier for communities that are often heavily engaged in writing' and, instead, advocates a distinction between *sociolinguistic* grouping and *sociorhetorical* grouping (Figure 2.4).

Speech Community	Discourse community
• Sociolinguistic • The communicative needs of the group, such as socialization or group solidarity, predominate and determine the development and maintenance of its discoursal characteristics • Centripetal (absorb people into a general fabric) • Inherits its membership by birth, accident or adoption	• Sociorhetorical • The communicative needs of the *goals* tend to predominate and determine the development and maintenance of its discoursal characteristics • Centrifugal (separate people into occupational or speciality interest groups) • Recruits its members by persuasion, training or relevant qualification

Figure 2.4: Differences between speech and discourse communities, based on Swales, 1990.

Swales' taxonomy and principles have also been contested, alternative terminologies have been proposed, and further differentiation between groups and communities suggested (Zhu, 2005, p.37). Linguists' difficulties in producing encompassing definitions for speech and discourse genres and to account for individuals' apparently inconsistent and multiple discourses inside a given community illustrate their 'failure to acknowledge the actual possibility of specific genres coexisting' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.5) within a given body of

discourse, which Bakhtin had already identified in his critique of the poetics of the nineteenth century.

The internal 'stratification of discourse' and the 'diversity of social speech types' that Bakhtin (1981, p.262) argues are present in the novel are not there because they *only* exist in the novelistic form; they are there because the novel is the only literary genre that is capable of incorporating the 'extraliterary heteroglossia' that characterizes any living discourse and transposes other genres into its artistic form (p.7). The novel is the artistic organization of the 'diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices' (p.262) that are present in any discourse, including the discourses of online communities such as the one analyzed in this study.

In a report published by the European Commission, Aceto et al. (2010) analyzed twelve different online learning communities, including one devoted to English language learning (pp.59-64) and one created to facilitate the exchange of books among individuals mostly living in the US and Europe (pp.69-72). According to the report, in spite of all the differences among them, in all analyzed communities 'members perceive that significant learning happens unintentionally (with very few exceptions) by means of interaction, knowledge and experience sharing, and material creation and/or sharing' (p.6). Aceto et al. (2010, p. 105) conclude that the usual definition of an online learning community as 'a group of individuals who have a common learning goal' fails to adequately describe the complex interactions (contextual, motivational, personal, behavioural, values, etc.) which 'combine to create a satisfactory and effective learning experience'. Instead, they propose a definition of learning community as a group of 'individuals who share common interests, aims, passions, objectives or circumstances' and who 'expand their level of understanding, awareness, knowledge, experience and horizons' by engaging with other members in the group through electronic media.

There is no shortage of publications in the field of online learning communities. For instance, some focus on collaboration (Palloff and Pratt, 2010), effective strategies for community building in online courses (Palloff and Pratt, 2007), and a wide range of issues related to technology-based learning from the instructional, technical and collaborative point of view (Alavi, 1994; Andreson and Elloumi, 2004; Lambropoulos and Zaphiris, 2007; Luppicini, 2007; Pozzi and Persico, 2010; Prestridge, 2010; Stephenson, 2001; Warschauer, 1998, 2002). There are also edited publications that are more specifically connected to the setting of this study. For example, England (2012) focuses on online education from a TESOL perspective; and Lancashire (2009) brings together a collection of case studies in language and literature online teaching.

Lamy and Hampel (2007) analyse some research done on online communities that are based on asynchronous fora. They note that because of their 'low-tech demands', asynchronous fora have been long used as a learning tool by teachers and institutions (p.107). They compare and contrast two studies on online communities: one 'inspired by Hallidayan text linguistics' and, thus, positioned in the 'more cognitive learning framework' (p.108); and another that investigates teachers' collaborative use of technology from a constructivist point of view and is, therefore, positioned 'within the more sociocultural of the learning frameworks' (p.110). They come to the conclusion that 'asynchronous forum-based research as a field has had the opportunity to develop' but it 'continues to be missing a theory of collaboration' (p.112). Tschudi et al. (2009, p.124) also focus on asynchronous communication and argue that *cohesion* is the mark of online fora where members 'overcome time and space to foster a sense of community'. They define cohesion in Hallidayan terms as the 'sustained advancement of relevant topics by participants in conversation' creating a 'single text', but also argue that attention to content and topic development indicate that members are paying 'due attention to previous contributions' (p.124).

In the present study, I have adopted Aceto et al.'s broad definition of online community based on the sharing of a common interest in literature instead of a goal oriented definition since data presented and discussed in Chapter 5 show that participants' objectives when joining the Group tend to vary. I also propose employing the concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia and answerability to fill in the theoretical gap Lamy and Hampel identified and, hence, explain how online community members collaborate and construct knowledge through language.

2.7 Research questions

This study aimed to identify the nature and extent to which contact with and discussion of literary texts related to participants' construction of discourse about texts in the ORG forum; to better understand how teachers created meaning, built understanding and shared knowledge in this particular online professional community; to understand how accounts of the Group experience were linguistically constructed; and whether such accounts were influenced by the various forms of interaction happening in the Group.

The research questions posed in the main phase of this study differ from the ones asked in the pilot study phase (discussed in Chapter 4), which reflected an a priori personal interest in issues related to English language teachers' professional identity and attempted to determine whether the acts of reading and discussing works of literature in the ORG had any impact on how participants perceived themselves as professionals.

The questions guiding the main stage of this investigation emerged from my initial observations of the posts in the discussion forum and from my ambition to fill in the gaps in the research on reading groups and on online teacher professional communities identified in this literature review. The questions posed are the following:

1. Which are the features of participants' responses to texts read in the Group? In particular, to what extent and in what ways are such responses related to:

     A. The contact with the literary text?

     B. The group interaction?

     C. The technology-mediated nature of the setting in which they occur?

2. In their accounts of Group participation, what connections do participants make between reading literature in the Group and their other reading and professional experiences?

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter is a review of four bodies of literature that have direct relevance to this study: a) theories of reading, b) reading as a dialogic process, c) language and literature, and d) computer mediated communication in the context of English language learning and teacher education. It attempted to demonstrate how theoretical speculations on the nature of the reading process and an examination of the features of literary texts can be useful to our understanding of the interactions readers have with texts and with each other in the online reading group investigated in this study. The chapter concluded by presenting the research questions posed in the main phase of this study.

The next chapter extends the theoretical discussion into the field of research methodology and presents the research paradigms, approaches and tools adopted in this study in order to find possible answers for the research questions posed above.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the philosophical principles that guide this study, how they translated into the research paradigms it subscribes to, and how they relate to my choice of approaches and methods. It also discusses ethical issues related to this investigation.

Doing research is a complex process where philosophical, methodological and ethical aspects are interwoven and interdependent. The assumption I make here is that research practice should be informed by and be coherent with the researcher's understanding of the nature of the world and the nature of knowledge. These should, in turn, inform the understanding of the means by which knowledge can be acquired. However, as Pring (2004, p.6) points out, the theoretical underpinnings, the nature of the phenomena and the nature of the field to be investigated should also be taken into consideration when deciding what kind of research is more likely to produce relevant findings.

The first part of this chapter deals with the theoretical framework of this investigation and discusses understandings of the nature of reality (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology). I also make considerations about the values (axiology) that underpin the research methodology I adopted. The second part deals with the research framework and discusses the set of beliefs that inform this study (research paradigms), the quantitative and qualitative stances (research approach), the lines of enquiry adopted, and my choice of discourse analysis as the research method. This is followed by a more detailed discussion on diverse discursive analytical approaches. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations related to research validity and reliability and discusses issues of accessibility, consent, risks to participants, confidentiality, and data protection.

3.2 Theoretical framework

According to Blaxter et al. (2006, p.58), doing research is an activity that is, by its very nature, dependent on theory. It is the act of looking at an event that takes place in the world, gathering information about it and trying to make sense of such information in order to acquire some knowledge about the nature of the event observed. To be able to do so, it is crucial to understand first the assumptions we make about what 'the world' consists of, what 'knowledge' is, and how the processes of meaning-making occur, for these concepts have a significant bearing on the way research is done. In the following sections, I attempt to elucidate my understanding of key concepts that are essential in the context of the theoretical principles that underpin this study.

3.2.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations

Philosophical reflections on the nature of reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology) inform not only my theoretical stances as a researcher, but also the research design and my approach to data analysis. Ontology has been defined as the study of what there is, 'the nature or essence of being or existence', and what reality consists of. It also addresses the problems of how we relate to the entities believed to exist. Epistemology, on the other hand, is 'the study of knowledge and justified belief' (Steup, 2013, online). A discussion of epistemology is directly relevant to research for it is concerned with what constitutes knowledge, how it can be acquired and how much we can actually know about the world and the existing phenomena.

Greek philosophy, from its beginnings, poses questions that can in principle undermine the very possibility of relying on the information we collect in order to understand the phenomena we set to investigate. Plato (Plato and Lane, 2007) argues that what we see in the world is nothing but illusion. For him the sensory world is just a mere and imperfect manifestation of eternal and unchanging Forms or Ideas and it is not possible to have true

knowledge of the real world for it exists beyond our reach. Therefore, all the knowledge we have of the world is always partial and imperfect. Aristotle (Aristotle and Lawson-Tancred, 2004) accepts Plato's concept of the immutable Ideal realm where truth resides but, differing from him, states that by using our senses and studying a particular phenomenon, it is possible to acquire knowledge of the essence of the universal Forms. For Aristotle, knowledge of the world can be acquired through the things we experience through our senses for 'forms exist in physical objects, not in a Platonic realm independent of the sensory world' (Moser and Nat, 2002, p.36). Aristotelic philosophy then makes it conceptually feasible to carry out research for it postulates that it is possible to examine the world around us in order to understand its nature.

Platonic and Aristotelian thought have profoundly influenced Western philosophy throughout the Middle Ages and can still be traced in modern theoretical positions. It is debatable how much Platonic thinking comes into Cartesian understanding of existence (Nolan, 2011, online); however, Descartes states that we can only be convinced of the existence of things which we can 'clearly and distinctly perceive.' Some of them 'are obvious to everyone' whereas others 'are discovered only by those who look more closely and investigate more carefully' (Nolan, 2011, online). Yet, such investigation does not depend on sensorial perception; instead, it rests upon systematic empirical observation, logical deduction and *a priori* knowledge. Following Aquinas (Kreeft, 1990) and medieval Scholasticism, Descartes believes that the source of metaphysical *a priori* knowledge is God.

Kant (1787) departs from Plato and Aristotle and asserts that the world does exist in a place and time outside the Ideal realm; however, our knowledge of it still depends on human perception of external objects. He rejects Cartesian empiricism and argues that individuals can experience the world only within certain constraints; it is the human mind that provides the conditions of space and time to experience existing reality. For Kant, our cognitive faculties construct and shape reality. Knowledge thus depends on *a priori* internal knowledge

of things, which can exist independent of empirical experience, and also on *a posteriori* experience, which Kant calls intuition.

This study has as its starting point the Kantian principle that there is a fundamental gap between mind and world. Like Kant, Bakhtin (1981) also believes in such a gap and that the time/space categories are central to experiencing the world. However, contrary to Kant, he does not place the site of the consciousness of our experience (knowledge) in something transcendental (Kant, 1787), outside human reach. Bakhtin believes that the site of consciousness transgresses the boundaries of each individual's experience in a particular time and space (chronotope), and since the self can never know everything, it needs others to negotiate experience and achieve knowledge. This investigation is grounded on the Bakhtinian understanding that the site of knowledge is never unitary; conversely, it is always multiple and mediated by language (Holquist, 2008).

The philosophical principles discussed above have a direct bearing on my approach to this investigation and on the ethical positions I adopt. This research is based on my understanding that the relationships between texts and readers that are investigated exist in the sensory world at a specific time, which goes from 2009 to 2012, and in a specific 'place', which is the ELT Online Reading Group. I also understand that although the knowledge generated by this study can be relevant to people in other times and contexts, it is intrinsically bound to the time/space in which it was produced. The knowledge generated in the analysis of the data collected here is innately dependent on my *a priori* personal, professional and theoretical knowledge, as well as my *a posteriori* intuition and interpretation of it. I was aware that my knowledge of the data was only partial and decided that to better comprehend the phenomenon investigated there was the need in the current study to consider other participants' points of view. This was done through the collection of different kinds of data and also through inter-coding and intra-coding reliability checks. However, even considering multiple interpretations and carrying on extensive analysis of different data, the knowledge I

was able to achieve is still only partial because it does not encompass the views of all members of the Group and other individuals involved in this project at various levels.

I acknowledge that this research report is being written from my own perspective as the researcher and therefore, even when considering other people's interpretations, I can only analyse the data and write it from my own position in time and space. Equally, I understand that those reading and interpreting this thesis will do it within their own time/space situation. I hence adopt the theoretical standpoint that generating research knowledge is not an activity restricted to data analysis or to the dialogue between the participants and myself during the process of carrying out this study, but may also be created in continuing dialogue about the research findings.

3.2.2 Axiological considerations

Axiology is the branch of philosophy that deals with notions of *value*. In a broad sense Axiology encompasses Ethics and Aesthetics. In a narrow sense, it is 'concerned with classifying what things are good, and how good they are' and 'whether the objects of value are subjective psychological states, or objective states of the world' (Schroeder, 2012, online). In the context of this study, axiological considerations are narrowed down to questions about objectivity, subjectivity and reflection concerning my analysis of findings and the nature of the data collected.

Positions regarding the value of knowledge acquired can vary, along a continuum, from the extremes of objectivism to the extremes of subjectivism. Rationalism and empiricism are the theoretical systems that underpin a philosophical position that Lakoff and Johnson (2008, 186-8) call 'the myth of objectivism' which puts great value on objective and systematic analysis of events. In its extreme forms, objectivism implies that knowledge considered worthy to be pursued is that which is generated by objective data, analysed from a detached, impersonal and, supposedly, unbiased position. At the other end of the scale, there

is the 'myth of subjectivism' which places high value on the individual's 'feelings, aesthetic sensibilities, moral practices and spiritual awareness' (Lakoff and Johnson, 2008, pp.188–189). If we adopt this perspective, knowledge worth pursuing should come from thick descriptive data submitted to analysis that is unescapably shaped by the particular socio-historical location and perceptions of the researcher.

The position I have adopted in this study is that objectivity and subjectivity are not polar opposites, but exist in a dynamic relationship and complement each other. I understand that both positions should be valued because the site of knowledge is never static but always shifting (Holquist, 2002, p.18). Knowledge resides neither solely outside the researcher's interpretation nor exclusively inside her remit. In this study I make no attempts to neutralize or ignore subjective analysis for I accept the view that there is 'no thinking and understanding of the self or the world' outside a unique time and space situation (Holquist, 2008, p.28). Above all, subjectivity is not understood here as a synonym for individual consciousness. Conversely, I understand that interpretations of research findings are no different from other kinds of interpretation since they are the result of human thought. According to Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.88), thoughts and ideas do not live 'in one person's isolated individual consciousnesses; on the contrary, they take shape and develop when they 'enter into dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others'*. Therefore, a researcher's subjective interpretation should not be seen as the sole expression of an individual consciousness, but the result of a 'dialogic communion *between* consciousnesses' (emphasis in the original), including those of the research participants.

Reflection on the research process (McIntosh, 2010) is sometimes presented as a way of minimizing the researcher's limitations in perceiving and understanding events. It has been argued that by pondering over our actions and trying to see them from unusual and unfamiliar angles we can capture some of these aspects that are initially inaccessible and invisible to us and we are then able to develop a critical stance towards our behaviour and experiences

(Boud, 1985; Schön, 1995). Although I have kept a blog where I wrote my thoughts on the research process during the whole period of this investigation, I take the position that the concept of reflection is still inadequate to overcome the limitations of one's chronotope because even reflecting on my own actions, I can still only see them from my own perspective. No matter how much I try to see events from someone else's point of view, it is still ultimately *me* attempting to occupy a time/space that can actually only be occupied by the other. Moreover, reflection is a word associated with the image of a mirror. As Bolton (2010, p. 4) points out, 'the mirror image model of reflection suggests that there is a me *out there* practising in the big world, and a reflected me *in here* in my head thinking about it.' Therefore, not only does a reflective stance fail to solve the problem of one's limited perception of reality, but it also adds another problem for it implies that the epistemological space is in fact occupied by a single consciousness, even if apparently divided into two. In the reflective model, knowledge is still ultimately gained by the individual *me*.

Instead, this study adopts the view that knowledge resides outsides the bounds of an individual's sensibility and experience. Only by transgressing 'the boundaries of what is available to my sight in a particular moment' (Holquist, 2008, p.30) can I reach a more encompassing knowledge of reality. A reflective standpoint is incapable of crossing these boundaries because total transgredience, or the ability to go beyond the limits of the self, is unattainable, thus to have access to this knowledge I *depend* on others. The epistemological space is created in dialogue with others. For this reason, besides reflection on the process and informally discussing the data analysis with colleagues and friends, a sample of forum posts and semi-structured narratives were submitted to inter-coder reliability checks in order to have another person's view of the analytical categories and their coding.

Another question Axiology poses for research is about the value of the information provided by participants and about how truthful and reliable such information can be considered. Because each individual's chronotope is unique, the truth of what individuals say

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cannot be taken as a full and faithful description of an event since there are things that the individual alone cannot see, even when trying to be as honest and detailed about the information given as possible. Besides that, this study is based on the understanding that the truth claim of any narrative will always be dependent on (a) how a certain account is rendered into written language, (b) how facts and situations are interpreted by those involved, and (c) documentary proof (Ricoeur, Blamey and Pellauer, 2006, p.278). In the case of this study, *documentary proof* consists of participants' posts in the discussion forum and their own interpretation of the Group experience in the semi-structured narratives, making *truth* still dependent on what Ricoeur calls the 'witness' triple declaration: (1) I was there; (2) believe me; (3) if you don't believe me, ask someone else' (p. 278). This study is based on the decision of accepting participants' declarations, while being aware that such declarations are influenced by their assumptions and beliefs, previous experiences and their time/space circumstances, and by the fact that the language in which they make such declarations is not a transparent medium (Foucault, 2002b, pp.38–46).

3.3 Research framework

The 1990s saw an intense debate about what sort of educational research should inform educational practices and policy-making. The decade entered the history of educational research as the years of the 'paradigm wars' (Gage, 2007). On the one side of the divide there were educators and academics who called for educational policies and practices to be informed by research done on the models of randomised controlled trials and argued that educational research should be based on verifiable, measurable and objective data (Hargreaves 2007, pp.3–17). Opponents of this view included educators and researchers whose work was informed by a plethora of qualitative methodological approaches, from hermeneutics to critical theory to constructionism and post-structuralism (Atkinson, 2000; Byrne and Ozga, 2008; Freeman et al., 2007; Gage, 2007; Oancea, 2005).

This study is not specifically intended to influence educational policies, but knowledge of this debate is relevant because it has permeated most discussions of what educational research should consist of and what paradigms, approaches and methods should be selected by those doing it.

3.3.1 Research paradigms and approaches

Hammersley (2007a) warns against the expectation of finding a well-defined typology of educational research, for existing typologies are as diverse as researchers' ontological and epistemological positions. Although the philosophical concepts discussed in the first part of this chapter are at the root of how researchers understand the phenomena to be investigated and how research must be done in order to generate new knowledge, there is no straightforward and clear-cut relationship between each of those philosophical positions and specific research paradigms and approaches. A paradigm is here understood as the 'basic set of beliefs that guide' the researcher in the interpretation of research findings (Guba, 1990, p.7). Research approach is understood here as a set of methods for collecting and analysing research data.

Before deciding on the kind of data that should be collected for this study, I found it necessary to have a clear grasp on the theoretical standpoints that inform the various approaches that were possible. Very broadly speaking, it could be said that Aristotelian rationalism and Cartesian empiricism to some extent inform research that places great importance on observable phenomena, experimental procedures and scientific evidence. They inform the research paradigm sometimes labelled as *'empiricist'*, *'positivist'* or *'realist'* (Hammersley, 2007). These stances tend to be associated with quantitative approaches to research. Quantitative research relies on the collection of numerical data that is submitted to statistical analysis. Yet, the 'positivist' paradigm can also inform approaches to research that depend on the collection of qualitative, or descriptive, data. As Pring (2004, p.91) points out,

Comte, who was already working along empiricist lines, extended the positivist agenda beyond the natural sciences to 'embrace not only the phenomena of the physical world but also those of the social world.' Following the positivist tradition, the central principle of 'logical positivism' (Ayer and Rogers, 2001, p.6) states that for any sentence to be 'factually significant to any given person' it must be verifiable 'under certain conditions' and that if that is not the case, the proposition must be rejected 'as being false.' For Ayers & Rogers (2001), meaningful statements are only those which are either logical/mathematical statements, or empirical statements (Pring, 2004, p.93). Mathematical statements can be derived from quantitative data submitted to statistical analysis whereas empirical statements can be derived from qualitative data that has been submitted to systematic scrutiny, standardised procedures and experimental manipulation. In the case of social research, for instance, researchers analysing qualitative data may well draw on empiricist, positivist stances and include highly structured and stratified forms of coding, such as in some versions of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), and also employ software analytical tools that can produce statistical analysis and determine attribute values to qualitative data (Richards, 1999).

In spite of the immense differences between both philosophical stances, both Platonic idealism and Kant's emphasis on the mind mediating the understanding of reality are influential for research that places importance on interpretation, cognitive activity, and the researcher's judgements when analysing the data and drawing conclusions from it. They inform the research paradigm sometimes labelled as *'idealist', 'constructionist'* or *'relativist'*. These stances tend to be associated with qualitative approaches to research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.12) it is 'erroneous to presume that all qualitative researchers share the same assumptions.' In general, however, qualitative researchers tend to employ a 'set of interpretive, material practices,' such as field notes, photographs, transcriptions of conversations and recordings, in order to study occurrences 'in their natural

settings' and attempt 'to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (p.3). Qualitative research characteristically relies on textual, descriptive data that is submitted to various forms of exploratory and interpretive practices, such as those adopted by critical theorists (e.g. Fairclough, 2010), feminist theorists (Weiler, 2001), and Foucauldian discourse analysts (Hall, 1997). However, quantitative data cannot be entirely dissociated from constructionist, interpretive stances. First of all, the determination of discrete items and variables for any numerical data collection are based on the researcher's interpretation of the nature of the evidence needed to achieve relevant findings. Besides that, statistical analysis only provides information about the numerical attributes of a given phenomenon, but the interpretation of such findings is still informed by the researcher's understanding of the reasons behind them.

A third paradigm has emerged trying to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis. *Mixed-methods experimentalism* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.9), especially in educational research, tends to give prominence to qualitative work and assign a second place to quantitative analysis. The mixed-methods proposition has generated a number of controversies (Creswell, 2011, p.270) and has been criticized by those who defend the incompatibility between qualitative and quantitative approaches on the grounds that they are rooted in irreconcilable ontological and epistemological positions. Those defending the use of mixed methods argue that this is a pragmatic line of research that combines the strengths of both approaches and provides 'more comprehensive evidence' (Blaikie, 2009, p.219).

This research is aligned with the 'constructionist', interpretive paradigm informed by Foucault's (2002) understanding of language as a system of representation and Bakhtin's view of knowledge being dependent on the dynamic multiple relation between the self and others (Bakhtin, 1981). Moreover, I understand that quantitative and qualitative approaches are not unequivocally tied to a determined paradigm and adopt both approaches from an

interpretive stance because I understand that the 'quantitative/qualitative binary distinction (...) does not hold in practice' (Creswell, 2011, p.272) and that one approach does not automatically yield more valid findings than the other. The adoption of mixed-methods in this study is thus not based on the premise that a combination of methods can enhance the precision, credibility and validity of a study, for these do not exclusively depend on a set of chosen methods, but mainly on the internal coherence between the research design and the ontological and epistemological positions of the researcher. Instead, I adopt the mixed-methods approach because I take the position that the more data is available and the more diversified the angles from which it is looked at, the more comprehensive is the picture of the phenomenon investigated. The combination of approaches and methods adopted in this study is an attempt to compensate for the limitations of the participants and the researcher's chronotopes.

3.3.2 Research methods

Most data gathered in this study consists of a collection of texts which includes the literary texts available on the Group webpage and various forms of textual interaction among participants as well as between the participants and the researcher. The fact that written texts constitute most of the data is one of the factors that have determined the choice of discourse analysis as the research method. Apart from the textual nature of the data, the main reason for adopting discourse analysis in this study is the understanding that knowledge of human behaviour can be acquired through the examination of how people use language (Holquist, 2002, p.15). Various discourse analytical traditions are discussed in Section 3.4, where I explain my reasons for rejecting them as the research method of choice for this investigation. This study adopts a line of discourse analysis that views language as 'a system of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.47). It understands

that '*any* discourse' has a 'dialogic orientation' (p.279) towards other discourses. Bakhtin argues that,

> The linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgements (1981, p.281).

The approach to discourse analysis adopted in this study aims to examine how individual concrete utterances in a participant's discourse engage in dialogic relationship with other utterances. It tries to identify patterns of dialogue that are manifest through shared linguistic features, shared themes and social and cultural assumptions.

This study adopts a constructionist *retroductive* logic of enquiry in which the researcher constructs an hypothesis and then proceeds to 'establish its existence by observation and experiment' (Blaikie, 2007, p.9). In this study, I search the data for evidence of participants' textual constructions that can be explained by the Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. However, I also incorporate an *abductive* logic of enquiry in which researchers begin by looking at participants' actions, motives and reasons, and then redescribe them 'in the technical language of social scientific research'. Since dialogism and heteroglossia form the theoretical basis of this study, it is crucial to take into consideration participants' own accounts and interpretation of the interactions investigated, which are seen here in dialogic relationship with the proposed theory. Retroductive strategies are mainly adopted in the coding of the forum posts and abductive strategies are dominant in the thematic analysis of the posts and also in the analysis of the semi-structured narratives.

This research can be defined as an *instrumental* case study since it investigates specific instances of interaction in a particular group (Nisbet and Watt, 1984, pp.79–92) with the objective of identifying and illustrating patterns of dialogue between texts and readers that can provide insights into other similar situations and cases (Stake, 2005, p.445). Although this investigation takes place in a singular setting, the ELT Online Reading Group, it can still

be considered a *collective* case study since the interactions considered involve a large number of participants and posts are analysed both collectively and individually. This is *intrinsic* casework as the Group was already the focus of the researcher's professional activity and interest before the formal study began (Stake, 2005, p.450).

3.4 Text as discourse

This study is built on the examination of literary texts, participants' written narratives and online forum posts. For this reason, in this section I include a more in-depth consideration of the ways thinkers and researchers understand and analyse texts as background to the analysis of the data that follows in Chapter 5.

3.4.1 An overview of discourse analysis

Discourse analysis (DA) can be loosely defined as 'the close study of language in use' (Yates, Taylor and Wetherell, 2001, p.5) done in order to find specific language systemic patterns; patterns of social interaction; patterns in the language related to particular themes; or social and cultural patterns (Cook, 2011). DA is philosophically grounded in modern hermeneutics, from Schleiermacher (Schleiermacher and Bowie, 1998) to Heidegger (1996, pp. 151–156) and Gadamer (Gadamer, Weinsheimer and Marshall, 2004, pp.383–484) to Ricoeur (2004). DA is, thus, also influenced by developments in thinking about language as social practice, from Saussure (Saussure and Wade, 2013), to Austin (1975) to Foucault (2002a) and Bakhtin (Bakhtin, Holquist and Emerson, 1986).

Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics,* published posthumously in 1916, is considered not only the foundation stone of modern linguistics and structuralism, but also the basis for a systematic analysis of discourse that contrasted with the then traditional philological approach to the analysis of texts (Abrams, 1999, pp.140–1). The study of

language at the time was dominated by concerns with correct and incorrect forms of the language (grammar), the interpretation of texts and historical development of languages (philology), and/or the comparison between languages, especially the ones in the Indo-European group (comparative linguistics) (Davies, 2004, pp.9–14). Saussure was concerned with the arbitrary connections between signs and their differential aspects and, therefore, for him the linguist's task should be to analyse the structure of the language and relate it to other manifestations of language.

Contrary to Saussure, Wittgenstein believed that language was 'not one unified system, but a whole set of different parts with different roles', each of them with their 'own aims and rules' (Potter, 2001, p.40). Austin also rejected Saussure's view of language as an abstract system, however, while Wittgenstein saw language as active, dynamic and 'fragmented into a huge number of diverse language games that are likely to defy a precise overall characterization', Austin attempted to produce 'a systematic account of this active language' (p.43). Bakhtin, like Austin (1975) and Searle (1969), emphasizes the speech aspect of language (utterance) and argues that 'there is no such a thing as a general language' since meaningful language always involves 'somebody talking to somebody else, even when that someone is one's own inner addressee' (Holquist in Bakhtin, 1981, p.xxi). The developments and reactions to these ideas generated other philosophical speculations about the nature of language and led to further studies in the analysis of discourse.

Discourse has been analysed, at different historical periods, in a number of possible ways by linguists and scholars coming from different disciplines and traditions (Mills, 2004, pp.1–13). Wetherell et al. (2001, p.3-6) list six 'more or less distinct traditions' in the field: conversation analysis, sociolinguistics, discursive psychology, critical discourse analysis and critical linguistics, Foucauldian research, and Bakhtinian research. For purposes of this discussion only, I divided these six traditions into two groups (Figure 3.1).

Group 1

- Conversation analysis
- Interactional sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication
- Critical discourse analysis and critical linguistics
- Discursive psychology

Group 2

- Foucaldian discourse analysis
- Bakhtinian discourse analysis
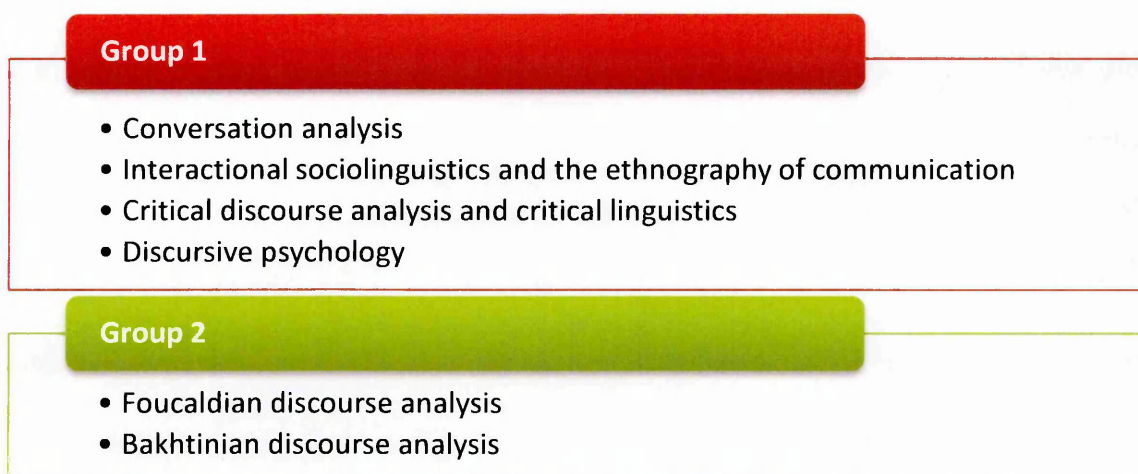
Figure 3.1: Discourse analytical traditions grouped by relevance to this study.

In the first group, I briefly discuss traditions in DA that have less overt influence on the line of discourse analysis I adopt in this study, whereas the second group includes discourse analytical traditions which are significantly influential on my analysis of the texts.

3.4.2 Group 1: Various discourse analytical traditions

The decision of adopting a Bakhtinian approach to the analysis of texts written by the research participants in this study was made after considering other forms of discourse analysis in terms of their suitability to examine the sort of phenomena I was interested in investigating as well as the philosophical principles that inform such traditions. According to Heritage (2001, p.46),

> [*Conversation analysis*] is not designed for the analysis of texts, or of contexts where activities are progressed by means other than social interaction. Instead it is a method designed to unpack the fundamental organization of social action and interaction.

Although social interaction is an important aspect of this investigation, this study is not restricted to it. Equally important is the examination of the texts produced in the Group as cognitive and affective responses to the literary texts read. Moreover, conversation analysis

(CA) focus on 'talk-in-interaction as a systematically organized and deeply ordered' (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008, p.20) sequence of events. CA would not be able to account for the 'messy' nature of forum asynchronous communication where it is not possible to establish the exact sequence in which participants posted their comments since these comments can be drafted, edited, and published at different moments. Above all, CA is 'seen as inextricably tied to the local circumstances in which utterances are produced' (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008, p.12). Hall, (1995, p. 210) argues that CA is largely based on the understanding that meaning resides 'in the linguistic resources' and is 'locally created and negotiated among the group interactants' being 'unfettered by larger social, political or historical constraints'. Such a view differs from the theoretical perspective adopted in this study which sees participants' meanings and attitudes as dependent on historically constructed visions of the world, for 'events initiated in the most distant past, as measured by the clock, may still be fresh and unfinished in cognitive time/space' (Holquist, 2002, p.24).

Yet, there are conversation analysts who have discovered 'useful intersections' between the Bakhtinian approach to situated talk and 'that of conversation analysis' (Holt, 2003, p.225) but despite such efforts, it seems that the areas of divergence between Bakhtin's views of language and CA outnumber and outweigh those of convergence (pp.228-30). Bakhtin's 'discussion of content, form and material in art' has also been used by researchers drawing on Goffman's (1981) work to analyse online interaction but focusing on the 'immediate experience of an on-line dialogue' (Cresswell and Hawn, 2011, online) in a synchronous forum whereas this study is based entirely on asynchronous communication. This investigation focuses on the dialogical orientation of communication which goes beyond the analysis of the exchange of remarks in a particular context to encompass the open dialogic nature of their internal textual composition. Such composition is not restricted to the time and space context in which texts were produced in the ORG forum but comprises a

'mass of different combinations of past and present relations' (Holquist, 2002, p.37) identified in the participants' textual compositions.

Another distinct discourse analytical tradition is the one based on *sociolinguistics*. Both interactional sociolinguists and the sociology of languages investigate 'the relationships between language and society' to better understand the 'structure of the language and how languages focus on communication' (Wardhaugh, 2011, p.12). The sociolinguistic approach to data analysis would require a systematic study of the societies in the different countries research participants come from in order to be a viable alternative for this study. Besides the great variety of nationalities found among ORG members, it must be taken into consideration that social groups and their cultural differences are not only determined by 'country of origin and native language but also exist at the subcultural levels of ethnic heritage, class, geographic region, age and gender' (Tannen, 2001, p.150). Since the data does not give us access to this whole set of information, using sociolinguistics as the discourse analytical approach would be highly unlikely to produce comprehensive and reliable results.

In spite of accommodating a wide variety of research, 'a growing amount of work within' sociolinguistics tends to take 'an interventionist approach' (Wardhaugh, 2011, p.15) towards what it deems as an issue or a problem that needs to addressed thus aligning sociolinguistics with critical research. However, I did not see the phenomenon I set out to investigate as a problem that needed to be solved in order to empower my research participants as language users or literature readers; instead I was interested in finding out how they used language to communicate and establish connections between texts and to mediate their relationships in the forum without adopting an evaluative attitude towards their practices. Embracing sociolinguistics as the analytical approach would noticeably alter the focus of this investigation and would probably require a different epistemological position. Having said that, it is also important to acknowledge that researchers working in the field of sociolinguistics have also drawn on Bakhtin's theoretical framework to conduct their studies.

For instance, the Bakhtinian concepts of 'authoritative and internally persuasive discourse' have been used to examine the tensions between ideologically hegemonic public discourses in Greek 'and the condition of language shift faced by Albanian-speaking communities' (Tsitsipis, 2004, p.569). Similarly, researchers at the Bakhtin Centre at Sheffield have investigated, among other issues, 'the development of a sociological approach to language related to such contiguous areas as psychology, folkloristics, and literary studies,' among which the Bakhtin Circle is included (The University of Sheffield, 2013, online).

Sociolinguistics' concern with human social systems led some scholars and researchers to turn their attention to 'how language is used to exercise power' (Wardhaugh, 2011, p.15). Such concern developed into an approach called *critical discourse analysis* (CDA). Critical discourse analysis is informed by the writings of Western Marxists, such as Althusser (2005) and Gramsci (Holub, 1992), and the view that social reality is determined by the historical struggle between classes (Eagleton, 1991, pp.193–6). Critical discourse analysts aim to demonstrate how language figures in social interactions and processes and to 'discern connections between language and other elements in social life which are opaque' (Fairclough, 2010, p.230). They tend to adopt a political stance which sees research as a means for the empowerment of exploited and marginalized social groups (Van Dijk, 1993, pp.300–3). Researchers specially concerned with power relations tend to adopt a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to research, since they are especially interested in understanding the mechanics of dominance and oppression exerted by powerful groups against the resistance and challenges posed by disfranchised ones (Van Dijk, 1993).

My reasons for rejecting CDA as the approach to inform this study were purely epistemological. Springing from cultural materialism, CDA has an implicit agenda of empowering groups viewed by these researchers as oppressed. It sees individuals divided into basically two opposite positions – the self and the other – entangled in a social struggle which will, in the flux of history, be eventually solved in favour of those who are disadvantaged.

Moreover, CDA researchers tend to see the academics' role to help and speed up this process, as much as possible, through their research. Among my reservations towards such positions are my understanding that (a) affiliation to 'dominant' and 'oppressed' groups is not fixed; (b) the self and the other are in a mutual dependent and dynamic relationship; and (c) researchers are not in a privileged position in relation to participants to allow them to decide in what direction and how such power conflicts should be solved. According to Wetherell (2001, pp.391–2) researchers working in a Foucauldian research tradition have criticized critical discourse analysts for their 'realist position', the privileged place they seem to allocate to their own discourse constructions at the expense of their 'oppressed' research participants. Moreover, as Holquist (2008, p.70) points out, the resolution of any power struggle will not be solved definitely in one direction or another, but will always be dependent on centripetal and centrifugal forces that are in continuous and dynamic balance throughout history.

The fourth tradition in discourse analysis to be considered here is *discursive psychology* (DP). Edwards and Potter (1992), the proponents of DP, state that it focuses on 'the action orientation of talk and writing' and is concerned with 'how events are described and explained, how factual reports are constructed' and how 'cognitive states are attributed (Edwards and Potter, 1992, p.2). In order to perform such tasks, discursive psychology examines the way 'memories or states of thought are made relevant in talk and the actions which are accomplished by the process within the local discursive context' (McKinlay and McVittie, 2009, p.13). Discursive psychologists draw on conversation analysis to examine how talk is organized, but focus on how participants' identities, narratives and versions' (Wetherell, 2001, p.388) of described events can be understood in terms of how they construct their identities and positions. Discursive psychology is theoretically grounded in the work of Wittgenstein and his preoccupation with mental language, reference and description and his emphasis on language as 'the vehicle of thoughts' (Potter, 2001, p.42). However,

discursive psychology and Bakhtin's work have also been brought together by researchers interested in the dialogics of mental processes. According to Shotter and Billig (1998, p.14), by drawing on Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's work, 'individual psychology is first transformed into social psychology, and then social psychology is rooted in the study of people's dialogical utterances.'

Although discursive psychology could have been considered as an alternative in the pilot study phase of this investigation when the focus was on participants' construction of professional identity in discourse, it became a much less appropriate alternative when identity ceased to be the focus in the main stage of this study. While it would be possible to apply discursive psychology to an analysis of how participants talk *about* literature, this would force a shift away from my interest in the constitutive elements present in both participants' post and the literary texts.

3.4.3 Group 2: Foucault and Bakhtin

Foucauldian discourse analysis is based on Foucault's view that it is through discourse that meaning and knowledge are produced. Foucault (2002, pp.38–46) argues that an individual's view of the world is formed and defined by the way we talk about it since it is language that creates what we understand as real and meaningful. Concepts, categories and the boundaries of social relationships are defined and established by language. Moreover, his most fundamental concern is to question assumptions and show that power in society cannot be isolated from any socio-political and cultural institution or manifestation (Andersen 2003, p.3). Foucault's own research on the socio-construction of the notions of madness (Foucault, 2001) and also sexuality (Foucault, 2012) is an example of how assumptions and perceptions are generated in discourse. Foucauldian discourse analysis is not only textual analysis or structural analysis but an examination of the 'formation of statements' about objects, subjects, conceptions and strategies (Andersen 2003, pp.8–32). Foucauldian discourse

analysts, thus, aim to produce *genealogies* of how current understandings of and the meaning ascribed to subjects, objects and social interactions were created by the interplay between language, power and knowledge throughout history (Hall, 2001, pp.75–8).

Foucault and Bakhtin have similar concerns with discourse since both were interested in 'language and discourse in relation to ideological and literary phenomena' and they both set out to examine deviations in 'individual and collective consciousness' (Patterson, 1988, p.5). While Bakhtin was interested in the novel and in the role of laughter (Bakhtin, 1984b), Foucault was interested in how madness had been historically constructed in discourse (Foucault, 2001). Foucault employed an archaeological approach to the analysis of discourse. According to Gutting (2013),

> The premise of the archaeological method is that systems of thought and knowledge (epistemes or discursive formations, in Foucault's terminology) are governed by rules, beyond those of grammar and logic, that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period. (2013, online)

Foucault's method is called 'genealogy' and aims to 'show that a given system of thought' results from contingent 'turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends' (Gutting, 2013, online). For instance, a Foucauldian approach to this study would try to explore how the concept of literature and the value attributed to it by English language teachers has been constructed through history in the discourse of ELT. This alternative was in fact considered as a possible line of enquiry but was discarded because it would have possibly reduced the focus on online interaction to a minor aspect in the whole investigation.

Foucauldian discourse analysts have developed their own techniques to build discourse genealogies (Ransom, 1997, pp.78–100) whereas Bakhtinian researchers work in a less well-established tradition and in a much more diverse, and even messy, field (Ball and Freedman, 2004). The use of Bakhtin's concepts to underpin educational research is not without controversies. Bakhtinian philologists have accused educators of misappropriating

Bakhtin's concepts with little knowledge of current Bakhtinian scholarship (Matusov, 2007) and reproached educational researchers for adapting Bakhtin to serve their own purposes without developing proper references to his work. Matusov refutes these accusations, arguing that attacks on Bakhtinian educational researchers by philologists may reflect a struggle for the ownership of Bakhtinian scholarship (p.217) and that the accusers fail to see the possibility of dialogue between researchers in different fields and he adds that as 'more disciplines begin using Bakhtin original scholarship, they can produce independent analysis grounded in their own field's "direct contact" with Bakhtin' (p.226).

Bakhtin's main preoccupation with language and discourse in literature, particularly in the novel, has been used as an argument against the adoption of his ideas to underpin social and educational research. As Gardiner and Bell (1998, p.2) point out,

> The sheer breadth, complexity and conceptual richness of Bakhtin's intellectual legacy has much to offer to a panoply of academic disciplines. (...) In spite of his repeated insistence that his project was an inclusive and open-ended one, with broad relevance for all human sciences-centred around an approach that has been variously termed 'dialogism' or translinguistics – the majority of scholarly work using Bakhtin can still be located in the realm of literary theory and textual analysis. (...) Indeed, despite his growing international notoriety, there remains considerable resistance to the development of Bakhtinian-inspired theoretical frameworks within many academic spheres.

Based on Bakhtin's ideas, Holquist (2002, p.60) defines discourse as the way by which we structure life situations though language. In this study, I argue that this multiplicity of speeches that Bakhtin sees as the formative units of the novel can also be found in discourses *about* literary texts, such as the ones Group members post to the discussion forum. That the compositional units and discursive features that Bakhtin sees in the novel are suitable to inform the categories adopted for the data analysis became clear in the very early stages in this study - well before a systematic examination of the posts was attempted - when it was already possible to discern on participants' replies a multiplicity of discursive building blocks akin to the ones employed by novelists to construct their texts. For Bakhtin (1981),

Authorial speech, the speech of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (p.263)

In a similar way, the speech of characters and the narrators in the literary texts upon which participants comment, other forum posters' speeches, the professional jargon of ELT, and the language of literary criticism have also been found among the multiple voices that constitute a participant's reply in the online forum. Such similarity justifies the adoption of Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia as the guiding principles to the analysis of discourse in this study.

3.5 Ethical considerations

3.5.1 Research assessment criteria

Validity and *reliability* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013, pp.179–216) are concepts that articulate concerns with the trustworthiness of the claims made in a piece of research and the honesty and rigour with which it was conducted. Based on some of the ontological and epistemological principles discussed before, such notions have been questioned as acceptable criteria for the assessment of research done in the social sciences by researchers working with qualitative data using more critical and constructivist oriented approaches (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, p.206). The concepts *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *conformability* have been proposed as alternative criteria for the assessment of qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1989, pp. 236-43). Credibility is concerned with whether the findings adequately represent the research participants' constructed realities; transferability places on the researcher the responsibility for describing the research context in a way that enables the readers and users to make judgements about the applicability and relevance of the research to other contexts; dependability and conformability replace internal and external validity checks

by requiring that the researcher provides full documentation of each stage of the research process.

In turn, criticisms of the conventional criteria for the assessment of research have also been subject to critique on the grounds that their rejection would result in a sort of relativism that could undermine the value and stability of research claims and lead to some indulgent self-assessment within the research community (Hammersley, 2008). As this study is aligned with more constructivist practices, I subscribe to the assessment criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) and described above; nevertheless, I have also taken Hammersley's criticism into consideration and conducted intra-coder and inter-coder reliability checks. These were conducted in order to add external perspectives to the analytical process and account for a diversity of chronotopic positions in relation to the data analysis, as discussed in Section 4.3.2.

3.5.2 Codes of conduct

This study follows the guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL), and the Framework for Research Ethics. It complies with the Open University code of conduct and ethics established by the Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC). In order to obtain approval from the HPMEC, a request was submitted to the British Council, the organization responsible for the website hosting the Group, to use the posts on the Group discussion board. British Council permission was granted in January 2010 and pertinent documentation was sent to the HPMEC which in the same month gave consent for the research to be conducted. A letter of informed consent was posted to the Group homepage so that all Group members were aware that their contributions may be used for research purposes. The letter was also sent by email to participants from whom frame narratives were requested.

This study does not involve any foreseeable risk for the participants and their identities remain confidential since posts, interviews and semi-structured narratives have been anonymized to ensure that individual participants cannot be identified. Moreover, there is no formal connection between participation in this research and any form of professional assessment participants may experience in their professional practice. All data has been handled with maximum confidentiality. Participants could withdraw consent by contacting the principal investigator or supervisors via email using the addresses provided in the letter of consent. Although posts to the forum are available to all Group members and cannot be deleted without altering the content of the public discussion that has already taken place, all relevant other data collected from a specific participant could have been deleted if the individual concerned had requested withdrawal. Data is password protected and is currently stored on the researcher's PC at the OU and on the OU server. Earliest date for data destruction is 30 September 2015 and the latest date is 30 September 2016.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter started by discussing the philosophical concepts that form the theoretical framework of this investigation. The second part examined the research paradigms, the quantitative and qualitative stance and the lines of enquiry adopted here. This is followed by a more detailed discussion of various forms of discourse analysis as a research method and the rationale for adopting a Bakhtinian oriented approach to the analysis of texts in this study. The chapter concluded with a brief consideration of research assessment criteria and the issues of accessibility, confidentiality, and data protection.

Chapter 4 Data collection and analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the data collection and analysis procedures adopted in this study. It gives a rationale for this adoption in the light of the philosophical, methodological and ethical aspects discussed in Chapter 3. Their selection and adoption were based on a number of factors, such as my research motives and goals and the principles of applicability, practicality and suitability and were considered in relation to the research setting and the kind of research question and data available (Blaikie, 2009). However, above all, I understand that they should be coherent with the ontological and epistemological principles that guide me as a researcher.

Having said that, I acknowledge that it is always possible to adopt other forms of data collection and analysis, as well as different tools, even when one is guided by concerns and theoretical principles that are similar to the ones I adopt here. My choices were ultimately also determined by the limitations of my experience and knowledge as well as the means available to me at the time of this investigation.

This chapter provides information on the research setting and participants. It discusses the two processes for quality control used in the stages preceding and following the data collection and analysis. It briefly comments on the research questions, findings and conclusions of the pilot study and highlights its importance for the development of the main study in terms of the experience acquired and the changes implemented in the research project. I then present the rationale for carrying out reliability checks, describe the reliability procedures conducted, and the adjustments made accordingly. The final sections are devoted to the discussion of the process of data collection and analysis of each set of data (Figure 4.1).

Source of data	Collection tool	Period of collection	Analytical tools	Purpose
Discussion forum posts	Text document version of the online posts	First cluster: April – July 2010 (data from the pilot study revisited) Second cluster: October 2010 – September 2012	NVivo9 Tropes	To analyse the patterns of dialogue and interaction between individual readers and the literary texts. To analyse the patterns of dialogue and interaction between Group members. To analyse the relationship between the dialogues and interaction patterns above and technology-mediated nature of the setting in which they occur.
Questionnaires	Online survey SurveyMonkey	February – May 2012	SPSS	To gain access to statistical information and comments on patterns of participation, reading preferences and other variables which potentially relate to levels of online engagement and interaction. To more specifically gain access to information provided by Group members who had not posted to the forum but had been visitors and readers/users of the texts available.
Semi-structured narratives	Email	June 2012	NVivo9 Tropes	To gain access to information provided by Group members who had not posted to the forum but had been visitors and readers/users of the texts available. To gather non-posters' views and reflections on the Group itself and on their own Group membership.

Figure 4.1: Data collection - analytical tools, timeframe and objectives

4.1 Research setting

This is a case study of the *ELT Online Reading Group*, which is an electronic version of a reading circle. The Group, which started in August 2007, was developed and is coordinated by this researcher with the support of the British Council Literature and English & Exams departments. At the time, the British Council (BC), an organization founded in 1934 to promote English culture and develop cultural relations worldwide, was running a project called *enCompassCulture* to support face-to-face reading groups in countries where the organization had offices, aiming to improve literacy and facilitate multiculturalism through dissemination and discussion of literary texts in English. The project website functioned as a support platform for resources, such as book recommendations. An asynchronous forum was also available but underused. As an English language teacher trainer and someone interested in the contact area of literature and language learning, I felt that a specific target population, English language teachers, could benefit from a dedicated online reading group. I obtained a space on the website and some support from the British Council to set up the ORG for English language teachers. As the Group coordinator, my responsibilities include initiating activities by choosing texts, introducing these to the community and moderating the ensuing exchanges.

In 2010, the *enCompassCulture* project was discontinued due to a process of internal restructuring in the British Council and the ORG was transferred to *TeachingEnglish* (British Council, 2013), which targets English language professionals worldwide. The ORG is hosted in the Community area of the website and access to it is restricted to registered members. Registration has to be approved by the Group coordinator or one of the British Council site managers. Access to the Group is password protected. Posts and replies to the forum are unmediated and do

not require administrative approval. Moving the ORG to *TeachingEnglish* led to great online exposure and has resulted in a significant increase in the membership. It gradually increased from over 300 at the end of 2009 to more than 1,400 members based in over 75 countries at the time of writing (Figure 4.2). Light areas show membership around the world whereas darker areas show countries where membership is above 100 members.
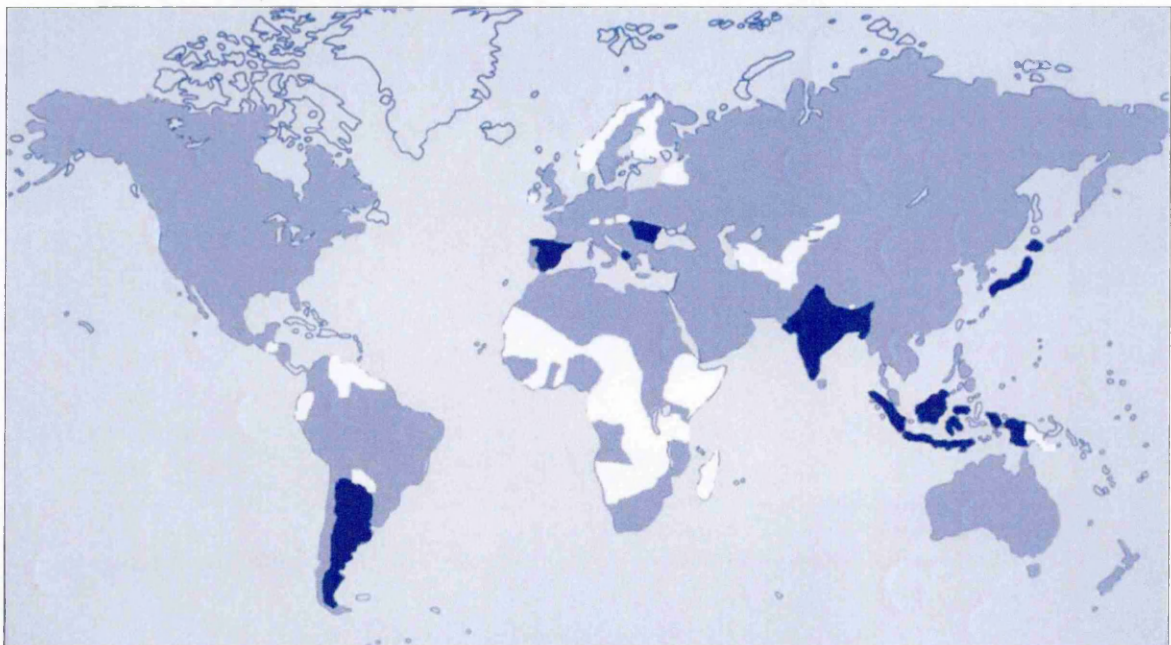
Figure 4.2: ORG membership worldwide in 2012.

Communication in the Group has remained asynchronous and written-text based, in spite of developments in technology making it possible to use other online communication tools that allow for synchronous communication using video and audio. There are practical reasons for this. Above all, there is the issue of accessibility, since most Group members are based in countries where access to the internet may still be limited and dependent on low-speed connections. Figure 4.3

shows access to High-speed Internet worldwide . Countries with connections >5Mbps

are shown on a sliding scale with light areas showing 100% connectivity >5Mbps.
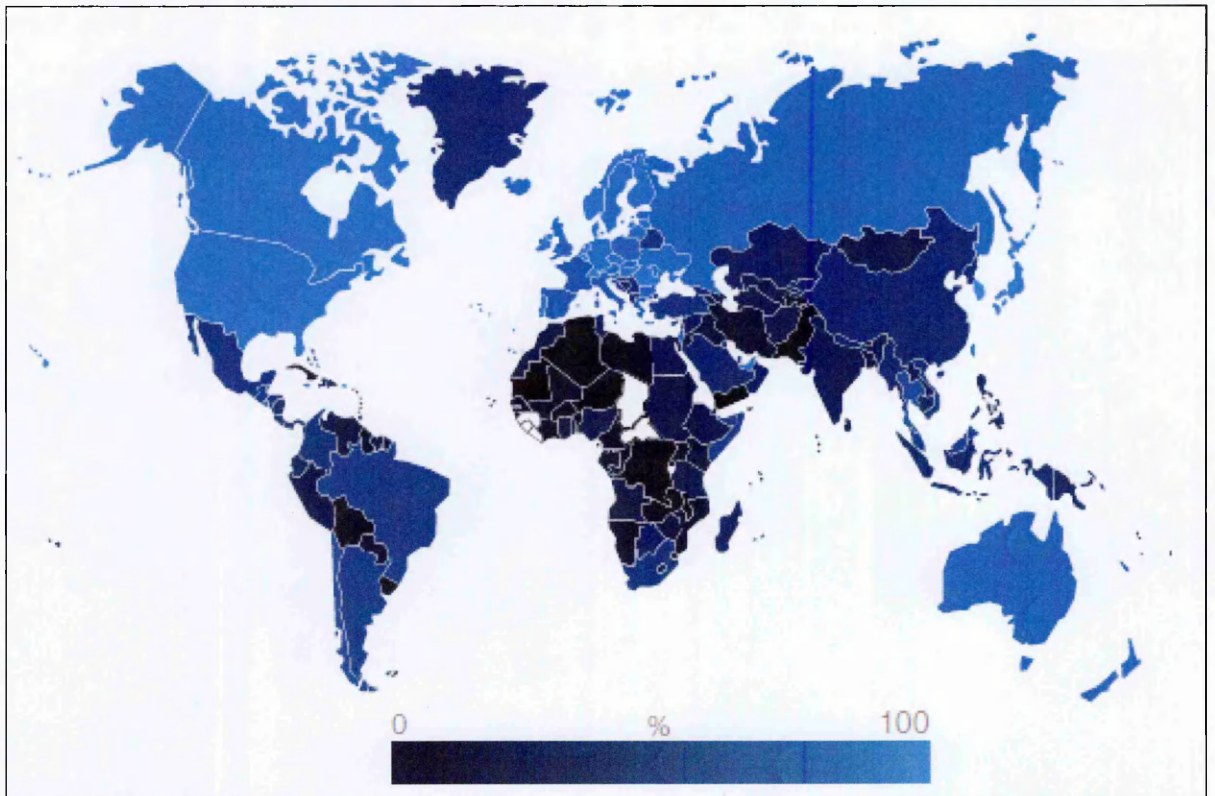
Figure 4.3: Broadband access around the world. (Source: The Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2012, p.8).

Secondly, some participants based in less developed countries are less likely to access

the Group from home (Figure 4.4). Instead, they may have access to the Group

through computers in their schools and workplaces where both the number of

terminals and time to use the equipment may be limited. Downloading heavy files

and/or waiting for buffering could slow down the interaction process or discourage it

altogether.

Proportion of households with Internet access in developing countries, 2002-2015

By 2015, 40% of households should be connected to the Internet

Source: ITU
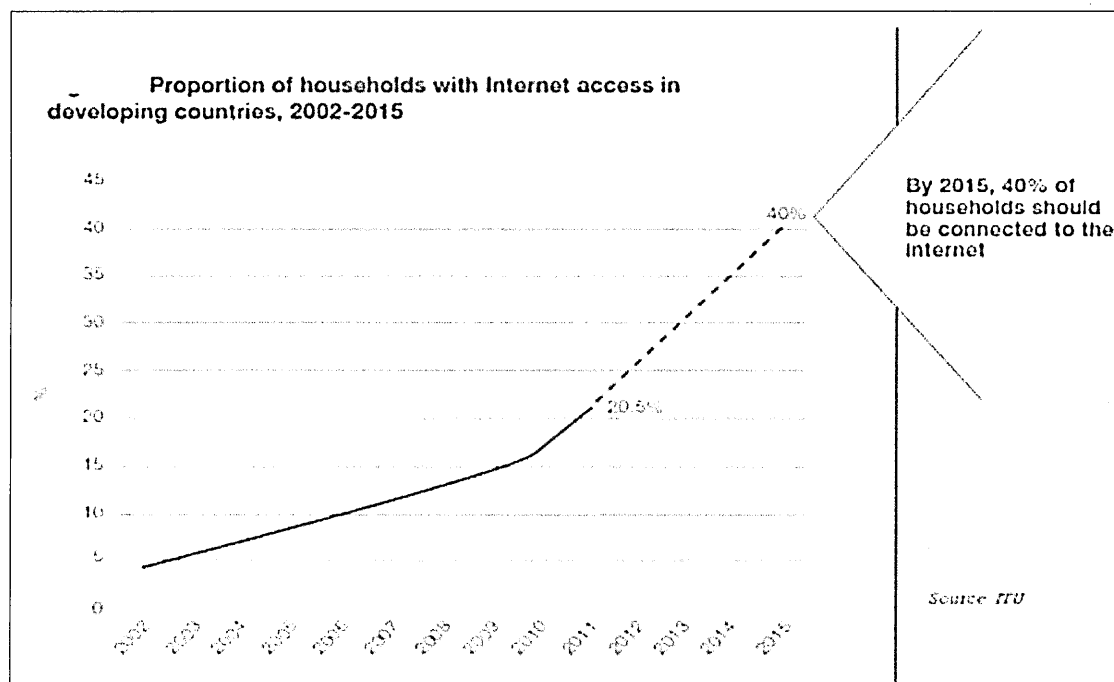
Figure 4.4: Households with Internet access in less developed countries. (Source: The Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2012, p.42)

Another point to consider is participants' computer skills. Since no information has been available regarding how comfortable group members felt about using synchronous online interactive features, a decision was made to keep access and posting as simple as possible considering the limits of the technical demands made by the website where the Group is hosted.

4.2 Research participants

All individuals registered in the ELT Online Reading Group are considered members and are part of the *Research population* regardless of their membership status (see below) or level of engagement in the Group discussions and activities. The research population thus includes members who actively contribute to the Group activities and also members who just follow the discussions and/or download the materials available. Active participation is understood to be (a) contribution to the forum

discussions in one or more threads of the discussion board, (b) contribution to one or more of the Group collections of members' creative writing, and /or (c) the taking of an active role in promoting and coordinating online or offline initiatives connected to and/or inspired by Group membership.

Research participants, on the other hand, are only those who have provided some form of data to this study. Research participants are (a) any Group member who has posted to the discussion forum and whose posts have been submitted to data analysis, (b) Group members who have replied to the online survey and (c) Group members who have provided written semi-structured narratives (Figure 4.5). Different sampling methods have been adopted for different kinds of data and are dealt with in more detail in Section 4.4 where the collection of each data set is discussed.
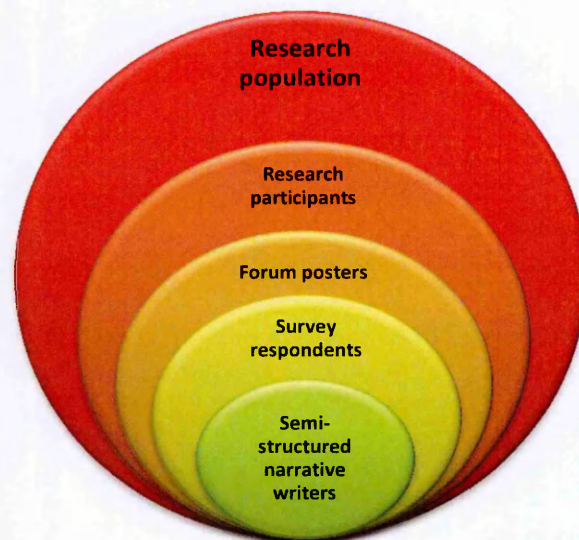
Figure 4.5: Research population and forms of participation in this study.

4.2.1 Demographics

Data from the website allow us to identify only the countries which members select as their 'location' and, therefore, it is not possible to establish the mother tongue of each Group member. However, considering the wide spread membership it is possible to suppose that the vast majority are teachers whose first language is not English and

who are presently working in countries outside the BANA (Britain, Australia, North America) circle (Holliday, 1994). This first supposition is corroborated by the online survey conducted between February and May 2012 where just thirteen out of 126 respondents (10.31%) selected English as their first language. Only five out of the 126 survey respondents were at the time of the data collection working in an English-speaking country: two in the UK, two in the USA and one in Canada.

TeachingEnglish is a website devoted to English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals in general with a strong focus on ELT practitioners since the majority of the website sections consist of downloadable classroom materials, lesson plans, short activities and resources for teachers, such flashcards, charts and posters. There are also 'articles on aspects of teaching, and free teacher development and teacher training materials' (British Council, 2013), which may also attract the interest of those involved in ELT teacher development and teacher training. The website's overall orientation seems to be reflected in the Group membership. Once again, data from *TeachingEnglish* do not provide accurate information on members' professional status, but the survey sample shows that the majority of survey respondents are ELT practitioners (73.8%) with the second largest group consisting of teacher trainers (17.5%) (Appendix F, Table 3).

The survey participants' ELT history is much more heterogeneous; however, approximately one in four of respondents report having been working in the field for more than 20 years (mode > 20, median 10-20 years) (Appendix F, Table 4). Demographic data were collected through questions in the online survey (Appendix E) in order to try to examine the possible bearing of participants' location and teaching contexts on the points of view they express and on their patterns of online

participation. Such possible relationships and further quantitative data are presented and discussed in Section 5.5.

4.2.2 Participants and researcher's roles

Group members have either member status or administrative status. Administrative status is given both to the British Council staff member who works as website administrator and also to myself as Group coordinator and online moderator, henceforth designated as 'Group coordinator'. Administrative status grants not only technical control over the website design and maintenance, but also privileged access to members' information and the possibility of editing and deleting posts. In the case of the Group coordinator, it also includes the responsibility of developing means and activities that keep members engaged in the discussion, facilitate the debate and promote the sharing of knowledge and ideas in a communicative, friendly and respectful online environment. In the reading group studied here, the Group coordinator also has the role of Reading Group leader and, as such, is expected to suggest the reading texts and promote engagement with the text. Since the creation of the Group, I have been performing the role of manager and discussion leader. Besides that, I am also the researcher.

I understand that these roles put me in a unique position of authority derived from my administrative status, as well as my authoritative position among Group members due to my role as reading group leader. It also puts me in the double position of participant and observer. Participant observation is a term that has its origins in ethnographic studies carried out in the 19th century when researchers started to live for an extended period of time in the societies and communities they wanted to observe (Tedlock, 2005, p.467). Since then, the researcher's immersion into the

research environment has raised questions about the neutrality of the observations made and the contamination of the data collected by the researcher's own position in such a context, as well as the trustworthiness of the analysis and transparency of interpretations.

When designing the research, I assumed that a possible total withdrawal from posting after starting the research process might negatively affect group dynamics and compromise the existence of the Group since, due to the nature of its organization, there would have been no one performing the role of discussion leader. This could, in turn, have put at risk the very possibility of carrying out this study to its completion. The strategy I adopted, from the beginning of the data collection to its final stage, was to reduce my participation in the discussion of texts by limiting myself to the role of welcoming members, posting links, and writing short messages where I thank members for their contributions and pose questions to provoke further discussion.

I also adopt the standpoint that it is not possible in a research study to 'isolate a body of data uncontaminated by the researcher' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.15). The researchers' chronotope, as well as their ontological and epistemological positions will always play a role in the decisions made about data collection, sampling and interpretation of findings. I, therefore, acknowledge my privileged and authoritative position in the Group and the possible extent to which it may have influenced participant's posts to the forum and their written narratives. I also acknowledge that my online long-term acquaintance with some research participants may have influenced my analysis of the data.

Moreover, my posts to the discussion forum have been part of the on-going dialogue in the Group since its beginning. Adopting Bakhtin's view that texts may enter into dialogue with readers even after their immediate production, beyond

'circumscribed meaning' and 'limited configuration of time/space' (Holquist, 2002, p.38), any attempt to totally eliminate researcher's contamination by trying to ignore the researcher's voice in the data's heteroglossia would have been futile and undermine the claims made by this investigation. According to Bakhtin,

> The person who understands (including the researcher himself) becomes a participant in the dialogue, although on a special level (depending on the area of understanding or research) (...) The observer has no position outside the observed world, and his observation enters as a constituent part into the observed object. This pertains fully to entire utterances and relations among them. They cannot be understood from outside. Understanding itself enters as a dialogic element in the dialogic system and somehow changes its entire sense (1986, pp.125-126).

Therefore, instead of seeing my voice in the forum as a detrimental factor to the trustworthiness of this study, I see it as an intrinsic part of the dialogue and interaction taking place in the Group and as an equally important source of data.

4.3 Quality control processes

4.3.1 Pilot Study

This study builds on the research conducted between 2009 and 2010 on the same Group for the purposes of the Masters of Research degree (Open University, 2010, unpublished). The 2009-10 study focused on participants' perceptions of professional identity and served as the pilot study for this investigation. The overall aim of the pilot study was to *establish whether the acts of reading and discussing works of literature in the online reading group have had any impact on (a) participants' perceptions of their professional identity and (b) participants' classroom practices.* The results indicated that participants generally believed that engaging in a multi-cultural dialogue in the Group had some positive impact on the way they saw themselves as professionals. However, it was problematic to distinguish between the

personal and the professional facets of participants' identities. The notion of professional identity proved to be much more elusive and resistant to investigation than initially conceived and the study was not able to find robust evidence that participation in the Group had changed participants' teaching practices.

Nevertheless, the pilot study findings suggest that participating in the Group had some positive impact on the way participants saw themselves as NNS language teachers who were then able to read and write complex literary texts in English. As for the role of the online environment in the shaping of professional identity, data showed that participants regarded being able to make online contact with other professionals coming from different countries and cultures as one of the most important aspects of Group participation. They also stated that being part of the Group contributed to their sense of belonging to a wider professional community. However, whether the reading and commenting on literary texts and the participation in the Group had tangible impact on participants' professional identity, as a broader concept, and on their teaching practices remained inconclusive.

Such drawbacks led to a reassessment of what it would be possible to achieve in terms of research considering the setting and the resources available in the main study and to the redesigning of the research questions, the collection of different kinds of data and the establishment of a revised set of analytical categories. This re-evaluation led to the decision to carry out a more robust investigation based on Bakhtinian concepts accompanied by a more thorough discussion of the literature and reader response theory. It also resulted in the redesigning of the research questions, the collection of different kinds of data, and the establishment of a revised set of analytical categories.

Although the pilot study had a different focus, its theoretical underpinning, methods of data collection and analysis adopted at the time were fairly similar to the ones selected for the main investigation. Figure 4.6 summarizes the differences and similarities between the pilot study and the present investigation in terms of the focus of the investigation, methodology and data analysis.

	Pilot Study	**Present investigation**
Focus	Group interaction: professional identity and reading classroom practices.	The distinctive features of participants' responses to texts read in the group, and their narratives of group participation.
Major theoretical underpinning	Bakhtin: dialogism	Bakhtin: dialogism, heteroglossia, answerability, and chronotope.
Data analysis methods	Discourse analysis	Discourse analysis, thematic analysis and statistical analysis
Data sets	8 literary texts 10 threads = 562 forum posts 10 semi-structured interviews	17 literary texts 20 threads = 1,553 forum posts 12 semi-structured narratives 126 replies to the online questionnaire
Analytical tools	Pen and paper	Qualitative analysis software: NVivo9 and Tropes Quantitative analysis software: SPSS

Figure 4.6: Similarities and differences between the pilot study and the present investigation.

4.3.2 Intra-coder and inter-coder reliability checks

According to Lewis-Beck et al. (2004, p.525), '[a]n observer's or coder's judgments about people's behaviors or other phenomena of interest' tend to fluctuate in different circumstances. The intra-coder reliability check aims at assessing 'the amount of inconsistency' that may result from 'factors such as carefulness, mood, noise, fatigue, and fluctuation of targets' behaviors that occur during a period of time.'

Although some of the categories adopted in the pilot study (first cluster of posts) were still preserved in the new coding adopted for the present investigation, all

the threads analysed for the pilot study where resubmitted to a second analysis using new code categories. This re-coding was done 18 months after the first analysis. Additionally, six months after the new codes were established, three threads accounting for 102 posts on two short stories and a long narrative poem were submitted to an inter-coder reliability check. The key stages in this process are summarized in Figure 4.7.

Pilot Study (First cluster)

- 10 threads
- First analysis May 2010

Pilot Study Codes:
- Interactive patterns
- Positioning
- Cognitive and affective engagement
- Comments on personal and professional experience
- Intertextuality

Recoding (First Cluster)

- 10 threads
- Nov-Dec 2011

Changes:

All previous categories revised and new ones established.

Two sets of categories established: one for the relationships between posts and literary texts and another for posts and other posts.

Intercoder reliability check

- 3 threads
- Jan-Feb 2013

Changes:

Data recoded with some small changes in the labelling of categories.

Categories divided into the present sub-categories.

Changes applied to the all threads analysed (first and second clusters)

Figure 4.7: Stages in the re-coding and the inter-coder reliability check.

According to Peacock et al. (2012, p.18), '[r]eliability checks involve comparing the results of two observers [or more] independently coding or scoring the same sample of behaviour for consistency.' The usual rationale for adopting inter-coder reliability checks is that qualitative researchers working with large amount of texts and complex tasks are prone to making errors when 'developing and applying codes to data' and that having 'multiple and well-trained coders' would reduce the margin of error and

improve reliability by demonstrating 'that the themes are shared constructs and not simply a figment of the investigator's imagination' (Kurasaki 2000, pp.179–80).

In this study, I subscribe to the epistemological principle that knowledge is created in dialogue with others and that neither the participants not the researcher can have a full encompassing view of the phenomena analysed. Therefore, an external coder was brought into the process to examine the codes applied to the forum posts in order to add another viewpoint to the data analysis. The inter-coder reliability check was carried out by an academic and researcher working on the field of English Literature and Interactive Media.

Three forum discussion threads (T03, T06 and T13) accounting for 83 posts were analysed by the inter-coder who focused mainly on the categories used to describe the relations between the forum posts and the literary texts and the relationships between posts in the same thread. Although the thematic categories were also taken into consideration, more attention was given to the categories designed specifically for this study as they have not been fully adopted as a taxonomy by any previous researcher.

Changes in the terminology were made based on the feedback received and on further discussion with the external coder. The sub-category which is now labelled as 'interpretation' (Figure 4.14) was previously called 'analysis' and it was changed based on the inter-coder's argument that 'literary analysis presupposes reflection and critique and is a step further in the process of reading' (see Figure 2.1); therefore, it is 'not directly dependent on material *taken* from the text itself.' As the inter-coder pointed out, textual analysis entails the process of meaning-making; since meaning is not entirely *in* the text itself, it cannot be taken *from* it. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to have this sub-category under the main category Appropriation.

Moreover, the term 'interpretation' better reflects what posters seem to be doing in the forum when they 'seize the linguistic material offered by the text in an attempt to attribute meaning to it and, in doing so, make the text their own to a certain extent'. The change in the terminology was made taking into the consideration his argument that meaning must first be constructed in interpretation with the material appropriated from the text, among other sources, and only then 'deconstructed' in the analytical process. Another change in the categories was the elimination of the sub-category *paraphrasing* since very few instances could be identified as the paraphrasing of specific sentences in the literary text and, as the inter-coder pointed out, *retelling* and *summarizing* are instances of paraphrasing.

As for the actual coding, after the adjustments in the categorization mentioned above, there were only nine instances where the data was coded in a different way by the inter-coder, six in T03, encompassing 3.69% of the coded word count in the thread, and three in T13, accounting for 1.52% of the word count in the thread. These instances were recoded according to the feedback given by the external coder.

4.4 Forum posts

The establishment of the categories was the initial step to be able to conduct the examination of the most relevant set of data in this study: the posts in the Group asynchronous discussion board. The ORG consists of an introductory page and a series of asynchronous forum threads where Group members discuss literary works written in English, from short stories, to novel extracts, to poetry. A thread refers to a string of messages devoted to each literary text or particular topic. Figure 4.8 shows a sample of threads available for discussion on the Group forum.

Figure 4.8: The ORG discussion forum at TeachingEnglish.

At the moment of writing, there were 38 discussion threads in the Group with a total of 1,611 entries, including the coordinator's posts and member's replies. Participation in specific threads varied widely, with hugely popular threads on poetry having over 300 entries and some less popular short stories attracting just a couple of replies.

Each thread in the discussion board starts with a first post by the Group coordinator (Figure 4.9). First posts contain a very brief introduction to the text to be read, some succinct information on the author, and an invitation to group members to post their reactions and reflections on it. They also include links to the texts files for download. First posts are not included in the data analysis because they generally do not contain language that could be arranged into the categories adopted. All the other posts that follow are considered 'replies' and are analysed in this study.

Figure 4.9: Screenshot of a forum thread with the introductory post and first reply.

4.4.1 Data collection

All data was collected from electronic sources and recorded in Word text format. Two

clusters of forum posts are considered in the present study (Figure 4.10).
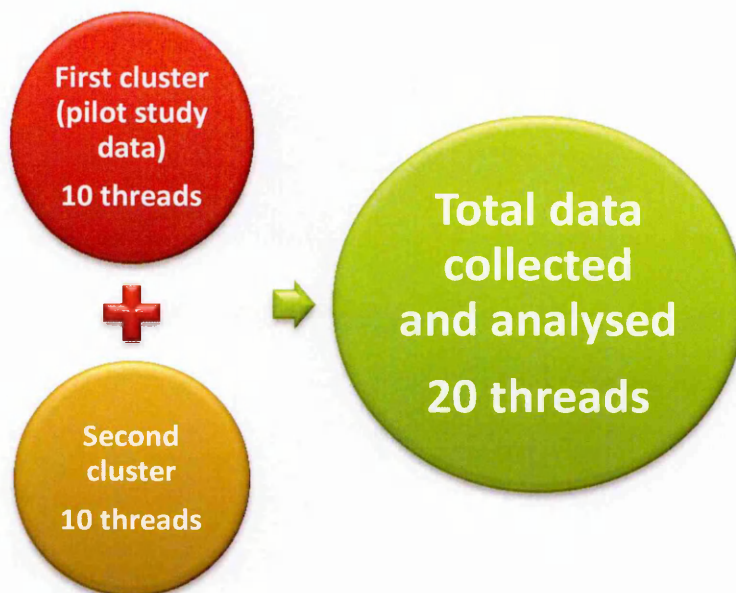
Figure 4.10: Data from forum posts

The *first cluster* comprises posts to the enCompass website between August 2007 and July 2010, collected for the pilot study and re-analysed for the present study. When the collection period was finalized in July 2010, the total number of threads in the group discussion board was 35. The total number of replies, on the same date, was 1,031. Eight out of these 35 threads were immediately excluded from a possible analysis for being too general or for having failed to prompt more than a couple of replies, such as the threads on novels which attracted less than ten replies each. From the remaining twenty-seven threads, ten were selected, with the number of replies amounting to 562.

Figure 4.11 shows the ten threads selected for analysis in the first cluster, which include (a) eight threads on literary texts proposed by Group coordinator, (b) the thread on poetry where participants themselves decided on the poems to be posted (T09), and (c) the thread on classroom experience and activities (T10). The eight threads on literary texts selected for analysis were those with a minimum of about twenty replies each. The threads selected for analysis also roughly corresponded to three different periods in the Group's existence at the time, which added a longitudinal dimension to the study. Thus, some of these threads were opened at the very beginning of the project (T01, T02, T03), some during the middle period (T04, T05), and the last ones at the end of period of data collection (T06, T07, T08). They also include texts written in a wide range of styles, by writers of different nationalities and from different literary periods.

Thread	Title	Author	Opening date	N° replies
T01	'Ullswater'	Romesh Gunesekera	August 2007	32
T02	'A House in the Country'	Romesh Gunesekera	September 2007	22
T03	'The Landing'	Anita Desai	March 2008	19
T04	'The Nightingale and the Rose'	Oscar Wilde	January 2009	21
T05	'The Verger'	Somerset Maugham	February 2009	32
T06	'The Story of an Hour'	Kate Chopin	November 2009	24
T07	'David Swan'	Nathaniel Hawthorne	January 2010	20
T08	'Michael'	William Wordsworth	May 2010	38
T09	The Poets' Corner	Various	May 2008	285
T10	Sharing Point	Various	February 2010	69

Figure 4.11: Forum posts - first cluster

The *second cluster* of forum posts corresponds to data collected after the discontinuation of the enCompass website and the transfer to TeachingEnglish in August 2010 until August 2012. Ten threads were selected for analysis in the second cluster, which include (a) seven threads on literary texts proposed by Group coordinator, (b) the *Poets' Corner,* which operates in the same way of the previous one on the enCompass website, and (c) two threads that support members' local initiatives. This cluster contains 991 posts altogether (Figure 4.12)

The seven threads on literary texts were chosen following the same criteria adopted for the selection of texts in the first cluster: larger number of replies, range of contributors and opening date. Similarly, the literary texts were also written in different styles, by authors of different nationalities and from different literary

periods. Besides these, three other ongoing discussion threads were selected for analysis due to their special characteristics compared to the threads dedicated to the discussion of specific literary texts.

The *Poet's Corner* (T09/T18) was created as a thread where Group members could share their favourite poems and comment on each other's preferences. However, it gradually became mainly an outlet for four dedicated poetry writers to post their own pieces of creative writing. Its inclusion in the data selected for analysis is due to the fact that it contains a high number of contributions and provides data for the investigation of the possible extent to which Group participation has contributed to participants' creative writing and language development. This is particularly relevant for the thematic analysis discussed in Section 5.5.

The *Maputo Reader's Corner* (T19) is a project that promotes three kinds of reading groups: reading groups in local schools in Maputo, Mozambique, radio sessions on Maputo Corridor Radio, and the online discussion in the Group. Most stories and poems on the thread are either from English school textbooks approved for use by the Mozambican National Education Authority, or translated stories selected from Portuguese textbooks, or books adopted by private English teaching institutions in Mozambique. The creators of this initiative have been active Group members since its creation and it was their suggestion to use the Group as a vehicle to post comments on these texts and also make them available to a broader readership in their country. The *Digital Stories for Literature* thread (T20) was opened to support EFL students and secondary school teachers in Malaysia engaged in a literature project designed by the Ministry of Education. Project participants produced short videos with personal interpretation of texts, posted them on a dedicated website and used the forum to comment on each other's video productions. Both threads were selected for analysis

because they could potentially provide data for the investigation of the participants' narratives of professional experience.

Thread	Title	Author	Opening date	Replies
T11	'The Nightingale and the Rose' (new thread)	Oscar Wilde	October 2010	32
T12	'The Lady Of Shallot'	Alfred Lord Tennyson	July 2011	20
T13	'The Homecoming'	Rabindranath Tagore	February 2012	40
T14	'The Song of the Morrow'	Robert Louis Stevenson	March 2012	22
T15	'Goat'	Romesh Gunesekera	May 2012	27
T16	'Edward Mills and George Benton: A Tale'	Mark Twain	July 2012	22
T17	'The Parrot's Tale'	Rabindranath Tagore	August 2012	11
T18	The (New) Poet's Corner	Various	October 2010	431
T19	Maputo Reader's Corner	Various	April 2012	355
T20	Digital Stories for Literature	Various	May 2011	31

Figure 4.12: Forum posts - second cluster.

4.4.2 Data analysis

Each thread of the discussion forum selected for analysis, along with the respective literary texts, when applicable, was uploaded to NVivo9 (QSR International 2012), the qualitative analysis software selected for this investigation for its capacity to deal with considerable amounts of data available in different formats, and its fairly user-friendly interface. All the coding of the texts analysed was done using the coding tools available on NVivo analytical software.

The coding of the first threads submitted to analysis was carried out a number of times because categories had to be readjusted and reconsidered as stretches of data emerged in an attempt to define what 'was happening to the data and begin to grapple with what it means' (Charmaz, 2006, p.46). The flowchart in Figure 4.13 illustrates the process of selecting and organizing the data into coded categories. It shows the general analytical process to which literary texts and forum posts were submitted in order to identify the occurrence of distinctive discursive features in their composition, such as the use of direct quotes and references to other texts, as well as common themes, such as references to professional and Group participation experiences.

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┌─────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Literary texts and  │   │ Reassessement of the│   │ Irrelevant and/or   │
│ posts uploaded to   │──▶│ codes adopted in    │──▶│ inappropriate       │
│ NVivo 9 for         │   │ pilot study         │   │ categories          │
│ discourse analysis  │   │ considering the new │   │ discarded and new   │
│                     │   │ research questions  │   │ categories adopted  │
└─────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────┘
                                                                │
┌─────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Discursive features │   │ Discursive features │   │ Themes in the posts │
│ in both the literary│   │ in different posts  │   │ identified and      │
│ texts and forum     │◀──│ in the same thread  │◀──│ underlined          │
│ posts identified and│   │ identified and      │   │                     │
│ colour-coded in both│   │ colour-coded        │   │                     │
│ sources of data     │   │                     │   │                     │
└─────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────┘
       │
┌─────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Forum posts uploaded│   │ Themes identified   │   │ Discursive features │
│ to Tropes for       │──▶│ and graphics        │──▶│ and themes in the   │
│ thematic analysis   │   │ generated           │   │ posts compared to   │
│                     │   │                     │   │ the ones in the     │
│                     │   │                     │   │ semi-structured     │
│                     │   │                     │   │ narratives          │
└─────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────┘
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Figure 4.13: Process of coding and analysing forum posts.

This study's choice of approach was based on conceptual understandings strongly influenced by Bakhtin's views of the dynamic multiple relations between the self and

others encapsulated in the concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, and the final analytical categories emerged from the process of considering the relationships between selected sets of text from a dialogic and heteroglossic point of view.

However, there is not yet a single Bakhtinian approach with a set of specific analytical tools, such as the ones developed by conversation analysts or Foucauldian researchers. The concept of 'dialogism offers no new research methodology' and researchers analysing discourse from a Bakhtinian perspective tend to develop their own codes based on the 'complex' and 'valuable conceptual resources' Bakhtin offers (Coulter, 1999, p.12). Researchers working in different disciplines and in diverse educational contexts, for example, have developed their own sets of research strategies and tools. According to Maybin (2001, p.70), Bakhtin's master concepts, previously discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, have the following practical implications for those analysing discourse:

1) 'Both spoken utterances and written texts need to be understood in terms of how they are responding to, and anticipating, other utterances and texts'

2) 'A speaker may explicitly or implicitly report or appropriate other voices from written texts, authoritative figures, or a comment earlier in the conversation'

3) 'The words and phrases which speakers use bring with them their own social history and association, and introduce a wealth of nuances and connotations into the current speech context,

4) 'Individual utterances and texts will reflect the heteroglossia of language itself, and the conflicts that permeate it, between centrifugal and centripetal forces and between authoritative and inwardly persuasive discourses.'

Maybin's summary above was instrumental for the establishment of the discourse analytical categories I adopted for this investigation (Figure 4.14). For instance, her first point is important to understand how posters reply to previous posters and how they create links in their response to possible following replies (interactions). The second point is the basis for the creation of analytical categories that denote the borrowing of content and language from the literary texts (appropriations) and other posts (adoptions); whereas the third point particularly informs the creation of categories that denote connections between themes and topics in the literary text with other real life events (transformations) and other texts (intertextual references). The final analytical categories emerged from the process of considering the relationships between selected sets of text and readers from a dialogic and heteroglossic point of view. Adding to the theoretical background covered in the literature review, I also followed Matusov et al. (2005, p. 23) and derived the final coding categories from the research questions, the data itself and from my experience with online discussions.

Figure 4.14 displays the code categories used for the analysis of the forum posts. The relationships between forum posts and the other texts available to participants via the Group discussion board are represented by the horizontal lines, also called branches. The branches on the *left* of the central icon represent the relationships between a given post and the literary text discussed in the same thread whereas the relationships between a given post and the other posts in the same thread are represented by the horizontal lines on the *right*. The analytical categories are explained in the following section.
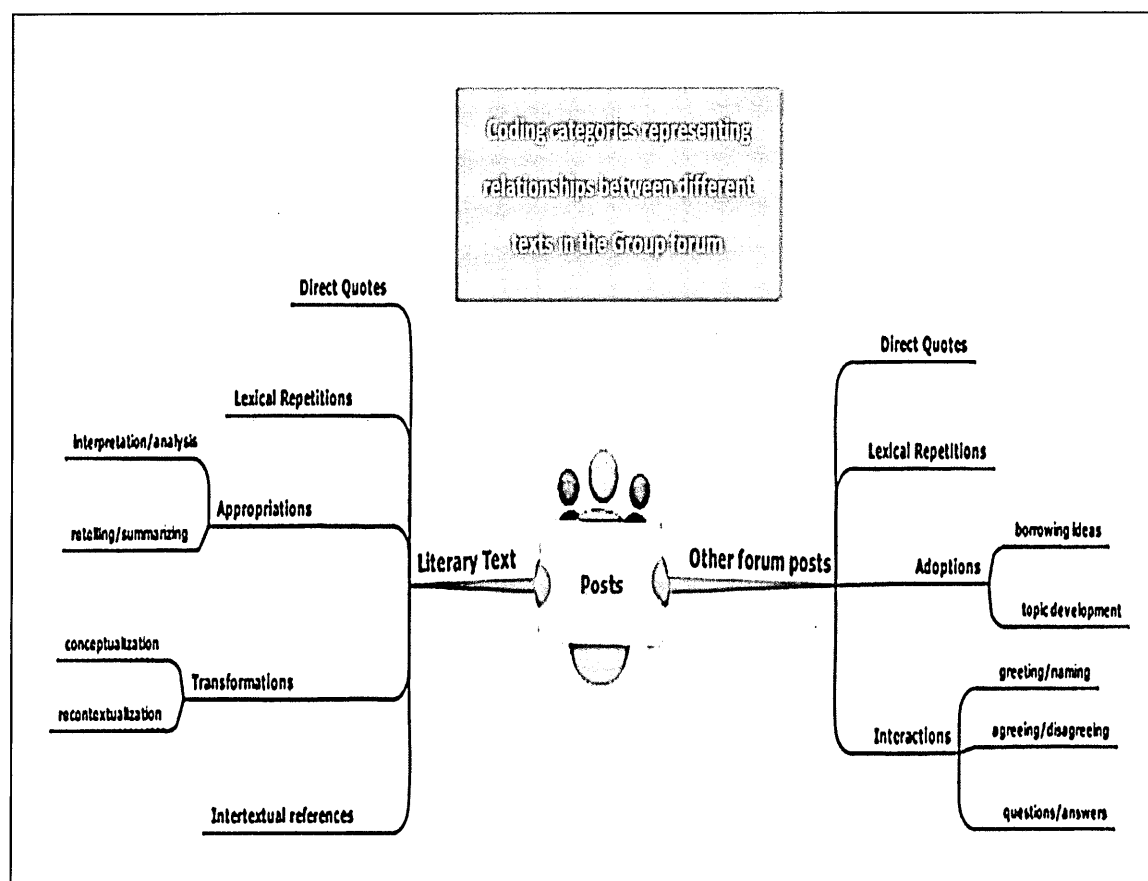
Figure 4.14: Overview of the coding categories for the analysis of the forum posts.

POSTS AND LITERARY TEXTS

The first stage in the analysis was to look at the posts in relation to the literary texts on which they commented in order to identify discursive features also present in, or showing some connection with, the reading source.

Direct quotes are extracts copied exactly from the literary text, marked by quotation marks, either single or double, and integrated into a post. Direct quotes vary from single words to stretches of language of various lengths. They denote the poster's overt intention to refer to the source text and they are often used as a source of evidence to support an argument and/or to validate the writer's position. An example of a direct quote is when a participant incorporates a poem line into her own sentence when posting a comment on Wordsworth's poem 'Michael':

His mind was filled with a variety of feelings, sentiments conveyed by those fields, hills, "A pleasurable feeling of blind love, the pleasure which there is in life itself." (P12 in T08)

Lexical repetitions are single words or phrases that are 'prominent' in the original literary text and that are present in the post without being signed-posted by quotations marks. These words or phrases are low frequency lexical items in the British National Corpus (BNC) (Oxford University Computing Services, 2013) that are present in the text and which do not appear in posts by the same participant in other threads. An example is the word 'wrought' that appears in the short story 'Ullswater' line 23 in the phrase 'wrought-iron affairs' and is then used by a participant in the sentence 'the text is fantastically well wrought'. The rounded frequency per million word tokens for 'wrought' in the whole BNC corpus of spoken and written English is only two, and the participant never uses the word again in any other posts in the whole set of data collected. 'Wrought' was then coded as an instance of lexical repetition.

Direct quotes and lexical repetitions are instances where the discourse of the literary text is directly integrated into the posters' own discourse either deliberately or less intentionally. They were adopted as categories because the data revealed that forum participants tend to incorporate language from texts when voicing their own thoughts. A similar phenomenon was observed by Knoeller (2004) when analysing the oral and written narratives on a set text provided by twelfth grade English class students from an urban school in the US. He observed that students voiced 'the language of authors or characters (...) when quoting or paraphrasing (...) to illustrate specific perspectives while calling others into question' (p.151). From a Bakhtinian perspective, quotes and lexical repetitions can be seen as the poster's orientation towards the readers by introducing 'totally new elements into [their] discourse' that will facilitate the reading of their own ideas and help to engage in dialogue with the

readers' own 'conceptual system of understanding' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.282) through the use of language that is now shared due to the previous reading of the same text.

Appropriations are posters' attempts to *make a text their own* by ascribing some meaning to it. They occur when posters take ownership of content and/or language of a text and use them to generate meaning and create their own texts in the forum. They occur when posters (a) attempt to interpret the text, sometimes using language and conventions borrowed from literary criticism, in order to discuss themes, topics, characterization, and perceived authorial intention, (b) restate the meaning of a sentence or passage by closely paraphrasing it, and/or (c) retell or summarize large portions of the story or the whole text. An example of appropriation occurs when a participant provides background information on the production of Tagore's short story, summarizes the plot and gives an interpretation of its meaning. The instance below was double coded as Appropriation>interpretation> summarizing:

> *This text was first published in a Bengali magazine in 1918 and it focuses on disrespect for the bird, efforts aiming not the improvement of the bird but making huge amounts of money while pretending to educate the bird, but really suffocating it with nonsense.* (P23 in T17)

Transformations are instances when posters discuss ideas and situations that are connected to the themes and topics in the text but significantly depart from it. They occur when posters try to elaborate philosophical, moral or ethical concepts based on some idea or event in the text (*conceptualization*). For example, when commenting on 'The Nightingale and the Rose,' a participant states that the story shows that, 'those who seek prestige, in the name of love, they end up rich yeah, but deep inside their hearts nothing is real at all.' This chunk of language was marked as Transformation>conceptualization since the poster is drawing a general moral principle out of the context of the text.

Transformations also occur when posters try to re-contextualize the story, usually by referring to contexts and situations in real life (*recontextualization*), and in doing so imbuing their narrative with similar meaning perceived in the text. For example, commenting on 'The Verger' (T05), a participant draws a parallel between the story of the main protagonist and 'women and men [in my country] becoming rich by selling food, sweets, chewgums [sic] in the streets and even flowers at the graveyard'. This instance was marked as Transformation>recontextualization.

Appropriations and transformations can be seen as instances that denote 'active and engaged understanding' since they incorporate the concepts and the language 'under a new conceptual system' and establish 'a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances' with what is said by others enriching it 'with new elements' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.282). Greenleaf and Katz (2004, pp.177–8) observed similar strategies employed by teachers in a professional development programme in California. Their research participants had the 'opportunity to closely analyse the many language features of literary texts' and 'their own use of these features to draw inferences and understandings about the literary world being constructed by the author.' They call these processes of 'integration' and 'reconfiguration'.

While the term 'integration' describes the re-use of ideas from the literary text in a post, it seems to me it fails to capture a further dimension since quotes and lexical repetitions are also instances of language being 'integrated' into posts. I use the term 'appropriation' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012), on the other hand, in an attempt to convey the idea that in interpreting, retelling, summarizing and paraphrasing those ideas, posters to a certain extent make them their own. Likewise, while the term 'reconfiguration' describes the act of altering something, especially in appearance, it

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does not seem to convey the full extent of such change. I use the term 'transformation' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012) in an attempt to capture the idea of metamorphosis; the process of creating new meanings, transferring ideas and concepts into another context and, in doing so, transmuting them.

An *intertextual reference* is the act of referring to one text in the process of commenting on another. They are instances where participants refer to other literary texts, other members' creative writing or other artistic manifestations, such as theatrical performances, films, music and/or visual arts. For example, commenting on a Tennyson's poem, a participant establishes multiple intertextual connections: first, with 'Loreena McKennitt singing a very slightly altered version;' secondly, with 'John William Waterhouse's painting at the Royal Academy;' and then with Greek philosophy (Plato and Lane, 2007):

> *Actually the poem makes me think of Plato and the reflections of the real world in the cave- invisible worlds behind the visible.* (P08 in T12)

Intertextual references can be seen as instances where posters' previous knowledge of cultural artefacts and reading experience are incorporated into their discourse about the literary text. The term 'intertextual' is used here to denote a straightforward connection established by posters between two or more texts and does not necessarily encompass the complex interdependence between systems, codes and traditions in works of literature (Kristeva 1980), as discussed in Chapter 2. Instead, intertextual references are used here to denote a 'dialogical character' in posters' 'relationship to the various phenomena of literature and culture' (Bakhtin 1981, p.256), analogous to the one Bakhtin observed in the text of novels.

OTHER POSTS IN A THREAD

The second stage was to look at posts in the same thread in order to identify discursive features and interactive patterns between posts. The analysis of *direct quotes* and *lexical repetitions* is similar to the one done in relation to the literary texts but here it is aimed at identifying connections between posts.

Adoptions are posters' attempts to build on an idea or theme raised by others. They are instances where one poster presents ideas or raises issues that have been previously raised or discussed by someone else in the same thread without making a direct or indirect reference to the previous post (*borrowing ideas*). For example, in the thread devoted to the discussion of 'The Nightingale and the Rose' a participant compares the bird's death to 'the Lord's sacrifice for mankind salvation' (posted on 20th January 2009, 12:46 pm). In the reply that immediately follows it (posted on 21st January 2009, 07:25 pm), another poster, without acknowledging the previous religious reference, proclaims a biblical connection and cites the Gospels. Besides the intertextual reference, the passage below was thus coded as Adoptions>borrowing ideas.

> *This story of love comes from the remote time, even in the bible. We can see that God loves the world and gave his only Son who was killed by the same people. John 3.16 "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, ... " and Luke 23.18 " the whole crowd cried out: kill him... ".* (P04 in T04)

Adoptions are also instances where one poster develops an idea or topic based on something that has been posted by (an)other participant(s) but does so from a different angle or adding a different nuance to the discussion, directly or indirectly acknowledging it had been mentioned before (*Topic Development*). For instance, in T13 (Tagore's 'The Home-Coming'), when a participant comments on how she appreciates a character's rebellious behaviour towards his brother, the following two

posters reply extending the discussion into the relationships of servant and master between different characters in the text. Such stretches were coded as Adoptions>topic development.

Adoptions are similar to instances of 'appropriation' observed between posts and literary texts in the sense that they are occurrences where posters embrace someone else's idea as their own. However, they also include an element of alteration similar to the ones observed in 'transformations' since they may develop and extend such ideas. I use the term 'adoption' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012) in an attempt to capture this double function and also to avoid confusion between this category and the other ones adopted to describe the post-literary text relationship.

Interactions are communicative instances where posters clearly address each other by naming and/or signalling a response to another participant's post by framing it with pertinent language. The most frequent forms of direct interaction observed in the data collected are presented in the table below along with some examples from sample threads (Figure 4.15).

Thread	Form of interaction	Language framing (Examples)
various	Greeting/Naming	Hi P01 – Hello P02 & All
T12	Acknowledging a contribution	'great response [P11] and I love the interweaving of the Nightingale and the Rose.' 'thanks for your comments about my response…'
T13	Agreeing	'I think you are right, [P23]. As you have pointed out, …'
T07	Disagreeing	'I don't fully agree with u .yes no one wants to be lonely…'
T14	Posing questions	'I would ask you, dear readers, what do you think is the moral of this story?'
T14	Answering to questions	'Well, by now, I think the writer is challenging us before the two existing, contrasting sides of life impending on us/society.'

Figure 4.15: Forms of interaction between posters.

Interactions are overt ways of actively responding to what is posted by others, either as an immediate reply or as a delayed response. Besides that, the very act of posting and replying can be seen as an actively sought form of interaction and a response to someone's utterance. According to Bakhtin, any 'live utterance is inherently responsive' (Bakhtin 1986, p.68) as it will necessarily elicit a response in one form or another. It always has an addressee, even when no direct address is articulated.

Although the analytical categories used are unique to this study, Hall's (2005, pp.160-177) review of some cognitive studies done in the field of reading literature, with both native speakers of English and second language learners in different educational contexts, reveals that some of the categories adopted by those researchers bear some similarities with the ones I employed here, albeit differing in the terminology adopted. The main differences between the studies Hall discusses and this investigation are that a) those are mostly controlled experiments in extensive reading, b) they tend to consider solely the relationships between texts and individual readers, without considering reader-reader interactions, and c) they tend to focus on linguistic features of readers' responses to texts.

Besides the analytical categories discussed above, forum posts were also submitted to thematic analysis on Tropes. However, as the coding categories and the analytical tool for that are the same ones used for the analysis of the semi-structured narratives, such analysis will be discussed in the following section.

4.5 Semi-structured narratives

Stories have a fundamental role in human interaction and professional development, as discussed in Chapter 2, and data collected from the forum posts and interviews for

the pilot study showed that participants frequently resorted to narratives and story mode to illustrate their ideas and to link aspects of the literary texts to their own personal and professional experiences. In this study, semi-structured narratives were requested from a sample of survey respondents in order to try to have access to similar data from Group members who do not post to the forum but who also have access to the texts and discussions in the forum.

The concept of narrative frames comes from Barkhuisen and Wette (2008, p.375), who used a template of 'starters, connectives and sentence modifiers' to guide their research participants to create a writing narrative of their teaching experiences.

4.5.1 Data collection

The first stage of data collection was to design the frames template. This was a modified version of the document used by Barkhuisen and Wette (2008, p.385) and adapted to the context of this investigation. A first draft was reviewed by four experienced ELT teacher trainers, both English NS and NNS, and working in different countries (Argentina, Brazil, and India). Changes in the document were made based on their feedback and also on the suggestions made by the supervision team (for the final version, see Appendix C).

Among the 126 survey respondents, 84 agreed to take part in a possible further stage of data collection and provided their contact email addresses on the online questionnaire form. Among these 84, ten had previously posted to the Group discussion forum and were, for this reason, excluded from the list of potential narrative writers. Individual emails, with the semi-structured narrative Word document attached, were then sent to the remaining 74 possible contributors. Eleven of those 74 who were approached actually provided semi-structured narratives for data analysis.

4.5.2 Data analysis

A first reading of the forum posts had revealed that Group members sometimes established connections between the literary text and other members' posts and their own professional and personal reading experiences as well as their perceptions of being part of the Group. The semi-structured narrative template was designed to raise the same connections. The narratives were analysed considering three major overlapping themes (Figure. 4.16). Semi-structured narratives were then submitted to thematic analysis in order to better identify such instances and try to answer the question of the extent to which these experiences are related to Group interaction and the online environment.
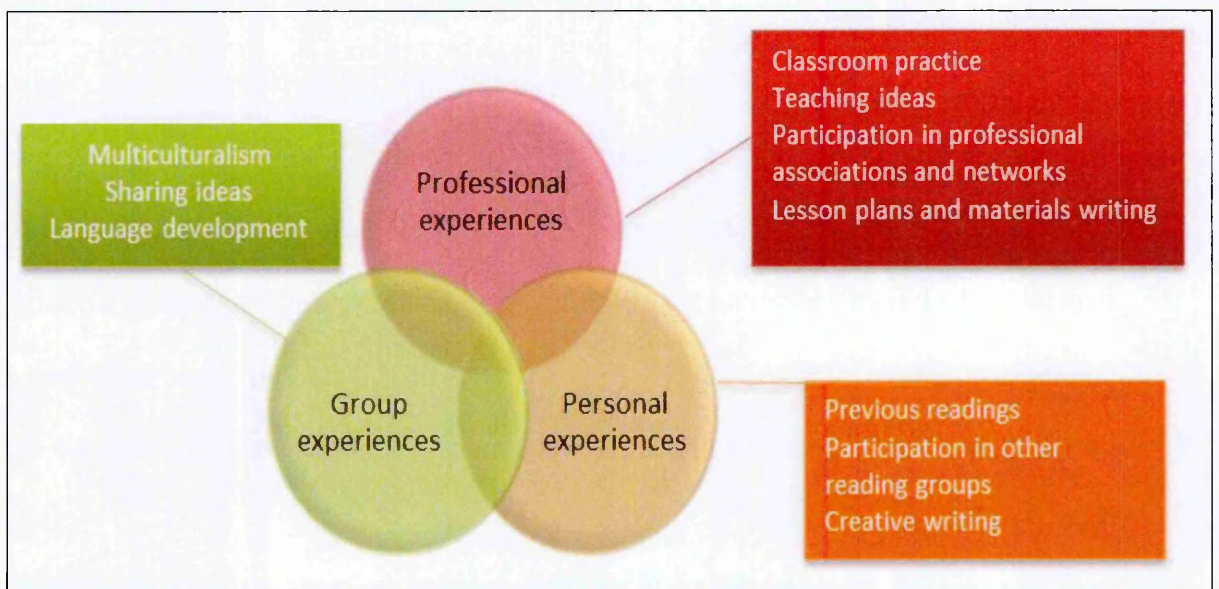
Figure 4.16: Major themes considered in the semi-structured narratives and forum posts.

Semi-structured narratives and the posts on non-specific texts (T09, T10, T18, T19 and T20) were analysed for themes using Tropes (ACETIC 2012, online), a semantic analytical software which 'detects contexts, isolates themes and identifies principal actors' in written texts.

Texts in Word format were visualized on Tropes and analysed in terms reference fields. The *reference fields* tool identifies main themes sorted by frequency. It highlights key words connected to particular vocabulary sets pre-defined by the software programme. Once these key words were identified, they were considered in the context of the sentences and of the main argument in the text and selected as examples of instances denoting one of the main three categories of experience. For example, in the collated texts of all semi-structured narratives, words such as 'teaching', 'classroom', 'teachers' and 'students' were coded by the software as equivalents of 'education' and displayed in a graph (Figure 4.17) that shows the relations between this particular reference field and the others. The reference field for 'Education' was then considered as pertaining to the Professional Experiences theme.
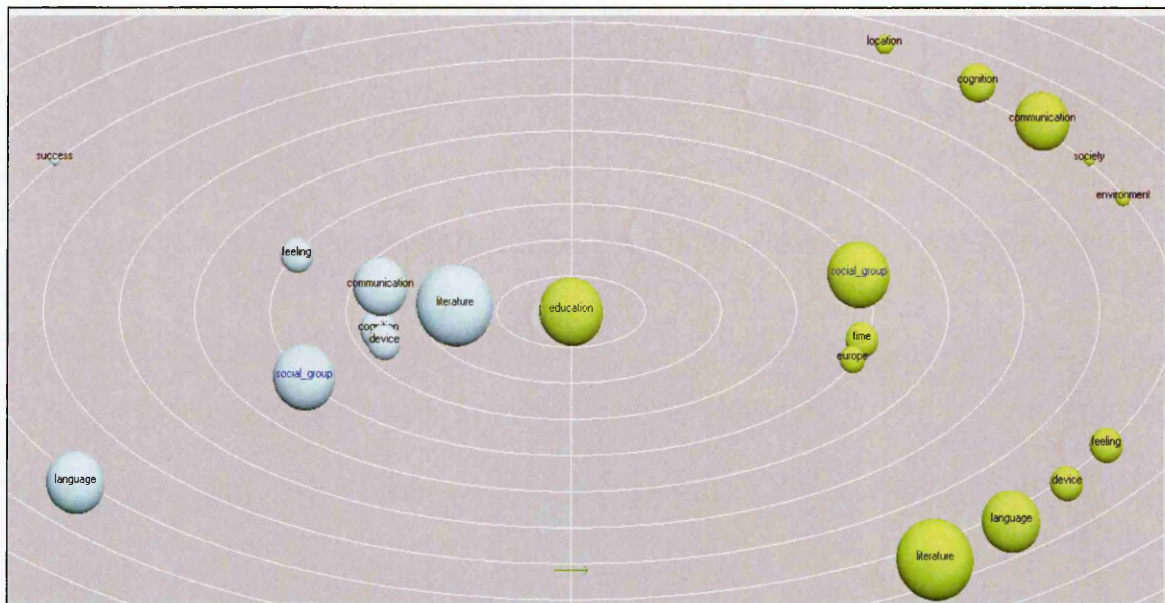
Figure 4.17: References and relationships for 'education' in the semi-structured narratives.

On the sphere above, each reference field appears as a sphere whose surface is proportional to the number of words it contains. The distance between the central sphere and the other spheres is proportional to the number of words used in the same sentence belonging to these reference fields: in other words, when two spheres are

close together, it indicates a higher frequency of use those words in the same sentence and when they are far from each other the number of references is lower. The references on the left precede the central reference in a sentence and those on the right follow them. Start graphs (Figure 4.18) follow the same basic principles of sphere graphs in terms of reference orientation in sentences, but they facilitate visualization when there are too many reference fields and they are so close that the spheres overlap. Also, instead of showing area equivalent to frequency, start graphs show the number of occurrences for each reference field and specific words associated with them.

The graphical representation is useful as an indicator of the concepts and ideas that participants bring together. For instance, in Figure 4.18 we can see that in the forum posts words related to 'education' often appear in connection to the words 'communication', 'language', and 'family'. A more in-depth analysis of these connections would be possible, however, for the purposes of this study, it suffices to identify the main ideas participants relate to in the three main thematic categories.
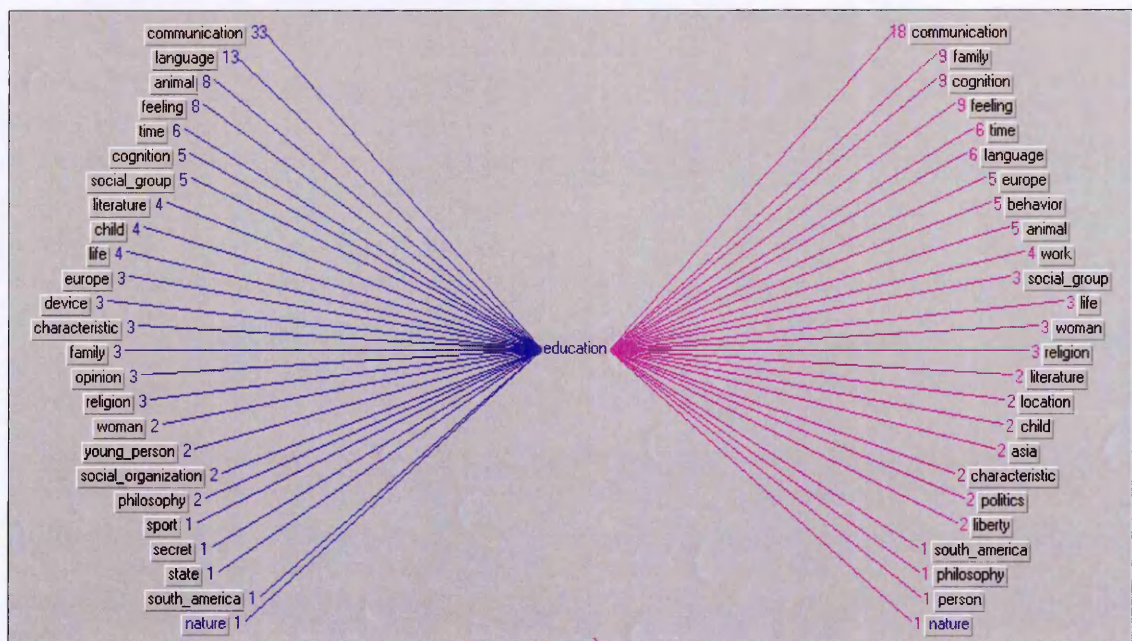
Figure 4.18: References and relations for 'education' in the forum posts

The semantic analytical software was used to help identify lexical items that could point towards specific themes. However, this identification was just the first stage and the findings still had to be sorted into the categories that corresponded to the participants' experiences I wanted to investigate. The next stage was to look at the textual data to determine more precisely the context of each reference. The coding process was based on the six-step process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87) (Figure 4.19).

1. familiarization with the data
2. initial coding generation
3. search themes based on the initial coding
4. reviewing themes
5. theme definition and labelling
6. report writing
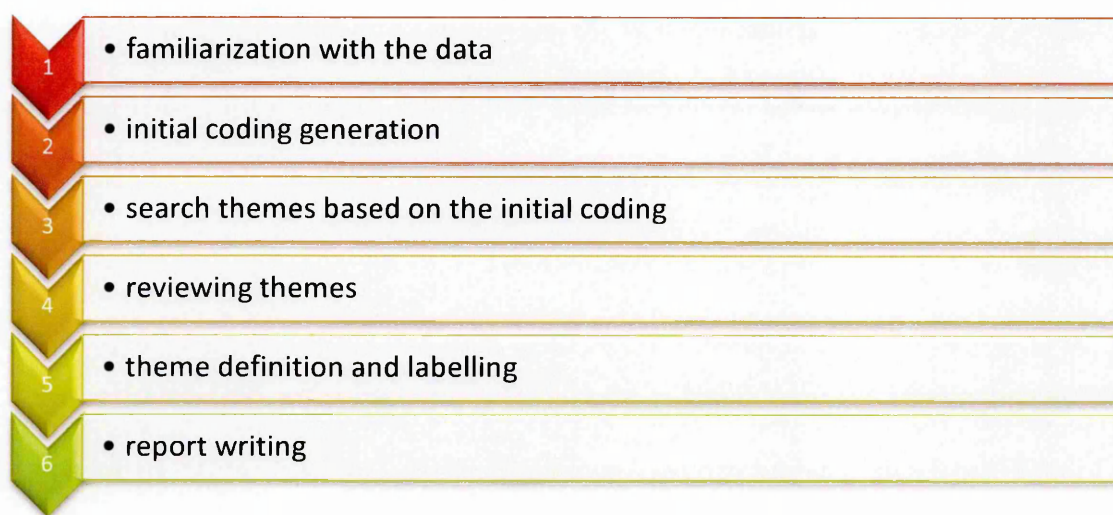
Figure 4.19: Thematic analysis process.

The initial coding generation (Stage 2) had already been done based on the study pilot data and the three major thematic categories (Group, Reading and Professional Experiences) were just consolidated in this process. When appropriate, chunks of the text were double or triple coded. References were then sorted into the three major categories that represent the most frequent aspects to which participants made references (see Figure 4.16).

A combination of discourse analysis and thematic analysis was also used by Sperling (2004) to examine coexisting and contradictory voices in teachers' discourses about classroom experiences. She identified four main topics but does not

seem to have established a connection between them or how these themes appeared in narratives by different participants. In order to establish possible shared themes and experiences among all narrative writers, all semi-structured narratives were submitted to analysis as a single text on Tropes. The next stage of the thematic analysis was to submit the forum posts to the same process.

4.6 Online survey

Although access to the membership list allows us to identify the countries where Group members are based (Figure 4.2), as well as the length of time for which they have been members, it does not provide access to other kinds of demographic information, such as age group, gender, work place, or number of years of teaching experience. An online survey was created in order to draw a more detailed picture of Group members' profiles, patterns of access to the discussion forum (Appendix F, Table 7 and 8) and reading habits (Appendix F, Table 12). It was also an attempt to have a glimpse into a sample of non-posters' teaching contexts as well as a means of collecting narratives about Group experience from non-posters. In this study, quantitative data is seen as a complementing source of information that provides further insight into some Group members' professional contexts, posting habits (Appendix F, Tables 6 and 10) and use of the online resources available to them on the Group website (Appendix F, Table 11).

4.6.1 Data collection

Krosnick and Presser (2010, p.263) state that 'the heart of a survey is its questionnaire' since results fundamentally depend on how well-crafted it is and how much the questionnaire designer adheres to 'best practices' that 'stem from

experience and common lore on the one hand and methodological research on the other.' The questionnaire designed for this study drew primarily on what they call 'conventional wisdom' (p. 264); however, methodological aspects, such as the optimal number of closed and open questions, number of points and labelling of rating scales and question order, were carefully considered and a number of drafts were produced before reaching the final version.

The questionnaire for the survey was drafted as a Word document and piloted with five participants who had been members of the Group for more than 3 years. Changes were made according to feedback received and comments from the supervision team. A final version was then created using an online survey tool (SurveyMonkey 2012) (Appendix E). A request for participation was posted on the Group home page along with a Participant Letter of Informed Consent and a link to the survey host.

The survey went live on 17th February 2012 and the last response was collected on 22 May 2012. During this period, the Group consisted of approximately 800 members. The total number of responses collected was 138. Incomplete responses were filtered out and the total number of complete responses considered in the statistical analysis was 126, which amounted to approximately 15% of the Group membership. Eight out of the 12 unfinished responses had the same IP address of other complete responses and displayed an early entry date and time, which indicates that respondents abandoned the first attempt to reply to the questionnaire and returned later to do it. The other four were responses where the respondents only completed section A, which collects demographic information.

4.6.2 Data analysis

SurveyMonkey provided information on the data collected and generated charts that provided information on discrete items. Figure 4.20, for instance, shows data on survey participants' answers to the question on the number of years participants had been involved with ELT (Question 5). Data from the survey was then input into a SPSS (IBM 2013) data spreadsheet and the various survey items analysed for frequency, cross-tabulation (Figure 4.21), descriptive statistics and factor analysis. Initial calculations were reviewed by a member of the supervision team and further calculations made accordingly. Results that are statistically significant are discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the text-based qualitative data.

5. How long have you been involved with English language teaching?	Create Chart Download		
		Response Percent	Response Count
A. Less than 1 year		7.9%	10
B. Between 1 and 5 years		18.3%	23
C. Between 6 and 10 years		22.2%	28
D. More than 10 years		21.4%	27
E. More than 20 years		24.6%	31
F. I am a TESOL student		5.6%	7
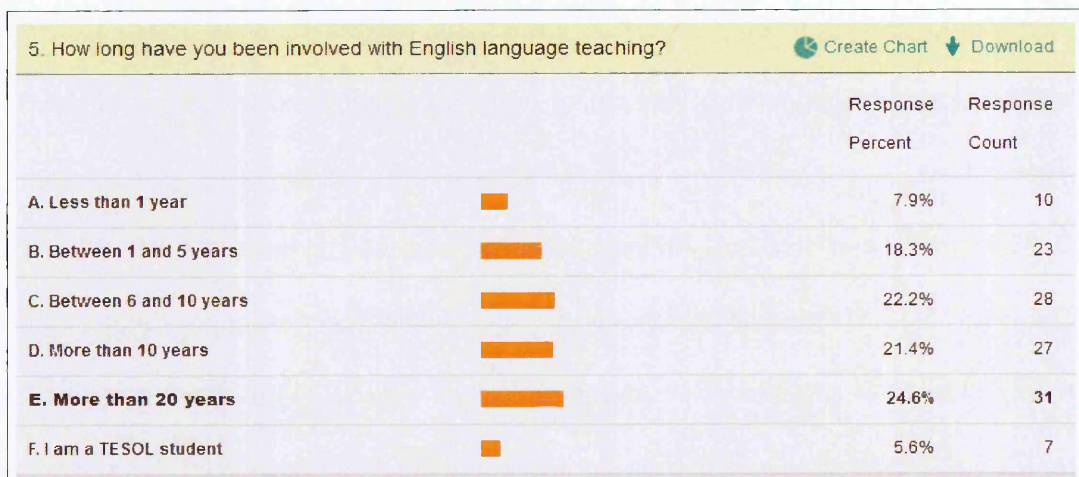
Figure 4.20: Example of data results on SurveyMonkey, in percentages.

			Have you ever posted to the forum?
			Yes (out of 126)
Time as a member	less than 6 months	Count	7
			21.2%
	between 6 months and 1 year	Count	5
			15.2%
	between 1 and 2 years	Count	10
			30.3%

Figure 4.21: Example of cross-tabulation on SPSS - time as a member in relation to posting

4.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the research setting and provided information on the organization and contents of the online platform where the ORG is hosted. It conveyed some general information on the Group constitution and the ethical implications of having the Group moderator also as the person conducting the research. This is followed by a discussion of the quality control steps taken to guarantee research reliability. These initial sections are followed by a more detailed examination of the nature of the data collected, the coding processes and the analytical categories adopted.

The following chapter will deal with the findings and discuss them considering the current state of knowledge in the field.

Chapter 5 Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the analysis of forum posts, semi-structured narratives, and data from the online survey are considered in relation to each other and discussed against the backdrop of the research questions below. I then present the outcome of the thematic analysis of posts and semi-structured narratives.

---

1. Which are the features of participants' responses to texts read in the Group? In particular, to what extent and in what ways are such responses related to:
   A. The contact with the literary text?
   B. The group interaction?
   C. The technology-mediated nature of the setting in which they occur?
2. In their accounts of Group participation, what connections do participants make between reading literature in the Group and their other reading and professional experiences?

The extracts discussed in this chapter represent a small sample of all the data collected and analysed and they serve as an illustration when presenting the research findings. In total 1,553 posts to the forum were analysed, comprising 57,041 words; eleven semi-structured narratives were collected and analysed accounting for 3,122 words. The main criterion for the sample selection was how well extracts were regarded as representing the points discussed, but other factors were also taken into consideration. As far as possible, the post extracts presented here feature comments from different participants and were taken from different narratives and forum threads opened at different periods along the existence of the ORG. This is an attempt to capture a diversity of voices in the Group, including posts by long-term members as well as contributions from newcomers to the ORG at the time of the data collection.

Participants were anonymised by being assigned numbers. Numbers 01 to 25 were randomly given to participants with high frequency of posts in the discussion forum; numbers beyond 26 were randomly assigned to other participants as the data coding proceeded. When possible, illustrative posts were also selected from threads that were double coded by the inter-coder (T03, T06 and T13).

Appendix A contains a list of discussion threads on those literary texts which were submitted to analysis along with information on the literary genres these texts belong to the period in which they were written and web links to the full texts. These texts deal with different themes and topics and can be seen as representing, to a certain extent, the diversity of reading material available for discussion in the Group. Appendix B contains three complete threads from the discussion forum (T03, T08 and T17) which were selected applying the same criteria and rationale used for the selection of the sample extracts. In the complete threads, it is possible to see the posts in the sequence of their submission and the comments in context. Appendix D contains the entire collection of the semi-structured narratives and Appendix F contains the tables that illustrate further quantitative data from the online survey.

5.2 Question 1A: Participants' contact with literary texts

This section discusses participants' interactions with the literary texts available in the Group considering (a) survey respondents' answers to questions related to their motivation to join the Group and the uses they make of the literary texts, (b) the connections semi-structured narrative writers establish between literature and their responses to the short stories and poems posted in the Group, and (c) the distinctive compositional features of posters' comments.

The starting point for the analysis of the data in this study is the literary text. It is against the short stories, poems and novel extracts published in the Group that all the data was examined. Literature was the main reason for the creation of the Group and data from the online survey shows that gaining access to literary texts and literature teaching materials are the main factors (columns A & E in Figure 5.1) attracting teachers to the website.

Why have you joined the Group·

A. To have access to the literary texts in English
B. To discuss literature with other readers
C. To communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds
D. To share my professional experience
E. To gain access to literature teaching materials
F. To share my own writings
G. To improve in English language skills
H. Other
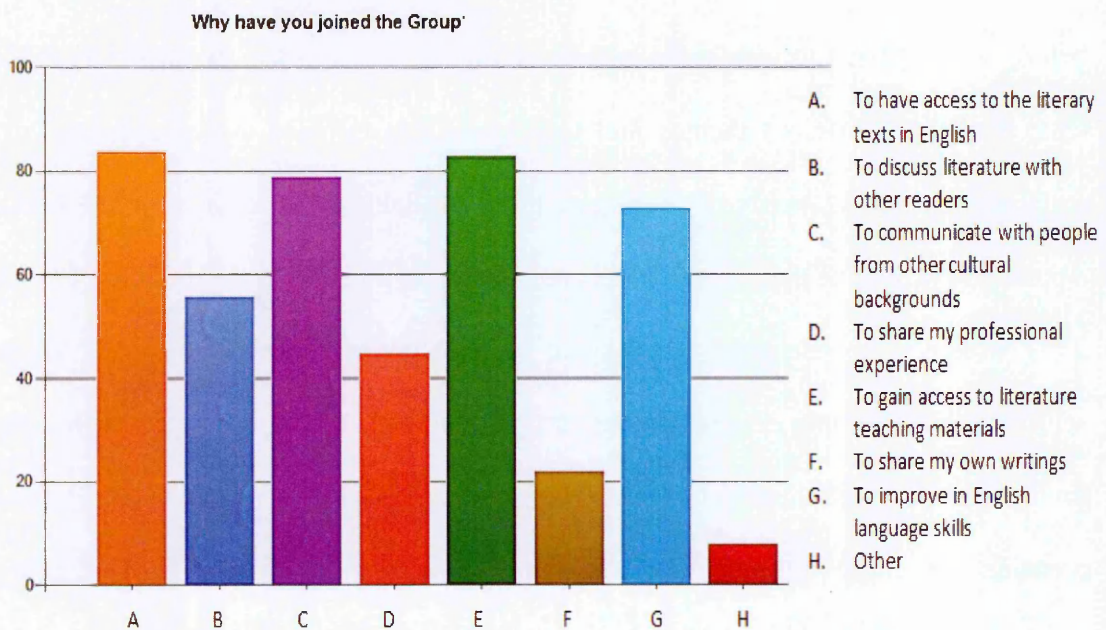
Figure 5.1: Survey respondents' reasons for joining the Group (multiple-choice question).

However, when asked about which of the answers above they considered the most important factor determining their membership, responses varied according to professional status. Teachers constitute the highest proportion of respondents wanting access to literary text and literature teaching materials (73.8% each time). Teacher trainers account for the highest proportion of respondents wanting to discuss literature with other Group members (55%), to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds (75%), and share their experience (55%). TESOL students mostly want to improve their own English skills (91.7%). Although the basic principle behind a

reading group is to discuss shared reading, data shows that the majority of survey respondents adopt a very instrumental attitude towards the Group, which is seen as a means to improve linguistic competence (29.4%) and as a source of reading material (23.8%), whereas only 9.5% see discussion as the most important factor (Figure 5.2).

Which of the answers above do you consider the most important reason?

A. To have access to the literary texts in English

B. To discuss literature with other readers

C. To communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds

D. To share my professional experience

E. To gain access to literature teaching materials

F. To share my own writings

G. To improve in English language skills

H. Other

Figure 5.2: Survey respondents' main reason for joining the Group.

Despite the practical and professionally-oriented approach to Group membership demonstrated by survey respondents, data from the discussion forum show that some posters also tend to attribute high value to literature in their lives:

> *My reality and day to day life make it impossible to go on living without creating a place where I can be happy and enjoy life away of crowded and noisy human life and activity. I've found this place in literature.* (P11 in T09)

> *I think we all have to agree that "Literature is life". Everything that we can feel has already been felt and even though we may try to find words for it, a poet, or, philosopher, or, religious text will have already expressed it so much the better.* (P41 in T09)

Data from the semi-structured narratives, collected among survey respondents (who had not posted to the forum) and subsequently analysed for themes on Tropes (see Section 4.5), indicate that narrative writers usually associate, in their sentences, words

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related to literature (62 occurrences) with words related to education (42 occurrences), social group (38 occurrences), language (37 occurrences) and communication (32 occurrences) (Figure 5.3).
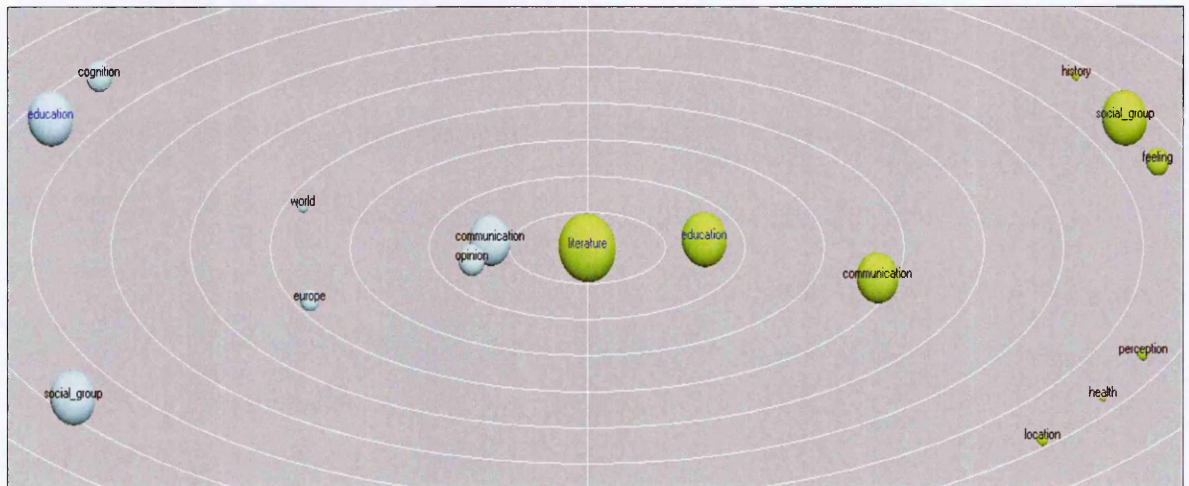
Figure 5.3: References and relations for 'literature' in the semi-structured narratives.

Participants' semi-structured narratives seem to confirm that contact with literary texts available in the Group generate responses that involve establishing further relationships with their previous knowledge of literature and also with future possible uses of it in their professional activities. The following are some of the answers given by narrative writers (indicated by N+Number) to the sentence beginning with: **When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually…**

> *… think about the ideas presented, the expressions and the style…* (N03)

> *… compare them with my own ideas and with the precepts known from literary studies.* (N08)

> *… take some notes to enhance my students' awareness of reading literature and how to interpret it.* (N02)

> *…think how my students (teens/adults) would feel about those texts, because they usually are the right size to deal with in class – sorry! Professional conditioning…* (N05)

> *…I look for the language items such as words, phrases and unusual way of structuring language.* (N11)

Despite different motivations to join the Group and different connections established with literature, data collected from the three sources show that participants generally attach considerable importance to reading literature and tend to respond to the literary texts in diverse ways. This study is mainly concerned with these responses as they happen in the ORG asynchronous discussion forum. The first research question was thus posed with the objective of identifying the compositional features of participants' responses to texts read in the Group and to examine to what extent such responses are related to participants' contact with the literary texts.

To be able to identify the compositional elements of the forum posts, participants' comments were analysed using NVivo 9. Analytical categories (see Section 4.4.2) were colour coded and the post extracts are presented here in similar colours used in the software. However, an extra colour (aqua) had to be introduced since only six colours are available on NVivo9 whereas seven major categories are adopted. Moreover, the yellow option available on the software is not easily discernible on screen or on paper and had to be replaced by orange to facilitate visualization (Figure 5.4).

Category	Font colour	N° incidences (in 382 posts)
Direct quotes	Green	247
Lexical repetitions	Orange	40
Appropriations (interpretation/analysis, retelling/summarizing)	Blue	330
Transformations (conceptualization, recontextualization)	Purple	198
Intertextual references	Pink	102
Interactions (naming, questions & answers, agreeing & disagreeing)	Red	524
Adoptions (borrowing ideas, topic development	Aqua	167

Figure 5.4: Colour code for categories used in the analysis of forum posts.

5.2.1 Direct quotes

One of the most easily identifiable features of the posts in the discussion forum is the use of direct quotes **(in green)** from the literary texts that are being discussed in the thread (indicated by T+Number). In this study, an individual instance of direct quoting is identified each time a poster (indicated by P+Number) uses quotation marks to insert language from the literary text in a comment. There are 247 direct quotes in the fifteen threads devoted to the discussion of the individual literary texts. In these threads (T01-T08 and T11-T17, see Section 4.4.1) 110 posts out of 382 posts altogether display one or more direct quotes from the literary text being incorporated into the comment.

In literary criticism direct quotes are used to illustrate and/or support a point being made as well as to add an authoritative voice to the writer's argument. The use of direct quotes in the forum does not much differ from their use in academic writing in terms of purpose. Direct quotes are marked by quotation marks and posters usually incorporate quotations into their own sentences creating a text interwoven with their own authorial voices and the voice of the author of the literary text. In the extract below the poster supports her view of the personality of the vicar in Maugham's (2000) 'The Verger' by embedding the narrator's description of the character into her own sentences:

> *Wasn't the vicar threatened by Albert's imposing personality? The antagonism between the two protagonists has been portrayed with a photographic fidelity, 'The red faced energetic man in the early forties' had his finger in every pie and 'fussed'. But while Albert tolerated his opponent, his opponent was not ready to tolerate the good-natured verger.* (P37 in T05)

In the thread devoted to Chopin's (2001) 'The Story of an Hour', another poster incorporates a direct quote mid-sentence to disagree with a previous poster, support the analysis of another, and reinforce his own interpretation of the authorial intention:

Dear [P10], the heart problem is not significant in the story. As [P44] mentioned before the story has ironies, and Chopin is using the heart disease as a device to introduce irony, especially towards the end of the story when "doctors said that she died of joy, of joy that kills". (P17 in T06)

In most cases direct quotes are interwoven into the sentences and paragraphs as in the examples above. Long direct quotes that stretch for more than 2 lines uninterrupted by the poster's own words are much less frequent (18 instances out of 247) but they can also be found, as in the extract below, when the poster starts his comment with a long direct quote from the text before making his case:

Dear All, "The Leica was my connection to what had gone before, and what lies ahead. The metal body always feels good and heavy as though it preserves the past in itself with every shot. Through it I feel I can see what is to be. In its frame lies all of life... The Leica never fails" In my opinion, the Leica and is used as a clock for timing events in the story. (P11 in T15)

Incorporating direct quotes into a comment requires from the writer reasonable command of the language in order to make sentences and/or clauses agree grammatically. Moreover, using direct quotes requires from the readers/writers the capacity of identifying in the original text the chunks of language that can potentially reinforce their argument or challenge the argument of the other, in case of disagreement; such ability rests upon well-developed reading and writing skills (Council of Europe, 2013, pp.21–27). Direct quotes are more frequently inserted in longer posts by participants that generally demonstrate high levels of language accuracy and control when using a wide range of grammatical structures as well as wide lexical resources in their comments (IELTS, 2013), as observed in the extract below:

Tagore's story protagonists involved in "the bird's education" - from the goldsmith to scribes and others - just aimed at showing off regardless of the bird's needs and wishes as "It seemed it was rather irrelevant to look at the bird." (P12 in T17)

Yet, direct quotes, can also be found in short posts where a less elaborated response is given and where language control and sophistication are less apparent, such as in the following example. However, such occurrence is much rarer:

> *I have some questions regarding Homecoming, I hope you all will help me clear it: (...) Phatik was 'plumbing an unfathomable sea', what is the author trying to say? what meants 'mother,the holidays have come'?* (P70 in T13)

Direct quotes denote a conscious effort from posters to insert the voice of the author into their own textual production; however, language from the literary text also appears without being clearly signposted by the use of quotation marks.

5.2.2 Lexical repetitions

Instances of shared language between the post and the literary text not clearly signed by quotation marks were coded as *Lexical Repetitions* (see Section 4.4.2). For instance, in the extract below P10, who is a very meticulous writer and a frequent user of direct quotes, simply omits the quotation marks twice in a single passage when clearly borrowing vocabulary items from the text (in orange):

> *So it isn't surprising that Ranjit isn't satisfied with the foxglove and hollyhock, lakeside account of his father's death: "What the hell did he think he was doing?" he asks. He wants his uncle to exonerate him.* (P10 in T01)

The names of the two flowers clearly stand out because they appear together in line 16 in Gunesekera (1993)'s text (*'but the foxgloves and hollyhocks out at the bottom of the garden framing Ullswater in purple'*). The verb 'exonerate' appears in line 274 in the original text (*But Ranjit seemed to want me to exonerate him*). Although P10 displays in all his posts in the forum an advanced command of the grammar and a wide range of vocabulary that would probably allow him to confidently use these vocabulary items without the necessary input from the literary text, it is significant that these items do appear in a post that discusses a text where these words are also

used. Furthermore, the verb 'exonerate' can be considered an infrequent lexical item since only 28 occurrences in the rounded frequency per million word tokens for it are found in the British National Corpus (BNC).

Lexical repetitions are much less frequent than direct quotes with 40 instances in 382 posts in the fifteen threads devoted to the discussion of a single literary text. One of the reasons for this is because it is not possible to determine, based on the data collected here, to what extent posters employ a particular word because it was present in the original text and it has somehow permeated their consciousness. Neither can the question of intentionality in omitting the quotation marks be answered; thus, what determined the coding of a vocabulary item as lexical repetition are the lack of quotation marks and the low frequency of an item which is present in both the literary text and in a post. In this study only single words that are found to be low in frequency in the BNC are considered as instances of lexical repetition. There are 29 instances of such singular words out of the 40 identified instances of lexical repetition. Besides the items in T01 mentioned above, other examples of lexical repetition are the words 'covenant' and 'ignominy' in the following extract:

> *Assuming he'll one day recover from the effects of the city and overcome ignominy, hold up his head again he will remember the covenant he made with the old Michael and become a successful man.* (P11 in T08)

'Covenant' appears in line 416 of Wordsworth (2008)'s 'Michael', the text being discussed, *('A work which is not here: a covenant')*. It has a 964 rounded frequency per million word tokens in the BNC. 'Ignominy' appears in line 446, *('To evil courses: ignominy and shame')*. Only 45 occurrences per million word tokens are found for it in the BNC. The other 11 identified instances of lexical repetition consist of language chunks that are similar to those present in the literary text but which are

incorporated into a comment without the use of quotation marks, such as in the examples below:

The ice crackled like a pistol shot (P08 in T01)
Turn around the hemlock tree and slowly withdraw (P11 in T02)
The frogs have always been croaking (P11 in T02)
The sea beat, the gull's cries, the wind, the blast of clean air, God's sky (P23 in T14)

In the case of lexical repetitions, the issue of intentionality and usage awareness is, for the purposes of answering the research questions, of little relevance; as is the issue of whether the poster had previous knowledge of the lexical item. What remains is the fact that the language in question is found concomitantly in the text read and in the text created to discuss it when the statistical frequency of the word use is low. Both quotes and lexical repetitions are seen here as examples of tangible presence of language from the literary text in the posters' own textual construction.

5.2.3 Appropriations

As discussed in Section 2.2.2, a reader's response to a text is what impregnates the text with new meanings (Frye, 1964, p.104). As Jauss (1990) points out,

> [a] literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period. It is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue. It is much more like an orchestration which strikes ever new chords among its readers and which frees the text from the substance of the words and makes it meaningful for the time. (p.75)

Reading groups are essentially reading communities where readers respond to a text and engage in the process of making sense of it together usually by interpreting and ascribing meanings to it (Lang, 2012). In this study, such instances were coded as *Appropriations* since they are seen as posters' attempts to gain control of the literary text by inserting comments that emulate the authoritative voice of literary criticism or the authoritative voice of the authors themselves (Maybin, 2001, p.70) and make them

their own. There are 330 instances of Appropriations in the fifteen threads (made up of 382 posts) devoted to the discussion of a single literary text. These are instances where posters provide interpretation or analysis of the text and/or retell/summarize and which are uninterrupted by instances of Transformations, Intertextual references, Adoptions, or Interactions. Appropriations **(in blue)** may contain embedded direct quotes **(in green)** and instances of lexical repetitions (in orange). For example, in the comment below the poster's interpretation of the text is interrupted by a comment that expresses a general concept about love (Transformation>Conceptualization) **(in purple)** and in this case the post was coded as having two instances of Appropriation:

> *The nightingale may know what it is for she was the only one who sacrificed herself. I think she represents nature, the most pure of things. Although the student "knows everything" because he read about it, he really does not know (there are things that cannot be learnt from books). Here we see nature vs. culture. I guess that the true answer to the deepest questions of life (and Love is indeed one) is not in books. We must look inside our heart (and so did the nightingale). I think this tale is all about love: the girl's love for jewels, the boy's love for knowledge (his comfort comes from books) and the nightingale's love for feeling.* (P65 in T11)

Instances where posters attempt to interpret the text and/or the authorial intention were coded as *Interpretations/Analysis* (Section 4.4.2). These are frequent forms of comment in the body of posts devoted to the discussion of a particular literary work **(in blue)**. In the extract below the poster appropriates the language of book reviews and literary criticism to comment on Hawthorne (2004)'s 'David Swan':

> *I read David Swam this text takes place in Boston, the protagonist is David Swam, the rest of the actors in this story are the antagonist because they criticize David Swan because he slept on the tuft of maples. He slept there because he was very tired but people didn't understand. Who told the story is a narrator but this narrator is limited omniscient because the narrator knows about one or two characters, but not all.* (P45 in T07)

Although the poster shows a low level of linguistic control, evidenced by the use of vocabulary repetition ('because'), faulty punctuation and sentence structure, she does show knowledge of sophisticated vocabulary used in literary criticism. The voice of

the critic is heard in the use of words such as 'protagonist', 'antagonist' and 'limited omniscient narrator'. Noticeable is also the lexical repetition in *'the tuft of maples'*, which appears in the second paragraph in the original text (*'As if planted on purpose for him, there soon appeared a little tuft of maples'*).

In the same thread, other posters comment on language, on what they interpret as the meaning of the story, and on perceived authorial intention:

> *I was startled by the beauty of the language and also by the content itself: it seems that the story is really about the bliss of not knowing: after all he doesn't regret anything because he doesn't really know what he missed.*(P46 in T07)

> *The story "David Swan" by Nathaniel Hawthorne forces us to direct our sights on the elderly couple and the youth ... a focus of opposites with a language that is flowery, and quite poetic - creating an evocative narrative throughout the story!* (P43 in T07)

By rephrasing and incorporating into their comments their interpretations of the text and what they perceive as the intentions of the author, posters acquire some level of control over their reading and, to a certain extent, gain ownership of the 'meaning' of the literary text. This taking over is not limited to interpretation. It also appears at the more basic level of plot appropriation. Attempts to 'seize' the text and re-use it for one's own purposes – namely, write a comment in the forum – can also be identified in the acts of retelling and summarizing a story, as seen in the post below on Wilde (2006)'s 'The Nightingale and the Rose':

> *"Why, what a wonderful piece of luck!" said the student when he found the red rose that was the only one thing that could make his object of love accept his heart. Then, when it was time to offer the rose to the object of love, he was turned down. And the Nightingale died for the rose in trying to save the student from the pain he felt for his love! That was his time to learn there's no love if you're not loved, for the girl loved someone else who has power, silver buckles and jewels that cost far more than rose, like she was setting a price for her love.* (P11 in T04)

In the example above, the poster opens the comment with a direct quote from the text **(in green)** and proceeds to retell and summarize the main events in the story **(in blue)**. A similar strategy is employed by another poster in the same thread, but also with the inclusion of a specific reference to the paragraph in the text where the events occur:

> *The young student loves more the professor's daughter who asked him to find first a Red Rose. Difficult task for the boy, but he accepted to bring it to her because of LOVE. She did not love the boy and for that she preferred to give him a hard task. However, Nightingale was also suffering for him (page 1, paragraph 5), she is complaining for her love to him who cannot feel the same.* (P04 in T04)

Both examples of retelling and summarizing above show a feature that is also quite common in many other comments and threads analysed: the interweaving of retelling and interpretation which makes it particularly challenging to code the data. For instance, there is a hint of interpretation when P11 moves from the account of the Nightingale's death into *'That was his time to learn there's no love if you're not loved,'* and *'she was setting a price for her love'*. A similar phenomenon happens when P4 inserts the sentence *'She did not love the boy and for that she preferred to give him a hard task'* between the sentences where she retells the characters' actions. Such a blending of retelling and interpretation is exemplified in the following comment on 'The Verger':

> *The whole story shows who the author sides with, it unfolds in a way that convinces the reader that Foreman's views are sacred. One example is where after discovering that he's illiterate, he's offered the possibility to go back to school but he refuses. He then loses his job as Verger and while he's on a lonely walk in the streets of London he has the bright idea of opening a shop that leads to expansion and the unexpected offer to invest. Hence the conclusion of the story can only be ironic – it is not how much you learn that counts, but rather how well you make use of the little you know.* (P13 in T05)

The first and last sentences denote, respectively, attempts of interpreting the authorial intention and the assigning meaning of the story and were coded as

Appropriations>interpretation/analysis whereas the whole middle of the paragraph takes hold of some events in the plot and uses them to build up the argument and was coded as Appropriations>Retelling/Summarizing. In the last part of the last sentence **(in purple)** the poster detaches the argument from the text itself. By using the pronoun 'you' in '*it is not how much you learn that counts, but rather how well you make use of the little you know*', the poster thus transforms a particular event in the story into a more general principle that is presented as applicable to other situations and to living individuals. This kind of instance was coded as *Transformations*, which is the category discussed next.

5.2.4 Transformations

According to Maybin (2001, p.70), the language individuals use reflects their socio-historical context and is impregnated with a wide range of 'nuances and connotations'. Furthermore, when constructing their posts and narratives, participants tend to take the 'nuances and connotations' suggested by the plot and characters in literary texts and add their own layer of meaning to it. There are instances in the data where posters use the text as a source from which they make generalizations, draw concepts, and moral principles. By doing so, posters 'transform' the material provided by the fictional text into a different kind of text and reshape it according to the perceptions they bring to the reading. The resulting comment is much more detached from the original text than a retelling, summary or even attempts at interpretation and analysis since the story or poem ceases to be the focus of the comment and becomes the background against which the post is constructed. There are 198 identified instances of Transformations in the fifteen threads devoted to the discussion of a single literary text. These are sustained comments uninterrupted by Appropriations, Intertextual References, Adoptions or Interactions. Transformations may contain

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embedded direct quotes and/or lexical repetitions. The following extracts, from the thread on 'Ullswater', are examples of instances coded as Transformations>Conceptualizations (Section 4.2.2):

> *First it made me think about how we sometimes drift away from the ones we once loved and with whom we shared our most treasured memories and happiest times. It is also so touching seeing how getting old makes us so vulnerable and susceptible to the passions and feelings that we spend part of our lives denying and trying to hide or avoid. It also made me think how the fear of death and guilt work on making people try to redeem their feeling of guilt.* (P02 in T01)

> *Family is so important, and they hardly knew each other. The lesson that I have always known is that family always must be together, after all is all that we've got.* (P05 in T01)

In these extracts, posters depart from a direct reference to situations and characters in the short story to draw moral values from it. By doing so, they transmute fictional narrative and characterization into ideas and concepts which they present as applicable in non-fictional contexts. Such practice is not a novelty in itself since the idea of extracting moral values from stories is engrained in many oral and written literary traditions. Fables, both in the East and in the West (Bodleian Library, 2013), morality plays (Walker, 2000) and biblical parables and proverbs (Weeks, 2010) are examples of what is referred to as 'wisdom literature' and whose traces can be found in the sample posts above.

Another form of transformation is *recontextualization*, when posters depart from the text being discussed to build up their own narratives. In such instances, participants adopt the voice of the narrator themselves to tell 'stories' that share themes and topics with the literary texts they have read. Gunesekera's story, for instance, has prompted a poster to share her narrative of family relationships in her own culture.

In African families, the future relationship between people/ children depends on principles based on love, affection that they learn when they are very young. They rarely have this sort of missing affection. African parents teach sharing, affection and unity to their children. For example: eating together, sharing the same plate of food, telling story around the fire and also sharing different points of view about everyday life. (P04 in T01)

In the same thread, a participant tells a story of suicide in his circle of acquaintances (29th August, 2007, 09:03 pm) and concludes his post with a reference to the 'darkness' of the lake water in the short story, which he sees as reflecting the 'inadequate account' of the character's suicide. The response (30th August 2007, 09:47 am) comes from a participant who adopts a narrative stance to connect both the literary text and the story told by her fellow Group member:

In Bengal, India, when we have a nightmare, we are told by elders to say it in front of water to reduce its potential atrocity and malevolence. When I was reading Ullswater, this cultural belief also came to my mind. The tragic death of Senaka and its memory in Victor's mind can be compared to a haunting nightmare and saying it in front of water helps in expurgating his pent up feeling of guilt, sadness etc. (P09 in T01)

There are numerous instances in the body of the data collected in which posters draw out concepts and make ethically-oriented statements and/or resort to story mode to share cross-cultural experiences similar to the ones found in the literary text. It is not unusual to find both examples together, as in the following extract where the poster connects the events in Maugham's 'The Verger' to his own personal experience and concludes with a general statement about the usefulness of literature in helping us to deal with events in real life:

We have a building in a commercial part of the city. This area is very valuable. Recently, my family built a shopping complex there. But, against my suggestions they sold off the shops. Looking at The Verger's prosperity, got from shops, I couldn't help narrating the whole story to my mother. What she thought of it I don't know... We can draw from the experiences in stories to help with real life. (P41 in T05)

When posters resort to story mode in their comments, they include narrative elements that unite the apparent fragmented experience of the fictional text into a connected new narrative that transforms the literary text from an impersonal account into a personal experience. For instance, in the case above, Maugham's short story provides the framework of the individual who changes his life by becoming a shop owner in Victorian London while the reader takes this framework and fills it with the figure of a family member who builds a shopping complex in an Indian city in the 20th century. The post/new story is born from this dialogic interaction between the text and the reader. In this way, the literary text and the poster enter into a dialogic relationship with each other for the text speaks to the reader beyond its own chronotopes and provides a basic structure which the reader/poster relates to his own context thus generating his own story. Another example of the same process can be observed in a post on Tagore (2013)'s 'The Home-coming':

> *...in my culture parents disapprove us only to see how much we can keep trying to do things, or how far we can go in tackling life challenges. They wanted us to be honest and any wrongdoing was severely punished in case they knew about. Of course they wanted us safe and to know almost everything we were doing with friends, but most of adolescent groups are mixed as we see Phatik's "gang" and some are violent and careless in their games. As boys we climbed and fell from trees, took bath in the drainages, went to beaches without parent's consent (with a natural innocence). In order to escape punishment we had had to keep it a secret, or would be punished as Phatik was when his mother knew he had hurt his brother. In this environment we learned not to expect for parents approvals since we thought asking for their permission to do things was a half way to make them stop us.* (P11 in T13)

In this case, Tagore's story provides the framework of the boy leader of a gang of children who lives in the Indian countryside and who is sent to live with a relative in the city as punishment for being unruly. The reader establishes a connection between the chronotope of the character in the text and his own by resetting the story in his own childhood in Africa. It is from this 'conversation' between the literary text and the poster that a different narrative is generated in the form of a forum post.

5.2.5 Intertextual references

Besides prompting participants to write their own narratives, the literary texts discussed in the forum also prompt references to other texts (in pink). There are a number of instances where other works of literature, either from the same author or from other authors, are mentioned or directly quoted. The samples below come from various threads in the forum:

> *[Tagore] himself was involved in the events of the stories he tells (I've read the translations of The Judge, The Parrot's Tale, The Cornet...)* (P11 in T13)

> *'David Swan' by Nathaniel Hawthorne is a work of art, which is not common in the present day. It is wholly subjected to an explication of an exquisite belief that "Fate plays with two balls" (Sarbievius, a Polish-Lithuanian poet who wrote in Latin in early seventeenth century).* (P59 in T07)

> *I am reminded of another poem, by [Yeats].*
> *"...And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,*
> *Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings..."*
> *(THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE)* (P60 in T08)

References are also made to texts in other forms of media. In the discussion on Tennyson (Tennyson and Roberts, 2009)'s 'The Lady of Shallot' (T12) P09 mentions Loreenna McKennitt's song version of the poem and provides a link to a YouTube video and links to Waterhouse's paintings. In the thread on Stevenson (2004)'s 'The Song of the Morrow' (T13), a link to a video production of the story is mentioned by P23 while the whole thread of Digital Stories for Literacy (T20, 46 comments) is devoted to the discussion of participants own video productions of poems they upload on YouTube.

In the ORG discussion forum, poetry is the literacy genre that generates the highest number of references to other texts. For instance, the thread on 'The Lady of Shallot' (T12) contains references to Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', Wilde's 'The Nightingale and the Rose', and Plato's *Republic*. Tennyson's poem also prompts

posters to publish three of their own pieces of verse related to it by the instigation of

P09 who finds '*The story of Elaine, as given by Wikipedia, is quite disappointing*' and

urges Group members who are '*creative writers or poets [to] come up with a better*

original explanation for the curse, the Lady's passion for Sir Lancelot and her death

at Camelot'. The thread on 'Michael' (T08) contains comments on poems by Yeats,

W.H. Auden, on Dante's *Inferno*, and on the Gospels. Wordsworth's poem also

prompts posters to share four of their own poems in the thread.

There are 77 references to other texts in the fifteen threads devoted to the

discussion of single texts, including poetry, folktales, short stories and novels as well

as non-fictional and religious texts, with references to various books in the Bible. On

a number of occasions, direct quotes are embedded in the intertextual reference

adding a third dimension to the post, a text-within-a-text that had been written to

discuss another text, as in the sample below:

> *To borrow the concluding words from Rodney Shewan, 'The Nightingale and*
> *the Rose' is essentially an ironic tale of "misplaced romantic passion and its*
> *tragic incommunicability".* (P19 in T04)

> *Fascinating story! Somehow it brings to mind Coleridge and his Xanadu*
> *"Weave a circle round him thrice... [Wealth, Love, Death]...for all who see*
> *cry 'beware, beware',...for he has drunk the Milk of Paradise".*
> *Who is he? and why do people say 'Beware'?*
> *Is the young man himself a threat to the others.* (P20 in T07)

Intertextual references here are not intended to directly refer to the concept of

intertextuality, discussed in Section 2.3.2, which is a much more complex and less

transparent term to denote the 'intersection of textual surfaces' among a number of

different writings (Kristeva, 1980, p.65); however, the notion of readers moving

among texts and which undermines the complete originality of any textual production

still remains (Allen, 2000, pp.1-2).

5.2.6 Blending

The samples presented and discussed in this section so far were extracted from the different posts to illustrate specific relationships, but different features often occur together in the forum posts. The multi-faceted nature of participants' comment and their multiple relations with the literary texts are exemplified in diverse combinations of the features discussed above in virtually every single post. In the examples below, we can see the colours representing each category and how they come together in the posters' textual construction:

And the Nightingale was loved by its friends, the trees and all the nature like each of us is loved by someone, even if one loves someone else like a chain. I love that the story takes us into metaphysics, the nature of existence, to teach us the reality about existence is very complex all the world around. It was the chance to study my metaphisics and must say thanks for this fairy but teaching short story! Great it has a place for us readers: "So he returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read." It was like this line was addressed to me as I have to go back now and read something. I'll see to love if I have the time! (P11 in T04)

A very much disturbing story indeed! Interesting to see how the true Louise finds her short-lived freedom at last! Interesting to once more read about slavery as being related to marriage, about the murderable power ill relations entail, about the power that one person may exercise on other, "There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature." (P16 in T06)

It is perhaps not possible to define love, and I am hardly qualified enough to attempt to. The Student is pathetically restricted by bookish knowledge in his perspective, "for he only knew the things that are written down in books", so much so that the first sight he has of the beautiful rose is occasioned by the inane comment "It is so beautiful that I am sure it has a long Latin name". The daughter of the Professor is, of course, what Clifton Snider ('On the Loom of Sorrow') would term "a sort of negative female dandy". (P19 in T11)

Colour Code

Direct Quotes

Lexical Repetitions

Appropriations

Transformations

Intertextual References

In the samples above we can see how posters created complex texts incorporating direct quotes and low frequency lexical items present in the literary text discussed

(*metaphysics*), adding attempts at interpretation and analysis, and using concepts and moral lessons drawn from the stories. They also connect such stories to non-fictional contexts, as in the case of the reference to marriage being related to slavery in the second extract, and insert quotes from the text discussed as well as from other texts they came in contact with, as seen in the last sentence in the third extract.

5.3 Question 1B: Group interaction

The extracts in the previous section of this chapter illustrate the interactions between readers and texts. The interactions that happen between readers, and which are triggered by the reading of the literary work, are equally important for this investigation for they answer the second question posed in this study, namely to what extent responses to texts read in the group are related to Group interaction. Exchanges between participants also make an integral part of the texture of the posts and, therefore, are a distinctive feature of participants' writing.

Although the ORG is a discussion forum where people post comments and reply to other member's comments, the actual posting does not seem to be the main activity happening on the website. For instance, in May 2013 there were over 1,400 individuals registered as Group members, however, analysis of the forum posts shows that posting was done mostly by a core of long-term members and a few new members that took up posting with enthusiasm, besides occasional contributions by various other members. Data from the online survey show that 74.5% of the 126 respondents never posted to the forum. The reasons that were given for that vary, but a number of comments from posters about themselves reveal some anxiety about not being able to adequately express their ideas and opinion in English, and not having knowledge enough to contribute with relevant ideas to the discussion (Figure 5.5).

Lack of time is the most frequent reason (28.23%), but being a newcomer to the Group also appears as a significant deterrent to posting (25.88%). Although technical issues do not score high as a reason for not posting, they still have been mentioned even by participants who had sufficient access to be able to take part in the online survey.

Reasons	Per cent	Sample Comments
Time	28.33%	• *I'm too busy...* • *While I'm trying to follow the discussion, I'm doing some other tasks at the same time* • *Because I don't have any time to check my post* • *I don't have enough time to prepare useful writings*
Being a newcomer	25.88%	• *I have just joined in* • *I registered some days ago* • *I have been a member only for a couple of weeks* • *Perhaps it is my first experience in this site so I need time to read more and think, check my ideas about the topics discussed* • *I am not accustomed yet to the group*
Low language proficiency level	7.05%	• *I think my English languish [sic] not good* • *I feel I cannot express myself in English very well* • *My E is not good enough-I think so!* • *Confusing that I don't good in English*
Technical issues	8.23%	• *I usually don't get any alerts.* • *Time and Internet constraints in china* • *I don't have mobile which have net facility* • *problems with internet, it is slow*
Lack of confidence	23.52%	• *I'm very shy* • *Not confident enough* • *I feel I don't have anything to offer* • *I do not think that my opinion is special enough to be posted* • *Would it be really interesting? That's the point* • *I don't feel like I have enough expertise to contribute* • *I only read the forum the reason is that I am too shy*
No particular reason	10.58%	• *Not any special reason* • *No reasons*

Figure 5.5: Survey respondents' reasons for not posting to the forum - sample comments.

Statistical correlation analysis of the survey data conducted on SPSS shows that there is no significant link between posting and the particular text type respondents would like to have available for discussion, neither is there a significant link between posting and the frequency with which survey respondents visit the site. Correlation analysis was conducted comparing information between two variables to determine possible relationships between them. A number of correlation analyses were done to try to identify relations between posting and other variables (Appendix F) but no significant links were found. For example, no significant statistical correlation was found between posting and particular reasons for joining the Group (Figure 5.6).

Reasons for joining the Group			
	To have access to literary texts in English	Correlation	.127
		Significance (2-tailed)	.161
	To discuss literature with other readers	Correlation	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.
	To communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds	Correlation	.318
Have you ever posted to the forum ?		Significance (2-tailed)	.000
	To share my professional experience	Correlation	.298
		Significance (2-tailed)	.001
	To gain access to literature teaching materials	Correlation	.118
		Significance (2-tailed)	.194
	To share my own writings	Correlation	.281
		Significance (2-tailed)	.002
	To improve my English language skills	Correlation	-.069
		Significance (2-tailed)	.449
	Other reason for joining	Correlation	.123
		Significance (2-tailed)	.173

Figure 5.6: Correlation between posting and reasons for joining the Group.

Thirty-one out of 126 survey respondents who have posted (24.6%) reported different reasons for deciding to write a comment in the discussion forum (Figure 5.7).

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Reasons for posting
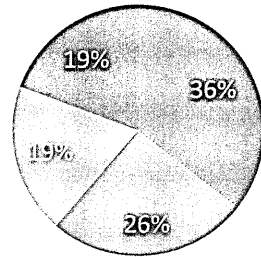
□ Desire to be part of the group

□ Inspiration given by the literary text

□ Desire to respond to a post by another member

□ No particular reason

Figure 5.7: Survey respondents' motivation to post.

Data from the semi-structured narratives, collected among survey respondents who never posted themselves, show that sharing experience (19 occurrences), expressing opinions (15 occurrences), and exchanging/generating ideas (12 occurrences) are regarded as important features for Group participation. The comments indicate that reading other members' posts in the forum has its own merits and some sort of connection is still established between posters and non-posters, even though these do not write a direct response to the comments they read (Figure 5.8).

	When I read other members' comments in the forum I usually...
N01	...usually feel them round me
N02	...take notes to avoid these gaps in the future. Also, these comments provide me with good experience, and sometimes they remind me of things may slip out or forgotten information
N03	...think about how others' reception and perception of ideas
N04	...take some time to think things over.
N05	...find it interesting to find out how other people may have different interpretations of facts I would have taken for granted after my own reading
N06	...try to compare notes with what they write in order to get a clearer picture of how the thread is developing
N07	...check out the connection between the comments and the text
N08	...compare them with my own and with the precepts known from literary studies. I also think how their comments reflect their personalities
N09	...get excited to know that there are many people who are improving their skills through this group
N10	...have new ideas and maybe I will have more communication with other people and improve my bad language
N11	...analyse the way they express their ideas and opinions. Also new experiences usually capture me.

Figure 5.8: Semi-narrative writers' views on posts they read in the forum.

5.3.1 Direct quotes and lexical repetitions

Analysis of the forum posts reveals that some of the patterns of interaction between posters are similar to the ones observed between the readers and the literary texts. For example, posters tend to directly quote from each other (**in green**) and use specific lexical items employed by a previous poster (in orange) (Section 4.4.2). Such instances were originally underlined when the data was coded to differentiate them from the direct quotes and lexical repetitions coming from the literary texts. The underlining was removed from the samples below to facilitate visualization.

Analysis of the forum posts reveals that posters quoting from each other are far less frequent occurrences than posters quoting from the literary texts; however, there still a number of occasions in which writers' borrow each other's words. There are 46 instances in the fifteen threads devoted to the discussion of a single literary text when posters insert a direct quote from other posters into their comments. The examples below show how participants quote each other to agree with a particular statement, disagree with it, pose questions, or develop a topic further:

> *As [P6] said in a previous post, 'Ullswater is a good text of outstanding language.'* (Moderator quoting P6 in T01)

> *I fully agree with your suggestion that 'the characters bear their fate stoically', but in my reading I....* (P11 quoting P10 in T01)

> *Why [P11] when you said "finally where is the ghost in this story? Not where he supposed to be"...* (P11 to P33 in T03)

> *The second part conveys destruction, extinction, a damaged environment, where "the purity of the land is lost to civilization"* (P12 quoting P21 in T08)

Quotes are usually used by writers to enhancement the reliability and authority of their statements. The fact that quotes from another posters are less numerous than quotes from literary text and less frequently used to build up an argument may be seen as an indication of how much less authoritative posters consider the others' contribution to the forum. In comparison, it may be also seen as an indication of how

much they regard the literary text itself as the final authority in matters of interpretation.

Likewise, other posters' comments seem to be a less frequently used as source of new vocabulary to be incorporated into a participants' post. There is only one instance in the fifteen threads devoted to the discussion of a single literary text where a participant seems to borrow very infrequent lexical item from another. It happens in T03 when P32 uses the word *eerie* in 'her efforts to get rid of the eerie feelings' (10th March 2008, 01:52 pm), and in a following post (14th March 2008, 12:26 pm) P26 uses the word *eerily* in 'restful abode in a world that persistently remains to her strangely familiar and eerily foreign'. *Eerie* has a 297 rounded frequency per million words in the BNC.

Yet – as in the case of lexical repetitions in connection to the literary texts – it is not possible to establish in a reliable way which words posters in fact borrowed from each other. However, the fact that P26 had been exposed to a low frequency lexical item and later employed it productively illustrates the fact that posters can make use of vocabulary previously used by others in the construction of their arguments. The analysis of lexical repetitions here only considers cases of very low frequency in the BCN, and there are no means of establishing whether a poster had already some previous knowledge or had used a particular lexical item before. Therefore, perhaps more interesting in terms of how much posters may be influenced by other posters' novel language item is the fact that in some cases a participant uses a relatively frequent word and it becomes a recurrent item in subsequent comments. For instance, in Gunesekera's 'A House in the Country' (T02), P14 uses the words *powerful and complex* to describe the narrative and after that the Coordinator, P3, P11 and P33 use them again seven times altogether in the same thread. A similar

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phenomenon is observed in the thread devoted to Wilde's 'The Nightingale and the Rose' (T04/11) where P12 uses the word *sacrifice* twice in the fourth post in the thread and after that the word appears 26 times in various other posts in the same thread. Although there are other stories and poems in the Group that could have prompted members to use the word *sacrifice* in their comments, not other occurrence is registered in any of them.

5.3.2 Interactions

Interactions here are considered the instances where participants directly or indirectly address each other when posting to the forum. The most frequent form of interaction is the opening address when participants greet each other, either speaking to the group as a whole or directing their responses to particular individuals. General ways of addressing are usually *'Hi All'* and *'Hi everyone'* with variations using the words *hello* instead, but more elaborate versions, such as *'Dear Colleagues'* and *'Hi Readers'*, can also be found. P01 uses *'Dear ELT e-reading friends'* in T02 (13th September 2007, 08:11pm) and immediately after, in the same thread, P33 uses *'Dear ELT e- reading pals'* (13th September 2007, 11:47pm).

The usual greeting used when directly addressing another Group member is *'Dear'* followed by the name of the person. There are only 31 instances in the forum threads opened to discuss particular literary texts where the posters start writing without any form of addressing others. Nine out of these 31 are posts by a native-speaker of English whose posts are characterized by short matter-of-fact statements without any form of addressing or final salutation. In general, however, the tone of addressing is polite and frequently posters address the previous commentator by name. Names are also frequently used in conjunction with a general greeting as in

'Dear Chris and All'. The general address may, as in *all*, may be a form of addressing all the other posters involved in the discussion in a particular thread; otherwise, it may also be a way posters have to acknowledge that their comments would be read by a large online audience and as a way of reaching out for other potential Group members who had not engaged in posting.

Another interactive strategy posters seemed to adopt is the use of questions that invited a response. In the samples from T01 below, the three different forms of interactions coded in the data can be observed: naming, questions and answers and agreeing and disagreeing.

> (P04) *Hi [P3], It is just to answer your question addressed to the group. I also agree with you. For critical readers, the narrator could not give all the details. I also think he wrote everything for any audience. (...) I am also leaving the same question to our dear colleagues: Should the narrator tell everything to his/her reader?*

> *Hello All, I'm [P30], from the south of B____. I'm a university teacher and I've been following your discussions with interest. As for our friend's question about the narrator's role, my opinion is no, I don't think he should tell us everything!* (P30)

> *Hi [P30], Welcome to the group. I agree with that the narrator shouldn´t tell us everything. And this one doesn't.* (P02)

Although indirect and rhetorical questions cannot be considered a direct form of interaction they were also coded as Interactions>questions & answers because they are also intended to prompt some form of response. In fact, the very act of posting in the forum is an open invitation for communication with others since Group members know that their comments are available to all other current and possible future members in the TeachingEnglish website who are also be able to read and reply to any comment as they wish. The exchanges below illustrate how posters made use of rhetorical questions and indirect forms of inviting replies:

> *We found the last line interesting: "Heaven is for them that bring the rain." Shall we compare this "rain" to God's blessings?...* (P12 in T08)

So... are you going to let the passion into your lives? (P61 in T11)

...That certainly doesn't happen here. Wonder what others think. (P25 in T14)

Maybe I myself am going too far on my thoughts about the text...(P23 in T14)

As the Group Coordinator, one of my roles is to promote discussion and motivate members to post. When analysing the data I became more aware of the interactive strategies I adopted myself, and found out that they do not greatly differ from the ones adopted by other posters, such as greeting, naming, and using of direct and indirect questions. My opening posts set the discussion threads. They always included a greeting and closed with an invitation for reading and commenting, such as *'I hope you enjoy your reading and I look forward to having your comments here'* or slight variations on the same phrase. At the beginning, before setting up this research project, I used to engage in the discussion with other members and write comments that could be as long as theirs. After starting this study my posts became quite short and instead of directly engaging in a discussion, I resorted much more to questions to stir the discussion and motivate people to post, as in the examples below:

> *Hi [P12], Agree...actually, I think it would be very likely that it would put us into more trouble...Life is a leap of faith, isn't it?* (P00 in T07)

> *Anyway, I am still not sure about the end of this story... What do Phatik words really mean??* (P00 in T13)

From a research ethical point of view my partial withdrawing from the discussion forum was the correct course of action demanded by the ethics of research; on the other hand, I observed that my absence deprived long-term and new members of a point of reference and of someone with whom they were used to exchanging ideas. The result was that P12 slowly became the most frequent voice in the Forum to the point of dominating the discussions and perhaps demotivating others to engage. A positive aspect of this is that I could observe the interactions from a more detached

point of view, but it is noticeable that the latest discussion threads contain posts with less complex content compared to the first threads and exchanges among participants are shorter. Another factor that may have significantly contributed to the change in the patterns of interaction is the fact that the ORG moved from the enCompassCulture website to the TeachingEnglish website, which has a broader reach and led to a substantial expansion in the number of Group members.

5.3.3 Adoptions

Adoptions are also a form of interaction among members but are much more mediated by the contact with the literary texts than the more straightforward interactive strategies discussed above. Adoptions are instances where the comments of one poster are prompted by another's previous comments on a theme or topic triggered by the reading of the text. There are 167 identified instances of Adoptions (in aqua) in the fifteen threads devoted to the discussion of a single literary text. These are chunks of comments uninterrupted by Appropriations, Transformations or Intertextual References. Adoptions may contain embedded direct quotes and/or lexical repetitions. They may be briefly interrupted by some interactive strategies, such naming the person who brought up the idea being discussed or openly agreeing with a previous statement posted by another participant, as in the example below:

> As for the narrator not having a name, I agree with you, [P12], that it is not
> relevant, and I also agree with you, [P11], that the narrator is probably the
> author himself (both were born in Colombo; both are now living in London).
> (P23 in T15)

When posters do not acknowledge the previous poster's contribution and simply re-state a similar point ignoring that it has just been mentioned, the instance is coded as Adoption>borrowing ideas as in the extracts below from the thread on Wilde's 'The Nightingale and the Rose' (T04/11). In the fifth post into the discussion (20th January

2009, 12:46 pm) a participant makes a reference to the religious overtones of the tale. In the post that immediately follows it (21st January 2009, 07:25 pm), the poster makes no reference to the point brought up by the previous poster and presents the same idea in a way that suggests that she has either decided to ignore the other member's comment or simply had not read it and has come to the same conclusion inspired directly by the text. As the posts are very close to each other and there seems to be no attempt to develop the topic first presented, the instance was coded as Adoptions>Borrowing:

> *This thought, I think, has much of a whole spiritual dimension; it has much of similar to The Lord's sacrifice for mankind salvation. So has the Nightingale's sacrifice towards the young Student's Love salvation.* (P12 in T04)

> *This story of love comes from the remote time, even in the bible. We can see that God loves the world and gave his only Son who was killed by the same people.* (P04 in T04)

Only two instances of clear borrowing were coded in the 17 threads devoted to specific literary texts. The second one occurred in the thread on Tagore's 'The Parrot's Tale' (T17) when a participant comments of the historical context of the short story creation and the second poster after her makes a similar comment ignoring the previous remark:

> *The moment I read this tale was first published in Bengali in 1918 it made me think of Bengali situation at that time. It was still a British colony and striving for independence (together with India and other places on that region)* (P23 in T17)

> *Though the story was written long back in the context of the colonial education system of India, its appeal is universal.* (P62 in T17)

Much more frequent are instances where posters develop a topic previously brought up by another poster and which had presented a novel angle to the discussion of the

text as in the exchange below between two posters in the thread on Wilde's story (T04):

> *[The Nightingale] interprets things through her own emotions, for as Wilde himself had remarked, "No great artist ever sees things as they really are."* (P19 in T04)

> *Now it's done! [P19] has given us the key! thanks a lot! Well, literature sometimes is just like a mirror and Oscar Wilde saw nothing but absence of love in it, or maybe he did not find one. Oh man, how do you know that! Eh, its literature! It's just a feeling we have in front of a mirror!* (P18 in T04)

> *@ [P18]: Now that you speak of mirrors, it almost seems as if Wilde has held up an enchanting mirror through his story to reflect real life and society.* (P19 in T04)

The exchange below is from the thread on Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shallot' (T12), a participant (P08) includes an intertextual reference to Waterhouse's painting and after that the paintings become more the focus of the conversation than the poem itself:

> *Thanks for sharing with us the paintings, seeing them after reading the story has had huge impact, when I looked at the Boat I remembered about the final tragic moment, about the fateful moment, and when I saw the Room painting the description of the Lady of Shallot room in the poem, I could actually re-read the story by looking at the paintings. It was an enjoyable experience. The way the artist retells the story is unique, I think.* (P11 in T12)

> *The 'room' picture gives a real feeling of the lady's traumatic isolation and the web she's weaving...I know there's some background to the poem in your introduction- I never knew the story and used to wonder what name the lady wrote around the prow.* (P08 in T12)

> *Thanks for the links to these wonderful paintings! They have added further inspiration. I also think they have helped me reflect on the curse...* (P12 in T12)

5.3.4 Blending

As in the case of the relationships between readers and the literary texts, the relationships between readers in the forum are not limited to a single category in each post. Instead, they are all interwoven and many times overlap. Posts often show a

combination of features that denote both connections with the literary text and with other posts.

	Colour Code
Hi folks, this was the first time I'd encountered Romesh Gunesekara and I loved this story. Thanks once again for leading me to another fine new (for me) author. I agree with many of the comments made here, especially the one made about the cultural mishmash present in the story. I'm always drawn to this as I've experienced first-hand something similar. But what struck me most on my initial reading of the story were the two characters of Byron and his friend (I've only now realised that he's not actually named in the story which highlights what I want to say) [...] Well, I'm off to think some more about the role of the camera in the story. Thanks for those who pointed this out. I hadn't really noticed its importance. (P24 in T15)	**Interactions** **Appropriations** **Transformations** **Adoptions** **Intertextual References**
[P12] and all, As for the narrator not having a name, I agree with you, [P12], that it is not relevant, and I also agree with you, [P11], that the narrator is probably the author himself (both were born in Colombo; both are now living in London). But now, the other main character does have a name: Byron. From all names in the world, he is named the same as the famous author who is well known not only for his literary works, but also for having been involved in so many love affairs. The Byron in 'Goat' also seems to get involved very easily. And then the name Rehana. Of course, there is a singer with that name but I guess there is no relation here whatsoever. (P23 in T15)	

In the extracts above we can see the use of greeting, naming and expressions of agreement **(in red)**. Not only do posters attempt to develop the topic initiated by the previous commentator by keeping the discussion focused on it but they also add more content to the discussion **(in aqua)** and interweave that with comments which go back to the literary text **(in blue)**. Extra voices are then added to the composition of the comment: in the case of the first extract, the poster takes the discussion further afield and recontextualizes it in her own life **(in purple)**; in the second extract, the poster makes intertextual references to Byron's poetry and also to popular culture **(in pink)**.

5.4 Question 1C: Technology-mediated communication

Another aspect that this study was set up to examine is to what extent and in what ways participants' responses to the texts they read in the Group and their accounts of Group experience are related to the ORG online environment.

The most visible form of communication between participants in the Group is the exchange of posts in the discussion forum. However, as discussed before, for a number of possible different reasons, the vast majority of the over 1,400 members of the ORG has never posted to the forum. Yet, the number of individuals registering in the ORG grows daily and data from the semi-structured narratives show that lurkers, or non-posters, still seem to value their membership of the Group despite not actively engaging in forum exchanges. Analysis of the semi-structured narratives written by non-posters shows that participants often establish connections between reading in the Group with cognitive processes by using words such as *awareness, ideas, knowledge, opinion, understanding,* and *thoughts* to describe their Group experience (Figure 5.9).
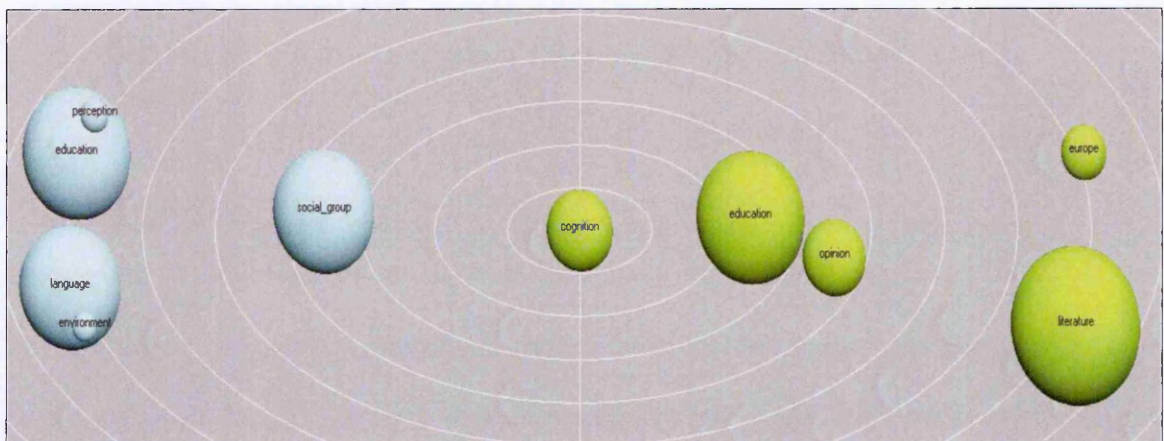
Figure 5.9: References and relationships for 'cognition' in the semi-structured narratives.

Comments in the semi-structured narratives attest that although they do not engage in posting, these Group members still consider it a valuable experience to connect with

others online to read and discuss literature. However, some limitations and disadvantages are also brought to the fore in the comments below:

> *In my point of view, reading literature online has advantages and disadvantages. However, let's shed light on the shiny face of the coin which is the advantages. First of all, something remarkable for teacher students or keen people who are full time- work. For, these groups can't find sometimes a space of time to open a page. Regardless, also some materials are exorbitant not all people can afford them. The marvellous advantage which sharing the people's opinions. On the other hand, mixing with people and keeping in touch with them is a huge beneficial thing which we miss on line. (N02)*

> *When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I first download it onto my ebook reader. I then usually read it through once and then mull over it for a few days. After that I read it again before going to the site to see what others have made of it. When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually take some time to think things over. I'm afraid I don't comment as my time online is pretty limited. I don't have a computer at home and can only comment from the local library. But I do try and read the comments once a week and invariably profit from them. In my opinion, reading literature online is not as good an experience as reading a book. I still prefer books. But reading with a group is one of the great advantages of online reading. (N04)*

The interactional, human contact aspect that N02 sees as missing in the online environment is also highlighted by other narrative writers. For instance, N08 often finds that *'the result is rather disappointing because the social contact with face-to-face interaction is missing'.* On the other hand, N01 finds that *'connecting with other teachers online is a challenge and a helping hand as well. I think the online medium helps me / prevents me from loneliness.'* The same sense of connectedness is expressed by N11 who thinks *'the online medium helps me in getting involved in different useful activities with people from the globe.'*

In spite of frequent comments in the semi-structured narratives and in the discussion forum about the value of being in contact with other people online, data from the survey show that some members have the ORG as their sole online network experience. 47.6% of the 126 respondents do not participate in any other form of online network and/or social media. Reasons for that may vary and could be also

related to time, technical constraints, and other issues mentioned by respondents as reasons for not posting to the ORG forum (see Figure 5.5). Survey respondents who belong to other networks and social media list Facebook and a number of Teachers Associations forums as their other online groups; Twitter and LinkedIn are mentioned only three times. Nevertheless, data from the survey also show a higher proportion of posters among participants who are members of other online professional networks as well (Figure 5.10).

Have you ever posted to the forum?			
		Yes	No
Are you a member of other online professional networks?	Yes	22	36
		66.7%	39.1%
	No	11	56
		33.3%	60.9%
Total		33 - 100%	92 – 100%

Figure 5.10: Relationship between participation in other online networks and posting.

Furthermore, long-term Group members and the most frequent posters to the forum (e.g. P01, P02, P03, P08, P09, P13, P16 and P17) are also members of other professional online networks related to literature and other social media. Most of them are involved with other learning and technology initiatives: P01 has a very strong professional-social presence on Facebook and Twitter, P02 is a keen blogger, and P08 was deeply involved with the very first ELT online community created by the British Council in Brazil. P12, the most prolific post writer in various threads of the ORG, is also a member of various IATEFL SIG discussion lists and a frequent contributor to IATEFL Online forums. P11, the second most frequent poster, also became the coordinator of his own small online reading group within the ORG and is involved in a radio reading group project in his own country. However, it is not possible to

determine, from the data collected in this investigation, how much involvement with online professional networks and social media occasional posters to the forum have.

Neither is it possible to determine, based on the data collected, whether ORG members also belong to other face-to-face reading groups. Although this investigation is not a comparative study between offline reading groups and the ORG, some conclusions may be drawn on similarities and differences between both based on some features observed by Hartley (2002).

According to Hartley (2002, pp.74–84), there are four factors that contribute to 'good discussions': 'the books themselves, the range of opinions in the group, the background of context and information that people bring to the book and the congenial atmosphere of the group.' The first factor is the text being discussed and Hartley's data show that participants considered it important to cognitively and emotionally engage with the chosen book, otherwise the discussion would not develop (pp.74-76). Similarly, some texts selected for the Group attracted more posts than others, as the threads selected for analysis here; conversely there are a number of texts that, for whatever reasons, simply failed to attract a connected sequence of responses from the readers, such as 'Clap hands, here comes Charlie' by Beryl Bainbridge, 'Half-brothers' by Elizabeth Gaskell, 'Cold Room' by Regi Clair, and 'The Idiot Boy' by William Wordsworth.

As for the second factor, discussion threads that thrived in terms of number of contributions are those where a range of different points of view on the plot or characters are expressed. These are threads where there is some level of disagreement between posters and where posters respond to each other engaging in a sequence of exchanges. For instance, in the thread on Maugham's 'The Verger' (T05) P10 and P38 engage in a debate about P10's use of the word 'inferior' to describe the verger in

the story. That prompts P39 to add a comment about her doubts on the character being able of *'being close to Spiritual things'* since he was simply *'VERGER - a man whose duty it is to take care of the interior of a church building'*. P38 replies and the discussion then unfolds in eighteen further comments with other new posters adding their voices to the debate on perceptions of moral values and social class.

The third aspect is 'the background of context and information that people bring to the book' (Hartley, 2002, pp.74) and this can be seen in the instances coded as conceptualization and re-contextualization as well as in the intertextual references posters make. The range of views, information about other countries and cultures and posters previous reading experiences prompt members to post. Participants seem to give considerable value to the exchange of information about other countries and contexts embedded in the posts and point out the enriching multicultural aspect of being part of the Group:

> *I love the group for it's powerful in the diversity of opinions however different our biliefs may be, we can share our reading experience.* (P11 in T03)

> *I'm very happy to have become a member of the Reading Group and be able to exchange opinions and ideas with you from different countries!* (P28 in T13)

In spite of these similarities, the environment in which these exchanges occur is very different from the ones researched by Hartley (2002) and others investigating face-to-face reading groups (Samantha Duncan, 2009; Sanacore, 2013; Swann and Allington, 2009) since the overwhelming majority of ORG members have little or no offline contact with each other. Granting that there are considerable differences among different face-to-face reading groups investigated by those researchers, some aspects are nevertheless regularly observed (Hartley, 2002). Figure 5.11 attempts to summarize and compare *some* of those features to the ones observed in the ORG.

	Hartley, 2002	This study
Membership	Usually linked to local, small communities; quite regular number of members; members usually belong to different professional groups; diverse cultural backgrounds; most adult groups with a high number of female participants.	Worldwide community; open, fluctuating membership; members belong to one professional group; diverse cultural backgrounds, no specific information on participants' gender.
Interaction	Usually pre-determined, regular, scheduled meetings; predominantly face-to-face contact and interaction; mostly oral communication; typically immediate response to other members' comments; the discussion is accessible only to group participants and, potentially, those in contact with them.	Flexible, unrestricted, and unscheduled access to the discussion; predominantly, and often exclusively, online contact and interaction; text-based communication; mostly delayed response to other members' comments; the discussion is accessible to any individual visiting the Group as long as the website remains live.
Reading	Texts available as hardcopies; texts usually selected by group members; wide range of criteria for text selection; typically all members read the same text for a given period.	Text available as electronic copies; texts mostly selected by the Group coordinator; choice of text restricted by copyright restrictions according to the UK laws and regulations; members may be reading different texts available on the website in a given period.
Reader-response	Mostly oral commentary; personal and ethically oriented responses to texts; comparisons to other books read together. *No data regarding other linguistic and compositional features observed in the texts read; no data on the use of quotes; no data on creative writing triggered by texts discussed in the group.*	Predominantly written commentary; personal and ethically oriented responses to texts; frequent intertextual references; presence of other linguistic and compositional features observed in the text; frequent use of quotes; creative writing output triggered by texts discussed in the Group.

Figure 5.11: Some similarities and differences between face-to-face reading groups and the ORG.

The main question posed by this study in terms of CMC was to what extent and in what ways participants' responses to texts read in the Group are related the technology-mediated nature of the ORG. Some features are easily noticeable in the

composition of the posts; others are not visible and can only be inferred by considering the literature on CMC and discussion forums. Wright's (2005, p.16) concept of *observable* and *unobservable* elements of classroom management can be useful to help us distinguish between these two sets of factors in the ORG discussion forum (Figure 5.12).
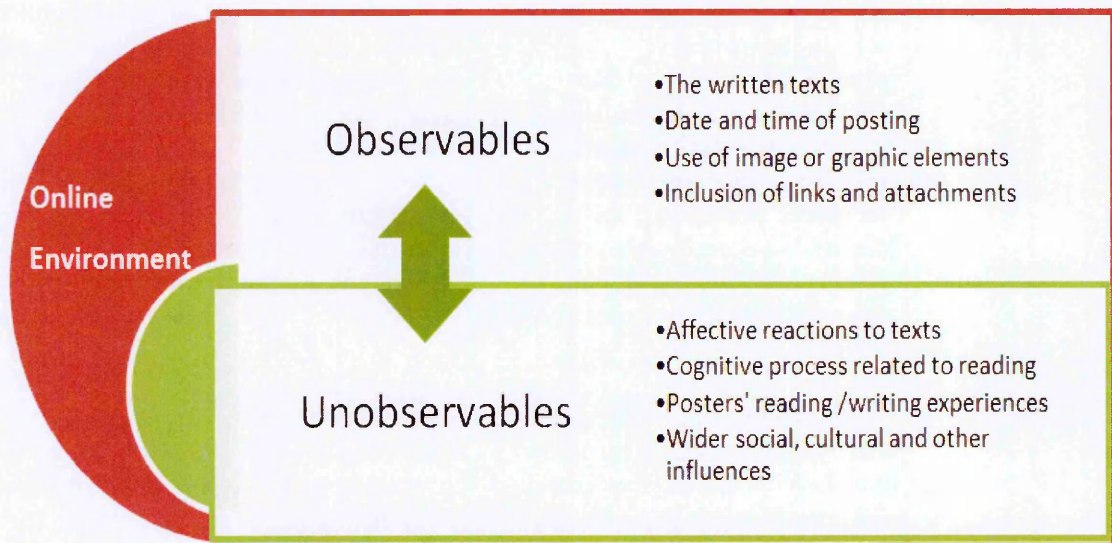
Figure 5.12: Observable and unobservable features in online forum interaction.

5.4.1 Observable features

The most obvious feature of the forum interactions between readers and the literary text as well as between a reader and other readers is the post or reply itself. The written texts posted to the Group constitute most of the data in this study and have provided the content for most of the discussion so far. Although the ORG and face-to-face reading groups share some features in terms of organization and interaction - as discussed previously - there are three features that are especially salient in the Group online environment, such as the *use of direct quotes*, the *development of creative writing* and the presence of *intertextual reference*.

USE OF DIRECT QUOTES

Using other people's utterances as they were spoken is a frequent feature of everyday conversation and journalistic writing, and it usually appears in the form of reported speech. In novels and short stories, the presence of an individual's utterance is manifest in portions of the narrative that constitute dialogues among characters. The use of direct quotes in a written text is a direct attempt to incorporate other voices in the text and posters in the ORG make frequent use of this strategy as illustrated before. The fact that the literary text is available in electronic form could be one of the reasons for the high frequency of direct quotes embedded in posters' sentence and paragraphs. The electronic availability of the text makes it much easier to simply copy and paste a direct quote into one's own text and this may explain the inclusion of quite long direct quotes in some posts. An example is the following post where 41.8% of P12's words in the comment are directly quoted from Tagore's text (in green).

> *Hi [P11], Those were words of relief indeed. They are certainly resonating in every mother's heart on reading this moving story. Regarding Phatik's younger brother, Makhan, I have thought of R. Tagore's philosophical insights while portraying Makhan's profile. For instance, "He was pushed, rather timidly, by one of the boys and told to get up but he remained quite unconcerned. He appeared like a young philosopher meditating on the futility of games." Another flash of the story regarding Makhan's profile has seemingly to do with the writer's moral concerns: "Makhan heard the order and made it a point of honour to stick on. But he overlooked the fact, like those who attempt earthly fame in other matters, that there was peril in it." What do you think of this? Can the relationship master-servant at some point of this story be related to Indian social ranks? I also wonder if Phatik's mother's gesture of respect, sort of veneration towards her brother can be associated with Indian cultural and educational values. "She bowed to the ground and touched his feet." A "sunken barge on the river banks" and "floods" are also typical environmental scenarios in India, I think. (P12 in T13)*

The following two extracts also show long direct quotes from the literary text embedded into some participants' posts:

> *The following is my reading notes. I want to share this with the group. 'I could hear sheep bleating in the field behind us. Up and down the long*

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garden the borders brimmed with pink and blue English flowers: Senaka would have known all their names, but the foxgloves and hollyhocks out at the bottom of the garden framing Ullswater in purple are the only ones I know, and those only because I asked' (P09 in T01)

Where she really belongs to is a "set of small rooms above shops". Instead of "black rooks with an astonishing volume of sounds" there are only some insects revolved around a lamp". "Four-poster bed" in old house has been replaced with an image of "metal foldup contraption". (P33 in T03)

Since participants are posting their texts online, it is also quite easy to copy and paste texts from other electronic sources into the comment box on the discussion forum. Participants make frequent use of that in the Poets' Corner (T09/T18), a thread where participants are free to post any poems they want to discuss and share, without focusing on a particular literary text. The thread soon became the most popular one in the whole ORG discussion board with 716 posts altogether, counting the ones collected for the pilot study and the ones collected for the main study. Lengthy comments, interpretation and topic development – usually found in the threads devoted to the discussion of specific short stories, poems and novel extracts – are less present in the Poet's Corner. Instead, posts often consist of entire poems being copied and pasted into the comment box, including complete pieces by Blake (16 lines), Frost (18 lines), Okey Ndibe (18 lines), Owen (46 lines), Wordsworth (24 lines) and twelve of Shakespeare's sonnets.

DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE WRITING

Besides poems from well-established authors, 147 out of the 716 posts in the Poets' Corner contain members' own poems. These posts consist of verse writing that varies from haikus to poems that extend to over 30 lines, making this a distinctive feature of the online interaction in the Group. Some of members' own poems and short stories were collected, edited and are now available as online publications (ELT Online

Reading Group, 2013). Certainly, nothing prevents a member of any face-to-face reading group from bringing their own creative writing to be read to other members of the group, but some ORG members find that the online environment stimulates their creativity and facilitates sharing their creations. The comments below come from the interviews given by members with a largest number of poems published in the forum and collected for the pilot study:

> *I now have more confidence as a reader. In "The Poet's Corner" we are allowed to post our own poems in the forum and I have transformed my reading into writing. In the end I found out I have written a number of poems and one of the poems has won an ELT writing contest (At the Bus Stops).* (P11)
> *Within our ELT e-Reading Group I am grateful to all Colleagues/Readers who took their time to read my poems. Actually, whenever I perceive honest, positive feedback, I feel motivated to write further lines. If it happens something less positive I usually reflect upon it so as to improve.* (P12)
>
> *The reading group that deals with poetry enables me to see how others are writing, how my poems are in terms of quality I mean. In short, I like poetry, I write poem and the feedback I get from this group is empowering me somehow. The comments given by the readers are very important because they empower me to write more and more. (...) They have told me that the way I write should be better with shorter texts, and nowadays I am trying to do so, although I prefer longer texts.* (P18)

Comments from other members are overwhelmingly positive and seem to motivate members to keep posting their creative writing:

> *[P11], congratulations!! i mean, i love your poems! Theys are a kind of a mirror through which the wolrd is open! your poems have horizons, long horizons... strong feelings!* (P34 in T09)
>
> *Dear [P09], Your post has hit my heart profoundly, mainly because of your suspicion on mockery being present on my poems, if I well understood that.* (P11 in T09)

The presence of Group members' own creative writing is a significant feature of the ORG interaction and some of these pieces of poetry seem to have been created under the influence of the texts read and discussed in the Group. For instance, in T18, P03 publishes a 'Pastiche of the Solitary Reader' after Wordsworth's poem 'The Solitary

Reaper' is posted by another member. Both P11 and P12 create and post their own versions of the story of Elaine of Astolat while discussing Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shallot' in T12. Most instances though are published in the Poets' Corner (T09/ T18). As seen in the comments above, some participants argue that they were inspired to write some of these pieces when reading a previous poster's poem. In fact, in T09 there is an unbroken string of nine 'poem responses' where a poem written by one participant prompts the other participant to create a poem as well. Data from the interviews conducted for the pilot study show that experience of discussing texts with fellow group members in the forum had an impact on some participants' creative writing experiences, as pointed out by P20 and P18 below:

> *it has made me realize much. E.g. Writing a story continuing another novelist's was a new and exciting experience for me. I felt honoured to be awarded a prize for that too.*

> *The reading group that deals with poetry enables me to see how others are writing, how my poems are in terms of quality I mean. In short, I like poetry, I write poem and the feedback I get from this group is empowering me somehow.*

INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCES

A third observable feature of the ORG forum is the frequent presence of intertextual references in posters' comments. References are frequently used by participants to share reading of other material they connect with the texts being discussed and, in doing that, some posters add links to the referred material. Providing immediate access to a wide range of material that is not an integral part of the text being discussed by members of a reading group is a task that is much more easily achievable in an online environment. In a number of threads it is possible to find web links to entries on Wikipedia, YouTube videos, images, audio files, writers' own websites, and full text databases, such as the Project Gutenberg. In T09 and T18,

posters also added links to websites that contain full texts of copyrighted material, which had to be removed because of legal issues, since the website where the Group is hosted in an official website for the British Council. Such limitation in the material available is also a particular characteristic of ORG and it can be argued that such constraints may also exert some influence on the reading and sharing experiences participants have.

5.4.2 Unobservable features

There are certain aspects that may influence readers' relationships with texts and other readers and that can be observed in face-to-face reading groups but which are not immediately noticeable in the online environment of the ORG. For example, unless explicitly mentioned in the posts, there is no way of accessing members' emotional and/or cognitive responses to texts since the ORG forum does not allow users to communicate through voice intonation or body language that can give us clues about how members react to what they read. Also, apart from the intertextual references made in the posts, there is no way of knowing how much participants' posts have been influenced by their previous or current reading/writing experiences. Neither have we access to the broader socio-cultural contexts in which members live and which may influence their access and responses to the reading material. There are, however, two unobservable aspects on which data collected provide some information: participants' *reading-response time* and their *post writing/editing process*.

READING-RESPONSE TIME

According to some non-posters who provided the semi-structured narratives, reading the texts available in the Group involves reading, re-reading and taking notes:

... when I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually take some notes to enhance my students' awareness of reading literature and how to interpret it. Nevertheless, when I read other members' comment on the forum I usually take notes to avoid these gaps in the future. (N02)
What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that I have to lay my own ideas aside for a while so as to let the other's experience inform my own understanding. After that I can let mould the two into something new. (N04)

I usually take down notes and do some quick Google research for the writer's biography and some reviews on the story. When I read other members' comments on the forum, I usually try to compare notes with what they write in order to get a clearer picture of how the thread is developing. (N6)

I usually download it to my computer to read it again later and check out the comments of the group members. When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually check out the connection between the comments and the text. (N07)

The comments above seem to indicate that processing the content of the texts and posts takes some time, within which readers take notes, '*lay ideas*' aside for later consideration, check the Internet for further information, and re-read texts and comments before making any other use of them. P11 makes a similar comment in the forum about the need to take time to reconsider the story being discussed:

This story is complex in a way almost all happens in an opposite way we expected. The situations in which the two characters are involved seem sarcastic, even the value of patience here can cause conflicting feelings in readers if we ignore the holiness of the human being. I'll have to reread...
(P11 in T16)

Since forum threads once opened remain so, Group members can read and comment at their own pace. Unlike face-to-face reading groups where people are expected to have read the text selected before the next meeting, the online environment allows for this cognitive processing time. It is not unusual to have new members and occasional posters coming back to texts in threads that have been opened for months and even years. For instance, a new comment was added to T13 on 27th August 2013 answering a question I posted on 22nd March 2012. Such comments and occurrences seem to confirm Bakhtin's claim that in dialogue existence is freed from the circumscribed

meaning in the limited configuration of the immediate time/space relation in which the text is created (Holquist, 2002, p.38). This seems to apply even more to an online dialogic context than to a face-to-face one.

POST-WRITING AND EDITING PROCESS

Lamy and Hampel (2007) mention the particular feature of online communication that allows participants to delay their responses in asynchronous online forums. On the one hand, delayed response may demotivate posters who would like to see others soon replying to their comments; on the other hand, it can give posters the opportunity to re-read, write, check content and language accuracy, and edit their posts before actually submitting them. It is not possible to observe how much posters to the ORG engage in the process of editing their comments, but this seems a particularly relevant aspect in an online group whose members are not reading and writing in their first language. Data from the online survey (Figure 5.5) show that language anxieties about being able to express themselves accurately in English play a key role in preventing some members from posting in the forum. The comment below in one of the semi-structured narratives seems to confirm that language is an issue and some members see others' posts as input they can profit from both in terms of language and ideas:

> *When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually have new ideas and maybe I will have more communication with other people and improve my bad language* (N10)

The fact that posts are visible to a wide readership may contribute to members' concern with language accuracy in their posts, especially taking into consideration that the majority of posters are English language teachers and are themselves, therefore, expected to be language models for their students and perhaps other ELT professionals in their countries. This may explain the quite elaborate, and sometimes

intricate, language some posters use when commenting on the forum and which could denote a concern with the language when writing posts. It may also be one of the reasons behind the frequent use of direct quotes and the instances of lexical repetition, which indicate that some time has been spent in the composition. How much time and effort are put into composing posts is an aspect that, in this study, still remains in the realm of the unobservable. The same applies to the proofreading and editing process. Once again, it is not possible to determine how much proofreading and editing participants have conducted, also because posters can edit a comment even after submitting it. Yet, it is evident in some cases that posters have a higher level of language control whereas in others the level of linguist competence is still low, as in the samples below:

> *Going back to The Home-coming and the comments about adolescence I can tell you that I was overprotected when I was a teenager and then I had to make great efforts to become an independent and self-confident person and I luckily succeeded in doing so.* (P28 in T13)

> *Does phatik dies at last in his mother's hands due to fever? The premier's fourth edition guide says so...tell me the climax!* (P63 in T13)

Although this study does not focus on language acquisition and development, the comments above show that language may be an important factor affecting posting. Since most participants are non-native speakers of English who have joined the Group expecting it to help them improve their language skills (29.4%) (Appendix F, Table 9), further questions could be asked about how much being a member of ORG has helped some participants to improve their language skills. The language issue and other aspects participants see as related to their Group membership are discussed next.

5.5 Question 2: Accounts of group participation

One of the questions this study attempts to answer is related to participants' experience of being a group member and the connections participants make between reading literature in the Group and other reading and professional experiences they perceive as related to their membership. Forum posts and semi-structured narratives were thematically analysed in order to try to identify participants' perceptions of the experience of being a Group member. This is an important aspect of this study because it adds participants' own views on a phenomenon that, otherwise, would just be seen from the perspective of the researcher. By including participants' own views on the experience of reading and discussing literature online, other time/space perspectives are added to the analysis and to the conversation.

5.5.1 Reading experiences

Previously discussed instances coded as Transformations>recontextualization show that posters tend to make connections between the literary texts and real life events in which they, and/or people they know, have been involved. There are also some instances when posters comment on their personal experiences as readers and elaborate on their affective and cognitive reactions to the text being discussed. These instances are seen here as ways in which the text 'affectively speaks' to the reader prompting recollections and the need to share their reactions with others. The quotes below come from various threads in the discussion forum:

> *I believe as a child what attracted me most about* [this story] *is the immense romantic imagination.* (P19 in T04)

> *I've always enjoyed stories that are told in places like the graveyard, or loss of beloved people where every possible thing of love or hate happens, but I never expected to read a "funny" and tragic story like this...* (P11 in T06)

> *It reminds me of both my father and my mother (although this one is gone for good.* (P18 in T09)

I'd like to say that it's the first time I come across a story like this one, which is relatively short and yet can make the reader experience so many different emotions: tenderness, sadness, compassion, astonishment and pure anger. (P48 in T11)

Poetry seems to be a powerful motivation for sharing personal experiences. The comment below comes from the Poets' Corner (T18) and illustrates some of the reactions found in the forum:

> *I'd like to share my favourite poem. It became my favourite 20 years ago when I was a student at the University and it is still one of my favourites in English today. I just came across it in an Anthology of English and American verse, published in Moscow in 1972. It penetrated through the walls of my heart then. Actually it played a major role in the process of me becoming a Christian out of an atheist. And now it still makes my heart pound faster with its vivid images and light, but breathtaking form of a sonnet.* (P77 in T18)

As discussed previously, Group members have also transformed the Poets' Corner (T09 and T18) in a space for sharing their creative writing. There are 147 pieces of writing in verse in the ORG discussion board. Although these include poems by various members, the overwhelming majority are contributions from P11, P12 and P18. Reading poetry seems to have inspired ORG members to write more in the same genre. Besides the Poets' Corner, threads devoted to reading and discussing single poems have also prompted members to post their own poetic lines, which did not happen in the threads devoted to short stories. In the thread devoted to Wordsworth's 'Michael' (T08), members submitted five of their own works and in the thread on Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shallot' (T12) there are three posts featuring members' own verse creations on the Arthurian theme.

Participants with a high number of submissions in form of verse (P09, P11, P12, P18 and P22) also tended to read, praise and comment on each other's work and attempt interpretations of texts written by their peers. There are also occasions when the writer explains the reasons for the creation of a particular text, and occasions

when the writer of a poem acknowledges the review received, as in the samples below:

> *The following poem is nothing but a greeting in my cultural background, I mean, for my parents and siblings and all relatives bound in the same cultural context we can view this as a simple greeting with nothing special, we can have it as a way of saying HELLO to each other. (P11 in T18)*

> *I have appreciated your carefully detailed interpretation of my lines. You are absolutely right. I wrote that poem by the time of those heavy floods, which devastated the country and families. I also recall the image/story of that brave woman who climbed the tree and sat on the branches to give birth to a baby girl. (P12 in T09)*

Interviews collected for the pilot study show that the forum interaction had a considerable impact on some participants writing skills. According to P11, being able to read fiction and poetry in English...

> *...has helped me achieve some degree of fluency and understanding of the complexity of practical use of English through exploration of the world of fiction and poetry. It has been useful and a key to improving my writing skills and confidence in using English for professional and entertainment.(...) I have had motivation to read more and deeply as I try to come up with my comments and read about other readers' comments. I now have more confidence as a reader.*

This interactive creative process is one of the distinguishing features of forum participation in the threads devoted to poetry, but members' support to others in their creative initiatives is also present in threads specifically opened to promote professional development through the reading of literature (T19 and T20).

5.5.2 Professional experiences

Some participants have used the ORG as online forum to support their professional development projects. That is the case of the *Digital Stories for Literacy* thread (T20) which was opened to support a CPD teacher training project in Malaysia where teachers create their own videos based on poems they read. These videos are posted

on YouTube and participants use the ORG forum to comment on each other's productions. The two samples below show how participants used the forum to support their peers but also develop their critical reading and thinking skills:

> *First of all, I would like to congratulate [P73] for completing the project. Overall, the poem is delivered quite well. The pictures/video used are suitable for the text. However, the narration is lacking of intonation and maybe a background music should be included with the narration. That's all. Thank you. (P75 in T20)*

> *First of all, it was a good presentation and I think you have put a lot of effort to produce that marvellous video. You have come out with good images to convey the meaning of the poem but I think the only problem is the wording has distracted the view of the images. I suggest the wording should be put at the bottom so that the images could be seen clearly. Thank you. (P79 in T20)*

Another forum thread specifically devoted to professional development and the promotion of literature reading in schools is the *Maputo Readers' Corner* (T19). This project was developed by two of the long-term Group members who saw in the ORG an opportunity to extend the experience to other teachers in their own country. It was entirely their initiative to do so and they took upon themselves the responsibility for keeping the thread active. The thread has also been used for posting members' creative writing and has supported other local initiatives in Mozambique such as local face-to-face reading groups in schools and radio programmes *'as a result of fiction stories and poetry reading here [in the Group]'* (P11).

Analysis of data in the various threads of the discussion forum shows that Group members make use of the material available on the website for classroom activities. They also contribute with some ideas about how others can explore the texts for teaching. Particular literary texts have prompted comments about classroom experiences, such as the following ones:

> *At the University where I work, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an obligatory story that fourth-year English major students read in the American Literature subject they take. There are so many similarities between these two works of*

fiction that I would suggest that "The Yellow Wallpaper" be a story posted in the ELT e-Reading Group. (P58 in T03)

This story was included in the English textbook that I used for my higher secondary (+2 stage) students studying English as a compulsory language in India. In spite of the unfamiliar background and the 'non-standard' language used by the verger in his speech my students enjoyed the story and admired the indomitable spirit of the man who was ill treated by the vicar. (P37 in T05)

Non-posters also seem to have used the Group as a source of teaching material. Although 87 out of 126 survey respondents said that they read the stories and poems posted in the group for their own pleasure, the vast majority (63.1%) singled out uses related to teaching and learning (B,C, D and F) as the most frequent use made of the material available (Figure 5.13).
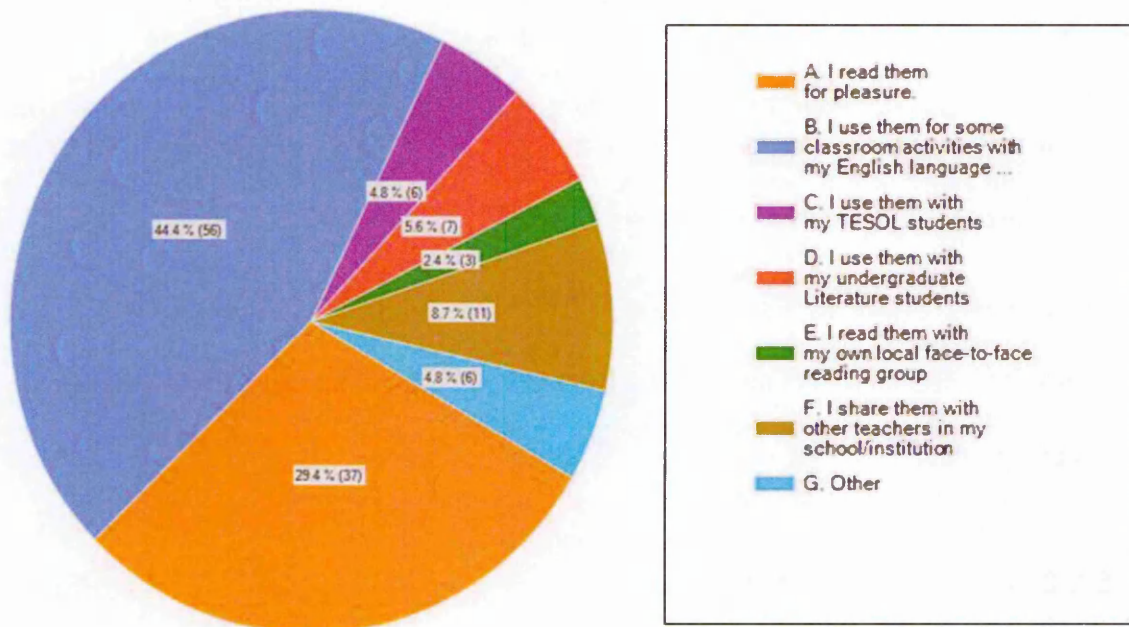
Figure 5.13: Survey respondents' most frequent use of Group material.

The most frequent use survey members make of the material available in the Group is as a source for activities to be done in the classroom with their English language learners. This is may not be a surprise when we consider that 73.8% of the respondents are ELT teachers. Data from the semi-structured narratives also show that

participants often think of their students when accessing the Group website, as the comments below suggest:

> *I have decided to sign-up in Reading Group because I reckon that it is a great way to support myself with materials I can't find it everywhere which will bring about a great success for my students, and to improve in term of knowledge as well as teaching.* (N01)

> *I think the online medium helps me being up-to-date with recent writing tendencies and has provided me with good written material for my students and for my own pleasure.* (N05)

Long-term members have made attempts to motivate others to post instead of just using the Group as a materials source as the comment below shows:

> *I would like to encourage all members post their views, even if we know some members just enjoy the access to stories and may use them for interaction with other groups (I used to print the stories and share with members of a face-to-face reading group) but posting would make our group even better. I personally think reading and sharing in group is better than reading alone. There are many advantages beyond simple access to stories, the discussion can give us input for using the stories for teaching, in posting we improve our own writing and critical views etc. For example, I've enjoyed Tagore's stories, he's one of my best favourites, but this one I hadn't read before, and so this was a great opportunity for me.* (P11 in T13)

The comment above shows that the experience of sharing ideas in the Group is highly valued by some members and data collected from both posters and non-posters seems to confirm that.

5.5.3 Group experiences

Comments in the discussion forum and in the narratives about the experience of being a Group member tend to be positive. There are, however, in the data collected from the semi-structured narratives some remarks about how less engaging it is to read and discuss literature online instead of face-to-face:

> *In my opinion, reading literature online saves a lot of trees but takes away relaxation one gets from reading.* (N03)

In my opinion, reading literature online is not as good an experience as reading a book. I still prefer books. But reading with a group is one of the great advantages of online reading. Communicating with others about literature can be, in fact I'd say is, very definitely an enriching experience. (N04)

In my opinion, reading literature online is a good way to initiate and participate in discussions and to improve in terms of language, but I often find that the result is rather disappointing because the social contact with face-to-face interaction is missing... (N08)

Conversely, other members see the online environment as a way of enriching their contact with other teachers living and working in different socio-cultural context and geographical locations. The multicultural aspect of Group interaction, as well as the exposure to different ideas, is brought to the fore in the comments below:

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that sometimes I read a story or a poem with a different point of view, which I have never thought of before. On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that to see how people from different parts of the world can think about the same things about a poem or short story... (N07)

Communicating with others about literature can be beneficial when the thermometers of cultural variations and contrasts are slow down. As for connecting with other teachers online, it is a pleasure for me. I think the online medium helps me in getting involved in different useful activities with people from [around] the globe. (N11)

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a surprisingly nice experience because I love reading, but being able to access what other people so generously share out of the commercial circuit is a totally new thing and exactly because the texts don't have to obey to commercial rules, they come out with such authenticity that makes them enjoyable. On the whole the quality is very good and I specially value originality, independence and humility. (N05)

The comments above illustrate the general tone of the feedback received in the semi-structured narratives written by non-posters. They seem to confirm that, contrary to posters' perceptions, lurkers also engage in a form of dialogue with others, even if their responses are not shared in the forum. They attest to the permeating nature of dialogism that goes beyond the chronotope of the online environment itself.

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the findings of this investigation in relation to the research questions and illustrated them with extracts of the forum posts and of the semi-structured narratives. Quantitative data from the online survey were also discussed in connection with the qualitative data to illustrate particular aspects of Group membership and patterns of participation. The theoretical conclusions drawn from the findings presented here are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The hypothesis proposed from the outset of this investigation was that the interactions happening in the ORG discussion forum could be understood when analysed against the theoretical background provided by Bakhtin's main concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia while also considering his notions of chronotope and answerability. The coding categories were designed taking this hypothesis into consideration - as discussed in Chapter 4 - and the analysis of the data seems to confirm the initial proposition. In this chapter I discuss the findings in the light of Bakhtin's theoretical framework. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of the relevance of this study for ELT professionals and educational researchers and provides some suggestions for future research.

6.2 Discussion

6.2.1 Dialogism and heteroglossia

As discussed in Section 2.3, Bakhtin was concerned with the historical processes of linguistic unification and stratification and with dialogue as a major concept to explain discourse in the novel (Bakhtin, 1981, pp.269–272). Dialogism could be defined as the intrinsic permanent orientation of any word towards the listener/reader (Bakhtin, 1981, p.285). In this sense, the words in the literary text 'address' the reader and prompt a response that, in the context of this investigation, is observable in the form of the forum posts. The forum posts are here seen as a way in which readers engage in dialogue with the text, responding to it in distinctive ways. One way in

which this 'conversation' takes place is in the acts of Appropriation –
Interpretation/Analysis and Retelling /Summarizing (Chapter 5.2.2). As in spoken
interaction, interlocutors often rephrase, paraphrase and summarize what the others
have said in an attempt to confirm their presuppositions about the meaning of a
statement. In this way the conversation can proceed as the speakers are reassured that
their discussion is based on common ground (Korta and Perry, 2012, online). Making
assertions about the plot, characters and meaning is understood here as a strategy that
posters employ to 'seize' the perceived meaning of a story or poem, confirm their
presuppositions against the text, and share them with other members in an attempt to
have them confirmed or questioned in the potential development of the
'conversation'. Working with intermediate-level French literature students, though in
a much more structured course context, Grossman (2009, p.335) claims that students'
'interpretive reading', 'textual analysis' and 'literary argumentation' all benefited
from online communication and collaboration among participants. As Bakhtin (1981,
p.282) argues, 'Understanding comes to fruition only in the response.'

Instances of Transformations (Section 5.2.3), as *Recontextualization,* are also
seen as ways of engaging in dialogue with the text. As Kearny (2002, p.130) points
out, 'inside every human being there are lots of little narratives trying to get out' and
some of these narratives come to the surface prompted by the stories in the literary
texts. Data from the forum posts shows that quite frequently posters resort to narrative
mode to recontextualize themes and topics as well as talk about their reading
experiences with a particular text. Some of these narratives are also accompanied by
moral statements, which in the data coding are categorized as Conceptualization.
These are often reflections on the ethical implications of characters' actions and on
what readers see as the intended authorial moral message. In this way, it can be said

that the text demands from the reader an ethical reply and this is given in the form of a principled statement. Ethically-oriented discussion is also observed by Long (2003, p.72) who argues that reading groups 'allow members to think about themselves and the social world in [critical] ways'. The dialogue between text and readers is not, however, only a two-way relationship. As Bakhtin (1981, p.284) argues, 'The phenomenon of internal dialogization, as we have said, is present to a greater or lesser extent in all realms of the life of the word.' Therefore, words in the texts, both literary and participants' textual productions are also in a dialogic relationship with other contexts and other texts.

The dialogue among readers is visible at surface level in the interactive strategies they use (coded as Interactions), such as greeting, naming, posing questions (direct or rhetorical), giving answers and openly agreeing or disagreeing with something that has been previously said by another poster (Section 5.3.2). These are the most noticeable distinguishing features of the interactions in the forum and are understood here as an attempt to extract from other Group members a written reply that will contribute to the ongoing dialogue. At a deeper level, dialogic interaction is found in a poster's drive toward what others have said, which is coded as Adoptions (Section 5.3.3). At times, statements by a participant are not openly acknowledged by later posters who then present a previous line of thought as theirs. As discussed earlier, such borrowing of ideas may be the result of not having read the other's post, but it may also be that posters have reached such a high degree of agreement with what was said before, or have already internalized the message to a point, that they already see these ideas as theirs. Instances of borrowing are, however, much less frequent than topic development. More common are the situations in which posters address an issue or topic related to the text from a particular viewpoint and others

engage in an unfolding exchange about it for a string of comments, which can be seen as evidence of the desire to engage in a conversation with the other.

The occurrences discussed above are evidence of dialogic relations between readers and literary texts, as well as between readers and texts written by other posters in the forum. Besides those, the internal dialogue that Bakhtin refers to and that is part of the fabric of texts is also observed in the forum data. Posts display the internal textual stratification, the many voices that speak at the same time in a text, which Bakhtin calls heteroglossia. Heteroglossia is one of the distinctive features of participants' responses to texts in the ORG forum and it is discernible in the inclusion of the voice of the author of the literary text into a poster's composition in the form of direct quotes (Section 5.2.1). Through direct quotes, the voices of the author, the narrator and the characters are embedded into posters' own voices in the forum. At a less overt level, the voice of the literary text can be heard in the lexical repetitions. The concept of heteroglossia applies to direct quotes and lexical repetitions taken from comments written by fellow posters in the forum. The multiple voices of others are also brought into the composition in the form of intertextual references (Chapter 5.3.1) and of references and direct quotes from other texts (Chapter 5.2.4) that are part of the reading background posters bring to the conversation.

The multiplicity of social voices that Bakhtin (1981, p.263) sees as the 'indispensable prerequisite of the novel as a genre' is also present in the internal stratification of the texts created by posters and semi-structured narrative writers. Especially in the discussion forum, participants adopt, at different occasions and often within the same comment, a variety of styles and authorial voices which can be also equated to some of the social and interactional roles performed by students in face-to-face ELT classroom based reading circles (Macmillan, 2013; Oxford University Press,

2013). Instances of Appropriation can be linked to the roles performed by the 'passage person' and the 'summarizer'; instances of recontextualization and the inclusion of intertextual references can be linked to the role of the 'connector' as suggested in the *Bookworms Club Reading Circles* role sheets (Oxford University Press, 2013). As the Group Coordinator, the voice of the *discussion leader* was usually mine but when I partly withdrew from the forum discussions because of my role as a researcher, P11 and P12 (two of the senior members and frequent posters) started to fill the leadership gap. The authoritative voice of the leader can be heard in P12's reply to P23 who posted a question about when there would be another text available for discussion:

> *Hi [P23] & All, We are very glad to have you near us journeying through reads, which is adding great pleasure to our ELT Online Reading Group. Every month we read a new text. It can be a short story or a poem (…) We usually receive it during the first week or so of each month.* (P12 in T13)

The voice of the *reader* is heard in episodes of evaluation, similar to the ones found by Swann and Allington (2009, p.254), in which posters make references 'to the act of reading' as a 'common means of presenting evaluations' on the text. An example is P19's comment on Wilde's 'The Nightingale and the Rose', where she expresses her appreciation for the text and adds that, '*I have loved [this story] since childhood when I read it first, although now I understand it better.*' Likewise, when posters interpret, analyse, summarize, and recontextualize, they tend to adopt the stance of the reviewer, the literary critic and the storyteller by employing topic vocabulary, style and register that is usually found in these particular genres. The voice of the *teacher* is also heard in comments about classroom experiences and in the sharing of ideas about how to use a text with students and other teachers (Section 5.5.2).

6.2.2 Chronotope and answerability

As discussed in Section 2.3.2, the act of reading is where the chronotopes of the text and the reader meet. The main evidence of this 'meeting' in the study is the forum post since the very act of commenting on a text is a response given in the present time and in the virtual 'space' of the forum to a text created in a past time and a different spatial context. The online forum is also the environment that allows participants posting in diverse time/space to meet and exchange their personal views in a conversation that is triggered by the literary text. Data from both the forum and the semi-structured narratives suggest that participants find it stimulating to have contact with others who come from a wide variety of countries and cultures and bring with them different responses that are connected to their own chronotopes (Section 5.5.3). Hartley (2002, p.104) also reports that participants in face-to-face reading groups around the world where there is a 'mix [of] incomers and nationals' show that they mutually benefit from such contact in terms of cultural experience and 'language practice'. Despite possible cultural misunderstandings and conflicts in online interactions (Goodfellow, 2004, p.392), the online environment has the potential of augmenting this multicultural experience by extending it to a large number of members in a much more culturally varied community of readers (Figure 4.2).

Another distinguishing feature of participants' responses is the presence of ethical statements embedded on their comments. Instances of interpretation and recontextualization are often accompanied by such statements, which in the data coding are categorized as Conceptualization (Section 5.2.3). These are often reflections on the ethical implications of characters' actions and on what readers see as the intended authorial moral message. In this way, it can be said that the text demands from the reader an ethical reply and this is given in the form of a principled

statement. As Kearney argues (2002, pp.150–152), stories have an ethical function that allows the reader to use it as referential and to which the poster returns in the form of a moral concept. The many instances of conceptualization observed in the data analysis are, thus, ethically-oriented answers given by readers as responses to the ethical issues of the fictional and/or non-fictional narratives they read in the Group.

Because every utterance is dialogically oriented and requires a response, readers have no option but answer, even when apparently no reply is given. Absence of a written answer is also a form of response, since passivity is, nonetheless, the 'activity of choosing to be passive' (Holquist, 2002, p.153). Data from the semi-structured narratives show that although lurkers remain silent in the forum, they also respond to text and posters comments in a variety of other ways, such as taking notes, thinking about the content of a particular post and comparing and contrasting opinions (Chapter 5.3). The feeling of linguistic inadequacy and/or incapacity to contribute with something relevant to the discussion that some non-posters survey respondents expressed (Figure 5.5) has also been observed by Sedo (2011c, p.149) among new members of face-to-face women's reading communities. However, contrary to offline interaction, in the online environment potential contributions are not limited by the boundaries of the time/space created in the Group discussion board and may eventually come at some later point. As a survey respondent put it, *'I'm still preparing...'*

6.3 Limitations of this study

Although I see my participation in the ORG forum as one of the elements that add to the dialogic relationships occurring in the research site, a greater detachment as a researcher might have been desirable. Considering the focus of the data analysis and the reliability checks put in place, it does not seem that undertaking the study as a

completely external researcher would have produced substantially different results, but it would have certainly provided a different viewpoint from which to analyse the data.

A possible limitation is the absence in this study of a control group where participants were not English language teachers and which operated on the same basis as the ORG and from which I could have obtained similar data for comparison. This absence was simply due to the uniqueness of the Group setting. A control face-to-face reading group could have also added a further dimension to this investigation; however, it would have probably resulted in a change in the research questions and would have added a number of other variables to the study making it perhaps too complex for the present research context. Another limitation was the lack of access to participants' offline environment. Once again, this was a constraint imposed by the nature of the ORG, since participants are located all over the world and access to their schools, institutions, and working places would have required considerable extra resources.

6.4 Relevance and implications

The findings of this study may be particularly relevant to those working in English language teacher education, teachers interested in using literature with language learners, and researchers working in diverse areas in the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences.

6.4.1 ELT professionals and educators

The findings confirm previous research in the field and show that there is a dialogical orientation in the communicative strategies that participants employ in the forum and this may help those interested in exploring CMC in teaching and learning to

understand how teachers and TESOL students construct their comments when communicating in online professional forums. Practitioners interested in conducting research projects with their own students in distance learning and/or blended courses may find the categories used to analyse posts in relation to each other (Section 5.3) useful to better understand their students' online interactions and communicative strategies. Online forum moderators working in educational contexts may find that the use of literary extracts and quotes can be a useful tool to trigger greater interaction in the forum and facilitate cognitive and emotional engagement with the topic proposed for discussion.

Comments on the Group Experience and on how some participants have developed their reading and creative writing skills (Section 5.4.1) seem to indicate that literature has a role to play in the professional development of English language teachers. They suggest that literature can be a useful tool to promote teachers' imagination and creativity and help them reflect on issues that are connected to their everyday lives inside and outside the classroom. Since data, both from the forum posts and the semi-structured narratives, show that contact with literature, especially poetry, has the capacity to motivate some readers to write creatively, interaction in online reading groups can be used as ways of motivating teachers to develop their own writing skills, which in turn may have a positive impact when they design their own lesson plans and materials. It may also motivate teachers to become creative writers, publish their work electronically or locally, and open up new possibilities in their professional lives. Online reading groups can also be a way of motivating TESOL students and language learners to write beyond the required coursework assignments and, consequently, increase their reading and writing practice with the potential development of these skills.

Comments on Professional Experience (Section 5.5.2) have shown that for some participants the experience of discussing literature online has led to greater involvement in other professional activities. Comments on the forum, semi-structured narratives, and also results from the online survey, suggest that teachers tend to extend the experience of Group participation by sharing the reading material with other teachers in their institutions and local reading groups as well as classroom resources to promote literature reading among their students (Lima and Lamy, 2013).

Data from the forum posts and the interviews conducted for the pilot study show that online reading groups may serve as a way of making use of members' tendency to share to motivate these teachers to engage more actively with others in their institutions and local networks to promote extensive reading and literacy practices. Moreover, online reading groups can be an affordable way of making literary texts and teaching materials on literature available to teachers working in contexts where access to hardcopies of books is limited (see N02 in Appendix D).

Similarly, online reading groups could be created to promote the reading and discussion of literature among language teachers and ELT professionals in other contexts besides the ORG. Teachers Associations could create similar reading groups on their own websites, embedding links to educational discussion board platforms, such as Edmodo. This would potentially increase the range of services and support they offer to their members. Small online reading groups could also be implemented as part of TESOL courses using virtual learning environments, such as Moodle and Blackboard, which are adopted by a number of higher education institutions as part of their learning technologies provision. This could potentially help would-be teachers develop their communicative, reading, and writing skills, as well as make them more familiar with potential uses of new technologies for teaching and learning. Such

online reading groups could be implemented in purely distance learning courses or in blended programmes, as in the case of the Argentina TESOL small reading group within the ORG. Online reading groups can also be adopted by those working on CPD programmes, as a way of increasing the time contact with trainee teachers and as a way of improving the sustainability of their projects, as it is the case of the Digital Stories for Literacy project in Malaysia (T20).

Besides promoting extensive reading among teachers, online reading groups may also be a way of promoting it among students. As teachers feel more confident to select and comment on texts themselves they may find it easier to work with literature with their students (McRae, 1997). In turn, these teacher trainers and teachers may find themselves in the position of creating their own online reading groups to support their classroom discussions on literature. An example of a project already in place is the small group created in 2013 by P18 to promote the reading and discussion on African short stories and poems among students from all courses at the University Eduardo Mondlane, in Mozambique.

6.4.2 Researchers

The academic community, especially researchers interested in working with Bakhtinian informed discourse analysis, may find the design and the categories adopted in this study useful and relevant. The analytical categories may be adopted and adapted for research involving textual analysis in diverse context and across disciplines. For instance, the code categories devised to analyse the relationships between posters in the ORG (Section 5.3) may be useful to researchers interested in investigating CMC in other online communities. Forum data show that participants make use of interactive strategies, such as posing questions and stating agreement and disagreement in order to engage others in discussion (Section 5.3.2). Forum data also

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show that ORG members have a tendency to develop themes and topics proposed by others even though these may not be the central ones proposed by the discussion leader (Section 5.3.3). These categories may thus be useful to researchers interested in investigating what interactive strategies their own participants employ and in analysing patterns in the development of the conversation in other online environments.

Similarly, the code categories established to analyse the connections between the literary texts and the forum posts (Section 5.2) could be useful not only to researchers working on groups reading fiction but also to those interested in investigating reading groups that discuss professional and academic literature. Data from the forum posts show a high frequency of use of direct quotes from the literary text embedded in comments (Section 5.2.1) and also the constant use of retelling and summarizing when commenting on the text read (Section 5.2.3). These strategies are common practice in academic writing, but data show that that they are also employed in the much less formal writing environment of the forum. This could help the academic community better understand how professionals and academics enter in dialogue with non-fictional texts and whether they employ the same constitutional components as the ones found in the posts analysed in the ORG when informally commenting on professional literature.

Researchers working in the field of literary studies, especially those working within the frameworks of new-historicism and post-colonial criticism could also make use of the categories devised in this study to analyse the relationships between posts and literary texts in this study to examine possible connections between the works of different authors, possible influences of one author on the work of another, and the dialogical relationships between non-fictional texts and literary texts written in a

particular historical period or belonging to a specific genre. For instance, data show that when constructing their comments on a literary text participants frequently use direct quotes (Section 5.2.1) and refer to other texts (Section 5.2.4) to support and validate their statements. Therefore, Direct Quotes and Intertextual References may be adopted as analytical categories by researchers interested in examining to what extent and for what purposes literature is embedded in non-literary texts such as biographies, journalistic writing and political speeches.

Moreover, data show that in the construction of their comments posters employ low frequency lexical items and chunks of language that can be also found in the literary text they are commenting (Section 5.2.2). The Lexical Repetitions category can thus be further refined with more specific numerical parameters to determine the low frequency of an item and used to examine the shared language between two or more pieces of work or the entire oeuvre of an author who is believed to have come under the influence of another writer. Lexical repetitions may as well be used to identify instances where common chunks of language appear in texts of different authors or in texts written in different genres in the same period in order to identify specific instances of intertextuality and 'cross-pollination' between texts.

In this study, forum posters often paraphrase and summarize the texts they read (Chapter 5.2.3) and use them as springboards to develop concepts and refer to other situations perceived as similar to the ones described in the fictional text (Chapter 5.2.4). Appropriations and Transformations may hence serve as tools for researchers who want to investigate the development of shared themes or topics in texts by different authors, especially those writing in the same literary tradition or in the same historical period and thus examine to what extent this process can be related to the creation and/or development of a particular genre.

Researchers interested in investigating reading groups may consider the findings of this study useful for future comparison with the findings of their own research, be it either on face-to-face or online reading groups, or both. Researchers working with mainly qualitative data may find semi-structured narratives (Barkhuizen, 2011) (Section 5.5), as used in this study, useful to gain access to the ideas and *opinions* of participants that are less willing to publicly express themselves in a group. In this investigation, data from the semi-structured narratives proved invaluable to allow access to the views of non-posters. They can thus be used as tool by other researchers interested in investigating lurking in online environments, either in online reading groups or other kinds of online communities.

6.5 Dissemination

Partial results and other aspects of this investigation, such as the rationale and methodology adopted for this investigation, have already been presented to the ELT and the research community on a number of occasions. Different aspects related to this research were the topic of my presentations at IATEFL Annual Conferences in 2012 and 2013. The final findings and further considerations on this study will be presented at the IATEFL Annual Conference in 2014 as part of a symposium on English language and creativity. Partial findings were also presented at the 2012 STORIES Conference (School of Education, University of Oxford), and at the 2012 Cutting Edge Conference (Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury). This research was the subject of poster presentations at the OU Poster Competitions in 2010, 2011 and 2013, and at the 2012 Kaleidoscope Conference (School of Education, University of Cambridge).

Reflections on this investigation were published in the IATEFL 2012 conference selections (Lima, 2013) and as a book chapter co-authored with one of my

supervisors (Lima and Lamy, 2013). Future papers will be submitted to other relevant academic and professional publications.

6.6 Possible future research

A future line of enquiry could include the investigation of participants' language development in relation to the reading and discussion of literature in online reading groups. Based on the knowledge acquired in this study regarding the way posters construct their comments using linguistic features present in the texts they have contact with in the online environment, it would be possible to look at participants' diverse writing outputs and examine to what extent predetermined sets of vocabulary and grammar structures are productively used afterwards. A control discussion group where there is no extensive reading input could be used in a longitudinal study as a way of determining to which extent language fluency and accuracy in participants' writing is connected to the literary textual input.

A comparative study on levels of interaction and participation could also be carried out between large, open-access reading groups, such as the ORG, and small online reading communities where membership is restricted. Comparative studies are also possible between exclusively online reading communities and blended ones to examine whether participants' forum interaction display similar features to the ones found in this study. More research on reading groups where the majority of members are non-native speakers of the target language would be particularly welcome.

6.7 Concluding remarks

Conducting this study was a learning process in a number of ways. From its outset, this investigation was based on the hypothesis that participants in the ORG discussion

forum employed compositional and interactive strategies that could be explained by adopting the Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia as a theoretical framework. However, it was unclear to me how this hypothetical dialogue between texts and readers - if present - would actually be manifested in textual form. Dialogue and heteroglossia were only vague concepts. It was through the process of close examination of the textual data from the forum and from the semi-structured narratives that those theoretical principles started to materialize in the form of the analytical categories adopted here.

Moreover, although my experience teaching literature in English language learning contexts indicated that reading and discussing literature had the capability to promote communication and dialogue among teachers and learners, I was unsure whether the same would be applicable to the discussion of literature in an exclusively online environment. The findings of this examination seem to indicate that literature and CMC can be creatively combined to promote such dialogue among writers and readers situated in different time/space contexts.

I hope in the future others will also engage in a dialogic relationship with the findings of this research and continue the conversation in their own reading groups as well as professional and academic communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Literary texts analysed

Thread	Author	Title	Genre	Period	Link to text
T01	Romesh Gunesekera	'Ullswater'	short story	contemporary/postcolonial literature	http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/britlit/ullswater
T02	Romesh Gunesekera	'A House in the Country'	short story	contemporary/postcolonial literature	http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/britlit/a-house-country
T03	Anita Desai	'The Landing'	short story	contemporary/postcolonial literature	http://www.scribd.com/doc/22861953/Anita-Desai-the-Landing-FV
T04/ T11	Oscar Wilde	'The Nightingale and the Rose'	short story	19th century/ Anglo-Irish literature	http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/NigRos.shtml
T05	Somerset Maugham	'The Verger'	short story	20th century/ English literature	http://www.sinden.org/verger.html
T06	Kate Chopin	'The Story of an Hour'	short story	19th century/ American literature	http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/webtexts/hour/
T07	Nathaniel Hawthorne	'David Swan'	short story	19th century/ American literature	http://www.online-literature.com/poe/128/
T08	William Wordsworth	'Michael'	narrative poem	English Romanticism	http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnLine/3286/
T12	Alfred Lord Tennyson	'The Lady Of Shallot'	narrative poem	Victorian literature	http://www.online-literature.com/donne/720/
T13	Rabindranath Tagore	'The Homecoming'	short story	20th century/ Indian literature	http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnLine/1757/
T14	Robert Louis Stevenson	'The Song of the Morrow'	short story	19th century/ Scottish literature	http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/stevenson/robert_louis/s848f/chapter20.html
T15	Romesh Gunesekera	'Goat'	short story	contemporary/postcolonial literature	http://www.wordpowered.org/InWords/goat.html
T16	Mark Twain	'Edward Mills and George Benton: A Tale'	short story	19th century/ American literature	http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/EdwaMill.shtml
T17	Rabindranath Tagore	'The Parrot's Tale'	short story	20th century/ Indian literature	http://www.parabaas.com/translation/database/translations/stories/gRabindranath_parrot.html

Appendix B: Sample forum threads analysed

Colour code	
Relationships between a post and a literary text	**Relationships between posts in a thread**
Direct quotes	<u>Direct quotes</u>
Lexical repetitions	<u>Lexical repetitions</u>
Appropriations (interpretation/analysis & retelling/summarizing)	Interactions (greeting/naming, questions and answers & agreeing and disagreeing)
Transformations (conceptualization & recontextualization	Adoptions (borrowing ideas & topic development)
Intertextual references	

T03 'The Landing' by Anita Desai

[P32] (2 posts) March 10th, 2008, 01:52 PM

I too enjoyed reading the piece. I thought I will share my thoughts on it with others.

For a while I wondered what made this story scary. Then it occurred to me that it's "the knowledge of the unknown" that controls the fear factor in the story. The lady thought that she controlled the house; then suddenly she started envisioning that there is somebody else there of which she had only rudimentary knowledge. Somehow she chances upon the thought that it is the landing where the unknown stays.

Her efforts to rationalize the whole thing and escape it breaks down as she realizes the sure signs around. There are things happening around her over which she had no control. This feeling coupled with her loneliness made her miserable.

However, her efforts to get rid of the eerie feelings by getting out of the house and living in a cramped house where there is no space for any one else except her backfires when she realises that the ominous feelings have grown inside her along with a longing to know the thing which is there in the landing. The note in which the story ends bring the ghost feeling to another level where the new owners also become part of the horrifying things.

At one level Ms Desai made a deliberate effort to ascribe personal traits to the otherwise inanimate house. This has made the house a living presence in the story. As readers we come to know that the house breathes, it watches, etc. There arises a sort of mutual longing for each others presence. But that relation's growth is stymied when the other remains unknown. The element of suspense heightens through the colleague character who was also unknown to many.

These are some of the random thoughts which occurred to me after reading the piece.

[P26] (02 posts) March 14th, 2008, 12:26 PM

'Anita Desai's Landing vividly impresses as being a superb short story of a homeless mind trying to come to terms with its present – and future - surroundings. She feels an inner compulsion, so it seems, to connect with her unbeknownst heritage, even if it were only possible through ghosts of times past. The existential pangs of rootlessness she feels makes her want, in quiet desperation, to withstand the "silent dissolving of darkness" of her life and times. She surmises, hence, that a "presence inhabited" in the lonely house had to be met in the standing; although it was not to be.

The whole theme exudes a melancholy loneliness that is masterfully narrated in forceful, pellucid tones. This author hard as she tries to bridge her inner and outer worlds finds herself squarely, albeit unintendedly, in a netherworld that is not entirely of her own making. On a personal reflection, though, I am intrigued by the lack of a spiritual and emotional comradeship with present and past human beings, real or imagined. She reveals that she is also, in effect, a homeless spirit desperately trying to find a secure and restful abode in a world that persistently remains to her strangely familiar and eerily foreign. It is remarkable to note that in our post-modernist times Octavio Paz´s Labyrinth of Solitude still rings true.

That will be all. Have a very good day.
[P26]

[P11] (213 posts) March 17th, 2008, 09:10 AM
"The Landing"

I could hardly learn she wanted to live in a silent place or in the sound like a guetho house she finally got to live in. And I can hardly learn why after she left she had to go back again just to turn around the hemelock tree and slowly withdraw. Did she miss the rooks? And it seems she doesn't own a name!

Peharps she needed somebody to share with her emotions - a boyfriend or a husband. One shouldn't lead an extremely lonely life, otherwise there's a danger of having hallucinations - and one'll want to run away from oneself.
[P11]

ChrisL (208 posts) March 21st, 2008, 09:03 PM
Hi All

Very interesting ideas so far. It also called my attention how much impersonation Desai uses when talking about the house and how she masters the genre making us hold our breath till the last paragraph. What's more, even after the story is finished in the paper it goes on in our minds. What does exactly 'withdrew' mean in there??

I totally agree with [P32] that the whole tale is much about how we deal with the unknown but I would also say that it is very much about how we deal with our fears and our powerful imagination. It brought to me how our minds can create realities that seem to be almost touchable and how many times we have to deal with the consequences of our creations.
Looking forward to hear your comments on that.
Cheers – Chris

[P03] (24 posts) March 21st, 2008, 11:02 PM
Hi All,

What I love most about this reading group is to have the chance to read the readings of everyone ! My impressions on The Landing are various and somehow as intricate as the threads of this story I dare qualify as psychosis . The illusions and phantasms the narrator seems to "see" can be but the dormant earnest need to a real sensitive and -why not- sensual life. Her seeming to feel the breathing is a pathetic fallacy she tries to hide in as a sort of defense mechanism from this hostile and lifeless present.

Also what makes the story scary is that it unveils our inner and repressed self we keep (allow me the coining pliz) "euthanasing" ...for the scary aspect of the short story is more psychical than sensational. We do sometimes imagine things breating or talking and even hugging us , but are not these hallucination deeply rooted in our very complex inner self?!

[P32] (2 posts) March 23rd, 2008, 10:19 AM

Dear [P11]

Your observation that the woman is too lonely so that she hallucinates is a valid one.

There is always a possibility to invite people inhabiting your mental world to the real world when people in the real world fails you or you don't like to be with them. The story points at the fact that the woman, though she's socially alive in the sense of having a job and friends, keeps a large self of hers to herself. Nobody seems to stay with her. After unpacking her belongings the people leave her to her solitude.

Ms Desai cleverly leaves her past untouched. We wonder whether she's like this right from the beginning or something happened in between to make her so. However there is no space for us to think and find an answer as each moment awaits something terrible to happen which in turn never happens.

One can also see an earnest effort in a human soul to be in company all the time with something or somebody even when the company seems to be unreal. No one wants to be left alone. When loneliness is forced on us we manipulate and create a world of ours from where we get the momentum to go forward.

[P15] (11 posts) March 24th, 2008, 11:15 AM

hi everybody . especially [P32] and [P11]

I dont fully agree with u .yes noone wants to be lonely but sometimes people must be lonely.

u cant find anyone around u infact u can find some so called friends and think that u can get rid of from lonelines but that time u feel so bad and friend start to give u damage pcsyhigolically .to prevent this .it is better to be lonely and try to find ways to soothe urself.

I think the girl in the story was empty that is to say one neeed to believe sth to get rid of this hallucinations .only Allah or god will help people in this situations.

[P15] (11 posts) March 24th, 2008, 11:20 AM

and i want to ask everyone what did u felt when u finished readind the story? please tell me and later i will share my feelings.

ChrisL (208 posts) March 25th, 2008, 04:46 PM

Hi everyone, I couldn't agree more with [P03] when he says that one of the great things about this group is that 'we have the chance to read the readings of everyone'. The are sometimes so different and bring up aspects that I haven't imagined. Thanks all of you for this great experience.

[P15]' s approach to the text is, for example, completely new to me because I come from another culture, probably quite different from hers. I'm not sure if people 'must' be lonely. I see that we 'are' so most of the times, even if there are lots of people around us who are apparently part of our lives - bottom there we are always lonely. Should it really be like that? The religious answer to this question depends a lot on each one's beliefs and it is interesting to see here how each of us tries to find a sort of explanation to the events that unfold in the story.

How I feel after reading the story?? Still lonely, but more serene about this because I realised that my own imagination and 'homeless spirit' - to use Roberto's words - are at least a bit more on the leash than the character's ones :)

Cheers-Chris

[P33] (5 posts) March 26th, 2008, 02:27 PM

Hi, Chris, I agree with your opinion that Desai superbly masters the genre, but at the same time fails our expectations when we speak about some elements typical for the ghost story. Formaly, everything is there-"small house on the hill. presence of something what had existed before"etc; we keep our breathing to the last paragraph, wondering what is going to happen, but nothing actually happens. Nothing coud have happened because "The Landing" is, from the beginning to the end a briliant parody of the genre!

It is significant that trying to puzzle mystery over the old house main character doesn/t feel fear, but anger or frustration. She desperately tries to make a contact with the "unknown," but house seems to be determined not to reveal its secrets Woman can not put up with "it" which tortures her mind.

"It" must be a symbol of something.I think it is a symbol of the world which had definitely dissapeared-not even traces remained. Woman is allowed to own the house, but not to be a part of it.Where she really belonges to is a "set of small rooms above shops".Instead of" black rooks with an astonishing volume of sounds" there are only some insects revolved around a lamp". "Four-poster bed" in old house has been replaced with an image of " metal foldup contraption". Writer gives us details which clearly associate to emptiness and banality of everyday life.World we live in has a litle in common with that one which could make us feel secure and fulfiled.

And, finally where is the ghost in this story? Not where he supposed to be, in the old house-1743..He doesn/t inhabit mysterious places any longer, he moved into the real life.We find him in an office, where woman works ;one of her colleagues "with something malevolent in his lidded eyes".

Best regards, [P33]

[P03] (24 posts) March 26th, 2008, 05:47 PM

Hi [P33] and all,

I do appreciate the way you react to the text! It's indeed here the role of art: it is to make you, and/or me feel frustrated, disappointed, de-automatised and even angry. For what is art if it doesn't shake , or destroy, or frustrate your expectancies?! Desai has in a way or another deviated from the run-of-the-mill traditional genres we are used to.

As for Dafodill's pertinent question I do claim that my feelings after reading the Landing, were somewhat mingled with pleasure and frustration, which is a sweet albeit paradoxical feeling.

I have a question to [P33]:Why [P33] when you said"finally where is the ghost in this story? Not where he supposed to be"did you imagine the ghost as male, not female? Is your image-making so male-oriented? Contrarily, I have been imagining the ghost as a "sexless" entity: I don't know why.

So should the image-making mechanism-while reading- be related to our referential world? If yes, what is then the role fiction if it keeps us glued to reality?
Cheers - [P03]

[P11] (213 posts) March 27th, 2008, 02:29 PM

Hello everyone,

While I was trying to find an answer to Chris question: What's does "Withdrew" mean, I learned that withdrew is the last word of the whole story, and the last one of the 1st paragraph."After upacking people leave her to her solitude" withdrawn from herself - I think she's living away from the world around and even from her inner self.

I love the group for it's powerful in the diversity of opinions however different our biliefs may be, we can share our reading experience.
[P11]

[P15] (11 posts) March 27th, 2008, 02:45 PM

Thanks for ur answers. Chris u said that my approach is different yes it may be because of culture diffrence . where are u from I have wondered. and I think it is also because of religion diffrence ,isnt it. but I agree with u that to learn diffrent opinion is very good.

I think the coment on the story is diffrent because of the things I am experiencing nowadays . but ones mood can be very changing.

see u soon

[P34] (1 post) March 30th, 2008, 12:35 AM

Hi all

A bit late but it's never too late to share!

While reading "The Landing", I thought of Henry James's "The Turn of The Screw".they are both mesmerizing.

The lady in "the landing" is to some extent similar in character to the governess-the protagonist in Henry 's novella.

They both see themeselves facing some dark and unseen forces.In both writings we can feel that the ghosts if any are but figments of their imagination.I read everyone's comments and could feel that you focused mainly on the psychic/psychological state of the woman.But there are questions to ask: What if the house is really haunted? What's the presence of the malevolent aged man "ghost of the department" for?Those would be some of the questions that an "apparitionist" would ask,no?

No one believes in a theological concept of evil?

[P34]-Morocco

[P33] (5 posts) March 31st, 2008, 01:43 AM

Hi, [P03],Well, I obviosly was not clear enough, saying that"writer fails our expectations when we speak about some elements typical for the ghost story".

It should have had absolutely positive connotation! If we expected "typical" ghost story as "The Landing" seemed to be at the beginning, then Desai surprised us, offering totaly fresh and innovative view on this genre! I simply understood the whole story as a briliant parody, trying to pay attention to some details which, in my opinion gives us a key for understanding of writers intentions. Mentioning of the ghost who exists in the department, not where "he supposed to be" is, if nothing else, a good example of how Desai manipulates run-of-the-mill traditional genre.By the way, I also imagine the ghost as a sexless entity, but in this case I just tried to stick to the text("the aged man...)Do you think that in a context of the story question of the ghost gender is a relevant one?

Best regards, [P33]

[P11] (213 posts) March 31st, 2008, 08:10 AM

Hello [P34] and the board,

You've raised a new approach to the discussion, urging us to look for the ghost, or check if the scene (the house) is haunted. If you read Mostafa and Yasmina's comments on the matter of finding out where the ghost is in the story, you find out it was even diffuculty for the narrator of the story to tell us that. My view is that we learn most of the things about this story through HER sight and emotion, and we can be taken to think there's a ghost while there isn't any.

We're not told of any friendiship she owns, no relatives and the emptiness of relantionship ties in her life and her hallucinations can urge you think She was too LONELY'

[P11]

[P35] (3 posts) August 29th, 2009, 03:41 PM

Just reading the title of this short story made me go into a totally different direction before I even started reading the story itself! For a while when it stood on my desk at home I believed that it was going to be about a plane trip from one place to another, and how the passengers will have to be extremely careful when coming down the stairs from the plane because of a fire on that side! Those were honestly my first thoughts!

After reading the first page, I was somewhat sucked up into the story and by the last page I could say with certainty that it very much reminded me of "The Yellow Wallpaper" (by Charlotte Perkins Gilman). At the University where I work, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an obligatory story that fourth-year English major students read in the American Literature subject they take. There are so many similarities between these two works of fiction that I would suggest that "The Yellow Wallpaper" be a story posted in the ELT e-Reading Group. I'm sure the rest who still haven't read it will come to the same conclusions. So if you like "The Landing" or even "The Fall of the House of Usher" (E.A. Poe), you'll certainly be fond of "The Yellow Wallpaper"!   Best regards,

[P35]

....

T08 ' Michael' by William Wordsworth '

[P12] (130 posts) May 15th, 2010, 06:03 PM

Hi Chris and All Colleagues,

Thank you for e-mailing us this gem of poetry. I read it a long time ago, and this revisiting has prompted me into a deeper reflection. I find it absolutely touching!

Life lessons so tenderly, affectively woven within a rural family/community framed by the powerful Nature images described/created by this Beloved Poet - William Wordsworth.

Through "natural objects" the poet reflects "...on man, the heart of man, and human life."

The Old Michael, a Shepherd, is a full "connoisseur" of Nature - the winds, blasts, storms, mists - he had experienced all through his life. His mind was filled with a variety of feelings, sentiments conveyed by those fields, hills. "A pleasurable feeling of blind love, the pleasure which there is in life itself."

The relationship between father and son is so tender, affectionate.

As for the structure of the Poem/Tale , I think it is so criteriously following a chronological thread.

We love some comparisons/simile used by the Poet, e.g.

A very beautiful metaphor, "He heard the South make subterraneous music like the noise of bagpipers on distant Highland hills." in my view, is used to parallel the "Pair" House/cottage, named by villagers, old and young, the " EVENING STAR". The permanent light there means, I think, that laborious family who keeps working until late at night.

Well, I feel like requesting "youthful Poets" and other Nature lovers to continue W. Wordsworth's work, as it was his wish: " ... will be my second self when I am gone."

Looking forward to seeing you all in the next posts.

 Best regards, [P12]

Dear All,

Thanks Chris for the poem, and thanks [P12] for the interpretation of the poem/tale. It has to be a great poet who tells us a love and family story in just one poem. It evokes courage, first of the poet who walks from "The public place" to "the brook of Greenhead Ghyll" with his pen and writes the story for us.

It also evokes the courage of a Father who broke the chain that generation from generation kept the family there, and didn't want to leave the same torch with his son, inviting him to go for different experiences and challenges.

The courage of the mother who accepts to see the only son go away, knowing after Michael, frail now, noone was there to share her love.

It also evokes the courage for Luke to walk from "the tumultous brook of Greenhead Ghyll" to the "public place". I hope Luke overcomes the ignominy found in the city and once go back to see the covenant he and his father have made, or rather, the remains of the unfinished Sheepfold that was still visible - if time does not clear them.

It is a love poem, but also a sad one for we're told about love that bounds and love that separates and the thing that survive over the time is the EVENING STAR, and it is a symbol that shows that old Michael's work continues and his name and the name of the family are engraved everywhere and in the poem. I'll re-read the poem again and again as I still see Michael saying:

> Courage my son,
> Go close and see the turns of human life.
> "'T will be between us; but, fare thee well,whatever fate
> Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
> And bear thy memory with me to the grave."

With love, [P11]

[P12](130 posts) May 17th, 2010, 04:05 PM
Hi Chris and All,

I would like to thank you, Tanguene, for having added relevant points to the poem/tale, and inspired me with some further words...

In fact, Luke's father and mother were very courageous. Their bravery was born from love, family love. This particular aspect has prompted me to write the lines below, as I believe they might inhabit Luke's mind.

> *From Son to Father and Mother*
> *How I revere you, Father and Mother dear!*
> *Your acts of tenderness, toil, restlessness,*
> *Spontaneously brought from your heart,*
> *Have blessed my way,*
> *And filled with joy my heart.*
> *Be sure I will make my best part...*
> *God bless you both*
> *For your achievements of great art!*

Dear All,

Thanks [P12] for your poem *"From Son to Father and Mother dear!"* It looks like the missing part of the poem in "Michael". Look, we were not told a lot of Luke's thoughts about the chain of events that come to separate and "end" the story of the family, but the overall

poem looks like the thoughts from Father and Mother about the son. The poet looks like was passing by, but as he had brought his pen with him, he took the toil of writing. Luke doesn't speak in the original poem but he speaks alone in your thread. and it completes a missing part.

I'd like to have permission to consider it for one of our radio sessions at Maputo Corridor radio, and I trust [P18] will agree with it.

Thanks a lot!

[P11]

ChrisL (209 posts) May 18th, 2010, 09:06 AM

Hi [P12], [P11] & Everyone

I think the first lines are really sticking because it invites us to take different paths, to go where people usually don't and to pay attention to things we usually just pass by.

I think it is the same in terms of relationships, especially in the family. Some people take their children - and parents- for granted, thinking they will always be there and neglect to give them love and attention till it is too late and they are not there anymore.

This is a sad poem, as [P11] said, but it is also an eye opener.

Chris

[P18](41 posts) May 18th, 2010, 01:58 PM

Hi all!

It reminds me of both my father and my mother (although this one is gone for good).

I think we can use the text for our radio sessions at the Maputo Corridor Radio.

I am just wondering if our members will be listening to the session!

We are trying to move on, we are planning a new blog soon!

[P18]

[P12] (130 posts) May 18th, 2010, 07:57 PM

Hi Chris, [P11] and All Colleagues,

I am very pleased, Tanguene, because you have appreciated my lines as if they were "the missing part" in "Michael- A Pastoral Poem".

Precisely, I thought of giving a little more of Luke's thoughts, as an obligation of revering his father and mother. So, I dared take the toil of writing...

Dear [P11], I will be honoured to be able to share my lines with your local community. I wish I could listen to you voicing them.

All the best, [P12]

[P12] (130 posts) May 18th, 2010, 08:30 PM

Hi Chris and All,

I entirely second your views, Chris, in terms of relationships. I also think the very first lines of the Poem seem to work out as a sort of "alert", beyond encouragement.

"But courage! for around that boisterous brook/ the mountains have all opened out themselves./ And made a hidden valley of their own."

Would it be an exaggeration if we saw/compared that opening out of the mountains to Luke's parents' toil, and the "hidden valley" to Luke himself?...

Best regards [P12]

ChrisL (209 posts) May 18th, 2010, 08:32 P

Hi [P12]

You bring us the missing voice of the son - I think this one of the beauties of literature: the capacity of generating more of its own and extending our experience of a text.

Thanks a lot for this!

Cheers - Chris

ChrisL (209 posts) May 18th, 2010, 08:35 PM

Hi [P11] & [P18]

Are you together in the Radio project? This is great.What a pity, I don't think I can listen to it from here. Have you ever thought of creating a podcast?

Cheers - Chris

[P11] (213 posts) May 19th, 2010, 09:23 AM

Dear Chris and All,

Yes, [P18] and I manage together the Reader's Corner project. We started together as members of The Book Club at the British Council resource centre, and we moved to AEMO (association of mozambican writers office) and applied for a radio reading room. We hold live sessions every Friday 2 to 3pm, and the session is repeated on Sunday 3pm. We prepare the scripts and select readers to join us. for next Friday we've invited a teacher and student from [X], one of the main secondary schools of the country as a way of promoting the idea of reading groups for language learning in schools.

I will try and find out how to have podcasts.

Thanks for your permission and we'll use the website material, one day we'll bring more mozambican members to join our e-reading group.

Thanks,

[P11]

[P11] (213 posts) May 19th, 2010, 11:12 AM

Dear [P12], Thanks for your deep analysis, I agree Luke can be the "the hidden valley" looking at our struggle to make him win a voice before great loss we feel at the destruction of the Evening Star. I wished he could go back to add happiness to his parents, or do like the parish-boy who built a chapel at his birth-place, "floored with marble which he sent from foreign lands".

Did look forget the covenant? Assuming he'll one day recover from the effects of the city and overcome ignominy, hold up his head again he will remember the covenant he made with the old Michael and become a successful man - "the hidden valley", for Father said:

"When thou art gone away, should evil men
Be thy companions, think of me, my Son,
And of this moment; hither turn thy thoughts,
And God will strengthen thee: amid all fear
And all temptation, Luke, I pray that thou
May'st bear in mind the life thy Fathers lived,
Who, being innocent, did for that cause
Bestir them in good deeds. Now, fare thee well--
When thou return'st, thou inthou in this place wilt see
A work which is not here: a covenant
'Twill be between us; "

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because
"... whatever fate
Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
And bear thy memory with me to the grave."

As I re-read this poem I get sad, we've stories of friends and countrymen who after leaving poverty home to seek for better oportunities around the world they never gave any sign of life, the parents and family waiting for never to see them again.
[P11]

[P12](130 posts) May 20th, 2010, 01:11 AM
Hi [P11],
Thank you very much indeed for your attention.
This "Michael - A Pastoral Poem" conveys so powerful thoughts, sentiments, that it keeps involving us in that rural community, their family labour, and the sorrow for the lack of protection of their beloved ones.
These Father's words are certainly based on his whole life experience, also fearing his beloved son's separation and family agreement...It seems we are hearing from there the father's strong appeal: " hither turn thy thoughts, /And God will strengthen thee." In fact, it sounds like a prayer for me, you know.
You are right, [P11]. How many distressing examples of family members one encounters, not being able to compensate their family with being more grateful.
Thanks for sharing your relevant points.
Best regards, [P12]

[P12](130 posts) May 20th, 2010, 01:21 AM
Hi Chris,
Thank you very much for your attention.
Yes, in fact, that is "one of the beauties of literature". And... as we read over and over it seems that it enhances the practice of some "creative writing".
Best wishes, [P12]

[P12](130 posts) May 20th, 2010, 01:31 AM
Hi [P18] and All,
You and [P11] are doing a great job indeed.
You deserve our sincere congratulations. Keep up your good work.
How can we listen to those radio sessions from here in my country? The idea of a podcast as suggested by Chris would be interesting, adding to further connections...
All the best, [P12] (in Portugal)

[P39] (44 posts) May 20th, 2010, 08:02 AM
Dear ALL,
I've created a Ning "uzbekespteachers",the related link is:
http://uzbekespteachers.ning.com/
we are 23 now , 1 are from Germany,1 from Kazakhstan, others- mostly from Tashkent.Pls, join/contribute,
[P39]

ChrisL (209 posts) June 1st, 2010, 10:27 PM
Hi everyone

I don't know exactly why but the first lines of this poem make me make an unusual connection - somehow they remind me of Dante's 'Inferno'...

'Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.'

Perhaps it is because Wordsworth invites us to take another path from the one usually taken - to look at the road from another angle. Perhaps it is because when we meet the father he is also midway upon the journey of his life. Perhaps it is because Wordsworth saw in nature the redeeming powers of religious faith...

Is this is also a journey poem? For the characters and for us, the readers??
Looking forward to hear your thoughts on this... maybe I'm completely off track :)
Cheers – Chris

[P12](130 posts) June 2nd, 2010, 01:41 AM
Hi Chris and everyone

Thank you for enhancing further reading...

I think you have made an appropriate association to those lines of Dante's "Inferno". In our view, Dante's "Inferno" "...forest dark" could be seen as the challenging tasks and major concerns of "Michael" Father and Mother. As for "the straightforward pathway had been lost", we perceive the time at Sheepfold when things within the family started diverting... we mean following a different course, certainly filled with drawbacks.

Yes, for me it can also be considered a journey poem. The poet leads us across the Sheepfold's and her wife's life journey. As readers, we do feel we follow their life stages, their daily toil, their pleasurable spots, their plans along the life path.

A second journey can we also follow, though not so near... It is Luke's one - after having laid "the first stone of the Sheepfold" until ... in the dissolute city gave himself to "evil courses."
Cheers,[P12]

[P21] (15 posts) June 2nd, 2010, 11:44 AM
This pastorial poem makes for a pleasurable reading, although it is tragic. But the lessons are inherent and glaring, the twists of life, which we either check or allow to decide our fates. What more can I say than to say that the poem is very inspiring.

I weep for Michael and Isabel and mourn for Luke,
[P21]

[P21] (15 posts) June 2nd, 2010, 11:58 AM
Hi all,

Please kindly comment on this poem I wrote recently. Thank you.

"Dry Season"
During the dry season,
Relics of creation enmeshed
In external and internal dryness.
Man is the worse for it and...
His skin is taken in evidence,
Then his garments measured

In size, quality and value.
His case would have been salvaged,
But that he came in clothes with
Empty pockets.

Symbiosis is a genius philosophy,
A wise oath sworn to by the gods.
Man is best for it so...
He bends his back for
His falling brother to land on.
Then everybody becomes a visioner,
Seeing God in the image of man.
Hell is for those who stop the rain,
Heaven is for them that bring the rain.

[P12] (130 posts) June 2nd, 2010, 08:43 PM
Dear [P21] and Everyone,
    Let me dare interpret your lines this way...
    This poem sounds as a reflection on how some people enjoy keeping up appearances in this world where , for some of those, the external part is mostly valued, e.g. "... garments measured in size, quality and value.". Rather than valueing sentiments, character. So, this part entails a materialistic view, I think...
    The second part presents another dimension : a religious/spiritual one. Man is seen within a positive circle, encompassing fraternity...
    We found the last line interesting: " Heaven is for them that bring the rain." Shall we compare this "rain" to God's blessings?...
    Looking forward to your views.
    Regards, [P12]

[P21] (15 posts) June 4th, 2010, 11:29 AM
Hi [P12] and all,
    I deeply appreciate your efforts at demystifying the poem "Dry Season." You're right in your own way about the first and last stanzas. As you know, you have the right to interpret the poem as you understand it.
    Permit me to say that there are other meanings attached to the poem, especially from the point of view of the less privileged. I am pleased with your interpretation because it is in line with the meaning. But let me dare say that I would really like everyone to say something about how the poem strikes them.
    Regards,
    [P21]

[P21] (15 posts) June 7th, 2010, 08:14 AM
Hi all! I wish everyone on this Board a pleasant and fulfilled week. I have a new poem I would like to share with you all. Your comments will be deeply appreciated. Thank you.

"The Niger Delta Story"

"Once upon a time," my grandfather used to say,
Our homeland was awesome to behold.

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Lush green mountains beautiful to behold,
Sorrounded by forests unravished and virgin,
Wild creatures prancing and happy birds chirping,
Men and animals had respect for one another.
The air smelt of peace and the land was pure,
Crystal clear rivers, home to healthy fauna and flora,
Borded from the land by rich mangroves,
The beauty of nature unveiled, unperturbed.
"Those were the good old days" he would say.

"Things are no longer the same" my father would say.
The world has been turned upside down,
There is hardly a tree left in our forests.
The mountains now look like heaps of sand,
Wild creatures lament the threat of extinction,
The songs of the birds are undulating dirges,
A cold war ensues between man and the creatures.
Poisoned air reverberates the atmosphere,
The purity of the land is lost to civilization.
Fauna and flora mourn the living-dead state of rivers,
Exposed further by the the emasculated mangroves.
Everything judged before the judgement day.
"Things have fallen apart" he would say.

Where have the lush green mountains gone to?
What became of the unravished virgin forests?
How did the wild creatures all disappear?
Why do the birds sing only songs of sorrow?
Which substance transformed the fresh and peaceful air?
Who polluted the rivers and endangered fauna and flora?
These are questions I dread when I tell my children stories.

[P21]

ChrisL (209 posts) June 9th, 2010, 12:03 AM
Hi [P21] & All
   Thanks a lot for the poem! It makes me think how far have we come in our views of nature from the ones professed by the romantics, like Wordsworth?
   Where can we find nowadays the unspoiled beauty of the Grasmere Vale? In very few places indeed! For Wordsworth and the Romantics nature was a source of inspiration and spiritual healing - then the Victorians took upon themselves to tame it and we now have to rethink it. Are we becoming romantic about nature again? Or are we just nostalgic for something that is a literary invention?
   Cheers - Chris

[P12](130 posts) June 9th, 2010, 03:13 PM
Hi [P11] and All, Thank you for sharing your poem "The Niger Delta Story". We have enjoyed the sequenced-generation story. The first part depicts "the good old days" when man and nature showed respect for each other, living in a peaceful communion. To some extent, the poet seems to pay homage to his grandfather's generation and the "unperturbed" nature.The second part conveys destruction, extinction, a damaged environment, where "the

purity of the land is lost to civilization". All this witnessed by another generation, the poet's father's.

The third part invites us , human beings, to a deep reflection upon the existing threats affecting nature and man's balance these days. This really causes great fear to the poet on telling his children stories... We all wish our children would contribute to restore that purity, balance in nature, as well as encourage their children to pursue a more positive, peaceful path.

Best regards,

[P12]

[P12] (130 posts) June 9th, 2010, 03:52 PM

Hi Chris and All,

You are right when you say that very few places today offer that "unspoiled beauty of the Grasmere vale". I have thought of some beautiful spots, and I am pleased to post some lines focusing on them. Am I becoming romantic about nature again?...

Well, in my view, we have the duty to keep being increasingly attentive to nature, and either do we sing it as we perceive its manifold contrasts or might we have no chance of contributing to literary pieces...

Best regards, [P12]

A Song of Joy

From the top of the mountains
We breathed the pure air
Enjoying the stunning, awe-inspiring views
That stretched around there.
Coming down to the green valley
We got involved in the breeze around,
And walked by the little brook
Singing together melodious sounds.
The sweet scent of flowers and bushes
Accompanied us all the way long
Allowing for a quiet reflection,
In stillness and love,
Away from the throng.

[P36] (2 posts) June 10th, 2010, 04:52 AM

Hello Everyone

Thanks for welcoming me into the group. I was away, therefore, couldn't keep track of the discussion.

On reading Michael, I was reminded of the life for many in the Himalayas. Life for some of us hasn't changed much.

Chris had said, "Where can we find nowadays the unspoiled beauty of the Grasmere Vale?" I have seen children and womenfolk toil, carry water across hills on foot, guide the goats and cows (not sheep in this case :)) home before sunset through steep and narrow pack tracks where an urban soul wouldn't dare to tread, where I have heard the sound of silence in harmony with the birds.

I am reminded of another poem, by Blake.

"...And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,

Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings..."

(THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREEE Regards

[P36]

[P20] (14 posts) June 10th, 2010, 07:43 PM

Hi all, My comment to Chris was that, since India is going through rapid technological changes and trees are being ruthlessly cut (chasing away birds and other animals) in the name of development , all I say is that, those of us who love Nature will always love and respect it and those who dont wont.The story of this poem is being repeated here everyday as rural folk enter the cities. I also have another peom which I have been asked to share with you all for discussion.here it is: I have used it for Literary Appreciation for years with excellent results.I taught adult males.

Poem by Evgeni Venohurov,'
   Translated by W.H.Auden

   " Every railroad station keeps a book of Complaints
   And, if you ask for it, they have to give it to you.
   It wouldn't be a bad idea, I think
   If Eternity had a book like that.
   Then people wouldn't have to keep silent about their sorrows,
   Timidly, cautiously at first, they would all come bringing;
   The griefs they endure, the wrongs they are made to suffer
   To universal attention and judgement.
   How we should then be struck I know
   By one entry of half a line, written by that woman,
   Who, slumped against its railings,
   Was crying in the park last night."
   [P20]

[P50] (1 post) June 11th, 2010, 06:25 PM

Hi all ,

   This is such a beautiful poem , as it nears its end one can feel the sadness permeating through it , one can almost feel the terrible pain Michael went through when he heard of his son's wayward ways.

   The poet by building up an intense background of the father's feeling for the child draws us irrevocably into the story. He stresses so much upon what the father felt at each stage; at the age of 5 , at the age of 10 and at the age of 18 , that when he finally hears the news of his son , he dies of heart break .

   The poem also describes the industrious and extremely simple life of the mountain side. Their life seems to border on cave men lifestyle albeit without the violence of the latter.

   It is an illustration of a typical patriarchal poem , a classic father-son relationship , it would be nice to know what the mother's perspective was like.

   Do any of you have any ideas on that?
   Regards, [P50]
   Student, India.

[P36] (2 posts) June 12th, 2010, 03:16 AM

Sorry, the poem I quoted in my last post was by Yeats. Adding to what Iris says in her posting, sparrows had started disappearing some time ago from urban spaces here. Now I find that you don't see them in rural areas as well because of excessive use of cell phones.

   I think in our times it's important to be romantic about nature since so much around is being swept away by new developments. It's perhaps our way of holding on to what's left. For me, Michael is a call of nature. Perhaps, I identify more with this aspect of the poem than others.

   Ragards [P36] India

[P12] (130 posts) June 12th, 2010, 03:48 PM

Hi [P36] and All,

Pleasure to meet you here within the ELT e-Reading Group. We also have to thank you for bringing to us some real atmosphere in the Himalayas.

That keeps being a hard labour for so many people there, we see. Children, in particular, were not supposed to endure such burdensome tasks. Unfortunately, they are not granted their dignified status in other different parts of the world, too.

May the responsible leaders and other "urban souls" be able to change those children's paths so that the world really understands the true value of development and peace!

[P51] (1 post) June 14th, 2010, 11:35 AM

Hello everyone,

I've read the poem at first for a casual reading,

secondly, to know what is truely awaiting Michael,

thirdly, to feel the nature as is described, the fields-mountains-rocks life within!

It depicted life through nature, a couple-happy and content living to give life to their only hope Luke.. But as always Luke denies Michael creating a traumatic ending! I mostly liked the way Michael caressed and brought-up Luke as similar to a mother maybe more exeedingly! In this he outran Isabella! It refreshes one's mind travelling along the 'Evening Star' an adventure memorable & fruitful!

[P09] (29 posts) June 15th, 2010, 12:53 PM

Michael is a tragic story of a father and a son and their unfulfilled expectations and ideals regarding life. The poem starts with a perfect virtuous order in the microcosm – a happy and righteous family of three with absolutely nothing problematic in their life. Michael is a successful head of the family, a dutiful father and husband. Luke, the son appears to be ideal throughout the most part of the poem. Luke had to be sent out to earn so that Michael can pay off the debt suddenly befell on them. This apparently temporary separation between the father and the son paves the way for greater long-term and disastrous separation between them; the family becomes scattered as a result of this decision of dislocate the son from his original context, i.e. the pastoral and pristine life. The urban exterior of the city corrupts innocent rural interior of the pastoral mind. Criminality creeps in replacing righteousness and sense of virtue in Luke. Luke seems to have forgotten the parting advice of his father: "When thou art gone away, should evil men / Be thy companions, think of me, my Son, / And of this moment; hither turn thy thoughts, / And God will strengthen thee: amid all fear / And all temptations, Luke, I pray that thou / May'st bear in mind the life thy Fathers lived, / Who, being innocent, did for that cause / Bestir them in good deeds." This advice shows that the father was at least faintly aware of a possibility of the spiritual alienation of the son not only from his family and root but also from his spiritual upbringing and belief.

There is an interesting circularity expressed through the structure of the poem – giving an idea of wholeness of life in general however much incomplete it may appear. The poem begins with a description of the brook of Greenhead Ghyll and the poem ends also with the same reference. Interestingly though the adjective used to describe the brook changes from "tumultuous" to "boisterous." I find it interesting because while the poem begins in a positive note the adjective used at the beginning carries a somewhat negative connotation whereas the end of the poem in spite of its definitely tragic overtone the adjective used is positive. This denotes of the hope and redemptive nature of human life that Wordsworth seems to believe in.

Here I would also draw my co-readers' attention to the taxonomy of characters in the poem as used by Wordsworth. In Hebrew, Christian and Islamic traditions Michael, the archangel commands the Army of God. In the poem too he is in the position of a commander of virtues teaching Luke the ways of life along a righteous path. The name Isabel means "consecrated or devoted to God." Luke is one of the authors of the Gospels; his is the third of four Gospels in

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the New Testament. An associate of the Apostle Paul, Luke also wrote the book of Acts. Luke's Gospel concentrates on Christ's teachings about salvation and Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. The circularity regarding the hope and redemptive nature of human life and the victory of the pristine spirituality over materialistic corruption comes to a complete circuit while read with the biblical references of these characters. The poem, though apparently have a tragic ending does not seem to end there – it continues in the poet's hope of spiritual salvation and the return of the prodigal son to his father's home.

Regards [P09]

[P21] (15 posts) June 15th, 2010, 02:36 PM

Hi [P12] and all, thank you very much for your response to my poem "The Niger Delta Story." As you rightly pointed out, the poem tells the story of how things used to be before the advent of pollution, caused by oil exploitation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, how things have become as a result of these activities, and the envisaged effect these developments will have on the future generations.

I really appreciate your contribution to the reading of this poem as I hope that you will pray for the continuous survival of the people of Niger Delta. Thank you very much.

[P21].

[P21](15 posts) June 15th, 2010, 02:43 PM

Hi Chris and all,

Thank you for the professional outlook you gave to my poem "The Niger Delta Story." Actually, the poem is a romanticization of nature because it mourns the loss of the beauty of nature. I think we are forever going to be romantic about nature and reveal this whenever the muse comes upon us. This poem can be seen as a pointer to the recent BP oil spillage problem, indeed, a catastrophy to nature. If truly we love nature, then we cannot but be concerned about her welfare. Please be romantic about nature. Thank you.

[P21]

[P12] (130 posts) June 15th, 2010, 06:56 PM

Hi Chris and All,

I have greatly appreciated [P09]'s characterization of this poem/story, and the way she traced this rural family history. Very interesting what [P09] expresses regarding the brook, changing from "tumultuous" to "boisterous". Her observation has aroused another point of curiosity in us: does the poet choose the "tumultuous brook" as a start, whose course/flow of its waters is never the same, preparing us for some struggle, for witnessing the ups and downs of life?

I also think this poem appeals to courage, love and hope. The poet highly values spirituality alike. [P09] has focused on it through the characters' profile and the wonderful biblical references of those. I entirely agree with [P09]'s view, and I love it: "The poem, though apparently have a tragic ending does not seem to end there- it continues in the poet's hope of spiritual salvation and the return of the prodigal son to his father's home."

We send [P09] our cordial greetings, and look forward to further posts from her again.
Cheers,
[P12]

Dear all,

I was re-reading the poem, besides the sad end of Michael's family history: the unfinished sheepfold, broken promises (Luke doesn't return and the land is lost) an all that what struck me was the vow of endless love the father kept for his son,

" 'Twill be between us; but, whatever fate
Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
And bear thy memory with me to the grave"

This is very important in our lives, and I never thought a written word could convey so much sadness to a reader, as this poem does, that can cause tears to drop.

Thanks again

[P11]

....

T17 'The Parrots' Tale' by Tagore

[P23] - Submitted on 25 August, 2012 - 01:17

This text was first published in a Bengali magazine in 1918 and it focuses on disrespect for the bird, efforts aiming not the improvement of the bird but making huge amounts of money while pretending to educate the bird, but really suffocating it with nonsense.

This text was published in a Bengali magazine in 1918.

I feel so sorry for the bird and so proud of Tagore!

Chris Lima - Submitted on 25 August, 2012 - 10:44

Hi [P23]

I remember the first time I came into contact with this text was in a teacher training event a couple of years ago, I think. I can't help thinking that what those people did to the parrot is not very different from what sometimes we do to students: lock them into classrooms, stuff them with the curriculum and expected them to be happy and learn.

Of course, this is gross generalisation but still, one just wonders...

Cheers – Chris

[P25]- Submitted on 25 August, 2012 - 16:23

Sorry for not sharing for a while. Just got back from holidays.

It's striking that everyone in the story seems very happy with what is going on, except of course the poor parrot. But then, even the narrator doesn't give him his say. I wonder if he's just leaving us to fill in the gaps or whether even for him the parrot doesn't really count?

[P23] - Submitted on 25 August, 2012 - 21:15

Hi [P25], Chris, and all other colleagues,
The moment I read this tale was first published in Bengali in 1918 it made me think of Bengali situation at that time. It was still a British colony and striving for independence (together with India and other places on that region), if I'm not mistaken.
The take is about oppression and about being manipulates by others that want to take economic advantage of the weak.
Do you think I am being too "political" in this analysis?
Bye for now,[P23]

[P81] Submitted on 25 August, 2012 - 23:03

How sad! This was written a very long time ago , and it still reflects what's happening today . The victim is the free defenseless bird who was accused of being ungrateful I wonder who similar is it to our education systems I love Tagore

[P77] Submitted on 26 August, 2012 - 16:53

As a child, Tagore disliked formal education and was taught by a home tutor. The story, The Parrot' is a satire on the education system which does not care for the needs of the learners. The traditional education system is a symbol of oppression and the negation of individual liberty.

The poor parrot was a victim of the ego of a ruler who approached the whole issue from his perspective. His sychophants were interested in their material advancement and pushed the innocent parrot to its death in a most inhuman manner.

We build buildings for imparting education, allot huge amount for the education of the children, design our syllabus as per our whims and caprices, but never think of the need of the learners. The story is a sad commentary on the mindless, aimless and useless education system that robs the children of their natural urge and inclination. They get what 'we' think is good for them, not what contributes to their growth and natural development.

Tagore has very nicely brought out the hypocracy of the so called scholars who

Though the story was written long back in the context of the colonial education system of India, its appeal is universal. Has the situation changed over the years? Have we stopped feeding our learners with irrelevant information and bookish knowledge? Aren't we perpetuating the age old system of stifling the free will of the younger generatiomn? When will we stop the 'oppression' that goes in the name of imparting education?

All the policy makers connected with education should read this story. Stop treating the learners as 'parrots'. [P77]

[P77] Submitted on 26 August, 2012 - 17:58

'The Parrot' by Tagore is a satire on the education system that stifles the free will of the learners. We look at the welfare of the learners from 'our perspectives', we indulge in educational innovations to satisfy our ego, we prescribe the syllabus to prove our scholarship, not to help the learners to grow. The mindless, aimless and useless educational 'enterprise' of the rulers and their sychophants robs the learners of their freedom of will and forces them to their 'death' as it happened in the case of the parrot.

Tagore's pictorial description of the human greed for wealth, his apt description of the autocratic attitude of the king and a vivid description of the reaction of the socalled scholars are unique. Why do we go for our syllabus design and the socalled innovations in educational initiatives? To satisfy the kings?

The story was written when the Indians were subjected to the imported education system which was nothing but 'parrot learning' and aimed at oppression and deprivation. But has the situation changed? Do we look at the need of the learners from the persspective of the learners? [P77]

[P12] Submitted on 22 September, 2012 - 21:00

Dear Colleagues & All Readers,

I have just caught up with this delightful story satirizing the education system still prevailing in some teaching/learning contexts (unfortunately).

I've read with pleasure all comments and I think [P77] has said it all in a realistic detailed analysis.

In my view, this tale is a timeless alert to all those who are committed to education. Parents,educators, teachers, politicians, governments should reflect upon Tagore's teachings. Tagore's story protagonists involved in *"the bird's education"* -- from the goldsmith to scribes and others-- just aimed at showing off regardless of the bird's needs and wishes as *"It seemed it was rather irrelevant to look at the bird."* One could also associate this image *"...the wings of the bird were cut off."* to the terrible deprivation of learner creativity within some educational environments.

This has been an impressive read into the realm of R. Tagore's wise, insightful, critical thoughts. For me, the two last sentences of this tale clearly translate the openness, freedom, way to creativity and freshness of the atmosphere outdoors in a contrast with the oppression, selfishness, ostentation, hypocrisy of the indoor environment. The author has achieved it in a very poetical tone, in my opinion.

Thanks a lot! [P12]

[P82] Submitted on 26 September, 2012 - 17:36

Hi all,What a sad story! The first question that came to my mind was, "What is the effective way of teaching?' A bird is the symol of freedom. Thus, I think the writer is asking us to free our learners' minds regardless to anything else. How? That's the question :)

Best wishes.[P82]

[P93] Submitted on 27 September, 2012 - 19:39

I have just joined the programme can you send me the message you are sharing on please!

Chris Lima - Submitted on 10 October, 2012 - 12:58

Hi Everyone

Indeed, I think the issue is that education should free a person's mind instead of making us slaves of it. Spot on!

[P92] Submitted on 11 February, 2013 - 06:49

When I read Tagore's The Parrot's Tale. I questioned myself what I am teaching my students. What is going on in our education system. What should I teach my students are really helpful for them? The more questioning the more thinking I need to carry on everyday in my teaching job. I think I can't change a big system, but at least I can keep thinking and reflecting .That is worth in my job as well as in my life. I like Tagore's writings very much. I read his poems in Chinese long time ago. His eassies and poems are very beautiful and romantic, very gentle as well. But The Parrot's Tale gave me another aspect of Tagore's writing. I like him more:)

Appendix C: Semi-structured narratives template

ELT Online Reading Group - Narrative

Instructions
- Read the whole page BEFORE starting to write
- Write a coherent narrative; i.e. link each idea to the next like you would in a story
- Feel free to express your ideas and opinions in the way you consider most appropriate
- Use as much space as you need ☺

> Example: I have decided to join the Reading Group because *I think that it is a good way to ... and to improve in terms of...* When I read a short story or poem posted in the Group I usually *take some notes to ... and I also think about how the text connects to...*

I have decided to join the Reading Group because...

When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually...

When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually...

In my opinion, reading literature online...

Communicating with others about literature can be...

As for connecting with other teachers online, it...

I think the online medium helps me / prevents me from...

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that...

On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that...

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a [...] experience because...

Username: email:
Please return this to M.C.B.Lima@open.ac.uk_ before 15th June 2012
Thanks a lot for your help and participation!

Appendix D: Semi-structured narratives

N01

I have decided to join the Reading Group because I have always enjoyed reading and sharing it with different people.

When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually think of what sort of personality that person might have. When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually feel them round me.

In my opinion, reading literature online opens closed doors of the world. Communicating with others about literature can be a way of knowing each other easier. As for connecting with other teachers online, it is a challenge and a helping hand as well. I think the online medium helps me / prevents me from loneliness.

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that I can discover so many different opinions on the same subject.On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that I can use some materials in my classes.

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a very pleasant experience because I can use the Net for my favourite hobby.

N02

Actually, I am so glad to e-mail me back, that is great kind on your behalf.

I have decided to sign-up in Reading Group because I reckon that it is a great way to support myself with materials I can't find it everywhere which will bring about a great success for my students, and to improve in term of knowledge as well as teaching.

However, when I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually take some notes to enhance my students' awareness of reading literature and how to interpret it. Nevertheless, when I read other members' comment on the forum I usually take notes to avoid these gaps in the future. Also, these comments provide me with good experience, and sometimes they remind me of things may slip out or forgotten information.

In my point of view, reading literature online has advantages and disadvantages. However, let's shed light on the shiny face of the coin which is the advantages. First of all, something remarkable for teacher students or keen people who are full time- work. For, these groups can't find sometimes a space of time to open a page. Regardless, also some materials are exorbitant not all people can afford them. The marvelous advantage which sharing the people's opinions.

On the other hand, mixing with people and keeping in touch with them is a huge beneficial thing which we miss on line.

As for connecting with teachers online, allows me to back up my information as well as provides me discovering new beliefs new interpretations, also helps me with meeting different people with different back ground which is the most favorable two things I adore. Discussing with teachers contradicting with them show the logic of mind the logic of man on earth, give the sense of being critical or being venerable to others' critics which is a great enjoyable and enlarge my ability as well as potentiality to read the literature with a good taste and high sense of reading.

I believe the online medium helps me in surfing others' prospective as well show me a range of materials, people, culture, discussions, and it keeps updated of what is going round the world of literature. Further, It keeps me catching up with the forums with meeting and with people.

As a matter of fact, what I find challenging about being part of this group is that I can't catch up with them because I think they have good experience in materials they use as well as in teaching these material this the only reason.

On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that meeting teachers have good experience, reading their comments, sharing their views, debating with them or

contradicting with them give me the sense of being a part of high level community depends on logic and analysis. Not only that, but supporting me with teaching, choosing the best materials for reading for teaching and for learning.

N03

I have decided to join the Reading Group because I want to be aware of latest happenings and get new ideas for improving my teaching and of course self improvement...

When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually think about the ideas presented , the expressions and the style...When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually think about how others' reception and perception of ideas...

In my opinion, reading literature online saves a lot of trees but takes away relaxation one gets from reading. Communicating with others about literature can be a fruitful exercise...

As for connecting with other teachers on line, it provides a platform for exchange of views and ideas. I think the online medium helps me / prevents me from. To be aware of latest happenings in the teaching field..

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that to come up with original ideas. On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that the genuine love people for teaching...

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a [good...] experience because it has provided valuable insights into creativity and teaching of English.

N04

I have decided to join the Reading Group because I wanted an environment in which I could share thoughts on literature and my reading of specific texts with others and enrich the reading experience by reading what others have discovered. When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I first download it onto my ebook reader. I then usually read it through once and then mull over it for a few days. After that I read it again before going to the site to see what others have made of it. When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually take some time to think things over. I'm afraid I don't often comment as my time online is pretty limited. I don't have a computer at home and can only comment from the local library. But I do try and read the comments once a week and invariably profit from them.

In my opinion, reading literature online is not as good an experience as reading a book. I still prefer books. But reading with a group is one of the great advantages of online reading. Communicating with others about literature can be, in fact I'd say is, very definitely an enriching experience.

As for connecting with other teachers online, it's not really possible for me for reasons I've explained above.. This is what I find most interesting about being part of the group.

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a been a very positive experience because it has introduced me to texts I would not have otherwise read and has helped me to look for new elements in my text from my own personal reading.

N05

I have decided to join the Reading Group because I'm curious about what other people may think about the same texts I read.

When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually think how my students (teens/adults) would feel about those texts, because they usually are the right size to deal with in class – sorry! Professional conditioning...

When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually find it interesting to find out how other people may have different interpretations of facts I would have taken for granted after my own reading

In my opinion, reading literature online takes away the sense of intimacy I used to experiment when reading books, but on the other hand it extends my views on the topics and ways of writing. Communicating with others about literature can be relaxing and entertaining, as we are sharing a common interest.

As for connecting with other teachers online, it has revealed some shared worries and has simplified some tasks. I think the online medium helps me being up-to-date with recent writing tendencies and has provided me with good written material for my students and for my own pleasure.

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that I can't spare as much time online as I would like to. On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is the variety of what becomes available.

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a surprisingly nice experience because I love reading, but being able to access what other people so generously share out of the commercial circuit is a totally new thing and exactly because the texts don't have to obey to commercial rules, they come out with such authenticity that makes them enjoyable. On the whole the quality is very good and I specially value originality, independence and humility.

N06

I have decided to join the Reading Group because I can hardly find any motivation to read anything that is not job specific material, and I have always enjoyed reading Literature.

When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group, I usually take down notes and do some quick Google research for the writer's biography and some reviews on the story. When I read other members' comments on the forum, I usually try to compare notes with what they write in order to get a clearer picture of how the thread is developing.

In my opinion, reading literature online has really helped me find some motivation to read Literature again. Communicating with others about literature can be a good way to develop the skills needed to become effective mediators of our cultural differences.

As for connecting with other teachers online, it is an invaluable tool to get useful insight into different teaching environments and experiences. I think the online medium helps me make use of my free time devoted to reading in a more relaxed and flexible way. I can read even at work when I want to take some time off.

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that I feel deeply committed to participating in it but I sometimes have the impression that I lag behind. On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that we can all benefit from the intercultural aspect present in all the forums.

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been an enriching experience because it has helped me analyse literary texts from various and sometimes opposing perspectives.

N07

I have decided to join the Reading Group because firstly I like reading very much ,secondly I studied English literature at university so I think it will be a good opportunity for me to share opinions with other colleagues about the poem or story we read.

When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually download it to my computer to read it again later and check out the comments of the group members. When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually check out the connection between the comments and the text.

In my opinion, reading literature online... is one of the ways to develop yourself professionally and personally.Communicating with others about literature can be a way to express your feelings... As for connecting with other teachers online, it is great to work together. I think the online medium helps me share my opinions.

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that sometimes I read a story or a poem with a different point of view, which I have never thought of before. On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that to see how people from different parts of the world can think about the same things about a poem or short story...

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a [great...] experience because it helps me understand a story or a poem better and I meet lots of great people online....

N08

I have decided to join the Reading Group because I expected professional discussions...When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually I think how the texts relates to my present emotional state and I also think of my classroom experience connected with the text...

When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually compare them with my own and with the precepts known from literary studies. I also think how their comments reflect their personalities (the criterion highlighted by Laurence Raw in the Fielded discussion on Jane Austen)....

In my opinion, reading literature online is a good way to initiate and participate in discussions and to improve in terms of language, but I often find that the result is rather disappointing because the social contact with face-to-face interaction is missing. Communicating with others about literature can be more pleasing if done in immediate communication...

As for connecting with other teachers online, it is a good way of getting into contact, initially. I think the online medium helps me to stay connected and to use English but it prevents me from real progress in English. I learned much more and with greater pleasure when I read and studied intensively Shakespeare and English poets of the 18th century as part of my research for the second dissertation (Doctor habilitatus) in 1982-1983. I still refer to these classical authors from time to time just to remember their texts and enjoy them, and to enrich my English. I am absolutely convinced that professionals in language and literature studies (linguists, literary scholars and teachers) should do a lot of literature and preferably discuss it in face-to-face communication in the classroom and in society. Every time I have a chance, I mention literature as part of obligatory university programmes in teachers' professional development schemes.

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that I happen to misdirect my responses (? Computer literacy?) and that I fail to get into a really deep discussion with somebody of my experience.

On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that I can see what students require in reading and discussing literature and what can help to improve the learner's Engllish (and the learner may be myself).

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a pleasant experience because it gave me ideas about learning English and studying literature.

N09

I have decided to join the Reading Group because...i think that it'll help me a lot. When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually...enjoys it. When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually...get excited to know that there are many people who are improving there skills through this group.
In my opinion, reading literature online...is very helpful and effective communicating with others about literature can be...very helpful and exciting.

As for connecting with other teachers online, it... will enhance my communication skills . I think the online medium helps me / prevents me from...

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that. On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that...On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a good experience because... it will help me and serve as a good guide for me in future.

N10

I have decided to join the Reading Group because... because I think that it is a good way to improve my language.When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually... take some notes to understand the all ideas. When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually...have new ideas and maybe I will have more communication with other people and improve my bad language

In my opinion, reading literature online...it is a very good idea especially if I have a time for that! Communicating with others about literature can be more fine and improve my language.

As for connecting with other teachers online, it...is a good idea. What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that...how can I communicate with them and be more active with them.On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that...they are interesting to be one of them I think .

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a very good experience because of all thing that I mentioned at the above points.

N11

I have decided to join the Reading Group because I am very interested in Reading both in English and Arabic (my mother tongue).

When I read a short story or a poem posted in the Group I usually...look for the language items such as words , phrases and unusual way of structuring language. When I read other members' comments on the forum I usually...analyse the way they express their ideas and opinions. Also new experiences usually capture me.

In my opinion, reading literature online is not easy .and interesting STILL THE BOOK is the KING of reading. Communicating with others about literature can be...beneficial when the thermometers of cultural variations and contrasts are slow down

As for connecting with other teachers online, it is a pleasure for me. I think the online medium helps me in getting involved in different useful activities with people from the globe / prevents me from. Enjoying the TRADITIONAL ways of learning, reading and, memorizing things

What I find challenging about being part of this Group is that...keeping on contacting and browsing every single post. On the other hand, what I find most interesting about being part of it is that... being up-dated and professionally having the self satisfaction of a teacher whose colleagues talk about the things bomb the blood in his veins.

On the whole, I would say that being a member of the Reading Group has been a pleasant and beneficial experience because I feel that I am travelling in a boat in the right water with the people that I know.

Appendix E: Online survey questionnaire

This is the paper version of the questionnaire available to respondents on SurveyMonkey. The survey went online on Survey Monkey on 17th February 2012 and it was closed on 24th May 2012.

A. **About you**

1. How long have you been a member of the Group?

  ○ A. Less than 6 months

  ○ B. Between 6 months and 1 year

  ○ C. Between 1 and 2 years

  ○ D. More than 2 year

2. In which country do you currently work? _____

3. What is your first language? _____

4. Are you?

  ☐ A. A teacher

  ☐ B. A teacher trainer

  ☐ C. A TESOL student

  ☐ Other (please specify)

5. How long have you been involved with English language teaching?

  ○ A. Less than 1 year

  ○ B. Between 1 and 5 years

  ○ C. Between 6 and 10 years

  ○ D. More than 10 years

  ○ E. More than 20 years

  ○ F. I am a TESOL student

6. Besides this Group, do you participate in any other form of online network and/or social media?

  ○ A. Yes

  ○ B. No

7. Which one(s)? _____

B. About your membership to the Group

8. Why have you joined the Group? Tick all that apply.

☐ A. To have access to literary texts in English

☐ B. To discuss literature with other readers

☐ C. To communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds

☐ D. To share my professional experience

☐ E. To gain access to literature teaching materials

☐ F. To share my own writings

☐ G. To improve my English language skills

☐ H. Other (please specify)

9. Which of the answers above do you consider the most important reason? _____

10. How frequently do you visit the Group?

○ A. Every day

○ B. About once /twice a week

○ C. About once /twice a month

○ D. I don't have a routine for visits

○ E. When I receive an email alert

○ F. Other (please specify)

11. Have you ever posted to the forum?

○ A. Yes (Go to 12)

○ B. No (Go to 14)

12. What has motivated you to post? Tick all that apply.

☐ A. The chosen literary text

☐ B. A post from another Group member

☐ C. A response to my own initial post

☐ D. The chance to publish my own writing

☐ E. The desire to be part of the Group

☐ F. Other (please specify)

13. Which of the answers above do you consider the most important factor? _____

14. What were your main reasons for not posting?

C. <u>About reading</u>

15. What do you do with the short stories/poems posted in the Group? Tick all that apply.

☐ A. I read them for pleasure.

☐ B. I use them for some classroom activities with my English language learners

☐ C. I use them with my TESOL students

☐ D. I use them with my undergraduate Literature students

☐ E. I read them with my own local face-to-face reading group

☐ F. I share them with other teachers in my school/institution

☐ G. Other (please specify)

16. Which of the answers above would see as the most important use?

_____

17. What kinds of text would you like to read in the Group? Tick all that apply.

☐ A. Canon literature in English: long-established English-speaking authors

☐ B. Contemporary literature in English: new English-speaking authors

☐ C. World Literature written in English: African, Asian, American, European authors

☐ D. Literature in Translation

☐ E. Other (please specify)

18. Which of the answers above would be your favourite? _____

D. <u>Almost there!</u>

19. Is there anything else about the Group that you would like to tell us?

20. Please tick the boxes if you agree with the statements below.

☐ I understand that this research is done exclusively for educational purposes and all information I provide will be treated as strictly confidential.

☐ I agree to be contacted by the researcher to take part in further stages of this study.

21. In case you agree to be contacted, please write your email address below.

Appendix F: Online survey results

The tables and graphs below illustrate some of the online survey findings that are connected to aspects discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 1: Survey respondents' time as Group member.

		Response Percent	Response Count
A. Less than 6 months		57.1%	72
B. Between 6 months and 1 year		16.7%	21
C. Between 1 and 2 years		14.3%	18
D. More than 2 years		11.9%	15
	answered question		126
	skipped question		0

Table 2: Possible relationship between time a Group member and posting.

How you ever posted to the forum?	Yes	No
Time as a member		
Less than 6 months	7 21.7%	65 70.7%
Between 6 months and 1 year	5 15.2%	15 16.3%
Between 1 and 2 years	10 30.3%	8 8.7%
More than 2 years	11 33.3%	4 4.3%
Total	33	92

Table 3: Survey respondents' professional status.

		Response Percent	Response Count
A. A teacher		73.8%	93
B. A teacher trainer		17.5%	22
C. A TESOL student		7.9%	10
Other		14.3%	18
	Other (please specify) Show Responses		20
	answered question		126
	skipped question		0

Table 4: Survey respondents' period of involvement with ELT.

		Response Percent	Response Count
A. Less than 1 year		7.9%	10
B. Between 1 and 5 years		18.3%	23
C. Between 6 and 10 years		22.2%	28
D. More than 10 years		21.4%	27
E. More than 20 years		24.6%	31
F. I am a TESOL student		5.6%	7
		answered question	126
		skipped question	0

Table 5: Possible relationship between professional involvement with ELT and membership.

How long have you been involved with ELT? Time as a member	Less than 1 year	Between 1 and 5 years	Between 6 and 10 years	More than 10 years	More than 20 years
Less than 6 months	7 70%	9 40.9%	19 67.9%	15 60.0%	17 51.5%
Between 6 months and 1 year	2 20%	9 40.9%	3 10.7%	5 20.0%	1 3.0%
Between 1 and 2 years	1 10%	3 13.6%	4 14.3%	3 12.0%	6 18.2%
More than 2 years	0 .0%	1 4.5%	2 7.1%	2 8.0%	9 27.3%
Total	10	22	28	25	33

Table 6: Possible relationship between professional involvement with ELT and posting.

How you ever posted to the forum? How long have you been involved with ELT?	Yes	No
Less than 1 year	2 6.1%	8 8.7%
Between 1 and 5 years	4 12.1%	18 19.6%
Between 6 and 10 years	6 18.2%	22 23.9%
More than 10 years	2 6.1%	23 25.0%
More than 20 years	18 54.5%	15 16.3%
TESOL student	1 3.0%	6 6.5%
Total	33	92

Table 7: Survey respondents' frequency of visits to the Group website.

		Response Percent	Response Count
A. Every day		11.9%	15
B. About once /twice a week		23.0%	29
C. About once /twice a month		8.7%	11
D. I don't have a routine for visits		31.7%	40
E. When I receive an email alert		19.8%	25
F. Other		4.8%	6
	Other (please specify) Show Responses		7
	answered question		126
	skipped question		0

Table 8: Possible relationship between frequency of visits and posting.

How you ever posted to the forum?	Yes	No
How frequently do you visit the forum?		
Everyday	6 18.2%	9 9.8%
Once or twice a week	7 21.2%	22 23.9%
Once or twice a month	5 15.2%	6 6.5%
No routine	9 27.3%	32 34.8%
When I receive an email alert	6 18.2%	19 20.7%
Other	0 .0%	4 4.3%
Total	33	92

Table 9: Survey respondents' reasons for joining the Group (multiple-choice question).

		Response Percent	Response Count
A. To have access to literary texts in English		66.7%	84
B. To discuss literature with other readers		44.4%	56
C. To communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds		62.7%	79
D. To share my professional experience		35.7%	45
E. To gain access to literature teaching materials		65.9%	83
F. To share my own writings		17.5%	22
G. To improve my English language skills		57.9%	73
H. Other		6.3%	8
	Other (please specify) Show Responses		9
	answered question		126
	skipped question		0

Which of the answers above would see as the most important reason?			
G: 29.4%	E: 23.8%	C: 17.5%	A: 12.7%
B: 9.5%	D: 3.2%	H: 2.4%	F: 1.6%

Table 10: Possible relationship between reasons for joining the Group and posting.

How you ever posted to the forum?	Yes	No
Most important reason for joining the Group		
To have access to literary texts in English	1 3.0%	14 15.2%
To discuss literature with others	4 12.1%	8 8.7%
To communicate with people from other cultures	9 27.3%	12 13.0%
To share my professional experience	3 9.1%	2 2.2%
To have access to literature teaching materials	5 12.5%	26 28.3%
To share my own writings	0 .0%	1 1.1%
To improve my English language skills	9 27.3%	28 30.4%
Other	2 6.1%	1 1.1%
Total	33	92

Table 11: Uses survey respondents make of the literary texts available in the Group (multiple-choice question).

		Response Percent	Response Count
A. I read them for pleasure.		69.0%	87
B. I use them for some classroom activities with my English language learners		64.3%	81
C. I use them with my TESOL students		12.7%	16
D. I use them with my undergraduate Literature students		7.1%	9
E. I read them with my own local face-to-face reading group		8.7%	11
F. I share them with other teachers in my school/institution		34.1%	43
G. Other		10.3%	13
	Other (please specify) Show Responses		13
	answered question		126
	skipped question		0

Which of the answers above would see as the most important use?

B: 44.4%	A: 29.4%	F: 8.7%
D: 5.6%	C: 4.8%	G: 4.8%

Table 12: Kinds of texts survey respondents would like to read in the Group (multiple-choice question).

		Response Percent	Response Count
A. Canon literature in English: long-established English-speaking authors		42.9%	54
B. Contemporary literature in English: new English-speaking authors		**78.6%**	99
C. World Literature written in English: African, Asian, American, European authors		55.6%	70
D. Literature in Translation		31.7%	40
E. Other		1.6%	2
	Other (please specify) Show Responses		4
	answered question		126
	skipped question		0

Which of the answers above would be your favourite?

B: 55.6%	A: 18.3%	C: 17.5%
D: 7.9%	E: 1.6%	

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