

國立交通大學
英語教學研究所碩士論文

A Master Thesis
Presented to
Institute of TESOL,
National Chiao Tung University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

以活動理論探究在臉書的英語學習社群成員之中介行為與參與感受

Exploring Community Members' Mediated Actions and Perceptions
in an English Learning Community on Facebook through the Lens of
Activity Theory

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中華民國 一百年十月

October, 2011

論文名稱：以活動理論探究在臉書的英語學習社群成員之中介行為與參與感受
校所組別：國立交通大學英語教學研究所
畢業時間：一百學年度第一學期
指導教授：張靜芬博士
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中文摘要

近年來，網路的進化發展改變了人們相處、合作和互動的方式。社群網站的興起，提供人們在共有的網路空間參與共同話題的討論或是意見交換。由於社群網站的廣泛使用，英語學習者開始利用社群網站成立線上英語學習社群尋求語言學習機會及和其他學習者進行社交聯繫。雖然這種新興的語言學習方式在語言學習研究領域中漸漸獲得關注，但是鮮少研究探討個人社群成員在線上語言學習社群的中介行為與其參與感受之探究。

本研究採活動理論(Engeström,1987,1999)探究四位社群成員在一個透過臉書成立的英語學習社群活動的動機及其中介行為。根據 Engeström，活動系統裡主要由六個要素組成，包含包括對象(subject)、目標(object)、媒介工具(mediating artifact)、規則(rule)、角色(division of labor)以及學習者所身處的社群 (community)，當個體遇到矛盾時，這六個要素將會互相交織影響個體的中介行為。本研究主要探討影響社群成員中介行為的活動系統，並探究這四位社群成員參與這個臉書社群的感受。

本研究採個案研究法，進行長達一年的線上觀察及兩次的訪談，所收集的資料經由觀察歸納分析，並以活動理論架構加以分析其個別要素之間的交互影響。研究結果指出此四位社群成員參與臉書社群中介行為包含 (1)回答問題、(2)給予讚美、(3)聊天、(4)貢獻知識、(5)詢問問題及(6)建議發文規則。從活動理論觀點探究社群成員的中介行為發現，雖然每位社群成員的中介行為受到個人經驗背景、設立的參與目標及情境因素影響，但其個別的影響程度不同，也形成不同的

活動系統。此外，這四位社群成員的參與感受隨著他們參與的時間而有所改變；起初，社群成員將此線上活動作為一獲得樂趣、成就感及交朋友的管道。然而，隨著參與時間的增加，社群成員對於參與社群不再抱有熱情，反而將其視為一種例行的生活習慣。

此研究指出社群網站上的學習社群具有高度潛力幫助語言學習者，教師可在其教學上應用線上學習社群刺激學生參與學習活動。基於此概念，雖然本研究針對教室外的線上社群作為研究場域，但其結果仍能提供三個在教學實務上的建議。首先，當教師應用線上學習社群於教學時，教師需將學生的個人背景因素考量其中。第二，教師需費心思設計能增加社群成員互動及引起學生興趣的線上活動，以期達到線上社群學習的效果。第三，教師應擔起社群主持人的責任，確保線上學習社群的秩序以讓此線上社群成員能夠持續地參與社群活動。

關鍵字：社群網站、活動理論、線上學習社群、臉書

ABSTRACT

In the recent years, the evolutionary development of the Internet has changed the ways that people meet, collaborate, and interact with each other. Social networking sites (SNSs), the newly emerging media of online communication, provide spaces for people to join online communities to discuss ideas, exchange opinions, and share knowledge. Language learners show much interest in forming online communities in SNSs in which they seek for learning opportunities and make social connection with other language learners. While the innovative language learning has gradually drawn attention to language learning research, few studies have focused on individual members' mediated actions and perception in online language learning communities.

Targeting at an English learning community on *Facebook*, one of the most popular SNSs, this study attempted to examine how four targeted community members operated in the online language learning community and what factors underlay their mediated actions in the learning community and their perception of participation in the online community through the lens of an activity theory perspective (Engeström, 1987, 1999). According to Engeström, six components in an activity system—subjects, objects, mediating artifacts, rules, division of labors, and the situated community—are constantly interwoven with each other when an individual encounters contradictions. Adopting activity theory as the theoretical framework was to map out the complexity of the interwoven relationship of these elements in each individual community member's activity systems.

This study adopted qualitative case study methodology. The data were collected from one-year online observations and two formal interviews with the four focal community members. The data were analyzed based on emerged mediated actions shown in their online participation. The interview data were analyzed based on the six

components underlying individuals' activity systems. The findings of the study indicated that the four participants' participation included (1) answering questions, (2) showing appreciation, (3) chatting, (4) contributing knowledge, (5) asking questions, and (6) suggesting posting rules. From an activity theory perspective, it was found that the community members' mediated actions were highly influenced by their growing background, learning experiences, the goal they set for participation, and the contextual factors situated in the community. As for the perceptions of their participation, the participants perceived the online experiences differently through the time they participated. At the beginning of their participation, they considered the online participation as a way to have fun, acquire a sense of achievement, and gain friendship. However, through the time they participated, they lost their enthusiasm for participation. Instead, they perceived the online participation as routine work without any strong motivation.

Although this study targeted at an out-of-class learning community, there are still several pedagogical implications for language teachers. First, when integrating online learning communities into their classroom, teacher educators need to take students' subject agency into consideration. Second, teachers need to carefully design online activities which can enhance community members' interaction to arise students' interest in participating in the online discussion actively. Third, teachers should take the responsibility to ensure that the online learning community is in order in order to keep the community alive.

Keywords: activity theory, *Facebook*, online learning community, social networking sites (SNSs)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been completed without the support and guidance from many individuals. I am deeply indebted to them who have supported, encouraged, and believed in me through this journey.

First, I am particularly grateful to my thesis advisor, Dr. Ching-Fen Chang, for her constant guidance and encouragement during all stages of my research. She is a mentor who not only ushered me into the field of sociocultural theory but also set a role model of being a good teacher. She has always been patient in reading my thesis and generous in offering her insightful advice which led me on the right track of the study. Without her patience and wisdom, this thesis could not have been completed.

Second, my heartfelt gratitude also goes to the committee members, Dr. Shiou-Wen Yeh and Dr. I-Ru Su, who offered insightful suggestions and comments. Their valuable insights and constructive suggestions to my thesis undoubtedly contributed a great deal to the revision of the thesis and made it more complete.

Third, I would like to express my deep thankfulness to the four participants who let me enter their social network. Their generous participation in the study provided the research with substantial data. Without the data, it was impossible to carry out the study. Their participation made the process to a success.

Fourth, I save the deepest gratitude to my parents for their unwavering love and support. Their unconditional love and belief in me kept me going through every toughest moment. Lastly, and most importantly, I owe my hearty thanks to my life partner, Li-Hsuan Chung. She always encouraged me and gave me hugs when I felt frustrated. She is the source of my happiness that always alleviates my pressure and stirs me on in life.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The growth and evolution of the Internet in recent years has changed things people do on the Internet. In the 1990s, the Web was a tool for only accessing information which was created by small numbers of people for a very large number of users. Less than a decade later, the situation has changed rapidly with new development and applications emerging on the Internet (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). Internet users have started to interact through blogs, collaborate through wikis, and build relationships through social networking sites (SNSs) recently. In other words, barriers to online publishing, interaction, and collaboration have eliminated nowadays. This new type of online communication is referred to as Web 2.0, “the second generation of the World Wide Web” (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007, p.2).

Web 2.0 technologies, such as blogs, wikis, and SNSs, provide the affordances for Internet users not only access information via the Internet but also create and contribute content collaboratively on the Internet. In the realms of Web 2.0 environments, users are actively involved in publishing, communicating, and collaborating with each other. In this sense, Web 2.0 technologies can be described as a social web which is a highly interactive and participatory platform with an obvious focus on inter-human connectivity (Siemens, 2005). One of the representative Web 2.0 technologies is the SNS which serves primarily as a means of bringing people with similar interests or experiences together (Davis, 2009). Users may join or build online groups where they have a discussion about certain topics or exchange opinions with aiming at a particular theme. By joining interaction in groups, people are linked together and may establish online communities where they make new relationships or

social contacts with other members.

Among these SNSs, *Facebook* has been considered as one of the most popular SNS (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010). *Facebook* was launched by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 and added its 550 millionth member in 2010 (Grossman, 2010). The site has been one of the fastest-growing and best-known sites on the Internet today. Grossman (2010) indicated the popularity of *Facebook*,

One out of every dozen people on the planet has a *Facebook* account. They speak 75 languages and collectively lavish more than 700 billion minutes on *Facebook* every month. Its membership is currently growing at a rate of about 700,000 people a day. (para.5)

In addition to its popularity, one unique feature of *Facebook* is its various applications which make it far more sophisticated than many of its SNS counterparts, such as *Bebo*, *Friendster*, and *MySpace*¹ (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). The popularity of *Facebook* has recently interested language learners in joining or forming online communities to seek for language learning opportunities and make social connection with other language learners. These online learning communities provide language learners a platform to exchange information or share learning experiences in a shared online environment beyond the boundary of time and space.

In response to the current trends of using SNSs for language learning, research on online language learning has been spurred. From the review of these studies, it is found that existing literature on online language learning communities is very limited in three aspects. First, some of these studies focused on language learners' discourse behaviors and online activities in an online community by analyzing the content of their posts (e.g., Hoshi, 2003; Miceli, Murray, & Kennedy, 2010; Rasulo, 2009; You & Zhang, 2007; Zeng & Takatsuka, 2008). Second, other investigated learners'

¹ *Facebook* (<http://www.facebook.com>); *Bebo* (<http://www.bebo.com>); *Friendster* (<http://www.friendster.com>); *MySpace* (<http://www.myspace.com>)

perceptions and motivations of using SNSs as learning communities in support of their language learning through their responses to questionnaires (e.g., Clark & Gruba, 2010; Hoshi, 2003, Jee & Park, 2009; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Mills, 2009). Third, further discussion concerning motivation explored the issue of sense of community in an online learning community (e.g., Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Petersen, Divitini, & Chabert, 2008, 2009; Rovai, 2001, 2002).

One commonality of these studies is that most of them were carried out mainly in formal learning context to grasp the effects of community building in language learning class. Another commonality of these studies is that most of these studies adopted quantitative research investigating frequencies and patterns of learners' interactions or their perceptions and motivation toward the online learning community. These quantitative results, however, did not clearly demonstrate how individuals participated and interacted with other members as well as what community members were experiencing during their participation in the online learning community. Furthermore, this quantitative research did not afford to explore sociocultural context within particular communities and often ignored the examination of crucial but often hidden contextual factors (Warschauer, 1998). In order to fully understand the complex interrelation of individual-context interaction, research paradigms should be expanded to “engage in critical qualitative research which takes into account broad sociocultural factors” (Warschauer, 1998, p.760).

Rationale of the Study

To explore the interrelation of members' operations and contextual factors within an online learning community in *Facebook*, this study employs sociocultural perspectives, especially Engeström's (1987, 1999) activity theory to understand and describe individual community members in an online language learning community.

Sociocultural theory asserts that individuals are social beings influenced by the social, cultural, and historical factors in specific contexts (Lantolf, 2000). According to Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy (1999), human practice cannot be understood or analyzed outside the context in which they are situated. Therefore, when analyzing human activity, research focus should be put not only on the activity that people engage in but also on who is engaging in that activity, what their goals and intentions are, what objects or products result from the activity, the rules and norms that circumscribe that activity, and the larger community in which the activity occurs.

Drawing on sociocultural perspectives, activity theory is a philosophical and multidisciplinary theory with a naturalistic emphasis on mapping out relationships of various contextual elements within an activity (Engeström, 1999; Kuutti, 1996). It provides a useful theoretical framework for examining how seemingly individual human actions are interconnected by various contextual elements. Given that activity theory contributes to unfold the complex interrelation among individual minds, actions, and communities where they are situated, it seems that activity theory is an appropriate theoretical framework which can be used in this study for interpreting how individuals operate in an online language learning community and what factors underlie their operations in an online language learning community.

Purpose of the Study

While much attention has been paid to the exploration of online language learning community from quantitative perspectives, research on how individuals participate and interact in an online language learning community from sociocultural perspectives has remained largely outside the focus of research. Therefore, the current study aimed to understand and describe individual community members in an online language learning community through activity theory.

More specifically, the purposes of the current study were (1) to investigate community members' participation within an online community and interaction with other community members; (2) to identify the underlying reasons which might take effect on their participation and interaction in an online language learning community; (3) to explore the interrelation between individual community members' personal agency, participation, and contextual elements in the community; (4) to have more understanding of community members' perception toward their online participation experiences.

Research Questions

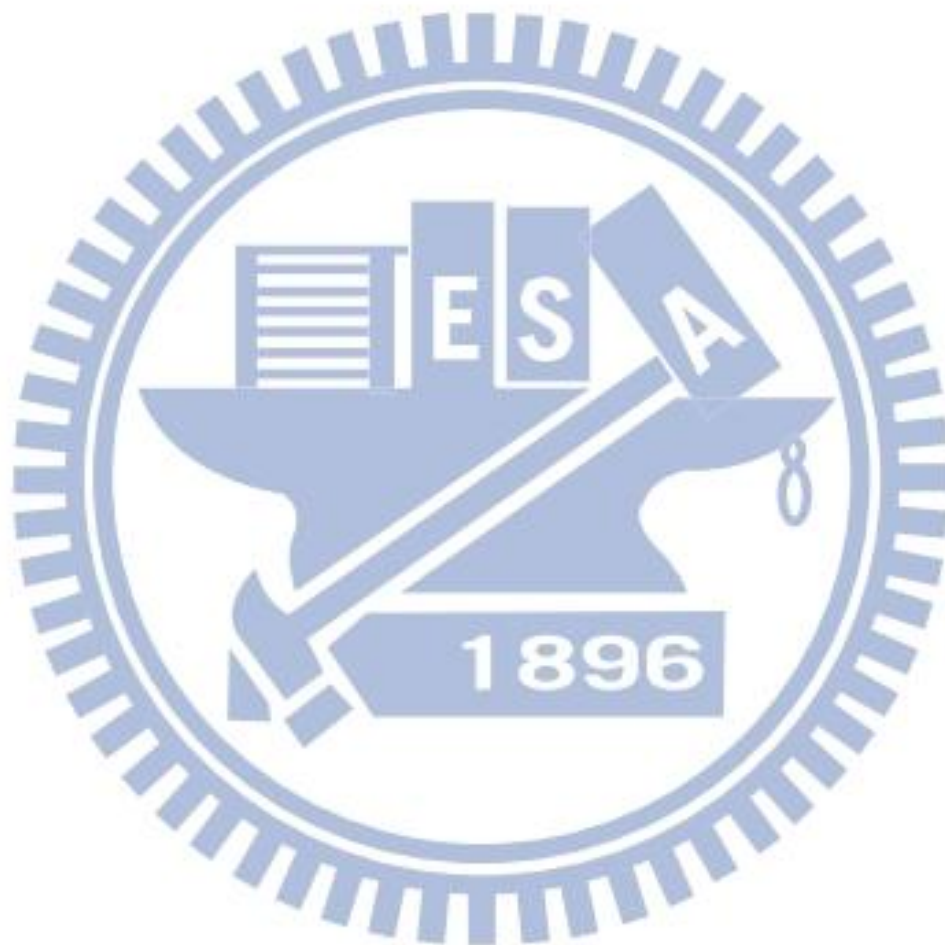
According to the purposes of the current study, this study adopted activity theory as a theoretical framework to depict the experiences of community members in an online learning community. In view of the preceding research purposes, three major research questions were addressed as follow.

1. How do community members mediate their actions in the online English learning community?
2. How do underlying factors interact with their mediated actions through the process of engaging in the online English learning community?
3. How do community members perceive the experiences of engaging in the online English learning community?

Organization of the Thesis

The organization of this thesis is as follows. In Chapter Two, related literature on the use of Web 2.0 in language learning is reviewed first. Next, the discussion of activity theory and its application in research is presented. In Chapter Three, the research methodology is reported in detail, including the study setting, the recruitment

of participants, data collection as well as the procedure of data collection and data analysis. In Chapter Four, the results of the study are presented in response to the research questions. In Chapter Five, as the final chapter, concludes the study by displaying the discussion and the summary of the study findings, pedagogical implications from the study, limitations of the study, and suggestion for future research.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, related research is introduced in detail. First, an introduction of Web 2.0 and its application, *Facebook*, is provided. Furthermore, related literature of the use of SNSs, including *Facebook*, in support of language learning is reviewed. Second, activity theory serving as a theoretical framework of the current study is discussed from its historical development and its core components. Third, the application of activity theory in education and research of language learning are further discussed.

Introduction to Web 2.0

The term Web 2.0 has taken hold since its appearance at the first Web 2.0 Conference in 2004. The term which was coined by Tim O'Reilly (2005) refers to an improved form of the World Wide Web and new ways of using it. To be more specific, Web 2.0 means the second generation of the World Wide Web (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). The Web before Web 2.0 is thus named as Web 1.0 which is the first generation of the World Wide Web. The retrospective term Web 1.0 refers to the initial information-oriented Web, authored by a small number of people for a very large number of users (Pegrum, 2009). Web 1.0 merely allows people to access information via the Internet but it does not provide affordances of interacting and participating on the Internet. On the other hand, in the era of Web 2.0 nowadays, people can do more than access information via the Internet. People can apply Web 2.0 technologies to interact through blogs, collaborate through wikis, and build relationships through SNSs with relative ease. On the whole, the differences between Web 1.0 and 2.0 can be summarized by the features of Web. That is, Web 1.0 is static which links

information on the Internet while Web 2.0 is dynamic and interactive which links both information and people on the Internet (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007).

Web 2.0 technologies provide a platform which is easily for users to interact, collaborate, and maintain relationships with people around the world. These technologies including blogs, wikis, and SNSs allow Internet users to do more than retrieve information. With Web 2.0 technologies, they build connections and communities across the world. For example, bloggers share their personal journals or thoughts of certain topics they are interested in while blog readers read and comment on blog entries. Bloggers and their readers exchange opinions and interact with each other on blogs. Under such circumstances, they build online communities through blogs which connect them together. Another representative example of Web 2.0 technologies is wikis. Wikis are created by groups of people who work together to generate new knowledge through an open editing and review structure (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). In this way, users with similar interests feel connected together through interacting within a shared online space. In a nutshell, Web 2.0 provides an environment for Internet users to become active participants who construct and contribute content interactively and collaboratively, hence being connected together in an online community.

Facebook

Facebook, one of the Web 2.0 applications, is further discussed here since it has great affordances to build online communities and the major platform of this study. *Facebook* provides a new way for people to meet, collaborate, and reinforce new and existing relationships. Davis (2009) suggested that *Facebook* appear to allow people to not only form new relationships but also strengthen the relationships with those who are already part of their social network. When engaging in social interaction on

Facebook, people gain some positive psychological benefits, including well-being and self-esteem, which result from positive online engagements with others (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). The social-networking feature of *Facebook* provides an asset in establishing online communities which aim at different aspects, for example, a high school community, a photography community, a sports community, or a learning community.

The basic structure of *Facebook* is the “Profile Page” which consists of information such as age, location, education, work, personal interests and added details about the user (McBride, 2009). Within these sections are more labeled spaces to enter specific data such as hometown, political views, relationship status, favorite music, and quotations. Besides, *Facebook* profile also consists of one picture which is named as a profile picture. *Facebook* users can upload any pictures they want as their profile pictures. Figure 2.1 shows one example of *Facebook* user’s profile page.



Figure 2.1 Screenshot of *Facebook* profile page²

² The *Facebook* usernames in Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 3.1 are shown in part in order to protect users’ identities.

After completing the information on profile page, users are considered as one member of *Facebook* community. As *Facebook* community members, users can add other *Facebook* users as their *Facebook* friends. Basically, the composition of profile page includes *Facebook* user's basic information, profile picture, and *Facebook* friend list. The demographic information, descriptions of interests, and sharing of photos noted on the user's profile page can be considered as the expression of self-disclosure (Wang & Woo, 2010).

An interesting aspect of *Facebook* is the viral spreading of online interactions on *Facebook*. Every action of users' *Facebook* friends can be traced on the *Facebook* home page called "News Feed" (see Figure 2.2). On news feed page, users see a constantly updated list of their friends' *Facebook* activity such as their profile changes, shared videos, upcoming events, updated status, recent joined groups, and conversations with other *Facebook* friends. By reading news feed, users can update their *Facebook* friends' activities immediately. Consequently, users and their *Facebook* friends interact online form an online community based their social network.

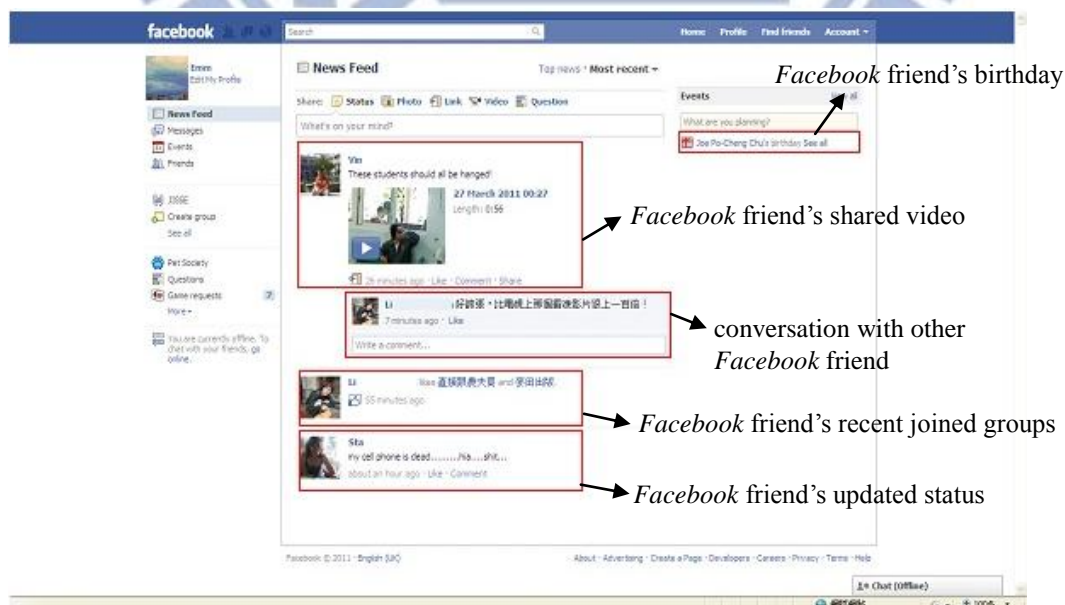


Figure 2.2 Screenshot of *Facebook* news feed page

In addition to being one member of *Facebook* community, *Facebook* users may join “*Facebook Page*” which created by other *Facebook* users with similar interests, experiences, or causes. Figure 2.3 presents an example of *Facebook* page which was created by *Facebook*. *Facebook* page applications have been specifically designed to build bonds between users that share a common interest or activity. In *Facebook*, users can join pages that already exist or easily create a new one based on their common interests, experiences or causes. On each *Facebook* page, users are able to learn more about a topic or an experience—whether it is cooking, traveling, or learning a new language—and see what their friends and others in the page are saying about this topic. Users are linked through their common interests by having joined the same page. Such activities are noted on one’s profile page which is important in the establishment of one’s online identity (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Vie, 2007).



Figure 2.3 Screenshot of *Facebook* page

The interface of *Facebook* page is similar to *Facebook* personal profile page.

Users can click the “Info” tab to read the descriptions of *Facebook* pages, such as the

founded time, mission, and its website address. By reading the Info message, users can see whether the page meets their interests and click the “Like” tab to become its members. After joining a *Facebook* page, users can have a discussion about certain topics which they are interested in or exchange opinions with aiming at a particular theme on the “Wall” of the page. The wall is a virtual place where members can share their thoughts and ideas on any topics they are interested in. In addition, members have the ability to contact, interact, or make friends with other members in a variety of ways through the *Facebook* applications, such as sending private message, adding as friends, or writing on their walls. In a nutshell, by joining interaction in a page, users are linked together and hence establish online communities where they can interact with other members and make new relationships or social contacts.

Applications of Facebook in Building Learning Communities

The growing popularity of *Facebook* provides additional avenues and purposes for educational uses in enhancing social interactions among learners. The social and interactive nature of *Facebook* supports the application of building learning communities where collaboration and participation involved in the learning process (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2011). With the special social and interactive nature, *Facebook* may benefit learners by allowing them to be involved in communities of collaborative learning. Therefore, the main educational use of *Facebook* is seen to lie in the support for indirectly creating a learning community which is a vital component of learning (Baker, 1999).

In an online learning community, learners can actively participate in online discussion. They can leave comments on a discussion board and ask for more detailed explanations which may not be easily achieved in formal educational context (Hemmi, Bayne, & Land, 2009; McLoughlin & Lee, 2007; Munoz & Towner, 2009).

Furthermore, it is contended that the online learning communities may better motivate students as engaged learners rather than learners who are primarily passive observers of the educational process (Ziegler, 2007). In conclusion, *Facebook* which possesses powerful social and interactive abilities is considered being conducive for language learners to form online learning communities which facilitate their learning.

Studies on Facebook in Language Learning

Along with the advent of *Facebook*, language learners are provided with a significant opportunity for language learning. It is found to be a very effective way of allowing people to stay in contact and communicate with others that the educational resources are being put to good use. As Godwin-Jones (2008) noted, SNSs “that enhance communication and human interaction can potentially be harnessed for language learning” (p.7). Within the application of *Facebook* in language learning, learners can contact and interact with other learners, communicate with each other as well as collaborate on solving problems regarding language learning.

Several studies explored the application of SNSs, including *Facebook*, to language learning, described the implementation in language classroom contexts, reported on learners’ experiences and outcomes, and identified potential benefits in language learning (e.g., Clark & Gruba, 2010; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Hoshi, 2003; Jee & Park, 2009; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Mills, 2009; Miceli, Murray, & Kennedy, 2010; Petersen, Divitini, & Chabert, 2008, 2009; Rasulo, 2009; Zeng & Takatsuka, 2008). Conducted in language classroom contexts, recent research has pointed out that the application of *Facebook* in class could help to establish and maintain immediacy among students (Mazer, Murphy, & Simmonds, 2007). Mazer, et al. (2007) noted that by accessing *Facebook*, students may see similarities with peers which could lead to more comfortable communication and better learning outcomes.

The emotional connections were considered important elements of developing sense of community which created an intrinsically rewarding reason to continue participation in a group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Likewise, Blattner and Fiori (2009) also proposed that promoting a community of learners was extremely useful as it often positively impacted affective learning and students' motivation.

In addition to the examination of the formation of an online learning community on learning process, other studies focused on online activities and discourse, indicating that *Facebook* provide authentic environments for enhancing communication, interaction, and discussions (Mills, 2009). Blattner and Fiori (2009), for example, pointed out that *Facebook* can be utilized for authentic language interaction and could be used to improve the performance of language learners. Furthermore, Mills (2009) discovered that her students within *Facebook* environment felt that the language class was more interesting and the authentic environment motivated them to use accurate language in online discussions.

To sum up, previous research investigating *Facebook* in language learning has focused on online community formation in language learning, learners' perception and motivation toward participating in an online learning community, and the effect of an online learning community on language learning development. Although these studies have provided general information about the use of *Facebook* in language learning, these studies were mostly conducted in classroom settings. Little attention has been paid to examine online learning context out of class. Furthermore, previous studies have seldom been conducted by a qualitative approach which may elicit more solid understandings of online language learning. Hence, the present study sought to understand individual activities as socially situated participation in an online learning community out of class through the lens of activity theory.

Theoretical Framework: Activity Theory

Activity theory is a philosophical and multidisciplinary theory that offers a framework for describing human activity and provides a set of perspectives on practice that interlink individual and social levels (Kuutti, 1996; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999; Nardi, 1996). Rather than investigating an individual separately from his/her surroundings, it focuses on the interaction of human activity within its relevant environment context. Serving as a theoretical framework of the study, the historical development and central ideas of the activity theory are discussed in the following section.

The Historical Development of Activity Theory

The activity theory originated from the concept of Vygotsky's (1978, 1981) sociocultural theory and then was expanded by Leont'ev (1981), and Engeström (1987, 1999). Vygotsky (1978, 1981) believed that human activity happens when human beings intend to resolve problems by using tools to achieve their goals. The central concept of Vygotsky's theory is mediation which lies in the notion that human activity is mediated by tools and signs. These mediating tools can be physical (e.g., computers, books, peers, teachers) and psychological (e.g., languages, signs, beliefs, culture) tools which serve to assist subjects working on achieving the object. According to Vygotsky, human behavior is activity which is mediated by tools and signs serving to connect subjects and objects. The basic structure of human mediated activity, including subject, object, and mediating artifacts, can be illustrated as a triangle which shows the relationships between each item to mediate an interaction (see Figure 2.4).

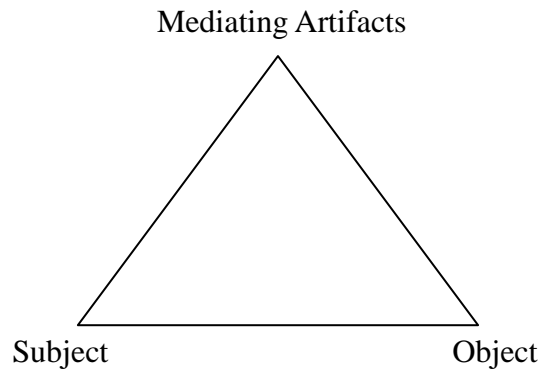


Figure 2.4 The basic representation of activity theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981)

Based on Vygotsky’s concept, Leont’ev (1981) proposed a more complex model of activity theory. Leont’ev (2003) defined activity as a “unit of life that is mediated by mental reflection” (p.46) and characterized it as a reciprocal transformation between subject and object. Leont’ev (1981) extended Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of the mediated relationship between subject and object in which action is a particular instantiation of activity that is realized through situational operations (Haneda, 2007). He viewed the nature of activity, action, and operation as incorporating three hierarchical processes (see Figure 2.5).

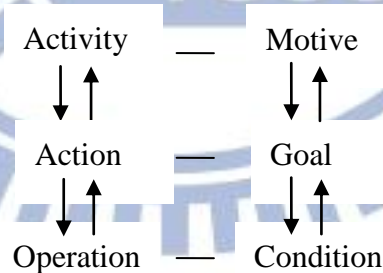


Figure 2.5 Hierarchical nature of activity, action, and operation (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999)

The highest level of the hierarchy, activity, is conscious and driven by an object-related motive. The middle level, individual action, is conscious and driven by a goal. The lowest level, automatic operations, is unconscious and driven by the conditions of the actions (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). That is, individuals are driven by

underlying motives and these motives are realized in goal-directed actions to satisfy the initial needs. Therefore, motives are significant and crucial elements in triggering human action. To sum up, an activity is not merely mediated by external tools but is also driven by the inner need to transform an object into desired outcomes.

Engeström (1987, 1999) further contextualized activity by situating it within a community where historical and contextual factors are embedded. Accordingly, this expanded model contains subject, object, mediating artifacts, community, rules, and division of labor. Activity is conceptualized in terms of a set of interconnected triangles where the subject interacts with the mediating artifacts, community, rules, division of labor, and the object to reach the outcome. The above mentioned six components are formed together as an interacting model named activity system, which describe how human activity occurs (see Figure 2.6).

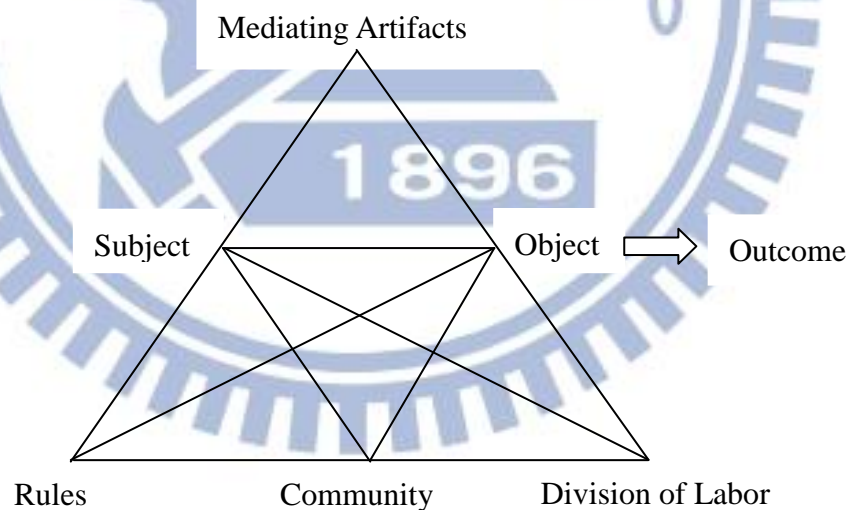


Figure 2.6 The expanded activity system (Engeström, 1987, 1999)

The Six Components of Activity System

An activity system has six interacting components, namely subject, object, mediating artifacts, community, rules, division of labor, and the object. Subjects are human agents who are engaged in an activity. Objects are goals to be achieved.

Mediating artifacts are physical tools which are used to achieve goals such as computers, books, and pens or psychological things such as languages, ideas, and experiences that help to carry out an activity. Community refers to a group to which subjects belong. Rules are customs, conventions, or regulations that govern behaviors of subjects within the community. Division of labor is the distribution of subjects' roles, powers, and responsibilities.

An activity system which is depicted as a triangle describes the interactions and relationships between the six components. The triangle in the upper half of the system depicts the relationship between subject and object as mediated by mediating artifacts. This upper triangle describes individual action with relations between the subject, object, and the mediating artifacts, in isolation from the community. The upper triangle explains how subject works to achieve object through mediating artifacts. The further lower part of the triangle incorporates three new elements, that is, community, rules, and division of labor and links them with the elements in the top triangle. The lower triangle describes how subject is constrained by rules to interact with community and how community defines division of labor for subject to accomplish object of the activity system. The triangle structure of activity system clearly states the interrelated relationship of individuals within a community.

Within an activity system, these six components are not fixed but are reciprocally and dynamically interacting with one another. Any changes or modifications of these elements will influence other elements and change the operation of the activity. According to Engeström (1999), the origins of changes and modifications come from contradictions such as problems, breakdowns, tensions, or conflicts happen within an activity system. To take an online learning community as an example, when online community members interact with other members, they form division of labor within a shared online environment. However, when one new member comes to the

community, the division of labor in this community may be changed. For other community members, contradictions here emerge between subjects, division of labor, and objects. Hence, to solve the existing contradictions occurring in the activity system, subjects may change their objects which lead to new directions in the developmental process of the activity system. However, the adjustment of any components could possibly give rise to new contradictions and then actions taken to solve the contradictions. The cycle of the process keeps going until the activity system achieve equilibrium. Nevertheless, activity theorists consider contradictions as source of development. According to Engeström (1987), the effort to resolve contradictions is the driving force of change and development activity systems. Therefore, based on the notion of contradictions, identifying contradictions and understanding the transformation of activity system are significant to portray the nature of the activity (Barab, Schatz, & Scheckler, 2004).

In sum, activity theory develops an activity system which intends to explore human activity between an individual and his/her environment through mapping out the six components, namely subject, object, mediating artifacts, community, rules, and division of labor in the activity system. The systematic model of activity theory emphasizes on the interrelationship between the subject and the surrounding environments. Furthermore, these six elements of an activity system constantly interact with each other and could possibly develop contradictions within the activity system. Under the circumstances, subjects would try to resolve contradictions until the activity system achieve equilibrium. Therefore, by zooming the lens of activity theory, the developmental path of the interrelationship is easily traced. It is concluded that the activity theory is indeed with the potential to analyze sociocultural and historical impact upon individuals in their choice of actions, thus proven valuable for providing a theoretical framework of research.

Activity Theory in Education

The interest of activity theory in education has been increasing in the recent decade (Roth, 2004). Researchers have started to use activity systems to understand and examine learning process since learning is seen as a mediated action. According to Vygotsky (1981), learners construct meaning through interacting with artifacts and other people in their particular sociocultural community. In the view of sociocultural perspective, learners are regarded as social beings whose actions are influenced by sociocultural as well as historical factors within specific context. As Scanlon and Issroff (2005) noted, activity theory provides a language to describe some of the key features of learning experiences. On the whole, activity theory allows educational researchers to have an understanding of how multiple contexts in which an individual operates work together transform internal thought processes into learning actions.

Activity Theory and Educational Studies

Since activity theory offers a holistic and contextual method of discovery, recent educational research applied activity theory to explore both teachers' and learners' behaviors and actions in educational context (e.g., Barab, Barnett, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire, & Keating, 2002; Brine & Franken, 2006; Choi & Kang, 2007, 2010; Hung, Tan, & Koh, 2006; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). For example, Karasavvidis (2009) applied activity theory as a theoretical framework to examine teachers' concerns regarding the use of technology in their teaching. This study discovered that the main obstacles of technology integration in teaching were time and curriculum constraints. Examining from the perspective of activity theory, it was found that contradictions of mediating artifacts and object existed in the teachers' activity system.

In addition to concerning teachers in educational context, other studies also used

activity theory to examine students' learning process. Brine and Franken (2006) used activity theory as the basis of their analysis to evaluate students' perceptions of a computer mediated academic writing program, coding reflective journal entry data according to the six components of activity system. This study identified challenges in online educational environments in relation to group processes and how new tools facilitate or impede these processes. The challenges identified in this study were manifested in explaining students' activity systems where contradictions and tensions between mediating artifacts and processes were found. Another similar study conducted by Choi and Kang (2010) found that an activity system was a useful tool to reveal conflicting factors of contradictions during group work. The findings implied that contradicting situations arose due to a lack of competency with tools. It was further proposed that the most frequently observed conflicting factors were located among subjects, object, mediating artifacts, and community.

Apart from explaining teachers and learners' behaviors separately, educational research also explored both teaching and learning process situated in the same context from activity theory which illuminates the whole picture of an educational context. For instance, Barab, Barnett, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire, and Keating (2002) analyzed participation by undergraduate students and teachers, explaining the instances of class activity that characterized course dynamics. This study focused on the relations of subject (student) and object (astronomy understandings) and how object transformations leading to scientific understandings mediated by tools (both technological and human). In addition, they also examined the interrelationship among the overall classroom culture (emergent norms), division of labor (group dynamics and student-instructor roles), and rules (informal, formal, and technical). It used activity theory as an analytical lens for understanding the transactions and pervasive tensions that characterized course activities.

Activity Theory and Language Learning Studies

Activity theory has been not only employed widely in a number of overall educational research, but also in the studies of language learning which put emphasis upon the social and historical influences of learners' surrounding environments on learners' participation in language class (e.g., Haneda, 2007; Lantolf & Genung, 2002; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Nelson & Kim, 2001; Storch, 2004). In other words, to understand how students learn language requires an analysis of the activity systems in which they are embedded and an analysis of the contradictions inherent within activities and between them.

Storch (2004), for example, investigated the dyadic interactions among learners through the lens of activity theory. It was found that although language learners were seemingly engaged in the same task, they may be engaged in different practice. Various types of students' interaction patterns were found in this study. Such variations were contributed to learners' own interpretation of the situation, the goals they set, and the role they played. The results revealed that individuals underwent different activity systems depending on their language learning experiences and their own activity systems embedded in a specific context. The results were in accordance with Haneda's (2007) finding. The study exploring students' learning process of writing in a foreign language concluded that students' participation in class is mediated by the concepts and tools of the past and present activities in which they have engaged and were engaging. In other words, from sociocultural perspective, individuals were seen as agents who engaged in goal-oriented actions with cultural tools, both symbolic and material, as members of a particular sociocultural community. In another similar study, Gillete (1994) conducted an investigation of university students studying French. In this study, there were two students, both taking French classes to fulfill the university's language requirement, considered the

learning of French as two completely different activities: while one student saw it as deeply relevant to her desire to become a writer, the other did not see any real-life relevance in language study. It was found that the kind of learning activity the students employed in learning French were influenced by their histories, in which were rooted their motives for studying French and their goal on specific occasions. It was further proposed that individuals' actions were energized by their own activity systems.

In addition to investigating learning in language classrooms, recent research has started to explore learning in online environments. Incorporating an online community into consideration, these studies applied activity theory to understand and describe learners' online learning experiences (e.g., Aalst & Hill, 2006; Basharina, 2007; Masters, 2009). Conducting in an online learning environment, Aalst and Hill (2006) investigated learners' participation in class online discussion. Findings of the study illustrated that the online discourse was structured by rules, division of labor, and mediating artifacts in the online community. In addition to examining the interrelationship among elements of activity systems, some studies drew attentions on the contradictions emerged in activity systems. The study of Basharina (2007) focused on contradictions in telecollaboration among English learners from Japan, Mexico, and Russia. These students were participants of multiple activity systems simultaneously. They were embedded in their local classrooms, an online global community, and broader context of their local cultures. From the perspective of activity theory, this study identified three levels of contradictions: intra-cultural, inter-cultural, and technology-related contradictions. On the whole, these contradictions detected in the above studies were the result of having the same task but engagement in different activities, characterized by differences in their different interacting activity systems.

The above-discussed studies, by adopting activity theory as a theoretical framework, altogether put focus on the importance of a given context as well as the impact of social and historical factors upon individuals' choice of actions in the learning process. Furthermore, these studies also emphasized the discovery of contradictions or tensions in individuals' activity systems since contradictions were considered the source of changes in their learning actions. It is concluded that activity theory offers a holistic and contextual method of discovery that can be used to support qualitative and interpretative research. It is indeed with the potential to yield different perspectives for analyzing the evolving learning process of individuals' actions in an educational context.

Since activity theory provides a powerful theoretical framework to explore the complexity of individual actions and the situated context, the present study takes the lens of activity theory to focus on investigating an online language learning community out of class in effort to get a portrait of what and how mediated actions of community members are formed as well as underlying factors of their mediated actions in an online learning community.

In the next chapter, the research methodology will be presented in detail to answer the aforementioned research questions of the current study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methods of this study, including the description of the study setting, participants, data collection, procedure, and data analysis.

Study Setting

The current study targeted at one online language learning community which was located in one of the most popular SNS in the world—*Facebook*. *Facebook* users may join one or several “Pages” created by other *Facebook* users with similar interests or experiences. The targeted *Facebook* page, “Oh, That is Not How We Say It in English?” (原來這句英文不能這樣說喔?) (<http://www.facebook.com/poor.english>)³ was an English learning community where community members gathered together in a virtual space and discussed English language problems with other members.

According to the profile page of the *Facebook* page, the mission of this page is to provide an online space for discussion about using English correctly. Community members can post their questions for discussion in the *Facebook* page. The profile picture of this *Facebook* page also tells the purpose of this learning community (see Figure 3.1). Besides, there are three *Facebook* page rules as follows: (1) Please look up the word in the dictionary or google it first. This is the way to improve your English ability; (2) If you are not sure about the answers after consulting, then drop your questions for discussion here; (3) Please keep a polite and warm manner. The *Facebook* page was founded in April 17, 2010 by an anonymous *Facebook* user and

³ The name of the targeted *Facebook* page is in Chinese, that is, 原來這句英文不能這樣說喔? The researcher translates the Chinese name into an English name, “Oh, That is Not How We Say It in English?”

the number of members has been increasing to over 245,000 in April 2011.

This study tried to elicit the community members' experiences from the very beginning of their participation and intended to capture their changes in the community. Therefore, this online language learning community was targeted as an ideal research site because the researcher started the study while the online community was launched.



Figure 3.1 Screenshot of the targeted Facebook page

Community members of this Facebook page can have discussion by posting language problems or responding to other members' questions on the "wall" of the Facebook page. The "wall" is a virtual place where community members can share their thoughts and ideas on any topics they are interested in. In this online learning community, any topics of language learning were posted and discussed by community members. From the online observation, it was found that discussion topics on the wall

of this *Facebook* page included English-Chinese translations, English grammar questions, culture-embedded language issues, English learning strategies, and any other issues related to language learning.

The Recruitment of Participants

The researcher started to search active members by doing online observation since April 2010 right after the online community was founded. The online observation indicated that although the number of members was huge and has been increasing rapidly, there were a few members who participated in online discussion intensively. By observing their participation for four months, nine members were targeted because of their regular participation in online discussion. They posted questions or replied to other members' questions at least once a week.

The nine members were informed of the purpose of the study through private message on *Facebook*. After they replied to the private message, the researcher sent them both Chinese and English version of consent forms by email (see Appendix A and B). Consequently, four of them who intensively answered members' questions on the wall of this *Facebook* page agreed to be the participants for this study. Table 3.1 presents the basic demographic information of respective participants.

Table 3.1
Profiles of the targeted community members

Participant	Age	Gender	Location	First language	Second Language	Self-assessed English proficiency
A	Mid 20s	Male	the U.K.	English	Chinese	Native
B	Mid 20s	Male	Taiwan	Chinese	English	Intermediate
C	Late 30s	Female	the U.S.	Chinese	English	Advanced
D	Above 50s	Male	Taiwan	Chinese	English	Intermediate

Participant A lived in the U.K., Participant C in the U.S., and Participant B and D lived in Taiwan. In other words, two of them lived in an English-speaking country while two of them lived in an English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) country.

Participants were all Chinese and their first language was Chinese except Participant A who was born in the U.S. He used English as his first language and Chinese as his second language. Furthermore, their self-assessed English proficiency was intermediate to native.

With regard to the time of their participation in this *Facebook* page, Participant A and B had joined the discussion of the community for four months while Participant C and D had joined for almost two months by the time of the study. That is, the duration of participants' activity ranged from two to four months by the time the recruitment of participants took place. In spite of their different durations of participation, they constantly and regularly engaged in the discussion during their participation. Table 3.2 illustrates the number of entries from the time of their first participation to August 2010 the time they were recruited as participants in this study.

Table 3.2
Number of entries per month on the wall of the Facebook page

Participant	Date of first participation	April	May	June	July	August	Total
A	April 19	345	88	12	66	33	544
B	April 20	85	76	42	54	56	313
C	July 9	— ⁴	—	—	35	18	53
D	July 16	—	—	—	22	81	103

Data Collection

In order to set a complete picture of what and how participants did in the online

⁴ Participant C and D started to join the discussion in July so there were no entries during April to June.

learning community, the researcher collected data from various sources. Data was gathered from online observation, online questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews with participants. Data collection started from April 2010 and lasted to April 2011. The following sections explicitly describe the data collections which were applied in this study.

Online Observation Field Notes

The researcher visited the targeted online learning community and kept observation field notes twice a week (see Appendix C). The purpose of field notes was to record the targeted community members' participations and interactions in the online community. The observation field note served as supplementary data for developing interview questions with participants.

Questionnaire

To gain information regarding the participants' biographical information, education background, English learning experiences, and perceptions of participating in the language learning community, the researcher asked the participants to complete the online questionnaire (see Appendix D) in September 2010 before the first interview. The information acquired from the questionnaires was helpful for the researcher to have further understanding of the participants and therefore developed interview questions.

Interviews

Two interviews with each participant were guided with semi-structured open-ended questions and also guided by questions emerging during the implementation processes. Given the participants lived in different areas (i.e. the U.K.,

the U.S., and Taiwan), the interviews were done via Windows Live Messenger (except for Participant D who preferred to have interviews by telephone). Table 3.3 summarizes ways of conducting and other related information about both the first and second interview.

Table 3.3

Summary of related information about the first and second interview

Participant	Location	Ways of conducting interviews	Language used
A	U.K.	Windows Live Messenger	English
B	Taiwan	Windows Live Messenger	Chinese
C	U.S.	Windows Live Messenger	English
D	Taiwan	Telephone	Chinese

The average length of each online interview lasted from one and half hours to two hours and the length of telephone interview was approximately one hour. The language used in interviews was tailored to the convenience of the participants. Some participants preferred to use Chinese while some participants felt more comfortable in using English. Among these interviews with four participants, Chinese was used in interviews with Participant B and D who lived in Taiwan while English was used with Participant A and C who lived in the U.K. or the U.S.; yet, code-switching between Chinese and English happened very often.

The first interview was conducted in October 2010 after the first six-month online observation. The first interview aimed to probe into the following questions: (1) the experiences of participating in the online learning community, (2) the perceptions of their experiences in the online learning community, (3) factors or motivations of participating in the online learning community, and (4) other specific events which were matter to the participants (see Appendix E). The second interview was conducted after the second six-month online observation. It was used to trace

participants' changes of participations and perceptions of engaging in the online learning community. In the second interview, participants were asked to clarify their changes of (1) actions and (2) perceptions in their at least nine months of participating in the online learning community and furthermore, (3) underlying factors of their changes were also explored in the second interview (see Appendix F).

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure undertaken in the study lasted for one year. Table 3.4 summarizes the data collected time and procedure. The researcher did online observation within the online learning community from April 2010 right after it was founded in April 17, 2010 and lasted to April 2011. After completely observing the community members' participation in this online learning community for four months, the researcher was curious about the participants' background information which was helpful for the researcher to develop the following interview questions. Hence, the participants completed online questionnaire regarding their basic information in September 2010 before the first interview. Then, the first interview was conducted to collect their experiences, perception, and factors in participating in the online learning community in October 2010. After the first interview, the researcher kept doing online observation for four months to perceive any changes in participants' action, participation or interaction in the online learning community. The perceived changes of the participants were the focus of the second interview which was conducted in April 2011 six months later after the first interview. At this particular time after these four participants had joined the online community at least for nine months, the purpose of the second interview was to capture the underlying factors of changes of community members' participation. Through the whole data collection procedure, the researcher tried to acquire a holistic picture of things which happened in the online

learning community during a prolonged time period as it naturally occurred.

Table 3.4

Data collection period and procedure

Data collection period	Method	Data
Apr. 2010 – Aug. 2010	Online observation	Field notes
Sept. 2010	Online observation	Field notes
	Online questionnaire	Online questionnaire
Oct. 2010	Online observation	Field notes
	Interview #1	One audio-taped and transcribed interview and four online interview logs
Nov. 2010 – Mar. 2011	Online observation	Field notes
Apr. 2011	Online observation	Field notes
	Interview #2	One audio-taped and transcribed interview and four online interview logs

Data Analysis

In this *Facebook* page, community members discussed issues related to English learning with other members. They got involved in the discussion to fulfill their needs. Through the lens of activity theory, these community members were seen as subjects who mediated their actions in the English learning *Facebook* page in order to attain their goals. In the context of the study, these community members' mediated actions were participating in the discussion of the learning community. In order to capture the holistic picture of participants' mediated actions and its underlying factors in the learning community, the study first examined participations' online entries to acquire a preliminary understanding of their participation and then analyzed the online observation note and the interview data which was related to their participation in the *Facebook* page.

Analysis of Online Entries

The analysis of online entries was guided by grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). From the analysis of their entries, participants' mediated actions can be categorized into two main types, replying message and initiating message. The first type of participation, replying messages, included (1) answering questions, (2) showing appreciation, and (3) chatting, while the second type of participation, initiating messages, included (4) contributing knowledge, (5) asking questions, and (6) suggesting posting rules. Specific descriptions of the six mediated actions are provided as follows (see Figures 3.2 to 3.7)⁵.

Replying messages: replying to the *Facebook* page members' entries.

1. Answering questions: providing answers for community members.
2. Showing appreciation: expressing appreciation to community members who provide good answers or clear explanations to the questions
3. Chatting: going off-topic and chatting about their personal life.

Initiating messages: initiating a thread on the *Facebook* page wall.

4. Contributing knowledge: posting message containing English knowledge.
5. Asking questions: seeking for answers to English questions.
6. Suggesting posting rules: asking community members to follow posting rules to keep the community in order.



Figure 3.2 Example of answering questions posted by Participant B and C

⁵ Participants' usernames and profile pictures in figures of the thesis are hid to protect their identities.



Figure 3.3 Example of showing appreciation posted by Participant C



Figure 3.4 Example of chatting posted by Participant C



Figure 3.5 Example of contributing knowledge posted by Participant A



Figure 3.6 Example of asking questions posted by Participant D

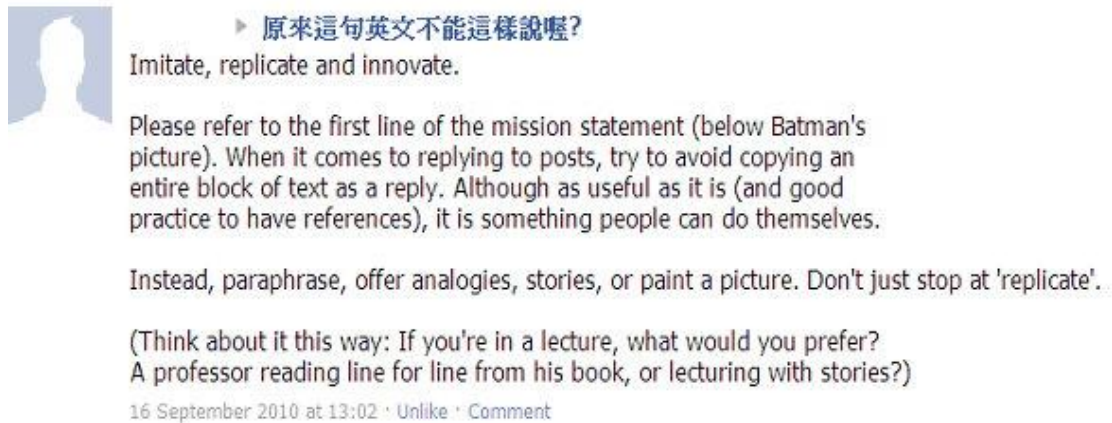


Figure 3.7 Example of suggesting posting rules posted by Participant A

The one-year online observation was divided into three stages, namely, April 17, 2010 to August 2010, September 2010 to December 2010, and January 2011 to April 2011. The first stage was the period of online observation for recruiting target participants. After four-month online observation, the second stage was the time of deciding the target participants and giving the first interview. After nearly four months, the third stage started and then ended after the second interview. Comparing mediated actions emerged in three continuous stages, the changes of participants' mediated actions and its underlying factors were readily revealed. In addition, participants' different types of mediated actions were also compared to elicit what respective participants did in their participation of the online learning community.

Analysis of Different Data

In addition to the analysis of online entries by grounded theory, the study also adopted Engeström's (1987, 1999) model of activity theory (see Figure 3.8) as the

analytic framework to examine different sources of data, including online entries, observation notes, and the interview data. The model of activity theory was used to identify participants' activity systems and its tensions within their activity systems. The six components of activity theory model, namely subject, object, mediating artifacts, rules, community, and division of labor, constantly interact with one another and intertwine together to achieve the final outcome gradually. In the current research, the six components in an activity system were operationally defined as follows:

1. Subject: four participants and their subject agency, such as their personal background and past learning experiences;
2. Object: the goals of engaging in the online community. That is, objects were community members' expectation toward participating in the discussion of the online learning community;
3. Mediating artifacts: materials or tools utilized in the process of engaging in the online community, such as *Facebook* and online resources. Additionally, languages community members used in interacting with other members were also mediating artifacts;
4. Community: community members who posted online as well as those who read or replied to the entries in the online learning community;
5. Rules: the regulations and net etiquette of posting on the *Facebook* page. For example, the founder of the *Facebook* page set rules of posting questions in the online community;
6. Division of labor: interactions and power relationships among the community members.

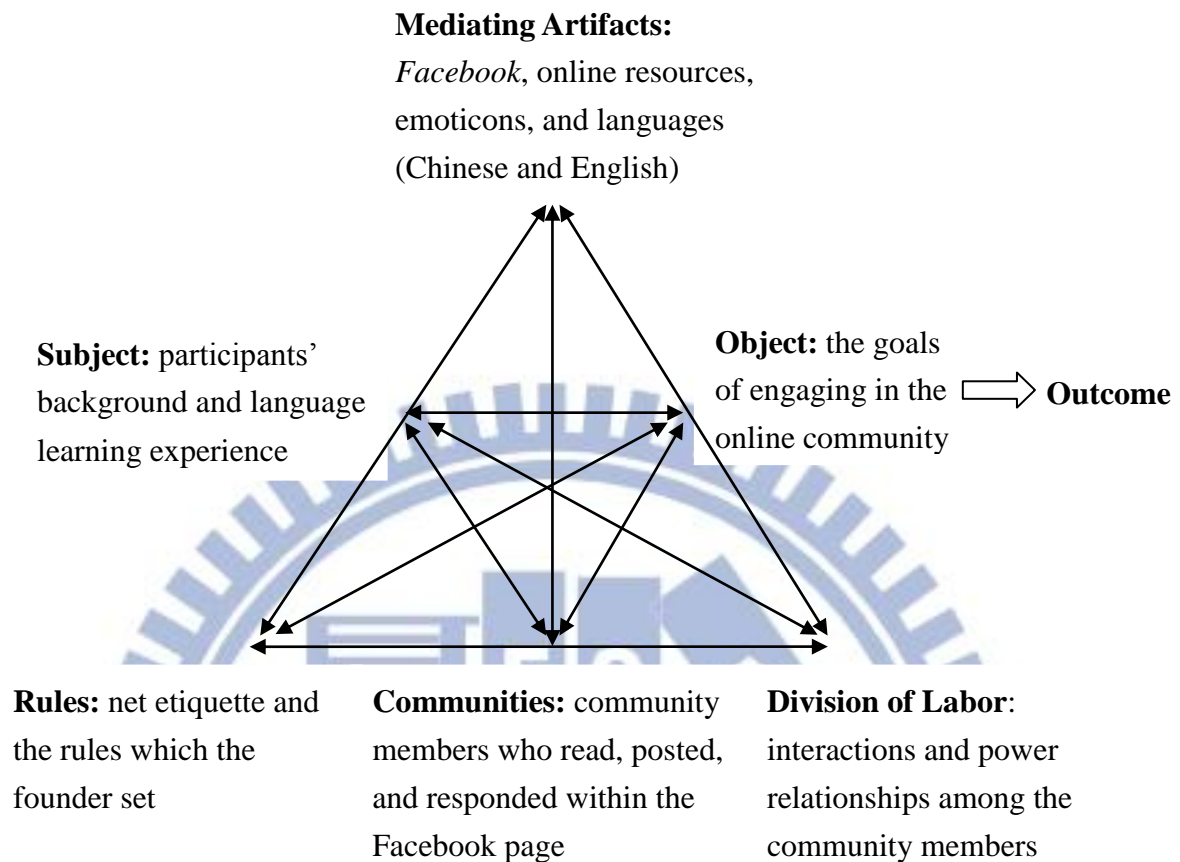


Figure 3.8 Six components of activity system in the current study

Data Analysis Procedure

In the process of data analysis, the researcher used analytic induction (Silverman, 2006) and constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for the analysis of the online observation field notes and interview data. Analytic induction generated themes and categories from online entries, field notes and interviews based on the six components of activity theory. Then, the data was analyzed through a constant interplay between analysis and data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In this study, the researcher first examined the four participants' online entries and categorized them into the six types of mediated actions. The mediated actions were compared according to respective participants and three observation stages. This

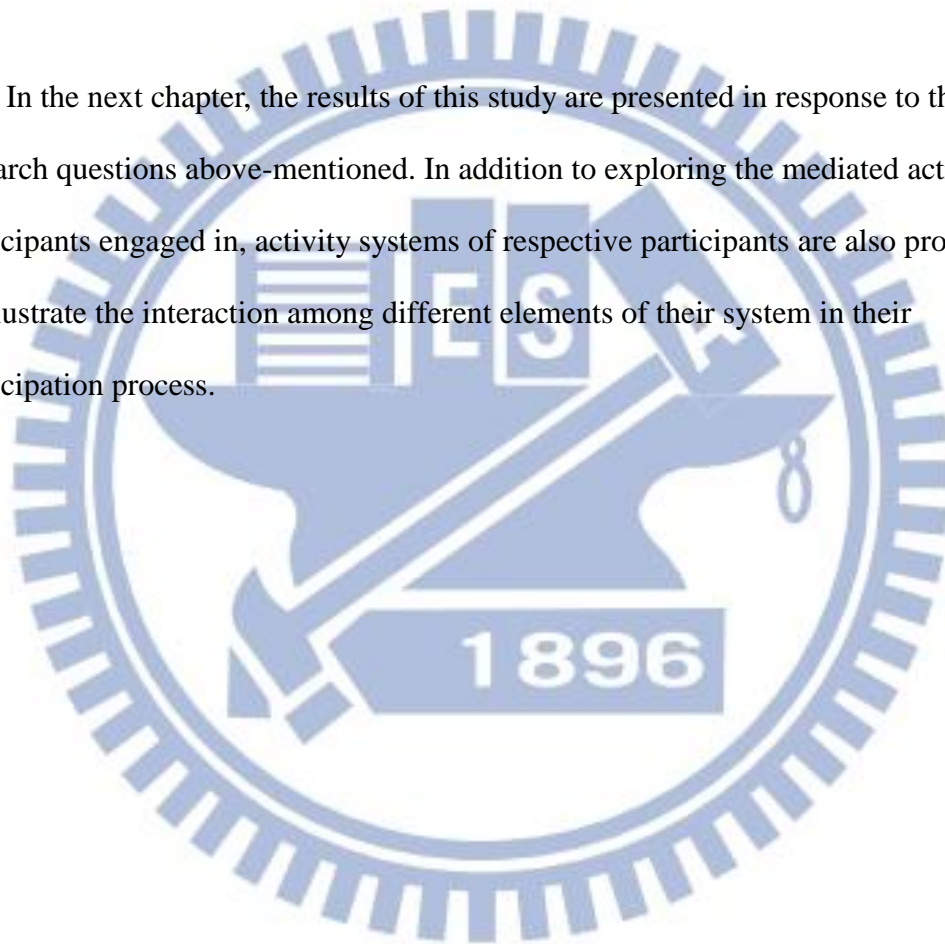
helped the researcher have a preliminary understanding of participants' participation in the learning community. Second, the researcher further analyzed interview data according to the components of activity theoretical framework. In this process, the researcher first compiled the online interview logs and transcribed the telephone interviews. Next, the researcher read through the online logs and transcription and reviewed them for general impression of participants' thoughts of the online experiences. Then, the researcher read the data again and marked phrases connected to the ideas of the six factors in activity systems. Third, the researcher mapped out the relationship of the six components within individual participants' activity systems. During the process of coding, the researcher tended to clarify how these six components interacted with each other and discovered the underlying factors of the interaction within an activity system.

Trustworthiness

To achieve the trustworthiness of the methodology, the current study applied two approaches: triangulation of data and member checking. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), "the use of triangulation reflects the attempts to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p.1) and is also a good way to achieve validation. Therefore, to increase the credibility of the study in qualitative research, the study collects multiple data which consist of online observation, field notes, and interviews with the participants. These multiple data triangulated to acquire the holistic picture of the data. In addition to collecting data from multiple sources, the data, such as observation, was undertaken in a continuous way. This study kept observing the online learning community for one year and cross-checking the data presented in this study at different time which implied triangulation of a single data source.

The study also adopted member checking technique to establish the trustworthiness. Member checking is used to verify and to avoid false interpretations of the data. It is used to ensure that the themes emerging from the data are not biased but truthful and reflect true experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). In this study, member checking was done after the interviews. The participants were asked to examine the accuracy of transcribed interview and online interview logs.

In the next chapter, the results of this study are presented in response to the research questions above-mentioned. In addition to exploring the mediated actions participants engaged in, activity systems of respective participants are also provided to illustrate the interaction among different elements of their system in their participation process.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter first presents participants' participation in this online learning community. Then, individual participants' mediated actions and the underlying factors are presented through the lens of activity theory. Finally, the participants' perceptions of the online experiences in this community are reported.

Mediated Actions in the Online English Learning Community

In the online learning community, community members participated in the discussion of the *Facebook* page. They posted messages on the wall of the *Facebook* page and got involved in the discussion with other community members. In total, the four participants posted 2,256 entries from April 2010 to April 2011. The entries can be categorized into two major types of participation, replying and initiating messages. They were identified from the 2,256 entries by grounded theory approach: (1) answering questions, (2) showing appreciation, (3) chatting, (4) contributing knowledge, (5) asking questions, and (6) suggesting posting rules.

Table 4.1 displays types and frequencies of the four participants' mediated actions in this online learning community during the data collection time. As shown in Table 4.1, the frequency of replying messages (96.1%) was much higher than that of initiating message (3.9%). The distribution of participation revealed that the participants of this study mainly replied messages in this online learning community. In *replying messages*, the most frequently occurring mediated action was answering questions, accounting for 85.3%. Showing appreciation and chatting occurred with a lower percentage, 6.2% and 4.6%, respectively. On the contrary, the occurrence of *initiating messages* was considerably low, ranging from 0.2% to 3.0%.

Table 4.1

Types and frequency of participants' mediated actions

Types of mediated actions	Frequency	Percentage
Replying messages		
Answering questions	1,925	85.3
Showing appreciation	140	6.2
Chatting	104	4.6
Total	2,169	96.1
Initiating messages		
Contributing knowledge	67	3.0
Asking questions	16	0.7
Suggesting posting rules	4	0.2
Total	87	3.9

Note. In total, the four participants posted 2,256 entries in the *Facebook* page. Data were retrieved from April 2010 to April 2011.

In order to get an inclusive picture of different participants' mediated actions, individual participants' entries were further classified according to three time frames as shown in Table 4.2. All of the four participants contributed to the online learning community. In *replying messages*, every participant replied messages for answering community members' questions, showing appreciation, and chatting with other community members. Nevertheless, the distribution of the types of mediated actions varied. For example, in *initiating messages*, only Participant A actively contributed knowledge concerning language learning and suggested posting rules to community members and only Participant D asked questions related English learning.

In conclusion, all of them contributed to the online learning community. They all answered English questions and had social interaction with community members. Nevertheless, in terms of types of mediated actions, Participant A and D's mediated actions were quite different from that of other participants. Participant A mainly contributed knowledge and suggested posting rules while Participant D asked English

questions in the online learning community. In other words, some particular participants did particular mediated actions in the learning community.

Table 4.2
Types and frequencies of mediated actions in three stages

Participant	Participant A			Participant B			Participant C			Participant D			
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	
Replying messages													
Answering questions	454	233	66	293	198	88	41	142	26	86	226	72	
Showing appreciation	32	28	8	9	5	3	8	10	1	5	26	5	
Chatting	31	23	6	11	8	2	4	4	2	2	7	4	
Initiating messages													
Contributing knowledge	26	11	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Asking questions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	6	0	
Suggesting posting rules	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Subtotal	Frequency	544	298	110	313	211	93	53	156	29	103	265	81
	Percentage	57	31	12	51	34	15	22	66	12	23	59	18
Total	952			617			238			449			

Note. 1. The one-year observation was divided into three stages lasting for four to four and half months. The 1st stage was from 2010/04/17-2010/08; the 2nd stage was from 2010/09-2010/12; the 3rd stage was from 2011/01-2011/04. 2. Participant A and B started to participate in the *Facebook* page in April 2010 since the observation began while Participant C and D started to join the *Facebook* page in July 2010 which was at the later of 1st stage.

With regard to the total frequency of their mediated actions, it is found that Participant A contributed most with 952 entries followed by Participant B and D (617 and 449 entries) while Participant C contributed least with 238 entries. Furthermore, examining their participation from three different stages, some significant results, related to the time they participated, were observed. Figure 4.1 further shows the four participants' mediated actions trends in the learning community over the three time frames.

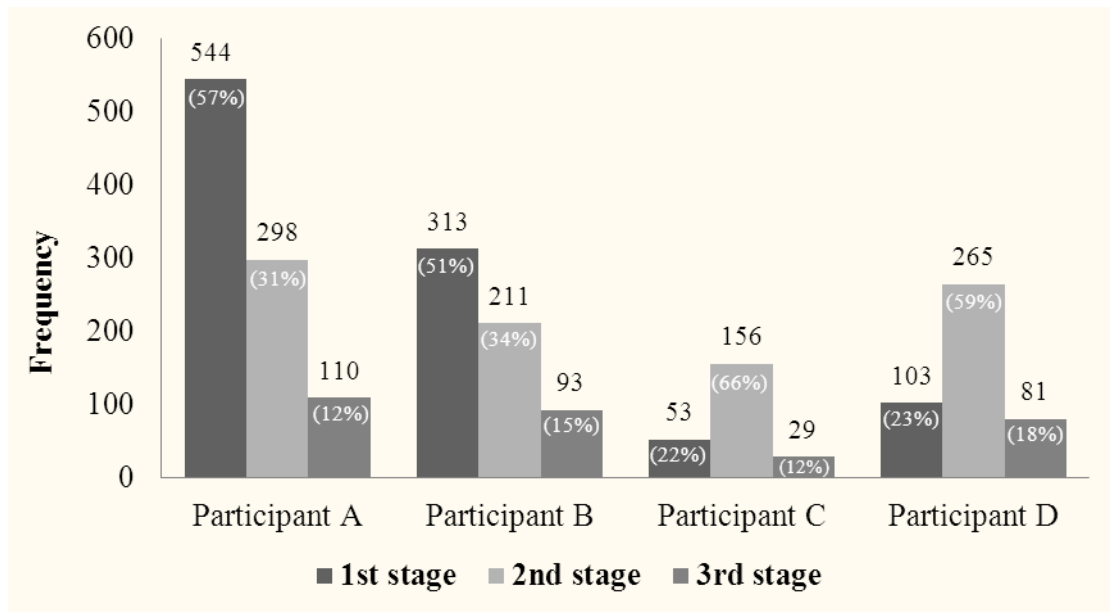


Figure 4.1 Mediated action trends over the three observation stages

As shown in Table 4.2 and Figure 4.1, the frequency of Participant A and B's mediated actions occurred most at the first stage, accounting for 544(57%) and 313(51%), respectively, which occupied over half of their total mediated actions. Then, the frequency of their mediated actions decreased through the last two stages. At the third stage, the frequency of Participant A and B's mediated actions declined substantially to 110(12%) and 93(15%), respectively. As for Participant C and D, because they started to participate in the community from July 2010 in the end of the first observation stage, both their mediated actions occurred little at the first stage, accounting for 53(22%) and 103(23%), respectively. However, the frequency of their mediated actions rapidly increased from the first stage through the second stage and then sharply decreased at the third stage. At the second stage, they participated in the learning community actively. Participant C and D posted most at the second stage, representing 156(66%) and 265(59%), dominating the half of their total mediated actions. Similar to Participant A and B, Participant C and D's mediated actions decreased at the third stage. The frequency of their mediated actions from the second

stage to the third stage decreased at only 29(12%) and 81(18%), respectively. All in all, all their mediated actions decreased through the time they participated.

To conclude, the results of the first section revealed two phenomena of the participants' mediated actions in the learning community. First, different participants demonstrated different types of mediated actions in the learning community. Second, the four participants' mediated actions generally decreased over the time they joined the online learning community.

Mediated Actions and the Underlying Factors in the Online English Learning Community

Examining the four participants' cases through the analytical lens of activity theory, their participation in the *Facebook* page was seen as the mediated actions in the activity systems. This section presents each participant's mediated actions and their activity system analysis in the online learning community.

Participant A

“Jokes are a big part of me. I’m a guy who likes to tell jokes and appreciate good jokes. This place is somewhere for me to tell jokes. If no one else is joking on the page, I’m getting bored with it.” (Interview #1, October 15, 2010)

Participant A’s mediated actions in the online English learning community

As revealed from previous section, Participant A posted 952 entries in total during his one-year participation. From the online observation, it was found that Participant A regularly visited the online learning community and actively participated in the discussion by providing answers in the learning community. At the beginning, he posted messages every day. He also interacted with other community members, such as showing appreciation or chatting with them. In addition, different from other

participants, he contributed knowledge to the community and suggested posting rules to other community members. In general, Participant A's mediated actions in the learning community included answering questions, contributing knowledge to the community, interacting with community members, and suggesting posting rules to community members.

In the *Facebook* page, Participant A mainly provided answers with clear explanations or examples. Because of his unique learning experience and background, his mediated actions were quite different from most community members who mainly asked questions in the *Facebook* page. Participant A, born in the U.S., had lived in Taiwan for seven years from the age of six and then went to a senior high school in Sweden. After graduating from high school, he continued his studies in the U.K. and he lived there until the data collection time. He learned several languages including English, Chinese, and Swedish. He perceived his first language as English and his second language as Chinese. Owing to his learning background in English-speaking countries, he considered himself as a competent English speaker. In the *Facebook* page, Participant A's answers usually provided explanations and examples to help community members solve English problems. He described himself and other members as a "big team" who worked around the clock and tried to respond to members' questions with all efforts, as he wrote in one entry (see Figure 4.2).



Figure 4.2 Participant A's self-description of his participation

In addition to responding to other members' questions, Participant A regularly initiated entries titled "daily contribution" which was a self-created title by him (see Figure 4.3). The daily contribution included an English phrase with its definition, example sentences, and Chinese translation. During his one-year participation, he initiated 67 daily contribution entries in total. He came up with these English phrases on his own, as he described about his daily contribution in interview, "I hear these [common idioms and phrases] everyday...I didn't use a reference for them..."(Interview #2, April 15, 2011).

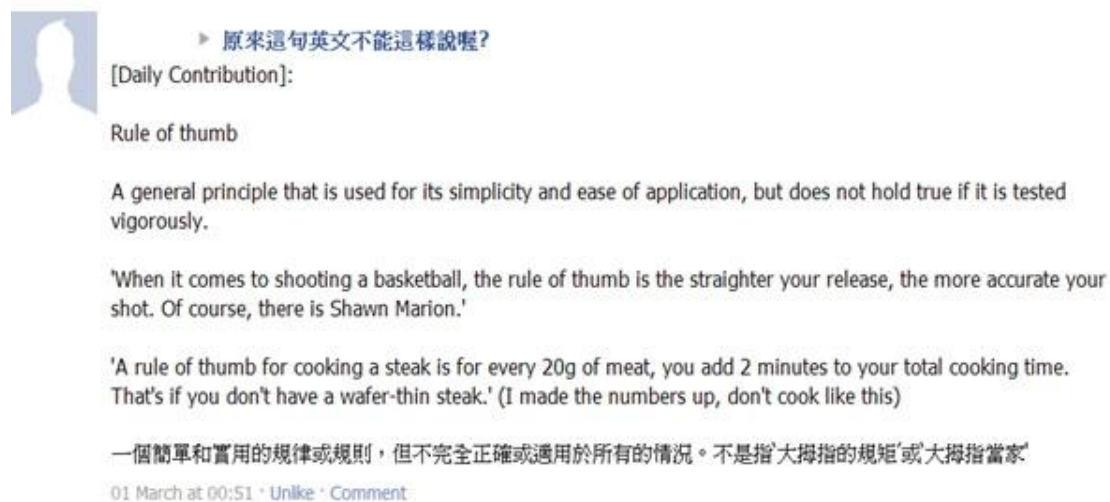


Figure 4.3 Example of Participant A's "daily contribution" entry

Other than contributing to the community, the interaction with other community members kept Participant A participating in the discussion. The motive which made him keep engaging in the discussion intensively was appreciation from other community members and the pleasure he got from bantering with community members. He received much appreciation from other community members to contribute more and more in the learning community. Furthermore, he also joked with them when providing answers to community members. Figure 4.4 demonstrates an example of his joke comments.



Figure 4.4 Example of Participant A's joke comment

He enjoyed joking with community members and got a lot fun from it. As he said,

I like jokes...I believe jokes are a big part of me. I think I'm a guy who likes to tell jokes and appreciates good jokes. What I try to do is making the online experience fun. If no one else is joking on the page, I'm getting bored with it. (Interview #1, October 15, 2010)

He further noted, "Since I lived in the U.K. for quite some time, people generally have a sense of humor, often involving sarcasm and irony" (Interview #1, October 15, 2010). Because of the environment where he was situated, he got used to exchanging banter with friends. He loved joking and appreciated good jokes which made by members in the community. He tried to make this online experience fun which made him keep participating in the learning community. At the beginning, there were a lot of questions asking some interesting Chinese-English translation. These interesting questions made Participant A participate in the discussion actively and enthusiastically. He enjoyed answering the questions and made jokes in the answers. However, as time went by, the questions asked by community members became complicated and mundane. Therefore, when there was no room to joke, the enthusiasm of participating in the discussion started to decrease.

The community was also a key factor which influenced his participation. The community founder played a vital role to affect Participant A to take the responsibility to suggest posting rules to community members. The community founder was quite

active at the beginning of the *Facebook* page. When talking about Batman, Participant A said, “Batman was quite active at the beginning. We all used to chat and joke. But after this whole group snowballed into this massive *Facebook* page that it is today, Batman was not here as often as before” (Interview #2, April 15, 2011). According to the online observation, Batman posted his last message in the *Facebook* page in December 2010 after the *Facebook* page was founded for eight months. After that, Batman disappeared and did not administrate the *Facebook* page anymore.

Due to the lack of management, there was so much spam posted on the wall of the *Facebook* page and the situation became worse and worse. Participant A mentioned the spam invasion,

Well, lots of *Facebook* page advertising agents come here and spam. I've sent them packing since I like this place to be clean...I personally don't like it, but I'm not in charge. I tried once [to contact Batman] to take over the *Facebook* page...but no response [from Batman]. It is rather hard to get his/her attention without being too obvious as I can't send him/her private message, nor do I know who s/he is. I'll be happy with the ability to delete some spams and keep things in order. (Interview #2, April 15, 2011)

Participant A loved this *Facebook* community which provided him a place to interact with others and get fun from it. He did not want this place to be ruined so he thought about taking over the *Facebook* page. However, he did not know how to do it without the *Facebook* page founder's authorization. One incident happened which made him start to take the responsibility to remind community members to follow the posting rules in the community. He initiated one entry shown in Figure 4.5. Participant A reminded community members to follow the rule when replying to entries. He asked members not to copy and paste things from the Internet. He posted this request which aimed at one member's replies in the *Facebook* page.



▶ 原來這句英文不能這樣說喔?

Imitate, replicate and innovate.

Please refer to the first line of the mission statement (below Batman's picture). When it comes to replying to posts, try to avoid copying an entire block of text as a reply. Although as useful as it is (and good practice to have references), it is something people can do themselves.

Instead, paraphrase, offer analogies, stories, or paint a picture. Don't just stop at 'replicate'.

(Think about it this way: If you're in a lecture, what would you prefer? A professor reading line for line from his book, or lecturing with stories?)

16 September 2010 at 13:02 · Unlike · Comment

Figure 4.5 Example of Participant A's rule suggested

According to the online observation, the member always worked hard to provide detailed and clear information from the Internet in his every reply. However, Participant A did not appreciate his method of providing answers in which some mistakes were found in the answers. He described this incident in the interview,

There is this guy who used to copy and paste things off the web. I just made a joke and said it's best not to do it, and the forum rules stated it's better to search things first themselves. [I posted it] because he has made quite a lot of mistakes. I backtracked his entries, and found a number of grammatical mistakes in his response, and he's rather active. So, I thought someone should intervene and I had to put an end to that. (Interview #1, October 15, 2010)

He further added on, "I would like to take over the group. For some members, their involvements exceed their English proficiency. I believe it is becoming a serious hazard that can spiral out of control if unchecked" (Interview #1, October 15, 2010).

He wanted everything in order in the community so he stood up to suggest rules to remind community members to follow. In this incident, he acted to moderate the learning community.

Factors influencing Participant A's mediated actions

Analyzing Participant A's mediated actions through an activity theory perspective, it is found that his participation in the learning community was

influenced by his language background, previous experiences, his object of participation in the community, and the contextual factors from the community.

Participant A's distinct subject agency which was different from other members deeply affected his mediated actions. Because of Participant A's native English proficiency, he always felt confident in providing answers and contributing English knowledge to the community. Thus, he actively provided answers in the learning community. Moreover, his learning background also shaped his choice and rule of language use in the online community. Because of his learning experience in native speaking environment, he believed that the use of Chinese may hinder English learning. Therefore, he preferred to use English as the main mediating artifact in writing entries of the English learning community. Furthermore, Participant A's humorous personality was an influential factor which trigger him to set his object of participating in the English learning community. His object of getting involved in the community was to get fun from chatting with community members with his humorous language. This object directed him to interact with community members a lot. During the process of bantering with community members, he got a lot of fun from the interaction which made him keep participating in the community.

Other than the influence of his subject agency and object, the interactive relations between contextual factors were found to influence Participant A's participation. First, the community members influenced Participant A's use of language in the entries. Initially, he only used English as his written tool since he believed Chinese may hinder English learning. However, several members asked him to add more Chinese translations and explanations to make his answers more clearly. Participant A replied to the member, "I still prefer not to use Mandarin in entries unless absolutely necessary, because it does hinder learning slightly. However, I can always include a line or two in Mandarin if it helps you pick up the pace" (*Facebook*

entry, January 17, 2011; see Figure 4.6). Thus, he started to add some Chinese but English was the main language tool in mediating his participation. Second, the change of the community influenced Participant A's participation. When the questions in the community were not interesting anymore, Participant A did not get involved in the discussion as often as he did at the first two time frames. Third, the division of labor shaped the power relations to regulate his participation in the online learning community. As a native speaker of English, he possessed more power to make his voice heard in this English learning community. In the *Facebook* page, he acted to respond to questions and contribute English knowledge actively, and to suggest posting rules. He dominated the discussion in the learning community. Hence, he was in a higher status than other members in the community. Furthermore, the higher status equipped him with the power to suggest posting rules to other community.



Figure 4.6 Participant A's reply to the member who asked to add Chinese in entries

Participant B

"In the process of reading answers and finding answers on my own, I learn a lot. I feel content when I learn a new idea or an expression. Actually, I not only learn new words and phrases, but also the art of expression, very often with deep cultural significance embedded." (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

Participant B's mediated actions in the online English learning community

Participant B posted 617 entries which ranked second in the number of entries among the four participants. As shown in Table 4.2, Participant B only replied messages in the *Facebook* page. He replied messages to answer questions, show appreciation to community members, and chat with community members.

As an English learner in Taiwan, he assessed his own English proficiency as intermediate rather than advanced for the lack of much English input and exposure to an English speaking environment. For Participant B, the English learning community provided him opportunities to acquire English phrases out of class. As he said,

In the process of reading answers and finding answers on my own, I learn a lot. I feel content when I learn a new idea or an expression. Actually, I not only learn new words and phrases, but also the art of expression, very often with deep cultural significance embedded. It's always interesting to learn something you don't know. (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

In the English learning community, he learned English phrases by reading the entries and finding answers for community members. Joining the English learning community helped him learn English phrases, especially slangs, colloquial and situational usages with deep cultural significance.

In addition to learning language in the community, Participant B also had social interaction with other members. He and some community members chitchatted their life and background. When talking about the online experience, Participant B remarked,

When replying questions in the page, sometimes we go off-topic. It is a way to communicate with other members, just chitchatting. It is something funny or interesting. We are not paid to teach English. So why not? It is not our job, and we are here for leisure. (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

Apparently, Participant B enjoyed social interaction with community members. The

social interaction in the learning community supported him to keep participating in the discussion of the community. As he said,

I am interested in chit-chatting... I participated because it is entertaining to me. Sometimes, I answered a question because I can make fun of it. It is going to get more attention from me than one that's boring. (Interview #2, April 10, 2011)

Therefore, when other community members did not participate in the online community as actively as before, Participant B started to decrease his participation. As noted by him, "Because of their less participation, interaction in the community decreases. This cuts down my enthusiasm and devotion in getting involved in the community." (Interview #2, April 10, 2011).

In addition to the changes of community members, the frequency of *Facebook* page founder's participation decreased. As noted before, the absence of the founder, Batman, resulted in the lack of management in the *Facebook* page. Participant B commented on this situation,

There are so many advertisement and stuff going on here, which is annoying. I am not so happy with non-action by the batman...either he should spend some time moderating the group, or allow other people to moderate it. I just don't want to see a good and useful discussion group to rot. (Interview #2, April 10, 2011)

Similar to Participant A, Participant B also felt frustrated about the situation and unhappy with the non-action by the *Facebook* page founder. However, he could not do anything to change the situation. Different from Participant A, who moderated the community, Participant B gradually started to spend less time and effort participating in this learning community.

Factors influencing Participant B's mediated actions

Similar to Participant A, when examining Participant B from an activity theory perspective, Participant B's subject agency and object along with the contextual factors from the community altogether affected his mediated actions in the learning

community.

Participant B brought distinct agency to shape his intended object for participation in the community as well as the mediational means he used in his participation. Since he learned English in Taiwan, he lacked the learning opportunities in acquiring English colloquial phrases. This *Facebook* page provided him a place to learn English. In the online learning community, community members discussed the use of English phrases and the translated Chinese colloquial phrases. Participant B discussed English with community members and tried his best to answer questions from other community members. In general, his object of getting involved in the discussion of the *Facebook* page was to learn English out of schooling contexts.

In Participant B's participation in the online discussion, he always tried his best to find out the answers to the questions. Sometimes he used Internet tools such as Internet search engines, online dictionary, and Wiki websites to get information. In the process of participation, he learned English and something that he can not get from normal English classes in Taiwan. In addition to using Internet tools as mediating artifacts, language was one mediational tool to help Participant B get involved in the online discussion. Same as Participant A, Participant B tended to mainly use English as his mediated tool in his entries since he believed that English should be used while learning English. Because Participant B learned English in Taiwan, he considered that the use of English was necessary in successful English learning. In conclusion, the choice of the mediating artifacts was the outcomes of his belief which can be traced back to his language learning experience.

Other than the influence of subject and object, the community also affected Participant B's participation. The community involved in Participant B's activity system included the community members who interacted with him and the community founder. First, the involvement of members' participation influenced

Participant B's enthusiasm of participation. Participant B enjoyed interacting with community members. The social interaction kept him joining the discussion of English learning. However, when the interaction with community members became less, the participation in the discussion became less. Second, the decreasing participation of community founder also affected Participant B's participation. At the later stage, the community founder did not appear and administrate the community. The disordered *Facebook* page did not fascinate Participant B anymore. In the end, Participant B's enthusiasm of participation in the discussion was gradually reduced.

Participant C

"It gives me a sense of belonging – I am still a Chinese no matter where I am, and I love it! Most important of all, I'm speaking to people whom I can relate. I like to stay connected to my language. I wish I had a real Chinese social circle."
(Interview #1, October 9, 2010)

Participant C's mediated actions in the online English learning community

Participant C started to participate in the community in July 2010, which was later than the time when Participation A and B participated. As shown in Table 4.2, Participant C posted 238 entries, the least number among the four participants' entries numbers. Similar to Participate B, she mainly replied message in the *Facebook* page. She replied message to answer questions, show appreciation to community members, and chat with community members.

Compared to other participants, she engaged in the learning community with a rather different intention. Her object of participating in the discussion of the community was to get involved in a Chinese community which gave her a sense of belonging. Being a Chinese having lived aboard for over twenty years, she felt homesick for being surrounded by English-speaking people. Participant C went to the

U.S. and has lived there since she was 16 years old. She married an American and had a lovely kid. She spoke English not only at work but also with her family in her daily life. For her, this *Facebook* page which was made of people from Taiwan was a Chinese community in the cyber space. In this online learning community for Chinese speakers, Participant C could use her native language, Chinese, to communicate with members of the community. Even more, she became their friend or teacher who helped their English. Since she helped those community members to learn English, she made a lot of friends in the *Facebook* page. In other words, she made friends by providing answers to community members. For her, interaction with community members who shared the same language and whose background was similar to her made her feel comfortable in the community. She further remarked, “Participating in this *Facebook* page is like visiting a relative whom I haven’t seen in a while. I am related to them but I don’t get to see them much” (Interview #1, October 9, 2010). For her, the goal of participating in the community was to have the sense of belonging to a Chinese community.

From the involvement in the community, she gained some friendships and broadened her social cyber network. As she commented on her online experiences, “I have made a couple of friends that are really helpful to my personal growth (Interview #2, April 5, 2011). According to online observation, it was found that she made *Facebook* friends with members from the English learning *Facebook* page and even interacted with them on her own “Wall” of *Facebook*. Since she had made friends from the *Facebook* page and formed her own social networking with those friends on the Internet, she gradually left the *Facebook* page after she participated in the community for several months.

Factors influencing Participant C's mediated actions

Through the activity theoretical perspective, Participant C's mediated actions were influenced by her personal background, her object of participation and the choice of language use in her participation. In addition, the contextual factors rooted within the community caused her to participate less in the later stage of her participation.

Subject agency was an influential element in Participant C's participation. Her personal background resulted in her eagerness to access a Chinese community to relieve her homesick. In the online community for English learners, she interacted with community members who were from the same country and spoke the same language with her. Her object of getting involved in the discussion was to have connections to people whom she could relate to. It was obvious that her subject agency, life background, determined her object of participating in the language learning community. In addition, her subject agency also affected her choice of mediating artifacts. She used both Chinese and English in her entries. The use of Chinese reminded her about her Chinese identity. In this English learning community for Chinese, she could use Chinese as a communicative tool to interact with people.

The social interaction with community members fulfilled Participant C's object of getting involved in the *Facebook* page. In the process of having social interaction with community members, she gained friendship which made her feel warm and got a sense of belonging to a Chinese community. In addition, some community members became her *Facebook* friends. She formed her social network with these community members on *Facebook*. Since her object of participating in the *Facebook* page had been satisfied, the time she invested in her participation in the *Facebook* page gradually decreased.

Participant D

“My main action here was sharing. I provided more information than others. It’s like learning by teaching. In the meanwhile, I also read other members’ entries and searched information [related to the questions asked by community members]. It’s human nature to share things with others.” (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

Participant D’s mediated actions in the online English learning community

Participant D posted 449 entries in total during his nine-month participation in the *Facebook* page. As shown in Table 4.2, he invested a lot of time and efforts in providing answers of the questions asked by community members. In his replies, he always provided a block of paragraph which contained clear explanations and answers (Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7 Example of Participant D’s answer

In the *Facebook* page, community members raised many English questions.

Participant D considered these English questions as a test or practice to examine his

English ability. When answering these questions, he provided what he knew to the community members and searched for what he did not know from the Internet.

Furthermore, he shared information which he searched from the Internet with community members. In the participation, he learned a lot from answering questions, sharing information, and reading entries in the English learning *Facebook* page. As he described his online experiences in the learning community,

My main action here was sharing. I provided more information than others. It's like learning by teaching. In the meanwhile, I also read other members' entries and searched information [related to the questions asked by community members]. (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

In addition to replying to questions, he also raised questions regarding English learning. He had been learning English for forty years since he was in a junior high school. He described his English learning experiences as follows.

I learn English in Taiwan. I've never lived abroad. It's hard to learn English successfully in Taiwan. Being an English learner in our generation, we learn English in a rote way. As for learning English in an English-speaking country, those learners use English as a communicative tool to interact with people. They learn the language and its culture. This is what we can't have in Taiwan. (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

He learned English in a traditional way in Taiwan. In his English learning, he memorized Chinese-English translation from textbooks. He thought that this way of learning English was useless in enhancing communicative ability. Sometimes, he felt depressed about his weakness in English. However, in this Internet age, he started to learn English by innovative Internet tools. In his words, "The Internet is a good tool in English learning. It is easy to search any colloquial languages on the Internet"

(Interview #1, October 11, 2010). From the Internet, he got a lot of online resources in learning English. He joined many *Facebook* pages which were about English learning. For Participant D, the goal of participating in the *Facebook* page was to learn English

and advance his English ability.

In Participant D's participation, he not only answered or asked questions on the *Facebook* page but also had social interaction with community members. Participant D reported that the appreciation from community members in the *Facebook* page made him more encouraged in engaging in the discussion. In addition, community members' comments were found to influence Participant D's participation in the discussion of the community. An overseas community member posted an entry which suggested rules and asked for all community members to follow. In the entry, the member asked all community members not to copy and paste the whole paragraph from the Internet and further noted that this behavior was a kind of imitation. However, the entry seemed to aim at Participant D's entries since he always provided long and detailed answers that he searched from the Internet. When talking about this incident in the first interview, Participant D said,

His [the member's] personal opinions could be acceptable, if he imitated the little bird to say something softly and privately. Why doesn't he just think to himself, "To each his own!" which means "Different People Have Different Preferences" or "Different Strokes for Different Folks." Here is the wonderful world for everyone who wants to learn and share! Who actually has the conn to decide what and how we present our thoughts? (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

Obviously, Participant D was really upset about the member's opinions about the rule of posting. He believed that every community member had the right to post in their own way. No one should intervene to regulate the way of posting or sharing. As he said,

The *Facebook* page is for English learning. If you don't like it, just skip it. Do not strike other's morale. We do not have great language talent like him. In the *Facebook* page, this is my choice to present answers like that. In learning, there are smart ways as well as stupid ways of learning English. I think he, as a near-native speaker, never understands how we learn English. (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

After the incident, Participant D adjusted his way of posting. He tried to shorten his response in the entries. According to him, “Yeah, I tried to make my responses brief and short. Sometimes, I even skip the questions. Because someone doesn’t like my responses in this *Facebook* page...” (Interview #1, October 11, 2010). Apparently, his participation in the discussion was influenced because of this incident. His passion for providing answers was cut down and was not as strong as it was at the beginning. In the second interview, Participant D further remarked his less participation,

I’ve mentioned that person in the first interview. My participation might be affected by him. It is obvious that he tries to dominate the *Facebook* page. Surely, I can’t compete against him with my English ability. He’s a little arrogant. When getting involved in the discussion, he won’t stop until he wins the argument. I don’t like it! I don’t want to get involved in the argument. So, I left the group. (Interview #2, April 10, 2010)

In addition to the community members, the *Facebook* page founder also played a critical role in his participation. Like other participants in the study, Participant D complained the disappearance of the *Facebook* page founder. He did not like the spam invasion in the *Facebook* page and felt upset about Batman’s non-action and non-participation. Similar to other participants, owing to the lack of management, Participant D did not join the discussion as often as before.

Factors influencing Participant D’s mediated actions

Examining Participant D’s case through the lens of activity theory, it was found that his learning background, his object, and the use of mediating artifacts were interwoven together in his activity system. In addition, the contextual factors from the community also influenced the change of his participation.

Participant D carried his subject agency to choose his object of participating in the community. Because of Participant D’s language learning experience and study background, his object of getting involved in the discussion of the English learning

community was to learn and practice his English. As an English learner who had never lived aboard, he was eager to have any opportunities to learn and practice English in his daily life. He considered this online learning community as a wonderful place for him to speak, write, and read English in his life.

With this object in mind, he tried to use English most of time in his entries. For him, the use of English was a way to practice English which was important in this EFL environment. However, he sometimes used Chinese in his entries when the entries were about English to Chinese translation. In addition to the use of language, he also employed Internet tools and English dictionary software to get information and present himself in the learning community. As he indicated,

I used search engines on the Internet. Also, I used several dictionaries in my computer. Whenever my mouse clicks on the word, its Chinese translation would show up. So, my ability of searching is better than others. I can search for information faster than other. Therefore, I can share more information than other. (Internet #2, April 10, 2010)

Participant D employed various tools to help him participate in the discussion. By the use of the Internet tools, he could provide as much as answers he wanted in the entries. Hence, he learned a lot from the information on the Internet. For him, in the process of participation, he not only shared information with community members but also learned English. Therefore, it was found that the use of mediating artifacts was affected by both the subject and the object in Participant D's activity system.

Concerning the community, the community members and the *Facebook* page founder regulated Participant D's participation. In Participant D's activity system, the comments from community members affected his enthusiasm of participation. For example, the appreciation from community members encouraged him to keep participating in the discussion. However, one overseas community member suggested posting rules changed Participant D's way of posting and even made him decrease his

participation in the *Facebook* page. With regard to the interaction with those community members who has lived aboard, there were interactive relations found in the division of labor. According to the interview, Participant D's subject agency deemed himself as an English learner whose language proficiency was not as good as those who lived overseas. He had to rely on Internet tools to search for information and provide answers. However, the style of providing answers was criticized by the overseas member. In Participant D's activity system, the interaction with this overseas community member made him being in a lower status in the community. Consequently, because of the overseas member's suggestion, Participant D shortened his entries and gradually reduced his time and effort to this community. Other than the community members, the decrease of the community founder's participation also affected Participant D's participation. Due to the non-participation of the community founder, the *Facebook* page was disordered. In the end, Participant D did not participate in the discussion as often as before.

Perceptions of Engaging in the Online English Learning Community

The interview data retrieved from two interviews revealed that the four participants had similar perceptions toward their online experiences but all changed their perceptions at the later stage of their participation. Their perceptions of their participation can be illustrated in two time frames: at the beginning and at the end of data collection.

At the Beginning Stage

At the beginning of their participation, participants enthusiastically got involved in the discussion. They enjoyed the online experiences of answering questions and interacting with community members in the online learning community. Overall, they

had positive experiences in getting involved in the discussion of the learning community.

All of the participants enjoyed answering questions from other community members. They perceived the online experiences of providing answers to community members as an interesting activity. From figuring out community members' questions and providing answers to community members, they got a sense of achievement. For example, Participant A mentioned what he did and how he felt about his participation in the first interview,

Answering questions are like solving puzzles. If you get it right, you are excited...so I get that rush, too...well, rush is too strong a word for it but a sense of satisfaction is definitely there. I am an addict. Somebody needs to send me to rehab. (Interview #1, October 15, 2010)

Participant B also showed positive perception of this online experience in the first interview,

[I] read comments and answer questions [in this *Facebook* page]. [I feel] content when I learn a new idea or an expression; [I feel] excited at an eureka moment when answering questions (not necessarily correct answers; could be joking comments). Participating in this *Facebook* page is like being addicted to drugs, I guess (though I never am). (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

Similarly, Participant D described his experiences in the online learning community,

I was captivated by this! On the one hand, it is for whiling away the time. On the other hand, it is for brainstorming. That is, I'm learning English from this. I immersed myself in this community from the morning to the night! (Interview #1, October 11, 2010)

In addition, the four participants also enjoyed interacting with community members. They reported that receiving feedback to their entries from other community members was cheerful and encouraging, as Participant B noted in the interview, "When somebody likes my entries, I get an alert. Everybody likes to be

encouraged. I'm happy to get an encouragement...." (Interview #1, October 11, 2010).

Furthermore, communication and idea exchanging with community members were an important part of their participation. They considered the community members who exchanged idea with them as a team working together in the *Facebook* page. As

Participant A said,

People are friendly and helpful here. There are a lot of nice people contributing to the group. I get to know them from interacting with them. We become friends. [When answering questions,] we offer different things. We all jump in and take our turns. We like a group who provide answers to community members. (Interview #1, October 15, 2010)

All of the participants perceived the social interaction with community members as a way to gain friendship. They enjoyed the friendship which supported them in continuing participating in the discussion.

To conclude, all participants reported their positive experiences of answering questions and interacting with community members in the first interview. They enjoyed the rewarding and interesting experiences. They felt it was fun to participate in the *Facebook* page and the pleasant experiences made them keep investing time and efforts in this online learning community.

At the Later Stage

After six months of the first interview, they did not express strong emotion to the learning community as they did at the earlier stage. As Participant C remarked the change of her perception of the participation experiences, "I am not as excited about participating in the discussion as much. I have not really been participating as frequently as I did before" (Interview #2, April 5, 2011). After joining this learning community for several months, they were not as fascinated by the joy of participating in the *Facebook* page.

At the later stage of their participation, they considered their participation as a routine. As Participant B said, “After six months, visiting the *Facebook* page is like a daily routine. Just like brushing teeth after getting up...after I check my emails, I usually visit the *Facebook* page for leisure” (Interview #2, April 10, 2011).

Participants checked the *Facebook* page to see whether there was something interesting. They did not contribute to the community as much as before. Participant A noted his decrease in contribution in the second interview,

I guess since there are fewer new entries than before, I participate a little less. I think I, like many other senior participants who have been on the page since the beginning, we participate a little less than before. (Interview #2, April 15, 2011)

Similarly, Participant B also mentioned that there was a slight change of his participation in the second interview. He stated,

I now invest less time on this page. A few months ago, I visited this site on a daily basis and now on a weekly basis. Comparing to the time when the *Facebook* page was founded, the entries are less than before. (Interview #2, April 10, 2011)

These participants did not put focus on answering questions at the later stage of their participation. Instead, they perceived the *Facebook* page as a place to visit old friends and have fun. As Participant A described the purpose of his participation in the second interview,

I visit the *Facebook* page to see how my old friends are doing and kill time. I made a lot of friends here so I came back here to know how they were doing. It's like you went to a party, had fun, meet lot of new people and you will probably come back and visit them sometimes. (Interview #2, April 15, 2011)

To conclude, at first, participants had highly interest in participating in the discussion. They got a lot of enjoyment in answering questions and interacting with other *Facebook* page members. They felt excited about everything happened in the online community. They met people with similar background, made friends with them,

learned language together, and even enjoyed the joyful of sharing and providing answers. Thus, they poured a lot of time and energy into participating in this community. Nevertheless, as time went by, the enthusiasm that they had at the beginning slowly diminished. They did not have much interest in participating in the *Facebook* page than before. Visiting the *Facebook* page had become their daily routine. They invested less and less time and energy in participating in the discussion over the time they were in the *Facebook* page. From the online observation, the decreasing number of their entries also echoed the situation of lack of interest. Overall, these participants were full of enthusiasm in participation at first while as time went by, their enthusiasm was diminished at the later stage of their participation.

This chapter described each of the participants' mediated actions, the underlying factors, and their perceptions of the online experiences of the English learning community. In the following chapter, the findings of the study are further discussed. Finally, the summary of the study results, pedagogical implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research are also presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the findings are first summarized and discussed in depth to address the research questions of this study. Then, a summary of the study finding, pedagogical implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research are presented in the conclusion of the study.

Discussion

The findings of the current study are discussed to address the three research questions in this study.

Research question 1: How do community members mediate their actions in the online English learning community?

The study indicated that the community members mediated their actions to participate in the learning community. The analysis of the four participants' entries revealed that their mediated actions can be categorized into six types. Among the six types of mediated actions, they mediated to answer questions most of time. Although the four participants were all active to participate in the online community, they performed differently in the online learning community. Furthermore, the results of the study also indicated that the frequency of their mediated actions decreased over the time they joined the online learning community.

As Wenger (1998) suggested, participation involves actions as well as relationships and connections to others in the community. In this study, the results of the online observation indicated that the actions of the four participants included (1) answering questions, (2) contributing knowledge, (3) asking questions, and (4)

suggesting posting rules while the connections with other community members contained (5) showing appreciation and (6) chatting. Among the six types of mediated actions, they mostly answered questions in the learning community. According to Petersen, Divitini, and Chabert (2008), a long-term relationship between individuals and their actions forms their roles in the community. Their actions explicated that all the four participants played the role of knowledge contributors in the online learning community. By playing the role of knowledge contributors, the four participants got achievement and felt content from their online participation. Thus, through the gain of achievement, they kept participating in the community and became active community members in the online learning community.

In addition to answering questions, the four participants also posted entries to appreciate others' answers and chat with community members as friends in the English learning community. However, it was found that some participants performed particularly in their participation with their distinctive subject. For example, Participant A was the only participant who suggested posting rules to the community members and initiated messages containing the information of English phrases or learning resources. Only Participant D asked questions about English learning. As Booth (2011) indicated, members brought their stories, their experiences, and their expertise to the community. The ongoing interaction between their subject and the community shaped their specific actions in the community. As shown in the study, different participants who brought their own experiences performed different types of mediated actions in the learning community. The results of the study imply that the distinctive subject agency is one of the crucial factor in community members' mediated actions in online learning communities.

With regard to the change of mediated actions over time, the online observation showed that the mediated actions of the four participants decreased through the time

they joined the *Facebook* page. At the beginning of their participation, they invested time and effort to get involved in the discussion of the learning community. The frequency of Participant A and B's mediated actions occurred most at the first stage. In addition, the frequency of Participant C and D's mediated actions rapidly grew from the first stage and reached a peak at the second stage. However, all of their mediated actions decreased sharply at the third stage. As time went by, the four participants did not get involved in the community as actively as they did at the beginning of their participation. The change of their mediated actions through the three stages echoes the findings of previous studies which indicated that online communities may undergo life cycles of development. (Brown, 2001; Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robins, & Shoemaker, 2000; Lock, 2002; Schwier, 2002; Wilson, Ludwig-Hardman, Thornam, & Dunlap, 2004).

Schwier (2002) suggested that when learning communities emerge, they generally go through three stages: a formative stage, a maturity stage, and a stage of decline. The formative stage in the life of an online learning community is characterized by the attraction of new members. Members start their participation in the community. During the formative stage, the participation of community members is tentative as they try to communicate and make connections with other community members. When community members' participation becomes steady, the community proceeds to the mature stage of life. At this point, some online communities will be challenged to undertake conflicts. Then, old members whose needs are satisfied leave the community. The life cycle of the learning community develops into the stage of decline. Overall, the life of the online learning community in the current study was compatible with the notion of the online community life cycle.

The results imply that the maintenance of online learning communities is a difficult task. When educators apply online learning communities in their classroom,

they need to try their best to promote the development of online communities and maintain the online communities alive. For example, Bryce-Davis (2001) proposed “ringers” as a critical feature for building and maintaining learning communities. Ringers are special activities or surprise events which renew community members’ interest or motivation to participate in the community. Thus, ringers can keep online learning communities awake. With a specific activity by the major moderator of an online learning community, the life cycle of the community may last longer.

Research question 2: How do underlying factors interact with their mediated actions through the process of engaging in the online English learning community?

From an activity theory perspective, the four participants’ activity systems present factors influencing their mediated actions in the learning community. Three components of their activity systems, including the subject, the object, and the community were found to be mostly influential in their process of participation in the English learning community.

The interwoven relationship among subject, object, and mediating artifacts

The subject and objects were found to be interwoven together to affect each other and also influence the use of mediating artifacts which individuals used to achieve their objects. The findings indicate that each participant brought with their growing background, personalities, and learning experiences in their participation of the learning community. Their distinctive agency made them have different motives to participate in the online learning community. Thus, with different motives, they set different objects for their participation which influenced their mediated actions in the community.

Participants’ agency influenced the object they set for participating in the online community. Because of their different backgrounds, their motives to be in part of the

community triggered them to set different objects. For example, Participant A who enjoyed bantering with people actively participated in the online learning community because he wanted to get fun from interaction with community members. With the influence of his personalities, Participant A mediated his actions to chat with community members in the online learning community. His object of participation was having fun by playing with languages and chatting with community members. This object directed him to interact with community members a lot. During the process of his participation, he got a lot of fun from the interaction which made him keep participating in the community. However, when his object could not be achieved, he gradually stopped participating in the community. As for Participant B and D who were English learners in Taiwan, they participated in the online English learning community to have more learning opportunities out of class. As English learners, they set their object to learn more English phrases that could advance their English proficiency. Different from other participants, Participant C was a special case which had a unique motive to participate in the learning community. Participant C was eager to join a Chinese community in her life. The *Facebook* page provided her a place where she could interact with Chinese community members. Her object of participating in the discussion of the *Facebook* page was to make Chinese friends and build a Chinese community in which she could heal her homesickness. After participating in the *Facebook* page for several months, she made a lot of friends from the *Facebook* page. They formed their own social network on their *Facebook*, not in the language learning community. At the end, she did not visit the *Facebook* page since she formed her own community in *Facebook*, which was not for language learning but for social interaction.

Holding different subject agency and having different objects, participants chose different mediating artifacts as the tools in their participation. Language was one

mediating artifact to interact with community members. With their own language proficiency, language learning experiences, and personal background, they chose different languages as their main tool to write *Facebook* entries. Participant A, B, and D tended to use English more than Chinese because they believed that the use of Chinese might hinder the learning of English. Therefore, they avoided using Chinese in their posts if it was necessary. The belief also influenced their rule of language use in this English learning community. The choice of their language use reflected their belief of English learning. However, Participant C was glad to use Chinese to interact with community members because using Chinese made her feel a sense of belonging since she had lived in the U.S and not spoken Chinese for years in her daily life and she considered Chinese as a tool to interact with Chinese whom she can relate to. The use of Chinese reminded her about her Chinese identity. She chose Chinese as her communicative tool to achieve her object of getting involved in the online community.

Internet tools were other mediating artifacts in participants' participation in the learning community. Participants used Internet tools to help them achieve their goal in their participation of the English learning community. The object of Participant B and D was to learn English by answering questions of community members and reading entries in the *Facebook* page. In particular, for Participant D, he considered answering questions as a challenge of his English ability. By trying to answer members' questions, they practiced and advanced their English. When they saw a question which they also wanted to know, they used the Internet tools, such as search engines and online dictionary, to find out the answer. Because of their object of learning English, they tried to answer community members' questions with the help of Internet tools.

The interactive relationship among contextual factors within the community

In addition to the influence of subject agency and object, the factor of community played an influential role in participants' participation in the learning community.

First, although different participants had their own rule of language use in the learning community, community members made an influence on participants' rule of language use. Some community members asked participant A to use more Chinese in his entries in order to make his answers more clear. Because of community members' suggestion, Participant A changed his rule of language use. He started to add some Chinese to his entries.

Second, the appreciation from community members was a strong motive for participants to keep participating in the discussion of the online learning community. Furthermore, the joy from bantering with community members made participants continuously visit the learning community and contribute more in the discussion. Participants developed the personal relationships such as trust and friendship with community members whom they interacted and bantered with. Previous studies (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Hewitt, 2005) indicated that personal relationship resulted in shared understandings and community feelings. Both of which increased the contribution in the online discussion.

Third, the interaction with community members influenced the division of labor which affected their participation. In this study, the four participants answered community members' questions. They provided answers to the community members actively and generously. Based on the interaction with other community members, they formed a relation of providers and receivers in the community. Under the relation of providers and receivers, they established their relationship and power with others. Since Participant D sometimes asked questions in the community, he was in a lower

status in the division of labor. The lower status made him concern more when posting messages in the *Facebook* page. He was afraid of being criticized by the community members whose English ability was better than him. Gradually, he started to reduce his participation and contributed fewer entries either asking or responding questions in the online discussion. The influence of community members on participation was in line with the findings highlighted in previous literature. Murphy and Coleman (2004) suggested that community members stopped contributing if they felt threatened by other community members or if the tone of the discussion became rude to the community members. In Participant D's case, the negative relationship with others reduced his willingness of keeping participation in the discussion of the learning community.

To sum up, the factors which influenced the participants' actions in the current study were complex, and they were interwoven together. Through the lens of activity theory, the complex interrelationship involving participants' subject agency, contextual factors within the community, and their actions in the online learning community are brought to the surface. It is found that participants' subject agency was a prerequisite factor in determining their actions within the learning community. Participants' motives were based on individual agency which influenced the set of objectives and decided the use of mediating artifacts and their mediated actions. Additionally, contextual factors which interacted within the community also made an effect in participants' participation in the community. The results of the study confirmed Engeström's (1987) notion of activity theory which proposed that internal-mental activities cannot be understood when analyzed in isolation from external activities (Levin & Wadmany, 2008). Therefore, under such theory, it is suggested that the factors assisting or inhibiting community members' participation

are developed as a result of the interactive relationship among community members and the related situations.

Research question 3: How do community members perceive the experiences of engaging in the online English learning community?

At first, the participants perceived the online experiences as an addiction. They enjoyed getting involved in the discussion with community members. They were fascinated by the sense of achievement from answering questions in the learning community. Through providing answers to community members, they gained friendship in the online learning community. Furthermore, the interaction with community members gave participants a lot of support to continuously get involved in the discussion of the online learning community. Overall, participants considered the participation in the learning community as a positive experience which gave them a lot of joy. Because of this, participants invested tons of time and efforts in the learning community at the beginning of their participation. As found in previous studies (McAlpine, Lockerbie, Ramsay, & Beaman, 2002; Vonderwell, 2003), the positive perception toward online experiences reflected community members' highly motivation in participating in the discussion of the community.

Nevertheless, after participating in the community for several months, their perception toward the online experiences was not as satisfying as their perception at the beginning of their participation. They perceived the participation in the learning community as routine work without strong emotion and motivation. At the later stage of the online learning community, the *Facebook* page was full of spams since the *Facebook* page founder abandoned the *Facebook* page and did not administer the online community anymore. The lack of management in the community made participants suffer from the disordered community. For participants, the online

learning community was not perceived as a way to get a sense of achievement and to gain friendship anymore since there were fewer entries and less interaction on the *Facebook* page.

According to previous research of Cheung and Hew (2004), Vonderwell (2003), and Wyatt (2005), the lack of member interaction in the community made participants decrease their time in participating in the online discussion and interacting with community members. In a study of Cheung and Hew (2004), it was found that community members ceased to contribute when they received no immediate response or comments to their entries in online discussion. Furthermore, according to Feenberg (1987), the delay caused community members to feel that they were speaking into a vacuum. Therefore, gradually, participants had lower motivation and interest in the participation of the discussion. In conclusion, the lack of management made the community members have difficulties in participating in the online discussion. Then, the disappearance of community members' responses or comments wore down members' initial excitement and caused them to leave the community gradually.

Conclusion

In the last part of this chapter, the summary of the study is first presented and followed by several pedagogical implications on the basis of the findings of the study. Subsequently, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are provided.

Summary of the Study

This study explored four community members' participation in one online English learning community and their perceptions of the online experiences. By various qualitative data collection techniques, including online observations,

participants' *Facebook* page entries, and semi-structured interviews, this study tended to carefully elicit the four community members' mediated actions and the underlying factors influencing their process of participation. An activity theory approach was employed as the analytical framework to map out the complex relationships among individuals' six components, namely subject, object, mediating artifacts, community, rules, and division of labor, within their activity systems regarding their participation in the online learning community. Furthermore, it also examined their perceptions toward the online experiences and how their perceptions changed through the time they joined the online English learning community.

The results of the study indicated that the mediated actions of the four participants included (1) answering questions, (2) showing appreciation, (3) chatting, (4) contributing knowledge, (5) asking questions, and (6) suggesting posting rules. Among the six types of mediated actions, answering questions was the most significant mediated action in their online participation. However, the *Facebook* entries showed that different participants had particular mediated actions in the learning community. Furthermore, from an activity theory perspective on community members' participation, it is found that many factors, including their personal agency, the objects they set for their participation, and contextual factors, interwoven by each other influenced the for participants' mediated actions. Shaped by their individual backgrounds and learning experiences, participants carried their own stories to participate in the online learning community. The subject agency, learning experience, influenced the objects they set for participation in the community and influenced their use of artifacts. Additionally, contextual factors from the community where participants were situated also largely influenced their mediated actions in the online learning community. The appreciation from other community members encouraged participants to keep getting involved in the online discussion while the criticism from

other community members demotivated participants to keep participating in the online discussion. The interaction with other community members in the online learning community was critical to their participation.

As for the participants' perceptions of participating in the learning community, the results showed that participants perceived the online experiences differently through the time they participated. At the beginning of their participation, participants enjoyed their participation of the learning community a lot. They perceived the online participation as a way to acquire a sense of achievement when answering questions and to gain friendship from interacting with community members. However, through the time they participated, the entries in the online learning community became disordered and there was less and less interaction among community members. Therefore, participants' interest in participating was gradually diminished. At the later stage of their participation, they perceived the online participation as routine work without strong motivation. Finally, participants decreased their time and efforts to participate in the online discussion of the learning community.

Pedagogical Implications

Although this study targeted at an out-of-class learning community, there are still several pedagogical implications for language teachers. These implications could be taken into consideration for educators who plan to use the innovative Internet tool, *Facebook*, to build online language learning community in their classroom.

First, the findings of the present study demonstrated that participants' subject agency served as significant influence upon their participation. Students' personal background and learning experiences would naturally reflect in their participation of the learning community. In this regard, teacher educators need to take students' subject agency into consideration when integrating online learning communities into

their classroom. For example, teachers should be aware that some students may post fewer entries and they may hesitate to contradict their peers and teachers in a public forum because they are not accustomed to discussion-based learning in online community. Therefore, teachers should be prepared to build a warm atmosphere in the online environment and help students overcome obstacles which are resulted from their subject agency in their activity systems.

Second, contextual factors from community members' situated community served as another major influence on members' participation in the online discussion. The member interaction seemed to be a crucial element in community members' participation. With the active interaction with other community members, students are encouraged to participate in the online discussion more. For example, the appreciation from peers supports students keep contributing to the online learning community. Furthermore, active interaction between students enhances their interest and willingness to participate in the online discussion. It is thus recommended that teachers need to carefully design online activities which can enhance community members' interaction to arise students' interest in participating in the online discussion actively.

Third, according to the findings, the existence of the community moderator was significant to the life of the community. The findings indicated that at the later stage of the community, the interaction in the online learning community was not as active as before due to the leave of the community founder. Thus, in order to keep the online learning community alive, the community moderator should take the responsibility to administer the community. In classroom, the online learning community moderator is the teacher who needs to think carefully about how to create positive online environment as well as organize and maintain the community activities to facilitate students in the process of their participation. In other words, when integrating an

online learning community into classroom, it is teacher's responsibility to ensure that the online learning community is in order and the interaction between students is active.

Limitations of the Study

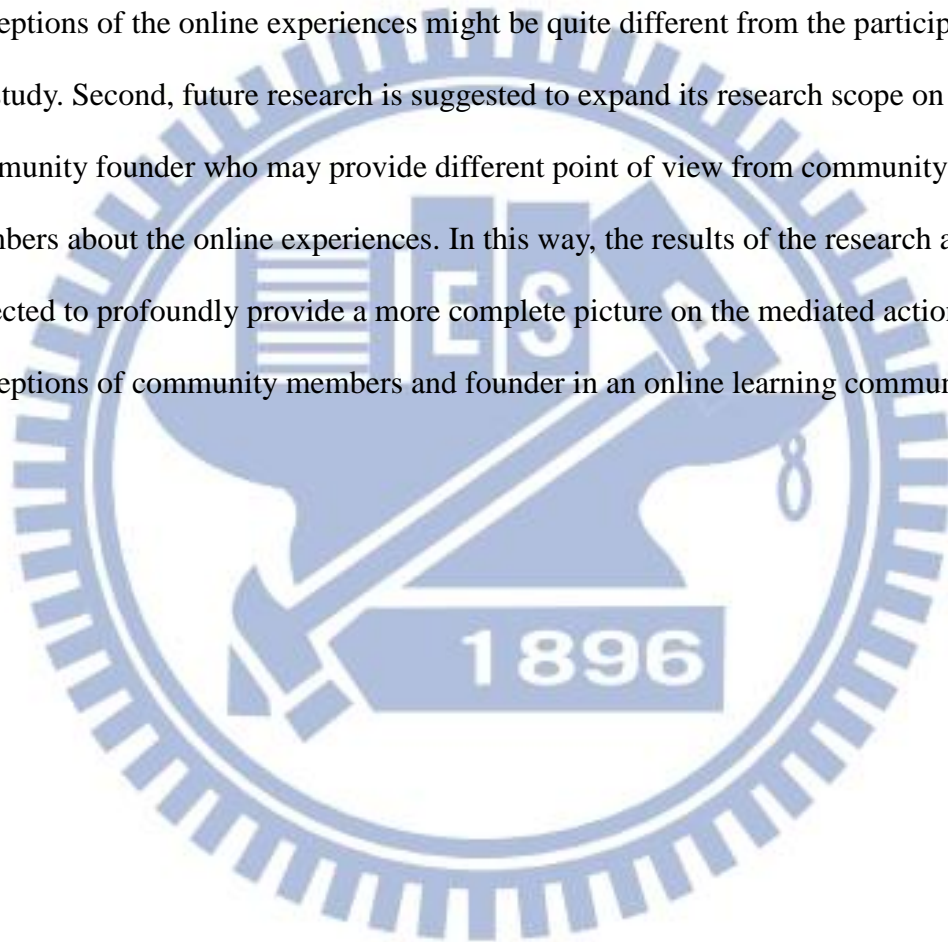
Although the present study provides some pedagogical implications to educators, there are some flaws in the following aspects. First, the current study only investigated the participation of four community members who usually provided answers in the English learning *Facebook* page. Due to the difficulty of the participant recruitment, the participants in the study did not include those community members who actively asked questions in the learning community. The lack of involving these people in this study might not well reflect all of the community members' online participation and their perceptions in general. Thus, the research results may not represent the participation, underlying factors, and the perspective of most community members. Second, the study did not invite the community founder. Exclusion of the data from the community founder may overlook some crucial findings about the growth of the online learning community and the perspective from the community founder. It might not well grasp the picture of the online learning community, including the perspective from both members and founders.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study was a pioneering effort to apply an activity theory perspective to explore community members' mediated actions and the underlying factors of their mediated actions in an online learning community. In addition, community members' perceptions of their online experiences were also examined. As noted in the previous section, there were some limitations of the study. Therefore, for future research on

related topics, several recommendations for further studies are suggested.

First, since the study did not contain the investigation to community members who sought for answers in the community, future research is suggested to further inquire these community members' participation in the online English learning community. Through these community members' perspective, it is believed that their mediated actions and the factors influencing their mediated actions as well as their perceptions of the online experiences might be quite different from the participants in the study. Second, future research is suggested to expand its research scope on the community founder who may provide different point of view from community members about the online experiences. In this way, the results of the research are expected to profoundly provide a more complete picture on the mediated actions and perceptions of community members and founder in an online learning community.



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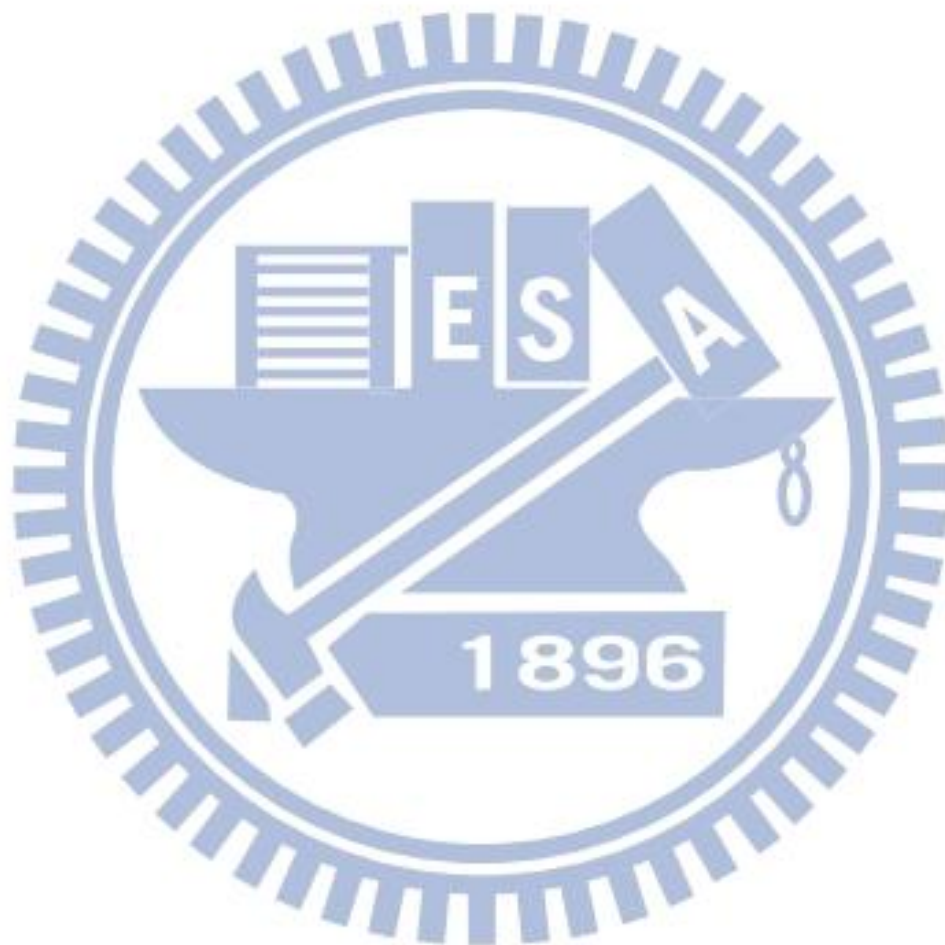
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Chinese Version of Consent Form

參與研究計畫同意書

您好！我是國立交通大學英語教學所碩士班研究生姚瑋雯，目前正在進行碩士論文的研究計畫，研究目的在於了解社群成員在線上英文學習社群的經驗及感受，研究對象為參與 Facebook 上的「原來這句英文不能這樣說喔？」粉絲專頁 (<http://www.facebook.com/poor.english>) 的粉絲，在此誠摯地邀請您參與此研究，由於您的熱情參與，將幫助英語教學研究者了解線上英文學習社群對於英文學習的幫助。

若您同意參與本研究，您將會填寫一份基本資料的問卷調查表，藉此瞭解您的語言學習背景。此外，本研究也會收集您在此社群所發表的文章內容，並進行二至三次的訪談，訪談的方式將透過線上通訊軟體（Windows Live Messenger 或 Skype）與您訪談，每次訪談時間以不超過 1 個小時為原則。

您所有的問卷資料及訪談內容將會進行保密，除了我與指導教授外，絕對不會有第三者知悉，在研究報告中，也會以匿名的方式處理您的資料，以保障您的權益與隱私。在研究期間，若您有任何不愉快的感覺或是無意願繼續參與，您可隨時退出，一切關於您的資料也將退還給您或是全部銷毀。如果您對本研究或是在參與過程中有任何疑問或建議，歡迎您透過電話 886-937-939-157 或電子郵件信箱 emmawwyao@gmail.com 與我聯繫。您也可以與我的指導教授張靜芬老師聯絡，電話為 886-3-5712121# 52715，電子郵件信箱為 cfchang@mail.nctu.edu.tw。

感謝你撥空閱讀此同意書，若您同意參與本研究，請在下一頁同意聲明的簽名處簽上您的全名，並將這份同意書以電子郵件附件方式寄到 emmawwyao@gmail.com，在此先感謝您的熱情參與。

研究者：姚瑋雯

國立交通大學英語教學所碩士班

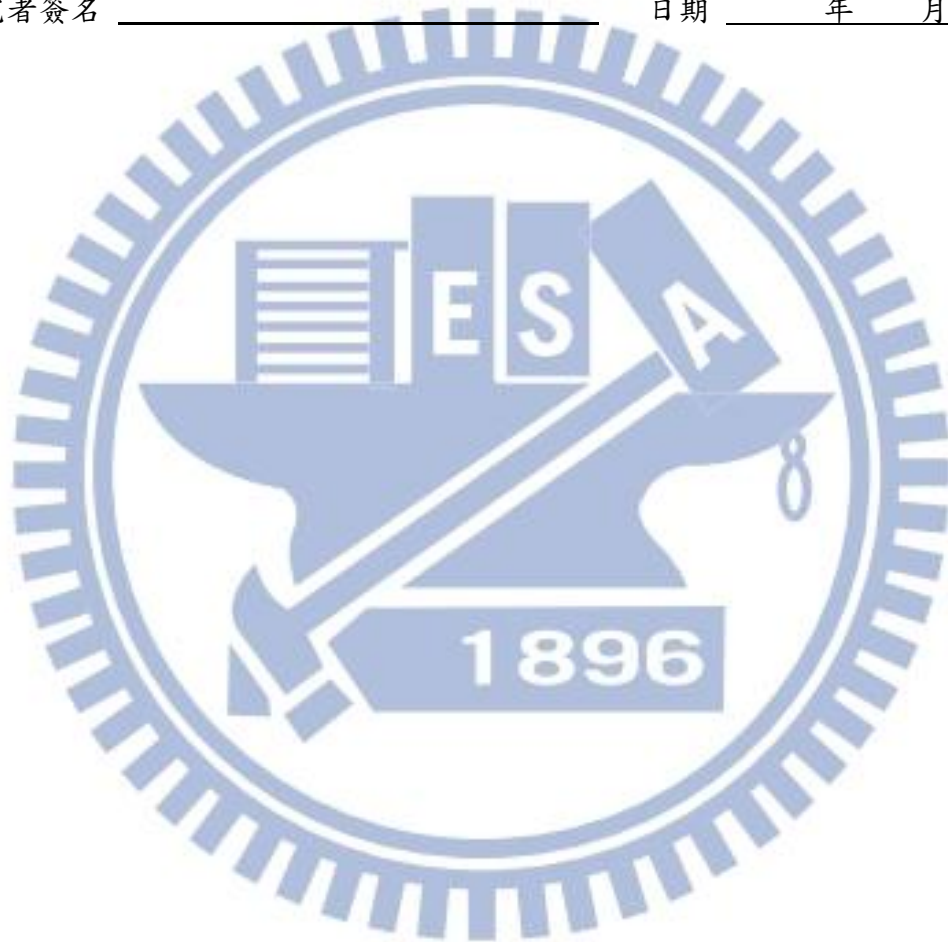
指導教授：張靜芬

國立交通大學英語教學研究所助理教授

本人已詳細閱讀本同意書，了解參與計畫的各項要求及我個人權益問題，我同意參加本研究計畫。

參與者簽名 _____ 日期 _____ 年 _____ 月 _____ 日

研究者簽名 _____ 日期 _____ 年 _____ 月 _____ 日



Appendix B

English Version of Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Dear participants,

I am a graduate student in the Master's program in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at National Chaio Tung University, Taiwan. I am currently conducting a research project for my master's thesis. The project is to gain an in-depth understanding of community members' experiences and perceptions in an online language learning community. The potential participants in this project are the members of the *Facebook* page, "Oh, That is Not How We Say It in English?" (<http://www.facebook.com/poor.english>). This research is expected to contribute insight to the field of online language learning. Therefore, your participation is highly appreciated.

To participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a survey concerning your background information and your entries in this online community will be collected for research. Besides, you will receive two to three interviews via online messengers such as Windows Live Messenger or Skype and each interview will not take longer than one hour.

Please note that your participation in this research is voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable during the research, you can withdraw from the study at any point and for any reason and all data will be returned or destroyed. In addition, the collected data will be treated in a secure and confidential manner and only used for purpose of this study. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me, at 886-937-939-157 or emmawwyao@gmail.com or contact Dr. Ching-Fen Chang, my advisor, at 886-3-5712121# 52715 or cfchang@mail.nctu.edu.tw.

If you agree to participate in this research, please complete the form on the next page and mail it as an attachment to emmawwyao@gmail.com. Thank you very much!

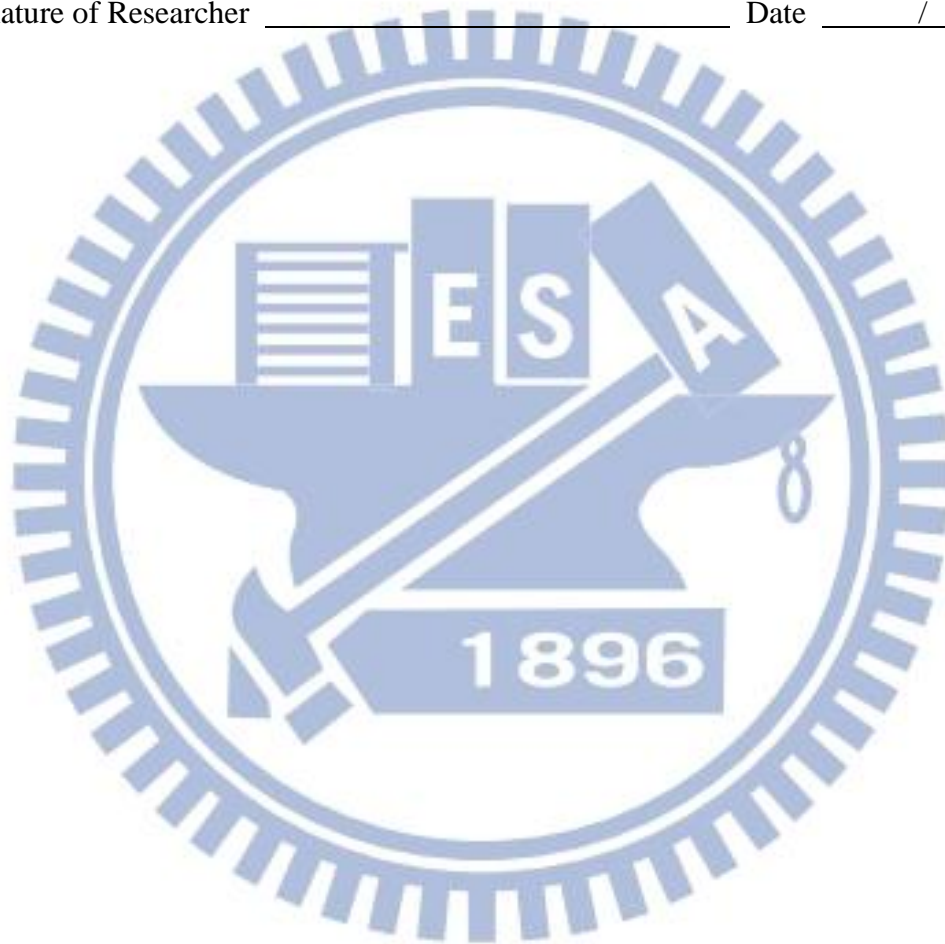
Researcher: Emma Wei-Wen Yao

Advisor: Dr. Ching-Fen Chang

I have read this form and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing below I am giving consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant _____ Date ____ / ____ / ____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date ____ / ____ / ____



Appendix C

Excerpts of Online Observation Filed Notes

Date:

2010.09.16

Description of Object:

Participant A gave a suggestion about the way of providing answers of the questions posted by members. Participant A wrote,

“Please refer to the first line of the mission statement (below Batman's picture).

When it comes to replying to posts, try to avoid copying an entire block of text as a reply. Although as useful as it is (and good practice to have references), it is something people can do themselves.

Instead, paraphrase, offer analogies, stories, or paint a picture. Don't just stop at 'replicate'...”

This entry from Participant A seemed to aim at the way that one member used in providing answers in the community.

Reflective Notes:

The conflict between Participant A and the member seems to originate from their different perspective about learning or other else? I'm curious about why Participant A wanted to suggest members to follow the posting rule. Also, I'm curious about how the member feels after reading this entry. Moreover, will the member change his way of providing answers in the future?

Appendix D

Questionnaire

Dear Participants,

Thanks very much for participation in this study. Here are questions to gain a brief understanding of your background. Your answers are helpful for me to develop follow-up interview questions. So please respond to the following questions as clearly as possible. All information will be used for the research purposes only and will be kept strictly confidential. Thank you for your support and participation.

Best regards,
Emma Wei-Wen Yao

1. Your name on *Facebook* (<http://www.Facebook.com>)

2. Gender

3. Age

4. Educational level *

5. Occupation *

6. What is your current location? How long have you been there?

7. What is your hometown? How long did you live there?

8. What is your first language?

An empty text input field with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side. The field is currently blank.

9. What is your second language?

An empty text input field with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side. The field is currently blank.

10. What other languages do you speak?

An empty text input field with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side. The field is currently blank.

11. How long have you been learning English? Where did you first start learning English?

An empty text input field with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side. The field is currently blank.

12. Please describe your English level. e.g., beginning, intermediate or advanced

An empty text input field with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side. The field is currently blank.

13. How do you know this *Facebook* page?

An empty rectangular text input box with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side.

14. How often do you visit this *Facebook* page?

An empty rectangular text input box with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side.

15. Why do you "like" this *Facebook* page?

An empty rectangular text input box with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side.

Appendix E

Interview Questions for Interview #1

Part One: Six Components of Participants' Activity Systems

Subject

1. How do you define yourself in this *Facebook* page? Who are you within this page? What role do you play in this page? Why do you define yourself like that?

Object

2. What purpose does this page serve for you?
3. What do you think is the purpose of this page?
4. Do you learn something useful from this page? What do you gain from participating in this page? What do you change after you participate in this page?

Mediating Tools

5. What other online resources do you use when you post or reply to message in the online discussion of the page?

Community

6. Does this page feel like a community to you? Why or why not?
7. What does the word "community" mean to you?
8. Do you think other members work together with you in this page?

Division of Labor

9. Do you go and check who replies or "likes" your posts? How do you feel about their replies to your posts? Talk about one reply which impressed you most.
10. How do you feel when other members correct your answer?
11. Have you ever experienced any conflicts in this page? How did you deal with them?
12. What are the factors encouraging you to keep participating in the page?

Rules

13. Do you have any concerns when replying other members' posts?

Part Two: Perception of the Online Community and the Online Experiences

14. How would you describe this page to someone who knows nothing about this page?
15. You've participated in this page for several months. What do you usually do in this page? Use a metaphor to describe your experiences in this page.
16. How do you feel about your experiences in this page?

Appendix F

Interview Questions for Interview #2

Part One: Possible Changes of Participation and Perception

1. Do you perceive any differences of your participation during almost one year of participating in this page? (e.g., the role you play, the time you invest in participation, the purpose of your participation, the feeling of your participation...) Can you give some examples?
2. What factors do you think make your changes?
3. Will you continue visiting this page and participating in the discussion of this page? Why?
4. What is your current perception of your participation and this page? Do you still hold the same attitude, perception, and expectation on this page as what you held at the beginning of your participation in this page? Why?

Part Two: Overall Participation Experiences

5. Were there any particular incidents impress you most or influence your changes of participation or perception? How do you feel about these incidents?
6. What have you gained or learned from your participation in the discussion of this page?