Sociolinguistic Approaches for Intercultural New Media Studies

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Abstract: "Intercultural new media studies" is said to be the next frontier in intercultural communication (Shuter, 2012). The present paper will first review the realm of intercultural new media studies that attend to the structures and patterns of new media usage and critique how well the methods and findings in the existing literature have attempted to achieve the aims of understanding new media communication across cultures. Afterwards, the paper will present two significant approaches in sociolinguistics, i.e., Variationist Sociolinguistics and Interactional Sociolinguistics, detailing the assumptions and methods of these two approaches, and discuss how they can be well utilized and integrated with the advances in the communication discipline so as to contribute to our further understanding of new media communication that takes place across cultures.

Keywords: Variationist sociolinguistics, interactional sociolinguistics, new media, intercultural communication

1. Introduction

"Intercultural new media[1] studies" is said to be the "next frontier in intercultural communication" (Shuter, 2012). An increasing body of literature in this field constantly reinforces the belief that new communication technologies are anything but neutral instruments; rather, they are subject to cultural influences in various aspects related to communication circumstances and outcomes.

This paper will first review and summarize the major aims of "intercultural new media studies" and critique how well the existing literature in the communication discipline has attempted to achieve those aims. The paper will then present two significant approaches in sociolinguistics, i.e., the Variationist Sociolinguistics and the Interactional Sociolinguistics, detailing the assumptions and methods of these two approaches, and discuss how they can be incorporated with the advances in the communication discipline so as to contribute to our further understanding of the message characteristics and identity construction on new media and to the further achievements of our aims in "intercultural new media studies".

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[1] As complained by many, "the term 'New Media' is old and misleading, since any latest technology is always new" (Rafaeli & Ariel, 2007, p. 81). For the purpose of this paper, "new media" refers to the Internet and any initial and recent developments of the Internet that facilitate human communication on the medium.

2. Cross-cultural Studies of New Media Communication

There has been an increasingly large amount of research devoted to intercultural new media studies by communication scholars in the recent years and it is beyond the aim of this paper to review all of them. For the purpose of the present paper, the review will be focused on three areas of development: 1) the patterns of new media use across cultures; 2) the message characteristics of new media-mediated communication across cultures; and 3) online interaction and relationship building across cultures.

2.1. Patterns of New Media Use across Cultures

An immediate description of new media usage concerns whether and how new media technologies are used by different ethnic or national groups. Boyd and Ellison (2007) noted that Hispanic students were more likely to use Myspace while Asian and Asian American students preferred Xanga and Friendster. In addition, Jackson and Wang (2013) surveyed Chinese and American students about their social networking site (SNS) use – time spent and motives for use. Results showed that US participants spent more time on SNSs, considered them to be more important and had more friends in SNSs than their Chinese counterparts. The differences were interpreted in terms of collectivism vs. individualism: collectivistic emphasis on family, friends and one's groups could be partly responsible for lesser use of SNSs by Chinese participants, while individualistic values of self and having more but less close and enduring friendships could explain US participants' greater use of SNSs.

Quite a number of studies have surveyed social media use in a number of countries. For instance, Gong et al. (2014) surveyed SNS adoption across 36 countries, mostly drawing on Hofstede's (2001) national culture scores. Furthermore, Shuter and Chattopadhyay (2014) conducted a cross-national study of Denmark and USA and found cultural values and contextual norms as a strong predictor of mobile phone activity of users. The study concluded that the horizontal individualists, as represented by Danes, were significantly more likely than the vertical individualists, as represented by Americans, to engage in mobile activity when conversing with authority figures and while at work.

Nonetheless, there are few studies to indicate a lack of nation-state level cultural influence on new media usage. For instance, in comparing the motives for and patterns of using SNSs among college students in the US and Korea, Kim et al. (2011) found that the major motives for using SNSs – seeking friends, social support, entertainment, information, and convenience – are similar between the two countries, though with different weights placed on these motives. Similarly, Ling et al. (2012) found that there is no difference in core mobile phone use between subjects in developed and developing countries, suggesting that global socio-cultural factors, unrelated to world region or co-culture, might be driving social uses of mobile phones.

Further description of new media usage also concerns whether and how new media technologies are used by different social groups. Hargittai (2007) found that gender, race, ethnicity, and parental education all play a role in users' choice of SNSs. Grasmuck et al. (2009) found that minority groups such as African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Vietnamese compose Facebook profiles and narratives explicitly proclaiming their cultural

roots and identities. Chen (2010) also found that the longer immigrants lived in a host culture, the less likely they surf home country websites but the more likely they are to communicate with residents of the host culture online, which facilitated their intercultural adaptation.

2.2. Message Characteristics of New Media-mediated Communication across Cultures

Quite a number of studies have attempted to delineate cultural variations of message characteristics in the new media sphere. A typical example is Park et al. (2014). Relying on Gudykunst's cultural variability in communication (CVC) framework and culture-specific facial expressions of emotion, the authors examined cross-cultural variations of the use of 34,231 emoticons. Drawing on Hofstede's national culture scores and national indicators across 78 countries, they found that people from individualistic cultures tended to use horizontal and mouth-oriented emoticons like :), while those in collectivistic cultures preferred vertical and eye-oriented emoticons like ^_^. Hasler and Friedman (2012) also observed that Asian avatar dyads in a virtual world interacted at larger distances than their European counterparts, which was believed to be consistent with their differential socio-cultural expectations in the physical world.

Strategies of online self-presentation have been one of the research foci. For instance, Rui and Stefanone (2013) compared self-presentation strategies across Singapore and the US and found American users presented more text-based posts while Singaporean users preferred more photos. Cooley and Smith (2013) studied the head-body ratio of 716 profile pictures and user-provided information on Facebook (USA) versus VKontakte (Russian equivalent of Facebook). Applying the social psychology theory of face-ism to measure the head-body ratio of men and women, the study revealed significant differences in the mean face-ism indexes between men and women of the two countries. In addition, Barker and Ota (2011) compared American young women versus Japanese young women in their use of Facebook versus Mixi and found that the American women are more prone to public expressions of connection with peer group via their Facebook photographs, whereas Japanese women are much more likely to communicate closeness via Mixi diaries.

Besides work on self-presentation strategies by individuals, a large amount of work has been devoted to strategic presentation and image management by the different corporations online. For instance, Tsai and Men (2012) employed content analysis to identify cultural orientations in communication appeals of the corporate pages on leading SNSs in China (Renren) and USA (Facebook). It is found that value appeals such as interdependence, popularity, high social status, luxury, emotions, and symbolic association are more common in collectivist, high-context societies such as in China; whereas individuality and hedonism are more frequently used in an individualistic society like the USA. Furthermore, Khan et al. (2014) examined how government agencies used Twitter in Korea versus in USA and found some differences in Twitter strategies between the two governments: Korean ministries are more likely to engage in collective collaboration and retweet common content to reinforce their collective agendas regardless of their main administrative functions, while US government departments are more individualistic, and likely to retweet the messages that specifically fit the purpose of each department. In addition, Ma (2013) compared the microblogging contents by consumers in sharing brand information and entertaining messages on Twitter versus Weibo (China's hybrid

form of microblog similar to Facebook and Twitter) and found that cultural values play a significant role in moderating the types of content being shared on the SNSs. However, Waters and Lo (2012) investigated Facebook profiles of 225 nonprofit organizations in the US, China, and Turkey and concluded that organizational uses of SNSs are only minimally affected by traditional cultural values, pointing to emerging global virtual cultures. Wu and Li (2015) also show a similar array of emotional branding strategies adopted by leading global brands across Twitter and Weibo.

We can observe that most of the methods used for examining message characteristics of new media-mediated communication here involve quantitative content analysis or qualitative thematic analysis. Nonetheless, there are a few studies using or combining the content analysis with qualitative interviews. For instance, Cho and Park (2013) used semi-structured focus interviews comparing SNS use in Asia and the West and discovered that cultural differences have considerable influence on SNS users' communication style as well as attitudes towards SNSs.

2.3. Online Interaction and Relationship Building across Cultures

With the affordance of new media technologies in supporting interpersonal messaging capacities, increasing attention has also been paid to the process of interaction and relational management (e.g., Chambers, 2013). Many studies in this area confirm the significant influence of national cultures on interaction and relationship building. Cho and Lee (2008) examined virtual intercultural collaboration among students from the United States and Singapore. It is found that collaboration online is constrained by preexisting social networks and cultural boundaries in their respective countries: students are more willing to collaborate and share information with virtual partners who are members of their in-groups and share their cultural values. Seo et al. (2008) also find differences in online interaction across collectivist and individualistic cultures. Choi et al. (2012) surveyed SNS users in the US, China and Korea in terms of their engagement on SNSs and found that their social interactions within SNSs are still bound by their respective cultural orientations.

In comparing the influence of self-disclosure on relationship development in Korea, Japan, and the US, Yum and Hara (2006) found self-disclosure and trust positively related for US participants, negatively related for Korean participants and a nonfactor for the Japanese. Cho and Park (2013), in examining the nature of SNS social relationships and attitudes toward self-disclosure via SNS, also found Korean participants are likely to have a relatively small number of close friends on SNSs, whereas U.S. participants tend to be more inclusive of acquaintances, friends, close friends, and family members. Meanwhile, American participants are more willing than Koreans to disclose personal information. It is cautioned that when participants from high-context and low-context cultures are interacting, there should be more attention to face concerns to prevent misunderstanding.

Nonetheless, we can observe that Yum and Hara (2006) and Cho and Park (2013) also found that the effect of self-disclosure on relationship quality is rather similar across cultures. All participants reported greater self-disclosure as associated with greater love, liking, and commitment. A possible reason they gave is that participants in the studies are young college students "who had been educated in democratic and egalitarian beliefs and values" and that

"regardless of culture, young people have similar expectations about communication and the quality of close relationships they choose to form and continue" (Yum & Hara, 2006, p. 140). It is noteworthy that recent studies have increasingly attempted to break away pre-assigned cultural categories and adopted a developmental perspective. For instance, Clothier (2005) duly points out that a hybridized cultural identity can emerge from being inducted into a virtual community composed of diverse people and cultural influences that border and overlap each other, which Clothier calls a hybrid virtual culture. Chen and Dai (2012) also argue that virtual communities challenge pre-existing cultural identities because of asymmetrical power relationships that are inherent in these communities, and the power advantage of Western culture still transfers to the cyberspace, shaping the development of new cultural identities in virtual communities.

Parallel to interpersonal communication research, research studies regarding online organizational communication across cultures have also flourished. Men and Tsai (2012) compared how companies in China versus in the US use popular social network sites (SNSs) to facilitate dialogues with the public, through a content analysis of 50 corporate web pages with 500 corporate posts and 500 user posts from each. It is found that companies in both countries recognize the importance of SNSs in relationship building and employ appropriate online strategies such as disclosure, information dissemination, and involvement, but specific tactics differ. Cultural differences in the types of corporate posts and public posts on SNSs indicated that culture plays a significant role in shaping the dialogue between organizations and their publics in different countries. Also comparing China and the US, Chu and Choi (2011) studied electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in SNSs, by examining social relationship variables (social capital, tie strength, trust, and interpersonal influence) as potential predictors of eWOM communication online. Chinese consumers are found to engage in a greater level of information giving, information seeking, and pass-along behavior on SNSs than do their American counterparts. The results have confirmed respective cultural orientations of horizontal and vertical collectivism vs. individualism, pointing to the significant influence of national culture on eWOM behavior.

For practitioners and scholars of public relations, social media have become "a continuation of the very best communication principles organizations have long aspired to or practiced" that "complements, expands, and enriches organizational communication" (Hart, 2011, p. 115). Via surveys and content analysis, scholars in the fields of communication and public relations have enthusiastically devised and validated various measures and scales of investigating interactivity, relational strategies and outcomes on the social media platforms (e.g., Cho & Huh, 2010; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Smith, 2010; Yin et al., 2015).

3. Sociolinguistic Approaches to New Media

Sociolinguistics is a discipline that aims to study the relationship between language and society. A great amount of advances have been made over the years in the theories and methods of sociolinguistics to describe and explain language uses in the society (see, e.g., Bayley et al., 2013; Wodak et al., 2011). This section will present two important sociolinguistic approaches to new media, i.e., Variationist Sociolinguistics and Interactional Sociolinguistics, and discuss how they can be utilized in our attempt to further understand new media communication across cultures.

3.1. Variationist Sociolinguistics

Pioneered by William Labov (1966, 1972), variationist sociolinguistics is a line of sociolinguistic research that focuses on analyzing phonetic, lexical, and syntactical variations across different groups of speakers or language communities. By way of large-scale quantitative analysis, such research explores the correlations between language forms and language user variables such as gender, age, social class, profession, etc. A representative study of using this approach for researching new media is Herring and Paolillo (2006), who located a cluster of linguistic features preferably used by male authors (e.g., demonstratives, numbers, quantifiers and possessive pronouns) versus those by female authors (e.g., singulars and plurals of first-person pronouns, singulars and plurals of third-person pronouns) and found significant correlations between the use of the linguistic features and the author's gender on weblogs, though sometimes in different patterns than they have hypothesized. Furthermore, Schwartz et al. (2013) conducted a big data study, with a sample of 0.7 billion Facebook messages of 75,000 volunteers, and found significant correlations between lexical choice and the personality, gender, and age of the authors on Facebook.

Rooted in essentialism, variationist sociolinguistics views language as heterogeneous but ordered or structured, maintaining that the correlations between linguistic forms and language user factors are objective (Coupland, 2007, pp. 47-48). Besides attention to the choice of lexical and syntactic features, other studies have also explored the correlation between structures of interaction or discourse strategies and language user variables. For example, Herring (2003) found that male and female users differ significantly in the extent of participation and speech styles: males tend to send more and longer messages and also receive more replies than females do; male speech is more aggressive and absolute, involving more self-compliment and less politeness, whereas female speech shows more hesitation and mitigation, expressing more personal feelings, politeness, and agreement. In contrast, Panyametheekul and Herring (2007) probed the influence of gender on turn allocation in Thai chat rooms and found a completely different picture: based on a total of 917 chat room messages of 52 participants, the study found that Thai women show greater involvement and receive more replies than their male counterparts. The findings by Panyametheekul and Herring (2007) suggest not only a difference from the situation of gender and language in the English-speaking countries but also a difference from the stereotypes of women being powerless and in subordination, which are often found in research on gender communication offline (e.g., Coates, 1993; Tannen, 1994, 2001). In addition, Liu and Wu (2015) examined the construction of corporate identity on the Internet by top 10 energy companies in China versus in the US using a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach and discovered some similar as well differential language strategies used by the Chinese versus the American companies.

We can observe that although variationist sociolinguists have not seemed to pay much attention to differential language use across nations or other large cultural groups on the new media platforms, they have attended to small-culture differences such as gender and age, etc. Furthermore, their method of linguistic analysis with systematic quantification is much more detailed, which can overcome the limitations of the gestalt approach of thematic or content analysis often employed by communication scholars.

3.2. Interactional Sociolinguistics

Different from variationist sociolinguistics, interactional sociolinguistics, represented by John Gumperz (1982), extends the units of analysis to the larger context of language use and to larger stretches of language use such as conversations and texts. Interactional sociolinguistics "combines wider contextual knowledge with linguistic analysis and conversational analysis to illuminate the interpretive processes of interaction" (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999, p. 13). In recent years, with increasingly interactive functions offered by the new media, increasing research takes place in interactional sociolinguistics that has integrated different theories and methods to address communication and interaction issues in the context of new media. This section will present a few key notions and research methods in interactional sociolinguistics that have been utilized to study human interaction and discuss how these notions and the related research methods can benefit intercultural new media studies.

3.3. Speech Act and New Media Communication

The notion of speech act was first proposed by Austin (1962) to refer to an utterance that has a performative function in language and communication. Over the years, the term has been utilized to describe and understand the messages and their meanings in human interaction. Austin (1962) suggested that speech acts can be analyzed at three levels: a locutionary act (the literal meaning of the utterance), an illocutionary act (the intention of the speaker of the utterance), and a perlocutionary act (the effect of the utterance on the hearer). Searle (1976) further refined Austin's idea of illocutionary act and classified illocutionary speech acts in terms of assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Assertives refer to speech acts that commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition of the utterance; directives refer to speech acts that are used by the speaker to get the hearer to do something; commissives refer to speech acts that commit the speaker herself to future actions; expressives are speech acts where the speaker expresses her emotions, inner states, or attitudes towards people or events; and declaratives are speech acts that are aimed at bringing about changes in reality.

   In recent years, some, though few, language and communication scholars have applied the framework by Searle (1976) to understand interpersonal meaning and speech acts on the new media platforms. For example, Hassell et al. (1996) compared speech acts in three media – email, face-to-face, and telephone – and concluded that assertives are the most common speech act across all three modes of communication, while imperatives/ (directives), commissives, expressives, and declaratives are more common in email and telephone communication than in face-to-face contexts, and expressives are more common in email than in face-to-face communication. Concerning SNS, Carr et al. (2012) examined the use of speech acts on Facebook status messages and found that the messages are mostly frequently constructed with expressive acts, followed by assertives. Also examining Facebook status updates, Ilyas and Khushi (2012) concluded with the frequency ranking of expressives, assertives, imperatives, and commissives. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that Wu and Lin (2016), in their attempt to further understand relationship building by Chinese celebrities on Weibo, pointed out that the definition and framework of speech act by Austin (1962) and Searle (1976) are largely

dependent upon the "individual self", not the "social self", with insufficient attention to the process of relational communication by the speaker with the hearer. Wu and Lin (2016) have thus developed a framework of classifying speech acts in terms of how the acts contribute to building relationship and human connectedness and name them as relational acts.

Furthermore, differently from other language and communication scholars, computational linguists propose even more specific types of speech act, such as 18 types and 43 subtypes by Verbmobil (Jekat et al., 1995). In their endeavor for automatic recognition of speech acts to model conversation (Stolcke et al., 2000), computational linguists have worked on annotated corpora such as Switchboard-DAMSL (Jurafsky et al., 1997) and Meeting Recorder Dialog Act (Dhillon et al., 2004).

We can observe that while the criteria for classifying speech acts can be different depending upon the specific objectives of the researchers, the notion of speech act is highly significant and can be further explored in our future understanding of human interaction and cross-cultural communication online.

3.4. Face and New Media Communication

Face is another notion that has been widely used for understanding the process of human interaction, although the conceptualization and analysis of face vary among different language and communication scholars. Scholars from anthropology, sociology and socio-psychology (e.g., Goffman, 1955, 1967; Huang, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 1990) tend to arrive simply at various conceptualizations of face, but linguists endeavor further to specify the speech acts, language features and/or strategies that have been used to achieve face.

The sociologist Goffman (1955, 1967) was one of the first Western scholar to define face, as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken" Goffman (1967, p. 5). Further to Goffman (1955, 1967), the linguists Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) pointed out that face is something that is emotionally invested, can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. They defined two universal types of face: positive face and negative face, with the former referring to a person's desire for approval and being appreciated by others, while the latter referring to a person's desire for independence and autonomy of action. They also pointed out that face and politeness are closely linked, with face as a driving force for politeness, and as a result, speakers should adopt politeness strategies to mitigate potential threats to others' positive face need or negative face need.

Furthermore, a detailed mechanism for engaging facework with a list of possible linguistic features and strategies appealing to people's respective need for positive face versus for negative face is provided by Brown and Levinson (1978/1987). For example, according to Brown and Levinson, the linguistic strategies that address the positive face need of the hearer include taking notice and complimenting the hearer's admirable qualities or possessions, using colloquialisms or slang to convey in-group membership, using first-name or in-group name to show familiarity, using inclusive forms ("we"/ "let's") to include both parties in the activity, etc.; whereas the linguistic strategies that address the negative face need of the hearer include using hedges (words or phrases that diminish the force of a speech act), using the subjunctive

to express pessimism about the hearer's ability or willingness to comply, using formal word choices to indicate seriousness and social distance, and avoiding personal pronouns like "I" and "you", etc. And according to Scollon and Scollon (1995/2001), the linguistic features that appeal to the positive face need of the hearer include the use of given names or nicknames to address the hearer, of informal language style or of the hearer's dialect, etc.; whereas the linguistic features that can appeal to the negative face need of the hearer include the use of family names and titles to address the hearer, and of formal language style, or of the speaker's own language or dialect, etc.

Research on social media by interactional sociolinguists naturally involves face consideration and analysis. For instance, West and Trester (2013) collected Facebook interaction stretches of 20 American users and examined how they attended to each other's face needs. It is concluded that positive face strategies are prominent in Facebook interactions. Their study also compared the users' authentic Facebook data and fake (humorous) data in a *Wall Street Journal* report to highlight users' attention to face.

Research by Chinese scholars on face and politeness emphasize the maxims of respect and modesty (see Tsou & You, 2007), and stress the principles of power and hierarchy (see Gu, 1990). However, the study by Feng and Wu (2015) of leading Chinese brands on Weibo and that by Li and Wu (2015) of leading global brands on Weibo both indicate that face communication by corporations interacting with the Chinese public on the SNS are no longer subject to the concern of power and hierarchy, with minimum respect and modesty behavior involved; instead, corporations are more concerned with building solidarity with the public, employing extensive positive politeness strategies on the Chinese SNS.

Furthermore, there seems to be a tendency in recent (im)politeness research to move away from the top-down universal politeness research led by Brown and Levinson (1987) and move towards a bottom-up trajectory focusing on individualized and diversified politeness, with increasing attention to conflict or impoliteness on the SNSs (e.g., Haugh, 2013; Arundale, 2010; Locher, 2006; Watts, 2003). For example, Kadar et al. (2013) looked into impoliteness and face threats in Mainland Chinese and Taiwan online forums. They found that Mainland and Taiwan participants differ in their ways of expressing conflicts in discussions regarding cross-straits issues: while Taiwan participants use swear words to insulate themselves from Mainland participants, the latter tend to use pan-China identity discourse to encompass Taiwan participants' discourse, linking themselves with the other party. Shum and Lee (2013) studied disagreement and (im)politeness in two Hong Kong online forums and found eleven strategies of expressing disagreement, most of which are direct using mitigation markers but are rated as appropriate by the forum visitors.

Lange (2014) looked at 330 viewer comments on 35 angry videos, arguing that angry videos on the Internet, different from angry discourse offline that is often regarded as anti-social, are not always negative and can actually help to construct a public sentiment space and foster discussions among people with shared interests and concerns. The study supported a conclusion from recent research: conflicts in new media are not necessarily disruptive, but can play important roles in social life (e.g., Pagliai, 2010; Shum & Lee, 2013).

This line of research indicates that e-politeness (politeness in the Internet context) is a complex phenomenon and that both analysts and users should raise their awareness of its

intricacies since it has significant influence on communication online (Graham, 2007). Meanwhile, the studies reviewed above have addressed, in one way or another, this question: are the various models in the past built for offline face and politeness still applicable to and sufficiently effective in explaining politeness in the new media context? As pointed out by Bou-Franch and Blitvich (2014), previous models of face and politeness which are mostly designed for local, synchronous, and dyad interactions, cannot illuminate interpretations for social, diachronic, and large-scale discussions in the context of new media. Further research integrating interdisciplinary insights to establish new models specialized for the new media context is called for.

3.5. Discursive Constructions of Identity in New Media

It is believed that identity and identity construction are an inevitable outcome as well as process of human interaction. Recent years have witnessed the rise of an area specializing in identity research – language and identity in sociocultural anthropology (see Kiesling, 2006). We can observe that variationist sociolinguistics (as mentioned in the earlier section) addresses identity in terms of contextual variables such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity, i.e., identity is regarded as a static notion and a pre-given category. Different from variationist sociolinguists, interactional sociolinguists do not see identity as pre-assigned or shaped by the context, but emergent and dynamically constructed through interaction where interlocutors employ various linguistic means and resources for meaning negotiation.

Typically non-essentialist, interactional sociolinguistics views language users as active agents who consciously make use of various linguistic resources to construct the context, index and negotiate their own and partners' identities as well as meaning in the process of interaction. For instance, Auer (2007) views style as a tool or resource for social identity construction and management in interaction. In an earlier study, combining textual analysis, user surveys and interviews online and offline, Androutsopoulos (2007) analyzed stylistic features of a German hip-hop music website and its discussion zone, revealing how stylistic selection manifested social and symbolic values of linguistic resources in German hip-hop music communities. Newon (2011), situated in the online game World of Warcraft, analyzed gamers' discursive practices including voice messaging, text messaging, and avatar gestures, specially focusing on how senior games exhibited authority and authenticity and employed multimodal resources and symbolic tools to construct their expert identity.

In addition, Sebba (2007) examined language use by a British comedian Ali G, pointing out that the playwright drew upon mixed stylistic features in constructing Ali G into a figure with uncertain ethnic backgrounds. Ali G was speaking southern British English mixed with Jamaican creole, which soon became popular among youngsters' comments on Ali G's theme website, though in reality they would not use this kind of "colored" style. Peuronen (2011) examined local and global discursive practices in an online Finnish extreme sports forum and ways in which forum users employed Finnish (native) and English (global) linguistic resources and styles to construct multiple identities in interaction.

We can observe that in interactional sociolinguistics, different language variations and characteristics are discourse resources to be deployed by language users to achieve goals

such as self-presentation and interpersonal relationship management. The major methods of investigation and analysis used by interactional sociolinguistics for researching new media communication include: ethnography of communication, conversational analysis, and social pragmatic analysis.

Ethnography of Communication: This is a method adopted from anthropology (see Hymes, 1972). Many scholars have realized the primacy of new media platforms for field research. Conducting Internet ethnography was in fact initiated by scholars in marketing. Various terms have been proposed to name this kind of method: virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000), network ethnography (Howard, 2002), netnography (Kozinets, 2002), and webnography (Puri, 2007), primarily for aiding marketing research such as branding and consumer behavior in digital times. There has been increasing awareness by interactional sociolinguists as well as scholars in other disciplines that Internet ethnography should not be limited to collecting data from new media platforms, but should be combined with other techniques in traditional ethnography such as observation and interviews so as to diversify data types and make them mutually supportive to produce results that are more convincing and closer to reality. For example, Androutsopoulos (2008) advocates discourse-centered online ethnography (DCOE) which combines the systematic observation of selected sites of online discourse with direct contact with its social actors, analyzing not only the online texts but also practices concerning the production and reception of such texts.

Conversation Analysis: It is a method initially developed by Sacks et al. (1974) to analyze daily conversational structures and processes. The process of interaction in social media in fact resembles that of daily offline conversations, e.g., online forums and microblogging and commenting. In recent years, more and more studies on new media communication are applying this method. One early case of conversation analysis of new media is Herring (1999). She studied the interactional coherence of chat messages on the Internet and found that text-based internet chat was only loosely coherent. Although interaction on the social media environment often involves numerous participants, the number of conversational turns is often limited (one or two turns). Many studies are thus limited to examining only the first several turns or simply openings of the interaction. For instance, Frobenius (2011), a conversation analysis of the openings of v-blogs on YouTube, reported that the types of openings of the videos on the Internet are not always the same as conversation openings in other contexts, but represent a kind of interactional feature that can help encourage viewers' participation and construct v-bloggers' identity. Del-Teso-Craviotto (2006) extracted 30-min chat records in English and Spanish chat rooms for conversation analysis and highlighted the role of humor discourse in enabling users' to enjoy the delight of private chatting and keep a subtle social distance with their conversation partners.

Socio-pragmatic Analysis: Many studies of online interaction and relationship building can be identified as using socio-pragmatic analysis. For example, Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen (2014) examined interactions between two Finnish companies and their clients on Facebook and found two main strategies of impression management: elevating social acceptability and credibility. Each strategy included more specific techniques, e.g., the use of politeness markers, moral discourse, and avoidance of topics possibly resulting in a negative impression. Wu and Li (2015) compared the emotional branding strategies of global brands across Twitter and Weibo

and found a prevalent use of pragmaticist, evangelist, and sensualist appeals and of positive politeness strategies such as small talk, humor, "chicken soup" content, orality, slang, etc.

In short, considering the primary role of language in forming interaction and building meaningful and lasting relationships, the current agenda for researching online interaction and relationship building across cultures should spare some more space for sociolinguistic investigations.

4. Conclusion

Into the 21st century, the advent of new media has dramatically changed our communication practices. People rely heavily on new media to share information and feelings, to construct and present identities, to build and maintain social relationships and form speech communities, which all point to the need and significance of further exploration and advancement in new media communication across cultures.

This paper has reviewed and critiqued a large number of studies that have been conducted by both linguists and communication scholars that attend to the structures and patterns of new media usage across cultures. The authors are of the view that in order to better describe, interpret, and predict the patterns and development of human interaction in digital times, cross-disciplinary endeavor should be attempted. Research by communication scholars can be enriched not only from the macro-perspective and conceptualization by scholars from disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and socio-psychology, but can also benefit from the detailed and systematic methods of examining language and communication process by linguists.

As noted by previous researchers (e.g., Cappella, 1987; Duck & Pittman, 1993), the interdependence between people that constitutes a personal or social relationship derives in significant ways from their language use, and in digital contexts, where many social cues are "filtered out", language use becomes even more central to relational connectedness. Therefore, future studies of intercultural new media communication can further utilize the resources offered by sociolinguistics, e.g., utilizing the approach of variationist sociolinguistics to overcome the limitations of the gestalt method of thematic or content analysis with a detailed linguistic feature analysis with systematic quantification, or, utilizing the approach of interactional sociolinguistics for its fine-grained analysis of the linguistic mechanisms of human interaction.

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