Chapter 1
A Wiki Platform for Language and Intercultural Communication

Minjie Xing
University of Manchester, UK

Bin Zou
Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

Dongshuo Wang
University of Manchester, UK

ABSTRACT
This chapter studies a wiki project that electronically links English students learning Business Chinese in the UK and Chinese students learning Business English in China. The focus is placed upon enhancing English/Chinese language skills and intercultural communication competence. Students’ messages on the wiki illustrate that cultural values and cultural competence are important parts of business communication. The results of a questionnaire survey and a focus group interview indicate that the interaction between language learners and native speakers not only helped students improve each other’s language, but also allowed them to understand the business norms and behaviours in another culture. The chapter concludes with a proposal that wikis can be a platform for enhancing language output and intercultural communication competence, if well designed and monitored.

INTRODUCTION
In the modern Web-connected world, companies are becoming more and more globalized physically and virtually. Globalized business brings with it the changing of business environments and the challenges of intercultural communication (Wangshington, Okora, & Thomas, 2012). The diversity of cultures in the global economy and the interaction between companies of different cultures can either facilitate or obstruct the operation of business, depending on business people’s foreign language skills and intercultural communication competence. Companies between
cultures need to develop mutual understanding to communicate effectively within varying linguistic and cultural contexts.

Consequently, companies increasingly require graduates to be able to demonstrate a proficient level of foreign language and intercultural communication competence. In addition, modern employees need to bring to employers their personal, culture-related and communicative competence, which form the basis for their proven ability to face substantial global challenges (Maarten & Manning, 2007). As Sapp (2004) pointed out, “learning intercultural communication skills is vital to our students’ success in the increasingly global economic arena in addition to encouraging the reduction of ethnocentrism and an increased value for diversity of all kinds; some of the inevitable challenges to these global partnerships include linguistic and cultural issues” (p. 268).

However, in most language departments at present, intercultural competence is still often neglected by teachers or learners and is not being sufficiently developed in curricula (Dervin, 2010). The increasing expectations that companies have of graduates creates the need for an intercultural communication competence-oriented redesign of learning activities in language programmes (Schneckenberg, Ehles, & Adelsberger, 2011). Such programs are proposed by Hawisher and Selfe (2000), Andrews (2001), and Bosley (2001), based on the assumption that international interaction and learning can be achieved with modern technology such as Web 2.0, which can create simulations of international learning environments (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Hung, 2011). Technology-facilitated programs for language skills and intercultural communication competence are called for (Andrew, 2011; Crossman, 2011). The present study is based on such as a program.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Intercultural communication competence is defined as the ability to act within a given context in a responsible and adequate way (Wang & Byram, 2011). Byram’s (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model presents a conceptual framework consisting of four interrelated components—knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness. To become competent intercultural communicators, language learners need to have knowledge of other cultures and possess the skills for smooth communication. Language learners need to be open-minded to understand the world from intercultural perspectives and with non-judgmental attitudes, and they need to be aware of cultural similarities and differences so as to be able to deal with situations where different cultures meet. As far as business exchange between China and the west is concerned, the following aspects need to be taken into consideration, because China is a country different from the west in many aspects and both western and Chinese people have to make a conscious effort to adjust their communication and business styles to compensate for the linguistic and cultural barriers.

**Individualism vs. Collectivism**

Individualism/collectivism refers to people looking after themselves and their immediate family only, versus people belonging to in-groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty (Gao & Prime, 2010). In individualistic cultures, people are ‘I’-conscious; self-actualisation is important, and one’s identity is in the person; while in collectivist cultures, people are ‘we’-conscious. Their identity is based on the social system to which they belong, emphasizing group interest, conformity, and harmony (Bond, 1991).

Western organizational culture in general values individualism, which emphasizes individual productivity, independence, competence, and achievement. The slogan of “be the best YOU can
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