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Positioning (mis)aligned: The (un)making of intercultural asynchronous computer-mediated communication

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Abstract

Framed from positioning theory and dynamic systems theory, the paper reports on a naturalistic study involving four Chinese participants and their American peers in an intercultural asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) activity. Based on the moment-by-moment analysis and triangulation of forum posts, reflective essays, and retrospective interviews, this study charts out participants' positioning trajectories and identifies five discursive practices (pronouns, epistemic phrases, evaluative phrases, emoticons, and posting style) as control parameters of participants' positioning systems. The study also reveals that positioning in ACMC is multiple, emergent, and contested, defying preconceived roles and identities. Therefore, the success of ACMC can be attributed to the participants' ability to make sense and make use of discursive practices to negotiate positions and achieve positioning alignment. The pedagogical implications of positioning interrogation and positioning intervention in ACMC are also discussed.

Introduction

Online intercultural exchange "refers to the activity of engaging language learners in interaction and collaborative project work with partners from other cultures" through the use of communication technologies (O'Dowd, 2007, p. 4). The activity has been recognized as a treasure trove to develop learners' linguistic, intercultural, and digital competences. Despite these promising affordances, intercultural computer-mediated communication (CMC) is fraught with potentials of miscommunication and misunderstanding (Thorne, 2003; Ware & Kramsch, 2005), largely due to socio-cultural, rhetorical, and netiquette differences. In vast scholarship, communication issues have been consistently documented (Belz, 2002; Chun, 2011; Ware, 2005). Four groups of factors have been identified to cause communication problems in intercultural CMC (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006; Ware, 2005): (a) individual factors including participants' knowledge, expectations, motivation, and communicative competence; (b) classroom factors such as task design, group dynamics, and quality of teacher–teacher cooperation; (c) socio-institutional factors including logistic arrangement, workload, and course recognition; and (d) interactional factors such as communication styles and communication tools.

Whilst these studies shed light on the potential threats that may disrupt online intercultural communication, they tend to adopt a positivist stance of linear causality. They assume that miscommunication, as an end product, is caused by a set of discrete factors. Without doubt, all the factors reported thus far reflect the legitimate concerns for intercultural CMC (Helm, 2015). However, the positivism that underpins this line of research overlooks the dynamic nature of intercultural CMC. Instead of treating miscommunication and its precursory factors as discrete entities, researchers can be more sensitive to the fluidity of intercultural CMC through an interpretive stance. Miscommunication may not be caused by the presence or absence of

a certain factor, but rather by participants' emergent (mis)understanding of the positions expected and enacted. Interaction dynamics are constantly negotiated between intercultural participants, not prescribed by some predetermined factors. It is from this interpretive stance that the current study sets out to reveal how intercultural participants create and close discursive space when they negotiate multifarious positions emerging from online interaction.

Theoretical Framework

Positioning Theory

Positioning theory is "about how people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others" (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010, p. 2) "in jointly produced storylines" (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 37). Thus, positioning is the discursive act of placing interlocutors in positions. The theory entails three important constructs: position, storyline, and illocutionary force (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). A *position* is the distribution of "rights and duties with respect to what can legitimately be said and done by whom" (Harré, 2005, p. 186). Based on social or narrative convention about the distribution of rights and duties, a *storyline* unfolds and is usually taken for granted between interlocutors. Discursive practices, when referenced to the storyline, carry *illocutionary forces* (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). For instance, if Participant A, in intercultural CMC, asks Participant B to correct her English essay, her request positions herself as a language learner and B a language expert. According to the distribution of rights and duties in the conventional storyline of *helping those in need*, B is obliged to provide corrective feedback. However, if B dismisses A's request by complimenting that her English writing is good, B's deviation from the storyline might invoke an illocutionary force of saving A's face.

Positioning theory is particularly revealing in this study, as it underscores the transient and fluid nature of positioning in and through discursive practices. Unlike previous CMC research, which equates identities with positioning (Fong, Lin, & Engle, 2016), this study theorizes positioning to be different from roles and identities. Whereas roles are static and identities are stable, positioning is dynamic, fluid, and ephemeral (Harré & Slocum, 2003). For instance, in intercultural CMC, non-native speakers are typically, if not always, assigned the role of language learners, while native speakers[1] play the role of language experts. The role assignment is usually based on the assumption that the status or identity of native speakers guarantees the mastery of a pure and correct language system. Such presumption disregards the contested nature of interaction, whereby participants negotiate their positions by conforming to or digressing from storylines. For instance, intercultural CMC studies have found that native speakers may refrain from giving explicit corrective feedback for fear of hurting the feelings of language learners (Ware, 2005). Still, native speakers may not act out the learner–expert storyline, because they are not entirely capable of giving language feedback (Kitade, 2014). Participants are more agentive than what roles and identities precondition them to be. Therefore, positioning theory affords an appropriate theoretical lens to reveal the moment-by-moment dynamics in intercultural CMC.

Dynamic Systems Theory

Dynamic systems are "systems with numerical states that evolve over time" based on some principles (van Gelder & Port, 1995, p. 5). In dynamic systems theory (DST), systems are composed of multiple and interacting elements, emergent, co-adaptive, and self-organizing (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; van Geert, 2008). Dynamic systems are emergent, because systems' properties are spontaneously shaped by the systems' internal interactions and defy any preexisting configuration. Dynamic systems are co-adaptive, because they adapt to and incur changes in other systems. Finally, they are self-organizing, because systems' components "interact and amalgamate to create a structure at a higher level" without external interference (Merry & Kassavin, 1995, p. 172). Taken together, the fundamental tenet of DST is that evolution of systems is emergent and cannot be explained or predicted by simplistic linear causality.

While existing studies have revealed how identities are discursively constructed in intercultural CMC (e.g.,

Lam, 2000), they tend to focus on learners' agency of identity formation, with relatively little attention to how learners' identities are contested in intercultural interaction. Participants' agency, albeit important, does not fully represent the dynamism of interactional personae, which are susceptible to intercultural partners' expectations (e.g., Chun, 2011), performance, and negotiation of positions. There is a need to trace the evolution of positions and map out the fluctuating trajectory through intra-personal and inter-personal discourses (Henry, 2016). As such, the current study theorizes intercultural participants' positioning as a dynamic system and examines how positions are spontaneously emergent from and performed through interacting discursive acts (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

Interplay of Positioning Theory and DST

The current research synthesizes positioning theory and DST, highlighting the complementarity of the two theoretical lenses. Participants' positioning will be examined in three DST constructs: attractor state, phase transition, and control parameter.

In DST, an *attractor state* is understood as a dynamic pattern a system settles into (de Bot, 2008; van Geert, 2008). This pattern is relatively stable and exhibits somewhat fixed and predicable structure. In this study, when intercultural participants settle into relatively stable positions in a somewhat predicable storyline, I consider this positioning pattern an attractor state. As positioning is in a flux, it might evolve from one attractor state to another and settle into a renewed positioning pattern. This positioning shift or repositioning constitutes a *phase transition*, enabled by systems' *control parameters*. In DST, control parameters are the elements whose changes have an effect on the qualitative nature of the system (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014). While a system state can be "described in terms of the values of a very large number of variables," the qualitative character of the system state is "determined by the value of a far smaller number […] of key control parameters" (Byrne, 1998, p. 21). The current study focuses on asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC), typically devoid of contextualization cues in face-to-face settings. Therefore, I postulate that the control parameters of participants' positioning systems can be identified in and through participants' online discursive practices. These practices influence and are influenced by the positioning systems, indicative of a dialogic relation between discursive construction of positions and evolution of positioning systems.

Research Design

Research Questions

This study is guided by two research questions: (a) What do discursive practices shape and how are they shaped by positioning systems? (b) How do participants' positioning as a dynamic system evolve or remain in stasis in intercultural ACMC, eventually leading to positioning (mis)alignment and (un)successful communication?

Context and Participants

As an ongoing commitment to technology-mediated intercultural writing pedagogy, this study reports on a three-stage intercultural ACMC activity, involving 20 Chinese university students (enrolled in an *Intermediate English Writing* course) and 20 American university students (enrolled in a *Writing in Social Sciences* course). In the first stage, all students watched one Chinese movie (*Go Lala go*) and one American movie (*The devil wears Prada*), and wrote an essay in English to compare the movies. In the second stage, students were paired up and engaged in discussion in a self-built online forum in their own time. Each student received comments from one peer and gave comments to another. For example, a Chinese student (Chow) posted her movie essay to initiate a forum thread, and received comments from her American peer (Cindy). Simultaneously, Chow posted her comments on the movie essay by another American peer (Judy) in Judy's forum thread. Building on comments, students could expand their discussion to cover whatever issues they found interesting. To make the interaction naturalistic, teachers

from the two universities did not intervene throughout the 3-week interaction. In the third stage, students revised their movie essays based on the online discussion. They were also required to write a reflection essay to report how the ACMC activity contributed to their knowledge and skills of writing for an intercultural audience. All the posts, movie reviews drafts, and reflection essays were submitted for grading, which accounted for 15% of the course grade.

After the interaction, one colleague (with 10 years of teaching intercultural writing) and I independently read students' posts and ranked the interaction based on the quantity (the number of posts and words per post) and the quality (the interaction flow). We compared our rankings and found four inconsistencies, which were then discussed until agreement was reached. When the ranking was finalized, I adopted a "maximum variation sampling" design (Patton, 2002, p. 243) and purposefully focused on four Chinese students: Chow, Kwan, Fong, and Tseng (all pseudonyms). Chow had the most successful interaction, and Tseng the least. Nested between the two extremes were Kwan and Fong. This multi-case design affords a full and detailed picture of the interaction dynamics. For the reason of space, I only report the analysis based on the interaction between the Chinese students and the American peers assigned to comment on their essays. Table 1 shows the basic information of the dyads.

Table 1. *Profile of the Four Dyads*

Chinese Participant	American Peer	Number of Posts	Number of Words
Chow	Cindy	14	5,738
Kwan	Kevin	11 (20)[a]	3,090
Fong	Flora	9	3,239
Tseng	Tina	5	1,620

Note. [a] In three instances, Kwan and Kevin broke down their comments into several posts. The number in parentheses shows the absolute count of posts, while the number outside the bracket is the post count combining the rapid-succession posts.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedure

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology and analyzes textual data including forum posts, reflection essays, and retrospective interviews (see also Figure 1). To capture the positioning dynamics, moment-by-moment analysis was performed. First, the aforementioned colleague and I independently read forum posts and identified illocutionary acts, which were then logged in a time-sequenced grid. Second, we examined the communicative rights and duties and identified the positions implied by the illocutionary acts. Positions were then grouped into storylines in the time-sequenced grid. Next, we read the forum posts again, and performed open coding (Glaser, 1992) to identify discursive practices that influenced or were influenced by position ascription, acceptance, rejection, and shift. In the theoretical coding process (Glaser, 1992), we categorized these codes in light of Kiesling's (2009) characterization of language styles as stance-making resources. After this, we met and compared our codes about time-sequenced grids, positions, storylines, and discursive practices. We resolved all inconsistencies through discussion. We identified five discursive practices: pronouns, epistemic phrases, evaluative phrases,[2] emoticons, and posting style. In the fourth step, in order to close in on the learner experience (Levy, 2015) and increase information richness (O'Rourke, 2008), retrospective interviews were conducted with the four Chinese participants, who were asked to share their lived experience. They were shown the forum posts and asked what positions they assumed and expected their peers to assume and what intentions they had in mind when using certain discursive practices. Finally, interviews were transcribed and triangulated with the forum posts and reflection essays to check the validity of the positions and discursive practices identified in the coding process. Where inconsistences occurred (12 instances), I emailed the participants to ask for clarification. Based on the time-sequenced grid, textual data, and learners' insights, I was able to chart out the positioning trajectory in each dyad, and examine the relationship between positioning and discursive practices.
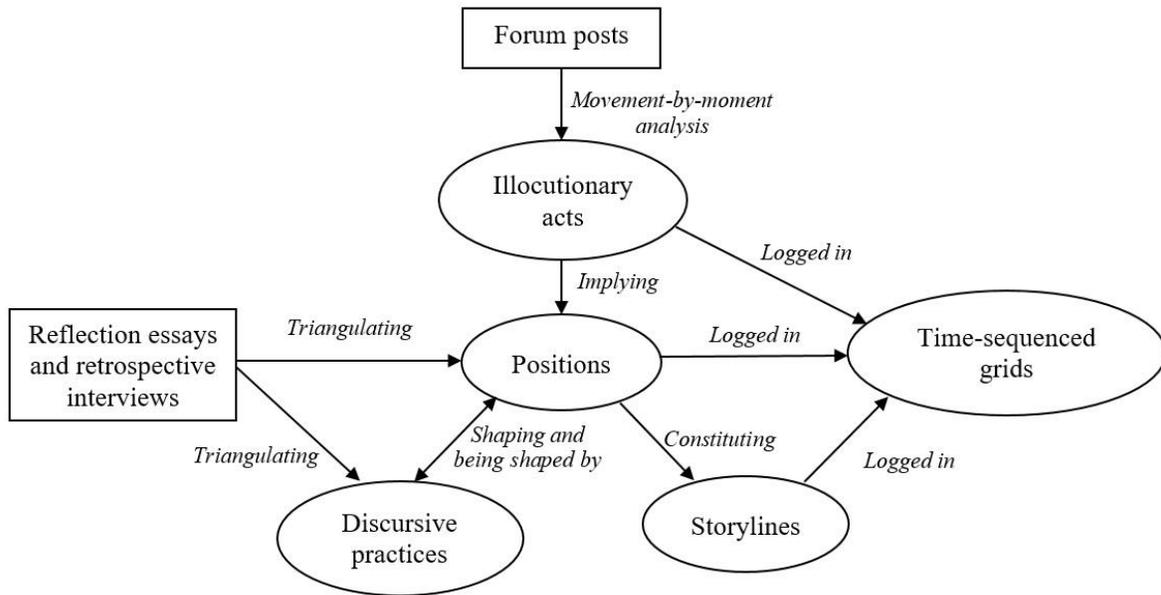
Figure 1. Triangulation of data sources. The squares represent data sources, and the ovals represent data analyses.

Data Analysis

This section analyzes the vignettes of four dyads. In each subsection, the positioning trajectory is presented and then discursive practices are examined to demonstrate how they create and reflect (mis)aligned positioning.

Chow: Positioning Aligned

Chow initially positioned her American peer, Cindy, as "a language savant and an eye-opener" (Chow's reflection), while Cindy positioned the dyad as peer reviewers who would go through "a back-and-forth revision process of film critique papers" (Cindy's reflection). As the positioning trajectory shows (see Figure 2), however, the positioning of language novice or expert was absent from the storylines. Contrary to her initial expectation, Chow never solicited language advice from Cindy, and Cindy did not comment on Chow's English (writing). In Chow's reflection, she explained, "when I read American peers' movie essays, I noticed that they didn't pay close attention to tense agreement or singular/plural agreement. They made some other mistakes as well." Therefore, she did not invite any language correction or comment on her writing. Despite this, she believed that the intercultural activity benefited her English learning: "Although we didn't focus on the movie essays, we had rounds and rounds of online discussion. That gave me ample opportunities to use and learn English" (Chow's interview). The dyad was able to have "rounds and rounds of online discussion" because they consciously adjusted their initial expectations and evolved their positions to achieve alignment.

Post	Author	Storyline 1		Storyline 2		Storyline 3		Storyline 4		Storyline 5	
		Chow	Cindy	Chow	Cindy	Chow	Cindy	Chow	Cindy	Chow	Cindy
1	Cindy	movie commentator	movie commentator	fashion expert	fashion layman						
2	Chow	movie commentator	movie commentator	fashion expert	fashion layman						
3	Cindy	movie commentator		fashion expert	fashion layman						
4	Chow			fashion observer	fashion observer	opinion sharer	(opinion sharer)	cultural information seeker	cultural information provider		
5	Cindy			fashion observers		opinion sharer	opinion sharer	cultural information sharer	cultural information sharer		
6	Chow			fashion observers		opinion sharers		cultural information sharers			
7	Cindy					opinion sharers		cultural information sharers			
8	Chow					opinion sharers		cultural information sharers		reality show sharer	(reality show sharer)
9	Cindy					opinion sharers		cultural information sharers		reality show sharer	reality show sharer
10	Chow	movie commentator	(movie commentator)			opinion sharers				reality show sharers	
11	Cindy	movie commentator	movie commentator			opinion sharers				reality show sharers	
12	Chow	movie commentators								reality show sharers	
13	Cindy	movie commentators								reality show sharers	
14	Chow	movie commentators								reality show sharers	

Figure 2. Chow and Cindy's positioning trajectory. Cells that share the same name indicate self-position; different names indicate other-position. For instance, in Post 1 Storyline 2, Cindy positions Chow as a fashion expert and herself a layman. Positions without brackets indicate positions explicitly assigned. Positions in brackets represent positions implicitly assigned. Positions in a combined cell are positions reciprocally assigned. Empty cells indicate no position explicitly or implicitly assigned.

In the dyad's positioning trajectory, three shifts were noticeable (Storylines 1, 2, and 4). Of particular interest was positioning alignment in Storyline 2. In Post 1 (see Appendix A), Cindy used evaluative phrases (*really enjoy*, *very observant*), epistemic phrases (*point*, *notice*) and the second-person pronoun to position Chow as a fashion expert. Chow accepted this position by describing how she formed a habit to take note of fashion style in movies. When the storyline unfolded, Cindy, as a fashion layman, sought information about cinematic fashion techniques from Chow, as a fashion expert. However, Chow could not provide the exact information Cindy requested. Chow's use of epistemic phrases (*recalling*, *thought out*, and *occurred to*; see Post 4 in Appendix A) showed that she really tried her best, but she could only offer Cindy a second-best answer. Chow then used epistemic phrases and the second-person pronoun ("have you found out some movies which use a similar skill") to explicitly invite Cindy to provide information. Therefore, Chow repositioned herself from a fashion expert to a fashion observer, who both provided and sought information. Also noteworthy is Chow's use of the inclusive pronoun *we* (Post 4) to position Cindy as a kindred observer and to create "a shared alignment" (Gordon & Luke, 2012, p. 118). Cindy accepted the fashion observer position by offering her epistemic knowledge (Post 5). After this negotiation, the dyad converged on reciprocally positioning each other as a fashion observer, exchanging information about cinematic fashion techniques.

Similarly, Storyline 4 is another example showing the dyad's flexibility when negotiating their positions. Chow at first positioned herself as a cultural information seeker by asking an epistemic question "What kind of role do the women play in American society generally?" (see Post 4 in Appendix A). In her response, Cindy not only provided the information, but also repositioned the dyad as information sharers by asking "Is this similar in China, or are the dynamics different?" (Post 5). From then on, the dyad reciprocally solicited and provided cultural information, achieving positioning alignment.

A final note is that Chow used the emoticon O(∩_∩)O, a cute and happy face in the Chinese netiquette, to reflect solidarity and intimacy (see Posts 10 and 14 in Appendix A). As shown in Figure 2, Chow and Cindy had a fairly balanced set of communicative rights and duties in the second half of the interaction. Both of them "had a lot of questions for each other and were able to provide answers along with examples" (Cindy's reflection). This back-and-forth positioning alignment culminated in Chow's use of emoticons to "show the interaction was getting intimate and natural" (Chow's interview).

Kwan: Positioning Partially Aligned

Kwan had an ambitious array of expectations for the activity: she wanted to "discuss the movie essays, improve writing skills, understand American culture, and make e-pals with American peers" (Kwan's reflection). Thus, Kwan positioned herself as an author, a language learner, a culture explorer, and a potential e-pal. Her peer Kevin, however, negatively expected the dyad to have "awkward conversation" (Kevin's reflection).

As it turned out, the dyad was able to adjust to each other, and their positions were largely aligned in Storylines 1, 2, 3, and 5 (see Figure 3). A noticeable position shift was observed in Storyline 5. At first, Kwan positioned herself as a cultural learner and asked Kevin "the best way" to "learn more about American culture" (see Post 17 in Appendix B). In Kevin's response, he simultaneously positioned himself as an expert of American culture and a learner of Chinese culture (Post 18). Kwan replied with epistemic suggestions and examples (Post 19), thereby successfully repositioning herself from an American culture learner to a Chinese culture expert. She explained in her interview, "I purposefully observed which topic [Kevin] was interested in and crafted my response to his interest."

Positioning misalignment was found in Storylines 4 and 6. In Storyline 4, Kwan positioned herself as an English language learner. She asked Kevin to give "some advices on improving [her] writing and [her] overall English" (see Post 15 in Appendix B). Kevin performed a language expert and judged that Kwan's English "is very understandable and easy to follow"; but he also advised Kwan to avoid "extravagant wording" (Post 16). Kwan was "so happy to hear [Kevin's] reply" and asked more epistemic questions, such as "memorizing new words [is] hard for my poor memory; What should I do?" (Post 17). However, Kevin did not respond to Kwan's question, suggesting that he no longer acted as a language expert.

Post	Author	Storyline 1		Storyline 2		Storyline 3		Storyline 4		Storyline 5		Storyline 6	
		Kwan	Kevin	Kwan	Kevin	Kwan	Kevin	Kwan	Kevin	Kwan	Kevin	Kwan	Kevin
1-5	Kevin	author	peer-reviewer									(e-pal)	
6	Kwan	author	peer-reviewer	movie commentator	movie commentator								
7	Kevin	author	peer-reviewer	movie commentators									
8-10	Kwan			movie commentators		cultural information seeker	cultural information provider					e-pal	(e-pal)
11	Kevin			movie commentators		cultural information seeker	cultural information provider					(not responded)	
12-15	Kwan					cultural information seeker	cultural information provider	language learner	language expert			e-pal	(e-pal)
16	Kevin					cultural information seeker	cultural information provider	language learner	language expert			(not responded)	
17	Kwan			movie commentator	movie commentator	cultural information provider		language learner	language expert	American culture learner	American culture expert		
18	Kevin				movie commentator			(not responded)		American culture learner / Chinese culture expert	American culture expert / Chinese culture learner		
19	Kwan									Chinese culture expert	Chinese culture learner		
20	Kevin									Chinese culture expert	Chinese culture learner	cooperative ACMC partner	appreciative ACMC partner

Figure 3. Kwan and Kevin's positioning trajectory. Positions that are not addressed or responded are marked as *(not responded)*.

In Storyline 6, it is interesting to note that the dyad's posting style indexed a unique "interactional tempo" (O'Rourke, 2008, p. 234). Unlike the other participants who almost always posted their comments in "a single draft-and-send operation," the dyad had three instances of breaking their comments into several posts, or what O'Rourke called "send-units" (2008, p. 234). For instance, Kevin's very first set of comments

(Posts 1–5) were broken down into five posts, or send-units. This rapid interactional tempo was unusual in a threaded forum—an ACMC medium where more time was spent on deliberation and elaboration (see Furstenberg & Levet, 2010). This led Kwan to assume that Kevin "tried to craft an informal and engaging dialogue," so she felt obligated to "follow suit" (Kwan's interview). Interestingly, Kwan "drafted all the talking points in a Word file, copied and pasted the first point in the comment box, and hit send; and then copied, pasted, and sent the second, the third…" (Kwan's interview). This retrospective account shows that even though Kwan created her comments in a single draft, when she posted the comments, she broke them down into several send-units. As such, she intentionally emulated Kevin's posting style to maintain what she perceived an informal interactional tempo. However, what transpired in the ensuing interaction was that Kevin reverted back to the one-post style, and Kwan stopped the multi-post style after her second attempt. Kwan later found out that she had misinterpreted the position ascribed to her. She lamented in her interview: "I thought I would make an e-pal, but as it turned out, I did not." Kwan's emulation of the multi-post style and the dyad's return to the formal one-post style indicated positioning misalignment in the e-pal storyline.

Fong: Positioning Partially Aligned

At the beginning of the activity, Fong wanted to "communicate with native speakers," "experience cultural shock," "polish [her] paper," and "learn from peers" (Fong's reflection). In Storylines 2, 3, 4, and 5 (see Figure 4), the dyad achieved positioning alignment, exchanging opinions, personal stories, comments, cultural information, and interests in American TV series. Typically, in Storyline 2, Fong at first solicited Flora's opinion on balancing life and work. Flora not only offered her preferred choice, but also asked Fong: "I am curious to know what you would prefer," repositioning the dyad as opinion sharers. Fong then offered her opinion and also solicited Flora's, thereby achieving positioning alignment. When Fong shared her personal story in Post 7, Flora was able to follow this updated storyline and the dyad shared more stories in the ensuing discussion (see Storyline 2 Figure 4).

Post	Author	Storyline 1		Storyline 2		Storyline 3		Storyline 4		Storyline 5		Storyline 6	
		Fong	Flora	Fong	Flora	Fong	Flora	Fong	Flora	Fong	Flora	Fong	Flora
1	Flora	camera technique expert	(camera technique layman)										
2	Fong	amateur photographer		opinion seeker	opinion provider	movie commentator	movie commentator						
3	Flora			opinion sharer	opinion sharer	movie commentators							
4	Fong			opinion sharers		movie commentators		culture teacher	culture learner	American TV show follower			
5	Flora			opinion sharers		movie commentators		culture teacher	culture learner	American TV show follower	American TV show follower		
7	Fong			personal story & opinion sharer	(personal story & opinion sharer)	movie commentators		culture teacher	culture learner	American TV show followers		language learner	language expert
8	Flora			personal story & opinion sharers		movie commentator		culture teacher	culture learner	American TV show followers		*(not responded)*	
9	Fong			personal story & opinion sharers				culture teacher	culture learner			language learner	language expert

Figure 4. Fong and Flora's positioning trajectory.

Perhaps the most salient feature of the dyadic interaction was the frequent use of emoticons to signal position alignment and to negotiate position assignment. As repetition creates interpersonal involvement (Tannen, 2007), the reciprocal and repeated use of emoticons confirmed and reinforced their position shift "from a peer reviewer who was tasked to make essay comments to a friend who shared thoughts, interests, and stories" (Fong's interview). For instance, Fong used a wide array of emoticons to express her affinity for the interaction. In Post 7 (see Appendix C), the emoticons :), ^ ^, and TvT suggested that Fong was "very delighted to have many valuable discussions with [her] peer" (Fong's reflection).

On the other hand, as identified in some studies (e.g., Chang, 2016; Dresner & Herring, 2010), emoticons were used to mitigate the negative perlocutionary act of position imposition. In Post 4 (see Appendix C), Fong explained to Flora the Chinese convention of putting the family name before the given name, thereby positioning herself to claim epistemic superiority. At this point, a new storyline emerged, potentially upsetting the power-neutral balance established in the previous posts. Thus, Fong strategically used the :)

emoticon in Post 4 to mitigate the "imposition of the dispreferred action" (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006, p. 317)—positioning Flora as a Chinese culture learner (see Storyline 4 in Figure 4).

Additionally, to balance out the power differential, Fong initiated Storyline 6 through the combined use of epistemic phrases (*mistakes* and *point out*), an evaluative phrase (*feel free*), the first-person pronoun (*I*), and an emoticon (the second :) in Post 7; see Appendix C) to position herself as an English language learner. Collectively, these discursive practices suggested that Fong was fine with this less powerful position she assigned herself to, an attempt to cancel out the "embarrassment" caused to Flora (Fong's interview). However, Flora did not address Fong's language request in the subsequent post. Even when Fong specifically asked Flora a language question (Post 9), Flora still did not reply. These two instances clearly signal positioning misalignment: Fong invited Flora to point out her writing mistakes and asked her a language question, but Flora's non-action indexed her refusal to act as a language expert.

Tseng: Positioning Misaligned

Initially, Tseng positioned her peer as "[a] provider of fresh thinking" and language support (Tseng's reflection), while her American peer, Tina, expected to receive and offer "constructive criticism" on the movie essays (Tina's reflection).

Post	Author	Storyline 1		Storyline 2		Storyline 3		Storyline 4	
		Tseng	Tina	Tseng	Tina	Tseng	Tina	Tseng	Tina
1	Tina	insight provider		author	constructive peer reviewer	opinion provider	opinion seeker		
2	Tseng			author			opinion seeker	unconfident language user	
3	Tina					opinion provider	opinion seeker	skilled language user	language expert
4	Tseng	insight seeker	insight provider				opinion seeker	unconfident language user	
5	Tina	insight provider		author	constructive peer reviewer				

Figure 5. Tseng and Tina's positioning trajectory.

In Storyline 1 (see Figure 5), Tina positioned Tseng as an outside-of-box thinker. Tina's evaluative phrase (*fresh insights*) and epidemic phrase (*not thought of*) in Post 1 (see Appendix D), though meant to be a compliment, were actually counterproductive, because Tseng wanted to receive, not provide, fresh insights. Tseng's insistence on receiving insights was demonstrated in Post 4. She recommended Adam Curtis's documentaries to Tina and she used epistemic phrases and second-person pronouns (*have you ever watched* and *long to know your opinion*), an evaluative phrase, and an inclusive pronoun (*we have more in common*) to demand insights from Tina. Unfortunately, Tina had not watched the documentaries, and could not provide any insight. At this point, the positioning was misaligned, as Tseng regretted in her reflection: "I expected the American peers to give me some fresh insights, but in fact they didn't."

In Storyline 2, Tina positioned herself as a constructive peer reviewer and asked Tseng some questions about the movie essay, as in the epistemic phrases *if you could further clarify for me* and *do you feel that…* (see Post 1 in Appendix D). Although Tseng obliged and answered the questions, she repositioned herself as an unconfident language user: "my poor English could not make me express what I want to say clearly," implicitly requesting Tina to offer language advice (see Storyline 4 in Figure 5). Tina did not accept this position. She was quite positive about Tseng's language proficiency: "You were very descriptive and I really appreciate that" (Post 3). Despite this, Tseng continued to position herself as an incompetent language learner. In her reply to Tina (Post 4), she explicitly lamented: "How I wish to put my thoughts into words appropriately." Tina ignored this language concern and used elaborate epistemic phrases (e.g., *add some details*, *elaborate*, *describe*; see Post 5) to reinforce her self-position as a constructive reviewer.

Additionally, Tina used the inclusive pronoun *we* to characterize the dyad as author–reviewer and suggested that Tseng "add some details we discussed" in her revision (Post 5). However, Tseng did not post any follow-up response, and the interaction ended prematurely. She complained in the interview: "my peer was very reluctant and hesitant to get on board."

Clearly, the dyad stuck to their initial positions and did not adapt to each other as the interaction unfolded. Two sets of storylines (i.e., 1 and 4, and 2 and 3) ran in parallel, never woven into a dynamic whole. Tseng wanted to be impressed by fresh insights and language improvement advice (Storylines 1 and 4), but she ended up "answering a bunch of questions" from Tina (Tseng's reflection), without realizing Tina's unwavering intention to be a constructive peer reviewer.

Discussion

Discursive Practices and Positioning Systems

The moment-by-moment analysis demonstrates that participants' positioning systems are dialogically related to a particular discursive repertoire: (a) pronouns index the location and distribution of rights and duties in a storyline, (b) epistemic and evaluative phrases reflect the epistemic and attitudinal commitment to a position, and (c) emoticons and posting style signal participants' efforts to build and maintain informal relationship. From a DST perspective, these discursive practices are control parameters of positioning systems—changes of control parameters lead to the qualitative change of system state, which triggers the system to self-organize its constitutive components, including control parameters (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014). In the following paragraphs, I compare how the similar discursive practice(s) created or reflected qualitatively different positioning systems in intercultural ACMC.

First, both Chow and Fong were commended by their American peers for their unique perspectives in the movie essays. Chow's dyad developed the compliment into a full-fledged storyline that spanned six posts (see Storyline 2 in Figure 2), while Fong's dyad was only able to enact a two-post storyline (see Storyline 1 in Figure 4). A scrutiny of their communication reveals that the two dyads differed in the quantity and quality of epistemic and evaluative phrases. For instance, Chow used a variety of epistemic and evaluative phrases to recount how she acquired knowledge of cinematic fashion techniques (see Post 2 in Appendix A). This detailed account positioned her as a fashion savant and Cindy a layman, who was given the right to request fashion information from Chow, thereby opening up space for further exchange. Conversely, Fong responded to her peer's compliment with only one epistemic phrase (*focused on*) and one evaluative phase (*interested in*; see Post 2 in Appendix C). In this rather perfunctory response, Fong did not suggest that she knew more than her peer, thereby closing space for further exchange. At face value, the two dyads differed in a small number of epistemic and evaluative phrases. The difference, although minimal, is not inconsequential—because small difference in control parameters may lead to enormously different outcome effect (Byrne, 1998)—in this case, the epistemic and attitudinal commitment to a position.

Second, both Chow and Tseng used the inclusive pronoun *we* to construct collectivity (Pavlidou, 2014) and assign communicative duties to their peers (Harré, 2015; Yates & Hiles, 2010). Chow positioned her peer as a fashion observer, and Tseng presumed her peer to be an insight provider. However, the positioning dynamics differed greatly, so their peers' responses varied. Cindy agreed to act as a fashion observer, so she used an elaborate set of epistemic phrases to provide fashion information (see Post 5 in Appendix A). Conversely, Tina insipidly used one epistemic phrase and one evaluative phrase to respond to Tseng's invitation to share insights and then marshalled more elaborate epistemic phrases to provide content suggestions on Tseng's movie essay (see Post 5 in Appendix D). This disparity shows that Tina did not take on the position of an insight provider but persisted on her self-position as a constructive reviewer. The comparison of the two cases reveals that although the Chinese participants used the same inclusive pronoun to project self- and other-position, it triggered very different epistemic and attitudinal responses, which were conditioned by the American peers' positions.

Third, in order to compensate for the absence of face-to-face communication cues in CMC (Herring, 2001),

Fong and Kwan used non-verbal resources to express affect and position the dyads as informal interlocutors. In Fong's case, she initiated the use of emoticons to build rapport with her peer. Throughout the interaction, the dyad sprinkled their posts with emoticons to maintain a mutually acknowledged informal relationship. In Kwan's case, it was her peer, Kevin, who initiated the multi-post style, which Kwan interpreted as an effort to sound like an informal e-pal. Kwan followed this practice by breaking down her responses into several posts or send-units. Kevin, however, changed back to the one-post style and Kwan stopped after her second multi-post attempt. The difference between Fong's and Kwan's cases might be attributed to the positioning systems reflected in the storylines. As Figure 4 shows, Fong's dyad shared a more balanced set of epistemic duties: both of them provided and sought information and opinions. In Kwan's dyad, however, Kevin assumed more epistemic and evaluative duties to provide information, opinions, and even judgement, especially in the second half of the interaction (see Figure 3), when the dyad returned to the one-post style. Taken together, these two cases demonstrate that (a) non-verbal practices in ACMC signal participants' affection and attempts to nurture an informal relationship and (b) balanced distribution of epistemic and evaluative duties can reinforce the positions of members of a dyad as informal interlocutors, thereby sustaining the reciprocal use of non-verbal resources.

Properties of Positioning Systems in Intercultural ACMC

This subsection adopts a DST perceptive and discusses the properties of positioning systems identified in this study: multiple, emergent, and contested.

Multiple Positioning

The moment-by-moment analysis showed that all the intercultural participants in this study assumed multiple positions throughout the interaction. These positions, imagined and enacted, problematize the dualistic characterization of ACMC participants as language or cultural learners and experts. Existing studies typically, though not always, pigeonhole intercultural participants as native speakers and non-native speakers (see Pasfield-Neofitou, 2011; Vandergriff, 2013). Although some studies focus on how identities evolve, they frame participants' identity shifts as linear processes. That is, in one phase, there is one identity, and as the communication continues, a new identity replaces the old one (see Liu, 2011). This study, however, demonstrates that intercultural participants' positions are multiple and dynamic. This challenges the dichotomous labeling and the linear framing that reify static roles and essentializing identities in intercultural ACMC.

Emergent Positioning

The current study also shows that participants' positions in intercultural ACMC are performed, not predetermined. Participants enter into an interaction with their preconceived expectations or positions, but as the communication transpires, they assume and negotiate new positions, or what Kirkham called *interactional personae* (2011, p. 203). For instance, Chow was positioned as a fashion expert and then a fashion observer. Kwan did not expect to be a Chinese culture expert until her peer assigned her such position. Fong did not anticipate to be complimented as a camera technique observer. Tseng unexpectedly and reluctantly enacted the position of an author, answering her peer's clarification questions. These emergent positions attest to the fluid and performative nature of intercultural ACMC, whereby interaction cannot and should not be predicted by participants' predefined roles or identities (Kitade, 2012).

Contested Positioning

CMC has been recognized as a fruitful site for positive position formation (Fong et al., 2016). This study further shows that participants not only take up positions, but also exercise agency to negotiate positions. Negotiation takes three forms. First, participants may circumvent a position assigned to them. In the cases of Fong and Tseng, their American peers did not act as language experts. Fong's peer simply left the language request unaddressed and Tseng's peer evaded the request by giving Tseng positive comments. Second, participants may re-affirm their initial positions to counter position circumvention. To continue with the examples of Fong and Tseng, both of them contested their peers' position evasion by requesting

language advice yet again, explicitly (i.e., Fong asking an epistemic question) or implicitly (i.e., Tseng offering self-deprecated evaluation). Third, participants may reposition themselves and their peers to evolve the positioning systems. In Kwan's case, she initially positioned Kevin as an American culture expert. In Kevin's response, he not only supplied American cultural information, but also sought Chinese cultural information, thereby repositioning himself from an American culture expert to a Chinese culture learner. In the ensuing posts, Kwan accepted this new positioning dynamics and assumed the epistemic position to provide information to Kevin. Similar reposition transpired in Chow's position shift from a fashion expert to a fashion observer, as has been discussed previously.

Positioning (Mis)alignment in Intercultural ACMC

Studies have found that participants in ACMC are aligned in language use, tone, and content agreement (e.g., Uzum, 2010). However, these studies tend to provide an idealistic picture of alignment (as a product), and overlook the dynamics of alignment (as a process). In this subsection, positioning (mis)alignment is discussed to account for the (un)making of intercultural ACMC.

Indicated by participants' expectations of the ACMC activity, a dyad's positioning systems were initially two separate systems in two attractor states. As the interaction continued, the two separate systems contacted, clashed, and negotiated. Based on the moment-by-moment analysis and participants' verbalized experience, three consequential states of positioning systems can be identified: aligned, partially aligned, and misaligned.

Two positioning systems are aligned when they are fully adaptive to the positions emergent in the interaction and shift away from their initial positions (attractor states) to evolve into one higher-order supra-system. In the case of Chow and Cindy, the two participants discarded their initial positions or exceptions, and effectively adjusted to the positions emergent in the interaction. Therefore, their positioning systems moved away from their respective attractor states and settled into a new attractor state: both of them maintained a balanced and aligned set of communicative rights and duties. The alignment produces "a *meta*position" (Harré & Slocum, 2003, p. 113, original emphasis) in a grand storyline, whereby Chow and Cindy were reciprocally positioned as equal "and friendly contributors in the discussion of various topics" (Chow's interview). This metaposition underpinned all the aligned positions in the second half of the interaction: movie commentators, fashion observers, opinion sharers, cultural information sharers, and reality show sharers.

Two positioning systems are partially aligned when they are adaptive to some positions emergent in the interaction, but still cling to some initial positions. Partially aligned positioning systems occupy two or more attractor states and demonstrate multi-stability (Henry, 2016; Vallacher, van Geert, & Nowak, 2015). In the cases of Kwan and Fong, the dyads were aligned in the positions to seek and give cultural information and personal opinions. However, they were misaligned in the language learner–expert storyline, because Kwan and Fong continued to position their peers as language experts, even though their peers were noncommittal. Therefore, multi-stability was observed in at least three attractor states: reciprocally positioning each other as information and opinion sharers, Chinese participants clinging to their self-positions as language learners, and American peers being unwilling to act as language experts.

Two positioning systems are misaligned when they do not evolve, but return to their initial states. In this study, neither Tseng nor Tina adjusted their positioning systems, indexed by two perpetually different sets of epistemic and evaluative phrases. Even though negotiation occurred, the effect was dismal and their attractor states continued to be self-sustaining, eventually leading to unsuccessful interaction. The misaligned positioning systems were entrenched in their respective attractor states, which required significant changes in control parameters to trigger phase transition. For instance, hypothetically, if Tina had used epistemic phrases to provide insights about the documentaries Tseng recommended, or if Tseng had used evaluative phrases to express her appreciation of Tina's content suggestions, their positions might have been aligned and the interaction might have transpired rather differently.

Pedagogical Implications

In DST, causation and constitution are distinguished as two types of dynamic relations (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014). As revealed in this study, discursive practices are both the causes and constituents of positioning systems, because discursive practices have the causal power to effect the change of a positioning system state but are simultaneously susceptible to the system state. Although such whole–part dynamics render the relationship unpredictable in conventional mechanism (de Bot, 2008), this does not mean that the relationship is random and precludes the possibility to facilitate positioning alignment in intercultural ACMC. Therefore, I highlight two pedagogical practices for intercultural ACMC activities: positioning interrogation and positioning intervention.

Positioning Interrogation

Although participants' motivations and expectations have been recognized as important factors in CMC (Chun, 2011; O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006; Ware, 2005), they tend to be characterized as static and discrete entities. However, this study reveals that some participants were able to interrogate their expectations and adapt them to emergent storylines. As demonstrated in Chow's case, she initially expected Cindy to be a language expert, but when she realized that American students also made mistakes in their essays, she consciously "shifted [her] position from a language learner to a chatty friend" (Chow's interview). Conversely, some participants were less willing or able to interrogate their projected positions when their peers enacted a persona different from their expectations. For instance, in this study, as in others (e.g., Kitade, 2014; Ware, 2005), native speakers did not want to act as language experts. They circumvented the language expert position by either complimenting Chinese participants' English or disregarding the explicit or implicit invitation to language correction. When intercultural participants' expectations were not met, they needed to examine the positions expected of and enacted by their peers. If participants left the disparity unchecked, they became entrenched in their expectations and disappointed by their peers' reactions to their positioning acts, potentially leading to short-lived communication.

Positioning Intervention

Following the previous point, when instructors identify symptoms of positioning misalignment, they can undertake positioning intervention, by working with participants to analyze the positioning dynamics: How do discursive practices create and reflect positions? What communicative duties are expected of the participants? What illocutionary acts do discursive practices imply or achieve? Instructors can also guide participants to experiment and explore different discursive practices to negotiate positions. For instance, participants can vary the quantity and quality of pronouns, epistemic phrases, and evaluative phrases to experience the differing degrees of epistemic and attitudinal commitment to a position. They can also try different emoticons and posting styles to build conversational rapport. These analytical and experimental activities afford ample opportunities to enhance participants' sensitivity to and reflexivity in the dialogical relation between discursive practices and positioning systems, thereby preventing missed communication (see Ware & Kramsch, 2005) and miscommunication. Incisive and well-timed positioning intervention not only facilitates online intercultural interaction, but also hones participants' discursive dexterity—the ability to make sense and make use of discursive practices to negotiate positions and achieve positioning alignment—an important outcome of intercultural exchange.

Limitations

This study follows the "imminentist ontology" that underpins positioning theory: "positioning is contextually tied to the moment of interaction in which it occurs and not across interactions or scales of activity" (Anderson, 2009, p. 292). Therefore, this study limits its focus to the micro-level (e.g., ACMC interaction) practices, while acknowledging the important mediation by meso-level and macro-level factors (see Anderson, 2009; Levy & Caws, 2016). It would be interesting for future research to find out how meso-level (e.g., institutional policies) and macro-level (e.g., cultural norms) factors enable or constrain the

evolution of positioning systems. For instance, if instructors make their presence more visible (e.g., by providing positioning intervention), or if participants are given a specific task (e.g., corrective feedback), how will the institutional factors complicate the dynamics of participants' positioning systems?

Conclusion

Unlike previous studies that attribute online intercultural miscommunication to static and discrete factors, the moment-by-moment analysis in this study demonstrates the fluid and performative nature of intercultural interaction, whereby participants' discursive practices shape and are shaped by positioning systems. When intercultural participants' positioning systems are aligned, they create conversational engagement and enact extended interaction, thereby maximizing the language learning potentials of online intercultural exchange. When participants' positioning systems are misaligned, "there is no discursive bridge from one to the other" (Harré & Slocum, 2003, p. 112), and the participants risk losing the opportunities to develop linguistic and interactional skills. As participants have divergent expectations and motivations in intercultural exchange (Chun, 2011), instructors need to train participants to be discourse analysts who are cognizant of and well-versed in the interrelation among discursive practices, illocutionary acts, and concomitant positions. This communicative repertoire is crucial for participants to co-construct positioning alignment in what Byram (1997) called "experience of otherness" (p. 70), eventually contributing to the success of intercultural ACMC.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Native speakers of a language conventionally refer to those who have learned the language in their childhood.

2. In this study, *epistemic phrases* are broadly defined as the discursive practices participants enact to solicit, display, and (co-)construct knowledge. Typical epistemic phrases include *I think*, *I believe*, and *I don't know* (Kärkkäinen, 2003), as well as asking questions such as "Could you recommend…" and "How is this similar or different…". *Evaluative phrases* are defined as the discursive practices participants enact to convey attitudinal judgement and assessment of a situation, a question, and a feeling (for examples, see Appendices A–D).

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Appendix A. Excerpt from the Online Interaction Between Chow and Cindy

Post	Author	Post Content
1	Cindy	[…] **I** also really enjoyed **your** *point* about the different fashion styles between Lala and Andy. […] It was very observant of *you* to *notice* that Rose, who was in a higher position within Lala's company, wore darker […] **I** would be curious *to look into* other movies with women lead roles in the workplace *to see* if this fashion *trend* is evident there as well. **I**'m curious, *what are your feelings about* both women changing their way of dress as they gained status within their companies?
2	Chow	[…] In China, some *TV programs* are shown to *analyze the details* of the movies or TV series, especially costume dramas for audience, in order to help people *understand* the *content* better. Something like [t]he makeup of *different* characters, the real *history* in the dynasty will *be told* in these kind of *programs*, which **I** enjoy very much. **I** *have formed a habit of observing* the clothes, makeup, or changes of the characters because of this. And that's why **I** *pay attention to* clothes of Lala and Andy so much […]
3	Cindy	[…] **I**'m curious, have **you** ever *watched* any movies in which the male character's success was also *portrayed* through his clothing or is this something only seen with women?
4	Chow	[…] by *recalling* the movies **I** have ever *watched*, **I** feel a little bit sorry that **I** haven't *thought out* such a movie, which *portrays* the male's character's success through his clothing. The only thing which *occurs to* **me** is that in movie The Pursuit of Happiness, the main character Chris Gardner changes his clothes almost every time he has an interview […] So **we** *can see that* people always care about their dress code and **I** *personally think that* it could also partially *explain* why Lala and Andy change the style of clothes. And have **you** *found out* some movies which *use* a similar *skill*? […] this is a real *problem* that trouble many young girls and families […] *what kind of role do the women play in American society generally* […]

5	Cindy	[…] **I** *think* that in *American movies* there is *a greater focus on* the designer or look of clothing *compared to* the makeup of an individual when *reflecting* someone's change in status. However, one movie that does *focus on* more special effects makeup is Nanny McPhee. […] Yes, she is a capable mother to her twins but she makes Andy and her other workers do things for her children because she is simply too busy to do so. *Is this similar in China, or are the dynamics different?*
…		
10	Chow	[…] **I** am always <u>looking forward to</u> **your** reply! O(∩_∩)O
…		
14	Chow	[…] **I** <u>do appreciate</u> what **you** have *told* me, and *feel* that this kind of *communication* is <u>fairly worthy and meaningful</u>. […] Best wishes to **you**! [Chow] O(∩_∩)O

Notes. The excerpts are reproduced with omission indicated by ellipsis in brackets. The excerpts are marked up to highlight three discursive practices dialogically related to positioning: pronouns in bold text, epistemic phrases in italics, and evaluative phrases in underlined text.

Appendix B. Excerpt from the Online Interaction Between Kwan and Kevin

Post	Author	Post Content
15	Kwan	[…] **I** was *wondering* whether **you** can *give* **me** some *advices* on *improving* **my** writing and **my** overall English?
16	Kevin	[…] **I** *think* **your** English is <u>very understandable and easy to follow</u>. […] If there is one thing that **I** could *recommend* in the English language, it would be to <u>*keep* **your** *wording rather simple*</u>. Americans like "getting to the point" as **we** *say* which means *extravagant wording is not necessary*.
17	Kwan	[…] **I**'m <u>so happy</u> to *hear* **your** *reply*. […] And **I** have *more questions to ask* **you**. Hope **I** <u>don't bother</u> **you**. Firstly, if **I** want to *learn* more about *American culture*, *what's the <u>best way</u>* for **me** to *do that*? […]
18	Kevin	[…] **I** *think* **your** *answers* are <u>very helpful</u> …in **my** *opinion the <u>best way</u> to learn American culture* other than *coming* here to the United States is to *read* the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and *watch* various news stations such as CNN, FOX and MSNBC […] In **your** *opinion*, what would be *the <u>easiest way</u>* to *learn Chinese culture*?
19	Kwan	[…] **I** *figure* that the *<u>easiest way</u>* will be to *do some reading* too. *Books are our teachers*. Firstly, if **you** want to *know* the mainstream in China, some *books* about Confucianism are recommended, like the Analects, Dao De Jing of Lao Tze […]
20	Kevin	<u>Thank</u> **you** for **your** *insight* to Chinese culture, it will be <u>very valuable</u> to **me** in the future. Unfortunately this will be **my** <u>last</u> *comment* to **you**. **I** would just like to <u>thank</u> **you** for <u>being very co-operative</u> and *providing me the <u>best feedback</u>* that **you** can. […]

Appendix C. Excerpt from the Online Interaction Between Fong and Flora

Post	Author	Post Content
2	Fong	[…] **I** *focused on* the editing and shooting of films because **I**'m interested in photography! […] **I** *was wondering* if Andy's story *reflected* American people's career or their values towards work and life? **I**'m looking forward to **your** *opinions*! ☺
3	Flora	Hey [Fong]! It is [Flora] again!:) […]
4	Fong	Hi, [Flora]! Here is [Fong]. […] Commonly, **we** *write* the family name first, then the given name, which is *different* from how American and English people *write* their names. So **you** can *call* **me** [Fong] :)
5	Flora	Hello [Fong] […] **You** *mentioned* how **you** have *seen* some American dramas, **I** am just curious as to which ones **you** have *seen* and if **you** enjoyed them or not?:)
…		
7	Fong	Hello, [Flora]! **I**'m very glad to *hear* from **you** again:) […] If **I**'*ve made mistakes in writing*, please feel free to *point out* **my** *mistakes* as well:) **I**'m really enjoy *talking* to **you**.^ ^ […] As what **you** *said*, they act certain ways they never would have thought themselves to. It's hard and sad to *acknowledge* this, but *it's true*. TvT […] **Your** *remarks* inspired **me** that **I** need to be more open-minded and try to make some changes in **me** and in **my** team! **I** feel more better now:)
8	Flora	[…] **I** am glad **I** *was able to learn* the *proper way* to *do so* and appreciate **you** *teaching* **me**.
9	Fong	May **I** *ask* **you** a *question* about English grammar? […] When **we** *talk* about the storyline of the two movies or *mention* some of the plots, **I** prefer to *use simple present tense* while **my** classmate prefer to *use simple past tense* […]

Appendix D. Excerpt from the Online Interaction Between Tseng and Tina

Post	Author	Post Content
1	Tina	**You** have a very fresh *insight* on these two films that **I** *had not thought of* and **I** *think* that is great. **I** have *a few points* in your paper that **I** would appreciate if **you** could further *clarify* for **me**. *What is the "old cliché"* **you** *talk* about in your second paragraph? […] are **you** *referring to* the *differences* between what Andy and Lala think of love? If **you** could *expand on* that that'd be great! In **your** paragraph *discussing the similarities* of the two films, *do you feel that* the films inaccurately *portrayed* the *actualities* of the two industries or *do you feel that* they just didn't *get* the "fantasy" or the "dramatization" *right*?
2	Tseng	[…] **I** really appreciate your *viewpoints* in response to **my** essay […] But **I** have to beg your forgiveness if **my** *views* are too racial (**my** poor English could not make **me** *express* what **I** want to *say* clearly) and **my** *judgement* is not complete that could not *represent* all Chinese girls.
3	Tina	Thank **you** for **your** *response* and *clarification* of those topics! **You** were very descriptive and **I** really appreciate that. […]

| 4 | Tseng | Have **you** ever *watched* the *documentaries* made by Adam Curtis? […] And **I** also <u>long to</u> *know* **your** *opinion* of Adam Curtis's documentaries. Maybe **we** have <u>more in common</u> with some *problems*. How **I** <u>wish</u> to *put my thoughts into words* <u>appropriately</u>." |
| 5 | Tina | **I** *have not watched* any Adam Curtis documentaries but **I** <u>am very interested</u> in *watching* them! […] In regards to *revisions* **I** could *propose* for **your** paper, maybe **you** can *add some details* **we** *discussed about the differences* in American consumerism and Chinese consumerism. […] **I** think it would be <u>great</u> if **you** could *elaborate* a little bit on the criticism Andy was receiving and *elaborate on* **your** *opinion* of how it wasn't "deep". […] **You** could *describe* how in both movies that both female characters veered off their path of individuality but it was short lived and temporary. |

About the Author

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