**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)**
www.ijepc.com

GAE
GLOBAL ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

NEW CHINGLISH IN SOCIAL MEDIA: CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS' LANGUAGE USAGE PATTERNS

Liu Xiaoman[1], Esther. Jawing[2*], Zhao Xiaofang[3]

[1] International Education School, Hunan University of Medicine, China
Email: LIU_XIAOMAN_DU20@student.ums.edu.my
[2] Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia
Email: estherjawing@ums.edu.my
[3] Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia
Email: du1911011a@student.ums.edu.my
[*] Corresponding Author

Abstract:

The large number of English learners in China establishes a strong foundation for English users in the country. The rapid development of Chinese social media platforms offers a broader platform for English usage in China. College students, with their bilingual or multilingual backgrounds, play a vital role in using English. Unlike the traditional English taught in educational settings, English used on social media differs and is referred to as New Chinglish. This study aims to explore the role of New Chinglish in the lives of college students on Chinese social media platforms, focusing on their behaviours and habits related to its usage. The qualitative analysis findings highlight the commonality of using New Chinglish among college students, often evolving into an unconscious habit. Moreover, New Chinglish has transcended the confines of the social media platform, extending into offline life. The study also reveals contradictory emotional trends underlying their user behaviour and habits. It provides a detailed description of the role of New Chinglish in the lives of Chinese youth, emphasizing the integration of English as a part of their daily routines. Additionally, this study contributes significantly to the existing literature by depicting the English usage situation in China.

Keywords:

Chinese Social Media, New Chinglish, Chinese College Students

Introduction

English usage in China has a profound history, dating back to as early as 1298 when foreign language learning emerged among aristocrats during the feudal empire dynasty to facilitate trade with Southeast Asian countries (Gu, 1996). The outbreak of the Opium War marked a significant turning point, as English entered the daily lives of ordinary people in China, initially seen as a "military aggressor" and a symbol of capitalist intrusion challenging the "sinocentric worldview" (Adamson, 2002, pp. 231-232). English development in Chinese society faced various challenges and fluctuations in the following decades. The year 1978 witnessed a historical milestone in English education in China, marking its growing importance. As the dominant foreign language in Chinese education, English usage in China, despite being in a predominantly monolingual country, constituted a small proportion compared to Mandarin users. However, due to China's status as the world's most populous nation, even a small proportion still represented a significant portion of the global English-speaking population. By the late 1990s, China had an impressive English learner population of approximately 400 million, as reported by Wei and Su (2012). Although this information is outdated, given China's continued economic and social development, it can be estimated that the scale of English language learning has experienced an unprecedented growth rate. Xu and Zhang (2021, p. 189) asserted that "there has been a noticeable transition from English learners to English users in the past decades in China." The substantial number of English learners in China provides a solid foundation for English usage in the country.

According to the 50th Statistical Report of China's Internet Network Development by the China Internet Network Information Centre, China boasts a netizen population of over 1 billion, which provides a dynamic environment for the "distribution" and "spread" of English on social media (Widdowson, 1997, p. 140). Notably, in addition to regular users, official websites like People's Daily utilize social media platforms for information dissemination (Lim, 2014). Moreover, government-controlled media plays a crucial role by not only providing information to foreigners and tourists in China but also promoting Chinese ideologies and policies to the global audience through social media (Alvaro, 2015). This official use of English on social media suggests the Chinese government's supportive stance toward English usage in this domain. Furthermore, Xu and Zhang (2021) highlight that social media has provided an open platform for individuals to use and encounter English (p. 189). However, despite the wide scope of English use in China, Bolton (2017) raises a fundamental question about the actual number of people in China who incorporate English into their daily lives (p. v). Additionally, there is a lack of micro-level descriptions of the English usage situation and its role in the lives of Chinese students (Bolton, 2013).

Xu and Zhang (2021) describe the use of English on Chinese social media as a "translanguaging practice" (p. 187). García (2009) also defines translanguaging as a "hybrid language use" for bilinguals and multilinguals, providing a useful framework for understanding different language messages (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Alvarez, 2001, p. 128). Therefore, having a bilingual or multilingual background is necessary for users to employ English on Chinese social media platforms. College students, who often possess such backgrounds, play a vital role as English users, both in educational contexts and on social media. Unlike the standardized English taught in educational settings, English used on social media platforms exhibits significant differences. Li (2016) refers to this language as "New Chinglish," highlighting its coding-mix language nature. While Xu and Zhang provide a general overview of English usage on Chinese social media, there is still a lack of detailed descriptions regarding its usage among

Chinese college students, specifically in relation to New Chinglish. This research aims to address this gap by investigating the New Chinglish usage patterns among Chinese college students, providing a comprehensive understanding of their English language behavior and the role English plays in their lives. The study methodology involves collecting students' usage records and examining their usage habits, similarities, and differences in New Chinglish usage. Through this investigation, a specific perspective will be presented, shedding light on the English language usage among Chinese college students in the digital age. This will contribute to an extensive understanding of English development and usage in China.

Literature Review

Chinese Social Media
Social media emerged as an online platform designed for information sharing, facilitating discussions and publications among individuals and communities, with a significant global impact (Kietzmann et al., 2011). In China, social media experienced explosive growth since its inception in 1994 with the introduction of the first bulletin board system (BBS). The widespread use of personal computers further increased the number of internet users, and in 1999, the popularity of the instant messaging platform QQ attracted millions of young people and college students (He & Pedraza, 2015). The development of blogging and social networking sites, such as Sina Weibo and WeChat, played a pivotal role in the expansion of Chinese social media. According to the Annual Report of the Development of New Media in China No.13 (2022), WeChat and QQ remained the top social media platforms in China. Research conducted by the influential magazine Chinese Journalist in 2022 revealed that social media is particularly popular among individuals under the age of 30 (Jiang, 2022). The 2022 Mainstream Social Media Platform Trends Insight Report (2022), jointly proposed by Weiboyi and Pangjing organizations, identified WeChat, TikTok, and Sina Weibo as the top three platforms in China in terms of internet traffic, while Xiaohongshu and Bilibili experienced rapid growth. Unlike dominant global social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, Chinese social media platforms exhibit diverse content and distinctive features. Sina Weibo serves as a social square and hotspot curator, WeChat and QQ are social connectors, TikTok is an amusement community and information hub, Xiaohongshu is a seeding community, and Bilibili focuses on two-dimensional culture. In summary, QQ, WeChat, Sina Weibo, TikTok, Bilibili, and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) are the most popular social media platforms among young people in their daily lives. In contrast to global social media, Chinese social media platforms demonstrate significant differences in terms of content retweeting and sharing. Jokes, interesting pictures, and entertaining content are more likely to be shared and retweeted on Chinese social media (Yu, Asur & Huberman, 2015).

English Usage on Chinese Social Media
Despite China having over 1 billion netizens by 2022, Chinese remains the dominant language on social media due to variations in English proficiency levels among Chinese individuals and the complex English education landscape in the country. Nevertheless, English usage on social media is still notable as it provides a convenient platform for information exchange and access. Xu and Zhang (2021) assert that social media has become one of the emerging and most vibrant domains for English use in China (p. 190). You (2011) discuss the high levels of bilingual and multilingual creativity exhibited by English-literate individuals on the internet, while Zhang and Ren (2022) highlight the creative language practices of Chinese internet users through translanguaging. Bi (2011) recommends that using English in Chinese media is an inevitable

trend and has gained popularity in China, leading to a trend of code-mixing. Zhang (2012) views the English used on social media as a code-mixing practice known as "Chinese English," which has gained popularity in China, particularly among the younger generations who incorporate it into their daily lives. Zhang (2015) presents a case of an official microblog account called Shanghai Release, under the control of the municipal government of Shanghai, adopting code-mixing practices to connect with the public.

Xu and Zhang (2021) identify a range of English usage on Chinese social media, ranging from traditional perceptions to code-mixing practices and New Chinglish. Li (2016) introduced the concept of "New Chinglish" to describe the language used on Chinese social media, viewing it from a translanguaging perspective to address the challenges posed by multilingualism. Dong (2019) further explores New Chinglish words within the framework of translanguaging. Xu and Deterding (2017) highlight the common feature of "playfulness" shared by New Chinglish and other English varieties in Asia from the perspective of World Englishes, often produced in a jocular tone. Another feature emphasized by Xu and Zhang (2021) is the hybrid nature of New Chinglish, combining Chinese characters, Chinese pinyin, English, and Chinglish.

Although some research exists on English usage on Chinese social media, there is still a lack of detailed descriptions specifically pertaining to the English usage habits, preferences, intentions, and reasons for New Chinglish usage among Chinese youth, particularly on social media platforms. Existing research often neglects the significant impact of the bilingual and multilingual backgrounds of individuals in China, which can influence the development of English and New Chinglish in the country. To address these gaps, further research should be conducted to explore the sociolinguistic aspects of English usage on Chinese social media. While Xu and Zhang (2021) provide a general overview of English usage on Chinese social media and analyse its features, they overlook the largest group of people in China with bilingual and multilingual backgrounds. Additionally, there is a need for micro-level investigations into the role of this language in the daily lives of individuals, their usage habits, preferences, and reasons for utilizing New Chinglish on Chinese social media platforms (Bolton, 2013).

Methodology

A qualitative method was employed for this investigation, involving the collection of New Chinglish usage journals from 20 participants per month at a Chinese university. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to verify and complement the recorded data. The journal content included five essential elements: "who," "when," "why," "what," and "how," providing a detailed description of the participants' New Chinglish usage on Chinese social media. The interviews were used based on the participants' recorded usage habits. The participants were selected from four grades at the university, ranging from freshmen to seniors, with four participants from each grade. To ensure information-rich samples, participants' English proficiency levels were taken into consideration, assessed through measures such as English final exams and the official Chinese English Proficiency Test of College English Test Band 4 and Band 6. To overcome language barriers, a total of 600 journals were written in Chinese, allowing participants to provide more detailed descriptions of their usage. To obtain comprehensive information and avoid overlooking certain usage cases, participants recorded their New Chinglish usage both on social media and in daily offline communication. These recordings were submitted online once a day. The researcher differentiated the participants' New Chinglish recordings on social media and verified them through the interviews, increasing the generalizability of the results.

Findings and Results

The Frequency of New Chinglish Use on Chinese Social Media
By accumulating all using data and distinguishing their using frequency of New Chinglish on Chinese social media, a total of 173 New Chinglish usage recordings were recorded in the journals, which means the use of New Chinese English in their daily lives accounted for 28.8% of the total. In China, a predominantly Mandarin-speaking monolingual country, this proportion reveals the fact that English has entered the daily life of college students with some popularity. Similarly, the English that is popular in the daily lives of college students is not English in the traditional sense, but rather New Chinglish, which is a blend of Chinese features. Surprisingly, every participant used New Chinglish during the past thirty days. In Figure 1, it is apparent to observe that 67.1% (116) of New Chinglish usage cases occurred online, and on social media, and only 32.9% (57) cases occurred offline, concentrating on face-to-face communication. Although the majority of New Chinglish usage among college students occurred on social media platforms, New Chinglish has moved from online to offline and become a part of their daily life. In the journals, many participants repeated that mostly they tend to use New Chinglish and Chinese rather than English.
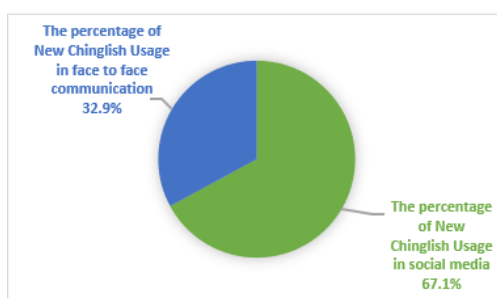
Figure 1: The Percentages of New Chinglish Usage on Chinese Social Media

In addition, due to the popularity and prevalence of social media, the frequency of using New Chinglish did not vary much between different grades. It showed that social media offers a convenient platform for the fast spreading of the message. In other words, social media provides a significant way to spread New Chinglish, as well as a means of knowing New Chinglish expressions or usage for participants. Some participants also stated that: "Other people use 'no zuo no die' on WeChat, so I use it too"; "I use 'we two who and who' to comment others on Sina Weibo". Much of the use and acquisition of New Chinglish by college students was achieved on social media, so as long as college students use social media, they would be exposed to and use New Chinglish. Furthermore, those who use social media regularly would have more opportunities to know New Chinglish and would be more likely to use it.
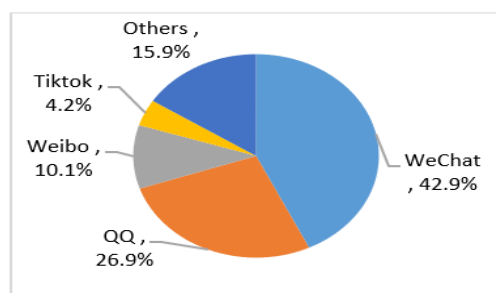
The Preference of Social Media Platforms and Expressions of New Chinglish Use
In terms of using New Chinglish on Chinese social media, they also show their preference, either on platforms or on expressions. Among all New Chinglish usage cases, the most frequently used platforms were displayed in Figure 2 and the widely known New Chinglish expressions were shown in Figure 3.

Figure 2 demonstrates that the top four most used social media platforms among college students are WeChat (42.9%), QQ (26.9%), Sina Weibo (10.1%), and Tiktok (4.2%). Other

platforms, such as Xiaohongshu (Red), Ding Talk, Bilibili, Instagram and Line, among others only accounting for 15.9%. WeChat, QQ, Tiktok and Sina Weibo also the Chinese most popular social platforms, occupying a vital role in Chinese people's life. The highly New Chinglish using platforms showed the consistency to the Chinese popular social media platforms. Among other platforms, although Instagram and Line as overseas social media platform with bilingual or multilingual language background, college students preferred to use New Chinglish in domestic social media platforms. Therefore, college students preferred to use New Chinglish in greater and easily accessible social platforms rather than smaller and inaccessible ones.

Figure 2: The Percentages of Social Media Platforms among Participants

When considering the college student's preference for New Chinglish expressions, "栓 Q" (also known as "拴 Q", which means thank you) recorded the highest frequency of usage, with 37.2%; followed by "欧克" (OK)," 奈斯" (nice), "get 到" (understand), and "good good study, day day up" (study hard and make progress every day), with 12.2%, 6.4%, 5.8%, 4.7% respectively.
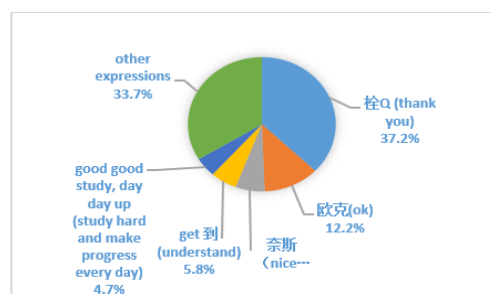

Figure 3: The Percentages of New Chinglish Expressions Usage

As the most frequent New Chinglish expression in the participants' using journals, "栓 Q" originated from the non-standard English pronunciation of a blogger "刘涛 (TeacherLiu)" in Chinese TikTok. He used the bilingual introduction to the mountains and waters of Yangshuo, Guilin Province, and interpreted by funny bloggers as a hot stunt with a Guilin dialect, and became an internet catchphrase used to express the emotion of being speechless and bored with something, in the same way as "I'll thank you". "欧克" (OK) and "奈斯" (nice) were produced by using Chinese characters to resemble the English pronunciation. Expressions of the top three are short and simple. "Good good study, day day up" (study hard and make progress every day) derived from a widely spread slogan, which is pasted on the wall in every classroom. Short and

simple expressions and familiar expressions made these New Chinglish expressions to be more memorable and usable than others. Additionally, the New Chinglish expression use preferences of college students are similar and consistent to some extent.

The Intentions of New Chinglish Usage on Chinese Social Media

After analysing the 173 New Chinglish usage cases, all participants used New Chinglish on social media, and they all were aware that they had this behaviour and they were more likely to use New Chinglish mainly for communication and amusement. When accumulating the intentions of using New Chinglish, it was suggested that college students had fewer limitations and more freedom to use New Chinglish on social media. In Figure 4, Communication and amusement (90%) were the vital elements for participants to use New Chinglish on social media, which indicates that these New Chinglish was a significant element in communication, but appeared occasionally for studying purposes (10%), such as taking in an online class and doing homework. New Chinglish is progressing into the education process, albeit online.
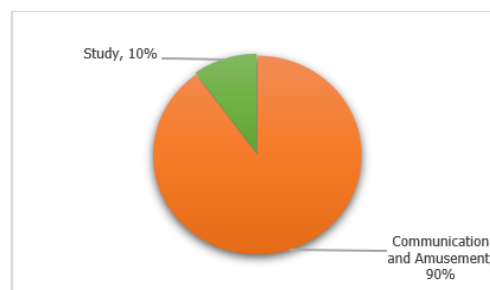
Figure 4: The Intentions of New Chinglish Usage on Chinese Social Media

Same Expression with Different Emotions and Meanings

When using New Chinglish on Chinese social media, the expression would be no longer limited to the original meaning, but embowed with different meanings and emotions. The New Chinglish showed strong adaptability, in much simpler terms where the same New Chinglish expression could be used in a different situation to express different feelings of different speakers, including happiness, support, approval, helplessness, anger, shock, sadness, and praise among others. For example: "I use '栓 Q' to express thanks on my WeChat"; "When I was playing the online game, I didn't guess the real killer and thought I was the real killer. When I was discussing it with my friend later, I used the word "栓 Q" to express my helplessness and anger."; "This afternoon I was complaining with a friend on WeChat by using '栓 Q'"; "I was on the phone with a friend, and when she was about to lose her game, she said '栓 Q'."

A Familiar Role of New Chinglish in College Students' Life

College students were familiar with New Chinglish and using New Chinglish became a habitual behaviour for them. According to their New Chinglish using journal recording, college students' use of New Chinglish tended to be an unconscious behaviour, indicating New Chinglish was prevalent on Chinese social media which even lead people to ignore this behaviour in their language use. For example: "I use this expression a long time ago, and unconsciously"; "Today, I saw the expression of '我 get 到这个点了(I understand this point) when I was browsing the website, and I found everyone was using New Chinglish, either consciously or unconsciously."

During the recording period, the participants generally observed and documented their own behaviour, as well as the behaviour of those around them, both in their physical surroundings and on the internet. They also acknowledged that New Chinglish was easier for them to understand and use. Their familiarity with Chinese characters, Chinese pinyin, and their bilingual or multilingual backgrounds encouraged the use of New Chinglish. The recordings and interviews provided additional information regarding various aspects of New Chinglish, including their understanding of it, their perspectives on it, and the advantages and disadvantages they associated with it. These findings suggest that they have a strong familiarity with New Chinglish.

Contradictions behind Using Behaviour

While the usage recordings indicated the widespread use of New Chinglish among college students on Chinese social media, they still harboured concerns regarding their usage behaviours. Drawing from their recordings and interviews, certain words were extracted to highlight the contradictions between their usage behaviour and their emotional inclinations. In addition to positive and neutral emotional inclinations towards New Chinglish usage behaviour, negative emotional trends still persisted. On one hand, they perceived social media as providing a more comfortable and liberated social environment that promoted the use of New Chinglish. On the other hand, the descriptive words such as "informal," "biggest problem," "confusion," "playful," and "time-limited internet buzzwords" reflected the participants' lack of respect for New Chinglish, along with negative emotions associated with it. This denial was more directed towards New Chinglish itself rather than a denial of their own behaviour in using it on social media. Likewise, there was no clear positive or negative link between the emotional trends and their New Chinglish usage behaviour. This can be explained by their New Chinglish usage on social media where those with negative emotional trends did not stop using New Chinglish and others with positive and neutral emotional trends did not use New Chinglish as much as possible. In essence, their perception did not totally determine their usage behaviours.

Conclusion

This research investigated the usage of New Chinglish among college students on Chinese social media. It illustrated the using habits by examining the their using preferences, using frequency, intentions and role of New Chinglish in their social networking lives. It was noted that for college students, using New Chinglish on Chinese social media was a common behaviours and English use entered their daily lives and could not be ignored. Moreover, while the platforms they utilized for New Chinese English were not restricted solely to Chinese social media, it was primarily on Chinese social media platforms that they predominantly employed New Chinglish. Most of the New Chinglish vocabulary used by college students were easy to understand and familiar. Also, entertaining and communicative functions of New Chinglish were the main purposes of college students to use. Despite the widespread use of New Chinglish by college students on Chinese social media, there were still some contradictions behind this behaviour, indicating the barrier of their acceptance of New Chinglish itself. This emotion towards the New Chinglish itself had an impact on their use behaviour, but could not fully determine their use behaviours. The present study also offers an insight into how English entered the college student's life and the participants revealed an awareness of their behaviour during the research and could realize usage of those around them (online and offline) and to describe this situation.

Although this study explores the usage of New Chinglish among college students on Chinese social media, it is important to consider its limitations due to the relatively small sample size. The future research directions would be recommended to identify the reasons and causes behind their using behaviour, and the offline usage situation.

Acknowledgements

References

Adamson, B. (2002). Barbarian as a foreign language: English in China's Schools. *World Englishes*, 21(2), 231–243.

Alvaro, J. J. (2015). Analysing China's English-language media. *World Englishes*, 34(2), 260-277.

Bi, N. Z. (2011). An investigation into English mixing in Chinese Internet language. *World Journal of English Language*, 1(2), 60.

Bolton, K. (2013). World Englishes, globalization, and language worlds. *Of butterflies and birds, of dialects and genres: Essays in honour of Philip Shaw*, 227-251.

Bolton, K. (2017). Preface: English in China and the continuing story of Chinese Englishes.

Dong, H. (2019). Translanguaging in New Chinglish Online Buzzwords. *Overseas English (海外英语)*, 75-77..

García, O. (2009). *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A global perspective.* Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.

Gu, Y. (1996). Steering a middle course: educational dilemmas in managing tertiary foreign langauge education in China. *Issues in language in education*, 145-151.

Gutiérrez, K., Baquedano-López, P., & Alvarez, H. (2001). Literacy as hybridity: Moving beyond bilingualism in urban classrooms. *The best for our children: Critical perspectives on literacy for Latino students*, 122-141.

He, X., & Pedraza, R. (2015). Chinese social media strategies: Communication key features from a business perspective. *El Profesional de la Información*, 2015; 24 (2): 200-9.

Hu, Z. R., Huang, C. X., & Wu, X. X. (2022). *Annual Report of the Development of New Media in China No.13 (2022) (中国新媒体发展报告 No.13 (2022)),* Social Sciences Academic Press (CHINA)

Jiang, Y. (2022, June 22). Survey: social media is more popular among the under-30s (调查：社交媒体在 30 岁以下的青年群体中更受欢迎). *Xinmin website.* Retrieved from 调查：社交媒体在 30 岁以下的青年群体中更受欢迎_时政_新民网 (xinmin.cn)

Kietzmann, J.H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I.P., & Silvestre, B.S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241–251.

Li, W. (2011). Moment Analysis and translanguaging space: Discursive construction of identities by multilingual Chinese youth in Britain. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(5), 1222-1235.

Li, W. (2016). New Chinglish and the Post-Multilingualism challenge: Translanguaging ELF in China. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 5(1), 1-25.

Lim, J. (2014). A model of functional rules for social media in the networked news sphere. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 24(3), 279-294.

Wei, R., & Su, J. (2012). The statistics of English in China. *English Today*, 28(3), 10–14.

Weiboyi & Pangjing. (2022, May 12) *The 2022 Mainstream Social Media Platform Trends Insight Report (2022 主流社交媒体平台趋势洞察报告*). Retrieved from https:微播易 &胖鲸：2022 主流社交媒体平台趋势洞察报告.pdf(附下载)-三个皮匠报告 (sgpjbg.com)

Widdowson, H. (1997). EIL, ESL, EFL: Global issues and local interests. *World Englishes*, 16(1), 135–146.

Xu, Z., & Deterding, D. (2017). The playfulness of 'new' Chinglish. *Asian Englishes*, 19(2), 116-127.

Xu, Z., & Zhang, D. (2021). Exploring the use of English in Chinese social media. *English in East and South Asia: Policy, Features and Language in Use* (pp. 185-197): Routledge.

You, X. (2011). Chinese white-collar workers and multilingual creativity in the diaspora. *World Englishes*, 30(3), 409-427.

Yu, L. L., Asur, S., & Huberman, B. A. . (2015). Trend Dynamics and Attention in Chinese Social Media. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59(9), 1142-1156.

Zhang, W. (2012). Chinese-English code-mixing among China's netizens: Chinese-English mixed-code communication is gaining popularity on the Internet. *English Today*, 28(3), 40-52.

Zhang, W. (2015). Multilingual creativity on China's Internet. *World Englishes*, 34(2), 231-246.

Zhang, Y., & Ren, W. (2022). 'This is so skrrrrr' – creative translanguaging by Chinese micro-blogging users. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 19(3), 289-304.