Bridging the Gap: Transfer from Online Discussions to Subsequent Tasks in Three Dimensions

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Among modern technologies, computer-mediated communication (CMC), a text-based communication system, has been widely used in educational instruction. Language researchers have investigated the use of CMC from diverse perspectives. They found that language learners in CMC, compared with those in face-to-face communication, produce more language output (Abrams, 2003; Chun, 1994; Kern 1995; Kung, 2004; Sullivan, 1998; Warschauer, 1996) and have more interactive communication (Chun, 1994; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996). They ask more questions, provide more feedback, request more clarification, as well as become more sensitive to word choice, and use more different words and dependent clauses. Other researchers have reported CMC can promote learners’ attitudes (Beauvois, 1994-5) toward writing, reading, and speaking skills (Jaeglin, 1998). It also reduces their anxiety toward language learning and heightens students’ learning motivation (Kern, 1995; Lewis & Atzert, 2000). Learners may benefit from CMC in terms of error correction, either in groups or by themselves (Beauvois, 1998; Chun, 1996; Kelm, 1992).

Many CMC researchers have suggested the need to explore the transferability of language competence that students obtain from synchronous CMC (SCMC) discussions to their subsequent task performance. Chun (1994) suggested that because of the fact that the written sentences in CMC are so similar to what students will say in spoken conversation, the written competence that students acquire from computer-assisted classroom discussion may progressively transfer to their speaking competence. Warschauer (1996) also indicated that SCMC “might be an excellent medium for prewriting work since it could serve as a bridge from spoken interaction to written composition” (p. 22) because he considered that “electronic discussion might be used effectively as a prelude to oral discussion” (p. 22). Beauvois (1998) also made a similar proposition that “the slowing down of the communicative process seems to bridge the gap between oral and written communication for a number of students, allowing them to benefit more fully from the language learning” (p. 213). However, even though these assertions may sound reasonable, we know of only one study to confirm them. Investigating whether 17 Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students used the ideas generated in SCMC in their subsequent essays, Huang (1999) found that seven out of the 14 students used the ideas from the prewriting written discussions for

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one assignment and more than 11 did the same for another assignment. She even pointed out that
more than 78% of the students reported in students’ interviews and questionnaires that they had
used the ideas in prewriting synchronous discussions in their later essays. These students used
different types of ideas that made a change smaller than a paragraph, a paragraph-level change, a
macro-level change, and a topic change. She also found that students used ideas from different
sources in their essays, such as textual information from the library, their own and friends’ ideas,
textbook and teacher-provided handouts, and ideas from computer-mediated prewriting
discussions.

Huang’s study seemed to illustrate that the prewriting SCMC session had a certain level of
influence on later writing assignments. Unfortunately, the average number of examples in the
written discussion that led students to change their topic or consider other perspectives was low,
0.7 and 1.4 respectively for each assignment. Certainly, more studies are needed to explore the
nature of the transferability from SCMC to students’ subsequent writing assignments, as well as
to their oral production. The purpose of our study was to illustrate how and what EFL students
transferred from the SCMC discussions into their performance on subsequent speech and essay
tasks. More specifically, we were interested in how language output in one context would be used
subsequently in later language use. The results were shown in the later discussion in three
dimensions: where, what, and who.

Method

Context and Participants

Data came from 50 college senior students in the two-year college program in a university
in the south of Taiwan. The students (6 men, 44 women, aged 21-26) were enrolled for a required
course Media English. All of them had graduated from 5-year junior colleges. Although some of
them were from various education backgrounds, such as business, English or architecture, they
all had passed the entrance exam and had studied in the applied English department for one year.
Their English proficiency was in the range of high beginner to high intermediate levels. Due to
the impracticability of participating in different discussion groups at the same time, the instructor
did not join any group discussion.

Six online synchronous discussions were conducted using MSN Messenger during the 16-
week semester. Before each online discussion, students had received a three-hour face-to-face
lecture for language input such as the concept of the target theme and related vocabulary. Next,
following a brief in-class lecture or review from the instructor, students were randomly assigned
to one of six discussion groups and asked to discuss online in English two discussion questions
relative to the target theme for 35 minutes. Students in each discussion group then were divided
into two groups to fulfill two individual tasks in 70 minutes, i.e. 2-to-2.5-minute speeches and
200-to-250-word essays in two separate classrooms. Yet, when one student completed his/her
speech task first, he/she would be required to fulfill an essay task after his/her next online
discussion. Students with essay tasks were required to choose one out of three task questions
related to the previous discussion questions for their individual speeches or essays, whereas those
with speech tasks needed to draw one out of the same three task questions as their speech topic 2.
5 minutes before their performance due to the fairness of having the same amount of preparation
time. In short, each of the students completed the two tasks in turns, for 3 speeches and 3 essays
in total. The themes discussed were: 1) TV violence, 2) personal privacy and paparazzi, 3) the
ideal election candidates and opinion polls, 4) presidential election and the riot in Paris, 5) sexual
harassment at work and unemployment, and 6) welfare and strikes. At the end of the semester, 13
interviews were conducted with six randomly selected and seven willing to share their experiences.

Data Sources and Analysis

Several data sources were used for this study. The 36 online discussion transcripts were saved as electronic files. The 148 speeches were audiotaped and later transcribed, and 144 essays were collected and saved in electronic files. These three primary data sources were perused for ideas transferred from the online discussions into the subsequent speeches and essays. Surely, the textbook and the handouts for online discussion, speech, and essay questions were the secondary sources. In addition, 13 semi-structured interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for triangulation.

For data analysis, we first individually open-coded the transcripts, speeches, and essays that showed any sign of transfer. When a final set of categories was agreed upon, we re-coded the data looking for the examples produced in the same discussion group and later transferred to both speeches and essays.

Results

Our goal for this study was to understand qualitatively what EFL students transfer from synchronous online discussions into their performance on subsequent speeches and essays and in what way they made these transfers. We report our findings in three dimensions: where ideas came from (the textbook, class handouts, and the discussions themselves); at what level are the transferred ideas (vocabulary, phrase, and perspectives); and who initiates, uses, and borrows ideas in transfer. We provide each category under the first two dimensions a specific discussion excerpt along with a speech example and an essay example in which the transferred words were used. As for the third dimension—who, students having used the transferred ideas were categorized in three identities: initiator, discussant, and borrower according to their performance during the online discussions. In another word, if a student used his/her own ideas from the discussions in his/her speech or essay, he/she was an initiator. If he/she did not bring up the ideas during the discussions but used the ideas to discuss and later used them in his/her later tasks, he/she was a discussant. However, if he/she did not use the words at all during the discussions but used them in the following tasks, he/she was a borrower. We explain the identity of the group members transferring ideas in the discussion while interpreting the first two dimensions.

Where: Ideas from the textbook

One of the instructional goals for this course was to teach students key words commonly used in the media as well as to expect them to use these words well in their own production. Fortunately, almost every student reached this expectation. A good example is vilification, used by Tiffany and Florence in the third online discussion and later in their speech and essay.

The focus for the third discussion was election candidates. Students were taught to use key word categories like the campaign platform, whistlestop tours and spin doctors, the sleaze factor, polls and pollsters, trailing or riding high, and casting your ballot. The topics for this discussion were to discuss what an ideal candidate could be in their opinion and what the candidate should and should not do, as well as to share their personal opinions about using poll surveys during an election and the purpose for which candidates use it. Under the category the sleaze factor, students learned key words like mudslinging, smear campaign, vilification, and Teflon coating.

In Group 4, when discussing which traits a good candidate would show, Tiffany started to use the key word vilification as other group members contributed other behaviors a good candidate would be unlikely to show. Teresa continued to show her negative emotion about vilification,
while Laura presented a similar expression and then stated that it was a favorite behavior of current Taiwanese candidates. Zoe then mentioned that vilification could earn people’s attention, and emphasized that it was common in a political environment. Finally, though not knowing the spelling of the verb form of *vilification*, Florence claimed that she would not vote for a candidate who vilified his or her opponents. In the following example, the number in front of each utterance is the message number. Some messages are omitted here because they are not on the same thread.

17. Tiffany: I think a good candidate shouldn't have **vilification**
21. Florence: He/ She shouldn't muckraking other candidates
23. Teresa: i hate candidate do **vilification** thing
25. Laura: i think a candidate do **vilification** is worst
28. Barbara: and the candidate must do their platform
31. Laura: but candidates in taiwan like to do **vilification**
36. Zoe: but **vilification** is a way to get people's attention
40. Tiffany: he or she just try to make sure what public need not just want to corrupt or muckrake other candidates
44. Fanny: they should not bribe us in order to win the election
46. Teresa: people always just wanna take their benift– so they don't care about anymore
48. Zoe: you may be attacked from others but this is the condition in the policy
50. Zoe: but this is the condition in the policy
54. Tiffany: maybe they could make their perfect platforms to attract our attention
58. Florence: i won't vote him/her if him/her **vilificates** other candidates
62. Barbara: but, usually, when the campaigning coming, their will do the best behivor the people.

Following this vigorous discussion about candidates who vilify opponents, Tiffany drew a topic asking her to tell the audience how she thought a good candidate should look like. With Barbara’s and her own ideas in mind, she portrayed that good candidates, on the one hand, should make up a good platform and pay attention to people’s need, and, on the other hand, they should not vilify their opponents in that vilification would unsettle the peace.

I think a good candidate should make a good platform, and understand what people need actually. And they can not just **vilificate** other candidates and make them show off, to just want to attract voters’ attention. That is not the publics want. And **vilification** just makes the election to be more tumultuous. I think a good candidate should be responsible and honest.

Intriguingly, Tiffany did not look up the verb form of the word *vilification* (*vilify*), but used the wrong form (*vilificate*) that Florence had used in the discussion. Florence used for her essay the correct form in her essay when she chose to write about the same topic even though she used the wrong form in the discussion. Maybe when she wrote the essay, she found the chance to look up the correct verb form in the dictionary.

Along with the election’s coming, many didates begin to broadcast themselves. Such like walking in crowd and glad-handing, having adver trunks, etc. They state their good education background, what they are good at and what they can do for the
people. But some candidates vilify their opponents or try to find the scandals of the other candidates for getting more votes. Are those behaviors advantageous to them?

Although Tiffany and Florence both used the word vilification, they represented different identities according to the third dimension. Apparently, they both transferred the word into their subsequent tasks. However, because Tiffany was the first person to bring up the word and also used the word in her speech, we categorized her as an initiator. On the other hand, Florence, though also used the word in the discussion as well as her essay, she could only be categorized as a discussant because she did not come up with the idea during the discussion. More examples of the third dimension are shown below.

Where: Ideas from class handouts

The students not only transferred words from the textbook in their subsequent tasks, but also words from class handout. The fifth discussion was about sexual harassment at work and unemployment. The key word groups included ways of working, benefits and headhunters, discrimination at work, getting the sack, redundancy, redundancy pay, and jobless and on the dole. One discussion topic was:

The reasons causing a high rate of unemployment are varied. Overstaffing and the need to downsize are among them. This phenomenon usually leads to social disorder. It does not only slow down the development of economics, but also brings crimes or riots. Without doubt, the government has to take actions to decrease the ascending rate of unemployment in order to maintain the public order, such as providing dole to jobless people. Here comes our discussion topic. Do you think this dole is necessary? Why or why not? Is there are other action the government can take?

Students were asked to exchange their ideas about actions the government could take to decrease the ascending rate of unemployment. The word ascending was used in Kristin’s speech and Jean’s essay when they dealt with the topic related to the ascending unemployment rate. In Group 4, both Kristin and Jean accepted Frank’s view that unemployed people could join programs that the government provided for them to learn more skills in order to get a suitable or better job in the future.

So, if the government could give some money aids to some enterprise, and I think the company would have the ability to give the employees the money. So, I think there are two ways to help (decrease) the ascending rate of unemployment. The first one is to have the training programs, and the second one is to have business… to have money aids to business. (Kristin’s speech)

From ago to now, unemployment problems always confound our government. As a result of the bad international economic, the unemployment rate often breaks new high records. Government thinks up many policies for the ascending unemployment rate. But, the policies are often either ineffective or reduced unemployment rate in a short period. (Jean’s essay)

Interestingly, Kristin and Jean, drawing or choosing the same task topic, seemed to treat the noun phrase ‘the ascending unemployment rate’ as a word chunk and found no other alternatives to
substitute for the word *ascending*. Therefore, they could not but used the word or, more specifically, the noun phrase in their subsequent speech and essay.

*Where: Ideas from the discussion itself*

Likewise, students were very likely to use ideas in subsequent speeches or essays that came solely from the online discussions, not from the textbook or handouts. This might happen either when the ideas came from a student’s own posting or other group member’s posting during the discussion. In Group 1, Discussion 3, students made several postings about the importance of politicians *being honest* during the election process. In the discussion excerpt below, it is not hard to see that most of the students had a negative feeling about politics or, particularly, politicians. When Denise directly asked her group members about their definition of a good candidate, Vincent immediately pointed out the idea of *being honest* even though he felt that voters elected their candidates much like picking an apple from a basket full of rotten apples. When Denise continued to ask about the standard of being a good candidate, Fonda repeated Vincent’s idea about *being honest* and then gave another idea.

36. Vincent: somebody say Politic is just like underwear....smell terrible and dirty
39. Diana: i think a good candidate should stay low
49. Denise: how do you define a "good candidate"
52. Vincent: A good candidate should pretend he/she is very *honest*....then he/ she can get vote
54. Wanda: i think a good candidate should realize his political views and statement.
58. Vincent: The election is picking some bad apple in lots of worst apple
59. Denise: we won't have any comments today cause, we had no good sample ever
61. Rebecca: i dont' really know how to distinguish which one isgood
62. Denise: how to define the stander?
64. Heather: A good candidate should make citizen realize what he will do
66. Fonda: and *be honest*..
67. Diana: i just expect them to act like a good man , i didn't expect them actually are , i just expect at least they didn't make noise and disturb the peace
68. Heather: Don't attrack other candidate
71. Fonda: also, implement what he/ she promised

Even though Rebecca and Wanda did not use the phrase *being honest*, both of them did borrow the idea into their speech and essay respectively. Maybe because of the similarity of the task topic they got or chose or the phrase was easy to remember, Rebecca defined her ideal candidate as someone who does not lie and bribe but who is honest, whereas Wanda used the term in another context noting that she did not expect candidates to be honest but to make less noise or disturb peace, the idea of which was transferred from Diana’s comment.

I think the ideal candidate should be *honest*. He can’t lie to the other, the voters and keep the promises if they are elected. They have to circle voters… they can’t bribe voters in order to win the election. But I don’t really think there’s any candidate can be ideal because they often lie to voters and don’t do many things for people. They only want to earn more money. (Rebecca’s speech)
In my opinion, the election is picking some bad apple in lots of worst apple. I don’t expect the candidates are honest or good men. I just expect they don’t make noise and disturb the peace. Anyway, an ideal candidate is only exist in thinking. (Wanda’s essay)

Obviously, Rebecca and Wanda both used the phrase being honest in their individual subsequent tasks even though they did not use the phrase during the discussion. In fact, they both borrowed other group members’ ideas. For example, Rebecca might had taken Fonda’s idea that a candidate should “implement what he/she had promised” if he/she was elected. More appealingly, Wanda used in her last paragraph Vincent’s idea of picking some bad apple in lots of worst apple, and Diana’s ideas of making noise and disturbing the peace. It seemed that Wanda tended to copy the exact phrase derived from Vincent’s and Diana’s words because she made the same mistakes of countable nouns as Vincent did in the discussion.

In this example, Rebecca and Wanda were categorized the same according to their identities in the sense of the third dimension. Although Rebecca and Wanda both used the idea being honest in their subsequent tasks, they did not use the idea during the discussion participation. They did not initiate or discuss the idea by using it, but they borrowed it into their individual works. Therefore, they were, at best, the borrowers.

In sum, in addition to using words from their textbook, the handouts, or in the discussions themselves, students often carried these words or phrases into their later essays or speeches. As evidenced by students’ task performance, students transferred ideas from their own comments as well as from their group members’. They sometimes participated in the discussion using the exact same words but sometimes not. Even if they did not join actively to contribute to the online discussion, it did not mean that they did not read the discussion and would not use the words or ideas afterwards. We demonstrated this complex situation by next dividing students’ ideas in the discussions into three levels according to the amount of text transferred: vocabulary level, phrase level, and opinion level.

What: Ideas at the vocabulary level

This level was represented when one specific word was brought to students’ attention in the discussions and later used in their works. The word might be a keyword from the textbook, mentioned in the handouts, or newly introduced by one student in the discussion. Individual words could have influence across an online discussion, as the word insult from Group 3, Discussion 4. Students were expected to share their knowledge about dirty tricks sometimes used in a presidential election. Perhaps because political issues draw much attention during election, the students seemed to feel excited to share their opinions about dirty tricks in elections, especially those in the latest presidential election. Denise first introduced the word insult used as a noun, by saying “Well, like some insult” to give Tracy an example of what Denise meant by invisible tricks. The word then was picked up by Denise again a few minutes later using it as a verb after Tweety asked her a direct question about what tricks a candidate could do. This time Florence and Tweety also used the word insult in their individual expressions.

113. Umma: If you want to do something, you need the power, so must win the election, even though this trick is a fraud
115. Tweety: you said what tricks the candidate will do
117. Tweety: I say ~ to attend the show on TV]
118. Nancy: power is necessary??
120. Tracy: Umma, do something for themselves??
121. Denise: **insult** other candidates is a common way.
124. Fanny: place ad. on newspaper
126. Denise: yeah, power is necessary for SOME people.
127. Florence: uh i don't like the candidates who **insult** the oppenents
130. Florence: i will never vote them
133. Nancy: if you win the electioon, you must argue with people every day
138. Tweety: I think why they like to **insult** others candidates because they have nothing to do ~

The word *insult* later appeared in Tweety’s speech and Denise’ essay. Although Tweety did not initiate to use the word *insult* in the discussion, she used it as a noun as well as a verb, just like Denise did in the discussion. Tweety, a discussant, proposed that a presidential candidate should set himself or herself as a model not to trick people by insulting his or her opponents and learn to ignore insults to him or her. Meanwhile, composing a very long essay, Denise, an initiator, portrayed what her excellent future president would look like. To her, a good presidential candidate should be a good actor, always with a smile even when insulted, and should be eloquent to protect himself or herself from opponent insults.

I think the candidate should be as quiet as he can and ignore other **insult** and do what he said to people before. He should be responsible and I think nowadays candidates regard as **insult** others to be a necessary thing because I don’t know who is the first guy to **insult** somebody to raise the elect competition. But I think even a president use that trick before. (Tweety’s speech)

An excellent president candidate should be eloquent, so that he/she can protect him/herself while other candidate insulting them. Also, a good president candidates should have a perfect staff member to help him/her on the election… A “liked” president candidate should possesses a bearing manner; even when the oponant insulting or scolding at him/her on the face, he/she can still remain the smile and say no problem. (Denise’s essay)

Such transfer examples at the vocabulary level were numerous in students’ work across online discussions. For more examples, please see Appendix A. These examples of vocabulary-level transfer could be generated from the textbook, the handout, or the discussions themselves. In a word, there were a great many examples of vocabulary-level ideas being transferred into students’ subsequent speeches and essays, though some students, like Norma whom will be discussed below, surprisingly demonstrated no transfer at all.

*What: Ideas at the phrase level*

Students also transferred phrase-level ideas into their works. These phrases could be verbal, noun, or prepositional phrases that were brought up in the discussions, and later adopted in their subsequent tasks. Perhaps because of students’ low language development, these phrases were used verbatim repeatedly to describe a certain action or issue. One example was the incorrect verbal phrase *to accompany with* in Group 3, Discussion 1. One of the discussion topics asked students to share their opinions about how parents could protect their kids from TV violence. Although the idea of *to accompany with* had been introduced earlier by Kitty when the group
were discussing current TV programs suitable for children, the idea was not picked up until Ella mentioned it again to answer Bonnie’s question about how to protect children.

78. Kitty: it is much better to **accompany** with children
116. Bonnie: so how to protect our children? let's think about that....
119. Laura: i won't let them watch TV
121. Ella: i think the best way
122. Jennifer: we can choose good program for them
123. Tiffany: i think some programs with mayhem should disappear!!
124. Ella: we should **accompany** with children when they are watching TV
125. Ella: don't leave them alone
127. Norma: I think people should give advice when watching tv with children. We don't have to forbid
129. Kitty: but i think dancing and singing can help them become more soft.
177. Ella: if we allow children to surf on the et[net], we should still accompany with them

It seems reasonable that whoever uses a phrase in the discussion, he/she would very likely to use it in the subsequent work. Although Kitty mentioned the phrase to accompany with early in the discussion, Ella used it twice to address the importance of parents’ being present when their children are either watching TV or surfing on the internet. Both of them used this phrase in their speech and essay, respectively. In her speech, Kitty, an initiator in the sense of the third dimension, intended the phrase to tell her audience how to protect children, emphasizing the importance of protecting children.

I think maybe we have to, we have a lot of time to **accompany** with our children, and when they watch TV, we must **accompany** with them because if they have a question, we can teach and tell them at the first time.

Ella, a discussant, giving several examples of actions, tried to persuade her readers that parents, neither TV programmers nor others, should censor TV programs. She shared her opinions about TV violence by writing in her essay.

… However, I think TV violence sometimes can be educational for children. The best way to do is parents should **accompany** with children when they are watching TV; also, tell and teach them what is wrong or right through the programs… I think whenever children watch TV, parents should **accompany** with them. Because parents are their most intimate people who can give the schooling directly. No doubt!

In fact, this phrase was used by other group members, like Norma. Even though she did not use the phrase in the discussion but proposed a very close idea saying that people should give advice when they were watching TV with children, she, becoming a borrower, finally used the phrase in her speech.

Maybe you [parents] said you have your own job and your pay is really good. But since you decide to have a job, you just have to quit and **accompany** your children. Yeah. You have to give them advice on all kinds of TV shows.
Obviously, Kitty, Ella, and Norma did transfer the phrase from the discussion to their works. However, the ways of their transfer seem to be slightly different. Kitty and Ella did not know the correct usage of the word *accompany*, which is ‘to accompany someone’ or ‘to be accompanied with someone.’ Therefore, they transferred the wrong form to their subsequent tasks. In contrast, Norma, though did not use the phrase to discuss with her group members, used the correct form in her speech, maybe because of her higher language proficiency. In short, as planned for this class, students learned to use phrases from the textbook, the handouts, or the discussions in their speeches and essays (see Appendix B).

*What: Ideas at the opinion level*

Like the two levels presented above, many students used ideas representing certain opinions or viewpoints. They not only synthesized the viewpoints mentioned in the discussions and paraphrased these in their own later works, some even used and transferred the exact sentences to their individual works. The focus of the sixth discussion was strike and welfare. In Group 6, a variety of views about how to decrease welfare scroungers was presented. After the scrounger issue had been discussed for a few minutes, Fiona began to offer her solution of establishing a specialized institute to handle the welfare scrounger problem, while Vincent suggested the government send different investigators to welfare applicants’ houses in order to check their qualifications. Simultaneously, Bianca contributed another perspective brining up the dilemma of what would happen if the system of verification were too strict or too loose. She continued to take farmers’ subsidies in Taiwan as an example and questioned the appropriateness of doling out welfare to a farmer who just planted a few apple trees. These perspectives were later borrowed into Kay’s speech and Bonnie’s essay.

174. Fiona: I think government should set up a department to evaluate if those should receive the welfare
175. Vincent: I think government should send correspondent to check those people who apply for the welfare.
179. Vincent: They can not just check the documents
180. Bonnie: I agree with Vincent
181. Dawn: yes, government should do the evaluate carefully, because it's for whole people's benefit
187. Vincent: and...They should change the correspondent. They can not send the same correspondent to check those people or they may receive the bribery
188. Dawn: so many old men are rich, but they still get welfare
191. Bianca: if the government is too pickey to the documents then some people who needed help many not be accepted and get nothing. However, if the government is too easy to the documents then the scroungers will get extra money
197. Bianca: just like teacher mentioned> some farmers apply for the 农民津贴 [farmer subsidies] with only 1 tree and few apples = ="
200. Dawn: why farmer need welfare?
201. Wanda: because they working hard and poor
202. Bianca: because of WTO [World Trade Organization]?
203. Heather: because nature disaster
206. Kay: but how to kown the one is really need help is really a hard queston.
Vincent: some of my friends are farmers...They drive BMW or Benz go to work...

Kay: I think our gov. shold really make a useful plan to solve this problems.

Kay, a borrower, though did not participate much about the issue of farmers, mentioned the issue in her speech. She did not use the exact words proffered by Bianca, but paraphrased the idea although she was considerably nervous and did not synthesize the idea well while giving this speech. With the unfairness of this issue in mind, Kay then added Vincent’s idea about the government sending officials to investigate if welfare recipients truly needed the welfare. However, instead of using the same words, Kay chose the phrase “social worker” to make her speech more practical.

But they still just get the welfare from our government. The farmer, and I want to say the welfare to the farmer. The farmer maybe this farmer just has one trees and several apples on the tree, but he still gets the welfare from the government. I think it is unfair because maybe he makes a lot of money but he just pretends he is poor. So he still gets the welfare. It’s unfair to the people who really need the money. So I think government should investigate those people and to think about maybe they are suitable to get the welfare or not. (Kay’s speech)

Similarly, Bonnie also borrowed the exact sentences from the discussion into her essay. She took Vincent’s proposition to suggest that the government send some investigators to check welfare recipients’ qualifications in person. She also accepted Bianca’s advice about the consequences of the government’s examination of welfare recipients too strictly or loosely.

To resist these bad welfare scroungers, I think the government should make a plan to investigate those people to consider whether they are suitable to deserve the welfare or not. And the government should send correspondent to check those people who apply for the welfare. They should check it in person… But the government should take balance to undergo these actions. If the government is too picky to the documents then some people who need help many not be accepted and get money, however, if the government is too easy to the documents then the scroungers will get ill-gotten money. (Bonnie’s essay)

More surprisingly, Bonnie seemed to be somehow reading the discussion as she wrote her essay because some sentences in her essay were exactly the same as the comments in the discussion, such as Vincent’s and Bianca’s. She seemed to have found a way to duplicate the sentences including grammatical errors. In fact, Bonnie used quite a few her group members’ ideas in her essay. Even though she found a way to copy the exact sentences, she seemed not simply to present these ideas in her essay, but reorganized the ideas in a specific order to make her essay more comprehensible, which made her essay way longer than the required length (387 words). Transfer examples like these also occurred everywhere (see Appendix C).

Transferring ideas from online discussion to subsequent tasks did occur and was verified in students’ interviews. Transfer examples in the word, phrase, and opinion levels took place across the six discussion groups in the six online discussions. In Appendix A, B, and C, we just provided examples from the six discussion groups in the second online discussion of Personal Privacy & Paparazzi, to name only a few other transfer cases. Moreover, some students reported in the interviews that they did use the ideas from the discussions in their speeches and essays.
Tiffany reported that because having a speech or an essay afterwards, she could “accept or adapt or adopt” the ideas when she had no opinions towards the target topics. Bonnie even revealed how she got the sentences in her essay exactly the same as those in the discussions. She copied and pasted the content of discussion and sent it to her email account in order for her to prepare her following tasks. She even reported that she read the transcripts many times because she tended to use every group member’s ideas. From her essays, we could see her efforts combining and reorganizing ideas from different group members. Bonnie even gave us a dark secret that Wanda did the same thing since the third online discussion.

**Discussion**

Our study has shown that online discussion, not only “may,” as what CMC researchers (Chun, 1994; Beauvois, 1998; Warschauer, 1996) reported, but also “can” be a bridge for language students to transfer what they have learned and discussed to their subsequent tasks. The students in this study not only employed the ideas from the textbook, the handouts, and the discussions, but also used the ideas at the vocabulary, phrase, and opinion levels into their speeches and essays, whether they were the idea initiators, the idea discussant, or simply the idea borrowers.

Because transferring ideas from online discussions to subsequent tasks were quite common in this study, we have to note that even though students did not discuss a certain issue at the moment, it does not mean that they did not participate in the discussion at all. They might be busy at considering the issue from other viewpoints, or trying to keep up reading and comprehend the discussion, and found no time to respond due to their language limitations. Whether students participated in the discussion or not, they seemed to concentrate hard to keep up the discussion pace and tried to get some ideas in order to perform better in the later tasks. With this goal in mind, some students even developed a particular strategy, like Bonnie and Wanda, to help themselves to conduct a richer speech or write a better essay. More specifically, Bonnie learned new ideas about the target issue by participating the discussion through reading other group members’ comments and responding with her own ideas. She then saved the content of the discussion afterwards and continued her learning by going back to read through it, looking for good arguments provided by others for her essays. She not only used her own ideas in her essays, but also others’ arguments because she may have been persuaded by them and seen them as close to what she wanted to say. It is very likely that she felt that she could not address the argument better than her group members and decided to copy and paste the arguments into her essay. Such a process of internalization, in a sense of socio-constructivism, is often seen in learning a first language when a baby imitates the language heard from parents and others. In another word, the students in CMC settings not only receive many ideas through constructing ideas during the process of questions and answers, but also need to appropriate the ideas in their task production. They acquire more language input, but also produce more language output (Abrams, 2003; Chun, 1994; Kern 1995; Kung, 2004; Sullivan, 1998; Warschauer, 1996).

Maybe someone would concern the issue of students using the incorrect grammar in their later works. Like what Kelm (1992) mentioned, students were very likely to copy and paste other students’ words without paying attention to the correctness of those words in the online discussion. In fact, although students may learn many grammatical errors during online discussion and use the errors in their production, this problem can be solved according to Kern (1995). These errors may be corrected by the users themselves or by other group members. Moreover, these errors can be fixed when the instructor exams the transcripts and corrects the errors afterwards (Chun, 1996).
An authentic learning setting is particularly necessary in EFL environment. Our findings suggest that even though EFL students do not have many opportunities to practice English, not only outside the class but also inside the class, online group discussions can open another window for them to communicate in English authentically. They used in the online discussions what they have learned from the textbook and lectures, and then transfer the ideas and practice the language again in subsequent oral and written uses of the language.
## Appendix A

More Examples of Ideas Transferred at the Vocabulary Level in the Second Online Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Utterances in Online Discussion</th>
<th>Example Sentences in the Subsequent Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Donna: Laura-u'r right. but the job of paparazzi is to <strong>invade</strong> the privacy of celebrities&gt;&lt;</td>
<td>Donna (initiator, essay): If I can’t bear the action which paparazzi do one day, maybe I will take an action of suing for those paparazzi who <strong>invade</strong> my privacy too much. (The Violation of Personal Privacy)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 Textbook</td>
<td>Fanny: I think that once they decide to be celebrities, they should know that they would loss their privacy when they getting more and more famous. Barbara: but, not all reports are true. Barbara: maybe, journalist want to the <strong>circulation</strong></td>
<td>Barbara (initiator, essay): I think the media that can’t issue of personal privacy for <strong>circulation</strong>. (The responsibility of media)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Xavier: Someone would like to hide his/ her <strong>secrets</strong>, and someone would like to find hem out Fonda: but, paparazze still like to take pic of famous people and discover the <strong>secret</strong> of them</td>
<td>Fonda (discussant, speech): I am thinking about personal privacy is very important because all of the men is the same. They may have their old <strong>secrets</strong>. And maybe… (If I were a reporter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Gill: if i am a paparazzi ,, my job is to reveal what a true celebrity is Tracy: Gill, do you think that celebrity's love should be reported? Felicia: how about the <strong>moral</strong> aspect?</td>
<td>Winnie (borrower, speech): I am also the person who has highly <strong>moral</strong>… have a sense of highly morality, but my job is to work for a gossip magazine company. (If I am a reporter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5 Textbook</td>
<td>Wesley: i think if he [Pon Cha Cha] didn't feel very down about 1 month ago Earl: it's all <strong>journalist</strong>s' game</td>
<td>Wesley (borrower, essay): I am really fed up all the media <strong>journalist</strong>s, that is because you guys are always dogging me. (If I were Jay Chou)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Nell: like corruption, <strong>scandal</strong>. i think these shoule be reported Nell: since those celebrities, especially stars, use their fame to earn $, they'll have to accept being reported. Heather: But we just know these <strong>scandals</strong>...what can we get</td>
<td>Heather (discussant, speech): I think it is my job and I need to report some <strong>scandals</strong> or about their everyday life. We just want to entertain audience and give them information. So, we need to expose their scandals or some private things because we have pressure. (If I am a reporter)</td>
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</table>

* The parenthesis here was the title of students’ speech or essay.
## Appendix B

More Examples of Ideas Transferred at the Phrase Level in the Second Online Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Utterances in Online Discussion</th>
<th>Example Sentences in the Subsequent Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Wanda: if we refuse to watch those negative news, the rating must <strong>lower and lower</strong>. Will media change their point of view? something like society??</td>
<td>Nina (borrower, essay): To us, the high rating equal money. If you don’t like this kind of news, then don’t watch it. Let the rating become <strong>lower and lower</strong>, and we won’t report this kind of news anymore. (A Letter to My Readers)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Denise: imaging you are cha cha today, and what will you do Rebecca: i will apologize to everyone.... especially my wife… and tell the truth… Denise: if I were him, I might <strong>commit suicide</strong>  Karen: <strong>suicide</strong> is the most stupid way</td>
<td>Karen (discussant, essay): You said you were going find out the reason I <strong>committed suicide</strong>. You use your ways to investigate the reason. And you made guesses. Then tell the public your guesses. You started to report the relationship between (Xia Yi) and I. I’ve already ended up my life but why can’t you end up gossip? (My confession)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 Textbook</td>
<td>Queenie: Xavier, and many paparazzi use <strong>intrusive reporting technique</strong> like&quot;bugging&quot; recording famous people behavior Xavier: They are like thieves, they stole the private right.</td>
<td>Queenie (initiator, speech): They use <strong>intrusive reporting techniques</strong>, like bugs to record the famous people about their life and door-stepping without their permission. That is very immoral. (Reaction to violation of personal privacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Felicia: The society needs the <strong>brightside</strong> things to enlight people's heart</td>
<td>Gill (borrower, essay): We audience only can accept what they give, therefore, I think, one of the media’s responsibility is to show the <strong>brightside</strong> in the society. (Responsibility of Media)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Diana: i think the problem of the media is that they don't have ability to <strong>dig out</strong> deeper news Nydia: I think they dont want to <strong>dig out</strong> deeper</td>
<td>Tina (borrower, speech) Of course, sometimes the truth will involve with personal crisis, but now many media not only find out the truth, but also <strong>dig out</strong> the events….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Nell: i think media has right to report celebrities' private life, especial those <strong>dirty things</strong>. Nell: if the media don't exist or be limited, i guess politicians and celebrities will do more <strong>dirty things</strong>.</td>
<td>Nell (initiator, speech): But people just like watching famous people crying or doing <strong>something dirty</strong> on TV, on magazine. (If I am a reporter)</td>
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* The parenthesis here was the title of students’ speech or essay.
## Appendix C

More Examples of Ideas Transferred at the Opinion Level in the Second Online Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Utterances in Online Discussion</th>
<th>Example Sentences in the Subsequent Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Donna: Nina- <strong>people like to see what the famous people do.</strong> Laura: media always would like find out and publish information about famous people lives Norma: yes</td>
<td>Norma (borrower, essay): As my point of view, I think it is nothing to do with being allowed or not, but if the <strong>audience of the public want to know or not.</strong> (If I were famous people)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Vincent: I think those famous people should not expect the media to find out and publish information about their private lives. Everyone has their own secret. But, <strong>we need to know some politicians private lives, or we don't know they are corrupt or not. It’s the most important part. We need to know.</strong></td>
<td>Bonnie (borrower, essay): The <strong>public have “the right to know”,</strong> so we need the media. But now, the media seems to use “the right to know” to make money from (celebrities), politicians, and other famous people. (Journalism Ethics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Naomi: but sometimes i think <strong>paparazzi is to over</strong> Naomi: <strong>their behavior</strong> Queenie (discussant): i think the goverment should limit paparazzi's over behavior, because we want have present good for our audience</td>
<td>Tammy (borrower, essay): Sometimes <strong>paparazzi have bad behaviors</strong> and let people dislike. Actually, paparazzi is omnipresent. So paparazzi violate entertainer’s privacy all the time. (Reaction to violation of personal privacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Bianca: they become famous because of media! Gill: they use media and the media use them, too Bianca: then, if you wanna be celebrity, you should pay for it!</td>
<td>Bianca (initiator, speech): But on the other hand, some people said that the celebrities, if they want to become famous, they <strong>have to pay for the media;</strong> otherwise, people will forget them. (If I am a paparazzi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Diana: people just need to watch the headline and some international news. save your time on somthing more useful Nydia: so all of you think news are not useful? Diana: some are, most are not Nydia: <strong>what kind of news are useful</strong></td>
<td>Nydia (initiator, essay): the press has the right to report news, but the meaning of knowing news is to <strong>know the truth and useful information.</strong> (Responsibility of Media)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6 Discussion Itself</td>
<td>Nell: but i don't wanna know the detail of a love affair, either Heather: But we just know these scandals...what can we get Ella: but the truth is, <strong>ppl like to know it.</strong></td>
<td>Jennifer (borrower, essay): And the TV will broadcast this news all day, they know <strong>people like to watch it.</strong> They know that to do so, they could have good ratings. The media have this kind of conduct, because</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
people like it. (Why reporters want to write about gossip?)

* The parenthesis here was the title of students’ speech or essay.

**Reference**


