

April 2018

Community of Practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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Abstract

This netnographic research investigated features of an informal online English learning community in *Shanbay*, the biggest mobile English learning platform in China. Focusing on how these features shaped members' informal English learning, I selected a theoretical framework that consisted of multiliteracies, new media literacy, participatory culture, and community of practice. Data resources included postings in the community forum, online voice-chat interviews, and dialogues among members in online group chats. Major findings related that this online English learning community reflected the three key features of a community of practice, namely, mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Also, participants perceived their participation in this community as having positive influences on their English learning. They had their questions answered by other members, learned a lot about English learning strategies and resources, became more motivated in and persistent in learning English, and improved their English proficiency levels. However, it was not evident in the data that members' English learning in this community enabled their abilities as critical media prosumers. This research offers insights and suggestions for future designs of informal online English learning communities.

Keywords

Community of practice, informal learning, English as a foreign language, new media literacies

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my very great appreciation to my supervisor Dr. Zheng Zhang for her valuable and constructive suggestions on the planning and development of this research work. She has provided significant help for improving my academic writing. She has set herself an outstanding example for me as a good researcher and I have been greatly influenced by her rigorous academic attitude.

I also owe sincere thankfulness to Dr. Kathryn Marie Hibbert for serving on my advisory committee. She always gives wonderful advice based on the latest literature in the research field.

Special thanks goes to Hanzhou Xu who have reviewed my translations from Chinese to English and given useful suggestions to help me improve the accuracy of the translations.

I sincerely thank all my participants for being so supportive to my research. This study would have never been completed without their honest opinions. I look forward to seeing what the community would look like in the future.

I also would like to thank my dear parents for their encouragement. Even though we can only communicate online, they always care about me and are prepared to provide help anytime when I need them.

Many thanks to my best friend Zhen Lin who is always there encouraging me. She takes good care of me like my big sister. I appreciate that more than I can say.

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Chapter 1

1. Introduction

The rapid development of technology has greatly changed the way people communicate and enabled the fast growth of online communities in the past two decades. An online learning community is an online destination, either public or private, that meets the learning requirements of its members through peer-to-peer learning (Cook & Smith, 2004; Zhan, Xu, & Ye, 2011). Members of online learning communities often learn collaboratively by exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge using Internet-based media (Cook & Smith, 2004). Recently in China, there have been quite a few researchers (e.g., Li, W., 2013; Wu, Chen Hsieh, & Yang, 2017; Zhu, 2010) who found that online learning communities positively impacted formal English teaching and learning. However, there is a scarcity of research in China that investigates EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning in informal online learning communities. To contribute to discussions of this topic, I designed this research to investigate adults' English learning in an online informal English learning community in *Shanbay*.

1.1 Background of the study

Studies have found that online learning communities have great potential in informal learning (Gray, 2004; Richards & Tangney, 2008; Salavuo, 2006; Thompson, 2011).

Informal learning for the purpose of this study, refers to “any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria” (Livingstone, 2001, p. 4). China has witnessed a growing

number of informal online English learning communities in the past few years. For example, the Jituo online learning community (<http://bbs.gter.net/>) is an informal online learning community created for Chinese students who wish to study abroad. It hosts a few discussion forums in which students exchange information and knowledge about how to prepare for required English tests (e.g., Graduate Record Examinations, Test of English as a Foreign Language). To date, the Jituo online learning community has attracted 1,596,837 members and there are 13,744,120 postings in total (Guangzhou Jiuwei Educational Technology Ltd., 2018). Also, the Putclub English learning community (<http://forum.putclub.com/>) has 4,265,524 registered members who share English listening resources and knowledge about how to improve English listening skills (Chengdu Weiji Technology Development co. Ltd, 2018) in the community forum. However, there is little research that investigates how people learn English in these informal online English learning communities and how participating in these communities influences members' English learning.

Shanbay is China's biggest mobile Internet English learning platform developed by Nanjing Beiwan Educational and Technology Company. The *Shanbay* platform includes a series of *Shanbay* applications (apps) and the *Shanbay* website that are designed to help users to improve their English listening, reading, writing, and speaking (Nanjing Beiwan Educational and Technology Co. Ltd, n.d.). It is free to register a *Shanbay* account and in *Shanbay*, most services are free except for the online courses and some extension functions (e.g., associative vocabulary). In 2015, *Shanbay* was awarded as “2015 Popular Educational APP (“2015 年度人气教育 APP”)” by Tencent Holdings Ltd. and “Influential APP in the

Education Industry of China (“中国教育行业影响力 APP”)” by *Sina.com* (“*Shanbay* Launched English Speaking App to Construct an English Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing Learning Platform,” 2016, para. 5). Until 2016, *Shanbay* has attracted almost 30 million users (“*Shanbay* Launched English Speaking App to Construct an English Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing Learning Platform,” 2016, para. 5). I have a long-term interest in *Shanbay* as a virtual space for English learning. Given the acknowledged popularity of *Shanbay*, I have selected this platform to investigate adults’ English learning in an online informal English learning community in *Shanbay*. *Shanbay* contains the *Shanbay* English learning community intended for all *Shanbay* users and many user-created English learning sub-communities. In this research, I focused on a sub-community called Beibei (pseudonym) and explored the features of this informal online English learning community and how these features shaped its members’ English learning.

1.2 Theoretical framework and research Questions

As my research focused on an online English learning community, I built a theoretical framework composed of community of practice (CoP), multiliteracies, new media literacies, and participatory culture. Multiliteracies is a term coined by the New London Group (1996) that describes a new form of literacy reshaped by the growing linguistic and cultural diversity and the development of new communications technologies. Multiliteracies highlights that literacy pedagogy now should account for “the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” and “the context of our cultural and linguistically diverse and increasing globalized society” (New London Group, 1996, p. 61). In this research, multiliteracies shaped my understanding of what literacy

means in the 21st century. This term also sheds light on the notion of new media literacies, which refer to a set of abilities that meaning makers need to develop to fully engage in the new media ecology (Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Thoman & Jolls, 2008). As new media such as Web 2.0 enable private users to create and publish their own work through the Internet, there has emerged a so-called participatory culture which is

a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another.

(Jenkins, 2009, p. 3)

Multiliteracies, new media literacies and participatory culture together shaped my understanding of literacy learning in the highly technologized society, therefore, provided theoretical lenses for me to investigate members' English learning in Beibei. Community of practice (CoP) is formed by "a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, para. 4). Wenger (1998) addressed that three dimensions were crucial to a CoP, that is, mutual engagement (members' regular interactions), joint enterprise (members' shared purpose), and shared repertoire (a set of communal resources). I found Beibei shared some similar features with a CoP based on my cursory review of the notice of the *BeiBei* community. Community of practice therefore provided a theoretical lens for me to investigate Beibei as a learning community.

Employing this theoretical framework, I ask the following research questions:

1. What features does the Beibei online English learning community show to reflect a CoP?
2. What are the features of a CoP (if any) that are missing in Beibei?
3. How do the present features of Beibei affect members' English learning?
4. What are the implications for future designs of online informal English language communities as CoP?

1.3 Research methodology

I selected the qualitative methodology of “Netnography”. Netnography is a research method for “conducting ethical and thorough ethnographic research that combines archival and online communications work, participation and observation, with new forms of digital and network data collection, analysis and research representation” (Kozinet, 2015, p. 1). This research was conducted totally online by following a netnography research design. There were 23 members of Beibei (including the general manager and managers) who participated in this research. Data sources included postings in the community forum, online voice-chat interviews, and dialogues in online group chats.

1.4 An overview of the research

In Chapter 2, I present my theoretical framework that consists of multiliteracies, new media literacy, participatory culture, and community of practice. Then I review the existent

literature on informal learning, technology and language learning, and online communities to address the research gap and why this research is much needed.

In Chapter 3, I introduce my netnography research design and describe how I used NVivo 11 to analyze the data collected through reviewing postings, conducting online voice-chat interviews, and observing participants' communications in their online group chats. Then I talk about ethics consideration and limitations of this netnography research.

In Chapter 4, I draw on vignettes and direct quotes to present my findings on the features of Beibei that reflect a CoP and the influences these features had on its members' English learning.

In Chapter 5, I discuss my findings, give suggestions on designs of online informal English language communities as CoPs, and identify directions of possible future research.

Chapter 2

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

As the Beibei community is an online community that focuses on English learning, I hope to understand it from both the perspective of community and literacy learning. Thus, in this chapter, I introduce my conceptual theoretical framework that consists of multiliteracies, new media literacies, participatory culture, and community of practice. I then review the literature related to my inquiry from the perspective of my theoretical framework, to locate the way in which this research contributes to the current scholarly conversations taking place in the literature.

2.1 Multiliteracies

Rapid technological changes and growing influences of globalization mean that traditional literacy pedagogies, (e.g., “teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official standard forms of the national language” (New London Group, 1996, p. 60)) cannot meet people’s needs for fully participating in modern society. To address this gap, the New London Group (1996) proposed the multiliteracies pedagogy. They asserted that in response to the growing linguistic and cultural diversity and the proliferation of multimodal ways of communication, literate people were supposed to not only become skilled in reading and writing, but also have the competence of self-expression by taking full advantages of diverse linguistic, cultural, technological, and communicative perspectives and tools. Different from learners who receive knowledge passively or at best reproduce what they have been given, learners who are

proficient with multiliteracies are “makers and remakers of signs and transformers of meaning” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 175). Also, they are creative meaning makers with an open mind to differences, changes, and innovations (The New London group, 1996).

According to Kress (2009), who is a member of the New London Group, the multi in multiliteracies

lay and indeed still lies for me in the multiplicity of modes. For others, that “multi-” lay in the multiplicities of socially distinct uses of language--whether seen as discourses or as a multiplicity of socially shaped differences in what might be seen as one language. Or it might have lain in the multiplicities of factors that constitute the social domain itself--culturally, linguistically, in terms of class, of gender, of age as generation and so on. (p. 207)

Kress suggested paying attention to not only multiple modes of meaning but also to the multiplicities of contexts where language is used and the multiple factors that result in the formation of those contexts when discussing multiliteracies. Thus, I decided to look at literacy practices involving use of technologies in online communities, a relatively new context of communication that was born with the technological and social/cultural demands of the 21st century. Multiliteracies as a theoretical tool greatly deepened my understanding of the meaning of literacy today and offered a lens for me to investigate literacy in the online English learning community as it is embodied in social practices.

2.2 New media literacies and participatory culture

I considered members' English learning in the online community as closely related to their new media literacies, which is closely related to the framework of multiliteracies. New media can be specifically defined as computer and communication technologies, which enable users to interact with information and communicate with each other (Rice, 1984). The 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented development of new media and new media has deeply penetrated into our daily life. It is necessary to develop New Media Literacy (Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Thoman & Jolls, 2008) which refers to meaning makers' capability to fully engage in the new media ecology.

While much of the research paid attention to the technical affordance of new media, researchers highlighted the socio-cultural characteristic of new media in recent years (e.g., Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011; Jenkins, 2006). The emergence of new technologies, especially the Web 2.0 technology, has led to the shift of users' roles from media consumers to media creators. Web 2.0 enables ordinary users to infuse their ideas or values into the media content and engage in knowledge co-construction with other users. Therefore, Chen, Wu, and Wang (2011) proposed that new media literacy involved two continuums: "from consuming to prosuming literacy and from functional to critical literacy" (p. 85). Functional literacy refers to individuals' "textual meaning making and use of media tools and content" (Chen et al., 2011, p. 86). However, critical literacy emphasizes individual's ability to analyze, evaluate, and critique media contents (Ling, Li, Deng, & Lee, 2013). Researchers (e.g., Chen et al., 2011, Ling et al., 2013) stated that

people are supposed to develop not only consuming skills (knowing how to access, understand, analyze, and evaluate media contents), but also presuming skills (knowing how to critically produce, disseminate, mix media contents and how to participate interactively and critically in new media environments) to be new media literate (Lin, Li, Deng, & Lee, 2013). Jenkins (2009) proposed eleven new media literacies skills:

- Play.** The ability to solve problems by doing experiments or speculate open-endedly.

- Performance.** The competence of playing other people's roles and thinking and acting from other persons' views.

- Simulation.** The competence of using, interpreting, and building dynamic models.

- Appropriation.** The ability to pick out the needed information and integrate and recreate media content.

- Multitasking.** The ability to scan extensive information and concentrate on salient details.

- Distributed cognition.** The competence of utilizing various tools for expanding mental capacities.

- Collective intelligence.** The ability to work collaboratively with others, utilizing others' knowledge, and co-construct new knowledge towards a shared goal.

·**Judgment.** The ability to critically assess the reliability and credibility of materials collected from different sources.

·**Transmedia navigation.** The competence of utilizing a wide range of media.

·**Networking.** The competence of searching for, integrating, and spreading information.

·**Negotiation.** The ability to grasp different information, discern multiple viewpoints, and respect cultural diversity when traveling across various communities.

According to Silver (1992), “media no longer just influence our culture. They are our culture” (p. 2). By providing web-based technologies that are useful to facilitate massively produced knowledge and content, new media fosters the development of a new type of culture, which is called “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2009). Jenkins defined participatory culture as

a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another.
(p. 3)

Jenkins (2006) emphasized the social and collaborative aspects of participatory culture by saying “the new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through

collaboration and networking” (p. 4). In participatory culture, individuals share ideas, co-construct knowledge, and develop creative works in certain social communities. Active participation in these communities provides “strong incentives for creative expression and active participation” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 7) and may also benefit more capable people in improving their new media literacies skills (Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011).

New media literacies and participatory culture provided strong evidence for viewing online communities as an increasingly important place where learning could take place. They also provided prisms for me to see participation in online communities as not only an effective way of learning a certain type of knowledge but also a way of preparing individuals to be more new media literate for fully engaging in the modern society.

2.3 Community of practice

Back in 1991, Lave and Wenger (1991) first talked about the concept of Community of practice (CoP) in their book on situated learning. Different from cognitivist assumptions which considered learning as an individual behavior, they proposed a social theory of learning as they believed that learning was socially situated and knowledge was embedded in practices. Since people learn by actively participating in the social communities and building identities related to these communities, communities of practitioners who shared similar practice might be the appropriate unit of analysis to examine knowledge (Constant, 1987).

2.3.1 Definition of CoP

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) defined community of practice as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (para. 4). According to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, there are three characteristics that are crucial to recognize a CoP or distinguish CoP from other types of communities:

1. The domain. In a CoP, there is always a shared domain which gathers people together. The domain attracts people to participate, provide guidance for their learning, and gives meaning to their actions. Members of the CoP develop shared repertoire in the domain and their membership therefore indicates a commitment to the domain.

2. The community. During the process of engaging in joint activities, exchanging ideas, conducting emotional communications, members develop relationships that bind them together. Even though a group of people may share a lot in common, they only form a CoP if they interact and communicate with each other.

3. The practice. Members develop a shared repertoire of resources including symbols, stories, ways of doing things, routines, words, and tools—in short a shared practice after interacting with each other continuously for a long time. The practice is the specific focus around which members make new meanings and develop their community.

These three elements together constitute a community of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The term CoP is not new. However, researchers (e.g., Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) have kept giving new meanings to the term. Early attempts to understand CoPs mainly focused on describing and investigating CoPs that spontaneously emerged, while later more CoPs were created on purpose, for example, by educators to improve learning (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014). The rapid development of networked technologies has given rise to the increase of online communities on the Internet and has attracted researchers' (e.g., Hoadly, 2012; Wenger, White, & Smith, 2010) attention to investigating the role technology plays in supporting CoPs.

2.3.2 Wenger's theoretical framework of CoP

Lave and Wenger published their book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* in 1991. In that book, they introduced the concept of "legitimate peripheral participation": a process of how a newcomer gradually develops the capability of participating in the community as a full member through learning from others. Later in 1998, Wenger published his seminal book *Communities of Practice: Meaning, Learning, and Identity*. Referring to his study on a community of insurance claims processors, Wenger (1998) refined the existing definitions of CoP as a group of people work together for a joint enterprise and develop a shared repertoire through sustained mutual engagement. Wenger's (1998) framework of CoP focused on the idea of participation. He believed that it was through social participation that learning occurred. He asserted that

Participation here refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active

participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities ...Such participation shapes not only what we do, but who we are and how we interpret what we do. (Wenger, 1998, p. 4).

Based on this idea, Wenger proposed four aspects of practice (meaning, community, learning, and identity) which provides a framework of analytic components that can be used to understand CoPs.

Meaning aspect. In Wenger's (1998) framework, meaning arises from negotiation of meaning which involves the interplay of participation and reification. Participation indicates both "a process of taking part and also the relations with others that reflect this process" (Wenger, 1998, p. 55). Reification refers to various processes of giving form to ideas, concepts, procedures, and the products of these processes. From Wenger's perspective, participation and reification work together to produce meaning, which is what he called the duality of participation and reification. Participation and reification are not opposites but two dimensions that require and enable each other.

Community aspect. Wenger (1998) addressed three components that contribute to the coherence of the community: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire (p. 73). Mutual engagement refers to members' interactions which enable members to develop relationships. Joint enterprise represents members' shared goal or shared understanding about what ties them up. Through negotiating their joint enterprise, members develop a sense of mutual accountability. Shared repertoire is the community's routines, tools, symbols, and stories produced in practice (Wenger, 1998).

Learning aspect. A CoP is evolving all the time. As Wenger (1998) concluded, “communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning” (p. 86). New members may enter the community while existing members may leave. The community may organize new activities and discontinue previous activities. Members keep developing new ideas, stories, symbols and may abandon the old ones. As introduced in the community aspect, practices involve mutual engagement, negotiating enterprise, and developing shared repertoire. Corresponding to the three dimensions, Wenger listed three processes that a CoP will experience when learning in practice. They are evolving forms of mutual engagement, understanding and tuning their enterprise, and developing their repertoire, styles, and discourses (Wenger, 1998, p. 95).

Identity aspect. Wenger (1998) also emphasized the connection between identity and practice. From his perspective, “the formation of a CoP is also the negotiation of identities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 149). Figure 3.1 below shows the parallels between practice and identity.

| Practice as ... | Identity as ... |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • negotiation of meaning (in terms of participation and reification) • community • shared history of learning • boundary and landscape • constellations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • negotiated experience of self (in terms of participation and reification) • membership • learning trajectory • nexus of multimembership • belonging defined globally but experience locally |

Figure 3.1. Parallels between practice and identity. Reprinted from *Community of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (p. 150), by E. Wenger, 1998, Cambridge University Press: New York. Copyright 1998 by Cambridge University Press.

Thus, Wenger proposed that members developed identities in a CoP through participating and reifying themselves, developing competences members of the community entail, trajectories of their learning and memberships, mediating their memberships in various CoPs into one identity, and figuring out “local ways of belonging to broader constellations” (Wenger, 1998, p. 149). Wenger’s (1998) aspects and analytic components of community of practice were important references for developing my semi-structured interview questions to explore the features of the Beibei community. They also offered great help in developing themes in data analysis.

2.3.3 CoP as a theoretical tool

The theory of CoP has helped many researchers (Case & Jawitz, 2004; Gray, 2004; Tavakoli, 2015) to understand learning in a variety of contexts, both formal and informal. I chose this theory as I saw some similarities between a CoP and the Beibei community which I investigated in this research, even though this community might not be designed as a CoP in the first place. The theory of CoP offered some entry points for analyzing informal learning in the Beibei online English learning community. Moreover, it provided a theoretical foundation for understanding members’ behaviors, perceptions, and interactions in the online community.

The theory of CoP is criticized mainly because of lacking emphasis on the issue of power (Barton & Tustig, 2005; Fox, 2000; Wenger, 2009). Therefore, in this research, I also paid attention to the larger context (the *Shanbay* apps and the *Shanbay* online learning community) where the Beibei community is situated and the distribution of power inside

the community.

2.4 Summary of theoretical framework

I introduced my conceptual theoretical framework which is consisted of multiliteracies, new media literacies, participatory culture, and community of practice. Multiliteracies provided a broad view of understanding the expanded notion of literacy in the 21st century. Community of practice illuminated my research on a social network site from the perspective of community construction. Finally, new media literacies and participatory culture provided a prism for me to view new media literacies practices as embedded in an online learning community.

2.5 Introduction to literature review

This study aims to investigate the features of the Beibei online English learning community in *Shanbay* and how they may influence members' English learning. In this chapter, I address several areas (informal learning, technology and language learning, and online communities that are closely related to my research. By reviewing existent literature in these areas, I first introduce what has been done in these areas, then I address why my research is necessary and how my research can contribute new knowledge to these areas.

2.6 Informal learning

In this review, I start with defining informal learning by comparing it to formal learning. Then I introduce the importance of informal learning and the impacts of technologies on

informal learning.

2.6.1 Formal learning vs informal learning

Formal learning often refers to learning that takes place in formal educational establishments such as schools, colleges, universities, and other formal educational institutions. Formal learning is always highly institutionalized, carefully organized, and guided by a certificated instructor who teaches according to specified educational curricula or plans. Formal learning often results in a formally recognized credential, for example, a bachelor's degree (Schugurensky, 2000; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2012).

The importance of formal learning was barely questioned while learning that happened outside formal educational settings didn't attract much attention until the middle of the 19th century. To better understand the significance of informal learning, it is necessary to know how it differs from formal learning. The definition of informal learning varies as researchers hold different views on the classifications of learning and the terms used to describe different types of learning. So is the situation in China. Yu and Mao (2005) considered that learning could be formal and informal. Formal learning refers to the learning in academic education and continuing education while informal learning happens usually through social contact in informal learning time and spaces. Compared with formal learning, informal learning is regulated and controlled by learner themselves (Yu & Mao, 2015). A number of researchers (e.g., Liu, 2007; Zhang, 2010) have viewed informal learning as all types of learning that happened outside the classroom without the

guidance of teachers. Other researchers (e.g., Feng, 2003; Huang, 2009) further divided learning that was not formal into non-formal learning and informal learning based on the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s opinion on lifelong learning (1996). For example, Huang (2009) opined that informal learning was unorganized and unstructured, usually accompanied by a main activity. Informal learning happens anytime and anywhere in daily life. Non-formal learning is structured learning that takes place outside formal educational settings (OECD, n.d.). Though non-formal learning does not lead to diplomas and qualifications, learners learn purposefully by deciding the learning objectives by themselves (OECD, n.d.).

As shown above, scholars used the term “informal learning” differently, which made it difficult to reach consensus on the definition and boundary of informal learning.

Considering that informal learning was usually a term used as in contrast with formal learning, I adopted Livingstone's (2001) definition of informal learning for this study, that is, “Informal learning is any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria” (p. 4). Compared with formal learning, informal learning (a) is less organized and scheduled; (b) takes place in a much wider variety of situations; (c) allows learners to learn more flexibly and freely; (d) does not involve a role of instructor; (e) is driven by learners' own intentions, purposes, or needs (Eraut, 2004; Lima, Vasconcelos, Félix, Barros, & Mendonça, 2010).

2.6.2 The necessity of informal learning

According to Helou, Li, and Gillet (2010), “To cope with today’s changing world, learning should be pursued actively throughout life rather than be mainly acquired in early life stages and within standard educational systems” (p. 179). Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2006) emphasized that "studies of informal learning, especially those asking about adults' self-directed learning projects, reveal that upwards of 90 percent of adults are engaged in hundreds of hours of informal learning” (p. 35-36). As informal learning is not confined to certain learning contexts and can happen in a variety of places, it enables people to develop knowledge, competencies, and attitudes that are essential to survive in the rapidly changing society while following their daily routine and maintaining their professional development (Helou, et al., 2010; Marsick, 2006). So far, many countries have attached importance to informal learning by putting recognizing informal learning as the top priority of their policy agenda to reshape learning for better meeting the requirements of the modern societies (OECD, n.d., para. 6 &7).

2.6.3 Informal learning and technology

The dramatic technological advancements in recent decades have greatly changed the way learning can occur. With the widespread expansion of the Internet and the popularization of computers and mobile phones, informal learning has become more accessible as learners are able to access abundant learning contents easily at any time or location (Mayes, Ku, Akarasriworn, Luebeck, & Korkmaz, 2011; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Jones, & Bakia, 2009). The increasing flexibility of learning with the support of

technology also gives rise to learners' autonomy in controlling their learning and opportunities to receive support from peers at a distance (Booth, Carroll, Papaioannou, Sutton, & Wong, 2009). To conclude, technology has great potential to facilitate informal learning.

2.7 Technology and language learning

In recent years, technology has been frequently used to support and facilitate language learning in both formal and informal learning. As technology is a broad concept which includes a variety of digital devices and techniques, in this review, I will mainly focus on literature about how the Internet and Web 2.0 facilitate language learning.

2.7.1 Internet and language learning

Since the 1990s, the world has experienced a rapid popularization of the Internet, which is defined as the global system composed of interconnected smaller computer networks that link with each other using standardized communication protocols ("Internet," n.d.). According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), there were 3.2 billion Internet users globally by the end of 2015. As of December 2016, there were approximately 7.31 million internet users in China (CNNIC, 2017). The quick growth of Internet accessibility has led to scholarly inquiries on the use of the Internet in the field of education.

A large amount of research has explored how the Internet can be used in language learning. Shih (2011) found that integrating Facebook (one of the most popular online

social networks around the world) in teaching college English writing greatly motivated students, enhanced collaborative learning, and improved students' English writing skills and knowledge. Kessler and Bikowski (2010) conducted a study on an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) online course involving the use of wikis. Students interacted actively and learned collaboratively by contributing their own information and ideas to the team achievements. Results showed that the flexible learning environment wikis was beneficial for improving students' collaborative language learning. According to Lee (2009), blogs and podcasts were also useful tools for encouraging interactive collaboration in language learning. Lee (2010) also found that applying blog technology in second language instruction positively improved students' writing fluency and critical thinking. Nah's research (2011) indicated that learning EFL online using a mobile phone significantly improved students' listening skills. Also, in this research Korean learners showed positive attitudes towards mobile phones as a learning tool.

All the research mentioned above reported positive results on the use of the Internet in language learning. Since much of the research discussed this issue in formal educational settings, I only found a few articles in the field of online informal learning of English (OILE) that talked about informal English learning with the support of the Internet. Toffoli and Sockett (2010) did a quantitative questionnaire study which explored the types of informal learning in which university students in French engaged. In this article, they defined OILE as non-native speakers' (NNSs) participation in various leisure activities involving the use of English without any externally imposed structure or timetable. Later, Sockett and Toffoli (2012) did a qualitative study on how non-specialist

English learners read and listened to English and communicated in English on the Internet in their leisure hours. They found that all of the participants frequently listened to English songs, watched American and English television dramas, and browsed English websites relevant to their majors. Further, participants kept in touch with other English users in social networks which allowed them to participate in virtual communities and to talk about work and leisure in English. The studies in OILE discussed above focused on university students only. More research is needed to explore a broader population of learners. Also, it is necessary to discuss online informal English learning in other contexts, for example China. Thus, this research contributes to this field by investigating adults' learning in an online community in China.

2.7.2 EFL in China

Since Deng Xiaoping put forward the “Reform and Opening Up Policy” in the late 1970s, a recognition of English as an important driving factor for the development of China arose (Hu 2002). Individuals learn English for the purposes of cross-border/cultural communications and better global mobility for life and career. Thus, English as a foreign language has attracted tremendous attention in China.

Compared with English as a Second Language (ESL) in English speaking countries, English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, including Chinese English learners, face more challenges due to lack of exposure to authentic language environments (Lakshmi, 2013). Thus, there has been a long time that English learning often happens in formal educational settings, that is, in schools, universities, colleges, and licensed training

institutions. I think that is probably why formal learning has been the major focus in research in EFL.

In China, there also emerged a trend of applying web 2.0 technologies in EFL teaching and learning. W. M. Zhang and E. W. Zhang (2013) presented their design of an interactive multimedia-internet-based teaching system (IMITS). The system was built to be student-centered, user-friendly, and individualized. The system made it convenient for teachers to share learning contents with students, assess students' learning results, answer questions after class, and enhance students' effectiveness of learning with online exercises. The result of using this system in Chinese college English teaching turned out to be positive as it gave students more chances to practice English, develop a closer relationship with their teachers, and conduct autonomous learning with the support of the IMITS. Another related study was done by Zhang (2014) who did a review on Task-Oriented Internet Assisted Language Teaching and Learning (TIAETL). TIAETL was a new English teaching and learning model that connected a task-oriented teaching approach with the Internet. The TIAEL model generated more chances for students to practice English, enabled learning beyond the limitation of time and space, getting students motivated, and created a student-centered learning environment. The author suggested that EFL teachers integrate the TIAETL model to college English teaching and learning.

As was mentioned earlier, technology can not only promote learning in class but also provide more opportunities for learners' informal learning. Though much of the research investigated EFL in China in formal educational settings, some researchers have realized

the importance of understanding the role of technology in learners' informal EFL learning. Zhang (2015) investigated the current situation of Sina Weibo (a Chinese microblogging website) as a tool for supporting informal English learning. By counting the number of followers of some Weibo accounts that only present English learning content and analyzing one of the Weibo accounts in detail, the author found that many people learn English informally using Weibo. Though Weibo did have its strength in spreading learning contents, the knowledge that learners received was not systematic or consistent. To improve the efficiency of learning in Weibo, the author suggested that the owner of the Weibo account need to arrange the learning contents reasonably, motivate the interactions among followers, and build a positive learning environment. In Zhang's research, learners only used Weibo as a learning tool. Zhang provided little information on the interactions among learners. There is a scarcity of research that investigates informal online collaborative learning in the context of China. Therefore, I chose the Beibei online learning community as the context of this research in which members learned by collaborating and interacting with each other.

2.7.3 Collaborative learning in second language acquisition

Dillenbourg (1999) defined collaborative learning (CL) as "a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together" (p. 1). Through CL, learners learn together as a group in which they support each other and enjoy equal opportunities to express opinions. By extending CL to a classroom setting, it can also serve as an instructional approach to guiding students' collaborative exploration or application of the learning material instead of just providing them with answers. Thus, CL made a

significant contribution to change the typical teacher-centered classrooms (Smith & MacGregor, 1992).

The concept of CL was mainly developed from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) which considered learning as situated in the context and interactions with other people (Dillenbourg, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). In the field of second language acquisition, CL was greatly supported by the Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis and Swain's (1985, 1995) Output Hypothesis. The Input Hypothesis emphasizes that learners learn language through receiving comprehensive language input (Krashen, 1985). The output hypothesis, however, indicates that not only comprehensible input but also opportunities for learners to produce language output are important for L2 learning. In other words, learners need to speak or write the target language for the sake of restructuring their interlanguage grammar (Swain, 2000). In CL, learners have more chances to both receive language input and produce output when negotiating meanings and constructing new knowledge (Krashen, 1981). Also, CL is considered to have the potential to enable students to be more independent from their teachers and construct knowledge by themselves (D. W. Johnson, & R. T. Johnson, 1989; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1995).

CL has been widely used as a teaching and learning strategy in second language learning (e.g., Burress & Peters, 2015; Saha & Singh, 2016). Recently, the development of new technology has enhanced CL and enriched the ways of conducting CL. In China, researchers have also made some efforts to combine CL with technology-supported EFL learning or apply CL in online environments. Zou, Wang, and Xing (2016) found that there was no guarantee that students could collaborate effectively by simply grouping

them into heterogeneous small groups. Thus they developed a mobile-device-supported peer-assisted learning (MPAL) system and implemented the system in an elementary EFL class. As a result, MPAL helped improve students' collaboration and promoted their reading motivation. Lin, Chan, and Hsiao (2011) did a study and found that students remembered English vocabulary for a longer time when studying collaboratively with the help of computers. Similar research was abundant in formal educational settings (e.g., Lan, Sung, & Chang, 2007; Yang & Lin, 2015) but there was a scarcity of research that paid attention to Chinese EFL learners' online informal collaborative learning.

2.8 Online communities

With the popularization of the Internet, research into online communities started to emerge in the 1990s. Preece (2000) defined an online community broadly as a group of people who gathered online for a purpose and who were governed by norms and policies. This definition, according to Souza and Preece (2004), included both communities that existed completely online and communities that also had a physical presence component.

There are various types of online communities. Porter (2004) divided online communities into two types, organization sponsored communities and peer initiated communities. Organization sponsored communities, which usually exist in formally organized institutions or groups, follow an up-down organization. These communities are expected to produce measurable results that benefit the organizations (Porter, 2004). As peer-initiated communities have a bottom-up organization, the content of members' conversations is to a great extent determined by members themselves. Online

communities with different purposes, levels of connectivity, and levels of institutionalization have different terms (e.g., online community of interest, online knowledge community, online learning community). However, no matter what type of online communities, they are virtual social networks where people with something in common can share resources, exchange ideas, and fulfill emotional demands (Li, 2013).

There is abundant research that focuses on learning in online communities. For example, Gray (2004) conducted a study on an online community of adult learning coordinators in Alberta. By reviewing online discussion postings, live chat transcripts, surveys, and interviews transcripts, Gray found that meaningful informal learning happened in the online community. Interactions in the online community, mostly telling stories and sharing problem-solving strategies helped both new members and experienced practitioners to gain new knowledge about their practice while contributing to the construction of both individual identity and the identity of the collective community of coordinators. There were quite a few studies that explored informal online communities; however, when it came to online English learning communities, most of the research was conducted within formal establishments. Zhu (2010) taught English writing by creating an online community on Ning.com. Students reported that they received better learning results in participating in the online community than in traditional English writing classes. Li (2015) came up with the idea of combining micro learning resources (structured digital resources that present fragmentary learning content with the help of information technology) with online learning communities to improve English interpretation teaching based on a literature review. Li (2013) researched on an online

EFL learning community that was created using an instant messaging tool called QQ International. Results showed that the online EFL Learning Community improved students' learning interests and efficiency as students participated actively in their process of knowledge acquisition.

The only research I found that investigated English learning in informal online learning communities in China was the one Sun (2014) conducted to investigate the functioning of the GRE Analytical Writing Section Discussion Forum in the Jituo community. It was also the research most aligned with this study. Using the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model as theoretical framework, the author found strong evidence on the existence of teaching presence (i.e., the design, direction, and facilitation of learning), cognitive presence (i.e., the extent to which the members of the online community are able to construct meaning through constant communication), and social presence (i.e., the ability of members to project themselves socially and affectively into the online community) in this community from the data collected from the discussion forum and surveys (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). Though Sun's (2014) research shared a similar research context with my research, he devoted most of his efforts to examine to what extent teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence existed in the online community. Thus, he discussed little about how these elements of CoI influenced members' English learning. It is necessary to go beyond what people do in the online communities and further explore the influences of their behaviors and interactions. Therefore, in this research, I investigated not only members' interactions in the Beibei online English learning community, but also what influences these interactions had on

members' English learning.

2.9 Summary of literature review

This literature review has shown that technology, or more specifically the Internet is a useful tool to facilitate informal language learning. In China there was a large amount of research that investigated the use of the Internet in EFL learning and English learning in online communities. However, most of these studies were situated in formal educational settings. This literature review indicates that there was a scarcity of research that investigated EFL learning in informal online learning communities in China. Therefore, I considered it necessary to conduct this research to provide more information on how members learn English in the context of an informal online learning community and how participating in the online community affects their English learning.

Chapter 3

3. Methodology

To answer the questions about the features of the Beibei online English learning community and how they may influence members' English learning, I believe that a qualitative research design is appropriate here as this research focuses more on gaining deep understandings of the community and members' opinions on their experience in this community. Among all qualitative research methods, I see "netnography" (Kozinets, 2015) as a good fit for conducting this research. It facilitates investigations on people's social interactions and communications in an online context with various online qualitative techniques. In this chapter, I first introduce netnography and then talk about my own netnography research design.

3.1 Netnography

Research that uses netnography to investigate online behaviors is burgeoning across fields, including education (Burford & Park, 2014; Kulavuz-Onal, 2015; Thomas & Peters, 2011). As my research is about people's online interactions in an online community where members spread across different areas of China, I consider netnography as a good fit.

"Netnography" (Kozinets, 2015) is a response to the growing demands of conducting online qualitative research. Kozinets defined this approach as a method for "conducting ethical and thorough ethnographic research that combines archival and online communications work, participation and observation, with new forms of digital and network data collection,

analysis and research representation” (p. 1). Therefore, netnography is in close tie with ethnography. Ethnography is a research method which is used to understand a particular culture, a social setting, or behaviors of people belonging to a certain culture group (Creswell, 2007; Hobbs, 2006). Participant observation is the most common way of collecting data for ethnographic studies. Similar to ethnography, netnography is aimed at obtaining cultural understandings of human experiences. However, it differs from ethnography in that it focuses on investigating online social interactions in online social networks or online communities. There are also “online ethnography” (Markham, 2005) and “virtual ethnography” (Hine, 2000) which use ethnographic methods to investigate human cultures in online contexts. However, unlike online ethnography and virtual ethnography which allow a combination of online and offline data collection approaches, netnography only uses online data collection tools (Kozinets, 2015).

Netnography uses “computer mediated communications as a source of data” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 60). In a netnographic study, data come primarily from three sources: archival data, elicited data, and fieldnotes (Kozinets, 2010). “The Internet is an archive, an incredible one” (Kozinets, 2015, p. 74). Archival data refers to those textual, audiovisual, graphical, and photographic data that can be found in forums or webpages. Netnography researchers can easily collect a large amount of archival data which might exist before the researcher enters the community. In addition to archival data, netnography researchers also collect elicited data (Kozinets, 2010) from their online communications with participants. This can be in the form of asynchronous communication, (e.g., posting and commenting in a forum, exchanging emails), or in the form of synchronous communication (e.g., online interviews,

instant online chatting). Fieldnotes are also an important data source in netnography as netnographers add their “valuable interpretive insight” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 113).

Netnography allows the use of a wide range of online data collection techniques, so researchers need to decide what techniques to use based on their research contexts and research questions (Kozinets, 2015).

3.2 Data collection

This study focused on one of the sub-communities in *Shanbay* named Beibei. I chose this sub-community as it had been created for almost three years (according to the record in its community interface) and stayed on the top of the *Shanbay* community rankings which were publicly available for all *Shanbay* users in the *Shanbay* website and apps. Based on my research questions and the features of netnography studies, I collected data through observing archival data (postings in the forum and dialogues in online group chat) and doing online voice-chat interviews with voluntary participants.

The data collection process took about two months and was fully online. I first contacted the general manager of Beibei who generally took charge of the community and gained her permission to do this research in Beibei. She was also glad to be my participant. I collected her verbal consent for allowing me to observe and interview her (See Appendix C Letter of Information and Consent for the General Manager). Then I submitted an application to join Beibei. She agreed and also invited me to their online *QQ* and *WeChat* (both of them are popular instant messaging software in China) group chats. After entering the community, I recruited participants by sending recruitment emails to all members using the built-in

messaging service provided by *Shanbay* (see Appendix B Recruitment Email). If managers who assisted the general manager to manage the community responded to my recruitment emails and were willing to participate in this research (the list of managers can be found in the community's top posting), I sent them a Letter of Information and collected their verbal consent (see Appendix D Letter of Information and Consent for the Manager). Considering the fact that there might be quite a lot members who wanted to participate (according to the information in the community interface, there were about 700 members in the community), I designed a *Qualtrics* survey and used it to introduce the detailed information of my research and collect members' online consent forms (see Appendix E Letter of Information and Consent for Members). I sent members who were interested in participating in my research a link to the *Qualtrics* survey. They filled in the form and submitted it through the Qualtrics platform which provided data transmission encryption. Finally, twenty-three participants in total participated in this research (see Table 3.1 for participants' profiles), including members, managers, and the general manager. Among all the participants, nineteen of them agreed to participate in interviews. I secured all the consents before starting data collection.

Table 3.1

Participants' profiles

| | Pseudonym | Time for being a member of Beibei | Position |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Participants I interviewed and observed | <u>Honghong</u> | 2 years | General manager |
| | <u>Bingbing</u> | 500 days | Manager |
| | <u>Xinxin</u> | 1 year | Manager |
| | <u>Pengpeng</u> | 1 year | Manager |
| | <u>Maomao</u> | 6 months | Member |
| | <u>Huahua</u> | 1 year or more | Member |
| | <u>Huanhuan</u> | Less than 6 months | Member |
| | <u>Duoduo</u> | 1 year | Member |
| | <u>Yingying</u> | 6 months | Member |
| | <u>Xiuxiu</u> | 3 or 4 months | Member |
| | Participants I only observed | <u>Haohao</u> | Unknown |
| <u>Congcong</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Mingming</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Lele</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Tiantian</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Yuanyuan</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Nana</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Sisi</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Longlong</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Zhenzhen</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Liangliang</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Wenwen</u> | | Unknown | Member |
| <u>Dongdong</u> | | Unknown | Member |

Once finishing recruiting participants, I began to review the postings that members posted before I entered the community in the community forum. These postings provided abundant information about what members did in this online community and how they interacted with each other. I excerpted contents that could help me to answer my research questions about the features of the community and their influences on members' English learning from participants' postings and comments and saved them as data.

Next, I contacted my participants who were willing to be interviewed and did the first round of voice-chat interviews online using *Skype* and *Dingtalk* (a Chinese social software) based on participants' preferences. I designed semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix F Interview Questions) which could help me to answer my research questions based on my theoretical framework. I interviewed ten participants in total. Among the ten interview participants, three of them were managers of Beibei, one was the general manager, and six were members. Each interview ranged from thirty minutes to one hour. Due to participants' preferences, I interviewed them in Chinese. All the interviews were recorded with participants' permissions. I initially analyzed the interview transcripts by reading the transcripts several times, highlighting participants' answers that were unclear or confusing to me, and developing interpretations and my preliminary findings on the features of the Beibei community and how the features affected members' English learning. Then I conducted a second round of online voice-chat interviews with the ten participants to ask about their opinions on my interpretations and make sure I understood them appropriately. I did the second round of interviews for member checking, which I will further address in the next section.

While reviewing the postings and doing the interviews, I also observed my participants by reading their latest postings in the forum and their interactions with other members in group chats. When I saw contents in postings or messages that were useful for answering my research questions, I copied and saved them as data. I also developed fieldnotes in the process of data collection. According to Bernard (1995), there are three kinds of fieldnotes: descriptive notes, notes on methods, and analytic notes. As members' interactions were

archived online in the community forum and in the group chats, I could review them anytime during data collection. Therefore, I mainly developed analytic notes about my reflections by focusing on how specific archival data could answer my research questions and how they were related to the selected theories.

3.3 Addressing rigour

Creswell (2007) cited eight strategies that were frequently used by qualitative researchers to help achieve verisimilitude in conducting qualitative research. They are *triangulation*, *member checking*, *rich and thick description*, *spending prolonged time in the field*, *clarifying researcher bias*, *presenting negative or discrepant information*, *peer debriefing*, and the use of *an external auditor* (Creswell, 2007, p. 157). Here in this section, I will address some of these strategies that this study used. Then in the limitations section (See 3.6), I address strategies that I did not use.

3.3.1 Triangulation

Researchers (e.g., Gesme & Peshkin, 1992) suggested collecting multiple sources of data as a strategy to strengthen qualitative research. In this research, observational data that showed members' interactions about English learning, interview data about how members learned English collaboratively in the community and what impacts participation in the community had on their English learning, and my fieldnotes formed a triangulation of data sources that allowed me to further ensure the credibility of the data. For example, Pengpeng said in the interview that he was willing to answer other members' questions, which I was able to verify when I observed his interactions with other members in online group chats.

3.3.2 Member checking

Member checking is a technique that is considered as “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). To apply member checking, researchers should return data, transcripts, interpretations, and findings to the participants which enables participants to ascribe accuracy to their account. However, Harvey (2015) questioned this process based on her previous experience that most participants responded to any texts she sent with broad agreement with everything she had said. Inspired by the dialogic qualitative interview design she presented (Harvey, 2015), I decided to do two interviews with each interview participant. The second interview provided opportunities for me to confirm particular aspects of data, assess accuracy of the data and initial findings, and receive additional information provided by participants voluntarily. For example, when transcribing the first round of interviews, I found that some of the interview participants mentioned that their English proficiency was improved after joining in Beibei. Conducting the second round of interviews with these interview participants enabled me to confirm whether their progress was related to their participation in Beibei or not, which they did not specify in the first round of interviews.

3.3.3 Strategies used to reduce researcher bias

As a Chinese student, I share the similar cultural and educational background with members in Beibei which could help me to understand them better but also increased the risk of having bias when doing the research. I was clearly aware that it was easy for me as a researcher to bring bias to my research and bias may happen in every step of conducting

qualitative research. Therefore, I kept reminding myself of my identity as a researcher and tried my best to avoid affinity with participants, avoid asking leading questions, and be honest about the data I collected. Heath and Street (2008) addressed that “As you collect data, know the company you keep as ethnographer and get to know yourself as constant learner---ever curious and open to what’s happening” (p. 31). In this research, I was open to report both positive and negative data (e.g., friendship and conflicts among members). I also reported Beibei’s use of punishment and a monetary penalty to engage members in English learning which was not aligned with my previous assumption of English learning in online learning communities my selected theoretical framework indicated. “Interpretation is at the heart of qualitative research because qualitative research is concerned with meaning and the process of meaning-making” (Willig, 2017, p. 276). Creswell (2007) suggested doing peer debriefing and using an external auditor, that is, involving an interpretation beyond the researcher to reduce bias in data analysis and interpretation. In this research, my supervisor (also the principal investigator) and my committee member were invited to critically review my interpretation and ask questions from their perspectives.

3.4 Data analysis

According to Kozinets (2015), “Netnography is about finding gems online and then building them together into magnificent pieces of jewelry, with the gold and silver metals provided by the narration, the theoretical storytelling” (p. 198). Thus, in this research, the processes of data analysis and interpretation involved filtering and sorting out useful pieces of information from archival data, observational data, interview data, and fieldnotes. As the process of data analysis and interpretation involved a large amount of qualitative data,

especially text-based data, I used NVivo 11 to improve the efficiency of analysis. NVivo 11 is a qualitative data analysis software designed to help researchers organize, analyze, and find insights in unstructured data from various resources such as documents, OneNote, e-mails, and websites. After creating a new project in NVivo 11, I transcribed the interviews and imported the interview transcripts to Nvivo 11. I also imported my fieldnotes and the contents I recorded from postings on the forum and online group chats.

To begin with, I developed several deductive themes and subthemes from my selected theoretical lenses of new media literacies and community of practices (see Table 3.2). I used new media literacies as the lens for understanding members' online English learning practices. I deductively developed several themes that might be applicable in this research from the eleven new media literacies skills Jenkins (2009) listed (i.e., play, performance, simulation, appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, judgment, transmedia navigation, networking, and negotiation). These themes contributed to my understanding of features of Beibei and the influences of participating in Beibei upon members' English learning. Also, since CoP was directly related to my research focus, I focused on CoP and deductively derived themes out of the three core and interrelated terms in Wenger's (1998) framework of CoP, namely, mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. I also employed "identity" from Wenger's framework as a deductive theme as I considered membership and identities members develop in Beibei might motivate members to participate actively in the community and invest more efforts to English learning.

Table 3.2

Deductive themes and subthemes developed from the theoretical framework

| Theory | Themes |
|-----------------------|--|
| New media literacies | Theme 1: Appropriation Theme 2: Collective intelligence Theme 3: Distributed cognition Theme 4: Transmedia navigation Theme 5: Networking Theme 6: Negotiation |
| Community of practice | Theme 1: Mutual engagement Subthemes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged diversity • Mutual relationship Theme 2: Joint enterprise Subthemes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprise is negotiated • Mutual accountability Theme 3: Shared repertoire Theme 4: Identity Subthemes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nexus of multimembership • Negotiated experience • Learning trajectory • Belonging defined globally but experienced locally |
|--|--|

As Saldaña (2013) proposed that there are two stages of coding, First cycle and Second cycle coding. First cycle coding involves assigning summative and essence-capturing attributes to the data while Second cycle coding is mainly about finding patterns from the first cycle codes (Saldaña, 2013). In the First cycle coding, I reviewed all the data I collected, sorted out data that related to my research questions, and coded them wherever these deductive themes were applicable. I also used First cycle coding methods (Saldaña, 2013) such as Descriptive coding (summarizing the major topic of a passage using a word or a short phrase); In Vivo coding (using words or phrases from participants' own languages as codes); Emotion coding (labeling the emotions participants experienced and reported); Values coding (capturing participants' attitudes, values, and beliefs from the data) to develop inductive codes. Then I did the Second cycle coding by connecting and grouping the First cycle codes to identify themes. In this process, I paid attention to the recurring phrases (i.e., In Vivo codes) and common threads of participants' accounts as Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggested. For example, during the Second cycle coding, I found some In Vivo codes that kept reappearing and were quite similar: sticking to English learning, forming a habit of learning English, and never stopping learning English. I clustered these codes and developed a theme named "persistence in English learning".

There were also some data that related to the theme "identity" but did not fit in any of the

five subthemes Wenger (1998) addressed. I summarized my initial coding of these data and developed a subtheme of “role model” under the theme of “Identity”. Finally, I reviewed each participant’s data and highlighted the length of being a member in Beibei, level of activity, and position (the general manager, manager, or member) to see if these factors may lead to participants’ different experiences.

3.5 Ethical considerations

I started contacting potential participants after gaining approval from the Western Research Ethics Board (REB). As this research focused on adult learning, I informed my potential participants in the recruitment email and letters of information that this research only recruited participants who were over 18 years old. I explained the research details (e.g., the purpose of the research, sample size, time commitment, research procedures, what I would observe and who I would interview, participants’ rights, foreseeable risks, how I would ensure the confidentiality of data) to participants in the Letters of Information and answered their questions regarding my research using the built-in messaging service of *Shanbay* before collecting their consent. I started collecting data after I received consent from all the participants.

Confidentiality was my major ethical concern in this research. The community forum of Beibei was publicly accessible online and the postings could be easily found through search engines. According to Kozinets (2015), it is increasingly easy to identify direct quotes through search engines. As the postings in Beibei’s community forum could be easily found through search engines, it was easy to connect direct quotes to members’ *Shanbay* IDs and

then to their personal information that they presented in their *Shanbay* profiles. I identified this potential risk in the Letters of Information and only extracted postings of members with whom I have consent. To make data less traceable, I used a pseudonym “Beibei” for the community and assigned pseudonyms to my participants. Also, I did not provide the original Chinese excerpts when quoting participants’ postings or comments in the community forum. I used the *Qualtrics* platform recommended by Western’s Research Ethics Boards (REB) to collect participants’ online consents. “*Qualtrics* uses Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption for all transmitted Internet data” (Qualtrics, 2015, p. 5). The social media (i.e., *Skype* and *Dingtalk*) used for online voice-chat interviews also provided end-to-end encryption for all transmitted data and were approved by Western’s REB. In this research, I did not collect any personal information from participants except their *Shanbay* IDs, email addresses, and social media accounts and such identifiable information was kept separately from research data. I stored all the electronic data in a password-protected computer and backed up the data to my *One Drive* Western University server.

3.6 Limitations of this research

Netnography research design made it possible for me to conduct this research on an online community in China while I was in Canada. However, I did experience some technical problems during the research. For example, I tried a few website builders such as *wix.com* and *weebly.com* when designing a website to collect online consent. I sent links to my friends in China. However, not all of my friends could access the websites I created and view all the content. Finally I used a *Qualtrics* survey but there were still two members of

Beibei who had problems accessing the survey. Also, when doing the online interviews, participants encountered different technical problems in registering and signing in *Skype*. Though we solved the problems in most situations, it was time consuming. These technical problems happened probably because of the Internet censorship in China and the technologies (e.g., *Skype*) used in this research reacted differently in different digital devices, operating systems, and browsers. Therefore, I recommend that netnography researchers take full considerations of technical problems they may encounter and always prepare a few alternatives. Also, it is necessary to notify participants in advance of the potential technical problems and leave sufficient time for interview schedules just in case.

Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers spend prolonged time in the research field and convey findings using thick descriptions. However, due to the time constraints of graduation, I spent only two months collecting the data. It was a pity that I did not have more observational data which could enable me to provide more detailed and rich descriptions. The low response rate to my recruitment email was also one of the limitations of this research. Later in data collection I was told by my participants that *Shanbay* could automatically block similar messages sent to a few users from the same account. This could be one of the reasons for the low response rate. Finally, I recruited only 23 participants while there were almost 700 members in Beibei. When I asked my interview participants how they would describe themselves, a core member, someone more on the edges, or somewhere in between, none of my interview participants considered themselves to be on the edges. Also, through reviewing the postings in the forum and observation, I found all my participants participated in activities and interacted with other members in the online

group chats or in the community forum. Though I included participants that served different positions (i.e., the general manager, manager, member) in the community, this research failed to collect opinions from those members who were on the edges. These people may provide different perspectives from my participants.

Zhang (2012) addressed that translation “posed a huge methodological and ethical challenge to the credibility of translated qualitative data” (p. 99). As *Shanbay* is an online English learning community in China, members communicate with each other in both English and Chinese. To be accurate, I translated the data in Mandarin (e.g., interview data) into English for the thesis. Because my translation may bear misinterpretations as I am not a professional translator, the principal investigator, who is bilingual provided help with my English translation of the collected data in Mandarin Chinese. I also got the permission from the Research Ethics Board (REB) to present the original data and my translation to a third person who is fluent in both Mandarin and English for translation advice. I then made revisions based on their advice (see Appendix Affidavit for Transcription). I sent original data that I reported in my thesis and my translation as encrypted documents. The third person received the encrypted documents via encrypted emails. I ensured that the provided data and my translation did not contain any participants’ personal information. I also got a signed agreement about not letting out the research data from the person ahead.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, I introduced my netnography research design for conducting this research.

To achieve valid conclusions, I collected data from different sources (postings in the forum,

online voice-chat interviews, and online group chats) and applied the strategy of triangulation and member checking. NVivo 11, a qualitative research tool played an important role in organizing data. In data analysis, I developed deductive themes generated from my theoretical framework (new media literacy and community of practice), however, I was also open for inductive themes that emerged from the data. By reviewing the data again and again and coding data to both deductive and inductive themes, I gained deep understandings about the features of Beibei and how these features influenced members' English learning.

Chapter 4

4. Findings

In this chapter, I first give a brief introduction to the community. Then I present my findings to answer the following research questions:

1. What features does the Beibei online English learning community show to reflect a CoP?
2. What are the features of a CoP (if any) that are missing in Beibei?
3. How do the present features of CoP affect members' English learning?

Findings were based on an analysis of postings, interview transcripts, and field notes from observations. I translated all the excerpts from the interviews, postings, or dialogues in online group chats from Mandarin to English if I do not specify otherwise.

4.1 Introduction to Beibei

As a sub-community of *Shanbay*, Beibei was closely connected with the use of *Shanbay* apps and was ranked among all the sub-communities in *Shanbay*. Therefore, I first explain two functions of the *Shanbay* English learning apps and also how *Shanbay* developed the ranking of all the sub-communities.

1. ***Shanbay* English learning projects** (扇贝英语学习计划): *Shanbay* apps provided three English learning projects: reading project, sentences training project, and

listening project. After joining the projects users had to complete corresponding learning tasks every day until the projects ended. There was a minimum requirement, for example, users had to read at least two pieces of English news every day if they joined the reading project. Users could choose their learning contents. For instance, they could choose English news or original English books in the reading project, sentences or articles listening practices in the listening project. It usually took ten to twenty minutes to fulfill the minimum requirements of all three projects.

2. **Clock in (打卡):** *Shanbay* users clicked a special button to indicate that they completed all the daily learning tasks they set up in *Shanbay* apps (including tasks of the learning projects). The button was not clickable before users finished all their learning tasks.

3. **Contribution points (贡献点) and ranking.** Users who joined a sub-community earned contribution points through completing learning projects and clocking in. The contribution points that all sub-community members earned greatly influenced the sub-community's ranking among all the sub-communities in *Shanbay*. In this way, members' individual learning in *Shanbay* could also be seen as a way of making contributions to their community by improving the community's ranking to attract more *Shanbay* users to join the community. In Beibei, its community rules conveyed that members had to join all three learning projects and keep a high frequency (98%) of clocking in or they would be "removed from community temporarily (暂时移出小组)" by the managers. However, they were welcome to rejoin the community.

Each sub-community in *Shanbay* had a community interface. From there members could see the basic information of the community such as the general manager, creation date, and the community's ranking. There was also a brief introduction to the community. I knew from the community interface that this community was created about three years ago. A sub-community in *Shanbay* could have 700 members at most. During my stay in the community, the Beibei community always had around 700 members and maintained a high ranking. As members' IDs in the online groups contained a label that explained their status (i.e., working, graduate student, or university student), I knew that most of the members were undergraduates and above. Quite a few members had already got a job. There was a ranking of all members according to their contribution points. Members could view others' personal homepages and send private messages using the built-in messaging service provided by *Shanbay* by clicking their IDs in the ranking. The community interface also contained a community forum where members could view the community's most recent postings, postings highlighted by the general manager, and recent members' badges (symbols of achievements in learning English provided by *Shanbay*) by choosing different tags. Based on my observation, members of Beibei interacted with each other mainly through posting and commenting in the community forum in *Shanbay*, communicating with each other in *QQ/WeChat* (both are popular instant messaging software in China) online group chats, and sending private messages to each other through the built-in messaging service in the *Shanbay* platform.

Usually the general manager was the one who created a new sub-community. The general manager took full charge of the community. However, the creator could also pass on this

position to a member who he/she thought was capable of managing the community. Honghong (pseudonym) was appointed as the general manager of Beibei by its creator about two years ago. There were also some managers who volunteered to help Honghong manage the community. Some managers were hosts of the activities and some took the responsibility to check members' frequencies of clocking in and remind members to clock in by @names in online group chats. The general manager and managers had the right to recruit new members or remove members from the community. They had regular meetings to decide the community rules and organize activities. Honghong claimed that Beibei was a non-profit English learning community. Even though participating in some of the activities could involve paying deposits, half of the deducted deposits were given to members as rewards and the other half were kept by managers as the community fund for future activities.

4.2 Mutual engagement

Mutual engagement refers to the sustained interactions of members (Wenger, 1998). Here I report several types of mutual engagement related to English learning in Beibei.

Collaborative problem solving. During observation, I noticed that members often raised questions on certain knowledge of English and discussed with other members to solve the problems. For example, Huahua quoted a paragraph with its translation and raised a question in one of the community's online group chats. The following is her dialogue with Honghong.

Huahua: "The Conservative Party knows all too well that education is an emotive

issue in British politics—indeed, perhaps the most emotive. In May a restatement of its line on selective grammar schools—that new ones would not be created by a future Tory government, just as they had not been by the last one—provoked a fortnight of internal strife.” The Chinese translation is:

“保守党十分清楚教育问题在英国是一个敏感的政治话题，确切地说，是极其敏感。今年5月份，保守党重申了器建立选择性文法学校的强硬立场。在其执政期间政府将不会新建任何文法学校，正如他们刚刚否定了一项有关于此的提议一样。这项申明在托利党内部激起长达两周的争执。”

How to understand “just as they...”?

Honghong: “They” refers to “the new ones” in the last sentence. The “-provoked” after just as they had not been (created) by the last one (the late government) is connected with the previous sentence about grammar schools.

Huahua: Thank you Honghong for answering my question late at night! I am very touched! It seems that I have misread “one-provoked” as one word. But I still have a question. I think if I consider “last one” as the late government then it doesn’t match the Chinese translation. Can I understand it as the last period of time when the government is in power?

Honghong: Oh, yes! It should be “the last Tory government” based on context.

Huahua: I completely understand this paragraph. Thank you.

Honghong: You’re welcome.

In this example, through interacting with Honghong, Huahua identified her own mistake and developed a better understanding of the original text and its translation. Another example was provided by Haohao. He once posted his analysis of a difficult long sentence he learned from a piece of English news in the community forum. In the posting, he also talked about the differences among different types of multiple attributive clauses to support his analysis. He used the English sentence “She is the only girl who I know can play the

guitar.” as an example of an embedded attributive clause and the English sentence “She is the only girl who I know who can play the guitar” as an example of progressive attributive clauses. The two sentences caused confusions for other members as they looked really similar. He further explained to other members the different meanings of the two sentences and discussed whether moving “I know” to the beginning of the sentences would change the meanings. In the end of their discussions, Haohao said: “Discussion [on Beibei] enabled me to better understand the logic behind grammatical structures. ” This example indicated how Haohao co-constructed knowledge through interactions with other members.

Vignette 4.2.1

In a discussion on how to translate the Chinese idiom “可遇不可求” into English in the group chat, Maomao provided an English translation “can not be met” learned in *Shanbay* and also provided a screenshot of the search result in *Bing.com*. The result showed that the idiom was translated as “only comes out by accident”. Nana expressed her idea that the translation should emphasize contingency and luck. For the translation “sth may not seek” found in *Youdao Dictionary*, Maomao said that he didn’t like this translation as it was rigid. Honghong also participated in the discussion and said that she liked the idea of using the word “serendipity” in a member’s translation.

Discussions did not always lead to an agreement. As is shown in Vignette 4.2.1, members used different online tools to search for translations and provided different opinions on the translations of the phrase. They did not reach a consensus about the translation in the end. However, they were able to gather information and opinions through interactions which provided references for answering the question.

Sharing learning resources and strategies. As Bingbing emphasized, members of

Beibei shared “quite abundant” English learning resources. For example, Zhenzhen shared different versions of translations of a Chinese classic philosophical text Daodejing (道德经) by chapters and also his/her opinions on the translations. Sisi shared quite a lot of English knowledge such as analysis of synonyms, 500 useful English phrases, and writing templates. I also saw Nana introduce English songs in the online group chats and Honghong recommend English TV series to other members in the community forum. By sharing learning resources with others, members could have a chance to learn new knowledge based on other members’ feedback. For example, there was a posting about a piece of English economic news and its translation in which a Chinese proverb was translated. Honghong commented the posting that she had read an article about how advanced translator Zhang Lu translated the Chinese verse “亦余心之所善兮，虽九死其犹未悔 (For the ideal that I hold dear to my heart, I’d not regret a thousand times to die)” Prime Minister Wen Jiabao quoted in a press conference. Liangliang shared a translation of an idiom “自食其果 (Now that you’ve made your bed, lie on it)” in the forum and he learned an alternative way of translating the idiom from other members’ comments.

Members shared not only learning materials retrieved from other resources, but also learning materials developed by themselves. Sharing their own original work and receiving constructive feedback stimulated their motivation to learn English. Yuanyuan, Mingming, Huahua, and Duoduo shared their English reading journals in the community forum. Honghong uploaded her dubbing video clip of the movie *Pride & Prejudice* (2005) recorded in Liulishuo app. Yuanyuan and Xiuxiu recorded themselves reading aloud in English and shared the recordings as voice messages in the online group chats. When members shared

these learning materials developed by themselves, other members gave feedback. For example, there was a period of time when Honghong kept posting her translations of English news every day in the community forum. Other members answered the questions she raised and corrected her mistakes. She also received some compliments and appreciations. Other members' positive feedback, according to Honghong, "encouraged me to learn more". Xinxin talked about her similar experience. "There was once I shared an English reading journal of mine. They (other members) all said it was great. I felt delighted so I read books more carefully and took more notes."

Further, I also found that members shared their strategies of English learning in Beibei. For example, Haohao posted in the community forum to share his strategy for memorizing vocabulary through repetitions. He recommended that English learners recite 100 to 300 words a day but go over the learned words one or two times a day and also several times in a month. Sisi also introduced how she practiced listening skills using VOA news audios and how she improved her translation by translating English news into Chinese in *Shanbay* apps.

Vignette 4.2.2

Nana said in the group chat that she did not feel her English improved by just reading the English news in the *Shanbay* apps and she intended to change her way of learning English news. She mentioned that she planned to first copy the news down and then read them so that she could better remember the words and sentences in the news. Two members provided their suggestions on how to learn English through English news. Finally, Nana changed her idea and decided to not only copy the news but also translate the news into Chinese.

Vignette 4.2.2 provided an example of how members benefited from other members' advice and their online sharing and discussion about English learning strategies. Besides Nana, six of the interview participants reported that they had acquired learning strategies from other members. For example, Huahua followed a manager's strategy for reading original English books. Instead of simply reading about the plots like she used to do, she began to take notes of the idiomatic expressions and try to understand each sentence. She found the strategy quite useful. Bingbing mentioned that she learned a few strategies of memorizing vocabularies, practicing English speaking, and improving English listening skills based on other members' online discussions in the forum.

Sharing learning experience. Members also shared their experience of other English learning activities and the courses that they took to improve their English.

Vignette 4.2.3

In one of the online discussion threads, Honghong asked other members, whether they had tried the paid English speaking courses provided by Dongni (懂你), an English learning app. Four members who had experience learning the courses provided detailed information on how long the courses cost each day, how difficult the courses were, and how they were rewarded after completing all the courses. Well informed, Honghong decided not to buy the courses as she couldn't spend a fair amount of time on the courses each day.

The vignette showed how Honghong learned information from other members' experience in an English course. Xinxin and Pengpeng shared their learning experiences in the *Shanbay* Reading Camp activity (an online activity which invited participants to read English books) to provide information and suggestions for those members who were

interested in participating this activity. Also, according to Honghong, she always invited members to share their learning experiences when they clocked in for hundreds of days, which indicated that they had learned English for a long period of time. Zhenzhen shared his/her English learning experiences in the community forum when he/she clocked in for 200 days. In the posting, he/she talked about what he/she learned from his/her own experience: “People are different. A learning strategy that suits you is the most effective and scientific strategies in the world.” Sisi and Haohao also post to share their English learning experiences. They received a few comments from other members saying that they had learned new knowledge about learning strategies and learning tools.

Sharing and discussing learning tools. Members of Beibei always utilized various learning tools to learn English. As Beibei was situated in the *Shanbay* platform, members of Beibei were all users of *Shanbay* apps. They were required to join all three learning projects so they shared an everyday learning routine, which involved using *Shanbay* apps to memorize vocabulary, practice English reading and listening, and learn useful English expressions. As *Shanbay* apps played important roles in members’ shared practices of learning English, they developed an “encyclopedia (百科全书)” which included all the knowledge new comers were supposed to grasp to effectively use *Shanbay* apps to learn English and fully engage in the community forum. Pengpeng reported that he learned how to make his own vocabulary books in *Shanbay* apps through the experiences that other members’ shared in the community forum. Sisi mentioned in one of her postings that other members recommended her to make a catalog of her own learning resources in the community forum. She had no idea about how to make a catalog in the beginning but with

the help of other members she succeeded. Pengpeng and Sisi both enhanced their competences of using *Shanbay* apps after participating in the community.

Besides *Shanbay* apps, members also shared and used a variety of useful learning tools. These tools included apps, browser plug-ins, paper-based and digital reference books, websites, and software. All interview participants agreed that they learned a lot about learning tools and how to use them through interactions with other members. Honghong listed a few tools she was using: Webster's Dictionary, Google Translation, and MDict, a dictionary software. She also started to use the Liulishuo (流利说) app to practice English speaking under the influences of other members. "Without their (members') introductions I would not use or download these tools." She said. What's more, Bingbing and Xinxin mentioned that members who were using the same learning tool or who were participating in the same course or activity would sometimes form a small learning group. For example, Bingbing told me that Haohao once introduced a vocabulary dictionary and gathered a few members who were interested in using this dictionary to memorizing vocabulary together. They had a *WeChat* group chat in which they shared their learning progresses, exchanged learning tips, and asked about their peers' vocabulary learning progresses.

Activities. According to Bingbing and Honghong who had been members of Beibei for about two years, there were fewer activities when they just joined the community. However, there had been more and more activities in the past two years. According to Honghong, there were some small online activities organized by individual active members in the beginning. For example, Honghong mentioned that there was a translation activity in which the host of the activity posted a paragraph in English (or Chinese) in the community forum

and participants replied with their Chinese (or English) translations. Later members organized more activities and invited participants to join online group chat created for these activities. For example, Honghong mentioned an activity called Reading Club organized by one of the active members. In this activity, each week participants read the same English book they selected through a vote. They discussed in a *WeChat* group chat weekly around a topic given by the host, for example, the most impressive details in the book. Honghong said that through discussions with other participants, she was able to understand the meanings of sentences that she failed to understand when she read the books. Also, she gained deeper understandings of the books by participating in the discussions and rereading details that other participants mentioned. She liked the design of this activity, but also reported some negative aspects of the activity. “In the beginning, participants were all enthusiastic about discussions. Later I found that it was always the same group of people who were talking while most of other participants kept silent in the weekly discussion.” She shared two main reasons. First, as participants were diverse in English proficiency, reading the same original English book could be easy for some participants but difficult for others. Also, sometimes participants’ questions remained unsolved after discussions as no one in the group was proficient enough to answer all the questions. Second, some participants could not persist in reading so they failed to catch up with the schedule and then they quit. Therefore, participating in this activity required participants to have strong self-discipline. Postings showed that members of Beibei had once organized an English-speaking activity in which members communicated with each other in English. There was also an activity which gathered members to recite and discuss President Obama’s speech drafts. In this

activity, the host selected paragraphs from President Obama’s speech and posted in the community forum. Participants were expected to record themselves reciting these paragraphs. Each Saturday night they shared their audio recordings and discussed pronunciations, vocabulary, grammar, and background information of these paragraphs in English. However, they all shared one problem according to Honghong. She said “We’ve organized various activities, but we found that these activities did not work well because of lacking a restriction mechanism. In other words, we did organize the activities but only a few members participated and few of them made it to the end”. Therefore, members negotiated and changed the way they organized activities. The activities they had when I joined the community were quite different from the previous ones. The following are the rules of a current activity called “White Whale Word” activity¹.

Activity rules:

1. Participants are required to pay a deposit of ¥11 Chinese yuan (fully refundable at the end of the activity if participants can finish the required tasks on time)
2. Participants are required to finish the following tasks on time (Beijing time). Please use the *Shanbay* Word app to memorize English vocabularies (at least 200 words per day) for five days a week to be qualified for checking in. Please check in by posting a screenshot of your vocabulary learning progress interface in the community forum before 22:00 p. m. on Sunday, or your task fails.
3. Participants’ deposit will be deducted and their status will be on hold if they fail to complete the tasks. Participants’ learning record returns to zero and their participation ends if they don’t pay the deposit again.

¹ I found that the postings in Beibei could be found in search engines so I didn’t provide the original Chinese here to protect the participants’ anonymity.

4. The activity allows members to sign up halfway and their learning record begins to accumulate the same day. The deposit will be charged in the beginning of the next week.

Rewards for completing the challenge mission:

During the activity, 100% of the deducted deposit will be included in the activity fund.

The activity fund will be equally distributed to participants who succeed to master more than 650 English words (the challenge mission) from the date of registration to the activity ends.

When the activity began, the hosts recorded participants' learning progresses. Each week hosts compared the learning progress that participants reported with the records to examine whether participants had completed the tasks or the challenge mission. In this activity, the host used a monetary penalty for participants who failed to complete the task and monetary incentive for participants who completed the tasks.

Members had developed two series of activities, "We" series and "White Whale" series, which shared a similar design with the White Whale Word activity when I joined Beibei. These activities all required participants to pay a deposit and they could only receive refunds if they could complete the required tasks. In a similar vein, half of the deducted deposits were distributed equally to participants who successfully accomplished the task. Table 4.1 is a brief introduction to these activities. The other half would go to the community fund managed by the managers for Beibei's future activities.

Table 4.1

Regular activities in Beibei

| Name of activity | Length | Basic tasks | Tools used in the activity |
|------------------|--------------------------|--|---|
| Werise | 12 weeks, 4 times a year | An activity that requires members to get up early for morning English reading. Participants should clock in between 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. at least five times a week | <i>Shanbay</i> apps |
| Weread | 12 weeks, 4 times a year | Participants are supposed to read books for at least five hours a week. Participants must post a reading journal in the forum every two weeks. | <i>Shanbay</i> reading app or <i>WeChat</i> reading app |
| Wetask | 12 weeks, 4 times a year | Participants use the Tomato Potato app which was designed based on the Pomodoro Technique. The core idea of this technique is to break down work into intervals, traditionally 25 minutes in length, separated by 5 minute short breaks. Participants should first determine the tasks they planned to accomplish and then complete at least four thirty-minute intervals without interruption for at least six times a week. They are also required to write reflections on their learning efficiency and post them in the forum every two weeks. | Tomato Potato app (a time management app) |
| Wekeep | 12 weeks, 4 times | This activity invites members to work out more to have a better physical fitness for study. Participants should spend at least 150 minutes | Keep (a fitness app) |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|---|
| | a year | doing physical exercises every week and use mobile apps to keep records. | |
| White Whale Listening | 3 weeks, once a month | Participants must accumulate two thousand points (e.g., filling in one blank in the spot dictation earns one point) in the <i>Shanbay</i> listening app per week. | <i>Shanbay</i> English listening app |
| White Whale Speaking | 3 weeks, once a month | Participants should spend more than ten minutes practicing English speaking using <i>Shanbay</i> or other mobile apps at least five days a week. Or they can read aloud in English, record it and send it to the activity's online <i>WeChat</i> group chat. | <i>Shanbay</i> English speaking app or <i>Liulishuo</i> or others |
| White Whale Word | 3 weeks, once a month | Participants are supposed to use <i>Shanbay</i> Word app to memorize two hundred words a day for at least five days a week. | <i>Shanbay</i> Word app |
| White Whale examination preparation | 5 weeks, held before the tests | An activity for members who are preparing for College English Tests. Participants have to do a past exam paper each week and earn 270 points in the step-by-step English training in <i>Shanbay</i> apps. | <i>Shanbay</i> apps |

According to Xinxin, who was the host of the White Whale Word activity, these activities were designed to “provide monitoring services”. Participants of an activity were gathered into a *WeChat* online group discussion. Based on my observation, members discussed about learning tools, sharing resources, and solving problems collaboratively in the activity group chats like I described previously, but the design of these activities emphasized more on members' individual English learning than their collaborative learning.

Participants reported that they benefited a lot from participating these activities. Huahua participated in the Wered activity and said that: “After participating the activity, I was able to read English books that I would not read one by one.” Sometimes she read simply because she wanted to have her deposit back. Xinxin said: “Maybe everyone could be lazy. At least for me, I can only persist in memorizing English vocabularies when I am involved in this activity (White Whale Word activity).” Some participants reported that their learning efficiency was greatly improved through participating in the activities. Bingbing had tried almost all these activities. She had a clear daily learning plan when participating these activities. “For example, in a day, I tried to finish the tasks planned in the Tomato Potato app. Among the tasks, there were quite a few English learning tasks. So I knew when to practice English speaking and when to memorize vocabularies and then it became easier to develop a habit (of learning).” Huahua participated in Wekeep and Wered. She said: “I exercised when I felt tired after learning for a period of time. Then I felt very relaxed after exercising. I thought it was great to be energetic when I went back to learning again.”

4.2.1 Mutual relationships

Participation involves not only collaboration but also competition, disagreement, and conflicts (Wenger, 1998). This was so in members’ participation in Beibei. Based on the interviews and observations, I found that participants developed friendship with other members. Honghong, Xiuxiu, Bingbing, and Maomao all mentioned that in Beibei they “made like-minded friends”. Yingying told me in the interviews that she and her friends in Beibei sometimes sent postcards to one another. Sisi mentioned a few members of Beibei including Honghong and Haohao in one of her postings and said: “You are my family

members. I really love you people, deeply.” In Beibei, members were encouraged to find a learning partner (“deskmate” as they called) to learn English together and support and monitor each other to clock in on a daily base. Bingbing reported she and her deskmate became really good friends. “She urges me to keep learning. She’s a top student. Sometimes when I fail an exam, unlike other friends online who just comfort me, she mocks at me but then seriously considers how to help me.” Bingbing said. Maomao also mentioned his deskmate when I asked him if he had made friends with other members. They had been deskmates for six months and were both students. They shared their learning progresses and supported each other when coping with exam stress.

As mentioned in the introduction to Beibei, there was a ranking of members’ contribution points, which somewhat created competitive relationships among members. During the interviews I asked participants about their opinions on the ranking. Most of them replied that they did not care much about the ranking. Xinxin, Huanhuan, and Maomao all told me that they cared more about their learning progress than their rankings. However, it did become an extrinsic motivation for some members to invest more time in English learning. For example, Duoduo considered the ranking as “kind of important”. She said “the ranking indicates how long you have been learning in this community and if you are making progress together with others. If your ranking gets lower, it means you haven’t moved forward with other members.” I also saw my participant Nana said in one of the group chats that she was quite excited to see her ranking become higher after she completed the learning projects.

Conflicts and disagreements also existed in Beibei. For example, Honghong recalled that

there was a debate on the “four-step vocabulary learning strategies (四步单词法)”, which was a learning strategy that emphasized the importance of learning roots of English vocabularies. Honghong recalled that “Some members considered it unnecessary to learn the roots of the words because roots themselves had various transformations. It was quite difficult to analyze the roots of a word. However, some members insisted that learning the roots of the words was necessary for vocabulary learning.” Through negotiation, members reached a consensus that learners could choose whatever learning strategies they preferred; however, they agreed that persistent learning was the most important. Xinxin agreed that there were disagreements among members on certain learning tools or learning strategies, but she felt that members respected one another’s opinions and their differences. Bingbing, Xinxin, and Pengpeng reported that disagreements also happened among managers when they discussed the design of activities or issues about community management. However, they focused on issues but did not take it personally.

4.3 Joint enterprise

A joint enterprise is members’ shared response to their conditions (Wenger, 1998) or a shared understanding of what gathers them together. In Beibei, a joint enterprise of learning English was evident. According to the community introduction, members of Beibei shared these goals: “memorizing vocabularies, joining the three learning projects, participating in community learning activities, sharing learning resources, and making vocabulary books.” These goals were all related to English learning. Also in the interviews, I asked participants what they perceived as the focal areas of this community. They all agreed that the community was formed because members intended to learn English together. Yingying

answered: “The community is created to gather a group of people to learn English and make progresses together.” Huanhuan said: “As indicated in the name of the community, members wished to grasp a large vocabulary like native speakers and support and monitor each other to learn English in this community.” Pengpeng provided a similar answer to Huanhuan’s. As Wenger (1998) contended, an enterprise reflects the “full complexity of mutual engagement” (p. 77). In Beibei, as can be seen from their mutual engagement, their shared enterprise was not just about learning English. It also involved being persistent, accumulating knowledge, motivation, and improving learning efficiency, which was related to time management, regular routine, and physical fitness.

4.3.1 Negotiated joint enterprise

Wenger (1998) emphasized that joint enterprise is a “collectively negotiated response” (p. 78) to members’ conditions. It is an ongoing process of negotiating the community’s goals, outcomes, and processes. At the beginning, Beibei was only a place where members exchanged English learning resources, shared experiences, and asked questions. In 2016, Honghong conducted an online survey on members’ English proficiency and their expectations on Beibei. Based on the survey results, Honghong and her management team designed the “We” series activities. Therefore, as a result of negotiation among members, recently Beibei also became a platform or mechanism to support and monitor members to keep learning English. According to Honghong, it was hard to come up with an activity plan if she invited all members (700 people) to the discussion. Therefore, recently when they had a new activity plan, they always first discussed it in the management team. When Honghong and the managers reached consensus, they would try it out, collect members’

suggestions or comments, and then revise the plan. Other members could also initiate new activities after discussing with Honghong and the managers. The process of developing a new activity that Honghong described showed that even though members did not have equal power or influences, they still made things work through negotiation.

4.3.2 Mutual accountability

According to Wenger (1998), negotiation of joint enterprise leads to a sense of mutual accountability among members, which he described as “being responsible to others by not making life harder for others” (p. 81). Through observations and interviews, I found that my participants shared a sense of mutual accountability to each other. In the interviews, participants kept mentioning that members were supposed to “make progresses together” in the community. They all agreed that they would definitely answer the questions of others or help others if they could. They were happy for others’ achievements and always voluntarily did things to encourage and support each other. Huahua told me that she “had a feeling of joy when they (other members) share their learning achievements”. According to Honghong, when members collected 50000 points in *Shanbay* English listening app, she would post in the forum to congratulate those members and Haohao would make an exclusive profile picture for them. Managers also made special e-certificates as a compliment to those members who learned hard and completed tasks in the activities. When other members introduced vocabulary books made by themselves, Haohao, Pengpeng, and other members supported them by buying the books using shells (currency used in *Shanbay*). Also, when Bingbing talked about the occasions when she was encouraged by community members, she commented, “there were too many to remember”.

Further, members respected each other and appreciated others' contributions. It was quite common to see members say thank you to others who shared their English learning resources. For example, in a posting a member shared knowledge about roots of English words, Honghong commented: "(I) already highlighted this posting. Thank you for sharing!" Bingbing commented: "Wonderful!" and Xinxin commented "Thank you."

During observation, I also noticed that members always appreciated managers for their contributions. They would say "Thanks you for your hard work!" at the end of the activities and they voluntarily tipped the managers by sending *WeChat* red envelopes in the online group chats using their *WeChat* e-wallet if they had a good experience in the activity. Haohao collected these *WeChat* red envelopes and distributed half of the money to Honghong and all managers based on their contributions. The other half went into the community fund for future activities.

As members respected and appreciated managers' contributions, they developed accountability for not bothering them. In a posting in which Honghong invited members to talk about the most impressive thing they experienced in Beibei, Bingbing wrote: "The most impressive thing for me is that managers took their responsibilities to remind members to clock in every day. When I finished clocking in and was ready to go sleeping, I felt touched when I saw their messages". "The only thing that I can do is to clock in and save them some troubles." She added. Maomao also shared the same feeling. He said: "The managers have to stay up late until 12:00 p. m. or 1:00 a. m. I think they are quite committed and I feel I have the responsibility to clock in and I cannot clock in too late to bother the managers." XiuXiu also said "In an activity, I try to complete the basic tasks so I

will not feel sorry for myself, for people who organize the activity, and for people who make contributions behind the scene.”

As previously mentioned, members were encouraged to find a deskmate in the community to supervise each other to learn. *Shanbay* allows members to choose to become deskmates for 7 days or 30 days. When either of the two members who are deskmates fail to clock in for one day, the system breaks their deskmate relationship and they have to wait until the end of the cycle to find another deskmate. Users earn points at the end of each successful deskmate relationship. *Shanbay* gives deskmate badges according to the points. Maomao said: “If I do not have a deskmate, maybe there will be no consequences if I miss clocking in for once. However, after I had a deskmate I felt a sense of responsibility because the deskmate relationship breaks if either of us fails to clock in. The failure will influence my deskmate’s points. So I remind myself that I must keep clocking in.” Huanhuan agreed that the accountability to her deskmate enabled her to clock in every day.

4.4 Shared repertoire

According to Wenger (1998), members develop a shared repertoire of symbols, stories, ways of doing things, routines, tools, language, concepts, and words used as resources through mutual engagement. I found that members of Beibei develop a shared repertoire when learning English together. An appropriate example was the activity organized for members who were preparing for the College English Test (CET) to learn together to get a good grade in the tests. Honghong was one of the two hosts of this activity. As there were two levels of CET, participants of this activity formed two teams, one for CET-4 candidates

and one for CET-6 candidates. Each team had a *WeChat* group for participants to exchange learning resources, share learning strategies, ask questions, and encourage one another. There was a meeting held weekly in each team discussing problems that participants encountered when preparing for the tests and solutions to these problems. The hosts summarized the discussions in the meetings and posted in the forum. The following is the summary of members' concerns and the results of discussions translated by myself.

1. Unknown words affect moods

Suggestions:

Don't pay too much attention to the rules of words when memorizing words before the tests. Just memorize the important words, that is, words which appeared in the past exams. There should be a summary of these words in the past exams.

We usually have a strong impression that we cannot answer the questions if we cannot understand the words. However, it is important to guess meanings of words according to the contexts.

Failing to react quickly in listening

Suggestions:

Failing to react to what you hear means that you are not familiar with the word. Listen again after answering the questions. If you still cannot understand then review the audio transcripts and repeat after the audio. Pay special attention to the words where you fail to understand and repeat after the audio a few times.

Listening comprehension mainly tests your ability to focus. All kinds of emergencies may happen during the test and you may panic if you get distracted. Therefore, you should practice to be as calm as possible when facing emergencies.

It is suggested to focus on complete sets of listening exercises (that were designed for the tests) rather than listening exercises in *Shanbay* a month before the test.

Having difficulties in writing the composition

Suggestion:

- 1) Everyone seems to struggle with composition. Before the test, analyze the templates, read the model essays, and then practice writing by following the templates. This is really important or you may get confused in the test.
- 2) It takes time to make progress. Now you can practice based on the tests but normally when you read English news in *Shanbay* or analyzing the past exams you can memorize categories of vocabulary, that is, vocabulary classified by different topics.
- 3) Please invest more efforts to analyze previous examination papers and summarizing commonly used sentence patterns. Then at least you can have a general idea about the framework of your composition in the test.

In this example, participants of the activity developed a shared repertoire about ways of dealing with problems they encountered when preparing for the CET tests. In the posting, Honghong also reported that participants came up with a way of practicing writing composition in their discussions. Each week participants wrote compositions based on a topic that the host gave. Two participants became partners, commented on each other's compositions, and then discussed with other participants together in the *WeChat* group. This way of practicing English writing was used later in the activity.

Honghong mentioned that “We (she and the managers) thought if we did not post in the forum to summarize the activities then only participants would know what happened in the activities. Other members would not be able to see any outcomes of the activities.”

Therefore, though during the activities most of the participants' interactions happened in online group chats, the hosts of the activities summarized their discussions and posted on

the forum so that not only participants could benefit from these activities, other members who were not involved in the activities could also have a chance to benefit from the result of the discussions in the activity. The English learning resources, strategies, and knowledge members shared and developed were mostly recorded in the form of postings, which created easy access to the shared repertoire in the community forum.

When there were postings that Honghong considered important or valuable for all members to read, she highlighted these postings and members could have a quick access to these postings by choosing the tag of “highlighted posts (精华帖)” in the forum. Also, she wrote a sticky posting in which she made a catalog of Beibei’s shared repertoire. The following is a part of the catalog I copied from the posting. I colored the titles of the postings in blue to indicate that they were hyperlinks.

- ★ How to manage time more efficiently and improve the efficiency of work and study? If you are confused, have a look at >>>> [About time management- Introduction to Pomodoro Technique and its tools](#)
- ★ [Must see] [Academic postings are here](#) <<<<<< Treasure of the community, full of learning atmosphere
- ★ Wishing to pursue the goal of memorizing 35000 vocabularies, but do not know which vocabulary book is suitable for you? See here >>>> [Recommendations of vocabulary books \(updated regularly\)](#). What a coincidence that you also plan to memorize 35000 vocabularies?
- ★ A handy dictionary is indispensable for memorizing vocabulary. Are you still using Youdao? We have more professional ones >>>> [Recommendations of dictionaries \(Long-term project\)](#), are you still using Youdao?
- ★ Grammarly browser plug-in, *Shanbay* Assistant browser plug-in enhanced

[edition, Ebook searcher Project Gutenberg](#) <<< These must-have useful learning tools can help you learn English better.

The whole catalog showcased that through sustained mutual engagement, members of the Beibei community had developed a shared repertoire of resources, tools, stories, historical events, and symbols. Through this catalog members could quickly review the history of the community, access knowledge that English learning members collaboratively developed, and locate learning resources that they need.

4.5 Identity

Wenger (1998) emphasized that practice involves the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context. He said: “The formation of a community of practice is also the negotiation of identities” (p. 149). In CoPs, identity in practice is formed by the ways members experience themselves through participation and also by the ways they and others reify themselves (Wenger, 1998). Members of Beibei also developed identities in the community through interacting with each other.

4.5.1 Nexus of multimembership

Based on my observation, members of Beibei varied in identities so they were able to bring various knowledge of English learning to the community. As Wenger (1998) addressed that identity, that is, who we are, should be considered as nexus of multimembership as we all belong to many communities of practice. Members of Beibei shared identity as English learners and members of Beibei, but they also had diverse identities at work, in their families, or at school. Xinxin was a teacher working abroad in an English-speaking country

so she could share authentic English expressions with members. As an English learner who also had a full-time job, Honghong participated in members' discussions on how people could spare time to learn English in the forum like she did and provided suggestions based on her experiences. Haohao mentioned in one of his postings that he was a computer programmer. Based on my observation, he often introduced some useful English learning apps and helped members to solve technical issues they encountered when using English learning tools. Sisi mentioned that as a university student major in English, she could always share substantial learning materials.

4.5.2 Membership

In the section of mutual accountability, I talked about members' accountability to each other and their social connections. Here in this section I mainly talk about members' accountability to the community they build. Honghong once posted in the community forum to notify members that Beibei had collected the "whale badge(鲸鱼徽章)" because the weekly growth value of Beibei had reached 200 million. Sisi commented on the posting: "Finally we get the whale badge! I can say that I have made a contribution." In one of her postings she also described Beibei as "no longer just network data in my eyes, it becomes a home. I contribute to making it a better learning community. I get upset when it gets slandered." Nana also mentioned in the group chat that she loved Beibei and had a strong sense of belonging. Xiuxiu said: "I think I represent Beibei when I make a statement in the *Shanbay* forum or *Shanbay* group chats using our community's exclusive profile pictures. I think I should behave more like an active learner." Yingying said it was her responsibility to help maintain the community's ranking and ensure the positive learning atmosphere so

that newcomers could have a good learning environment. Xinxin confirmed that one of the reasons that she volunteered to be a manager was that she wished to make contributions to the community. These interview data relate that participants had developed a sense of accountability and a sense of belonging to the community.

4.5.3 Role model

Data showed that members had strong motivations to learn English when they saw that other members who were hard-working, persevering, or more proficient in English learning. “Most of the managers of the community are quite proficient in English.” Pengpeng said, “After joining the community I felt the big gap between me and the managers”. Thus, I get stronger desire to learn.” Maomao joined the Werise activity and reported that he got motivated when seeing some members get up around 5 a.m. to learn English for more than forty minutes. Also, Huahua said she changed her learning attitude after reading postings posted by a member of Beibei who took English learning seriously. She shared, “I get slack after a period time of studying. Seeing her long English reading journals in which there were some words I could not even understand, I immediately had the motivation to learn English”. Almost all interview participants talked about their similar experiences of getting motivated by the role models in Beibei.

While members were motivated by the “gaps” between their role models and themselves, Honghong was motivated by members’ high expectations of her as the general manager. In the interviews, several participants talked about their impressions of Honghong as quite proficient in English. However, she identified herself as not as proficient in English as

members perceived. “Maybe because I am the general manager, members might give tacit consent or reach a consensus that I am proficient in English.” She said that her desire to receive members’ recognition and become as proficient in English as members perceived became a motivation for her to set higher standards for herself in learning English. She also emphasized that “As a general manager you cannot be halfhearted in learning or you will fail to act as a role model. Others (other *Shanbay* users) may consider that your community and members (of your community) are not taking learning seriously.” Her responsibility as the general manager also drove her to contribute more efforts in English learning.

4.5.4 Learning trajectory

Wenger (1998) emphasized that we define our identities by our past, present, and future. Participants reported a few changes when they reviewed their learning trajectory in the community.

Participants reported that they became more persistent in learning English. All participants appreciated their experiences in Beibei as they could persist in learning English. For example, Xiuxiu said, “I am not a person with strong self discipline. I need a group to support and monitor me. (I wish) to have a community and a group of friends and we can make progress together.” After participating in Beibei, she was able to keep learning English. “Without these activities it is impossible for me to stick to it (English learning) for such a long time,” She said. Huanhuan shared the same opinion: “When you start to work, you will find that you always remind yourself to study but you fail to take actions and then you may have a feeling of emptiness. However, if you join this community, there are people

who monitor and encourage you to learn. You will feel at ease and do not have to worry about falling behind.” “I learn more regularly rather than in fits and starts. I have never stopped learning English since I joined the community.” Yingying said. Some participants reported that they had formed a habit of learning English as a result of participating in the community for a long time. Xinxin said: “When I was in university I learned in fits and starts. However, as I have joined in the community for more than a year, it has become a habitual behavior to learn English and to clock in.” Huanhuan agreed: “I think it has become a habit (to learn English). I feel uncomfortable if I do not use *Shanbay* for one day as I feel I do not learn”.

Also, participants believed that their English proficiency was improved. Due to sustained learning, some members could feel that their English proficiency had been greatly improved. For example, Honghong had participated in a national English translation certificate examination and failed. This year, she retook the exam and passed. She accredited her progress to participating in the Beibei community as it enabled her to persist in learning English. Xinxin attended a job interview in English with an Indian interviewer some time ago. She did not realize that her English was improved until she found that she could communicate with the interviewer effectively in English. She agreed that participating in the community urged her to learn English, which was one of the reasons why her English improved. Also, she emphasized that the positive learning environment members created motivated her and made her feel that she was not learning alone. Other interview participants such as Pengpeng, Huahua, Maomao all mentioned that their English proficiency improved after participating in the community.

4.6 New media literacies skills

According to Jenkins (2009), learners should develop distributed cognition, namely, the ability to “interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities” (p. 66). Based on my observation members of Beibei utilized various learning tools such as mobile apps, dictionaries, and web-based tools to learn English but they mainly utilized these learning tools to access knowledge and information. For example, as I have mentioned, members used *Shanbay* apps to memorize vocabularies, read English news or books, and recited English phrases and sentences. Jenkins, however, emphasized the importance to think with and through tools to solve more complex problems, of which I found little evidence in members’ English learning in Beibei. Besides tools, Jenkins considered it important to utilize others’ knowledge and compare notes towards a shared goal. He defined this ability as collective intelligence. As I addressed earlier, members of Beibei collaboratively solve problems and share English learning resources and strategies. Examples such as Vignette 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 showed their abilities to interact within the community and pool knowledge together to gain more knowledge about English learning.

Transmedia navigation (i.e., the ability to collect and use information from different media) is a necessary skill in new media literacy practices (Jenkins, 2009). Beibei members’ ability to traverse across modes and media was evident as they shared and used English learning materials collected from diverse media. However, I did not find much evidence of members’ abilities to reconstruct the knowledge they learned from various media, which is essential to the appropriation skill, namely, the ability of “sampling and remixing media content” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 55).

Members' negotiation on the "four-step vocabulary learning strategies (四步单词法)" and managers' discussions on the design of activities I have mentioned indicated that members of Beibei had developed the new media literacies skill of "negotiation" which was the ability to negotiate among "conflict opinions" and respect "diversity of views" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 99). Jenkins (2009) also mentioned the new media literacies skill "networking" which is the ability to "search for, synthesize, and disseminate information" (p. 91). Vignette 4.2.1 showed that members were able to search for information they needed. They disseminated information by sharing the learning materials developed by themselves in Beibei. However, I failed to find strong evidence to show that members synthesized the media contents they found online to create new knowledge.

4.7 Summary

Findings indicated that Beibei reflected the three key features of community of practice Wenger (1998) addressed, that is, mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Members of Beibei reported that participating in the community benefited their English learning as they had their questions answered by other members, learned a lot about English learning strategies and resources, became more motivated in and persistent in learning English, and improved their English proficiency levels. Findings showed that members had the ability to access and disseminate information in new media but there was little evidence to show their ability to synthesize and create new media contents.

Chapter 5

5. Discussion, conclusions, and suggestions

This chapter summarizes and discusses the major findings and provides suggestions for future designs of online English learning communities as CoPs. I also address the limitations of this research and give recommendations for future research in this chapter.

5.1 Discussion

In this research, I investigated Beibei from both the perspectives of communities of practice and new media literacies. Thus, in this section, I discuss my findings from these two perspectives and also give suggestions to future designs of online English learning communities as CoPs.

5.1.1 Beibei as a community of practice

Wenger (1998) suggested that shared repertoire, joint enterprise, and mutual engagement are three key components that make up a CoP model. Findings of my study relate that Beibei reflected all the three key features of a CoP that Wenger addressed.

Mutual engagement. Mutual engagement refers to the sustained communications and interactions between individuals (Wenger, 1998). Members of a CoP “sustain dense relations of mutual engagement organized around what they are there to do” (Wenger, 1998, p. 74). In Beibei, data showed that members mutually solved problems, shared and discussed English learning resources and strategies, shared English learning experiences,

and engaged in activities. However, by reviewing recent and previous postings in the forum, I found that the forms and objectives of activities in Beibei had changed in the past two years. Previous activities involved members' collaborative learning and supported members' mutual engagement. For example, the Reading Club activity required participants to read the same original English book and each week members gathered to discuss the book in an online group chat. In the activity to help members prepare for the College English Test (CET) tests, members shared their strategies of test-preparation and peer reviewed each other's compositions. There was also an activity in which participants read and recited paragraphs from President Obama's speech in the community forum. In this activity, participants gathered together weekly to share their audio recordings and discuss English language points and background information of these paragraphs. However, recent activities such as the White Whale Word activity were organized to monitor members' individual English learning. Participation in these activities only involved completing individual learning tasks and reporting their learning progresses each week. Participants did not have to work with each other to learn English. Therefore, these activities did not contribute to members' mutual engagement as there were no planned procedures in these activities that involved members' collaborative learning. Since the CoP theory emphasizes that members acquire knowledge through social participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), I considered it important to change the design of the current activities so that members could learn English collaboratively.

According to Honghong, previous activities failed as few participants of the activities held on until the end. For example, most participants did not manage to finish reading the

assigned book within the set time frame and stopped participating in the discussions in the Reading Club activity. There have been quite a few researchers (e.g., Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003; Correia, Paulos, & Mesquita, 2010; Fang & Chiu, 2010) who have explored the reasons why members participate or do not participate in CoPs. They found that members of CoPs were motivated by factors such as gaining access to information and knowledge (Correia et al., 2010; Wasko & Faraj, 2000), trust (Sharratt & Usoro, 2003), satisfaction of sharing their knowledge with others (Krogh & Grand, 2002), and financial rewards (Hall & Graham, 2004). For barriers to participation, Correia et al. (2010) found in the virtual CoP they investigated that members did not have enough time to contribute their knowledge to the community. Guldberg and Mackness (2009) found that in the CoP learning tensions and negative emotions constrained members' participation. Unfortunately, I did not probe into the reasons for participants' lack of participation because only the general manager participated in the previous activities I mentioned. This refers to a future direction for my future research to investigate what motivates or refrains members to participate in online informal English learning communities. I also recommend that the general manager and managers explore members' reasons for participation and barriers to participation by inviting members to collective discussions or collecting individual members' opinions. Then based on the findings, they can come up with activities that are more attractive to members and also encourage members' collaborative learning.

Wenger (1998) addressed that mutual engagement could be both harmonious and conflictual. Vignette 5.2.1 and Vignette 5.2.2 showed that members collaborated to support each other in English learning. However, there were also disagreements and conflicts when

members interacted with each other; for example, members had different opinions when discussing the “four-step vocabulary learning strategies”. Though disagreements and conflicts existed, data indicated that members’ interrelationships were mostly harmonious because members showed respect to one another when collectively exploring English learning strategies and discussing how to organize activities.

Joint Enterprise. Joint enterprise is members’ negotiated response to their situation and a shared understanding of what binds them together (Wenger, 1998). The goals delineated in the community introduction and participants’ similar responses about the focal area of Beibei in the interviews indicated that members of Beibei had a joint enterprise of learning English. According to Wenger (1998), the joint enterprise of a CoP was an ongoing process of negotiating the community’s goals, outcomes, and processes. In Beibei, I found that members kept discussing and negotiating how to organize activities to fulfill their needs of improving English even though the general manager and managers seemed to be given more authority by the group in decision making.

Wenger (1998) stated that negotiation of joint enterprise created a sense of mutual accountability among members of a CoP. The sense of mutual accountability was also evident among participants as they had the responsibility to answer other members’ questions, appreciated information contributed by others, voluntarily encouraged or supported one another, and spontaneously avoided causing troubles for others.

Shared Repertoire. Shared repertoire of a CoP represents a set of stories, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts, and symbols that “reify something of that

practice in a congealed form” (Wenger, 1998, p. 59). Data showed that members of Beibei developed a shared repertoire through sustained interactions. For example, in the activity organized for members who were preparing for CET, members developed a shared strategy for test-preparation for the CET tests and recorded it in the form of a posting. Also, there was a sticky posting that the general manager posted which contained a catalog of all the valued English learning tools, strategies, stories, resources members had adopted or produced since Beibei existed. The posting showed that members had developed a shared repertoire of English learning. They also created an easy access to their shared repertoire through hyperlinks. What Beibei did was in line with what Wenger, Mcdermott, and Snyder (2002) suggested as “developing a systematic body of knowledge that can be easily accessed” when cultivating a CoP.

As Beibei reflected all of the three key components of a CoP that Wenger (1998) addressed, I considered Beibei as a CoP in which members gathered together with a shared goal to improve their English and developed a shared practice of learning English by sustained interactions. However, I found that Beibei was becoming less like a CoP due to the change of its community activities. The design of the recent activities needed to be improved to encourage members’ mutual engagement in English learning according to members’ reasons for participation and barriers to participation.

5.1.2 New media literacies practices in Beibei

Members of Beibei reported that they benefited from participating in the community as they had their questions answered by other members, learned a lot about English learning

strategies and resources, became more motivated in and persistent in learning English, and improved their English proficiency levels. In the interviews, no participants mentioned that participating in Beibei constrained their English learning. They all found their experiences of participating in the community quite positive. Findings also showed that Beibei had achieved its goals listed in Beibei's community introduction:

1. **Memorizing vocabularies.** Members participated in the White Whale Word activity and shared strategies for memorizing vocabularies.
2. **Joining the three learning projects.** This was a community rule that every member should follow.
3. **Participating in the community learning activities.** There were “We” series and “White Whale” series activities in Beibei and participants reported joining these activities and benefiting from these activities.
4. **Sharing learning resources.** For example, Sisi shared resources in the community forum such as analysis of synonyms, 500 useful English phrases, and writing templates.
5. **Making vocabulary books.** Pengpeng learned how to make his own vocabulary books in *Shanbay* apps through the experiences that other members shared in the community forum. I also found that Haohao and Pengpeng bought the vocabulary books other members developed and shared.

However, I also identified constraints of Beibei as a 21st century, online learning

community through the theoretical lenses of multiliteracies and new media literacies.

New media literacy consumers should be able to gather information from various media and understand the meanings of media contents. However, more importantly, they should have more opportunities to develop or enhance the ability to critically analyze, synthesize, and evaluate media contents (Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011; Ling, Li, Deng, & Lee, 2013).

Vignette 5.2.1 showed that members could gain knowledge about English idioms or idiom translation via tools such as e-dictionaries and the *Shanbay* apps. I also found members shared and used English learning resources that were collected from diverse media (e.g., English songs, English TV series), but I seldom saw them analyze these English resources and explore the social or cultural contexts of these resources. For example, in the dialogue between Honghong and Huahua, they only discussed the literal meaning of the paragraph written in English. According to Bruce (2002), “Adolescents need to learn how to integrate knowledge from multiple sources, including music, video, online databases, and other media. They need to think critically about information that can be found nearly instantaneously throughout the world” (p. 17). Jenkins (2009) also considered it important to develop the abilities to critically assess the reliability and credibility of new media contents and thinking from multiple perspectives. Therefore, in my view, English learning in Beibei involved more functional consuming abilities than critical consuming abilities of members.

Besides consuming skills, members of Beibei also showed their abilities of prosuming new media. They were able to produce new media contents using different technologies. For example, Honghong knew how to produce a dubbing video clip of the movie *Pride &*

Prejudice (2005) using the Liulishuo app. Yuanyuan and Xiuxiu were able to record themselves reading aloud in English and shared the recordings as voice messages in the online group chats. Zhenzhen, Sisi, Nana and Honghong showed their abilities to share their English learning resources gleaned from different media by posting in the community forum or uploading to the online group chats. These examples showed that members of Beibei could functionally prosume by using technologies to produce new media contents and disseminating information at hand (Ling, Li, Deng, & Lee, 2013). However, to participate in new media environments literacy, learners should not only be functional but also critical new media prosumers who have the abilities to interactively and critically participate in media environments and create media content embedded with his/her own ideology or socio-cultural values (Chen et al., 2011; Ling et al., 2013). Critical media prosuming is closely related to the participatory culture defined by Jenkins (2009). Participatory culture provides “strong support for creating and sharing creations”. However, in Beibei, though members produced new media content, they seldom creatively created English new media content that reflected their own ideologies. For example, the vocabulary books they made using the *Shanbay* apps only involved picking up and reorganizing vocabularies. Also, to involve members in constant activities in English learning, managers of Beibei paid much attention to members’ extrinsic motivations including competition, rewards, and punishments. For example, the ranking of all members led to competition among members. The current activities used a monetary penalty for participants who failed to complete set tasks and a monetary incentive for participants who learned hard. Members in Beibei had to keep learning English to avoid being removed from the community or

losing their money. Conversely, in a participatory culture, people participate as they “believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connections with others” (Jenkins, 2009, p. xi). Participatory culture indicates that people participate due to their intrinsic motivations; for example, members would participate in collective English learning and meaning making because they have passions to share their knowledge and they feel pleasure in communicating and collaborating with other members. Therefore, I suggest creating a participatory culture in Beibei that allows members to express their opinions freely, supports members to collaboratively solve problems, and encourages members to share their new creations of English new media content.

Jenkins (2009) emphasized that new media literacies involve a few cultural competencies and social skills that young people develop by participating in the new media environment. Ling, Li, Deng, and Lee (2013) also addressed that to be critical media prosumers, people need to develop social skills that allow them to effectively participate in new media spaces. Findings showed that members of Beibei learned English mainly through memorizing vocabularies (e.g., the White Whale Word activity), analyzing grammar (e.g., the dialogue between Honghong and Xinxin, Haohao’s online discussion about attributive clauses), learning phrases, and reading or listening to English news or articles (e.g., joining the three learning projects). Even though they interacted and negotiated with each other, in most cases they focused on understanding English grammars or phrases or discussing English learning tools that just “reinforce members’ mastery of basic skills through drill and practice activities” (Skourtou, Kourtis-kazoullis, & Cummins, 2006). Generally, English learning in Beibei put much emphasis on increasing vocabularies, passing English tests,

and keeping receiving language input but did not focus on meaningful English learning. As a result, there were few activities or communications in Beibei that actually encouraged authentic, meaningful English learning where members could connect English learning and meaning making with their real-life experiences.

To conclude, English learning in Beibei involved members' capability of functional consuming and prosuming new media content but provided few opportunities for members to critically consume and prosume English new media contents. I therefore provide the following two suggestions to Beibei and future designs of online English learning communities:

1. Use new media not only to access English learning resources but also support members' critical thinking about the credibility of the resources and the biases embedded in the shared resources.

2. Consider English learning as a social practice (Street, 1985) and make learning enjoyable and meaningful. I recommend organizing activities that provide strong support for members to collaboratively solve problems, bring their life experiences to learning, and transform what they learn through their own creative creation of English new media content. In my opinion, members can learn English by engaging in online inquiry-based projects in which they are interested. For example, members can create animations, put together a collage of pictures, or share written stories in the online community to depict their own overseas traveling experiences, such as how they applied for a visa, booked air and hotel tickets, packed their luggage, and interacted with local people. Then they could

collaboratively develop an electronic travel brochure and publish it online within the online community or on other online platforms for a broader audience.

5.2 Significance of this study and recommendations for future research

This research investigated an online informal English learning community named Beibei in *Shanbay*, China's biggest mobile Internet English learning platform. By exploring the features of Beibei and members' opinions on how Beibei influenced their informal English learning, this research has the potential to enrich existing knowledge about informal online learning communities in China by offering insights into the affordances and constraints of such informal online English learning communities. Data from multiple sources (i.e., interview data, postings in the community forum, and dialogues in the online group chats) indicated that Beibei created an effective and friendly online learning environment for English learners to share learning resources, tools, or knowledge and to motivate each other to be persistent in learning. However, this research also identified that the design of Beibei constrained members' development of social, critical learning skills and failed to create a participatory culture that provided strong support for members' collaborative problem-solving and creation of new knowledge. Based on the findings, this research offers suggestions that hopefully will benefit managers of online informal English learning communities and also future designs of informal online English learning communities as CoPs.

This research identifies several directions for further investigation. First, this research only

explored one of the sub-communities in *Shanbay* while there are thousands of them there. It was unknown whether members of the other sub-communities benefited from participating in the sub-communities like members of Beibei did and whether there were also similar constraints. Second, the research only explored the learning experiences of 23 participants. It was possible that other members (about 675) could have different perspectives and experiences from my participants. Also, no interview participants in this research were so-called lurkers, “those who read but seldom if ever publicly contributes to an online group” (Nonnecke & Preece, 2003). It is important to hear from those who are lurking as it is possible for them to have a different learning experience from those who actively participate in the community. In communities of practice, lurking is also interpreted as “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) which is a crucial process for newcomers to situate themselves before fully participating. It is necessary to explore the reasons why some members choose to only lurk, what kind of help or information they need to fully participate, and whether they benefit from reviewing postings and other members’ communications. Third, there should be more empirical studies to investigate what strategies can be effective to create an informal online English learning community which facilitates English literacy learners’ new media literacies skills. Personally, I have had this idea to inform the general manager and managers of Beibei of my findings. I wish to work together with them by pooling my knowledge on literacy learning and their knowledge on community organization together to come up with new designs of English learning activities which can add value to Beibei. I plan to do an empirical study in the future in which I will organize these new activities to see if they can lead to members’ active

participation and if they are beneficial for members' English learning. It is my hope that my MA study research could inspire more research on how to leverage the affordances while addressing the constraints of informal online English learning communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval Notice



**Western
Research**

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Research Ethics

Principal Investigator: Dr. Zheng Zhang
Department & Institution: Education, Western University

NMREB File Number: 109315
Study Title: Community of Practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China

NMREB Initial Approval Date: June 26, 2017
NMREB Expiry Date: June 26, 2018

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

| Document Name | Comments | Version Date |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------|
| Western University Protocol | Received June 22, 2017 | |
| Recruitment Items | Recruitment Email | 2017/06/21 |
| Letter of Information & Consent | Members | 2017/06/21 |
| Letter of Information & Consent | Manager | 2017/06/21 |
| Other | Translation Attestation - Received for Information | 2017/06/21 |
| Other | Communications with Shanbay - Chinese - Received for Information | 2017/03/17 |
| Other | English Translation of Communications with Shanbay - Received for Information May 2, 2017 | |
| Instruments | Interview Questions - Received May 2, 2017 | |


The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 0000041.


 Ethics Officer, on behalf of Dr. Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair or delegated board member

EO: Erika Basile ___ Grace Kelly ___ Katelyn Harris Nicola Morphet ___ Karen Gopaul ___ Patricia Sargeant ___

Western University, Research, Support Services Bldg., Rm. 5150
 London, ON, Canada N6G 1G9 t. 519.661.3036 f. 519.850.2466 www.uwo.ca/research/ethics

Appendix B: Recruitment Email



Invitation to participate in research

Hello,

We have received your contact information through your profile in the community that is publicly available. You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Dr. Zheng Zhang and I, Ran Li, as an MA in Education are conducting. As this study is about adults' informal learning and adults refer to those who are at least 18 years old in China, if you are no less than 18, you are welcome to participate in this research that takes place fully online.

Briefly, the study is aimed to investigate the features of the online English learning community that you are in and how these features may influence members' English learning. The data collection process of this study will take about one month. It involves observing participants' online interactions in the community and doing online voice-chat interviews using *Skype, Whatsapp, or Dingtalk*. I will observe your postings on the forum and your communications with other participants in the community's online group chat. I will mainly focus on their interactions related to English learning. If you agree to be interviewed, you will be invited to participate two interviews. The first one takes about an hour and the second one takes about twenty minutes. You can enter a draw to win a prize (money or currency used in the online community) if you agree to become my participants and allow me to observe you. If you not only allow to me observe you but also attend the interviews, you can additionally get an honorarium (a certain amount of money or currency used in the online community) besides having the chance to enter the draw. The honorarium is a token of appreciation for taking the time to participate in the interviews.

If you would like to know more information on this study or would like to receive a letter of information about this study please response to the e-mail or contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

Thank you,

Ran Li
Faculty of Education in Western University



Appendix C: Letter of Information and Consent for the General manager



Community of practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China

Letter of Information – the general manager of the community

Principal Investigator

Dr. Zheng Zhang, PhD, Education
Western University

Additional Research Staff

Ran Li, MA, Education
Western University, [REDACTED]

My name is Ran Li and I am an MA student in education who is examining adult's informal learning in an online English learning community in China. I would like to ask for your permission to let me do this research in your community and invite you to participate in this study that will take place fully online.

The study intends to explore the features of the online English learning community that you manage and how these features may influence members' English learning. Literature review shows that most of the research in China investigated using technology to learn English in formal education. Thus, I believe a study like this which explores informal collaborative learning in an online English learning community outside formal educational settings is much needed.

As this study is about adults' informal learning and adults refer to those who are at least

18 years old in China, I would like to invite you to participate in my research if you are no less than 18 years old. I will also recruit members who are no less than 18 years old in your community to be my participants. My data collection process will take about one month. In this one month, I will observe participants' postings on the forum and their communications with other participants that are related to English learning in the community's online group chat, and do online voice-chat interviews with 10 to 15 participants using *Skype*, *Whatsapp*, or *Dingtalk*. There will be two interviews for each interview participant. Interviews will be audio-recorded with permission. I will contact participants who are willing to be interviewed and set up a time for the interview based on their schedule. As I am bilingual in English and Chinese, participants can choose which language they want to use in the interviews. The first interview takes about an hour. I will ask Interview questions about how participants participated in this community and how participating in the community had an impact on their English learning. If you agree to be interviewed, I will ask questions about how you managed this community and how managing and participating in this community impacted your English learning. After I finish analyzing the data collected from the first interview, I will contact the participant and make an appointment to conduct the second round of interviews to ask for the participant's opinions on my initial findings. The second interview takes about twenty minutes.

Notably, I will not ask for or record your and other members' personal information in the data collection process. However, identities are still likely to be traced from direct quotes to your ID and then to identities in real life because the profiles in this community involve personal information. You can always let me know which data you are not comfortable sharing for the study during the data collection processes. I will assign pseudonyms to all participants. Also, when shared information is highly identifiable and may incur risks for participants, I will paraphrase the quotes to make the pertaining information less identifiable. All the data will be kept in my encrypted computer and my Western University *Onedrive* account to which no one will have the access except me and my supervisor.

While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical

Research Ethics Board may require access to participants' study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research. Also, if data is collected during the project which may be required to report by law we have a duty to report.

You have the rights to decide whether to allow me to do the research in your community. You and other members of the community have the right to choose to participate, to be observed but not interviewed, to be interviewed but not recorded, and to withdraw your information from the study. There are no risks or harms of participating in the study. Instead, participating in this study can help other members review their learning journeys in this community, based on which they can adjust their future English learning plans and participation in this community. For you, participating in this study may inspire you with new ideas on the future development of the community. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected from my observation and interviews. If you wish to have your information removed please let me know.

If you choose not to let me do this research in your community, not to participate or to leave the study at any time there will be no effect on your personal life.

You can enter a draw to win a prize (money or currency used in the online community) if you agree to become my participants and allow me to observe you. If you not only allow to me observe you but also attend the interviews, you can additionally get an honorarium (a certain amount of money or currency used in the online community) besides having the chance to enter the draw. The honorarium is a token of appreciation for taking the time to participate in the interviews.

As the company who develops *Shanbay* is also interested in my research, I will share my findings with the company. However, I will make sure that no identifiable information (e.g., the name of the community, members' *Shanbay* ID) will be involved.

We will give you and other members new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal right by signing this Consent Form.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact me at [REDACTED] or +1 [REDACTED] or my supervisor, Dr. Zhang at [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics at [REDACTED], or email to [REDACTED].

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Consent Form

Community of practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China

Letter of Consent – the general manager of the community

Principal Investigator

Dr. Zheng Zhang, Ph.D., Education

Western University



Additional Research Staff

Ran Li, MA, Education

Western University



I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to let you do this research in my community. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I allow you to do this research in this community.

YES NO

I agree to participate in this research.

YES NO

I agree to be observed in this research.

YES NO

I allow you to review my previous postings on the forum.

YES NO

I agree to be interviewed in this research.

YES NO

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research.

YES NO

I allow you to take notes of my responses to the interview questions if I do not want to be audio-recorded.

YES NO

I allow you to quote me directly in reports and publications on a premise that a pseudonym is used.

YES NO

Print Name of Participant

Signature

Date (DD-MMM-2017)

Please provide a copy of the written signed consent form to the researcher.

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I

have answered all questions.

Print Name of Person
Obtaining Consent

Signature

Date (DD-MMM-
YYYY)

Verbal Consent Survey

Community of practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China

Letter of Consent – the general manager of the community

Principal Investigator

Dr. Zheng Zhang, Ph.D, Education

Western University

Additional Research Staff

Ran Li, MA, Education

Western University, [REDACTED]

Do you confirm that you have read the Letter of Information and have had all questions answered to your satisfaction?

YES NO

Do you allow me to do this research in your community?

YES NO

Do you agree to participate in this research?

YES NO

Do you agree to be observed in this research?

YES NO

Do you allow me to review your previous postings on the forum?

YES NO

Do you agree to be interviewed in this research?

YES NO

May I audio-record the interviews?

YES NO

May I take notes of your responses to the interview questions if you do not want to be audio-recorded but still want to be interviewed?

YES NO

May I quote you directly in reports and publications on a premise that a pseudonym is used?

YES NO

Date: _____

This paper is yours to keep for future reference.

Chinese Translation

给社区总管理员的通知书

项目名称：成人在网络英语学习社区中的非正式学习

项目成员：张箐，西安大略大学教育学院导师 [REDACTED]

李然，西安大略大学教育学院研究生 [REDACTED]

我叫李然，是一名教育学研究生。我正在做一个有关成人在网络英语学习社区中的非正式学习的研究。我希望获得您的准许让我在您所管理的社区进行这项研究，同时也希望邀请您参加这项完全在网络上进行的研究。

这项研究的目的是为了探寻您所在的这个网络社区的特点以及这些特点对成员的英语学习产生的影响。通过回顾文献，我发现中国大多数研究都将关注点放在了如何在正式教育中运用科学技术来学习英语。所以我认为像这样一个在正式教育的环境之外探讨网络英语学习社区中的非正式合作学习的研究是十分必要的。

由于这项研究针对的是成人的非正式学习，而在中国成人意味着年满 18 周岁，所以如果您年满 18 岁我想邀请您参加这项研究。同时我也会招募这个社区中年满 18 岁的其他成员成为我的研究参与者。我的研究数据收集过程大概会持续一个月。在这一个月里，我会观察参与者发布的有关英语学习的帖子和回复以及他们在群聊中与其他参与者进行的有关英语学习的互动，并在网上通过 *Skype*, *Whatsapp* 或钉钉对其中的 10 到 15 名参与者进行语音采访。我将进行两轮采访并在参与者的许可下进行录音。我会根据参与者的时间安排采访日期，并会提前了解参与者希望用什么语言（英语或者中文）来进行采访。第一次采访大概需要一个小时。我会问一些关于参与者们如何参加这个网络英语学习社区以及参加这个社区对他们英语学习产生了什么影响的问题。如果您愿意参与研究并接受采访，我会询问您一些关于您如何管理这个社区以及参与和管理这个社区对您的英语学习产生了哪些影响的问题。在我完成对第一轮采访的分析之后，我会联系参与者并进行第二次采访。这次采访主要为了了解参与者对于我对第一轮采访数据分析得出的最初的结论的看法，时长约为二十分钟。

值得注意的是，在数据收集的过程中我不会询问或记录任何您和其他成员的可识别个人的

信息。但直接引用有可能导致人们能通过引用的言论来追踪到这个人的网络 ID 从而获取他在现实生活中的身份信息。所以在研究过程中如果您有任何不愿意共享的信息，请一定要告知我。我会在研究报告中使用假名。当您或其他参与者透露的内容含有高度可识别的个人信息并有可能给您和他们带来风险时，我会对您和他们说的话进行改写来模糊其中的个人信息。我会将所有数据保存在我加密的电脑中并备份到西安大略大学的 Onedrive 账号中，这个账号只有我和我的导师知道。

尽管我们会尽全力保护您的信息，但是我们不能保证我们能够做到。西安大略大学非医学研究伦理委员会的代表可能要求查看与研究有关的参与者的记录来监控研究的进行。并且如果法律要求查看此次研究的数据我们有责任上报。

您有权利决定是否允许我在这个社区中进行这项研究。您和其他参与者有权利选择是否参加研究，是否让我对你们进行观察，是否被采访，是否进行采访录音，以及是否从这个研究中撤回相关信息。参加这个研究不会有任何风险和危害，相反能够帮助成员们回顾在社区中的学习历程，从而调整以后参与社区和英语学习的计划。参与这项研究也可能让您产生对社区未来发展的新的想法。如果您决定退出这项研究，您有权利要求撤回我对您的观察记录和您的采访记录。如果您希望删除您的信息请告知我。

如果您拒绝让我在您的社区中进行这项研究或者不参与这项研究或者随时退出研究，您的生活将不会受到任何影响。

如果您同意成为参与这个研究，允许我观察您，您将参与抽奖并有机会赢取一定数额的奖金或社区中使用的虚拟货币。如果您不仅允许我观察您并且参与了采访，除了参与抽奖外您还将获得一定数额的人民币或虚拟货币来感谢您抽出宝贵时间支持我的学术研究。

由于扇贝的开发公司（南京贝湾教育科技有限公司）对我的研究也很感兴趣，我会将我的研究成果共享给该公司，但我会保证共享的内容中不包含任何研究参与者的可识别个人信息，比如所在小组名称，参与者的扇贝 ID 等。

在研究过程中我们会反馈给您影响您决定是否继续留在项目中的最新信息。签署这份同意书不会让您放弃任何合法权利。

如果您对这项研究有任何的问题，请发送邮件到我的邮箱 [REDACTED] 或者拨打 or +1 [REDACTED] 或者发送邮件到我导师的邮箱 [REDACTED] 如果您对研究参与者拥有的权利以及研究的开展有任何问题，您可以拨打 [REDACTED] 或者发送邮件到 [REDACTED]

联系人类研究伦理办公室。

您可以保留这份文件以供将来参考。

同意书

项目名称：成人在网络英语学习社区中的非正式学习

项目成员：张箐，西安大略大学教育学院导师 [REDACTED]

李然，西安大略大学教育学院研究生 [REDACTED]

我已经阅读了研究参与说明书，并且了解了这项研究的相关内容。我同意你在我管理的社区中进行这项研究。我所有的问题都得到了令我满意的解答。

您是否同意我在您的社区进行这项研究？

是 否

我同意参与这项研究。

是 否

我允许你在研究期间对我进行观察。

是 否

我允许你查看我之前在讨论区发布的帖子

是 否

我同意被采访。

是 否

我允许对我的采访进行录音。

是 否

我不希望你对我的采访进行录音，但我允许你记录我对采访问题的回答。

是 否

我允许你在使用假名的情况下在论文或出版物中直接引用我的话。

是 否

您的姓名（正楷）： _____ 签名： _____

日期： _____（yyyy 年 m 月 d 日）

请抄送一份签字后的同意书给研究者。

我的签名表示我已经向该参与者详细说明了研究内容并且回答了所有的问题。

同意书接收人（正楷）： _____ 签名： _____

日期： _____（yyyy 年 m 月 d 日）

口头同意书

项目名称：成人在网络英语学习社区中的非正式学习

项目成员：张箐，西安大略大学教育学院导师

李然，西安大略大学教育学院研究生

您是否阅读了研究参与说明书？您在此次研究的所有的疑问是否都得到了令您满意的回答

是 否

您是否同意我在您的社区进行这项研究？

是 否

您是否同意参与这项研究？

是 否

您是否允许我在研究期间对您进行观察？

是 否

您是否允许我查看您之前在讨论区发布的帖子？

是 否

您是否同意被采访？

是 否

您是否允许我对您的采访进行录音？

是 否

如果您不希望我对您的采访进行录音，您是否允许我记录您对采访问题的回答？

是 否

您是否允许我在使用假名的情况下在论文或出版物中直接引用您的话？

是 否

日期： _____

您可以保留这份文件以供将来参考。

Appendix D: Letter of Information and Consent for the Managers



Community of practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China

Letter of Information – the managers of the community

Principal Investigator

Dr. Zheng Zhang, Ph.D., Education
Western University

Additional Research Staff

Ran Li, MA, Education
Western University

My name is Ran Li and I am an MA student in education who is examining adults' informal English learning in the online English learning community you are in. As this study is about adults' informal learning and adults refer to those who are at least 18 years old in China, if you are no less than 18, I would like to invite you to participate in this study that will take place fully online.

This study wants to explore the features of the online English learning community that you are in and how these features may influence members' English learning. Literature review shows that most of the researchers in China investigated using technology to learn English in formal education. Thus I believe a research like this which describes informal collaborative learning in an online English learning community outside formal

educational settings is quite needed.

It is expected that you will be in the study for one month. If you agree to participate, I will observe your postings on the forum and your communications with other participants that are related to English learning in the community's online group chat. If you also agree to be interviewed, you will be invited to do two online voice-chat interviews with me using *Skype*, *Whatsapp*, or *Dingtalk*. You can let me know whether you allow me to audio-record the interviews and which language (English/Chinese) you prefer before the interviews. The first interview will take about an hour. I will ask Interview questions about how you participate in managing this online community and how managing the online community impacts your English learning. Later after I finish analyzing the data collected from the first interview, I will make an appointment with you to do the second interview, which will take about twenty minutes. In the second interview, I will ask your comments on my interpretations and initial findings.

Notably, I will not ask for or record your personal information in the data collection process. However, identities are still likely to be traced from direct quotes to your ID in this community and then to your identity in real life because your online profile in this community may show part of your personal information. You can always let me know which data you are not comfortable sharing for the study during the data collection processes. Also, I will use pseudonyms. When shared information is highly identifiable and may incur risks for you, I will paraphrase the quotes to make the pertaining information less identifiable. All the data will be kept in my encrypted computer and my Western University *Onedrive* account to which no one will have the access except me and my supervisor.

While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to the study-related records to monitor the

conduct of the research. Also, if data is collected during the project which may be required to report by law we have a duty to report.

You have the right to choose to participate, to be observed but not interviewed, to be interviewed but not recorded, and to withdraw your information from the study. There are no risks or harms of participating in the study. Instead, participating in this study can help you review your learning journey in this community, based on which you can adjust your future English learning plans and participation in this community. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected from my observation and interviews. If you wish to have your information removed please let me know.

If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time there will be no effect on your personal life.

You can enter a draw to win a prize (money or currency used in the online community) if you agree to become my participants and allow me to observe you. If you not only allow to me observe you but also attend the interviews, you can additionally get an honorarium (a certain amount of money or currency used in the online community) besides having the chance to enter the draw. The honorarium is a token of appreciation for taking the time to participate in the interviews.

As the company that develops *Shanbay* is also interested in my research, I will share my findings with the company. However, I will make sure that no identifiable information (e.g., the name of the community, your *Shanbay* ID) will be involved.

We will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal right by signing this Consent Form.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact me at [REDACTED]

([REDACTED]), or my supervisor, Dr. Zhang at [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics at [REDACTED], or email to [REDACTED]

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Verbal Consent Survey

Community of practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China

Letter of Consent – the managers of the community

Principal Investigator

Dr. Zheng Zhang, Ph.D, Education

Western University

Additional Research Staff

Ran Li, MA, Education

Western University, [REDACTED]

Do you confirm that you have read the Letter of Information and have had all questions answered to your satisfaction?

YES NO

Do you agree to participate in this research?

YES NO

Do you agree to be observed in this research?

YES NO

Do you allow me to review your previous postings on the forum?

YES NO

Do you agree to be interviewed in this research?

YES NO

May I audio-record the interviews?

YES NO

May I take notes of your responses to the interview questions if you do not want to be audio-recorded but still want to be interviewed?

YES NO

May I quote you directly in reports and publications on a premise that a pseudonym is used?

YES NO

Date: _____

This paper is yours to keep for future reference.

给管理员的通知书

项目名称：成人在网络英文学习社区中的非正式学习

项目成员：张箬，西安大略大学教育学院导师

李然，西安大略大学教育学院研究生

我叫李然，是一名教育学研究生，正在做一个关于成人在网络英语学习社区中的非正式学习的研究。由于这项研究针对的是成人的非正式学习，而在中国成人意味着年满 18 周岁，所以如果您年满 18 岁，我希望邀请您参加这项完全在网络上进行的研究。

这项研究的目的是为了探寻您所在的这个网络社区的特点以及这些特点对成员的英语学习产生的影响。通过回顾文献，我发现中国大多数研究都将关注点放在了如何在正式教育中运用科学技术来学习英语。所以我认为像这样一个在正式教育的环境之外探讨网络英语学习社区中的非正式合作学习的研究是十分必要的。

我的研究数据收集过程大概会持续一个月。如果您愿意参与这项研究，我将主要观察您发布的有关英语学习的帖子和回复，以及您在群聊中与其他参与者进行的有关英语学习的互动。同时，如果您愿意被采访，我将通过 *Skype*, *Whatsapp*, 或钉钉对您进行两次语音采访。您可以在采访前告知我您希望我用什么语言（英文或者中文）进行采访。第一次采访时大概为一小时，我会询问有关于您是如何参与管理这个网络英语学习社区以及参与管理这个社区对您的英语学习产生了什么影响的问题。在我完成对第一次采访的数据分析后，我会联系您并与您约时间进行第二次采访。这次采访大约需要二十分钟，主要为了了解您对于我对第一轮采访数据分析得出的最初的结论的看法。

值得注意的是，在数据收集的过程中我不会询问或记录任何您的可识别个人的信息。但直接引用有可能导致人们能通过引用的言论来追踪到您的网络 ID 从而获取您在现实生活中的身份信息。所以在研究过程中如果您有任何不愿意共享的信息，请一定要告知我。我会在研究报告中使用假名。当您透露的内容含有高度可识别的个人信息并有可能给您带来风险时，我会对您说的话进行改写来模糊您的个人信息。我会将所有数据保存在我加密的电脑中并备份到西安大略大学的 Onedrive 账号中，这个账号只有我和我的导师知道。

尽管我们会尽全力保护您的信息，但是我们不能保证我们能够做到。西安大略大学非医学研究伦理委员会的代表可能要求查看与研究有关的参与者的记录来监控研究的进行。并且如果

法律要求查看此次研究的数据我们有责任上报。

您有权利选择是否参加研究，是否让我对您进行观察，是否被采访，是否进行采访录音，以及是否从这个研究中撤回相关信息。参加这个研究不会有任何风险和危害，相反可能会您回顾在社区中的学习历程，从而调整以后参与社区和英语学习的计划有所帮助。如果您决定退出这项研究，您有权利要求撤回我对您的观察记录和您的采访记录。如果您希望删除您的信息请告知我。

如果您拒绝参与这项研究或者随时退出研究，您的生活将不会受到任何影响。

如果您同意成为参与这个研究，允许我观察您，您将参与抽奖并有机会赢取一定数额的奖金或社区中使用的虚拟货币。如果您不仅允许我观察您并且参与了采访，除了参与抽奖外您还将获得一定数额的人民币或虚拟货币来感谢您抽出宝贵时间支持我的学术研究。

由于扇贝的开发公司（南京贝湾教育科技有限公司）对我的研究也很感兴趣，我会将我的研究成果共享给该公司，但我会保证共享的内容中不包含任何研究参与者的可识别身份信息，比如小组名称，您的扇贝 ID 等。

在研究过程中我们会反馈给您影响您决定是否继续留在项目中的最新信息。签署这份同意书不会让您放弃任何合法权利。

如果您对这项研究有任何的问题，请发送邮件到我的邮箱 [REDACTED] 或者拨打 [REDACTED] 或者发送邮件到我导师的邮箱 [REDACTED]。如果您对研究参与者拥有的权利以及研究的开展有任何问题，您可以拨打 [REDACTED] 或者发送邮件到 [REDACTED] 联系人类研究伦理办公室。 _

您可以保留这份文件以供将来参考。

口头同意书

项目名称：成人在网络英语学习社区中的非正式学习

项目成员：张箐，西安大略大学教育学院导师

李然，西安大略大学教育学院研究生

您是否阅读了研究参与说明书?您在此次研究的所有的疑问是否都得到了令您满意的回答?

是 否

您是否同意参与这项研究?

是 否

您是否允许我在研究期间对您进行观察?

是 否

您是否允许我查看您之前在讨论区发布的帖子?

是 否

您是否同意被采访?

是 否

您是否允许我对您的采访进行录音?

是 否

如果您不希望我对您的采访进行录音，您是否允许我记录您对采访问题的回答?

是 否

您是否允许我在使用假名的情况下在论文或出版物中直接引用您的话?

是 否

日期：_____

您可以保留这份文件以供将来参考。

Appendix E: Letter of Information and Consent for Members



Community of practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China

Letter of Information – members of the community

Principal Investigator

Dr. Zheng Zhang, Ph.D., Education
Western University

Additional Research Staff

Ran Li, MA, Education
Western University

My name is Ran Li and I am an MA student in education who is examining adults' informal English learning in the online English learning community you are in. As this study is about adults' informal learning and adults refer to those who are at least 18 years old in China, if you are no less than 18, I would like to invite you to participate in this study that will take place fully online.

This study wants to explore the features of the online English learning community that you are in and how these features may influence members' English learning. Literature review shows that most of the researchers in China investigated using technology to learn English in formal education. Thus, I believe a research like this which describes informal collaborative learning in an online English learning community outside formal educational settings is quite needed.

It is expected that you will be in the study for one month. If you agree to participate, I will observe your postings on the forum and your communications with other participants that are related to English learning in the community's online group chat. If

you also agree to be interviewed, you will be invited to do two online voice-chat interviews with me using *Skype*, *Whatsapp*, or *Dingtalk*. You can let me know whether you allow me to audio-record the interviews and which language (English/Chinese) you prefer before the interviews. The first interview will take about an hour. I will ask Interview questions about how you participated in this community and how participating in the community impacted your English learning. Later after I finish analyzing the data collected from the first interview, I will make an appointment with you to do the second interview, which will take about twenty minutes. In the second interview, I will ask your comments on my interpretations and initial findings.

Notably, I will not ask for or record your personal information in the data collection process. However, identities are still likely to be traced from direct quotes to your ID in this community and then to your identity in real life because your online profile in this community may show part of your personal information. You can always let me know which data you are not comfortable sharing for the study during the data collection processes. Also, I will use pseudonyms. When shared information is highly identifiable and may incur risks for you, I will paraphrase the quotes to make the pertaining information less identifiable. All the data will be kept in my encrypted computer and my Western University *Onedrive* account to which no one will have the access except me and my supervisor.

While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to the study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research. Also, if data is collected during the project which may be required to report by law we have a duty to report.

You have the right to choose to participate, to be observed but not interviewed, to be interviewed but not recorded, and to withdraw your information from the study. There are no risks or harms of participating in the study. Instead, participating in this study can help you review your learning journey in this community, based on which you can adjust your future English learning plans and participation in this community. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information

collected from my observation and interviews. If you wish to have your information removed please let me know.

If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time there will be no effect on your personal life.

You can enter a draw to win a prize (money or currency used in the online community) if you agree to become my participants and allow me to observe you. If you not only allow to me observe you but also attend the interviews, you can additionally get an honorarium (a certain amount of money or currency used in the online community) besides having the chance to enter the draw. The honorarium is a token of appreciation for taking the time to participate in the interviews.

As the company that develops *Shanbay* is also interested in my research, I will share my findings with the company. However, I will make sure that no identifiable information (e.g., the name of the community, your *Shanbay* ID) will be involved.

We will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal right by signing this Consent Form.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], or my supervisor, Dr. Zhang at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics at [REDACTED], or email to [REDACTED].

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Online Consent Form

Community of practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China

Letter of Consent – members of the community

Principal Investigator

Dr. Zheng Zhang, PhD, Education

Western University



Additional Research Staff

Ran Li, MA, Education

Western University,



I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

YES NO

CONTACT FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Please check the appropriate box below and initial:

___ I agree to be contacted for future research studies

___ I do NOT agree to be contacted for future research studies

I agree to be observed in this research.

YES NO

I allow you to review my previous postings in the forum.

YES NO

I agree to be interviewed in this research.

YES NO

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research

YES NO

I allow you to take notes of my responses to the interview questions if I do not want to be audio-recorded but still want to be interviewed.

YES NO

I allow you to quote me directly in reports and publications on a premise that a pseudonym is used.

YES NO

ID (in this community): _____

Email Address: _____

Social media account: _____ *(optional, if you have Skype, Whatsapp, or Dingtalk account please provide it here)*

You can always ask me for a copy of your electronic consent.

给社区成员的通知书

项目名称：成人在网络英文学习社区中的非正式学习

项目成员：张箐，西安大略大学教育学院导师

李然，西安大略大学教育学院研究生

我叫李然，是一名教育学研究生，正在做一个关于成人在网络英语学习社区中的非正式学习的研究。由于这项研究针对的是成人的非正式学习，而在中国成人意味着年满 18 周岁，所以如果您年满 18 岁，我希望邀请您参加这项完全在网上进行的研究。

这项研究的目的是为了探寻您所在的这个网络社区的特点以及这些特点对成员的英语学习产生的影响。通过回顾文献，我发现中国大多数研究都将关注点放在了如何在正式教育中运用科学技术来学习英语。所以我认为像这样一个在正式教育的环境之外探讨网络英语学习社区中的非正式合作学习的研究是十分必要的。

我的研究数据收集过程大概会持续一个月。如果您愿意参与这项研究，我将主要观察您发布的有关英语学习的帖子和回复，以及您在群聊中与其他参与者进行的有关英语学习的互动。同时，如果您愿意被采访，我将通过 *Skype*, *Whatsapp*, 或钉钉对您进行两次语音采访。您可以在采访前告知我您希望我用什么语言（英文或者中文）进行采访。第一次采访时大概为一小时，我会询问有关于您是如何参加这个网络英语学习社区以及参加这个社区您的英语学习产生了什么影响的问题。在我完成对第一次采访的数据分析后，我会联系您并与您约时间进行第二次采访。这次采访大约需要二十分钟，主要为了了解您对于我对第一轮采访数据分析得出的最初的结论的看法。

值得注意的是，在数据收集的过程中我不会询问或记录任何您的可识别个人的信息。但直接引用有可能导致人们能通过引用的言论来追踪到您的网络 ID 从而获取您在现实生活中的身份信息。所以在研究过程中如果您有任何不愿意共享的信息，请一定要告知我。我会在研究报告中使用假名。当您透露的内容含有高度可识别的个人信息并有可能给您带来风险时，我会对您说的话进行改写来模糊您的个人信息。我会将所有数据保存在我加密的电脑中并备份到西安大略大学的 OneDrive 账号中，这个账号只有我和我的导师知道。

尽管我们会尽全力保护您的信息，但是我们不能保证我们能够做到。西安大略大学非医学研究伦理委员会的代表可能要求查看与研究有关的参与者的记录来监控研究的进行。并且如果法律要求查看此次研究的数据我们有责任上报。

您有权利选择是否参加研究，是否让我对您进行观察，是否被采访，是否进行采访录音，以及是否从这个研究中撤回相关信息。参加这个研究不会有任何风险和危害，相反可能会您回顾在社区中的学习历程，从而调整以后参与社区和英语学习的计划有所帮助。如果您决定退出这项研究，您有权利要求撤回我对您的观察记录和您的采访记录。如果您希望删除您的信息请告知我。

如果您拒绝参与这项研究或者随时退出研究，您的生活将不会受到任何影响。

如果您同意成为参与这个研究，允许我观察您，您将参与抽奖并有机会赢取一定数额的奖金或社区中使用的虚拟货币。如果您不仅允许我观察您并且参与了采访，除了参与抽奖外您还将获得一定数额的人民币或虚拟货币来感谢您抽出宝贵时间支持我的学术研究。

由于扇贝的开发公司（南京贝湾教育科技有限公司）对我的研究也很感兴趣，我会将我的研究成果共享给该公司，但我会保证共享的内容中不包含任何研究参与者的可识别身份信息，比如小组名称，您的扇贝 ID 等。

在研究过程中我们会反馈给您影响您决定是否继续留在项目中的最新信息。签署这份同意书不会让您放弃任何合法权利。

如果您对这项研究有任何的问题，请发送邮件到我的邮箱 [REDACTED] 或者拨打 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]，或者发送邮件到我导师的邮箱 [REDACTED]。如果您对研究参与者拥有的权利以及研究的开展有任何问题，您可以拨打 [REDACTED] 或者发送邮件到 [REDACTED] 联系人类研究伦理办公室。

您可以保留这份文件以供将来参考。

同意书

项目名称：成人在网络英文学习社区中的非正式学习

项目成员：张箐，西安大略大学博士 [REDACTED]

李然，西安大略大学研究生 [REDACTED]

我已经阅读了通知书，并且了解了相关内容。我同意参加这项研究。我所有的问题都得到了令我满意的解答。

是 否

关于是否参与以后的研究

是，你可以联系并邀请我参加你以后的研究

否，请不要联系或邀请我参加你以后的研究

我允许你在研究期间在小组内对我进行观察

是 否

我允许你查看我之前在讨论区发布的帖子。

是 否

我同意被采访。

是 否

我允许对我的采访进行录音。

是 否

我不希望你对我的采访进行录音，但我允许你记录我对采访问题的回答。

是 否

我允许你在使用假名的情况下在论文或出版物中直接引用我的话。

是 否

社区中使用的 ID: _____

邮箱: _____

社交媒体账号: _____ (选填, 如果您有 Skype, Whatsapp, 或钉钉账号请在此处填写)

您可以随时向我索要您所签署的同意书备份。

Appendix F: Interview questions

For the members:

1. How long have you been in this community?
2. Could you tell me why you want to participate in an online English learning community and why you choose to participate in this community?
3. What do you perceive as the areas of focus of this community? Would you say members in this community share similar goals and values? If yes, what are they? How do they influence activities in this community?
4. Please tell me about your experience when you just joined this community. How did you fit in? What do you think about the guidance the community provides for newcomers?
5. How do you participate in the community (e.g., participate in activities, post on the forum, communicate with other members in the online group chat)?
6. Could you please describe some English learning activities you have participated in and talk about your experience in detail? How have you and other members worked together in these activities? How has participating in English learning activities influenced your English learning?
7. From your perspective, what does membership mean in this community (rights and responsibilities)? Do you think the ranking of your community among all the Shanbay communities matter? Why? Do you think your ranking in your community matter? If yes, what will you do to improve your ranking?
8. What relationships have you developed with other members of the community? How were these relationships developed? How have these relationships changed over time? What impacts have these relationships had on your English learning?
9. How has the community changed since you joined (e.g., activities, tools, members,

management teams, rules, regulations)?

10. What kinds of conflicts exist? How are they managed?

11. What would you say is your place in this community? Would you describe yourself as a core member, someone more on the edges, or somewhere in between? Has your place changed over time? Do you feel “included”? What experiences in this community have given you a sense of belonging? Has the sense of belonging increased your involvement in the community?

12. What are some famous stories in this community? Are there any stories which have influenced your English learning?

13. How often do you read postings on the community forum? What postings have benefited you in learning English?

14. How do you balance between your identity as a member of this community and your other identities (e.g., an employee, a parent)?

15. The community has existed for more than two years now. What would you say sustains it? How will you comment on the community and your experience in this community? What suggestions do you have for the development of this community?

For the manager and members of the management team:

1. How long have you been in this community? When did you become the manager (or a member of the management team)?
2. Could you tell me why you want to participate in an online English learning community, why you choose to participate in this community?
3. Why did you want to be the manager (or join in the management team)? How did you become the manager (or a member of the management team)? What are the rules of recruiting members into the management team?
4. Would you say members in this community share similar goals and values? What do you think this community is created for? How do they influence activities in this community?
5. Could you please describe some English learning activities you have hosted and participated? What contributions have you made to lead these activities to success? Have you experienced any difficulties or conflicts? How have you dealt with them? What about the results? Have hosting and participating in these English learning activities influenced your English learning?
6. From your perspective, what does membership mean in this community (rights and responsibilities)? Do you think the ranking of your community among all the Shanbay communities matter? Why? Do you think your ranking in your community matter? If yes, will you invest more time in English learning to improve your ranking?
7. What kind of relationships have you developed with other members of this community? How were these relationships developed? How have those relationships changed over time? What impacts do these relationships have on your English learning?
8. What kinds of conflicts exist? How are they managed?
9. Have you involved in any important decisions of the community (e.g., personnel change, modification of the rules, discontinuity of activities, cooperation with other communities)? How have these decisions been made?

10. How has the community changed over time (e.g., activities, tools, members, management teams, rules, regulations)?
11. How has your own practice changed as a result of your participation in this community? Does your role of being the manager (or a member of the management team) influence your investment in English learning?
12. What are some famous stories in this community? Are there any stories which have greatly influenced your management philosophy or your own English learning?
13. The community has existed for more than two years now. What would you say sustains it? What efforts have been made to maintain and develop the community ?
14. How did you balance between your identity as the manager (or a member of the management team) and your other identities (inside or outside the community)?
15. What's the relationship between your community and other sub-communities in Shanbay?

Chinese Translation:

采访问题

成员：

1. 你进组多长时间了？
2. 能不能说说你为什么会想参加英语学习小组，以及为什么选择参加了这个小组呢？
3. 以你的理解，小组主要关注的领域有哪些？你认为小组的成员有着相似的目标或价值观吗？如果是的话，是什么目标或价值观？它们是怎样影响小组的活动的？
4. 请说说你刚入组时的经历。你是如何融入的？你怎样评价小组对新成员提供的帮助和指导？
5. 你是如何参与小组的（比如参加活动，发帖，和其他组员在群聊中交流）？
6. 能不能请你说说你参加过的一些小组活动并详细谈谈你的经历？在这些活动中你和其他组员是如何合作的？参加这些活动是否对你的英语学习产生了影响？
7. 你认为组员这个身份意味着什么，有什么样的权利和义务？你认为小组在扇贝中的排名重要吗，为什么？你认为你在小组中的排名重要吗？如果是，你会如何来提高你的排名？
8. 说说你和其他组员的关系。这些关系是怎样发展起来的？发生过那些变化？这些关系对你的英语学习产生了什么影响？
9. 在你加入小组后，小组发生过哪些变化（活动，工具，成员与管理小组成员，规则等）？
10. 小组中是否发生过一些冲突？这些冲突是怎样被解决的？
11. 你认为自己在小组中是怎样的存在？你觉得自己属于以下哪一种，核心成员，边缘成员，或者处于两者之间？是否发生过变化？你是否觉得有归属感？哪些经历会让你产生归属感？这种归属感是否会让你更大程度地参与到小组中来？
12. 说说小组中的名人名事。这些故事是否对你的英语学习产生影响？

13. 你看小组内的帖子的频率是？什么帖子对你的英语学习提供了帮助？
14. 你是如何在小组成员以及你的其他身份（比如公司职员，孩子的家长等）之间取得平衡的？
15. 小组已经创立超过两年了。你认为是什么在支撑它？你会如何评价这个小组以及你在小组中的经历？对小组的发展你有什么建议？

组长和小组管理员：

1. 你加入小组多长时间了？你成为小组管理员（或组长）多久了？
2. 能不能告诉我为什么你想参与英语学习小组，并且选择参与了这个小组？
3. 为什么你想成为小组管理员（或组长）？你是怎样成为成为小组管理员（或组长）的？招揽成员进入管理团队的标准是什么？
4. 你认为小组成员是否有着相似的目标和价值观？这个小组是为何而建立的？（这个目标或理念）是如何影响小组活动的？
5. 能不能请你说说你主持和参加过的活动？你为活动的成功付出过怎样的努力？是否遇到过困难或冲突？又是怎样解决的？结果如何？主持和参加这些活动对你的英语学习产生了什么影响？
6. 你认为组员这个身份意味着什么，有什么样的权利和义务？你认为小组在扇贝的排名重要吗，为什么？你认为你在小组中的排名重要吗？如果是，你会如何来提高你的排名？
7. 说说你和其他组员的关系。这些关系是怎样发展起来的？发生过那些变化？这些关系对你的英语学习产生了什么影响？
8. 小组中是否发生过一些冲突？这些冲突是怎样被解决的？
9. 你是否参与过小组中的重大决定（比如人员变动，规则修改，停止活动，和其他小组的合作）？管理团队是如何做出这些决定的？
10. 在你加入小组后，小组发生过哪些变化（比如活动，工具，成员与管理小组成员，规则等）？
11. 在加入小组后你的英语学习发生了什么变化？作为小组管理员（或组长），这个身份是否对你的英语学习产生了影响？
12. 说说小组中的名人名事。这些故事是否对你的英语学习或管理理念产生影响？
13. 小组已经创立超过两年了。你认为是什么在支撑它？大家为了维持和发展小组付出过什么样的努力？

14. 你是如何在小组管理员（或组长）和其他身份中取得平衡的？
15. 小组和其他扇贝小组之间是什么样的关系？

Appendix G: Translator's Declaration

Affidavit for Transcription

I, Xu hanzhou, hereby declare that I am fluent in English and Mandarin Chinese. I hereby certify that I have checked the English translation of the collected data in Mandarin Chinese used in the thesis "Community of practice: Adult's Informal Learning in an Online English Learning Community in China". To the best of my knowledge, the translation is true, accurate and complete.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

2018.2.14

Appendix H: Permission to do this research in Shanbay

关于扇贝英语学习社区的研究申请



Jie Wang

Sat 03-11, 2:08 AM



你好

谢谢你对我们的兴趣。

只要对方小组同意接受研究，我们公司没有意见，当然前提是我们也希望看到你的研究结果。

王捷

扇贝网 shanbay.com

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在 2017年3月11日 下午12:01，Ran Li [redacted] 写道：

王总您好，

我是一名教育学专业的在读研究生，目前在加拿大西安大略大学留学。出国前曾用扇贝app学习过英语，受益良多。所以在构思毕业论文的时候我萌生了做一个关于扇贝英语学习社区的研究的想法。我会以其中一个学习小组为研究对象，观察小组成员在小组中如何互动，并采访一部分小组成员来了解参与这个小组对他们英语学习具体产生了什么影响。

由于贵公司是扇贝网及扇贝手机应用的开发者和所有者，我诚心希望贵公司能够准许我进行这项研究。

期待您的回复。

李然

Translation of the email

Jie Wang [REDACTED]

Hello,

Thank you for your interest.

As long as the members of the sub-community are will to participate in your research, we wouldn't have a problem with that. However, the premise is that we also want to know your research findings.

Wang Jie
Shanbay.com

Ran Li [REDACTED] wrote:

Hello Mr. Wang,

I am a graduate student in the faculty of education at Western University, Canada. I used to use *Shanbay* mobile applications to learn English before studying abroad and I benefited a lot from this learning experience. Thus when planning my MA thesis, I came up with the idea to do a research on the *Shanbay* online English learning community. In this research, I will focus on one of the sub-communities in *Shanbay*. I will observe members' online interactions and interview some of the members about how they participate in the community and how participating in this community impacts their English learning.

As your company is the developer and owner of *Shanbay*, I really hope that you can give me the permission to conduct this research.

Looking forward to your reply.

Best wishes,

Ran Li

Curriculum Vitae

| | |
|--|---|
| Name | Ran Li |
| Post-secondary Education Degrees: | Nanjing University Nanjing, Jiangsu, China 2011-2015 B.A. |
| | The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2015-present |
| Honours and Awards: | Western Graduate Research Scholarship 2015-2016, 2016-2017 |
| | AER Graduate Scholarship for Literacy Studies in Education 2015-2016, 2016-2017 |
| Related Work Experience: | English tutor for Grade 4 Nanjing, Jiangsu, China 2014-2015 |
| | Chinese tutor in the Short-Term Chinese Language Sessions Nanjing University July, 2014 |