

**Students' Preparation for IELTS: Development of Written and Oral Argumentative  
Texts**

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction and Background

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the rationale, aims and objectives and the focus of the study. It describes the research questions. This chapter also discusses the reasons for adopting the research approach for collecting data and the framework for analysing the data. Finally, it addresses some emerging problems or issues, and discusses the limitations of the research.

This study reports on an IELTS Academic Version preparation course (hereafter referred to as IELTS academic) which sought to provide the candidates with opportunities to practice written and oral argumentative texts. The purpose of the research was to look at class tasks which generate opportunities for experiencing literacy, and to describe aspects of literacies development for producing argumentative texts (written and oral). This has implications for IELTS stakeholders, for example, English-medium universities. The focus is on literacy practices, specifically on linguistic resources as used in producing written and oral argumentative texts.

### 1.2 Situating the study

This study is concerned with the IELTS academic candidates' argumentative texts. It looks at problematic areas of the candidates' argumentative texts from a literacy practices perspective. I reviewed relevant research on IELTS issues (Coffin, 2004; Green, 2005; Mickan & Slater, 2003), and literacy studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Lea & Street, 2006) and their applications in argumentative texts.

I have considered the candidates' argumentative texts as literacy practices. This has shifted the focus from reduced literacies, for example, orthographical issues (i.e. spelling errors) to "broader institutional discourse and genre" (Lea & Street, 1999, p. 368). Classroom literacy practices are viewed as social practices which are variables of context, culture and genre (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1995).

### 1.3 Rationale

Students from different countries whose first language is not English (henceforth referred to as 'Other Than English as First Language' or OTEFL students) apply to further their education in English-medium universities such as Australian universities. OTEFL students are expected to read and prepare academic texts, attend lectures and take notes, participate in tutorials, and listen to seminars conducted in English (Coley, 1999; Wicks, 1996). These students need to reach a level of proficiency in English that enables them to meet university study requirements satisfactorily. OTEFL students are required to show evidence of an appropriate level of proficiency in English language as one of the prerequisites for entry into English-medium universities. One of the tools for assessing OTEFL students' language proficiency (the others include: FCE; CPE; MELAB; TOEIC, and TOEFL) is the IELTS examination. English medium-universities have set minimum language proficiency levels, with IELTS as preferred test for entrance into universities (Bayliss & Ingram, 2006; Coffin, 2004; Coley, 1999; Feast, 2002; Merryless, 2003; Moore & Morton, 2005).

It is assumed that IELTS academic test-takers who meet band scores requirements will be able to cope with the multiplicity of tasks when they commence tertiary studies (Bayliss & Ingram, 2006; Jakeman & McDowell, 1996, 1999). But, the research shows that some OTEFL students with the required IELTS band scores experience communication problems and serious difficulties, failing to meet the academic requirements in their initial tertiary studies in English-medium communities (Bellingham, 1993; Brown, 1998; Coffin, 2004; Coley, 1999; Feast, 2002; Green, 2007; Malcolm & McGregor, 1995; Moore & Morton, 2005; Philips, 1990; Weir, 1990; Wicks, 1996).

IELTS academic is designed to assess test takers' ability to understand and produce the written and spoken language expected of students in English-medium universities (Coffin & Hewings, 2003; Deakin, 1997; IELTS hand book, 2004; Jakeman & McDowell, 1996; Witt, 1997). But, the findings of some studies (Malcolm & McGregor, 1995) do not support this claim. Unless a test assesses what it claims to be assessing, questions may be raised about its validity. The language abilities measured by a testing tool should correspond to language abilities which will be used in the non-test situation (Bachman, 1995). The washback effect (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Cheng & Watanabe, 2004) refers to the way the design of a test influences classroom discourse and educational

resources in test preparation. This may affect test-takers' results and the expert knowledge they gain in order to function in their academic career (Green, 2006). Thus, the suitability of the IELTS as an entry requirement has been questioned (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Davies, 2001; Mickan, 2003; Read & Nation, 2005). This has raised questions about literacies experienced in IELTS academic preparation classes (Brown, 1998; Coffin, 2004; Moore & Morton, 2005).

Wicks (1996) and Coley (1999) have reported that a cause of international students' failure in English-medium universities is their general lack of English proficiency. Wicks (1996), for example, found that students with the required IELTS band scores performed significantly poorer in units requiring language use compared to students who had qualified by having studied a tertiary course in English. The same teaching materials and assessments are used by international students and Australian students, so "unless English proficiency is a problem" (Wicks, 1996, p. 199), a similar level of expertise is demanded. He suggested a more detailed investigation into OTEFL students' language problems (Wicks, 1996, pp. 199 and 203).

Some studies suggest the significance of the prior experiences on test-taking. Mickan, Slater and Gibson (2000) noted the importance of social factors in assessment "as they impact on interpretation of prompts" (pp. 9 and 29). Regarding composition of candidate responses, Mickan and Slater (2003, pp. 61-62), and Yu and Mickan (2007) point out the importance of negotiation of meaning and appropriate interpretation of the prompts and social purposes of the topic. They emphasize that there are implications for developing argumentative texts. However, identifying literacies that candidates in IELTS academic preparation classes experience in order to produce written and oral argumentative texts as preparation for the examination is under-researched. In an ethnographic inquiry into IELTS General Version classroom instructions, Mickan and Motteram (2008) suggest the need for further study to focus on the IELTS academic preparation practices over a longer period of investigation.

My motivation to undertake this study emerged from the suggestions of the previous studies for further research and my own interest. I conducted this study to reveal what it is that IELTS academic candidates experience in a formal preparation class for the examination. I am an OTEFL student who comes from Iran and who has experienced

preparation processes for the IELTS examination, and then commenced an academic program in an English-medium university in Australia. Also, as an IELTS instructor, I have taught in IELTS preparation courses in Australia and in Iran for a number of years. Thus, my second motivation to undertake this investigation was to gain insights into the difficulties that OTEFL students face with university study. For these reasons it seemed appropriate to conduct the research in Iran.

### **1.3.1 Context of the study**

Iran is a non-English speaking country where an increasing number of locally born students apply to continue their education at English-medium universities. Iranian students who intend to continue their education at an English-medium university mainly prepare themselves for the IELTS academic examination by attending IELTS preparation courses. Most IELTS preparation classes are held in Tehran (the capital of Iran). As with other OTEFL students around the globe, Iranian students too face problems in university study.

I selected a typical English teaching institution named Rahrovan Language Teaching Centre (hereafter referred to as RALTEC) in Tehran, where IELTS preparation programs are held. It was an appropriate place in which research could be undertaken because it had an appropriate record over a number of years in preparing test-takers for IELTS. It was accredited by the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and Trinity College in the UK. This provided me with a suitable site to conduct an ethnographic study of IELTS academic preparation practices. I, the researcher, was the instructor as well. Macaro (2003) says that “research which has teacher involvement is more likely to have ecological validity” (p. 43). The purpose of this study is to investigate literacy practices provided in a formal IELTS academic preparation class for developing argumentative text literacies. Literacy practices such as reading texts with contentious content, debating controversial issues, and constructing their own texts in order to achieve their social purpose may lead to the candidate’s relevant literacy development. Engaging in such literacy practices will also help to identify some of the problematic areas with which OTEFL students struggle when they attempt argumentative writing and speaking. Analysis and description, however, did not cover every activity undertaken during the course. However, the candidates’ activities - be they written or spoken, class exercises or homework - were taken into consideration. In the following section, I discuss the focus of the study.

## **1.4 Focus of the study**

The main focus of the study is on the classroom literacy practices in terms of written and oral argumentative texts (in accordance with IELTS expectations) in order to identify and analyse relevant aspects of literacies experienced in the course. In this inquiry, I examined the candidates' different tasks (both written and oral). The tasks comprised different classroom exercises and homework. Comparing the tasks is an important key to understanding and reflecting on literacy development and improvement in the course. Using an ethnographic approach the study is "about self-reflection and observing closely the every day practices going on around the language learners" (Hamilton, 1999, p. 437). Significant aspects of self-reflection emerged in the processes of individual and specific group interviews (interviews appear in appendices F, p. 363, I, p. 394, L, p. 501 and R, p. 541 in the accompanying CDROM).

## **1.5 Aims and objectives of the study**

### **1.5.1 General aims**

The study investigated an IELTS academic preparation class in order to identify and to analyse class tasks which generate opportunities for developing argumentative texts (written and oral). It also aimed to describe the relevant aspects of the experienced literacy.

### **1.5.2 Aims of the study**

The main aim of this inquiry was to provide insights into the literacy practices which IELTS academic candidates experience as preparation for the examination. A second aim was to find the extent of OTEFL students' control over the complex and technical nature of argumentative discourse conventions. It identified some of the problematic areas that OTEFL students demonstrate when they produce written and oral argumentative texts. The study covered description and discourse analysis of instruction and the candidates' interactions. Another aim of the research was to outline implications of the findings for IELTS.

### **1.5.3 Objectives**

Based on the aims of the study the specific objectives are mentioned below:

- To investigate class argumentative tasks (written and oral) as opportunities provided for experiencing literacy in an IELTS academic preparation course;

- To identify and analyse aspects of written and oral argumentative literacies that IELTS academic candidates experience;
- To describe aspects of the candidates' experienced literacies;
- To discuss implications that this study's findings have for IELTS.

### **1.6 Research questions**

The overarching question of this study is: 'what are the attributes of written and oral argumentative texts that candidates develop in a formal preparation course for the IELTS academic examination?' The reasoning for posing this question is to build on the insights that previous studies have offered (Brown, 1998; Coffin, 2004; Mickan & Motteram, 2008). These studies have provided insights into the differences between IELTS preparation courses and EAP preparation courses. They have also built on the body of knowledge by comparing and contrasting university writing tasks and IELTS writing tasks (Moore & Morton, 2005) in terms of the pedagogy used. There is a need for further research into literacy practices in IELTS academic preparation classes. IELTS stakeholders - especially test developers and academic institutions - have expressed interest (IELTS calls for research 2006, 2007) in developing new insights into opportunities provided in IELTS academic preparation classes for experiencing relevant literacies. Therefore to facilitate a more detailed and focused analysis of the data, it was necessary to break down the overarching question into more specific questions. The specific questions are as follows:

1. What argumentative tasks (written and oral) in class do candidates engage in as preparation for the IELTS academic examination?
2. What linguistic resources do candidates experience because of their engagement in the argumentative writing and conversational class tasks?
3. How do candidates organize and structure their written and oral argumentative texts?
4. What discourses do candidates use to convey meaning in texts?
5. What are the implications for the IELTS?

### **1.7 Justification of the study**

The outcomes of this study can be used to: (a) assist English-medium universities achieve the desired literacy outcomes of their IELTS academic preparation programs, (b) address

current criticisms about such programs, (c) assist English language professionals and instructors to develop greater insights into and understanding of IELTS, and (d) discuss probable practical implications of the study for IELTS.

## **1.8 Framework of the study**

Because of the nature of the research questions a qualitative approach was selected (Creswell, 2003; Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 1990). Within this framework a classroom ethnographic inquiry emerged as the most appropriate method (Gimenez, 2001; Mackey & Gass, 2005; McKay, 2006; Saville-Troike, 2003). The reason for this was that this is an investigation into classroom literacy practices which involved assessing the experiences of human learners (Heath, 1992; Hymes, 1982; Iddings, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nunan, 1992; Toohey, 2000) Qualitative data collection was triangulated for trustworthiness. Triangulation was observed by means of audio and video recordings of the literacy events, in addition to field notes (by outsiders), questionnaires and individual and group interviews.

### **1.8.1 Theoretical framework**

The qualitative method that I have adopted for data analysis is known as grounded theory (Mackey & Gass, 2005) in which the researcher lets the data guide the analysis. My initial decision was to observe literacy practices that were provided to prepare the candidates for the IELTS academic examination. Instead of considering a pre-determined data analysis framework, I decided to allow the findings to emerge from reviewing and re-reviewing the raw data inductively, that is, by multiple examinations and interpretations of the data in the light of the research objectives, with the categories induced from the data (cf. Mackey & Gass, 2005). After some consideration and also based on my research questions I used the following perspectives to frame this study.

This inquiry draws on two approaches to the study of written and oral argumentative texts development. The literacy socialization perspective involves: firstly, determining the range of linguistic resources in a speech community, including reading and writing as its ground rules, and the way they are developed and distributed (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986); and secondly, the concept of literacy from a linguistic point of view based on Halliday (1994 and 2003) which distinguishes between two different influential contexts on texts, namely the socio-cultural context (in general) and context of situation (in particular).

I have employed the systemic functional grammar (SFG) perspective (Halliday, 1994; Martin, 1997) in order to examine the candidates' use of linguistic resources that construct the experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings (cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.3.10). These are said to characterize the important aspects of literacies which the candidates experience.

I also have employed a social practices perspective. Barton (1994) suggests that "literacy events are the first basic unit of analysis for social practices approach to literacy, and that they are a constituent of literacy practices" (p. 8). I have considered language socialization. Cook-Gumperz et al. (1986), Schieffelin and Ochs (1986), and Watson-Gegeo (1988) argue that language socialization entails an ethnographic perspective on language learning (see also Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Heath, 1983; Mican, 2006; Vygotsky, 1991).

The process of social learning combined with the emergence and evolution of shared socio-cultural practices in which people with common goals interact, is embedded in the concept of what is known as a community of practice (CoP), (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). Communities of practice based on Wenger et al. (2002) are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p. 4). This can mean identifying a group of participants, for example in a preparation class for IELTS, and studying how it develops shared patterns of behaviour over time (i.e. ethnography). This paradigm has contributed to literacy studies (Gee, 1994), and second language learning (Morita, 2000; Young & Miller, 2004; Yu & Mican, 2007).

Based on this premise I have used discourse analysis of literacy practices from the literacy socialization perspective in group discussions (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1985; Mican, 1997). Based on literacy from a linguistic perspective (Halliday, 2003), I realized systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994; Martin, 1986) was appropriate for analysing the nature and extent of literacy development. Specifically, this refers to IELTS's expected argumentative written and oral tasks. I also found instructional conversations analysis (Goldenberg, 1991, 1992, 1993) useful for classroom instruction. The analysis involved:

- Identification, description and analysis of the aspects of argumentative class tasks (written and oral) in which the candidates engage to develop their texts;

- Identification, description and analysis of certain aspects of linguistic resources as applied by the candidates in developing their argumentative texts in different phases of the study;
- Identification and description and analysis of the classroom discourse practices of the IELTS academic learners;
- Description of the relevant patterns of literacies which promoted the candidates' expert knowledge of the extent of the appropriate application of certain linguistic resources in discourse, and
- Description of the category of the IELTS candidates' classroom discourses (written and oral).

### **1.9 Organization of thesis**

This dissertation consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 - 'Introduction and Background' - provides an outline of the whole dissertation. It situates the study and is followed by background and rationale. It introduces aims and objectives, the focus and the research questions of the study. It also discusses some limitations and emergent issues. Chapters 2 provides information about the IELTS, its background and studies on its related issues in specific. The review of the literature provided me with an opportunity to conceptualize the important IELTS related issues, and to gain the relevant insights needed to realize the knowledge gap which justifies the research. Chapter 3 is devoted to the theoretical conceptualization which forms the foundation of the study. It also assisted me in establishing a theoretical framework and a methodological focus. It considers different aspects of literacy and language learning and communities of practice. Chapter 4 outlines frameworks for data collection and data analysis. It discusses the reasons for adopting a qualitative approach with a classroom ethnographic method. This chapter also evaluates the suitability of discourse analysis, situated learning, IRF pattern, and the systemic functional paradigm of language to analyse the data.

Chapter 5 reviews the plans, programs, preliminary measures and logistics. The research method, site, participants, ethical issues and selection of theoretical frameworks for data analysis are discussed in detail. Chapters 6 and 7 provide analyses and interpretations of the data. In these chapters suggestions about selecting writing and speaking as the focus for a more detailed analysis are put forward. A detailed analysis of IELTS expected academic

argumentative writing tasks and literacy events such as small group discussions, and oral report is undertaken in these chapters. Finally, chapter 8 summarizes the study, discusses the findings of the investigation, responds to the research questions, puts forward suggestions for future research and concludes this dissertation.

### **1.10 Limitations**

The study was limited by a number of factors. It was, firstly, limited by the aim of the study which was identification and analysis of aspects of literacy development relevant to IELTS argumentative (written and oral) texts. Argumentative texts in the classroom were the main focus of this study. Another limiting factor was analysis of the data and interpretation which considered small group discussions and oral report as part of speaking skills, and writing task 2 as part of writing skills. A further factor was investigation and assessment of the learning resources as part of the learning opportunities which fell beyond the scope of this study. Finally, this study provides IELTS stakeholders with consciousness raising about the extent of linguistic knowledge that the candidates experience in an IELTS academic preparation course in order to obtain their required IELTS band scores to enter an English-medium university. The extent of knowledge, however, does not guarantee their ability to meet university requirements satisfactorily. Investigations into literacy practices in different IELTS preparation courses in different contexts may result in different conclusions.

### **1.11 Summary**

This chapter addressed the reasons for undertaking this research and included comments on the topic, focus, and scope, aims and objectives. The more specific research questions, justification and framework of the study were also outlined. The method of analysing the data and the way this thesis is organized were presented, including a description of the content of the following chapters. There was also discussion of some limitations or debateable issues. Chapter 2 provides the literature review.

## CHAPTER 2

### **IELTS: background, issues and justification of the study**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews previous studies on the IELTS and the relevant issues. Section 2.2 states the problem. Section 2.3 and its sub-sections talk about the background of the IELTS in general and its format. This section also provides information about selection of the IELTS as the preferred test by some English-medium universities. Section 2.4, then, turns to the significance of the study and reviews the previous studies. I have pointed out the contributions of previous studies. I have indicated the knowledge gaps with regard to IELTS academic literacy practices in terms of written and oral argumentative text development as preparation for the examination in formal classes in order to justify the significance of the study.

#### **2.2 Statement of the problem**

OTEFL students experience communication problems associated with the demands of academic requirements. One of the concerns of English-medium universities also has been OTEFL students' difficulty in coping with academic requirements in terms of academic texts (written and oral) (Bellingham, 1993; Coffin, 2004; Coley, 1999; Feast, 2002; Green, 2007; Mickan, 2003; Phillips, 1990; Wicks, 1996). One of the major causes of these problems according to research (Coley, 1999; Wicks, 1996) is students' poor English proficiency. For example, Wicks (1996) states, "Since the international students are using the same teaching materials and assessments as the Australian students, we may expect them to perform similarly - unless English proficiency is a problem" (p. 199). This situation has led to the need for OTEFL students' language assessment as a prerequisite for entry into Australian universities.

#### **2.3 A preferred means of language proficiency measurement**

Different English tests (FCE, CPE, MELAB, TOEFL and IELTS for example) have been designed to evaluate the applicants' level of English proficiency. Among these tests, the IELTS has been selected as the preferred test by English-medium universities in different countries, for example, in Australia (Bayliss & Ingram, 2006; Coley, 1999; Feast 2002; Green, 2005). However, over time, English-medium universities have realized that some

OTEFL students with the required IELTS band scores experience serious difficulties in coping with the rigours of academic study (Coffin, 2004; Malcolm & McGregor, 1995; Moore & Morton, 2005). Therefore, questions have risen about the appropriateness of IELTS and its band scores for the aforementioned purpose (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Davies, 2001; Mickan, 2003; Read & Nation, 2005; Shaw, 2006). This situation in turn has raised questions about literacy practices in terms of academic texts (written and oral) that candidates experience in IELTS academic preparation classes (Brown, 1998; Coffin, 2004; Moore & Morton, 2005).

In the section below I will provide an account of the nature and features of the IELTS followed by the significance of the study and review of the related literature.

### **2.3.1 What is the IELTS?**

The IELTS is the joint production of the British Council, the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP) and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), and is administered by UCLES (IELTS Handbook, 2006). It is a specific test which claims to measure test-takers' level of language proficiency in terms of listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills as appropriate for tertiary education and migration purposes (Cambridge IELTS, 2000; Cambridge IELTS, 2006; Hogan, 1992; Jakeman & McDowell, 1996, 1999; Weir, 1990; Witt, 1997).

Although the IELTS officially began in 1989 (Moore & Morton, 2005), it is rooted in a local testing system called the ELTS which the British Council started in 1965 (Coffin, 2004; Criper & Davies, 1988; Hamp-Lyons, 1991b; Weir, 1990). The ELTS, which “replaced the English Proficiency Test Battery (EPTB)<sup>2</sup>” (<http://www.ielts.org>, viewed 25/05/2009), was based on the communicative paradigm which aims at maximizing “learners’ opportunities for using the language in communicative activities” (Mickan, 2004, p. 179), and during the period 1986-1989 was revised so that it became a new tool of language measurement, named the IELTS (Weir, 1990, p. 31). Its development has been

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<sup>2</sup> EPTB, a traditional largely multiple choice test battery that had been used by the British Council in its overseas student recruitment operation since the mid 1960s for the purpose of screening international applicants to universities and colleges in the UK. (Source: [http://www.ielts.org/research/history\\_of\\_ielts.aspx](http://www.ielts.org/research/history_of_ielts.aspx)).

documented by Weir (1990) who states, “The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) supersedes the earlier English Language Testing Service (ELTS) test” (p. 181). However, its development has been continuous as a result of ongoing research on IELTS issues so as to improve and promote the test.

### **2.3.2 Why IELTS?**

The main aim of the ELTS has been to measure the level of language proficiency of OTEFL students wishing to further their education at tertiary level in an English-medium context (Hogan, 1992; Weir, 1990). And, according to Weir (1990) “a growing demand from other student groups and receiving institutions, especially in Australia, as well as new developments in testing theory, has resulted in this up-to-date, completely revised and flexible testing system” (p. 181). Previous studies (Baker, 1989; Criper & Davies, 1988; Weir, 1990) indicate serious difficulties and possible failure that a large percentage of OTEFL students had experienced in their academic studies at English-medium universities. These studies point out that the main reason may be OTEFL students’ poor English proficiency. Similar studies argue that those students who had achieved much in their tertiary studies mostly “had attended pre-sessional courses on the basis of detailed and reliable English language test results” (Weir, 1990, p. 181). Consequently, “Australian institutions have requested an appropriate English test which provides an indication of students’ level of English skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing” (p. 181). Based on these studies the assumption has been that following this approach might provide OTEFL students with an opportunity to upgrade their language knowledge to a level appropriate for university study. Therefore, it has been argued that an appropriate assessment of OTEFL students’ language proficiency “followed by recommended amounts of tuition to remedy areas of weakness” (Weir, 1990, p. 181) might overcome problematic areas. In response, as explained above, the IELTS has become the preferred means of language assessment.

Tertiary institutions in different countries, for example in Australia, have selected the IELTS as an internationally recognized test to determine applicants’ English language proficiency (Bellingham, 1993; Coffin, 2004; Coley, 1999; Green, 2005, 2007; Griffin, 1990; Wicks, 1996; Witt, 1997). Some other scholars, for example Moore and Morton (2005), have also noted that, “The IELTS test has assumed increasing importance in university system around the world” (p. 45). To date, different English-medium

universities around the world have demanded IELTS as the preferred test for entry into university (Coley, 1999; Feast, 2002; IELTS Australia Published Research Reports, 2004; Merrylees, 2003).

The IELTS has been selected and deemed “to assess students’ level of ability in precisely those skills that would be most required in tertiary study” (Hogan, 1992, p. 13) (cf. Section 2.4 for further discussion). It was assumed that the IELTS would measure the four macro skills “in an encapsulated form, and the results, the subtest band scores, indicate both to the student and to a tertiary institution the students’ areas of linguistic strength and weakness” (p. 13). These may justify the growing trend of academic institutions towards preferring the IELTS. This method of language assessment is based on a banding system and a test format.

### **2.3.3 The test format**

The IELTS exists in two versions - ‘General’ and ‘Academic’. The test measures candidates’ level of language proficiency using six modules. Listening and speaking modules are the same for general and academic candidates. However, reading and writing modules are different in academic and general versions of the test (Garbutt & O’Sullivan, 1991). Based on the IELTS administrators the examination begins with a listening subtest followed by reading and then writing subtests. These three modules are to be taken respectively on one day without any interval. Speaking subtest however, can be taken before or after these three in a seven day period. Relevant decisions in this regard are made by the test centres (cf. different IELTS handbooks and websites, for example <http://www.ielts.org>, for more information about the rules, statistics and test centres around the world). Regardless of their language abilities, for example, non-user and expert user candidates can sit the test (IELTS Handbook, 2006). An overall format focusing on the academic version, which is the focus of this study, is outlined as follows (Figure 2.1). For more details see the different IELTS Handbooks.

**Figure 2.1. Overall format of testing the four skills in the IELTS academic examination**

**NOTE:**  
This figure is included on page 15  
of the print copy of the thesis held in  
the University of Adelaide Library.

IELTS Handbook, 2006, p. 3

### **2.3.4 Interpretation of IELTS band scores**

The IELTS has adopted “holistic” evaluation as an “impression based banding system” (Carroll, 1980b; Chaplen, 1970; Weir, 1990). Table 2.1 indicates the interpretation of the IELTS band scores as adopted from the IELTS Handbook (2006).

**Table 2.1. Interpretation of the IELTS band scores**

NOTE:  
This table is included on page 16  
of the print copy of the thesis held in  
the University of Adelaide Library.

IELTS Handbook, 2006, p. 5

### **2.3.5 Interpretation of results**

There is no pass or fail mark in the IELTS. Acceptance of a candidate depends on obtaining the appropriate band score as demanded by the target education institution for undertaking a specific program or course of study. The following guide (Table 2.2) indicates different acceptability levels for some different courses. For more details see IELTS Handbooks.

**Table 2.2. Different acceptability levels**

**NOTE:**  
This table is included on page 17  
of the print copy of the thesis held in  
the University of Adelaide Library.

IELTS Handbook, 2006, p. 5

#### **2.4 Significance of the study**

Various studies have investigated issues of the IELTS and OTEFL student's difficulties in meeting academic requirements after they commence their tertiary education at English-medium universities (Bellingham, 1993; Brown, 1998; Coffin, 2004; Coley, 1999; Criper & Davies, 1988; Feast, 2002; Green, 2005, 2007; Mickan, 2003; Moore & Morton, 2005; Philips, 1990; Shaw, 2006; Weir, 1990; Wicks, 1996). However, previous studies have reported contradictory findings with regard to OTEFL students and university study.

OTEFL students who have taken the IELTS and have met band scores requirements are assumed to have gained skills relevant to cope with the multiplicity of tasks when they commence their studies (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Jakeman & McDowell, 1996, 1999). In contrast, research has found (Brown, 1998; Feast, 2002; Malcolm & McGregor, 1995; Moore & Morton, 2005; Philips, 1990) that a notable percentage of students with the required IELTS band scores face serious problems in doing academic study - a finding which is of major concern. These students face the prospect of failing their examinations (Malcolm & McGregor, 1995; Philips, 1990).

The IELTS Australia Board has funded relevant research. However, there has been little research into literacy practices for developing written and oral argumentative texts in

IELTS academic preparation classes. Studies to date have included a comparison of university writing and IELTS writing (Moore & Morton, 2006), while retrospective analysis of writing scores on official versions of the IELTS test was conducted by Green (2005), but Coffin (2004) looked at the range of argument structures deployed by academic test-takers and the extent to which particular strategies are associated with the IELTS band scores awarded for the task, and (Mickan & Slater, 2003) studied factors affecting the ability of non-English speaking IELTS candidates to indicate their writing ability on the IELTS academic writing task two. In addition, some other scholars conducted research on response validity of the IELTS writing subtest and lexico-grammar influences on the readability of prompts (Mickan, Gibbson & Slater, 2000), but Coley (1999) looked at the English entry requirements as set by Australian universities for NESB students, and addressed the apparent discrepancy between the actual English proficiency of international students, as reported by the academic staff, and their IELTS band scores as an indication of their level of language proficiency (Coley, 1999, p. 8), while NESB students' performance being below their potential after they enter Australian universities despite presenting the required IELTS band scores was undertaken by Wicks (1996), and other researchers investigated into confusion with gained IELTS band scores and real performance of students after their admission to university (Bellingham, 1993; Deakin, 1997; Feast, 2002), and more recently, some IELTS test-takers' casual preparation for the examination in Adelaide, South Australia was conducted by Mickan and Motteram (2009). Most of these studies provide some useful data about IELTS-related issues. However, relatively little is known about what candidates prepare for the IELTS academic examination in its most formal manner-the classroom. An investigation is needed to focus on IELTS academic preparation practices to fill this knowledge gap. This study is an effort in this direction.

It is asserted (Coffin & Hewings, 2003; Deakin, 1997; Green, 2006; IELTS Handbook, 2004; Jakeman & McDowell, 1996; Witt, 1997) that the IELTS is designed to assess test-takers' ability to understand and produce written and spoken language in accordance with the students' academic tasks in English-medium universities. For example, Green (2006) emphasizes that "The academic module of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is designed to assess the readiness of candidates to study through the medium of English and is widely used as a selection tool by universities and other educational institutions" (p. 114). These studies, however, do not provide data in order to demonstrate such students' satisfactory meeting with academic requirements after they

commence their tertiary education at English-medium universities. IELTS preparation courses influenced by the washback/backwash effect (Cheng & Watanabe, 2004; Green, 2006; Mickan & Moterram, 2008) (cf. Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1, p. 26 for more information about washback) are also expected to prepare their candidates to meet the requirements of the test and to obtain appropriate band scores for admission into English-medium universities.

Some assertions, as already mentioned, may lead to the assumption that OTEFL students who meet the required IELTS band scores will do their academic tasks satisfactorily when they commence their tertiary education at English-medium universities. For example, developers of the test have asserted that “IELTS is widely recognized as a reliable means of assessing whether or not candidates are ready to study or train in the medium of English” (Cambridge IELTS, 2000, 2002, p. 1). And also, “The ACADEMIC<sup>3</sup> modules assess whether a candidate is ready to study or train in the medium of English at an undergraduate or postgraduate level” (IELTS Specimen Materials, 2003, p. iii). Elsewhere Deakin (1997) notes that “IELTS claims to be a test of EAP...” (p. 12). However, many OTEFL students (who present the required IELTS band score as evidence of their English proficiency) find it a considerable shock when their English is deemed unsatisfactory, and they face possible failure (Malcolm & McGregor, 1995). Some studies, Wicks (1996, p. 199) for example, have considered lack of English proficiency responsible for this situation. Wicks (1996) has addressed that OTEFL students perform below their potential. The students studied by Wicks, for example, had gained the required IELTS band scores as part of the entry requirements to university. Yet, the findings of his study showed that they had a significant drop in their results for units where English comprehension and expression were important. Wicks (1996) also found that students with the required IELTS band scores performed significantly poorer in units requiring language use compared to students who had qualified by having studied a tertiary course in English. He, therefore, suggested a more detailed investigation into international students’ language problems (Wicks, 1996, pp. 199 and 203). The study conducted by Wicks (1996) was quantitative and limited to ‘Statistics’ and ‘Culture’ subject matters.

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<sup>3</sup> Uppercase in the origin

Some English-medium universities have recommended setting higher IELTS band scores as a solution (Feast, 2002). The findings of some studies have shown that a higher IELTS band score does not necessarily guarantee success in university study (Brown, 1998; Feast, 2002; Green, 2005; Hayes & Watt, 1998).

Findings of a number of investigations suggest that there is some mismatching between the actual English proficiency of OTEFL students and their gained IELTS band scores. Sometimes the relationship between IELTS band scores and real academic performance of students after their admission to university is a matter of confusion. For example, Bellingham (1993) found that students with band scores below 6.0 in the IELTS had 20% chance of passing, whereas at band scores 6.0 or more their chance rose to 50%. However, there were certain students with low IELTS band scores in Bellingham's study who achieved an average over 50%. In a later investigation, drawing on previous studies (Malcolm & McGregor, 1995; Phillips, 1990) and findings of her own study, Coley (1999) concluded that despite showing the evidence of the required language proficiency "it is indeed possible for NESB students to be at an Australian university without being able to speak, write, read or understand English at the required level" (p. 15). In addition, some studies report conflicting findings and do not provide "statistically significant relationship between IELTS scores and academic performance" (Feast, 2002, p. 72). However, the preceding studies have been restricted to quantitative or mixed methodology approaches. Observation of students' literacy practices in preparation courses for the IELTS academic has not been the focus of their studies.

In a study in order to find the outcomes of IELTS preparation courses Brown (1998) adopted a mixed research approach to compare two groups of students. One group studied in an EAP preparation course, the other group in an IELTS preparation course. Brown's (1998) reason for selecting these two groups was because EAP students "have similar motivation and language proficiency level to the IELTS preparation group, as both maintain intentions to continue their studies in Australia at tertiary level" (p. 23). However, the investigator was not sure about the effectiveness of the EAP course, "English for academic purpose courses designed to prepare students for the tests are available in most states of Australia, but the effectiveness of such programs is uncertain" (p. 21). The focus of this research was limited to writing only (Brown 1998, p. 23). Having studied a 10-week program, Brown concluded that there is a difference between preparation for the IELTS

examination and preparation for academic purposes. Yet, the report provides no data to describe the differences and the processes and linguistic resources which the candidates experienced to prepare for the IELTS. Thus there is a knowledge gap in need of further investigation to identify and analyse such aspects. Furthermore, findings of the study show that:

... intense IELTS preparation may benefit IELTS candidates in terms of successful performance in the IELTS test. It does not indicate that such students are necessarily better prepared for the rigours of academic study. Further research is needed to determine whether IELTS or EAP preparation programs are successful in the training of ESL students in the skills required of them for successful participation in Australian tertiary education. (Brown, 1998, p. 36)

Hayes and Watt (1998) undertook an investigation into the effects of different approaches to IELTS preparation. Their study showed that different preparation programs for the language test contributed little to the test-takers' overall language development and performance in the IELTS examination. However, the focus of their study was on finding a way to help students obtain a higher band score in the examination. Observation of literacies experienced in IELTS academic preparation courses has not been included in their studies. This is an area of research that requires attention. IELTS academic preparation classes prepare students for the examination. There are practice resources for preparing the candidates. However, there is very little research focusing on the outcomes of IELTS academic preparation programs. I did not find one study that had literacy practices in terms of argumentative texts (written and oral) in a formal IELTS academic preparation program in its scope. The current study not only focuses on written and oral argumentative texts, it also situates these skills as literacy practices and examines shortcomings inherent therein. In so doing, the classroom argumentative tasks (written and oral) in an IELTS academic context can be addressed.

There has been an attempt to establish differences between the types of writing required in two domains, namely those of the university and the IELTS, by Moore and Morton (2005). The investigators found that although IELTS writing bears some resemblance to the predominant genre of university study - the essay - there are some very important differences between university writing and IELTS writing in terms of genre, information source, rhetorical function and object of enquiry. One of the significant findings of the

study conducted by Moore and Morton is the clarification of the distance between university writing and IELTS writing in terms of epistemic categories and deontic categories. However, their study is limited to the IELTS academic writing task 2 (which receives greater attention in test preparation programs) and how it differs from university writing. Clarification of the reasons for differences is beyond the scope of their study.

In another study, Coffin (2004) examined an extent of argumentative structures that IELTS candidates use in order to develop a short argumentative text. The researcher noticed that the overall preference of IELTS test-takers was for the exposition genre over the discussion genre. Test-takers' approach to writing was more like a press release than academic prose. Coffin (2004) aimed to establish the extent of the relationship between the awarded band scores in the IELTS academic writing task 2 and particular strategies employed to accomplish the task. Coffin (2004) also aimed at offering a better understanding of the linguistic demands of the IELTS test, "specifically the section that assesses students' ability to construct a short argument essay" (p. 230). She utilized linguistic analysis to show how argument structures vary according to the overall purpose of the writer. She attempted to clarify the exposition genre in distinction to the discussion genre. The investigator attempted to discover test-takers' use of theme and aspects of tenor based on the systemic functional theory of language. The overarching aim of the research as Coffin (2004) states, "... has been to contribute to the growing English for Academic Purpose (EAP) research literature as well as to provide IELTS with a research basis for ongoing review and revision of its practices" (p. 233). However, Coffin's study also is limited to the descriptors for assessment and assessment criteria with respect to the IELTS academic writing task 2. Linguistic study of the processes that candidates experience so as to develop their control of the above criticized texts has been beyond her investigation.

Given that these are some of the issues, then research is necessary to clarify the reason(s) for: (a) the overall preference of test-takers for exposition over discussion, and (b) test-takers' approach to writing which is more like a press release than an example of academic prose. These in part motivated the current study to investigate what it is that IELTS academic test-takers prepare. One approach to analyse these issues is to examine IELTS academic preparation literacy practices in terms of argumentative texts (written and oral) in a formal academic preparation class.

In a more recent study, Mickan and Motteram (2008) focused on teaching pedagogy in an IELTS General Version preparation class. Over eight weeks they studied a group of IELTS students enrolled in an IELTS general preparation class in an ELICOS (English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students) program in Adelaide. They observed classroom interactions three hours per day each week. The researchers opted for a method “to describe the instructional practices in the preparation class and to investigate how the instructions prepared students for the examination” (Mickan & Motteram, 2008, p. 6). They noticed that the instructor had used multiple resources: IELTS course books, practice test for IELTS, internet resources and even materials used for teaching general English.

The researchers used Hayes and Read’s (2003) experience of classroom behaviour, to document all handouts, samples of students’ homework, and class work for the purpose of analysis. They maintain that, “Although the classroom events embraced many complex social interactions, the analysis includes the normal, typical and most frequent practices” (Mickan & Motteram, 2008, p. 8). They found that pedagogy played a central role in informing students about the format of the examination, what and how to practice to prepare for the examination, and how to be an independent learner. These studies were more focused on pedagogy and teacher-learner interaction in different contexts.

Investigation of class argumentative tasks as opportunities for experiencing literacy in a formal IELTS academic preparation course has been beyond their focus. They underscore “a lack of descriptive studies of classroom instruction of candidates preparing for IELTS” (p. 2). They call for further research into classroom preparation practices for the IELTS test. They also note that there is a need to evaluate what it is that IELTS candidates prepare. A further and longer period of investigation is required into IELTS preparation programs to fill the knowledge gap. The current study, therefore, looks at students’ literacy practices in a formal IELTS academic preparation class in order to analyse and describe literacies that candidates experience when engaged in producing written and oral argumentative texts. Classroom observation is important because classrooms are social contexts where literacy may develop. The language classroom is a place where students develop their skills in the discourse of the classroom community (Seedhouse, 1996). More importantly, language is learned through participation in language mediated speech and literacy events or activities (Mickan, 2003).

The current study looks at written and oral argumentative texts that candidates produce as preparation for the IELTS academic examination. As already noted, the study examines literacy issues from a “broader institutional discourse and genre” (Lea & Street, 1999, p. 368) perspective rather than orthographical issues. This concept of literacy regards students’ texts primarily as a genre-based product (cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.3.9 for discussion on genre) which has social aspects. For example, student text development based on Lillis (2001, p. 31) “takes place within a particular institution, which has a particular history, culture, values and practices”. The circumstances are also observable in formal preparation classes for the IELTS academic. These statements address the discourse and practices of written and oral argumentative texts in an IELTS academic context. Investigation of such aspects has been beyond the scope of previous studies. This indicates a knowledge gap, which the present study addresses. It is expected that the findings of this investigation will contribute to the literature and knowledge in English–medium universities with regard to argumentative literacy practices that candidates experience in formal IELTS academic preparation classes. The findings also provide data about probable literacy development as the outcome of IELTS academic preparation practices especially to: (a) Australian tertiary institutions, and (b) IELTS stakeholders. In addition, the findings may be utilized to improve IELTS academic preparation practices. These contributions in turn justify the significance of this study.

## **2.5 Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the literature that is relevant to this topic. I provided an overview of the IELTS examination in terms of its nature and features. I talked about its impact on relevant stakeholders. Some significant studies on the IELTS and related issues were reviewed. The review led to identification of the knowledge gap, which motivated the current investigation. The following chapter discusses theoretical conceptualization.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Theoretical Conceptualization**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews specific issues related to this study: language socialization, literacy, community of practice, discourse as social practice, texts and classrooms, text-based discussions, and washback effect. In reviewing the literature, I have explained how previous studies inform my study and contribute to the gaining of more insights into the theoretical underpinnings relevant to the research problem.

This study looks at class tasks in terms of producing written and oral argumentative texts as preparation for the IELTS academic examination. Hence, the formation of the course was based on English for specific purposes. Learning resources and class tasks, thus, needed to be tailored to the demands of the test (Buck, 1988) in a way to fit the purpose of the class, i.e. preparation in accordance with the expectations and descriptors of the test. That is to say the design of the test influenced the class tasks—a phenomenon known as washback/backwash effect. Literacy events and discourse of the classroom are, typically, variables of the purpose of the course of education for which a class is formed. Thus, the literacy practices that students experience in the class may be influenced by the purpose of the course and the design of the related test (cf. Hughes, 1989; Khaniya, 1990a). Therefore, a discussion on the washback/backwash effect, which is relevant to this study because of its concern about the test validity (cf. Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bachman, 1995), is deemed appropriate at this stage.

#### **3.2 IELTS and washback effect**

In their 2008 study, Mickan and Motteran point out that the “IELTS examination is a complex combination of communicative activities” (p. 21). They noticed the effect of testing on teaching and learning, a phenomenon known as test washback or backwash effect (Alderson & Wall, 1993). In another recent study, Wall and Horák (2006) also evaluated the effect of changes in the TOEFL test on teaching and learning, (it is noteworthy to point out that TOEFL, which stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language, after recent changes currently closely resembles the IELTS in design and testing). Their study can be considered appropriate to this discussion. Wall and Horák’s

(2006) investigation was the first in a series of investigations aiming to inquire into the effect of the new TOEFL test on classroom practices. Influenced by Alderson and Wall (1993) who were pioneers into looking critically at the notion of test washback, Wall and Horák (2006) were also keen on investigating the washback hypotheses, “also known as backwash in general education” (p. 2). Regarding the concept of test washback, it is argued that, “test designers should be more explicit about the type of impact they hoped their tests would produce” (Alderson & Wall, in Wall & Horák, 2006, p. 2). The researchers employed classroom observations, recording of literacy events and interviews. They conducted their research in ten sites in six countries in Eastern and Central Europe for approximately four months. The participants included ten teachers, twenty-one students and nine directors (one of the teachers had been a director as well). The researchers found that the teachers had been feeling guilty about their role in the classroom in the past. The teachers were now more enthusiastic in interaction and shifting from deductive teaching to inductive teaching and promoted creativity. They also found that the main goal of students in participating in the preparation courses was to get through the examination. The students stated that, “getting through the examination was the aim of the teaching - not (usually) preparation for life in an English academic institution and certainly not language development” (Wall & Horák, 2006, p. 119). Such insights may highlight the role and importance of washback in teaching and learning interaction.

### **3.2.1 Washback**

Washback is a metaphor which refers to the effect of testing on teaching and learning. In defining washback some writers (Hughes, 1989) have termed it backwash and have defined it as simply the effect of testing on teaching and learning. Inspired by Alderson and Wall (1993), Messick’s (1996) definition also regards washback as “the extent to which the test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not necessarily otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning” (p. 241). However, despite these views, washback is a complex phenomenon. It is associated with and influenced by different interceding variables such as tests, test-related teaching, learning and the perspectives of stakeholders (cf. Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng, 2001; Watanabe, 1997b). Alderson and Wall (1993) assert that “... the term ‘washback’ is common in the language teaching and testing literature and tests are held to be powerful determiners of what happens in classrooms” though “the concept is not well defined” (p. 117). However, of significant relevance to the present study is Buck’s (1988) definition, as follows:

There is a natural tendency for both teachers and students to tailor their classroom activities to the demands of the test, especially when the test is very important to the future of the students, and pass rates are used as a measure of teacher success. This influence of the test on the classroom (referred to as washback by language testers) is, of course, very important; this washback effect can be either beneficial or harmful. (cited in Bailey, 1996, pp. 257-258)

The probability of washback and the significance of its effect whether positive or negative has been underscored in various studies (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Cheng & Watanabe, 2004; Green, 2006, 2007; Messick, 1996; Shih, 2007; Shohamy et al., 1996). Some studies on washback include the ways in which the status and importance of tests affect teaching, learning and policy-makers' decisions on test use (Shohamy et al., 1996). While some scholars have attended to positive influence of washback on teaching by using diverse instruments (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Cheng, 1999), some others have considered washback effect on learning itself (Shih, 2007) and washback effect on learning outcomes (Green, 2006). Green's (2006) study only investigated learners' IELTS writing skill performance. Exploration of learning outcomes on the other skills was not done.

Studies on washback have roots in the studies on the impact of examinations over classroom events conducted by some scholars (Davies, 1968; Hughes, 1989; Khaniya, 1990a, 1990b; Pearson, 1988; Vernon, 1956). Studies on washback have noted negative effects (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1992; Nolan, Haladyna & Haas, 1992; Pearson, 1988; Shepard, 1990). These studies mostly related to traditional, Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQ) and large-scale tests. However, positive or no effects (Linn & Herman, 1997; Sanders & Horn, 1995; Vernon, 1956) have also been evaluated. Almost all the studies on washback agree upon washback or backwash influence of testing on teaching and learning behaviours. For example, Alderson and Wall (1993) say, "we need to look closely at classroom events in particular, in order to see whether what teachers and learners say they do is reflected in their behaviour" (p. 127):

Even if we were to use the term 'washback' to refer to the test's effect on text-book design, we would probably need to distinguish between pedagogic material which is directly related to a specific test in terms of content or method (see, for example, the Kennedy, Kenyan, and Matthiesen 1989 preparation course for the test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)) and material which is intended to help students get ready for an exam in some more general way-for

example, study skills courses which claim they give students skills relevant to taking a test of English language for Academic Purposes like International English Language Testing System (IELTS). (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 118)

Washback itself as a term according to (Alderson and Wall 1993) is a neutral word, which can refer to ‘influence’. Alderson and Wall (1993) suggest that negative washback can manifest as a result of a poor test, whereas a good test can lead either to non-negative or to positive washback. Nonetheless, based on Morrow’s (1986) notion of washback validity Alderson and Wall (1993) presume that a test which has good washback is a valid one and vice versa. However, later, Alderson and Wall (1993) refuse a direct relationship between washback effect and test validity. They argue that “Whereas validity is a property of a test, in relation to its use, we argue that washback, if it exists-which has yet to be established-is likely to be a complex phenomenon which cannot be related directly to a test’s validity” (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 116).

Despite the significant role of testing on teaching and learning its effect has been questioned by critics. However, testing as a means of proficiency measurement has been valued and “tests are held to be powerful determiners of what happens in classrooms” (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 117). The importance and influence of testing on learners and teachers and classroom practices and education stake holders have been emphasized by various scholars (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Baker, 1991; Calder, 1997; Cannell, 1987; James, 2000; Kellaghan & Greaney, 1992; Li, 1990; Messick, 1996; Runte, 1998; Shohamy, 1993a). Counting on the influence of washback, Messick (1996), for example, states that if “a test might influence *what* is taught but not *how* is taught, might influence *teacher* behaviours but not *learner* behaviours, or might influence both with little or no improvement in skills” (p. 242). The studies and their findings are emphatic that the existence of a washback/backwash effect is undeniable regardless of whether it is positive or negative.

Pearson (1988) views the washback effect as negative if it does not reflect the learning principles and objectives of the course to which the test supposedly relates. In addition to this, in my view, the negative effect of washback occurs when the test does not fully contribute to what it claims to contribute, also when it does not meet its proclaimed purpose. No doubt, “the relationship between testing and teaching and learning does appear

to be far more complicated and to involve much more than just the design of a good assessment” (Cheng & Watanabe, 2004, p. 16). However, one way of distinguishing between positive and negative washback, as advanced by (Cheng & Watanabe, 2004), is its remarkable reliance “on where and how it exists and manifests itself within a particular education context” (p. 11), (Cheng and Watanabe’s (2004) argument may be in support of my contribution and the perspective that I have already argued). Moreover, in the words of Cheng and Watanabe (2004), “performing well on a test does not necessarily indicate good learning or high standards” (p. 17). In other words a passing score cannot always guarantee acquisition of the required knowledge or vice-versa.

A more relevant negative effect of washback to the current study is ignorance of teaching subjects and activities that are not directly related to passing an examination (Vernon, 1956; Wall & Alderson, 1993). Surprisingly, the ignored subjects may play a key role in the success of the students in their further education for which they have taken the test. For example, in his study on washback among learners doing a preparation course for IELTS, Green (2006) underscores that “there are aspects of academic writing that may be under-represented in current modules of IELTS preparation” (p. 132). This is an under-researched aspect in IELTS academic preparation which the current study aims to identify. Some studies have emphasized the negative washback effect on students taking the IELTS language proficiency as required for entry into English-medium universities. The negative washback effect of the IELTS, at least in its academic version, is evident in that the IELTS lacks the degree of comprehensiveness required to test those aspects of university study which it claims to test. If the expectations of university study are included in the IELTS examination to an appropriate extent, the washback effect may change and become positive. Some aspects which may be included are such instances as ‘referencing’ and ‘citation’ in academic writing and test of ‘academic oral presentations’ which are regarded as literacies in general and academic literacy specifically. The present study adopts a literacy perspective to address these issues.

### **3.3 Literacy**

Different definitions of the concept of literacy abound. However, as with Hall (1999), I would say that, “Definitions and quantifications of ‘literacy’ are to be treated with scepticism except to the extent that they are grounded in deep, preferably member-based

knowledge of the specific society or social fraction whose literacy profile is under discussion” (p. 383). Some researchers have considered the reality of using literacy in natural settings as a reflection of social or cultural practices (Barton, 1994; Baynham, 1995; Gee, 1990; Kress, 2003). As social or cultural practices, therefore, literacy is viewed as a set of socially patterned activities developing through interactional exchanges. Individuals in social groups use texts in literacy events in order to negotiate meaning in different contexts.

Some scholars (Barton et al. 2000; Bloome & Bailey, 1992; Chi, 2001; Christie, 2005; Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis, 2001; Seloni, 2008) suggest that literacy is far more complex than the definition advanced by the ALLP (Australian Language and Literacy Policy):

Literacy is the ability to read and use written information and write appropriately in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. Literacy also includes the recognition of numbers and basic mathematical signs and symbols within texts. Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing. Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and continues to develop throughout an individuals' life. (cited in Davison, 1996, pp. 48-49)

Various studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Luke, 1993; Seloni, 2008; Street, 2003) show that in today's circumstances, literacy is far more than the ability to read and write and do some mathematical calculations. One study (Luke, 1993) refers to literacy as “social practices that are put to work in institutions such as the family and community, school and work place according to stated and unstated rules” (p. 4). This means in effect a mutual cycle of development between literacy and practices in the process of socialization. This approach opens a new paradigm in literacy education. The literacy education perspective views literacy as a “dynamic, social and historical construction” (Luke, 1993, p. 4), rather than as a set of skills to be acquired by learners. Luke (1993) underscores the significance of the relationship between literacy and practices based on the circumstances and types of literacies. For example, classrooms can be regarded as appropriate sites for socializing learners into literacy practices suitable for their goal of literacy which they need to experience.

More recent studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) see some literacy events linked into routine sequences, which may be part of the formal procedures and expectations of social institutions like schools. They also address the significant role that texts play in literacy events and their embedded literacy practices. Therefore, as with Barton and Hamilton (2000) it can be said that, "Texts are a crucial part of literacy events" (p. 9). Various educational institutions counted as social those institutions that support and structure literacy events in particular contexts. Furthermore, as Barton and Hamilton (2000) point out, "literacies are coherent configurations of literacy practices; often these sets of practices are identifiable and named, as in academic literacy and they are associated with particular aspects of cultural life" (pp. 10-11). The study of literacy from a social or cultural practices perspective "involves drawing on the interrelated dimensions of texts, practices, and contexts" (Baynham, 2000, p. 100) which opens new paradigms to the concept of language learning.

Consequently, literacy practices conducted to provide the candidates with learning opportunities in this study are viewed from a social or cultural practices perspective. As a result, it is possible to say that IELTS literacy practices refer to the social practices in language use and use of language involving instructors-candidates' interactions and the candidates' literacy activities and engagement with written and oral texts. These literacy practices are integrated with other non-verbal tools associated with critical thinking and viewing to enable candidates to recognize and use English as a means appropriate to IELTS examination situations.

Literacy from a socio-cultural practice paradigm, however, bases literacy on people's actions. Various scholars (Barton, 1994; Baynham, 2000; Gee, 1990; Gumperz, 1986; Heath, 1983; Lea & Street, 2006; Seloni, 2008) have termed it "new literacy studies". The new literacy studies (Baynham, 2000; Maybin, 2000; Street, 2003) stress literacy as social practice which involves "both what people do with literacy and the subjective dimension of what they make of what they do: the values they place on it and the ideologies that surround it" (p. 99). The social contexts are therefore responsible for producing practices that affect meaning-making practices, values and ideologies. Thus understanding of literacy requires the study of social context encompassing such constructs as practices, events and texts.

### **3.3.1 New Literacy Studies (NLS): a critical approach**

New Literacy Studies (NLS) is an area of research linked with a gradual introduction and use of the term literacy in different disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, psychology, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, anthropology, and politics (cf. Barton, 1994; Gee 2000). In an attempt to facilitate understanding the concept of New Literacy Studies Street (2003) suggests that it involves viewing literacy from an angle which focuses “not so much on acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice” (p. 1). This perspective provides ethnographic studies with a vigorous means for making sense of literacy as social practice. Street (2003) uses such terms as ‘multiple literacies’ as a substitute for some older terms in order to facilitate making sense of his formulation and suggests a distinction between literacy events and literacy practices (cf. Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3).

This study aims at identifying literacy events and the embedded literacy practices in the IELTS academic preparation class as opportunities for experiencing literacy in order to describe aspects of literacy development as the product of the students’ literacy practices. It also raises consciousness about some literacies that OTEFL student’s experience as preparation for the IELTS academic examination. Previous studies have focused on identifying the relationship between IELTS scores and academic performance. Some studies (Cotton & Conrow, 1998; Dooley, 1999) reported the absence of a meaningful link between the two, but others (Bellingham, 1993; Feast, 2002; Ferguson & White, 1993; Hill, Storch & Lynch, 1999; Kerstjens & Nery, 2000) found a general positive link - whether weak or contradictory - between IELTS entry proficiency levels and Grade Point Averages (GPAs). Scholars (Bayliss, 1996; Brown & Hill, 1998; Merrylees & McDowel, 1999; Mickan & Slater, 2003; O’Loughlin, 2000) have studied test and raters’ liability, while some other scholars (Brown, 1998; Elder & O’Loughlin, 2003; Read & Hayes, 2003) focused on the impact of test preparation programs on test results or band score gains. IELTS academic preparation with a focus on argumentative literacy practices has received little attention.

### **3.3.2 Literacy practices**

The ideological representation of literacy in the words of Street (2001) is “a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another” (p. 7). The ideological representation “posits instead that literacy is a social practice not

simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street, 2001, p. 2). These practices are more ideological than neutral, and individuals translate them differently:

Literacy, in this sense, is always contested, both its meaning and its practices, hence particular versions of it are always ideological, they are always rooted in a particular world-view and in a desire for that view of literacy to dominate and to marginalize others. (Street, 2003, p. 2)

In order to facilitate the concept of literacy as social practice Barton and Hamilton have suggested the following representations (2000, p. 8):

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationship, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through the process of informal learning and sense making.

The notion of literacy practices is central to the notion of literacy as social practice.

Literacy practices entail “...the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). Thus, the study of literacy practices is concerned with examining those practices which are experienced by the participants in their interactions with texts, and with each other.

In order to investigate literacy practices in contexts, Hamilton (2000) proposes a framework with four primary elements, namely ‘participants’, ‘setting’, ‘activities’, and ‘artefacts’ (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1. Primary elements central to the study of literacy practices**

<b>participants</b>	The people who are interacting, producing, interpreting, circulating and otherwise regulating the written texts.
<b>settings</b>	The immediate physical circumstances and domain of practices in which the interaction takes place and takes its sense and social purpose.
<b>artefacts</b>	The material tools and accessories (including texts), and understandings, ways of thinking, feeling, skills and knowledge, that are brought to the literacy practices
<b>activities</b>	The actions performed by participants, as well as the structured routines and pathways that facilitate or regulate actions; rules of appropriacy and eligibility—who does/doesn't, can/can't engage in particular activities.

Hamilton, 2000, p. 17

The framework based on Hamilton (2000) devotes a pivotal role to texts in producing types of practices. Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 9) are emphatic that the study of literacy is to some extent a study of texts and the way they are developed and employed, and they, further, comment that a mixture of written and spoken language is typically used in a number of literacy events. The presence of texts in different forms and types is significant in the routines of people's daily lives which may be concerned with different or the same types of practices.

The notion of literacy practices has also been employed by Street (2003) to refer to “a means of focusing upon social practices and concepts of reading and writing” (p. 2). As with Barton and Hamilton (2000), Street (2003) views literacy practices as reflected in social practices “such as those of a particular job market or particular educational context and the effects of learning that particular literacy will be dependent on those particular contexts” (p. 2). The study of literacy practices in the IELTS academic preparation class also fits these perspectives, because it focuses on the interaction of texts and practices in addition to the role of content in experiencing literacy (cf. Baynham, 2000). Barton and Hamilton (2000) base their social theory of literacy on the notion of literacy study.

Accordingly, they advance the first proposition of literacy as follows:

Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices, these are observable in events which are mediated by texts and the study of literacy is partly a study of texts and how they are produced and used, and in many literacy events there is a mixture of written and spoken language (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 9).

The social theory of literacy underscores the importance of texts and literacy events as two other constructs. Literacy events involve activities in which literacy plays a role, and usually entails discernible episodes which produce practices and are formed by them (Barton et al., 2000). Below, I explain literacy events in detail.

### **3.3.3 Literacy events**

The notion of literacy events underscores the presence of different literacies in different contexts or domains. Literacy events are complex in that they refer to the association of oral and written language and their literate functions such as reading, writing, or responding in an interview (Heath, 1982). Some scholars view literacy events as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (Heath, 1982, p. 93). Other scholars (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) who regard practices in different cultures and languages as different literacies view literacy events as “practices which involve different media or symbolic systems” (p. 10). They point out that “... literacies are coherent configurations of literacy practices; for example, academic literacy or work-place literacy and these are associated with particular aspects of cultural life” (p. 10). Barton and Hamilton (2000) furthermore see texts of any kind - be they a piece of written text or texts that are pivotal to the activity or talk around a text - as embedded parts of literacy events. But, literacy events are not limited to these. They can refer to “situations where one or more people engage in an activity in which print texts are central for language interactions” (Comber & Cormack, 1997, p. 24). Small group discussions in this study are also literacy events because there is “a written text or texts, central to the activity” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). The premise indicates the centrality of texts in determining the types of literacy events and their embedded literacy practices, and establishes the second proposition that:

There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.

From this, it can be inferred that literacy can be used more specifically for the study concerning the kind of argumentative writing expected of test-takers to produce in the test.

The view that “socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to value and support dominant literacy practices” (Barton et al., 2000, p. 12) raises the third proposition.

Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationship, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.

These practices can be viewed as forming parts of whole discourse, “institutionalised configurations of power and knowledge, which are embedded in social relationship” (p. 12). Barton et al. (2000) further point out that “other vernacular literacies which exist in people’s everyday lives are less visible and less supported” (p. 12). For example, in the case of IELTS academic preparation programs, prevailing literacy practices with which the candidates are provided are considered to be formulaic conventions that are valued in academic communities of practice. The candidates’ background knowledge and experiences, which they bring with them into preparation classrooms, can be seen as an example of vernacular literacies. In the case of IELTS preparation programs, over-emphasizing dominant literacies in the IELTS academic test-takers’ writing may lead to considering their writing as the final product. In other words, the instructor’s focus may be on traditional structural and orthographical issues rather than “broader institutional discourse and genre” (Lea & Street, 1999, p. 368). Based on this realization, Barton and Hamilton (1998) advanced their fourth proposition:

Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.

According to Barton and Hamilton (1998) literacy practices are “as fluid, dynamic and changing as the lives and societies in which they are a part, we need an historical approach for an understanding of the ideology, culture and traditions on which current practices are based” (Barton, 2000, p. 13). The culturally situated construction of literacy practices as declared, in addition to the view that literacy as with all cultural phenomena have their roots in the past (Barton, 2000) establishes the fifth proposition that,

Literacy is historically situated.

This perspective can provide a useful tool for situating the IELTS test-takers’ writing in the historical context. For example, basing my study on this perspective, I was able to observe the influence of ideological, traditional and cultural convention and washback on the candidates’ texts (see Appendices D and E, and Chapters 6 and 7).

The notion that literacy practices are bases of a learning process, and that “this learning takes place in particular social context and part of this learning is the internalization of social processes” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000. p. 14) establishes the last proposition that:

Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through the process of informal learning and meaning making.

Based on this proposition, literacy practices are learned, and they are variables of the social context in which they are embedded. Social contexts are different and require different use of language. Appropriate language for communication is decided by what is known in SFL as Field (what is happening), Tenor (who are involved) and Mode (the channel of communication) (cf. Christie & Misson, 1998). For example, in the IELTS academic preparation class, literacy practices in which the candidates engage are influenced by a phenomenon known as the washback effect (for an explanation of the washback effect see Chapter 3, Section 3.2) resulted from the demands of the IELTS examination.

The preceding discussion identified the association of language learning and participation in social practices. It also underscored the significant role of discourse in expressing and determining social practices. However, scholars have not yet reached a consensus about what precisely is meant by the term ‘social practices’. Toohey (2000) supports Miller and Goodnow (1995) who view practices as “actions that are repeated, shared with others in a social group, and invested with normative expectations and with meanings or significances that go beyond the immediate goals of the action” (p. 7). My interpretation of the above viewpoint is that practices entail social and cultural actions in addition to historical perspectives shaping socio-historical perspectives, which links the past to the future (cf. Duff, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1991). The premise necessitates the following discussion about language learning from a social point of view.

### **3.4 Language learning: a social perspective**

#### **3.4.1 Socio-cultural theory**

Socio-cultural theory as developed by Vygotsky (1991) considers the dynamic of the interdependence of social and individual processes as its core. The theory is viewed by Wertsch (1991, 1998) in the context of learning in classrooms. He says that socio-cultural theory emphasizes the significance of conceptualizing language learning as a

developmental process mediated by semiotic resources appropriated from the classroom. Semiotic mediators function as tools to enhance human activities and mental functioning (Vygotsky, 1991). Vygotsky (1991) suggests that young learners construct thought by means of language. Inspired by Vygotsky's concept of human reliance on tools and physical activity for individual development, Wertsch (1991, 1998) further underscores the significance of semiotic resources in the learning of an additional language. The semiotic mediators can be physical or symbolic (psychological) means or signs, and language is seen as the most significant one of these (Gibbons, 2006). Some semiotic resources are print materials/texts, the physical environment, gestures and classroom discourse (Lantolf, 2000). According to Lantolf (2000), socio-cultural theory views the learning of additional languages as a semiotic process attributable to participation in socially-mediated activities. These ultimately result in the development of individuals' own mental functioning.

Language plays multiple roles in assisting learning, communicating, and sharing opinions and experiences with other members of the community (cf. Wilson, 2005). However, the social context of English as additional language (EAL) learners requires the language to play two roles; language is both the goal and the mediator. The latter role of the language has been considered by Vygotsky as the most significant mediator of all the physical and symbolic tools (Lantolf, 2000). This duality enables the language to: (a) function as a mediator of social activity, and (b) mediate "the associated mental activities in the internal discourse of inner speech" (Wells, 1999, p. 7). Language both serves as an external tool to facilitate engagement in interactions and as an internal meaning-making resource to facilitate meeting educational demands. The double function of language can serve in the development of language if the learners are provided with opportunities to be taught the language explicitly, and to be engaged in language socialization.

### **3.4.2 Language learning as social practice**

Language learning as social practice requires learners' involvement in social activities. In support of the importance of social activities in language learning Halliday (1978) proposes that social constituents and systems in classrooms can be seen as permeating the whole texture of a language. Social activities from Mohan's (1986) point of view involve the integration of knowledge (theory) and action (practice). Language, according to socio-cultural theory, is rooted in people's daily social routines and activities. Participation in language mediated literacy activities provides opportunities for learning to use language as

a tool for meaning-making in cultural practices (Mickan, 2004). Based on this notion not only are language and meaning inseparable, but they are entangled in social interactions.

Engagement in different social interactions such as “turn-taking, initiating talk, or making meaning through the composition of texts rather than writing exercises” (Mickan, 2004, p. 194) demonstrates the importance of social activities in learning and language use. Mickan (2004) further points out that participation in language-mediated speech and literacy education contributes to language learning. The importance of this is also emphasized by Sfar (1998) who encourages language learners to “become a member of a certain community” (p. 6). The proposal suggests involvement in social interaction facilitates learners to internalize and incorporate the “cultural array of means for mediating both material and mental actions” (Wells, 1999, p. 104). As the study by Galbraith et al. (1999) concluded, in the process of socialization, participants experience opportunities such as learning to prepare their language to make communication possible with other members and learning the discourse resources as used in others’ utterances.

Following this perspective Breen (1996) views social practices as “the routine procedures that teachers and learners jointly establish and this social or cultural practice shapes their discursive practices” (p. 4). Breen’s (1996) definition of social practice facilitates an interpretation of language learning in classrooms. Other scholars, for example Breen (1996) and Fairclough (1992) state that establishment of social relationships by means of discourse between the participants in the classroom can lead to the development of academic and social knowledge. Language learning based on this perspective is deemed as apprenticeship of learners into new skills and knowledge development. Social activities in such classes as preparation for IELTS academic requires an appropriate classroom discourse in order for the students to apprentice into skills and knowledge required for the examination. Below, I provide a brief account of discourse as social practice.

### **3.4.3 Discourse as social practice**

Discourse is pivotal in the formation of social practices in spite of being viewed differently by some scholars. Johnstone (2002), for example, claims that most discourse analysts regard it as a ‘mass noun’, but Foucauldian scholars view it as a ‘count noun’. Fairclough (1992) sees discourse as a mode of action through which members of a community may act upon the world and in particular upon each other in addition to modes of representation.

Jaworski and Coupland (1999b) do not support the idea of taking any discourse as equal or fixed. They do not support Fairclough's perspective of 'discourse' when examining other conceptualizations of discourse. They propose that "as in most approaches to discourse, we do need to engage in empirical linguistic study of some sort, and to establish principles according to which empirical investigation may proceed" (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999b, pp. 135-136).

Advancing perspectives on discourse, Van Dijk (1997) views discourse as complex structures and hierarchies of social interactions in written and spoken and other semiotic forms and their embedded genres in community. This role according to Van Dijk (1997) is additional to the role of discourse as form, meaning and mental process. He asserts that description of discourse includes "a form of social interaction, the context in which the discourse is embedded, the power which is the key notion in the study of group relation in society, and the ideology which establishes links between discourse and society" (pp. 6-7). However, despite the lack of consensus of a solid definition of discourse, most scholars agree on the use of language in discourse, or in the words of van Lier (1996), "language use in context".

Fairclough (1989) proposed viewing discourse as a form of social practice. In a later publication, Fairclough (2003) also views social practice as "a relatively stabilized form of social activity (e.g., classroom teaching, television news, family meals, medical consultations), and every practice embedded in an articulation of diverse social elements within a relatively stable configuration, always includes discourse" (p. 1). Fairclough (1992) suggests three key functions, namely "ideational", "identity", and "relational" in discourse based on Halliday's (1987) notion of systemic functional theory and based on a constructivist perspective (cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3, p. 63 for more explanation). Fairclough acknowledges Halliday's view of language in texts entailing ideational, interpersonal and textual aspects. Fairclough's (1995a) postulation is that both written and spoken texts "are social spaces in which two fundamental social processes simultaneously occur: cognition and representation of the world, and social interaction" (p. 6). Thus, discourse is embedded in social interactions and comprises different manners of acting in daily life.

Social practices (Candlin & Mercer, 2001, p. 310) are also the institutional circumstances that produce and restrict specific texts as well as discursive practices of classroom lessons. Based on this view they demonstrate the relationship between social practice and discursive practice. Accordingly, engagement of the participants (including teachers) in classroom social activities establishes the appropriateness of the probable practices. The literacy practices may encompass reading, writing, listening, speaking, and deriving meaning from different print texts, decoding text, and making meaning with texts and engaging in group discussions to debate on texts. Participation in the classroom in order to engage in such literacy practices provides the learners with opportunities for language use in order to attain their social purpose. Engagement in such activities is an opportunity for the learners to engage dynamically in making meaning of talks, texts and practices in the language, which in turn promote language learning. In such a context, text-based activities facilitate the participants to socialize into using language. The context also provides participants with opportunities to engage in classroom interactions (with the teacher and/or the peers) to use the language and acquire significant associated skills as required.

### **3.5 Texts and classrooms**

Texts used in a language classroom do not only include such materials as books. Texts can appear in any form or size. According to Feez (2002) a text can be “any stretch of language which is held together cohesively through meaning” (p. 4). Diversity of texts is not limited to their written form. For example, Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) have pointed out that “text can be written, oral, signal, electronic, pictorial, etc., and a text can refer to a string of words, a conversational or written routine or structure, a genre of written language as well as a genre of social activities or event types” (p. 311). As far as the language in a text contributes to construct a whole meaning, it can also appear in spoken forms and visual forms and scripts and outlines of social roles played in everyday life (Luke, 1993).

The use of texts in classrooms is purposeful. The use of texts in classrooms provides the participants with opportunities to draw on their familiarity with texts and with discourse conventions linked to particular social practices (Mickan, 2004). The use of texts also is not limited to the teacher’s instructions because texts can be used as a means of interaction between the learners as well. Texts can serve both to establish the teacher’s instructional relationship with the learners and to establish learners-to-learners’ relationships or individuals’ autonomous engagement in literacy practices. Their engagement through

processes of reading and writing can activate texts (Darville, 2001). Texts are viewed as building blocks or tools which serve participants in social interactions. Language in texts is integrated to perform social functions and to create meaning (Mickan, 2004). Mickan (2004) further argues that the “grammar and vocabulary or lexico-grammar” (p. 196) contribute mutually in constructing meanings in a text. This situation allows learners to make sense of the ways of applying language in the real world in making meaning instead of being introduced to some grammatical and lexical arguments in isolation. Texts used to carry out a specific task in a particular literacy event are interpreted and discussed by the interlocutors engaged in the embedded literacy practices. In language socialization, participants create meaning with texts and themselves. Using texts in the class can lead to the creation of opportunities for participation in literacy practices accompanied by the texts. This participation plays a pivotal role in the individual participant’s literacy learning.

### **3.5.1 Text-based discussion**

Text-based argumentative conversation has been viewed as crucial in literacy events (Bergvall & Remlinger, 1996; Chi, 2001; Eco, 1990; Myers, 1988; Unrau & Moss, 1996). For example, Chi (2001) underscores “in the process of text discussion, the participants constantly redefine the texts, reframe their thoughts and beliefs, and reconstruct their personal experiences and knowledge of the world and of the language” (p. 149). Student centred discussions can be more useful particularly if the participants take up different positions for and or against the issue(s) addressed in the text (cf. Beach & Phinney, 1998; Bergvall & remlinger, 1996; Unrau & Moss, 1996;). Nevertheless, there are advantages and disadvantages in student centred text-based discussions. An example of a disadvantage might be occasions of inappropriate use of linguistic resources which may lead to formation of bad habits. However, one advantage is the participants’ opportunity to practice their language skills in the classroom (cf. Knoeller, 1994).

Another advantage of text-based group discussions is the development of critical thinking skills. In support of this, Barnitz (1994) says, “Through dialogues, classroom participants build social relationships, model good oral and written discourse strategies, expand background knowledge, and lead each other to elaborate on ideas, rather than undertake only specific reading and writing skill” (p. 588). Spontaneous group discussion provides interlocutors with the ability to propose points or issues in order to argue and interpret and

evaluate different perspectives. Such literacy events may lead to the development of critical thinking skills and literacy - an aspect of university study.

Texts are the motivation for discussions and talk about texts is embedded in literacy practices. The immediate contribution of talk about texts in the class is the engagement in oral interaction which provides participants with opportunities (a) to practice and promote their speaking and listening skills, and (b) to develop the literacy and the culture of discussion about the issue(s) embedded in the texts. Authentic conversations on the issue(s) motivate interlocutors to use verbal cues in the text and in the situational context to help them create meanings in shaping appropriate literate responses (cf. Love, 2001). These talks not only include instructor and students' interaction, they engage participants in exchanging their opinions and ideas and their perceptions of the world around them (cf. Gaskins, 1994). Underscoring the significance of group interactions about texts, Lemke (1995 in Barton & Hamilton, 2000) says that "the starting point for the analysis of spoken language should be 'the social event of verbal interaction', rather than the formal linguistic properties of texts in isolation" (pp. 8-9). In this way, the participants engage in negotiating, elaborating and making meaning and describing and explaining the issues and sub issues which are embedded in the texts. These are considered as the different forms of literacy practices embedded in the literacy events.

Talk about texts leads to: (a) promotion and improvement of the participants' linguistic resources such as lexico-grammar, discourse, and genre, and (b) development and promotion of their understanding and mental functions (cf. Wells, 1990). This classroom activity also provides opportunities for group learning or learning in groups – an aspect of language socialization with the members of the community of practice. Alternatively, in the words of Sunderland et al. (2001), "talk about texts is the way in which language users consume texts as a discursive practice within a wider social practice" (p. 282). Engagement in text-based discussion in English provides participants with an opportunity to develop their cognition in English in addition to particular skills and literacy development.

Talk about texts also provides the participants with "opportunities to construct text worlds based on their real-world social experiences" (Beach & Phinnery, 1998, p. 159). In other words the participants' translation of texts is influenced by their social and cultural and experiential background. According to Lemke (1993, cited in Wells 1999) text and talk

mutually function to engage participants in the “semiotic apprenticeship into the various ways of knowing when they move back and forth between text and talk, using each mode to contextualize the other, and both modes as tools to make sense of the activity in which they are engaged” (p. 146). In talks about the texts students contextualise the meaning from the written form back into colloquial form to assist them in making sense of the content which may lead to developing their mental activity in the language they mean to learn.

The participants in a discussion about a text may take up different positions. They may initiate talk in order to illicit information. They might respond to an inquiry or provide information or directives. In any case, in the processes of talk about texts “they, too, are ‘reading the social’ in which they continually redefine and negotiate meaning of those texts in order to define the meaning of their social practices” (Beach & Phinney, 1998, p. 160). The participants in the discussion about a text need to adjust their oral exchanges in order to fit their social purposes.

Text-based argumentative conversation provides the interlocutors with opportunities to read different types of texts. Literacy practices in the classroom, which include reading a text of some contemporary contentious issues, can facilitate the students’ awareness of different genres of writing. In addition, these practices provide the candidates with opportunities to strengthen their vocabulary and to structure knowledge through language socialization. The importance of including reading different text types in classroom practices has been highlighted by various scholars (Chi, 2001; Goffman, 1974; Maybin & Moss, 1993; Mckan, 2004; Roser & Keehn, 2002; Tannen, 1993). For example, Mckan (2004) emphasises that reading different text types as part of the literacy in the classroom provides learners with opportunities to experience different discourses, which in turn will contribute to their literacy development. Similarly, Chi (2001) has underscored the importance of talk about texts from social practices point of view. Chi stresses the intertextuality of talk about texts in the language classroom, and asserts that “it is a natural part of reading, emerges as a process whenever we as a reader connect what we read with what we have previously read, viewed, heard or told” (p. 247). Chi (2001) proposes three different functions of intertextual talk as follows (Chi, 2001, pp. 249-52):

1. text contextualization where the participants are offered opportunities to look for their own questions, re-formulate their understandings and pursue inquiry meaningful to them. For this, talk

about or around text or intertextuality links suggest a collaborative environment whose goal is to share viewpoints, provide a rational argument and work toward new understanding of the previous texts;

2. re-storying which provides opportunities to integrate their previous literacy experiences and acquire knowledge via sharing their individual voices;
3. reflection which is viewed as an action that allows classroom participants to turn their experiences into learning or to apply their new experiences to a new context.

Chi's (2001) discussion about texts' perspective supports the language socialization perspective. Other scholars (Roser & Keehn, 2002) emphasize the significance of talk about texts in class, and they propose the functions adapted in Table 3.2 below.

**Table 3.2. Types of talk about texts and their functions**

**NOTE:**  
This table is included on page 45 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Roser & Keehn, 2002, p. 419

Roser and Keehn (2002) say that talk about texts provides the participants with opportunities to develop and improve their abilities in interpreting, predicting and evaluating. These can be viewed as a result of meaning-making processes in which the participants engage in decoding and communicating with the texts. Deriving meaning from the texts on which discussions are based can assist the participants to contextualize and enrich their meanings, which can lead to understanding "the fluid nature of social interaction" (Lewis, 1988, p. 169), and production of their own texts.

### 3.5.2 Producing argumentative texts as literacy practices

The preceding discussion provided an explanation for the concept of literacy and its relationship to texts (written and oral). As mentioned before, Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 9) emphasize on the existence of a mixture of written and spoken language in various literacy events. This belief can also be derived from the words of Johns (1997) who sees literacy as "...ways of knowing particular content, languages, and practices" (p. 1). Johns further views literacy as "strategies for understanding, discussing, organizing, and producing texts. In addition, it relates to the social context in which a discourse is produced and reproduced and the roles and communities of text readers and writers" (p. 1). Johns' (1997) view of the concept of literacy here is that "a literate person relates in a more sophisticated manner to some texts, roles and contexts than to others" (p. 3). Furthermore in the relationship between the concept of literacy and texts, Meek (1988) says that "if we want to see what lessons have been learned from the texts children read, we have to look for them in what they write" (p. 38). From the previous discussion and these perspectives we see that literate beings, for example candidates in an IELTS academic preparation class, may demonstrate their literacy development through production of texts, and the extent of their literacy development varies from person to person. The variable nature of peoples' literacy (Johns, 1997, p. 3) depends on "a person's interests, cultures, languages, and experiences, and by responses of others to their texts". As with engagement in reading text, thus, in developing writing, students need to make meaning of the text they develop.

But, students also need to develop expert knowledge of vocabulary and structure in order to use them appropriately in accordance with the social purpose of their texts. Johns (1997, p. 5) regards literacy as an amalgamation of different perspectives based on (a) the traditional view, which is concerned with the formal properties of texts, their macrostructure and grammar, (b) the learner-centred view, in which it is the students' meaning-making process that drives the other elements of the theory, (c) personal-expressivity view, which is concerned more with language ability as behaviour than language knowledge, and (d) socio-literate view which considers that the socio-literate theorists begin with the community and culture in which texts are read and written and the social influences of the context on discourses. The theoretical approaches draw on the following main concepts to propose definitions of literacy based on different perspectives. They are:

- The nature of acquisition-in the sense that the theories differ in their beliefs of how literacy is acquired;
- The nature of the learner and the role the learner plays in literacy acquisition-again how the learner and the role s/he ought to play are defined variably by the theories;
- The role of the literacy teacher, or any adult expert in the literacy acquisition-these are also looked at variably by the theories;
- The nature of language and texts.

Further, the same author suggests an integration of literacy perspectives claiming that learners are not required to “conceptualise a social construct as a rigid set of rules, but as guidelines to be negotiated within specific contexts” (Johns, 1997, p. 5). Therefore, in the act of reading texts and developing writing as literacy practices, learners, for example IELTS candidates, always have the opportunity to express their own interpretations and purposes and voices. Johns (1997) also suggests providing learners with opportunities to “experiment within and outside, textual boundaries and conventions” (p. 5) as apprentices who make meaning by the use of target language in the course of their learning. The premise shows that Johns (1997) interprets and discusses argumentative literacy practices as developed based on a critical thinking approach to texts. For example, Johns (1997) underscores the importance of students’ consciousness-raising “to analyse, critique, and negotiate intelligently the texts, roles and academic contexts in which they operate” (p. 18). These indicate the relevance of the author’s perspective to the current study.

### **3.5.2.1 Student text: socio-cultural and institutional practices effect**

The concept of literacy from a socio-cultural perspective based on Ballard and Clanchy (1988 in Taylor et al., 1988) leads to an understanding of the influence of socio-cultural and institutional practices which underpin the whole processes of student text development. They suggest that the concept of literacy from the literacy competence perspective encompasses (a) literacy of context (i.e. correctness, cohesiveness, appropriateness of style, voice and other formal features), and (b) control of disciplinary dialect (i.e. those meanings, items and forms of language pertaining to the discipline) (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988 in Taylor, et al., 1988, p. 17). Such rules “inform the way in which the writing task is initially framed by the academic and the way in which the student’s response to the task (text) is finally assessed” (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988, cited in Taylor et al., 1988, p. 8). Ballard and Clanchy (1988) propose that these rules affect students’ linguistic behaviour and that this would be reflected in the assessment of their

literacy. This phenomenon has also been observed in the IELTS test-takers' argumentative texts, for example in the study conducted by Bayliss and Ingram (2006).

With regard to students' linguistic behaviour Bayliss and Ingram (2006) investigated the extent to which the proficiency scores obtained by OTEFL students aiming at furthering their tertiary education could predict their language behaviour in meeting university study requirements. Using a mixed approach the inquirers studied 28 OTEFL students (male and female) from different countries studying at an Australian university. The participants were enrolled in the first semester of a full-time academic program at different levels ranging from undergraduate to PhD. The researchers conducted interviews with the participants about their performance in the English mediated learning environment. They observed the participants when engaged in note-taking in lectures and in their interactions in group discussions and pair work with both peers and academic staff and individual presentations. They found that IELTS scores could be a predictor of students' language behaviour in the first semester of their academic life, but that some individuals' language proficiency levels might be perceived differently. Bayliss and Ingram (2006) stated, "Pre-study questionnaires (self-evaluations) were administered to all participants to gauge their self-perceptions of language proficiency" (p. 2). Bayliss and Ingram (2006) did not find a "clear correlation between individual students' IELTS scores and their reported experiences using English in the university context or their opinions of the adequacy of their English for study" (p. 6). However, they suggest a probable association in written tasks with writing proficiency. The researchers' focus was on language proficiency. They call for further investigation into the language skills needed for discipline-specific tasks, for example producing argumentative texts, and the cause of students' failure in coping with university study requirements.

Student development of argumentative texts has been investigated in different studies (Barnitz, 1994; Bergvall & Remlinger, 1996; Chi, 2001; Eco, 1990; Myers, 1988; Unrau & Moss, 1996; Yu & Mickan, 2007). However, research into literacy practices for developing argumentative texts (written and oral) in an IELTS academic preparation class has received little attention. Indeed, relatively little is known about what candidates prepare for the IELTS academic in formal classrooms. So, the general aim of the study has been to investigate literacy practices which generate opportunities for experiencing literacy in order to develop appropriate argumentative texts (written and oral) to meet the

expectations of the IELTS academic examination. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical implications for IELTS stakeholders.

### **3.6 Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature on washback effect and its relationship with the IELTS. I also consulted different studies and literature on literacy in general, New Literacy Studies from a critical perspective, literacy events and their embedded literacy practices, and language learning from a social point of view. Other significant discussions covered the notion of discourse from a social practices viewpoint, texts and classrooms, texts based discussion, and producing argumentative texts as literacy practices. This study identified and described some aspects of literacy development resulting from the IELTS candidates' engagement in doing classroom argumentative tasks. The next chapter focuses on the data collection and data analysis frameworks.

## CHAPTER 4

### Data Collection and Data Analysis Frameworks

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework for the study. The study examines the literacy practices provided in a formal class to prepare for the IELTS academic examination. Suitable interdisciplinary frameworks for the qualitative approach which informed the current study have been considered. The qualitative approach incorporates a classroom ethnographic design. The relevance of ethnographic study to IELTS preparation practices, and also theories of situated learning and systemic functional linguistics have been discussed. Language learning in the context of English as an additional language has also been considered.

Two distinct strands of frameworks are discussed. The first looks at the approach and design involved in data collection. The second discusses the analytical orientations which frame the data analysis.

#### 4.2 Data collection framework

Observing the behaviour of a community of practice (cf. Section 4.3.6) is one of the key elements for collecting data in order to document why a phenomenon occurs. This requires using a qualitative approach which can include an ethnographic methodology. I selected the ethnographic method, because it provides a conceptual framework for studying the acquisition of literacies within the broader framework of literacy in society (Scheffelin & Ochs, 1986). The significance and functions of observation for ethnographic data collection have been addressed in a range of studies (Merriam, 1998; Nunan, 1992; Saville-Troike, 2003; van Lier, 1988).

##### 4.2.1 Ethnography

Ethnography refers to an investigation in which the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a long period of time by collecting, primarily, observational data (Creswell, 1998). Ethnography itself has its roots in anthropology as a method for the longitudinal study of different cultures (Saville-Troike, 2003). For example, in describing the emergence of ethnography from anthropology, McKay (2006) makes clear that “In the

original sense, ethnographies were in depth studies of particular cultures” (p. 78). With this method the research process is flexible and typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Some scholars (Agar, 1980; Cazden, 1988; Creswell, 2003; Dixon et al., 1999; Heath, 1982; Hymes, 1982; Maxwell, 2005; Willett, 1995) refer to ethnography as a theoretically driven tool to study the daily life of a social group systematically by recording and analysing the relevant data and representing the findings about such life. This approach comprises different phases such as planning, discovery and presentation of findings. Ethnography can also be used as a tool to encourage reflection, and theorize about literacy (Hamilton, 1999, pp. 430-431). For example, ethnography as a research method (Hamilton, 1999, p. 431) has been used to investigate students’ changes in literacy in classroom (cf. Larson, 1996; Panferov, 2002).

This qualitative study was based on an ethnographic design, and including observations of participants’ literacy practices. In this context the researcher sought to establish the meaning of literacy development from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2003). This entailed identifying a group of participants and studying how it developed shared patterns of behaviour over time.

#### **4.2.1.1 Ethnography of communication**

Ethnography of communication is concerned with *how* and *why* language is used and *how* its use varies in different cultures (Mackey, 2005; McKay, 2006; Saville-Troike, 2003). The ethnography of communication (Gumperz, 1982; Hymes, 1974; Saville-Troike, 2003) or “the ethnography of speaking” was proposed by Hymes in 1962 who has formulated and summarized, using the mnemonic device S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G, such components as ; Setting and scene of the communication practices, Participants in the practice, End of the practice, Act sequence involved in and for the practice, Keying the practice, Instrument or channel being used in the communication practice, Norms that are active when practising communication in the community, and Genre of communication when practising essential for collecting and analysing data . The emergence of the ethnography of communication had its roots in ethnography and linguistics (Saville-Troike, 2003). According to Saville-Troike (2003), “ethnography is a field of study which is concerned primarily with the description and analysis of culture” (p. 1). Culture, according to some scholars is composed of “certain values, practices, relationships and identification” (Massey, 1998;

Moghaddam, 2002). Looking at culture and linguistics from an ethnographic perspective, Saville-Troike (2003) describes linguistics as “a field concerned, among other things, with the description and analysis of language codes” (p. 1). However, this account does not apply only to large communities, because smaller communities such as classrooms (Tuyay, Jennings & Dixon, 1995) can also have their culture investigated under certain circumstances. For example, regarding ethnographies, in the original sense, in-depth studies of particular cultures, McKay (2006) says that “more recently, however, more limited investigations of particular social contexts such as classrooms have been termed *interpretive qualitative studies* or *ethnographic studies*” (p. 78) (italics in the original). These properties can also be observed in classrooms. A classroom can be described as a culture where certain semiotic resources are utilized for learning. An example is a language class for a specific purpose, which aims at promoting students’ expert knowledge of producing conventionally acceptable argumentative texts, such as preparation for IELTS academic has its own culture.

The current study, therefore, embraces ethnographic inquiry of classroom culture. In order to deal with empirical problems that are experienced in the relationships of members of a particular community of practice or individual repertoire, a jointly ethnographic and linguistic mode of description (Gumperz & Hymes, 1989) has been suggested. I employed this method because “research on talk in educational institutions, is not built to answer theoretically motivated research questions of the type that applied linguistics often ask” (Schegloff et al., 2002, cited in McKay, 2006, p. 103). In an ethnographic study of a specified classroom or an education program of a certain nature, the inquirer’s main aim is to disclose all tasks and events that contribute to the development of literacy in the duration of that specified program. Literacy events in the words of Barton (1994) “are the first basic unit of analysis for social practices approach to literacy, and that they are a constituent of literacy practices” (p. 8). Literacy practices embedded in the literacy events in a formal IELTS academic preparation class were the focus of this study in order to come up with the relevant aspects of literacy development.

#### **4.2.1.2 Ethnography as language socialization**

Ethnography in language learning also has been viewed as a form of language socialization (Cook-Gumperz et al., 1986; Ochs, 1990; Poole, 1992; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Watson-Gegeo, 1988; Willett, 1995). However, language socialization “is not a one-way process by

which learners blindly appropriate static knowledge and skills” (Willett, 1995, p. 475). In this situation the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Rogoff, 1990; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Vygotsky, 1991).

Social learning refers to people learning from observing other people in a social setting (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). This paradigm has contributed to literacy studies (Gee, 1994), and second language learning (Morita, 2000; Young & Miller, 2004; Yu & Micken, 2007). In this paradigm, the research process is flexible and typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in the field setting (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Thus, qualitative researchers are interested in recording the participants’ experiences which become the basis of collected data. They also “seek to build rapport and credibility with the individuals in the study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). These were important considerations in the current study.

The process of social learning with the emergence and development of shared socio-cultural practices is embedded in the concept of community of practice (CoP), (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990) (cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.3.6). In such communities people with common goals interact to achieve these goals. In other words, learning happens as a result of participation in a community of practice (Smith, 1999). Communities of practice have been described by Wenger et al. (2002) as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). This can mean identifying a group of participants, for example, the candidates in the preparation course in IELTS classroom literacy events in this study, and studying how they develop shared patterns of behaviour over time (i.e. classroom ethnography).

#### **4.2.2 Relevance of ethnographic inquiry to IELTS literacy practices**

Ethnography has been addressed as an appropriate method to investigate learning as a result of daily social practices (Willett, 1995). Social practices shape in IELTS preparation classes. A formal IELTS preparation class is a community of practice in which students engage in literacy practices. In such a community of practice, based on Hamilton (1999) “the focus shifts from literacy as deficit or lack, something people do not have, to the many different ways that people engage with literacy” (p. 432). Their engagement with literacy

according to Hamilton (1999) recognizes difference and diversity, and challenges the ways in which differences are valued in society.

Classroom ethnographic studies have included second language classes (Duff, 2002; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) and language programs for IELTS (Mickan & Motteram, 2008). Mickan (2000) has suggested that ethnography is an appropriate approach for analysing the discourse of classroom instructions. Considering classroom interaction as one of the primary tools for learning, Hall & Walsh (2002) studied language learning as a result of teacher-student interaction. They emphasize that English language plays a significant role in language classrooms, because “it is both the medium through which learning is realized and an object of pedagogical attention” (p. 181). These studies suggest that ethnographic inquiry is a rigorous and direct approach for learning about participants’ behaviour in the contexts of literacy events. Mickan and Motteram (2008) conducted an ethnographic inquiry in an IELTS general preparation program to find out about classroom instruction. Their main purpose was “to provide a description of the pedagogy, and a discussion of implications based on an analysis of the classroom data” (Mickan & Motteram, 2008, p. 1). Investigation of literacy development in relation to argumentative texts in IELTS academic preparation courses was not within the scope of their study.

The current study, therefore, focused on the class tasks to see what literacies the candidates experience when producing argumentative texts as preparation for the IELTS academic. I developed a matrix based on LeCompte and Preissle’s (1993) research to map my methods as described in Table 3.1. Some scholars, for example, Maxwell (2005), maintain that “any qualitative study requires decisions about how the analysis will be done and these decisions should inform and be informed by the rest of the design” (p. 95). I organized my research questions into the matrix. I identified how each component of my methods could help me collect the required data to answer the research questions (Maxwell, 2005). Matrices are useful not only for research design, but also for ongoing monitoring of selection and data collection and for data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 94).

**Table 4.1. The matrix for the study of literacy practices in an IELTS academic preparation class**

What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this?	What kind of data would answer the questions?	Where can I find the data?	Whom do I contact for access?	Time lines for acquisition
What argumentative tasks (written and oral) in class do candidates engage in as preparation for the IELTS academic examination?	To assess different means and tools provided for experiencing literacy in the IELTS academic preparation class.	Classroom observations, taking field notes, video recorded and audio recorded data, interviews	In the classroom designed for the IELTS academic preparation course, handouts, texts, and different relevant materials.	Instructor and candidates	February 2007 to June 2007
What linguistic resources do candidates experience because of their engagement in the argumentative writing and conversational class tasks?	To assess candidates' literacy development as the result of practices, and engagement with texts and materials used in the classroom.	Investigation of the written and oral practices done in the classroom and their homework	Observation of the classroom, field notes, video recorded and audio recorded materials, interviews	Instructor and candidates	February 2007 to June 2007
How do candidates organize and structure their written and oral argumentative texts?	To assess the candidates' literacy development in monitoring the organization and structure of their argumentative texts (written and oral)	Analysis of the candidates' texts as developed in three different phases in the course	In the data collected from the candidates' texts as developed in the classroom	The candidates	February 2007 to June 2007
What discourses do candidates use to convey meaning in texts?	To reveal the category of the discourse in the classroom	Analysis of the candidates' texts as produced in the duration of the study	Observation of the class tasks, learning resources and candidates' texts	The candidates	February 2007 to June 2007

Source: Adapted from *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), by LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, San Diego: Academic Press. In Creswell, 2005, pp. 100-101.

In this way, I employed an ethnographic method to examine the details of the candidates' literacy events and the embedded literacy practices in their natural settings in the study. The following section discusses the method of analysis for the study.

### **4.3 Analytical orientation**

An early decision on the choice of a theoretical orientation was not crucial. I let the framework for analysis be shaped by my experiences and insights which I obtained in the processes of data collection, transcription and revision of the data. One approach that is used to guide the analysis of qualitative data is known as grounded theory (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Based on this approach the attempt is “to avoid placing preconceived notions on the data, with researchers preferring to let the data guide the analysis” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 179). So, instead of considering a pre-determined data analysis framework as with Mackey and Gass (2005), I allowed the “findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes within the raw data” (p. 179). I observed classroom argumentative tasks (written and oral) to which the candidates were assigned to prepare for their IELTS academic examination with the following perspectives framing the study.

#### **4.3.1 Social practice perspective: language socialization**

Language socialization - a theoretical and methodological paradigm - was articulated and proposed by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) as a response to two significant areas of socialization. They are “socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, p. 163).

I employed language socialization, because Cook-Gumperz et al. (1986), Schieffelin and Ochs (1986), and Watson-Gegeo (1988) underscore that language socialization entails an ethnographic perspective on language learning (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Heath, 1983; Mican, 2006, 2007; Ochs, 1988; Rogoff, 1990; Schieffelin, 1990; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Vazquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994; Vygotsky, 1991). Language socialization is entailed in literacy events which are “the first basic unit of analysis for social practices approach to literacy” (Barton, 1994, p. 8), and they encompass literacy practices.

In studies of child socialization, investigators did not underscore the significant role of language. This absence is addressed by the language socialization paradigm “by insisting

that in becoming competent members of their social groups, children are socialized through language, and they are socialized to use language” (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004, p. 350). In other words, young learners and other newcomers to a social group become socialized into the group’s culture through exposure to, and engagement in, language-embedded social activities (Morita, 2000). This premise highlights the significance of social activities in language learning. Engagement in social interactions provides the participants with opportunities to learn from one another by observing the use of language in contexts, and by using the appropriate language (cf. Duff, 2005). One appropriate example of such social context for socialization is engagement in classroom activities. Language socialization is neither restricted to oral texts, nor is it limited to young learners. It encompasses learners of different ages with different social experiences of language learning similar to such circumstances as observed in the IELTS academic preparation class in this study.

The notion of “socialization through the use of language” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, p. 163) means learners socializing in the language via interactions that require the use of language. The interactions may entail the engagement with texts disregarding their mode (oral or written) or different practices for language learning. In such activities language is believed to be the tool and product of socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). In the process, learners use the language for meaning-making and as a catalyst for learning. Halliday’s (1978b) notion of socialization of language sees language as a tool for communication in order to express and make meaning in context. That is to see how people exploit the use of language in exchanging meaning in different interpersonal contexts (cf. Chapelle, 1998).

Viewing the essence of the meaning-making purpose of language learning, Halliday (1993) states that “language development is learning how to mean” (p. 93). Participants learn language as a result of their engagement with the semiotic process of making meaning with the practices, texts and interactions embedded in social activities. Participation in the language classroom, where the context is available for language socialization, makes it possible to socialize into the language by engagement in text-based activities and interactions between instructor and learners and between the learners.

Learning, as suggested by Vygotsky (1991), can be experienced through social activities. Learning develops as a result of participation in community activities, as has also been noted by McDermott (1993) and Rogoff (1994). Based on this perspective language furnishes learners with a tool to organize their mental activities for remembering, thinking and reasoning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Learning situated in an educational context, for example in a classroom, can be experienced throughout different stages. The beginning stage of experiencing learning is known as scaffolding (Bruner, 1978; Dufficy, 2000; Freebody, 2000; Wood & Bruner & Ross, 1976), and it is a term that has been used in some studies (Hammond, 2001) as “a metaphor to capture the nature of support and guidance in learning” (p. 2). Following, I provide a brief talk about the notions of scaffolding and ZPD in order to describe possible processes of experiencing literacies and the ways of deploying them in an IELTS academic preparation class.

#### **4.3.1.1 Scaffolding**

In the processes of knowledge development and acquiring skills individuals may require more knowledgeable or more experienced participants’ contribution and support. In a classroom setting, the teacher supports the learners using different pedagogical strategies such as direct instructions, recasting, negotiation of meaning, and giving feedback which determine the classroom discourse. Furthermore learners contribute to and support each other in the processes of learning and skill development by peer communication and their engagement in different social interactions such as group discussion on contentious topics. This support is metaphorically known as “scaffolding” (Bruner, 1983; Dare & Polias, 2001; Hammond, 2001). Considering it as a metaphor, Hammond (2001) explains that, “scaffolding has been widely used in recent years to argue that, in the same way that builders provide essential but temporary support, teachers need to provide temporary supporting structures that will assist learners to develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities” (pp. 1-2). She also explains that “as the learner develops control of these, so teachers need to withdraw that support only to provide further support for extended or new tasks, understandings and concepts” (pp. 1-2). Scaffolding and nurturing learners through their participation in activities (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) may lead learners to communicative functions. The functions are used as requirements for participation in the scaffolded activities. Scaffolding does not necessarily mean guided

teaching by the teacher or instructor. Scaffolding can also happen through negotiation of meaning between interlocutors involved in a discussion. In such a case scaffolding may be fluid rather than solid. This means more knowledgeable interlocutors in certain areas of knowledge can interchangeably scaffold one another through negotiation of meaning. This stage is forming part of zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1991).

#### **4.3.1.2 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**

The (ZPD) is another term used by Vygotsky (1991) to refer, metaphorically, to a window of potential learning that lies between what a learner in any situation can manage to do unaided and what s/he can achieve if help is provided (Galbraith, Van Tassell, & Wells, 1999, p. 296). The final stage has been referred to as autonomous learning. In the process of learning language from one another, regarded as a performance assisted by means of the ZPD (Moll, 1992; Thrap & Gallimore, 1988), a more knowledgeable interlocutor contributes to learning to help learners reach a stage of self regulation and eventually autonomy thereafter.

The notion of scaffolding is informed by Vygotsky's (1991) notion of "zone of proximal development (ZPD)" (Feez, 1998). Vygotsky's (1991) "zone of proximal development" theory is the locus of the perspective of social and participatory learning with "scaffolding". In the beginning stages of the processes of learning, the more knowledgeable participants take most responsibility. Gradually, however, in the ongoing participation in such contexts, receiving guidance can promote the learners to the level of "zone of proximal development (ZPD)" (Vygotsky, 1991). This zone is a stage at which the learners do things based on the knowledge they have gained unaided, yet they may need help with the rest. The help can be supplied by providing opportunities in a social context.

The notion of "zone of proximal development (ZPD)" is informed by socio-cultural theory. That is, participation in social practices can lead to the development of new skills and their associated knowledge. Accordingly, learning is perceived as a socially-mediated process. The notion of "ZPD" indicates the development of the knowledge involved in such contexts. The "zone of proximal development" is a transition layer between a scaffolded commencing stage and an unaided function stage that learners in any situation need to experience in the process of learning. A learner may go through four different stages in the

transition layer between “scaffolding” and “ZPD”. They are: (a) copying or imitating, (b) modelling, (c) inspiration-based creation, and (d) independent creation.

The ZPD, however, is not a fixed transition layer for different individuals in a classroom. It varies from participant to participant and from circumstance to circumstance. Every individual’s ZPD can be achieved through collaborative participation with more knowledgeable and experienced participants. The extent to which assistance is sought in facing unfamiliar knowledge recedes as the extent of the accumulation of the learner’s knowledge grows. Learners can seek assistance from more experienced members in the field, or it can occur in the process of peer communication. The premise underscores the significance of learning through socialization and its influence on a learner’s knowledge development.

Engagement in social interactions provides opportunities for language use and learning. Social activities also play a significant role in the learning process. van Lier (1996), for example, asserts that on the whole, engagement in social activities signifies “being ‘busy with’ the language in one’s dealings with the world, with other people and human artefacts, and with everything, real or imagined, that links self and world” (p. 147). In socialization, language both plays a key role as the means of interaction and serves in assisting each of the participants’ mental processes to make meaning of their actions. Language is the key “mediational means available to individuals engaged in social interaction, and human learning and development are inherently embedded in social relations” (Donato, 2000, p. 27). Language is not only the primary mediational tool but also demonstrates varying multiple functions in different social interactions. For example, in their study, Galbraith, et al. (1999) documented a student’s engagement with the teacher’s instructions, in note-taking, describing and commenting on the subject matter, and in seeking assistance from written texts in a science classroom. This shows the student’s simultaneous engagement in different literacy practices. The investigators reported that learners’ involvement in a range of language tasks can help learners in their “zone of proximal development”. They noted that the students’ engagement in different literacy practices assisted the learners “to extend and consolidate their understanding of the concept involved” (p. 309). The premise indicates that engagement in literacy activities accompanied by the contribution of the more knowledgeable participants in the field will provide the learners with opportunities to develop new skills.

Social practices are also viewed by other scholars (Candlin & Mercer, 2001, p. 310) as “institutional circumstances” for the development of specific texts and literacy activities in the classroom, including teacher-student interactions which are part of the classroom discourse. Studies of the socio-cultural nature of learning and the dynamics of classroom discourse (Wertsch, 1986, 1991; Vygotsky, 1991) indicate the importance of negotiation of meaning (Anton, 1999; Forman & Cazden, 1985) in debating issues from different perspectives through peer discussions. But, in terms of pedagogical implications for the language classroom, it can be suggested that the instructors play a role as an expert guide in the learner’s ZPD. Classroom practices, for example in an IELTS preparation class, shape literacy events through which spoken and written texts can be developed. They provide opportunities for experiencing literacy. These lead to a view that an examination of literacy learning can be framed by literacy socialization.

#### **4.3.2 Learning opportunities: a social practices perspective**

Opportunities for literacy learning, for example, can be referred to as negotiation of meaning in a discussion, reading and deriving meaning from a print text, exploring a pattern in language usage, or getting direct feedback on one’s own use of language (Crabbe, 2003). Crabbe (2003, p. 10) points out that, “Such opportunities are normally available in the classroom in varying qualities and quantities”. Classroom language socialization also requires learners to engage in social practices or activities so that their knowledge (theory) is manifested in action (practice) (Mohan, 1986). The view point has been articulated by Halliday and Hasan (1985, p. 5).

Learning is, above all, a social process; and the environment in which educational learning takes place is that of social institution, whether we think of this in concrete terms as the classroom and the school, with their clearly defined social structures, or in the more abstract sense of the school system, or even the educational process as it is conceived of in our society.

Different studies have regarded classrooms as social contexts for the purposeful and meaningful use of language where members’ skills in the discourse of such community may develop (Seedhouse, 1996). Instructing language for specific purposes is a literacy event in a situated learning context. In terms of the context, Mohan (1986) suggests different ways of realization of knowledge structures linguistically, which may assist in the analysis of social practices. Such a context is characterized by its own patterns of language

use which highlight the roles and functions of the instructor and learners (Cazden, 1988). Social participation in language is therefore mediated by speech and literacy events which provide opportunities for language learning (Mickan, 2003).

Based on a socio-cultural theory (Lantolf et al., 1994; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1991) the manifestation of learners' methods of engagement in classroom literacy events normally occurs in linguistic forms. This is because learners' engagement in classroom literacy practices entails thinking, acting, feeling and communicating with texts and the development of texts in a situated or specific context (Fairclough, 1992). Engagement in literacy activities to produce meaningful or conventionally acceptable texts can be viewed as social practices in their discourse-specified contexts. Relating discourse and social practices, Fairclough (2008) views social practices as "a relatively stabilized form of social activity (e.g. classroom teaching) and every practice embedded in an articulation of diverse social elements within a relatively stable configuration, always including discourse" (p. 1). Also Fairclough (1992) and Breen (1996) point out social practices using classroom discourse provide an appropriate social context for experiencing literacy.

#### **4.3.3 Discourse as social practice: an analytical perspective**

Despite the absence of consensus on a definition of discourse (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 1999; Jaworski & Coupland, 1999b; Johnstone, 2002; Taylor, 2001; van Lier, 1996), it is regarded as social practice (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 1999; Hasan, 1996; Taylor, 2001) based on the use of language. This view has implications for investigating texts above sentence level. This means investigating "the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions, both the immediate conditions of the situational context and more remote conditions of institutional and social structure" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 26). This premise leads to the assumption that discourse is both demonstrator and determinant of social practices.

Discourse based on the notion of genre theory and discourse analysis is also considered to be an aspect of social practice (Bhatia, 2002) (cf. Chapter 3, Section 3.4.3). Discourse, however, in van Dijk's (1997) perspective is a combination of form, meaning, mental process, complex structures and hierarchies of interaction and social practices in community. A framework of discourse comprising three components has been suggested by Fairclough (1992) (cf. Chapter 3, Section 3.4.3, p. 40). The components correspond to

Halliday's (1994) three meta-functions (cf. Chapter 4, Section, 4.3.10) respectively, as follows; 1. Any instance of discourse can be seen as a piece of text, which corresponds to "identity" (ways of setting up social identities in discourse). 2. An instance of discourse practice, which corresponds to "relational" (ways of enacting or negotiating social relationships between interlocutors). 3. An instance of social practices corresponding to "ideational" (ways of signifying the world and its processes through texts) (Fairclough, 1992). These properties suggest that, firstly, language is far more than a tool solely for communication, and secondly discourse itself is far more than the language system in use.

Discourse according to some scholars (Fairclough, 1992) features three primary functions, named "ideational", "identity", and "relational". However, the combination of "identity" and "relational" has been addressed as "interpersonal" by Halliday and Hasan (1985). Regarding Halliday's perspective on function as "a fundamental principle of language", Fairclough (1995a) argues that texts (written or spoken) are "social spaces in which two fundamental social processes simultaneously occur: cognition and representation of the world, and social interaction" (p. 6).

The social practice perspective of discourse has implications for investigating its interactional features (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1985; Taylor, 2001; van Lier, 1996; Voloshinov, 1995). One reason for this is that viewing language from a social practices perspective highlights the fact that whether oral or written it is interactional or dialogic (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982). By engaging in interaction, in the words of Moerman (1988), "people encounter, experience and learn" (p. 2) about the world around them. They use language to exchange opinions and learn language through the use of language. Recognition of the important role of language in socialization leads to a realization of what people do when they use language. In their conversations, people take up certain positions on what the world or reality should be like, and in order to secure "social goods" (Gee, 1999, p. 2) they develop their perspectives based on their personal beliefs and wishes, and they act accordingly.

Based on this premise, I used discourse analysis of literacy practices from the literacy socialization perspective to discuss candidates' engagement in producing argumentative texts (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1985; Mican, 1997). The social practices perspective helped me to analyse the candidates' discourse practices in IELTS argumentative writing and

conversation in its social context, or in the words of Fairclough (2001) “within a structured network of practices, and a domain of social action and interaction” (p. 122). I selected this approach because I was interested in gaining insights into the elements that influence the IELTS candidates’ argumentative texts’ (written and oral) development and improvement. Furthermore I used literacy socialization and community of practice concepts in relation to participation and language. They helped to structure my expectations of the relationship between participation and discourse in social practices in the IELTS academic preparation classroom. This is explained in more detail below.

#### **4.3.4 Literacy learning: socialization perspective**

Socialization for experiencing literacy learning in a language other than a first language, for example in English (Duranti & Ochs, 1986; Schieffelin & Gilmore, 1986) is concerned with: (a) socialization to use language, and (b) socialization by means of language.

Language socialization based on the related discussions and literature contends that in any case the process is interactive (interlocutors not to be passive) (Corsaro, 1985; Ochs, 1990; Schieffelin, 1986), or a bi-directional process (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990) in which participants learn from one another. However, in the former case, more knowledgeable members may contribute more, although this is not essential and “the process of language socialization is not limited to spoken mode of language” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, p. 163). For example, such literacy practices as reading and writing “are always situated within specific social practices within specific discourse” (Gee, 2000, cited in Barton, et al., 2000, p. 189). Literacy practices, for example writing, as Gee (2000) puts it, “only make sense when situated in the context of (sic) and cultural practices of which they are but a part” (p. 180). In the process of language socialization participants interact with each other by participating in language-embedded social activities (cf. Morita, 2000).

Socialization to use language in the words of Schiefflin and Ochs (1986) refers to the manifestation of explicit socialization when more advanced language users clearly teach social norms shared by members of society (Cook, 1999, pp. 1444-1445). “Socialization through the use of language” according to Schiefflin and Ochs (1986) refers to “a process in which learners learn to be competent members of a social group by taking part in daily activities” (pp. 1444-1445). These activities provide the participants with opportunities to use language in different texts and/or materials. Therefore language classroom activities provide a social context for language mediated literacy socialization (cf. Mehan, 1979,

1985; Michaels, 1981; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). However, it is important to examine the ways in which language is used as a learning opportunity in the socialization process (Schieffelin, 1986).

To date studies have covered the role of language as a socializing means for constructing a social world to structure communication (Corsaro, 1985), and the complexity and contextualized nature of L2 learning with regard to the related socio-cultural contexts (Takahashi, 1998). Furthermore, acquiring skills of attentive listening and turn-taking in class from a language socialization perspective (Cook, 1999) have been discussed. The development of linguistic knowledge and skills with the help of teacher by engaging in organized classroom activities (Mohan & Marshall Smith, 1992) has also been considered. These studies provide insights into the embedded socialization processes in literacy events, yet they also address the need for more ethnographic investigation to provide supplementary insights in this area.

I employed literacy socialization to contextualize candidates' argumentative texts (written and oral) in the institutional social cultural context relevant to the IELTS academic preparation community of practice. I also used it to observe the candidates' meaning making in their argumentative texts' processes. This has been possible because of the notions of 'context of situation' and 'context of culture'. These have been influential in realizing how the IELTS class as a social cultural structure with its specific ideologies affects IELTS candidates' texts. I emphasize this because based on the language socialization perspective, "language learning is the process of becoming a member of a socio-cultural group" (Willett, 1995, p. 475). Features of the notion of language socialization, for example active participation and use of both spoken and written texts, were observable in the IELTS class in this study.

#### **4.3.5 Participation: centrality of learning**

The term participation has been suggested as complementary to the term acquisition by Sfarid (1998), in which "the fundamental premise requires language learners to become a member of a certain community" (p. 6). Based on this concept, language learning entails learners' participation in socially constrained practices. In support, Mickan (2003) has also pointed out that language is learnt because of participating in language mediated speech and literacy activities or events. Considering conversational and interactive aspects of

participation, Throne (2000) regards it as “discourse between individual and cooperative practice and the construction of social context” (p. 223). That is, language socialization provides opportunities for language development.

This study was based on the context where English is an additional language.

Consequently, the purpose of exploring the candidates’ use of language was not only to obtain insights into the candidates’ manner of engagement in literacy events in English, but also to associate this with language learning. The research, therefore, has been informed by the participation concept - one of the two elements of negotiation of meaning, the other known as “Reification” (Wenger, 1998).

Participation, as Wenger (1998) also suggests, can be viewed as “the social experience of living in the world in terms of memberships in social communities and active involvement in social enterprise” (p. 55). Wenger (1998), in fact, implies that participation from this point of view is concerned with both personal aspects and social aspects. The concept is enhanced by his viewpoint that participation “is a complex process that combines doing, talking, feeling and belonging. It involves our whole person, including our bodies, minds, emotions and social relations” (p. 55). From a social participation perspective any engagement, for example writing, is necessarily social, because it involves social interactions (Wenger, 1998, p. 57). Participation in social interactions according to Wenger (1998) comprises different linguistics resources. He further states:

Words as projections of human meaning are certainly a form of reification. In face-to-face interactions, however speech is extremely evanescent; words affect the negotiation of meaning through a process that seems like pure participation. As a consequence, words can take advantage of shared participation among interlocutors to create shortcuts to communication. It is this tight interweaving of reification and participation that makes conversations such a powerful form of communication (Wenger, 1998, p. 62).

This perspective emphasizes both the important role that ‘words’ play in participation and the essential role of access to discourse in the process of learning. Participation, however, may occur for different reasons, for example, because of personal preferences or interests in the domain or shared values or resources or control over the practices (Wenger et al., 2002). Community of practice is also characterized by fluidity which means participants’ movements in different CoP and discourse communities while experiencing change of

identity based on different discourse practices (Gee, 1994). Gee (2000) also claims that “knowledge is distributed among multiple people, specific social practices, and various tools, technologies, and procedures-and is not stored in any one’s head” (p. 186). The sense of belonging and membership is normally inspired by the use of common ways of discussion and interaction, and shared values and beliefs in a particular community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002).

Previous studies (Hanks, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986) provided insights into the notion of participation and language socialization. This helped me to select learning as participation in community specific socialization (Douglas, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton & Toohey, 2002) as an appropriate framework for examining the candidates’ extent of literacy in terms of producing written and oral argumentative texts in the current study. The candidates participated in language socialization by attending literacy events either in the form of small groups or the whole class discussions in order to produce argumentative texts in the IELTS academic preparation class. The importance of this participation process has been emphasized by Hall (1995b), who says, “individuals within groups, and groups within communities, (re) create and respond to both their sociohistorical and locally situated interactive conditions, and the consequences - linguistic, social, and cognitive - of their doing so” (p. 221). The candidates participated in language socialization because of the concept of participation and its fluid nature (Hawkins, 2004) in second language learning practices; Young and Miller (2004) regard second language acquisition as “a situated, co-constructed process, distributed among participants” (p. 519). This fluid characteristic of participation in changing communities of practice may provide learners with opportunities to obtain the required expert knowledge in order to understand and make meaning of universally and locally situated communicative situations.

#### **4.3.6 Communities of practice and situated learning**

Learning requires a process (“situated learning”) of transforming knowledge as well as a context (“community of practice”) for participation (Wenger, 1998). Learning from a socio-cultural perspective is understood based on the notion of “situated learning” or “legitimate peripheral participation” (LPP) proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Wenger regards place and process to be pivotal to learning and says that learning:

entails a process of transforming knowledge as well as a context in which to define an identity of participation. As a consequence, to support learning is not only to support the process of acquiring knowledge, but also offer a place where new ways of knowing can be realized in the form of such an identity (Wenger, 1998, p. 215).

My understanding gained from this argument is that the two elements (place and process) are crucial to learning. Lave and Wenger's contribution to learning in recent developments of literacy studies has been recognized (Gee, 2000; Hanks, 1991; Toohey, 2000). Based on the work of Rogoff (1984), community of practice (CoP) refers to "the process of social learning that occurs and shared socio-cultural practices that emerge and evolve when people who have common goals interact as they strive towards those goals" (Shin & Bicke, 2008, p. 1). This concept is currently recognized in various disciplines of studies, for instance, New Literacies Studies (Freebody, 2001; Gee, 1994; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Street, 2003), and second language learning (Morita, 2000; Young & Miller, 2004).

In communities of practice three interrelated components named: (a) the community (members motivated by a mutual interest in the domain), (b) the practice (ideas, tools, expertise, knowledge, and shared resources that serve to move the field of inquiry forward), and (c) the domain (topic or theme to be addressed and advanced) have been identified (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Domain of knowledge involves parameters such as people who believe in domain and shaping a community. They develop shared practices to validate the domain, and make it effective and accessible. Accordingly, these features help establish communities of practice characterized as a framework for participants.

In a particular community of practice such as an IELTS preparation class, the participants share a common language use, discourse, values and beliefs. This property leads to the sense of belonging that holds the members together (cf. Wenger et al., 2002). In such a community every member has different tasks and a variety of roles.

Learning in classroom communities of practice as I observed in my study reduced the teacher's role. Debating the role of teacher in the classroom, Donato and McCormick (1994) argue that "language learners who believe teachers as the authoritative source of knowledge are likely to avoid the self-directed strategies necessary to achieve language

proficiency” (p. 461). Conversely, situated learning provided learners with a greater opportunity to more actively exercise and practise as much of their expert knowledge gained in the course as possible. Despite the recognition of the significant role of practice, the clarity of the meaning of practice is equally important. Wenger et al. (2002) suggest that socially situated practice entails “the explicit and the tacit” (p. 47). By explicit they mean, for example, what people talk about in their discussion group where language tools and different semiotic signs or systems are brought into play. Additionally, by tacit they mean the unsaid or implicit relationship between the participants in the process of socialization.

With regard to the constructive concept of learning, while Lave and Wenger (1991) underscore the importance of a ‘learning curriculum’, they indicate its distinction from a ‘teaching curriculum’ by assuming that “a learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice” (p. 93). Learning not only entails learners, it also incorporates vital aspects of literacy events (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991). Based on this premise the concept of “situated learning” is deemed applicable to various learning situations (e.g. educational and non-educational). For example, this concept has been adopted by Young and Miller (2004) in second language learning. I have found studies of community of practice and situated learning perspectives (Mickan, 2003; Rogoff, 1985; Wenger, et al., 2002) appropriate to inform a participation framework to frame this study.

Accordingly, I employed the situated learning perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to investigate argumentative literacy learning (written and oral) and the learning processes. One reason for this selection is Lave and Wenger’s (1991) view of learning as social practice. They point out that “learning is not merely situated in practice as if it were some independently refinable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world” (p. 35). My interpretation of this point of view is that learning can happen in one or more communities of practice, in which patterns of participation can change, and that it requires complete engagement in social practices. In clarifying their perspective on legitimate peripheral participation, Lave and Wenger (1991) further state that: “By this we mean to draw attention to the point that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). I have accepted that the

community of practice perspective would assist me to approach candidates' participation in IELTS academic classroom discourse to observe their ways of making meaning and engaging in negotiation of meaning. This view was based on the fact that in an IELTS academic preparation classroom, candidates experience a variety of social practices to negotiate meaning.

#### **4.3.7 IELTS academic preparation class as a community of practice**

An IELTS academic preparation class, based on the above premise, can be viewed as a community of practice which provides candidates with opportunities to experience written and oral literacies in their situated practices. The previous discussion leads to the perspective that in such a class experiencing literacy, which entails social interaction, can be viewed as involving practices and the participants and learning resources as a community.

The language classroom, however, is characterized by complexity, because the classroom encompasses “multiple, complex and often interdependent components and characteristics that students must negotiate (both socially and academically) in order to come to participate” (Hawkins, 2004, p. 15). Studying the nature and function of classrooms, some scholars (Green & Dixon, 1994; Hawkins, 2004; Lemke, 1985) have considered them as “complex ecosystems” that provide “specific situated cultural and language practices” (Hawkins, 2004, p. 12). These perspectives demonstrate that involvement in social interactions in classrooms is not only a process for understanding the subject matter by means of negotiation of meaning, but also it provides the participants with opportunities to socialize, based on the culture shaped as a result of their participation in terms of their dialogic processes, their roles and conventions.

The nature and function of the language classroom as reviewed above are viewed as fluid and dynamic (Hawkins, 2004). Based on this proposition, whatever is entailed in these environments, be they participants, practices, the forms of language and literacies and the social, historical and institutional contexts, the activity and task designs with which they are situated “come together in fluid, dynamic and ever changing constellations of interactions, each one impacting the other” (Hawkins, 2004, p. 21). Language classrooms, therefore, can be viewed as educational sites where participants can be provided with opportunities which may contribute to the process of their literacy development (cf. Pica,

Young & Doughty, 1987). These sites can also provide the participants, or as Wells (2000) has suggested, ‘communities of learners’, with opportunities to negotiate and develop meaning in the situational context.

Viewing classrooms as sites where sociocultural or sociohistorical communities of practice form has led to the proposition of re-thinking the concept of the function of language classrooms (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Traditional language classrooms have undergone critiques for a long time due to the shortcomings of their teaching practices. Traditional language classrooms have been described by some scholars, for example, Pennycook (2001) as a single facet acquisition tool which depicts language and learners as passive participants. Supporting this notion, Donato (2000) describes traditional language classroom teachers as the sole conduit for transferring knowledge. However, language is regarded as a living entity with a “meaning potential”, characterized by socio-cultural functions (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 10). Consequently, language cannot be viewed as a fixed entity and nor can learners be viewed as passive participants. As Hawkins (2005) argues, language and literacy learning develop as a result of engaging learners in interactions with other participants in social contexts for a specific purpose to provide them with opportunities to engage in social practices in communities of apprenticeship (Wells, 1999) and for meaning making (Mondana & Doehler, 2004).

The premise resulted in adapting the ‘community of practice’ perspective as an appropriate framework for the focused literacy practices. This decision was strengthened by a recognition of the lack of application of the concept of situated participation in IELTS academic preparation classes. Some studies in this area include ESL learners’ participation in discursive practices (Young & Miller, 2004), written activities (Currie & Cray, 2004), and academic literacy socialization (Seloni, 2008). In a recent study, Seloni (2008) investigated the academic socialization processes of the participants while building academic knowledge and social relationships in their second language-based discussions and academic writing. She based her study on sociolinguistics, ethnography, language socialization and New Literacies to investigate the participants’ academic socialization. She documented the students’ written work and classroom discussions and concluded:

socializing into the values of academic writing is a complex and multilayered process in which students collaboratively construct meaning and engage in interactive dialogues both inside and

outside of their classroom in order to learn how to become legitimate participants in their academic disciplines (Seloni 2008, p. iii).

Based on the concepts of community of practice and situated learning and also suggestions and findings of the studies as discussed, I focused my study on the candidates' class tasks which required their involvement in socialization, with argumentative writing and group discussion. The usefulness of student-student classroom discussion for language development has been underscored (Gass, 1997; Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002). Candidates' engagement in group discussions as literacy events led to such embedded literacy practices as reading texts and talking around the announced issues in the texts. Talking about the issues led to a sequence of moves of questions and answers. In the process, some interlocutors initiated discussion (the opening move) (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992, p. 22) by putting forward an issue in order to elicit or inform other participants. The action was usually followed by responses or follow ups in order to either further the discussion or acknowledge the issue which created an IRF pattern.

The function of an opening move is to cause others to participate in an exchange. Opening and answering are complementary moves. The purpose of a given opening may be passing on information or directing an action or eliciting a fact (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992, p. 22).

The process of initiation, response and follow up necessitated considering an appropriate framework. Classroom discussions in order for learning to become 'legitimate participants' in a designated community of practice, such as a language classroom in preparation for the IELTS, can also be framed by the IRF pattern as an appropriate tool. The notion of classroom discussion, and the process of students' full engagement in argumentation conversation that is teacher-free and framed by IRF, is discussed in more detail below.

#### **4.3.8 Analysis of IRF pattern in classroom group discussion**

The IRF can be modelled in two forms. One form involves teachers in the role of the teacher who monitors discussions and feeds back. The other form involves the teacher but as one of the participants who only collaborates probably as a more knowledgeable member of the group, but with equal membership rights in expressing perspectives. The IRF in its latter form can also be considered as completely teacher-free. For example, van Lier (1988) points out that the IRF pattern offers an opportunity for teaching in classroom.

But, he suggests an alteration in the IRF pattern in order to provide participants with opportunities to interact in a more symmetrical manner (van Lier, 1996). The latter is also more comprehensive than IRF in regard to Initiation, Response, Feedback (Hauser, 2006). The comprehensiveness is evident because “in language classrooms where students perform dialogues and role-plays, and do pair and group work, the teacher-initiated IRF may even not be the predominant exchange” (Sunderland, 2001, p. 9).

The IRF pattern (Initiation, Response, Follow-up), however, has its roots in the IRE pattern (Initiation, Response, Evaluation). Whereas IRE is meant to be teacher initiated (typically a question), with student response and teacher evaluation in a closed cycle (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Cazden, 1988; Edwards & Mercer, 1994; Mehan, 1979; Sunderland, 2001), thus impeding students’ engagement or commitment in the collaborative construction of meaning, the IRF pattern is viewed as student initiation (a bid or a question or announcement of an issue), teacher/student response, and teacher/student follow-up (comment, evaluation or counter argument) (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Swain, 1999). Other scholars, for example Wells (1993), also suggests the application of IRF as “opportunities to extend the students’ answer” (p. 30). A direct relationship between the frequency of occurrence and the nature of student-initiated IRFs and the nature of the classroom activity has been suggested (Sunderland, 2001).

The IRF in its student follow-up sense has been applied to student initiation, student response, and student follow-up in open circuit classroom conversations without teacher involvement. This sense, based on Kumaravadivelu (1994) provides opportunities for “asking referential questions which permit open ended responses, rather than display questions which have predetermined answers” (p. 34). So, in the IRF pattern from a student-student perspective, interlocutors demonstrate a high level of engagement and commitment in the moves and exchanges. This circumstance, perhaps, arises mostly because of the position which they choose in the argument.

Viewing communication from a collaborating activity perspective (Clark, 1996), however, some scholars have underscored the limitations of the IRF. Comparing the IRF pattern with conversational exchanges which lack the evaluative move of feedback, Mican (1997) sees the lack of self analysis of the move or collaboration of the speaker in the follow-up move as a major limitation. But, this could be true as far as IRF is practised in an IRE context

(differences discussed above). In addition, despite the limitations of IRF exchange as reviewed for second language learning, “the IRF exchange can also be used for opening up options for learner responses by using the third move in the exchange for stimulating and scaffolding learner move” (Wells, 1993, cited in Mickan, 1997, p. 147). Nevertheless, Mickan (1997) points out that “the third move for example offers opportunity to extend learners answers, to draw out the significance of contributions and to make connections with learners’ experiences” (p. 147).

The IRF pattern has been suggested (McCarthy, 1991) as a useful and credible tool for realizing elements of discourse and their possible combinations. Student discourse based on the IRF, however, draws on the proposition that “any language serves simultaneously to construct some aspects of experience, to negotiate relationships and to organize the language successfully so that it realizes a satisfactory message” (Christie, 2005b, p. 11). These properties of language use are based on what Halliday (1978 and 1985) terms the metafunctional organization of language - one of the significant constituents of systemic linguistic analysis – some others being the notion of language as a system, and the association of language or text and context (cf. Christie, 2005b). This, in addition to the notion of genre analysis, required the involvement of systemic functional linguistics as another constituent of the analytical framework. This is discussed briefly in the final sections of this chapter.

The IRF, however, is interpersonal (Li & Nessi, 2004; Yu & Mickan, 2007).

Interpersonality draws upon the conversation in a group based on some contentious issue(s) from a written text of argumentative genre. As an example of the interpersonal sense, Sunderland (2001) refers to some types of student interactions in the classroom which may be intentionally used by them as a learning strategy. Their interactions can be with written texts (Reading and Writing) and/or oral texts (Listening and Speaking) or with the members of the classroom community of practice. Participants who are assigned to develop a writing task necessarily interact with the prompt/rubric and the topic to decode it in a form to make meaning of it. Participation in group discussions also potentially requires people to interact with one another to negotiate meaning in their discussions. Following this philosophy, some studies (Wells, 1993) suggest that the IRF is not always ‘testing’. It can comprise checking and monitoring learners’ existing knowledge, ‘modelling’ the correct responses of some learners in the classroom and producing opportunities to follow-

up learners' responses as different pedagogic functions. Follow-up or continuation move in the IRF has received little attention. In support of this, Sunderland (2001, p. 34) states,

continuations have not been fully recognised and discussed in the literature, even in discourse terms. Tentatively, they would seem to be important as evidence of (a) learning strategies, (b) students' discursal competence (though not in the target language), and (c) possible interest in the language.

Previous studies (Basturkmen, 2002; Francis et al., 1992; Mehan, 1985; Sunderland, 2001; Tapper, 1996; Tsui, 1994; Willis, 1992) have applied the IRF pattern to investigate the function of utterances in terms of their structure and communicative properties in oral exchanges. Some studies include analysis of spoken discourse (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1972), exchange structure (Coulthard & Brazil, 1981), priorities in discourse analysis from a linguistic perspective (Sinclair, 1992), a functional description of questions (Tsui, 1992), the use of rank scale to address problems of delicacy in oral interactions (Willis, 1992), spoken discourse in the language classroom (Willis, 1987), and manipulating power-in-interaction for participation in the development of oral skills (Yu & Mican, 2007). But, application of the IRF in argumentative conversations in an IELTS academic preparation class has not been noted.

The IRF has been used in a number of studies on group discussion. Some studies on the IRF compared exchange patterns in Chinese and English university student group discussions (Li & Nesi, 2004); student feedback (Stubbs, 1983); comparison of elderly and young adults learners in classroom conversations (Brown, 1985); components of the basic IRF sequence (Cazden, 1986); student-initiated IRFs in the language classroom (Sunderland, 2001), and comparisons of Asian and non-Asian students' initiation turns in classroom interactions (Sato, 1982). Sato (1982), for example, found that Asian students initiated remarkably fewer turns (including procedural questions) compared to non-Asian students. Various studies (Hauser, 2006; Li & Nesi, 2004; Micheau & Billmyer, 1987; Watanabe, 1993; Wei, Hua & Yue, 2001; Yamada, 1990; Yu & Mican, 2007) have found classroom-based small group discussions to be literacy events encompassing different literacy practices, such as reading texts, and talking about and around texts. Such literacy events produce opportunities for language socialization, and development of relevant expert knowledge. These studies have shown that participants tend to negotiate more with other members of the group who may be at different levels of language proficiency. In

their responses as part of a study conducted by Rex and McEachan (1999), for example, students appreciated the significance of the classroom discussions in providing them with enhanced learning opportunities. In group discussions the members have more opportunities for interaction in which they can engage in authentic negotiation of their intended meaning (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Experiencing different learning opportunities can enhance learners' ability to generate knowledge relevant to their respective tasks (Alton-Lee & Nuthall & Patrick, 1993), and to this extent they are effective in preparing them for tasks that they might encounter in the IELTS examination and, later, their university study. However, employment of the IRF in argumentative group interactions in a formal IELTS preparation class has received little attention, but when used within a suitable framework such as the systemic functional theory of language, could help identify the category of literacy being experienced in group discussions in IELTS classes. Studies (Hall & Walsh, 2002) have called for research to look closely at linguistic resources which can be used to create stimulating learning environments.

Participation in group discussion provides the participants with opportunities to become engaged in a literacy event such as negotiation of meaning. Negotiation - a kind of interaction - as suggested by (Gass & Varonis, 1989; Long, 1983a, 1983b, 1996; Pica, 1994) is a method of signalling a misconception or the incorrectness of a meaning by interlocutors in an interaction. It is also an attempt to justify the meaning as used in the language. Occurrence of misconception or incomprehensibility in interactions motivates interlocutors to seek elucidation, expansion or repetition in order to make sense of the utterance (White, 1987). This occurrence results in negotiation of meaning by interlocutors in an interaction (Pica et al., 1987), which ultimately may result in the development of the candidates' argumentative literacies. In order for candidates to establish an appropriate engagement of academic nature in their community of practice they require awareness of the different conventionally appropriate goal oriented, staged social processes (Martin, 1986) (cf. Sections 4.3.9 and 4.3.10). They are required to know how to distinguish between different text types in order to manipulate the embedded issues conventionally in their talks with each other and in the development of their texts (written and oral). In order to carry out the task satisfactorily, the candidates need to obtain the required literacy. An aspect of literacy required for engagement in such interactions is obtaining expert knowledge of the use of appropriate genres. Examination of the development of such

literacy makes it necessary to employ a genre analysis paradigm. These circumstances necessitate an explanation of the notion of genre which follows.

#### **4.3.9 Genre analysis paradigm**

Genres indicate text producers' ways of using language in order to share their perspectives about different matters based on shared conventions (Hyland, 2008). Regarding genres as ways of communication, for example, Bhatia (2001) says:

Genres are the media through which members of professional or academic communities communicate with each other (p. 65).

The “recurring situation” to prepare for IELTS academic examination requires candidates in the class to produce texts in compliance with the conventions of argumentative genre. Genre can be realised by looking at its “generic identity” (Eggins, 2004). By this Eggins (2004) means “reminiscent of other texts circulating in the culture” (p. 55). In other words different genres are shaped by different registers which in turn are shaped by their specific fields, tenors and modes. The relationship according to Coffin (2004) is a situation where “language use both reflects the social and cultural context which people inhabit and helps to shape it. The theory proposes that structures and lexico-grammatical systems evolve within a particular culture to enable humans to achieve their social purpose” (p. 235). Hence, the theory is an appropriate tool for analysing and categorizing the IELTS candidates' argumentative texts.

A written argumentative text is seen as a social practice, because the “community-based nature of genres suggest that their features will differ across disciplines” (Hyland, 2008, p. 543). For this reason Hyland (2008) encourages teachers to conduct research on the features of the texts the students are required to develop in “their target context” (p. 543). Genre analysis of the argumentative texts emphasized the need for a close look at “textual features that essentially played the role of road signs in the infrastructure of language in text” (Hinkel, 2002, p. 18). Genre analysis based on Swales (1990) is called academic discourse community. Discourse communities in the words of Swales are regarded as “sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals” (Swales, 1990, cited in Hinkel, 2002, p. 17). Swales notes one significant characteristic of a discourse community is that “their established members possess familiarity with the

particular genres that are used in the communicative furtherance of those set goals” (Swales, 1990, cited in Hinkel, 2002, p. 17). A reason for this is that every discourse community is a “peculiar, socially constructed convention in itself” (Myles, 2002, p. 3).

Genres help to distinguish between academic and non-academic texts by looking at their registers (cf. Figure 4.1). The extent of control over the realization of genres and the manner and extent of their appropriate use in the production of texts can be regarded as an indication of the probable literacy learning and its extent. Identification of genres was required both in terms of argumentative writing and oral interactions to reveal the features and category of the candidates’ experienced probable literacies. Genre according to White (2006) “is always directed towards explaining language as it is used within texts (either spoken or written) in actual social situations” (p. 4). For these reasons, genre analysis (Eggins, 2004; Hyland, 2008; Swales, 1990) has been employed as part of the analytical approach to frame the study.

I also used genre analysis (Eggins, 2004; Hyland, 2008; Swales, 1990) as a constituent in framing the analytical approach, because genre enables the researcher “to look beyond content, composing processes and grammatical forms to see texts as socially situated attempts to communicate with readers” (Hyland, 2008, p. 543). It also assists instructors in identifying the text types that students will be required to produce in their intended contexts, and ultimately in organizing the literacy practices required to achieve their goal (cf. Hyland, 2008). Thus, the development of frameworks for analysing the organization and structure of the texts which candidates in the IELTS class produced and also their ways of using language to prepare for the examination is very relevant to this study. In the processes of analysis of the texts, I drew on Knapp and Watkins (1994, p. 8) who advise a consideration of:

...how a text is structured and organized at the level of the whole text in relation to its purpose, audience and message. It then considers how all parts of the text, such as paragraphs and sentences, are structured, organized and coded so as to make the text effective as written communication.

I also drew on Hyland (2008) who states that writing “is always a social practice, influenced by cultural and institutional contexts” (p. 561).

Drawing on the social concept of genre (Hyland, 2008) in “literacy education” (p. 543) helped me to group the texts together to examine the writers’ typical approach in using language to develop their texts based on the assigned topics. Looking at specific genres shows how researchers create meanings, both the aims that writers want to achieve and the language they use to do it (Hyland, 2008).

In analysing the data, I aimed at identifying the genres as employed by the candidates in their writing and oral tasks. In doing text analysis I went beyond orthography (spelling issues), in that I also considered grammatical features as “the on-line processing components of discourse and not the set of syntactic building blocks with which discourse is constructed” (Rutherford, 1987, p. 104). Based on this premise, I developed a framework that was appropriate for analysing different approaches through which the candidates organized and structured the discourse of their written and oral tasks at different phases of the IELTS academic preparation class. However, this framework is set within the wider systemic functional paradigm of language. Below I briefly discuss the theory.

#### **4.3.10 Systemic functional linguistics**

Systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL) is concerned with the relationship between language and context. This theory views genres:

In the wider rhetorical structures fundamental to various forms of communication in a culture, like NARRATION<sup>4</sup>, DESCRIPTION and EXPOSITION, which can combine to form our everyday genres such as RESEARCH PAPERS, LAB REPORTS and RECIPES (Martin, 1992, cited in Hyland, 2007, pp. 557-558).

Viewing genres as social processes, within the systemic functional theory of language, according to Martin, Christie and Rothery (1994) is based on the fact that “members of a culture interact with each other to achieve” (p. 233) their shared goal. In other words the view refers to “the way a meaning becomes encoded or expressed in a semiotic system” (Eggins, 2004, p. 65). The view has been visualized in Figure 4.1 which depicts the relationship between language, register and genre. Genres are goal oriented because they have evolved to get things done, and because there is usually a need for more than one step for the members to achieve their goals, they are considered to be staged.

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<sup>4</sup> Upper cases in the origin

**Figure 4.1. Relationship between language, register and genre (Martin, 1986)**

NOTE:  
This figure is included on page 80  
of the print copy of the thesis held in  
the University of Adelaide Library.

As a framework, SFL can be applied to investigate how languages are learnt and taught (White, 2006). SFL according to White (2006) is a tool that, “explores the mechanisms by which language enables speakers and relationships, and pursues rhetorical objectives” (p. 1). SFL can facilitate the analyst’s identification of the key words and phrases which are responsible for differences in meaning that people construct in their social practices; “how is the reader positioned to regard these people and these actions” (White, 2006, p. 2). The development of the frameworks for analysing the structure of argumentative texts is of particular relevance to this study. The relevance of systemic functional linguistics is also derived from the theory of Halliday et al. (1985), who state: “Systemic” in systemic functional linguistics derives from the fact that linguists working in this tradition see language as a system of choices that accounts for the meaning people make in using language, the use of word “Functional” is due to the fact that people make these choices based on the functions for which they seek to use the language (Halliday et al., 1985).

Consequently, SFL regards language as a meaning-making resource. These meanings are of three very broad kinds: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday et al., 1985). A description of the meta-functions (Halliday et al., 1985) follows:

1. Ideational, which encompasses the “experiential” (ways of representing events and entities in the experiential world) and the “logico-semantic” (ways of representing logical relationships between events in the material world) is used to construe and encode reality in order to represent experiences (also termed “reflective”);

2. Inter-personal refers to social interactions in order to engage in social relationships, which is also termed “active”.
3. Textual is used to organize representational and interpersonal meaning in order to present a message as text in context.

I employed SFL as the theoretical framework through which to support the literacy analysis of this study. SFL provided a suitable tool to help distinguish and clarify the appropriate use of linguistic resources by the candidates in their texts. SFL emerged as an appropriate tool for this purpose, incorporating the concept of literacy from a linguistic point of view. Based on this perspective Halliday (2003, p. 181) suggests:

By ‘linguistic’ here I mean two things: (1) treating literacy as something that has to do with language; and (2) using the conceptual framework of linguistics-the theoretical study of language-as a way of understanding it. More specifically, the framework is that of functional linguistics, since I think that literacy needs to be understood in functional terms.

I used SFL because of its semantically oriented approach to grammar and discourse analysis as well as its focus on texts (Martin, 1986). I based systemic analysis of literacy practices on the following studies: Eggins 1994; Halliday, 1984; Hasan, 1986; Martin, 2000; Mican & Slater, 2003. In employing SFL to analyse texts, Hasan (1984) says that “it provides a model of language in which the relationship between meaning and wording is treated in a systemic, non-ad hoc manner” (p. 98). This specifically fits in with the argumentative writing and oral tasks that are expected in the IELTS class.

SFL was used to identify and describe linguistically oriented differences in text analysis. SFL also helped in the analysis of the candidates’ ways of applying experiential, interpersonal and textual meaning in their texts. These are said to characterize the important aspects of their literacy development. The analytical application of SFL has as its common focus the analysis of authentic products of social interaction (texts), considered in relation to the cultural and social context in which they are negotiated (Eggins, 1994). Thus the most generalizable application of systemic linguistics is “to understand the quality of texts: Why a text means what it does, and why it is valued as it is” (Halliday et al., 1985, p. xxx).

The explanation and interpretation of texts is regarded as the cornerstone of the relevance of systemic functional grammar to language learning (Christie & Unsworth, 2000). A functional account of lexico-grammar systematically monitors language structure and its compatibility with language function and its potential to enable language learners to make meaning. Hence, it is assumed that by shifting from form to meaning making and by concentrating on language as functional in context, this theory can appropriately be employed to observe language learning as social practice. The use of SFL helps language analysts to disclose the underlying meaning in a text in relation to its context. Halliday states that SFL “enables us to analyse any passage and relate it to its context in the discourse, and also to the general background of the text: who it is for, what is its angle on the subject matter and so on” (1990, p. 34).

Subsequently, I used SFL as a means (a) to understand language interaction in depth and breadth, and (b) to identify and to describe the aspects and the extent of literacy development (written and oral). It provided me with an opportunity to more closely examine the organization, structure, context and style of the texts which the candidates produced. In the process of analysing the texts I looked at their linguistic resources. Linguistic resources which play significant roles to achieve this goal are nominalization, lexical density, unity, coherence, and cohesion in terms of, for example, Theme/Rheme and reference, (cf. Halliday, 1985; Martin, 1986, 2001; Mickan & Slater, 2003). Analysis of the extent of appropriate use of these resources in the candidates’ texts can reveal their probable extent of literacy development and its nature.

The analysis of texts in the study is also based on the work of Hasan who says, “the essential attributes of the structurally important units of any text will have to be stated in semantic terms” (Hassan, 1984a, p. 83). Using this tool, I look at genres as indicators to identify the features and the nature of texts as produced by the candidates bearing in mind that, “...SFL is as much a theory about the nature of texts...” (White, 2006, p. 4). SFL is particularly suitable for investigating IELTS academic preparation practices, because it facilitates the analysis of the candidates’ texts and relates them to their relevant context in the discourse. Therefore, I found SFL particularly suitable for analysis of written and oral argumentative texts produced by the candidates as preparation for the IELTS.

#### **4.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed qualitative approaches to data collection and the ethnographic method of inquiry. I explained language and literacy socialization and community of practice perspectives. I provided a brief account of the notions of scaffolding and zone of proximal development (ZPD). I also discussed the underpinning philosophical reasons for the adoption and implications of these perspectives in analysing literacy practices for developing argumentative texts when students prepare for the IELTS academic examination. A discussion about the importance of using the IRF pattern, the genre analysis paradigm, and systemic functional linguistics in analysing the nature and features of the texts (written and oral) concluded this chapter. The methodology for this study is discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### Methodology

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the study. It begins with a general overview of the research perspective and provides data about the observation of literacy practices for the IELTS academic examination in a formal preparation class in Tehran. This study examines opportunities for experiencing written and oral argumentative literacies, so as to make conclusions about the features and extent of the literacy development. Observations encompassed normal settings of the candidates in an IELTS academic classroom where English was used in literacy events with their embedded literacy practices. An ethnographic method of analysis was used and the adoption of a qualitative approach in the classroom is discussed. The relationship between ethnographic inquiry and literacy socialization is outlined. This chapter concludes with a description of the research procedure and data analysis, including reasons for employing discourse analysis and a systemic theory of language and processes for data analysis.

#### 5.2 What was involved?

I conducted a qualitative study of a specific English class over time. I investigated the candidates' classroom tasks in an IELTS academic preparation course in Rahrovan Language Teaching Centre (hereafter referred to as RALTEC) in Tehran, Iran. The research project aimed at examining the ways in which the candidates were provided with opportunities for experiencing written and oral argumentative literacies in a classroom setting in order to prepare for the IELTS academic examination. The investigation was conducted in normal settings where the candidates used semiotic resources when preparing for the examination.

In this study, my emphasis was on describing aspects of the literacies experienced in the IELTS class. The focus was on classroom argumentative tasks (written and oral). Linguistic socialization, for example, has been described by Fischer (1970) as "the learning of the use of language in such a way as to maintain and appropriately and progressively change one's position as member of society" (pp. 107-8). My focus was not only on what was occurring linguistically in and around the classroom, but also on the social setting in

which that language was located (Halliday, 1997, 2003; van Lier, 1988, 89). I therefore tried to interpret the data in a classroom scenario which encompassed both a linguistic context and a social setting.

### **5.3 The research approach**

‘Qualitative research’ according to some scholars is a broad term. For example, Mason (1996) noted that “qualitative research - whatever it might be - certainly does not represent a unified set of techniques or philosophies, and indeed has grown out of a wide range of intellectual and disciplinary traditions” (p. 3). It is also, however, equally true that due to the nature of the research topic and the research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005; McKay, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) some areas of study, for example in second language classroom socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), cannot be carried out using non-qualitative research. Consequently it has been established that “the importance and utility of qualitative methods is increasingly being recognized in the field of second language research” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 162). A brief definition advanced by Mackey and Gass (2005) states that “qualitative research can be taken to refer to research that is based on descriptive data that does not make (regular) use of statistical procedures” (p. 162).

The qualitative approach has been selected for two major reasons. Firstly, my interest has been in understanding and gaining insights into the nature of literacy practices as experienced by candidates when preparing for the IELTS academic examination. This study has required holistic field observations, i.e., participating in a natural classroom setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Tetnowski & Damico, 2001) and utilization of multiple sources of data to investigate the questions. According to McKay (2006) qualitative research “typically starts with the assumption that classroom learning must be studied holistically, taking into account a variety of factors in a specific classroom” (p. 6). Secondly, the nature of my research project does not incorporate statistical procedures and verifying or proving a hypothesis. This is because my intention is to develop a deliberate description of the process and nature of the researched phenomena rather than numerical evaluation of the outcomes (Duff, 1995). However, qualitative data collection can be done in varying ways (Mackey & Gass, 2005; McKay, 2006). Recognizing it as a general term, some scholars maintain that: “Qualitative research is an umbrella term for many kinds of research approaches and techniques, including ethnographies” (Watson-Gegeo, 1988, p.

576). I have adopted the ethnographic perspective because it best fits my research project for reasons that are explained below.

### **5.3.1 Ethnography**

Ethnography as an area of study, according to Saville-Troike (2003), primarily is concerned with “the description and analysis of culture, and linguistics is a field concerned, among other things, with the description and analysis of language codes” (p. 1) over a long period of time. For example, when studying second language acquisition in a community setting, the ethnographer “will systematically sample locations, participants, events, times, and types of interactions in the setting, conducting observations and interviews over the course of several months or years” (Watson-Gegeo, 1988, p. 583). Over the last two or three decades ethnographic inquiry has been celebrated in L2 research (Davis, 1999; Johnson, 1992; Maxwell, 2003; Nunan, 1992; Watson-Gegeo, 1988). A considerable number of studies have adopted classroom ethnographic methods to date and these studies have suggested the appropriateness of ethnography for classroom inquiry (Davis, 1995; Duff, 1995; Lave, 1996; Lazaraton, 1995, 2003; Morita, 2000; Seedhouse, 1995; Wegner, et al., 2002).

One of the key principles of ethnography according to Watson-Gegeo (1988) is the focus on group behaviour and the cultural patterns underlying that behaviour. A “holistic” approach to describing and explaining a particular pattern in relation to a whole system of patterns (Mackay & Gass, 2005) is considered to be another important principle. Based on this principle, adoption of the holistic approach provides the ethnographer with an opportunity to integrate investigation of different literacy practices and to address them as literacy learning (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Another principle to be observed in ethnography is to be “emic” (i.e. to be unbiased and consider the insiders’ perspectives). The “emic” principle or “culturally specific framework” in Watson-Gegeo’s point of view is that “each situation investigated by an ethnographer must be understood from the perspective of the participants in that situation” (p. 579). For example, “in investigating the learning experiences of a particular group of ESL students, a researcher would try to find out how these learners view their own learning experiences” (McKay, 2006, p. 78). In the context of investigating the ways in which complex factors interact there are other significant factors to be considered when conducting an ethnographic inquiry (Creswell, 2003;

Mackey & Gass, 2005; McKay, 2006; Maxwell, 2005). Observing the aforementioned principles is a necessity to avoid threats to validity.

In ethnographic inquiry the depth of the collected data is considered as the most valuable asset. For this reason, investigation of language classroom necessitates intensive or in-depth perspectives for its assumptions to be precise, valid and reliable (Myers, 1999). Reliability and validity are pivotal in ethnographic investigation, because “conception of validity threats and how they can be dealt with is a key issue in qualitative research” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 107). In the following I will elaborate on procedures to ensure trustworthiness in this study.

### **5.3.1.1 Trustworthiness/Validity**

Based on what previous studies (Bouma, 2000; Creswell, 2003; Castanheira et al., 2001; Lincoln, 1997; Maxwell, 2005) have suggested, I used ethnographic inquiry, triangulated for cross-reference and for validity. Ensuring trustworthiness or validity in ethnographic investigation is an important requirement. The term “validity” has been used by some scholars. Maxwell (2005), for instance defines validity as being “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106). Trustworthiness is documented in different ways. Some of the best methods include “rich, thick description”, “prolonged field observation” and “triangulation”. In ethnographic inquiry the depth of the collected data is considered the most valuable aspect. Collecting information using a variety of sources and methods is one aspect of what is called “triangulation” (Fielding & Fielding, 1986 in Maxwell, 2005, p. 93). Triangulation of the data establishes the robustness of the internal validity of the research (Gillham, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Morse & Richards, 2002). Validity of data collection in ethnographic inquiry relies heavily on “triangulation” (Creswell, 2003). Data collection using multiple sources (e.g. observation of normal settings, video recordings and audio recordings, taking field notes and interviews) aims to provide a realistic picture of the members of the community of practice’s actions and interactions (Dysthe, 1996; Iddings, 2005; Spradley, 1980; Swan, 1994; Willett, 1995). As McKay (2006) remarks, “In an attempt to achieve a holistic explanation of a class exchange, ethnographers of communication might use interviews, classroom observations, field-notes, and other data in their study” (pp. 102-103). For this study, I also found this method to be an appropriate approach to understanding events embedded in the processes that are evident in practices,

which aim at learners' language learning and literacy development - see also Kantor et al. (1992), Wall and Horák (2006), and Willett (1995).

I collected data from multiple sources to document the candidates' experiences in social contexts. Data collection using multiple sources aims to provide a natural picture of the community members' actions and interactions (Dysthe, 1996; Goodenough, 1981; Iddings, 2005; Spradleg, 1980; Willett, 1995). As McKay (2006) shows, because of the concern about "achieving an emic and holistic perspective of the interaction" (p. 102), an inquirer conducting an ethnographic investigation of classroom practices would holistically explain a classroom exchange through the use of interviews, classroom observations, field-notes, and other data in their study. So, in this study, I ensured triangulation by using multiple sources such as: classroom observations, taking field-notes, audio recording and video recording of the participants' interactions and classroom events from different angles, collection of their homework and other activities recorded on handouts, and interviews. In this way the risk that the researcher's conclusion might "reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method" should lessen and allow the researcher "to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues" being investigated (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 93-94). These measures were all deemed important in documenting this ethnographic study.

### **5.3.2 Relevance of ethnographic inquiry to this study**

The ethnographic classroom has included second language classes and language programs in its scope (Cazden, 1988; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1981; Duff, 2002; Iddings, 2005; Michaels, 1986; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Willett, 1995). The motive behind adopting classroom ethnographic inquiry as an appropriate method has arisen from the researcher's interest in why certain pedagogical strategies or application of certain literacy practices have been adopted in a particular education course. The researcher or stakeholder is also curious about divulging what happens in a certain language course in terms of experiencing literacy for specific reasons, i.e., so that students are prepared for a test, for example the IELTS. Involvement of ethnographic research with such issues has been underscored by Watson-Gegeo (1988), who says:

Ethnography has been greeted with enthusiasm because of its promise to investigate issues difficult to address in language learning, how institutional and societal pressures are played out in moment-

to-moment classroom interaction, and how to gain a more holistic perspective on teacher-student interactions to aid teacher training and improve practice. (p. 575)

Classroom ethnographic study also entails multiple sources of data to ensure trustworthiness, and involves observing and documenting what is involved in students preparing usually over a long time span. It is therefore appropriate for the purpose and time delimitation of the research project. “Ethnographic classroom research demands a great deal of time and commitment, involving a lot of record keeping, extensive participation in classroom, and tedious analysis of multifaceted data” (McKay, 2006, p. 83). The outcomes, however, may have implications regarding the promotion of pedagogical strategies and required literacy practices.

As previously mentioned, the context of my study includes both a linguistic context and a social setting. Such a context can be described as a culture marked by education and instruction standards, syllabus based practices and activities and interactions between teachers and students. Culture, in the words of Massey (1998) is “made up of certain values, practices, relationships and identification” (p. 2), and language is a means to talk about culturally oriented behaviours and interactions and relations. A general theory of the interaction of language and social life must encompass the multiple relations between linguistic means and social meaning (Gumperz & Hymes, 1989). Gumperz and Hymes further add, “The relations within a particular community or personal repertoire are an empirical problem, calling for a mode of description that is jointly ethnographic and linguistic” (p. 39). Therefore I adopted this perspective because in an ethnographic study of a specified classroom/education program, the inquirer’s main aim is to disclose all tasks and events that contribute to the development of literacy for the duration of that specified program.

The study of the IELTS related literacy learning requires an appropriate methodology. Ethnography has been considered by some scholars to be appropriate for investigating learning as a result of social practices (Cazden, 1988; Iddings 2005; Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Mickan & Motteram, 2008; Willett, 1995) similar to those of IELTS preparation classes. Ethnography has been suggested because it encourages reflection, and it is very useful in studying literacy learning (Hamilton, 1999, pp. 430-431). According to Hamilton (1999) “ethnography is used to investigate how literacy is changing” (p. 431). Ethnography

has also been considered by a number of investigators as a tool for studying daily life of a social group systematically (Cazden, 1988; Creswell, 2003; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Halliday & Hasan 1985; Heath, 1982; Hymes, 1982; Maxwell, 2005; Spradley, 1980; Willett, 1995). This systematic approach consists of different phases such as planning, discovery and presentation of findings.

#### **5.4 Context of the study**

For this ethnographic study I chose Iran where prolonged IELTS preparation courses are run in different institutions. Observations occurred in an IELTS academic classroom where English was used by Iranian students in literacy events. In the following, I explain in more detail how I selected the site and recruited the participants. I also describe the site, the participants, the events and my procedures for collecting the data.

##### **5.4.1 Negotiating the site**

After some consideration, I selected RALTEC which is located in Tehran (the capital city of Iran) as the site for my research project. I corresponded with the institution's chief administrators and explained my intention and sought their cooperation. I invited them to send me as much information as they could about their background, their experiences in holding IELTS academic preparation courses, the number of students and facilities. They sent me the required information and official invitation letters to conduct the research in their institution. The major reasons for selecting RALTEC were: (a) its comparatively strong managerial team in terms of educational background and education level, (b) their well organized and timely classes, (c) their accreditations, and (d) their links to a well-known English-language education institution based in the United Kingdom - Trinity College. RALTEC is a registered examination and research centre of Trinity College and connected to Azad University. "Rahrovan is now accredited by the Ministry of Culture (sic). The Iranian Department of Education officially recognizes the Ministry of Culture (sic) as a reliable authority as to the quality of education or training provided by the programs they accredit" (RALTEC Website, 2007, p. 1). In addition, "Rahrovan is also accredited by the Trinity College of UK as a registered examination centre and the academic support centre of Trinity ESOL examination in Iran" (p. 1). RALTEC maintains a proud record in preparing students for the IELTS academic examination in Tehran.

Upon my arrival at the site I met the people in charge of RALTEC. Arrangements had been agreed upon by e-mail, letters and telephone calls. However, the authorities of RALTEC demanded detailed explanations about the aim and objectives of the study. I provided them with explanations accordingly and in particular regarding the methodology to be used. During negotiations, I made clear to them the goals of this study. I informed them of the study processes involved. I found out about their facilities, equipment and difficulties.

Afterwards, I held consecutive meetings with the chancellor and board of directors of RALTEC to inform them of the progress of different stages of the research. Finding solutions for some shortcomings and issues, for example air conditioning, were also negotiated.

#### **5.4.2 The site**

The day after my arrival in Tehran, I arranged a meeting with the president of RALTEC with whom I was mainly in contact, and handed the letter of introduction to him. He showed his facilities and classrooms to me. I selected classroom number 3, which seemed to be more suitable for the purpose of the study. The classroom was large enough to house comfortably 16 candidates with their armchairs, a big TV table, a large bookcase and the instructor's desk. The candidates' chairs were set in a 'U' shape formation facing the entrance door and the whiteboard. The classroom was furnished with two large windows and sufficient lighting. Ventilation and air conditioning were appropriate at the time of selecting the site. It was also equipped with a cassette/CD player for the purpose of 'Listening' classes (for the map of the classroom see appendix A, section c). The next issue concerned the availability of participants.

#### **5.4.3 Recruiting participants**

Despite all the precautionary measures, I was struck by the unavailability of participants. In my second meeting with the president of RALTEC, I learnt that I had arrived in the field at the worst possible time of the year to conduct this kind of research. Their term for the IELTS preparation program had already finished. Furthermore, people were preparing for the Noruz (the Iranian New Year). The New Year holiday is a lengthy one as it lasts about 14 days or even more. People usually go on trips as part of their Noruz holiday. People/participants counted by Richards (2003) as one of "the four central components of observation in ethnography" - the other three being "setting", "system" and "behaviour" -

turned out to be my largest concern. RALTEC's president and I negotiated a strategy to recruit participants. We agreed on three means: (a) advertising in a newspaper with a high print run, (b) printing and publishing posters, and (c) printing and publishing fliers.

Having no participants, I had to begin a recruitment campaign. I began advertising in a newspaper with the highest print run on 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2007. Simultaneously, I printed some posters and fliers to put them on the notice boards of some 15 major universities and colleges in Tehran. I also handed them out to people/passers-by.

I received about 150 telephone calls. 800 viewers also referred to the RALTEC website. Unfortunately, only about 50 people volunteered to attend my information and briefing seminars. I held two seminars, one on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2007 and the other on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2007. Each seminar took about two and half hours. Although the attendants seemed to be very interested in participating in the course, they were either suspicious of what might happen to them in the process of the research project, or they intended to go on a trip for their New Year holidays. However, 16 were recruited to participate in the research project.

My intention was to conduct my research on a group of 10-15 academic test-takers including both males and females, from among these applicants. Despite this intention, what I had in mind was to form an even larger group, consisting of, for example 20-25 participants. The reason for this decision was my concerns about possible dropouts. The age of such participants could range from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 60. Based on my personal experiences, as an IELTS instructor for a number of years, applicants for the IELTS academic range from students with a certificate of the completion of 12 years of schooling to those who hold a PhD. Regardless of their educational qualifications, they intend to continue their education at an English-language university for different reasons. However, after a 3 week campaign for recruiting participants, I could only begin the real research with 16 participants on the evening of 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2007.

#### **5.4.4 The participants**

Sixteen IELTS academic test-takers were recruited as participants. All were adults five being female and eleven male, and their ages ranged from 24 to 42 with the average age being 33. Seven held a Bachelor Degree and the remaining nine each had a Masters

Degree. Their fields of study were: computing, electrical engineering, electronics, civil engineering, architecture, aerospace, road and urban development, psychology, husbandry and English.

The prospective participants and I negotiated and agreed upon a meeting day to provide them with some primary information about the study and to fix the induction date. I commenced the research and the IELTS preparation class on 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2007, (see App. C, p. 306). During the introductory session, I talked at length about the research project both in Farsi (the participants' first language) and English in order to prevent any misunderstanding or misinterpretation (see App. C, p. 306, ll. 18-33 and p. 307, ll. 1-6).

In the meeting session, I explained the purpose of the study to the potential participants and invited their participation. In this session, I tried to collect the required preliminary data on their background. I also collected data about their future plans and their reason(s) for participating in the research. In conducting a qualitative study, I needed to systematically reflect on the candidates in the inquiry. I was also sensitive to their personal biography and the way it might affect the study, because collection of the data is important for improving the researcher's insight (Creswell, 2003; Maxwell, 2005). The data could help me gain an understanding of their possible level of knowledge and expectations, so that I could speculate about the management and organization of the program. I informed the candidates about the process of the study. Then, I sought their consent to use their written works and their audio and video recorded classroom practices, interactions, and interviews. I distributed the 'Ethics Agreement Forms' in two copies. I gained their consent and ensured that all the steps required under ethics clearance were implemented (see App. C, and the signed agreement forms are kept in a safe by the researcher of the current study). Participation in the research project was voluntary. Candidates who chose not to participate in the study, or subsequently withdrew from the study would impact on the breadth of the study, but they were permitted to do so at any stage of the research.

I was the researcher and the instructor as well. I was a second year PhD candidate in linguistics with a Masters degree in TEFL while this study was underway. I have also instructed the IELTS in such programs for a number of years (both in Australia and in Iran) at the time of undertaking the research.

### **5.4.5 Procedure**

I had planned to select the participants among those who had already sat for an official IELTS academic. Based on my plan, their total band score was supposed to be 4, 4.5 or 5. This range was considered as pre-intermediate to intermediate, which was deemed to be an appropriate range for the purpose of the research project. However, only four of them were holding an official IELTS band score result paper with band scores 4-5.

At the time of conducting the study, there were two official IELTS examination centres in Tehran, namely the 'British Council Iran' and the 'IELTS Tehran Centre'. I had informed them of my intention to conduct the research project in Tehran. I had sought their cooperation by sending them e-mails and letters approved and signed by my principal supervisor. I had also invited them to inform their applicants about the research and find out whether or not they would be interested in participating in the research and benefitting from the opportunity. However, they did not respond to my request. Consequently, I invited the rest of the candidates to sit for a mock IELTS examination at the RALTEC Testing Centre, which was an accredited testing centre. Their band scores ranged from 4 to 5. They were then eligible to participate in the study. Administration of the mock test also served as a needs analysis. I could make appropriate arrangements and apply the learning resources suited to the candidates' needs.

### **5.4.6 The raters and the scores**

The essays were inter-rated by two anonymous accredited raters at the testing centre (the site). They were experienced IELTS raters. The raters were an associate professor and senior lecturer at the university who had taught academic writing for two decades at the tertiary level. Their PhD theses had focused on EFL writers' academic writing. They did not want to be identified by their names or any codes.

It was important at the beginning of the course to determine the participants' band scores, particularly those who had not already sat for the examination. This measure could provide me with an opportunity to select test-takers with band scores 4, 4.5 or 5 considered as pre-intermediate to intermediate levels of English. I could make sure that the academic test-takers were not beginners in an IELTS academic preparation class in a 15 week course (consisting of 8 hours of classroom instructions and practices each week). The candidates'

background English knowledge was mainly based on the Iranian formal curriculum of schooling and the tertiary education system (cf. the Iranian schooling curriculum).

### **5.5 Data collection**

For collecting data I used a matrix (cf. Table 4.1, Chapter 4, p. 55) as a guide. I began with the first question of the research project and moved ahead while considering limitations and delimitations of the study. The first question of the study is, ‘what classroom argumentative tasks (written and oral) do candidates engage in as preparation for the IELTS academic examination?’ Based on this question I inquired into and examined different but appropriate means and tools to collect the appropriate data to investigate the question.

I employed classroom observations, field notes, collected the candidates’ texts (written and oral) and the semiotic resources used in the classroom and questionnaires in this research project. The duration of the research project in terms of observations and data collection was about 5 months. I observed the candidates’ engagement with literacy practices. I audio recorded and video recorded what happened in the classroom to validate the data. I conducted audio recorded and video recorded individual and group interviews using open-ended questions. The purpose of holding such interviews was to enquire into the candidates’ perspectives about the program’s content and the learning resources and their probable effects on the candidates’ literacy development (Cf. App. F, p. 363 for the transcription of the interviews, and App. Q, p. 538 for the list of the open ended questions in the accompanying CD). I collected and examined their classroom argumentative texts (written and oral) for the purpose of data analysis.

#### **5.5.1 Observations**

I observed, audio-recorded and video-recorded classroom events every 2-3 sessions. In so doing, my focus was mainly on three issues: ‘Small group discussions’, ‘Report to the class as a whole’ and ‘Academic Writing task 2’. This resulted in documentation of about one third of the sessions in Phases 1-3 (each phase consisting of 20 sessions and each session two hours of different practices). The collected data assisted in developing a detailed transcription. In the process of transcription, I added commentaries. Literacy events included interactions between firstly, the instructor and the candidates, and secondly the candidates, and the way in which the texts were used, for example, in group discussions. I

made field notes of time, day and date, place of observations, specific facts, and details of classroom events. These notes included my own comments after each recording. The practice-focused investigation of literacy development included formal discussion about texts (i.e. information provided by the instructor to facilitate learning and feedback) and informal discussion (i.e. peer discussion). I inquired about the content of classroom tasks and semiotic resources. What was taught and how the candidates made meaning with the texts was investigated.

Following this I investigated what might happen over the course's duration. I tracked and recorded the candidates' argumentative literacy practices no matter what form they took. In this way, I was able to describe opportunities for experiencing literacy as preparation for the IELTS.

#### **5.5.1.1 Audio recording**

Audio recording has been considered important in ethnographic inquiry (Bachman, 2004; Gass & Houck, 1999; Iino, 1999) and for this I used a 'Samsung Digital Voice Recorder'. It was very small but with high sound quality and powerful enough to document voices from a significant distance. I could simply put it in my shirt pocket without candidates being aware of it, because there are disadvantages associated with a tape recorder being sighted as this can cause anxiety or compromise the naturalness of the setting (McKay, 2006; Wall & Horák, 2006). This could also significantly affect the naturalness of the observations and collection of data from social practices observed in the classroom.

Audio recording was crucial to my data collection, because it was central to recording or capturing literacy events such as small group discussions and reporting to the class. These literacy practices formed a major part of the focus of this study. Hence, collecting their data was significant for the purpose of the data analysis.

#### **5.5.1.2 Video recording**

When taking notes and even during observations it was possible that I might overlook some details or critical movements, so video recording was deemed necessary to help prevent such flaws to some extent. There are advantages to video recording in qualitative research such as the density of data that it provides (Grimshaw, 1982a). This study aimed to observe real people in their natural settings. Therefore, video recorded data could

provide the researcher with a better sense of interaction and events (Gass & Houck, 1990; Iino, 1999).

I utilized a 'Sony Digital Handy Cam' for the purpose of video recording. The video camera was very small but powerful enough to record good quality images, voices and sounds. Because it was very small it could simply be placed in a discreet area, so that the participants' attention would not be disturbed. This could be very helpful and useful in capturing very natural images from the participants' body gestures, even when they were behaving inappropriately in their classroom social interactions. For the duration of video recording in the program, the video camera was always fixed in the same place with the same view. Consequently, not all participants could be recorded visually.

### **5.5.2 Interviews**

Interviews may allow the inquirer to observe the "line of questioning" (Creswell, 2003, p. 186) although there are limitations such as having only limited data "through the views of interviewees" (p. 186). Interviewing has been regarded as central in conducting qualitative studies (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Gillham, 2000; Hammersley, 2004; Merriam, 1998; Saville-Troike, 2003; Yin, 1994). I conducted interviews with the candidates to learn how they reflected directly (Weiss, 1994) on particular circumstances. This was because not only is description truly the immediate result of observation, but also "this is equally true of interviewing" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94). I sought their perspectives by putting forward open-ended questions (which needed paragraph answers), as Maxwell notes "interviewing is mainly useful for obtaining the perspectives of actors" (2005, p. 94).

First, I conducted pilot interviews with people who were not participants in the study. I interviewed two students who were also doing an IELTS academic preparation course, but they were not included in the recruited group. I had sought their written consent. I conducted the interview twice, firstly on an individual or one-to-one basis and then secondly as a group. I put forward the questions which I had provided for the main participants in the study. I collected the data and transcribed them. They form a part of the appendices which appear in appendix F, p. 348 and appendix L, p. 486 in the accompanying CD.

This process provided me with more insights and informed me of possible flaws and shortcomings, which I could fix before conducting the interviews. While interviewing the candidates I tried to take notes as much as I could when probing their viewpoints and reflections on literacy development through IELTS academic preparation courses. I audio recorded and video recorded the interviews. I carried out immediate transcription and description of interviews in order to understand if any informant might not have had “a direct understanding of his or her perspective” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94). However, sometimes questions emerged from the candidates’ responses. I interviewed six persons among the candidates (3 males and 3 females). First, I explained the purpose of the interview to the candidates, and I assured them of the confidentiality of their names and remarks. I then invited them to volunteer for the interview.

I conducted the interviews twice. I carried out the first round of interviews with each informant individually. The second round was a pre-arranged focus group interview in the form of peer communication. If the interviewees seemed reluctant to express their deep feelings and reflections on the subject matters in English, I invited them to use their first or native language (i.e. Farsi). In such cases, I then translated them into English accompanied by their Farsi transcription. These interviews can support my data and/or be used for the publication of some related papers in the future. After I finished the interview transcriptions, I invited them to read the transcriptions to delete, change or add any information if they wished.

I investigated the candidates’ perspectives concerning the texts and related literacy practices. I tried to familiarize myself with the ways that opportunities for experiencing literacy were implemented and carried out in the course. After each observation, I transcribed the recorded data of that day. I also analysed the collected data before the time had elapsed. I categorized the analysed data into significant themes that could form the basis of further interpretation.

### **5.5.3 Procedures for analysing the data**

I used qualitative analysis. I employed note-taking, categorizing (such as coding and thematic analysis) and connecting (such as narrative analysis) chronologically as part of data analyses in this research project. I began analysing the data immediately after I finished each interview or observation. I continued analysing the data throughout my

research to avoid piling up unanalysed field notes and transcripts. Consequently, as soon as the first interview or observation was finished, I continued analysing the collected data as long as I was involved in the investigation. However, during the whole process, I sometimes postponed analysing briefly in order to write reports or develop papers (cf. Maxwell, 2005). Writing notes regularly not only documents or records researchers' analytic thinking about the data, but also facilitates such thinking about analytic insights (Maxwell, 2005). For triangulation of the data, I carried out a verbatim transcription of the audio and video recorded classroom literacy practices and interviews. The qualitative analysis of the data was supported by systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994 & 2001). SFL was selected on which to base the literacy analyses in this study because of its semantic oriented approach to grammar and discourse analysis as well as its focus on texts (Martin, 1986). I based the study on Martin (1989). I attempted to discover candidates' use of theme and aspects of tenor based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics.

### **5.5.3.1 Transcriptions**

In order to prepare the collected data for transcription, firstly, some actions were required. Having audio recorded and/or video recorded each session, I transferred the recorded materials from my digital audio recorder and video recorder into a 'Pentium 3 Computer' on the same day. Then, using a computer, I converted the transferred materials into compatible versions to be recordable on raw audio and video CDs. Next, I transferred the data from the computer to the raw CDs. This process was necessary to prepare the collected data for the purpose of transcription and to keep an electronic copy for future references and for the validity and credibility of the research project. After the transformation of the data from the audio and video recording devices was complete, I began transcribing the collected data of each session off -site. This process firstly involved developing a manuscript of events that had occurred in the classroom - for instance the candidates' engagement in classroom literacy practices through the use of texts. Needless to say, I did not transcribe every detail, because as Ochs (1999) has stated, a perfect transcription is unlikely to emerge. However, for some unreadable parts, I sometimes had to replay that part several times for the sake of not missing any significant pattern or information. Although a tedious process, I myself was very curious to know and find out what had really happened during the literacy practices. For the study focus, I tried to be selective in my transcription and attempted to transcribe significant data by reviewing and re-reviewing the data while having an eye to my research questions. This deliberation was

important because “a transcript that is too detailed is difficult to follow and assess. A more useful transcript is a more selective one” (Ochs, 1999, p. 168). However, in the second round, I typed and retyped the manuscripts so that the first draft of the transcription of the raw data was ready in time for the next part of the process. This provided me with an opportunity to obtain further insights into the data.

In the third round, I categorized classroom literacy practices, field-notes and interviews (an example is provided in Table 5.1 in the following discussion). Based on the work of Atkinson and Heritage (1984), I coded the transcriptions to make them ready for the next step of the data analysis. This action also provided me with a further opportunity to re-review the raw data looking for “emergent patterns and themes” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 241). McKay has pointed out that “researchers need to develop categories from the data by returning to the data over and over again, looking for patterns, and modifying existing categories to accommodate new insights” (McKay, 2006, p. 58). In this way I could add more of what I was fresh in my memory over the duration of the study.

I followed the steps in the process of data analysis one by one seeking to identify the significant patterns. I based analyses on the collected data and my research questions with the focus on the argumentative texts (written and oral) and related literacy practices in the classroom.

### **5.5.3.2 Categorization of classroom argumentative tasks**

In order to facilitate data analysis, I categorized the significant patterns of an example of classroom argumentative tasks. I adopted the idea of categorization from Crabbe (2003). However, I developed my own matrix as a framework for analysing a classroom literacy event (small group discussion and oral report) as one of the opportunities for literacy learning. Table 5.1 below shows the matrix illustrating the analysis of the task.

**Table 5.1. Analysis of a classroom task/literacy event as an opportunity for literacy learning**

Classroom task/literacy event: Small group discussion and oral report to the class			
Lesson: For & Against			
Day and Time: Wednesday, 20:00-20:30			
Duration: 30 minutes out of 120 minutes of the ‘Speaking’ session			
Number of participants in the classroom: 12			
Number of participants in each group: 4			
Topic: “World governments should conduct serious campaigns against smoking” (Alexander, 1973)			
Classification	Actions/literacy practices		
Group discussion literacy event in a community of practice based on a controversial issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each candidate is provided with the same text on a particular topic to read.</li> <li>• The participants initially read a brief account of the particular debating issue (i.e. a ‘for and/or against’ topic) as outlined in the literacy resource named “For and Against” (Alexander, 1973).</li> <li>• Participants take up a position at their will to debate for or against the debating issue (talk about and around the contentious topic).</li> <li>• Each participant orally communicates their perspectives to the other interlocutors in the group (talk about the text based on their perspectives).</li> <li>• One of the participants in each group acts as their spokesperson and reports to the whole class on the discussion/debate.</li> </ul>		
Individual learning opportunities in the classroom and possibly outside of the classroom.	Categories of literacy practices	Description of the participants’ engagement in literacy practices	Role of the instructor
	Data reception (i.e. Reading and deriving meaning/gist from the print text).	The participants read a text based on a controversial issue. They would probably experience processes of meaning making and activating their linguistic knowledge with the information provided in the text.	The instructor provides spoken input by consciousness raising about the task.
	Data production in language usage	The candidates talk about and around the text related to the controversial issue as addressed in the text. They also write down some of their own perspectives or those of the participants in the group for further discussion, and also to provide an oral summary.	Observation of the participants’ engagement in literacy practices and making notes for possible feedback

	Negotiation of meaning in discussions	The participants engage in negotiation of meaning in their discussion with each other. They interchange information and perspectives with other interlocutors for interpretation and evaluation of their points and arguments	The instructor answers their questions, and when necessary reminds them to keep track of their discussion
Receiving feedback for enhancing performance	Getting feedback on one's own use of language	The instructor provides the participants with feedback on their translation of and communication with the text and also their decoding. The participants also receive feedback from one another and notice new vocabularies either used in the text or by the instructor or by other participants.	The instructor provides the participants with appropriate feedback on their use of language.
	Rehearsal	Each participant can read the text later, as many times as they wish, to enhance their learning. They can rehearse the text orally whether individually or with their friends or partners. They can also notice their phonological issues and linguistic resources noticed in feedback	The instructor provides individual and group feedback
	Exploring patterns in language usage	The candidates make note of new structures and try to learn rules and conventions to compare and contrast English and L1 in terms of 'organization of the text and form and function'.	The instructor provides feedback and appropriate awareness
	Learning enhancement	Participants single out their problematic areas experienced in the literacy practices and reflect on their nature and how to improve them.	The instructor gives feedback and appropriate guidelines.

Group discussions and oral reports in the IELTS academic preparation classroom were informed by situated learning (cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.3.6, p. 67) in order to distance classroom activities from mere informational or teacher-directed instructions and

interactions. The pedagogical philosophy underpinning this course of action I had assumed may provide the candidates with an opportunity to develop and promote the IELTS expected oral skill. I provided the candidates with contentious topics to discuss in small groups taken from a book titled 'For & Against' (Alexander, 1973). The topics were derived from the argumentation genre which is typical in academic study, IELTS academic writing test and IELTS speaking test (part 3) (see IELTS hand books and publications). My further pedagogical philosophy underpinning incorporating group discussion and oral report into IELTS preparation course was based on the assumption that this might contribute to the development of literacy skills and help build candidates' written and oral language proficiency. The findings of some studies (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994; Swain, 1995; Swain & Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002) have also supported the positive effect of student-student oral interaction on language development.

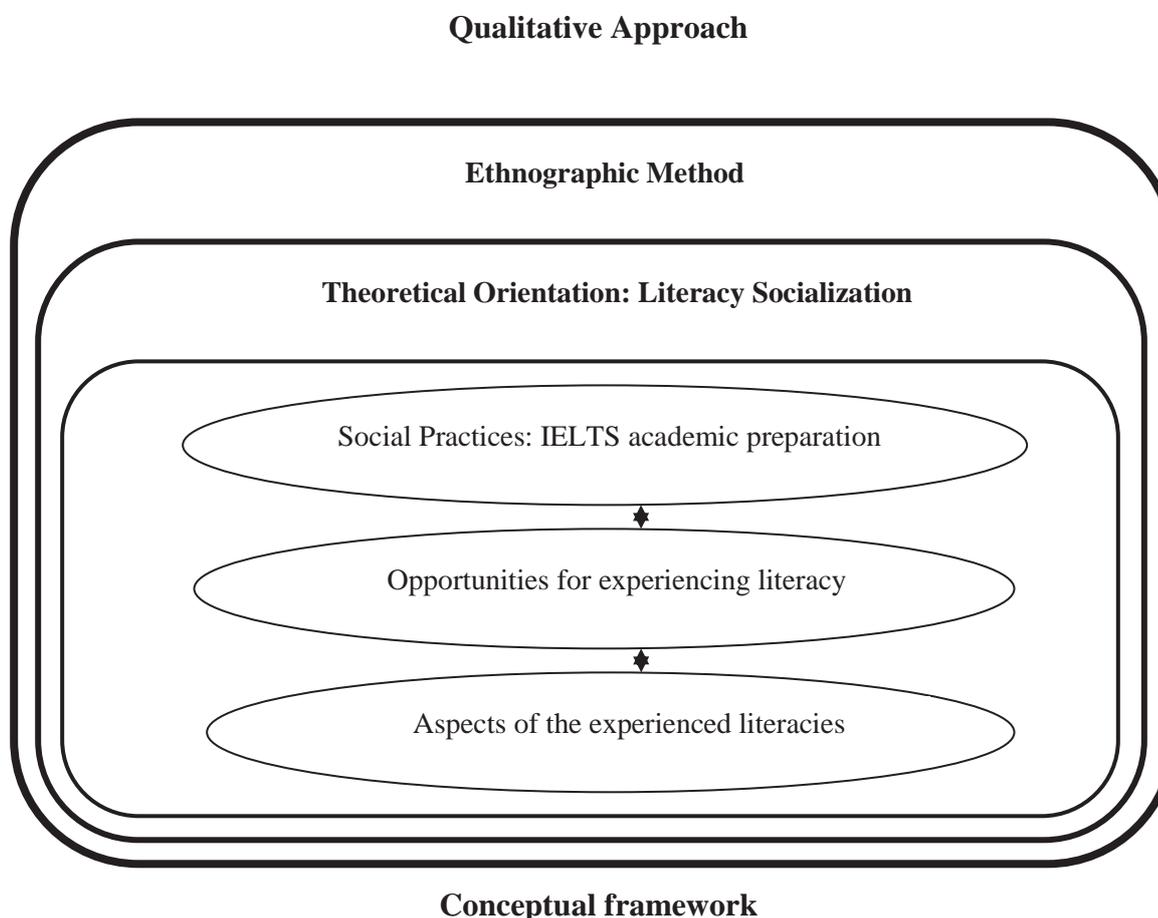
### **5.6 Theoretical framework**

One approach that is used to guide the analysis of qualitative data is known as grounded theory (Mackey & Gass, 2005). This method underpinned my attempt "to avoid placing preconceived notions on the data, with researchers preferring to let the data guide the analysis" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 179). However, my initial decision was to observe the literacy practices provided to prepare the candidates for the IELTS. Thus, instead of considering a pre-determined data analysis framework, involving reviewing and re-reviewing the raw data, I let the "findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes within the raw data" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 179) inductively. Inductive data analysis, according to Mackey and Gass (2005), is "determined by multiple examinations and interpretations of the data in the light of the research objectives, with the categories induced from the data" (p. 179). The premise can provide the inquirer with insights in forming an appropriate framework for analysis based on their assumptions and experiences (cf. Mackey & Gass, 2005). Accordingly, I employed a social practices perspective as the theoretical framework of my study.

One of the key elements of collecting data is to observe people's behaviours by participating in their activities. The ethnographic approach to the study of language has been influential in providing a conceptual framework for studying literacy learning in society (Scheffelin & Ochs, 1986). Based on my research questions, I opted for literacy socialization. I developed the following 'concept map' or 'conceptual framework' (Figure

5.1). I also benefited from the work of Hampston and Echevarria (1998) in the process of data analysis.

**Figure 5.1. Conceptual framework**



### 5.7 Data analysis

I have utilized qualitative analyses of the data (e.g. ethnographic narrative). I have also carried out classroom discourse analysis of the transcripts for the purpose of analysing literacy practice in terms of argumentative texts (written and oral). I did so because of “a linguistic sense in which it refers to passages of sentences that form a unified whole and exhibit semantic cohesion” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976 in Schiffrin, 1994, p. 385). It has been pointed out that the “advantage of using discourse analysis to investigate classroom interaction is that it allows researchers to gain insight into what is being accomplished in a particular classroom interaction that takes place in a specific social context” (McKay, 2006, p. 105). Classrooms are planned communities and the settings are purposeful. In these purposeful communities participants learn by taking part in their specified social practices. Kumaravadivelu (1999) says that “by emphasizing the social context of language

use, classroom discourse analysts can look at the classroom event as a social event and the classroom as a mini society with its own rules and regulations, routines and rituals” (p. 458). The focus, however, is the literacy practices within the community.

I selected different appropriate tools in order to analyse classroom literacy practices. Firstly, analysis encompasses argumentative texts (written and oral). Secondly, within each strand, analysis covers different genres in terms of comparisons and contrasts between the discourse of literacy practices and range of linguistic resources as applied. I used studies of Cazden (1988), Eggins and Slade (1997) and Nunan (1993), regarding the way in which discussants decode and analyse topics and printed texts and the way in which meaning was negotiated between them in group discussions. However, I was also interested to investigate the candidates’ approach to discussions. By this, I mean the ways that they initiated, responded and followed up the talks in their discussions. So, I found IRF pattern (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Sunderland, 2001) useful in order to analyse aspects of exchanges, moves, and turn-taking (cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.3.8, p. 72 for more information about IRF). This kind of data analysis helped me observe “how particular features are used in a specific context and thus to reach conclusions about language use” (McKay, 2006, p. 107). Also, for the purpose of written argumentative text analysis and oral reporting, I needed to employ systemic functional linguistics to “systematically” (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Martin 1986 & 2001) examine the extent of linguistic resources applications. However, because written texts are complex (McKay, 2006; Mican & Slater, 2003; White, 2006), I realized that “no uni-dimensional analysis of text can offer an adequate interpretation of the nature of text” (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 39). Systemic analysis of texts has been suggested as part of discourse analysis and SFL has been introduced as a reliable base for textual analysis (Fairclough, 1992). Using SFL in addition to discourse analysis was undertaken in order to obtain more insight into the aspects of probable literacy development. These approaches were employed as appropriate and reliable analytical frameworks that could contribute much to the data analysis process.

### **5.7.1 Discourse analysis approach**

Literacy practices and discourse may lead to literacy learning and promotion. Discourse analysis was required in order to identify the patterns of discourse and practices of IELTS academic preparation in terms of argumentative texts (written and oral). Previous studies have addressed and emphasized the significance of the general role of discourse analysis. I

adapted the models of Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001; Cazden, 1988; Eggins & Slade, 1997; Mehan, 1985; Schiffrin, 1997; Zuengler & Mori, 2002 as the basis for the procedures for conducting discourse analysis. I employed discourse analysis to take account of the interactions in the program as they happened, and to analyse “the micro features of the text” (Flowerdew, 1999, p. 1093). Employment of discourse analysis could also contribute to the realization of the organization and the ways of developing the texts (Johnstone, 2002) and in the words of Halliday and Hasan (1976), their “texture”.

However, the functions of discourse analysis in the words of Fairclough (1995a) are not limited to descriptive perspectives; they encompass explanatory perspectives too. There is a move from describing a problem or a situation followed by evidence to an explanation. Discourse analysis could include “the study of language in use that extends [sic] beyond sentence boundaries” (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 4). Nevertheless, discourse analysis is not divorced from social practices, because of its “analytical commitment to studying discourse as texts and talk in social practices. It is the medium for interaction, analysis of discourse becomes, then, analysis of what people do” (Potter, 2004, p. 203).

Considering the limitations of traditional interaction analysis as agreed by different scholars (Duff, 1995; Seedhouse, 2004b; Tarone & Swain, 1995), classroom literacy practices can also be examined through the lens of “systematic textual analysis as a part of discourse analysis” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 193). In his argument Fairclough (1992) distinguishes two types of textual analysis, namely “linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis” (p. 193). He suggests “systemic functional linguistics” as a base for textual analysis. Additionally, as Clyne and Slade (1994) have pointed out in regard to the implications of SFL for discourse analysis, “researchers focus more specifically on the grammatical and textual patterning of language” (p. 3). This premise could contribute to my aim in identifying aspects of experiencing literacy in an IELTS academic preparation context. Below I will provide an account of my reasons for adopting a systemic functional paradigm.

### **5.7.2 Systemic functional linguistics approach**

I employed the systemic functional paradigm to identify and describe aspects of, as well as the extent of, experiencing literacy in terms of argumentative texts (written and oral), (for a discussion on SFL see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.10). Using SFL I analysed the extent to

which the candidates applied linguistic resources in their texts as produced in the three phases of the study. I compared and contrasted different formations in the texts by looking at the similarities and differences in genres and staging of the texts. In this way, SFL provided me with an opportunity to examine more closely the structure, context and style of the texts as produced by the candidates more closely.

Using SFL I compared texts for lexical density and lexical variation. I observed the sequential flow of the structures and organization and the contents of the texts. In so doing, I identified features and nature of their texts. In analysing the data, I also identified the genres as employed by the candidates (for a discussion on genre see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.9). In this sense, identification of genres was required to reveal the aspects of their probable literacy development. Genres provide significant criteria for recognizing texts as either academic or non-academic. The extent of control over realization of genre and the manner and extent of their appropriate employment in the production of texts could be regarded as an indication of probable literacy learning and the extent to which it has developed. Gaining insights into these may have implications for English-medium universities and academic bodies in making appropriate decisions about their OTEFL students' and staff's academic life.

SFL also provides an opportunity to discover the differences between the channels of communication (“mode”) in social settings. According to White (2006), “...it is always directed towards explaining language as it is used within texts (either spoken or written) in actual social situations” (p. 4). Therefore, I found SFL particularly suitable for investigating IELTS academic preparation practices in terms of argumentative texts (written and oral). Nevertheless, IRF was another suitable tool in order to look at exchange patterns in oral argumentative text development in terms of moves, acts and turn-taking. Below, I explain, in brief, the way I used IRF.

### **5.7.3 IRF pattern**

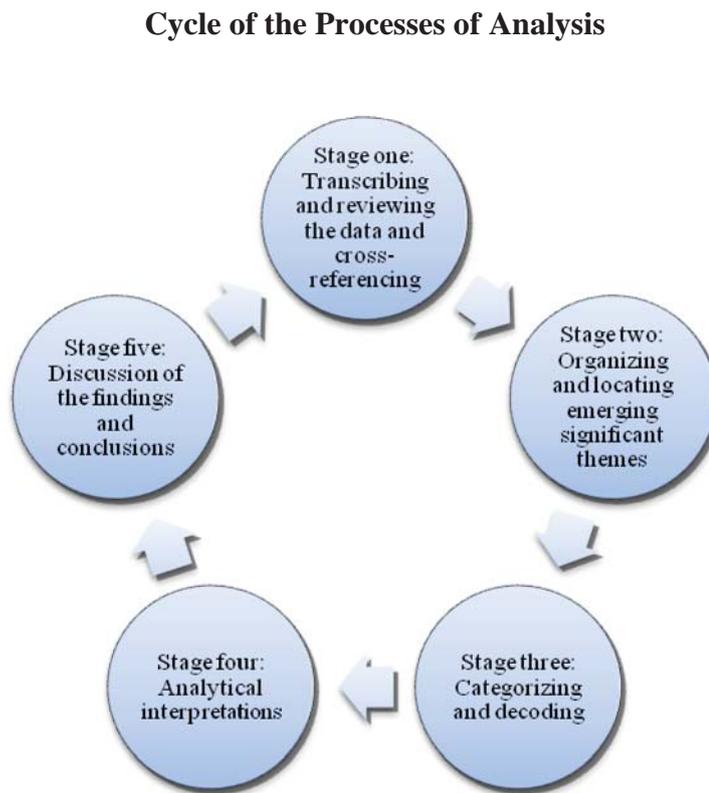
Previous studies suggested that the IRF pattern can establish sets of rules for well-formed sequences of speech (McCarthy, 1991). McCarthy's suggestion can be supported, because “in speech, many utterances tend to be more oriented either to what preceded or to what will follow” (Sacks et al., 1974, cited in Nassaji & Wells, 2000, p. 376). Supporting this, Willis (1992) suggests that subjecting samples of oral discourse to the same structural

analysis makes it possible to realize similarities and differences which belong to the same or different genres. I therefore used a student-based IRF (i.e. no teacher involvement) to compare and contrast oral discourse in group discussions by candidates in three different phases in terms of the date of the literacy events in the study. I aimed to find the similarities and differences in the exchange patterns based on: (a) the initiation of the exchanges, (b) the functions of the turns, (c) the length of the turns, and (d) the complexity of the turns.

#### **5.7.4 Process of data analysis**

Regarding the process of data analysis, my challenge - in the words of Mannion and Ivanič (2004) – was “to determine how best to collect, analyse and represent data that captures” (p. 6) aspects of experiencing literacy in the class. However, I approached analysis of the data with “an open mind” (McKay, 2006, p. 104). My concern in presenting obviously observable literacy events was “with the social context of the interaction” (p. 102), and also “to achieve a holistic explanation of a classroom exchange” (McKay, 2006, p. 103). The aim was to identify significant patterns in preparing the candidates for the IELTS. I have depicted a summarized cycle of the processes of analysis (Figure 5.2). These steps are described in more detail below.

Figure 5.2. Summarized cycle of the processes of analysis



#### 5.7.4.1 Detailed transcription of the data

I transcribed the collected data based on my research goals. I did a detailed and verbatim transcription of all observations, audio recorded and video recorded the literacy events and the embedded literacy practices in addition to interviews. As with Williams (2006), “the challenging process of transcription leads to insights that inform and enrich the analyses” (p. 842). When transcribing, I bore in mind that not every utterance of each learner and/or instructor’s instructions or interactions (because of their lack of relevance to the focus) recorded on a tape really needed to be transcribed (cf. Mackey & Gass, 2005).

#### 5.7.4.2 Organization of the data

Based on my research questions, I opted to approach the data analysis by key events and key issues chronologically. As Patton (1990) states, the challenge of data analysis “is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (pp. 371-372). I transcribed, categorized, checked and reviewed interpretations of the data to identify significant patterns for the purpose of analysis. I organized the data

in terms of key events and their significance as I observed them. I also organized the data according to key issues or themes that I had identified. The organizing process was based on what I had observed over time. However, at any stage of data collection and data analysis, there was the possibility of emerging patterns, which needed to be established. By focusing on classroom argumentative tasks (written and oral), I was able to seek the candidates' meaning-making (Cunningham, 1992; Halliday, 1975; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978) in texts and by other means in addition to patterns of the candidates' engagement in social practices.

When analysing data Ellis (2008) stated that it is important to “set about trying to identify developmental patterns” (p. 74), and I tried to explain the logic of the interactions that I encountered. To accomplish this, I began with a process of “unmotivated looking, which entails noticing what may at first seem unremarkable features of the interactions” (McKay, 2006, p. 104).

#### **5.7.4.3 Coding**

The complex and disorganized ‘raw data’ must be organized. It has correctly been suggested that, “once data are collected, it is necessary to organize them into a manageable, easily understandable, and analysable base of information” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 221). Subsequently, I prepared the ‘raw data’ for coding, an activity about which Orwin (1994) has commented, “Coding represents an attempt to reduce a complex, messy, context-laden and qualification resistant reality to a matrix of numbers” (p. 140). While coding I also sought to identify significant patterns of ‘literacy development’ bearing in mind that, “in qualitative research, coding is usually grounded in the data” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 241). Furthermore, in coding the data I searched for anything which was related to or could be considered as a potential element for answering the research questions (Mackey & Gass, 2005; McKay, 2006). In relation to ‘transcription conventions’ or a ‘coding system’ that “provide guidance and notation for different levels of detail” (p. 233), I used Atkinson and Heritage (1984) (see App. A, Section d, p. 295 for a complete list of the utilized codes).

#### **5.7.4.4 Mapping**

Used metaphorically, the term ‘mapping’ refers to “the whole process of data collection and analysis” done by the inquirer (Mannion & Ivanič, 2004). I constructed maps of what I

had observed about literacy practices. In this way, I was able to show how the candidates engaged in literacy practices. I used mapping (associating each element of a set with an element of another set) to identify the candidates' IELTS literacy practices. Mapping data to my analytical framework led me to identify distinctions in more detail within the categories. I talked about the texts and semiotic resources as 'literacy events' which have been described as "an observational action or group of actions in which a text plays a role" (Mannion & Ivanič, 2004, p. 3) in the classroom. "It is our responsibility as researchers to ensure that the mapping processes involved in the research challenge preconceived boundaries, and open up possibilities rather than closing them down" (Mannion & Ivanič, 2004, p. 4). I was concerned with the classroom as a community of practice. Clarifying this included the ways that the candidates engaged in communication, their subjects and purpose of communication and their expected results. I used discourse analysis for the purpose of these clarifications. An example of 'mapping' can be seen in Table 5.2 below.

**Table 5.2. An example of mapping: segments of argumentative writing practices**

Literacy practice	Focus/Preparation	Experienced literacies
classroom argumentative writing tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Genre writing</li> <li>* Cohesiveness</li> <li>* Paragraph writing</li> <li>* Conventional logic of staging structure</li> <li>* Nature and features of IELTS-based academic writing tasks</li> <li>* Decoding prompts/rubrics</li> </ul>	<p>The candidates experienced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* differences between genres and styles in argumentative writing. For example, differences between 'Discussion and Exposition'; 'Hortatory and Analytical'</li> <li>* how to develop different genre writing (e.g. exposition, discussion) of around 250 words</li> <li>* the nature and features of different IELTS-based academic writing</li> <li>* how to decode a prompt/rubric and highlight the key constituents, (e.g. the writer's point of view, sub issues, scope)</li> <li>* how to develop an argument for and against an idea</li> </ul>

#### 5.7.4.5 Cycles of activities

Identification of the observed literacy practices as cycles of activity was important. Cycles of activity that occurred over time could assist the candidates to infer the goals, rules and values in the ensuing literacy practices (Green & Meyer, 1991). They illustrate the candidates' processes of engagement with literacy practices. By observing IELTS literacy practices maps, I identified cycles of activity, such as a sequence of practices or events,

required to prepare and engage the candidates in developing argumentative tasks (written and oral).

#### **5.7.4.6 Selection of the IELTS literacy practices**

In this stage, I selected the relevant IELTS academic practices through which the candidates engaged in meaning-making with texts (Cunningham, 1992; Halliday, 1975; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Peirce, 1955; Pica, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978) and social practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mercer, 1995; Rogoff, 1990) (i.e. 'Academic Writing Task 2' and 'small group discussions including oral report to the class'). My selection was influenced by factors such as whether they showed a clear relation to the identified preparation cycles of activities, and whether they involved instructions related to literacy development (written and oral) activities including class work, homework, and handouts.

#### **5.7.4.7 Application/Implementation**

In this stage, I described literacy practices for the IELTS. I reported on the ways through which the candidates engaged in language socialization activities with a focus on meaning-making with texts. I used selections from transcriptions in the previous stage to present a critical description of aspects and main features of literacy practices for the IELTS (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, the findings may provide IELTS stakeholders with some insights into developing IELTS materials, the test design and their preparation programs.

### **5.8 Summary**

In this chapter, I explained the methodological approach taken for this study. I discussed the reasons for selecting a classroom ethnographic method and its relevance to the current study. I explained different instruments of data collection for triangulation. They included classroom observation, audio-recording and video-recording of the classroom literacy events and their embedded literacy practices, in addition to individual interviews and group interviews. Also, I talked about the adoption of a theoretical orientation framing the analyses and the processes of data analysis. The next chapter is an explanation of the analysis of literacy practices to prepare for the IELTS academic examination

## CHAPTER 6

### Data Analysis and Interpretation: Written Argumentative Texts

#### 6.1 Introduction

This data analysis aims to identify, categorize and describe the literacy experienced in the IELTS academic preparation course. The data analysis chapters (i.e. Chapters 6 and 7) illustrate the focus and classroom practices of writing and speaking skills with their literacy development, while information about listening and reading skills appear in appendix D, pp. 19-281 in the accompanying CDROM.

One reason for selecting classroom tasks of writing and speaking for analysis is because they can indicate the candidates' actual extent of creativity and knowledge as obtained in the course in order to put theory (i.e. instruction and consciousness raising in the duration of the course) into action by producing written and oral argumentative texts based on given contentious topics. A second reason is that "writing is a key skill for international students at university as it is most often the basis for assessing their work and so plays a key role in academic success" (Green, 2006, p. 112), and speaking plays a key role in tutorials, presentations and in communicating with peers and the university staff. It has also been necessary to limit the scope of this enquiry, and so the researcher has selected 'Small Group Discussion with Oral Report' and 'Academic Writing Task 2' as the main types of class tasks. The reason for selecting these literacy events is that they focus on the forms of argumentation which is central to academic life (Green, 2006; Halliday, 1985; Martin, 2001). This chapter on data analysis investigates the complex elements involved in the development of the IELTS academic argumentative written texts. The organization of the analysis is based on the research questions (cf. Chapter 1, Section 1.6).

I have developed chapter six to demonstrate the analysis of writing tasks and chapter seven for the analysis of oral literacy events. In chapter seven I have used the letter 'p' to refer to the candidates in the current study and the letter 'p' followed by a number to refer to a specific candidate. I did so because of the space limitation of the tables for long names. But, in chapter six I used pseudonyms because I was not restricted by space limit in the tables. However, the real names and their codes appear in appendix A, section b.

From among classroom writing tasks, I selected three sets of three texts randomly (for impartiality) in order to look more closely at their discourse and the extent of linguistic resources employed by the candidates. The nine texts were developed by three different candidates in three different phases of the study. The texts selected for the purpose of analysis by the use of appropriate analytical orientations (cf. Chapter 4), were developed using the typical prompts of the IELTS academic writing task 2 (prompts appear in the App. G, p. 458). The three topics are based on three different contemporary contentious issues requiring the development of an argumentative text. The IELTS academic writing task 2 is derived from the argumentative genre and mostly resembles the university essay (Coffin, 2004; Green, 2005; Moore & Morton, 2005).

Of the three writers [Atusa and Pashand and Khashy (pseudonyms)], I have randomly selected one set (Atusa's) for demonstration in this chapter, while the remainder appear in the appendices G 4 to G 9. However, when necessary I have sought support from an analysis of the other two sets of texts and their findings to support the findings of this set or to reveal differences.

In this chapter, I look at Atusa's texts 1 and 2 and 3. I focus firstly on the generic structure of the texts, and then on the use of different linguistic resources. My purpose here is to demonstrate any probable shifts in the organization and application of linguistic resources and the extent of their congruence with argumentative texts' conventions (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin, 1986; Mickan & Slater, 2003). In order to identify and describe the genre and the extent of probable literacy development, I examined: (a) the discourse and its probable shift, (b) the linguistic resources, and (c) the possible shift in the choice of certain linguistic resources. However, I begin first with an explanation of written preparation practices. The following is a general picture of the nature and features of the program being studied here.

## **6.2 The program in context**

In order to conduct this study, during the introductory session I informed the candidates of the general format of the program and provided them with an outline of the activities based on the four skills in the course, (see App. D, 'Introduction of the IELTS preparation materials', p. 308, ll. 6-33, and 'Instructions on the order of the four skills in the

classroom’, p. 311, ll. 20-34 and p. 312, ll. 1-4). Also, see the following excerpt taken from Appendix D, (p. 308, ll. 8-18).

- 1 R/L The course that we are starting today is ‘IELTS preparation program’. As you know, we are working with all the skills (oral and written).

I wrote on the whiteboard.

1. Oral skills
  - a. Listening
  - b. Speaking
2. Written skills
  - a. Reading
  - b. Writing.

I did so in order to (a) inform the candidates of the content of the course at macro level, and (b) negotiate with the candidates in order to organize the class and devote suitable time for each of the macro skills.

### **6.2.1 The general patterns of the classroom events**

The course comprises a number of events (cf. App. D), and the categories and patterns of these events and their embedded literacy practices are shown below. These map and describe the opportunities provided for experiencing literacy to prepare for the IELTS. Significant patterns aided identification, description and analysis of the linguistic resources used, and the opportunities provided for experiencing literacy in the course. Table 6.1 shows the general patterns of classroom events.

**Table 6.1. Patterns of IELTS academic preparation-focused classroom events**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarization with texts (for IELTS academic preparation)</li> <li>• consciousness raising of the nature and features of the tasks and the related practices</li> <li>• Elicitation of the participants' literacy problematic areas (by means of "Initiation, Response, Follow up", "IRF")</li> <li>• Demonstration and analyses of exemplars and tasks</li> <li>• Simulation of the situations</li> <li>• Focused addressing and instructing of linguistically oriented issues</li> <li>• Engagement with argumentative (written and oral) texts (e.g.; semiotic resources)</li> <li>• Initiating, responding and feeding back on the tasks</li> <li>• Development of different genre-based 'written and spoken' tasks (as instructed by the instructor and developed by the candidates followed by the instructors' feedback)</li> </ul>
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The candidates engaged in the classroom argumentative tasks (written and oral) in the sessions organized for the duration of the research project. In the class the candidates exchanged information in order to share their perspectives. The class tasks were always conducted in English, which included exchanges between the candidates and in the use of texts (written or spoken). For example, on an April, 8<sup>th</sup> 2007, 'NT 2' notes that, "...the participants speak, listen and write in English" (App. E, p. 410), (see also other Appendices for more data). But, an important element in this process concerned the forms of literacy development.

I explained to the candidates the class tasks in the course. I informed the candidates to pay particular attention to the prompts (cf. App. D, pp. 359-362), for example in writing tasks. I told them that they needed to identify the main issue and sub issue(s), the writer's point of view, the social purpose and the scope of the writing task.

I commented and gave feedback on the candidates' texts which they produced during the course. These patterns formed the continuous focus of the inquiry in the program and they demonstrated the candidates' processes of experiencing literacy as preparation for the IELTS.

### **6.2.2 Texts used in the class as learning resources**

I used some books, books with cassettes/CDs, and commercially-published resources for the IELTS in the preparation course. The selection of learning resources was based on the

experiences of the instructor resulting from a number of years of work with IELTS programs. Careful selection of texts for a language program, especially when it is for a specific purpose, is crucial because “what teachers choose to focus on in their classrooms has a large effect on what students learn about the nature and purpose of literacy” (Orellana, 1995, p. 677). Consequently, I selected the learning resources best suited to raise the students’ levels of literacy to the required IELTS band scores. As Orellana (1995) noted, “the structure of the classroom environment and the materials that are available to support literacy learning also influence students’ knowledge acquisition” (p. 677). Nineteen different types of learning resources were used in the program, all being commercially available (App. B, Table 6.1).

Because the candidates expressed particular interest in additional resources which could provide authentic examples of the English language, I suggested some other items for optional practice outside of the classroom. These extra learning resources included *Vocabulary in use* (in three volumes), *Tree or Three* and *Sheep or Ship*. The candidates supplied the materials from the list provided to them on the day of enrolment for the course, and they were required to have them ready for use in the classroom. The following excerpt (App. D, p. 308, ll. 20-22 and p. 310, ll. 17-25) elicits some of the learning resources as used in the course.

1 R/L ... Now, you’ve a bag of books and cassettes, all of you. .... These are going to be divided for different purposes. ... For ‘Writing’ you have ‘English Grammar in Use’ in common between your ‘Writing’ and ‘Reading’ Classes. ... . And then, you have another book called ‘Academic Writing Course’. And then, you have another one called ‘Practical Writer with Readings’.

In so doing, I informed the candidates of the extent of certain learning resources related to different skills.

### **6.2.2.1 Aims and objectives of the learning resources**

The learning resources devoted to each of the main skills and sub skills are listed in appendix B, Table 5.2. The table shows the aims and educational objectives, with some remarks regarding learning opportunities.

However, as noted above, of the different writing and speaking classroom practices available for use, I selected ‘Writing Task 2’ for the writing practices, and a class literacy event named ‘Small Group Discussions and Oral Reports’ for the speaking practices. ‘For & Against’, used as a motif for small group discussions and ‘Writing Task 2’, seemed to be more appropriate because of their relevance to the academic system of scholarly justification and argumentation. So these literacy practices provided a focus for the development and analysis of writing and speaking literacies.

### 6.3 Focused classroom literacy practices

In order to answer the first research question (cf. Chapter 1, Section 1.6) the opportunities discussed below were provided to the candidates.

I outlined the aims of the practices concerning the macro skills, and explained some of the required sub-skills (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) (see App. B, pp. 296-305, Tables 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, and 6.6). Students were informed that they would have opportunities to experience different techniques and strategies, and useful tips were given; for example, how to get the gist of a text, and how to decode a prompt in writing tasks (cf. App. D, p. 314, ll. 4. 33, and p. 315, ll. 1-32 and p. 316, ll. 1-34) and excerpts below. Additionally, the candidates were advised how to apply these in their language use.

265 R/L This is called a ‘Writing’ task. ... . Now, this part which is blackened and bold is your prompt. ... . And then, there are some conditions. It says, “You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.” So, this is an important point. Then, it says, “Present a written argument or case... .” So, what does ... a written argument mean?

App. D, p. 321, ll. 24-30

I invited the candidates to comment and elaborate on ‘written argument’. “So, what does a written argument mean?” I asked of them. But, they chose to remain reticent. I considered their reticence as an indication of their possible unawareness of the term ‘written argument’. I, therefore, introduced the term and talked about ‘argument’. See excerpt below.

265 R/L ... For example, so we must write for and against something in an ‘argument’. We have different viewpoints... . So, when it is an ‘argument’ that means may be I have different viewpoints from yours.

So, you must write two sides of a topic or argumentation. ... . Then, for each issue you will bring evidences. ... . And then, you are limited by the words. It says, “You should write at least 250 words.” ... . And then, it says, “Present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no specialist knowledge of the following topic.” What does it mean ‘an educated reader with no specialist knowledge’?

App. D, p. 322, ll. 1-12

I invited the candidates to find out whether or not they could make sense and understand what they were required to do. They were expected to demonstrate the extent of their understanding in their texts that they were supposed to develop. But, their texts showed their lack of such expert knowledge at that stage. So, I elaborated on the terms. For example, I told them that by “Educated reader” it meant that they were advised not to use slang or lay words or explain obvious matters too much.

265 R/L Do not say lay words. Don’t use very simple language. Or, do not say evident things. ... . Don’t write obvious things. ... . It means that the readers know obvious things, so don’t write obvious things, and don’t write simple things.

App. D, p. 322, ll. 19-22

But, none of the candidates needed special encouragement, because they were all highly motivated. For example, the field notes (N2) for April 7<sup>TH</sup> 2007 record that:

In IELTS classes the participants have external instrumental kind of motivation, because most of them study IELTS to benefit from the certificate as one of the requirements for taking a visa to migrate or to continue their education in an English-language community. App. E, p. 409, ll. 6-9

However, students were stimulated with questions. They wrote texts and spoke about texts. They engaged in silent reading, reading aloud, (in chorus with others), talking about and around the texts, listening, repeating spoken texts and arguing and sharing perspectives. This process is explained in more detail below.

### 6.3.1 Argumentative writing preparation practices: the context

I provided the candidates with relevant information to prepare for developing argumentative writing with a specific time limit based on IELTS prompts. In the first session, I wrote on the board the properties of writing with reference to two macro elements and ten micro elements as follows:

There are two major aspects in your writing:

a. Appearance, b. Content

The factors for an acceptable appearance are as I list them:

Margin, Format, Punctuation, Limitations, and Orthography

And, the aspects for an appropriate content are:

Semantics and Syntax, Cohesion and Coherence, Variety, Deviation, and be Logical, unbiased & truthful

The researcher's data, 15/03/2007

I then explained each item in detail to the candidates. Next, the candidates engaged in classroom tasks to practice developing written texts based on the contentious topics which resembled the typical IELTS writing tasks (see detailed explanation of examples with analysis in the forthcoming sections). Classroom practices aimed at producing opportunities for experiencing such aspects of writing literacies covered the first phase of the course. Phase two was devoted to providing the candidates with lessons about the generic structure of an argumentative writing. In this phase the candidates experienced producing different written argumentative texts based on the conventions of the generic structure (Coffin, 2004; Martin, 1986, 2001) of such genres as discussion, exposition, analytical and hortatory. In this phase, the candidates practiced writing different parts of argumentative texts based on different topics from among the IELTS exemplars which I assigned them after instruction and consciousness raising. For example, one session was devoted to producing 'Introduction' part in which the candidates experienced producing background (if necessary), writer's point of view or proposition. They wrote about the main issue and sub issue(s) if any and also indicated the scope of the topic if needed. In another session they practised producing 'Main body' part of the texts. They experienced producing arguments followed by elaboration, interpretation and evaluation in accordance with the genre of the topics (i.e. analytical or hortatory). A next session was devoted to practicing 'Conclusion' writing in which the candidates experienced bringing together the significant points and arguments in summary. These formed different parts of their class

tasks. In phase three, they undertook topic analysis and decoding different topics in order to make sense and make meaning according to the purpose of the topics as part of their class tasks. The candidates experienced identifying key constituents of the topics such as main issue and social purpose of the topics. In addition, they engaged in classroom practices for group discussions concerning group editing and proofreading. They formed groups of 3 or 4 for this purpose. In every session they selected the text of one of the members (so that everybody had an opportunity for their texts to be discussed) for the purpose of editing and proofreading. The candidates compared the texts with the conventions and shared their comments and perspectives and if unsure they sought for the instructor's assistance (the researcher's classroom observations and also see App. D). Approximately one third of the class time was devoted to the candidates' practice of vocabulary and structural arguments. Following this I collected their written texts and provided feedback after correcting them. In the next session, I returned their texts to them. In any writing session, normally, one or two texts were selected randomly from among the candidates' writing tasks to be analysed and discussed in the classroom; for example, see the following excerpts, "Now we have group correction" (App. E, p. 409, l. 32):

267 R/L: .... So, you can compare your friends' writing with your own writing.

App. D, p. 323, ll. 13-14

894 R/L: ...., I am giving your writing back to you, but do not put them away,  
because, we are going to have some analyses on your works.

App. D, p. 334, ll. 23-24

The candidates read out their texts. They engaged in group work to peer review and peer correct each other's text and to discuss their problematic areas (the researcher's classroom observations also see App. D, pp. 317-322 and pp. 388-398 for more information). They contributed to editing and proofreading each other's texts. The candidates put forward their questions with regard to their writing tasks in the classroom. They also put forward their queries about different aspects of linguistic resources in terms of vocabulary or structure or discourse or other linguistic aspects.

In the analysis I focus on the generic structure of the texts and the use of different linguistic resources. My purpose here is to demonstrate any probable shifts in the organization and application of linguistic resources and the extent of their congruence with

argumentative text conventions (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin, 1986 & 1992; Mickan & Slater, 2003). I begin with the comparison of the texts.

#### **6.4 Selecting the texts: a comparison**

I have selected one set (Atusa's) for demonstration in this chapter. The texts offer baseline data for comparing literacy development in argumentative writing, because they are based on the argumentative genre as developed by the same candidate during three different phases of the study. The first writing task was developed in the first day of the research (i.e. 10/03/2007). It was used both as a means of evaluating the participant's level of English knowledge in terms of writing skills, and for the purpose of the needs analysis. The second writing task was developed at approximately the mid-point of the study, i.e. after 60 hours of classroom preparation. Finally, the third one was produced at almost the end of the research project, after 112 hours (out of 120 hours) of preparation practices. They were analysed to identify and describe the probable changes in literacy and its nature.

#### **6.5 Analysis of the texts**

In an analysis of the texts, I sought to identify and describe linguistic resources that students used in producing their argumentative texts. I begin by looking at the rubrics and their text appropriateness.

##### **6.5.1 The rubrics: level of texts-appropriateness**

Analysis of the students' respond to the rubrics/prompts (cf. Chapter 6, Section 6.6.3 for an example, also for the prompts see Appendix G, p. 458) of the three selected tasks showed that their levels in terms of general knowledge were appropriate for an undergraduate or a postgraduate participant. They are concerned with the contemporary contentious issues.

##### **6.5.2 Comparing the texts at a surface level**

The first essays were rated at an average of band score '5' (cf. Chapter 5, Section 5.4.6 p. 94, for the raters and the band scores). This level was evidence that the candidates were able to make sense of the tasks in general in order for them to develop relevant texts to some extent. The later essays were rated by the same raters at an average level of band scores '6+' to '6.5', which showed a general improvement in the candidates' change of literacy. Change in literacy can be identified in different ways. One of the tools for a general comparison of texts is calculating differences in lexical density.

### 6.5.3 Lexical density

Lexical density refers to the percentage of the informational lexical items across a text, (cf. Halliday, 1994; Ure, 1971; White, 2006). Calculation of this percentage is carried out by a calculation of all the words and calculation of all the lexical word classes (noun, verb, adjective and adverb) in a given text. Analysis of the lexical density in a text provides the reader with the level of the language proficiency of the writer, and the control that the writer has over the deliberate use of the language resources, although this is not agreed upon completely by some scholars (Halliday, 2001; Ure, 1971). Although this knowledge makes it possible to compare and contrast texts at different stages of language learning in order to identify the probable literacy change, “counting LD is not intended to function as a method of essay evaluation” (Linnarud, 1973, p. 51).

A general analysis of Atusa’s texts (Table 6.2) showed that the writer had experienced a change in her literacy competence by (a) producing overall 40 more words in text 2 and 54 more words in text 3 in comparison to 219 words in her text 1, (b) developing 23 more lexical words in text 2 and 32 more lexical words in text 3, and (c) increasing the lexical density by 3% in text 2 and 4% in text 3 in comparison to her text 1.

**Table 6.2. Atusa’s texts in phases 1, 2 and 3, (researcher’s data, 2007)**

texts Stages	Text 1 (10/03/2007)	Text 2 (04/05/2007)	Text 3 (15/06/2007)
<b>Introduction</b>	I think these days all of us are far from natural living. you know, for example now we are living in luxuries and comfortable apartmants but we are far from farms or villages and .... As aresult our childrens can not play with animals. many of us living in the city refer to living in the villages. and we must cope with anxiety of this life style. we have many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc.	Today, most of people live in the cities or towns. Infact, people don’t remember the advantages of living at the rural. Do you ever think about living at the rural instead of town or city?	Over weight is one of the most important problems in developed countries. Children, especially more than others involve with this problem. In fact, there are several reasons for overweighting children. Some factors are the number of fast foods and other factors are about the parents. They do not pay attention to children’s health.+

<b>Main body</b>	<p>we want comfortable and luxuries life style. without thinking about the pollution or psychological disease. In these days we damage our environment.</p> <p>people have beenleft their house in village and are coming to the city. All of the gardens in the cities are damaged and after one yeas or more we will see there ten floors apartments.</p> <p>In other points we are noticed the cars. Many cars In the streets are the cause of airpollution and sound pollouction In the cities like Tehran.</p> <p>These pollutions are damaged ozone layer in the atmospher. we don't have natural view from our house as aresult we are tired from living in this prison that we make it. you know, All of us come from natural, therefore we cope with this problems, without think about it.</p> <p>we want to come back the natural. (farms, rivers, see,...)</p>	<p>About three-quarters of the people in Developed Countries live in towns, instead of this, in Third world two-thirds of the population live in rural areas.</p> <p>In rural areas, we have many advantages for living human need to be with nature when we are living in this area, we can use from everything in natural form for example foods, weather, transportation. In addition to here we have not any pollution like air, sound and etc. in the rural we don't have any mental disease like anxiety, Depression and etc, because we don't have any stress.</p> <p>At the other hand, in rural areas, we have many disadvantages for living. Here, we don't have any welfare or facilities, for our living for example, when we want to wash up the dishes, don't have warm water here, we don't have any luxuries like Royls Roys for transporting.</p> <p>In addition to explain the rural areas, we have many advantages and disadvantages for living in the cities. Example for advantages of living in cities are the childre can go to the educated schools. But one of the disadvantages of living here is pollution.</p>	<p>In Developed countries, the number of fast food is increasing. Advertisments of fast food daily present in mass media. Variety of them help to existe a tendancy for childrens feeding. In addition to eat, children do not have any movement af eating. So, a lot of them have over weight.</p> <p>At the other hand, parent's are very busy. They do not have any time for preparing foods at home. They are working most of the time. Simply, They use from fast foods. But, They do not have any knowledge about this type of feeding. They pay attention to advertisement like their children. They do not have any report about disadvantages of fast foods. Over weight is one of these disadvantages.</p> <p>In my opinion, The function of parents is very important. They have to increase their knowledge about children feedings. They must pay attention to over weighting. So, They can have a schedual for eating food in fast foods. For example, one time at the month. Then, the can exist a situation for sport, and movement</p>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>(Total words: 219); (Lexical words: 83); (Lexical density: 38%)</p>	<p>Finally, in my opinion, the living in rural areas is very useful for human, but we must increase the welfare and level of living in rural areas. The Developed countries must explane it to Third worlds people.</p> <p>(Total words: 259); (Lexical words: 106); (Lexical density: 41%)</p>	<p>In summary, over weight can be solve with parents' function. They have to increase their knowledge about feeding, and controlling over wight of children's with presenting a program for eating, movement, etc.</p> <p>I wish, The children will have a normal weight at the world countries.</p> <p>(Total words: 273); (Lexical words: 115); (Lexical density: 42%)</p>

Table 6.2 (for more examples and closer analysis also see Tables 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7) indicates that the writer has used her experienced literacy in order to (a) develop a clearer and more

conventionally structured introduction and main body, (b) develop a conclusion, and (c) provide the reader with more grammatical and topic relevant clauses. However, in order to provide more substantial insights, it was deemed necessary to conduct further analysis of more texts.

### 6.5.3.1 Comparison of texts: a matter of lexical density

Lexical density has been suggested as a tool (Halliday, 1985; Ure, 1971) for comparing the informational load and extent of texts' spontaneity or non-spontaneity. Therefore, as a preliminary approach to analysis, I analysed the texts in terms of the number of total words, lexical words and lexical density (Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3. Comparison of Atusa, Arash and Khashy's texts in the three phases in terms of the total words, lexical words, and lexical density, (cf. Halliday, 1985; Rothery, 1989; Ure, 1971)**

Phase writer	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<b>Atusa</b>	Total Words: 219 Lexical Words: 83 Lexical density : 38%	Total Words: 259 ↗ Lexical Words: 106 ↗ Lexical density : 41%	Total Words: 273 ↗ Lexical Words: 115 ↗ Lexical density : 42%
<b>Arash</b>	Total Words: 234 Lexical Words: 106 Lexical density : 45%	Total Words: 264 ↗ Lexical Words: 125 ↗ Lexical density : 47%	Total Words: 261 ↘ Lexical Words: 118 ↘ Lexical density : 45% ↘
<b>Khashy</b>	Total Words: 275 Lexical Words: 127 Lexical density : 46%	Total Words: 232 ↘ Lexical Words: 127 = Lexical density : 54% ↗	Total Words: 329 ↗ Lexical Words: 136 ↗ Lexical density : 41% ↘

The results of the analysis of Atusa's three texts show a continuous increase in her expert knowledge of applying lexical resources when producing written texts (Table 6.2).

However, comparison of Arash's three texts and Khashy's three texts resulted in different findings. For example, in contrast to Atusa's continuous improvement, Arash experienced an improvement in phase 2 followed by a decline in phase 3. Arash's word total rose from 234 words in phase 1 to 264 in phase 2, but this fell to 261 words by phase 3. Also, the number of lexical words rose from 106 in phase 1 to 125 in phase 2, but it dropped to 118

in phase 3. Consequently, Arash's lexical density rose from 45% in phase 1 to 47% in phase 2 suggesting some improvement, but it fell back to 45% in Phase 3. However, another significant finding is that although comparison of Arash's phases 1 and 3 shows a remarkable increase in terms of total words (from 234 words to 261 words) and lexical words (from 106 words to 118 words), lexical density stands still (i.e. 45%), contrary to expectations.

Comparison of Khashy's texts provides even more interesting findings. Khashy's total words decreased from 275 words in phase 1 to 232 words in phase 2, but rose to 329 words in phase 3. Khashy's number of lexical words stayed the same in phases 1 and 2 (i.e. 127 words), but experienced a sudden rise to 136 words in phase 3. Nonetheless, the most significant finding is that firstly, despite the fall in the total words from 275 words in phase 1 to 232 words in phase 2, lexical density rose from 46% in phase 1 to 54% in phase 2. Secondly and more surprising, in spite of the sudden rise in total words from 232 words in phase 2 to 329 words in phase 3 and a remarkable rise in lexical words from 127 words in phase 2 to 136 words in phase 3, lexical density suddenly dropped from 54% in phase 2 to 41% in phase 3. Also, a comparison between Khashy's phase 1 and phase 3 indicates that despite a remarkable increase in terms of total words (from 275 to 329 words) and lexical words (from 127 to 136 words), lexical density dropped from 46% to 41% (Table 6.2 summarises the comparison of numerical data). These findings seem to contradict Halliday's (1985) assertion that high lexical density is an indication of complexity in written discourse. They suggest that considering lexical density as an index of comparison to demonstrate an improvement in text development might require rethinking (at least with regard to texts produced by those whose first language is not English), and further research in this area may provide more insights.

The assumption is that comparing the texts in terms of lexical density may provide some insights regarding the observation of some differences and changes. An increase in lexical density may indicate some development. But this factor alone does not seem to account for the level of abstraction in a written text. A possible question might be about the nature and terms of the improvement. The probable progress and the difference in this regard is only one dimension (cf. Halliday, 2001). For example, it may be that an increase in total words and content words that have been used increase the percentage of the lexical density. Yet, this change does not necessarily mean that, for example vocabulary appropriateness and

text cohesiveness have also been observed. Below, I will provide some more analysis using the systemic theory of language to identify and describe the changes from different perspectives.

### **6.6 The category of the experienced written literacy**

Identification and description of the category of literacy, for example, in producing argumentative written texts, are made feasible by analysing texts in terms of conventionally appropriate use of some linguistic resources. Linguistic resources which play significant roles in achieving this goal are as follows: lexical density, nominalization, clause complexes, cohesive ties and devices such as unity, coherence, cohesion, for example by the use of reference, conjunction, lexical cohesion, and Theme/Rheme (cf. Halliday, 1985; Martin, 1986, 2001). The extent of the appropriate use of these elements can be identified from a linguistic point of view of literacy (Halliday, 2001), and utilizing a functional paradigm of language.

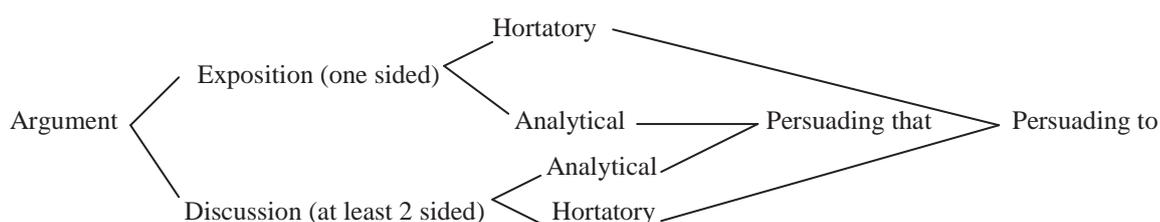
### **6.7 A systemic analysis: genre**

Analysis of the texts was carried out using the systemic functional theory of language (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Martin 1986, 2001). The texts are of exposition and discussion argumentation genres which could use hortatory or analytical styles (cf. Coffin, 2004). The argumentation genre, according to Coffin (2004), in general “is defined in terms of purpose, rather than according to the rules of formal logic” (p. 230). Also, “argumentation is aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader” (van Eemeren et al., 1996, p. 340). However, in such tasks, having described the preliminary situation, test-takers are normally expected to argue about *what* the situation is (i.e. analytical style), or *how* the situation should be (i.e. hortatory style).

#### **6.7.1 Identification of the genre and style**

In order for the social function or purpose of the writing tasks to be facilitated, I have postulated the following flow chart of argumentation (Figure 6.1). Its design has been adapted from the Coffin (2004) and Toulmin (1958) models.

**Figure 6.1. Flow chart of argumentation genres**



Exposition has also been categorized as moral and factual (cf. Martin & Peters, 1985; Peters, 1985). These categories have also been organized in at least three subcategories for moral exposition, namely interpretative, evaluative, and argumentative. Additionally, at least two sub-categorisations – explanatory, either explaining what, and explanatory, or explaining how/why - have been recognized for factual exposition. A combination of one or more of these could form a text. A text could also be developed by utilizing different types for different stages. Based on this premise I will compare and contrast the texts in terms of these higher levels.

The topics of the selected writing tasks chosen for analysis are compatible with the analytical and hortatory styles (cf. App. G for the topics). For example, the prompt of text 1 says, “To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement”, which is compatible with the analytical style (*what* the situation is). But, the prompt of text 2 says, “The developed world **should** lead by example and not insist that aid to the Third World is...”, which is compatible with the hortatory style (*how* the situation **should** be).

In such cases the writer is expected to argue for or against a point of view and to justify their thesis. Development of such an argument could be done through what Mickan and Slater (2003) consider to be “language patterns of causality and logic and the presentation of point of view” (p. 70). They point out that making certain linguistic choices, as shown below, helps to achieve the desired social purpose:

- To refer to generic or non-human participants,
- To nominalise and use abstract technical terms in the attempt to establish objectivity,
- To develop an argument and persuade readers through the organisation of coherent; text, for example relational processes and conjunctions to stage the argument, and

- To compress information and be concise through, for example, nominalisation.

Mickan and Slater, 2003, p. 70

Analysis of the essays below seeks to identify and describe aspects of lexico-grammatical constituents as employed in the argumentative texts. These elements illustrate the presence and the extent of the candidates' control over appropriate identification of the social purpose of the topic and the use of appropriate linguistic resources in order to justify their thesis (i.e., literacy development).

### **6.7.2 Sequential flow of the structure and the content**

Sequential flow of the structure and the content facilitates the social purpose of a text. The process of ordering information or the conventional logic of the staging has also been named by some scholars as “generic coherence” (Eggins, 1994) and “schematic structure” (Halliday, 1978a, 1985b). The writer needs to utilize a variety of the language resources so that the reader can make sense of the task's purpose. Thus, an understanding of the schematic structure of different genres (e.g. argumentative essay) is required for the development of an appropriately conventional argumentative writing.

#### **6.7.2.1 The structure of argumentative writing: organization and staging**

An argumentative essay's usual generic structure (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin, 1986, 2001; White, 2006) is:

Introduction/Thesis ^ Main body/Argument(s) ^ Conclusion/Reinforcement

I have developed a model of an argumentation essay, based on Eggins and Slade, (1997); Martin, (1986, 2001); and White, (2006) as shown in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4. Generic structure of academic argumentative writing: a framework for analysis of essays based on Eggins and Slade (1997); Martin, (1986, 2001); White, (2006).**

Genre	Staging	Description of the forming parts
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Thesis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Orientation/background:</b> The purpose of this subsection is to establish the topic/rubric, clarify the terms of the debate, and the discussion or the analytical issue(s) at stake (though may not always be necessary if these are well understood, or may be limited to a sentence or two).</li> <li>• <b>Primary position:</b> the aim of this subsection is to present the essay's primary conclusion/findings/arguments.</li> <li>• <b>Preview:</b> This subsection provides a brief overview of the subject matters (which are going to support, explicate, develop, and justify the position taken in the Thesis) and their overall ordering to be applied in the body.</li> </ul>
<b>Main body</b>	<b>Argument</b>  (Can be one or two or more argumentative paragraphs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Point:</b> Where the argument/evidence/refutation is presented in overview, (e.g. raising an issue and advancing a suggestion as what to do).</li> <li>• <b>Elaboration:</b> where the point is further specified, elaborated, explained and justified (reason(s)/answers to whys and hows to do).</li> </ul> <p>This section provides the material which supports/justifies/provides evidence for the position taken in the Thesis, depending on the nature of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting evidence for the position derived, for example from detailed textual analysis, sociolinguistic surveys, statically analyses, data supplied by secondary sources. In the case of textual analysis of the type discussed above, this evidence will take the form of a detailed description and analysis of the various linguistic features which justify conclusions about the text's social, stylistic, communicative, rhetorical properties.</li> <li>• Evidence and subsidiary argumentation in support of the primary position derived from, or provided directly by, the established literature.</li> <li>• Careful refutation of any literature which could be seen as contradicting or at least challenging the primary position.</li> </ul>

<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Reinforcement</b>	<p>Returns to and restates the primary position, probably in stronger terms, briefly indicating how the argument section (body) has, in fact led compellingly to this conclusion, finding, interpretation, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which questions remain unresolved;</li> <li>• Where further research/analysis is required;</li> <li>• What new issues have been raised by material addressed in the body.</li> </ul>
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### 6.7.2.2 Analysis of argumentative writing: a general view

An overall review of Atusa's 'Introduction' of Text 1 (Tables 6.2) shows that the writer's talk in this section is generally about a change in life style away from nature rather than "damage to the environment." However, judging from the last sentence, "we have many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc." a reader may implicitly infer that the writer has meant this as an aspect of damage to the environment, although there is no logical link between the new information and the given information. The writer has only partially mentioned some points which may implicitly refer to "damage to the environment", for instance "many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc." The whole 'Introduction' is as follows:

"I think these days all of us are far from natural living. you know, for example now we are living in luxuries and comfortable apartmants but we are far from farms or villages and .... As aresult our childrens can not play with animals. many of us living in the city refer to living in the villages. and we must cope with anxiety of this life style. we have many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc."

A primary analysis of the writing task as developed by Atusa in phase one of the study signals an 'analytical exposition genre'. The statement of and argumentation about the existence or non-existence of an issue is considered as "analytical exposition" (cf. Coffin, 2004; Gerot & Wignell, 1994). This aspect, however, has not been deliberately articulated and elaborated in accordance with the topic in this section. Hence, the writer's point of view, and ultimately the genre are unclear. For example, in the first sentence of her 'Introduction' Atusa expresses her point of view by writing "I think these days all of us are far from natural living." But, the selected register mismatches the field; consequently, it fails to address the social purpose of the topic. This situation has led to the lack of unity between the topic, the opening sentence and the rest of the text. The writer has also

personalized the viewpoint throughout the entire ‘Introduction’. Examples are: an underlined ‘I’ in the first sentence, ‘you’ and ‘we’ (twice) in the second sentence, ‘our’ in the third, ‘us’ in the fourth, ‘we’ in the fifth, and ‘we’ in the last sentence.

This shortcoming indicates the writer’s probable lack of experience, at this stage, in decoding the topic appropriately in order to derive the required meaning out of it. This knowledge is essential in order to completely establish and organise her thoughts in a written form. Further analysis of other participants’ texts, for example those of Arash and Khashy showed that these issues were common (see App. H, p. 476, and App. I, p. 492).

### **6.7.2.3 The features and nature of the text**

This section attempts to identify and describe the extent to which the candidate has appropriately utilized some aspects of lexico-grammar in the essay. Analysis of the texts is assumed to contribute to identifying the features and nature of the texts. I used this tool accompanied by comparison and contrast between the texts as developed by the candidate to examine the nature and features of literacy development.

Conventionally, academic argumentative written texts are expected to have certain academic features, for example the register. Register in such texts is normally shaped by three situational variables in the context of situation. The variables are called field, tenor and mode (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1985) in which field attends to what is happening, tenor refers to the participants who are involved, and mode indicates how the interaction (spoken or written) is carried out. Register directs the discourse to be of “objective rather than personal or emotive discourse” (Mickan & Slater, 2003, p. 73). Identification and description of impersonal participants is regarded as one strategy to distinguish an academic text. Participants, based on systemic functional theory of language as described by Halliday (1985), are the nouns that refer to what is going on in a sentence. They can be nouns which refer to concrete entities which are also known as ‘general participants’, for example things, people, and places (cf. White, 2006). One strategy for using impersonal participants can be shifting from active voice to passive voice as used by the writer in the following excerpt.

“All of the gardens in the cities are damaged and after one yeas or more we will see there ten floors apartments.”

The analysis shows that only on one occasion and only in the main body has the writer used ‘passive voice’ as discussed above. In the rest of the text (Table 6.2) the writer has personalized her argument (cf. Section 6.7.2.2) which is not in accordance with the academic argumentative conventions as discussed.

### **6.7.3 Analysis of Atusa’s texts**

I analyse the texts to identify and describe their characteristics over different phases in order to gain insights into any probable literacy achievement. Therefore, an analysis of the texts in terms of general structure, the use of participants (as part of the general structure of clause based on Halliday and Hasan, 1985), and nominalization is deemed as a priority. I selected these, because they indicate the extent of student texts’ association with academic texts’ properties (Halliday and Hasan, 1985; Halliday, 1994). I have typed the original texts without correction (Tables 6.2, 6.5, 6.6, and 6.7). Hand scripts appear in the appendices G1, G2 and G3.

#### **6.7.3.1 Comparing the structure**

##### *A. Analysis of Atusa’s text 1*

The candidates were assigned a class task to develop a written argumentative text to express their agreement or disagreement on ‘the damage that worldwide improvement in the standard of living causes to the environment’ (details of the task appear in the App. G). The general structure of the argumentative text is shown in the right hand column (Table 6.5). As indicated, the elements do not comply appropriately with the conventional structure. The writer has taken up a position, without any orientation. Although providing the reader with orientation is not mandatory, in situations where the reader is not informed or the background has not already been rehearsed, writers are expected to provide this information (cf. Eggins, 1994; Martin, 2001).

**Table 6.5. Atusa's text 1 (10/03/2007)**

Stage/ Section	Text 1	General structure
Introduction	(1) I think these days all of us are far from natural living. (2) you know, for example now we are living in luxuries and comfortable apartmans but we are far from farms or villages and .... (3) As aresult our childrens can not play with animals. (4) many of us living in the city refer to living in the villages. (5) and we must cope with anxiety of this life style. (6) we have many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc.	Primary position. Writer's point of view + support by example Point 1 + Point 2 + Point 3 + Point 4
Main body	(7) we want comfortable and luxeries life style. (8) without thinking about the pollution or psychological disease. (9) In these days we damage our environment. (10) people have beenleft their house in village and are coming to the city. (11) All of the gardens in the cities are damaged and after one yeas or more we will see there ten floors apartments. (12) In other points we are noticed the cars. (13) Many cars In the streets are the cause of airpollution and sound pollouction In the cities like Tehran. (14) These pollutions are damaged ozone layer in the atmospher. (15) we don't have natural view from our house. (16) as aresult we are tired from living in this prison that we make it. (17) you know, All of us come from natural, therefore we cope with this problems, without think about it. (18) we want to come back the natural. (farms, rivers, see,...)	Argument + additional argument + factual support + support by example New point 1 New argument Argument Point 1 + Point 2 Writer's point of view Statement
Conclusion	<b>(Total words: 219) (Lexical words: 83) (Lexical density: 38%)</b>	Restatement of the stance

As indicated the relationship between the writer's stance and the topic is unclear. After expressing her position, the content in the opening of the introduction strays and looks like a mixture of the opening and the conclusion. In the body, furthermore, although some arguments have been provided, they are not backed up by interpretation and evaluation. The unconventional organization of the text can result in a reader having difficulty in trying to understand the writer's point of view.

### ***B. Analysis of Atusa's text 2***

An analysis of text 2 (Table 6.6) shows that the 'Introduction' lacks the orientation or background subsection.

**Table 6.6. Atusa's text 2 (04/05/2007)**

Stage/ Section	Text 2	General structure
Introduction	(1) Today, most of people live in the cities or towns. (2) Infact, people don't remember the advantages of living at the rural. (3) Do you ever think about living at the rural instead of town or city?	Primary position. Writer's point of view Point 1 query
Main body	<p>(4) About three-quarters of the people in Developed Countries live in towns, instead of this, in Third world two-thirds of the population live in rural areas.</p> <p>(5) In rural areas, we have many advantages for living human need to be with nature when we are living in this area, we can use from everything in natural form for example foods, weather, transportation. (6) In addition to here we have not any pollution like air, sound and etc. (7) in the rural we don't have any mental disease like anxiety, Depression and etc, because we don't have any stress.</p> <p>(8) At the other hand, in rural areas, we have many disadvantages for living. (9) Here, we don't have any welfare or facilities, for our living for example, when we want to wash up the dishes, don't have warm water here, we don't have any luxeries like Roys Roys for transporting.</p> <p>(10) In addition to explain the rural areas, we have many advantages and disadvantages for living in the cities. (11) Example for advantages of living in cities are the childre can go to the educated schools. (12) But one of the disadvantages of living here is pollution.</p>	<p>The issue</p> <p>Point 1+ Elaboration 1. Elaboration 2. Point 2 +elaboration 3.</p> <p>Point 1+ Point 2+ elaboration 1+ elaboration 2.</p> <p>Point 1 + Elaboration 1 + elaboration 2.</p>
Conclusion	<p>(13) Finally, in my opinion, the living in rural areas is very useful for human, but we must increase the welfare and level of living in rural areas. (14) The Developed countries must explane it to Third worlds people.</p> <p><b>(Total words: 259) (Lexical words: 106) (Lexical density: 41%)</b></p>	Reinforcement. Restatement of the primary position

The writer has shown a primary position, which is in agreement with the topic and signals an analytical style, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

Today, most of people live in the cities or towns... .

However, the preview, which conventionally forms the following subsection after the primary position, has been overlooked. Overall, the writer has indicated an insufficient

decoding and understanding of the social purpose of the topic, (see the excerpt above and the task). The writer's claim or primary position is not in line with any part of the rubric which requires discussion of two completely different situations in the 'Developing World' and the 'Third World'. The content of the text signals a comparison between rural lifestyle and urban lifestyle rather than explaining the role of the 'Developed World' in dealing with the issue as experienced in the 'Third World'. This deviation can in turn violate the unity.

### *C. Analysis of Atusa's text 3*

The text (Table 6.7) has been labelled according to its generic structure. The closing stage or 'Coda' (in terms of genre staging, e.g. Eggins & Slade, 1997) has been added and clearly labelled. The content of the closing stage also signals the characteristics of a conclusion. The writer has employed a variety of lexico-grammatical resources at different stages of the writing.

Table 6.7. Atusa's text 3 (15/06/2007)

Stage/ Section	Text 3	General structure
Introduction	<p>(1) Over weight is one of the most important problems in developed countries. (2) Children, especially more than others involve with this problem. (3) In fact, there are several reasons for overweighting children. (4) Some factors are the number of fast foods and other factors are about the parents. (5) They do not pay attention to children's health.</p>	<p>(Implicit primary position) Statement of the main issue + statement of a sub issue + Argument for the issue (choice of a stance) + support by examples + Argument (preview)</p>
Main body	<p>(6) In Developed countries, the number of fast food is increasing. (7) Advertisements of fast food daily present in mass media. (8) Variety of them help to existe a tendancy for childrens feeding. (9) In addition to eat, children do not have any movement af eating. (10) So, a lot of them have over weight.</p> <p>(11) At the other hand, parent's are very busy. (12) They do not have any time for preparing foods at home. (13) They are working most of the time. (14) Simply, They use from fast foods. (15) But, They do not have any knowledge about this type of feeding. (16) They pay attention to advertisement like their children. (17) They do not have any report about disadvantages of fast foods. (18) Over weight is one of these disadvantages.</p> <p>(19) In my opinion, The function of parents is very important. (20) They have to increase their knowledge about children feedings. (21) They must pay attention to over weighting. (22) So, They can have a schedual for eating food in fast foods. (23) For example, one time at the month. (24) Then, the can exist a situation for sport, and movement.</p>	<p>Point 1 Elaboration Point 2/cause Statement of the result/effect (elaboration) Point 1+ Rephrasing point 1 + repetition+ Statement of cause and effect Elaboration Statement of the issue Writer's point of view Elaboration + support by example + Point</p>
Conclusion	<p>(25) In summary, over weight can be solve with parents' function. (26) They have t increase their knowledge about feeding, and controlling over wight of children's with presenting a program for eating, movement, etc.</p> <p>(27) I wish, The children will have a normal weight at the world countries.</p> <p><b>(Total words: 273) (Lexical words: 115) (Lexical density: 42%)</b></p>	<p>Conclusion Restatement of the stance</p>

Producing a somewhat suitable answer in terms of the expectation of the prompt reveals that the writer has succeeded in translating the prompt appropriately. She has made some sense of the instructions to argue ‘for’ the topic. For example:

“Over weight is one of the most important problems in developed countries. Children, especially more than others involve with this problem. In fact, there are several reasons for overweighting children. Some factors are the number of fast foods and other factors are about the parents. They do not pay attention to children’s health.”

A discussion which may lead to an analytical or a hortatory style has been signalled in the first sentence, because the writer has begun by stating a controversial issue, and “In the case of the hortatory and analytical discussion, the starting point is a controversial issue” (Coffin 2004, p. 236). In addition, the main issue and the scope have been indicated. This indicates the writer’s appropriate meaning making.

“In my opinion, The function of parents is very important. They have to increase their knowledge about children feedings. They must pay attention to over weighting. So, They can have a schedual for eating food in fast foods. For example, one time at the month. Then, the can exist a situation for sport, and movement.”

However, the texts, in general, lack appropriate organization, structure and cohesiveness.

### **6.7.3.2 Participants**

The writer has over personalized the participants. Except on very few occasions the text lacks the use of impersonal participants. This divorces the text from an academic text as such. Conventionally, academic argumentative written texts are expected to have certain academic features. For example, as noted before, the register in such texts as shaped by field, tenor and mode (Halliday, & Hasan, 1985) directs the discourse to be “objective rather than personal or emotive discourse” (Mickan & Slater, 2003, p. 73). Identification and description of impersonal participants is regarded as one strategy for distinguishing an academic text. Participants, based on the systemic functional paradigm (Halliday, 1985) are the nouns that refer to what is going on in a sentence. Impersonal participants can manifest themselves in the form of the passive voice. They can be nouns referring to concrete entities which are also known as general participants, for example things, people, and places (cf. White, 2006).

Analysis of the texts shows that only on one occasion and only in the main body has the writer used a passive voice, as follows:

“All of the gardens in the cities are damaged and after one yeas or more we will see ten floors apartments.”

The writer has, however, personalized her argument by beginning with “I think...” (Table 6.1), and personalization has been overused in the text through the use of ‘I’, ‘we’, and ‘you’. She has also personalized the viewpoint throughout the entire ‘Introduction’. For example, ‘I’ in the first sentence, ‘you’ and ‘we’ (twice) in the second sentence, ‘our’ in the third, ‘us’ in the forth, ‘we’ in the fifth, and ‘we’ in the last sentence.

In a fashion that is very similar to text 1 the writer has over-applied personalization of participants in text 2. This text also lacks the use of impersonal participants. This situation makes the text look like a string of spoken words rather than academic written prose. Unlike texts 1 and 2, except on one occasion, there is no sign of personalization of the participants in text 3. The only occasion is the last sentence of the conclusion, “I wish, the children will have a normal weight at the world countries.” Otherwise, she has used impersonal participants such as ‘children’, ‘parents’. She has also managed to use abstract nominal groups such as ‘developed countries’, ‘fast foods’, ‘advertisement of fast foods’. The use of abstract and impersonal participants and, when appropriate, non-human participants, is an indication of an academic text (cf. Mickan & Slater, 2003).

### **6.7.3.3 Nominalisation**

Nominalization refers to a technique for changing verbs and adjectives in a clause to nouns (cf. Halliday, 1985). In so doing, the volume of data provided in a text will be compacted and the content will be more academic in character. Texts according to some scholars (Gerot, 1995) require clauses to have more nouns but fewer verbs, as “Heavy nominalization makes a text sound prestigious, abstract and formal, authoritative and impersonal” (p. 76).

A close look at the Atusa’s text 1 illustrates that except for very few occasions, the use of nominalization is almost absent. This minimal usage, in addition to personalization, makes

the text less academic in nature but more informal or casual (Eggins & Slade, 1997), for example, in the following extracts:

“we want comfortable and luxuries life style.... In these days we damage our environment....”

“you know, All of us come from natural, therefore we cope with this problems, without think about it. ...”

The excerpts indicate lack of application of the nominalization technique. This lack can be an indication of the candidate’s lack of awareness of the existence of the technique prior to attending the course. Given that the text has been developed at the beginning of the course, it shows a lack of the skills and literacies in this relation to the use of nominalization.

The absence of nominalization in text 2 is because the candidates were not provided with information about the technique and its application in their texts at this stage.

In text 3, however, Atusa has demonstrated her skills and literacy development in the use of nominalization. She has used the technique of changing verbs and adjectives into nouns. When appropriate, she has deliberately borrowed the main building blocks, for example ‘overweight children’ and ‘developed countries’ from the rubric to observe consistency by means of nominalization. Despite some shortcomings and flaws in her general English, (e.g. structural and spelling issues) she has followed to some extent academic conventions governing the generic structure of an essay. The writer has used nominalization to develop the theme. Developing the theme has resulted in the existence of a general assumption across the text keeping the reader on track.

The nominalization technique has been observed in different paragraphs across the text, for example: ‘Developed countries’, ‘the fast foods’ in the second paragraph and ‘the function of parents’ in the third paragraph. Mickan and Slater (2003) point out that the use of nominalization also contributes to increasing the academic and authoritative sound of a text. They argue that, “nominalization also helps to structure the text through topic nominalization and elaboration and through subsequent reiteration” (p. 78). The writer has also used “topic nominalization and elaboration” respectively across her text. She has managed to demonstrate her literacy development in producing writing of an academic nature. However, in order to observe the changes from different facets, I also considered

further analysis of the texts in terms of the application of clause complexes, which is discussed in the following sub-sections.

#### **6.7.4 Cohesiveness: cohesive ties and cohesive devices**

Cohesiveness in texts can be monitored by observing such aspects as unity, coherence and cohesion. Detail exploration of cohesive ties and cohesive devices is beyond the scope of this study (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1985, pp.70-96 for more information), but a concise review of the cohesive elements in a general sense is provided.

A cohesive tie as Halliday and Hasan (1976) put is a “semantic relation between an element in a text and some other element that is crucial to the interpretation of it” (p. 8). Such elements can be within the text named ‘endophoric’, or one of the elements can stay outside of the text referred to as ‘exophoric’. Although exophoric references contribute to linking a text to its situational context, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976), they do not contribute to the text cohesiveness. Thus, based on Halliday and Hasan (1976) lexical and grammatical links are responsible for the word and sentence order to make a text understandable as related discourse rather than a set of isolated words and sentences away from the context and meaning.

Cohesive ties with their semantic nature are responsible for making relation between the elements that form the texture of a text (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Such semantic relations, in the words of Halliday and Hasan (1985) “form the basis for cohesion between the messages of a text” (p. 73). The cohesive ties can appear in three kinds: (a) co-referential, (b) co-classification, and (c) co-extension (exploration of such aspects is beyond the focus of this study, so for detailed information see Halliday & Hasan, 1985).

The term cohesive devices, on the other hand, refers to a number of linguistic resources which contribute to the creation of cohesion of texts. The major classes of cohesive devices as Halliday and Hasan, 1985) introduce are: references, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical reiteration and collocation. There are, however, various subclasses which are beyond the scope of the current study. Following, I will provide a brief account of each of the major cohesive devices, and I will identify, describe, and analyse the extent to which these linguistic resources have been employed by the candidates when experiencing producing argumentative texts. This is important, because in evaluating the quality of an

argumentative text (although a controversial issue) in general and written argumentative texts in particular raters, primarily, (cf. Allard & Ulatowska, 1991) attend to the discourse features and cohesiveness of the texts in terms of coherence and cohesion. These are also among the descriptors for assessing IELTS test-takers' texts.

Analysis of the essays, as follows, focuses on the embedded lexico-grammatical constituents or building blocks which illustrate the presence and extent of cohesiveness throughout the texts.

#### **6.7.4.1 Unity: understanding the social purpose of the topic**

Unity refers to the meaningful relationship between the content of a text and the topic (Bailey & Powell, 1988, P. 28; Hasan, 1985, P. 52). In other words, the logical flow of the talk from general to specific is expected not to deteriorate because of irrelevant and non-aligned talk. Realization of the extent of control over unity in a text can be assisted by examining one of the linguistic resources, namely register (cf. Section 6.7.2.3). Analysis of the register used in text 1 shows violation of the unity.

“we don't have natural view from our house as a result we are tired from living in this prison that we make it. you know, All of us come from natural, therefore we cope with this problems, without think about it.”

“we want to come back the natural.(farms, rivers, see,...)”

The field of talk as advanced in the topic is about the damage that worldwide improvement in the standard of living causes to the environment. The conventional organization of the essay requires the writer to begin the text with an orientation (though not an obligation) followed by the primary position and then the preview in the introductory section. Therefore, the writer is expected to select appropriate vocabularies in order to demonstrate the logical link between these subsections and an overall link to the topic. On the contrary, however, the writer complains about the standard of living “...we are tired from living in this prison that we make it”. As observed in the excerpt, there is not much discussion about the relationship between “worldwide improvements in the standard of living” and “damage to the environment” as the main building blocks of the topic. Furthermore, the writer centres talk on the “natural view” which is not the main issue of the topic.

A primary analysis of text 1 indicates that the selected register mismatches the field; consequently, it fails to address the social purpose of the topic. For example, the following excerpts from the ‘Introduction’ signal a comparison between advantages and disadvantages of living in rural areas versus living in urban areas which is not in the scope or focus of the rubric or the task.

“I think these days all of us are far from natural living. you know, for example now we are living in luxuries and comfortable apartmants but we are far from farms or villages and .... As aresult our childrens can not play with animals. many of us living in the city refer to living in the villages. and we must cope with anxiety of this life style. we have many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc.”

In this section the writer talks generally about a change in lifestyle, rather than “damage to the environment”. Based on the conventional organization of an essay, the writer is expected to select appropriate wording in order to indicate the logical link between the subsections of the introduction and an overall link to the topic. However, from the last sentence, “we have many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc.” a reader may infer that the writer has meant this as an aspect of damage to the environment, although there is no logical link between the new and the given information. This situation has led to the lack of unity between this opening sentence and the rest of the text with the topic.

In text 2 also unity has not been observed possibly because of miscommunication with the topic and the task. For example, the following excerpts [from the main body (paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 respectively) and the conclusion] signal a comparison between advantages and disadvantages of living in rural areas versus living in urban areas, which is not in the scope or focus of the topic.

“In rural areas, we have many advantages for living human need to be with nature...”

“At the other hand, in rural areas, we have many disadvantages for living...”

“In addition to explain the rural areas, we have many advantages and disadvantages for living in the cities...”

“Finally, in my opinion, the living in rural areas is very useful for human...”

From the excerpts, analysis of the text indicates lack of unity. Examination of unity in a text can be used as an index to identify the extent of literacy development in meaning-making related to the prompts and producing a relevant and appropriate text accordingly.

Unlike in the other two examples, in text 3 the writer has used different tools and techniques to maintain the unity of the text. For example, the excerpts below:

“In Developed countries, the number of fast food is increasing. Advertisements of fast food daily present in mass media. Variety of them help to exist a tendency for childrens feeding. In addition to eat, children do not have any movement af eating. So, a lot of them have over weight.”

The main issue and the sub issues as outlined in the ‘introduction stage’ also have been discussed analytically. Except for one last instance of alteration from an analytical style to a hortatory style no major deviation in the argument’s social purpose is observable.

“The function of parents is very important. They have to increase their knowledge about children feedings. They must pay attention to over weighting. So, They can have a schedual for eating food in fast foods.”

As demonstrated, firstly, she has adopted an appropriate stance (“Over weight is one of the most important problems in developed countries.”), which is congruent with the directive of the prompt (“to what extent do you agree with these views?”). She has then exploited the key constituents of the topic in order to interpret and evaluate them. These indicate that to some extent there has been literacy learning of the appropriate application of linguistic resources in argumentative texts.

Another way of examining unity is the analysis of topic related lexis which may provide insight into the writer’s control of unity. “Lexical items used in different parts of a text indicate that the parts are actually related to a single idea, thus creating what is technically referred to as UNITY” (Fazelimanie, 2004, p. 13). This is important because the writer needs to provide the readers with elaboration, interpretation, evaluation and support, and also explain the way they relate to the topic.

Investigation of the texts 1, 2 and 3 resulted in identification of topic-related lexis as shown in 3 different columns in Table 6.8 below.

Table 6.8. Topic related lexis of the texts 1, 2 and 3

Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
<b>Damage to the environment</b>	<b>Developed World</b>	<b>Number of overweight children</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pollution, ...air, sound...</li> <li>• Pollution or psychological disease</li> <li>• Damage our environment</li> <li>• ...gardens in the city are damaged</li> <li>• Cars In the streets are the cause of air pollution and sound pollution</li> <li>• Pollutions are damaged ozone layer in the atmosphere</li> <li>• Don't have natural view</li> <li>• This problems (reference to damage to the environment)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About three-quarters of the people in Developed Countries</li> <li>• Developed Countries must explain it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overweight (5 times)</li> <li>• This problem</li> <li>• Overweight children</li> <li>• A lot of them (children) have overweight</li> <li>• These (overweight) disadvantage</li> <li>• Overweight can be solve</li> <li>• Controlling overweight of children's</li> <li>• Children will have a normal weight</li> </ul>
<b>Improvement living standard</b>	<b>The Third World</b>	<b>Developed countries</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxuries and comfortable apartments</li> <li>• Anxiety of this life style</li> <li>• Comfortable and luxuries life style</li> <li>• Ten floors apartments</li> <li>• Cars</li> <li>• ...tired from living in this prison (prison used as metaphor for improvement in the standard of living)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Third world</li> <li>• To Third worlds people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed countries</li> <li>• In Developed countries</li> <li>• World countries</li> </ul>
<b>Supports/reasons</b>	<b>Living in towns and cities</b>	<b>Fast food outlets</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we have many pollution, for example air, sound... and etc.</li> <li>• The pollution or psychological disease.</li> <li>• Many cars In the streets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• most people live in the cities or towns</li> <li>• Advantage for living in the cities.</li> <li>• Advantages of living in cities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of fast foods</li> <li>• The number of fast food</li> <li>• Advertisments of fast food variety of them</li> <li>• Fast foods</li> <li>• Disadvantages of fast foods</li> </ul>

<p>are the cause of air pollution and sound pollution...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we don't have natural view from our house</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eating food in fast foods</li> </ul>
	<b>Living in rural areas</b>	<b>Parents and children's health</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>living at the rural</li> <li>Think about living at the rural...</li> <li>Two-thirds of the population live in rural areas (3 times) in the rural...</li> <li>...explain the rural area...</li> <li>The living in rural areas is very useful</li> <li>level of living in rural areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children</li> <li>Other factors</li> <li>The parents</li> <li>they (parents) (11 times)</li> <li>children's health</li> <li>children feeding (2 times)</li> <li>children do not have movement af eating</li> <li>parent's very busy</li> <li>their children</li> <li>the function of parents</li> <li>knowledge</li> <li>situation for sport and movement</li> <li>parent's function</li> <li>feeding a program for eating, movement</li> </ul>

Analysis of text1 shows that in the first place the writer has been able to communicate with the prompt to some extent. She has made sense of the topic's general social purpose. For example, in the column (Damage to the environment) the relevance is shown either directly (i.e. "damage our environment") or indirectly (i.e. "pollution, air pollution and sound pollution", "damaged ozone layer in the atmosphere"). The column (Improvement in the standard of living) and the column (Supports/reasons) contain some topic-related lexis in their own categories. These show that the writer has made sense of the topic. The scope of the appropriate use of linguistic resources indicates a degree of literacy acquisition needed for the development of a text of an academic argumentative nature.

But, analysis of text 2 indicates that at this stage the writer lacks appropriate meaning-making in response to the prompt as a whole. The rubric expects the writer to discuss and suggest the manner in which the developed world can contribute to the Third World.

**Task:**

“Argue for or against the following statement:”

**“The developed world should lead by example and not insist that aid to the Third World is used to develop rural areas.”**

But, following an analytical style, the writer has mostly focused on the advantages and disadvantages of living in rural areas compared to living in urban areas (Table 6.8). This indicates the writer’s disorientation regarding the issue and the topic’s social purpose. The data suggest that the candidate has poor proficiency of language at this stage and lacks the required literacy for decoding the complex topic in order to understand the text, although it may be that further preparation practices will contribute to an improvement in problematic areas. Such an improvement has been demonstrated in the development of the participant’s third text. These significant findings might have pedagogical implications. Examination of text 3 indicates an appropriate understanding of the task as a whole. She has decoded the social purpose of the topic (Table 6.8). Despite an inadequate level of language proficiency she has, to some extent, provided a relevant answer to the expectation of the topic. She has identified and introduced the issues and discussed the causes and effects.

#### **6.7.4.2 Coherence**

Coherence is the underpinning of and meaningful link between the constituents of a text. This can be achieved by using, for example: (a) explanation of the supports, i.e. being more specific and providing more detail, (b) reminders of the opinion in the topic sentence, i.e. using some appropriate adjectival and/or adverbial phrase, and (c) application of appropriate transitional words (connectives and their derivations) at the critical locations (cf. Bailey & Powell, 1989). Coherence in the words of Halliday and Hasan (1976) is the “property of signalling that the interpretation of the passage in question depends on something else” (p. 13). These, however, may seem mechanical, but without them the reader may very probably be bewildered.

Analysis of text 1 revealed the general lack of coherence in almost the whole text. For example, the writer puts forward a point about damage to ozone layer, then, without providing a relevant argument, explanation or elaboration, talks about a new point.

“These pollutions are damaged ozone layer in the atmospher. we don’t have natural view from our house as aresult we are tired from living in this prison that we make it. you know, All of us come from natural, therefore we cope with this problems, without think about it.”

The excerpts show that after each point, the writer has not used the different techniques required (as discussed above) in order to maintain coherence.

An underpinning, meaningful link, however, is observable in the constituents of the content of the text 2 as a whole. The writer has achieved this by following the same line of discussion:

“In rural areas, we have many advantages for living human need to be with nature when we are living in this area, we can use from everything in natural form for example foods, weather, transportation. In addition to here we have not any pollution like air, sound and etc. in the rural we don’t have any mental disease like anxiety, Depression and etc, because we don’t have any stress.”

“At the other hand, in rural areas, we have many disadvantages for living. Here, we don’t have any welfare or facilities, for our living for example, when we want to wash up the dishes, don’t have warm water here, we don’t have any luxuries like Roys Roys for transporting.”

The writer has developed a focused discussion in the main body to explain the merits and demerits of country life. She has then provided an explanation that compares and contrasts the ways in which city life and country life differ:

“In addition to explain the rural areas, we have many advantages and disadvantages for living in the cities. Example for advantages of living in cities are the childre can go to the educated schools. But one of the disadvantages of living here is pollution.”

The writer has provided a coherent explanation of the differences between city life and country life and has succeeded in depicting the differences by providing organized arguments and points followed by relevant interpretation, evaluation and support. The

writer has achieved this goal by observing vocabulary appropriateness, collocation, and clause arrangement.

“Over weight”; “developed countries”; “Children, especially more than others involve with this problem.”; “several reasons for overweighting children”; “the number of fast foods”; “Advertisements of fast food daily present in mass media”; “parent’s are very busy.”; “They use from fast food.”; “They pay attention to advertisement like their children.”; “They do not have any report about disadvantages of fast foods.”; “Over weight is one of these disadvantages.”

The excerpts above indicate the writer’s use of such strategies as ‘reminders of the opinion in the topic sentence’ and ‘explanation of the supports’ in order for the control over coherence in the text. She has maintained the underpinning and meaningful link between and across the clauses by being more specific and providing more detail. She has also observed cohesion.

#### **6.7.4.3 Cohesion**

Cohesion refers to the conventional grammatical and syntactical togetherness of the constituents of a clause at the micro level or macro level in a text. The relationship of meaning between the parts of a text constitutes the texture of the text (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 71). In other words, cohesion in this sense refers to the compatibility of the building blocks of a linguistic form. This linguistic resource is used to describe the internal consistency of the constituents of texts, and Halliday and Hasan, (1976) say:

Cohesion occurs when the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. When this happens, a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed, are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text (p. 4).

Cohesion throughout a text can be monitored by the appropriate use of certain linguistic resources, for example ‘non-informational/grammatical word classes’. Non-informational/grammatical word classes refer to articles, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliaries and conjunctions (cf. White, 2006). Other scholars (cf. Pirie, 2003; Mickan & Slater, 2003; Smoke, 1998) have referred to such linguistic resources as lexical cohesion, conjunctions/transitional words, and reference.

### A. *Reference*

A convention of writing is avoiding repetition of nouns once they have been introduced to the reader. Avoidance of repetition can also be observed by means of reference. However, poor or imprecise or lack of control over appropriate use of reference may make it difficult for the reader to understand the text, or follow the line of inquiry (Mickan & Slater 2003). Participants who may be people, places or general things can be referred to with pronouns in a text. Pronouns such as personal and demonstrative are usually used as language resources to create logical and coherent links across a text (cf. Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Mickan & Slater, 2003).

Appropriate use of reference assists a reader to keep track of the participants (cf. Jones et al., 1989). For example, Mickan and Slater (2003) documented the use of reference in a study conducted to examine the candidates' interpretation of prompts and to compare NS candidates' written texts with those of OTEFL candidates for the IELTS. They show that appropriate use of reference makes it easy for the reader to follow a text. Yet, the consequence of lack of control over using reference or its inappropriate use is that "the reader must stop to trace the antecedents in the text" (p. 75), thus making it more difficult to understand, especially where there is a mixture of different singular and plural pronouns.

Analysis of the writer's first text showed that the first and second personal pronouns (i.e. I, you, we, and us) have been over-used. The third personal pronouns, however, have almost completely been neglected. The use of reference (though ungrammatical) occurred on only one occasion at the end of the text. The excerpt below shows the reference item, and its referent is underlined:

"you know, All of us come from natural, therefore we cope with this problems, without think about it. ..."

This shortcoming might be viewed as indicating that at this stage the writer has possibly lacked control over the appropriate use of pronouns as reference. Consequently, the reader may have difficulty in following the meaning.

Reference has not been applied in text 2. The only pronoun 'we' as used across the text has resulted in personalization of the participant.

“We have many advantages...”

“We are living in this area...”

“We have not any pollution...”

“We don’t have any disease... ,etc.”

In text 3, however, an appropriate use of reference also indicates an extent of development in the participant’s writing skills and literacy. An example of reference as used by the writer is ‘they’ (12 occasions out of 273 total words). See the following excerpts from one paragraph in the main body where the reference they has been underlined:

“At the other hand, parent’s are very busy. They do not have any time for preparing foods at home. They are working most of the time. Simply, They use from fast foods. But, They do not have any knowledge about this type of feeding. They pay attention to advertisement like their children. They do not have any report about disadvantages of fast foods.”

As demonstrated the candidate has used different forms of reference in her writing in order to avoid repetition of nouns. For example, in the extract above pronoun ‘they’ has been used to refer to ‘parents’. But, on other occasions she has appropriately used other aspects of reference such as “this problem” in sentence 2 and “Some factors” in sentence 4 of her ‘Introduction’ in order to help the potential reader keep track of the participants. There are, however, other instances of reference across the whole text.

### ***B. Lexical cohesion***

Compatibility of the informational words across a text is referred to as lexical cohesion. Lexical cohesion accompanied by reference can establish continuity in a text (Mickan & Slater, 2003). One of the indicators of literacy development can be the extent of a writer’s control over the appropriate selection of vocabularies to create meaningful and cohesive clauses. The choice of words creates connections in which words tend to occur together (cf. Halliday, 1985). Analysis of text 1 indicates a low level of such control across the whole text.

“we want comfortable and luxuries life style. without thinking about the pollution or psychological disease.”

The writer has begun her first sentence with the first person plural pronoun “we”, but the following sentence has begun with a preposition followed by a gerund “without thinking” which is not compatible with “we”. So, the excerpts demonstrate the absence of application of compatible informational words to create cohesion. This shortage can be interpreted as another probable lack of awareness of the required skills and literacies in developing writing. It is perhaps because of inexpert language knowledge that she has not been able to use lexical cohesion appropriately. The following excerpts demonstrate some more occasional uses as underlined.

“In these days we damage our environment.”... “All of the gardens in the cities are damaged...”...  
 “Many cars In the streets are the cause of airpollution and sound pollouction....”... “These pollutions are damaged ozone layer in the atmospher.”

In text 2, regardless of the lack of unity, use of lexical cohesion is evident. This is despite the fact that the whole text is not directly relevant to the topic and task:

“Today, most of people live in the cities or towns...” “... living at the rural.” “...think about living at the rural instead of town or city?” “About three-quarters of the people in Developed Countries live in towns, instead of this, in Third world two-Thirds of the population live in rural areas.” “In rural area...”, “...to explain rural areas...” “...advantage of living in cities...”, “...level of living in rural areas.”

The bulk of this piece involves a comparison between the advantages and disadvantages of rural life and city life. Yet, despite the deviation, use of lexical cohesion is evident.

In comparison, one of the techniques to control cohesion in text 3 has been the writer’s appropriate use of key constituents in the prompt.

“Over weight is one of the most important problems in developed countries. Children, especially more than others involve with this problem. In fact, there are several reasons for overweighting children. Some factors are the number of fast foods and other factors are about the parents. They do not pay attention to children’s health.”

Thus it can be seen that the writer has used techniques which indicate her control of the appropriate use of lexical cohesion - one aspect of academic writing skills. The writer has made an appropriate choice of wording. She has moved appropriately from general to specific. She has achieved this by monitoring the compatibility of informational words and their suitable positions in the context. In so doing, the writer has demonstrated a degree of

literacy learning in the appropriate application of lexical density to produce a conventionally acceptable written text.

### *C. Conjunctions*

Conjunction as a discourse system can be used as a means of observing logical relations in a text. They can be between clauses across a text (external conjunction) or between the sections (internal or rhetorical) that control the logical flow of the talk across the text (cf. Halliday & Hassan, 1976; Martin, 1983, 1992). Utilisation of internal conjunction creates a logical link across arguments in a text to form its rhetorical structure. Appropriate use of conjunctions can help the reader easily comprehend the text. Inappropriate or shortage or lack of application of conjunctions can lead to: (a) reader's difficulty in meaning making, (b) misinterpretation at discourse level, and (c) the text looking more spontaneous than an academic written text.

Analysis of text 1 indicated the absence of appropriately used conjunctions, for example, in the extract below.

“I think these days all of us are far from natural living. you know, for example now we are living in luxuries and comfortable apartmants but we are far from farms or villages and...As aresult our childrens can not play with animals. many of us living in the city refer to living in the villages. and we must cope with anxiety of this life style. we have many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc.”

The excerpt indicates the general lack of utilisation of conjunctions in the text. The use of this linguistic resource has appeared only on one occasion (‘As a result’), which is not in an appropriate sequence, in addition to the general connective (‘and’) . The first sentence, “I think these days all of us are far from natural living.” can address either a cause or an effect. If the writer intended, for example, to show it as a cause, then the reader might expect to be informed of the effect by the use of an appropriate conjunction.

Conventionally, reference to an effect, requires conjunctions such as ‘so’ or ‘as a result’. But, this is not observed in the text. The effect, however, appears in the third sentence which is not linked to an immediate preceding cause. In the rest of the text, for example, in the main body, there are some occasions of cause and effect, but there are no conjunctions to make the link clear. This shortage has resulted in the text looking like a string or set of diverse utterances without a logical connection.

Unlike text 1, the writer has used some external and internal conjunctions to observe cohesion in text 2. For example, the writer has demonstrated this development of knowledge by using ‘in addition to’ in paragraphs 2 and 4 of the main body, and also the use of ‘At the other hand’ in the third paragraph, and the concessive conjunction ‘But’ in the fourth and the last paragraph to indicate another idea. In the last paragraph the use of ‘Finally’ signals the ‘Conclusion’.

“In fact, people don’t remember ...”

“In addition to here we have not any pollution like air...”

“At the other hand, in rural areas, we have many disadvantages for living.”

In text 3, the writer has shown to some extent an increase in control over the appropriate use of conjunctions, for example ‘concessive conjunction’ or ‘concluding’ and ‘sequencing’ in comparison to texts 1 and 2.

“But, They do not have any knowledge about this type of feeding.”

“So, They can have a scheduled for eating food in fast foods.”

“Then, the can exist a situation for sport, and movement.”

Comparison and contrast as found in some samples of the three texts, in terms of the application of conjunctions, indicate some development of this aspect of literacy in producing argumentative texts by the writer. In so doing, the writer has demonstrated some understanding of how to create cohesion through the use of conjunctions.

#### **6.7.4.4 Theme/Rheme: cohesion and orientation management**

Theme/Rheme pattern is one of the linguistic resources in order to monitor cohesion in texts (cf. Chapter 7, Section 7.2.2.2/A/d, p. 226 for more information about Theme/Rheme). ‘Theme’ is also known as given information (though not always the exact copy of Theme), and in the words of Halliday, (1994, p. 37) occupies an initial position preceding the process to “serve as the point of departure of the message”. Also, it functions to orientate the reader towards the meaning of the clause. The clause concerned could be unmarked or marked. Marked Theme in SFL (Halliday, 1985b) refers to positioning a circumstance prior to the subject (traditional grammar) as part of the ‘Theme’. The rest of the clause, which provides the reader/hearer with some information about the Theme, is known as ‘Rheme’. Rheme which usually forms the ending part of

the clause or sentence is also known as new information. New information signals the focus of the information.

The thematic principle is inclusive of subordinate clauses. The positioning of a subordinate clause at the beginning of a sentence is considered by Martin (1992) to ensure its function as a marked Theme. Development of this knowledge about positioning of clauses appropriately and its application in the development of clauses or sentences, provides cohesion across clauses and the text.

Theme/Rheme is used in order to monitor cohesiveness at discourse level (Martin, 1993b; Fries, 1994) in argumentative writing. Given that a significant property of written argumentative texts is a high frequency of cross references, Theme/Rheme is a suitable tool in order to examine students' extent of control over appropriate use of thematic structure, thematic selection and progression. I begin my discussion about Theme/Rheme with thematic structure.

#### *A. Thematic structure*

Theme tells the reader/hearer what the text is about. The rest of the clause which develops this is referred to as Rheme. The following excerpt provides an example.

“we want comfortable and luxuries life style” (Table 6.5, Text 1, Clause 7).

**Table 6.9. Theme/Rheme pattern: subject as Theme**

Theme	Rheme
we	want comfortable and luxuries life style

In the example above the declaration clause is unmarked. In the English language, by nature, Theme of an unmarked declarative clause is often the subject. Also, in the English language the topical clause is the beginning semantic constituent which can represent the participant, process or circumstance harmoniously. The topical clause of the message is realised either by the subject, predicator and complement of the clause or by its circumstantial adjunct (Halliday, 1994, p. 44). Based on Halliday (1994), following, I provide some instance respectively. For example, in Table 6.9 above the subject represents

the Theme, while the excerpt below demonstrates an example of circumstantial adjunct as Theme.

“In rural areas, we have many advantages for living human need to be with nature...” (Table 6.6, Text 2, Clause 5).

**Table 6.10. Theme/Rheme pattern: circumstantial adjunct**

Theme	Rheme
In rural areas,	we have many advantages for living human need to be with nature...

The excerpt below is an example of complement as Theme.

“In addition to here we have not any pollution like air, sound and etc” (Table 6.6, Text 2, Clause 6).

**Table 6.11. Theme/Rheme pattern: complement as Theme**

Theme	Rheme
In addition to here	we have not any pollution like air, sound and etc

In this way the writer is emphatic on the complement. So, when up fronted, the subject, circumstantial adjunct, and complement are all referred to as topical Themes, because they refer to the content of what is being talked about by the clause. However, I need to underscore here that not whatever word is up fronted may be referred to as topical Theme. For example, members of modals and conjunctive adjuncts cannot be topical Themes, though they have metafunctional affiliations which I will consider later in this section.

Theme can either be marked or unmarked. For example, the excerpt shown in Table 6.9 which begins with subject is called unmarked, whereas excerpts indicated in Tables 6.10 and 6.11 (non-subjects) are instances of marked.

### ***B. Metafunctions of Themes***

Themes, according to Halliday (1994, p. 54), can have such metafunctional affiliations as textual, interpersonal and ideational as demonstrated with their components in Table 6.12 below.

**Table 6.12. The metafunctional relationship of Thematic building blocks**

metafunction	component of Theme
Textual	continuative <sup>5</sup> , structural (conjunctive or WH-interrogative <sup>6</sup> ), conjunctive (adjunct)
Interpersonal	vocative <sup>7</sup> , modal (adjunct) finite (verb) WH- interrogative <sup>6</sup>
Ideational	Topical (subject, complement, or circumstantial adjunct)

**C. Multiple Themes**

Some clause appears as multiple Themes if a topical Theme is accompanied by up fronted interpersonal and/or textual Theme. In such a case, they all will be embedded in one clause, for instance:

“At the other hand, in rural areas, we have many disadvantages for living” (Table 6.6, Text 2, Clause, 8).

**Table 6.13. Multiple Theme**

Theme			Rheme
textual	ideational		
conjunctive	complement	topical	
At the other hand	in rural areas	we	
			have many disadvantages for living

In some occasions, however, a multiple Theme may even embed more elements. For example, see the following clause as I have developed based on Halliday (2003, pp. 303-320).

“Okay, but then Peter, probably, wouldn’t a better idea be to remove that section entirely?”

**Table 6.14. An example of a more comprehensive multiple Theme**

Theme							Rheme
textual			interpersonal			experiential	
continuative	structural	conjunctive	vocative	modal	finite	topical	
Okay	but	then	Peter	probably	wouldn’t	a better idea	
							be to remove that section entirely

<sup>5</sup> Based on (Halliday, 1994) smallest of items such as ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘well’, ‘oh’, ‘now’ which are used to signal initiating or continuing moves in a discourse are referred to as continuatives.

<sup>6</sup> In this case, WH-constituent either in a relative or interrogative clause can function entirely as or as a part of the subject, complement or adjunct. It can also be the entire or a part of topical Theme. However, in case of WH-interrogative the element may be topical Theme as well. And aslso, in the case of WH-relative the textual Theme may be the topical as well.

<sup>7</sup> A vocative is an optional nominal in discourse. It signals to the people involved, that the clause refers to her/him or them.

Table 6.14 demonstrates that continuative ‘Okay’ links the text back to the previous interlocutor, ‘but’ signals proposal of a conflicting point of view, ‘then’ bridges the previous utterance to the forthcoming, the vocative ‘Peter’ clarifies the next interlocutor directly involved, ‘probably’ indicates an extent of workability of the suggestion, ‘wouldn’t’ indicates an extent of formality of the interpersonal relationship, the topical Theme is realised in ‘a better idea’. The rest of the clause forms the Rheme. However, combination of Theme/Rheme can be of different patterns.

Previous studies (Belmonte & McCabe-Hidalgo, 1998; Danes, 1974) have shown that academically accredited writers’ preference is to thematize either Discourse Themes or Topical Themes. Thematic progression as proposed by Danes (1974) refers to “the choice and ordering of utterance Themes, their mutual concatenation and hierarchy, as well as their relationship to the hyperthemes of the superior text units (such as paragraph, chapter...) to the whole of text, and to the situation” (p. 114). Major patterns of thematic progression have been proposed by Danes (1974), and I have tabulated them as follows in order to assist me in the process of the analysis. The analysis seeks to reveal students’ approach to Theme selection and Theme progression. I demonstrate the findings below.

#### ***D. Thematic progression***

The four major patterns of thematic progression (Danes, 1974) are discussed below followed by analysis of the texts produced in the current study accordingly. The basic principle is that thematic choices should not be unexpected. They should be relevant to the elements indicated in a previous Theme or Rheme.

##### ***a. Linear or ‘zig-zag’ pattern***

In linear pattern, an item that is first introduced in the Rheme of a clause becomes the Theme of the subsequent clause. The generic sequence is shown in table 6.15.

**Table 6.15. The generic sequence of linear progression**

Theme 1	Rheme 1
Theme 2 = Rheme 1	Rheme 2
Theme 3 = Rheme 2	Rheme 3

The candidate has used this pattern only in one occasion in three consecutive sentences in the main body of text 1. In fact, out of 18 sentences which form the whole text, only 3 clauses in sentences 12, 13 and 14 follow this pattern as demonstrated in Table 6.16.

**Table 6.16. Application of linear progression in text 1**

Theme	Rheme
(12) In other point we	are noticed the cars.
(13) Many cars In the streets	are the cause of air pollution and sound pollution In the cities like Tehran.
(14) These pollutions	are damaged ozone layer in the atmospher.

From the data, the candidate addresses “cars” as a problem in the Rheme of clause (12). Then, she puts “cars” in the word group “Many cars in the streets” in order to form the Theme of clause (13). In clause (13), the Rheme introduces the reasons for considering cars as a problem in city life, because they are responsible for such pollutions as sound and air pollution. “These pollutions” then becomes the Theme of clause (14).

Unlike text 1, this pattern has not been used in text 2. But, the candidate has used it in 4 occasions out of 27 sentences which form the whole text 3. Table 6.17 provides the data about the clauses.

**Table 6.17. Application of linear progression in text 3**

Theme	Rheme
(3) In fact, there	are several reasons for overweighting children.
(4) Some factors	are the number of fast foods and other factors are about parents.
(5) They	do not pay attention to children’s health.
(8) Variety of them	help to existe a tendency for children feeding
(9) In addition to eat, children	do not have any movement af eating.
(25) In summary, over weight	can be solve with parents’ function.
(26) They	have t increase their knowledge about feeding and controlling overweight of children’s with presenting a program for eating, movement, etc.

In the Rheme of clause (3) “several reasons” are considered responsible for overweighting children. The candidate has used the relevant synonym “Some factors” as the Theme of clause (4). The factors have been introduced in the Rheme of clause (4), and then instead

of “parents”, the third person plural pronoun “They” has been used as the Theme of clause (5), and so on and so forth.

***b. Continuous or constant Theme/Rheme***

In this pattern, the same Theme remains the focus of the discourse in a sequence of clauses. However, information is built up in the following Rhemes. The generic pattern is demonstrated in Table 6.18 below.

**Table 6.18. The generic sequence of continuous or constant progression**

Theme 1	Rheme 1
Theme 2 ↓	Rheme 2
Theme 3 ↓	Rheme 3
Theme 4 ↓	Rheme 4

The candidate has used constant Theme/Rheme in 2 occasions in text 1 and Table 6.19 indicates the data about the clause.

**Table 6.19. Application of constant progression in text 1**

Theme	Rheme
(5) and we ↓	must cope with anxiety of this life style
(6) we ↓	have many pollution for example air, sound...and etc.
(15) we ↓	don't have natural view from our house.
(16) as a result, we ↓	are tired from living in this prison that we make it.

Application of constant Theme/Rheme is observable in 6 occasions in text 2. The clauses are shown in Table 6.20.

**Table 6.20. Application of constant progression in text 2**

Theme	Rheme
(1) Today, most of people	live in the cities or towns.
(2) In fact, people	↓ don't remember the advantages of living at the rural.
(6) In addition to here we	↓ have not any pollution like air, sound and etc.
(7) in the rural we	↓ don't have any disease like anxiety, Depression and etc,...
(8) At the other hand, in rural areas, we	↓ have many disadvantages for living.
(9) Here, we	↓ don't have any welfare or facilities, for our living for example, ...

This kind of sequences has been used in 14 occasions in text 3 and Table 6.21 indicates the excerpts from the clause.

**Table6.21. Application of constant progression in text 3**

Theme	Rheme
(7) Advertisements of fast food daily	present in mass media.
(8) Variety of them	↓ help to existe a tendancy for children feeding.
(9) In addition to eat, children	do not have any movement af eating.
(10) So, a lot of them	↓ have over weight.
(11) At the other hand, parent's	are very busy.
(12) They	↓ do not have any time for preparing foods at home.
(13) They	↓ are working most of the time
(14) Simply, they	↓ use from fast foods.
(15) But, they	↓ do not have any knowledge about this type of feeding.
(16) They	↓ pay attention to advertisement like their children.
(17) They	↓ do not have any report about disadvantages of fast food.
(20) They	↓ have to increase their knowledge about children feeding.
(21) They	↓ must pay attention to overweighting.
(22) So, they	↓ can have a schedual for eating food in fast foods.

Tables 6.19 and 6.21 show that the candidate takes the same Theme or a related word or synonym either a single word or a word group to form the Theme of the following clause.

For example, in Table 6.19 the first person plural pronoun “we” which is the Theme of clause (5) has been used as the Theme of clause (6). But, in Table 6.21 the Theme of clause (7) “Advertisement of fast food daily” has been changed to the related word group “variety of them” as the Theme of clause (8).

*c. Split Rheme progression*

In this kind, the Rheme of the first clause contains more than one bit of new information (NI) which is split up in order to introduce the Themes of subsequent clauses. This kind of progression can also have occasions of embedded constant Theme pattern. Table ... shows the generic structure.

**Table 6.22. The generic sequence of split Rheme progression**

Theme 1	↓	Rheme 1 = (NI 1 + NI 2 + NI 3 + .... )
Theme 2 = NI 1	↓	Rheme 2
Theme 3 = NI 2	↓	Rheme 3
Theme 4 = Theme 3	↓	Rheme 4
Theme 5 = NI 3	↓	Rheme 5

Texts 1 and 3 do not demonstrate the use of split Rheme progression. But, text 2 has used this kind of progression in one occasion in sentences (10), (11) and (12) as indicated in Table 6.23.

**Table 6.23. Application split Rheme progression in text 2**

Theme	Rheme
(10) In addition to explain the rural areas, we	have many advantages and disadvantages for living in the cities.
(11) Example for advantages of living in cities	are the children can go to the educated schools.
(12) But one of the disadvantages of living here	is pollution.

Base on the data, in the Rheme of clause (10) the candidate points out that there are “many advantages and disadvantages for living in the cities”. She, then, form the Themes of clauses (11) and (12) with word groups containing the words “advantages” and “disadvantages” and elaborates on them separately in the related Rhemes.

*d. Derived hyperthematic progression*

In this kind of thematic progression the particular Themes in the next clauses are derived from a hypertheme, or the same overriding Theme. The hypertheme, in my point of view, however, may be latent in the Theme group or phrase. In this case the Theme/Rheme sequence may be with empty Rheme (cf. Bloor & Bloor, 1992). The generic pattern of this type is shown in Table 6.24.

**Table 6.24. The generic sequence of derived hyperthematic progression**

Hyper Theme	Rheme/emptyRheme
Theme 1	Rheme 1
Theme 2	Rheme 2
Theme 3	Rheme 3

The candidate has not applied derived hyperthematic progression in texts 1 and 2. But, the introduction section of text 3 begins with a hypertheme – overweight. Table 6.25 provides the data.

**Table 6.25. Application of derived hyperthematic progression in text 3**

Hyper Theme	Rheme/emptyRheme
(1) Overweight	is one of the most important problems in developed countries.
(2) Children, especially more than others	involve with this problem.
(3) In fact, there	are several reasons for overweighting children.

The excerpts show that although Theme of clauses (2) and (3) are different, they are related to the hypertheme of “Overweight” which is the Theme of clause (1).

Overall, analysis of the data shows a steady increase in the application of Theme/Rheme from text 1 (16%) to text 2 (20%) and to text 3 (64%) (Table 6.26).

**Table 6.26. Percentage of the application of Theme/Rheme in the texts**

Text progression	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
Linear	2	----	4
Constant	2	3	10
Split	----	2	----
Hyperthematic	----	----	2
Total and %	4 (16%)	5 (20%)	16 (64%)

However, the upward trend in using Theme/Rheme is not necessarily convincing evidence of students' strong point in producing conventionally appropriate argumentative texts, because this depends on the kind of thematic progression they use in their texts. For example, to mention a few problems, the candidate has over-used constant Theme progression in text 3 (10 occasions) which has resulted in a sharp rise in using Theme/Rheme in comparison to texts 1 and 2. But, the problem with over-using this kind of progression is that the text may look like a list which does not provide readers with much data. The problem, however, may be removed provided students use more of 'zig-zag' and/or 'split' Rheme patterns in order to explore the perspectives introduced as new information in Rheme and to create more ideas to discuss.

Another important point to attend to in using Theme/Rheme is incidents of Discoursal and Topical confusion. Unclear selection of Discoursal Themes may lead to readers' confusion in understanding the writer's perspective and argument. For example, text 1 (Table 6.5) indicates a number of jumps of ideas, because of the lack of clear links between the selected Themes. This may also act as the source of other emerging problems, for example:

- a) It may lead to a large and irrelevant stretch of talk between an item introduced in a Rheme and its subsequent appearance in Thematic position. An instance can be seen in text 1 between clauses (7) to (14) where the candidate introduces "pollution" in clause (8) and later returns to it in clause (14), whereas, conventionally, it should have appeared in clause (9).
- b) It may result in introducing a number of new Themes without elaboration, interpretation and evaluation. This can also be observed in different sections of text 1, for example, between clauses (14) to (18).

Also of importance is the problem of students using Themes without clear reference. For example, students may over-use personal pronouns particularly the first and the second personal pronouns either singular or plural (cf. Text 1, Table 6.5) instead of impersonal participants such as ‘people’, or introducing them specifically in complex nominal groups.

Tables 6.27, 6.28, and 6.29 demonstrate the application of Theme/Rheme in the three texts.

**Table 6.27. Application of Theme in Introductions**

Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
I you we (3 times) many of us and we	Today Infact	Overweight Children in fact Some factors They

Analysis of the application of Theme in the introductory section of the texts (Table 6.27) demonstrates that the applied Themes generally orient the reader to the participants involved except for one occasion in text 2 which orients the reader to time (‘Today’).

Analysis of themes in the introductions of the three texts reveals a significant development in the organization of information within clauses. Unlike text 1 in which Themes are simple nominal groups (usually single, “I, you, we” and involving the writer), texts 2 and 3 indicate the use as Theme of impersonal participants and complex nominal groups.

“To day” (Text 2)

“Overweight children” (Text 3)

These complex nominal groups (some of them marked) are a common feature of the written mode which requires some preplanning. This is less common in the spoken mode (Eggins, 1994).

Another finding is a shift from personalization to the involvement of other participants as people, environment and phenomena. In the main body (Table 6.28) this trend is observable as the text furnishes the reader with more information, indicating an improvement in the extent of control over the use of language resources.

**Table 6.28. Application of Theme in Main bodies**

Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
We (4 times) In these days we people All of the gardens in the cities In other points we Many cars in the streets These pollutions You	About three-quarters of the people in Developed countries In rural areas In addition to here we in the rural we At the other hand Here In addition to explain the rural areas Example for advantages of living in cities But	In Developed countries Advertisements of fast food daily Variety of them In addition to eat So (2 times) At the other had They (6 times) Simply But Overweight In my opinion For example Then

Analysis of the concluding sections of the three texts also shows some development (Table 6.29), that is, from no conclusion (Text 1) to development of a conclusion in text 2 with an appropriate structure, and a more extended and developed conclusion in text 3. The writer has used Theme/Rheme to angle the orientation towards its social purpose.

**Table 6.29. Application of Theme in Conclusions**

Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
	Finally The developed countries	In summary They I

Over all, the analysis of themes in the introductory sections of the three texts reveals a significant change in the organization of information within clauses. In texts 1 and 2 the system of theme by personalization ('I', 'You', and 'We') does not organize the clause to signal the relationship of its local context to the general context of the text as it is supposed to do (Halliday, 1985b, 1994). But, in text 3 the writer has shown a clear relationship by selection of topic-focused impersonal participants ('Overweight', 'children', and 'some factors') demonstrating a significant development. In text 1 themes are mainly simple nominal groups referring to personal participants ('I', 'You', 'We') and in text 2 the thematic shift is towards orientation of the reader to time or facts. In comparison, in text 3 the writer has used complex nominal groups (overweight children) and impersonal

participants (children, they) to orient the reader to the issues at stake. The writer has shown her skill and literacy development in understanding the concept of Theme/Rheme pattern and applying it in her writing, as for example in the excerpts below:

“In fact, there are several reasons for overweighting children. Some factors are the number of fast foods and other factors are about the parents. They do not pay attention to children’s health.”...

“Advertisements of fast food daily present in mass media. Variety of them help to existe a tendancy for childrens feeding.”

Using a Theme-Rheme arrangement, the writer has succeeded in angling the orientation towards its social purpose and showing the logical and meaningful links and flow of discussion in her writing. Complex nominal group and impersonal participants are more typical of the written mode than the spoken. Analysis of the texts in terms of application of Theme/Rheme also revealed to some extent the appropriate use of the pattern by the candidates in text 3. Analysis of some more texts, for example those of Arash and Khashy, (cf. Appendices, H and I and Sections 6.5.3.1 and 6.7.5) also showed more or less the same trends, although to a lesser extent in the texts of Arash, but to a greater extent in those of analysis of Khashy.

These findings suggest development in the employment of Theme/Rheme so that the reader can follow the logic of the text and the angle of its social purpose (Martin, 1993b). Theme/Rheme has implications for IELTS preparation courses and EFL/ESL classes in order to elevate students’ expert knowledge in terms of control over cohesiveness at discourse level. It also has implications for IELTS academic writing test rating in order to assess the extent of cohesiveness at discourse level in test-takers’ argumentative texts. Next, I look at another technique used in texts to make them demonstrate an academic argumentative nature, namely Nominalization.

### **6.7.5 Atusa, Arash and Khashy’s texts: analysis of clause complexes**

In this section I compare and contrast the three sets of three texts in terms of their use of clause complexes (Tables 6.30, 6.31, and 6.32). The comparison is carried out in terms of the quantity and the quality of the clauses. Then, I break them down into their sections (i.e. Introduction, Main body, and Conclusion) to provide clearer comparative discussion and elaboration.

**Table 6.30. Atusa's texts in phases 1, 2 and 3, (researcher's data, 2007)**

texts stages	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
<b>Introduction</b>	<p>I think    these days all of us are far from natural living. you know,    for example now we are living in luxuries and comfortable apartmants    but we are far from farms or villages and .... As aresult our childrens can not play with animals. many of us [[living in the city]] refer to [[living in the villages]]. and we must cope with anxiety of this life style. we have many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc.</p>	<p>Today, most of people live in the cities or towns. Infact, people don't remember the advantages [[of living at the rural]]. Do you ever think [[about living at the rural instead of town or city]]?</p>	<p>Over weight is one of the most important problems in developed countries. Children, especially more than others involve with this problem. In fact, there are several reasons for overweighting children. Some factors are the number of fast foods    and other factors are about the parents. They do not pay attention to children's health.</p>

<p>Main body</p>	<p>we want comfortable and luxuries life style. without thinking about the pollution or psychological disease. In these days we damage our environment. people have beenleft their house in village    and are coming to the city. All of the gardens in the cities are damaged    and after one yeas or more we will see there ten floors apartments.</p> <p>In other points we are noticed the cars. Many cars In the streets are the cause of airpollution and sound pollouction In the cities like Tehran.</p> <p>These pollutions are damaged ozone layer in the atmospher. we don't have natural view from our house    as aresult we are tired from [[living in this prison]] [[ that we make it]]. you know,    All of us come from natural,   therefore we cope with this problems, [[without think about it]].</p> <p>we want to come back the natural. (farms, rivers, see,...)</p>	<p>About three-quarters of the people in Developed Countries live in towns,    instead of this, in Third world two-thirds of the population live in rural areas.</p> <p>In rural areas, we have many advantages [[for living human need]] to be with nature [[when we are living in this area]], we can use from everything in natural form for example foods, weather, transportation. In addition to here we have not any pollution like air, sound and etc. in the rural we don't have any mental disease like anxiety, Depression and etc,    because we don't have any stress.</p> <p>At the other hand, in rural areas, we have many disadvantages [[for living]]. Here, we don't have any welfare or facilities, [[for our living]] for example, [[when we want to wash up the dishes]], don't have warm water here,    we don't have any luxuries like Roys Roys [[for transporting]].</p> <p>In addition to explain the rural areas,    we have many advantages and disadvantages [[for living in the cities]]. Example for advantages [[of living in cities]] are the childre can go to the educated schools. But one of the disadvantages [[of living here]] is pollution.</p>	<p>In Developed countries, the number of fast food is increasing. Advertisments of fast food daily present in mass media. Variety of them help [[to existe]] a tendency [[for childrens feeding]]. In addition to eat,    children do not have any movement [[af eating]]. So, a lot of them have over weight.</p> <p>At the other hand, parent's are very busy. They do not have any time [[for preparing foods]] at home. They are working most of the time. Simply, They use from fast foods. But, They do not have any knowledge about this type [[of feeding]]. They pay attention to advertisement like their children. They do not have any report about disadvantages of fast foods. Over weight is one of these disadvantages.</p> <p>In my opinion, The function of parents is very important. They have to increase their knowledge [[about children feedings]]. They must pay attention to over weighting. So, They can have a schedual [[for eating food]] in fast foods. For example, one time at the month. Then, the can exist a situation for sport, and movement.</p>
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<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>Finally, in my opinion, [[the living in rural areas]] is very useful for human,    but we must increase the welfare and level of living in rural areas. The Developed countries must explain it to Third worlds people.</p> <p><b>(Total words: 219);</b>  <b>(Lexical words: 83);</b>  <b>(Lexical density: 38%)</b></p>	<p>Finally, in my opinion, [[the living in rural areas]] is very useful for human,    but we must increase the welfare and level of living in rural areas. The Developed countries must explain it to Third worlds people.</p> <p><b>(Total words: 259);</b>  <b>(Lexical words: 106);</b>  <b>(Lexical density: 41%)</b></p>	<p>In summary, over weight can be solve with parents' function. They have to increase their knowledge [[about feeding]], and [[controlling over wight of children's]] [[with presenting]] a program [[for eating]], movement, etc.</p> <p>I wish, The children will have a normal weight at the world countries.</p> <p><b>(Total words: 273);</b>  <b>(Lexical words: 115);</b>  <b>(Lexical density: 42%)</b></p>
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**Table 6.31. Arash's texts in phases 1, 2 and 3, (researcher's data, 2007)**

<b>Stage/ Section</b>	<b>Text 1</b>	<b>Text 2</b>	<b>Text 3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<p>As the population grows up    the improvements for standard of living Expand relatively. Day after day Generations improves    and for response to grown up needs    we seek for new resources. Today living without these civilization device is like nightmare. we used to use these improvements. All of us knows    that the pollution of Environment grows up    and it will be a risk for us but    it becomes a part of our life.</p> <p>In my opinion we should set some strategies [[to get the benefits of recent technologies]] but accordingly we should not omit [[to keep our environment safe]].</p>	<p>Now a days, the majority of population in developed countries live in towns and cities    but, on the other hand the larger amount of population live in rural areas in developing countries. I agree [[that developed world should help the third would to develop rural areas]].</p>	<p>The number of overweight children in developed countries is increasing. I agree [[that parents are to blame for not looking after their children's health]]. There were many reasons    that parents can do [[to control this increasingly obesity problem]].</p>

<b>Main body</b>	<p>accordingly we should not omit [[to keep our environment safe]].</p> <p>One of the major hazards [[which now is green house gas the main resource of this problem]] is world industrial plans. we should keep in mind [[that all of us are the victims of technology]]. As the matter of fact we should keep our government [[to control this problem]].</p> <p>Recycle of materials is one of the ways [[to keep the Environment clean]] and keep resource last longer. [[Because of human biengs is one part of this Environment]] and our life is dependant to it    we should do our effort [[to keep it clean safe and pollution free]].</p> <p>I am a Engineer in the field of pavement. I'll do my best [[to reduce distroy material]]. Such as use new technology [[for paving roads by recyclable materials]]. Environment needs a prompt help. Make your effort [[to keep it]].</p>	<p>It is obvious [[that the facilities in urban areas is much better than rural area]]. Also it is included in health condition and factors. So if any communicable disease happen in third world    it can be a serious hazard for developed world too. As an example, the maim source of spreading HIV was found in Africa    but know all the world are cope with this evil disease.</p> <p>There is a famous proverb in my language [[which says    “you should have a large ocean    to find a nomerous worthy pearls]].” There were a lot of good students in the Third world [[which could not educate well only]] because of poor education system in their country. If they prepared well in both phisical and mental fields, part of them    will have a suitable chance of migrate to developed countries    and undoubtly acts as a good scientist or worker there.</p>	<p>At first I believe [[that most overweight children are breeding in families]] [[which father and mother or at least one of them is fat]]. It means that    because the family’s common habbits in feeding is not work properly    so, their children become fat easily. On the other hand if the parents could omit the fast foods from their diet,    they would be able to become fit.</p> <p>Secondly, the majority of overweight children have a very little activity. Parents play a great role in this part. In fact they can manage their children’s time    and encourage them [[to do physical activities]]. For example parents can easily put a rutine daily exercize in families program. By this plan [[both parents and their children would be helthy and fit]].</p> <p>At last but not least, parents can negotiate with fitness advisors    and asked them for help. By this they can easily and correctly guide their children in a way that, [[they can decrease ther weight]]. In this procedure the can persuade their children with gifts and prizes.</p>
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<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>As a conclusion in the reason that all human beings live in a same world    and the problems of societies do not be limited in the boundries    thus developed countries should help Third world. In this way their societies will be safe    and protect well. Also they can find many good and fresh talents in the Third world [[which easily fill the need of increasingly need for professional workers and scientists]].</p> <p><b>(Total words: 234)</b>  <b>(Lexical words:106)</b>  <b>(Lexical Density: 45%)</b></p>	<p>In conclusion, Although the growing number of fast foods outlets is a one of the reasons of children’s obesity   but, the parent management role in family’s diet control is much more significant. Undoubtly parent should be very careful in their job    and they must be looking after their children’s health.</p> <p><b>(Total words: 261)</b>  <b>(Lexical words:125)</b>  <b>(Lexical Density: 47%)</b></p>	<p>In conclusion, Although the growing number of fast foods outlets is a one of the reasons of children’s obesity   but, the parent management role in family’s diet control is much more significant. Undoubtly parent should be very careful in their job    and they must be looking after their children’s health.</p> <p><b>(Total words: 261)</b>  <b>(Lexical words:118)</b>  <b>(Lexical Density: 45%)</b></p>
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**Table 6.32. Khashy’s texts in phases 1, 2 and 3, (researcher’s data, 2007)**

texts stages	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
<b>Introduction</b>	<p>I believe [[that damage to the environment is an inevitable consequences of worldwide improvements in the standard of living]], but if people want to live on the earth for long time,[[want to have the healthy children,]] [[want to be healthy]], [[ want to enjoy of their life]], [[want to have beautiful environment and etc..]] they should decrease the speed [[of polluting their environment]] and using energy.</p>	<p>Becoming developed is a very important problem [[that any developing country has]]. In this case [[living in rural and urban areas]], play a noticeable role. As we know [[although three-quarters of the population in developed countries live in urban areas]], in developing countries this ratio is about one-third. So, the civilized countries help the developing countries,    but they insist on the use of aids for developing rural areas.</p>	<p>Fatness is a very big problem in all society, specially in civilized country in these days. But, this problem is much greater [[when it happens in low ages, specially in children]]. some people think that this would be because of bad food system in civilized country, For example, fast food and deviation of traditional eating systems. Others believe [[that it would be the parents fault]] [[who are not looking forward their children’s health]]. Now, I want [[to explain about both these view of points]].</p>

<b>Main body</b>	<p>I agree    that damage to the environment is an inevitable consequence of world wide,[[ because in new style of living, most of our energy obtain from fossil fuels like gas, oil and coal and also nuclear power]] is more dangerous than fossil fuels. Also the growth of population    cause the more use of water, air, wood, coal, gas, oil nuclear power    and also factories should work more and... . So this will cause more pollution in our environment    and less mines of source of power for future.</p> <p>But I believe    that if we want to live on earth for a long time, [[be healthy]], [[have healthy children]], [[enjoy our environment more, ]] [[enjoy our life]] [[and save the source of energy for our children future, ]] we should decrease the speed of polluting our environment, [[using energy]], [[using nuclear power]], [[using natural gas and etc]]..</p>	<p>Living in rural and urban areas play an important role [[to become a civilized country]], [[because when the population migrate to urban areas]], [[their living become much better]] and they would have better training, working and living conditions,   but this migration should be programming in developing countries very carefully. For example, in our country, the high amount of migration to big cities, made our capital very crowded, [[dirty]], [[polluted]] and with the bad living conditions.</p> <p>Also when civilized country help poor countries, [[they shouldn't insist]] [[that they should use the help]] [[for developing their rural areas]]. They should release them [[to follow their programmes]] [[to develop their country]].</p>	<p>One of the most popular eating system in civilized country is fast food. It became so popular [[because most people's lack of time to spend for eating]]. In the other hand, it has a great influence on human health, specially on children. Because they are in growing age    and this system seems to be harmful for their health. Also fast foods usually contains a great amount of sausage [[that make them very delicious]], but make them harmful. For example I have a niece. She is about 10 years old    and although her parents are thin,   she is very fat. Her doctor said    it is just because of fast foods [[which serves in their school]] and lack of sport activity.</p> <p>Some other blame parents in the children's fatness. I think    parents should be responsible for their children's health    and they should control their children's eating and activities. One of the most common problems in these days is lack of sport activities in all ages, specially children. It is because [[of using computer and computer game instead of sport activity and other games]]. Also children are going to their schools by their parents cars instead [[of going by bicycle or walking]].</p>
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<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>As I mentioned above,   polluting our environment is actually inevitable in modern civilization;    but, as we want [[to live healthy]], [[have good and healthy children]] and etc., we should notice [[that it is a wrong way]] [[and we should be aware it's feed back it's very bad effects]]. Also, we could not stop the polluting of environment    but it is obvious [[that we can decrease it's speed]].</p> <p><b>(Total words: 275)</b>  <b>(Lexical words:127)</b>  <b>(Lexical density: 46%)</b></p>	<p>As I mentioned above    urban and rural population is one of important factors [[to be a civilized country]], and civilized countries help developing countries [[to improve their rural areas]]. But, we can easily understand [[that civilized countries follow their strategies]] [[to keep developing countries poor, dependant]] and under civilized countries control by this kinds of helping.</p> <p><b>(Total words: 232)</b>  <b>(Lexical words:127)</b>  <b>(Lexical density: 54%)</b></p>	<p>As a summary, I think    all the points [[that I mentioned above]] are interfere with children health and their fatness. Also we should be serious in obesity deseases [[wich is so popular in these days]], [[because it would influence our health and living method in future]].</p> <p><b>(Total words: 329),</b>  <b>(Lexical words:136)</b>  <b>(Lexical density: 41%)</b></p>
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Analysis of the texts shows the development of a number of clause complexes including co-ordinate, sub-ordinate and embedded clauses. However, these are mostly ungrammatically structured in the texts. Usually, this would result in the production of lengthy sentences which lack both cohesion and coherence. Therefore, a more detailed observation is deemed necessary in order to indicate any probable changes.

**6.7.6 Analysis of clause complexes: a comparison**

In this section, I will provide a comparison of the texts by looking at any probable change in the number and quality of clause complexes in different sections of the texts. I begin with a comparison of the introductory sections.

**6.7.6.1 Introductions of the texts**

Cross-comparison of the introductory sections shows a general and continuous reduction of the use of clause complexes from texts 1 to texts 3. There is a shift from lengthy and usually non-cohesive clause complexes towards developing short single finite main clauses with a thematic cohesion to the following clauses (Tables 6.33, 6.34 and 6.35).

**Table 6.33. Introductions of Atusa, Arash and Khashy's texts 1, phase 1**

Stage/ Section	Atusa	Arash	Khashy
Introduction	I think    these days all of us are far from natural living. you know,    for example now we are living in luxuries and comfortable apartmants    but we are far from farms or villages and .... As aresult our childrens can not play with animals. many of us [[living in the city]] refer to [[living in the villages]]. and we must cope with anxiety of this life style. we have many pollution, for example air, sound, ...and etc.	As the population grows up    the improvements for standard of living Expand relatively. Day after day Generations improves    and for response to grown up needs    we seek for new resources. Today living without these civilization device is like nightmare. we used to use these improvements. All of us knows    that the pollution of Environment grows up    and it will be a risk for us but    it becomes a part of our life. In my opinion we should set some strategies [[to get the benefits of recent technologies]] but accordingly we should not omit [[to keep our environment safe]].	I believe [[that damage to the environment is an inevitable consequences of worldwide improvements in the standard of living]], but if people want to live on the earth for long time,[[want to have the healthy children,]] [[want to be healthy]], [[ want to enjoy of their life]], [[want to have beautiful environment and etc.,]] they should decrease the speed [[of polluting their environment]] and using energy

For example, in text 1, Atusa has developed five clause complexes of which two are embedded clauses and three are co-ordinated clauses. By comparison, Arash has produced eight clause complexes six of which are co-ordinated clauses, and the remaining two are embedded clauses. However, Khashy has written six clause complexes all of which are embedded clauses.

**Table 6.34. Introductions of Atusa, Arash and Khashy's texts 2, phase 2**

Stage/ Section	Atusa	Arash	Khashy
Introduction	Today, most of people live in the cities or towns. Infact, people don't remember the advantages [[of living at the rural]]. Do you ever think [[about living at the rural instead of town or city]]?	Now a days, the majority of population in developed countries live in towns and cities    but, on the other hand the larger amount of population live in rural areas in developing countries. I agree [[that developed world should help the third world to develop rural areas]].	Becoming developed is a very important problem [[that any developing country has]]. In this case [[living in rural and urban areas]], play a noticeable role. As we know [[although three-quarters of the population in developed countries live in urban areas]], in developing countries this ratio is about one-third. So, the civilized countries help the developing countries,    but they insist on the use of aids for developing rural areas.

In text 2, Atusa has written only two embedded clauses. This marks a reduction from five clause complexes to two, and omission of co-ordinated clauses. Arash has developed only one co-ordinated clause and one embedded clause. It is in effect a reduction from a total of eight clause complexes to only two. Khashy has also reduced clause complexes from six to four, which are three embedded clauses and one co-ordinated clause.

**Table 6.35. Introductions of Atusa, Arash and Khashy's texts 3, phase 3**

Stage/ Section	Atusa	Arash	Khashy
Introduction	Over weight is one of the most important problems in developed countries. Children, especially more than others involve with this problem. In fact, there are several reasons for overweighting children. Some factors are the number of fast foods    and other factors are about the parents. They do not pay attention to children's health.	The number of overweight children in developed countries is increasing. I agree [[that parents are to blame for not looking after their children's health]]. There were many reasons    that parents can do [[to control this increasingly obesity problem]].	Fatness is a very big problem in all society, specially in civilized country in these days. But, this problem is much greater [[when it happens in low ages, specially in children]]. some people think that this would be because of bad food system in civilized country, For example, fast food and deviation of traditional eating systems. Others believe [[that it would be the parents fault]] [[who are not looking forward their children's health]]. Now, I want [[to explain about both these view of points]].

Text 3 demonstrates a further decline in clause complexes in Atusa's writing. There is a reduction to only one co-ordinated clause complex despite an increase in the total number of words from 35 words to 54 words. Further, while Arash has added only one embedded clause to his introduction in text 3, Khashy has produced four embedded clauses, but has avoided producing co-ordinated clauses.

#### **6.7.6.2 Main bodies of the texts**

Analysis of the main bodies also indicates that there is (a) a general reduction in the number of the clause complexes at a higher level of language knowledge and writing skills, and (b) a general tendency to use more embedded clauses rather than co-ordinated and sub-ordinated clause complexes (Tables 6.36, 6.37 and 6.39).

Table 6.36. Main body of Atusa, Arash and Khashy's texts 1, phase 1

Stage/ Section	Atusa	Arash	Khashy
Main body	<p>we want comfortable and luxuries life style. without thinking about the pollution or psychological disease. In these days we damage our environment.</p> <p>people have beenleft their house in village    and are coming to the city. All of the gardens in the cities are damaged    and after one yeas or more we will see there ten floors apartments. In other points we are noticed the cars. Many cars In the streets are the cause of airpollution and sound pollouction In the cities like Tehran.</p> <p>These pollutions are damaged ozone layer in the atmospher. we don't have natural view from our house    as aresult we are tired from [[living in this prison]] [[ that we make it]]. you know,    All of us come from natural,   therefore we cope with this problems, [[without think about it]].</p> <p>we want to come back the natural. (farms, rivers, see,...)</p>	<p>accordingly we should not omit [[to keep our environment safe]].</p> <p>One of the major hazards [[which now is green house gas the main resource of this problem]] is world industrial plans. we should keep in mind [[that all of us are the victims of technology]]. As the matter of fact we should keep our government [[to control this problem]].</p> <p>Recycle of materials is one of the ways [[to keep the Environment clean]] and keep resource last longer.</p> <p>[[Because of human biengs is one part of this Environment]] and our life is dependant to it    we should do our effert [[to keep it clean safe and pollution free]].</p> <p>I am a Engineer in the field of pavement. I'll do my best [[to reduce distroy material]]. Such as use new technology [[for paving roads by recyclable materials]]. Environment needs a prompt help. Make your effort [[to keep it]].</p>	<p>I agree    that damage to the environment is an inevitable consequence of world wide,[[ because in new style of living, most of our energie obtain from fosill fule like gas, oil and coal and also nuclear power]] is more dangerous than fosillfuels. Also the groth of population    cause the more use of water, air, wood, coal, gas, oil nuclear power    and also factories should work more and... . So this will cause more pollution in our environment    and less mines of source of power for future.</p> <p>But I believe    that if we want to live on earth for a long time, [[be healthy]], [[have healthy children]], [[enjoy our environment more, ]] [[enjoy our life]] [[and save the source of energy for our children future, ]] we should decease the speed of polutting our environment, [[using energy]], [[using nuclear power]], [[using natural gas and etc]].</p>

For instance, the main body of Atusa's text 1 shows eight clause complexes comprising five co-coordinated clauses and three embedded clauses. The main body of Arash's text 1 indicates eleven clause complexes including ten embedded clauses and only one co-

ordinated clause. Lastly, the main body of Khashy’s text 1 demonstrates fourteen clause complexes consisting of nine embedded clauses and five co-ordinated clauses.

**Table 6.37. Main body of Atusa, Arash and Khashy’s texts 2, phase 2**

Stage/ Section	Atusa	Arash	Khashy
Main body	<p>About three-quarters of the people in Developed Countries live in towns,    instead of this, in Third world two-thirds of the population live in rural areas.</p> <p>In rural areas, we have many advantages [[for living human need]] to be with nature [[when we are living in this area]], we can use from everything in natural form for example foods, weather, transportation. In addition to here we have not any pollution like air, sound and etc. in the rural we don’t have any mental disease like anxiety, Depression and etc,    because we don’t have any stress.</p> <p>At the other hand, in rural areas, we have many disadvantages [[for living]]. Here, we don’t have any welfare or facilities, [[for our living]] for example, [[when we want to wash up the dishes]], don’t have warm water here,    we don’t have any luxuries like Roys Roys [[for transporting]].</p> <p>In addition to explain the rural areas,    we have many advantages and disadvantages [[for living in the cities]]. Example for advantages [[of living in cities]] are the childre can go to the educated schools. But one of the disadvantages [[of living here]] is pollution.</p>	<p>It is obvious [[that the facilities in urban areas is much better than rural area]]. Also it is included in health condition and factors. So if any communicable disease happen in third world    it can be a serious hazard for developed world too. As an example, the maim source of spreading HIV was found in Africa    but know all the world are cope with this evil disease.</p> <p>There is a famous proverb in my language [[which says    “you should have a large ocean    to find a nomerous worthy pearls]].”</p> <p>There were a lot of good students in the Third world [[which could not educate well only]] because of poor education system in their country. If they prepared well in both phisical and mental fields, part of them    will have a suitable chance of migrate to developed countries    and undoubtly acts as a good scientist or worker there.</p>	<p>Living in rural and urban areas play an important role [[to become a civilised country]], [[because whe the population migrate to urban areas]], [[their living become much better]] and they would have better training, working and living conditions,   but this migration should be programing in developing countries very carefully. For example, in our country, the high amount of migration to big cities, made our capital very crowded, [[dirty]], [[polluted]] and with the bad living conditions.</p> <p>Also when civilized country help poor countries, [[they shouldn’t insist]] [[that they should use the help]] [[for developing their rural areas]]. They should release them [[to follow their programmes]] [[to develop their country]].</p>

In text 2, Atusa has produced thirteen clause complexes with four co-ordinated clauses and nine embedded clauses. This increase in the number of clause complexes may result from an increase in the total number of words in the main body from 147 words in text 1 to 191 words in text 2. This may be an indication of an increase in expert knowledge.

Arash's text 2 shows a total of nine clause complexes with six co-ordinated clauses and three embedded clauses. That is a reduction from eleven clause complexes in text 1, despite an increase in the word total from 147 words in the main body of text 1 to 153 in the main body of text 2. However, Khashy has developed ten clause complexes with nine embedded clauses and only one co-ordinated clause. The main body of Khashy's text 2 also demonstrates a decrease in the use of clauses from fourteen in text 1 to ten in text 2.

Table 6.38. Main body of Atusa, Arash and Khashy's texts 3, phase 3

Stage/ Section	Atusa	Arash	Khashy
Main body	<p>In Developed countries, the number of fast food is increasing. Advertisements of fast food daily present in mass media. Variety of them help [[to existe]] a tendancy [[for childrens feeding]]. In addition to eat,    children do not have any movement [[af eating]]. So, a lot of them have over weight.</p> <p>At the other hand, parent's are very busy. They do not have any time [[for preparing foods at home]]. They are working most of the time. Simply, They use from fast foods. But, They do not have any knowledge about this type [[of feeding]]. They pay attention to advertisement like their children. They do not have any report about disadvantages of fast foods. Over weight is one of these disadvantages.</p> <p>In my opinion, The function of parents is very important. They have to increase their knowledge [[about children feedings]]. They must pay attention to over weighting. So, They can have a schedual [[for eating food]] in fast foods. For example, one time at the month. Then, the can exist a situation for sport, and movement.</p>	<p>At first I believe [[that most overweight children are breeding in families]] [[which father and mother or at least one of them is fat]]. It means that    because the family's common habbits in feeding is not work properly    so, their children become fat easily. On the other hand if the parents could omit the fast foods from their diet,    they would be able to become fit.</p> <p>Secondly, the majority of overweight children have a very little activity. Parents play a great role in this part. In fact they can manage their children's time    and encourage them [[to do physical activities]]. For example parents can easily put a rutine daily exercize in families program. By this plan [[both parents and their children would be helthy and fit]].</p> <p>At last but not least, parents can negotiate with fitness advisors    and asked them for help. By this they can easily and correctly guide their children in a way that, [[they can decrease ther weight]]. In this procedure the can persuade their children with gifts and prizes.</p>	<p>One of the most popular eating system in civilized country is fast food. It became so popular [[because most people's lake of time to spend for eating]]. In the other hand, it has a great influence on human health, specially on children. Because they are in growing age    and this system seems to be harmful for their health. Also fast foods usually contains a great amount of sausage [[that make them very delicious]], but make them harmful. For example I have a nice. She is about 10 years old    and although her parents are thin,    she is very fat. Her doctor said    it is just because of fast foods [[which serves in their school]] and lack of sport activity.</p> <p>Some other blame parents in the children's fatness. I think    parents should be responsible for their children's health    and they should control their children's eating and activities. One of the most common problems in these days is lake of sport activities in all ages, specially children. It is because [[of using computer and computer game instead of sport activitiy and other games]]. Also children are going to their schools by their parents cars instead [[of going by bicycle or walking]].</p>

Atusa has developed eight clause complexes including seven embedded clauses and only one co-ordinated clause in the main body of her text 3. This is a sudden decrease from thirteen clause complexes in text 2 to eight in text 3, which is also accompanied by a slight

decrease in the total number of words from 191 in text 2 to 176 in text 3. Arash has produced ten clause complexes in text 3 comprising five embedded and five co-ordinated clause complexes. That is an increase of only one clause complex in comparison to text 2 while the total words in text 3 shows an increase of 25 words. Khashy has developed eleven clause complexes of which six are co-ordinated clauses and five embedded clauses. There is no change in the total number of the clause complexes in spite of a remarkable increase in the total words from 108 words to 205 words. However, a shift from one co-ordinated clause in text 2 to six co-ordinated clause in text 3 is observable.

### 6.7.6.3 Conclusions of the texts

Analysis of the conclusions to some extent confirms the findings in the observations of the introductions and main body sections (Tables 6.39, 6.40 and 6.41). That is, comparisons of the conclusions demonstrate different situations. For example, (a) text 1 of both Atusa and Arash lacks a conclusion, and (b) Atusa has developed more clause complexes in the conclusion of text 3 than of text 2. On the contrary, Arash has developed more clause complexes in text 2 than in text 3. Unlike those of Atusa and Arash, a steady reduction in the number of clause complexes from text 1 to text 3 is observable in Khashy's texts.

**Table 6.39. Conclusions of Atusa, Arash and Khashy's texts 1, phase 1**

Stage/ Section	Atusa	Arash	Khashy
Conclusion			As I mentioned above,    polluting our environment is actually inevitable in modern civilization;    but, as we want [[to live healthy]], [[have good and healthy children]] and etc., we should notice [[that it is a wrong way]] [[and we should be aware it's feed back it's very bad effects]]. Also, we could not stop the polluting of environment    but it is obvious [[that we can decrease it's speed]].

In text 1, Atusa and Arash have not developed a conclusion (This indicates their possible lack of expert knowledge as how to develop the Conclusion section, or their possible lack of the skill needed to complete the assigned writing task in the allotted time span).

However, Khashy has demonstrated the ability to develop a conclusion which includes eight clause complexes consisting of three co-ordinated clauses and five embedded clauses.

**Table 6.40. Conclusions of Atusa, Arash and Khashy's texts 2, phase 2**

Stage/ Section	Atusa	Arash	Khashy
Conclusion	<p>Finally, in my opinion, [[the living in rural areas]] is very useful for human,    but we must increase the welfare and level of living in rural areas.</p> <p>The Developed countries must explane it to Third worlds people.</p>	<p>As a conclusion in the reason that all human beings live in a same world    and the problems of societies do not be limited in the boundries    thus developed countries should help Third world. In this way their societies will be safe    and protect well. Also they can find many good and fresh talents in the Third world [[which easily fill the need of increasingly need for professional workers and scientists]].</p>	<p>As I mentioned above    urban and rural population is one of important factors [[to be a civilized country]], and civilized countries help developing countries [[to improve their rural areas]]. But, we can easily understand [[that civilized countries follow their strategies]] [[to keep developing countries poor, dependant]] and under civilized countries control by this kinds of helping.</p>

In text 2, Atusa has succeeded to develop the conclusion section. The conclusion includes two clause complexes of which one is co-ordinated and one embedded. Arash also shows literacy construction in terms of developing a conclusion. His conclusion includes four clause complexes with one embedded and three co-ordinated clauses. Further, Khashy has written five clause complexes of which one is co-ordinated and four are embedded clauses. That is a reduction of three clause complexes in comparison to the number in text 1.

**Table 6.41. Conclusions of Atusa, Arash and Khashy's text 3, phase 3**

Stage/ Section	Atusa	Arash	Khashy
Conclusion	<p>In summary, over weight can be solve with parents' function. They have to increase their knowledge [[about feeding]], and [[controlling over wight of children's]] [[with presenting]] a program [[for eating]], movement, etc. I wish, The children will have a normal weight at the world countries.</p>	<p>In conclusion, Although the growing number of fast foods outlets is a one of the reasons of children's obesity    but, the parent management role in family's diet control is much more significant. Undoubtly parent should be very careful in their job    and they must be looking after their children's health.</p>	<p>As a summary, I think    all the points [[that I mentioned above]] are interfere with children health and their fatness. Also we should be serious in obesity deseases [[wich is so popular in these days]], [[because it would influence our health and living method in future]].</p>

In text 3, Atusa's conclusion includes four embedded clauses marking an increase of two clause complexes with an increase in the conclusion's word count from 38 to 45 in text 3. In comparison, Arash's conclusion in text 3 shows a reduction of clause complexes to only

two co-ordinated clauses; this reduction is accompanied by a decline in the conclusion's total words from 74 in text 2 to 52 in text 3. And, Khashy's conclusion indicates a decrease to four clause complexes which is also accompanied by a decrease in total words from 57 in text 2 to 47 in text 3.

Further analysis of the different sections demonstrated that there has been a shift from lengthy clauses to short clauses. Furthermore, this phenomenon is more observable in the introductions and the main body sections, but in the conclusions the shift is not linear. This finding suggests a possible general tendency towards less use of clause complexes with improvement in writing and experiencing literacy.

## **6.8 Summary**

This chapter provided the analysis of some IELTS classroom tasks. The focus is on the development of written argumentative texts as part of the classroom tasks in the preparation course for the IELTS academic examination. The findings showed that the candidates experienced literacy for: (a) communicating appropriately with the rubrics and controversial issues in order to achieve social purposes of the tasks, thus making it possible to develop relatively relevant argumentative texts, (b) observing argumentative genre conventions in organizing their texts to some degree, and (c) selecting appropriate linguistic resources in order to elaborate, interpret and evaluate contentious issues appropriately to some extent. The next chapter provides analysis and interpretation of oral argumentative texts.

## CHAPTER 7

### Data Analysis and Interpretation: Oral Argumentative Texts

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises an analysis of the key literacy practices which were observed during an IELTS academic preparation class. The objective here is to identify and describe aspects of the experienced literacies. The focus is on literacies required for producing oral argumentative texts. The data consist of verbatim transcription of audio and video-recorded classroom literacy events, field-notes, questionnaires, interviews, and samples of the learning resources which were used for experiencing literacy by the candidates as preparation for the IELTS. Literacy events maps and cycles of activity shown in this chapter are based on the data.

There is an emphasis on the existence of a mixture of written and spoken language in various literacy events (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, Johns, 1997). Speaking and writing are categorized as productive skills (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Swain, 1995), hence written and oral argumentative text, because they demonstrate the degree of students' expertise in creating ideas, debating on issues, interpreting and elaborating certain points framed in academic conventions. For this reason in addition to the reasons outlined in Chapter 6 (cf. Section 6.1, p. 113) I selected these skills as the focus of this study. In this chapter, I have selected conversational class tasks for the purpose of data analysis.

#### 7.2 Conversational class tasks

Following is a description and analysis of oral class tasks and interpretation of the patterns which emerged amongst the candidates.

##### 7.2.1 Developing oral argumentative literacies: pedagogy

I assigned oral class tasks to provide the candidates with opportunities to improve their speaking skills to a level of fluency and to a colloquial standard to enable them to achieve at least a band score of 6 in their IELTS speaking test. However, the students were encouraged to develop their skills so that they would be confident to conduct a normal conversation with English speakers. For example, note the following excerpt:

1097 R/L ... In unit six, it is like a real conversation about making a decision what to do, ah, for example, ah, on a holiday, ..., may be on a Sunday, on Friday. It's a holiday and you want to make a decision to do something, ..., or entertainment. ...

App. D, p. 351, ll. 11-14

Performing such class tasks as pair work and small group discussion was aimed at promoting the candidates' oral expert knowledge to become familiar with real life situations and to develop oral literacies relating to academic activities. So, after the allotted time was up, I informed the candidates to end the 'Pair work' classroom activity and engage in 'Small Group Discussion'. See the excerpts below.

1099 R/L Now, let's go to your 'For and Against'. Okay, would you please take out your 'For and Against' and see which lesson we are at?

1100 Ps: 'Lesson four'.

1101 R/L: 'Lesson four'?

1102 Ps: Yes.

1103 R/L: "Any form of education other than co-education is simply unthinkable."

App. D, p. 352, ll. 14-20

Following this the candidates formed groups of 3 or 4 and engaged in a literacy event named group discussion. An example is provided below.

### **7.2.2 Classroom literacy events: small group discussions and oral report**

Table 7.1 illustrates the attribute of a literacy event namely small group discussion as one of the classroom tasks namely small-group discussion. The literacy event was selected for the purpose of data analysis.

**Table 7.1. An example of the properties of a class task named small group discussion**

Phase #: 1
Lesson: For & Against
Genre: Argumentation
Day and Time: Wednesday, 20:00-20:30
Duration: 30 minutes out of 120 minutes of the 'Speaking' session
Number of participants in the classroom: 12 (male & female)
Number of the participants in each group: 4 (male & female)
Topic: "World governments should conduct serious campaigns against smoking"

Group discussion (Table 7.1) is a literacy event which encompasses different literacy practices such as reading a print text and talking about and around the embedded issues. Engagement of the candidates in such literacy practices provided them with an opportunity to experience literacy learning of, for example, sharing and negotiating their perspectives with other members of their groups. Discussions were usually conducted in groups of four and members argued for or against a contemporary contentious issue. The topics were usually selected by the instructor from among different argumentative texts provided in a book entitled *For and Against* (Alexander, 1973) (see Appendices F1, F2 and F3, pp. 455-457 for the selected topics). Argumentation entails interpersonal relationships, and by drawing on insights from linguistics and critical semiotics, it can provide participants with opportunities for relevant literacy development (Eggins & Slade, 1997).

Excerpts from the transcriptions as follows illustrate engagement of the participants in small group discussions and oral report to the whole class. The instructor provided information and the candidates contributed.

287 R/L: .... Now, you have 10 minutes time to do a silent Reading. Then, you will have group discussion. ... So, read this lesson 2 in 10 minutes time, and then we will have group discussion about 10 minutes, 'Lesson 2'.

App. D, P. 326, ll. 28-31

In so doing, the candidates involved in a set of literacy practices. For example, the candidates initially read an argumentative text of about 500 words silently (cf. App. D, p. 326 and for the texts see appendices F1, F2 and F3), this task taking around 5-10 minutes.

The length of the reading time was based on the level of difficulty of the text, the researcher taking note that “...in order to generate a specific knowledge construct, a student needs to be exposed to a sequence of appropriate, topic-relevant information within a limited period of time” (Alton-Lee et al., 1993, p. 59). Reading was intended to develop knowledge of the topic, but it was also expected that reading comprehension of such texts might enhance students’ understanding of the genres and the styles of some argumentative texts. In addition, it was expected that they would enhance their vocabularies, develop their knowledge of semantics and semiotics, and learn how to develop an argumentative text. However, two points should be noted in this regard; firstly, not all the literacy events in the program were genre based and, secondly, not all academic requirements are limited to the argumentation genre. These practices constituted a part of the classwork in each speaking class. For example, I assigned the students to read a text on the topic of smoking in order to take up a position in their discussion group based on their understanding of the following issue, ‘World governments should conduct serious campaigns against smoking’.

289 R/L: ..., time’s finished. Now, I would like you to form groups of 4 or 5. So, change the format of your sitting.

App. D, P. 327, ll. 1-2

The candidates changed their sitting positions by moving their chairs to three different corners of their classroom in order to leave space between the groups. I also advised the candidates to form mixed gender groups. The candidates formed their groups. But, in the beginning moments they just looked at each other while reticent as if they probably were waiting for somebody else to begin the talk.

The second stage entailed the formation of discussion groups in order to negotiate meaning. This required students to adopt a specific point of view, to negotiate meaning in their discussions, and to assert their respective positions on a controversial issue.

289 R/L: .... . Now, we want to speak about for and against ‘Smoking’. So, who is going to speak against ‘Smoking’ in your group?

App. D, p. 327, ll. 4-5

As I observed, after a minute or so of reticence the candidates began negotiating meanings through group discourse as they sought to make sense of the issue and to

determine their point of view. The groups, however, acted differently at this stage. For example, in one group the candidates continued their reticence for a longer period and they were hesitant to begin their talk. But, in another group one of the candidates began the talk by announcing their determined stance and invited others to comment. Yet, in one other group almost all the members began revealing their perspectives and began arguing in agreement or disagreement with the topic. They, however, were free to decide their own views. They explored the topic from two or more perspectives before a concluding position was attained. The following is a more detailed analysis of this classroom activity.

### **7.2.2.1 Analysis of the group discussions**

I assigned the class tasks in three different phases which extended over three different periods of time in order to compare and describe their properties. In the debates, the candidates took-up positions and pursued arguments. They developed their opinions on a range of matters, without the aid of a lead figure (that is, no teacher involvement) or chairperson.

The purpose of the analysis was to

- examine the participants' tendencies to take extended turns with multiple argumentative accounts in the different phases,
- identify any changes in their tendency, and
- determine if the students were supporting or contradicting the argument.

The aim was to investigate similarities and differences in the exchange patterns in terms of (a) the length of the turns, (b) the complexity of the turns, (c) the functions of the turns, (d) the initiation of the exchange, (e) the features of the discussions, and (f) to describe the changes in order to demonstrate any literacy development in terms of argumentative oral literacies.

#### ***A. Categories***

The following categories were considered in the analysis of group discussions.

- Topic relevance,
- Extent of engagement of the speakers,
- Change in the extent of clarity,
- Cohesiveness of discussion (indicated by field, tenor and mode),

- Multiple argumentative accounts (supporting vs. contradicting, or both),
- The development of exchanges,
- The initiation of exchanges,
- The length of the turns,
- The structure of the turns, and
- The function of the turns (e.g. concur, endorse, protest, reformulate and negative evaluation turns vs. positive evaluation turns).

In the system for analysis of group discussions described by Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) classifying interactions as rank I and transactions as rank II, exchanges are considered as rank III. Verbal exchanges described by Sinclair et al. (1972) form the basic unit of interaction, and Table 7.2 shows the categories of typical exchanges.

**Table 7.2. Organization of typical exchanges based on I (R/I) R (F/I) F structure, cf. Coulthard 1992**

<b>Argumentative conversational exchange: the generic characteristics/schematic of the system of analysis</b>	
<b>Elements of structure</b>	<b>Class of moves</b>
Initiation (I)	I: eliciting or Informing or directing
Response/Initiation (R/I)	R/I: eliciting or informing
Response (R)	R: informing or acknowledging or behaving
Follow-up/Initiation (F/I)	F/I: eliciting or informing
Follow-up (F)	F: acknowledging

### ***B. The system of the data analysis***

The following is the system of analysis, in different generic schematics, which was used as a guide for data analysis. The transcriptions of the discussions were analysed at the level of act, move and exchange based on IRF pattern (cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.3.8 for an explanation of IRF). Analysis resulted in the identification of the following acts (see appendices for details). In outlining the definitions use has been made of the work of Willis (1992).

#### ***a. Move formation based on act combination***

The emergent structure of the moves in the discussions was: signal ^ pre-head ^ head ^ post-head. In this structure signal could be substituted by a ‘marker act’, pre-head by a

‘receive act’ or a ‘starter act’, and post-head by a ‘comment act’. Table 7.3 describes the typical structure of the moves that emerged from the data.

**Table 7.3. The structure of moves**

Structure Move	signal	Pre-head	Head	Post-head
Eliciting	Marker	Receive/starter	inquire, neutral proposal, marked proposal, return, loop, prompt	comment, prompt
Informing	Marker	Receive/starter	informative, observation, concur, confirm, qualify, reject, acquiesce	concur, comment, qualify
Acknowledging	Marker	Receive/starter	terminate, receive, react, reformulate, endorse, protest	comment, terminate

***b. Exchange formation based on move combination***

Moves are characterized by elements of the exchange structure. The emergent structure of the exchanges from analysis of the data were I or I ^ R or I ^ R/In ^ Rn or I ^ R/I ^ R ^ Fn or I ^ R/I ^ R ^ F/In ^ Fn in which ‘n’ represents more than one contribution. Because the discussions were free and independent there was no obligation for ‘R’ or ‘F’. But, the participants were expected to observe ‘I’, because of the nature of the argumentative conversation. Rn and Fn occurred because of the number of the interlocutors’ engagement in the discussions. Table 7.4 illustrates the patterns of typical exchanges.

**Table 7.4. Typical emerging exchange patterns of my study**

Structure Exchange	Initiation	Response		Follow-up	
	I	R	R/I	F	F/I
<b>Exchange 1</b>	eliciting		eliciting		
<b>Exchange 3</b>	eliciting				
<b>Exchange 4</b>	eliciting	informing	eliciting		
<b>Exchange 8</b>	eliciting		eliciting	acknowledging	eliciting
<b>Exchange 11</b>	eliciting	informing	eliciting	acknowledging	informing
<b>Exchange 12</b>	eliciting		informing	acknowledging	
<b>Exchange 15</b>	eliciting	acknowledging	eliciting	acknowledging	eliciting

From Table 7.4 it can be concluded that it was common for an ‘eliciting move’ to occupy the ‘initiation slot’. This move reflects the preceding utterances and usually leads to new

sub-topics which, although related, do not repeat the same argument. By way of illustration, Table 7.5 contains excerpts from discussions in phase 2.

**Table 7.5. Excerpts from phase 2 showing reflection of preceding argument in an exchange**

turn	es	p	argument	move	act
1627	I	P4	Yes, this topic is only that new fashion is only not for women not the fashion of the men.	eliciting	receive elicitation
1628	I	P10	I think that fashion make people more beautiful and more confident. When they have, when, when they are standing in front of another people.	eliciting	elicitation comment

An initiation can be followed by two types of response, namely informing or acknowledging (Francis & Hunston, 1992). These can be applied provided the argumentation maintains its restricted link to the preceding initiated sub-topic. For example, Table 7.6 provides extracts from phases 1 and 2.

**Table 7.6. Extracts from phases 1 & 2 indicating strict confine to the preceding argument**

Item Phase	turn	es	p	argument	move	act
Phase 1	327	I	P3	There are many actor, actors from TV, actors smoke in on the TV. So, oh many,	eliciting	elicitation comment
	328	R	P10	many [child...Oh ye.]	acknowledging	react
Phase 2	1629	I	P4	Do you think it is for exploiting?	eliciting	ne-proposal
	1630	R	P10	Yes.	informing	informative

But an initiation can also be followed by an eliciting response/initiation move (see Table 7.4, exchange 1). In such cases the response usually suggests some changes in the initiated sub-topic. Illustrations of this are shown in Table 7.7 below.

**Table 7.7. Excerpts from phase 2 demonstrating suggested changes in the initiated sub-topic**

turn	es	p	argument	move	act
1625	I	P12	Someone ah nowadays, someone can use, they make up, yeh.	eliciting	elicitation
1626	R/I	P3	It is some one's just make ah people they are more beautiful, or handsome. So, it doesn't make anything compulsory.	eliciting	elicitation comment

It is evident that members of the discussion group needed to decide between ‘R’ or ‘R/I’ as a response to the initiation. In general terms, ‘R’ and ‘R/I’ can both serve the initiation as acknowledging moves, so one of them may follow the initiation. Conventionally, any acknowledging move following the latter move is considered as a follow-up move (Francis & Hunston, 1992; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992), because it is based on previous contributions between ‘I’ and ‘R’. For example, in Table 7.8 see extracts from phase 1.

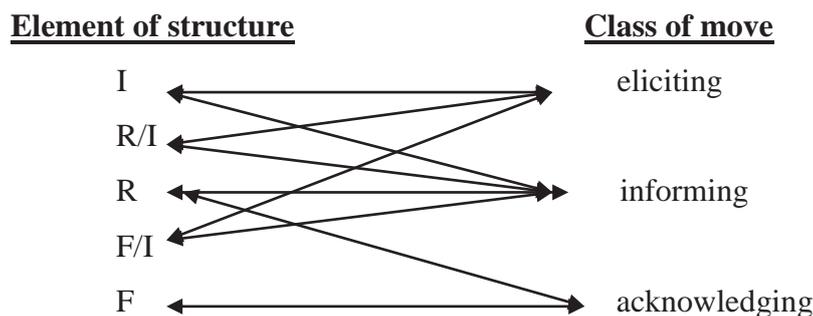
**Table 7.8. Extracts from phase 1 indicating sequence of the structure**

turn	es	p	argument	move	act
356	I	P4	But], is it nice to [hurt...?	eliciting	return
357	R/I	P3	It’s] quit smoking and diseases are quite different.	eliciting	informative
358	R	P4	But, it, it might [sometime...	acknowledging	protest
359	F	P10	Yeh...]	acknowledging	react

In turn 356, P4 raises a question which is based on shared knowledge between group members about the issue of the dangers of smoking. P4’s opinion about the sub-topic of the direct link between smoking and lung cancer is challenged by P3 in turn 357, and this is to inform P4 and the other participants that there is no direct link. While acknowledging P3’s utterance (Turn 358), P4 protests that a direct link is possible. These contributions, in addition to the previous contributions, establish a shared knowledge between the members of the group. So, socially speaking it is legitimate that other speakers contribute by acknowledging the outcome of the debate on the sub-topic, (i.e., P10 in Turn 359).

Data from this study show that conditions observed in response situations are also probable in follow-up situations. That is, a follow-up slot can be filled either by an ‘F’ acknowledging move or by an ‘F/I’ eliciting move (Francis & Hunston, 1992; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992). The condition applies provided the forwarded perspective or the utterance in the follow-up is not to receive, or to react or to endorse, in which circumstance it is probable that the follow-up will be considered as a re-initiation requiring a corresponding response. The premise is depicted in the following diagram (Figure 7.1) showing the exchange pattern in the group discussion.

Figure 7.1. Relation between element of structure and class of moves



As can be seen, an eliciting move or informing move occupies an initiation slot, and an eliciting move or informing move occupies the response/initiation slot. Then an informing move or acknowledging move fills the response, an eliciting move or informing move occupies the follow-up/initiation slot, and finally an acknowledging move fills the follow-up slot.

### *C. Findings*

An examination of the discussions in the three phases revealed some differences and similarities. Similarities encompass features such as the development of the exchanges and bound exchanges, in addition to underlying coherence, despite some lexical and structural inappropriateness. Different features were noted in the group exchanges:

- the length of the talks/discussions,
- the number of exchanges and bound exchanges,
- distribution of the turns,
- distribution of opportunity as taken up by different participants,
- the total elapsed time caused by pausing,
- the number of moves and the instructor's interventions for scaffolding and the elapsed time to enable the speakers to shape the main discussion,
- structure and function of the turns, and
- initiation and discourse of the exchanges.

These findings show that, in general, the arguments in these groups were significantly symmetrical, and members co-operatively engaged in the debates. The repetition of some statements by other members of the group indicates a level of agreement on particular points, and it suggests confidence on the part of members to intervene, to overlap, and to

complete the statements of others. This increased involvement demonstrates that participants became more relaxed, a notable change from the more hesitant contributions earlier in the discussions (Carter & McCarthy, 1997). They generally respected each other’s speaking rights, though on occasion one or two members would try to dominate or be more authoritative (Yu & Mickan, 2007). Also, on some occasions the instructor interrupted proceedings in order to redirect the conversation back to the central issue.

*a. Comparison of the phases*

The following tables indicate the differences between the number of moves and the time spent to reach the main discussion. Also, they show the number of moves from the commencement of group interaction to the beginning of the main discussion (Tables 7.9 and 7.10).

**Table 7.9. Number of moves and directives before the commencement of the main discussions**

<b>The number of exchanges based on exchange limit I (R/I) R (F/I) F</b>		
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
14 + (14 bound exchanges)	16 + (8 bound exchanges)	13 + (6 bound exchanges)
<b>The number of moves from the beginning of interactions to the beginning of the main discussion</b>		
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
29	43	6
<b>The number of turns from the beginning to concluding the main discussion</b>		
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
86	77	62

**Table 7.10. Elapsed time**

<b>Total length of the whole talk</b>		
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
06'.47"	07'.20"	04'.06"
<b>The total time spent to reach the main discussion</b>		
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
102 secs (25% of the whole time)	54 secs (14.6% of the whole time)	20 secs (8% of the whole time)
<b>Total participants’ pausing time in the duration of the main discussions</b>		
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
49"	55"	4"

Data from phase 1 show that the pace of speaking was very slow and was accompanied by several pauses. However, there was a gradual change to a normal pace of speaking with fewer pauses in phases 2 and 3. Also, from phase 1 to phase 3 there occurred rapid changes of non-focused comments and sounds (for instance, um, yeh), but these gradually decreased as more confident, focused, and relevant comments were made. For example, in phase 3 moves were topic-loaded, and sub-topics were about the ozone layer and global warming, subjects of a more academic nature. In most academic contexts, participants in a group discussion need to specify precise examples to elaborate or support their arguments, and this establishes them as being authoritative. But, in informal discussions the participants may select vague or unspecific language by using expressions such as ‘things like these’, ‘stuff like that’ (Carter & McCarthy, 1997).

**Table 7.11. Distribution of the turns**

Phase 1			Phase 2			Phase 3		
participant	# of turns	% of turns	participant	# of turns	% of turns	participant	# of turns	% of turns
P3	24	29.65%	P3	17	22.08%	P4	16	26.22%
P4	19	23.45%	P4	7	<u>9.09%</u>	P5	8	13.12%
P10	19	23.45%	P10	23	23.87%	P9	26	<u>42.62%</u>
P12	15	18.53%	P12	23	29.87%	P10	8	13.12%
Ps	—	00%	Ps	1	1.29%	Ps	—	00%
PS	4	4.94%	PS	6	7.79%	PS	3	4.92%
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 7.12. Frequency and percentage of the different exchange structures**

es phase	I		IR		IRFn		R/I or F/I		total of exchanges		
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	full ex.	bound ex.	%
Phase 1	5	21.7%	3	13%	8	34.8%	7	<u>30.5%</u>	12	12	100%
Phase 2	1	6.3%	2	12.5%	4	25%	9	<u>56.2%</u>	13	5	100%
Phase 3	6	28.6%	4	19%	2	9.5%	9	<u>42.9%</u>	12	6	100%

Table 7.12 illustrates the distribution of the exchange structures in the three phases. It is relevant to note that in phase 1 only 30.5 percent of the exchanges were devoted to complex extended exchanges. The rest were devoted to structures such as ‘I’, ‘IR’ or ‘IRF’. But, the percentage of the complex extended exchanges increased in phase 2 to 56.2 percent and in phase 3 to 42.9 percent.

This evident increase in verbal interaction might be interpreted as an indication of literacy development because of the greater involvement in negotiating meanings in debates on contentious issues by providing related sub-topics (Table 7.7, turn 1626). That is, following the introduction of a new sub-topic the members did not hesitate to put forward their own opinions. These contributions usually led to repetition or re-initiation (cf. App. F, pp. 439-452). This complexity of literacy socialization in turn could provide the participants with an opportunity for conversation of a higher order (Table 7.13).

**Table 7.13. Extent of engagement in discussions**

<b>Move</b>	<b>Eliciting</b>					
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Phase 1</b>		<b>Phase 2</b>		<b>Phase 3</b>	
<b>es</b>						
<b>I</b>	9	<u>13.8%</u>	16	<u>29.8%</u>	13	<u>26.0%</u>
<b>Ib</b>	14	21.5%	8	14.8%	6	12.0%
<b>R/I</b>	10	<u>15.3%</u>	10	<u>18.5%</u>	10	<u>20.0%</u>
<b>F/I</b>	8	12.3%	6	11.1%	5	10.0%
<b>Move</b>	<b>Acknowledging</b>					
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Phase 1</b>		<b>Phase 2</b>		<b>Phase 3</b>	
<b>es</b>						
<b>R</b>	8	12.3%	5	9.3%	10	20%
<b>F</b>	<u>16</u>	<u>24.6%</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>16.7%</u>	<u>6</u>	12%

The gradual decrease in the rate of follow-up (from 16 to 9 and then to 6 as shown in Table 7.13) is an indication of a reduction in final acknowledging moves. An increase in eliciting initiations (from 13.8 percent to 26 percent and then to 29.6 percent) and response/eliciting moves (that is, acknowledging while criticizing or demanding more elicitation) from 15.3 percent to 18.5 percent and then to 20 percent, could be an indication of the participants becoming more critical when debating issues. Engagement in argumentative interactions, in addition to greater experience in reading and discussing contentious issues in the classroom, probably resulted in a shift towards critical thinking, an essential element of academic life.

Unlike some other exchanges (for example teacher-student interactions in which initiation slots may be occupied by informing, eliciting or directing moves) group discussions most commonly comprise eliciting moves. Eliciting moves in such discussions are usually followed by a set of response-eliciting (R/I) moves and/or follow-up/eliciting (F/I) moves.

The main exchanges also include some bound-elicited exchanges. Francis & Hunston (1992) have explained that bound exchanges “are so named because they are bound to preceding exchanges and they all have eliciting moves at Ib” (p. 136). Bound exchanges are usually used to repeat, re-initiate or clarify utterances. Bound exchanges initiate with an eliciting move, the purpose being to challenge an idea or to extend the discussion on an issue. If the eliciting initiations do not evoke a response/eliciting or follow-up/eliciting situation, or are not followed by such moves, it might be possible that they reflect a personal point of view rather than a negotiating situation.

Analysis of the data (Table 7.13) shows a tendency for an increase in response/eliciting moves from phase 1 to phase 3. Also, there is a much higher percentage of eliciting initiation in phases 2 and 3 in comparison to phase 1. Conversely, the number of bound exchanges diminishes from phase 1 to phase 3. This is an indication of the development of negotiation of meaning in academic discussions. The findings indicate that discussions gradually become more cautious, using negotiation and reflection on the discussions in latter phases in comparison to the beginning phase, which was more challenging rather than resisting. For example, see P4’s strong stance (Table 7.14) in turn 341 in phase 1 in comparison to P9’s approach (Table 7.15) to discussion in turn 2133 in phase 3.

From a literacy socialization point of view, this knowledge development shows a recognition of other participants in the discussion, acknowledges the right of others to turn, and demonstrates that members distinguish between a quarrel (cf. App. F, p. 427, turns 391-399) and the conventions of academic debate (cf. App. F, p. 437, turns 2111-2119). Moreover, it can be viewed as a measure of literacy development. For example, Li & Nesi (2004) studied two discussion groups, one group comprising Chinese graduates, the other English undergraduates. It was observed that the English group endorsed and maintained a balance between positive and negative support. But the Chinese students showed no endorsement and negative support was 70 percent and positive support only 30 percent. This observation was an interesting instance of different forms of academic debate. Given that students were academic members of an English-medium university, English students’ approach to the process of the debate could be viewed as an example of academic argumentation.

**Table 7.14. Excerpts demonstrating exchanges from phase 1**

turn	es	p	argument	Class of move	Class of act
341	I	P4	I totally disagree with smoking, because ah (1 sec), it, if ah (1 sec) people ah (1 sec) do smoking keep constant so, they make ah (1 sec) some diseases like a big disease like a [cancer... -----	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Informative</b>
342	Ib	P3	Cancer?]	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Elicitation</b>
343	R	P4	Ye, cancer (1 sec)	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Acquiesce</b>
344	F	P3	Nooo (1 sec) I, I (1 sec) -----	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b><u>Protest</u></b>
345	Ib	P3	Lung cancer you mean?	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Return</b>
346	R	P4	Ye.	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Informative</b>
347	F	P3	Uh, but it depends on the [person...]	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b><u>Protest</u></b>
348	F	P10	Ye, ye (1 sec)] -----	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b>React</b>
349	I	P3	My father smokes and he doesn't have cancer, [ye...]	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Informative</b>
350	R/I	P4	How much does he smoke? -----	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Inquiry</b>
351	Ib	P3	No, no as I totally disagree, because (1 sec) um, very old people for long time smoking, but, uhm never die, just depends on, ye depends [on ...]	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Prompt</b>

These two exchanges, which included embedded (clarification) bound exchanges each demonstrate strong challenging moves such as, “I totally disagree with smoking...” (P4, turn 341). Similarly, P3 challenged P4’s perspective (turn 351) by uttering “No, no as I totally disagree, because...”. This type of discussion is usually considered as inappropriate in academic settings.

In comparison, during phase 3 the exchanges are shorter, more cautious and considerate, and usually do not include bound exchanges. The following excerpts in Table 7.15 below provide examples.

Table 7.15. Excerpts demonstrating exchanges from phase 3

turn	es	p	argument	Class of move	Class of act
2129	I	P10	We can send satellite and we can understand if something is wrong with the ozone layer and [then...	Eliciting	Elicitation
2130	R	P9	The only] thing that you are right in that [case...	Acknowledging	<u>Endorse</u>
2131	I	P10	And], we can't find solution [to...	Eliciting	Elicitation
2132	R	P9	Yeh], in that case you're right.	Acknowledging	<u>Endorse</u>
2133	I	P9	But, I don't think that's good..., That's good. I don't think that's good to invest money on Mars to uhh...solution, solution for problem. That's good idea, that's good to invest on it. But, I don't think to invest money on Mars and the other planets will help us.	Eliciting	Starter m. proposal
2134	R/I	P10	We keep [that...	Eliciting	Informative
2135	R	P9	Yeh] (2 sec)	Acknowledging	Qualify
2136	F	P10	Um, (engage)	Acknowledging	<u>Endorse</u>
2137	F	P9	So, um	Acknowledging	Terminating

In turn 2129, P10 initiates an exchange by putting forward her opinion as a solution to an issue about data collection in the ozone layer. P10's opinion is acknowledged, endorsed, and commented upon (turns 2130 and 2132 and 2133) by P9. Endorsement and negotiation of meaning are considered as appropriate forms of academic engagement, and they could reinforce the flow of responses which contribute to literacy development. In support of this Willis (1992) states that:

... as students become even more aware of the need to become fluent in English and to cope with the flow of natural speech, there is likely to be a greater demand for replication activities to allow learners to practices communicating in the classroom not simply at utterance level, but at discourse level, taking responsibility for their own turn-taking and negotiating their own way through a complete interaction. (p. 181)

P9 acknowledges and endorses P10's point of view, and this encourages P9 to provide more data and to provide a contradicting opinion "... I don't think that's good to invest ... for problem". In so doing, the members provide new data and perspectives which could reveal their extent of meaning making with each other's utterances.

*i. Comparison of coherence at act level*

As noted above, acts such as receiving, acknowledging, and endorsing may help in maintaining a coherent discussion. The following table demonstrates the use of different acts in the group discussion in the three phases.

Table 7.16. Extent of application of acts in the three phases

signal	Pre-head	head	Post-head	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3	
Marker				3	3.4%				
Marker		Elicitation						2	3.1%
	Starter	Elicitation		2	2.3%	5	6.3%	1	1.6%
	Receive	Elicitation		3	3.4%	2	2.5%		
		Elicitation		<u>13</u>	<u>14.8%</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>10%</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>10.9%</u>
		Elicitation	Comment					1	1.6%
		Informative				1	1.3%	2	3.1%
	Starter	Informative				4	5.1%		
		Informative		<u>14</u>	<u>15.9%</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>26.6%</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>21.8%</u>
	Receive	Qualify				1	1.3%		
		Qualify		1	1.1%			6	9.3%
	Receive					1	1.3%		
			Comment			1	1.3%	3	4.7%
	Receive	Qualify				1	1.3%		
			Terminate			2	2.5%	1	1.6%
		Terminate		4	4.6%	1	1.3%	1	1.6%
	Receive	Terminate				1	1.3%		
		Loop		2	2.3%			2	3.1%
		Endorse						3	4.7%
		Confirm		1	1.1%				
		React		<u>6</u>	<u>6.8%</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3.8%</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3.1%</u>
	Starter	Mar-proposal				1	1.3%	1	1.6%
		Neut-proposal		3	3.4%			3	4.7%
	Receive	Neut-proposal		1	1.1%				
		Reformulation		3	3.4%	8	10%	2	3.1%
		Observation		2	2.3%			1	1.6%
		Return		4	4.6%	2	2.5%	1	1.6%
	Starter	Return		2	2.3%	4	5.1%		
		Protest		5	5.7%			2	3.1%
	Starter	Protest		1	1.1%	1	1.3%		
		Inquiry		3	3.4%			3	4.7%
	Starter	Inquiry				1	1.3%		
	Starter	Prompt		1	1.1%	1	1.3%		
		Prompt		1	1.1%				
		Receive		3	3.4%	1	1.3%		
		Engage		10	11.4%	8	10%	6	9.4%
Total number of the moves and the percentage				88	100%	79	100%	64	100%
Percentage: the % of the total number of moves produced by the group									

Some studies (Li & Nesi, 2004; Micheau & Billmer, 1987; Watanabe, 1993; Yamada, 1990) have found that native English-speaking university students take very short turns and apply ‘endorse act’ in their group discussions, though use of ‘protest act’ is rare. But these acts are used less often by non-native English speaking university students. For example, Li & Nesi (2004) conducted a comparative study of Chinese and English university students to examine their discourse patterns in group discussions of about six minutes duration. They found significant differences between the use of ‘endorse act’ and ‘protest act’ in their exchanges. English students endorsed the speakers on 7.9 percent of occasions but endorsement was not observed among Chinese students. Conversely, Chinese students applied ‘protest act’ on 18.5 percent of occasions while for English students the rate was only 3.4 percent. It could be concluded, then, that English-language academic conventions require the use of ‘endorse’ rather than ‘protest’ in group discussions.

Findings from this study show that ‘endorse act’ was not applied in phases 1 and 2, but it was used in 4.7 percent of occasions in phase 3. Conversely, while ‘protest’ was applied in 6.8 percent of occasions in phase 1 it was used on only 1.3 percent of occasions in phase 2, and 3.1 percent of occasions in phase 3. These differences demonstrate a probable shift towards observing academic argumentative conventions during group discussions. Extracts from phases 1 and 3 in Table 7.17 provide illustrations.

**Table 7.17. Extracts from phases 1 and 3 showing application of ‘endorse act’ and ‘protest act’**

turn	es	P	Argument (phase 1)	Class of move	Class of act
342	I	P3	Cancer?] (clarify)	Eliciting	Return
343	R	P4	Ye, cancer (1 sec)	Informing	Acquiesce
344	F	P3	Nooo (1 sec) I, I (1 sec)	Acknowledging	<u>Protest</u>
-----					
345	I	P3	Lung cancer you mean? (clarify)	Eliciting	Return
346	R	P4	Ye.	Informing	Informative
347	F	P3	Uh, but it depends on the [person...	Acknowledging	<u>Protest</u>
348	F	P10	Ye, ye (1 sec)]	Acknowledging	React
-----					
349	I	P3	My father smokes and he doesn’t have cancer, [ye...	Informing	Informative
350	R/I	P4	How much does he smoke?	Eliciting	Inquiry
-----					
351	I	P3	No, no as I totally disagree, because (1 sec) um,	Eliciting	

352	R	P10	very old people for long time smoking, but, uhm never die, just depends on, ye depends [on ... Re-initiation Uhm...] (engage)		<b>Prompt</b>
353	R/I	P12	Uh, ye, ye, it depends on your body, your [health...	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Elicitation</b>
354	R	P4	But], yah, but [it...	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b><u>Protest</u></b>
355	F	P3	It is nice...	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Informative</b>
<b>turn</b>	<b>es</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Argument (phase 3)</b>	<b>Class of move</b>	<b>Class of act</b>
2119	I	P4	Okay, there is information about also you know that we know that, that someone landed.	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Elicitation</b>
2120	R/I	P9	Yeh.	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Quality</b>
2121	F/I	P4	At least we know about the atmosphere. Only if we know [that...	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Informative</b>
2122	R	P10	Yeh.]	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b><i>Endorse</i></b>
2123	F/I	P4	Discredited that for the other place.	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Informative</b>
2124	F	P9	You are not [arming...	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b><u>Protest</u></b>
2125	F	P5	You cannot prevent the [summer... -----	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b><u>Protest</u></b>
2126	I	P4	Who?] (clarify)	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Inquiry</b>
2127	R/I	P5	On the] space something wrong we know [something... -----	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Informative</b>
2128	I	P9	Ozone] layer you mean? (clarify) -----	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Ne-proposal</b>
2129	I	P10	We can send satellite and we can understand if something is wrong with the ozone layer and [then...	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Elicitation</b>
2130	R	P9	The only] thing that you are right in that [case... -----	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b><i>Endorse</i></b>
2131	I	P10	And], we can't find solution [to	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Elicitation</b>
2132	R	P9	Yeh], in that case you're right.	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b><i>Endorse</i></b>

### ii. Features of the moves: a comparison

Findings of previous studies (Micheau & Billmyer, 1987) indicate that a higher number of acknowledging moves and short moves occur in native English-speaking student discussions. But these patterns were less observable in discussions between non-native

English speaking students. It is apparent that numerous acknowledging moves and short moves are regarded as appropriate for academic debates in English-medium universities.

However, examination of the use of short moves and acknowledging moves in the three phases of this study did not show any significant differences (Table 7.18).

**Table 7.18. Frequency of the exchanges and moves**

Item	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Number of exchanges	14	16	13
Number of moves	86	75	62
Number of acknowledging moves and percentage	23 (26.7%)	16 (21.3%)	15 (24.2%)
Number of short moves and percentage	72 (83.7%)	61 (81.3%)	53 (85.5%)

There may be various explanations for this pattern of debate. One reason could be the shorter length of time in the third phase which limited the speakers so that they had fewer opportunities to develop more moves (4 minutes and 6 seconds in phase 3 vs. 6 minutes and 47 seconds in phase 1). A second reason could be that not all opportunities were taken up by the participants. Nevertheless, in group discussions the participants were left to themselves to find their own way, for no particular instructions were given as to which moves or acts were to be used, nor how to apply those moves and acts.

### *iii. Realization of exchange elements and boundaries*

Techniques for the analysis of communication have led to a variety of propositions by some scholars (Hoey, 1991; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Sinclair and Coulthard introduced 'I' as predicting, 'R' as predicted, 'R/I' as both predicted and predicting, and 'F' as optional. Also, Hoey (1991) found that a negative response in an eliciting-initiated exchange can predict a follow-up from the initial speaker. Further, analysis of the data showed that acknowledgement moves in which 'protest act' was applied were often followed by new acknowledging acts (Table 7.17). Hoey (1991) further suggests that a positive response may bring an exchange to an end because in such a case follow-up may be regarded as redundant (Table 7.19) (see transcriptions in the appendix F for more examples.) The data also show that in a significant number of exchanges 'F' and/or 'F/I' were used. Table 7.19 shows the frequency of application of 'F' and/or 'F/I' in the three phases.

**Table 7.19. Frequency of application of 'F' and/or 'F/I'**

<b>item phase</b>	<b>Total # of exchanges</b>	<b># of F</b>	<b>% of F</b>	<b># of F/I</b>	<b>% of F/I</b>
<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19.7%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10.6%</b>
<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10.1%</b>
<b>Phase 3</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8.9%</b>

Based on these conventions, 'I' serves as a predicting move, 'R' as a predicted move, 'R/I' is both a predicted and a predicting move, and 'F' is regarded as an optional move (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992). But because of the number of people in the group more than one acknowledgement was observed. This is because every member has a right to acknowledge, receive, endorse or otherwise protest about an idea. Excerpts in Table 7.20 provide some examples.

Table 7.20. Application of more than one acknowledgement move in the 3 phases

Item Phase	turn	es	P	argument	Class of move	Class of act
Phase 1	345	I	P3	Lung cancer you mean? (clarify)	Eliciting	Return
	346	R	P4	Ye.	Informing	Informative
	347	F	P3	Uh, but it depends on the [person...]	Acknowledging	<u>Protest</u>
	348	F	P10	Ye, ye (1 sec)]	Acknowledging	react
Phase 2	1653	I	P12	Ah, may be all shops is for women.	Eliciting	Elicitation
	1654	R/I	P10	And, so?	Eliciting	Inquiry
	1655	F/I	P12	Ah (1 sec), ye, ye, if you want to buy some cloths or you, yeh you, you, you, when you going for [shop...]	Eliciting	reformulation
	1656	F	P10	Buy cloths.]	Acknowledging	reformulation
	1657	F	P12	I couldn't, I couldn't, I can't choice, I couldn't choose.	Acknowledging	reformulation
Phase 3	2119	I	P4	Okay, there is information about also you know that we know that, that someone landed.	Eliciting	Elicitation
	2120	R/I	P9	Yeh.	Informing	Qualify
	2121	F/I	P4	At least we know about the atmosphere. Only if we know [that...]	Eliciting	Informative
	2122	R	P10	Yeh.]	Acknowledging	<i>Endorse</i>
	2123	F/I	P4	Discredited that for the other place.	Informing	Informative
	2124	F	P9	You are not [arming...]	Acknowledging	<u>Protest</u>
	2125	F	P5	You cannot prevent the [summer...]	Acknowledging	<u>Protest</u>
	2126	I	P4	Who?] (clarify)	Eliciting	Inquiry
	2127	R/I	P5	On the] space something wrong we know [something...]	Eliciting	Informative
2128	I	P9	Ozone] layer you mean? (clarify)	Eliciting	Ne-proposal	

In turns 2124 and 2125, P9 and P5 respectively disagree with P4's idea (turn 2123). Accordingly, they use 'protest act' in their acknowledging moves. These negative responses in follow-up moves lead to the extension of the discussion and elicitation of more information (turns 2126, 2127 and 2128). This phenomenon is also observable in turns 345 to 348. To this extent, these findings support those of Hoey (1991), discussed above. But this is not always the case and cannot be viewed as a fixed rule, because on

some occasions ‘protest acts’ are left unattended, and a new sub-topic is put forward (Table 7.21).

**Table 7.21. Application of more than one acknowledgement move**

turn	es	P	argument	Class of move	Class of act
356	I	P4	But], is it nice to [hurt...? (clarify)	Eliciting	Return
357	R/I	P3	It's] quit smoking and diseases are quite different.	Eliciting	Informative
358	R	P4	But, it, it might [sometime	Acknowledging	<u>Protest</u>
359	F	P10	Yeh...]	Acknowledging	React
360	I	P4	....some people yeh, mostly who are smokers, they uh, mostly, mostly have trouble with cancers and uh big disease.	Eliciting	Elicitation

The data also suggest that response in agreement can terminate an exchange, so precluding a follow-up move. This is also in line with Hoey's (1991) findings. However, this should not be viewed as a rule, because on different occasions a number of 'F' or 'F/I' followed positive responses (Table 7.22).

Table 7.22. Agreed exchanges without follow-up

<b>Item</b> <b>Phase</b>	<b>turn</b>	<b>es</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>argument</b>	<b>Class of move</b>	<b>Class of act</b>
<b>Phase 1</b>	388	I	P10	More expensive? (clarify)	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Return</b>
	389	R	P12	Ye.	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b>terminate</b>
<b>Phase 2</b>	1629	I	P4	Do you think it is for exploiting?	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Ne-proposal</b>
	1630	R	P10	Yes.	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Informative</b>
	1631	R/I	P3	May it is for more confidence.	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Elicitation</b>
	1691	I	P3	And, and may be, may be we can see on television some, more, more than one show like fashion show. So, they also have men fashion.	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Elicitation</b>
	1692	R/I	P10	Ye, (2 sec) is not only of women.	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Informative</b>
<b>Phase 3</b>	2129	I	P10	We can send satellite and we can understand if something is wrong with the ozone layer and [then...	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Elicitation</b>
	2130	R	P9	... The only] thing that you are right in that [case...	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b>Endorse</b>
	2131	I	P10	And], we can't find solution [to...	<b>Eliciting</b>	<b>Elicitation</b>
	2132	R	P9	Yeh], in that case you're right.	<b>Acknowledging</b>	<b>Endorse</b>

Some exchanges contained follow-up despite positive responses (Table 7.23).

Table 7.23. Agreed exchanges with follow-up

Item Phase	turn	es	P	argument	Class of move	Class of act
Phase 1	336	I	P12	Some, some young guys, ah...,when, when watch the movie or TV, they thought uhuh, [whaoo...	Eliciting	Elicitation
	337	R/I	P10	It's a nice (2 sec)]	Eliciting	Elicitation
	338	F/I	P12	Nice, ye (2 sec), they try to [smoke...	Eliciting	Informative
	339	F/I	P3	Ye, they, they try to smoke. Ye, nice to try.	Eliciting	Elicitation
	340	F	P10	Ye, nice to try.]	Acknowledging	Terminate
	379	I	P10	Because], cigarette fee is the for the tax used for some public ah...place, some public nature, some public things, so it could be have to public service [um...	Eliciting	Elicitation
	380	R	P3	Ye (1 sec)	Informing	Qualify
	381		P10	Um (1 sec) (engage)		
	382	F	P3	Ye (1 sec)		
	383	F	P12	Ye,	Acknowledging	Receive
384		Ps	Hah, huh, heh, hnh.] (laugh) (engage)	Acknowledging	Terminate	
Phase 3	2104	I	P9	Hum? (repeat)	Eliciting	Loop
	2105	R/I	P4	For you said.	Informing	Informative
	2106	R	P9	Yeh, [Okay...	Acknowledging	Qualify
	2107	F/I	P4	Who] knows about [planet...	Eliciting	Informative
	2108	R	P9	Yeh]	Acknowledging	Qualify
	2109	F	P4	Planet.	Acknowledging	Terminate
Phase 3	2133	I	P9	But, I don't think that's good..., That's good. I don't think that's good to invest money on Mars to uhh...solution, solution for problem. That's good idea, that's good to invest on it. But, I don't think to invest money on Mars and the other planets will help us.	Eliciting	Elicitation
	2134	R/I	P10	We keep [that...	Eliciting	Informative
	2135	R	P9	Yeh] (2 sec)	Acknowledging	Qualify
	2136		P10	Um (engage)		
	2137	F	P9	So, um	Acknowledging	Terminate

*iv. Initiating discussions and reaching conclusions: a comparison*

The data indicate differences between the beginning of initiation moves and the following exchanges in the three phases. For example, in phase 1 initiation was marked by hesitation “Erm (2 sec) (illegible), oh,...” (P3, turn 319, phase 1). But, this phenomenon was not observed in phases 2 or 3 (turn 1625 initiation of phase 2, and turn 2089, initiation of phase 3). Also, the findings show varieties of new sub-topics, though these are more limited in phases 2 and 3. This could be an indication of the development of literacy and language skills in that participants know how to be more focused (with a more narrow line of inquiry), and how to reach a conclusion or a degree of consensus. Inability to reach a conclusion or consensus was announced in phase 1, and Table 7.24 provides some examples.

**Table 7.24. Lack of reaching a conclusion/Consensus**

turn	es	P	argument	Class of move	act
406	I	R/L	Now, it's time for spokespersons to report to the class what you discussed and what you concluded. -----	Directing	Directive
407	I	P4	Conclude? (repeat)	Eliciting	Loop
408	R	R/L	Yes, what you discussed and what you concluded.	Eliciting	Elicitation
409	F	P3	We couldn't make conclusion, just discussion in this group.	Acknowledging	Comment

In phases 2 and 3 the groups managed to reach a conclusion, and this is expected as part of a conventional discussion (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin, 1986). Table 7.25 shows examples of consensus in phases 2 and 3.

**Table 7.25. Demonstration of conclusion/Consensus in phases 2 and 3**

Item Phase	turn	es	P	argument	Class of move	Class of act
Phase 2	1702	I	R/L	In general, what did you conclude? Do you agree on this topic or disagree?	Eliciting	Elicitation
	1703	R	P8	Strongly agree.	Informing	Informative
Phase 3	2152	I	R/L	So, what is the conclusion?	Eliciting	Elicitation
	2153	R	PS	Hah,huh,heh,hnh (engage)	acknowledging	
	2154	R	P9	How do we stop it.	Informing	Informative

*v. Length of turn*

Findings of some studies (Li & Nesi, 2004; Micheau & Billmyer, 1987; Watanabe, 1993; Yamada, 1990) have shown that the length of turn of native English-speaking students is noticeably shorter than those of non-native speakers. This brevity may provide other speakers with more opportunities to make contributions. Obtaining control over brevity as a technique in talk requires literacy practices resulting from expert knowledge of being precise and to the point. For example, Li & Nesi (2004) found that in the same length of time the English-speaking students had almost three times more turns to speak than did Chinese students (English students had 79 turns while Chinese students had only 24 turns). These findings suggest that the length of turns in an academic discussion are expected to be short, precise and to the point. But findings from the present study did not show a significant difference in this regard (Table 7.26). However, circumstances in terms of the total length of discussion were quite different.

**Table 7.26. Relationship of lengthy turns and number of turns**

<b>Item Phase</b>	<b>Lengthy turns (more than a line)</b>	<b>Total turns</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total discussion time</b>
<b>Phase1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>16.3%</b>	<b>6.47"</b>
<b>Phase2</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>7.20"</b>
<b>Phase3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>14.5%</b>	<b>4.06"</b>

*vi. Factors affecting the turns: role of structure*

Analysis of the data showed some differences in the structure of the turns. Two major differences were the length and the appropriateness of the structures, these aspects being affected by the participants' fluency in English and the use of terminology. Two turns by P10 in each of the three phases demonstrate these aspects (Table 7.27). P10 was one of the participants who were traced in the three phases.

Table 7.27. Effect of structure on turns in phases 1, 2 and 3

Item Phase	turn	es	P	argument	Class of move	Class of act
Phase 1	379	I	P10	Because], cigarette fee is the for the tax used for some public ah...place, some public nature, some public things, so it could be have to public service [um...	Eliciting	Elicitation
	401	I	P10	So], it could influenced to someone, uh (1 sec) people's health. But, depends, but it cannot to uh (1 sec) push the people, the government cannot push the people ah (1sec) It's task to just the people know about the how to banned cigarette, so I think, they can control by themselves, by [themselves...	Eliciting	Elicitation
Phase 2	1669	I	P10	I can see that pink was not (1 sec) also purple. But, nowadays, I can see many clothes shops, I can see many kind of clothes are just purple and pink colours,	Eliciting	Elicitation
	1695	R/I	P10	ah, I think it is being normal. ... May], many, many people are they are agree that women like men is nowadays has changed the way of life.	Eliciting	Informative
Phase 3	2116	I	P10	I disagree] with the this topic that space race is for knowledge (unreadable) it is for discovery of other planets for the problem of population on the Earth.	Informing	Observe
	2129	I	P10	We can send satellite and we can understand if something is wrong with the ozone layer and [then...	Eliciting	Elicitation

Another factor which could influence the length of turns is the extent of comments on the issues by some of the speakers. However, no significant differences were observed in this regard (Table 7.28).

Table 7.28. Demonstration of extent of comment in phases 1, 2 and 3

Item Phase	turn	es	P	argument	Class of move	Class of act
Phase 1	390	I	P4	And, you can see on the cigarette package ah there was something written um (3 sec) like a death head. Including every package we see this. There was written a little (2 sec) that you must (2 sec) In the pocket cigarette pocket also there was written may be death ah something like that. So, it include, it's, it increase ah (1 sec) it increase ah disease. Also, may be death.	Eliciting	Elicitation + comments
Phase 2	1701	F/I	P3	The affection is exploitation um, is just for women. (I sec) Ah (1 sec), and, I think the women, may be can have their opinion about fashion. Like ah may be this, this, this kind of cloth fit with another person not like some fat woman. They don't need to follow fashion. Like he said before, like ah, men nowadays they also pay attention on it's not only, just on woman.	Eliciting	Informative + comments
Phase 3	2110	I	P9	Yeh, I believe that knowledge is power, but it become power when we, we, we use it. If we know about the moon, that's knowledge, but I don't think that's power, because we don't use it. We don't use that, we know about the light of moon, that's knowledge. That light help us to see in the on dark time or on night time. That's that becomes power. I believe that knowledge is power, but it becomes power when we use that. So, I don't know the space knowledge is helping us to live in this [world...	Eliciting	Elicitation + comments

*vii. Function of the turns*

Based on the structure of the conversations, 'F' and 'F/I' can only follow 'R'. On the other hand, 'R/I' always reflects the exchange back to the initiation move. Consequently, because of an inverse ratio between the numbers of 'R/I' and 'F/I' or 'F', an increase in

the numbers of 'R/I' predicts a decrease in the number of 'F/I' and /or 'F' - and vice-versa (Table 7.29).

**Table 7.29. Extent of the occurrence of the turns in different phases**

Phase es Item	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
I	28	36.8%	24	34.8%	20	35.7%
R/I	10	<u>13.2%</u>	12	<u>17.4%</u>	13	<u>23.2%</u>
F/I	8	<u>10.6%</u>	7	<u>10.1%</u>	5	<u>8.9%</u>
R	15	19.7%	14	20.3%	12	21.4%
F	15	<u>19.7%</u>	12	<u>17.4%</u>	6	<u>10.8%</u>
total	76	100%	69	100%	56	100%

Table 7.29 shows a continuous and significant increase in the rate of 'R/I' from phase 1 to phase 3. Conversely, a continuous decrease in the percentage of 'F/I' and 'F' from phase 1 to phase 3 was observed. This finding supports the above-mentioned rule and it also indicates a willingness to contribute more critically to the discussions in order to evaluate issues from different angles. Table 7.30 provides an example.

**Table 7.30. Indication of critical discussion**

turn	es	P	argument	Class of move	act
2089	I	P9	Um, spending money on the waste, on the space (unreadable) explained in the passage, or this reading part, yes? We are to look upon hunger in the instead of spending money on the [space...	Eliciting	Marker Elicitation
2090	R/I	P4	Like] the other concerns, space was the study for the governmental [operation...	Eliciting	Informing
2091	I	P9	The] point is to spending on the places were linking the planet can live in is or shortage of oxygen something, I don't think it takes, I don't think [it takes...	Eliciting	Elicitation
2092	R/I	P5	Don't you think] it is about our life and [the	Eliciting	m. proposal
2093	F/I	P9	space...? Because, I don't think it takes short time. I, I think it takes long time to make that place suitable for living [beings...	Eliciting	reformulation

In turn 2089, P9 initiates the discussion by applying an eliciting move on the topic of wasting money on space exploration. This initiation receives a response from P4 in turn 2090, and this response/eliciting move reflects back to P9, so leading him to put forward a new sub-topic. This new sub-topic gains a response from P5 (in turn 2092) who introduces yet another sub-topic. This complexity of conversation led the candidates to use more linguistic resources to demonstrate their literacy development. However, as the allotted time for discussion elapsed the candidates then engaged in the next practice, namely oral reports.

### 7.2.2.2 Oral reports on the group discussions

Verbal reports formed the final step in a series of classroom oral activities. The reporters were selected as the spokespersons by the group members (Lave & Wenger, 1991), their task being to summarize the group's discussions and conclusions. This activity was important because it set the comments within the context of the conversations, and this influenced the negotiations of meanings (Hall, 1993). The purpose of the verbal reports was to provide candidates with a form of communication that was different from that of the group discussions.

401 R/L: Now, it's time for spokespersons to report to the class what you discussed and what you concluded.

402 P4: Conclude?

403 R/L: Yes, what you discussed and what you concluded.

404 P3: We couldn't make conclusion, just discussion in this group.

App. D, p.331, ll. 15-19

This exchange was an instance of a group not being able to reach agreement, and P4 ironically asks, "Conclude?", and P3 states, "We couldn't make conclusion, just discussion in this group."

As the spokesperson for one of the groups, P4 reported to the class as a whole, (turn 405). The following is a transcription of P4's report, and the analysis as shown in Table 5.32.

405 P4: Ah... people in this group think there is, ah, no prohibitions on smoker, because they want to freedom. But ah... some people think the government must be in some places because of the, ah... most of the smokers children can also, children can also they even still they cannot

they didn't ah...smoke still they, ah get influenced by ah... smokers. And, also womans and also ah,... So, government have must have to government must have to make a decision about them first. And, they must have to pay tax also have to make the rules for the smokers because on the, ah, ah... cigarette pocket also there was written something like ah can be disease. So, if ah.... smoker keep constant to smoking, so may be in future life they will, they will invite disease.

App. D, p.331, ll. 22-31

**Table 7.31. Properties of the oral report based on an 'Academic' report genre (cf. Eggins & Slade, 1997; Emerson, 1995)**

Genre	Oral report	Staging
Introduction	...people in this group think there is, ah, no prohibitions on smoker, because they want to freedom.	Orientation/Brief description of the context
Discussion	But ah... some people think the government must be in some places because of the, ah... most of the smokers children can also, children can also they even still they cannot they didn't ah...smoke still they, ah get influenced by ah... smokers. And, also womans and also ah,....	Indication of the existing problems and deliberation of a solution
Conclusions/ Recommendatio	So, government have must have to government must have to make a decision about them first. And, they must have to pay tax also have to make the rules for the smokers because on the, ah, ah... cigarette pocket also there was written something like ah can be disease.	Reinforcement of the recommendations and supports
Coda	So, if ah.... smoker keep constant to smoking, so may be in future life they will, they will invite disease.	Outline of a postscript

Analysis of P4's report demonstrates some of the properties of an academic report. The reported comprised, firstly, a general account of the topic, a brief description of the discussion, and the outcome. She has also classified the issue, "no prohibitions on smoker.". In her discussion she considered a range of existing problems and described the deliberations leading to a solution. In her conclusion she made recommendations, these being supported by examples. Finally, she provided a postscript as a coda to reinforce the group's recommendation. She used the present tense to demonstrate the ideas as facts; for instance, "... people in this group think...", "..., some people think the government must

be...” She has also generalized the words ‘people’, ‘children’, and ‘women’ to avoid personalization. Her report also made use of the technical language of the issue of smoking and suggested measures required of governments, but analysis clearly highlights an inadequate vocabulary, fluency, and articulation, and a lack of structural appropriateness. At this stage closer analysis of this classroom literacy practice at different phases is deemed necessary, and further investigation provides deeper insights into the changes resulting from verbal reports as a form of learning.

#### *A. Development of genre based oral report*

The data provided above indicate that oral reports in this study required the participants to undertake a relatively higher load of speaking responsibility, thus offering them certain opportunities for further developing their speaking skills. This development was crucial because the purpose of oral reports was to provide the candidates with an opportunity to practice English for their IELTS test. Sections 2 and 3 of the IELTS speaking test require candidates to read about a contentious topic, talk about it for two or three minutes, and then engage an examiner in an extended discussion on that subject (IELTS Handbook, 2007).

In the light of this requirement, this classroom literacy practice has been analysed within the context of an academic report genre (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Emerson, 1995; Martin, 1986, 1997). Based on these former studies, reports usually consist of an introduction, discussion, conclusion, recommendations, and a coda. Analysis of the structure of the oral reports provided better understanding of their construction of meaning. The findings exhibit some structural, lexical and discourse features in accordance with academic conventions.

The following are descriptions of three oral reports which have been examined in order to identify the extent to which the opportunities were taken up and to assess their level of literacy development. This has been done with the use of a systemic functional grammar perspective (Burns & Coffin, 2001; Halliday, 1994) as an appropriate tool to compare oral reports by different participants over different periods of time. Table 7.32 illustrates the reports.

**Table 7.32. Oral reports in phases 1, 2 and 3 (researcher's data, 2007)**

Phase	P	Oral report
Phase 1	P4	(1) Ah... people in this group think there is, ah, no prohibitions on smoker, because they want to freedom. (2) But, ah... some people think the government must be in some places, because of the, ah... most of the smokers children can also, children can also they even still they cannot they didn't ah...smoke still they, ah get influenced by ah... smokers. (3) And, also womans and also ah,... (4) So, government have must have to government must have to make a decision about them first. (5) And, they must have to pay tax also have to make the rules for the smokers because on the, ah, ah... cigarette pocket also there was written something like ah can be disease. (6) So, if ah.... smoker keep constant to smoking, so may be in future life they will, they will invite disease.
Phase 2	P5	(1) Talk about fashion. (2) Fashion in many country many men that bothers in many bet, between man and woman. (3) Woman really, really very expensive in the man, and are real more easily to buying some clothes or old fashion. (4) And, it was ah,... the fashion long time ago...every 10-20 years....ah, for example one 98 was one kind of fashion. (5) And, nowadays the same is they know every forty years circular, circular, circulation (X). (6) Strongly agree.
Phase 3	P9	(1) I said investing money on space is waste. (2) Ah, it doesn't help us. (3) But, P4 says it does, because it's knowledge. (4) And, knowledge is power. (5) But, if we use that power, that knowledge is good, and must be of people's interest. (6) Some people won't think this. (7) She 'P10' disagrees with this article. (8) But, P5 agrees with this article, because of global warming...

Table 7.33 below comprises categories of words used in the three reports, these being listed according to a framework for differentiating stages of reports known as the 'argumentation genre' (Emerson, 1995; Martin, 1986). The analysis shows the different approaches of the three participants in deploying the element(s) in the initial position in the clause known as "theme" (Halliday, 1994) to support the potential reader, and placing new information at the end of the clause.

**Table 7.33. The properties of the oral report based on an ‘academic argumentation’ report genre (cf. Eggin & Slade, 1997; Emerson, 1995)**

Genre	Oral Report 1	Oral Report 2	Oral Report 3	Staging
<b>Introduction</b>	... people in this group think there is, ah, no prohibitions on smoker, because they want to freedom.	Talk about fashion.	I said investing money on space is waste.	Orientation/ Brief description of the context
<b>Discussion</b>	But ah... some people think the government must be in some places because of the, ah... most of the smokers children can also, children can also they even still they cannot they didn't ah... smoke still they, ah get influenced by ah... smokers. And, also womans and also ah,....	Fashion in many country many men that bothers in many bet, between man and woman. Woman really, really very expensive in the man. And, are real more easily to buying some clothes or old fashion.	Ah, it doesn't help us. But, P4 says it does, because it's knowledge, and knowledge is power. But, if we use that power that knowledge is good and must be of people's interest.	Indication of the existing problems and deliberation of a solution
<b>Conclusion/Recommendation</b>	So, government have must have to government must have to make a decision about them first. And, they must have to pay tax also have to make the rules for the smokers because on the, ah, ah... cigarette pocket also there was written something like ah can be disease.	And, it was ah,... the fashion long time ago...every 10-20 years...ah, for example one 98 was one kind of fashion.	Some people won't think this.	Reinforcement of the recommenda tions and supports
<b>Coda</b>	So, if ah.... smoker keep constant to smoking, so may be in future life they will, they will invite disease.	And, nowadays the same is they know every forty years circular, circular, circulation (X). Strongly agree.	She 'P10' disagrees with this article. But, P5 agrees with this article because of global warming...	Outline of a postscript

*a. Format analysis*

The reports comprise four stages (Table 7.33): the introduction provides a brief description of the topic; the discussion indicates the existing problems and the group's deliberations; the conclusion reports the findings; the recommendations indicate possible future action; and the coda outlines a postscript (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Emerson, 1995).

*b. Development of argumentative experience*

Comparison of the contents of the reports required categorization. This was also crucial to the process of focusing on the linguistic resources and strategies the participants used in their text development. So groupings were made of the key argument clauses and key counter-argument clauses under a semantic label because, as Halliday (2003) noted, "spoken language is organized around the clause" (p. 186). Clauses included arguments and counter-arguments, or points put forward and issues that were raised. The underlined verbs in the clauses indicate what, in functional linguistics, are described as mental, behavioural and verbal processes (Tables 7.34, 7.35 and 7.36).

The candidates used some linguistic resources in their reports in order to signal the relevance of their arguments. A comparison of the extent of those linguistic resources illustrates the basis for their development in constructing arguments. For example, in oral report 1 (Table 7.34) the relevance of the argument is realized by the clause:

People in this group think....

The mental processes of the people in the group are apparent when advancing their perspective. For instance, a point of view is addressed to the reader/hearer in the following clause:

They want to have freedom.

The candidate in report 1 provides more information to make the reader/hearer ready to receive more new information:

Some people think....

The second use of mental processes signals to the reader the probability of a counter-argument.

**Table 7.34. Clause complexes in Report 1**

People's opinion	Government's role & obligations	Harms of smoking and smokers
People in this group <u>think</u> . (single finite clause-main) They <u>want to freedom</u> . (single finite clause-main) Some people <u>think</u> . (single finite clause-main)	The government <u>must be</u> in some places. (single finite clause-main) Government <u>must make</u> a decision about them. (single finite clause- main) Government <u>have to make</u> rule for the smokers. (single finite clause- main) They <u>must pay</u> tax. (single finite clause-main)	Children <u>get influenced</u> by smokers. (single finite clause- main) Smokers <u>keep</u> constant to smoking. (single finite clause- main) They <u>will invite</u> disease. (single finite clause-main)

But in the second oral report (Table 7.35) the participant does not provide the reader/hearer with much information:

Woman are more easily to buying some clothing.

The lack of information provided by this student may result from a variety of reasons. One possibility might be that he was unfamiliar with the topic or the content of the text. A second possibility is that not all the opportunities were taken by the participants.

**Table 7.35. Clause complexes in Report 2**

Women and fashion	Circulation of fashion
Woman are [[more easily <u>to buying</u> some clothing.]] (ungrammatical and unclear embedded clause)	It <u>was</u> the fashion long ago. (single finite clause- main) 98 <u>was</u> one kind of fashion. (single finite clause- main) Nowadays, the same <u>is</u> . (single finite clause-main) They <u>know</u> every forty years circulation. (single finite clause-main)

In the third verbal report (Table 7.36) the participant provided clearer, more specific and more appropriate information to signal the respective positions of different group members. This is exemplified in the following:

I said investigating money on space is waste.

It doesn't help.

P4 says it does help, because it's knowledge, and knowledge is power.

**Table 7.36. Clause complexes in Report 3**

<b>Disagreement on space exploration</b>	<b>Agreement on space exploration</b>
<p>I <u>said</u> (main) [[investing money on space]] (embedded non-finite clause) <u>is</u> waste (subordinate).</p> <p>It <u>doesn't help</u>. (single clause-main)</p> <p>But, if we <u>use</u> that power    (subordinate), that knowledge <u>is</u> good (finite main clause),    and (subject ellipsis) must be of people's interest (main).</p>	<p>P4 <u>says</u> (main)    it <u>does help</u>   , because it's knowledge,    and knowledge <u>is</u> power (three subordinate finite clauses).</p> <p>P10 <u>disagrees</u> with this article (single clause-main)</p> <p>P5 <u>agrees</u>, [[because of global warming]] (non-finite embedded clause).</p>

In comparing the first two reports, it can be seen that report 3 shows an appropriately sequenced set of clauses. The participant has observed some lexico-grammatical appropriateness and has employed suitable linguistics resources (for example, referencing, and concessive conjunctive), but such aspects do not seem to be present in the other reports: for example, the use of the concessive conjunction 'but', which makes the counter-argument explicit.

But, if we use that power, that knowledge is good, and must be of people's interest.

Report 3 also indicates the appropriate use of a range of different linguistic resources such as cohesion and coherence (cf. Table 7.32) (also see Chapter 6, Sections 6.7.4, pp. 138-166 for information about coherence and cohesion). This text also shows the participants' control over the deliberate use of such aspects of clause complexes as sequential and/or embedded clauses (cf. Tables 7.34, 7.35 and 7.36), which can be either finite or non-finite. Appropriate use of such elements contributes to the lines of discussion and to the positions of the speakers, for they indicate who says what and for what reasons.

Employment of such elements is not observable in the previous two reports. The absence could be due to a lack of vocabulary or to the absence of other alternatives. The shift could also indicate improvement in the development of oral literacies in conducting an argument.

*c. Analysis of genre*

Some text developers make use of a systemic functional theory of language (SFL) (Halliday, 1985) to develop texts and to apply lexico-grammatical systems to help them organize texts in ways that achieve their social purposes (Martin, 1989). The notion of genre in structuring and organizing texts (written and oral) is drawn on by SFL (Coffin, 2004; Martin & Christie & Rothery, 1994). Employment of this theory was of assistance in examining the use of language by the students in this study.

Table 7.37 provides some data to indicate the genres and styles of the three reports. In report 1, for example, the candidate has used mental processes (‘think’) and modalities of obligation (‘must’ and ‘have to’) to develop an argumentation genre as follows:

Some people think the government must be in some places...  
 So, government must have to make a decision...  
 ..., they have to pay tax, also have to make the rules...

The style of report 1 distinguishes this type of argumentation genre because although counter arguments and evidence have been discussed in the debate the reporter puts forward only a single line of argument (Coffin, 2004). Further, the use of modalities of obligation persuades the hearer that something should be done, thus signalling a hortatory style.

Table 7.37. Genre and style

Oral Report 1	Oral Report 2	Oral Report 3
<p>Some people think the government <u>must</u> be in some places, because children get influenced by smokers. So, government <u>must have to</u> make a decision about them first. And, they <u>have to</u> pay tax, also <u>have to</u> make the rules for the smokers.</p> <p><b>Hortatory</b></p>	<p>Fashion in many country <u>bothers</u> between man and woman. Woman really very expensive in the man, and are real more easily to <u>buy</u> some cloths. 98 <u>was</u> one kind of fashion. And, nowadays, the same <u>is</u> they <u>know</u> every forty years circulation. Strongly <u>agree</u>.</p> <p><b>Analytical</b></p>	<p>Investing money on space <u>is</u> waste. It <u>doesn't</u> help. But, P4 says it <u>does</u>, because it's knowledge. And, knowledge <u>is</u> power. But, if we <u>use</u> that power, that knowledge <u>is</u> good, and <u>must be</u> of people's interest. Some people <u>won't think</u> this. She 'P10' <u>disagrees</u> with this article. But, P5 <u>agrees</u> with this article, because of global warming.</p> <p><b>Analytical</b></p>

Unlike report 1, the approaches of reports 2 and 3 signal an analytical style. For example, see the following excerpts from report 2:

Fashion in many country bothers between man and woman.

98 was one kind of fashion.

Every forty years circulation.

And, excerpts from report 3:

Investing money on space is waste.

But, if we use that power, that knowledge is good...

Some people won't think this.

In report 2 and specifically in report 3 (which was given near the end of the course) the reporters consider both sides of the argument. Their reports reflect a negotiation of two or more issues instead of insisting on a personal point of view, as is obvious in report 1.

Reports 2 and 3 indicate a more cautious negotiating and reflective manner in the discussions in comparison to report 1 which was more challenging rather than resisting. For example, in report 3 the participant says:

P4 says it does, because it's knowledge.

Some people won't think this.

P10 disagrees with this article.

But, P5 agrees with this article, because of global warming.

In report 3 the use of a range of different linguistic resources (which are not present in reports 1 and 2) illustrates an extent to which students had probably applied what they had experienced in the course of preparation as how to develop an argumentative discourse. The data indicates that the candidates had experienced such different argumentation genres as discussion, exposition, analytical and hortatory in the preparation course and prior to sitting the IELTS academic examination. These findings do not support the findings of some studies (Coffin, 2004) which claims that the IELTS candidates "approach to argumentation being more reminiscent of letters to the press than of academic prose" (p. 243). However, the analysis shows that the opportunities provided for experiencing various linguistic resources in order to develop conventionally appropriate argumentative texts have been taken up differently and to different degrees by different candidates in the preparation course.

#### *d. Application of Theme/Rheme: text cohesion*

Application of Theme/Rheme pattern in a text aims to highlight information and to help the reader make more sense of the construction of information in clauses. Employment of this pattern in clauses enables the reader to communicate with the text and to follow the provided data more easily. The function of Theme (cf. Chapter 6, Section 6.7.4.4, pp. 153-165) according to Halliday (1994) is to orient the reader towards the concern of the clause/text. A text in relation to its social purpose, according to Martin (1993b) is oriented by theme, hence it is considered genre-oriented in the context.

Analysis of the three reports in terms of application of the Theme/Rheme pattern (Table 7.38) indicates poor or absence of control over application of Theme/Rheme in report 1.

...ah... most of the smokers children can also, children can also they even still they cannot they didn't

ah...smoke still they, ah get influenced by ah... smokers. And, also womans and also ah,... So, government

have must have to government must have to...

As can be seen, there are occasions of stretches of talk between one Theme/Rheme and a next one which do not follow. For example, see excerpts between sentences 2, 3, and 4 of phase 1 in Table 7.32. Also, the Theme of sentence 5 is dangling between the preceding sentences.

However, the pattern has been used more appropriately in report 2.

Talk about fashion. Fashion in many country many men that bothers in many bet, between man and woman. Woman really, really very expensive in the man, and are real more easily to buying some clothes or old fashion.

Likewise, in report 3:

..., P4 says it does, because it's knowledge. And, knowledge is power. ...

This phenomenon shows the extent of development of this aspect of expert knowledge, although to different extent by different participants.

Analysis of report 1 also reveals that the student has distanced herself from the members, so making the text seem more challenging, less resisting, less negotiating and less interpersonal.

People, they, some people, And they

By involving every member of the group, and by describing the orientation to the people involved in report 3, the reporting member has demonstrated higher levels of interpersonal involvement and contribution. In this way, the report seems more resisting and negotiating but less challenging.

I, It, P4, But, if we..., She (P10), P5

**Table 7.38. Application of theme in the three oral reports**

Oral Report 1	Oral Report 2	Oral Report 3
People They Some people And, also womans And, they So, if smoker	Fashion Woman And, it And, nowadays, the same	I It P4 But, if we She But, P5

Report 2 has turned the focus to the content of the article rather than providing an account of the discussion or the outcome. This could be viewed as a misunderstanding by participants as to the social purpose of the report.

Analysis of the data revealed some differences and similarities in the discussions. Similarities are usually concerned with the development of the exchanges and bound exchanges and cohesiveness despite some lexical and structural defects (cf. Tables 7.17, 7.20, 7.21 and 7.22). But, differences encompass such aspects as the length of the talk in turns (Tables 7.9 and 7.10), the number of exchanges and bound exchanges (Tables 7.9 and 7.10), distribution of the turns (cf. Table 7.11), the role of the structure and function of the turns (cf. Tables 7.14 and 7.15 and 7.16), and initiation and discourse of the exchanges (cf. Table 7.17).

It was also found that the candidates increased involvement in the discussions in the course of the study resulted in them becoming more critical thinking when debating issues (cf. Tables 7.22 and 7.23). However, one of the possible reasons of the candidates' shift toward critical thinking was the result of experiencing engagement in argumentative interactions, in addition to their experience of reading and discussing controversial issues. For instance, see appendices F1, F2 and F3 for the examples of the texts with which the candidates were provided as opportunities to experience such literacy practices as reading an account of argumentative texts.

Unlike some other exchanges (for example, teacher-student interactions), teacher-free discussions most commonly comprise eliciting moves. Eliciting moves in such discussions were usually followed by a set of response-eliciting (R/I) moves and /or follow-up/eliciting (F/I) moves. In the process of data analysis, however, it was also

found that as the course under the current study continued toward the last phase the candidates gradually became more cautious in their discussions. In comparison to the beginning phase “I totally disagree with smoking...” (Table 5.15) the candidates’ approach to the discussions in the last phase “We can send satellite and we can understand if...” (Table 5.16) was more congruent with argumentative (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin, 1986) texts’ conventions.

### **7.3 Summary**

The data discussed here contribute to the body of knowledge about an extent of opportunities provided for experiencing literacy in terms of producing oral argumentative texts as preparation for the IELTS academic examination. Reporting on the deliberations and conclusions of a group discussion provides one example. The analysis of group discussion in order for the candidates to experience such literacy practices as reading argumentative texts and talking about and around contemporary contentious issues was facilitated by the use of systemic functional linguistic descriptions of language (Halliday, 1994). Nevertheless, further inquiry in this area may have significant implications for the IELTS and for the teaching and testing of oral skills in English. In the next chapter, I will provide a more detailed discussion.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This final chapter provides discussion, responses to the research questions and conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of the data. The study has investigated opportunities provided for developing written and oral argumentative texts in an IELTS academic preparation class in Tehran. Here, I comment on the literacy development resulting from the candidates' engagement in developing written and oral argumentative texts. I bring together the conclusions and discuss the possible practical implications of the study for the IELTS. Finally, I offer some suggestions for future research.

OTEFL students' problems in fulfilling the academic requirements at English-medium universities (Mickan, 2003; Moore & Morton, 2005) formed the background of the study. According to the research (Bayliss & Ingram, 2006; Green, 2006), a lack of appropriate proficiency in English has been considered as a major reason for the problem (cf. Chapter 2, Section 2.2). Most Australian universities have selected the IELTS among others (CEP, TOEFL, and TOEIC) as the preferred test (Coffin, 2004; Coley, 1999; Feast, 2002) for this purpose. However, based on the reports of a number of studies, despite obtaining the IELTS band scores required for entry, OTEFL students still face difficulties in carrying out university tasks. These may lead to failure, particularly at the commencement of their academic life. This situation has raised questions about the IELTS and preparation practices for examinations in formal classroom contexts. This research aimed to address this problem and to provide insights into processes of preparation for the IELTS academic examination.

The study used an ethnographic methodology. Qualitative data was collected with a focus on literacy practices for developing argumentative texts (written and oral). The literacy practices were viewed as socialization processes which generated opportunities for the candidates to develop and improve the relevant literacies (Barton, 1994; Baynham, 1995; Heath, 1983; Lea & Street, 2006; Mickan, 2006). Literacy practices produce opportunities for language development by means of their embedded interactional exchanges. Debates on the presence or absence of an issue in society, for example global warming, were used

by students in the language classroom in order to develop relevant texts (oral and written). The candidates read what they had written. Their written activities were discussed. In discussions, oral skills (speaking and listening) were practised. This cycle was continuous over the duration of the preparation course. Thus, the candidates experienced different literacy practices with texts for the purpose of making meaning. Literacy practices such as talk about texts provides students with opportunities to use the language and genre of the texts and develop their perspectives and critical views about that language in order to draw upon them for production of their own texts. In so doing, they reflect on their experiences and use background knowledge of the field in order to interpret texts and to compose their texts.

Observation of the candidates' classroom literacy events provided me with an opportunity to identify and analyse the embedded literacy practices in order to achieve the above mentioned aims. This in turn indicated how the candidates experienced the literacies required for developing conventionally appropriate argumentative texts.

For analysis of the development of conventionally appropriate argumentative texts I used discourse analysis of literacy practices from the literacy socialization viewpoint (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1985; Mikan, 2006). For a linguistic perspective on literacy I used the systemic functional grammar model (Halliday, 1994; Martin, 1997). The use of SFL makes it possible to characterize significant aspects of students' literacy development, because as Halliday (1990) says:

It enables us to analyse any passage and relate it to its context in the discourse, and also to the general background of the text: who it is written for, what is its angle on the subject matter and so on (p. 34).

SFL contributed to an analysis of the candidates' use of linguistic resources that construct the experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings.

## **8.2 Preparation for the IELTS academic test**

The aims of this study were (a) to investigate IELTS academic class tasks in order to identify and to analyse literacy practices which generate opportunities for developing

written and oral argumentative texts, and (b) to provide insights into literacies which the candidates experience as preparation for the IELTS academic examination.

### **8.2.1 Class tasks**

I began the investigation with the question “What argumentative tasks (written and oral) in class do candidates engage in as preparation for the IELTS academic examination?” This question led to investigating the candidates’ engagement in literacy practices for negotiating meaning around texts.

Different class tasks were observed and documented when the candidates were engaged in practices as preparation for the IELTS. The tasks aimed at providing the candidates with opportunities to produce argumentative texts (written and oral). The analysis indicated that the tasks deployed in the classroom generated opportunities for the candidates to experience different literacy practices when engaged in group discussions and presentations about issues in print texts. Some classroom tasks were based on daily conversations. For example, the candidates took part in paired role plays, such as buying things from shops, visiting a doctor, booking a room in a hotel, registering for a sightseeing tour, enrolling at university, and discussing with administrative staff the selection of subjects for university study. Candidates also searched for appropriate topics for oral presentations and discussions using such resources as books, magazines, newspapers and the Internet. Another aspect of literacy practice was the candidates’ group and individual work in developing argumentative texts. For example, they read a section of a contentious text and talked about the issues in the text. In the process of developing texts, they discussed the issues and negotiated their different perspectives in order to reach conclusions. These practices made it possible for the candidates to experience relevant literacies required for the IELTS.

#### **8.2.1.1 Consciousness raising**

The program sought to develop written and oral argumentative skills as required for the IELTS academic test. Instruction included consciousness raising about the IELTS, the way it works, its expectations and processes of preparing for the examination, and introducing and providing relevant discourses for engagement in written and oral argumentative tasks. Instruction on argumentative texts (e.g. techniques, strategies, rules, and conventions) was explicit and instructor directed. The whole course was IELTS task-based in accordance

with direct instruction as described by Goldenberg (1991). In Phase 1 classroom instruction was more in the nature of direct instruction rather than instructional conversation. At this stage, I provided the candidates with information about appropriate applications of grammatical arguments which are more typical of argumentative texts. I also devoted a portion of the class time to promoting the candidates' vocabulary knowledge by reading different texts and constructing their own clauses with newly learned vocabularies.

My belief was that the participants needed to be provided with an opportunity to gain an appropriate expert knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical accuracy in accordance with published English grammar materials that meet IELTS expectations. Focus on grammar was a part of students' experiences, particularly, in the first phase of the course. I taught different tenses of the language, passive voice, reported speech, conditionals, the uses of articles and prepositions. I selected different learning resources (cf. App. B) influenced by the nature of the test, its design and descriptors for assessment of the skills and thus the washback effect, so as to meet the expectations of the test appropriately.

I introduced typical features of written and oral argumentative texts (cf. Chapters 6 and 7). I taught cohesive ties and devices in terms of unity, coherence and cohesion. I explained issues and responded to the candidates' queries in this regard. They were provided with various contemporary topics for debate, for example 'spending money on space exploration', for constructing argumentative texts. The texts required the candidates to take up a position in order to compose their texts in agreement or disagreement with the topics (see topics in App. G, p. 458). They resembled the argumentative texts expected in an IELTS test, because the candidates used commercially published IELTS materials (App. B). The candidates read and discussed different models of argumentative texts. Such class tasks provided the candidates with opportunities: (a) to learn the genre and style of some argumentative texts, (b) to learn how to develop ideas for and against contentious issues (cf. Chapter 7, Section 7.2.2, p. 186), (c) to learn how to open, continue (elaborate or interpret and evaluate and support an idea) and thus generate an argument (see Appendices F, F1, F2, and F3 for the texts used in the group discussions), and (d) to acquire appropriate words and phrases. However, at least two important points should be borne in mind in this regard: (a) the literacy events over the course of the program were tailored to meet the requirements of the IELTS academic examination, and (b) the academic

requirements of English-medium universities are significantly at higher level of discourse and complexity, notwithstanding the fact that academic genres may vary in different academic disciplines. These may make it clear that the extent of knowledge that OTEFL students bring with them into English-medium universities may not be at an appropriate level for commencing university study as far as IELTS is concerned.

In the latter Phases (i.e. Phase 2 and particularly Phase 3), however, my role as instructor gradually shifted with a greater percentage of class time being devoted to the candidates' direct engagement in the class tasks. This shift of the role was necessary because I had made it clear to the candidates that they needed to put theory (i.e. what they had been taught in Phase 1) into practice in latter Phases. In Phase 2, for example, I acted as a more knowledgeable participant among them to answer their queries and/or make suggestions. I gave feedback to the candidates. The candidates also read and analysed argumentative texts which resembled IELTS reading texts. Using their own experiences and knowledge of the field, they were encouraged to take up a position in order to talk in agreement or disagreement on a topic. In order to monitor participation, I also invited the candidates to respond to different questions based on IELTS test types. These patterns formed the continuous focus of the inquiry in the course. These patterns established the candidates' participation in their "literacy socialization" (cf. Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). They also provided the candidates with opportunities to utilize as many typically appropriate learning resources as possible to develop and promote the required knowledge for producing argumentative texts. This suggests that the whole course was of a dynamic nature, involving such activities as reporting to the class and discussing conclusions in group discussions.

In the next stage, i.e. Phase 3, sessions were mostly student-based. Most of the class time was devoted to group work. This provided the students with the opportunity to share their perspectives, experiences and knowledge of literacies.

However, classroom discourses are complex. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1994), such complexity often results from "linguistic misunderstanding" and "complicity in misunderstanding". By "linguistic misunderstanding" Bourdieu and Passeron (1994) mean university students' failure "to cope with the technical and scholastic demands made on their use of language as students" (p. 4). For instance, in the beginning sessions of the

preparation course, despite the instructor's frequent invitation to put forward any questions or queries (Chapter 6, Section 6.3, p. 118), rarely did the candidates ask questions. This lack of active participation in the classroom discourse can lead to a situation where candidates are not certain of the knowledge they have gained. Lack of participation or only minimal participation in class discourse may have two explanations. One could be the candidates' poor control over linguistic resources (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994). Another reason may have cultural underpinnings rooted in the dominance of passive learning (as found in a teacher-centred classroom background) (Fazelimanie, 2004; Liu & Littlewood, 1997) and avoidance of critical thinking in the classroom.

### **8.2.2 Acquiring linguistic resources**

The second question was "What linguistic resources do candidates acquire because of their engagement in class argumentative writing and conversational tasks?" The question required consideration of the kinds of literacies that the candidates would acquire as the result of engaging in the class argumentative tasks.

Candidates engaged in multiple literacies for developing argumentative texts. They needed to understand the topics and the contents of the texts in order to put forward their views and share their knowledge and experiences on specific issues. This required analysis of genre of texts in addition to relevant selection of vocabulary and structure. In order to achieve the task successfully, the candidates needed to acquire specific linguistic resources. They, therefore, studied such genres as exposition, discussion, analytical and hortatory (cf. Chapters 6 and 7, and Appendices F1, F2 and F3). Further, because they were required to compose conventionally structured and organized argumentative texts, they used, for instance, cohesive ties to create (Chapter 6, Section 6.7.4) unity (Section 6.7.4.1), coherence (Section 6.7.4.2) and cohesion (Section 6.7.4.3). In order to demonstrate their control over, for example, cohesion, they developed such aspects as lexical cohesion, reference, conjunctions and Theme/Rheme pattern (Section 6.7.4.4 and subsections). They also acquired nominalisation (Section 6.7.4.5) which is one of the features of argumentative texts in an academic context (cf. Chapters 6 and 7). However, the extent of the candidates' engagement was a variable of the extent of the individual knowledge of the field and their improvement in English. (cf. Chapter 7, extracts from small group discussions, and App. F).

### 8.2.3 Organization and structure of argumentative texts

The third question was “How do candidates organize and structure their written and oral argumentative texts?” This question emphasized conventions for structuring and organizing their argumentative texts. The first significant aspect of literacy that the candidates experienced was conventional argumentative structuring, staging and organizing of their texts (cf. Chapters 6 and 7). A second significant aspect was candidates’ use of English language for communication in the class. A further aspect was engagement with prompts and contentious topics in order to understand, decode and analyse the test rubrics on topics. This assisted the candidates to experience identifying different key constituents of the task to focus on the main issue, sub-issue(s) and the writer’s point of view.

#### 8.2.3.1 Written argumentative texts

Class writing tasks aimed at preparing the candidates for the IELTS academic writing test. Writing reports, descriptions and explanations based on some given data, and producing argumentative texts based on some contentious topics by the candidates in the classroom, are some examples. The candidates wrote their class writing tasks in accordance with the IELTS time and word limits and expectations (i.e. at least 150 words in 20 minutes and at least 250 words in 40 minutes). The extent of engagement with argumentative texts has also been in response to the IELTS expected descriptors and prompts and topics (cf. IELTS Handbook, 2007, and [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org), 2009).

The candidates produced written argumentative texts in response to the IELTS writing task 2 exemplars (cf. App. G). They had already been informed of the notion of argumentation genres and conventional steps in staging and sequencing their texts (cf. Table 6.4, Chapter 6, p. 130). I had informed them that if the prompts required the writer to express their own ideas without involving opposing perspectives (i.e. single sided), then they needed to compose their texts based on exposition genre. But, if the prompts suggested engaging different perspectives, then they needed to base their texts on discussion genre. Also, they had experienced that if the rubrics of the test on the topics indicated an offer to take an action, then they needed to approach the development of their texts based on a hortatory style and its academically conventional structure. Otherwise, they were required to follow an analytical style in order to structure and organize their texts (cf. Chapters 6 and 7). For

example, the excerpts below from Atusa's text 3 (cf. Table 6.7, Chapter 6, p. 137) signal that the writer has developed her text based on exposition and analytical genres.

(1) Over weight is one of the most important problems in developed countries. (2) Children, especially more than others involve with this problem. (3) In fact, there are several reasons for overweighting children. (4) Some factors are the number of fast foods and other factors are about the parents. (5) They do not pay attention to children's health.

Atusa has begun her text with announcing an issue (sentences 1) followed by arguments (sentences 2 and 3) and supporting examples (sentence 4). This trend is observable across the text.

(6) In Developed countries, the number of fast food is increasing. (7) Advertisements of fast food daily present in mass media. (8) Variety of them help to existe a tendancy for childrens feeding. (9) In addition to eat, children do not have any movement af eating. (10) So, a lot of them have over weight.

Regardless of some orthographical issues and grammatical shortcomings, organization and structure of the text, in general, followed the conventions, although these were not precisely compatible on occasions. For example, in the excerpts above the argument (sentence 6) is followed by a point, but it lacks interpretation. However, in other paragraphs the sequences have been observed to a greater extent (see Table 6.7, Chapter 6, p. 137 for the whole text).

### **8.2.3.2 Oral argumentative texts**

Oral proficiency plays a crucial role for students who intend to further tertiary education at English-medium universities. Group discussions provided the candidates with opportunities to experience relevant literacies. The candidates initially silently read an argumentative text of approximately 500-600 words in order to base their oral discussion upon it. They did this for 5-10 minutes (see Appendices F1, F2, and F3). The length of reading time was based on the item difficulty of the text. Reading "For & Against" texts aimed to develop the candidates' knowledge of and ability to talk/write about a particular topic area and the experiential domain in which it is set (i.e. developing field knowledge).

For example, in one task candidates read a text on the topic, “*World governments should conduct serious campaigns against smoking*”.

In group discussions, the candidates talked about the text, presented viewpoints and negotiated differences of opinion within a group. For example, in the following excerpt P4 demonstrates her stance:

341 P4: I totally disagree with smoking, because ah..., it, if ah... people ah... do smoking keep constant so, they make ah... some diseases like a big disease like a [cancer...]

App. D, p. 329, ll. 4-6

Drawing on argumentation genres, in turn 341, P4 directs the discussion into an *analytical* style and leads the discussion to its main social purpose by saying, “I totally disagree with smoking, because...” (cf. Chapter 7 and App. D for the whole discussion). In this way the candidates argued, interpreted, evaluated and supported their points of view. This literacy practice aimed to provide the candidates with an opportunity to experience an appropriate model of the interpersonal stance or voice which is typically adopted in English in conducting such debates.

Although argumentation does not typically form a significant part of the speaking test in IELTS, it usually appears as a writing task (i.e. Task 2). Literacy from the IELTS academic examination perspective, however, can be understood as the ability to participate in the type of social practices involved in the examination. The candidates experienced how to establish an argument, interpret, evaluate, and/or elaborate contentious issues in order to agree and/or disagree with others’ perspectives on the issues. The candidates reported the deliberations of the group to the whole class. The oral report’s generic structure resembles the generic structure of a written report. The findings (cf. Chapter 7) showed that in oral reports candidates organized their talks or deliberations in conventional format. These literacy events had implications for preparing the candidates to meet some of the expectations of the IELTS academic examination (samples of their official results appear in App. J, pp. 508-510).

#### **8.2.4 Discourses to convey meaning in texts**

The fourth question was “What discourses do candidates use to convey meaning in texts?” This question required the investigation of the candidates’ manner of approaching texts as a basis for their debates and discussions. The study investigated the way in which the candidates used texts and aspects of linguistic resources they utilized and reproduced in talk about texts in order to develop the relevant texts. I discuss the common features of discourses over the duration of the course and the ways these features affect the candidates’ argumentative literacies development.

Based on the class observations, the discourse of the IELTS academic preparation comprised different patterns. They were (a) interactions between the candidates and the instructor for the purpose of the IELTS related problem solving, guidance and solution, and (b) peer communication and negotiation of meaning in group discussions in order to produce conventionally appropriate argumentative texts.

The literacy practices aimed to provide the candidates’ with opportunities to experience producing argumentative texts in order to prepare for IELTS; that is a “shift from learning skills to learning to apply them” (Hampston & Echevaria, 1998, p. 174). For example, when engaged in group work to develop different stages of an argumentative text, they shared their ideas and views. After reaching agreement on their shared thoughts they reproduced them in the form of written texts. In order to share their views within the group with other groups in the classroom they discussed them in the class.

The participants in different groups collaborated, negotiated their own agreed upon perspectives and suggested reforms. From the data, debating of various contemporary contentious topics (Chapter 7, Section 7.2.2) contributed to and generated opportunities for experiencing, applying and activating their literacies (cf. Chapters 6 and 7). They experienced conventions of negotiation and transaction of opinions (Sections 7.2.2.1 and 7.2.2.2 and Appendices F1, F2 and F3) in order to reach conclusions. Text based interactions also produced opportunities to experience variety of discourses and a conventionally appropriate manner of argumentation (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2 in specific). These made it possible for them to reflect these literacies in producing their own argumentative texts (Chapter 6, Sections 6.7.1, 2, 3 and 4 and Chapter 7, Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2). After accomplishing a task, members of each group designated

one member to share the conclusions of their interaction with the whole class in order to receive their comments and criticisms. At this stage the candidates' discourse whether with the instructor or between themselves was for the purpose of mutual discussion and knowledge sharing. The candidates talked about texts analytically and discussed issue(s) independently in their small groups.

### **8.2.5 Implications**

The last question was "What are the implications of the study for the IELTS?" English-medium universities, typically, require students to engage in collaborative learning, and research and critical reading and writing and thinking. However, these aspects are not the focus of the preparation course for the IELTS academic test. Preparation for the IELTS is aimed at meeting expectations of the test based on its design and descriptors (cf. IELTS Handbook, 2007; [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org), 2009, these are demonstrated and discussed below). This can be considered as one of the effects of washback in test preparation. The expectations of a test as desired from its design direct the orientation of the preparation context. A number of studies, for example Cheng and Watanbe (2004), Green (2006), and Wall and Horák (2006), have supported this concept.

In their study conducted on TOEFL (which in its new version is remarkably similar to the IELTS) preparation courses in central and Eastern Europe, Wall and Horák (2006) noted that the content of the preparation materials in the courses originated from commercially published course-books. Thus the materials used in the preparation course under study were not necessarily oriented towards preparing for university study, but rather they were designed for the IELTS academic examination. However, opportunities provided in the course, unlike some other studies (Wall & Horák, 2006), were not restricted to course-books designed specifically for sitting the test. Based on the observations, on occasions the literacy practices exceeded to some extent the expected requirements for the IELTS examination. Some literacy practices in the four skills and sub-skills were linguistically oriented (cf. Chapters 6 and 7). In providing feedback and correcting errors I elaborated on the linguistically oriented subject matter at length in the classroom (cf. Chapters 6 and 7, and Appendices D and E). However, it might not be considered enough preparation for the demands of university study. In support of this, Bayliss and Ingram (2006, p. 1) say:

Although the score a student achieves in an IELTS test is meant to indicate whether he/she has a sufficient level of English proficiency to cope with the linguistic demands of tertiary studies, it does not imply that they will succeed academically or that they will not struggle linguistically.

Different factors can play a role in meeting university study demands where the IELTS may only indicate candidates' level of English proficiency at the time of sitting the test (cf. IELTS Handbook, 2005). For example, in his study on the washback effects on the learner, Green's (2006) findings "would seem to support the contention of the teachers that IELTS preparation might under-represent some of the academic writing skills they believed would be required for university study" (p. 126). Findings of the present study support those of Green's. For example, argumentative texts were neither of a critical nature in accordance with academic conventions as discussed below, nor were they based on literature review and referencing. Hence, improving the design of the IELTS test in accordance with this dominant typical academic culture could result in the formation of preparation classes that focus on such circumstances. That is, the design of the IELTS test may need change in a way that in addition to increasing English proficiency, candidates might practise adaptation and adoption of the academic culture before they commence their university study. This in turn may influence IELTS instructors to refrain from traditional structural teaching and move from teacher-centred classes towards literacy socialization. This would involve envisaging candidates as researchers, so as to encourage them to develop their knowledge by obtaining information from different resources inside and outside of the classroom in the course of preparation. This may lead to instructors taking preliminary measures in shaping a culture of how to engage in research and independent learning while collaborating in group work. In their group work members could give feedback and comment critically on each other's productions and viewpoints. This situation would resemble English-medium academic culture.

Change in the IELTS would be influenced by a positive "washback" effect. The design of the test and its descriptors must motivate candidates to prepare themselves in accordance with the expectations of English-medium university study, for example in terms of critical reading and writing, at least at commencement level. Descriptors of the IELTS at present do not signal such properties. An examination of the list of descriptors for assessing test-takers' writing (cf. IELTS Handbook, 2007, and [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org), 2009) reveals the absence of attention to such descriptors as discourse, understanding of the social purpose of the

topic, decoding and meaning making with the prompts and the topic for debating which are significantly valued in university writing. Bayliss and Ingram, (2006, p. 10) comment that,

IELTS proficiency descriptors provide little information about what a student should or should not be able to ‘do’ with language, making it difficult for university admissions staff and faculties to determine whether they are linguistically equipped to fulfil the task requirements of particular study disciplines.

There are descriptors such as ‘Task Achievement’ and ‘Task Response’ which may indicate decoding and communicating with the prompts, but they do not indicate whether or not discourse and understanding of the social purpose of the topic are also considered. These are achieved by looking at the extent of topic-related information in texts. There are also aspects of ‘Coherence and Cohesion’, ‘Lexical Resource’ and ‘Grammatical Range and Accuracy’ among the descriptors for assessing IELTS writing tasks. However, these also do not specifically clarify the criteria in detail. A discussion about the configuration of literacy practices for the IELTS (see below) provides more insights.

### **8.2.5.1 Configuration of literacy practices for IELTS preparation**

This section discusses the configuration of literacy practices for IELTS preparation within the framework of the IELTS academic preparation course, which is aimed at providing opportunities for developing argumentative texts. I examine the IELTS assessment criteria (IELTS Teaching Resources, 2007, accessible at [www.cambridgeesol.org](http://www.cambridgeesol.org)) to detect how the criteria determine the dominant IELTS preparation literacy practices, against which candidates’ achievement in argumentative texts is typically measured. Below is an explanation of the assessment criteria.

#### ***Assessment criteria***

IELTS developers have considered the following assessment criteria against which test-takers’ argumentative texts are measured:

- Task Response (i.e. how fully and appropriately the candidate has answered all parts of the task; the extent to which the candidate’s ideas are relevant, developed and supported; the extent to which the candidate’s position is clear and effective)
- Coherence and cohesion (i.e. how well the information and ideas are organised, presented and linked)

- Lexical Resource (i.e. the range of vocabulary used, how accurately it is used and how appropriate it is for the task)
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy (i.e. the range of structures used, how accurately they are used and how appropriate they are for the task)

IELTS Teaching Resources, [www.cambridgeesol.org](http://www.cambridgeesol.org), 2007 & 2009

The criteria have pedagogical implications guiding literacy practices for test preparation. Analysis of the data (cf. Chapters 6 and 7) indicated that literacy practices provided opportunities for developing argumentative texts to meet such criteria.

The IELTS assessment criteria are more concerned with accuracy at sentence level in terms of orthography and grammar. For example, the IELTS Teaching Resources (Item 3. Skills specific to Task 2) interprets the requirement of “accuracy of language” as:

... using the correct forms of language i.e. language which contains no mistakes of grammar, punctuation, spelling or vocabulary use.

IELTS Teaching Resources, [www.cambridgeesol.org](http://www.cambridgeesol.org), 2007 & 2009

The above quotes indicate that the focus of argumentative texts is expected to be on a reduced level of literacy at sentence level rather than literacy at higher levels such as academic discourse and genres.

Genres of academic argumentative texts based on English-medium academic culture vary according to the different disciplines. Accordingly, diverse genres require different literacies. A discussion or description addressing different university genres is not observable among the specified descriptors. This might be interpreted in a manner that considers literacy development as the development of reduced discourse skills. For example, it is questionable whether or not candidates would be able to explain a concept, employ methods of research, undertake a literature review or develop a research report in accordance with the discourse practices expected of them in their designated discipline.

Based on the IELTS interpretations (IELTS handbook, 2007), a test-taker who has reached a certain level of language proficiency to obtain the IELTS band scores required for entry into an English-medium university;

- a) has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations. (Band 6)
  
- b) has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning. (Band 7)

These interpretations, however, do not indicate if the test-taker might be equipped with, for example, such academic literacies as (a) developing a research proposal, (b) delivering a presentation required by a department in a seminar using Power Point, and (c) developing different essays and reports with varying length on various topics. These are some of the academic literacies expected of the university students. But some students who enter English-medium universities seem unable to demonstrate such literacies, leading to difficulties and possible failure in meeting academic requirements. One cause for this is that they have not been expected to demonstrate such literacies to obtain their IELTS band scores, and explains why after obtaining the required band scores for university entry, students still have difficulties with university study.

Improving test types based on disciplinary studies rather than on a general academic model would be useful both for candidates and recruiting universities. The benefit for candidates is their focused and informative preparation towards subject matter which faces them as part of their tertiary education. The usefulness for the receiving universities would lie in their awareness of the possible extent of the candidates' understanding, adaptation and adoption of the English-medium academic culture. Proposals for possible changes to the IELTS are: (a) improving the design of the test in terms of the four macro skills based on the academic literacies expected of students in English-medium academic culture in order to attune the candidates to the conventions of this culture, (b) improving the test design in a way to encourage the candidates to prepare for the examination typically through collaborative learning based on research and critical thinking perspectives, and (c) altering the test types towards those that are more course specific, for example university courses can be categorized into four major strands; Agricultural, Medical, Industrial and Humanities related courses.

This shift in the design of the test and the descriptors could (a) assist English-medium universities achieve desired literacy outcomes in their IELTS academic preparation programs, (b) address current criticisms about such programs, and (c) assist English language professionals and instructors to develop greater insights and understanding of the IELTS.

### **8.3 Limitations**

All the practices in the study aimed at preparing the candidates to obtain as high an IELTS band score as possible. Accordingly, their knowledge development was limited to meeting the extent of the descriptors as defined by the IELTS (IELTS Handbook, 2007; [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org), 2009) in order to obtain the assigned band scores. Other studies, for example Coleman et al. (2003) have addressed the same situation. In their investigation of the attitude of IELTS stakeholders they found that “both staff and students indicated that the purpose of the IELTS test is primarily functional (i.e. university entry), with a secondary learning/skill improvement role” (Coleman et al., 2003, p. 160). Consequently, the practices were directed towards the IELTS-expected expert knowledge for gaining the pre-defined band scores.

Literacy in academic writing is expected to demonstrate the writer’s ability to read critically, for example, to compare and contrast different perspectives in order to elaborate or support an argument (cf. Kern, 2000). Some significant aspects of university writing (e.g. quotation, citation and referencing) were not discussed in the preparation course. Furthermore, university students share a common expectation that they need to develop essays or reports of at least 1000 words or more. Practices towards developing lengthier essays or reports of, for example 1000 words or more, also were not engaged in. The course in this study did not provide the candidates with opportunities to develop literacies required for critical reading and writing appropriate to English-medium university requirements. The design of the IELTS also does not require candidates to demonstrate their ability in critical reading and writing (see IELTS descriptors and the test design). These circumstances deprive candidates of the opportunities to develop critical voices prior to starting their tertiary education at English-medium universities.

Analysis of the candidates’ class tasks (cf. Chapter 6) demonstrated that in the IELTS context, test-takers are not required to base their arguments on evidence obtained from

literature or research using inquiry appropriate to discourse practices in different disciplines. This context does not consider test-takers' texts as constituting the "very particular kind of literacy practices which is bound up with the workings of a particular social institution" (Lillis, 2001, p. 39). In other words, IELTS test-takers' writing did not indicate a model of typical university writing of any particular discipline, particularly in the sense that literacy is "always contested both in its meanings and practices" (Street, 2003, p. 2). For example, based on the present study's observations of the class tasks no portion of the class time was devoted to discussions about a critical approach to texts in relation to the academic culture of English-medium universities. Classroom literacy practices, also, did not encompass some significant aspects of university writing, for example referencing. Lack of attention to the importance of referencing and development of lengthy texts in the IELTS preparation courses has also been addressed by other studies. For example, Green (2006) found that, "The importance of integrating source material and generating and organizing lengthy texts were both aspects of 'Academic Writing' emphasized by the teachers in interviews and felt by them to be under-presented by IELTS" (pp. 125-126). These properties were not discussed or practised in the course in this study. These circumstances may in turn depict the participants' process of literacy construction. This situation is deemed unlikely to apprentice the candidates into the academic culture of taking a critical approach to texts. This can have consequences for the literacies which candidates experience when they are developing argumentative texts. As a result, the extent and features of the language knowledge which OTEFL students bring into English-medium universities may be at an inappropriate level or even incompatible with the academic demands of such universities.

The preparation course also did not cover the theme of 'research report' because it was not within the scope of the candidates' preparation for the IELTS academic writing test. This is an important finding because it can also be an outcome of the washback effect in test design. This phenomenon may also be observable in literacy practices for oral argumentative texts as discussed below.

IELTS-focused practices are not associated with such university-based oral activities as PowerPoint-aided presentations, for example. Presentations were simple and short (about 3-5 minutes). In other words, the practices seemed to be of "insufficient focus on 'Academic' English skills" (Deakin, 1997, p. 18). According to Hogan (1992) "The

listening and speaking sub tests are less clearly linked to study skills...these sections have to aim at a more common denominator of skill” (p. 15). She also reports that according to some critics of the IELTS, “it ignores, for example, the entire area of oral presentation-an integral part of study skills in an Australian context-as well as note-taking from a lecture” (p. 15). This approach is unlikely to prepare candidates for control of academic literacies despite their engagement in developing argumentative texts.

Consequently, when OTEFL students commence their tertiary education at English-medium universities they encounter two complex and challenging circumstances. The first challenge is their adaptation to and adoption of the new academic culture and its requirements. In the words of Lea and Street (1999) they need “to unpack the writing demands that are being made in different fields and environments in the course of their academic programs” (p. 81). Thus, such students are likely to encounter difficulties in producing different texts of varied nature in accordance with the academic requirements, with which they may be unfamiliar. Secondly, they struggle with their use of English language in trying to cope with the academic literacy practices as recognized by academic conventions. Technically, this means that candidates’ repertoires of literacy practices for obtaining IELTS band scores as a language proficiency pre-requisite might seem insufficient, or in need of significant development.

#### **8.4 Suggestions for further research**

This study was limited to one IELTS academic preparation class in Tehran. Additional empirical studies are needed to inquire into what underlies OTEFL students’ difficulty and possible failure in doing academic courses in English-medium universities. This study suggests further research into literacy practices in preparation programs for IELTS which can effectively lead candidates to adaptation and adoption of English-medium academic culture.

Research in this area could result in identifying specific patterns of literacy which closely relate to expectations and requirements of English-medium academic culture. Such a study would address the question: ‘What is the extent of the association between literacy practices provided in IELTS academic preparation courses in terms of the four skills and current academic literacy practices in different disciplines in English-medium universities?’

This area of research could require researchers to identify and describe the extent of candidates' preparedness in using English authentically and meaningfully in academic contexts.

### **8.5 Conclusion**

This study focused on candidates' experiences in the development of argumentative texts when preparing for the IELTS academic examination. I claimed that the achievements were not at a level expected of students doing tertiary studies at English-medium universities. However, the candidates' did engage in literacy practices for developing argumentative texts. This contributed significantly in the candidates' acquisition of literacies required for composing conventionally appropriate argumentative texts.

Analysis of a group of IELTS academic candidates' written and oral argumentative texts showed that participation in the IELTS academic preparation course provided the learners with opportunities to experience literacies: (a) to develop relevant argumentative texts, (b) to utilize a range of linguistic resources in composing their texts, (c) to observe argumentative conventions in organizing and structuring their texts, and (d) to engage in discourse practices in order to interpret, evaluate and/or elaborate on arguments and ideas.

OTEFL students usually come from diverse academic backgrounds, which may differ from that of western academic conventions. After entering into English-medium universities OTEFL students are challenged by at least two obstacles to access academic knowledge. Firstly, these students have to face different orders of discourse, which belong to a particular discipline genre embedded in the academic genres. Secondly, they have to deal with the medium of instruction - English. These can hinder students' successful adoption of and adaptation to English-medium academic life which can lead to students' poor academic results and achievements. Students are typically required to be able to produce a range of text types in their programs of study in English-medium universities. The processes required to develop such texts also vary in accordance with the different nature of the discipline (cf. Candlin & Plum, 1999). Consequently, because the expectations of university study are at higher level of complexity, OTEFL students may need to be provided with further information to prepare for university study, in terms of adaptation to and adoption of English-medium academic culture, prior to commencing their desired tertiary programs in such academic institutions as Australian universities.

Finally, the study has demonstrated that students' preparation for IELTS in formal classes contributes significantly to successful achievement of the desired band scores for entry into English-medium universities (cf. App. J, pp. 508-510). From the data it has been evident that candidates obtained significant information about the nature and features of IELTS, and they acquired a range of linguistic resources in terms of composing argumentative texts, which are also useful for university study. The study has implications for IELTS stakeholders as discussed. The study points to approaches which will enable OTEFL students to develop argumentative texts through the study of genres.

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