ABSTRACT

In computer-mediated communication, online chat rooms provide the Chinese learners of English additional opportunities for their acquisition and use of English.

The main aim of this research is to examine and identify the types and frequencies of communication strategies used by Chinese e-chatters of English and how the strategies reflect their Chinese linguistic and cultural background in the chat room interactions. The data of this study is in the form of thirty different online chat samples recorded from the different national English online chat rooms in mainland China. The identification of communication strategies is based on the typology of communication strategies by Dornyei (1995). The impact of the Chinese language and its cultural background on the Chinese chatters' English is analyzed and interpreted based on a framework adapted from Kirkpatrick's (2007) lexical summary of Chinese English.

The findings indicate that the Chinese e-chatters of English do adapt face-to-face communication strategies summarized by Dornyei to their online chat interactions. Among the strategies found, nonlinguistic signals (30.2%), literal translation (17%) and code-switching (7.6%) occur frequently. Due to the visual nature of computer-mediated communication and the shared purpose of learning English among the Chinese e-chatters, they also generate other strategies such as abbreviations, font types and text colours as well as doing cooperative learning with each other. These strategies thus enable participants to keep the smooth flow of

communication. In addition, the analysis of communication strategies indicates that Chinese e-chatters of English tend to produce typical expressions of Chinese English through frequent use of literal translation.

This study provides a preliminary picture of how Chinese e-chatters as English learners interact online with each other through their communication strategies and shows the characteristics of their Chinese English. Some recommendations are made which may assist in the teaching of English conversation utilizing computer-mediated communication--- online chat rooms which are widely available in China.