Avoiding Dialogues of Non-discovery through Promoting Dialogues of Discovery[1]

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Abstract

International students and direct entrants—those entering a higher year of a degree—often come from socio-economic or cultural backgrounds different from traditional students, and have different educational backgrounds. It is assumed such students need help with unfamiliar assessment tasks such as essays, reports, and so on, and many sources aim to help with these elements. Further assumptions are that dialogue helps, and that the words used in such dialogue will be understood similarly. Yet, if the assumed meanings of the words actually differ, then such dialogue is based on a false assumption; rather than genuine dialogue, what actually occurs is an exchange of monologic utterances. This article is a structured narrative of our ongoing research into how key assessment task words such as 'discuss,' 'analyse,' and 'critically evaluate' are understood differently in higher education. We describe how such differences are perpetuated through Martin Buber's (1947) ideas of monologic utterances, and what we call 'dialogues of non-discovery'. Here we detail a research-based approach to promote genuine and technical dialogue: what we call 'dialogues of discovery.' We first introduce a dialogue that led to the genesis of the study and theoretical context of our dialogues with the literature. We then detail our methods of data collection in a section of 'dialogues of exploration'. We present our findings in the form of categorizations of the different elements underpinning people's understandings of 'the word.' Our own categorizations of these elements encourage dialogue around the elements of language, culture, stakeholder, subject, weight, and development over time. This is an approach we term an 'anti-glossary approach' in that it is opposite to, and against, 'fixing' or 'ossifying' the language in a glossary. In the Bakhtinian tradition of 'incompleteness,' we conclude by encouraging readers to take and adapt our findings as an 'anti-glossary' approach to engage in genuine and technical dialogue with their students. In this way, we believe the quality and depth of student work can improve.

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Introduction: Dialogues of Non-discovery and Dialogues of Discovery

At our UK institution, as with many UK institutions, many students either start their studies after a period of time away from education, or come from overseas. These students often directly enter the third or fourth year of an undergraduate degree (degrees are four years long in Scotland at the undergraduate level), or go directly to a postgraduate Master's course. These students cross very real national boundaries and also the boundaries of education, language, culture, and different pedagogical approaches. Such students have to negotiate entry into the academy and yet, even after crossing the boundaries, they may be stopped by further 'border controls' such as the specific discourses used within disciplines, within programmes and within particular assessment types.

Many sources exist to support students with these different assessment types, but the sources contain glossaries with 'fixed' definitions of key words (e.g. Cottrell, 2008; Tracy, 2002; Turner, Ireland, Krenus & Pointon, 2008), thus assuming these definitions will suffice for all subjects and contexts. This assumption is itself grounded in the belief that words will be understood and used similarly in higher education. For the authors of this article, a chance encounter with students shattered these assumptions. We approach this article as a narrative that aims to convey to readers our experiences of dialogues of discovery and of non-discovery in relation to helping students become familiar with key assessment task words. Our aim is to help promote the former and help avoid the latter.

As authors, researchers, and lecturers, our roles comprise academic advisor within a Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Creative Industries and Programme Leader of an MSc in Intercultural Business Communication with a background in English for Academic Purposes. As such, our subjectivities were biased towards the linguistic angle of helping students interpret and engage with assessment, rather than the angle of the subject specific content. The first dialogue presented immediately below represents a turning point in our thinking of how to help students, and shows how we moved forward from our previous subjectivities to help promote dialogues of discovery.

The first dialogue we present here describes an encounter between students from China and a Western academic advisor, who spoke Chinese. We present this dialogue as data to show the genesis of, and stimulus for, the later, intentional data collection, although we did not expect it to be data, as it arose by chance. The encounter first followed what we term here to be a typical 'dialogue of non-discovery;' by this term we mean that dialogue takes place, but nothing new or useful to the participants is discovered. At the level of the utterance and the word, the language used in such dialogues is similar to what Bakhtin (1986, p.88) would call "neutral" in the sense of belonging to "nobody." Although the word may give the impression of being "an other's word" and "my word" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.88), it is nevertheless removed from its "actual context" (Voloshinov, 1973, p. 35) of subject and task with the subject lecturer and assessment task setter. In the dialogue described here, the students and advisor talked through the

coursework, considered structure and analysis, and advice was given about the best way to proceed with regard to completing the work on time. This was a dialogue that followed a template where the language and utterances used were neutral, and assumptions were not suspended (contra. Bohm, 1996). The students asked about what they needed to ask about after having been sent to the advisor by their lecturer to ask about these things, and the advisor told them what they needed to be told—in order to meet the requirements of the subject lecturer).

Then, at the end of the meeting, in the time-space between this template meeting and the outside geographical space, as the students were leaving, almost off-hand utterances were made that formed a dialogue of discovery. By 'dialogue of discovery,' we mean one where the words and utterances are relevant to the addresser and addressee and both are actively listening and engaging in dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986). The words and utterances are thus genuine (Buber, 1947) and lead to the questioning of previously held assumptions, which are essential for dialogue (Bohm, 1996). In this dialogue, the two students chatted with each other in Chinese, in a conversation that went roughly as follows:

Student 1: '*Critically analyse means to criticise and or find fault doesn't it?*'

Student 2: *'Yes.'*

Next, Student 1 asked the advisor "*By the way, what exactly does 'critically discuss' mean anyway"? Is it '批评'? [批评 pīpíng: to criticize / criticism? Or is it 批判 pīpàn: to criticize / critique?]*".

We should say here, that the Chinese students knew that the academic advisor could speak Chinese; we should also say that in Chinese, for one English word there could be multiple Chinese definitions with a gulf of difference between them (cf. Saussure, 1959). Knowing that the academic advisor spoke Chinese was critical, as it provided the basis of the dialogue.

This dialogue revealed the existence of multiple linguistic and cultural understandings of assessment terms that could only be understood through dialogue that was genuine and technical (Buber, 1947) and where previous assumptions had been suspended (Bohm, 1996). The dialogue thus came to be one of discovery as the words came to be owned more by both the students and the advisor rather than being neutral (cf. Bakhtin, 1986).

Furthermore, these themes arose with mature UK direct entrant students who asked almost the same question: *"What exactly is 'discuss' in this coursework?"* This further showed us students' active attempt to take personal (cf. Stern & Backhouse, 2011) ownership of the word from its neutral space. Critically for us, these dialogues of discovery led us to question the whole discourse used for assessment at the level of the word. In the next section, a theoretical context describes dialogues we had with the literature. We then detail our methods of data collection in a section of 'dialogues of exploration.' In focus groups, we asked UK lecturers, UK home students, UK based Chinese background lecturers, and Chinese students studying in the UK to consider words such as 'discuss,' 'analyse,' and 'critically evaluate.' Following this section, we present our findings in the form of categorizations of the different elements underpinning people's understandings of the word. Our own categorizations of these elements encourage dialogue around the areas of language, culture, stakeholder, subject, weight, and development over time. This is an approach we term an '*anti*-glossary approach' in that it is opposite to, and against, fixing or ossifying the language in a glossary. In the Bakhtinian tradition of dialogue never being completed (Bakhtin, 1981) we conclude by encouraging readers to take and adapt our findings (from appendices 1 and 2) and anti-glossary approach to engage in genuine and technical dialogue with their students. By genuine, we mean an authentic, transactional negotiation (Fecho 2011) by technical we

mean focused on the content required to complete the task (cf. Buber 1947). In this way, we believe the quality and depth of student work can improve.

Theoretical Frame

Once we decided to investigate this topic further, we engaged in dialogue with the literature. In order to categorise this dialogue into different areas, we drew on our sociological imaginations, which Wright Mills (1959) describes as consisting of the capacity "to shift from one perspective to another" (p. 232). By drawing on our sociological imagination, we were able to conceptualise the idea that from one perspective, dialogue would lead to 'discovery,' but from another perspective, it could be a process of 'non-discovery.' Dialogues of discovery could be categorised into the following areas: educational and literacy based, socioeconomic, linguistic, and philosophical. We do not, however, wish to do this process hermeneutically, as there is much crossover at the boundaries between each category, evidenced not least by the fact that each area led us into the next.

In terms of dialogues of 'non-discovery,' we categorized these under the umbrella term, study skills, which includes what we would term boundaried entombed vehicles or objects such as dictionaries and glossaries. In these objects, words are, according to Bakhtin (1986, p.88), "neutral" in that they are removed from any meaning for the addresser or the addressee, and that therefore no dialogue occurs between those for whom the word's meaning can be negotiated and contextualised. No assumptions that the definitions may be inappropriate are suspended (cf. Bohm, 1996). Yet, a dialogue of non-discovery— or monologue disguised as dialogue (Buber, 1947)—occurs, as the addresser (lecturer) can direct the addressee (student) to the object of this neutral meaning. We would even go so far as to extend what Bakhtin describes as neutral to 'neutralized.'

Dialogues of discovery

Dialogues of discovery are genuine and technical (cf. Buber, 1947) dialogues based in a relevant context, where we discover information of use to our own practice supporting non-traditional and international students with their writing. We classify these into a number of categories and deal with each in turn below: educational and literacy, socioeconomic—sociocultural, linguistic, and philosophical based.

Educational and literacy based

Our first dialogue of discovery was with sources contextualised in our own subject areas that were educational and academic literacy related. The general message was that non-traditional students with whom we had engaged in dialogue, both international (from China) and advanced entry (mature direct entrant student) would find challenges with UK Higher education academic literacies. These challenges would be more so for mature direct entrants (Lillis, 2003; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Williams, 2005) and international students (Horowitz, 1986; Skyrme, 2007) from a diverse body (Au, 1998) who may lack the confidence (Yorke, 2003) or feel disempowered (Cummins, 1986) in such an alien environment, even if commonalities across borders and times can be found (cf. Stern & Backhouse, 2011).

Moreover, if such students were entering a third or fourth year of a degree, as many of our students do, these challenges would be even greater (cf. Elton, 2010; Lillis, 2003). There would also be an even greater difference in perceiving instructions and goals between these students compared to more traditional students, something that is problematic to any students (Lillis, 2003; Nelson, 1990; 1995; Scaife & Wellington, 2010; Williams, 2005). The literature also noted that students would not be aware that the university itself was a cultural construct (Bartholomae, 1985; Tran, 2008) where writing is a performance of an institutional ritual to provide access to the academic literacy of a disciplinary

community (Bartholomae, 1985; Lillis, 2003; Lillis & Turner, 2001). In particular, if these students have not had the previous dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) that 'traditional' students will have had (see below), they will lack the advantage of having the spirit of assessment (Stern & Backhouse, 2011) promoted through dialogue. Nor will they have had dialogue used to help them work well during assessments (Hamp-Lyons & Tavares, 2011).

Socioeconomic—sociocultural based

Socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects can affect vocabulary learning and use (Corson, 1997), and within a diverse body of students there may be differences in tacit knowledge (Rust, Donovan & Price 2005). Therefore, to make assumptions of academic transparency (Lillis, 2003) may be an act of prejudice to a form of institutional discrimination by privileged dominant groups (Mackinnon & Manathunga, 2003). It may even be the case that UK Higher education culture reflects the "dominant discourse of the student learner as white, middle-class, and male" (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003, p. 261). Dialogue, however, can help redress this power balance (Rowland, 2006) by engaging all learners in the process of negotiating and thereby demonstrating meaning, and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty (Fecho, 2013) and questioning of assumption (Bohm, 1996) around the words through dialogue from which learning can proceed.

Linguistic based

In linguistics, underpinning much of what we read in other areas was the work of Saussure (1959). Saussure highlighted that the essence of language is form and not substance in that what language is used for relates to people's experiences within their linguistic systems. Such experiences are form only in that they are culturally context-dependent. Significantly, Saussure's noted assumption that language was more substantial is the origin of many misunderstandings: "This truth could not be overstressed, for all the mistakes in our terminology, all our incorrect ways of naming things that pertain to language, stem from the involuntary supposition that the linguistic phenomenon must have substance" (Saussure, 1959, p. 89; cf. Bohm, 1996; Buber, 1947).

In addition, and critically with regard to the work of Saussure, Bakhtin noted that, rather than look at words and sentences at a purely linguistic and grammatical level, as Saussure did, the words and sentences need to be considered as utterances (Bakhtin, 1986). A sentence could be individual and fully formed grammatically, but if not formed as an utterance it would have little context, or value, to the addresser or addressee, and would not be complete (Bakhtin, 1986); it would instead be neutral. We also were able to apply much from our own previous work in the linguistic area of English for Academic Purposes at a discourse level, the idea of specific genres (Swales, 1990) of texts and subjects (Becher, 1989) and also of the idea that language has a function, and that these functions can both differ, and be subject specific (cf. Halliday, 1985). Further, that the language could be used within a specific ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1964) that may differ according to students' backgrounds. On the basis of such linguistic literature we next turned to the more philosophical angle.

Philosophical based

The linguistic dialogue led us deeper into the philosophical literature. We were drawn then to Bakhtin, as "In Bakhtin there is no one meaning being striven for: the world is a vast congeries of contesting meanings, a heteroglossia so varied that no single term capable of unifying purist diversifying energy is possible" (Holquist, 1994, p. 24). The later works of Bakhtin develop the idea of heteroglossia, noting that the meaning of words alters according to context, and that many meanings exist. The idea of heteroglossia goes hand in hand with the idea of the word being neutral if it is placed in a dictionary (or

glossary) as it stands outside the context (cf. Bakhtin, 1986; Voloshinov, 1973). In addition, the language games of Wittgenstein (1953) resonate with the games of completing assessments that students had to play but into which they may not have been apprenticed (cf. Saussure, 1959; Wenger, 2002; Wittgenstein, 1953). Also, Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development theorises that students require input of a 'Goldilocks' nature', i.e. not too 'difficult,' not too 'easy,' but 'just right'. We realised that when applied to our students, the material may in fact be too difficult, not because of any connection with their ability, but more to do with the fact that they had not had the similar dialogic experiences that traditional students experienced, and it was therefore unfamiliar.

We first entered the idea of dialogue both through Bakhtin, who we were led to through the angle of academic literacies, and also through Aristotle. Aristotle's concept of Questioner and Answerer struck us as fitting perfectly with Bakhtin's dialogicality in a pedagogical context, given its emphasis on stimulating learning and discovery through dialogue. By coincidence, we also happened to be reading the work of Jorge Luis Borges, whose phrase, "Words are symbols that assume a shared memory" (Borges, 1979, p. 33) brought everything together and led us to the idea of a new anti-glossary approach (described below). We arrived through all this dialogue to the point where we realised that individual understandings would be based upon different backgrounds and assumed shared memories (cf. Borges, 1979). Further guided reading of work related to dialogue helped align and contextualise our own approaches to dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Buber, 1947). Our thoughts resonated with the words of Holquist (1994):

> The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, 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 (p. 276).

We realised that our traditional students would have the experience of, and thereby have acquired the tacit knowledge of, the academic assessment words they were given in their questions. This knowledge they would have acquired through dialogue within the context of traditional UK education within the academic subject being studied, and may assume that even if the word was taken out of the subject context, it would still mean the same thing to them because of their experiences. However, they would be blind to the neutral angle of the word in a dictionary context (Bakhtin, 1986) and not realise that the word to others may not have the same meaning. Indeed, and crucially, all the above led us to realise that many academics (including ourselves) assumed that the memories of such words would be shared.

Further, we previously assumed that all bodies entering such an environment would have the same experience at the level of the word. Yet, we learned that such an assumption was false, and that the traditional dialogic approaches within the classroom did not account for this nor help the non-traditional students we were dealing with acquire the knowledge needed to succeed. The literature affirmed that this assumption was false.

Evidence of Dialogues of Non-discovery in the Literature

Much of the literature we engaged with actually confirmed the existence of dialogues of non-discovery. We read that the writer of the first English dictionary published in 1755, Dr. Johnson, himself realised that any attempt to "fix" the English language was "folly" (Mullan, 2010, p. 3), and that language was mutable (Hitchings, 2006). We learned that without engagement with the discursive literature practices of the West, such words would not be known (Corson, 1997). Thus, to direct students to

dictionaries where the definitions are independent of the context would be promoting a dialogue of non-discovery, (cf. Buber, 1947) and yet we learned that almost every institution actually has materials of this very type: glossaries of key task assessment words in their libraries (e.g. Cottrell, 2008; Tracy, 2002; Turner, Ireland, Krenus & Pointon, 2008).

Through all the above dialogues of discovery and non-discovery, we decided to study different people's perceptions in a cascading, or progressively merged focus-group dialogue. Content wise we did this in the context of exploring UK lecturer and student—and UK based Chinese lecturer and student—perceptions regarding the meanings and expectations of key assessment task words such as 'discuss,' 'analyse,' and 'critically evaluate.'

Methodology: Dialogues of exploration

Our dialogues of exploration consist of two dialogues. Firstly, a dialogue involving data collection that explored our research questions in our initial project, and secondly, an ongoing discursive and reflective dialogue within the academic community exploring their reactions to the results. In this section we detail the dialogues of data collection and what they revealed, and later we describe the ongoing discursive and reflective dialogue. There were three stages in our initial project involving both English-language and Chinese language focus groups. In the first stage, we had four different focus groups, all invited by email, and all either employed by, or studying at, the university: a) UK mature students; b) students from China; c) UK lecturers; and d) UK based Chinese lecturers. In the second stage, we had one group of lecturers and students from the UK that we facilitated; and one group of lecturers and students from China that the Chinese lecturers facilitated. In the final stage we had one group of all participants that we facilitated.

In terms of language, the English speaking groups were conducted in English, and the Chinese groups in Chinese, the final group was conducted in English, but the participants who were Chinese speakers were able to use Chinese when they wanted to (cf. Cortazzi, Pilcher & Jin, 2011). Procedurally, each focus group meeting was first transcribed—and in the case of the Chinese interviews also translated—and the empirical data created was used to inform the next stage. In terms of the methodological literature we consulted, the approach focused on specific areas (Bryman, 2008; Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990), was somewhat similar to Delphi in that each stage informed the next (cf. Brown, 1968). Analysis of the data was done using a constructivist grounded theory approach whereby themes emerged from the data rather than through the use of a predetermined code, as would have been the case with an objectivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2011). Further, the aim was to generate content of benefit for all (Freire & Ramos 1970; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011; Padilla, 1993) through dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981, Marková & Linell, 2006) that was genuine and technical (Buber, 1947).

We created the space for and explored dialogue around the specific assessment terms such as 'describe', 'discuss' and 'critically evaluate'. We then took this dialogue in the form of key quotes (included in Appendix 2) and categorised them into areas for further dialogue with the academic community. Stage 4, which we describe in more detail in the concluding section below, is an ongoing discursive and reflective debate in which we use our empirical data gained from the three focus group stages of data collection to present and model a new approach theoretically grounded in Bakhtin (for the dialogue), Vygotsky (for his work in the Zone of Proximal Development), Aristotle (for his work in *Topics* with Questioner and Answerer), Bohm (to encourage the suspension of assumptions), and Buber (to focus the dialogue as being genuine and technical). We term this approach an '*anti*'-glossary approach given its opposition to the use of glossaries, and we situate it within the educational context of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) in a face to face context (Palincsar, 1998) using something similar to a

conversational framework (Laurillard, 2012). We now present and discuss key participant quotes and throughout explain this '*anti*'-glossary approach to encouraging dialogue.

Data and Analysis

We categorized the different elements of the participants' understanding the terms into the categories of culture and language, stakeholder, subject, development over time, and level and weight. We do the same here but write our discussion afresh, building on what we have learned since previous publication (Richards & Pilcher, 2013a; 2013b), from presenting at conferences, running workshops, and from further reading.
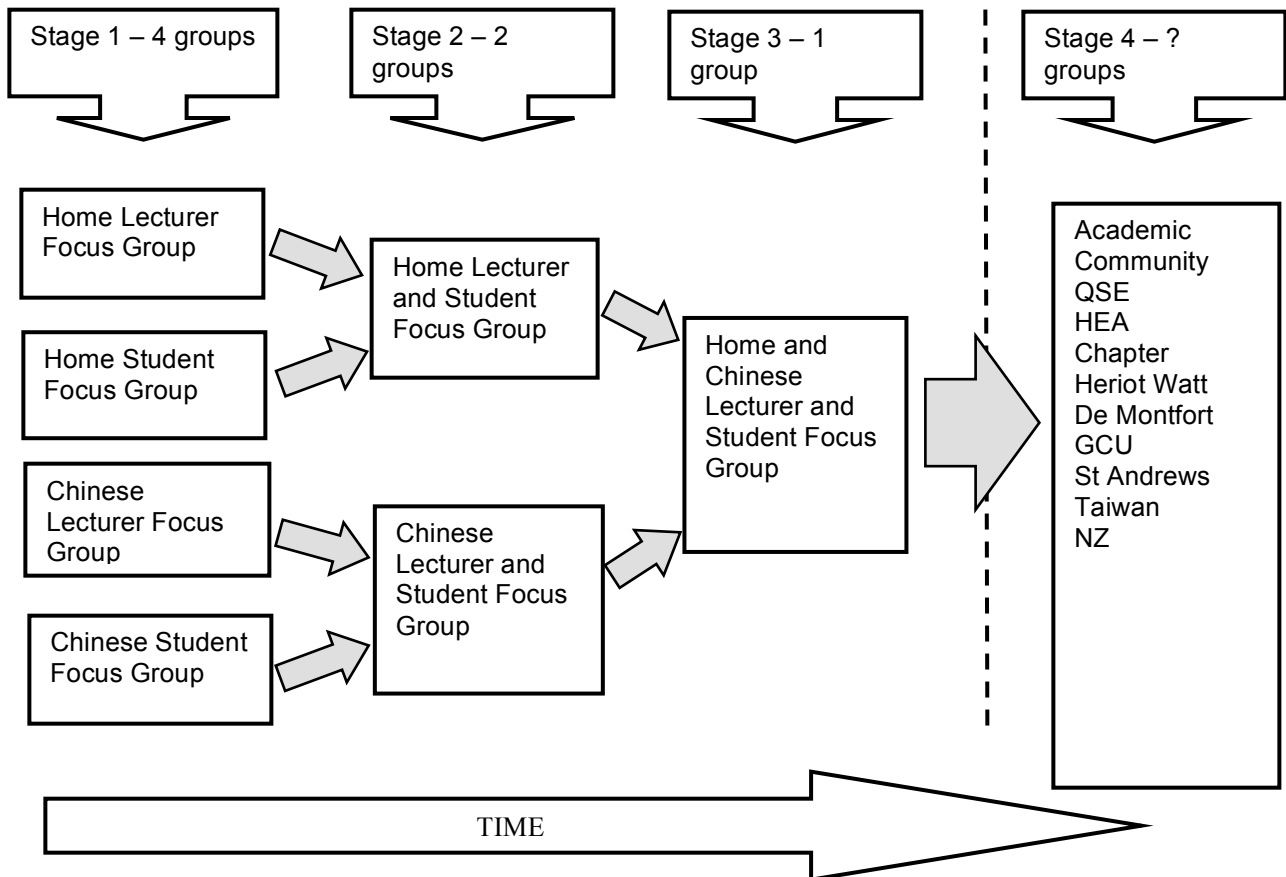
Stage 1 – 4 groups   Stage 2 – 2 groups   Stage 3 – 1 group   Stage 4 – ? groups

Home Lecturer Focus Group

Home Student Focus Group

Chinese Lecturer Focus Group

Chinese Student Focus Group

Home Lecturer and Student Focus Group

Chinese Lecturer and Student Focus Group

Home and Chinese Lecturer and Student Focus Group

Academic Community QSE HEA Chapter Heriot Watt De Montfort GCU St Andrews Taiwan NZ

TIME

Figure 1: Stages of dialogue, extended from Richards & Pilcher (2013a)

Culture and Language

We found differing cultural interpretations of the intended meaning of the words. For example, one Chinese student felt the verb 'discuss' implied verbal dialogue, and would not be used for written text: *"In Chinese discuss means to exchange your opinion with another or much more other people. So we can never discuss by yourself...if we say discuss it is weird because you cannot discuss by yourself."*

Further, we found evidence of different cultural perspectives to what was brought to the table in an academic dialogue, thereby giving differing perceptions of what dialogue actually is in a UK higher

education context. For example, for the term 'critically evaluate,' one Chinese lecturer had the following to say: *"Chinese students and British students use this word very differently. British students would know it's to make comments, to "critically analyse" or "discuss," while Chinese students' often write completely based on what is given, descriptive, without their own understanding and views, or just criticise, list all the negative points without including any positive points. Therefore, this is a very important word."*

Further, there could also have been the difference in perceptions of different lecturers from different cultures. For example with the term 'summarise,' a Chinese lecturer said, *"There shouldn't be any ambiguity in this one."* Yet, for a UK lecturer this was a very challenging term to deal with: *"It's a difficult one because it's synthesising stuff."*

Somewhat similarly, there was also evidence of the fact that a dictionary or a glossary would not help. Words needed to be seen in their contexts, however, the contexts would be very culture dependent. In the words of one Chinese lecturer: *"A precise meaning can only be determined when it is put in the real situation…different cultures mean different intentions."*

We also found surprising perspectives with regard to cultural approaches to words. What may well be assumed to be the deferential perspective of a Chinese student from a Confucian Heritage Culture (Jin and Cortazzi, 2006) was actually expressed by a UK student whose previous education had been in a different era and culture to the contemporary UK one: *"I've been brought up in a culture that you respect these people because they've got where they are today and my first reaction would be not to even question them…because I would just think, 'Oh right, they must know what they're talking about' so it's changing but God it's hard."*

We also found evidence, although we did not realise this at the time, of the active fostering and creation of what we would call strategies leading to dialogues of non-discovery. For instance, an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) strategy would be to just skip a word. The following comment was from a Chinese lecturer reading what one Chinese student said with regard to how they skipped certain terms: *"For 'comment on,' if you don't understand it, you would just pass it, and earlier for 'account for,' you also said if you don't understand it, you would just skip it [all laugh] an IELTS strategy."* Another lecturer from China noted that such IELTS strategies - what we would call dialogues of non-discovery -- would lead to a lowering of students' understanding of academic words, but that students were not responsible for this, as *"They were told to do this. They were educated to do this."*

Stakeholder

In our original analyses (Richards & Pilcher, 2013a; 2013b) we wanted to highlight the difference between the perspectives of the different 'stakeholders': students and lecturers specifically. However, now we are revisiting the quotes afresh, and are looking at them from a dialogic lens. What we see are different, more layered themes. For example, we now see a theme of a wish for confirmation that the perspectives are not too different. In the words of one UK lecturer: when reading, the first two focus groups were *"pleased to see there's no real gap there between students and lecturers."* Equally, we see evidence of worry when the views did differ. In the words of one UK lecturer regarding the word 'discuss': *"It makes me feel…slightly worried…reading the feedback on the other side…it worries me that students would feel like that [strongly against it] about it because I think it gives a lot of latitude to students to be able to talk about what they'd like to talk about."*

Clearly then, there was a concern on the part of the lecturers that students did not understand some of the terms, and that there was perhaps a concern of a previous (false) assumption that they did

(cf. Bohm, 1996). We can illustrate that this assumption was false by showing two perspectives regarding the word 'discuss' from the stage 1 focus groups where lecturers and students were apart. From a UK student: *"Ohh I hate this one…I don't really know what it means to 'discuss' and I often failed on it...well not fail but ahh you know not do so well…I read somewhere in one book, that discuss means that you have to highlight the most important points of certain arguments and either compare or contrast them [I - And does that make sense to you?] No! [Laughter]."* Conversely, from a lecturer: *"That's good un, use it all the time…'discuss' must contain the elements of 'critically appraise'… 'analyse' 'review' it's got 'synthesis' it's got 'scholarship' it's got the lot in 'discuss.'"* We also found evidence that the lecturers believed they differed in their understandings of these terms. For example, echoing Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, one UK lecturer noted that with regard to the word analysis: *"Two different lecturers will have a different use of the word."*

We also found evidence of a desire from students for more dialogue about the words. Not only was the importance of having confidence mentioned frequently, one student also said: *"I agree with what you're saying it is opening up like, but for me I prefer to have it just clear to know this is what you've done this is what you want to talk about."*

Clearly then, to direct students to a glossary is not only fruitless, but is counterproductive. It constitutes a dialogue of non-discovery.

Subject, level and weight

In direct contrast to directing students to a glossary and thereby facilitating a dialogue of non-discovery, would be a dialogue where the word was placed in the context of the subject and specific level of assignment, i.e. genuine and technical (Buber, 1947), and personalised to the student (Stern & Backhouse, 2011). We became more aware of this point through hints of subject specificity at the level of the word. For example, with the word 'describe', one UK lecturer said: "*To actually get an engineer's 'description' of soil requires certain tests, requires certain calculations,"* and if engineering students were asked to 'trace,' *"They'll be out with the greaseproof paper drawing pictures."* Similarly, an English and Film Studies lecturer said with regard to the word 'prove' that *"Obviously coming from English and film studies 'prove' is not really a word that we…really use, it would be more... 'justify' your argument."*

In terms of words in the context of questions, different words would be used at different levels of the students' programs of study. For instance, one UK lecturer said of 'outline' and 'summarise' that *"I would use 'outline' for a 5 mark question or for 2nd year where I would use 'summarise' with the 4th years because I think 'summarise' is a really tricky thing to get students to do."* In addition, for UK lecturers, certain words would be used for certain weights of marks, implying some are more complex than others: *"I find that 'define' the word for the 5 mark question or for summary and the 'discuss' is for 20 marks."* Further, certain words themselves would have very different expectations depending on the number of marks accorded to them: *"'Describe' if it's worth 1 is very different from 'describe' if it's worth 5."* Again, none of these clarifications could be known by a student from a dictionary or a glossary, and any such dialogue would be one of non-discovery. It is straightforward to read a definition of describe, but without that then being placed through dialogue within the context of the subject, the question and the weight, it would be hard to apply its specific intended meaning.

Development over time

There were also many quotes and even a dialogue *in situ* that showed both the power of dialogue and how people felt their understanding of the words had developed over a period of time; through

experience, and through dialogue. Lecturers and students both commented on how their understandings of, and approaches to, these words had developed. One UK lecturer said, *"I think…my understanding of all of these words has changed hugely since I was at university."* A Chinese lecturer even commented on how it would be better for students if they had not had any non-UK dialogue regarding the words before arriving here: *"I tell our students, it may be better if you haven't learnt it in China, so that you would learnt in English first hand, there won't be misunderstanding...[and] if you know a little in Chinese but don't thoroughly understand it, that would be worse. Many words can't be converted, misunderstanding can easily happen. It would be better if it's a blank slate."* This statement clearly has implications for advanced level (or direct) entrants into programmes, particularly from overseas, as not only will they have lacked the necessary dialogue before, but they may well have had dialogues of a kind that did not help them with how such words could be used in the UK. In the words of one student from China that illustrates this sentiment perfectly: *"I think I was memorising vocabulary before, and felt the meanings of the words are similar. Since I came here, I see them in context, and can feel the subtle differences between them, and not like when I was in China."*

Amongst the UK students there was also the feeling that the words had a certain mystery to them, that they were unsure of how to use them, but that this uncertainty would be replaced with confidence as they used them. One UK student said, *"When it comes to me I'm like no, that's a stupid question he's gonna think I'm stupid, I think it's a whole confidence thing [general agreement]."* Echoing this, a UK lecturer further noted that *"It's a confidence thing...a confidence issue of having the courage of your student convictions…'justify' 'discuss' 'critically evaluate' 'analyse' they're confidence issues it's having the confidence to just to go for it [general agreement]."*

We finish this section with two episodes. The first illustrates the extent of the current paradigm we are trying to challenge (cf. Saussure, 1959), the second illustrates the huge potential of dialogue. The first episode is an email from a student in response to a request to participate in the focus groups to talk about the meanings of the words (stage 1 above). This student was a fourth year, traditional student, i.e. one who had been through all the standard years and practices the system had and so could assume such dialogue was unnecessary, perhaps because they were unaware of any different understandings. Here is their response to the initial email we sent out inviting students to take part in a focus group to talk about the assessment terms:

"sound like stupid crap, no... p.s try dictionary.com"

Although (we presume) in jest, the response clearly shows how the student felt that such dialogue was unnecessary and also that such answers could easily be found in a dictionary. We should also mention that we repeatedly invited this student to a focus group but we received no further response. This student therefore did not take part in the study. This was a great pity as to have had insight into this student's perspective may well have been of great benefit.

The second episode is from stage three of the focus groups, and again shows the ingrained assumption that a dictionary or equivalent could provide students with the answers they needed, but more importantly, shows the power of dialogue to change that perspective and lead the lecturer to realise that a contextualised definition within the subject was needed far more than just a neutralised dictionary definition. The dialogue starts with the lecturer recommending students go to a dictionary, then follows with the counter-perspectives of students regarding this approach, and then ends finally with the same lecturer acknowledging that yes, a dictionary may not be the best approach:

"*L –   Dictionary's a hell of a powerful study... it's a magic book it tells you the meaning of stuff, and in that respect it's brilliant and it forces me to then think... if I've written down 'Discuss' would I have written what the dictionary said? And it's written by far cleverer people than me,*

StA – Well what I find I've I've started to do... I'm finding words and say small phrases and... actually just copy and paste them onto Google Or Wikipedia…and reading through what their understanding of it is coz... rather than one sentence you'll get a whole paragraph on it, and it actually it helps me understand what actually the word means [general agreement] within the sense of what I've originally seen it like

StB – You see the thing is with me I would, I would actually disagree with you [the lecturer] with the dictionary erm because the dictionary'll tell you what it means... but it... doesn't tell you how to put it into context it might give you... maybe one sentence containing the word but it'll no turn round to me and say... I need to use ethnography in this kind of context

L –   Yeh I know what you mean I could look up ethnography and I wouldn't know when to use it exactly yeh uh huh fair point."

Holquist noted (1994, p. 69) that dialogism assumes that "at any given time, in any given place, there is a set of powerful but highly unstable conditions at work that will give a word uttered then and there a meaning that is different from what it would be at other times and other places." He further noted that, "dialogism argues that we make sense of existence by defining our specific place in an operation performed in cognitive time and space, the basic categories of perception. Important as these categories are, they themselves are shaped by the even more fundamental set of self and other" (Holquist, 1994, p. 35). We believe our extract of focus group dialogue immediately above illustrates how the time and space influence people's approaches to understanding particular words in focus, and how this transformation of their understanding is achieved through dialogue. However, it also, worryingly, illustrates that speakers may well be unaware of the need for such dialogue and that, unless it is shown to them, they may not suspend their assumptions (Bohm, 1996) or, as we showed at the very start of the article, we ourselves were completely unaware of its existence. Here then, the dialogue would be one of non-discovery or monologue (Buber, 1947) and removed from personalization (Stern & Backhouse, 2011).

We argue that what students really need in order to fully understand what is expected of them from the term is dialogue within the specific subject and task context of the question set by the lecturer (cf. Voloshinov, 1973). This would then be genuine and technical (Buber, 1947) dialogue. Further, the lecturer also needs to understand what *their own* understanding of the word is and that this understanding may not be shared by the students, or by other lecturers; in other words, the lecturers need to suspend their assumptions (Bohm, 1996). It is these more recent reflections that have led us to the conclusion that we are not simply proposing something that is procedurally 'opposite to' glossaries, but one that is paradigmatically against them.

By 'anti-' we originally meant 'opposite to,' and previously (Richards & Pilcher, 2013a) we argued this. However, on further reflection, we wonder whether we in actual fact mean both 'opposite to' *and* 'against.' What the 'anti-' that we propose is opposite to and against is the traditional approach of directing students to dictionaries and glossaries in study skills guides. We arrived at this point through realising the existence of what we term dialogues of non-discovery (cf. Buber, 1947, monologue disguised as dialogue). Although described above, in this context we would term such dialogues 'non-discovery' in the sense that, if students (or staff) were to be directed to such sources for information, they

would actually discover nothing of any specific use, in spite of having *the sense* of discovering something, thus giving both the director and the directed a false sense of having had a dialogue and discovered something (Bakhtin, 1986; Buber, 1947) when in fact arriving to a neutralised 'meaning' of use to everyone but, by implication, of use to no one.

The *anti*-glossary approach we envision as breaking down the terms according to the categories stated above (culture, language, stakeholder, level, weight, subject and development over time) and is represented visually (Richards & Pilcher, 2013a) in the following figure:
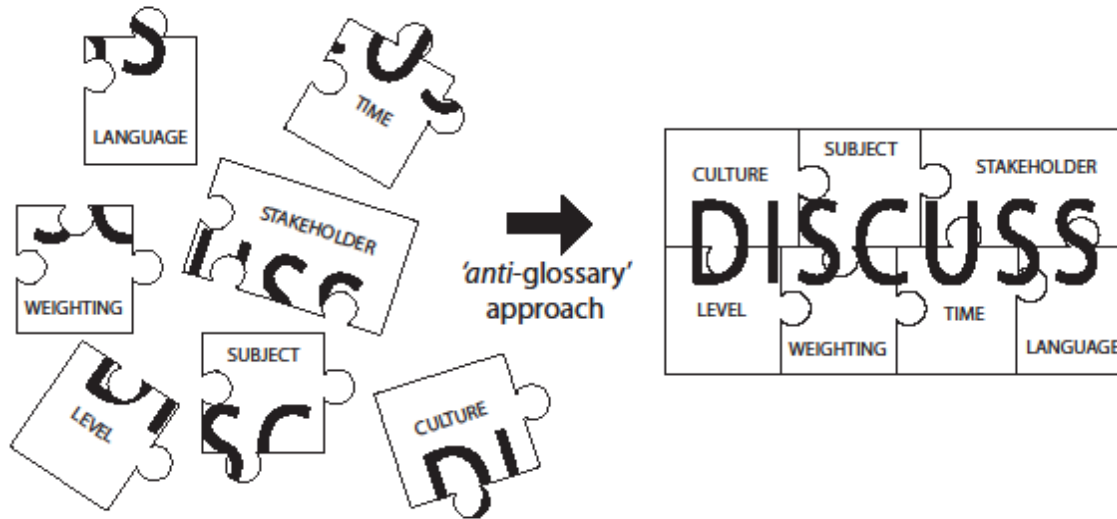

Figure 2: *anti*-glossary approach, from Richards and Pilcher, 2013a

In this approach, we envision dialogue being guided by the teacher to ask questions of the students on the basis of the categories on the individual pieces so that the students form a complete picture of what is required of them by the term used. (See Appendix 1 for an example). However, we stress that this is only our own categorization. In a fourth, ongoing Stage (see figure 1), we have taken quotes from our data and asked others to categorize them, not for triangulation of data as such but rather to move the dialogue forward. We visually represent some of the categories they have chosen to describe the words in the implications section below, as a way to encourage others to use the quotes in a similar fashion to generate dialogue.

Implications

Our conclusion is intended to be an extension of the contents here for others to take away and use in dialogue with students and staff. It is therefore, a stopping point or a pause (Appelbaum, 1995), with the aim for reflection and future continuation.

Our research questions were to explore UK lecturer and student—and UK based Chinese lecturer and student—perceptions regarding the meanings and expectations of key assessment task words such as 'discuss,' 'analyse,' and 'critically evaluate.' What we take from this project is that it is often wrongly assumed that students will know, and should know, what is expected of them from assessment terms. We further conclude that the worst approach to helping students who ask about such terms is to direct them to a glossary or a dictionary in order to find out about such terms. This action would mean that any

dialogue was one of non-discovery and would consist of monologic utterances (Buber, 1947). The dialogue would not be genuine or technical (Buber, 1947), because no assumptions had been suspended (Bohm, 1996). We believe that directing students to such 'resources' is decontextualised monologue using neutralised words (Bakhtin, 1981) and that, paradoxically, this is why it is often assumed to work, because: a. the lack of dialogue allows it to continue onwards and b. its non-subject specificity allows it continue under the auspices of a 'Why would we have an engineering one coz that would not suit the business folk?' guise. Both parties can believe they have said something or read something to help them, but they are still reliant on their own resources and have thus engaged in monologic utterances rather than genuine or technical dialogue (Buber, 1947).

We argue that such an approach does not promote genuine or technical dialogue, and that what students need to have is dialogue that explores the terms regarding the specific subject content, and context, required. We see this piece as one that can help students and lecturers engage in genuine and technical dialogue about assessment terms to help produce higher quality work. We suggest this can be achieved if lecturers and students leave the comfort zone of their standard spatial and environmental context through engaging in exploratory and genuine and technical dialogue. To encourage this action, we suggest that colleagues use our quotes (see Appendix 2) in workshops or classes with both students and staff and urge participants to categorize the quotes as they see appropriate, and to engage in dialogue using them.

As mentioned above, in an ongoing fourth stage of our exploration of these words, we take them to workshops and ask other lecturers to categorise the quotes from our focus group participants. We represent this here (Figure 3) as a word cloud (via wordle.net) to show the types of categories that have been generated.

Figure 3: Word cloud of others' categories

In the workshops, we suggest that such categorizations are then compared to our own 'anti-glossary' approach (see Appendix 1) and that guiding questions be written by the lecturers for their own

assessment questions. Such dialogue should not be reified and completed as a task each year, but should be visited afresh. To be genuine, it must have that quality of incompletedness, or *nezaveršennot* (Bakhtin, 1981).

We hope this paper and the suggestions within it lead to further dialogue amongst students and staff to help students learn more and to help staff teach them to learn more as well. We also very much welcome any dialogue with us at the contact email address above.

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Appendix A

Anti-glossary approach

We use the following Year 2 question from a Design module 'Debating Design 2' to show how the '*anti-glossary*' approach can be used

'Critically compare your chosen design / designers 'viewpoint' to that of the concurrent 'consumer culture''

- **Culture and Language**
  'What does 'critically compare' mean to you?'

  'How do you think 'critically compare' is used here? 'In this assessment?'

  'In China/school/college, if you are asked to be 'critical' what are you expected to do?

  'Do you think the way you use 'discuss' is different in China/college/school?'

  'What theories or concepts would you use from the course to 'critically compare' in this question'?

- **Stakeholder**
  'Is it possible for students of your generation to 'critically compare' the work of professors and other researchers?'

  'Are you confident that you can 'critically compare' a researchers/designers work?'

  'How would you 'critically discuss' without attacking them?'

  'Do you think lecturers 'critically discuss/compare' other lecturers' work and ideas?'

  'Thinking of this question, how could you 'critically compare' what designers are doing?' 'What would you look for?'

  'Where would you find sources to support the points in any 'critical discussion/comparison'?'

  How will you justify your choice of design/designer?

- **Subject**
  'What topics covered in your lectures and reading will help you 'critically compare'?

  'What theory can be used to support your 'critical comparison' of design/designers?'

  'What percentage of your answer needs to be 'critical' and 'discussion/comparison'?'

  How would you define a 'consumer culture'

  Is there a specific design consumer culture?

- **Development over time**

  'Were you asked to 'critically compare' at school or college? If yes, do you think you have to write something different at university?'

  'Do you think your understanding of 'critically compare' is stronger now? How?'

  Level and weight

  'Is the answer you need to write for 'critically compare' at this level different to one at a previous level?'

  'If the question with the word 'critically compare' in it is worth 5 marks how is it different from one where it is worth 20 marks? How?'

Appendix B

Quotes to use in workshops

"In Chinese discuss means to exchange your opinion with another or much more other people. So we can never discuss by yourself...if we say discuss it is weird because you cannot discuss by yourself."

Critically evaluate – UK based Chinese lecturers - *"Chinese students and British students use this word very differently. British students would know it's to make comments, to "critically analyse" or "discuss", while Chinese students' often write completely based on what is given, descriptive, without their own understanding and views, or just criticise, list all the negative points without including any positive points. Therefore, this is a very important word."*

'Summarise'- UK based Chinese lecturers -- *"there shouldn't be any ambiguity in this one."*

UK lecturers - *"'Summarise' is a really tricky thing to get students to do."*

UK based Chinese lecturers -- "a precise meaning [of critically evaluate] can only be determined when it is put in the real situation… different cultures mean different intentions."

UK students -*"I've been brought up in a culture that you respect these people because they've got where they are today and my first reaction would be not to even question them."*

UK student *"Ohh I hate this one…I don't really know what it means to 'discuss' and I often failed on it...well not fail but ahh you know not do so well…I read somewhere in one book, that discuss means that you have to highlight the most important points of certain arguments and either compare or contrast them [I - And does that make sense to you?] No! (Laughter)"*

UK lecturer *"That's good un use it all the time…'discuss' must contain the elements of 'critically appraise'… 'analyse' 'review' it's got 'synthesis' it's got 'scholarship' it's got the lot in 'discuss'."*

"obviously coming from English and film studies 'prove' is not really a word that we…really use, it would be more... 'justify' your argument."

"to actually get an engineer's 'description' of soil requires certain tests requires certain calculations."

Ask Engineers to 'trace' and *"they'll be out with the greaseproof paper drawing pictures."*

"'Describe' if it's worth 1 is very different from 'describe' if it's worth 5."

"I would use 'Outline' for a 5 mark question or for 2nd year where I would use 'Summarise' with the 4th years because I think 'Summarise' is a really tricky thing to get students to do."

"I find that 'define' the word for the 5 mark question or for summary and the 'discuss 'is for 20 marks."

UK based Chinese lecturer - *"I tell our students, it may be better if you haven't learnt it in China, so that you would learnt in English first hand, there won't be misunderstanding... [and] if you know a little in*

Chinese but don't thoroughly understand it, that would be worse. Many words can't be converted, misunderstanding can easily happen. It would be better if it's a blank slate."

Chinese student - *"I think I was memorising vocabulary before, and felt the meanings of the words are similar. Since I came here, I see them in context, and can feel the subtle differences between them, and not like when I was in China."*

UK direct entrant student - *"when it comes to me I'm like no, that's a stupid question he's gonna think I'm stupid, I think it's a whole confidence thing [general agreement]."*

UK lecturer - *"'Justify' 'Discuss' 'Critically Evaluate' 'Analyse' they're confidence issues it's having the confidence to just to go for it [general agreement]."*

UK Lecturer - *"I think…my understanding of all of these words has changed hugely since I was at university."*