CHINESE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The concept of communication means, in a large sense, any given process which can send some elements from one system to another; these elements can be biological, technical, social or linguistic symbols. Modern era has taken into consideration verbal communication as the most important form of communication. In the actual form, the verbal communication seems a historically determined mechanism. We are encountering nowadays a new form of communication due to the frequent use computers and media communication. This new form of communication has brought about interesting changes. This paper will touch upon some changes in Chinese communication due to large communication using English and creating new words or new icons specific for Chinese language and culture.

Keywords: Communication, Chinese culture, message, cyber era.

1. Concept of Communication

The concept of communication, in a large sense, is the process of exchanging information between two systems as *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of English Language* defines it, as "the imparting or interchange thought, opinions or information by speech, writing or signs" (328). In narrow social meaning, communication is an interactional process by which members of community have a survival goal, using specifically signals to understand each other. In such a case through communication some people are waiting for others to produce some behavioral changes like understanding, taking action or confirming data.

The message sent and received is coded as explicit or tacit knowledge. In fact, decoding the message means to create some representations in the mind of receptor. There are different taxonomies in communication, as, for instance, verbal, nonverbal (gestures, mimic, posture) and recently virtual, on-line, digital communication. The "cognitive space" shared by a given community means the competence and ability to understand and produce changes in the mind and behaviour of human actors. If they are not sharing the same cultural background they might encounter blockages in their communication. According to Pânișoară, Albert Mehrabian was the first who had concluded that 0.07% is verbal message, only 0.38% vocal and 0.55%, facial expression. Even so, other researchers such as Jurgen Ruesch and Weldon Kees have included the concept of nonverbal communication in the academic discourse (Pânișoară, 2004). The interest for nonverbal communication has recently risen. The functions of nonverbal signals in communication are to repeat, to complete, to stress or contradict, replace the initial message.

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Unlike the period dominated by Gutenberg's Galaxy which emphasised the importance of printed books, the contemporary era, also called Cyber digital era because of the use of virtual media, announced an interesting change regarding communication: the shift from paper to computer screen. Nowadays we must accept that the speed and numbers of contacts have increased and the words seem not to be enough. But why did people trust handwritten words and phrases more than the printed words or those appearing on the screen? How could they decode the real feelings of the people sending the messages if they are not expressed any in a letters and sentences? Might calligraphy be the personalized? What about the language of educated people?

My hypothesis is that we have a new mind of speedy contacts and large pieces of information, which needs images instead words for a proper communication and efficient time management. For centuries we have used other forms like symbols in religions or in a different culture. By accepting a different cultural background we can enlarge our conceptions regarding communications and its newly emerged forms. In my paper I shall try to focus on Chinese contemporary communication, emoticons, idioms and the creation of new words as trans-cultural bridges.

2. Communication in cyber era

Posting letters is already history. Everywhere in world we use personal computers connected to the internet. Young people cannot live without technology. Our life has been improved by many devices, applications and software and we are somehow addicted to all sorts of social networking. We want to express not only words, but also feelings, that is why so many of us resort to emoticons and superfluous exclamations in our emails, or in other social media interactions and other online forms of communication. In face to face communication we can use and decode body language, unlike in the online chat. We are not taking about words we need more, we need what we have recently discovered, the body language and tacit assumption. We do not totally trust the word, and maybe it was never the case with written messages. I.T. devices show us the importance of signals sent by our body and the roles of feeling in social communication, as Goleman (1992) emphasized when he talked about emotional intelligence.

Therefore, in business many speakers have pointed out the differences between face to face interactions, written / spoken communication and virtual media. The first and the most important thing is to understand the difference between virtual communication and office interactions. The meaning might not always be clear in the absence of facial expressions, body language and voice signals. Misunderstandings can occur and rapport can be damaged. We can improve social relationship by using emoticons. Sandra Lewis, the founder and the CEO of Worldwide101, has pointed to some tips of virtual communication to work better, more efficiently and more enjoyably with your virtual team:

-to maintain a visual element**;**
-to embrace technology;
-to respect (and understand) time differences;
-to eliminate micromanagement;
-to value everyone's time;
-to share in leadership;
- to get a little personal message.

"And like this list, it's probable that your email communications, group chats, and even video conferences are task-oriented and to the point. […] Social bonds and personal interactions are essential to building rapport, bolstering teamwork, and even diffusing tension. Make an effort to get a little personal with your team. Have every team member check in before a meeting; they could share some photos of their kids, report on their weekend soccer game, or chat about their favourite TV shows" (Lewis, 2014).

The list of tips starts with visual communication and ends with forms of emotional involvement. In business, personal conversation and positive impact are very important in efficient communication. Computer and virtual communication should not transform us into machines.

3. Communication with the Chinese People

In this chapter I shall focus on Chinese communication and on some aspects pointed out by Sean Upton-McLaughlin. First of all, I shall take into account the Chinese verbal communication.

In my experience I have noted that many words and phrases in traditional and modern Chinese are not as specific as their counterparts in Western languages (e.g. English).

Many words in Chinese have multiple definitions, and the same character can mean separate things in different contexts, as well as be pronounced in different ways. It is common in speeches, announcements and communications in China for more generalized speech to be used. Westerners in China may observe language which appears uncertain, and incorrectly assume that the lack of detail is deliberate. However in China it is important to have a clear understanding of context, and allow for the tendency of language to be vague (Upton-McLaughlin, 2013).

There are some general tips which can be stressed about Chinese communication in business, in everyday life and in schools. Based on my experience in a Chinese University, I agree with the authors who have tried to list several Chinese linguistic and cultural tips:

a) *to maintain a harmonious environment.* They take it for granted because they share a holistic philosophy as world view;
b) *to respect hierarchy.* This custom is rooted in their ancient and recent history;
c) *to avoid refusals and pay compliments.* It is influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism, two religions learnt from childhood by the Chinese and shared at every step in everyday life;
d) *to build and maintain relationships.* With its roots in Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, the importance of community in Chinese life has become a model and a goal for many Chinese;
e) *the non-specific nature of the Chinese Language.* It is about contextual, non-phonetic languages.
f) *refusals are best given in private.* Chinese believe the truth can hurt and they always try to preserve the feelings of others;
g) *when in doubt, follow up with specific questions.* The time conversation is always longer than we expect;
i) *the Chinese want something too.* This is about the historical custom of making gifts at first and win the heart later (Upton-McLaughlin 2013; Butucea, 2014).

All these tips are found in virtual communication as well. At first you are asked about your recent life. How are you lately? And I always mention "recently/lately" as the Chinese translation of phrase always includes this word. Chinese use the word Mister or Madam, even if they are equals. They never say "I speak English", but "I am learning English" – a sentence which shows their modesty. They put themselves in second position and ask additional question before asking something important. For example, if they want to know if you accept their invitation to the theatre, they will ask what you are planning to do tomorrow night. Only after they get a possible answer, they get to the point. Chinese start a long conversation about a certain topic, but the final decision will be communicated face to face, and perhaps after long time after you have been asked. The companies of mobile phones have been adapted to this habit and have low prices for minutes / duration of a conversation.

The first formal meetings are in a restaurant, because to show respect means to invite you for a meal. They do not do business there – it is just an opportunity to exchange gifts and compliments to each other. They talk a lot about family and relatives and may even show you some photos of them. They want to learn things about your private life and express gratitude for sharing your ideas and cultural stories. They like tales and anecdotes. The greetings are some somehow in Kung Fu style and show respect and consideration. They may also express themselves using emoticons in QQ or other social networks (Butucea, 2014).

4. Idioms and body languages

In Chinese verbal communication there are also some idioms which can make communication more effective if you can remember their real significance. People who lived, studied or worked in China must have known these idioms, because Chinese are described as emotional and intuitive people and metaphors works better than precise words.

An English teacher, teaching in China or a businessman can rely on the following idioms:
挣 线 恐 后 zhēng xiān kǒng hòu - "struggling to get ahead" because they are "afraid to be left behind".
打 草 惊蛇 dǎ cǎo jīng shé – "beating the grass and startling the snake" – carelessly revealing your enemies your plans.
三人成 虎 sān rén chéng hǔ – "three people can transform themselves into a tiger" – a rumour can become fact, or, at least, it can be believed by a large audience.
一举两得 yī jǔ liǎng dé – "to kill two birds with one stone." – the same as the English equivalent.
入乡随俗 rù xiāng suí sú – "when entering a village, obey the local customs and traditions (Upton-McLaughlin, 2014; Butucea, 2014).

The values of all these and many other idioms reflect the fact that if the Westerner student, businessman, traveller, researchers know them, then they can decode the deep meaning of the Chinese message. Of course, it takes a long time to study the Chinese language, but living and working there may really help improve your skills. But someone how wants to learn something new about a different culture and to chat with them can keep in our mind some useful, tips without studying the language:

a) We should not rush to accept, refuse or deny any proposal without seriously considering the topic, plan, and project even by e-mail, or chat. The discourse must improve with new knowledge, new auditions regarding the counterpart.

b) They are not very direct and try to preserve and respect the partner's feelings, but they never give up if they want something. They are open minded, accept what you have to say, but never forget their goal. They also preserve their culture and always think to gain something in exchange. The last generation is very determined to be successful and to be appreciated in the community.

c) Chinese body language is difficult to decode, because they always have a smile on their faces, even at the first meeting. Greeting (shacking hands, a bow in front of the elders or the authorities) is quite frequent in official meetings. Pointing at a child or a person is rude. A cup of tea or a business card must be offered with both hands. Knock twice on the table using fingers is a way of saying thank you (it is like a symbolic bow, unlike in ancient times when you were supposed to knee). There are also many others codes in the use of colours, objects or left or right hand, depending on gender, age or social position. Some of them will be appear in internet speech which uses icons, emoticons to convey specific meanings for Chinese culture.

5. Z Generation and a new paradigm of communication

Northeastern University (USA) conducted a study about young people aged between 16 and 19 (Duse and Duse, 2017). Joseph E. Aoun, the president of the university characterised them as "highly entrepreneurial, pluralistic, and determined to take charge of their own future". They think the world "did not exist before technology" – which means that a new world has just been born! The high technology can totally change our life and our presumptions! A brief characterization of the people born between 1995 and 2005 emphasized that a new mind-set is shaped by high-technology:

− Preference of computer instead of toys/school/books; suffering from fear of missing out (Sparks and Honey, 2014, as cited by Duse and Duse);

− Intuitive learning, synthetically use of information; some of them work starting from high school;

- The communication is basically virtual – through social networking, individuals of the generation Z easily create links with members of other cultures, which they consider integrated into a global culture group, in which all individuals are equal in terms of identity (Burrus, 2016, as cited by Duse and Duse, 2017).

- They operate multitasking; therefore it can cause modification in timing of attention, interpretation and diversity of viewpoints (Sparks and Honey, 2014, as cited by Duse and Duse, 2017);

- Their conversation stems brief responses, as meaningful mono-blocks, picture, icons; they see the world as a multitude of possibilities.

In the "Virtual linguist", in an article published in September 24, 2011, the word "emoticon" is said to be a blend of the two words, "emotion" and "icon". Many emoticons, like smileys, transcend language and are understood in many other countries. The emoticon :-) was first used in a digital context by Scott E. Fahlman of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University in 1982.

In some cultures the three capital letters, OTL, represent a kneeling person and represent failure, disappointment or despair; the O is the head, the T, the body with the top of the T representing the two arms, and the L, the bent legs. The most basic emoticons are relatively consistent in form, but each of them can be transformed by being rotated with or without a hyphen (nose).

There are also some possible variations of emoticons to get new definitions, by means of changing a character to express a new feeling or slightly change in mood. For example, :(means sad and :((, very sad. Weeping can be written as :'(. A blush can be expressed as :">. Others emoticons include wink ;), a grin: D; smug :->, and tongue out :P out of disgust or simply to make a joke. An often used combination is <3 for a heart, and </3 for a broken heart. :O is sometimes used to depict shock.

A broad grin is sometimes shown with crinkled eyes to express further amusement; XD and the addition of further "D" can suggest laughter or extreme amusement (e.g. XDDDD). There are hundreds of other variations including >:(for anger; or >:D, for an evil grin, which can be used in reverse, for an unhappy angry face, in the shape of D:<. =K stands for vampire teeth, :s for grimace, and ;P can be used to denote a flirting or joking tone, or may be implying a second meaning in the sentence preceding it. Nowadays many others emoticons have become international signs of communication using social media.

6. Chinese Cyber communication and emoticon

Emoticons can be culture-specific. As computers offer increasing built-in support for non-Western writing systems, it has become possible to use other glyphs to build emoticons. The "shrug" emoticon, ¯_(ツ)_/¯, uses the glyph ツ from the Japanese Katakana writing system.

There are also Chinese specific emoticons. For instance, the character 囧 (U+56E7), which means "bright", is used in the Chinese computing community for a frowning face. The character existed in Oracle bone script, but its use as emoticon was documented as early as January 20, 2005. Other ideographic variants for 囧 include 崮 (king 囧), 茴 (queen 囧), 商 (囧 with hat), 囧興 (turtle). The character 槑 (U+69D1), which sounds like the word for "plum" (梅 (U+FA44)), is used to represent double of 呆 (dull), or further magnitude of dullness. In Chinese, normally full characters (as opposed to the stylistic use of 槑) may be duplicated to express emphasis.

The use of computer and high technology does not change the Chinese style of thinking and new devices are adapted to the cultural background. For example, the syllabal "yu" can be rendered in 9 ways, depending on the context: 与, 于, 欲, 鱼, 雨, 余, 遇, 语, 愈. The operating system, Windows, is the same, but they use different names for certain software and applications: Yahoo is YouKu, Messenger is QQ, Explorer is BaiDu.

Because writing is very detailed, also emoticons are more detailed.

Expressing Feeling	Chinese style	Western style
Happiness	(^ _ ^),	:-)
Sadness	(; _ ;)	:-(
Surprise	(* O *)	: O
Wonder	(^ _)	; -)
Laugh	(^ _ ^)	: D
Joke	(# ^ . ^#)	
Embarrassment	(^ ^ ;)	
Excuse	m (_ _) m	

Sometimes puzzling, icons have a cultural background. A happy face with the hand covering the mouth might not mean anything wrong in Western culture, but in traditional Chinese culture it is a gesture made by girls who should not show their teeth when laughing.
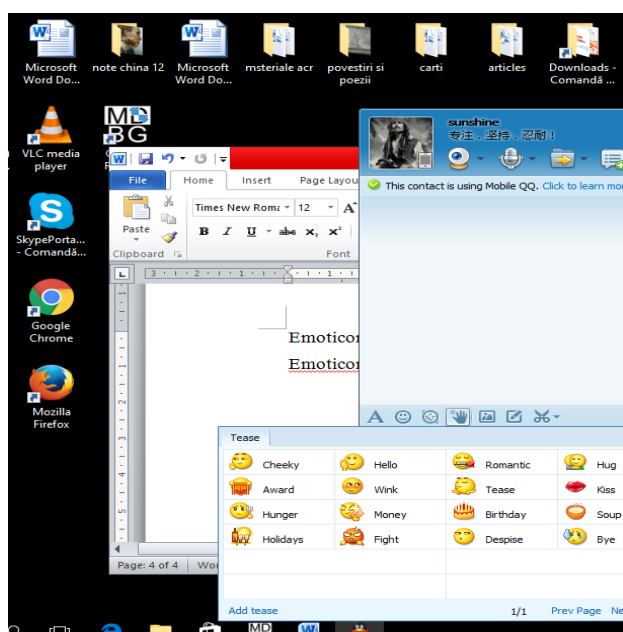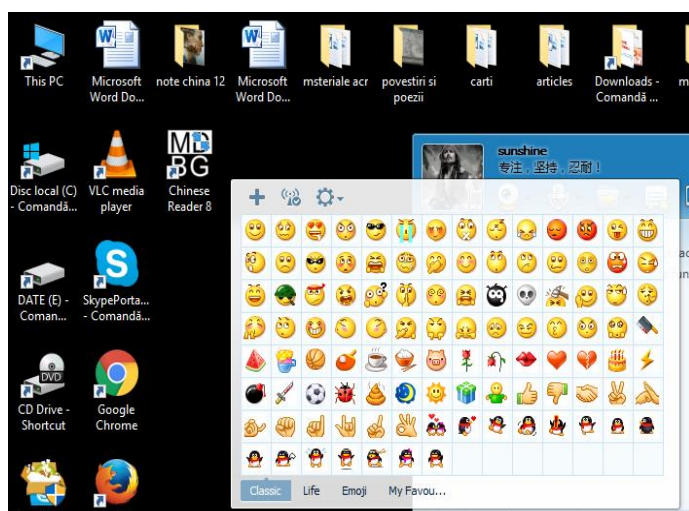
7. Transcultural creation – Chinese and English mixed words

Shi Liwei, Editor at English.xinhuanet.com[2], wrote an article called "Chinese Netizens Create Cyber Words" published in *International QQ*, in May, 2008. According to Shi Liwei, there are some new citizens (called netizens, meaning citizen in the cyber space) who use a new form of communication. New generation seems to be different from the previous one because they prefer cyber space for communication.

Cyber language was popular among Chinese netizens, who created English words to reflect a novel phenomenon in society. One example was "antizen", which referred to a group of college graduates who, earning a meagre salary and living in small rented apartments, were like the tiny and laborious ants. A "corrupted" "government" became "goveruption". "Smilence" is a combination of smile and silence, an attitude people take to comment on an issue which already has drawn consensus. "Foulsball" showed the anger of netizens towards the woeful Chinese soccer affected by match-fixing, crooked referees, and illegal gambling. "Emotionormal" came out with the media cliché, saying people are "emotionally stable" rather than outraged. "Corpspend" was derived from the issue. Three college students died in central China's Hubei Province while saving two drowning children, then fishermen tied the bodies to a boat to ask a high price for their recovery.

Globalization has affected Chinese life as well as. The new Chinese generation speaks English and creates new words to express things inexistent in Chinese. The new regulation issued by the General Administration of Press and Publication banned the use of *Chinglish* (half Chinese and half English words), buzzwords created by netizens for publishing in Chinese language. An unnamed official said that the regulation was aimed to purify the Chinese language. Netizen are working making fan, labelling or critiquing the real world and the result is the linguistic mixture of Chinglish.

There are combinations of English and Chinese or combinations of different English words used to express a new phenomenon or a new social situation. The scholars consider it a natural process of developing languages, unlike politicians who argue that the Chinese language must be purified and its writing must be kept clean.

For example, the word "Geilivable" is made by combining *pinyin* (writing with Latin letters) of Chinese characters Gei li (giving strength) with the English suffix for adjectives and literally means "giving power" or "cool". Cyber words such as "geilivable" might find a new regulation for negative like "un gei livable". Different suffixes and prefixes were added to a word. For instance, "*hen* gei livable" means "very cool", and "ungeilivable", "dull, not cool at all".

Another recently coined word is "niubility", composed by the pinyin of *niu bi* (a slang to say excellent) plus a suffix to make it a noun. I also noticed that when they translate a name or a word which has no Chinese equivalent, they sometimes use similar sounds as in "bye, bye", which is 88 on QQ, because eight is pronounced "ba" in Chinese and double "ba" would sound like "bye, bye", in English (Butucea, 2014).

Netizens have created new Chinese words and expressions inspired by different anecdotes or stories[3]. One example was "Suan Ni Hen". This three-character expression originally meant "you win" and the first character carried the same pronunciation as garlic, "suan" in Chinese. Netizens used it to satirize soaring garlic and food prices for a certain period of time. "My father is Li Gang" is another anecdotic story. It was first told by a drunk 22-year-old hit-and-run driver. Netizens worked it into classical poetry, jokes and ballads to vent their fury over the vicious behaviour of the privileged sons of powerful, wealthy and influential people.

There are also inventions in Chinese language. Chinese people use the character "bei" in combination with a verb to express passive voice. However, the netizens used it to show the helplessness in front

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[2] *Xinhuanet.com* is a news agency in China.
[3] It is deeply rooted in their culture, as Marcel Granet and many scholars noticed before.

of false conclusions and fake media reports. For instance, "zi sha" means "suicide" while "bei zi sha" means "be officially presumed to have committed suicide', and "xiao kang" means "fairly comfortable life" while "bei xiao kang' means "be said to be living a fairly comfortable life". A professor at Beijing International Studies University, first heard the word from his students. "They let me guess its meaning and I knew it was a kind of capability". He said it was very interesting to combine Chinese with English to create new words. "English is no longer mysterious to the Chinese people. They can use the language in a flexible way according to their own experiences".

Some of these words and expressions were even picked up in serious media reports. China's broadsheet, the *People's Daily*, mouthpiece of the Communist Party of China, carried a front-page news story with the headline "Jiangsu geilivable cultural province". The reactions varied. The netizens doubted the usage of the word, as "geilivable" was supposed to be an adjective rather than a verb, and hailed it as a sign of progress for the serious newspaper. On the other hand, a netizen with the nickname Sheshangjun said that "this is a small step in the cyber world, but a giant leap in Chinese language", while another netizen, Yang Huatao, stated that "I read the newspaper more carefully this time than in several months"/

A professor at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, saw the phenomenon of word creation as a natural response to young people to social issues. "Cyber language is more vivid and it shortens people's distances". At the mentioning of the regulation by the General Administration of Press and Publication, netizens expressed their concern. "The administration is totally 'ungeilivable'", said a netizen named *laoda1713*. "I know other netizens would shed tears with me...it is a good chance to enrich our language". "Language is always developing". "It needs to be updated to absorb foreign culture and folk wisdom". But an unnamed official said that, in fact, many senior staff from news media, who supported the regulation were worried that years later, the younger generation would forget how to use formal Chinese expressions. The official also pointed out that the regulation was only for publication of the Chinese language, and it only banned English, or Chinglish words in the publication. "The use of 'geilivable' in *People's Daily*, for example, is OK, so long as people see it as 'geilivable'" (Liwei, 2008).

All these debates in Chinese media are signs of a developing language and a changing mind-set. I have talked so far about the influence of the cultural background in emoticon, the special meaning of gestures, newly created words construction and the role of anecdotic and satiric tales. Moreover, I cannot help but notice that elder's (administration/teacher/editor/government official) and youngster's opinion on net communication are quite different.

8. Conclusion
Communication can be enriched by each member of society according to his/her needs for a proper expression. Even so, cultural background is still strong and transcultural way of thinking may lead to controversy. Is new generation so different from their parents and grandparents? Apparently, globalization has a say in it. The Chinese have embraced technology and try to convey their messages using their cultural background and enriching language through cyber communication. Sometimes even the adult feel puzzled at these new forms of communication but the Chinese are flexible enough to adopt novelty and become important citizens of the global world.

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