

University of New Mexico

UNM Digital Repository

University Libraries & Learning Sciences Faculty
and Staff Publications

Academic Department Resources

2009

Identity, Gender, and Language in Synchronous Cybercultures: A Cross-Cultural Study

Charlotte Nirmalani Gunawardena

Ahmed Idrissi Alami

Gayathri Jayatilleke

Fawda Bouacharine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ulls_fsp



Part of the [Online and Distance Education Commons](#)

Gunawardena, C. N., Idrissi Alami, A., Jayatilleke, G., & Bouacharine, F. (2009). Identity, gender, and language in synchronous cybercultures: A cross-cultural study. In R. Goodfellow & M. N. Lamy (Eds.), *Learning cultures in online education* (pp.30 –51). London, UK: Continuum.

Pre-print version of the print version available on:

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/learning-cultures-in-online-education-9781441158680/>

Identity, Gender, and Language in Synchronous Cybercultures: A Cross-Cultural Study

Charlotte N. Gunawardena, University of New Mexico, U.S.A.

Ahmed Idrissi Alami, Purdue University, U.S.A.,

Gayathri Jayatilleke, Open University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka, and

Fadwa Bouacharine, Al-Akhawayn University, Morocco

Introduction

The integration of the Internet into contemporary society worldwide has had a profound impact on the way we communicate, relate to ourselves, and to each other. Different users, depending on various characteristics such as age, gender, education, and sociocultural background, access the Internet for various communication needs such as exchanging emails, making new friends, or engaging in a serious discussion. Whatever the goal, users need to adjust to this new computer-mediated interactive

environment, and they do so either in ways that reveal native cultural values, or reflect the creation of new cultural norms and conventions. The nature of the tool that mediates communication impacts and alters their perceptions of the communication process as well, and how they perceive their social roles. As Joinson (2003) observes 'tools are more than just something to make a task easier. They change your way of thinking, of approaching a task (and indeed the nature of the task itself), and can reap unimagined wider social changes' (pp. 2-3). The development of tools from the early alphabetic and numbering systems to the new communication technologies has transformed not only the tasks performed by interacting with them, but also human capabilities. Vygotsky (1978) referred to this as 'mediation' and argued that tools as well as other people allow for the extension of human capabilities. Cole (2007) observes that artifacts that mediate human activity have changed. So, how does computer-mediated communication (CMC) with its ability to provide for both synchronous and asynchronous, text-based interaction between individuals or groups, across geographical distances and cultures, impact the communication process?

Ellerman (2007) describes three main approaches to understanding the impact of CMC on society: (1) the technological determinism approach (McLuhan 1967) which examines the ways in which technology shapes society, but takes little account of social context or individual action; (2) the "uses and gratifications" approach adopted by social psychologists who examined human needs first and how technology was adopted to satisfy these needs, an approach later developed into social information processing perspectives (Walther and Parks, 2002) that attempted to understand interpersonal communication on the Internet; and (3) the historical context approach

which examines the various contexts in which the technology is introduced and employed, and how technology affects and is, in turn, affected by the social, technological, and political context (Rowland 1997). The second and third approaches enable us to examine the psychological and sociocultural processes that underpin mediated communication online from the standpoint of the native cultures of the participants.

This chapter aims at developing our understanding of the sociocultural processes of synchronous online communication from the perspective of two different cultural contexts: Morocco and Sri Lanka, in order to draw implications for the development of learning cultures within online communities. To better understand the sociocultural processes that play a role in CMC, it is important to examine the informal use of the medium in different cultural contexts to determine the communication conventions naturally developed by Internet users; in this way, we can begin to understand how various communities adapt their media rich communication styles to the text-oriented medium of the Internet. People, when communicating in person, automatically generate meaning through different ways such as dress, non-verbal behavior, spatial distance, manner of speaking, etc. However, in cyberspace, users must depend on other means of creating such nuanced presentations of themselves, their ideas, and even their personalities. We have chosen, then, to look at two communities which have high-context cultures, namely, Morocco and Sri Lanka.

The purpose of the preliminary study discussed in this chapter was to explore what happens when individuals whose self-images are characterized by a sense of group identity based on factors such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, language, and

socioeconomic status, use the culturally heterogeneous and technically ephemeral forums of the Internet to pursue personal communication goals. We undertook the study with the intention of developing a conceptual framework for the sociocultural environment of an online community based on the factors that emerge from the communication conventions and processes employed by Internet chat users in Morocco and Sri Lanka. Such a framework would enable us to suggest implications about the role of learning cultures in the activity of such a community. In addition, it could provide insight in to how we can design online environments or learning spaces which encourage the types of communication we are striving to support, especially when we may be addressing participants from high-context and/or multi-lingual cultures.

Study Design and Context

We adopted a qualitative ethnographic perspective (Merriam, 1998) to conduct interviews with participants and examine communication conventions, and grounded theory building (Glaser et al., 1967; Strauss et al.,1998; Charmaz, 2003) to develop the conceptual framework for a sociocultural environment for online communities. Our collaborative study design involved four researchers who understood the cultural contexts studied and brought in an interdisciplinary perspective to the study.

Interview questions addressing the purpose of the study were initially developed by the lead researcher and revised in collaboration with the co-researchers who also participated in data collection and analysis. Interview questions were translated into Moroccan Arabic, French, Sinhala, and Tamil, and interviews were conducted in these languages and English. The interdisciplinary nature of the research team, the

diverse expertise and cultural knowledge enabled the conduct of culturally sensitive research, and culturally appropriate understanding of the issues.

The study was conducted in the Middle Atlas region of Morocco between September and January 2004, and in small and large towns in Sri Lanka from February to July 2005. Morocco and Sri Lanka exemplify two very different cultural contexts.

Morocco is an Arab, Berber, Muslim, Mediterranean African country, more recently colonized by the French, speaking standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, Berber, and French. Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim country, predominantly Buddhist, more recently colonized by the English, speaking Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Both countries are similar in that they have diverse minority groups with different languages and religions represented in the population. Interviews were conducted in Internet cafés or cybercafés and university computer labs in four different locations in the Middle Atlas region of Morocco, and in the western, southern, and eastern part of Sri Lanka that represented the ethnic and religious diversity in the population.

Participants were predominantly the general public who used Internet cafés and university students who used the Internet in campus labs. Although the Internet is constantly growing in popularity in these two countries, many cannot afford computers and Internet connections in their homes, and gather at Internet cafés to use the Internet.

We gathered data conducting individual and focus group interviews with fifty five adults in Morocco which included 36 males and 19 females, and with fifty adults in Sri Lanka which included 33 males and 17 females. This study focused primarily on

participants who used chat forums to engage in conversation and build relationships with people they did not know. In both these countries, fewer women frequented Internet cafés, reflecting social taboos. In Morocco, the café was and still is the domain of men and this transferred to the concept of the Internet café as well. In Galle, a mid size, fairly conservative town in Sri Lanka, only one in ten users was a female.

Culture Online

As we began this study, our major challenge was to arrive at a definition of culture. As Faiola et al. (2005) have noted, there are two aspects to be considered: the computer as a mediator in the communication process, and the people engaged in the communication as persons influenced by a complex blend of cultural contexts. We wanted to look for a definition that would incorporate both these elements.

Given the centrality of culture to human life (Shuter, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) and subscribing to the view that culture is present in mediated communication in the language employed and the manner in which communication happens, we felt that it was necessary to adopt an encompassing definition of culture for describing the two cultural perspectives (Moroccan and Sri Lankan) in our study. While we will refer to participants in our study as Moroccan or Sri Lankan indicating a national context, we believe that these individuals do not subscribe to a specific, fixed, national culture in the online context. The bipolar dimensions of nationally held cultural values put forward by Hofstede (1980, 2001) individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, and long-term orientation, while a

useful explanatory framework despite criticisms leveled at it (Carbaugh, 2007; Fougere et al., 2007; Kim, 2007), is not an appropriate framework to describe communication processes in the online context. For example, although Sri Lankan and Moroccan societies would be classified in Hofstede's framework as high power distance societies, participants from these countries look to the online medium as a liberating medium that equalizes status differences, thereby providing them with a level playing field. Cultural indicators such as social position, age and authority, personal appearance are relatively weak in the CMC context (Reid, 1995). Therefore, their interactions online will not necessarily reflect high power distance communication. Graioud (2005) takes this point further by stating that Internet chat and discussions are dismantling the traditional power structures in Morocco by allowing previously disenfranchised groups to publicize their concerns.

Ess et al. (2005) support this view by providing a considered critique of the applicability of Hofstede's framework to the online context and note that what interests CMC researchers is how national, as well as other cultural identities such as ethnicity, youth culture, and gender, etc. interact with intercultural communication online; that is already removed from the face-to-face setting. Very often those who communicate online identify with multiple frames of reference. They note that Hofstede's framework and to a lesser extent Hall's (1976, 1984) conceptualization of culture appear to be limited to national cultural differences and thus less well-suited for understanding and researching the multiple cultural differences within nation-states, including the 'third' or hybrid identities that are themselves fostered by the cultural flows facilitated by the Internet and the web.

Despite the criticism, we found Hall's (1976, 1984) conceptualization of high context and low context communication styles, and implied indirect and direct communication styles, useful for analyzing cultural differences in communication online. In both Moroccan and Sri Lankan cultures, context is important to understanding a message and its connotations. Many Moroccans and Sri Lankans adopt indirect communication styles in face-to-face communication. Therefore, Hall's conceptualization helped us to analyze if there were changes in communication styles when participants interacted online, or whether they were using the same communication styles online as they would use face-to-face.

As we explore how cultural variability plays a role in online communication, 'the variation within a culture in terms of situations, individuals, and socioeconomic status may account for as much or more of the variation in intercultural interpretations of messages as does the difference between the cultures of the individuals involved' (Rogers et al., 1999, p. 96). Kincaid (1987) has shown the shortcomings of Western approaches to understanding cultural differences in communication processes. Miike (2000) points out three important themes that emerge in establishing an Asian paradigm of communication: relationality, circularity, and harmony, with the underlying assumptions that (a) communication takes place in 'contexts' of various relationships, (b) the communicator is both active and passive in multiple contexts, and (c) mutual adaptation is of central importance as adaptation is the key to harmonious communication and relationships.

In this regard, it is worthwhile to consider the model developed by Shaw and Barrett-

Power (1998), which provides a detailed and precise mapping of the elements that constitute cultural differences by stressing the importance of considering the impact of both apparent and less visible aspects of cultural differences. The model differentiates between two sources of cultural differences - readily detectable attributes such as age, gender, or national/ethnic origin, and underlying attributes, such as values, perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, conflict resolution styles, socioeconomic and personal status, education, human capital assets, past work experiences, and personal expectations.

With this understanding of the myriad ways in which cultural variability can be observed, and interpreted, we tried to come to terms with the complexity of culture online, by defining it from the perspective of the Internet as a culture in its own right blurring the boundaries between the real and virtual worlds. Creating and participating in new communities is one of the primary pleasures people are taking in CMC (Baym, 1995). Reid (1995) notes that the conventions of CMC, enable users to weave a web of communication that ties each person into a sociocultural context. 'This web of verbal and textual significances that are substitutes for and yet distinct from the networks of meaning of the wider community binds users into a common culture whose specialized meanings allow the sharing of imagined realities' (p. 183). Therefore, we adopted the definition of 'idioculture' developed by Gary Alan Fine and cited by Cole (2007) as our definition of culture online:

An idioculture is a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction.

Members recognize that they share experiences, and these

experiences can be referred to with the expectation they will be understood by other members, thus being used to construct a reality for the participants (Fine, 1987, p.125).

This definition accommodates the idea of culture as a locally emerging activity system involving a briefer stretch of history (Cole, 2007), and includes multiple cultural selves and hybrid identities on the Internet that interact with each other cross-culturally to form unique cultures of their own. The definition fits well with the ephemeral, fluid nature of the Internet which fuels the development of cybercultures, cultures that emerge among those who use the Internet to communicate, developing its own etiquette, norms, customs, ethics and mythology, just as an idioculture does. Along with this definition of culture online, we used frameworks for understanding cultural patterns developed by Sri Lankan researchers (Disanayaka, 1998; Wickramasinghe, 1997; Wickremasinghe, 2004), and Moroccan researchers (Graiouid, 2005; Mernissi, 1984; Sadiqi, 2003), to explore to what extent the larger sociocultural context of the participants in our study were reflected in their Internet communication.

Emerging Conceptual Framework

Through the qualitative ethnographic perspective and the inductive theory generation process employed in the preliminary data analysis, three major themes were identified to constitute a conceptual framework to explain the sociocultural context of Internet chat users in Morocco and Sri Lanka. The three themes were identity, gender, and language, interacting with each other in their expression in synchronous chat. Identity is expressed through language reflecting the gender roles either real or assumed in the online sociocultural context. Three properties emerged related to the expression of

identity. They were trust building, self-disclosure, and face negotiation. Gender differences were observed in the expression of identity, trust building, self-disclosure, and face negotiation. The following sections discuss these themes in detail.

Identity Online

In chat sessions, identity is expressed by asking for the communicator's ASL (Age, Sex and Location). Depending on the context, chatters either reveal their true identity, create a different identity, blend or communicate their identity using a pseudonym (referred to as an ID) that expresses their true or imagined character. The chatter uses this information to create an image about his/her interlocutor. Ahmed stated that the revelation of his identity depends on the first question. If he feels the chatter is truthful he would give his real name. On the other hand, Javad noted that it depends if he wants to play, amuse himself and have fun, or attempt a serious communication. He usually does not give his real identity. Joinson (2003) has observed that constructing identity through text provides opportunity for people to craft an identity that exists quite apart from the usual pressures of real life and impression management.

In both countries, chat is perceived as a playful activity, a form of entertainment, a therapeutic agent, and a game that does not require the disclosure of true identity from the beginning. It is also perceived as an addiction as many were described as 'chat addicts.' A participant from Sri Lanka describes the therapeutic nature of chat:

One of my females advised me to use Chat when I was

undergoing a bad period. She said that chat would help me to boost myself. She told me how to login and how to reply. She advised me to give a false name. But I gave my true name; only the first name. I found that most of them use false names.

Chat addiction is also reported by Graioud (2005), whose study participants indicated that chat has become an essential part of life, and like morning coffee a chat session is necessary to start the day. Others reported parental concern for the amount of time and money spent in the cybercafés. For cybercafé owners, chat addicts are good clients since they generally spend more for their cybernetic journey. Asynchronous forum discussions on a topic of interest on the other hand, are regarded as more serious since they represent an arena for debating ideas and defending opinions. Therefore, respondents would feel more comfortable divulging their true credentials in a forum discussion.

The sociocultural context influences online communication as well as gets affected by communication in cyberspace and virtual environments. 'Whereas the Western concept of 'self' is based on the individual, the Moroccan concept of self is based on the Islamic notion of jama'ah 'community/group' and is, thus inherently plural' (Sadiqi, 2003, p. 65). One aspect of the collective self is the difficulty that Moroccans have in talking about themselves in public because it is generally considered in Moroccan society as 'lack of modesty' (p. 67). Sadiqi notes that the language of introductions reveals many aspects of a Moroccan's self. Introductions

involve an interplay of cultural, social, situational, and identity variables which range from sex, local geographical origin, class, setting, participants, age, and self interest. Given this sociocultural context it was interesting to observe the freedom with which many Moroccans played with their identity online.

It appears that of the three elements, age and sex are more important than location. Hamid gives his real age and sex. 'If the other person is not interested in your location, you do not tell.' Giving the location can sometimes hinder access to chatters. Lal, a Sri Lankan male noted that although he wanted to chat with Western females, they would not respond, only women from the Philippines did.

Cultural and social stereotyping occurs through names, nicknames, and pseudonyms. Mohammed used to have an ID 'Mohammed', but decided to change it because when he entered American and British chat rooms, he was accused of terrorism and was verbally assaulted. He feels his new ID 'green Python' is attractive enough to gain access to people. Other IDs used by female participants included: 'Scarlet', 'Diva', and 'Tzay'. Sarath, a Sri Lankan male, noted that to appeal to different audiences, he changes his identity. As in this instance, disclosing real names that are strongly associated with a religious, racial, or ethnic group could hinder communication online, whereas a nickname can enable a chatter to stay in an online relationship and probably build social presence through other means such as ideas, and taste (Gunawardena, et al., 2006). Continual construction and reconstruction of self-identity requires fluidity during virtual interactions (Khalsa, 2007), and may influence the way self and group identity is perceived during team interactions in online

communities.

Discussing how CMC and cybercafé culture are appropriated by individuals and groups in Morocco, Graioud (2005) argues that CMC mediates the construction of cybernetic identities and promotes the rehearsal of invented social and gender relations. This inventive accommodation of the Internet referred to as 'virtual h'rig' in Morocco makes computer-mediated interaction especially through chat and asynchronous discussion groups act as a contradiction to dominant patriarchal and conservative power structures. He points out that cyber interaction is contributing to the expansion of the public sphere in Morocco, and that the construction of 'cybernetic identities provides disenfranchised communities with a resistance space to deal with global exclusion and marginalization' (p. 59). In the tradition bound, isolated, impoverished, village of Ainleuh in Morocco, many of the women were looking for relationships with foreigners and Moroccans outside their community as a form of escape. Therefore, construction of identity on the Internet and the anonymity afforded by the medium will pave the way for marginalized individuals to express their ideas freely within an online community.

Building Trust

Identity is closely linked to building trust. Many will not reveal their true identity until they can trust the other person. From the initial encounter chatters spend their time trying to determine the trustworthiness of the other. Chatters use several

techniques to establish the trustworthiness of the other before revealing true identity. The most common trust building technique is to ask a series of questions in the initial online contact and ask the same questions again later to determine the consistency or inconsistency in the answers. Many mentioned time as an important factor for building trust. This is clear in the technique of using questions over time and repeating them to establish continuity and sameness.

If in the same country, chatters give out their mobile phone numbers in order to verify the trustworthiness of the other. Most respondents prefer e-mail when the online relationship gets longer and stronger. They feel that email communication is more 'serious' and 'honest' than chat. Another advantage of e-mail is that there is less time pressure to answer immediately. Some cannot write fast and this can affect the flow of communication and even the chatter's interest. Therefore, the speed of writing can be a factor in establishing trust. The use of mobile phones and e-mail is significant because it suggests the ways in which chatters view the development of cyber relationships and how they 'heirarchize' the methods of communication: Chatting – low risk and easy to dismiss; email - more personal involving larger risk; mobile phones - higher risk, requiring a degree of trust.

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure emerged as a factor related to trust building and expression of identity. Many participants indicated that the trustworthiness of the other is expressed through disclosure of private life. They insist on the importance of personal experiences, intimate problems as well as ideas to get to know each other better.

Anonymity increases the ability to self-disclose. Joinson (2003) confirms this finding by citing studies which show that visually anonymous CMC leads to higher levels of self-disclosure. Where there is an unequal distribution of power in society such as in Sri Lanka and Morocco, online communication equalizes participants. Respondents felt that talking online can break barriers to communication between people of different classes, professions, and sexes. Anonymity also encourages relationships that are superficial. A male participant noted that it is not necessary to reveal the truth, because he does not have an intention of continuing the friendship. When trust is established, participants are more likely to reveal their true identity.

Face Negotiation

Face is an identity phenomenon. Ting-Toomey (1994) defines face as 'the presentation of a civilized front to another individual within the webs of interconnected relationships in a particular culture' (p. 1). For our study, we defined face as an individual's claimed conception of his/her positive self image within interpersonal online interactions. Face negotiation was defined as the individual's intentions to portray his/her self image in a positive manner to others by utilizing verbal, nonverbal, and self-representation methods to support his/her conception of face.

In online chat sessions, the nature of the relationship determines reactions to insults and the negotiation of face. Chatters will close the window if the relationship is weak and employ a variety of techniques to resolve misunderstandings, and negotiate face if the relationship is stronger. A 35 year old Sri Lankan male respondent observed: It depends on the friendship. If the friendship is new then you are not bothered. If the

friendship is deep then you feel that the person is next you. In that instance you would like to continue the friendship.'

Generally, many respondents would first seek an explanation and then decide on other courses of action, such as shutting down the communication, ignoring the person, insulting back, or asking for an apology. An apology is requested if the person or the relationship is valued. E-mail is resorted to in order to clarify the situation, settle misunderstandings and present apologies. Email is preferable if the relationship has been going on for a long time and if the insulted person thinks that it is not intentional but a result of a misunderstanding.

According to Oetzel et al. (2000), three distinct factors are consistent with categorizations of face concerns in face negotiation: 1) dominating facework behavior, 2) avoiding facework behavior, and 3) integrating facework behavior. The first factor, dominating facework behavior, emphasizes the importance of asserting and defending one's face or self-interest with the use of direct tactics to threaten the other party's face in order to defeat the other person for self-gain. This behavior is seen in individuals who are aggressively trying to 'win the conflict' and do not care about the other's face. The second factor, avoiding facework behavior, emphasizes obliging or saving the face of the other party involved in the conflict in order not to embarrass the other person's face directly. This behavior is seen in individuals who do not want to deal directly with the conflict, or are concerned with maintaining relational harmony. The third factor, integrating facework behavior, emphasizes a mutual concern for both self-face and other-face by compromising or discussing the

conflict in private. This behavior is seen in individuals who are interested in maintaining self- and other-face while dealing directly with the conflict in a private setting. Gunawardena et al. (2002) supported these categorizations for the online context from their research with ethnically diverse participants.

The ability to confront people and read their faces is not possible while chatting unless there is a camera. In Morocco and Sri Lanka, face-to-face communication patterns are more high context and less direct than in the United States. It is generally difficult to communicate context in the online medium. In Morocco, for example, there are many taboos and behaviors which imply “hchouma” or “shame” and which thus should be avoided during communication. Many questions do not get answered because chatters cannot be very direct and tell them to the face of the other. This opens up room for interpretation and sometimes miscommunication. Sadiqi (2003) observes that the concept of collective self is so deep in the Moroccan psyche that an individual’s self-image is not cultivated internally, but derives from others’ opinions and attitudes which is manifested clearly in the concept of 'hchouma' or 'shame' which may be defined as the 'fear of losing face in front of others' (p. 67). This explains the heavy pressure within the Moroccan family to protect all its members because bad behavior from one member affects the reputation of all. To avoid 'shame' Moroccans may refrain from admitting blatant realities in public if they involve a loss of face.

According to Ting-Toomey (1988), low-context cultures emphasize individual identity, self-face concern, and direct verbal and nonverbal expression. In contrast,

high-context cultures emphasize group identity, other-face concern, and indirect verbal and nonverbal expression. However when online, whether a person is from a high-context or low-context culture does not matter as anonymity is a factor in the attempt to negotiate face. The elimination of title, gender, and other status cues can create a more neutral atmosphere. If the person who threatens face is a stranger, he or she will be ignored.

Therefore, attempts to negotiate face depend on the strength of the relationship that has been built. Face saving strategies are adopted when there is a bond and when there is an interest in maintaining the relationship. If not, in the real-time world of chat, the general tendency is to close the window and forget the person.

Gender Online

The results of our analyses indicated that men and women employ different communication styles when chatting. Men and women value different forms of communication and different kinds of online interactions. The online environment gives them the anonymity and freedom to act out gender roles and experiment with gender identity.

Graiouid (2005) observes that in order to understand reconstruction of gender relations on the Internet, it is important to consider the norms that rule the distribution of space in Moroccan society. In Moroccan society, interaction between men and women is produced and reconstructed through a hierarchical mapping of space. Citing the work of Mernissi, Graiouid points out how this gender divide is institutionalized

through a strict definition of spatial practices: '(strict) space boundaries divide Moroccan society into sub-universes: the universe of men, the Umma (nation) universe of religion and power and the universe of sexuality and the family (Mernissi, 1975, p. 81).' Sadiqi (2003) affirms this dichotomy between public and private space in Morocco, where public space is the street and the market place, the domain of men, and private space is the home where women live. In general, though women have access to public spaces, stepping out into the street is still felt by many as an act of trespassing into a hostile male domain. Sadiqi further elaborates that Moroccan culture is of a type that strongly constrains the behavior of men and women and lists eight influences on gender perception, gender subversion, and language use: (i) history, (ii) geography, (iii) Islam, (iv) orality, (v) multilingualism, (vi) social organization, (vii) economic status, and (viii) political system. Given this sociocultural context, Internet communication provides a tremendous opportunity to create virtual identities that can breach the dichotomy of public and private space that exists in Moroccan society. Graioud (2005) notes that this may explain why female chatters enjoy the anonymity of the World Wide Web, which allows them to build relationships without compromising themselves.

Gender stereotypes prevail in the creation of identity as reflected in the following perspectives from Moroccan participants. Jamal admits that it is easy to disguise himself as a woman. He tries to describe the experience of a woman chatting with a man but thinks it is a game that is short. In posing as a woman, he talks about women's topics such as dress and fashion. Hamid thinks that women rarely discuss social issues. They are mostly interested in personal experiences, and love affairs. When asked about how he can tell if a man is posing as a woman, he says that

exaggeration is what gives away a man posing as a woman. For example, somebody you have known for a short time saying that 'they cannot live without you or that they love you.' is likely to be male. Hassan thinks that women tend to discuss their daily schedules and errands more than men. He thinks that chat is like a game that could turn into a healthy relationship or end quickly.

Analysis of interviews from Sri Lanka also indicated gender differences in the expression of identity. Generally males disclose their true identity (ASL - Age, Sex, Location) from the start irrespective of the purpose of the communication (chat or academic forums). A 23 year old male student observed:

I'll tell that I am a webmaster from Sri Lanka and this is my website. I also tell my age and gender. Usually when males get to know that I am a male, they won't continue. But if someone is interested in my research area then they will continue.
Usually chatting among males is less. But females prefer to chat with females.

Sri Lankan females are much more cautious than males. They do not reveal their true identity in unknown communities. They either give only the first name or use a pseudonym and do not reveal much personal information. Once they establish the relationship then they will talk more about their personal lives. On the other hand, if females are chatting to get academic help, then, they reveal their true identity. A 34 year old female responded:

I give my name, interests and field. Don't say the age and

location. If I want to get information then I give the name of the institution. If they ask personal information, then, I ignore those and if that person is a difficult one, then block the use.

A majority of females prefer to communicate only with females. They are reluctant to talk with unknown male counterparts unless they have been introduced by one of their friends or relations reflecting social norms and practices. Most of them chat with local and Asian communities as they feel more secure communicating with them. A 26 year old female observed:

I will reveal about myself; true name, country, my age and sex. I usually log on to the Asian countries' chatting rooms. I feel that it is not dangerous to chat with the Asians and I feel that they are not bad compared to other western countries. So I will reveal my own identity.

Gender differences emerged in establishing social presence. Many felt that you need to choose adequate and suitable topics when talking with someone of the opposite sex. Tone is also important. Male participants claim that they do not talk in the same way to males and females. With females they are more cautious and more flattering. As to communicating with females, most respondents suggest that they depend on establishing social presence by asking about tastes in music, movies, reading, sports and dress styles. They feel that women tend to communicate their presence through description of their daily lives and their personal problems. When males chat with other males, subjects of discussion tend to be about political, social, and abstract

problems.

Preferences for chat partners differed. Moroccan men were mostly interested in chatting with Western girls, and Moroccan women mostly interested in men outside Morocco, predominantly Europe. Graiouid (2005) points out that the negative image Moroccan female chat users have of Moroccan males partly accounts for their interests in correspondents from other countries. Female informants in his study, consider Moroccan male chat users to be poorly conversant with the etiquette of interaction and discussion. In general, they hold against them a lack of genuine commitment to the virtual relationships they start and a general absence of tact and sensitivity. Graiouid (2005) presents further insights on this issue from his cybercafé research in Morocco. He notes that while European chatrooms where males and females intermingle freely are very popular with Moroccans, most of his female informants stated that they are also regulars at www.arabia.com because it is the congregation site for Arabs from different geographic locations. According to his informants, Moroccan female chat users prefer cybernetic correspondence with fellow Muslims from Europe or North America, because in case the virtual interaction develops into a more serious relationship it would be ethically viable and socially more acceptable for them to wed a Muslim. This is why most of them prefer not to commit to a correspondence when the user's identity does not correspond to the profile they seek. He further discusses his visit to a cybercafé located near a mosque in Rabat, the capital city of Morocco, where at the call for prayer, chatters exit the 'profane' World Wide Web and cross over to the sacred realm of the mosque. These examples indicate that while the invention of identity and openness of communication in synchronous chats can be a liberating experience, there is still the underlying

influence of sociocultural norms and conventions in traditional society, which the chat communicants find difficult to overcome.

Unlike the Moroccans who sought European chatrooms in this study, many Sri Lankan men and women spent their time chatting with the opposite sex within the same country. A Sri Lankan male noted that he prefers to discuss his personal problems with females as they are apt to give better advice than a male. Sri Lankans reported less chatting among males, whereas females prefer to chat with females.

These findings indicate differences in the ways men and women interact online. Women and men do exhibit different styles in posting to the Internet, contrary to the claim that CMC neutralizes distinctions of gender.

Gender and Self-Disclosure

When trust is established, participants are more likely to reveal their true identity. Generally, both females and males have reservations when revealing their personal details to an unknown group of people. Both do not reveal their personal information till they build up their relationship. Building up this relationship takes time with several messages (some times about 3 months). The basis is mere instinct, the 'feeling' that they get from reading messages, the 'feel' of the other or 'social presence' in mediated communication. Once they feel that the person is 'genuine' then, they start revealing their personal details. A 23 year old female observed: 'If I feel that this person is a genuine person and could be trusted then I reveal myself. I prefer if that person is open with me.' Females are very cautious of the way they write and also

expect respect from others. Manel, a 27 year old female observed: 'Yes, I am very cautious. I won't reveal my personal information. I think twice and write. It's too much effort from my part to write answers like this and is an additional burden for me.' Sri Lankan women were not comfortable with self-disclosure, hardly ever divulging information on private life in a chat session.

Ramani, a 34 year old Sri Lankan female responded :

Some ask unnecessary questions – comment on your figure, mention about body parts etc. We are not used to those. It's our culture. I know this is normal to the rest of the world. So I take precautions and tell them that I am not that sort of lady. Let them respect us as well.

Some males do not hesitate to place their own photograph on the web. One particular male uses different font sizes and colors to make it more attractive: 'I use a webcam and give a profile with the picture. I usually use 14-16 font with shaded colors.'

Females hardly ever send their photographs. But some who are familiar with computers use different fonts, colors and emoticons (smileys) when they send messages. 'I use emoticons. Those are quick. Use font like comic sans for friends and Arial and Centre Gothic with official group. Use short cuts like Y, U etc; Different techniques for different people.' Chat users have developed various conventions to present their identity and persona in chat sessions and will reveal their true identity depending on the context. Gender and Face Negotiation

Herring (1994) illustrates gender differences in face negotiation from her study sample. The female style takes into consideration the "face" wants of the addressee -- specifically, the desire of the addressee to feel ratified and liked (e.g. by expressions of appreciation) and her desire not to be imposed upon (e.g. by absolute assertions that don't allow alternative views). The male style, in contrast, confronts and threatens the addressee's "face" in the process of engaging him in agonistic debate.

Both female and male respondents in our study noted that they take extra care to resolve their online misunderstandings and negotiate face if the relationship is strong. If they fail online, they will telephone and explain the situation. Females are more likely to negotiate even when the relationship is not that strong. Usually males chat for entertainment and they do not expect long lasting relationships online. Therefore, when there is a misunderstanding and misinterpretation, they do not make an extra attempt to resolve the conflict. On the other hand, females take the extra effort to

resolve the misunderstanding. Davidson et al. (2002) support this finding by citing research on virtual interactions that indicates women are more relational than men -- women are more likely to approach the world as an individual within a social network; more likely to acquire skills in developing and sustaining personal connections, and more likely to seek out situations and develop behaviors that foster relationships.

Gender and Online Harassment

Harassment online emerged as an issue of concern related to gender and the expression of identity. A female Moroccan participant described how she used to give her true credentials at first and got in trouble and then changed her approach and started to claim a different identity, a French girl, when she enters chat rooms in order to avoid being harassed. Another female Moroccan participant noted that she used to present herself by giving her real name and real information. Then a friend told her how stupid that is, 'because it is different, a man can feel alright about giving his real information but a woman can't.' Because she is a girl, she now asks chatters to guess her name. If the chatter is from Europe or America she gives him her real name, but not if he is from Morocco. Women tend to hide their identities more because they will be targeted by chatters and harassed. Females were more cautious than males in revealing their identity online for fear of being harassed. This is a cultural feature of online communication that transcends nationality. Harassment online is a serious concern not only for women but also for children.

The Language of Chat

Innovations in language forms to adapt to communication via chat, was one of the most interesting findings of this study. While the predominant language of chat in Morocco was French and in Sri Lanka, English, participants interjected the native language using the Latin keyboard to increase their level of social presence and connectedness when they were chatting with people who understood the native language.

Moroccan Arabic is an oral language and its transliteration in Latin script enabled participants to express their affective, emotional self to connect with the other through text-based communication. Hassan said he can convey his true feelings by using Moroccan Arabic expressions when the other party knows it.

Examples of Moroccan Arabic written in Latin script in chat sessions and in text messaging (SMS) follow:

1. MNIN DEFNOU'H MA ZA 'ROU'H ('Since they buried him, they forgot about him,' an expression which means 'After you used me, you forgot me.' This is a common expression written in numbers, (3 7 9) which carries a similar meaning to: 'Why have you not kept in touch with me?')

2. Numbers used to express Arabic characters and sounds

3 → ع (ain)

9 → ق (kah)

8 → ◦ (hah)

3. Salam 3alikoum ! (Greeting)

These examples show conventions that chatters have adopted for chat and SMS to express cultural understanding in written form through the creation of commonly understood ways of symbolizing social and emotional meaning and contexts. As Sadiqi (2003) observes orality is an important component of Moroccan culture, speech carries greater significance than writing in regulating everyday life, as communication is mainly channeled through unwritten languages. Chatters have therefore developed conventions to express the nuances of unwritten languages in a written medium.

Mounia chats in English and French and switches to French when she gets angry. She does not insult in English but responds in French. She felt that insulting in Moroccan Arabic is 'low' and despicable, but insulting in French is acceptable. Many who were fluent in French and Moroccan Arabic indicated that French would be the language to use for insults as insulting in Arabic would lower their status. For Mustapha, changing languages would mean that he is weak and that he is not courageous, so, he would continue in the same language. Khalid sometimes uses Moroccan Arabic because expressions are shorter than French. For example, 'how are you?' in Arabic is 'ki dayer?' Chatters mix both French, a written language and Moroccan Arabic, an oral language if their communicants understand both languages. These are examples of code-switching which is a common practice in a multilingual society like Morocco. 'Code-switching is the use of more than one, usually two, languages or 'codes'

simultaneously' (Sadiqi, 2003, p. 258). Both men and women use code-switching in their everyday conversations in Morocco, but code switching is more associated with women than with men. Sadiqi observes that code-switching indicates social attributes and composite identities. The switching of Berber and Moroccan Arabic is both a rural and an urban phenomenon and involves literate and non-literate speakers as Moroccan Arabic and Berber are non-written mother tongues, whereas switching of Moroccan Arabic and French, and switching of Berber and French are typically urban and involve educated speakers only. While the switching of Berber and Moroccan Arabic is seen in all social classes, switching of Moroccan Arabic and French is more characteristic of middle and upper classes.

Similar innovations in the use of native languages via the Latin keyboard was observed in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, the predominant chat language is English for the Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims. Sri Lankan English, the variety of English spoken in Sri Lanka is different from that spoken in Britain and other parts of the world because of the influences the native languages have exerted on the structure of English (Disanayaka, 1998). Chatters often communicate by writing their native language using the English alphabet. Sinhala and Tamil are phonetic languages, which can be written using the English alphabet and Latin keyboard. Perhaps the technique the chatters have adopted to transliterate their native language using the English Alphabet and the Latin keyboard maybe one way to solve the language problem in Sri Lanka. Both Sinhala and Tamil chatters can learn about each other's language without having to learn a new alphabet and a new script if they are able to write their language in English. Sri Lankans also used code switching, the mixture of English and Sinhala,

for example. Ramani, explained that writing in Sinhala generates more feeling than writing in English.

Examples of Sinhala written in English include:

1. Ayubowan – How are you?
2. Paw – I feel sorry for you

Examples of Tamil written in English include:

Aniyayam - what a waste!

Sri Lankans also felt that phrases such as 'machan' which means 'buddy' when written in English generate closeness and social presence.

The level of language and the quality of opinions help chatters in Morocco build each other's profiles. Kenza relies on language (idiomatic expressions such as the ones associated with native French speakers) to generate social presence. Abdelali examines the English used by chatters and the amount of mistakes made especially if the person claims to be from an English speaking country such as the U.K. or U.S.A. In this case, the level and type of language use can be a factor in creating credibility.

Chatters enhance their social presence by using other media such as mobile phones and webcams. It was fairly common to see chatters talking to the same person on the mobile phone while chatting online. Some Moroccans spoke Arabic on the mobile phone and French online indicating their versatility in moving between different languages. The use of the two types of media enhanced their presence and connection

with each other.

Some chatters used emoticons (icons that express emotion) or smileys to enhance their presence and express their emotions. Others stated that they use text to express their emotions. Hamid expresses his personae through icons. He is very interested in showing that he is a man and that he is Moroccan, and that in Morocco the man is the one that decides for the woman. When asked if women continue to keep talking to him after this admission, he said that they keep on the discussion to know more about his perspectives and that it is a good way to exchange cultural aspects about the topic.

In analyzing communication conventions online, it is evident that chatters have developed unique forms of textual language and visual expressions to communicate their ideas and feelings through a new medium. They bring with them the conventions of their native language, which embody cultural traits as well as their prior use of the second language, English or French. 'Language and culture develop together.

Language is an essential part of culture' (Wickramasinghe, 1997, p. 25). This implies that as online learning cultures develop, students and facilitators will have to adjust to new modes of communication and interaction. Since language is an important factor in the negotiation of meaning in an online community, it is important to develop theoretical models of language to guide future practice (Tusting, 2005). 'An important step towards cross-cultural understanding could therefore be the development of policies and practices which allow for an element of multi-lingual communication, making space for the expression of social behavior free of the constraints of operating in a second language' (Goodfellow, et al., 2001, p. 80).

Implications for Online Learning Communities

We now address the implications we can draw from these findings of informal synchronous communication within two different cultural contexts for the development of online learning communities. We found that CMC is not a mere neutral technological innovation but a practice that is affected by the culture and society of its users. As discussed earlier, we used the definition of 'idioculture,' developed by Fine (cited in Cole, 2007) as a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction, as a framework for examining culture online. This definition enabled us to examine online culture as a unique phenomenon in its own right. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: identity, gender, and language, interacting with each other in their expression in synchronous chat. Given the unique online cultures developed by interacting groups, and the themes that emerged, we draw the following implications for learning cultures.

1. The creation of identity and playing with identity online, enables a participant to learn about herself/himself. It is a psychological tool that enables one to experience the real world in a new way. The ability to change one's environment and try out different ways of being will lend itself well to role play and computer simulations as favored learning methods in online learning communities.
2. Expression of identity through introductions is important for relationship building in online learning communities. However, self-disclosure may not be easy for some participants. Since identity is expressed in different ways by diverse individuals, careful attention must be given to how self-presentation

and introductions are done online. Therefore, rather than making self-introductions an open-ended activity, guidelines and protocols should be provided for how introductions should be done, and the type of information desired, also allowing for some degree of anonymity. An alternative technique might be to have participants introduce each other online, rather than themselves. Introductions also assist in the building of social presence, or the feeling that the other is a real person when communication is mediated by the computer.

3. Since posting photographs with introductions can lead to stereotyping and reduce the anonymity that will make a learning community a level playing field, it is important to devise other means of self-disclosure, especially to provide a comfort zone for women who are more reluctant to self disclose to an unknown community, and to maintain social equality of the group. For example, participants could be asked to post a picture or image that represents them with an explanation as to why the picture/image represents them.
4. Building trust and relationships are crucial for the health and well being of a learning community. Trust building group activities should be conducted during pre-course activities or during the first two weeks of an academic course to help participants build trust and become comfortable with each other.
5. Attempts to negotiate face and resolve conflict depends on the strength of the relationship that has been built. Therefore, face saving strategies should be part of the communication protocols developed for online learning communities. Learners should be encouraged to use e-mail to resolve misunderstandings and post mutually agreed on understanding for the group

when conflict situations arise. Women are more likely to make an attempt to resolve misunderstandings and negotiate face and should be encouraged to take up moderating roles in team interactions.

6. Communication protocols developed for online learning communities need to alert participants to gender differences in communication patterns.
7. Context is important to understanding messages and therefore participants should be encouraged to provide the context to enable the deciphering of messages communicated through an ephemeral and fluid medium.
8. Moderators or facilitators play an important role in relationship building and community building activities, and maintaining a safe and conducive environment for all participants, and therefore, should be present online frequently.
9. It is recommended that online designs allow for an element of multi-lingual communication, and diversity in the expression of English. This will promote cross-cultural understanding and a comfort zone in online communication.
10. In many developing countries, the Internet café maybe the only resource center where learners will gather to participate in online learning. Academic institutions wishing to provide access to learners in geographically isolated locations should make arrangements with Internet cafés to provide technology access and resources necessary for their academic programs.

These implications and guidelines will hopefully lead to the design of online learning environments that foster community and knowledge building. Issues of identity, gender, and language will continue to provide impetus for further research in our efforts to understand the learning cultures that develop in these environments.

Acknowledgements

This research study was supported by a Fulbright Regional Research Scholarship awarded to the principal author by the United States Department of State, 2004-2005.

References

- Baym, N. K. (1995), 'The emergence of community in computer-mediated communication', in S. G. Jones (ed), CyberSociety: Computer-mediated Communication and Community, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 138-163.
- Carbaugh, D. (2007), 'Commentary – from cognitive dichotomies to cultural discourses: Hofstede, Fougera and Moulettes in conversation'. Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 2, (1), 20-22.
- Charmaz, K. (2003), 'Grounded theory: objectivist and constructivist methods', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 249-290.
- Cole, M. and Engestrom, Y. (2007), 'Cultural-historical approaches to designing for development', in J. Valsiner and A. Rosa (eds), The Cambridge Handbook of Sociocultural Psychology, NY: Cambridge University Press, pp. 484-507.
- Davidson, A. L. and Schofield, J. W. (2002), 'Female voices in virtual reality: Drawing young girls into an online world', in K.A. Renninger and W. Shumar (eds), Building Virtual Communities: Learning and Change in Cyberspace, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, pp. 34-59.
- Disanayaka, J. B. (1998), Understanding the Sinhalese. Wellampitiya, Sri Lanka: Chatura Printers.

Ellerman, E. (2007), 'The Internet in context', in J. Gackenbach, (ed), Psychology and the Internet: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Transpersonal Implications (2nd edn). Burlington, MA: Academic Press, pp. 11-33.

Ess, C. and Sudweeks, F. (2005), 'Culture and computer-mediated communication: toward new understandings'. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 11, (1), article 9, Retrieved February 24, 2008, from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue1/ess.html>.

Faiola, A. and Matei, S. A. (2005), 'Cultural cognitive style and web design: Beyond a behavioral inquiry into computer-mediated communication, Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 11, (1), article 18, <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue1/faiola.html>.

Fine, G. A. (1987), With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fougere, M. and Moulettes, A. (2007), 'The construction of the modern west and the backward rest: studying the discourse of Hofstede's culture's consequences'. Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 2, (1), 1-19.

Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L. (1967), The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. Chicago: Aldine.

Goodfellow, R. Lea, M. Gonzalez, F. and Mason, R. (2001), 'Opportunity and e-quality: intercultural and linguistic issues in global online learning'. Distance Education, 22, (1), 65-84.

Graiouid, S. (2005), 'Social exile and virtual *H'rig*: computer-mediated interaction and cybercafé culture in Morocco', in M. Wiberg (eds), The Interaction Society: Practice, Theories, and Supportive Technologies, Pennsylvania: Idea Group, pp. 57-92.

- Gunawardena, C. N. Bouachrine, F. Idrissi Alami, A. Jayatilleke, G. (2006), 'Cultural perspectives on social presence: A study of online chatting in Morocco and Sri Lanka', A research paper presented at the American Educational Research Association 2006 Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA., April 7-11, 2006.
- Gunawardena, C. N. Walsh, S. L. Reddinger, L. Gregory, E. Lake, Y. and Davies, A. (2002), 'Negotiating "face" in a non-face-to-face learning environment', in F. Sudweeks and C. Ess (eds), Proceedings Cultural Attitudes Towards Communication and Technology, University of Montreal, Canada, pp. 89-106.
- Hall, E. T. (1984), The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time. Anchor Press, Garden City, N.Y.
- Hall, E. T. (1976), Beyond Culture. Anchor Books, Garden City, N.Y.
- Herring, S. (1994), 'Gender differences in computer-mediated communication: bringing familiar baggage to the new frontier', keynote talk at panel entitled "Making the Net*Work*: Is there a Z39.50 in gender communication?" American Library Association Annual Convention, Miami, June 27, 1994. Copyright 1994 by Susan Herring, http://www.eff.org/Net_culture/Gender_issues/cmc_and_gender.article.
- Hofstede, G. (1980), Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values. CA: Sage.
- Hofstede, G. (2001), Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations, (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Joinson, A. N. (2003), Understanding the Psychology of Internet Behavior: Virtual Worlds, Real Lives. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kim, M-S. (2007), 'Commentary: our culture, their culture and beyond: further thoughts on ethnocentrism in Hofstede's discourse'. Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 2, (1), 26-31.

- Kincaid, D. L. (1987). 'Communication East and West: Points of departure'. in D. L. Kincaid (ed), Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, pp. 331-340.
- Khalsa, D. K. (2007), 'Multi-cultural e-learning teamwork: social and cultural characteristics and influence', in A. Edmundson (ed), Globalized e-Learning Cultural Challenges, Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing, pp. 307-326.
- McLuhan, M. (1967), The medium is the message. NY: Bantam.
- Mernissi, F. (1975), Beyond the Veil. NY: Schenkman Publishing Company.
- Mernissi, F. (1984), Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society. New York: Schenkman Publishing Company.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998), Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Miike, Y. (2000, August), 'Toward an Asian standpoint of communication theory: Some initial assumptions', Paper presented at the Pacific and Asian Communication Association Convention, "Waves of Change: The Future of Scholarship in Communication and Culture" Honolulu: HI.
- Oetzel, J. G. Ting-Toomey, S. Yokochi, Y. Masumoto, T. and Takai, J. (2000), 'A typology of facework behaviors in conflicts with best friends and relative strangers'. Communication Quarterly, 4, 397-419.
- Reid, E. (1995), 'Virtual worlds: culture and imagination', in S. G. Jones (ed), CyberSociety: Computer-mediated Communication and Community, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 164-183.
- Rogers, E. M. and Steinfatt, T. M. (1999), Intercultural Communication. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Rowland, W. (1997). Spirit of the web: The age of information from telegraph to

Internet. Toronto: Somerville House.

Sadiqi, F. (2003), Women, Gender and Language in Morocco. (Women and Gender, The Middle East and the Islamic World, v.1). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

Shaw, J. B. and Barrett-Power, E. (1998), 'The effects of diversity on small work group process and performance'. Human Relations, 5, (10), 1307-1325.

Shuter, R. (1990), 'The centrality of culture'. The Southern Communication Journal, 55, 237-249.

Silva, N. (ed) (2004), The Hybrid Island: Culture Crossings and the Invention of Identity in Sri Lanka. Social Scientists' Association, Sri Lanka.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998), Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1988), 'Intercultural conflict style: a face-negotiation theory', in Y. Y. Kim and W. B. Gudykunst (eds), Theories in Intercultural Communication, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 213-235.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1994), 'Face and facework: an introduction', in S. Ting-Toomey (eds), The Challenge of Facework: Cross-cultural and Interpersonal Issues, Albany, NY: State University NY Press, pp. 1-14.

Tusting, K. (2005), 'Language and power in communities of practice', in D. Barton and K. Tusting (eds), Beyond communities of practice: Language, power and social context. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 36-54.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978), Mind in Society. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Walther, J. B., and Parks, M. R. (2002). 'Cues filtered out, cues filtered in: Computer-mediated communication and relationships', in M. Knapp and J. A. Daly (Eds.), Handbook of interpersonal communication, (3rd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 529-561.

Wickramasinghe, M. (1997), Sinhala Language and Culture, Buddhism and Art.

Dehiwala, Sri Lanka: Tisara Prakasakayo Ltd.

Wickremasinghe, N. (2004), 'Identity marks: Sri Lanka women', in K. Waleboda (ed), Gender and Media, University of Colombo: Journalism Unit, pp. 19-30.

Author Contact Information

Charlotte N. Gunawardena, Ph.D,
Professor
Organizational Learning and Instructional Technology Program
College of Education
MSC05-3040
1 University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001
U.S.A.
Phone: 505-277-5046
lan@unm.edu

Gayathri Jayatilleke, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer
Educational Technology Division
Open University of Sri Lanka
Nawala, Sri Lanka
Tel: +94-11-2853975
bgjay@ou.ac.lk

Ahmed Idrissi Alami, PhD
Assistant Professor and Director of of the Arabic Program
Department of Foreign languages and Literatures
College of Liberal Arts
Purdue University, Indiana, U.S.A.
aidrissi4@yahoo.com

Fadwa Bouachrine, M.A.
Web Management Officer
Al-Akawayn University
P.O. Box 104
Avenue Hassan II
Ifrane 53000
Morocco
Phone: +212 (0) 55 86 20 76
F. Bouachrine@au.ma