CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

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2.1 Agency

In this chapter, I will explore how agency has been theorized in social theory, focusing on the work of Giddens, but also drawing on the work of Bourdieu, de Certeau and Vygotsky, linguistic anthropology and SLA research. I will then look at the research on learning outside the classroom, especially with regard to language learning, after which I will deal with how Giddens's structuration theory has been used in information systems research. In the final section of this chapter, I will provide a brief review of the literature on computer-mediated communication and how it relates to SLA research, language use and agency. First, though, as Giddens, Bourdieu and Vygotksy have all been influenced by Marx and the dialectical way of thinking, it will be necessary to provide a brief introduction to dialectics.

2.1.1 Dialectics

Dialectics has had a long history in both Eastern and Western thought (McEvilley, 2003; Wong, 2006). Broadly speaking, dialectics is a relational way of thinking about reality that emphasizes the interconnectedness of things, or actions, and challenges the notion that anything can have an isolated, independent existence (McEvilley, 2003; Murti, 1960; Ollman, 1976, 2003; Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Ritzer, 2000; Stcherbatsky, 1962; Tian, 2005). Dialectical thinking, therefore, focuses on relationships, both between elements and between the past, present and future life of

elements. In this way, it brings to light the many changes and interactions that occur in the world.

One of the relations that has long been a concern of dialectical thinking is the interpenetration of opposites (Murti, 1960; Ollman, 2003; Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Ritzer, 2000; Stcherbatsky, 1962; Tian, 2005). According to this mode of thinking, 'cause' and 'effect', 'love' and 'hate', 'good' and 'bad' and other such opposites only appear to be opposite; in reality, though, they are joined by internal relations and are not logically independent of one another (Murti, 1960; Ollman, 1976, 2003; Paolucci, 2007; Tian, 2005). In Chinese dialectics, this can be seen in the *Yijing*, with the opposites of *yin* and *yang* depending on each other to be what they are (Tian, 2005), and the writings of Laozi (1993) about contrasting concepts: "Recognize beauty and ugliness is born. Recognize good and evil is born . . . . Is and isn't produce each other" (p. 2). Similarly, the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna (1995), founder of the Mādhyamika school, argued that entities that appeared to be different are, in reality, mutually dependent on each other, as no relations could arise between them if they were really different (Murti, 1960). In Greek thought, Heraclitus, who influenced both Hegel's and Marx's dialectic (Hegel, 2006 [1825-6]; Williams, 1989), believed that opposites were inseparable and that this tension of opposites was an essential part of our existence (Copleston, 1946).

An important element of the concept of the interpenetration of opposites is the way our judgments depend on how, and for what purposes, things are viewed. Under different circumstances, things that appear to be identical might seem to be different, and vice versa. According to Ollman (2003), this perspectival element plays an important part in dialectical thought. In Marx's writings on capitalism, for example, "a machine used by a farmer who owned it would not be capital, but it would be capital

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if he hired a man to operate it" (Ollman, 1976, p. 15). This is because, according to Marx (1967 [1867]; Marx & Engels, 2002 [1848]), the notions of wage-labor and exploitation are internally related to capital, and so if the use of a machine does not involve exploitation, or the paying of wage-labor, it cannot be capital. It only becomes capital when it is employed in an exploitative relationship between capitalist and laborer. In this conception of capital, factors that are usually thought of as being external to it "are viewed as co-elements in a single structure" (Ollman, 2003, p. 25).

With regard to human agency, one of the implications of the dialectical mode of thinking, and this philosophy of internal relations, is that action needs to be understood in relation to historical processes and social structures (Paolucci, 2007; Ritzer, 2000). Action does not occur in a social or historical vacuum. Neither, though, is it produced mechanistically by impersonal social or historical forces. As Marx (1972 [1852]) observed, "men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (p. 437). Any study of action, therefore, necessarily involves a study of history and social structures, not seen as external factors, though, but as relations implicated in action.

2.1.2 Giddens and Structuration Theory

The concepts of agency and structure are central to social theory (Archer, 1996; Stones, 2007). Often, though, they have been conceived of in oppositional terms, with action theories concentrating on the capacity of individuals to act freely and independently and structuralist theories focusing on the power of structure to constrain action (Giddens, 1979; Stones, 2007). In contrast, Giddens (1979, 1984, 1993), in his theory of structuration, argues that agency and structure are mutually dependent on each other, their relationship being a dialectical one, and that structure

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

enables action as well as constrains it. Traditionally, structure is conceived of as an external reality – existing, for example, in institutions, technologies, or other entities – confronting individuals and constraining their action (Best, 2003; Cassell, 1993; Poole & DeSanctis, 2004; Ritzer, 2000). Giddens, however, sees structure as rules and resources which actors draw upon when engaging in social practices, and which are reproduced, or transformed, through such action. Structure exists only in its instantiations in social practices and, on an individual level, as memory traces, and, rather than being conceived of as simply a constraint, it is seen as being essentially involved in the production of action.

The central concept in structuration theory is the duality of structure, which refers to the mutual dependence of agency and structure. Individuals draw upon structure, that is, rules and resources, when engaging in social practices, and it is through action, in turn, that structure is reconstituted. It is through this process that social practices, including those that reflect deeply embedded relations of inequality, are reproduced across time and space (Ahearn, 2001; Kasperson, 2000). An example of this process is the act of someone drawing on syntactical rules when speaking a sentence and by the very act of speaking that sentence contributing to the reproduction of these syntactical rules as enduring properties of the language (Giddens, 1981). The duality of structure, though, is not to be seen as a simple causal loop that determines action and structure mechanistically (Bryant & Jary, 2003); actors are still able to strategize in pursuit of their projects and there are always unintended consequences of action that feed back into the agency-structure relationship (Giddens, 1991).

Giddens (1984) describes rules of social life as "generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices" (p. 21). These rules are

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

generalizable because they need to apply over a wide range of contexts and occasions, as it would not be possible to formulate specific rules for every context. Rules vary according to how intensive, tacit and formal they are, and to the extent to which they are sanctioned. Intensive rules are rules that are constantly invoked in day-to-day life, an example being the rules of language. Giddens argues that most of the rules people use in everyday life are only tacitly understood; actors are very knowledgeable about them, in the sense that they are able to competently draw on them when participating in social life, but they are not usually able to formulate them discursively. Among rules that are formally codified, the type case is that of laws, which are among the most strongly sanctioned types of rules. This does not mean, though, that all informal rules are weakly sanctioned; Willis's (1977) study about working class lads' attitudes towards authority and Garfinkel's (1967) breaching experiments provide us with examples of the sanctioning power of certain informal rules.

In breaching experiments, everyday social rules are violated in order to gain a better understanding of how people construct social reality (Ritzer, 2000). The assumption behind these experiments is not only that people are constantly drawing upon these rules in the course of their day-to-day lives but also that they are largely unaware of this process – the rules being "a 'seen but unnoticed' background of common understandings" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 44). Breaching experiments involve the disruption of everyday procedures so that the process by which day-to-day life is produced and reproduced can be studied. Garfinkel (1967) describes an experiment he asked his students to do whereby they had to spend between fifteen minutes and an hour imagining that they were boarders and then acting on the basis of this assumption. In the vast majority of cases, family members were astounded by such behavior. "Reports were filled with accounts of astonishment, bewilderment, shock,

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

anxiety, embarrassment, and anger, and with charges by various family members that the student was mean, inconsiderate, selfish, nasty, or impolite" (p. 47). At the same time, the family members eagerly sought to make the strange behavior intelligible, reasoning that it could be explained by illness, overwork, or problems at work, for example. The students who rejected these explanations were likely to be isolated, or denounced, as family members became increasingly emotional during their attempts to restore order to their day-to-day lives. When one student was advised to work less, he politely replied that he appreciated the consideration, but that he felt fine, to which his father "responded in a high rage, 'I don't want any more of *that* out of *you* and if you can't treat your mother decently you'd better move out!'" (p. 48). When the experiment was explained to them, many of the family members were still annoyed with the students, although there were no cases in which the relationship between student and family members was irreparably damaged. The highly emotional reactions to this experiment, though, seem to reflect the importance of the tacitly understood social rules that people are continuously drawing on in their day-to-day lives.

An analytical distinction can be made between two aspects of rules – structures of legitimation, that is, normative elements, and structures of signification. By virtue of the duality of structure, people draw on norms when making decisions about the propriety of acts (Livesay, 1997), and through their action reconstitute structures of legitimation. Similarly, when communicating with other people, actors draw upon interpretative schemes, and thereby reproduce, or transform, structures of signification. It is important to note that the study of structures of signification is not concerned with signs in the abstract, but with signs as they are instantiated in interaction. It is also a study of not only words, or symbols, but other kinds of signs,

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such as gestures, types of clothes or architectural styles. In a hotel, for example, we can distinguish between workers and guests, and between different kinds of workers, based on the clothes, or uniforms, they wear. We are also aware of the parts of the building we can and cannot enter and where we would need to go to perform certain tasks on the basis of the layout of the building. In addition, any study of signs needs to take note of any absence of signs, such as when someone is silent or fails to observe a norm, as this is also potentially meaningful.

Resources are capabilities generating command over material phenomena (allocative resources) and people (authoritative resources), and these are embedded in structures of domination. These capabilities are the media through which power is exercised, and such action, in turn, reconstitutes structures of domination. Giddens stresses that these three dimensions of structure – legitimation, signification and domination – are only distinguishable analytically; in practice, they interpenetrate one another and are inseparable. For example, in the language learning classroom, if a female student wants to ask her male teacher a question, she needs to use her knowledge of the norms surrounding asking questions in the classroom, or similar situations, and draw on interpretative schemes to formulate the question. In addition, she has to use her power to attract the teacher's attention and get a response from him, which involves understanding at what times it is appropriate to ask questions in the class and what signs indicate that the teacher is ready to answer questions, and what signs she needs to use to convey to the teacher that she wants to ask a question. Once she has asked the question, of course, she then needs to process the answer, another potentially complex process.

Giddens (1984) sees the recursive character of social life, the routinized nature of day-to-day activities, as a key element in the continuity of an agent's personality

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

and society's institutions, both of which exist only through their continued reproduction. On the individual level, everyday routines provide actors with a sense of trust in their day-to-day social lives. When engaging in routine activities, they know from experience how to behave and can usually accurately anticipate the actions of others, something that would be much more difficult if their actions had to be constantly invented *de novo*. It is this sense of trust that was violated, which, in turn, provoked such emotional reactions, in the breaching experiment described earlier. Giddens argues that actors have a motivated interest in reproducing the conditions of trust provided by routine activities. As a result, many everyday actions are not directly motivated. There is, instead, a generalized motivational commitment to engaging in routine activities and extending the use of them across time and space.

Giddens does not see action as a series of discrete events, but as a continuous flow of conduct, "a stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions . . . in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world" (Giddens, 1993, p. 81). Within this flow of action, agents reflexively monitor their, and other agents', conduct, as well as aspects of the context in which they act. They also continuously maintain a theoretical understanding of their activity and can, if asked, provide an explanation for their conduct. According to Giddens, motivation is not as deeply implicated in the flow of action as the reflexive monitoring and theoretical understanding of action. In most cases, motives provide overall plans for action, with much of the action itself being not directly motivated.

Giddens stresses that human agents are both knowledgeable and capable. Each individual has an intimate, and practical, knowledge of the social rules they draw on in the construction of social life. Their knowledge, though, is always bounded by "unacknowledged conditions of action on the one side, and unintended consequences

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

of action on the other" (Giddens, 1981, p. 19). Giddens makes an important distinction between practical and discursive consciousness. Much of actors' knowledge exists on the level of practical consciousness, that is, they have a tacit understanding of how to conduct themselves in day-to-day life but cannot formulate this knowledge discursively. To be capable is to have power, to be able to act and make decisions, even in situations where the individual seems to be powerless. Every actor has the power "to 'make a difference' in the world" (p. 197), in situations where the "individual could, at any place in a given sequence of conduct, have acted otherwise" (Giddens, 1984, p. 9). This notion of people being able to 'have acted otherwise' has been criticized for being overly voluntaristic and not sufficiently appreciating the extent to which certain individuals' actions are circumscribed by social and material conditions (Bhaskar, 1979; Smith, 1998; Stones, 2005; Thompson, 1989). There is an important difference, though, between having no choice in a situation and reacting mechanistically to certain circumstances that the formulation 'could have acted otherwise' is meant to convey. Giddens acknowledges that there are situations in which actors have effectively no choice, but their action in such situations should not be seen as reaction, like the jerking of the knee when hit by a hammer. Even under the most constrained circumstances, human agents have alternative ways of dealing with social life, including the possibility of refraining from action.

2.1.3 Bourdieu, the Habitus and Games

There are several similarities between Giddens's structuration theory and the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 1991a). Not only do they both aim to go beyond the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism, they also see the agency-structure relationship as a dialectical one, and emphasize the importance of studying the

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

production and reproduction of social practices. For both authors, practices are the outcome of the agency-structure dialectic; they are neither determined mechanistically nor produced by free will (Ritzer, 2000).

Bourdieu views practices as the product of the relationship between the *habitus* and the specific social contexts, or fields, in which individuals act. Bourdieu uses the term habitus to refer to structures which are internal to the individual, "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53) that exist "in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (Wacquant, 1992, p.16). Bourdieu stresses that these dispositions operate below the level of consciousness and places great emphasis on the significance of the body, the acquisition of bodily dispositions, and the relationship between bodily and mental dispositions. Cultural understandings are encoded in the way people hold themselves and the gestures that they use (Taylor, 1999), and the way people stand, walk and speak, have, in turn, an impact on how they feel and think. In his writings on the Kabyle people, Bourdieu provides an example of the importance of examining these bodily dispositions by looking at how the opposition between men and women is expressed through bodily actions. Men are brought up to stand, walk and eat in a way that reflects uprightness and directness whereas the way women are to do these things in a way that reflects restraint and flexibility. This socialization, in turn, upholds male dominance by rooting "the most fundamental structures of the group in the primary experiences of the body which, as is clearly seen in emotion, takes metaphors seriously" (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 71-72).

Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 1998, 2000) often uses the analogy of a 'game' to describe social fields and how people act in these fields. To take part in a form of social life, or a game, actors need to have an intuitive grasp of how to conduct

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

themselves successfully, and they also need to have an interest in the 'game'. Bourdieu (1991b, 1998, 2000) refers to this interest in the game, this belief that the game is worth playing as *illusio*. The mere fact that people participate in a social game means that they tacitly accept its rules and that they attach importance to the game. To outside observers, this illusio might be thought of as illusion, or self-deception, but to the people involved in the game, it is a serious undertaking, one that is often played for high stakes. Nowadays, for example, the idea that certain men would settle questions of honor by dueling each other might sound farcical, but for people who lived in a society that endorsed dueling, it would, quite literally, be deadly serious. Even people who professed disdain for the practice of dueling felt compelled, due to the imperatives of the social field in which they lived, to take part in duels (Drake, 2004). However, it is also true that there was resistance to this practice, by individuals who skilfully challenged the rules of the game, and this is an aspect of social life that is underemphasized in Bourdieu's work.

Bourdieu describes practical logic, the logic that people use in their day-to-day life, as a 'feel for the game'. Contrary to rational calculation, this feel for the game is an awareness that agents have developed through their experience within a certain field, or game, and which allows them to act competently in specific situations giving them "a capacity for practical anticipation of the 'upcoming' future contained in the present" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). Just as a footballer needs to pass the ball to where his teammate will be, rather than where his teammate is now, competent social agents need to be able to anticipate the upcoming actions, and reactions, of other agents when engaging in social practices. By engaging in similar practices in the past, social agents gain principles whereby they can anticipate the imminent future, which allows them to know how to act in the present. Although this knowledge is probabilistic,

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

rather than being complete, it does allow individuals to engage in social life competently.

According to Bourdieu, the habitus is acquired through durable immersion in social life and provides actors with principles by which they can act and make choices in an unpredictable and ever-changing world (Bourdieu, 1977; Ritzer, 2000). Action based on these principles serves to reproduce the habitus, which, in turn, leads to further action based on similar principles. As a result, social practices, including those that reflect relations of inequality, tend to be reproduced across time and space. Bourdieu's description of the habitus, especially his contention that it operates below the level of consciousness, and the process whereby it is reproduced have been criticized for downplaying the agent's role in the production of practices and for providing an overly deterministic representation of human action (Bohman, 1999; Jenkins, 2002; Mouzelis, 1995). In response to this charge of determinism, Bourdieu emphasizes that the habitus is a historical product, and as such it "is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal!" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 133). It is quite clear, though, that Bourdieu sees individuals as being less powerful, and less able to change the social and material conditions of their existence, than Giddens does.

2.1.4 De Certeau and Ways of Using

De Certeau (1984) focuses on the interpretative work that individuals do when facing powerful, seemingly intractable social forces in their day-to-day lives. He stresses the importance of looking at the tactics the weak use to create for themselves space in which they "can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language" (p. 30). In other words, he emphasizes the active, productive aspect of

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

consumption. He cites the example of Brazilian peasants, who are constantly engaged in a struggle with the powerful, which they invariably lose, but who have appropriated Christianity, an ideology that has been imposed on them from outside, and reemployed it according to their own needs and the conditions of their existence. The faith they have found in their version of Christianity provides them with the hope they need to face the imposing social forces that confront them. "*A way of using* imposed systems constitutes the resistance to the historical law of a state of affairs and its dogmatic legitimations" (p. 18).

Although de Certeau looks at several everday activities, such as talking, cooking, shopping and walking, in his work on these 'tactics of the weak', he sees reading as the paradigmatic example of this form of consumption (Gardiner, 2000). "To read is to wander through an imposed system (that of the text, analogous to the constructed order of a city or of a supermarket)" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 169). Readers are not passive, though; they create meanings which are often different from what the authors intended, and it is through the relationship between the reader and the text that meanings are produced. "The text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control" (p. 170). Although the dominant powers attempt to enforce a literal reading of texts, individual readers are still able to create their own interpretations, especially when institutions weaken. As an example, de Certeau explains how the authority of the Church to impose their interpretation of the scriptures has diminished since the Reformation, and that this reduction in the Church's power has led to the growth of readers' creativity.

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

2.1.5 Vygotsky and Creativity

Before describing how Vygotsky saw human agency, it will be necessary to give a brief overview of the concept of mediation, which, according to Lantolf (2000), is the "most fundamental concept in sociocultural theory" (p. 1). Mediation, broadly speaking, refers to the use of tools to mediate the relationship between the individual and the environment. Just as we use tools to act indirectly on the physical world, we also use symbolic tools, or signs, to regulate and change our relationships with others and ourselves. Vygotsky (1978, 1997a) argued that whereas lower mental functions respond directly to stimulation from the environment, higher mental functions are always mediated by cultural artifacts, or symbolic tools, in particular by language. Through their use of these artifacts, humans move beyond their biological capabilities and develop culturally-based psychological processes.

Wertsch (2007), in his commentary on Vygotsky's use of the concept of mediation, makes a distinction between explicit and implicit mediation. The latter is seen as an aspect of mental functioning that is automatic and mostly unintentionally introduced, such as the interaction between thought and word (Vygotsky, 1987). Explicit mediation, though, involves the conscious use of cultural artifacts, for example, when people use pen and paper to work out mathematical problems, and, "by the aid of extrinsic stimuli, . . . *control their behavior from the outside*" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 40). This view of human agency, the ability to choose how to use or adapt artifacts, is reflected in Vygotsky's experimental method of double stimulation (Engeström, 2007; van der Veer, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978), in which subjects are given tools that might help them solve a certain task, such as a pen and paper for a memory task, but they have to decide how to use these tools themselves. In this approach, contrary to classical experimental methods, which have been

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

criticized for treating subjects as objects to be manipulated and categorized (Giest, 2008; Roebuck, 2000; Williams & Burden, 1997), the participants are seen as subjects who have "the capacity to adapt . . . [themselves] to reality *plus* the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality" (Freire, 1974, p. 4).

If individuals are to change reality, though, they will need to act on the world creatively. Although this creative capacity is alluded to in the models provided by Giddens (Sewell, 1992) and Bourdieu (Stones, 2005), it is undertheorized. Vygotsky (1997b, 2004), in contrast, places considerable emphasis on the importance of creativity and imagination, making it clear that these are capabilities that all human beings possess. "Imagination, as the basis of all creative activity, is an important component of absolutely all aspects of cultural life, enabling artistic, scientific, and technical creation alike" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 9). He describes creativity as the ability to combine elements from the past and rework them to make new products, ideas and behaviors, and the term imagination is used to describe this creative activity. Creativity, then, is not restricted to a few select individuals, but is a property of each and every person. "Creativity is present, in actuality, not only when great historical works are born but also whenever a person imagines, combines, alters, and creates something new" (p. 10). Defining creativity in such broad terms provides an explanation of how individuals are able to actively change, rather than simply reproduce, their social and material conditions.

2.1.6 Agency, Responsibility and Gender

The concept of agency has been a concern of linguistic anthropologists for some time (Ahearn, 2001). Several aspects of how language and agency relate to each other have been researched, including the relationship between language and gender (Ahearn, 2004; Eckert & McGonnell-Ginet, 2003; Ochs, 1992), the allocation and

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

negotiation of responsibility (Besnier, 1993; Du Bois, 1993; Duranti, 1993; Irvine, 1993), language socialization (Andersen, 1986; Ochs, 1996, 2002; Watson-Gegeo, 2004), and the social consequences of literacy (Ahearn, 2004).

If human action is mediated by sociocultural conditions, rather than simply being the product of free will, to what extent are people to be held responsible for their actions? Duranti (1993), in his study of how responsibility is attributed to orators in Samoa, argues against what Holquist (1983) calls the 'personalist' view of meaning, in which meaning is seen to be owned by autonomous individuals. He emphasizes that, in Polynesian culture, the self is conceived of as being grounded in social relations, rather than being autonomous. In Samoa, therefore, meaning is seen as a co-operative achievement, "*as the product of an interaction (words included) and not necessarily as something that is contained in someone's mind*" (p. 41). Samoan orators are held accountable for the implications of their actions/words, rather than their intentions. This can be contrasted with divination (Du Bois, 1993), in which the speakers are neither held responsible for their intentions nor the consequences of their words. This is because "what divination seeks is precisely the absence of human responsibility for either intentions or consequences" (p. 67). For the societies that use divination, this provides an "apersonal authoritative meaning . . . . which can be put to a wide variety of uses in social life" (p. 65).

In gender studies, a distinction is traditionally made between sex and gender, sex being biologically based and gender being "an achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 125). Men and women *accomplish* (Garfinkel, 1967), *do* (West & Zimmerman, 1987) or *perform* (Butler, 1999) their gender, and this needs to be both learned and taught (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Echoing Bourdieu's emphasis

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

on the importance of bodily dispositions, Butler (1997) argues that gender is instituted through what she calls "the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (p. 402).

Torab (1996), in her study of pious womens' prayer meetings, shows how an individual can accept dominant cultural interpretations of gender, and yet act in ways that challenge them. At one of the meetings, the leader of the gathering, a Mrs Omid, was asked to act as a prayer leader, a task that women are not allowed to perform as they are considered to be too emotional. The fact that she was asked to do this shows that she was considered to be just and rational, properties which, according to Islamic legal discourses, are generally attributed to males. However, Mrs Omid refused to perform this act insisting that it was a male task and jokingly telling her fellow participants that if they did not believe that she was not too emotional, they should get her husband a co-wife and see how she would react. In this way, Mrs Omid supports the established order at the same time that she challenges it by alluding to a law that causes women distress by allowing men to have more than one wife, thereby highlighting the inequalities that women face. Torab refers to these tactics as "simultaneous processes of complicity as well as resistance" (p. 235).

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) argue that gender is so deeply engrained in our social practice that we find it difficult to interact with, or talk about, other people unless we can assign a gender to them. Even in chat rooms, it seems that people attach a significant amount of importance to knowing the other participants' genders (Crystal, 2006). Information about real-life genders is requested and provided, and some people adopt gender-revealing nicknames, such as sexychica or shy_boy (Herring, 2001; Subrahmanyam, Smahel, & Greenfield, 2006). In addition,

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

participants tend to subconsciously reveal their gender by adhering to culturally-prescribed gendered norms, sometimes even exaggerating them (Herring, 2001).

2.1.7 Agency in Second Language Acquisition Research

Although there have been many studies in the broader field of education that have used Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Atkin, 2000; Bloomer, Hodkinson, & Billett, 2004; Clegg & McNulty, 2002; Colley, James, & Diment, 2007; Golden, 2004; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004; Makoe, 2006; Marjoribanks, 2006), only a few studies have made reference to this concept in SLA research (Lamb, 2009; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Scollon, 2002). Most of the studies that have addressed the concept of agency in SLA research have been in the field of sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Genung, 2002; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) and language socialization (Ochs, 2002; Watson-Gegeo & Nielsen, 2003), although there have also been several studies recently that have examined the links between agency, on the one hand, and motivation and identity, on the other (Lamb, 2009; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Ushioda, 2008).

Lantolf and Genung (2002) followed a highly-motivated language learner's failed attempt to learn Chinese in an intensive summer program. This doctoral student, who was referred to as PG, took the course not only to fulfill a degree requirement, but also out of a strong desire to learn Chinese. Her previous experience with foreign language courses taught at the school had been positive, and she expected the course to include communicative activities. However, nearly all of the instruction was teacher-fronted and relied on pattern practice exercises. The instructors adopted an authoritarian approach to teaching, and on one occasion, one of the instructors corrected a student in what seemed to be a very intimidating and humiliating manner, which left the student feeling "'verbally abused' and 'beat up'" (p.

PAYAP UNIVERSITY

187). As a result of these negative experiences, PG's motives, and her role in classroom practices, changed. Previously, she had taken the course in order to complete her PhD, but she also had a strong desire to learn Chinese, and "given her history as a successful language learner, she had anticipated yet another productive undertaking" (p. 189). Towards the end of the course, though, her sole motive to continue studying was to fulfill the degree requirement, and so "she took on the behavior of a dutiful and compliant student" (p. 189). In other words, she actively decided to become a passive student.

PG's experiences show how "motives and goals are formed and reformed under specific historical material circumstances" (Lantolf & Genung, 2002, p. 191), but they also provide an example of how people actively strategize in the face of difficulties. It can be seen that external forces, rather than determining action, should be seen as "boundary markers that become targets for negotiation, reconsideration, sabotage and/or change" (Long, 2001, p. 63).

Focusing on the process of socialization, Ochs (2002) shows the complexities of social activities by looking at the difficulties Erin, a young girl with autism, faces when taking part in a game of softball at school. To play the game competently, Erin needs to know the categories and rules of the game and how she is expected to behave, or what her role is, as a member of a softball team. Although rules of a game like softball can be explained, behavioral norms are not normally explicitly taught but "must be inferred from performances of conventional, socially co-ordinated activities, and interpretative practices" (p. 103). The problems that Erin has are compounded by the fact that typically many activities occur simultaneously. In addition, even in a game like softball, the norms that govern it still allow individuals space for maneuver. This is something that autistic children have difficulties with, and this means that they

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"tend to overgeneralize norms for activities and identities" (p. 105). Social norms, though, are to be negotiated and contested by knowledgeable agents, and so they cannot be reduced to formalized sets of rules, or static prescriptions for action.

2.2 Learning outside the Classroom

In recent years, informal learning, especially in the workplace, has been the subject of a considerable body of research (Eraut, 2004; Hunter, Spence, McKenna, & Iedema, 2008; Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Sawchuk, 2008; Solomon, Boud, & Rooney, 2006; Swanwick, 2005). It has been realized that in the light of the changes that have been brought forth by globalization and technical innovations, the notion that formal education, provided by schools and universities, is sufficient to prepare workers for a lifelong career is no longer valid (Cervero, 2000; Cseh, 2001; Guglielmino, 2008; Jarvis, 1996). For example, whereas in the late 1940's, most people could graduate from high school knowing 75% of what they would need to know during their career until retirement, fifty years on, that figure had been reduced to 2% (Barth, 1997; cited in Guglielmino, 2008, p. 5). It has been estimated that medical knowledge, for example, doubles every 6-8 years (Mantovani, Castelnuovo, Gaggioli, & Riva, 2003), and in the field of engineering, the half-life of knowledge, that is, the time in which half of what an engineer knows becomes obsolete, is considered to be between 2 and 8 years (Wulf & Fisher, 2002).

According to Livingstone (2002), "informal learning includes anything we do outside of organized courses to gain significant knowledge, skill or understanding . . . . informal learning is like an iceberg – mostly invisible on the surface and immense" (p. 2). Schugurensky (2000) identifies three forms of informal learning: self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization. He sees self-directed learning as being both intentional and conscious. A person, either

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individually or in a group, engages in a project with the intention of learning something, and that person is aware that learning has occurred. An example of this type of learning might be a person wanting to find out more about a historical event, and then researching this event on the Internet, going to museums, watching films, and so on, to gain more knowledge about this event. Incidental learning refers to learning that occurs as a byproduct of another activity. The person is, however, aware that he or she has learned something, although there was no intention to learn anything. For example, a toddler touches a hot iron and learns not to do this again. Socialization, which is also referred to as tacit learning, refers to the learning of attitudes, behaviors and skills that occur during everyday life. Not only does the person not intend to learn anything, he or she is also unaware that any learning has taken place. Learning a first language is considered to be an example of learning through socialization.

The term 'informal learning', though, has been criticized for privileging practices that take place in formal educational institutions rather than viewing learning as a consequence of participation and engagement in social practices more generally (Billett, 2002). Billett argues for adopting a broader notion of learning, seeing learning as change that takes place through the interaction between people, working individually or in groups, and the social environment (Billett, 2008; Vygotsky, 1997b), and avoiding terms that suggest that formal education is necessarily superior. Eraut (2004) has noted that the assumption that learning only takes place in formal education and training programs seems to be shared by most of the people he has interviewed in his research on workplace learning. They also tend to assume that working and learning are completely separate activities, whereas he has found that most workplace learning takes place on the job, especially when people are

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working with others or tackling challenging tasks (see also Billett, Smith, & Barker, 2005). As a result of these assumptions, many people are blind to the amount of learning that takes place in their day-to-day lives.

Just as work and learning are not separate entities, different types of learning do not exist in isolation from each other (Colley, Hodkinson, & Malcolm, 2003; Heath, 2005), but interrelate in different ways in different learning situations. For example, much incidental, or unintended, learning occurs in formal situations, and many informal learning situations also involve explicit instruction. There have been several studies in SLA research which have examined the unintended learning that takes place in the language learning classroom (Banninck, 2002; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; van Dam, 2002, 2003), and although first language socialization is cited as an example of learning through socialization, there are many instances of people being explicitly taught how to use their first language, both in the home (Demuth, 1986; Greif & Gleason, 1980; Ochs, 1982; Schieffelin, 2008; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986) and at school (van Lier, 2002).

Outside the classroom, language learners can improve their knowledge of the language by watching films (Griffiths, 2008; Lomb, 2008; McNeil, 2004; Oxford, 1996; Seferoğlu, 2008; Stelzer, 2005; Trimnell, 2005), using the Internet, listening to songs (Griffiths, 2008; Lomb, 2008; Scharle & Szabó, 2000) and reading books (Griffiths, 2008; Lomb, 2008; McNeil, 2004; Scharle & Szabó, 2000), including easy readers (Graves & Philippot, 2002; Smith, 2003) in the target language. Through films, language learners can become acquainted with how the language is used in real-life contexts by native speakers, each with their own accents and dialects (Seferoğlu, 2008; Sjöholm, 2004), and they can also learn about the culture associated with the language they are learning (Zoreda, 2005). In addition, with the advent of DVD

technology, watching films is becoming increasingly learner-friendly. More and more learners can watch films at home at their own pace, for example, by stopping the film and repeating certain sections if they do not understand something. They also have the option of watching the films with target language subtitles, which have been associated with gains in comprehension (Brett, 1998; Danan, 1992; Froehlich, 1988; Garza, 1991; Stewart & Pertusa, 2004; Vanderplank, 1990) and vocabulary acquisition (Danan, 1992; Froehlich, 1988). There are also resources that allow students to see definitions of words or phrases of interest by clicking on the subtitles while watching films. In a study about this technology, Bird (2005) found that many students who were watching films mainly to learn English found these interactive subtitles very useful. However, the learners who were watching the films mainly for entertainment purposes found looking up the definitions of words frustrating, as it disturbed the flow of the film. The value of this technology, then, depends at least partly on the learners' motives for watching films, and so designers need to be aware that different people are likely to engage with the technology in different ways.

For many English learners, there is a wealth of English language materials that they can access, and learn from, in their free time. With over 56% of web pages being in English (Lobachev, 2008), it is the dominant language on the Internet (Crystal, 2006; Danet & Herring, 2007), and the global outreach of Hollywood movies (Prince, 2003) and British and American popular music means that the English language is increasingly becoming a part of the popular culture in many countries today (Crystal, 2003; Kitao, 1996; McCann, 2003; Sjöholm, 2004). This dominance, though, can also act as a constraint to speakers of other languages and can discourage them from engaging with these media (Bourdieu, 1991a; Gorski & Clark, 2002, 2003; Phillipson, 2008). In addition, to take advantage of the amount of English available, learners need

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to have access to both technology and the ability to use that technology. In many parts of the developing world, though, there is little access to these media. For example, it is estimated that over 94% of Africans, and over 80% of Asians, do not use the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2009). For people who do have access to these media, technological literacy is becoming an increasingly important tool for studying languages (Black, 2009; Godwin-Jones, 2000; Hubbard, 2004; Robin, 2007).

These various opportunities to access, and learn, English, though, still need to be enacted by knowledgeable agents. In order to further understand learning, it is necessary to focus on how individuals interrelate with the environment, engaging with it in personally meaningful ways (Maddock, 2006), and how learning opportunities, and constraints on learning, are co-constructed. In addition, if Giddens's (1991) assertion that "there are always unintended and unforeseen outcomes" (p. 112) is correct, then it is essential to be aware of the unintended learning that takes place. Otherwise, important parts of the whole picture of learning will be missed.

2.3 Agency and the Use of Chat by Learners of English

2.3.1 Structuration Theory and Technology

Due to its dynamism and its view of structure as an interactive process, Giddens's structuration theory has been one of the most influential approaches used in information systems research (Jones & Karsten, 2008; Poole & DeSanctis, 2004). Structuration theory provides a way of going beyond technocentric approaches, which argue that technology has the power to shape human cognition and behavior, and approaches that underplay the role of technology and concentrate on human action and social practices (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). One area that has received considerable attention has been the difference between the intentions of the designers

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of information technologies and the ways in which they have been appropriated by users (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Nandhakumar & Jones, 1997; Orlikowski, 1992; Walsham, 2002). “While technologies may appear to have objective forms and functions at one point, these can and do vary by different users, by different contexts of use, and by the same users over time” (Orlikowski, 1992, p. 403). This can lead to contradictions arising as companies increasingly standardize their operations. Orlikowski (1992) cites the example of a company that attempted to increase productivity by encouraging consultants to use standardized tools when designing screens. Although the tools helped the consultants design screens faster, they limited the options available to the designers. In Giddens's terms, the structural properties of the tools both constrained and enabled action. The standardization process, though, did not succeed in completely eradicating the creative, or nonstandard, input of knowledgeable consultants. Although they were discouraged from doing so, if the consultants thought the tools were too restrictive, there were times when they did covertly circumvent them, and on one occasion, they were able to convince the project managers to have the tools modified. However, as new consultants are being trained to use standardized tools, and are unlikely to be aware of the possibility of not using the tools in the design process, the consultants are becoming more and more deskilled, which is also a concern shared by SLA researchers with regard to the detrimental effects of teachers slavishly following a standard curriculum or textbook (Block, 2000; Richards, 1998).

This emphasis on the variety of ways that people use technologies echoes de Certeau's observations about how people use imposed systems. Orlikowski (2000) argues that although technologies afford certain actions rather than others, they are not immutable and do not predetermine human behavior. People use technologies in a

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variety of ways that differ from how they were intended to be used, supplementing them and modifying them according to their needs. The structures of a technology, therefore, are not embedded in the technology itself, but emerge "from the ongoing and situated actions of . . . members as they engage the world" (Orlikowski, 2002, p. 249). Focusing on emergent structures problematizes the distinction made by DeSanctis and Poole (1994) between 'faithful' and 'unfaithful' appropriation of technology structures. If structures are emergent, rather than embedded in the technology, appropriation cannot be 'faithful' or 'unfaithful'; there are just various *ways of using* which need to be *enacted* by knowledgeable agents.

Focusing on the emergent nature of technologies challenges traditional models of technology-based change (Orlikowski & Hoffman, 1997). In these models, it is assumed that change can be planned and predefined, and that any deviations from these plans are symptomatic of failure. In line with Giddens's (1979) emphasis on the unanticipated consequences of action and their relation to change, Orlikowki and Hoffman (1997), in their improvisational model for change management, have argued that unanticipated outcomes are inevitable, as it is not possible to accurately predict the organizational impact of many technological changes. They suggest that managers need to be aware of this and be able to make conscious interventions "to encourage desirable emergent behaviours and discourage undesirable ones" (Stubbs, Martin, & Endlar, 2006, p. 165). Furthermore, although technological changes need to be planned, a plan needs to be seen as a guide rather than a blueprint, and unanticipated outcomes should be expected and actively managed (Orlikowski & Hoffman, 1997).

2.3.2 Computer-Mediated Communication and Chat

According to Zhao, Alvarez-Torres, Smith and Tan (2004), computer-mediated communication (CMC) comprises many different technologies, rather than

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being one homogeneous whole, and so any study of CMC needs to recognize that as these technologies have different features, they have different constraints and potentialities. Two of the features that Zhou and others (2004) consider to be fundamental when comparing different CMC technologies are temporality (synchronous vs. asynchronous) and identity/anonymity.

In asynchronous CMC, one example being email, users can send and receive messages to each other without any need for them to be logged on at the same time. In synchronous CMC, though, such as chat, senders and addressees need to be logged on simultaneously to exchange messages. As a result, people using chat have less time to read, write and edit messages, and are under a certain amount of pressure to respond in a timely manner. Merchant (2001) describes chat as "rapid written conversation" (p. 300), arguing that it combines characteristics of face-to-face communication with writing. In addition, chat also involves the exchange of digital information, such as image files and web addresses.

Identity/anonymity refers to the degree to which a participant's identity is revealed, or alternatively, the degree to which he or she can remain anonymous. For example, video conferencing provides less support for anonymity than normal chat, due to the fact that the recipient can see the video images of the sender. Greater anonymity has been associated with decreased inhibition and increased self-disclosure (Carvalheira & Gomes, 2003; Chiou, 2007; Joinson, 2001; Leung, 2002), a phenomenon known as the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004). Whereas there are times when people share very personal things about themselves and reveal secret emotions, fears and wishes, there are other times when people are rude and overtly show their anger and hatred in ways that they would never do in the real world. The anonymity that many CMC technologies provide allows users to evade responsibility

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for their actions. They do not need to acknowledge their own behavior "within the full context of an integrated online/offline identity. The online self becomes a compartmentalized self" (p. 322). Suler argues that this disinhibition effect should not be seen as the revealing of an underlying 'true self'; rather, it is "a shift to a constellation within self-structure, involving clusters of affect and cognition that differ from the in-person constellation" (p. 321). Furthermore, due to the fact that there are many different CMC technologies and online environments, diverse expressions of self will be made possible, each setting allowing people to see different perspectives on identity.

As can be seen from the research on anonymity and disinhibition, face-to-face communication is quite different from CMC, including synchronous CMC such as chat. Much is communicated nonverbally in face-to-face talk; people are constantly giving signals about their attitudes and feelings, and others are adept at interpreting these signals (Knapp & Hall, 2006; Birdwhistell, 1970). Although this nonverbal information is not immediately available in text-based CMC, it seems that users have developed ways of incorporating nonverbal information in online texts (Derks, Bos, & von Grumbkow, 2008; Lo, 2008; Yamada & Akahori, 2007). Emoticons, which Lo (2008) has termed "*quasi-nonverbal cues*" (p. 595), seem to be used in ways similar to facial behavior in face-to-face communication (Derks, Bos, & von Grumbkow, 2008; Lo, 2008). Alternatively, to communicate what type of action is being performed while writing, verbal descriptions or abbreviations are often used (Döring, 2000; Nishimura, 2007).

A particularly illustrative example of the extent to which users compensate for missing nonverbal information is cybersex (Döring, 2000; Herring, 2001). Although there are now products available that provide computer-mediated tactile stimulation

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(Lynn, 2004), and video technology is increasingly being used, most cybersex still seems to be text-based (Collins, 2007; Döring, 2000). In this text-based medium, although it is not possible to touch, see, hear or smell the other individual, people still manage to have mutually satisfying sexual encounters (Delmonico, 2003; Herring, 2001). In addition, it is important to note that the absence of the nonverbal cues associated with face-to-face communication enables action as well as constrains it. Users can present themselves as being younger, thinner or more attractive than they are in real life (Ross, 2005), and individuals with poor social skills can engage in sexual activity in a less threatening environment (Carvalheira & Gomes, 2003).

2.3.3 Chat in SLA Research

Several studies have examined the benefits of using chat to learn a second language (Hudson & Bruckman, 2002; Jarrell & Freiermuth, 2005; Kitade, 2000; Payne & Whitney, 2002; Sotillo, 2006; Tudini, 2003). There seem to be opportunities for negotiation of meaning, "the collaborative work which speakers undertake to achieve mutual understanding" (Ellis, 1994), in video-based (Wang, 2006; Yamada & Akahori, 2007), bimodal (sound and text) (Blake, 2005) and text-based chat (Kitade, 2000; Tudini, 2003; van Deusen-Scholl, Frei, & Dixon, 2005). This negotiation can provide language learners with both positive and negative second language (L2) evidence and increase their awareness of their interlanguage system (Pica, 1994, 2002). One major advantage of chat is that the communication can be archived and preserved, thus providing students with a record which can help them raise this awareness of the language used (Tudini, 2003; van Deusen-Scholl, Frei, & Dixon, 2005).

Chat has also been linked with greater motivation (Jarrell & Freiermuth, 2005) and learner autonomy (van Deusen-Scholl, Frei, & Dixon, 2005), and it seems to be

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particularly effective with shy students who find it difficult to interact in face-to-face discussions (Kroonenberg, 1994/1995; Tudini, 2002; Yamada & Akahori, 2007).

2.3.4 Chat and Language

Several authors have argued that the language used in chat is characterized by a considerable amount of linguistic invention (Al-Sa'di & Hamdan, 2005; Norton-Meier, 2004; Shortis, 2001) and differs from standard oral or written communication (Crystal, 2006; Herring, 2001; Merchant, 2001). There are also linguistic differences between the various forms of chat, with language use seen as a reflection of personal or social identity. Just as people tend to evaluate other speakers' social status based on their accent or dialect (Bourdieu, 1991a; Jones, 2004), similar judgments seem to be made about users on the basis of their language use in chat (Al-Sa'di & Hamdan, 2005; Crystal, 2006; Herring, 2001).

A certain amount of the creativity seen in chat language use seems to be due to the measures people take to compensate for the constraints that the nature of the medium places on them. In order to write speedily, users tend to write short, simple sentences and abbreviate words, for example, using one letter for a whole word, not writing all the vowels in a word, or using numerals to denote syllables or whole words (Al-Sa'di & Hamdan, 2005; Lee, 2007). A constraint on CMC in languages other than English is due to the fact that text-transmission on the Internet is based on the ASCII character set, which privileges English online (Danet & Herring, 2007). Speakers of other languages, especially those with non-Roman writing systems, need to rely on special character sets to be able to write all the characters in their language, and they cannot be sure that their interlocutors will be able to read messages that contain characters other than basic ASCII. One solution to this problem is for people to write in their own language but using the Roman alphabet. To do this successfully, though,

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users need to create new ways of representing sounds which do not occur in English, for example, by using numerals that resemble the letters in their own language (Palfreyman & Al Khalil, 2007; Tseliga, 2007).

Language in chat, as in spoken discourse (Thornborrow, 2004), is also used as a marker of individual and group identity (Crystal, 2006; Ihnatko, 1997; Palfreyman & Al Khalil, 2007). In addition, by playing with language and technology, people can explore their identities in online communication (Norton-Meier, 2004). Certain forms of language play, in turn, tend to become associated with particular groups. As a result, depending on the the type of site being visited, these forms will either be accepted or stigmatized (Herring, 2001). Katsuno and Yano (2007), in their study of the use of *kaomoji*, Japanese emoticons, in a Japanese housewives' chat room, argue that "the visual play of *kaomoji* . . . form a boundary of inclusion and exclusion in these online communities" (p. 295). Similarly, chatters who write the full forms of words rather than use abbreviations, or who respond to trolls, might be thought of as 'newbies', a term sometimes used in a derogatory manner to refer to newcomers who are not as sensitive to the informal rules of the Internet (Al-Sa'di & Hamdan, 2005; Crystal, 2006). Furthermore, the types of abbreviations that are deemed acceptable also differ between types of chat sites and these are recognized as markers of in-group and out-group identity (Herring, 2001).

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