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# INCORPORATING FACEBOOK IN AN INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL CHINESE LANGUAGE COURSE: A CASE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

*This qualitative case study examined four undergraduates in an intermediate-level Chinese language class. We investigated participants' perceptions of Facebook as a pedagogical tool in Chinese language learning and their engagement in free posting and online Chinese communication on Facebook. Data include all participants' Facebook posts and comments, a semi-structured survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and researchers' online observations and field notes. Our analysis revealed that participants engaged in a free Facebook posting activity mainly through (a) affective expression, (b) interactive communication, and (c) group-oriented salutations. These Facebook-supported social interactions offered many opportunities for language-learners to use Chinese in a relatively authentic environment while carrying out familiar on-line activities. Participants also reported that they favored both the concept of free writing in Chinese and its integration into Facebook posting. The study suggests that language-learning tasks should be authentic and that the use of technological tools such as Facebook can provide such tasks.*

# INTRODUCTION

With Facebook being embraced by most college students and faculty (Downes, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; McBride, 2009), there has been much interest in its educational potential (Mills, 2011; Thorne, 2011). Though college students use Facebook mainly for social interactions (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009), educators are excited about its potential academic benefits. Lomicka and Lord (2009) suggest that the next generation of foreign-language learning will rely heavily on social networking and online collaboration tools.

A few studies have been conducted on college students' use of Facebook. We know that students use Facebook as part of daily routines, that they enjoy using Facebook to make new friends and to maintain contact with old friends, that many students spend more time browsing than actually posting updates and that they use Facebook primarily for social interactions rather than for academic purposes (Madge et al., 2009; Pempek et al., 2009). Other studies have investigated student perceptions of the use of Facebook for educational purposes (e.g. Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010), student perceptions about instructor presence on Facebook (e.g., Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2009), the impact of the instructor's self-disclosure on Facebook on student-teacher relationships and student motivation (Aubry, 2009; Mazer et al., 2009), the formation and maintenance of social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008), and privacy and ethical issues (Foulger, Ewbank, Kay, Popp, & Carter, 2009). But only a handful of studies have been conducted in language learning contexts (e.g. Aubry, 2009; Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Kabilan et al., 2010; Mills, 2011; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011), and little research has been undertaken on the use of Facebook for Chinese language learning in U.S. classrooms.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Drawing from a social-presence perspective, which argues that learning is social in nature and that learners construct meaning through social interaction (Simina & Hamel, 2005), we examined how participants used the target language in an online class community supported by Facebook. According to Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), social presence refers to "the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as

'real' people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used" (p. 17). Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, and Archer (1999) developed an analytic framework to evaluate students' social presence in an asynchronous, text-based computer conferencing environment. In the framework, social presence is assessed using three categories: affective, interactive, and cohesive domains. In the affective domain, the indicators include expression of emotions, use of humor, and self-disclosure. In the interactive domain, the main indicators are referring to others' messages, sharing similar experiences or perspectives, asking questions, complimenting or showing appreciation, apologizing, expressing opinions, checking comprehension, giving advice, explaining, expressing agreement or disagreement, correcting self or others. Two original indicators—continuing a thread and quoting from others' messages—were not suitable for the study and were therefore abandoned. The indicators showing care or offering help, encouraging or praising others, referring to the group using inclusive pronouns, and phatics or salutations constitute the group cohesive domain.

Social presence allows students freely and openly to express themselves (Akyol, Garrison, & Ozden, 2009; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Once social presence is established, it can enhance online social interaction (Tu, 2000). Some studies have investigated social presence in an online learning environment. These studies have shown that a positive relationship exists between perceived social presence and students' satisfaction with the course, the instructor, and the online learning environment (Richardson & Swan, 2003; Rourke & Anderson, 2002; Swan & Shih, 2005), that an increase in the level of online interaction occurs with an improved level of social presence (Tu & McIsaac, 2002) and that students with the highest social presence project themselves more into online discussions (Swan & Shih, 2005). In the field of language learning, however, not much attention has been paid to the role of social presence in facilitating online language learning.

Research on second-language learning[1] in a Facebook environment has just begun. More research is needed to explore whether and how new technologies such as Facebook can facilitate second-language learning. Furthermore, current research in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is dominated by investigations of a few target languages: English, Spanish, French, and German. Much less research has been conducted on the use of technology in teaching and

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[1] For convenience, we use the term "second-language learning" to cover two other terms ("foreign-language learning" and "additional-language learning") in the remaining text.

learning less commonly taught languages such as Chinese (Felix, 2005, 2008; S. Wang & Vasquez, 2012; Zhao, 2003). As some studies have suggested that Facebook provides a positive learning environment, there is a clear need to examine how Facebook could be employed to help CFL learners develop their writing and communicating skills.

This study examined participants' free posting and online communication in Chinese on Facebook and investigated their perceptions of Facebook wall activity and the use of Facebook as a pedagogical tool in Chinese language learning. We addressed the following research questions.

1. *What are participants' perceptions of Facebook-supported wall activity? How do participants perceive Facebook as a tool to practice writing and communicating in Chinese as a foreign language?*

2. *How do the participants engage in Facebook-supported free posting and online communication to practice writing and communicating in Chinese as a foreign language?*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The current study is concerned with using Facebook to support learning Chinese as a foreign language. In this section, we discuss relevant literature about CALL research on learning Chinese as a foreign language and the application of Facebook in language-learning contexts.

### *CALL Research on Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language*

There is a general consensus that Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) has been underrepresented in language learning and technology research (Felix, 2005; S. Wang & Vasquez, 2012; Zhao, 2003). Though published research in this regard is limited, we can still glean some perspectives from this research in how different types of technologies have contributed to and facilitated different aspects of Chinese language learning. For example, in an early study, Xie (2002) investigated using online chat to facilitate Chinese language teaching and learning. In the study, Xie (2002) reported that the online chat promoted students' communication in Chinese and enhanced students' writing skills. Recently, Cai and Zhu (2012) investigating the impact of incorporating a short-

term online learning community project into Chinese language learning under on students' motivation. Results of the study showed that the project provided the students with opportunities to interact with other CFL learners, and it improved the students' motivation. Other related studies investigated the impact of integrating CMC technologies into Chinese language learning on students' interactional skills and cultural knowledge (Chang, 2007; Jin & Erben, 2007). A few studies have focused narrowly on examining how to use technology to facilitate Chinese character recognition and character writing (e.g., Ping & Jen, 2005), but these are out of the scope of this study. Regardless of the increasing interest in CALL and CFL in recent years, so far little research has been undertaken to examine how social media such as Facebook could be used to help CFL learners develop their Chinese language skills.

### *Application of Facebook in Language Learning Contexts*

With Facebook ubiquitous on U.S. college campuses (Downes, 2007; McBride, 2009; Steinfield et al., 2008), language researchers and educators have wondered how this new environment could support language learning (Chapelle, 2007; Mills, 2011; Thorne, 2011). Though a number of studies have been conducted on college students' use of Facebook and the application of Facebook for educational purposes in general educational contexts (e.g., Madge et al., 2009; Pempek et al., 2009), few studies have investigated the use of Facebook to aid second language learning (Aubry, 2009; Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Kabilan et al., 2010; Medley, 2009; Mills, 2011; Reinhardt & Zander 2011). The major findings of these few studies suggest that whereas students perceived Facebook to be a positive online environment that could be utilized to facilitate their language learning, faculty remained more skeptical (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Kabilan et al., 2010; Terantino, 2013). The findings also indicated that a Facebook-supported community could provide sufficient opportunities for interpretive and creative language use, cultural exploration, and rapport building (Medley, 2009; Mills, 2011; Reinhardt & Zander 2011).

In sum, previous studies show that different types of technologies have contributed to and facilitated different aspects of Chinese language learning (e.g., Cai & Zhu, 2012; Xie, 2002), focusing on the impact of integrating CMC technologies into Chinese language learning on students' interactional skills and cultural knowledge (Chang, 2007; Jin & Erben, 2007), and extending to the use of technology to facilitate character recognition and writing (e.g., Ping & Jen, 2005). Facebook also provided affordances of language learning by providing a

positive environment that could be used to facilitate language learning. Although the application of Facebook for educational purposes has been studied in general educational contexts (e.g., Madge et al., 2009; Pempek et al., 2009) and a few studies have discussed the use of Facebook to aid second-language learning (Aubry, 2009; Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Kabilan et al., 2010; Medley, 2009; Mills, 2011; Reinhardt & Zander 2011, studies have not yet examined how Facebook could help CFL learners develop their writing and communicating skills. To further this line of research, the authors of this study hope to understand college students' engagement in Facebook-supported posting and online communication, as well as their attitudes toward these activities. We hope to shed new light on how Facebook could be used in teaching and learning less commonly taught foreign languages.

## METHODOLOGY

We employed a qualitative case study design in this study. As Creswell (2007) states, "case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)" (p. 73). The bounded system for this study was an intact Level IV language class at a university in the southern US. We explored how the four participants engaged in free writing and online communication in Chinese on Facebook, their perceptions of Facebook-supported "wall" activity, and their perceptions about using Facebook as a tool to practice using Chinese. A "wall" is a Facebook user's main page, where users socialize with their friends by posting anything they wish (Ruiperez, 2002). Our case study method enabled us to conduct an in-depth analysis, offering thick description of what the four participants posted on Facebook and how they perceived the use of Facebook in the language-learning process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Setting*

We conducted our study in the World Languages Department at a university in the southern US during spring 2011. The Chinese language program offered four levels of language courses. This study was carried out in the level IV classes, where 20 students were enrolled. Most students took Chinese with an eye toward a future career related to China. The Chinese language program used an interactive DVD-based textbook for listening and speaking and a textbook of traditional Chinese stories for reading skills and cultural knowledge. The class

addressed four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As a supplement to classroom learning, the instructor designed a Facebook-supported wall activity for the students to practice writing, thinking, and communicating in Chinese outside of class.

## *Participants*

Four students participated in this study: Henderson, Lauren, Lee, and Darrin (all pseudonyms), with ages ranging from 19 to 22. Henderson and Lee were male; Lauren and Darrin were female. The four were majoring in different subjects: economics, accounting, marketing, and political science. Henderson and Lauren had no previous experience with Chinese, nor had they been exposed to Chinese-speaking environments before they started learning Chinese at the university. Lee was a half-Chinese heritage language learner. His father spoke Cantonese, a dialect from southern China, while his mother spoke no Chinese. Lee's family had immigrated to the U.S. from Cambodia nine years earlier. Lee had attended Chinese-language classes for two years during middle school. Darrin, a Vietnamese American, had two years of Chinese-language learning experience before she enrolled in the university Chinese language program. The participants' demographic information is in Table 1. We used a purposeful sampling strategy to select these participants (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The criteria for selection were (a) regular participation in posting on Facebook, (b) active peer interaction, and (c) above-average writing quality.

### *Table 1. Demographic Information on Participants*

| Name | Gender | Age | Ethnic Group | Major |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lee | M | 22 | Asian American | Accounting |
| Darrin | F | 20 | Asian American | Marketing |
| Lauren | F | 19 | African American | Political Science |
| Henderson | M | 19 | Caucasian American | Economics |

## *Task*

The task was an outside-class activity that all students in Level IV had to complete. Each week students were required to post at least two entries and to make at least four comments on their peers' posts, on a researcher-created Facebook group page. According to Swain (1985), language output may trigger learners to pay attention to the target linguistic form as they try to express their intended meaning. Like the students' regular Facebook postings in English, all of the students were told to write whatever they wanted to share with their peers-- but only Chinese could be used on this group page. This activity, which counted for 5% of their entire grade, was evaluated primarily based on whether students posted the minimum number of entries and comments.

## *Procedures and Data Collection*

In the first week, a training session was held on the use of Chinese language input software, how to use a keyboard to type Chinese characters, phrases and idioms, and how to switch from simplified to traditional Chinese. All students were then invited to join the class Facebook group page. During Weeks 2 to 14, one of the researchers provided feedback on linguistic and cultural aspects of the students' use of Chinese, recorded students' posts, and took field notes. The four participants completed a paper-based survey (see Appendix I), which included demographic information and their opinions about the Facebook activity.

Data included (a) all posts and comments made by the four participants, (b) answers to survey questions, (c) interview transcripts (see Appendix I for interview questions) and (d) a researcher's field notes taken after every class. Both the survey and the interviews were conducted in English. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed. Peer review and member checks were used to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## *Data Analysis*

To answer the first research question –What are participants' perceptions of Facebook-supported wall activity? How do participants perceive Facebook as a tool to practice free writing and communicating in Chinese as a foreign language?—we analyzed survey responses and interview transcripts. These data were analytically coded, and the codes were categorized into two groups

(perceptions of the activity and perceptions of using Facebook). In each group, the codes were sorted into two categories: advantages and disadvantages.

When addressing the second research question—How did the four participants engage in Facebook-supported free posting and online communication in Chinese, we used the Rourke et al. (1999) framework of social presence to code the participants' communication. This framework is one of the most widely used frameworks for asynchronous CMC analyses (Arbaugh & Hwang, 2006; Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Garrison et al., 2000). It is particularly appropriate for this study because it was developed from an asynchronous, text-based computer-conferencing environment.

The coding scheme has three dimensions—affective, interactive, and group-cohesive. There are several indicators in each dimension. A few modifications were made for this particular study, as shown in Table 2. A thematic or idea unit (Henri, 1992) was used as the unit of analysis, because it allows coders to capture a unit in its natural form (Rourke et al., 1999) and because the focal students were not advanced enough to write complete sentences.

The software Atlas.ti. 5.0 was used to code the participants' posts and to generate descriptive statistics. During the data collection and data analysis procedures, we triangulated our analyses by comparing data collected with different methods and by using member checking, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing strategies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

***Table 2: Coding Schemes for the Participants' Communication and Interaction on Facebook***

| Social Presence Indicators | Definitions | Examples (with translations) |
|---|---|---|
| *Affective* | | |
| Expression of emotions | Conventional expressions of emotion | 今天我很高兴因为… I am very happy today because … |
| Use of humor | Teasing, cajoling, irony, understatements, sarcasm | 哈哈, 张杰可能爱上谁了, 就用了好多感叹号。Aha, Zack must fall in love with someone. He used a lot of exclamation marks. |
| Campus-related events | Sharing events or activities related to schoolwork | 今天开始写我的城市报告了。I started to work on my city report today. |
| Events unrelated to campus | Sharing events or activities unrelated to school work | 今晚吃中国自助餐, 吃得很饱。I ate Chinese buffet tonight and I ate a lot. |
| Health status | Expressing health status such as getting a cold | 我觉得我有一点感冒了, … I think I got a cold, … |
| Personal interest/hobbies | Sharing personal interest or hobbies | 古琴是我最喜欢的乐器。The Chinese ancient string instrument are one of my favorite musical instruments. |
| *Interactive* | | |
| Referring to other's messages | Expanding on previous posts; introducing new ideas/ information. | 我还没有去过呢, 我只在电视里看到的。I haven't been there. I only viewed it on TV. |
| Sharing similar experience or perspective | Sharing a similar experience or perspective of others | 我也有很多作业。I also have a lot of homework. |
| Asking questions | Asking other students questions | 你懂我的意思吗? Do you understand me? |
| Complimenting/appreciation | Complimenting others or expressing appreciation | 为什么要减肥，你不胖。Why are you on a diet? You are not overweight. |

Table 2 (continued)

| Social Presence Indicators | Definitions | Examples (with translations) |
|---|---|---|
| Apologizing | Expressing sorry or making an apology | 对不起，我不应该开这个玩笑。Sorry, I should not make this joke. |
| Expressing opinion | Expressing opinion on something | 我觉得调皮人喜欢愚人节。I think creepy people love April fool's day. |
| Checking comprehension | Checking their own understanding | 不懂你的问题。I don't understand your question. |
| Giving advice | Giving advice to others | 你应该休息啊！You'd better have a good rest. |
| Explaining | Explaining something to others | 刚看了"十月围城"，是新的电影。是关于… I have just watched *Dark October*. It is a new movie. It is about … |
| Expressing (dis)agreement | Expressing agreement or disagreement with others | 我完全同意你的意见。I totally agree with you. |
| Self-/other correction | Correct one's own or others' mistakes | 不好意思，我写错了。Sorry. I picked up a wrong word. |
| *Group cohesive* | | |
| Showing care/offering help | Showing care or offering help to others | 你觉得好点儿了吗？Are you feeling better? |
| Encouraging/praising others | Encouraging or praising others | 哇，田露，真佩服你。WOW, Tina, I really admire you. |
| Referring to the group using inclusive pronouns | Addresses the group as we, us, our, group | 大家看看这个，很有意思，而且很搞笑。Hey everyone, look at this. It is cool and very funny. |
| Phatics, salutations | Greetings, closures | 大家愚人节快乐。Happy April Fool's Day to all. |

*Note.* Part of indicators and definitions were adapted from "Assessing social presence in asynchronous text-based computer conferencing," by L. Rourke, T. Anderson, R. D. Garrison, and W. Archer, 1999, *Journal of Distance Education, 14*(2), p. 56. All examples were taken from this study.

# FINDINGS

*RQ 1: What were the participants' perceptions of Facebook-supported wall activity? How did the participants perceive using Facebook as a tool to practice free writing and communicating in Chinese?*

### *Perceptions of the Free-Posting Activity*

All four participants reported that they loved free posting and that they benefited from this activity. The major advantages the participants noted were: the activity allowed them to communicate with peers in Chinese about the topics they themselves were interested in, which ordinarily could not be achieved in the limited class time; and it extended learning beyond the classroom. These findings support the claim that CMC can help language learners expand their use of the target language (Blake, 2000; Lee, 2002).

All four participants highlighted the benefits of using Chinese to communicate in a natural social setting such as Facebook.

Henderson:   I care about Chinese, but it's just gotta be something I care about talking about in Chinese, to talk about it outside of class, to talk about it, and to really push myself, you know.

Henderson:   ...that was my favorite part about, it was, you know, when we were talking about things that were interesting and relative, rather than talking about, you know, just using language points.

Darrin:   I liked the free writing too, because I can show everybody what Chinese songs I like.

Lee:   I think it's good because it allowed students to, like, communicate beside whatever they would do in class, to talk about whatever comes into their mind, they can just write it instead of, like, focus on what the question is.

Darrin:     Because sometimes we don't have enough time, because there's only 45 minutes to each class, it lets us use Chinese after class.

Henderson frequently used the word *talk* to refer to online communication and interaction on Facebook. He found the online social communication similar to face-to-face communication. This corroborates previous researchers' findings that computer-mediated communication is a genre that lies between written texts and spoken utterances (e.g., Warschauer, 1999). Research has also shown cross-modality transfer of L2 competency between computer-mediated communication and oral as well as written skills (Abrams, 2003; Payne & Ross, 2005; Payne & Whitney, 2002).

Participants also reported other benefits of the activity. It enabled them to recognize more Chinese characters and to attend to diction. It increased their awareness of grammar and syntax. It increased their reading and writing confidence and it gave them a sense of accomplishment when they realized they could express complicated ideas in Chinese. For example, Lauren said:

> It really improved not just typing it, but also character recognition. You constantly look up the right character pops up. So it just helps you, like, more uncommon character words become common to you because now you are using them.

In computer-assisted Chinese writing, Chinese character words ordinarily cannot be directly typed onto the screen. When Romanized Chinese is input, Chinese characters will pop up for writers to select because Chinese is a tonal language and one syllable can match several Chinese characters that have different meanings and usage. This is why Lauren reported that "more uncommon character words become common" when she was using Chinese through typing. Lauren also said that when she read other students' entries, she would ponder how the grammar works and whether other students chose correct words. This comment might mitigate some educators' concern that nonnative speakers (NNS) could repeat each other's mistakes during online interaction (Satar & Özdener, 2008). Other researchers have also shown that this concern might be overstated. For example, Gass and Varonis (1989) confirmed that learners who had already acquired a form did not change it as a consequence of their peers' errors.

Darrin reported that she benefited from the actual practice of typing and negotiating meaning, "because you really think in Chinese and typing it. So you are thinking in Chinese, thinking of the meanings, and thinking everything." Henderson echoed these benefits:

Henderson: I feel like I can express things in a very natural way rather than too formal or too informal. … I wrote not to just finish through requirement, but tried to write outside of what my boundaries are, tried to express an opinion or complicated opinion. … This is a complex sentence. That's so cool.

Nevertheless, participants also reported some disadvantages of the activity. For example, the activity was time-consuming; posting messages involved only typing and selecting rather than hand writing Chinese characters and sometimes they relied on Google translation.

### *Perceptions of Using Facebook for Language Learning*

The four participants all viewed Facebook as a good tool for learning Chinese by actually using it. This finding echoes the Kabilan et al. (2010) report that Malaysian college students believed Facebook could be used as an online environment to facilitate the learning of English. One reason our participants favored using Facebook as a tool for learning Chinese was the comfortable, low-pressure learning environment. Henderson noted:

Facebook is a very good medium to express that opinion because it's hard to do in the class because of pressure, because it's hard to formulate those ideas in your head, … and I think it works better in Facebook because you have that liberty to be at home and comfortable, you are comfortable, you know, you are in your home, you are not in much pressure.

During the interview, Henderson reiterated that Facebook afforded a "stress-free learning environment." In this less stressful environment, he could take risks in using the target language without worrying about linguistic errors. Similar findings about relaxed learning environments have also been reported by participants in studies conducted using Twitter (Antenos-Conforti, 2009), blogs

(Armstrong & Retterer, 2008; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Kim, 2011), and wikis (Chen, 2009).

In addition to providing a favorable learning environment, the two male participants claimed that Facebook united the class, strengthening relationships among the students. Lee reported that the Facebook activity made the whole class feel connected like a small group and that they could share whatever they liked. Henderson said:

> I think it (Facebook) definitely ties the class together; it forces us to interact outside of class. I definitely feel like the class got a little bit stronger of a bond. … I definitely noticed my relationships with my classmates got a lot stronger this semester, and I don't know what the reason for that is. I know them a lot better now, and I like to think maybe it's because of the Facebook project. That's the only thing that is different about this semester than last.

The two female participants, however, viewed Facebook merely as an extension of the existing learning community (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Kabilan et al., 2010). Darrin reported that she had already become close to her classmates because they often studied together. Lauren also reported that she had already developed a sense of community (Blattner & Fiori, 2009) in the face-to-face class. The Facebook activity functioned as an extension of the classroom learning community, but with more personal sharing and support (Kabilan et al., 2010).

In addition to their positive perceptions of using Facebook to facilitate Chinese language learning, the participants also noted some disadvantages. For example, they all reported that Facebook's social function could easily distract them from focusing on their school work. Henderson said he loved this activity at the beginning, but gradually lost interest towards the end. Lauren said she did not attach much importance to this activity. She perceived it as fun, and it was comparatively easy for her to accomplish, so she gave other homework priority. The participants regarded Facebook as a social and entertainment tool even though it was used for language learning purposes (Reid, 2011).

*RQ2. How did the participants engage in Facebook-supported free posting and online communication to practice free writing and communicating in Chinese?*

Table 3 presents a general picture of the four participants' engagement in the Facebook wall activity. Lee and Darrin contributed considerably more entries, comments, and Chinese characters than the class average. Based on our observations, Lee and Darrin also demonstrated a good mastery of Chinese language in their posts. Though Henderson and Lauren's contribution was not as extensive as Lee and Darrin's, the numbers of Chinese characters they produced were still greater than the class average. The quality of Henderson and Lauren's writing was also above average. The following sections discuss how these participants engaged in online communication, how they projected themselves socially, and how they interacted with their peers.

***Table 3. Participants' Engagement in Terms of the Number of Entries, Comments, and Characters***

| Category | Entries | Comments | Characters |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lee | 70 | 174 | 7,489 |
| Darrin | 60 | 167 | 9,880 |
| Henderson | 45 | 76 | 6,264 |
| Lauren | 44 | 88 | 5,373 |
| Class average | 43 | 82 | 4,354 |

**Table 4. Frequency of Indicators of Participants' Social Presence**

| Social Presence Indicators | Lee | Lauren | Darrin | Henderson |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Affective* | | | | |
| Expression of emotions | 1 | 10 | 18 | 4 |
| Use of humor | 2 | 3 | 9 | 3 |
| Campus-related events | 6 | 6 | 3 | 8 |
| Events unrelated to campus | 15 | 12 | 20 | 20 |
| Health status | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Personal interests/hobbies | 9 | 10 | 15 | 14 |
| Total in the affective domain | 36 | 44 | 67 | 54 |
| *Interactive* | | | | |
| Referring to peer's posts | 48 | 11 | 38 | 12 |
| Sharing similar experience or perspective | 16 | 6 | 8 | 3 |
| Asking questions | 27 | 22 | 38 | 23 |
| Complimenting/appreciation | 3 | 13 | 15 | 5 |
| Apologizing | 0 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Expressing opinion | 53 | 25 | 62 | 32 |
| Checking comprehension | 0 | 8 | 10 | 3 |
| Giving advice | 8 | 2 | 10 | 6 |
| Explaining | 28 | 11 | 10 | 2 |
| Expressing (dis)agreement | 11 | 2 | 10 | 9 |
| Self-/other correction | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| Total in the interactive domain | 197 | 104 | 209 | 100 |
| *Group cohesive* | | | | |
| Showing care/offering help | 6 | 3 | 10 | 0 |
| Encouraging/praising others | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Referring to the group using inclusive pronouns | 9 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Phatics, salutations | 3 | 6 | 5 | 0 |
| Total in the group cohesive domain | 20 | 12 | 19 | 6 |
| Total | 253 | 160 | 295 | 160 |

Table 4 presents the frequency of indicators of participants' social presence, based on the Rourke et al. (1999) coding schemes. We found that the four participants engaged in this online activity mainly by expressing their emotions and feelings, sharing responses to campus events, describing events unrelated to campus, expressing their health status, and sharing personal interests and hobbies. Table 4 shows that Darrin had the highest frequency of affective indicators (67), expressing her emotions (18), sharing information about her activities outside of the campus (20), and describing her personal interests and hobbies (15). Henderson had the second highest frequency of affective indicators (54). He did not often express emotions, but he described many activities off campus (20) and frequently described his personal interests and hobbies (14). Lauren was the third in the use of affective indicators. Lee had the lowest frequency of affective indicators (36). He seldom expressed his emotions in that activity and did not share his personal interests and hobbies as often as the other three participants.

In the interactive domain, participants referred to peers' posts to continue a topic, shared similar experiences or perspectives, asked questions, complimented others or showed appreciation, expressed opinions, checked comprehension, gave advice, explained, expressed agreement or disagreement, self-corrected or corrected peers' errors, and apologized. Darrin and Lee had the highest frequency of interactive indicators (209 and 197 respectively, and they often expressed their opinions. These two participants responded to their peers' posts through frequent follow-up comments, and actively interacted with their peers by asking questions and offering explanations. Henderson and Lauren also had high frequencies of interactive indicators, but not as high as Darrin's or Lee's.

In the group-cohesive domain, all four participants attempted to tie the class together by showing care to their classmates, offering help, encouraging and praising their peers, addressing the class with inclusive pronouns (we, us, our class, etc.), and greeting the class. These social expressions and phatic communication played a key role creating an online learning community (Arnold, Ducate, & Lomicka, 2005; Rourke & Anderson, 2002).

Like Arnold and Ducate (2006), we also found examples of all categories of social presence, and social-presence behaviors identified with the indicators in the coding framework constituted the entire free-posting activity on Facebook. After introducing a big picture of the four participants' engagement in the Facebook wall activity, we now sketch each participant's social communication on Facebook during the class activity.

### *Lee—Peer Supporter and Provider of Visual Learning Resources*

Lee was a half-Chinese heritage language learner who had some prior experience with Chinese. His written Chinese was good. Lee was the most active participant and contributed frequent and lengthy Chinese posts. He was very supportive of his peers, and he shared many visual learning resources. Table 4 shows that Lee had the highest number of posts referring to peers' messages and continuing their topics. He had the highest number of explanations, sharing similar experiences or perspectives, expressing agreement or disagreement, and referring to the group using inclusive pronouns. He also had the second highest number questions, expressing opinions, and showing care or offering help. The following examples (Example 1 and 2) illustrate his supportiveness and the important role he played in keeping this online learning community dynamic.

*Example 1:*
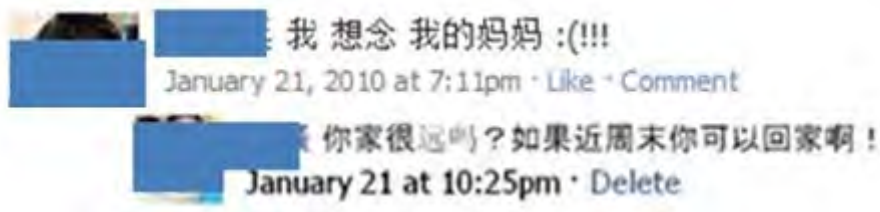


An entry posted by a classmate: *I miss my mother :(!!!.*
Commented by Lee: *Is your home far from here? If not, you can go home on weekends.*

*Example 2:*

An entry posted by a different classmate: *I am now watching a Chinese movie. This movie is a documentary about Guilin city.*

Commented by Lee: *The scenery in Guilin is really beautiful.*
Followed by the same classmate: *Have you been to Guilin?*
Commented by Lee: *I have not been there yet. I only viewed it on TV.*

One important feature of Facebook posts is their situationality (Reid, 2011). The examples above show a participant expressing something situational, acknowledging a classmate's ideas, which is the fundamental social function of Facebook. But unlike the participants' everyday Facebook routines, this activity was performed for pedagogical purposes. It was thus important for students to support one another. Lee played a crucial role in this regard.

In addition to supporting peers, Lee posted Chinese pop music, Chinese movie information, Chinese short TV series, and video clips about Chinese culture and Chinese language learning. These posts provided students with extra resources on Chinese culture. Examples 3 and 4 illustrate this.

***Example 3:***



这是很悲伤的歌曲。讲的是中国的玉树。2010年4月份，在那儿有地震，很多人死伤。这首歌非常好听，也是为了纪念玉树，大家有空看一看吧！

http://v.ku6.com/show/BYwTvhBsqaBvRd6r.html

玉树不要悲伤哭泣
v.ku6.com
玉树不要悲伤哭泣 在线观看，演唱：央金兰泽

8 hours ago · Comment ·Like · Share · Report

Entry posted by Lee: *This is a sad song. It is about Yushu city in China. There was an earthquake over there in April 2010. A lot of people were injured and died. The song sounds great. It is to remember Yushu. Watch it when you can.*
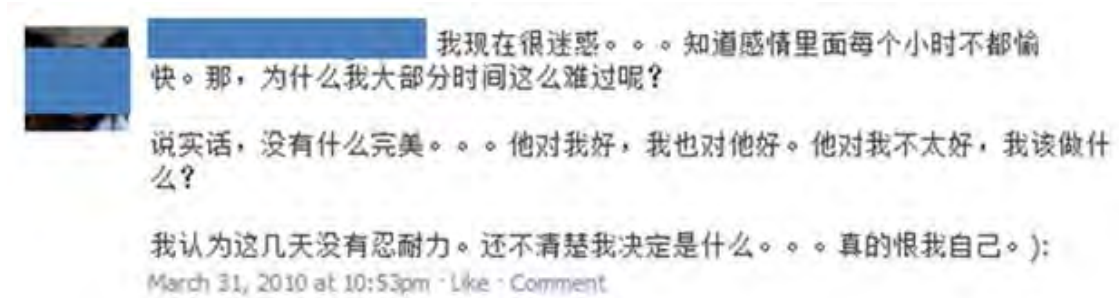
*Example 4:*



給你们推荐一个很酷的网络电视 http://www.ppstream.com/ 安装以后就可以看电影，新闻，等等。每个美国电影都有字幕，还有数不清的港台，大陆戏剧。

PPS网络电视官方网站 - 全球最大的网络电视服务商
www.ppstream.com
【游戏类别】MMORPG【游戏状态】留档内测【游戏大小】526MB【所需空间】
剩余空间800MB以上【操作系统】Windows 98 / ME / 2000 / XP / Vista【最低配置】Intel Pentium IV 1.3 GHz Geforce2MX400/32M 512MB内存以上

March 4 at 10:28pm · Comment · Like · Share · Report

Entry posted by Lee: *I would like to recommend a cool online TV website. After installing software, you can watch movie, news, etc. There are Chinese subtitles on American movies. You can watch tons of Chinese movies and dramas.*

In Example 3, Lee shared a sorrowful song about an earthquake that had recently occurred in Southwest China. In Example 4, he introduced a website where the students could watch Chinese movies online. In cases like this he shared resources other students would be interested in.

### *Darrin—Affective Learning through Expressing Emotions and Sharing Interests*

Darrin, a Vietnamese American student with two years of Chinese language learning experience prior to the university, used the most Chinese characters during the activity. When asked about the activity, she responded without hesitation: "I liked it, obviously." Her posts and comments had two salient themes. First, she frequently expressed feelings about her own romantic relationships and interacted with other students on this topic. Second, she shared a lot of information about Chinese music and Chinese pop singers she liked. Table 4 shows that, in the affective domain, Darrin had the highest number of indicators in total. She contributed the largest number of entries expressing emotions, using humor, and disclosing about herself. When expressing her feelings, Darrin used accurate diction, correct syntax, and appropriately self-disclosed her desire for a relationship. It is challenging for an intermediate-level learner to convey her inner thoughts and feelings, but Darrin managed it. She also had the highest number of indicators in the interactive domain. Here are two examples of Darrin's affective expressions.

***Example 5:***

我现在很迷惑。。。知道感情里面每个小时不都愉快。那，为什么我大部分时间这么难过呢？

说实话，没有什么完美。。。他对我好，我也对他好。他对我不太好，我该做什么？

我认为这几天没有忍耐力。还不清楚我决定是什么。。。真的恨我自己。）：

March 31, 2010 at 10:53pm · Like · Comment

Entry posted by Darrin: *I am now feeling lost … I know one could not be happy in every hour. But I was wondering why I felt unhappy most of the time. Actually, nothing is prefect … When he treats me well, I treat him well, too. When he does not care for me, what shall I do? I think I cannot stand it these days. I am still not clear what I will do … I really hate myself.*

***Example 6:***

你喜欢一个人。。。他不喜欢你。别的人喜欢你。。。你不喜欢他。怎么能总是是这样的啊？唉。。。

February 28, 2010 at 1:58am · Like · Comment

Entry posted by Darrin: *You love someone … but he does not love you. Someone loves you, but you do not love him. Why do things always go like this?*

According to ACTFL Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the communication category, students should be able to "express feelings and emotions" (ACTFL, 2006, Standard 1.1). Example 5 and 6 show Darrin's ability to communicate about emotions in Chinese. The Facebook wall offered an excellent opportunity to use Chinese for such authentic communication, which is at the heart of L2 study (ACTFL, 2006).

Another prominent theme of Darrin's posts and comments (227 in total, with a class average of 125) was introducing the class to Chinese songs and pop singers she loved. We coded these posts as sharing personal interests and hobbies in the affective domain, a category where she also had the highest number. Darrin used her knowledge of Chinese music, practicing the target language to

share this interest with her peers. The following two examples (Example 7 and 8) illustrate her entries and comments on Chinese songs and pop singers.

*Example 7:*



Entry posted by Darrin: *Guys, please have a look. This is one of my favorite songs. I hope you also like it.*

*Example 8:*



Entry posted by Darrin: *Here is another song I love. The lyrics of the song are touching. I would like to share some verses with you: "But I am afraid love is gone in the end", "No loneliness could not pass … no love deserves gamble with your whole life", "Though still remember love could hurt… no hatred stays in*

the heart", "Maybe you are still waiting... I wish, one day, you and I could meet by chance."

The themes of these songs related to Darrin's emotions, which helped explain why she was moved by them. We expect that the lyrics of these songs helped improve her comprehension because of this connection. In Example 8, she selected a couple of lines she especially enjoyed to share with the other students. She said "我把一些词句给你们分享" (I would like to share some of the lyrics with you). In this case, the lyrics served as a language-learning resource, a supplement to classroom learning. Facebook provided an excellent space for Darrin to share her interpersonal thoughts and emotional feelings with her classmates while practicing Chinese literacy skills and Chinese cultural knowledge.

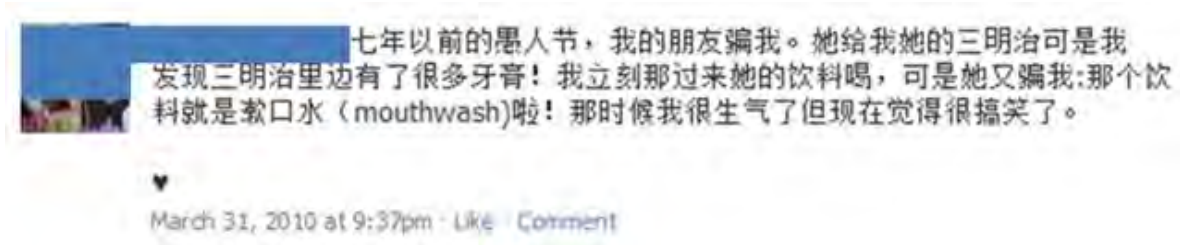### *Lauren—Using Chinese to Interpret American Culture*

Lauren was an African American student whose parents were from Haiti. She had no Chinese learning experience before she enrolled in the Chinese program at the university. Although the number of entries and comments Lauren contributed (132) was only slightly above the class average (125), the number of Chinese characters she produced (5,373) was much higher than the class average, (4,354), as was the quality of her writing. She was unique in using Chinese to interpret American culture. The following examples illustrate this pattern.

***Example 9***:



我觉得美国没有那么多传统故事呢。我小的时候读的故事都是从别的国家来的。例如，美女与野兽是从法国来的、雪白色是从德国来的、并小美人鱼是从丹麦来的之一。除了Pocahontas以外，美国没有传统故事吧。我认为因为美国不太老所以没有真的传统故事。

February 25, 2010 at 2:17pm · Like · Comment
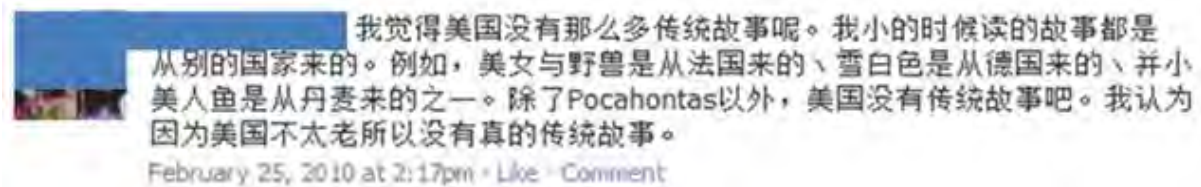
Entry posted by Lauren: *I don't think there are many American traditional stories. The stories I read when I was little were all from other countries. For example, **Beauty and Beast** is from France; **Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs** is from Germany; and **The Little Mermaid** is from Denmark. Except **The Story of Pocahontas**, I guess there are no American traditional stories. Because the US is not old, I think, there are no real traditional stories.*

*Example 10*:



七年以前的愚人节，我的朋友骗我。她给我她的三明治可是我发现三明治里边有了很多牙膏！我立刻那过来她的饮料喝，可是她又骗我:那个饮料就是款口水（mouthwash)啦！那时候我很生气了但现在觉得很搞笑了。

♥

March 31, 2010 at 9:37pm · Like · Comment

Entry posted by Lauren: *On April Fool's Day seven years ago, I was fooled by my friend. She gave me her sandwich, but I found there was a lot of toothpaste inside. I immediately grabbed a drink from her. I was fooled again. That was not drink but mouthwash. I was very angry at that time. But now I think it was really funny.*

In the above two examples (Example 9 and 10), Lauren told her own stories about April Fool's Day and Easter, and she shared stories she had read as a child. Lauren's posts were mainly about American culture. Foreign language learners should "demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own" (ACTFL 2006, Standards 4.2), and Lauren did this. For instance, she introduced her own culture to classmates in the target language, while comparing it to Chinese culture.

### *Henderson—Actively Sharing Opinions in Chinese on Politics*

Henderson was white, born in the northern U.S. He also had no Chinese language learning experience before enrolling in the program. He often demonstrated his interest in learning Chinese language and culture. Like Lauren, Henderson posted only an average number of times, but he generated more Chinese characters (6,264) than the class average (4,354).

Henderson liked to discuss political topics, and he was inclined to share family stories. Expressing opinions on politics in Chinese was challenging for those students because they had a limited vocabulary. Henderson made clear attempts, however, and he articulated many complex ideas using correct grammar and sentence structure. Example 11 and 12 demonstrate a great degree of lexical range and lexical density, syntactical complexity, and grammatical accuracy. In terms of lexicon, for example, Henderson used "我觉得…/我认为…" (I think), two different phrases expressing the same idea, and used other words and

phrases at a higher level of difficulty as well, such as "自由意志主义" (liberalism), "致富" (to become rich), "貌似" (look like), "道德" (moral), and "辩论" (debate). Syntactically, Henderson correctly used such connection phrases as "不是…也不是…" (neither… nor…), "如果…那么…" (if…), "…可是…" (…but…), "因为…所以…" (because…; thereafter…), "正如…" (as…) Henderson's ideas about those political topics were also insightful and thought-provoking. In the interview, Henderson expressed a strong sense of accomplishment for being able to articulate complicated ideas in Chinese. His use of Chinese on the Facebook wall was not simply practice, but an authentic expression of his opinions and ideas.

***Example 11:***
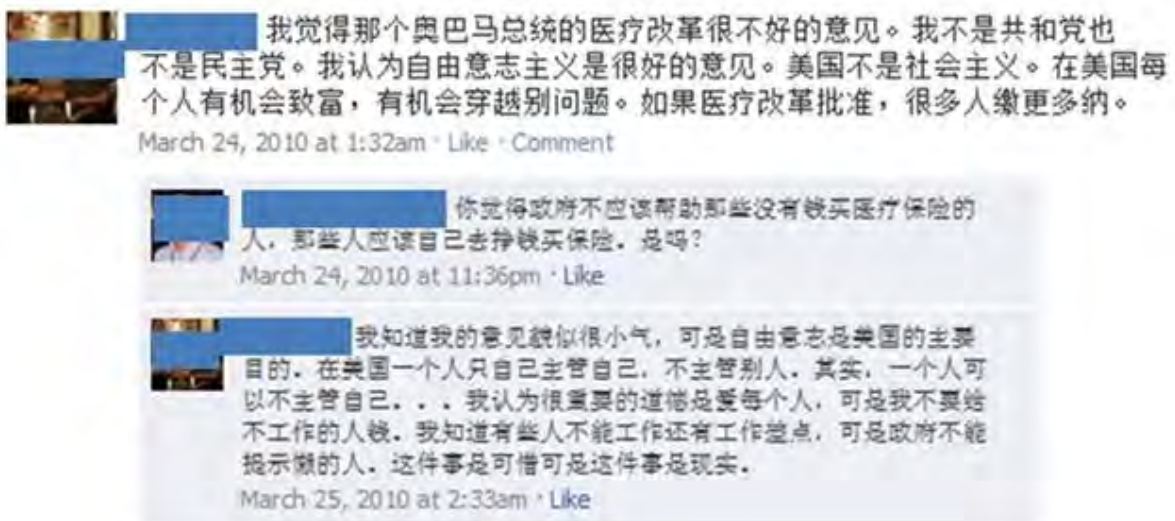


Entry posted by Henderson: *I think President Obama's health care reform is a bad idea. I am neither a Republican nor a Democrat. I think giving people freedom is a better option. America is not a socialist country. In the US, everyone has the opportunity to live a well-off life and can solve his/her own problems. If the health care reform is approved, many people will pay more taxes.*

Commented by an instructor: *You think the government should not help those people who could not afford to buy the health care, and those people should earn money to buy their health care. Is it correct?*

Comment followed by Henderson: *I know my opinion sounds mean, but freedom is one of the core American values. In the US, a person is only responsible for*

*him/herself, not for others. In fact, a person could not be responsible for him/ herself ... I think to love everyone is an important moral, but I cannot give money to those people who are not working. I know some people are unable to work or work for lower-payment jobs, but the government should not take care of lazy people. It is such a pity, but it is a reality.*

***Example 12:***
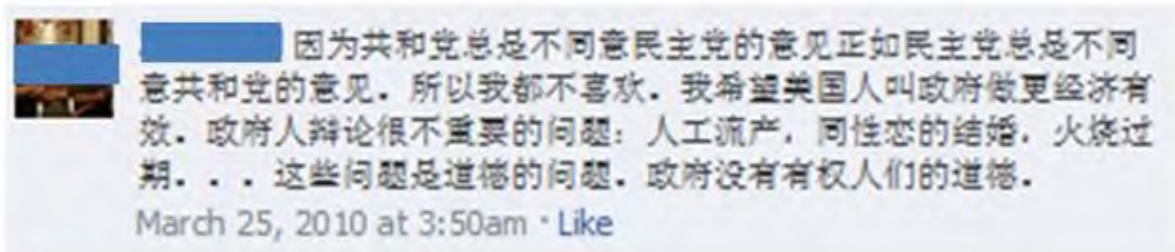


Comment on a classmate's comment: *Because Republicans always disagree with Democrats as Democrats always disagree with Republicans, I don't like either of them. I hope American people ask the government to be more efficient and more economical. The lawmakers often debate unimportant issues: abortion, gay marriage ... These are moral issues. The government has no right to intervene in people's morality.*

Each of the four participants had somewhat unique types of posts, but there was also some commonalty in their content—such as sharing their interests and social activities (having fun at the beach over the weekend, going shopping, sharing their family stories, etc.). In part through Facebook, they reached proficiency according to the ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines, which state that the intermediate level of Chinese writing proficiency is characterized by an ability to meet practical writing needs. The content of student writing should involve personal preferences, daily routines, everyday events, and other topics grounded in personal experience (ACTFL, 1987). The Facebook wall activity provided students with a suitable platform for meeting these guidelines.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Participants' perceptions of Facebook wall activity suggest that this language learning activity was productive. The participants reported several advantages of the activity—permitting them to communicate in Chinese with their peers about

topics that interested them, getting them involved in using Chinese outside of the class, etc. Students' interests enhanced their motivation to extend their language learning outside of school (Swan & Shih, 2005). Participants also developed their identities by engaging in authentic tasks such as negotiating meaning, interacting, and sharing a social repertoire (Kabilan et al., 2010). We will discuss three themes that emerge from our findings: (a) authentic language learning tasks, (b) Facebook as a space for identity formation and situated language learning, and (c) pedagogical implications.

### *Authentic Language-Learning Tasks*

Many L2 literacy researchers claim that the language-learning paradigm has been shifting from a cognitive to a social orientation, from classroom contexts to naturalistic settings, from an acquisition metaphor to a participation metaphor, from L2 learning to L2 use (Block, 2003; Johnson, 2004). This shift aligns with many of the affordances of Facebook, which allows language learners to use the target language in an authentic, multimodal enhanced setting (Top, 2012). When participants communicated in a familiar environment on Facebook, they were also practicing writing with the target language. In contrast to traditional L2 writing activities (i.e., sentence making, structured writing, or guided composing), free posting on Facebook allows students to make meaning in real communication, to write something relevant to their actual lives (Matsuda, 2003; Raith, 2009). As Vygotsky (1978) noted, "teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something. … Writing should be meaningful for children …Writing should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for life" (p. 289).

For example, when Darrin posted a number of entries that expressed her emotional status and difficulties with a romantic relationship, her motivation was not simply practicing the target language. She was expressing her emotions and communicating with her classmates. When she introduced Chinese songs and pop singers, Darrin was not merely practicing writing in Chinese, but also sharing her personal enjoyment. As the ACTFL's standards for foreign language learning state, students should learn to "engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions," and students should "show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment" (ACTFL, 2006, p. 4).

The Facebook wall activity was authentic in the content of the students' posts and it was less structured. We have shown that a less structured posting activity on Facebook can be a viable option for language-learning purposes (Lamy, 2007). Cook (2000) and Warner (2004) have noted that playful elements in language learning should not be considered trivial extras, but instead as a valuable type of language activity. A social and entertainment tool such as Facebook could therefore benefit L2 language learners.

### Hybrid Space for Identity Formation and Situated Language Learning

The individual cases showed how students' identities became relevant to language use in the target language, making this a form of situated learning (Gee, 2002). Situated meanings require "embodied experience of a domain and the ability to situate meanings in terms of that experience" (Gee, 2002, p. 25). Participants engaged in dialogue with their classmates to express their identities, negotiate meaning, and share information. Facebook provided a bridge from language learning in school to language learning outside of school. As Henderson said, "I care about talking about in Chinese, to talk about it outside of class," and it "definitely ties the class together; it forces us to interact outside of class." Lee echoed that "it allowed students to, like, to communicate beside whatever they would do in class." Darrin discussed her emotions and struggles with her boyfriend. She sought help from her peers in Chinese. Henderson expressed his political views by discussing current topics in Chinese. Facebook offered him a space to share his positions with classmates and extend formal language learning into an informal virtual setting. Thus Facebook created a multimodal space for learning and out-of-school literacy practice (Reid, 2011). Participants expressed their opinions (172 posts) more than any other social-presence indicators, showing how language learners formed their dynamic identities in this multimodal language-learning setting.

In addition, participants' online communication in Chinese on Facebook showed that social presence behaviors permeated the activity. Consistent with previous studies (Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Lomicka & Lord, 2009), we also found examples of all categories of social presence. Using Facebook as a social-networking tool, participants socially projected themselves when they carried out social communication and social interaction. In the online community, participants shared information about their daily routines and social events, described their interests and hobbies, expressed their emotions, expressed

opinions, responded to one another, referred to previous messages, and asked questions.

These communications could not have been conducted to the same extent in the physical classroom. The value of the Facebook wall activity was in combining the social functions of Facebook with the use of the target language. Language learning was submerged into using language for real communication. When the students meaningfully communicated with one another in Chinese, they were also forming an online learning community that in turn facilitated more communication in the target language (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Participants enjoyed engaging in this authentic activity (Buckingham, 2008), as members of this community. Their participation this *hybrid space* not only bridged language learning in school and out of school, but also connected academic topics to topics in life. Participants comments showed "how a sense of group belonging or 'community' is developed and maintained" (Buckingham, 2008, p. 6). By engaging in wall activity, students identified themselves by what they do, rather than by what they are. Language learners *become* rather than *were* (Buckingham, 2008), while they learned in these out-of-school virtual spaces and while they reflected on themselves and their experiences.

This study heeds Lomicka and Lord's (2009) call that more attention be paid to examining how social presence evolves, under what conditions, and through what media, and which indicators figure more prominent by a socially present online community. In this study, the participants built a *sense of community* (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). The online social presence further enhanced their sense of physical community, as relationships among classmates grew stronger during the activity. Facebook and its wall activity thus functioned as a bridge connecting the students' online social presence and their physical presence in the classroom. The activity promoted a community of learners by allowing them to share personal issues and political views, and participants appreciated their membership in this learning community. Facebook often has positive impact on affective learning and students' motivation (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Mills, 2011), by allowing meaningful interaction and facilitating the development of a constructive learning environment. It also encourages the sharing of valuable and authentic information on various topics.

## PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study's findings illustrate how language teachers can productively design language learning tasks that are relevant to the learners' real lives. When using technology to facilitate language learning, it is important to select the appropriate tool for the job (Lund & Rasmussen, 2008; Thorne, 2003). Although language educators have long drawn upon the concept of free writing, the challenge of how to fully engage learners in writing the target language has stymied many language teachers. This study confirmed that social media such as Facebook is useful in teaching foreign languages, particularly highlighting the case of Chinese as a foreign language.

Facebook can have a positive impact on learning (Reid, 2011) by creating a *hybrid space* that bridges language learning in school and out of school. Facebook can reach students after class and extend classroom learning to the outside environment. According to the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), Chinese is a Category IV language: achieving an advanced level in Chinese costs American language learners approximately three times as many hours of training as achieving a similar level in Category I languages such as Spanish, French, or German. Engaging students in Chinese language learning after class and motivating them to learn Chinese autonomously is an excellent way to supplement limited classroom hours. Integrating new technologies is a very promising strategy.

Participants in this study engaged in a freer and less structured (Lamy, 2007) Facebook posting activity mainly through affective expression, interactive communication, and group-oriented salutations. The Facebook-supported social communication offered many opportunities for the language learners to use the target language in a comparatively authentic environment where they engaged in daily routines (Madge et al., 2009; Pempek et al., 2009). All four participants reported that they liked the concept of free writing on this technological platform and felt that they benefited from their experience.

One limitation of this study was that the Facebook activity was an academic requirement, which could have an impact on the participants' engagement in and perceptions of the activity. Another limitation is that this study focused on the content of participants' posts. Attention was not paid to linguistic accuracy and cultural appropriateness of the participants' language use. We also selected only four, relatively successful participants for the study. By providing thick descriptions and emic voices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), however, our findings

illustrate what is possible when the pedagogy works well. Future research might examine whether and to what extent Facebook communication in the target language can enhance adult learners' L2 reading or writing ability as well as their spoken proficiency. Researchers could also investigate how students build a learning community and reach out to communities of native speakers on Facebook, as well as how identities are formed in the process of community building and community outreach when Facebook is introduced into language learning. In a nutshell, our study has shown that Facebook could be used as an alternative pedagogical space for L2 literacy practice outside of class.

## CONCLUSION

With the wide popularity of Facebook among American college students, we logically see the possibility to leverage the current college students' heavy reliance on this particular social networking platform in support of language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2010; Kabilan et al., 2010). Several contemporary studies have noted that Facebook holds great potential for L2 pedagogy because the use of these tools is an everyday literacy practice for millions of people, warranting its inclusion in L2 curricula (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; McBride, 2009; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011). The study elaborated that free posting on Facebook in Chinese helps students engage in authentic communication and allows students to communicate with their peers about the topics they are interested in; it enabled them to reinforce the learned Chinese characters and to recognize more; it increased their confidence in writing and communicating in Chinese; particularly, it gave them a sense of accomplishment when they realized they were able to express some complicated ideas in Chinese. In terms of how the participants engaged in free posting and communication, the findings revealed that they engaged in this online activity mainly by expressing their emotions and feelings, sharing responses to campus events, describing events unrelated to campus, expressing their health status, and sharing personal interests and hobbies.

In alignment with previous studies, the findings of this study support Facebook as a good medium of language learning, providing *a hybrid space* for language learning and learner identity formation through engagement in the activity. As the four participants illuminated, Facebook provided an authentic conversational environment they could actually use. Consequently it also demonstrated effective pedagogical implications for educational purposes.

In conclusion, such social media as Facebook currently account for a fair amount of writing done by current college students (Godwin-Jones, 2010). Being able to communicate effectively in these media is certainly part of developing foreign-language learners' digital literacy skills. But more research is needed to better understand which areas of language development actually benefit when learners use these media.

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