



Sociocultural Influences on Communication Strategies in Synchronous Online ELF Video Discussions: Implications for Young Chinese Adults’ Language Learning

Hui Liu^a, Stefanie Pillai^{b,*}, Shin Yi Chew^c

^a S2034204@siswa.um.edu.my, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia
^b Stefanie@um.edu.my, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia
^c Chewshinyi@um.edu.my, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia
* Corresponding author, Stefanie@um.edu.my

APA Citation: Liu, H., Pillai, S., & Chew, S. Y. (2026). Sociocultural influences on communication strategies in synchronous online elf video discussions: Implications for young Chinese adults’ language learning. <i>LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network</i> , 19(2), 1128-1153. https://doi.org/10.70730/XQNB5280	
Received 23/03/2026 Received in revised form 07/07/2026 Accepted 12/07/2026	ABSTRACT This study investigates how young Chinese adults (YCAs) use communication strategies (CSs) under the influence of their sociocultural norms in synchronous online English as a lingua franca (ELF) video discussions. Adopting a mixed-methods approach combining video observations and stimulated recall interviews (SRIs), this study revealed a gap between the YCAs’ CS repertoire, which focused on self-monitoring, and the collaborative demands of ELF communication. Quantitative analysis indicates that YCAs relied heavily on self-monitoring CSs (e.g., fillers, self-repetition) to ensure linguistic accuracy but made limited use of other-initiated CSs for meaning negotiation and co-creation compared with their Malaysian

	peers. Qualitative analysis confirms that the YCAs' relatively passive use of interactional CSs was shaped by sociocultural concerns related to politeness and face-saving, which led to unequal interactional labor. The online context further amplified this sociocultural inhibition. This study identifies a politeness dilemma: sociocultural obligations to maintain harmony may hinder effective ELF communication. The findings, therefore, challenge the common assumption of proactive collaboration in ELF contexts. Pedagogical interventions should instead reframe meaning negotiations, which tend to be perceived as a face-threatening imposition, as a constructive and collaborative communicative resource. Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), communication strategies (CSs), politeness, face-saving, young Chinese adults
--	---

Introduction

This statement by a young Chinese adult (YCA) was captured during the stimulated recall interview (SRI) of this study. It illustrates a scenario in which the speaker deliberately chooses silence over clarity when unable to understand other interlocutors during synchronous online English as a lingua franca (ELF) video discussions. However, ELF studies consistently emphasize that participants frequently employ various communication strategies (CSs) to facilitate mutual understanding (Yu & Kaur, 2024). Herein lies the conflict in which the need for mutual understanding may be compromised by sociocultural expectations of politeness and face-saving. When it comes to interpersonal communication, maintaining a polite and respectful communication environment is deemed essential for most Chinese speakers (Chen, 2023). This communicative dilemma leads to the central problem this paper investigates: under the influence of sociocultural norms that prioritize harmony, is the YCAs' repertoire of CSs sufficient to meet the demands of actual ELF communication?

In both face-to-face (FTF) and online contexts, interaction inevitably involves the use of CSs (e.g., Björkman, 2014; Kaur, 2010). They are strategic approaches used to pre-empt or resolve communication problems in ELF interaction without strict adherence to native-speaker norms (Björkman, 2014; Liu & Kinginger, 2021). Knowing when and how to use CSs can help make communication more effective in ELF contexts (Björkman, 2014). This is especially the case for speakers of English as a foreign language (EFL). For these individuals, awareness of CSs and opportunities to practice using them have been shown to help improve their communicative competence (Birlik &

Kaur, 2020; Chan, 2021; Kaur, 2017). However, despite the vital functions of CSs, many EFL learners receive limited explicit instruction in communication strategies and may therefore have relatively low awareness of their strategic use. Moreover, in Mainland China, where Mandarin is the lingua franca, YCAs have limited opportunities to practice using interactional CSs in authentic ELF contexts. In today's highly digitalized and globalized world, YCAs increasingly have opportunities to work or study in English-speaking countries. Yet, how they use CSs to cope with synchronous online ELF contexts remains underexplored (Yu & Liu, 2022). As mentioned previously, YCAs' sociocultural norms of being polite and face-saving may hinder their pursuit of communicative clarity. Furthermore, online communication may give rise to additional challenges. For example, non-verbal cues, such as subtle gestures or facial expressions, can frequently be filtered out or delayed due to technical issues (e.g., screen freezing or audio lag) (Chew & Ng, 2021). Consequently, speakers may have to adapt their language to compensate for the absence of non-verbal cues (Walther et al., 2010).

To date, most research has examined YCAs' CSs usage after they have spent a period of time studying as international students abroad (e.g., Liu & Kinginger, 2021). In contrast, few studies focus on YCAs who remain in their home country but need to communicate in online ELF contexts, a practice that has become increasingly common in this highly digitalized world. To further explore the influence of Chinese sociocultural norms on ELF communication, this study examines how YCAs use CSs in synchronous online video discussions. It aims to uncover whether their strategic repertoire is sufficient to meet the communicative demands of such contexts. To contextualize YCAs' interactional practices, their CSs use was examined in comparison with that of Malaysian participants. Malaysian participants were selected not merely as a contrasting group but as an appropriate ELF reference group for two related reasons. First, Malaysia is a multilingual society in which English is widely used including in higher education and professional domains (Pillai & Zainuddin, 2025). Consequently, young Malaysian adults are likely to have substantial experience communicating in English. Second, the prospective communicative needs of the YCAs typically involve interacting with interlocutors from diverse linguistic backgrounds in academic and professional contexts. In this respect, Malaysian participants in higher education, where there is a large number of international students, including those from China (Zainuddin & Pillai, 2025), provide a relevant ELF reference group against which the YCAs' developing CS repertoire can be compared. Rather than serving as a native-speaker benchmark, they provide a realistic interactional baseline for evaluating whether the YCAs' strategic repertoire is sufficient to meet the interactional demands of

synchronous online ELF communication. Specifically, this study is guided by the following two research questions:

- (i) What differences emerge in the patterns of communication strategies between young Chinese adults and their Malaysian peers in synchronous online ELF video discussions in both dyadic and polyadic interactions?
- (ii) How do sociocultural norms, particularly politeness and face-saving, influence the choice of CSs among young Chinese adults in these synchronous online ELF video discussions?

Literature Review

The following sections review relevant literature on CSs in ELF interactions. Particular attention is given to the conceptualization of CSs and how sociocultural norms, especially politeness and face-saving, may shape their use in interaction.

Conceptualizing Communication Strategies

From an ELF perspective, CSs are viewed as devices for facilitating mutual understanding and communicative effectiveness without strict adherence to native-speaker norms (Leung & Jenkins, 2020). In line with this perspective, this study is situated within the ELF paradigm, with particular attention to the research context and to avoiding the perpetuation of native-speakerism. In this study, CSs refer to any utterance or non-verbal cues used by communicators to pre-empt or resolve actual or potential instances of misunderstanding, including “misunderstanding” or “partial or non-understanding” (Kaur, 2010, p. 204).

CSs in ELF interactions involve a variety of strategies used by speakers to manage understanding, negotiate meanings, and maintain conversational flow. For example, repair represents a particular core strategy for addressing instances of misunderstanding or partial understanding. As Kaur (2020) and Higgins and Siritaratn (2022) suggest, the strategic use of repair is not merely a linguistic correction but a core component of interactional competence, enabling participants to collaboratively manage the social and communicative demands of the ELF encounter.

Björkman's (2014) CSs taxonomy framework (see Table 1) was developed on the basis of naturally occurring ELF conversations with participants from diverse lingua-cultural backgrounds. In this framework, CSs are categorized into self- and other-initiated strategies, a distinction that aligns with the traditional classification system of conversation analysis (CA) (Björkman, 2014; Kaur, 2020). CSs are further subdivided according to their

functions which enable a consistent and nuanced identification and analysis of CSs in this study.

This framework was selected for the present study as aligns more closely with the objectives and theoretical perspective of this research compared to earlier CS taxonomies. For example, Tarone (1981) and Faerch and Kasper (1983) primarily conceptualized CSs as compensatory responses to learners' linguistic deficiencies. This orientation is less compatible with the ELF perspective adopted in the present study, which views CSs as interactional resources for achieving mutual understanding rather than indicators of language deficit (Seidlhofer, 2001). Similarly, whilst Dörnyei and Scott (1997) proposed a broader classification of communication strategies, their taxonomy was also developed within the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) tradition rather than derived from authentic ELF interactions. In contrast, Björkman's (2014) taxonomy was developed from naturally occurring ELF interactions and organizes CSs according to their interactional functions while maintaining the distinction between self- and other-initiated strategies. These characteristics make it an appropriate framework for the current analysis.

Table 1

Björkman's (2014) Communication Strategies Framework

Self-initiated communication strategies	Other-initiated communication strategies
Explicitness strategies	Confirmation checks
• Repetition • Simplification • Signalling importance • Paraphrasing	• Paraphrasing • Repetition • Overt question
Comprehension check	Clarification requests
Word replacement	• Questions or question repeats
	Co-creation of the message/anticipation
	Word replacement

(Björkman, 2014, p. 129)

As shown in Table 1, in ELF contexts, participants use various self-initiated and other-initiated CSs. For example, when ambiguity arises, ELF communicators may use other-initiated overt questions (e.g., *You mean...?* or *You said...?*) as well as repetition or paraphrasing, to confirm whether their interpretation of a previous utterance is accurate. Moreover, they may also use questions or question repeats (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997; Kaur, 2010). In addition, CSs used for meaning negotiation and co-creation include strategies

such as other-initiated co-creation of the message, anticipation and word replacement (Björkman, 2014). These strategies help secure mutual understanding as ELF conversations progress. While the literature emphasizes that speakers in ELF contexts use a range of pre-emptive and remedial CSs to make communication smoother and more effective (Kaur, 2017), this view may not universally apply to all speakers. For those who are strongly influenced by sociocultural norms, such as the need to save face or avoid imposition, the pursuit of communicative clarity may be mediated by cultural obligations.

Chinese Sociocultural Norm: Politeness and Face-Saving

Despite the interactional nature of CSs in ELF interactions, YCAs' willingness to use CSs for interaction may be constrained by their sociocultural norms. Most mainland YCAs grow up in a Confucian cultural context in which individuals are expected to be polite, to preserve the face of others, and to conform to the majority (Liu & Fang, 2017). These cultural orientations priorities harmony over communicative clarity and may discourage YCAs from engaging fully in ELF communication (God & Zhang, 2019; Maiklad & Numtong, 2025).

YCAs may consider the use of interactionally necessary strategies for meaning negotiation or co-creation as socioculturally inappropriate during ELF conversations. In Chinese culture, being polite in interpersonal interaction does not simply entail the use of conventional politeness markers, such as *please* or *thank you*, in one's utterances. Rather, politeness is closely associated with safeguarding the face of all participants to maintain harmonious relationships. In this context, face typically involves two facets, namely moral face and social face (Chen, 2023; Wang & Spencer-Oatey, 2015). Losing either of these is often perceived as a disruption of interpersonal harmony (Chen, 2023; Zhang & Lütge, 2023). In ELF communication, information asymmetries are common (Björkman, 2014). However, when such asymmetries arise, YCAs may prioritize face-saving over message clarity in an effort to maintain social harmony and therefore choose silence rather than initiating interactional moves that could potentially cause embarrassment or conflict (Wang & Spencer-Oatey, 2015). As a result, their use of interactional CSs may be constrained.

This phenomenon has been well documented in empirical research. For example, Wang and Spencer-Oatey (2015) conducted a case study of Chinese government officials during a delegation visit to the United States. They found that these officials perceived the interpreter's clarification requests as rash and "extremely face-losing" for the Chinese side (Wang & Spencer-Oatey, 2015, p. 58). Similarly, in an educational context in Britain,

Zhang and Lütge (2023) found that Chinese international students were influenced by the Confucian cultural norms of face-saving and maintaining harmony. As a result, these students were reluctant to express their opinions or reveal a lack of understanding, as they feared exposing their limited language proficiency. Such concerns were associated with a perceived risk of embarrassment and loss of face.

This psychological burden may translate into a communicative preference for linguistic precision over interactive flow. This prioritization of face over clarity can be understood as a necessary strategy for maintaining social bonds during interaction. As Aspelin and Eklöf (2023) explain, the ability to instantly sense and protect social relationships, or to engage in “face-work”, is critical for successful and effective interaction (p. 73). For YCAs, the psychological burden of losing face represents a potential threat to their idealized social bond. This may lead them to instantly and subconsciously choose silence as a protective strategy to preserve relational harmony.

However, it is important to note that these studies on the influence of politeness and face-saving on YCAs have been predominantly conducted within FTF contexts. In synchronous online video discussions, multiple semiotic resources, such as audio, video, chat boxes, digital whiteboards, emojis, and file sharing, are available within a single interaction. Previous research suggests that, in such contexts, participants may experience lower anxiety (Aubrey & Philpott, 2023; Chen & Chew, 2021) as well as greater focus and engagement (Aubrey, 2022). At the same time, communication mediated through screens may render non-verbal cues more difficult to interpret, while the simultaneous availability of multiple information streams may also make it challenging for participants to process incoming messages (Aubrey & Philpott, 2023).

Additionally, navigating online intercultural exchanges requires the coordination of multiple interactional resources, including digital tools that mediate communication (Huong & Hung, 2021). Previous research on synchronous video-mediated communication suggests that online interaction often requires participants to coordinate multiple interactional resources and manage different communication channels simultaneously (Aubrey & Philpott, 2023). How this synchronous online ELF video context, in conjunction with Chinese sociocultural norms, shapes the choice of CSs among YCAs remains underexplored.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, which has been widely adopted in research on CSs (e.g., Birlik & Kaur, 2020; Chan, 2021). The study first examined the frequency, types, and patterns of CSs used by

Chinese participants in synchronous online ELF dyadic and polyadic discussions. Subsequently, SRIs were conducted with the YCA participants to explore how Chinese sociocultural norms, particularly politeness and face-saving, influence their choice of CSs in synchronous online ELF video discussions.

Participants

This study was conducted after obtaining ethics clearance from the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC approval no. UM.TNC2/UMREC_2593). It involved 24 participants in total, including 12 YCAs and 12 Malaysian participants (see Table 2). A background questionnaire was administered to elicit participants' demographic information (age, gender), language profiles (e.g., first language, English proficiency scores), and intercultural experiences (e.g., study abroad history, daily English usage).

All the YCAs had achieved IELTS bands which indicate that they were modest to good English users (IELTS, 2025). All of them were educated in mainland China, with no study abroad experience, and thus, had limited exposure to actual ELF communication contexts. These participants were situated in contexts that required communication in online ELF meetings or group discussions and had met the commonly required minimum language proficiency for work or study programs in English-speaking countries.

In addition, 12 Malaysian participants were recruited. They were randomly selected from local students enrolled at a Malaysian public university. They were typical ELF interlocutors in Malaysian and acted as interactional partners of the Chinese participants. They had diverse first languages and had independent to proficient levels of English use (Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2021). In contrast to the YCAs, the Malaysian participants reported markedly higher daily English exposure on the background questionnaire. Eleven out of twelve participants indicated frequent English use in their daily lives at home and at university, while only one reported doing so rarely.

Table 2

Participants' Demographic and Linguistic Profiles

Feature	YCAs (<i>n</i> = 12)	Malaysian Participants (<i>n</i> = 12)
Age	19–26	19–27
Gender Distribution	5 Males, 7 Females	5 Males, 7 Females

English Proficiency	IELTS: 5.5 – 7.0 (Modest to good user)	MUET: Band 3 – 5 (Independent to proficient user)
First Language	Mandarin	Malay, Tamil, or English
Daily English Usage	Limited (Classroom/Exam dominant)	Frequent (11/12 reported often to always)
Education Status	Undergraduate / Pre-Master's	Undergraduate

Note. Proficiency descriptors are based on official band descriptions from the IELTS (2025) and MUET (Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia, 2021) websites. Daily English usage frequencies are derived from participants' self-reported questionnaire responses.

Data Collection

A pilot study was conducted involving two YCAs and two Malaysian participants who did not subsequently take part in the main study. The pilot was used to refine the discussion tasks and research procedures. The two discussion tasks were also designed to be comparable in difficulty level. The dyadic task was adapted from the polyadic task (four-person group), and the number of discussion features and sub-questions was kept the same across both tasks. Both tasks focused on familiar, general-knowledge topics. This helped minimize the influence of topic familiarity and background knowledge on participants' performance.

For the main study, data were collected in two stages via Microsoft Teams. In the first stage, participants engaged in synchronous online discussions designed to replicate authentic study or work contexts and to stimulate varying degrees of interactional pressure. Twelve dyadic (one-on-one) discussions were conducted, in which one YCA was randomly paired with one Malaysian counterpart. Participants were assigned a collaborative problem-solving task that required them to select the best news medium by evaluating features such as portability, time sensitivity, authenticity, and customization.

In addition, six polyadic discussions were carried out, with each group consisting of two YCAs and two Malaysian participants. In this task, participants assumed the role of company representatives and were asked to negotiate and select the best city for establishing a new firm. For both tasks, participants were instructed to turn on their cameras and microphones. The authors were not present during the discussions to minimize the observer effect (the Hawthorne effect).

All the discussions were video recorded. Due to the technical limitations of synchronous online video discussions, such as screen visibility and the lack of mutual eye-contact alignment (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022; Walther et al., 2010), quantitative analysis of non-verbal cues (e.g., gaze

direction) was excluded to ensure analytical reliability. Nevertheless, following a sociocultural approach to interaction (Wang & Spencer-Oatey, 2015), salient paralinguistic cues (e.g., laughter, hesitation, and noticeable silence) observed in the video discussions were qualitatively considered alongside the SRI data. This approach allowed for a more nuanced interpretation of sociocultural interactional patterns.

At stage two, nine SRIs were conducted with the Chinese participants which were all video recorded. This method enabled the study to access participants' underlying strategies and thoughts, which aligns with the aims of the present research. During the interviews, participants watched their own recorded video discussions and were asked to pause the video to comment on their use of CSs. Guided by a set of prompt questions and by reference to their use of specific CSs in the video, participants were asked to reflect on what they were thinking at that moment. In addition, they were asked to consider alternative strategies and to reflect on the perceived effectiveness of their communication and the challenges they faced.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data from the first stage of this study were analyzed using conversation analysis (CA). There were recordings of approximately 165 minutes of dyadic and 115 minutes of polyadic discussions, all of which were transcribed verbatim following Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions (Appendix) and annotated in ELAN. Subsequently, the CSs were identified and quantified using ATLAS.ti, with reference to Björkman's (2014) framework (see Table 1). This was supplemented in this study with qualitative SRI data to capture sociocultural factors that a purely taxonomic approach might overlook.

Additionally, the SRI data (approximately 580 minutes of video recordings) were analyzed inductively. Recurrent themes were used to address the second research question, which concerns the dynamics and influencing factors shaping the YCAs' choice of CS under Chinese sociocultural norms. To ensure interpretive rigor, an initial 20% of transcripts were independently coded by the researcher and an intercoder with a relevant master's degree, yielding a Cohen's Kappa of 0.81, indicating strong intercoder agreement. The remaining 80% of the data were then coded and translated by the researcher and cross-verified by the intercoder. A back-translation check was conducted to verify the linguistic and conceptual equivalence of the translated interview data. All coding and translation discrepancies across the dataset were subsequently discussed and resolved through discussion and consensus, ensuring that the final interpretations accurately reflected the participants' original intentions.

Findings

While the YCAs demonstrated a stronger preference for certain self-initiated CSs, their use of other-initiated CSs, especially those required for interactional meaning negotiation, was notably limited compared to their Malaysian counterparts. This section first presents the quantitative and qualitative data that detail these divergent CS patterns. It then draws on the SRI data to explain how underlying sociocultural factors influenced their choice of CS.

Communication Strategy Repertoire of Young Chinese Adults in Online ELF Discussions

This section presents the findings related to the first research question. Analysis of the video discussions reveals that the YCAs' CS usage patterns are markedly different from those of the Malaysian reference group

Heavy Reliance on Time Management and Self-monitoring Strategies

Across both synchronous online dyadic and polyadic ELF video discussions, YCAs consistently demonstrated heavy reliance on self-initiated CSs. Notably, they employed markedly more self-initiated CSs for time-management/conversational control and self-repair than their Malaysian peers. As detailed in Table 3, the YCAs' self-initiated CSs for time management/conversational control accounted for more than half of their total CS use. This proportion was noticeably higher than that observed among Malaysian participants. Among these CSs, fillers such as *uh* and *um* were the most frequently used by the YCAs. Moreover, their use of self-repetition for time-gaining purposes was nearly double that of Malaysian participants. In addition, the YCAs also employed more self-repair for explicitness purposes than their Malaysian peers. Qualitative analysis of the YCAs' self-repair shows that 75% of these instances involved word-level repair, namely word replacement, rather than phrase- or sentence-level repairs. Furthermore, they tended to use word replacement primarily to clarify content-related ambiguities and to correct grammatical errors.

Table 3*Comparison of Frequently Employed Self-Initiated Communication Strategies*

Category & Specific CSs	Chinese (Total CSs = 2,912)	Malaysian (Total CSs = 2,252)
I. Time management/ Conversational control	1,593 (54.7%)	912 (40.5%)
Fillers (e.g., "uh", "umm")	1,140 (39.1%)	717 (31.8%)
Self-repetition (for time gaining)	445 (15.3%)	187 (8.3%)
II. Explicitness	757 (26.0%)	822 (36.5%)
Self-repair	353 (12.1%)	249 (11.1%)
Self-expansion	112 (3.8%)	157 (7.0%)
Self-repetition (for clarity)	71 (2.4%)	83 (3.7%)
Summarizing / Concluding	64 (2.2%)	93 (4.1%)
Making a contrast	45 (1.5%)	52 (2.3%)
Self-paraphrasing	40 (1.4%)	65 (2.9%)
Exemplification	39 (1.3%)	63 (2.8%)
III. Confirmation check. Overt question	53 (1.8%)	94 (4.2%)

Note. Data aggregate CSs occurrences from both dyadic and polyadic online discussions. CSs, frequencies < 1%, are excluded.

Beyond the CSs reported in Table 3, Malaysian participants employed both a greater number and a wider range of *explicitness* strategies than their Chinese peers. For example, Malaysians used *self-expansion* and *summarizing/concluding* nearly twice as frequently as YCAs. Furthermore, although not listed in Table 3 due to their low frequency (<1%), Malaysian participants also employed *synonymification* and *simplification* for explicitness purposes, whereas these strategies were not observed among YCAs at all. Additionally, Malaysians used more than twice as many *overt questions* for confirmation checks as their Chinese peers, more frequently checking whether other group members agreed with their statements.

Limited Use of Other-Initiated Interactional Strategies

In relation to other-initiated CSs, the YCAs demonstrated relatively limited use of these strategies in both dyadic and polyadic contexts. As shown in Table 4, the YCAs tended to favor low-effort strategies when employing other-initiated CSs. For example, they used other-initiated other-repetition for confirmation checks and questions for clarification requests. These strategies were used slightly more frequently by the YCAs than by their Malaysian peers.

Table 4*Comparison of Other-Initiated and Multimodal Strategies*

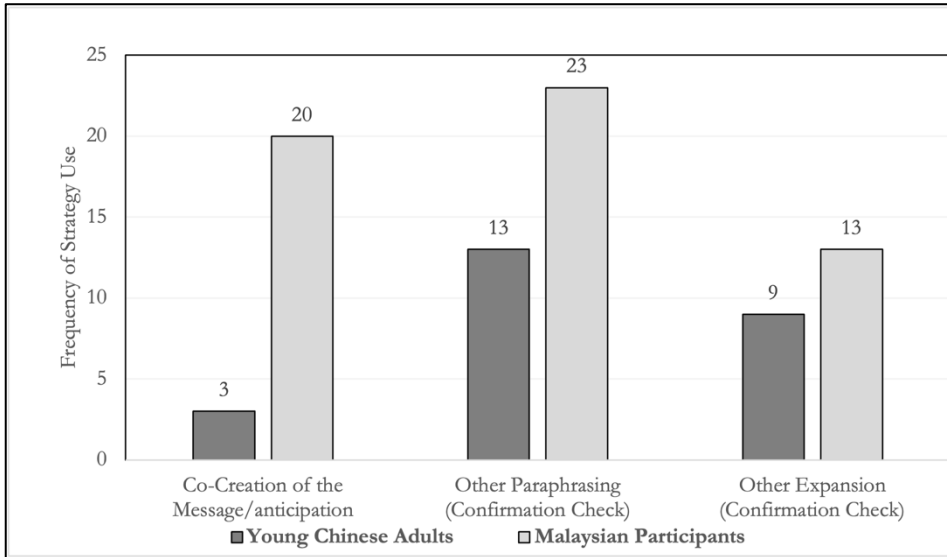
Category & Specific CSs	Chinese (Total CSs = 2,912)	Malaysian (Total CSs = 2,252)
I. Confirmation check (TOTAL)	110 (3.8%)	127 (5.6%)
Other-repetition	46 (1.6%)	30 (1.3%)
Overt question	24 (0.8%)	22 (1.0%)
Other-paraphrasing	13 (0.4%)	23 (1.0%)
Other-expansion	9 (0.3%)	13 (0.6%)
Other-repair	1 (<0.1%)	6 (0.3%)
II. Clarification requests. Question	23 (0.8%)	15 (0.7%)
III. Co-creation of message	3 (0.1%)	20 (0.9%)
IV. Multimodal & Online tools (TOTAL)	10 (0.3%)	26 (1.2%)
Hand gestures	10 (0.3%)	20 (0.9%)
Screen sharing / Text box message / Online searching	0 (0.0%)	6 (0.3%)

Note. Data aggregate CSs occurrences from both dyadic and polyadic online discussions.

In contrast, Malaysian participants employed a more balanced use of other-initiated CSs, especially those for collaborative meaning-making. For instance, they used other-repair to correct or refine another interlocutor's utterance, whereas this strategy was used only once by the YCAs. In addition, a much sharper contrast emerged in participants' use of several other-initiated CSs, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Disparity in Key Other-Initiated Interactional Strategies between the YCAs and their Malaysian Peers



Underutilization of Multimodal and Digital Strategies

The findings in Table 4 also reveal a marked disparity in the use of multimodal and digital strategies between the YCAs and their Malaysian peers. The YCAs utilized non-verbal hand gestures less frequently than the Malaysian participants. In addition, the YCAs did not use multimodal strategies such as screen sharing, chat box messages, or online search at all. In contrast, the Malaysian participants employed these digital strategies on six occasions.

Overall, the data in this section reveal three main features of the YCAs' CS use. Their CS use was relatively passive compared to that of their Malaysian peers. The YCAs relied heavily on self-initiated CSs, which were used primarily to improve linguistic accuracy and to gain time or maintain the conversational floor. With regard to other-initiated CSs, the YCAs' use of these strategies was rather limited, and they tended to favor low-effort options over more complex interactional CSs for meaning negotiation.

YCAs' Negotiation of Sociocultural Norms, Contextual Challenges, and Communication Strategies

Drawing on data from SRIs, this section explains that the YCA's passive use of CSs was not arbitrary but the outcome of a complex negotiation process. Three key factors influencing this process were identified: the imperative of politeness, the protection of face, and anxieties associated with a synchronous online video medium.

Prioritizing Politeness Over Clarity: Avoidance of Imposition

Based on the interview data, seven out of twelve YCA's (e.g., C1, C2 and C6) reported that they prioritized politeness over communicative clarity during video discussions. They explained that repeated confirmation checks and clarification requests could be perceived as an imposition on other interlocutors, rather than as a legitimate need for meaning negotiation or co-creation in ELF contexts. For example, participant C1 described why he chose to remain silent after failing to understand a Malaysian participant's utterance for a second time, attributing this choice to Chinese cultural norms:

Excerpt 1

Well, I think it's probably a habit of Chinese people. For example, if I don't catch what you said the first time, I can ask you again. But if I still don't catch it the second time, I will feel embarrassed to ask again. That's just how it is... Otherwise, it would be impolite and offensive to the speaker.

This reflective statement from the SRI is consistent with the video recording, in which C1 was observed to remain silent following a repeated communication breakdown. In these instances, the participant transitioned to a passive listening role rather than initiating a further clarification request.

Similarly, several participants (e.g., C4, C6 and C8) viewed seeking confirmation or clarification as socially risky and potentially disrespectful. C6 went further to express concern that such actions might be misinterpreted as mocking the speaker's accent or ability. He explained:

Excerpt 2

Because I think that it might be a bit like, how should I say it, a bit like making fun of someone. I think that's not very good. It would be impolite.

Safeguarding Face: Concealing Linguistic Deficiencies

Based on the interview data, eight of the YCAs reported employing CSs to conceal self-perceived linguistic deficiencies, reflecting sociocultural pressures to safeguard face. To avoid the risk of being interpreted as lacking language competence, these participants (e.g., C2, C3, C10 and C11) reported choosing to pretend to understand, such as by nodding or remaining silent, to maintain their image as competent English users. C10 explained her negotiation process:

Excerpt 3

If I couldn't understand, I would zone out. The more I zoned out, the less I could understand. But on the surface, I pretended to understand, and then, um, said, 'Not bad.'

The behavior described by C10 was exhibited in the video discussion, in which the participant was observed nodding and smiling immediately following an interlocutor's turn. The SRI data confirm that these non-verbal cues were used by the participant despite not fully understanding the preceding utterance.

This face-saving concern served not only to safeguard the YCAs themselves but also to protect the face of the previous speaker. For example, C4 chose silence over asking for clarification during one discussion to prevent the Malaysian speaker from losing face as a result of being interrupted:

Excerpt 4

They seemed to be trying hard to express themselves. I think I shouldn't interrupt their train of thought.

Navigating Online Constraints: Technical Anxiety as an Interactional Barrier

The synchronous online video discussion context further amplified the inhibiting effect on the YCAs' use of interactional CSs. Six participants (e.g., C1, C3, and C7) reported that technical issues in online interaction, particularly audio or video latency and overlap, discouraged them from engaging in further meaning negotiation. For instance, C1 and C7 noted that meaning negotiation in online contexts was challenging due to such delays, which reduced their willingness to pursue further interaction with other interlocutors. C7 considered it impolite to ask others to repeat themselves under these circumstances. C1 said the following:

Excerpt 5

In this kind of online group discussion, it's not easy for this kind of clash of opinions to happen because, well, I think when one person is speaking, because we are in different places, there's definitely a delay online. When they're talking, if I want to interrupt them, they may not hear me clearly, and I may not hear them clearly either. This kind of situation is not quite the same as interrupting others in a face-to-face discussion.

In the video recording, technical latencies frequently resulted in overlapping speech and extended gaps between turns. C1 identified these specific moments in the SRI as a primary cause of his reluctance to attempt interactional repairs. He also noted that audio delays made it difficult to coordinate the timing of his responses.

In addition, the digital strategies afforded by online platforms did not appear to facilitate interaction for the YCAs. For instance, although using chat box messages can serve as a potential strategy for explicitness, C3 was reluctant to use this option. She commented that typing messages while others were speaking felt awkward.

Discussion

The findings reveal a clear gap between the YCAs' CS repertoire and the demands of ELF interaction. This misalignment suggests that communication in such contexts is shaped not only by linguistic resources but also, and more notably, by speakers' sociocultural orientations. To better understand these CS patterns and the reasons underlying their emergence, the following discussion critically engages with the findings. It further examines the interplay between the politeness dilemma, an accuracy-centered orientation, and the impact of the digital context.

Politeness Dilemma: Re-evaluating Young Chinese Adults' Silence in ELF Contexts

The central finding of this study is the politeness dilemma faced by the YCAs when using CSs during ELF discussions. Although ELF literature commonly emphasizes that speakers can resourcefully employ a range of CSs to pre-empt or resolve misunderstandings (e.g., Björkman, 2014; Yu & Kaur, 2024), the YCAs in this study often chose silence over interaction.

The qualitative data reveal that this silence does not necessarily reflect a lack of communicative capability but is a conscious sociocultural choice. As

previously discussed, Chinese speakers are often inclined to adhere to sociocultural norms of politeness and face-saving to maintain communicative harmony, even at the expense of communicative clarity (God & Zhang, 2019; Maiklad & Numtong, 2025). In the context of ELF communication, this tendency created a politeness dilemma for the YCAs. These participants viewed clarification requests or confirmation checks as potentially face-threatening and imposing acts. As a result, they prioritized the social harmony valued in Chinese culture but sacrificed communicative clarity, which is generally regarded as central to successful ELF communication. This orientation corresponds with Aspelin and Eklöf's (2023) argument that maintaining social bonds, or "face-work", is critical for participants (p. 73). By opting for silence, the YCAs effectively prioritized the security of the social bond over message precision, viewing communicative silence as a safer micro-sociological choice to avoid the threat of social shame associated with misunderstanding. Therefore, for the YCAs, the strong sociocultural competence developed in their home context can paradoxically act as a barrier to the resourceful use of CSs for effective communication in ELF contexts.

Asymmetrical Interaction: Constraints of Young Chinese Adults' Learner Mindset

A critical consequence of the YCAs' passive use of CSs was the unequal distribution of interactional labor among participants. The YCAs displayed a relatively limited use of other-initiated CSs and primarily relied on self-initiated strategies for self-monitoring. This tendency reflects their preoccupation with individual linguistic accuracy over collective communicative success. In contrast, the Malaysian participants invested noticeably more effort in undertaking interactional labor, particularly through other-initiated co-creation of the message and other-paraphrasing. This disparity suggests that the responsibility for maintaining communicative flow was shifted to the more proactive interlocutors, namely the Malaysian participants.

Differences in linguistic proficiency or exposure to English may have given the Malaysian participants greater confidence to take interactional risks. However, the findings of this study suggest that the observed disparity is more strongly shaped by participants' prior communicative patterns. Unlike the Malaysian participants, who are often accustomed to the multilingual and collaborative nature of everyday communication in Malaysia, the YCAs operate in a markedly different language-use environment. Their use of English is largely restricted to formal educational settings, where the focus tends to be placed on individual linguistic output rather than on the mutual negotiation of meaning.

This asymmetry reflects a clear divergence in the mindsets of the YCAs and Malaysian participants. The YCAs reported concealing their self-perceived linguistic deficiencies during discussions to protect their own face. This suggests that the YCAs may remain oriented towards a learner mindset, in which English use is viewed primarily as a test of linguistic accuracy rather than as a communicative tool. Fear of losing face may further reinforce this orientation. Consequently, the YCAs focused more on the learner goal of making fewer mistakes than on the user goal of getting the message across. This preoccupation with linguistic accuracy reflects a more monologic orientation to language use, which may hinder collaborative meaning-making in interaction. The present findings further suggest that, even in actual ELF contexts, the fear of making mistakes may discourage speakers from employing necessary interactional CSs.

A salient manifestation of this mindset in this study is the asymmetry in the YCAs' repair patterns. While they frequently utilized self-initiated self-repair as a tool to ensure linguistic precision and to safeguard their own face, they exhibited a systematic reluctance to engage in other-initiated interactional repair. This imbalance suggests that the YCAs may misconstrue the function of other-repair. Instead of viewing interactional repair, such as rephrasing other interlocutors' sentences, phrases, or words, as a resource for meaning negotiation or confirmation, they may perceive it primarily as a face-threatening error-correction process. However, in ELF contexts, other-repair can and should function as a collaborative resource for ensuring accuracy and mutual understanding, and as a key component of interactional competence (Higgins & Siritaratn, 2022; Kaur, 2020). Consequently, the fear of exposing a lack of understanding prevents the YCAs from employing the social functions of other-repair, thereby shifting the burden of ensuring mutual understanding to their Malaysian peers.

In contrast, the Malaysian participants tended to operate more as English users. They focused more on collaborative meaning-making and employed a range of CSs to achieve shared communicative goals. This pattern aligns with CS use commonly observed in previous ELF research (e.g., Liu & Kinginger, 2021; Pietikäinen, 2018). Overall, the YCAs' fear of losing face further reinforced their learner mindset, and the burden of ensuring mutual understanding and collaborative meaning-making was disproportionately shifted to other interlocutors. This dynamic resulted in an unequal distribution of interactional labor. Such asymmetry highlights the challenges the YCAs face in functioning as equitable partners in authentic ELF communication.

Other factors may also have contributed to the observed patterns. Individual differences in communicative preferences, unfamiliarity with interlocutors, differences in prior exposure to interactive English

communication, and the structured nature of the discussion tasks may all have influenced participants' strategic choices. In addition, the real-time demands of managing linguistic resources may also have encouraged greater reliance on self-monitoring. The sociocultural interpretation proposed here should therefore be regarded as one plausible explanation rather than the only one. Nevertheless, this interpretation is based on the SRI data obtained in the present study and should be considered alongside these alternative explanations.

Digital Contexts: Amplifier of Sociocultural Inhibitions

The findings challenge the view that online communication contexts necessarily lower anxiety (Aubrey & Philpott, 2023) and increase participants' focus and interest (Aubrey, 2022). In contrast, the YCAs in this study reported greater anxiety related to politeness and face-saving. Consistent with the findings of Aubrey and Philpott (2023), the YCAs reported difficulties arising from ambiguities caused by latency and the overlapping of online audio and video streams. To avoid being perceived as impolite or socially awkward, they often chose silence under such circumstances. In digital interaction, the inability to establish mutual eye contact through the screen may make it more difficult for the YCAs to gauge the perceived 'safety' of the interactional space. This may lead them to view silence as a safer sociocultural choice rather than risking a potentially offensive interruption. Thus, for the YCAs, synchronous online interaction adds an additional layer of sociocultural pressure.

This struggle experienced by the YCAs reflects the high demands of coordinating multiple interactional CSs to ensure interactional safety in synchronous online video discussion contexts. Unlike their Malaysian peers, who were more proactive, the YCAs' structural silence suggests constraints on their ability to utilize digital tools to mediate communication in synchronous online interaction (Huong & Hung, 2021). Limited use of such interactional CSs may increase the risk of communicative breakdown in ELF interaction (Kaur, 2020). In the case of the current study, the YCAs were burdened by their fear of social awkwardness and therefore chose to avoid potential interactional risk by withdrawing from interaction, rather than engaging as frequently as their Malaysian peers.

Conclusion

This study reveals a marked misalignment between the YCAs' CS repertoire and the real communicative demands of synchronous online ELF video discussions. The YCAs were capable of using particular self-initiated

CSs frequently. These included fillers and self-repetitions, for time management and conversational control, as well as for repairing their own utterances. They were also able to utilize some low-effort other-initiated CSs, such as questions or repetitions, to gain time or hold their conversational floor. However, they demonstrated a structural reluctance to engage in collaborative meaning negotiation and co-creation. This reticence could be attributed to a politeness dilemma, in which the pursuit of communicative harmony may take precedence over the need for clarity. Consequently, the YCAs prioritized saving the face of both other interlocutors and themselves by avoiding face-threatening acts, such as interrupting others or seeking clarification or confirmation. In this context, silence or pretended understanding functions as a protective strategy to conceal self-perceived linguistic deficiencies and to maintain an impression of competence, even at the cost of genuine mutual understanding. Overall, these findings suggest that the YCAs tend to adopt a reactive approach in ELF interactions, prioritizing social safety over communicative effectiveness.

In addition, the synchronous online video discussion context acted as a catalyst that amplified these sociocultural inhibitions for the YCAs. Technical constraints, such as latency and overlapping, increase the likelihood of communicative ambiguity. However, for the YCAs, these disruptions were not merely technical glitches but were perceived as additional social risks. They were reluctant to take the risk of interrupting others, as the lack of non-verbal cues in online interaction made it more challenging to navigate the interactional ‘safety’ of their communicative moves. Consequently, in synchronous online ELF video discussion contexts, the interactional labor of ensuring mutual understanding was disproportionately shifted to their Malaysian peers. These peers adopted a more active language user role and employed a wider range of interactional CSs to bridge communication gaps and facilitate the achievement of collaborative communicative goals.

Theoretically, the findings of this study challenge the assumed norm of cooperativeness within the ELF paradigm. While ELF research has commonly suggested that ambiguities and misunderstandings rarely occur and are usually pre-empted or resolved through participants’ use of various CSs (Birlik & Kaur, 2020; Kaur, 2017; Leung & Jenkins, 2020), this study suggests that such interactional dynamics are mediated by speakers’ sociocultural backgrounds. For the YCAs, sociocultural norms related to politeness and face-saving function as protective mechanisms that constrain their use of interactional CSs to achieve successful and effective ELF communication. The practice of concealing self-perceived linguistic limitations to protect face can further reinforce a learner-oriented language mindset. This orientation, characterized by a preoccupation with linguistic accuracy, creates a cycle of inhibition that restricts the use of interactional CSs

for meaning negotiation or co-creation. This cycle is further exacerbated in synchronous online ELF contexts, where technical and communicative uncertainties amplify existing sociocultural inhibitions.

Pedagogically, therefore, strategic competence in ELF contexts, particularly in synchronous online settings, should be cultivated with explicit consideration of speakers' sociocultural backgrounds. For YCAs, enhancing strategic competence requires more than simply expanding their CS repertoire through increased practice of interactional strategies. More crucially, it demands a shift in communicative orientation from individual performance to collaborative success. Pedagogical interventions should aim to reframe learners' perceptions of interactional behaviors, such as seeking clarification or confirmation, as forms of constructive engagement rather than acts of impoliteness.

While this study offers theoretical and pedagogical insights into ELF research on CSs, several inherent limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a relatively small sample size of 24 participants, and the cultural pairing of Chinese and Malaysian participants was limited in scope. In addition, the analysis of CSs was based on a single communication platform, Microsoft Teams. Different online platforms may afford distinct interactional features and thus influence participants' choices of CSs in different ways. Future research could examine whether the CS patterns identified in this study persist when a larger number of YCAs interact with interlocutors from more diverse cultural backgrounds. Longitudinal research could further explore how YCAs adapt their CS use over time as they become more accustomed to ELF communication.

Overall, this study advances current understandings of strategic competence in ELF communication. It shows that strategic competence is closely shaped by speakers' sociocultural orientations, interactional goals, and the communicative demands of digitally mediated contexts. By highlighting how politeness norms, learner-oriented mindsets, and online interactional constraints jointly influence CS use, this study helps explain why effective collaboration in ELF interactions cannot always be assumed.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all the participants who consented to take part in this study. We would also like to thank the reviewers for their constructive feedback.

About the Authors

Hui Liu: A doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya. She has over a decade of professional experience in English language teaching, and her research interests lie in applied linguistics and language education.

Stefanie Pillai: A Professor at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya. She works in the areas of varieties of English, particularly the Malaysian variety, and on language use in (i) education (including language policies) and (ii) multilingual contexts.

Shin Yi Chew: A Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia. Her interests include language learning & development, 21st-century learning, computer-mediated communication and computer-assisted language learning.

References

- Aspelin, J., & Eklöf, A. (2023). In the blink of an eye: Understanding teachers' relational competence from a micro-sociological perspective. *Classroom Discourse*, 14(1), 69–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463014.2022.2072354>
- Aubrey, S. (2022). Dynamic engagement in second language computer-mediated collaborative writing tasks: Does communication mode matter? *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 12(1), 59–86. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2022.12.1.4>
- Aubrey, S., & Philpott, A. (2023). Second language task engagement in face-to-face and synchronous video-based computer-mediated communication modes: Performances and perceptions. *System*, 115, 103069. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103069>
- Birlik, S., & Kaur, J. (2020). BELF expert users: Making understanding visible in internal BELF meetings through the use of nonverbal communication strategies. *English for Specific Purposes*, 58, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2019.10.002>
- Björkman, B. (2014). An analysis of polyadic English as a lingua franca (ELF) speech: A communicative strategies framework. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 66, 122–138. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2014.03.001>
- Chan, J. Y. H. (2021). Bridging the gap between ELF and L2 learners' use of communication strategies: Rethinking current L2 assessment and teaching practices. *System*, 101, 102609. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102609>
- Chen, R. (2023). *Chinese politeness: Diachrony, variation, and universals in politeness theory*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009281201>

- Chen, Y., & Chew, S. Y. (2021). Speaking performance and anxiety levels of Chinese EFL learners in face-to-face and synchronous voice-based chat. *Journal of Language and Education*, 7(3), 43-57. <https://doi.org/10.17323/JLE.2021.11878>
- Chew, S.Y. & Ng, L.L. (2021). *Interpersonal interactions and language learning: Face-to-face vs. computer-mediated communication*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Scott, M. L. (1997). Communication strategies in a second language: Definitions and taxonomies. *Language Learning*, 47(1), 173–210. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.51997005>
- Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (1983). On identifying communication strategies in interlanguage production. In C. Faerch & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Strategies in interlanguage communication* (pp. 210–238). Longman.
- God, Y. T., & Zhang, H. (2019). Intercultural challenges, intracultural practices: How Chinese and Australian students understand and experience intercultural communication at an Australian university. *Higher Education*, 78(2), 305–322. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0344-0>
- Higgins, J., & Siritaratn, N. (2022). A development of a teaching module for enhancing interactional and intercultural competence of aviation undergraduate students. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 15(1), 775-808. retrieved from <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/LEARN/article/view/256746>
- Huong, L. P. H. & Hung, B. P. (2021). Mediation of digital tools in English learning. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 14(2), 512-528. retrieved from <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/LEARN/article/view/253278>
- IELTS. (2025). *Understanding your score*. IELTS. retrieved from <https://ielts.org/take-a-test/your-results/ielts-scoring-in-detail>
- Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In G. H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation* (pp. 13-31). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kaur, J. (2010). Achieving mutual understanding in world Englishes. *World Englishes*, 29(2), 192–208. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2010.01638.x>
- Kaur, J. (2017). Ambiguity related misunderstanding and clarity enhancing practices in ELF communication. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 14(1), 25–47. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ip-2017-0002>
- Kaur, J. (2020). Other-correction in next position: The case of lexical replacement in ELF interactions in an academic setting. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 169, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.06.013>
- Kohnke, L., & Moorhouse, B. L. (2022). Facilitating synchronous online language learning through Zoom. *RELC Journal*, 53(1), 296–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220937235>
- Leung, C., & Jenkins, J. (2020). Mediating communication—ELF and flexible multilingualism perspectives on the Common European Framework of

-
- Reference for languages. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3(1), 26–41. <https://doi.org/10.29140/ajal.v3n1.285>
- Liu, J., & Fang, F. G. (2017). Perceptions, awareness and perceived effects of home culture on intercultural communication: Perspectives of university students in China. *System*, 67, 25–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.04.003>
- Liu, S., & Kinginger, C. (2021). The sociocultural ontogenesis of international students' use of pragmatic strategies in ELF academic communication: Two contrasting case studies. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 186, 364–381. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.10.022>
- Maiklad, C., & Numtong, K. (2025). Politeness and speech acts in cross-cultural YouTube interview discourse: A comparative study of Thai and Chinese hosts and guests. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 18(2), 550-570. <https://doi.org/10.70730/HXUN2464>
- Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia. (2021). *Regulations and test specifications*. Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia. Retrieved from https://portal.mpm.edu.my/images/dokumen/calon-peperiksaan/muet/regulation/Regulations_and_Test_Specifications.pdf
- Pietikäinen, K. S. (2018). Misunderstandings and ensuring understanding in private ELF talk. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(2), 188–212. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amw005>
- Pillai, S., & Zainuddin, S. Z. (2025). Top-down policies and the language profiles of Malaysians in a multilingual language ecology. In P. Siemund, G. Stein, & M. Vida-Manly (Eds.), *World Englishes in their local multilingual ecologies* (pp. 116–142). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/hsld.9.06pil>
- Seidlhofer, B. (2001). Closing a conceptual gap: The case for a description of English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 133–158. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1473-4192.00011>
- Tarone, E. (1981). Some thoughts on the notion of communication strategy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 15(3), 285–295. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586754>
- Walther, J. B., Deandrea, D. C., & Tong, S. T. (2010). Computer-mediated communication versus vocal communication and the attenuation of pre-interaction impressions. *Media Psychology*, 13(4), 364–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2010.524913>
- Wang, J., & Spencer-Oatey, H. (2015). The gains and losses of face in ongoing intercultural interaction: A case study of Chinese participant perspectives. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 89, 50–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2015.09.007>
- Yu, S. Y., & Kaur, J. (2024). Increasing student comprehension in the English-medium instruction (EMI) context: Lecturers' use of explicitness strategies. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 7, 100334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100334>

- Yu, X., & Liu, C. (2022). Teaching English as a lingua franca in China: Hindrances and prospects. *English Today*, 38(3), 185–193. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078421000018>
- Zainuddin, S. Z., & Pillai, S. (2025). Identity navigation in a multilingual context: Voices of Chinese international students in Malaysia. In A. Hajar & S. A. Manan (Eds.), *Towards student mobility in Asia International Students Multilingual Identities Interculturality and Future Selves* (pp. 103–126). Routledge.
- Zhang, X., & Lütge, C. (2023). Home culture and its effects on English as a lingua franca communication: Voices from Chinese students at a United Kingdom university. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1057315. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1057315>

Appendix

Transcription conventions

Symbol	Description
?	Question intonation
↑	High pitch
↓	Low pitch
[	Onset of verbal or non-verbal overlap
]	End of verbal or non-verbal overlap
(0.0)	Pauses, in tenths of seconds
()	Unable to get what was said. The length of the parenthesised space reflects the length of the ungotten talk
(())	Transcriber's comments or descriptions of non-verbal actions, e.g., ((nods)), ((laughter))
bold	The part of the conversation where a strategy is used

Adapted from Jefferson (2004, p. 24-31)