WeChat as a Medium to Socialize into Chinese Culture:
The Persistence of Explicit Hierarchy

THESIS

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By
Chenxing Jin, M. A.
Graduate Program in East Asian Languages and Literatures

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Master's Examination Committee:
Xiaobin Jian, Advisor
Galal Walker
Abstract

Language socialization is the process of using language to construct social events and acquire language competence through socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986a, 1986b, 1990, 2011). The process reveals two layers of language socialization: participants gain language ability through interaction with a community, and participants use language as a medium to socialize in the community. The process of language socialization can help learners of a foreign language gradually acquire a competence in the language, while achieving membership in that community.

Virtual world, constructed by social media, has become a crucial part of people’s daily life. It establishes a community with its own cultural and social norms. Teachers of Chinese as a foreign language can facilitate their students functioning effectively in the context of social media. For Chinese pedagogy, the central concern is how to facilitate non-native speakers of Chinese to be socialized into the important Chinese online virtual communities. The virtual community constructed by WeChat is one of the most active social media in nowadays China.

This study takes WeChat as an example among various applications of social media and explores the value of using social media as a venue for Chinese language learners to socialize in a vast community that is not restricted by place or time, but nonetheless, constrained by culture and social norms. The process of language socialization through
WeChat contains two layers of socialization. The first, through interaction on WeChat, Chinese language learners can acquire and exercise language competence. Second, the learner can use such language competence to effectively socialize, and thus, integrate himself/herself into the WeChat community. The study is based on interviews with native speakers of Chinese who interact with non-native speakers of Chinese on WeChat. The study will adopt the concept of *performance* as a major framework to analyze the examples interviews provided. The examples all deal with moments that make native speaker feel “uncomfortable” with their non-native interlocutors. These “uncomfortable” feeling are caused by an unawareness of the differences in culture hierarchy. Culture hierarchy is not unique to Chinese community, however, the hierarchy in the Chinese community tends to be more consistent and explicit than the Western culture of hierarchy.

In addition, this study discusses several features of the languages on WeChat, including the oral-written mixed linguistic form and non-linguistic icons of emojis. The very different ways of using languages from daily communicating under face-to-face setting makes WeChat an outstanding case that language educators cannot ignore. In the end, the study suggests ways on integrating WeChat into a curriculum for Chinese language and culture.
Dedication

Dedicated to my husband: Xie Mingru

献给我先生
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Vita

February 1988 ............................................ Born, Hangzhou, China

2010 ................................................................. B.A. Chinese and English Bilingual Broadcasting and Anchoring, Zhejiang University of Media and Communications

2012 ................................................................. M.A. Teaching English as Foreign Language Education, Ohio State University

2014 to present .............................................. Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: East Asian Languages and Literatures

Chinese Language Pedagogy
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Chapter 1: Language Socialization and Social Media

1.1 Defining language socialization

Socialization has many definitions according to different theorists. Socialization involves the interaction between the individual and society. Many theorists (Ross 1896; Freud 1960; Mead 1956) in the past centuries were struggling with the role that individual is assigned in the society in the process of becoming the member of that society (Wentworth, 1980). According to Parsons (1937, 1951) and Merton (1949) who are specialized in the field of functionalism, they viewed the individual as a passive role that is socially directed. The individual internalizes the values of society through the process of socialization.

However, Schieffelin & Ochs (1986: 2) argued that socialization is a process of displaying (covert and overt) the interactions to the novice of expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Becker et al. 1961; Wentworth, 1980). Schieffelin & Ochs (1986: 2) further argued that “social interactions themselves are sociocultural environments” (Wentworth 1980:68) and that through their participation in social interaction, children come to internalize and gain performance competence in these sociocultural defined contexts (Leontyev 1981; Vygotsky 1978).” Following Schieffelin & Ochs (1986), I argued that children or novices are not passively receiving the social interactions, instead,
they are actively learning to recognize and construct the sociocultural environment. Children and other communication novices are active socializers.

Language socialization includes both socialization through language and to use socialization to learn language (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986: 2). It concerns the process of which children or novices acquire communicative competence of their base languages and become “particular speakers and members of communities” (Ochs and Schieffelin 2008, 2011, Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a, 1986b, 1996). Through exposure to and participation in “language-mediated interactions”, children and novices acquire language competence, i.e., “knowledge of the principles of social orders and systems of beliefs” (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986: 2). The process of language socialization for children or novice is also the process of acquiring the membership in a socioculturally defined community. During the process of socialization, children or novices are expected to come to “grips with the fact that cultural expectations about how people are to act and view” (Ochs 2002: 103). In short, as Elinor Ochs stated, they have to become a speaker of a culture (2002: 99).

1.2 Define second language socialization

Second language socialization shares many similar principles with language socialization. Patricia Duff defined second language socialization as the process “by which non-native speakers of a language, or people returning to a language they may have once understood or spoken but have since lost proficiency in, seek competence in the language and typically, membership and ability to participate in the practices of
communities in which that language is spoken” (2011: 564). People may encounter various settings of language contact in second language socialization, some of their experience may take place in the setting that the additional language is the dominant language in the society (Duff, 2011: 564) (e.g., second language learners of Spanish in Mexico); as the non-native learners of Chinese in the context of school or university foreign language classroom settings, they encounter more isolate or confined circumstances. Thus, as a language teacher, it is very important to provide appropriate contexts for students so that they can use appropriate expressions with situated behaviors to meet the expectations from their interlocutors when they communicate within the target community.

1.2.1 Experts and novices and the relationship to foreign/second language socialization

Patricia Duff defined “those who are more knowledgeable about and proficient in the language and familiar with the culture” as experts or old timers and those “with less proficiency” as the novices or newcomers. The second language socialization is usually mediated by those experts to such novices (2011: 566). The experts such as teachers, tutors, peers, relatives, or co-workers, they can be the mentors or agents into the process of socialization. Those mentors or agents not only help novices to acquire the knowledge of the target language but also “the ideologies, identities, stances, affective states, and practices associated with the language its users in particular communities of practices” (Duff, 2011).
For example, when a non-native speaker of Chinese has a conversation with native speaker through the medium of social media (such as WeChat), the interactions between the two interlocutors is a process of second language socialization. Under such circumstances, the non-native speaker can be seen as the novice and the native speaker as the expert in terms of Chinese language and Chinese culture. On one hand, when they have an interaction, the novice is using Chinese language to socialize with the expert and gaining in language competence during the interaction. On the other hand, the novice has to indicate his culture knowledge of Chinese so that he can successfully get his meaning across to the expert. The novice may not know the appropriate culture norms or behaviors at first; however, as continuing the on-going interactions and receiving the feedback from the expert, the novice can adjust his culture understanding of Chinese and eventually acquire the Chinese culture norms and become an old timer in a given Chinese community.

It is also necessary to keep in mind that the relationships between novices and experts are not fixed. It subscribes to the idea that a person may be an expert in one situation but a novice in another (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011). In the example above, the interlocutors are talking about an online game and the non-native speaker of Chinese may achieve higher status than the native speaker in that game; thus, in terms of online game, the non-native speaker is the expert and the native speaker is the novice. In fact, the influence of socialization between experts and novices is bidirectional and they can be both recipients and generators of such influence (Garret & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002). However, in the context of learning Chinese as a foreign language, in order to facilitate
Chinese language learners to function well in a Chinese community, thus, it is appropriate to let the native speakers make the “final judgement call” on the appropriateness to the target culture (Walker, 2010, p. 5). In this study, I will specifically interview and analyze from the native speakers’ perspectives of the interaction between Chinese language learners and native speakers on Chinese social media.

1.3 Current studies of second language socialization through an online community

The study of language socialization in the venue of an online community is a relatively new area and its progress and development are always intertwined with the development of new digital technology and the specific internet website. In fact, according to the vast development of new technology, this field is undergoing a burgeoning development especially on research focused on children, adolescents and adults.

One of the major contributions of language socialization through virtual practices is establishing the interactional norms across diverse cultures (Lam, 2008). Cassell and Tversky (2005) investigated an international virtual forum, the “Junior Summit 98”, which was hosted by Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The forum invited 3062 youth from 139 countries to engage in online discussion on the topic of global issues. The goal is to select 100 delegates from the 3-month-long online discussions and invite them to have a face-to-face summit as world leaders. The participants came from different cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds and posted over 19,000 posts during the 3-
month long online discussions. All the posts were written in English. The researchers selected 4,377 posts as a database and used computational word frequency analysis system to have a deep analysis on the language use in the data. According to their analysis, they found three major changes from the beginning stages of the forum to the later stage. The first is to “increase adoption of a collective vocabulary through the use of “we” instead of “I”. The second is about giving feedback and response. In the later stage, the participants changed to provide feedback or response to each other’s idea instead of focusing on expressing their own thoughts. The third change was that the participants tended to develop each other’s plans and integrating ideas to pursue common goals (Cassell & Tversky, 2005). The finding suggested the potential of using online community to facilitate participants to interchange ideas and establish collective social norms and shared common goals across the online community.

Belz (2003) and Ware (2005) studied collaborative learning in a foreign language program between a USA institution and a French university. The instructors paired students from both countries and asked students to exchange their ideas through email. By establishing such collaborative learning context, the students were expected to improve the language ability as well as social-cultural norms from their counterparts. The study indicated the necessity on developing the understanding of culturally forms of communicative genres, linguistic styles and academic conventions and expectations during the collaborative learning process. In addition, the searchers suggested the importance of providing guided opportunities for students to learn the linguistic and communicational differences. Meanwhile, it is necessary to establish a shared set of
interactional norms due to the diversity social-cultural backgrounds form which the participants came (Lam, 2008).

The most prominent study on second language socialization was conducted by Wan Shun Eva Lam. The study mainly draws attention to how the digital technology and virtual interactions in online environments mediate the learning of language and culture in the context of learning English as second language. Lam (2004) observed a group of Chinese immigrants in the United States joined an online chatting room with other Chinese worldwide. Lam undertook a deep research project by observing two specific Chinese L1 immigrants and conducting interviews with them and documenting their online textual utterances. The two participants used English and incorporated other forms of Chinese (for example, using Cantonese instead of Mandarin, or using Cantonese and English as a form of code-switching/mixing) to engage in talking and discussing in an online chat room. By observing the mixing of English vernacular and Romanized Cantonese from the utterances in the online chat room, participants, including the two Chinese immigrants and other Chinese worldwide, established a hybrid linguistic code (Lam, 2004, Lam & Kramsch, 2003) and the global alliance among youth internationally. The two participants constructed multicultural and multilingual hybrid identities as “English speakers that diverged from the monolingual imperative of their schooling experiences” (Lam, 2008, p. 306) through Web-based online community.

The purpose of such a study was to raise the awareness of minority students and encourage them to establish their own communities and identities. However, as I mentioned above, second language socialization occurs between novices and experts
when the novices seek membership into the target community by interacting and socializing with the experts. For this reason, I focus more on how to help students become engaged with the target community, rather than how the students could create their own communities as a group of language learners.

In addition, the studies I examined above are always concerned about the socialization from both ends, which means it is presented as the bidirectional interaction and socialization. The second language socialization also encounters such a situation. However, as I mentioned above, in my study, the specific area that I will pay attention to is the unidirectional socialization (from expert to novice) due to the purpose of the current study to help Chinese language learners improve their language ability as well as their understanding of Chinese culture through online practices. Language socialization through an online community is a relatively new area due to the development of technology: therefore, few studies have been conducted on this topic. Among previous studies, second language socialization studies are even fewer, not to mention second language socialization in the context of learning Chinese as a foreign language. Thus, my study will draw attention to observing Chinese language learners being socialized through online practices.

1.4 Define social media

1.4.1 What is social media

Social media is an extremely broad term (Sargeant & Tagg, 2014), an umbrella that “generally applied to web-based services that facilitate some forms of social interaction
or ‘networking’” (Zappavigna, 2012: 2). The other important concept that is essentially linked to social media is the creating, sharing and exchanging of information and ideas among individuals, which is referred to as “User Generated Content (UGC)” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This includes all the ways in which people make use of social media. Besides, the participants or users are not passively receiving information, instead, “the users of services and sites which make up modern web are themselves central to its nature – the audience or consumer is actively engaged in production” (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014: 3). Thus, any communications and interactions with end-users and communities on internet-based environment will be considered as social media. Therefore, Facebook, YouTube, Tweeter, Wikipedia, Myspace, LinkedIn, and WeChat are all included under this concept.

1.4.2 Brief history of social media

The Internet was invented in late 1960s, and this new technology immediately began to change lives and societies. Social networking was first launched in 1971 when the first email was sent. Later in 1978, the Bulletin Board System (BBS) was invented, which allowed users to upload, download, and exchange messages and data via phone lines. However, the users were limited by the technology of the time period. Jumping ahead to the 1990s, with the development of high-speech Internet, the World Wide Web (WWW) was launched which was the first time that content could be linked and connected on the Internet. That started with the Web 1.0 era.
After that, a revolutionary development, Web 2.0, was first used in 2004 and brought about a new way of utilizing WWW from both software developers and end-users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). That means that WWW users were no longer publishing individually; instead, the postings were “continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion” (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 60). As such, blogs, wikis and collaborative projects were developed as a result of Web 2.0, which laid the foundation for both the technical and ideological aspects of social media.

1.4.3 The popularity of social media among youth generations

With the undeniable popularity of social media, it is obvious that it plays a vital role in people’s daily lives. The average time people spend on social media has increased from 1.66 hours in 2013 to 1.72 hours per day last year, which accounts for approximately 28% of the total time people spend online (Bennet, 2015). The leading social medium, Facebook, can be seen as a prominent example of the importance of social media in our lives. In 2009, Facebook had 175 million active users; however, it grew to 350 million in 2011 and reached to 901 million in July 2012 (Socialbakers, 2012). In 2015, the number of monthly users reached almost 1.49 billion (D’Onfro, 2015). In his 2012 empirical study, Junco (2012) claimed that American students spent an average of 106 minutes per day on Facebook. More importantly, social media changes the way people communicate and interact with each other. It has not only made it easier to receive, send and share information, “but it also has facilitated communication, interaction and cooperation with different people, companies and organizations in different parts of the
world using various modalities such as writing, pictures, video or link sharing, and voice or video chat” (Akbari, Pilot & Simons 2015: 126). In this global society, social media can be used by people anytime and anywhere. (Except when access is restricted by governmental agencies such as in China.)

1.4.4 Current studies on social media and language learning

Considering the time students spend on Facebook and the innovation of such functionalities on social media, it is the educator’s responsibility to raise awareness of how social media can be incorporated into teaching and learning. As Davies proclaims “Today’s students are different in their interaction with media from those of previous generations …… Schools must teach and nurture the collaborative and networking skills that students need in the social networking Web 2.0 world” (2012: 11). In fact, many researchers have investigated the potential uses and pedagogical implications of social media and teaching in various fields (Ajjan and Hartshorne, 2008, , Jones et al., 2010 and Tiryakioglu and Erzurum, 2011).

Yu, Tian, Vogel & Chi-Wai Kwok (2010) conducted a quantitative online survey of the influences of social media on multiple aspects of student life among 478 undergraduate business majors. One hundred eighty-seven valid individual responses were collected only two weeks after they emailed the survey. The results indicate that engaging in social networking (e.g., Facebook) has a positive impact on students’ socialization from developing relationships and gaining acceptance from peers to increased acculturation of performance proficiency associated with university culture.
Jones et al. (2010) studied the relationship between the quality of students' social lives and their online learning experiences. She asserts that social networking can enhance the formal learning experience (Jones et al. 2010). Even though social life and learning experiences may overlap, some pedagogical implications and guidelines are necessary to combine these aspects that are typically perceived as independent.

In addition to the enhancement of the learning experience, social networking can establish effective background skills required for eLearning (de-Marcos et al., 2014). Stevenson & Liu (2013) conducted an online survey to explore the social network features on three foreign learning websites: Live Mocha, Palabea and Babbel. He argues that the most important aspect of social networking is to engage learners in an authentic communication environment that enables them to interact naturally with native speakers. As a result, it can be utilized as a platform for foreign language learning. Akbari, Pilot & Simons (2015) compared the learning outcomes of two groups of English language learners in Iran. More specifically, the researchers attempted to explore the differences between the face-to-face learning environment and a Facebook group in terms of autonomy, competence and relatedness, which are major motivations, according to the Self-Determination Theory. According to the author, "Learning a foreign language via Facebook helped our Iranian PhD students learn English better than the face-to-face environment because these students felt more autonomous, competent and related to other students” (Akbari, Pilot & Simons 2015: 131). Social media such as Facebook are not only helping to improve students’ foreign language proficiencies, but more importantly,
they can establish communities that enables students to create and share membership and motivate them to become autonomous learners.

Wang & Camilla (2014) conducted a study of 18 college-level intermediate Chinese language learners' writing performance on Facebook. The students were divided into two groups. One was asked to post their writing pieces and comments on a designated Facebook page weekly, while the control group did not post on a Facebook page. All participants were required to complete three writing tasks given at the beginning, middle and the end of the semester. The researchers found a significant difference in the second writing task, in which the students who posted writing updates and comments on Facebook were able to produce more Chinese characteristics than the other group. The researchers concluded that Facebook could be used as “an alternative pedagogical space for L2 literacy practice outside the classroom” (Wang & Camilla 2014: 78). The study also confirmed the positive outcomes of using Facebook as a facilitator to improve the learning experience.

These studies emphasize the significance of the social media in individuals’ daily lives. In addition, the researchers seem to hold quite positive attitudes about incorporating social media into the teaching and learning process. A similar situation is occurring in the field of Chinese as foreign language. With the limitation of the studies so far, it is not risky to predict that utilizing social media has the potential to enhance the learning experiences as well. Educators re-considering the incorporation of online social media into traditional language teaching and learning is crucial in terms of pedagogical perspectives. However, there are few studies on how to use other forms of social media,
for instance, WeChat, as a venue to enhance the learning experience and improve students’ language ability.

In addition, there is no study focused on social media from the perspective of language socialization or second language socialization. In the context of learning Chinese as a foreign language, it is impossible to neglect the most prominent end-users and representative social media in contemporary China, which is known as WeChat. As a newly invented social media, on one hand, it has the huge amount of Chinese end-users, meanwhile; it provides a venue for Chinese language learners to reach out Chinese community outside classrooms. It is necessary to draw attention on WeChat to analyze and observe the process of second language socialization and explore the value of using WeChat as a venue for second language socialization. Thus, in the following section, I will introduce the features on WeChat to lay a solid framework for further analysis.

1.5 WeChat as one of the most representative social media in China

1.5.1 What is WeChat

WeChat (Chinese Pinyin: weixin, literally means “micro message”), invented by Tencent, Inc., is a free mobile application that provides instant communication services for end-users among various operating systems including Android, iOS, and Windows (Weixin, n.d.). It was first lunched in January, 2011 and until the end of third quarter of 2015, it reached 650 million of monthly active users, which included users in China and overseas (Tencent third quarter results, n.d.).
1.5.2 Major functions on WeChat

WeChat is known mostly for private chatting and innocuous photo-sharing among small circles of friends (Economist, 2014). In addition, WeChat provides hold-to-talk voice messaging, broadcast (one-to-many) messaging, and video conferencing. In addition to chatting functions, WeChat provides video games, sharing of photographs and videos, and location sharing. Photographs may also be embellished with filters and captions, and a machine translation service is available as well. It can allow users to exchange contacts with people nearby via Bluetooth, as well as provide various features for contacting people at random if desired (if they are open to it), as well as integration with social networking services.

1.5.2.1 Chatting as the primary function on WeChat

“Connecting a half billion people just got more personal (Weixin, n.d.)” is stated on the front page of WeChat official website. The statement implies that the primary function for WeChat is to connect people. In order to reach out to people, one mode is conversation. As a social media, the most basic and fundamental features on WeChat revolves around chatting. The chatting on WeChat can be delivered by two forms: individual (one-on-one) chatting and group (one-to-many) chatting. Chatting on WeChat contains various forms for delivering messages to the counterparts. Group chatting and individual chatting share many features in common. Thus, in this study, I will use both group chatting and individual chatting as examples.
Figure 1 Example of the text message delivery on WeChat

Figure 2 Example of sharing images with interlocutors
The most dominant format to deliver message is through written text. The latest released version of WeChat supports 22 different languages, including English, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Spanish, and Arabic and so on. The example can be viewed in Figure 1. With the special features of internet language, the text can also include emoji as an additional “language” to deliver interlocutors’ emotions (See Figure 2). In addition to the text message, WeChat allows users to use voice to exchange messages. Users can hold "Hold to Talk" to start recording a message and release the button to send. The process is shown in Figure 3. Besides text and voice message, WeChat provides end-users to send and share the images with each other and they can share the current locations as well.

Figure 3 Example of "Hold to Talk" function
1.5.2.2 Other functions related with chatting on WeChat

As the primary function of WeChat is to connect people, it is important to provide various ways for people to connect with each other. WeChat designed two functions that provide different ways for people to get to know each other. In this section, my major focus is to introduce these two functions as providing alternative solutions for Chinese language learners to reach beyond the classroom to a broader Chinese community.

The first function is called “Shake” and it is presented in Figure 4. “Shake” provides an opportunity for people to know strangers and maybe make friends with them. When you use this function, you have to be physically shaking your mobile phone, and it allows you to see some random people who were shaking their phones at the same time. You can choose to drop a message and initiate a conversation with that person, or you can shake again to meet another random person. In addition, it provides the distance between your location and where the counterparts are. If you shake it in mainland China, the random person may not far away from you, for instance, 12 kilometers away from you as we can see in Figure 4. However, if you are outside China, for instance, in the United States, it may appear that random person is over 10,000 kilometers away from you. No matter where you are, you can always open WeChat and shake your phone to meet new people.

The other way to meet new people is to use the function of “People Nearby”. People Nearby allows its users to see the people near them who are using WeChat as well. It is presented in Figure 5. In order to run this function, both of Shake and People Nearby need to access your location data, meaning you have to have both enabled Location
Services on your mobile phone’s settings menu and grant WeChat access in the Location Services sub-menu.

Figure 4 “Shake” on WeChat

Figure 5 People nearby on WeChat
1.6 WeChat provides a constrained environment for second language socialization

Second language socialization is a broad and complex concept. People can be socialized into a target community by in-classroom instruction which is mediated by teachers, or they can be socialized through online chatting room with other people worldwide and establish a hybrid linguistic code and identities that has shared goals in a given community. However, due to the limitation of human capacity and broad concept of second language socialization, the second language socialization cannot be socialized into an entire community. The process of socialization is always mediated through constrained environments and people can only be socialized into some aspect of the community and its culture. For instance, in the ESL classroom, the students is socialized through the interaction with teachers. However, the environment of classroom is constrained as well: the time is limited to 55 minutes per session in university settings, the learning sources are limited to the textbooks and the practicing opportunities are limited by the number of students in the class. The same applies to language socialization through social media. When Chinese language learners use WeChat as a venue to socialize with a Chinese community, they are socialized into a constrained environment that is only limited to the context of social media and they can only be socialized into the Chinese language and culture that specifically appears on WeChat. The same behaviors may not be appropriate if it happens in other context. Therefore, in order to facilitate students’ functioning successfully on WeChat, exploring some unique features of WeChat is crucial to help Chinese language learners distinguish it from other mediations.
Chapter 2: Research question, framework and methodology

2.1 Research question

Chapter One discussed the different research perspectives on second language socialization and the major studies on this vital topic within the online community. There are many studies on social media as a vehicle for language education; however, there have been very few studies that bring these two subjects together to focus on second language socialization through social media. The major goal of this study is to increase awareness of the value of using WeChat as one kind of social media that provides a venue for people to participate in second language socialization. With the huge numbers of WeChat users in China, it is necessary to raise awareness of using WeChat as a venue for Chinese language learners to engage with elements of the Chinese community. When students utilize WeChat as a platform to socialize with native speakers and gain entrance to the target community, they may encounter various difficulties or mistakenly use inappropriate expressions due to their limited understanding of the cultural preferences that constrain the linguistic form. This research attempts to identify the reasons for such issues by analyzing the conversations between native speakers and language learners on WeChat.
2.2 Framework of analysis

2.2.1 Defining performance

Second language socialization occurs when non-native speakers seek communicative competence within the target language and membership as a participant in the target community (Duff, 2011). As novices engage more frequently with expert members within the target community, they gradually “develop an understanding of social actions, events, emotions, esthetics, knowledge, status, relationships, and other socio-cultural phenomena.” In other words, learning a language is the process of engaging in the target culture. According to Galal Walker (2000), “Language and culture cannot be separated” (Walker, 2). However, because the culture and other social norms are not presented explicitly to linguistic forms, they are very vague and abstract. For this reason, language learners may frequently encounter a situation in which they understand the meaning of a linguistic form but fail to grasp the complex cultural norms behind it.

For example, the Chinese term *chi le ma* 吃了吗 literally asks ‘Did you eat?’. Thus, from the perspective of linguistic form, it means someone is asking you about whether or not you have eaten. However, the proper answer to such a question is not so straightforward. One may reply with a simple *chi guo le* ‘Yes, I did’, or, one may continue the conversation by discussing meals with the person. What is the most appropriate reply to this question for a language learner? That always depends on the situation or context. When one meets a co-worker in the hallway around lunchtime, he may ask, *Chi le ma* 吃了吗 ‘Did you eat?’, which would serve as a simple greeting that would not require a discussion about food. If one’s friend texts this common phrase *chi le* 吃了吗...
ma 吃了吗 ‘Did you eat?’ on WeChat, it may be interpreted as an invitation to dinner. The variety of answers to such a simple question indicates the importance of knowing cultural preferences, social norms and traditions of a particular community. The challenge for the language learner is choosing the most appropriate answer for such a question in various contexts.

The cultural preferences, social norms or traditions are very vague, complicated and not directly observable. Rather they are encoded in the linguistic form. Ochs (1996) argues that it is a dilemma that is “concerned with how language practices encode and socialize information about society and culture.” Thus, language learners may become confused about how to express themselves in a culturally appropriate way when communicating with the target community in their language. Performance, a framework developed by Galal Walker and Mari Noda in 2000, may help to solve such challenges for language learners. A performance is one of a series of culturally-specific communicative events that involve specific people in defined roles saying specific words (script) and doing certain things at a particular time and place. (Walker & Noda, 2000) A performance is made up of the principle five elements: place, audience, role, time and script (or PARTS for short).

2.2.2 PARTS of a performance

A performance as a culturally-specific communicative event can be presented in various situations. For example, a student greeting his teacher when he enters the classroom before the class begins is a performance. As I mentioned previously, a
performance is determined by specific people with specific roles in a specific place and time and with a specific audience to say particular script. In the example above, the place is in a classroom and the time is before the class begins; the roles involved are the student and professor; the audience is his classmates. In such a situation, the students may say *Laoshi, nin hao* 老师，您好 ‘Teacher, hello’ as a daily greeting. In this example, the student uses “*nin*” instead of “*ni*”, which indicates respect for his teacher. In this situation, the social status of the student and teacher is not equal; the teacher is of a higher status than the student, so it is appropriate to use the honorific term *nin* 您 as an acknowledgement of the hierarchy between the teacher and the student. It also indicates a student’s respect for his teacher.

The same student later greets his classmate in the cafeteria around lunchtime is also a performance of the same category; however, the setting is changed to the cafeteria, the time is changed to noon, and the audience is changed to the people who are sitting in the cafeteria. The student may use the greeting, *ni chi fan ne* 你吃饭呢 ‘You are eating’ to address his classmate because they are of the same social status (both of them are students in college). Thus, the student uses *ni* 你 ‘you’ instead of *nin* 您 ‘you (with honor)’ as an indication of their equal relationship. In addition, the fact that the student uses “You are eating.” as a greeting instead of “hello” reinforces that the place is the cafeteria and it is lunchtime, which means that the ensuing conversation can be relatively causal rather than a formal greeting. From the examples presented here, the five elements influence and interact with each other; the script can be presented in various linguistic forms, according to place, time, audience and role.
The cultural preferences, social norms and traditions are not explicitly tied to linguistic forms; however, by using the performance as a framework of analysis, such cultural preferences become observable and memorable through the performance, just as language proficiency cannot be measured until a learner actually has an interaction with a native speaker. Based on such an observable event (e.g., conversation), the learner’s language proficiency can be accessed. Having a conversation on WeChat with a native speaker is also a communicative event that is regulated by the specific cultural preferences of WeChat. Thus, in the following chapter, I will use performance and its five elements (PARTS) as the framework to analyze my data.

2.3 Methodology and Procedure

“Performing a culture in each case should aim to create a memory focused on pleasing the subjects of the remembering so they will want to continue conversing. (Walker 2000, 4)” The goal of learning a foreign language is to help students function successfully in the target community, which requires them to meet the expectations of native speakers. In order to achieve this, I let native speakers make the final judgement call on deciding if the message the language learners produced made them feel comfortable or not. Thus, all the data I collected are presented from native speakers’ perspectives.

The interview was the major component of my research. My target interviewees were all native Chinese speakers. I interviewed 12 people in total, including six visiting scholars at The Ohio State University and six graduate students in the department of East
Asian Languages and Literatures at The Ohio State University. All of the visiting scholars, including five females and one male, had full-time employment at various universities in China, and they came to OSU as visiting scholars for one year. The age range of my participants was between 35 to 40 years old. The other six graduate students, including five females and one male, were full-time students at the Chinese Pedagogy Department at The Ohio State University. They all worked as teaching assistants at The Ohio State University and taught Chinese language classes on campus. One of the graduate students had only one year of teaching experience, and the others had more than two years teaching experience at the university. The age range of the students was between 26 to 30 years old.

The interviews were conducted privately on campus between February 9th and February 16th 2016. I interviewed each person individually. Each interview lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes. I did not record the interview; however, I took notes. The major topic of the interview concerned their conversations with Chinese language learners on WeChat. All of the interviewees had their own WeChat accounts and they frequently used WeChat as a communicative platform to interact with Chinese language learners. All the Chinese language learners with whom they interacted were full-time college students at The Ohio State University and have been studying Chinese for at least three years, which is considered the advanced level. I asked my interviewees if there was a scenario in which the text the Chinese language learners produced was not grammatically wrong but made them feel uncomfortable. In return, the native speakers
shared examples of this phenomenon. The interviewees also told me the contexts of each conversation and when and why they felt uncomfortable about them.

Before each interview, I asked my interviewee to sign an IRB form (see Appendix 1) to authorize me to present their examples in my research. All the examples I presented in this study were modified. All the names appearing in this study are pseudonyms and all the notes I collected from the interview will be stored in my computer for five years. All of my interviewees agreed to the IRB regulations and signed the form before I conducted each interview. After completing the interviews, I collected 40 examples that the native speakers shared with me. After I categorized and analyzed the data, I provided nine conversations as examples in this study, the analysis of which is presented in Chapter 3.
In this chapter, I will analyze several sample WeChat conversations with interviewees and attempt to identify the reasons for the sense of unease or “the uncomfortable feeling” that native speakers experience during conversations with Chinese as foreign language learners on WeChat. Haoxiang Liao (2012) analyzes the essential theme of “face” and the role it plays in the requesting and denying of favors in Chinese culture. He compares how the native speakers of Chinese and Chinese language learners use different expressions and strategies to approach this vital issue. He argues that the language learners have a “lack of hedges and insufficient expression of thoughtfulness” (Liao 2012, 161) compared to native speakers. In addition, He points out that the language learners may not realize their deficiencies until someone tells them, no matter how long they have lived in or interacted with members of the target community while using the target language. I faced a similar situation in my study. The problems experienced during conversations may be minor; however, it is vital to let the language learner know of his or her deficiencies, otherwise, he or she may never realize, and the mistakes will never be remedied.

In the following analysis, I use the five elements (PARTS) of performance as the major framework for analyzing my data. Throughout the analysis, I attempted to discern
the reasons for discomfort and perceived social faux pas on the part of native speakers. In the second half of this chapter, I will briefly discuss some language features and cultural preferences as they appear on WeChat.

3.1 The missed expectations associated with conversations on WeChat

Conversation can be defined as a genre of daily performance that involves “responsive storytelling” (Schank, 1990) sustained by the collaboration of two or more participants toward a shared goal in a given context with or without the assistance of external media (such as a writing system) (pp. 161).

From this definition, the two or more interlocutors are engaged in a dialog with a shared goal of “getting meaning across.” Thus, it is crucial for non-native speakers to use an appropriate style within a given context to deliver his or her message that meets the expectations of native speakers. As I mentioned in chapter two, the performance is a culturally-specific communicative event that involves a specific person at a particular place and time saying and doing certain things. Having a conversation on WeChat with a non-native speaker can be perceived as a kind of performance.

However, due to its unique setting, a WeChat performance is very different from that of a daily face-to-face interaction. For example, the place is limited to the online social media, thus, the element of place is fixed. The other element, audience, is fixed as well because conversations on WeChat are relatively private because it is one-on-one and involves no other participants. Thus, the audience may not be a concern in such a performance. (The audience will be restricted to the person or small group of persons
being called) The element of time on WeChat is also relatively flexible. The WeChat setting allows the interlocutors to conduct their conversation at any time or any place. In such a conversation, the interlocutors are not required to respond to their conversation partner immediately. In fact, it is common to send a message at 10:00 A.M and not receive the response until an hour later. Thus, the element of time does not play a deciding factor in such a performance. In fact, the role the partner plays in that conversation and the script the interlocutors follow are the two major factors that influence the performance. To be more specific, the role that the partner plays in that conversation is the deciding factor of his or her script during WeChat conversations. Thus, in the following analysis, I highlighted the role the interlocutors played and the script that was produced in the conversation on WeChat.

3.1.1 Local scope error

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Transcript</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NS: Please help me (to fill out this form).</td>
<td>NS: 请你帮帮忙😊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: X teacher, of course no problem. I have sent you an email. You can send me the survey and materials.</td>
<td>NNS: X老师，当然没问题，我已经回复你的邮件了，可以发给我调查的材料。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Hope you are well.</td>
<td>NNS: 希望你很不错。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: Thank you.</td>
<td>NS: 谢谢😊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: Just sent it to you.</td>
<td>NS: 发给你了</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: ok, I will do it later.</td>
<td>NNS: 好的，我一会儿做。</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 Conversation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker
In this conversation, the native speaker is the former Chinese teacher of the non-native speaker. The Chinese teacher is requesting that her former student fill out a survey. The teacher states that she sent an email earlier to her regarding a research survey and then asks her student to help her fill out the form "qing ni bang bang mang" 请你帮帮忙 ‘please help me’. The student replies that she would be happy to fill out the survey "dangran mei wenti" 当然没问题 ‘Of course, no problem’. In fact, she has already responded via email. In addition, the student hopes the teacher is doing well "xiwang ni hen bucuo" 希望你很不错 ‘Hope you are doing well’. The teacher thanks her and tells her that she sent the survey to her mailbox. The student replies that she will do it later. The entire conversation seems to go smoothly and the interlocutors get their meaning across. However, when the student attempts to wish her former teacher well, she states: “Xiwang ni hen bucuo” 希望你很不错 ‘Hope you are doing well’.” which is not an appropriate expression to say to someone who is of a higher status. "xiwang ni hen bucuo" 希望你很不错 ‘Hope you are doing well’ is a typical phrase used by an older person to convey a positive wish for a younger person or someone who is of a lower status. In this conversation, even though the Chinese teacher is asking her student to do her a favor, in this case, it seems the teacher is “entreating” her former student, the status of the Chinese teacher is still higher than that of her former student. There is an old saying in Chinese "yiri wei shi, zhongshen wei fu” 一日为师，终身为父 ‘Even if someone is your teacher
for only a day, you should regard him like your father for the rest of your life.’ In Chinese culture, once someone has taught you something, no matter if the roles become reversed or one’s social status changes, you will always be his/her student. This proverb means that no matter what kind of the situation the student and teacher encounter in the future, the student must always use respectful language to address his/her teacher. In such a case, instead of using *xiwang ni hen bucuo*, it may be more appropriate to use *zhuni yiqie shunli* 祝你一切顺利 ‘Wish everything is going smoothly for you.’

The other example (Figure 7) is a conversation between a non-native speaker and her current tutor. In this conversation, the non-native speaker asks for her tutor’s opinion on simplified and traditional Chinese characters *zhongguoren dui fantizi he jiantizi de kanfa* 中国人对繁体字和简体字的看法 ‘opinion on simplified and traditional characters’. The non-native speaker explains that her Chinese teacher, J gave the class an assignment to interview a native speaker. *J Laoshi de lingwai yimen gongke shi yao caifang zhonguoren* J 老师的另外一门功课是要采访中国人 ‘Another assignment from Mr. J’s class is to interview Chinese’. Her tutor replies that she will send responses from both herself and her daughter tomorrow *haode. wo keyi gaosu ni wo de guandian he wo nv’er de guandian. wo mingtian wo xie gei ni*. 好的。我可以告诉你我的观点和我女儿的观点，我明天写给你 ‘Sure, I can tell you both mine and my daughter’s opinions. I will write you tomorrow’ and the non-native speaker thanks her, which is appropriate.

In this conversation, the relationship between the non-native speaker and her tutor is not equal. In fact, there is still a hierarchy between them. Even though, her tutor is not her language teacher, she is a visiting scholar at The Ohio State University and she is much
older than the student. Her age and social status indicate that she has a superior position
to the non-native speaker who is a college student. In this case, even though she is not a
language teacher but a tutor, the non-native speaker should be aware of the language she
uses to address this woman and treat her as a teacher. In this conversation, the question,
“Will you explain your opinion to me?” usually is asked by the teacher. During the class,
when a teacher wants to inspire discussion, she will ask this question. In addition, the
word *jieshi* 解释 ‘explain’ usually indicates the need for detailed clarification or a
description of an entire process. Sometimes, *jieshi* 解释 ‘explain’ indicates a student is
doing something wrong, and the teacher is asking for an explanation for this mistake.
(*Jieshi yixia zheshi zenme huishi?* 解释一下这是怎么回事 ‘Explain what has happened
here?’). However, if a student wishes to interview someone about her opinions, especially
someone of a higher rank, either *shuoming* 说明 ‘enlighten’ or *tantan* 谈谈 ‘talk it over’
would be a better choice. In this conversation, the phrase *ni neng tantan/shuoshuo ni de
guandian ma* 你能谈谈/说说你的观点吗? ‘Will you tell me about your opinion?’ is
more appropriate than the one she chose.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Transcript</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Mr. Jian assigned more homework. He asked us to interview a Chinese person about his or her opinion/attitude about traditional and simplified Chinese characters.</td>
<td>Stating the reason for asking a NS for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Will you explain your opinion to me?</td>
<td>Asking someone who is of a lower status to explain his or her point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: Sure, I can tell you both of our point of views. I will write you tomorrow.</td>
<td>Confirming that she will help the NNS. Indicating future plan about when to provide the feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Thank you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: I will write the recommendation letter for you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: It will be easier if it is completed early.</td>
<td>Working on it earlier will reduce the workload.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Ask me anytime if you encounter questions.</td>
<td>Indicates that if the native speaker has any difficulties, it is ok to ask for help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7 Conversation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker (NNS=Non-native Speaker, NS=Native Speaker)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Transcript</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NS: When is the deadline?</td>
<td>Asking for the deadline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: January 31st, 2016</td>
<td>Providing the exact date of the deadline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Still have plenty time.</td>
<td>Indicates no hurry for writing the recommendation letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: Ok, I will write the recommendation letter for you.</td>
<td>Confirmation that she will write a recommendation letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: It will be easier if it is completed early.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Ask me anytime if you encounter questions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8 Conversation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker (NNS=Non-native Speaker, NS=Native Speaker)
In this conversation (Figure 8), the non-native speaker is a college student who is applying for a scholarship to attend a study abroad program. The native speaker is his current language teacher. The non-native speaker asks his teacher if she would be willing to write a recommendation letter for him. The teacher asks about the deadline for submission Deadline shi shenme shihou? Deadline 是什么时候? ‘When is the deadline?’. The student replies that the deadline is January 31st, 2016. In addition, the student adds that there is still plenty of time. Then, the teacher promises that she will write a recommendation letter for him Haode. Wo hui gei xie tuijianxin de 好的，我会给你写推荐信的。 ‘Ok, I will write the recommendation letter for you’. The student replies with two emojis and states that it would be easier if it is completed earlier zao zhunbei de hua geng qingsong 早准备的话更轻松 ‘It would be easier (for you) if you completed it early’. In addition, he tells his teacher that if she has any questions, ask him anytime yudao renhe wenti, suishi wenwen ba 遇到任何问题，随时问问吧 ‘You can ask any time when you have questions’.

In this situation, the student is asking for a large favor from his teacher. It is common in American culture to ask a teacher to write a recommendation letter; however, in Chinese culture, it is not common. The teacher does not say “yes” right away. Instead, she asks about the deadline first. This indicates that writing a recommendation letter is not a small favor; in fact, it is a big responsibility for the teacher. The student also is aware of the importance of the task, so he adds that the deadline is far away, “No hurry, you will have enough time to write the recommendation letter.” After considering this, the teacher commits to the request by stating she will write a recommendation for him. In
such a case, when a student asks for a serious favor from his teacher, the tone of the language should be formal and polite and he should be humble and show his sincerity toward his teacher.

However, after the teacher accepts his request, he does not thank her. In addition, which seems to indicate disrespect toward his teacher by stating, “zao zhunbei de hua geng qingsong 早准备的话更轻松. ‘It would less burdensome (for you) if you completed it early’.” This advice usually comes from someone who is older or of a higher status. In this context, the student is of a lower status than the teacher and is asking for help. For this reason, it would be more acceptable for the teacher to say this to the student, but not vice versa. In addition, the student follows up by informing his teacher to ask him for assistance if she has any problems yuda renhe wenti, suishi wenwen ba 遇到任何问题，随时问问吧. ‘You can ask any time when you have questions’. In Chinese culture, the teacher is perceived as knowledgeable and wise and the student is seen as the person who is eager to learn. It would be rare for a teacher to be confused about something and ask a student for help. (Instead, if a teacher were to be confused about something, he/she would ask his/her superior). The teacher’s role is to answer questions for students. In this conversation, the student may imply that the teacher may be uncertain about some of her student’s information (for example, his date of birth, the classes he attended, how many years he has studied Chinese and so on.), but he uses an inappropriate expression this possibility. It would be more appropriate if he had prefaced with ruguo/wanyi/如果/万一 ‘if/in case.’ “ruguo laoshi yuda renhe wenti 如果老师遇到任何问题，and added huaning 欢迎.” ‘Welcome’ in front of the second part, huaning suishi wen wo o 欢迎
随时问我哦 ‘You are welcome to ask me anytime’. This would have softened the tone of the request and avoided any implication that the teacher is not knowledgeable.

3.1.2 Invitation-related Scenarios

Figures 9, 10 and 11 are three examples of a conversation on WeChat involving various ways of extending invitations. In Figure 9, the interlocutors are classmates who met at The Ohio State University. During the summer, they were in China where they discussed on WeChat the possibility of hanging out together in Shanghai. The non-native speaker initiated the conversation by contacting the native speaker and telling her that she and her friend had returned to Shanghai  

CJ nihao, women huilai shanghai  CJ 你好，我们回来上海 ‘Hi CJ, we are back in Shanghai’ and living in the Xuhui District. Then he invites her to hang out with him and his classmates.  

women yinggai jianmian, keyi qu chifan, huozhe he kafei 我们应该见面，可以去吃饭，或者喝咖啡 ‘We should get together. We can go out to eat or have a cup of coffee’. The native speaker does not refuse his offer directly, instead, she explains that she is not in Shanghai but in Columbus  

keshi wo yijing hui Columbus 可是我已经回 Columbus 了 ‘But I’m already back in Columbus now’, which means she is has already gone back to America. She then asks him about the next available time they could get together and hangout  

12 yuefen hui hui Shanghai, nage shihou keyi chulai chifan 12 月份会回上海，那个时候可以出来吃饭. ‘Will be back in December. We can go out to eat at that time’ and invites him to dinner when she returns.
In Chinese culture, an invitation is usually delivered in a more formal/polite tone to show the guest respect. The guest is expected to express respect by “lowering his/her status” by using honorific words such as *nin 您* instead of *ni 你* (but they each mean ‘you’ in English) especially for a formal invitation. An invitation between friends may not include honorific words; however, a formal tone and a lowering of status are still needed to properly extend an invitation. In this conversation, when the non-native speaker extends an invitation to the native speaker, he states, “*women yinggai jianmian 我们应该见面.*” ‘we should get together’. In this question, *yingai 应该* ‘should’ stands out and changes the tone, making the invitation more like an order or command, which is commonly delivered by someone who is of a superior social status to the conversation partner. It is understood that the non-native speaker may directly translate the English word “*should*” into the Chinese expression “*yinggai 应该.*” when, in fact, they are not equal terms. Instead of using a declarative sentence, it is more acceptable to raise a question. For example, “*women jian ge mian? 我们见个面?*” would be a better choice to soften the tone and lower the inviter’s status to demonstrate politeness.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Transcript</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Hi CJ. We are back in Shanghai</td>
<td>NNS: CJ 你好，我们回来上海</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: We are staying in the Xuhui District</td>
<td>NNS: 我们住在徐汇区</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: We should hang out. We can go out to eat or have a cup of coffee.</td>
<td>NNS: 我们应该见面，可以去吃饭，或者喝咖啡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: But I have already returned to Columbus.</td>
<td>NS: 😞 😞 可是我已经回 Columbus 了😢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: I will come back in December. We can go out to eat then.</td>
<td>NS: 12 月份会回上海，那个时候可以出来吃饭。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: So fast. Ok, let us know when you are back.</td>
<td>NNS: 那么快。好的。你回来的时候就告诉我们😊</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 Conversation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker

(NNS=Non-native Speaker, NS=Native Speaker)

The examples in Figures 10 and 11 are similar to those illustrated in Figure 9. All the conversations occur between two friends and one of the friends is inviting the other to come and visit Shanghai/Beijing. However, throughout this conversation, *yinggai* 应该 ‘should’ is used in an inappropriate way. Figure 10 shows that the two friends are deciding when and where to hangout. The non-native speaker states, “Suoyi yinggai keyi gen ni jianmian 所以应该可以跟你见面,” ‘So, I should be able to see you’. In this phrase, “yinggai 应该” as “should” appears again. Looking back to the conversation (Figure 10), the native speaker is telling him that she is available anytime in Shanghai before Aug. 22nd wo 8 yue 22 zhiqian dou zai Shanghai 我 8 月 22 之前都在上海. ‘I will stay in Shanghai until Aug. 22nd’, which indicates she would like to meet with him if time allows. The non-native speaker replies that they will return to Shanghai in two weeks.
women liangge xingqi yihou huidao Shanghai 我们两个星期以后回到上海 ‘Sure. We will go back to Shanghai in two weeks’. This indicates that when they finally arrive in Shanghai, they will have time to hang out together. He may want to clarify the time of their date. Therefore, “yinggai 应该” as “should” is used for such a purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Transcript</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NS: When will you come to Shanghai? Let me know.</td>
<td>NS:你什么时候来上海？告诉我啊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: I will be in Shanghai before Aug. 22nd.</td>
<td>NS: 我 8 月 22 之前都在上海</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Sure. We will go back to Shanghai in two weeks.</td>
<td>NNS:好的，我们两星期以后回到上海。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: So I could see you then, right?</td>
<td>NNS:所以应该可以跟你见面，对不对？😊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: Of course, are all of you guys in Shanghai?</td>
<td>NS:12 可以的。你们都在上海吗？</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10 Conversation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker
(NNS=Non-native Speaker, NS=Native Speaker)

As mentioned previously, “yinggai 应该” implies that the nature of relationship or situation requires that something be done. “Should” is usually used when implying that there is a preferred or better thing to do. In such a case, in order to emphasize certainty when speaking Chinese, “yiding 一定’ ‘must’ is more appropriate than “yinggai” in that scenario. He could use women yiding yao jian yi mian 我们一定要见一面. ‘We really must get together’ to emphasize his willingness to meet. The same situation applies to the example in Figure 11. The non-native speaker is inviting the native speaker to come to Beijing for a visit if time allows. He states, “ruguo ni you kong, jiu yinggai lai Beijing 如
果你有空，就应该来北京。”If you have time, you should come to Beijing for a visit’. In this scenario, *yinggai 应该* has a strong indication that ‘coming to Beijing’ is an obligation or the only choice available. In fact, the non-native speaker may simply intend to express his kindness and hospitality to his friend. In Chinese culture, kindness and hospitality are highly valued. However, hospitality is not expressed by using a command or unavoidable obligation. Instead, a back and forth repetition may be a better choice. Back and forth repetition is very common in Chinese culture when someone wishes to extend an invitation because it indicates politeness and generosity. It usually takes several rounds: invite-refuse and invite again and refuse again and invite and accept. For example, in Figure 11, instead of using “*yinggai 应该*” or “should,” the politer option would have been to offer the invitation at least two or more times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Transcript</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NS: You can come to Hangzhou for a visit. I will show you around.</td>
<td>NS:你可以来杭州啊，我可以带你去附近玩。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: There is an ancient town near Hangzhou. Just like ancient China.</td>
<td>NS: 杭州附近有古镇，跟古代中国一样。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: (I think) you will like it.</td>
<td>NS:你应该会喜欢的。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: I like Hangzhou a lot. I have been there twice.</td>
<td>NNS:我很喜欢杭州。我去过两次。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: If I have a chance, I will meet with you.</td>
<td>NNS:如果有机会，就想跟你去见面。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: If you are free, you should come to Beijing. We can hang out together.</td>
<td>NNS: 如果你有空，就应该来北京。我们可以一起出去玩儿。</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11 Conversation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker
Conversation Transcript | Expectation
---|---
NNS: Miss Zhou, Good morning. | NNS: 周老师，早上好😊
Greeting
NNS: I know this is a simple question. | To prepare for asking a question.

NNS: but when we have to say the number 960,000,000, do Chinese people say 9.6 yi? (one yi is equal to one hundred million)? | NNS: 但是说 960,000,000 的时候，中国人不会说 9.6 亿吗？
To ask the question.

NNS: Should I say 96 wan? (one wan is equal to ten thousand?) | NNS: 应该说 96 万吗？
To ask another question.

NNS: I am working on my PowerPoint slides now. | NNS: 我现在做着 PPT😊
To indicate the reason for asking such a question.

NS: You should say 9.6 yi. These days, we do not say 9 wan wan 6 qian wan. | NS: 应该说 9.6 亿。现在不说 9 万万 6 千万了。
To provide the answer to the question.

Figure 12 Conversation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker

The examples from Figures 12, 13 and 14 were collected from conversations among a Chinese flagship student and her tutors. In Figure 12, the non-native speaker is asking a question about how to say big numbers in Chinese. The non-native speaker starts the conversation by greeting her tutor *zhou laoshi, zaoshanghao* 周老师，早上好. ‘Good morning, Miss Zhou’, she prefaces her question with, “I know it is a simple question, but I still want to ask……” (*Wo zhidao zheshiyige jiandan de wenti* 我知道这是个简单的问...
题). The student may want to express her regret for bothering her tutor to answer a simple
question. Thus she prefaces it with this sentence. However, as she states earlier in this
conversation, she refers to her tutor as teacher (“Zhou laoshi” ‘周老师’). In this case,
Miss Zhou is regarded as a knowledgeable person, as indicated by the title of “Miss
Zhou.”

Conventionally in China, the teacher plays a role of a facilitator to help students
solve problems. In most cases, the reason students ask for help from a teacher is that the
answer to the question is beyond their current knowledge capacity. Therefore, it is
important to have a teacher present to help them solve problems. If the question is simple,
there is no need to ask a teacher for help. The phrase “I know this is a simple question”
indicates that the question is straightforward; thus, the teacher might be offended by a
student bothering her with such a small, insignificant inquiry. As the non-native speaker
perceives the native speaker as her teacher, she should always keep this title in mind and
use the honorific that matches the title of teacher. It may be better to say, “you yige wenti
xiang qingjiao ni yixia 有一个问题想请你一下.” ‘I have a question I need to ask you’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Transcript</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Hello, I am at the front door of Derby Hall.</td>
<td>NNS: 你好，我在Derby Hall的门口前面</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Take your time</td>
<td>NNS: 慢慢走</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: Ok. I saw you now.</td>
<td>NS: 好的。我看到你了</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13 Conversation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker
(NNS=Non-native Speaker, NS=Native Speaker)
The example in Figure 13 is part of the conversation above involving the student and her tutor. The student states her location. *nihao, wo zai Derby Hall de menkou qianmian* 你好，我在 Derby Hall 的门口前面. ‘Hi, I am in front of Derby Hall, at the front gate’ so that the tutor can meet her at the right place. As we can see in the previous example, she addresses her tutor as “teacher.” It is more appropriate to keep referring to her by her title, instead of just using the simple expression “*ni hao 你好 hello*” throughout the conversation. In this scenario, using the phrase, “*Zhou Laoshi, wo zai Derby Hall de menkou qianmian* 周老师，我在 Derby Hall 的门口前面” would have been a better choice.

In Figure 14, the conversation is a continuation the one shown in Figure 7. The two interlocutors are a college student who is a non-native speaker of Chinese and her tutor, a native Chinese speaker and a visiting scholar currently at The Ohio State University. In this conversation, the student expresses her appreciation to her tutor after she provided useful opinions during the interview. Thus, the student states, “*xiexie ni xie de guandian 谢谢你写的观点.*” ‘Thank you for sharing your opinion’ and “*ni bang le wo da mang le 你帮了我大忙了* ‘Helping me was a huge favor’. In these two phrases, the student uses the informal version “*ni*” “你” or “you” to address her tutor.

As I mentioned earlier, even though the Chinese visiting scholar is her tutor, not an actual teacher, she is in her 40s and an assistant professor at the University in China while the college student is in her 20s. Therefore, it is more appropriate to call her “*laoshi*”
Teacher’ to acknowledge that she is in a superior position to the student herself. “ni

you” ‘you’ in Chinese usually is used to address someone who is the same age or around
the same rank. In this conversation, the student wants to express her great appreciation
for her tutor’s help; therefore, using “nin 您” (the respectful/formal version of “ni 你” or
‘you’) would have been more suitable for this situation. The conversation on WeChat
may be considered a more casual environment and sometimes it is not necessary to use
honorific language consistently in that setting. In this conversation, the alternative choice
would be to use her title Zhou Laoshi 周老师 ‘Miss Zhou’ instead of using “ni” 你 or
“you.” However, because the purpose of the conversation is for the student to thank her
teacher, using the respectful language with a person of superior rank is certainly
preferable if not necessary. There will never be a problem if people overuse the honorific
language; however, not using the appropriate language to address someone in a superior
role may cause offense and defeat the speaker’s intention.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Transcript</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Mr. Jian assigned another homework assignment. He asked us to interview a Chinese native speaker to discuss attitudes toward traditional and simplified Chinese characters.</td>
<td>NNS: 老师的另外一门课的功课是要采访中国人对繁体字和简体字的态度。。。  To state the reason for asking a native speaker for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Will you explain your opinion to me?</td>
<td>NNS: 你可以解释一下你的观点吗？  To ask someone who is of a lower status to explain his/her point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: Sure, I will tell you both my daughter’s and my opinion. I will write to you tomorrow.</td>
<td>NS: 好的。我可以告诉我的观点和我女儿的观点。明天我写给你。  To confirm that she will help the NNS. To tell her when she will be able to provide the feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Thank you</td>
<td>NNS: 谢谢。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: Thank you for sharing your opinions with me. You explained as a whole.</td>
<td>NNS: 谢谢你写的观点。我觉得很好，很完整的解释。  To indicate appreciation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS: You helped me with a huge favor.</td>
<td>NNS: 你帮了大忙了  To reiterate her appreciation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS: You are welcome.</td>
<td>NS: 不客气</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14 Conversation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker

(NNS=Non-native Speaker, NS=Native Speaker)

From the nine examples I listed above, the major reason for mistakes from non-native speakers that caused anxiety and discomfort in the conversations involved the ambiguity of the social hierarchy with the conversation partner. A hierarchical system in not unique to Chinese culture and society; it exists in every human group. However, different cultures and societies perceive hierarchy differently. In the Chinese community, when two Chinese people have a conversation, they always need to know some basic
background information about each other before they proceed. The basic background information could include age, job, gender, and place of birth. The purpose for gathering this type of information is so that the speaker can decide which style of language (honorific or informal) to use during the conversation. In other words, Chinese people are highly explicit about the hierarchy of a given situation and are careful not to disrupt it.

From the examples shown in Figures 6, 7 and 8, although the students are talking with their teachers, the style they choose is more appropriate for a teacher who is giving orders or commands to students. Therefore, the students incorrectly assumed the wrong roles in the conversation. The examples of conversations from Figures 9, 10 and 11 are among students and their friends or classmates. There are no hierarchical differences between them. In other words, the two conversation partners are equal. Thus, it is inappropriate for these students to use commanding tones in Chinese with their friends. Again, the language reflects that the students did keep the hierarchical positions in mind during the conversations.

In addition, Chinese people are constantly aware of hierarchy. In the example shown in Figure 6, even though the native speaker is her former language teacher, once the hierarchy has been established (teacher and student), it always remains. In this case, even though she is no longer her language teacher, the former hierarchy of teacher and student still exists. It is important for non-native speakers to keep this hierarchical relationship in mind and use honorific language to explicitly acknowledge it. Once it is recognized by the conversation partners, the one who is in a subordinate position is required to acknowledge this hierarchical relationship constantly and persistently. In the example
shown in Figures 12, 13 and 14, the students must use the name of the teacher with her title. Once the hierarchical relationship is established and agreed upon between the two conversation partners, the style of language (honorific or casual) is decided according to the statuses of each conversation partner. More importantly, this style choice will last as long as the two conversation partners are in the same relationship (teacher and student). For example, it is common for two Chinese people to negotiate how to refer to each other (e.g., teacher or student, Old Zhang or Little Li) at the first meeting and once they agree on the proper titles, it will be used for the rest of their conversation and even for all future meetings.

The inappropriate expressions and styles in the examples I listed above may not only appear on WeChat, students may dismiss the hierarchical system during everyday conversations in the real world as well. However, I argue that the errors may not be as obvious in other settings as they are on WeChat due to its unique format as I mentioned in Chapter One, WeChat establishes a virtual world in which every single message, expression, and conversation is delivered by cell phone or computer. In such a setting, the two conversation partners cannot see each other. Body language, facial expressions, tone of voice and emotions are all unknown due to the nature of the virtual world; the only thing that can be viewed is the text. Even though sometimes the student makes a mistake regarding the complex hierarchical positions during the conversation or does not consistently use correct titles, the gracious facial expressions and polite tone can help to diffuse a potentially “uncomfortable” moment.

The other possible reasons for students to dismiss the hierarchical system on WeChat
is due to the fact that it is a virtual community. It is true that the conversational setting on WeChat is more causal and flexible than real world communication which is strictly dependent on the context at that time. Thus, it is possible for students to regard WeChat as a leisure time entertainment for relaxing and having fun. Thus, it is understandable that students from China would choose casual conversational styles to communicate on WeChat, even with someone who is of a superior rank. The same situation would likely apply to native speakers as well. Because of the causal chatting environment, the native speaker would not be as focused on the hierarchical system as well. In the examples above, the conversations go smoothly, because they are not interrupted by inappropriate expressions, which indicate that the native speaker is not offended by such an informal style. The style the non-native speakers use is not technically wrong; however, it just makes the native speaker feel “uncomfortable.” Nevertheless, it is still vital for language learners to become aware of such formal usage so they can successfully communicate within the Chinese community in a culturally appropriate way.

3.2 The features of types of language on WeChat

As I mentioned previously, WeChat provides a controlled environment for people to socialize in the virtual world. One unique aspect is that people cannot see each other when they are conversing. In addition, body language, facial expressions, tone of voice (excluding the voice message function), and eye contact are all missing during the conversation. Therefore, in this setting, communication is highly reliant on the language
code itself. Due to the unique settings on WeChat, users have gradually developed a language with its own style and features.

3.2.1 Hybrid of oral-written language

Having a conversation on WeChat is different from daily face-to-face communication because everything is highly dependent on the text. On the other hand, it is not like writing an essay or a letter that the audience will not respond to immediately. People use a written linguistic form to deliver and exchange messages. However, the language on WeChat is not exclusively oral or written. Thus, the language can be seen as a kind of hybrid of oral and written forms. As a hybrid oral-written linguistic form, there is no clear boundary on which features belong to oral and which belong to written. The interlocutor may switch between the two scenarios according to the setting of such an interaction on WeChat. In most cases, it depends on the topic and the roles the interlocutors play.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Transcript</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>S1:</strong> Can a child get ready for college life after studying and preparing for the SAT for 8 to 12 month?</td>
<td><strong>S1:</strong> 如果孩子经过 8-12 月的准备 SAT，可以初步适应美国的高校学习和生活吗？</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S2:</strong> SAT is an American college entrance exam, which can improve your English proficiency. The vocabulary is relatively formal. However, the SAT cannot help to prepare one for the college life.</td>
<td><strong>S2:</strong> SAT 只是美国的高考，提高的是英语成绩。词汇也相对比较专业。而适应美国学习生活，单单靠 SAT 解决不了问题。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S2:</strong> For example, you may know how to order a Subway when you first enter the store.</td>
<td><strong>S2:</strong> 最简单的，来美国第一次去赛百味，你也不一定会点单。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S2:</strong> But usually Chinese students take the TOFEL and the SAT before they come to the United States. How well prepared and involved a student becomes with college life highly depends on his/her personality and habits.</td>
<td><strong>S2:</strong> 但是一般中国学生就是考了托福，SAT 之后来的美国……学校的融入程度，也要看学生自己的性格，习惯。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S1:</strong> Another concern is about choosing a major. How strong is the job market for the majors of finance or accounting?</td>
<td><strong>S1:</strong> 还有专业方面，选择会计，金融专业类别，就业前景如何？</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S2:</strong> Hahahahaha, that is a really good question.</td>
<td><strong>S2:</strong> 哈哈哈，这个问题问得好~😊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S1:</strong> (a laughing face)</td>
<td><strong>S1:</strong> 😄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S1:</strong> Choosing what kind of major depends on the kind of job you want to get in the future…… Business majors have a hard time finding jobs after graduation, and it is even harder for immigrants.</td>
<td><strong>S1:</strong> 选什么专业，关键看你未来想干什么，然后倒推……商科毕业在美国找工作很难，留美更难。</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 15** Conversation between two native spkeakers

(S1=Speaker One, S2=Speaker Two)

One of the examples can be seen in Figure 15, seen above. The conversation shown in Figure 15 takes place between two native speakers. S1 is asking about a study abroad program for his son with S2, who has been studying in the United States for over three...
years. In this example, S1 is asking if studying for the SAT eight to 12 months could help his son become more successfully engaged with campus life. S2 replies to his question by giving a brief introduction on the SAT. In that posting, the language is relatively formal, similar to that of written form (SAT zhishi meiguo de gaokao, tigao de shi yingyu chengji, cihui ye xiangdui bijiao zhuanye. SAT 只是美国的高考，提高的是英语成绩。词汇也相对比较专业。‘The SAT is an American college entrance exam, which can improve your English proficiency. The vocabulary is relatively professional). Then, S2 provides an example of the differences between studying for the SAT and learning how to order a sub at a Subway store. When S2 gives the example, the language style switches to a relatively casual oral form zui jiandan de 最简单的 ‘for the most common one’, lai meiguo diyici qu Saibaiwei, ni ye buyiding hui diandan. 来美国第一次去赛百味，你也不一定会点单. ‘When you come to America, the first time you go to Subway, you may not know how to order a sub’. In this part of the conversation, S2 does not use the phrase “for example” as one should if one were writing. S2 uses the phrase zui jiandan de 最简单的 ‘for the easiest one’ instead. This phrase is not a complete sentence, nor does it have any meaning on its own. The complete sentence should have been, ju yige zuijiandan de lizi 举一个最简单的例子 ‘using the most common situation as an example’. It is only acceptable in an oral conversation if the speaker eliminates some characters for convenience sake.

In the second half of this conversation, S2 suddenly uses ni 你 ‘you’ in the sentence. According to the context, “you” here refers to his son. S2 assumes that the first time his
son comes to Subway; he may not know how to order the food. However, in this conversation, the interlocutor is his father, not his son. In it acceptable to use “you” instead of “your son” in oral conversation, as the setting is more causal, even though grammatically it is incorrect. In fact, it would be completely incorrect in a letter or any written text. In this example, it is obvious that S2 switches between the oral and written style with in a same post. Thus, the language is neither in the casual, purely oral form nor the more formal purely written form.

Another example is when S1 asks about future careers associated with difference college majors. He asks about the job market for some majors, such as finance or accounting (haiyou zhuanye fangmian, xuanze kuaiji, jinrong zhuanye leibie, jiuye qianjing ruhe 还有专业方面，选择会计，金融专业类别，就业前景如何. ‘Another concern he has involves choosing a major. How strong is the job market for the majors of finance or accounting?’). He asks about the job market for the major of finance or accounting. Instead of answering his question directly, S2 comments on his question. (zhe ge wenti wendehao 这个问题问得好 ‘That was a really good question.’) by starting the sentence with hahaha 哈哈哈 ‘laughing sign’. This kind of casual expression typically appears during a conversation. After this post, S2 continues to provide more information to answer his question. In this example, the interlocutors switch between oral and written style between each post. Again, there is no clear boundary to distinguish between the oral and written form, I argue that the language on WeChat is a kind of hybrid of the oral and written form of text.
3.2.2 Addition emotional expressions to WeChat language: Emoji

3.2.2.1 What is an emoji?

An emoji is a small digital picture or icon that expresses ideas, emotions, and messages via several platforms (e.g., cellphone, computer, iPad) in electronic communication (Emoji, n.d.). Emoji was first created by Shigetaka Kurita in 1999 in Japan. Kurita was inspired by the symbols used in a weather broadcast, Chinese characters, street signs and Japanese comic art forms, (e.g., a light bulb above a character’s head usually signifies inspiration. The word “emoji” comes from two Japanese words as well, a combination of the Japanese term e (絵, "picture") + moji (文字, "character"). Emojis were first standardized in Unicode 6.0 in which the core emoji set consisted of only 722 characters. In 2010, the emoji application was supported by Apple to allow for installation on the iPhone. With the dramatic popularity of the iPhone, emojis went global. An additional set of approximately 250 emojis was included in Unicode 7.0 in 2014. As of August 2015, Unicode 8.0 included a list of 1,281 single- or double-character emoji symbols. (Novak, Smailovic, Sluban & Mozetic, 2015)

Emojis have become extremely popular on smartphones, in on-line chat rooms, and email applications. For example, according to a report in March, 2015 from Instagram, an online mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing and social media platform, nearly half of the texts on Instagram contain emojis (Instagram, n.d.) One of the major reasons for emojis’ popularity is that they enhance the emotions conveyed in a message. A recent study from Novak, Smailovic, Sluban & Mozetic (2015), compared two sets of Tweets, one
containing emojis and the other group containing simple text. The researchers concluded that the tweets containing emojis are more emotionally loaded and their presence has a greater impact on recipient’s emotional perception of the tweets (pp. 5).

In China, emojis came into the public domain with the development of an online communication platform --- QQ, an online chatting application that was first launched in China in February, 1999. Interestingly, the majority of users of QQ belong to the younger generation; therefore, emojis were first popular and well known only among this age group. It wasn’t until WeChat came along in 2011 and the rapid development of the smartphone that more and more people from different generations began to use WeChat as a tool for daily communication and emojis finally became more widely popular and in China. Some examples are displayed in Figure 16.

![Figure 16 Emojis on WeChat](image_url)
From the examples above and those I compared with my own experience in using WeChat, I found that females tend to use emojis more frequently than males. One possible reason for this is that the emojis themselves are very female oriented. For example, there is an emoji 🍀 for having a manicure, which is a very popular “female” pastime in China. Other such emojis can be found as follows: 💄 (lipstick), 💕 (high heel), 🤓 (bikini), and 🌸 (dress). Furthermore, in Chinese culture, femininity is always associated with the image of water (nv ren ru shui 女人如水 ‘female likes water’) due to its soft and gentle nature. A gentle voice is considered to be more feminine and more attractive to men. Thus, females traditionally tend to speak in a soft voice. However, when the conversation takes place via social media, these tones of voice are lost. How can women deliver their messages in a gentle tone? Emojis help with this conundrum. The addition of emojis to WeChat messages, allows women/girls to maintain their soft and cute quality which is highly favored in Chinese culture.

3.2.2.2 Dynamic use of emojis

The general purpose of emojis are to express and enhance the emotions contained in plain text. As emojis’ popularity becomes more widespread among users, the usage of these tools naturally becomes more diversified. Someone who is new to WeChat, such as Chinese language learners, may not be aware that some emojis are associated with various meanings and can be used in different contexts. For example, emoji 😂 is a very special one. This emoji has a watering mouth and heart-shaped eyes. Watering mouth
usually refers to something delicious to eat. “Heart-shaped eyes” usually appear in comic books or cartoons, indicating love or desire. When these features are combined into one emoji, the meaning is expanded. On one hand, it still contains its original meaning, connoting hunger for delicious food. For instance, if someone is describing a scrumptious breakfast, the conversation partner might reply with this emoji, meaning “yum and delicious” or “I want to try it as well!” The example can be seen in Figure 17.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Script</th>
<th>NS1: [Emoji]</th>
<th>NS2: (表情)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NS1: The Thai restaurant is super delicious! The one in front of my place.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS2: Really? Send me the picture</td>
<td>NS2: 真的吗？发照片过来！</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS1: (picture)</td>
<td>NS1: (照片)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS2: yeah…it looks so good!</td>
<td>NS2: 真的哦！看着好好吃！</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17 Conversation between native speakers with the use of emojis

The language on WeChat is unique and has its own features. On one hand, it combines the oral and written form, but does not denote a clear boundary between the two forms. Thus, I call it a hybrid oral-written form. This form can appear in one single message, or it can also be switched in one more complex complete conversation. The interlocutor can use oral form in one message and switch to a written form in the following one. Context always plays a major role in determining which form to use in the conversation. In addition, with the widespread use of emojis on WeChat, it is impossible to neglect the essential role emojis play in the conversation. As previously mentioned, one single emoji can contain various meanings and its usage is relatively flexible. With
such a large repertoire of emoji and their extreme popularity, emoji is a new signage that can be perceived as a new kind of WeChat communication.
4.1 The Goal of the Chinese Foreign Language Program

“Communication between adults requires social agreement and situated knowledge. The speaker, writer, or initiator has an intention to communicate and express that intention with contextualized means (Walker 2000, 54).” The recipient or interlocutor must recognize the initiator’s intention as well as his or her meaning. For example, when a student meets a fellow student in the hallway around lunch time, he says *chi le ma* 吃了吗? ‘Did you eat?’ The fellow student must decide how to best respond in this situation. The recipient may wonder if the conversation partner is giving him a simple greeting or wants to have a conversation about where to go for lunch. Since the student is walking quickly down the hallway and does not attempt to slow down, the recipient recognizes that, in this context, this common phase is serving as a simple greeting. Thus, the recipient decides to answer, *chi le* 吃了 ‘Yes, I did.’ The reason that the two conversation partners can communicate smoothly is that they have a shared culture that allows them to recognize each other’s intentions. This is similar to Dr. Walker’s proposed chain that facilitates being an individual in a society: “The culture creates meaning, meaning permits the framing and recognition of intention, and intentionality and interpretation permits a person to function as an individual in the culture and society.” (Walker 2000,
In fact, language is embedded in the culture. Learning to use a language effectively cannot be separated from learning the culture wherein that language is commonly used.

While Chinese culture imbues the Chinese language with meaning, it is not explicitly always tied linguistic forms. Therefore, it is a challenge for language learners to recognize, so they might miss the intentions of these linguistic forms. Culture as a source of meaning is abstract, complex and permeates the society. It is difficult to observe directly other than in a person’s behavior. Performance using the five elements (PARTS), provides a solution that makes culture observable and perceivable by language learners. As a language learner, the ultimate goal is to learn how to recognize a culturally motivated context and identify how to perform in a culturally appropriate way with the native speakers in the target community. As a language pedagogy educator, my goal is to help language learners recognize the intentions within the foreign culture and to behave in a way that meets the expectations of native speakers. In this way language learners can successfully navigate in a given Chinese community.

The Chinese philosopher, Wang Yangming (1472-1592) tells us: 知行合. ‘Knowing is doing’. This means that if someone does something, he or she knows it. For example, a girl sees a piano in a shop and says to her dad, “I know how to play that.” In fact, her only experience with a piano was seeing one being played on TV. She is convinced that if she could place her fingers on the right keys, she too, could play. The notion of “knowing” something is presented through “doing” that thing. This idea of hands-on learning can be applied to mastering a language. If a language learner can actually speak correctly and act appropriately at a particular place and time so that he or
she meets the expectations of the native speakers, we can conclude that the learner has gained proficiency in that language in that specific situation.

4.2 Integrating in-classroom knowledge with real world practice

Performed culture pedagogy can be a vital tool in the curriculum to help language learners gain language proficiency. The essential concept of this pedagogy is to encourage students to perform the language in various settings and contexts. In the following section, I propose two ways of utilizing WeChat as a language practice tool that can be integrated into real world activities.

4.2.1 Initiating a Relationship with a Native Speaker of Chinese

Making friends is a very basic communication skill that almost every individual existing in a society must acquire. It is vital for a foreign language learner to know how to initiate a relationship with native speakers in culturally appropriate ways. In the conventional in-class curriculum, communication skills are always practiced in a face-to-face setting. As people spend more and more time in the online virtual community, it is crucial to teach Chinese language learners to establish a relationship with native speakers of Chinese in a more virtual setting. On the other hand, as I mentioned in the Chapter one, throughout the process of language socialization, the novices can gradually improve their language ability through interacting with experts in the target community. Through these interactions with native speakers, the language learners can improve their language proficiency and learn about the culture as well. Due to the limited learning environment,
Chinese language learners in the United States have very few chances to communicate directly with native speakers of Chinese. WeChat provides a format for communicating with Chinese people directly, and the first step is to find them on WeChat.

One of the advantages of WeChat is that it provides various ways to get to know strangers no matter how far away they are. One way to make new friends is through the “shake” feature, which is located on the “discovery” page on WeChat, as shown in the Figure 18. Users click the “shake” button, which leads to the “shake it” page (see Figure 19). Then, users must physically shake their cellphones, and the system will look for someone who is shaking his or her phone at the same time. The system will automatically give the users an indication of the distance between them and the other “shakers.” (see the red circle in Figure 19). The other way to use this app is to directly click the “people nearby” button and the system will automatically show other people who are currently using WeChat (See Figure 20). Both access methods will appear on the greeting page if the user clicks the button that allows other WeChat users to appear on the screen (See Figure 21).
Figure 18 “Discover” page

Figure 19 “Shake” page
Figure 20 “People Nearby” page

Figure 21 Looking for new friends
Language teachers could start by asking students to “send a greeting” (in Figure 21) that is limited to 50 characters to the other users. Thus, the challenge is how to introduce oneself and greet the strangers appropriately with the goal of eventually accepting invitations from the other users and becoming “friends” on WeChat. After learning how to establish a friendship in the classroom, the teachers could encourage the students to try to make friends online. Through this practice, the students have the opportunity to use appropriate greeting expressions in a real-world setting. Self-introduction is another task that the students will need to learn as part of relationship building. The students also get the chance to practice how to respond appropriately based on the other users’ feedback. Such real-world, first-hand communication experiences can provide students with opportunities to interact with native speakers without physically living in China. By the end of the semester, the teacher could ask students to report how many friends in total they have made on WeChat through the “people nearby” or “shake” features. For advanced level students, the teacher could ask her students to share with their classmates the experience of making friends on WeChat.

4.2.2 Acculturation Regarding Traditional Chinese Conventions

With the rich culture and history of China, there are many traditions and conventions that have been passed down for hundreds of years. However, with societal improvements and the influence of modern technology, some of these traditional conventions have taken on new meanings. The tradition of the “red envelope” is a good example. Traditionally, during the celebration of the Spring Festival, or the Chinese New Year, people of the
older generation will give a red envelope filled with money to the younger generation as a wish for a prosperous new year.

In 2013, WeChat added a function that will allow people to give red envelopes to their friends (See in Figure 22). This became very popular among the Chinese community because people appreciated keeping the tradition alive. However, as we can see, the conventional rules have changed as it became a feature of WeChat. Now, it is not only the older generation who gives red envelopes to the young people, it is now a common occurrence between friends, lovers, co-workers and even classmates. The appropriate times for sending red envelopes have been changed as well. Now, the red envelope is not exclusively associated with the Spring Festival; instead, on WeChat, people use this function to send red envelopes in various scenarios regardless of season. For instance, it can be sent to a co-worker to celebrate a promotion. The amount of money involved has changed as well. The traditional red envelope usually contains more than 50 RMB, but amounts on WeChat can be as small as 1 RMB and as large as 200 RMB maximum. The overall purpose of the tradition remains the same--a way to share happiness and good wishes with friends. Chinese people also favor certain numbers, such as 520, which is pronounced similarly to “wo ai ni 我爱你” or “I love you.” For this reason, lovers can send 5.20 RMB on WeChat to declare their love for each other.

As a language teacher, it would be very useful to be able to present these changing traditions to the students when introducing such cultural conventions. In addition, the teacher could encourage her students to send red envelopes to their friends on special occasions, such as the Spring Festival. One limitation to such a function is that WeChat
users are required to link their bank accounts to WeChat to use the function of “sending red envelopes;” however, this function does not support bank accounts overseas at this time. Nevertheless, the purpose of introducing such a function in the classroom is to inform students about the latest trends in the Chinese community. WeChat is just like a living textbook that allows students to actually “see” and experience actual changes and traditions without going to China.

![Image of WeChat red packet](image)

Figure 22 Sending red pocket (envelope)

### 4.3 Basic Knowledge Before Using WeChat

When encouraging students to use WeChat as a medium to socialize with the
Chinese community, there are several basic aspects students must know before using this site. Usually, smartphones provide several different methods for typing Chinese characters; however, the most popular method is to use Pinyin to type the characters. Thus, students must be familiar with Pinyin in order to communicate effectively. In addition, students must be able to recognize a certain number of Chinese characters. They may not be able to write all the characters, however, students must be able to recognize them from the Pinyin they typed on the smartphone. As we know, the smartphone will suggest characters when the users type the wrong ones. Students also need to recognize the characters and be able to choose the correct ones from among the suggested expressions. I propose to introduce WeChat to the Chinese language learners in their second year of instruction. From that point, students will have acquired a familiarity with a certain number of characters and sentence structures. They would then have the ability to initiate a relationship using WeChat and provide responses accordingly.

4.4 Conclusion and Future Study

The examples I mentioned above are two simple ways to help students get hands-on experience with Chinese culture via WeChat. Thanks to modern technology, it is easy for students to download this application for free on their smartphones. Due to the difficulty of reaching out to the Chinese communities in the United States, WeChat provides a shortcut for students to connect virtually with this population. Once they begin to interact with native speakers on WeChat, the language socialization occurs simultaneously, which allows students to have more opportunities to improve their proficiency in the Chinese
language and increase their knowledge of communicating in the culture. As we assume Wang Yangming’s notion of “knowing is doing”, the activities either using “shake it” to find friends or sending red envelopes are real commonly used activities that students can actually “do” to socialize with native speakers of Chinese. Meanwhile, WeChat allows students get instant feedback from native speakers and, thus, can immediately realize if they are doing it correctly or successfully. Once they perform successfully under a particular context, the sense of achievement will motivate them to continue learning and interacting. Thus, I encourage teachers to integrate more activities that allow students to actually do something so they can accumulate the experiences within different given contexts.

The examples I presented in this study may not only apply to WeChat; however, due to the fact that it is an online virtual world, errors in communication are magnified. In addition, I encouraged the language educators to clearly point out the students’ mistakes or inappropriate usages during the process of learning Chinese as a foreign language, because once the students get into the real world and begin to communicate with the Chinese community, they would barely receive feedback on their mistakes. Thus, they would continue to make the same errors.

In this study, I focused on limited functions of WeChat that can be integrated into a language learning curriculum and extra-curriculum. There are others such as “Moments”, that provide a platform for students to interact and socialize with native speakers and to develop narratives in a circle of online friends. In the future, Chinese as a Foreign Language teachers, will explore more WeChat activities on a deeper level that allow
students to use the medium to become more thoroughly and quickly socialized into the Chinese communities and culture.
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