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## Book Review: Shin Yi Chew and Lee Luang Ng (2021). *Interpersonal interactions and language learning: Face-to-Face vs. Computer-mediated communications*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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The content of this book can be fully appreciated within the context of Malaysia, a country that is home to approximately thirty-four million people with multi-ethnic backgrounds. While the official language is Malay, a multitude of languages are spoken in Malaysia. The country aspires to educate professionally competent citizens in order to increase their opportunities for advancement and to enhance the country's ability for international relations and international trade. Rashid *et al.* (2017) point out that educational reform initiatives in Malaysia have often focused on language policy that places the English language at the center of curricular changes as English is viewed as the tool that may make it possible for the country to keep pace with its economic objectives. Within this view, English teachers have become key players in the implementation of educational reforms.

The authors, both faculty at the University of Malaya (*Universiti Malaya*) in Kuala Lumpur, have been experimenting with English as a Second Language (ESL hereinafter) teaching techniques in order to ascertain which ones are more conducive to student participation in ESL group discussions. They frame their exploration around two settings, namely, face-to-face group discussions that are carried out in a physical classroom and text-based computer-mediated discussions. This exploration also takes into consideration how learner-specific factors, such as second language (L2 hereinafter) proficiency level, personality, and motivation, may affect group discussion outcomes in the two settings.

The book is organized in seven chapters, each featuring a summary that synthesizes the points covered in the chapter. The first chapter, entitled "Communication is Vital," begins with a general discussion of the notions of *communication* and *learning*. Language is highlighted as a central element to communication and learning. The authors proceed by taking the notions of language and learning to the context of L2 teaching. They provide an overview of different L2 teaching methods. Addressing them chronologically, the following methods are described: the grammar-translation method, the direct method, and the communicative method. This overview is followed by a review of a selection of language learning theories and some considerations about the integration of instructional technology to enhance L2 teaching, and what this integration means in the Malaysian education system. The chapter concludes with a section that describes the characteristics of group discussions as a pedagogical practice that may promote L2 acquisition

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not only in face-to-face classroom settings but also when discussions are computer-mediated such as in the case of email, bulleting boards, chat rooms, and instant messaging.

Chapter two, “Models of Communication Process,” focuses on the discussion of communication models that aim to explain how human communication operates between interlocutors who share the same native language (L1 hereinafter). This chapter presents a detailed description of Foulger’s communication model (2004), which proposes a revision of previous models that have been traditionally followed in the field of communication studies. This chapter has a central role in the book as the model proposed by Foulger is reviewed again later in the book, in chapter six.

Chapter three, “Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC),” describes different ways in which computer-mediated communication (CMC hereinafter) may be carried out and how these ways of communicating can be adapted for pedagogical purposes in ESL teaching. The chapter is structured around two themes. The first one presents a comparison between dialogic communication, referred to as *discussion*, that occurs face-to-face, and dialogic communication that is mediated by computer software. These two ways of engaging L2 learners in discussions are examined by reviewing research that has analyzed the following elements: communication skills involved in each type of discussion, language characteristics, patterns of collaboration, turn-taking, and non-verbal cues. The second theme is articulated around both early and current CMC theories and models. The chapter concludes by pointing out potential benefits that can be derived from the pedagogical use of CMC in the L2 classroom. While in chapter three it is stated that the focus of the book is text-based group discussions, some of the content could have been more tightly connected with the stated focus; however, the sections within each chapter will prove useful to navigate the content.

In chapter four, “CMC vs. F2F: Discourse and Participation Styles of Different Language Learners,” the book takes a turn towards discussing empirical data that examines the role of individual differences such as language proficiency and personality type. Learners’ individual differences are examined as factors that may influence learners’ willingness to participate in face-to-face discussions vs. text-based CMC. These two discussion mediums are also compared in regards to the lexical complexity exhibited in discussions and the learners’ ability to carry out discussions by asking questions, requesting clarification, providing clarification, and redirecting the discussion topic. The chapter closes with a brief section that reflects on factors that may affect student participation in a discussion group.

In addition to the individual differences discussed in chapter four, other factors that may affect learners’ performance in a group discussion are covered in chapter five, “Other Factors Influencing Communication During Group Discussion.” This is a brief chapter that is structured around affective elements such as confidence, language anxiety, and motivation. It includes statements made by learners to illustrate the reasons why they prefer face-to-face group discussions and why others prefer text-based discussions. The chapter concludes with a section about noise and distractions that may affect the discussion flow in a group activity.

In light of the information that is presented in chapters three through five, the penultimate chapter, “Implications for Language Learning,” directs the discussion back to chapter two, where different communication models were described. Foulger’s communication model (2004) is revised to incorporate elements that may disrupt messages in a group discussion and elements that may enhance messages. The objective of the revision of Foulger’s model is to adapt it so that its explanatory power may be more robust to account for the elements that are present in a group discussion where the participants are L2 learners. The chapter concludes with a section where the authors provide a list of eleven recommendations that may

assist teachers with setting up both face-to-face and text-based discussions that are conducive to quality participation by all learners.

The final chapter, “Current Developments,” includes a review of computer-mediated communication tools beyond text-based applications and software. After highlighting the multimodal nature of some communication tools which combine text, graphs, images, audio, and video all at once, the chapter proceeds to discuss language learning as assisted by mobile devices, video conferencing, and gaming.

All the chapters are grounded on extensive referencing to theoretical and empirical research. Therefore, readers will find the book to be helpful as a starting point to build their knowledge on text-based vs. face-to-face discussion group dynamics in L2. Many of the works cited, including Chew (2013), Chew & Ng (2016, 2021), may provide ideas for future empirical research on text-based discussion as a L2 learning tool. At times, the information presented in the book would have gained clarity by making specific references to L2 proficiency levels as defined by either the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) or the language proficiency scale of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or equivalent. The revision the authors make of Foulger’s communication model (2004) shows potential for further research and provides a communication model that is L2-specific. In the context of Malaysian education, where the teaching of English is at the centre of educational reform efforts, ESL professionals will find in this book many elements relevant to their teaching and research.

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