CrossMark

MEDIA & COMMUNICATION STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Easily connected but difficult to become intimate? Intercultural friendships on social media among Taiwanese ESL students in the US

Hong-Chi Shiau[1,2]*

*Corresponding author: Hong-Chi Shiau, Department of Communications Management, Shih-Hsin University, #1 Lane17 Sec.1, Mu-Cha Rd., Taipei, Taiwan; Graduate Institute for Gender Studies, Shih-Hsin University, #1 Lane17 Sec.1, Mu-Cha Rd., Taipei, Taiwan
E-mail: iamhongchi@gmail.com

Abstract: ESL students in an exchange program are likely to be active users of social networking technologies while abroad. Social media allows them to connect with friends from different cultures, while also offering a cultural cocoon for these ESL students to remain connected with their old cliques without interacting with locales from the host countries. Drawing on ethnographic interviews and textual analysis with 18 Taiwanese ESL students in the United States, this study asked informants to retrospectively recount their use of social media with respect to English learning and intercultural relationships during their sojourning experiences. Friendships between Taiwanese and people from other cultures may face linguistic and cultural barriers, and while the use of social media embedded within various multimedia communicative tools (e.g. static or animated stickers, selfies or hyperlinks) can help overcome the tensions and challenges involved in the initial stage of communication, these multimedia communicative tools were phatic and supplementary to textual information. Intercultural/interracial friendships can only be better maintained and sustained with the sojourner's mastering of textism in vernacular English, and interlocutors can experience greater social bonding as more textual information is created. Unless tailor-made for a specific interlocutor, graphic postings shared on

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hong-Chi Shiau (PhD 2003, Temple) is professor of communications management at Shih-Hsin University in Taiwan. He had taught in the US before his academic career in Taiwan. He is passionate in building a more nuanced understanding of how increasingly communication flows have helped engender new collectivities. His recent research examines how individuals form impressions of the world through their media use and how transcultural power is negotiated in a global context. He has recently published articles in *Social Media + Society, Chinese Journal of Communication, Language Communication, Leisure Studies, Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, Asian Cinema, Cogent Arts and Humanities* and *International Journal of Comic Art* and also contributed several book chapters mainly on East Asian Popular Culture.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Intercultural friendships may face linguistic and cultural challenges. The growing popularity of social media apps on smartphones can help address these issues. This study thus examines how the multimedia communicative tools afforded by social media can maintain and sustain intercultural friendships. The results are mixed: on one hand, the use is phatic and supplementary; it is particularly useful in the initial stage. Shy users are empowered to share images. On the other hand, however, the users can only experience greater social bonding as more textual information has been created over time. Unless tailor-made for a specific user, graphic postings are mostly complementary and mastering of textism in everyday life English is crucial. This study unexpectedly finds that social media nurtures intercultural friendships between users from different East Asian countries for a shared digital visual cultures as well as being equally challenged by the use of English.

social media are mostly merely complementary to textual information. Additionally, social media nurtures intercultural friendships between ESL students from different East Asian countries (e.g. Taiwanese and South Koreans in the US) more effectively than friendships between Taiwanese ESL students and North-Americans.

Subjects: Intercultural Communication; Interpersonal Communication; Visual Communication; International & Comparative Education; Language & Linguistics

Keywords: intercultural friendship; social media; short messaging services (SMS); multimedia textism; cultural adaptation; digital ethnography

1. Introduction

With the phenomenal spread of social media and global interconnectedness, the number of contacts across cultures has increased dramatically (Shuter, 2012). Social media and networking have induced substantial growth of various cultural contacts, resulting in a great variation of uses in English. In light of the popularity of new social media, contacts of people from different cultures have been changed from predominant face-to-face encounters to instantaneous communication with others regardless of geo-political boundaries, time, or space (Shuter, 2012). The impact of social networking on intercultural communication has dramatically changed the "standard norms" of communication in various respects, compared to what has been understood decades ago (Cheese, 2008; Chen, 2012; Lebedko, 2014a, 2014b; Movius, 2010; Shiau, 2015; Shuter, 2012; Smith Pfister & Soliz, 2011). In many cases, for instance, for young Japanese men to overcome their shyness in communication, those with low social skills were also found to predominantly use mobile texting to maintain existing relationship bonds (Ishii, 2006).

Holmes' analyses of communication styles (Holmes, 2005, 2006) among Chinese and New Zealand students in New Zealand concluded that, in addition to language barriers, different means of engaging with cultural others, intercultural sensitivity, and critical cultural awareness in negotiating tasks might hamper efficient intercultural communication. However, with smartphone mobile texting, ESL students are afforded convenient communicative tools during their transitional stage. Evidences that such tools are widely favored by young people are not difficult to come by examined the development of face-to-face social networks and discovered that the students rated their relationships as more close and intimate when more texting on social media was involved in the maintenance of relationship. Smartphone texting can therefore potentially promote selective relationship formation as compared with large and loose modes of relationship.

The mobility of texting on social media drastically increased the frequency of communication that can increase the depth and breadth of interpersonal relationships. As a myriad of studies suggest, computer-mediated communication has played an increasingly large role in language instruction and in training language teachers (Reeder, Macfadyen, Roche, & Chase, 2004; Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Warschauer, 1997). However, the technological platform through which ESL students learn English has long not been confined to the traditional computer-mediated space on laptop. Rather, based on the empirical evidences in this research, Taiwanese ESL students gain at least ten new connections with students from other countries or local American students within a week after their arrival in the US. In terms of group project and assignment, mobile communication via social media, presently mostly on smartphones, becomes a dominant platform. Given this, it is imperative to understand how these ESL students learn English as well as establish and maintain emerging intercultural friendships, not only in the classroom but also from the way they communicate vernacularly. It is in this context that the present study examines a seldom-researched facet of second language learner identities—identities constructed through the linguistic performance on social media during Taiwanese ESL students' study in the United States.

Anecdotal evidences suggest that friendships between ESL students and people from other cultures may face linguistic and cultural barriers. The question this essay seeks to explore is whether the increasingly prevalent use of social media may help overcome such challenges. Are aspects of international students' performance of ethnic/gender identity challenged in unanticipated ways, both in interaction with their host families and with peers? Furthermore, social media offers a mobile cocoon for these ESL students to remain connected with their old cliques without leaving their comfort zones. It thus becomes imperative to understand how the use of social media can help ESL students to leave the comfort zone, learning English and actively interacting with locals from the hosting countries.

1.1. Texting on short messaging services and digital literacy

The special nature of text messaging communication has given rise to a wave of studies internationally. Much research on texting, or short messaging service (SMS), has been primarily devoted to the addictive figures among global teenagers and their psychological and cultural implications. These studies, which I call the first wave of SMS research, started with signs that teenagers are bringing countless mistakes to writing assignments into the classroom, partially as a result of the abbreviated SMS language teenagers are prevalently using with the ever increasing use of text messaging among students. There has been a growing concern among educators, parents, researchers and general public that this practice is damaging the use of spoken and written language and will affect the standard forms in the long run (e.g. Aitken, 2001; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Kim & Mitomo, 2006; Kinder, 1999; Ling & Yttri, 2002; Reid & Reid, 2004; Rössler & Höfflich, 2002). While there is a strong sense that mobile technology hurts student attention span, hindering students' ability to write and communicate face to face, most of these concerns were drawn from educators' perspective. Digital technologies, in a way, were creating an easily distracted generation with short attention spans. For instance, Skenazy (2009) argued that, more specifically, texting and other digital communication behavior potentially diminish key social skills like effective listening. Given these concerns, parents, school teachers, and experts feel a need to intervene to limit the unquenchable temptation of the use of such technologies by supposedly vulnerable youth, thus responding to scholars' earlier calls for more protection and guidance.

Similarly set in a pedagogical context, a different approach indicates that students are adapting to new communication norms in an increasingly digital world. Indeed, much scholarship in cultural studies and cultural geography has offered an oppositional thesis, refuting texting on mobile phone as antisocial devices which cause children and young people to withdraw from social interaction (Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Thompson & Cupples, 2008). From a social linguistic perspective, Crystal (2008) notably refutes the aforementioned concerns on literacy by observing that texting ultimately encourages creativity, through language play, and the ability to communicate concisely in spite of character restrictions imposed upon users of computer mediated communication. In analyzing the association between the reduced type of language used in internet chatting and that used in text messages, Crystal (2001) coined a word "Netspeak," attributing some of the abbreviated forms in text messaging to the users' familiarity with chat rooms. Since SMS, by their very nature, are abbreviated, informal, and unsupervised, a clear legacy appears to have passed on from other computer-mediated communication environments. The length constraints challenge individuals to communicate what they intend while maintaining a degree of clarity, and the tradeoff between clarity and efficiency ultimately results in effective communication.

1.2. Second language learning and cultural adaptation

While the significance of identity construction has been recognized in all types of learning, there is a common assumption that most long-term well-adjusted immigrants who live and work in a new environment need, and want, to better speak the local language and appreciate the local cultural practices, so as to achieve some level of efficacy in their daily lives (Kim, Izumi, & McKay-Semmler, 2009). Based on cross-sectional comparisons conducted by numerous studies, when ESL students move across borders, they experience cross-cultural transformations at different paces and with different

intensities (Gao, 2008; Pavlenko, 2003). Social media platforms can likely afford an informal but powerful learning activity system to ESL learners who also seek help from their peers and their own independent research. Using SMS on social media to communicate, these USL learners may gain various communication skills and enjoy the learning environments outside of the classroom in a more relaxed atmosphere. SMS texting applications on smartphones also offer an interactive learning environment, which is particularly valuable for the shy learners who are uneasy about communicating in class but who are eager to interact in real time with significant others in a globalized world in easier and more frequent approaches. For example, by browsing an online dictionary to define unknown words or expressions, ESL students can refer to various tools and communicate more effectively. This is particularly helpful when a learner has a personal question or wishes to explain a fact.

During the transitional processes, ESL students' native languages, ideologies and agency established in their primary socialisation cultures are very likely to contradict or even collide with the new ideologies and performance in the host cultures, and this is an interstitial space where ESL students may engage in a long journey of identity negotiation (Pavlenko, 2003). As suggested by sociocultural perspectives, the broader social, cultural and historical context presents the robust frame which influences realistic meaning-making and behavior during sociocultural interactions in a wider range of educational settings (Mills, 2011). Thus, when individuals are motivated to learn, it is possible for them to perceive affordances, limitations and strategies for active learning.

Learning English presents a financial incentive and higher degree of upward mobility which plays a gatekeeping role to higher education and well-paid professional jobs, implicating English in widening pre-existing class-based chasms (Ramanathan, 1999, 2005). While the short term exchange students may not be expected to live in the host culture permanently, the command of local language and a great acceptance of hosting cultural practices remain key for their adaptation in the hosting culture (Kim, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2011; Shiau, 2015). Studies of short-term adaptation of ESL students have found the common experience of "culture shock" and the related "U-curve" of psychological adjustment (Oberg, 1960; Zaharna, 1989). Although culture shock is typically associated with negative psychological impacts, many scholars have highlighted that most ESL students eventually achieve satisfactory adjustment, as Lysgaard (1955) introduced the idea of a "U-shaped curve" of psychological adjustment, which suggests that the individuals who experienced the most difficulty during their sojourn in the US were those who had stayed between six and 18 months, compared with those who had stayed either less than six or more than 18 months. Oberg (1960) elaborated a U-curve by dividing the curve into four stages starting with honeymoon stage, followed by a period of crisis, a period of adjustment, integration and enjoyment of the new environment.

In the case of Taiwanese ESL students in the United States, communication activities in general, and interpersonal communication activities in particular, play an essential role in shaping their adaptation process in the host cultural environment. As explained in Kim's (2001, 2005) integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation, their engagement in interpersonal communication activities with local people is a core factor in achieving greater functional fitness and psychological health vis-à-vis the host environment. For international ESL students, interpersonal communication by smartphone is particularly significant (Lebedko, 2014b; Movius, 2010). It is through communication that ESL students are able to interact more competently with others in a given cultural community.

A number of studies conducted earlier before the rise of social media have shown that computer-mediated interpersonal communication activities help maintain ethnic ties. For instance, Cox (2004) investigated the role of communication, technology, and cultural identity in repatriation adjustment, and the results indicated that high levels of closeness in relationships with folks at home, satisfaction with use of information and communication technology, and psychological adjustment abroad were positively correlated. Before the rise of social media, some mediated forms of communication, particularly e-mail communication, received higher ratings from the American ESL students than some types of face-to-face communication as serving their interpersonal needs with

respect to other Americans. Along the same line, Cemalcilar, Falbo, and Stapleton (2005) suggested a direct effect of computer-mediated interpersonal communication in the early stages of cross-cultural transition

1.3. Social media uses among ESL students from different cultures

As an instance of low context culture, the USA exemplifies a type of communication pattern that relies on explicit verbal communication, while Taiwan or other East Asian cultures epitomize high-context cultures where people communicate in ways that are implicit and rely heavily on context. It is intriguing to explore how people from low and high context cultures interact since they value interpersonal relationships differently. Adjustment to a foreign culture involves continuous adaptation and adjustment, which is why participants in an exchange program are most likely to be active users of social networking technologies while abroad (Lee, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2012). The advantages to ESL students using network technologies during intercultural adaptation have attracted academic attention (e.g. Chen, Bennett, & Maton, 2008; Lee et al., 2012; Sawyer & Chen, 2012; Trebbe, 2007; Ye, 2006). While there are advantages to using different communicative venues, texting on smartphone social media, in a way, is well-matched to the life circumstance of international students when abroad, surrounded by a myriad of uncertain weak ties.

Social media consist of interactive forms of media that allow users to interact with each other, having been traditionally facilitated by online learning platforms but presently mostly through various venues on mobile phones. Before the arrival of smartphone technologies, studying in the US would have been equivalent to moving on and cutting themselves off from their old lives, and ESL students might have had to fully immerse themselves in the host country. In response to the abrupt termination of old ties, there was an old-time definition of being an expatriate as learning a new language, overcoming isolation by seeking friendships with locals and making daily discoveries about the host culture. However, with the ubiquitous use of social media through smartphone technologies, it has also become possible for ESL students to indulge in texting and talking with co-ethnics in close vicinity or co-nationals in the home country. These students can use social networking sites to remain connected with friends and parents back home and network with ESL students from other countries. In terms of intercultural relations, the browsing of profile pages and possibility of leaving messages on social networking sites offer relatively easy and low-risk ways for ESL students to venture into a world of strangers as part of their new lives in host cultures. These social networking sites also provide communication venues through which people can effortlessly keep their friends at home informed, providing updates via personal profiles, weblogs and photos of activities.

A growing body of research has analyzed how social media can allow ESL students to learn English, either on their own, or outside of formal language learning classes or programs. One aspect of social media—role-playing games—has particularly attracted scholarly discussion with respect to its effectiveness in language learning. Role-playing games may easily transport across national and linguistic boundaries, enabling ESL learners to chat with players from all over the world who speak various languages (Rankin, Gold, & Gooch, 2006). ESL students are thus able to acquire more language skills by socially engaging in communication with native English speakers (Torne & Black, 2007). The social interaction these players engage in while playing the game helps with their understanding of the grammar constructions and conversational ways of the language they are using (Rankin, Morrison, McNeal, Gooch, & Shute, 2009). Given the highly contextualised nature of the "talk" that gamers may well be texting to one another, they are learning much sooner than they might otherwise. Without this social interaction, many students would probably be less willing to practice new skills which may enhance their abilities in the language they are learning.

My anecdotal experiences working with students as an instructor suggests that larger amount of learning takes place beyond the confines of classroom setting, and language learners are able to enhance their communication skills due to the different avenues which new social media have afforded. This study attempts to hone the focus on SMS applications (SMS—LINE or Whatsapp etc.). Based on the empirical data, these SMS applications are the most common technologies providing the

Taiwanese ESL learners with the possibility of participating in actual, real-time and relevant conversations and possibly practicing English with or without the help of an experienced teacher by his or her side. However, as most SMS venues presently allow their users to communicate visually, can language learners bypass the use of language per se, communicating without using any verbal language?

Prevalent uses of selfies, photo and animated stickers among social media users may suggest that social media users might be happily communicating without learning much English. International English language learners are likely fostering weak ties during their sojourning experiences. As Kim (2007) suggested, while talking verbally can be best used to advance relationships among those with strong social ties, such as nuclear family, text-based computer-mediated social media are used more to expand relationships with weak social ties In another case involving sojourning experiences, for instance, Lebedko (2014a), who examined Chinese and Japanese students studying in Russia, found that they used social media less during the initial stage as a way to alleviate the culture shock and/or devote more efforts to acculturate in the host culture. These students, however, gradually began using Facebook or other social media sites at a recovery stage subsequent to the cultural shock. In the end, the opportunities of using Russian on social media became less frequent—most of the international students came to withdraw from their cultural safari and returned to the electronic nutshells surrounding their co-nationals who support and understand them more effectively, in particular when those students experienced cultural bumps or communication failures at the acculturation stage. Some students (not so many) accepted different cultural values and rejected others. The texting and visual information shared among users on social media helped them supplementarily maintain interpersonal relationship through supporting face-to-face communications among existing relationships. While the increasingly prevalent phenomenon of intercultural friendship can be easily validated in everyday life, there have been limited academic endeavors dedicated to understanding how these friendships evolve, maintain and sustain themselves across the borders of different cultures.

2. Theoretical framework

With the popularity of social media use, the study tries to hone the focus on how the growth and sustainability of intercultural relationships relates to the use of social media. Additionally, our study seeks to comprehend how these ESL students negotiate a mediated self and come to further explore their ethnic and gender identities in the face of emerging others. In this study, I take a social constructionist approach to understand how learning English among Taiwanese ESL students is socially and technologically situated. This research focuses on a present-day English-learning journey in which Taiwanese students simultaneously negotiate gender and ethnic identities on social media, mostly via smartphone.

The purpose of this study is to further explore intercultural friendship maintenance and sustainability among Taiwanese ESL students in the US and to offer possible personal accounts of these experiences of friendship. Two common extreme thoughts relating learning English to the use of social media in the US can be summarized as follows: on one hand, the uses of social media impede English learning effectiveness, due to the social network sites primarily offering a safe and peaceful haven where ESL students can stay and hibernate within the co-ethnic community; on the other hand, the uses of social media can afford the practice of English to ESL users, potentially accelerating the growth of intercultural friendships with the accessibility of graphically-rich, multiple communicative venues.

2.1. Research questions

This study posits that there are contingencies for making the aforementioned extreme cases happen. However, as a longstanding promoter for learning English as well as intercultural understanding, this study is set out to understand when and how social media can help ESL students communicate better as well as nourish intercultural friendships. It is in such a context that the following two main research questions were formulated:

RQ1: How do international students relate their ESL learning experiences to the use of social media?

RQ2: How were the various communicative venues of social media used by Taiwanese ESL students to create, maintain and sustain intercultural friendships with other Taiwanese students as opposed to other nationals?

RQ3: How do these experiences inspire, challenge and/or transform these ESL students' gender/ethnic identities?

2.2. Methods: Interpretative ethnography

The study adopts an ethnographic research approach, including textual analysis of informants' texting and informal interviews as a participant. Since most of my informants are connected to the researcher using various smartphone applications, such as LINE, Skype and/or Facebook, the researcher reviewed their data regularly to understand the overall circumstances of their intercultural friendships on these social media sites. Participant observation of the Taiwanese students' smartphone interactions with their friends was conducted at our convenience.

In this study, the natural context is a fully smartphone-based, one-semester interaction through which my informants' perspectives were provided by postings in which they constructed their identities online through written and graphic correspondence. The ESL students sometimes complemented these ethnographic interviews with digital artifacts. Detailed fieldnotes were taken during observations with my informants, and significant correspondence on social media was retrieved for future analysis.

As a liaison officer who helps formulate partnerships among Taiwanese and North-American universities, I was able to include data from different settings, such as the administrators of the language schools and host families of these ESL students, which helps paint a holistic picture of my research by acknowledging the multifaceted experiences that shape my informants' identity negotiation of everyday lives in the US. Frequent interactions on social media helped me gather the data on what was going on with their English language learning and lives outside the classroom, which would facilitate the expression and analysis of personal and private experiences.

The naturalistic interpretive approach seems the most appropriate since this study is interested in the subjective interpretation of sojourning experiences, and how their use affects intercultural friendships in the host culture. Immersing oneself in this field is imperative to achieving such an idiosyncratic comprehension through "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973). Such a naturalistic inquiry strives to understand naturally occurring phenomena in their natural states.

2.2.1. Participants

While the larger research focus is more broadly on how the perpetual connectivity afforded by smartphone technologies changes the pattern of usage, the study centers essentially on the possibility of reconfiguring social relations among Taiwanese ESL students in the United States. Over six years of teaching several programs tailor-made for Taiwanese students who intended to study in the US or UK, the researcher has actively advised Taiwanese students on planning and applying to study in the United States or other English speaking countries. I recruited a total of 18 informants with a semester-long English learning experience, who participated, under my recommendation, in US study abroad programs between 2013 and 2015. Subsequently, the researcher employed a snowballing scheme, becoming acquainted with 10 more informants through the referrals from earlier informants.

3. Results

3.1. Typing in English itself is an ignored barrier

While the prospect of having actual, real-time, relevant conversations and practicing English on social media is possible, Taiwanese ESL students are particularly constrained by the fact that they hardly could type in English. If many of them do, they maneuver slowly, which they believe may dampen any possible enthusiasm for prospective interactions. While texting is popular in a computer-mediated environment, it was once predominantly used in the desktop environment. Before smartphone use became widely disseminated around 2010, SMS tended to be restricted to the office or home. Unlike other users of Roman alphabetic languages such as French and Spanish, with prior knowledge regarding each letters on the keyboard, English typing skills among Taiwanese students were considerably limited unless they had been trained at earlier stages. According to the informants, as a result of the fact that Mandarin Chinese has a complicated form, typing entry relies more on an independent phonetic system, which is not common in the Greater Chinese region. Students from mainland China applying the Roman spelling system to type Chinese more likely familiarize themselves with the Roman alphabet keyboard. Oftentimes, typing is usually a huge challenge even for Taiwanese students whose English proficiency may sound excellent.

The discrepancy between different nationals would easily set ESL students apart—with Asian students likely getting together without typing much English. In part due to the similar degree of unpreparedness in typing English, Taiwanese ESL students, along with Korean and Japanese, can relate the technical challenges among them better than other nationals. As many female informants (e.g. Chubby, D and Flora) put it in a straightforward way—however much talkative and eloquent we may be when texting in Chinese, we become silently childish on SMS because we can hardly type. We therefore use stickers or post selfies to communicate with other students. Typing English is challenging as explicated below:

> I guess I must have looked like an idiot online. I constantly send stickers and selfies—I wasn't like this. This is only what I can do to show my friendly gesture. (Chubby, 22 year-old)

> I am usually very responsive verbally, but typing is a huge challenge for me. My lecturer might think I am wired on replying through a bunch of stickers (or that I am a big fan of anime?) (D, 20 year-old)

> I may follow most conversations in the class but I simply couldn't type in the beginning. It got better after like one or two months. (Flora, 21-year-old)

There is a profound discovery disclosed by informants that it is this very challenge that gets them to affiliate with each other, coming to recognize that they are "East Asians," a distinctive identity marker that makes them non-White, non-Brown and non-Black. This affinity is reinforced by the technological platform—LINE—the most popular SMS application in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Instead of downloading other social media, East Asians have been framed on the basis of such affinity.

3.2. Stickers are culture-free

While intercultural friendships between Taiwanese ESL students and other nationals may face linguistic and cultural barriers, the use of social media embedded with various multimedia communicative tools (e.g. static or animated stickers, selfies or hyperlinks) somewhat overcomes the tensions and challenges. In the initial stage of intercultural personal contact, Taiwanese ESL students instantly exchanged account information with other ESL students despite other online learning venues offered by the college also being available to them. It is less awkward to request such information if both parties are assigned by the lecturer to work on the same task in a group.

However, a common situation for Taiwanese ESL students is that it is too scary to initiate a phone call to their non-Asian teammates, and vice versa. A convenient explanation for this is the expense, but a further investigation discovers that 16 of the 18 informants in this study indicated that having to speak English on the phone "scares them to death." The remaining two—Chubby and Lima—who have a better command of spoken English based on having stayed in the US for a considerable time prior to their major sojourning also found making a phone call too intrusive. Both maintained that they would likely text initially, and subsequently make a phone call only if necessary. Talking on the phone, where one's interlocutor is not visible, is something many people find embarrassing; according to informants Mosi, Lima and Jessie, even individuals with an excellent command of English can find it "impossibly challenging." Due to the linguistic barrier, texting becomes virtually a default choice but nearly all informants are slow in typing English.

Given the "strange" circumstances that moderate exchanges between Taiwanese ESL students and other nationals in the United States—where barriers exist to both typing and speaking—stickers and photographs are commonly used between Taiwanese ESL students and other nationals. Although an ESL student may have thousands of choices in their symbolic repertoire, to better illustrate these stickers, two examples are shown below. The left one, depicting a bear, is a static sticker showing gratitude; the right one, an animation of a duck, expresses "OK"—i.e. acceptance and/or agreement. The stickers are available for free download but are often packaged as part of a set and sold online. Each set comprises 20 stickers, and the interviewed ESL students typically have from 20 to 50 sets of stickers, meaning that they have a total collection of 400 to 2,000 stickers from which to choose.

Static and animated stickers that strongly resemble the above (perhaps more graphically complicated) were commonly used by the ESL students to initiate conversations with other nationals when using LINE or as simple responses to posts by friends. Small talk, in addition to the above examples, also includes phrases such as "how are you," "miss you," "great," and "good job," to name a few examples. May and Zara were told to "be well equipped with something cute" before arriving in the US since cuteness would help make sure whatever they said or did was not wrong. As D and Flora suggested in the interviews, "People won't slap your face if you are constantly smiling and looking innocent".

However, social media exchanges dominated by these stickers are sometimes perceived as "superficial" and "unprofessional." In fact, Bobo and Nate shared similar experiences of having been told by their American teachers and friends that these stickers somehow suggest a lack of communication ability or sincerity. According to Kungyang, although most Taiwanese ESL students use cute stickers to show friendliness, few notice how cuteness runs contrary to American ideas about professionalism:

> "It is OK when you are seven or eight years old to be sending a bunch of stickers, but for a college graduate, you should stop using that." Kungyang expressed slight antipathy to the use of stickers, despite frequently engaging in the habit. (author's personal interview on 07/28/2015)

Surprisingly, nine informants (50%) used stickers without intending to express cuteness. In most of these cases they simply wanted to show off recently acquired stickers, which can only be recognized by Korean and Japanese ESL students. Stickers in a sense should be used like accessories that the user has owned for a long time. May and Obi mentioned experiencing unusual situations in employing stickers on LINE (the SMS application social media used in Taiwan, Japan and Korea), as follows:

> Well, I see these stickers as my earrings. Sometimes my parents and friends would criticize my spending on these earrings as wasteful. I feel like I have to prove them wrong, so I ended up sending a wide variety of stickers to various friends. (May, author's personal interview on 07/22/2015)

I am surprised by my obsession for acquiring new stickers…I think some people buy shoes but I like to buy stickers. Anyway, my hobby is less expensive. (Obi, author's personal interview on 07/26/2015)

In conclusion, the use of stickers is common among Taiwanese, Korean and Japanese ESL students. On reflection, the Taiwanese ESL students by and large believed that their use of stickers was a habit they had carried to America from their old circles in Taiwan. They are convenient and friendly looking. Their life accounts also suggest that the frequent use of stickers is not only a result of a lack of English typing skills, but rather a complicated process of allocating available communicative resources to their friends in the life circle. For instance, if one possesses more than a thousand stickers, it is hard to keep them to oneself.

3.3. Photo sharing among us as "East Asians"

Over time, three types of photographs started to be exchanged, namely selfies, photos of places a person has visited or that are personally meaningful, and photos of food/meals. Since these graphic communicative resources require more self-disclosure from ESL students than do the stickers discussed above, as well as requiring a sophisticated knowledge of their new friends in the new learning environment, intercultural friendships often evolve and grow rapidly in tandem with such photograph sharing. The posting of photographs is often reciprocal; namely, Taiwanese ESL students typically post photographs in response to an inquiry or request. While both Taiwanese and other nationals occasionally post selfies, Taiwanese ESL students, along with "other East Asian students (from China, Japan and Korea) use selfies more often," often to situate themselves in a place that is important for them. In contrast, local Americans or other nationals were "rather subdued in posting selfies," and typically refrained from disclosing too much personal information in accompanying discussions.

Taiwanese ESL students, similar to other East Asians, are also more likely to mention their significant others in posts to their American locals, a means by which they illustrate their social circles. Photographs posted by ESL students often included their families and hometowns as a means of introducing their home culture and explaining their experiences of negotiating life transitions. In terms of photograph sharing, a notable discrepancy between ESL students from East Asia and American locals is that the former often emphasize the meals/foods they have experienced at home or overseas, even including specific details such as ingredients and cost, while their American counterparts are more likely to disclose a high level of detail about their pets, including how they raise and interact with them. HK and Lima expressed this difference as follows:

I think we "Taiwanese" (quotation gesture) simply inherently love taking pictures before eating anything—like the slice of pizza I had yesterday, which was too boring for my American friends to see. But to me, the point is that it's so boring; I want to ask people how a piece of pizza can be so plain. My American friends would probably say I am so easily entertained. (HK, author's personal interview on 06/28/2015)

One day we took part in a tour group, accompanying some Americans to see a theater performance. Before going into the theater, we first took individual selfies and then took group pictures. But everyone had at least one camera and wanted a group picture taken with her or his camera. We had to reshuffle the group almost five times, but one of the Americans left after we took the first group picture. (Lima, author's personal interview on 07/24/2015)

The American perception of Asians as being extreme enthusiastic about taking and sharing photographs is reflected in two common ethnic comments reported by subjects that refer excessive taking of photographs: "Come on, you are so Chinese"; "Oh, you are so Asian." (Personal interview with D, 06/25/2015) On the other hand, Taiwanese ESL students sometimes found that their American counterparts talk excessively about their pets, mainly dogs and cats. D and Peter expressed being mystified as how to best deal with American friends who constantly uploaded photographs of their

dogs and cats in a series of slightly different poses. As D put it, initially he would look at a cat and say "wow it is cute" but after a hundred pictures he would be running out of words with which to comment. Enthusiasm for such sharing of pictures can be dampened if the sharing efforts remain one-sided.

> In the long run, I only keep my photographs of meals for future retrieval. I find them too trivial for most of my friends, except my mother may want to know. (Jessie, author's personal interview on 07/28/2015)

> Well, you can't trade your meal pictures with their doggie pictures. It simply doesn't work that way. (LKK, author's personal interview on 07/24/2015)

Despite some perceived differences, photograph sharing can help the informants in intercultural understanding, particularly within the first three months. Many Taiwanese ESL students were quite skilled at editing (or photoshopping) pictures and willing to offer others their help in improving the aesthetics of their photographs. Voluntarily helping others through deploying editing skills in this way is rewarding because both parties can tangibly feel the enhancements realized. For instance, Lima posted pictures that were more "authentically flattering" to all parties involved, and her American friend was instantly impressed by how her free aesthetic labor enhanced their own appearance. Such digital enhancement requires sophisticated skills, which Lima gained through her previous internship at a startup company where her work involved "correcting" every incoming picture. Lima said that her objective was to make everyone look thinner and beautiful "authentically," which she defined as sophistication in editing to a point where most people perceive the final image to be natural rather than photoshopped. To achieve this objective required her to adjust many dimensions of the pictures, including lighting and color. Engagement in such aesthetic labor by Taiwanese ESL students can realize a long-term pay off, because these pictures become testimonies of co-existence and shared memories, solidifying their friendships. Besides, if the pictures are sufficiently flattering, they can easily be circulated through social networks.

Photograph sharing on social media can significantly enhance intercultural friendships during the honeymoon phase. The pictures shared are often a legacy of common everyday activities but can easily be lost if additional effort is not invested in their preservation and sharing. However, graphic postings shared on social media are mostly merely complementary to textual information in the long run unless tailor-made for a specific interlocutor.

3.4. Textism in vernacular English and small talks
Although scholars have argued that communication through social networks is preferable to speech for the digital generation (Lebedko, 2014a), the informants in this study expressed that there is an enormous barrier to sustain intercultural friendships on social media, particularly with American friends. The majority of the informants reported that frequent contact in real life increased the likelihood of friendship, and it was an essential factor for their intercultural friendship. However, language remains a barrier hindering people from directly interacting with each other more in-depth.

Most of the informants suggest that a common interest is necessary in increasing social contacts with Americans, thus sustaining their intercultural friendships—but in order to have these social contacts, it is important for these friends to have at least one common interest. We "have to do something together" to form friendships and "hang out" (May, Nate and Norton). When asked "what about online game and smartphone game," HK, Peter and Zara said that they have hundreds of friends from playing these games but they have never really talked beyond these games, "so perhaps they are not my friend." Sports could be good for maintaining friendships, for instance, Ben and D both like to play Badminton so they do that regularly with their American friends. Ben has been professionally trained, so he often went out with American friends after Badminton practice. On social media, Ben has fewer American contacts, as compared to most informants in this study, but their conversations were more frequent and longer. They "talk"—Ben spoke English relatively more

fluently and typed more skillfully because in order to reply to his friend's inquiry, he simply has to type in a way more similar to his speech. Stickers and photographs are rarely used; texting has a better "sense of individualized humanity." (Personal interview with Ben, 06/27/2015)

Ben's is a typical case of social media being used to maintain and sustain his existing real life intercultural friendships, chiefly arising from the common interest in practicing Badminton. However, in most cases, there is virtually no real life friendship to begin with, and the use of social media unexpectedly bonds the ESL students from East Asia: for instance Chubby, Flora, LKK, May and Kungyang unanimously express that a common life trajectory revolving around Taiwanese ESL students begins with SMS linguistic exchanges in the classroom setting, followed by the addition of numerous new contacts to their social network; however, most of the contacts added are weak and almost "disposable" except for those East Asians who may equally suffer from a linguistic barrier.

In most cases, the contacts on SMS are not really contacts, they are simply a person one barely knows—and a Taiwanese ESL student can have 500 to 1,000 contacts on social networks. Subsequently, through some visually-elicited communication via social media, the intercultural friendship among East Asians thus unfolds and grows more naturally. The photographs of various social events, if recorded properly, can always be shared on social media for further retrieval. But to make this happen, one has to be in an event where everyone likes to be in photographs to begin with. Then, to sustain the friendship, it is imperative for the social media users to come up with life narratives shared among parties.

For instance, Ben at times shared the tough tennis course he underwent as a child: with his five sweatshirts scattered around the field after his practice, he won 78 textual responses, most of which were in reminiscence of these sweating days and intercultural differences. The responses on Ben's facebook and whatsapp arrived almost in ten minutes, and Ben answered each response timely by texting.

Given this, our study cautions against the excessive optimism that presupposes the global level of networking as overcoming the barriers imposed on intercultural friendships; as seen in various cases, the aforementioned stickers and photographs are "a convenient starter" in the beginning. Having a "meaningful" conversation is important—but it is not necessarily comprised of being able to type in formal English; texting to people in a manner that makes visual sense is thus highly situated. Stickers, hyperlink references and photographs are highly effective to bond ESL learners from East Asia. Many indicated that they started their intercultural friendships with someone from the same dorm and class with other ESL nationals. For instance, in this study, Ben, D and May said that they do not have any local friends at all; all they have during their study in the US are friends from China, Japan and Korea. Most informants referenced the shared trajectory as an East-Asian ESL student in the US to the common Japanese-influenced anime culture in the region.

4. Conclusion and discussion

The visually-elicited communication on SMS has not fundamentally challenged the learning of English itself, but a fissure has cracked in the communicative space that affords ESL learners to reshape their understanding toward the cultural and linguistic landscapes of various countries beyond the English speaking world. The emergence of "East Asianness" and increased appreciation for multimedia communication may defy the expectation that all learned professionals must be able to speak English well. The increasingly dominant "alternative" linguistic and symbolic practices can possible lead to a counter-discourse against English hegemonic ideology.

Analysis of cultural differences in the context of communication in social media will enrich the context of this study. Pedagogically, this study suggests that Taiwanese ESL students could refrain from using stickers when they first arrive. Photographs denoting a shared memory generally helps bond far more than using stickers. Additionally, this study also suggests that there is a divide between North-Americans, who place more emphasis on textism, that is, being able to properly speak and text, and Taiwanese and East Asian ESL students, who prefer to offer visual images or other

implicit messages that connote efforts and enthusiam to secure friendships. As suggested in the research, novel configurations of user practices and technological capabilities with more emphasis on visual performances are altering how we learn languages and formulate intercultural friendships.

This research embeds these transformations in an interpersonal, intercultural and technological context, avoiding a naive privileging of technology as the main force driving society, but also avoiding the social media-centric reduction of intercultural relations that are situated within this context. While various terms have been used to denote strain in the long-term adaptation that immigrants may experience in response to their cultural uprooting and dislocation, such as "cultural fatigue" (Taft, 1977), "acculturative stress" (Berry, 1980, 1990, 2008) and "adaptive stress" (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2005), this study found Taiwanese ESL students rarely used similar terms to describe their study experiences in the US. Given the accessibility of various social media, they perceived themselves to be better supported.

This study resembles the research carried out by Cemalcilar et al. (2005) on social media in the early stages of cross-cultural transition and yields a similar result: interpersonal involvement in real life with members of the host society can effectively facilitate adaptation to that society. The use of social media in conjunction with stickers and photographs can potentially, but not always, help Taiwanese ESL students cope with cultural barriers in forming intercultural friendships. Such use of technology affords Taiwanese students flexibility and various means to simultaneously communicate with both members of the host society and other individuals of their own ethnicity. However, in this study the informants suggest authentic bonding with North-American locals remains "remote." Informants typically felt the need to maintain more than 500 contacts, as well as a stronger sense of both obligation and reward in their established relationships with old friends and parents back home; as such, international students from East Asia following similar trajectories can relate better.

Another finding in response to the adaptation U-curve (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960) may remain applicable to my informants, but the life cycle has shrunk partly due to the use of social media as well as other new technologies. The honeymoon phase in a sojourning destination has traditionally been assumed to last six months, though in this study most informants said that their honeymoon phase often lasted less than two months. Finding an American friend who can support them during their acculturation is no longer important. Notably, there is a lurking pride among many East Asians in being able to understand heavily accented English rather well; and after all, they are speaking their second, third or fourth language in opposition to some mono-linguistic Americans. Besides, with hundreds of contacts on social media, ESL learners constantly aspire to "move on" to a new place. Additionally, the most difficult period during their sojourn in the US did not occur between 6 and 18 months, as posited by Lysgaard (1955), but rather followed the end of an initial honeymoon period lasting approximately two months. At this point the ESL students began to face the harsh realities of their lives in America, if they intend to continue to pursue their professional career in the US.

Informants in this study tended to terminate their sojourning experience if it became too difficult. Various studies agree that immigrants require a good level of adaptation to the local language and cultural practices to achieve some level of efficacy in their daily lives (Kim, 2001, 2005). By the same token, intercultural friendships between Taiwanese students and other East Asians, in this case, ultimately depend on English textism literacy, a skill more related to proficiency in vernacular English as well as some "small talk" rather than standardized formal English. Despite the importance of knowledge and command of textism, new technologies offer new tools that help alleviate stress; for instance, common English usage has increasingly been replaced by stickers to save efforts in communication. Showing a hyperlink to an intercultural friend who may find it interesting also expresses a sense of regard and concern for a counterpart.

✳ cogent •• social sciences

Author details
Hong-Chi Shiau[1,2]
E-mail: iamhongchi@gmail.com
[1] Department of Communications Management, Shih-Hsin University, #1 Lane17 Sec.1, Mu-Cha Rd., Taipei, Taiwan.
[2] Graduate Institute for Gender Studies, Shih-Hsin University, #1 Lane17 Sec.1, Mu-Cha Rd., Taipei, Taiwan.

References
Aitken, S. (2001). *Geographies of young people: The morally contested spaces of identity*. London: Routledge.

Berry, J. W. (1980). Acculturation as varieties of adaptation. In A. Padilla (Ed.), *Acculturation: Theory, models and some new findings* (pp. 9–25). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Berry, J. W. (1990). Psychology of acculturation: Understanding individuals moving between cultures. In R. Brislin (Ed.), *Applied cross-cultural psychology* (pp. 232–253). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483325392

Berry, J. W. (2008). Globalisation and acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 32*, 328–336.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.04.001

Cemalcilar, Z., Falbo, T., & Stapleton, L. (2005). Cyber communication: A new opportunity for international students' adaptation? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*, 91–110.
doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.04.002

Cheese, P. (2008). Netting the net generation. *Businessweek. com*. Retrieved March 18, 2014, from http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2008-03-13/netting-the-net-generationbusinessweek-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice

Chen, G.-M. (2012). Impact of new media on intercultural communication. *China Media Research, 8*, 1–10.

Chen, R. T., Bennett, S., & Maton, K. (2008). The adaptation of Chinese international students to online flexible learning: Two case studies. *Distance Education, 29*, 307–323.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01587910802395821

Cox, J. B. (2004). The role of communication, technology, and cultural identity in repatriation adjustment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relation, 28*, 201–219.
doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2004.06.005

Crystal, D. L. (2001). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. L. (2008). *Txtng: The gr8 db8*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gao, F. (2008). Learning English in Britain: A journey of building up the ideology of 'Chinese national identity'. In M. Edwardes (Ed.), *Proceedings of the BAAL Annual Conference* (pp. 37–39). London: Scitsiugnil Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Towards an interpretive theory of culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The interpretation of cultures* (pp. 3–30). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Holloway, S., & Valentine, G. (2000) Children's geographies and the new social studies of childhood, In S. L. Holloway & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Children's geographies: Playing, living, learning* (pp. 1–26). London: Routledge.

Holloway, S., & Valentine, G. (2003). *Cyberkids: Children in the information age*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Holmes, P. (2005). Ethnic Chinese Students' communication with cultural others in a New Zealand University This paper was first presented at the Australia New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA) conference at Coolangatta, Queensland, Australia, in July 2002. The work is based on the author's doctoral thesis. *Communication Education, 54*, 289–311.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634520500442160

Holmes, P. (2006). Problematising intercultural communication competence in the pluricultural classroom: Chinese students in a New Zealand University. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 6*, 18–34.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14708470608668906

Ishii, K. (2006). Implications of mobility: The uses of personal communication media in everyday life. *Journal of Communication, 56*, 346–365.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jcom.2006.56.issue-2

Kim, K. (2007). Ideology. Identity and intercultural communication: An analysis of differing academic conceptions of cultural identity. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 36*, 237–253.

Kim, Y. Y. (1988). *Communication and cross-cultural adaptation: An integrative theory*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kim, Y. Y. (2005). Adapting to a new culture: An integrative communication theory In W. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 375–400). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kim, Y. Y. (2010). Unum and pluribus: Ideological underpinnings of interethnic communication in the United States. In L. Samovar, R. Porter, & R. McDaniel (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (13th ed.). (pp. 208–222). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Kim, Y. Y. (2011). Beyond categories: Communication, adaptation, and Transformation. In J. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of language and intercultural communication* (pp. 229–243). New York, NY: Routledge.

Kim, A., & Mitomo, H. (2006). Impact of mobile usage on the interpersonal relations. *Communications and Strategies, 61*, 79–94.

Kim, Y.Y., Izumi, S., & McKay-Semmler, K. (2009, November). The role of direct and mediated interpersonal communication in cross-cultural adaptation: A study of educated and long-term non-native residents in the United States'. *Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Communication Association*, Chicago, IL.

Kinder, M. (1999) Kids' media culture: An introduction, In M. Kinder (Ed.), *Kids' media culture* (pp. 1–28). Durham: Duke University Press.

Lebedko, M. G. (2014a). Globalization, networking and intercultural communication. *Intercultural Communication Studies, XXXIII*, 28–41.

Lebedko, M. G. (2014b). Communication experience of Chinese and Japanese students. A pilot study of social media and intercultural communication experience of Chinese and Japanese students in Russia. In C. Litang & M. H. Prosser. *Social media in Asia*. Dörzbach: World Dignity University Press.

Lee, J. W. Y., Kim, B. K., Lee, T. L., & Kim, M. S. (2012). Uncovering the use of facebook during an exchange program. *China Media Research, 8*, 62–76.

Ling, R., & Yttri, B. (2002). Hyper-co-ordination via mobile phones in Norway. In J. E. Katz & M.A. Aakhus (Eds.), *Perpetual contact* (pp. 139–169). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511489471

Lysgaard, S. (1955). Adjustment in a foreign society: Norwegian Fulbright grantees visiting the United States. *International Social Science Bulletin, 7*, 45–51.

Mills, N. (2011). Situated learning through social networking communities: The development of joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire. *CALICO Journal, 28*, 345–368. http://dx.doi.org/10.11139/cj.28.2

Movius, L. (2010). Cultural globalisation and challenges to traditional communication theories. *PLATFORM: Journal of Media and Communication, 2*, 6–18. Retrieved April 15, 2015, from http://journals.culture-communication.unimelb.edu.au/platform/v2i1_movius.html

Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology, 7*, 170–179.

Pavlenko, A. (2003). "I Never Knew I Was a Bilingual": Reimagining teacher identities in TESOL. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 2*, 251–268. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204_2

Ramanathan, V. (1999). English is here to stay: A critical look at institutional and educational practices in India. *TESOL Q, 33*, 211–231.

Ramanathan, V. (2005). *The English-Vernacular divide: Postcolonial language politics and practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Rankin, Y., Gold, R., & Gooch, B. (2006). Evaluating interactive gaming as a language learning tool. In *Proceedings of EuroGraphics* (Vol. 25, pp. 43–49). New York, NY: ACM.

Rankin, Y., Morrison, D., McNeal, M., Gooch, B., & Shute, M. W. (2009). Time will tell: In-game social interactions that facilitate second language acquisition. *Proceedings of the 4th international conference on foundations of digital games* (pp. 161–168). New York, NY: ACM.

Reeder, K., Macfadyen, L. P., Roche, J., & Chase, M. (2004). Negotiating cultures in cyberspace: Participation patterns and problematics. *Language Learning & Technology, 8*, 88–105.

Reid, D., & Reid, F. (2004). *Insights into the social and psychological effects of SMS text messaging*. Retrieved from http://www.160characters.org/documents/SocialEffectsOfTextMessaging.pdf

Rössler, P., & Höfflich, J. R. (2002, July). Mobile written communication or email on your cellular phone: Uses of short messaging service SMS by German adolescents: A pilot study. *Paper presented at the 52nd Annual Conference of the International Communication Association*, Seoul.

Rourke, L., Anderson, T., Garrison, D. R., & Archer, W. (2001). Assessing social presence in asynchronous text-based computer conferencing. *Journal of Distance Education, 14*, 1–18.

Sawyer, R., & Chen, G. M. (2012). The impact of social media on intercultural adaptation. *Intercultural Communication Studies, 21*, 151–169.

Shiau, H.-C. (2015). Beyond the cultural dichotomy, what do we share? An ethnographic study of intergenerational smartphone MMS use in sojourning experiences. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, 25*, 42–62.

Shuter, R. (2012). Intercultural new media studies: The next frontier in intercultural communication. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 41*, 219–237. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2012.728761

Skenazy, L. (2009, February 9). Smartphone apps great for marketing, bad for social skills. *Advertising Age*. Retrieved from http://adage.com

Smith Pfister, D. & Soliz, J. (2011). (Re)conceptualizing intercultural communication in a networked society. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 4*, 246–251. doi:10.1080/17513057.2011.598043

Taft, R. (1977). Coping with unfamiliar cultures. In N. Warren (Ed.), *Studies in cross-cultural psychology* (vol. 1, pp. 121–153). London: Academic Press.

Thompson, L., & Cupples, J. (2008). Seen and not heard? Text messaging and digital sociality. *Social and Cultural Geography, 9*, 95–108. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14649360701789634

Torne, S., & Black, R. (2007). Language and literacy development in computer-mediated contexts and communities. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 27*, 1–28. doi:10.1017/s0267190508070074

Trebbe, J. (2007). Types of immigration, acculturation strategies and media use of young Turks in Germany. *Communications, 3*, 171–191.

Warschauer, M. (1997). Computer-mediated collaborative learning: Theory and practice. *The Modern Language Journal, 81*, 470–481. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/modl.1997.81.issue-4

Ye, J. (2006). An examination of acculturative stress, interpersonal social support, and use of online ethnic social groups among Chinese international students. *Howard Journal of Communications, 17*, 1–20. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10646170500487764

Zaharna, R. (1989). Self-shock: The double-binding challenge of identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 13*, 501–525. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(89)90026-6