

Socialization into the Workplace: A Newcomer's Chitchat with Colleagues on Facebook Status Updates

Bernie Chun Nam Mak¹

¹ Department of English, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Correspondence: Bernie C. N. Mak, Room 304c, 3/F, Fung King Hey Building, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong. Tel: 852-3943-5711. E-mail: bcnmak@gmail.com

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines how workplace socialization can be addressed through a newcomer's linguistic practice in chitchat on Facebook status updates. Based on Wenger's (1998) framework of Communities of Practice and Gee's (2011) model of discourse analysis, it investigates over 60 status updates made by a new employee and his colleagues spread over five months. Results suggest that the newcomer chitchats with his colleagues in three arbitrary manners, and that he irregularly moves back and forth to the integrated membership. Sometimes he highlights the newcomer status through chitchat, while in other times he behaves like a core member in the community. However, the majority of his practice fall into a relatively moderate range between the new and the integral. Behind his participation in chitchat is the characteristic psyche and behavior during socialization into the workplace. A model of language and communication in workplace socialization is further suggested upon an in-depth elaboration on the data analysis. It is concluded that chitchatting in status updates can function as the gateway to understand workplace socialization. More studies are needed to explore how workplace socialization can be addressed through other speech events in computer-mediated environments.

Keywords: Facebook, status updates, microblogging, workplace socialization, chitchat

1. Introduction

This paper investigates an emerging but underexplored topic about microblogging, which is how a newcomer integrates into the workplace through participating in status updates with colleagues on Facebook. While Facebook as a social-network site (SNS) has gathered momentum in studies of computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) over the past few years (West, 2013), they seldom examine the subtle link between Facebook and workplace communication due to the leisure pursuits attached to Facebook (Carr, Schrock, & Dauterman, 2012). In addition, existing research of SNSs tends to neglect their roles in well-developed Asian societies, such as Hong Kong. Nevertheless, a few studies have indicated that status updates on Facebook can function as a "situated learning platform" for a workplace newcomer, especially in collectivistic cultures (Mak, Chui, & Liu, 2012, p. 397).

Considering the potential of interdisciplinary research on Facebook and workplace learning, this study aims to focus on how workplace socialization can be understood through status updates. Drawing on the empirical data collected from a workplace community in Hong Kong, the paper looks into how a newcomer's chitchat with other colleagues in status updates can reveal his socialization processes. This goal will be addressed by the (qualitative) discourse analysis method, and it will be responsive to the aforementioned research gaps.

2. Background

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice (CofPs)

The paradigm of workplace discourse analysis (WDA) research tends to conceptualize workplace communication by Wenger's CofP framework, which proposes that a workplace, together with its colleagues' behavior and experiences, can be considered to be a goal-directed process sustained by people's shared practices (see Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999 for their introduction of the framework to WDA). According to Wenger (1998), such practices proceed with three ongoing substances:

- *Joint enterprises*, which are the short- and long-term goals making colleagues united and accountable to the workplace;

- *Mutual engagements*, which are the colleagues' ir/regular ties and gatherings for achieving the joint enterprises; and
- *Shared repertoires*, which are the symbolic and behavioral norms cultivated through the mutual engagements.

According to this conceptualization, linguistic traits continually enacted in colleagues' interactions can be considered to be aimed at getting things done in the workplace ultimately (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). When these conventions are manifested in a single interaction, colleagues will perform *participation* adhering to the collective and existing norms, and enact *reification* to personalize the practice based on individual and situated needs (Wenger, 1998). A newcomer's acting in such practices (e.g., avoidance of participation, unexpected reification) can in/directly indicate his or her position in socialization into the workplace (Korte & Lin, 2013).

When colleagues (including newcomers) interact in a computer-mediated environment, the mutual engagements formed are usually loose and sometimes invisible, so the shared repertoires reinstated may become fluid or ineffective (Mak & Chui, 2013a). This particularly happens in SNSs where there is often a collapse of context (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Hence, while this study employs the CofP model as the theoretical framework, it will take a strong constructionist view in analysis of data, which means that the three substances of CofPs will be largely re/constructed through colleagues' interactions in status updates.

2.2 Language, Communication, and Socialization into the Workplace

Socialization into the workplace is the process through which an employee changes from being a newcomer to being an integral member of the work group or organization (van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The process involves acquisition of conventionalized work patterns and development of social relationships in the workplace (Korte & Lin, 2013). In modern workplaces, the two aspects intersect with each other (Blaka & Filstad, 2007). Workplace socialization takes place in both formal settings like training sessions, and informal settings like social talk in the corridor (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). It is not a linear process in which a newcomer becomes a veteran step by step, but a series of unperceivable events in which a newcomer moves forwards to or backwards from the integration and full membership (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Holmes, 2004), especially in the first three to six months after entry (Mak, 2009; also see Brown, 1985; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2002).

Since workplace socialization involves ongoing interactions between a newcomer and the core members, rather than the cognitive mediation of the newcomer him- or herself only (Korte, 2009), it can be understood through exploring the language use of the newcomer when he or she communicates with the other colleagues (Mak, Liu, & Deneen, 2012), whether face to face, on the phone, or on the Internet (Mak, Chui, et al., 2012). This paper focuses on chitchat in status updates on Facebook.

2.3 Chitchat as Small Talk in the Workplace

Chitchat has overlapping areas with other near synonyms of small talk, such as phatic exchange, gossip, etc. (Coupland, 2000), so one way to solve the terminology problem is to treat them different genres under the superordinate term "small talk" (cf. Jaworski, 2000). In this study, small talk embraces all casual conversations primarily aimed at accomplishing relational goals (Coupland, 2003; McCarthy, 2000; Reneland-Forsman, 2012), in contrast to core-business talk primarily aimed at achieving transactional goals (Holmes, 2003). In the workplace, the line between small talk and core-business talk usually blurs (see Holmes, 2000, p. 38 for a continuum of talk at work). Some general functions of small talk in the workplace are helping to open meetings (Holmes & Fillary, 2000), releasing previous disputes (Sotirin, 2000), and making good impression on colleagues (Tracy & Naughton, 2000). As small talk requires personal autonomy under institutional and cultural constraint, it is often a challenge to workplace newcomers (Holmes, 2005; Măda & Săftoiu, 2012).

As a subtype of small talk, chitchat is loose conversation without a basic direction or topic; to put it in layperson terms, it is (idle) talk which shoots the breeze (Mak, 2009). Owing to this characteristic, it often goes underdeveloped. While it shares the function of relationship-building as other forms of small talk do, it is unlike social talk which is with an off-task, specific topic (Holmes & Fillary, 2000), and it is unlike phatic exchange which is largely ritualistic and within a small number of turns (Coupland, Coupland, & Robinson, 1992). Chitchat is assumed to be common when colleagues converse in status updates, partly because of the intersection of different genres, goals, and audience on Facebook (Bazarova, Taft, Choi, & Cosley, 2013), and partly because of the sense of speech freedom on the Internet (Herring, 1999). Unfortunately, even research of chitchat in face-to-face workplace talk is scarce, let alone in status updates.

2.4 Social-Network Sites and Facebook Status Updates

Social-network sites, according to Ellison et al. (2011, p. 875), are bundles of technological tools that incorporate

features of earlier technologies (such as personal Web sites) but recombine them into a new context that supports users' ability to form and maintain a wide network of social connections.

An SNS integrates the instant messenger, email, blog, etc. to form a holistic platform for social purposes on the basis of a personalized profile for each of its user (DeAndrea et al., 2010). As one of the popular SNSs, Facebook allows users to interact in many ways. This paper focuses on its function of microblogging, called "status updates".

Interacting in status updates are similar to microblogging in Twitter through which users share what they do and/or think "at the moment" by typing short messages and/or embedding multimedia into the space provided (for a definition of microblogging, see Lee, 2011, pp. 111-112). However, Facebook is a moreonymous platform in that the posters and the readers are usually known to each other (see Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). When the poster subscribes an update to friends or specific members, the contents will be published as a "News Feed" on the readers' first page. They can read, respond to, share, and/or "like" the contents (or any responses to these contents) (Page, 2010). Structurally, these contents tolerate insufficient adjacency and incoherence (West, 2013). Stylistically, conversations in status updates are found to be less public but more casual, concise, multi-dimensional, and emotional than traditional blogs (e.g., Carr, Schrock, & Dauterman, 2012). They keep "friendship" on Facebook alive by motivating internal prompt discussions (Morris et al., 2010), opinion exchanges, information-seeking (Jansen et al., 2009), gossip-reading (Debatin et al., 2009), and tracking of past activities (DeAndrea et al., 2010). The diversity suggests why chitchat is likely to occur in status updates than in other means of computer-mediated workplace communication, such as emailing and instant messaging.

Although a handful of scholarly studies mention the role of Facebook for colleagues, such as maintenance of minimal ties after work (Zywica & Danowski, 2008), they do not concentrate on status updates from a linguistic perspective (Mak & Chui, 2013a). A few of them (e.g., Mak, Chui, et al., 2012) examine the potential of status updates in newcomers' learning, but their scope is usually small and does not specifically touch on chitchat or other forms of small talk.

2.5 Summary and Research Question

The above brief review has shown that socialization into the workplace can be addressed through looking at the language use of a newcomer in different genres of communication. One potential aspect is chitchat with integral colleagues in status updates. Then, focusing on status updates on Facebook, this study aims to answer the following question:

How does the chitchat of a newcomer in status updates reveal his or her socialization process into the workplace?

3. Methodology and Analytical Framework

The research site was a branch store of an international Italian restaurant, Hana Pizza (pseudonym), in Hong Kong. This branch contained 20 employees, who were Hong Kong locals. They worked irregularly on or across different shifts. Over half of them were part-time employees, and they were studying full-time in universities (during the data collection period). According to the informal consultation before data collection, they had added each other on Facebook and had formed a so-called community (Hana-809 hereafter) where English was intentionally used in status updates to exclude other local staff who had limited proficiency in English. Hana-809 colleagues barely talked in status updates in work hours, but usually after work and at midnight. Whereas both the new and the integral share the responsibility for workplace socialization (Holmes, 2004; Korte & Lin, 2013), the methodological design focused on Sam, a new crew member who had joined in the store for a few months (at the start of the data collection period). He was a full-time university student at that time (see Appendix II for information of other main participants).

3.1 Collection of Status Updates and Interview Data

Hana-809 colleagues' status updates were collected in the form of computer-generated files. Participants were invited to either use the print-screen method to capture their status updates as jpg files or run Adobe Acrobat Professional to save them as pdf files on a monthly basis. Focusing on Sam, these empirical data were cleaned and coded according to different degrees of his integration into Hana-809. Afterward, semi-structure interviews in English or Cantonese were conducted with the involved members. These interviews consisting of open questions focused on providing contexts for the status updates. The members, especially Sam, were generally asked 1) what had motivated them to write and/or reply in a way as shown in the status update, and 2) how they thought about the contents or development of the status update. Excerpts without sufficient interview support for further analysis were screened out at the end.

The corpus consisted of 114 status updates in total. Focusing on Sam's participation in chitchat, approximately 60 analyzable status updates from Hana-809 colleagues were documented. These status updates took place within the period October 2011 to February 2012. They were coded into three categories: 1) attachment to the newcomer identity, 2) gradual integration into the community, and 3) addressing of nearly full membership. Most (over half) of these excerpts fell into "gradual integration into the community". Second comes "attachment to the newcomer identity", with "addressing of nearly full membership" coming third.

3.2 Analytical Framework: Gee's (2011) Model of Discourse Analysis

In order to examine the representative status updates in depth, this paper adapts Gee's model of discourse analysis to look into how Sam's participation in chitchatting in status updates manifests his socialization process into Hana-809. Gee (2011) proposes that language use will construct the reality in seven areas which can be analyzed by six tools, and that they are applicable in analysis of both spoken face-to-face discourse and computer-mediated discourse. The analysis in this paper mainly focuses on the areas of *practice*, *identities*, and *relationship* in his model. The first area focuses on the discursive products of getting things done, including transactional and relational goals; the latter two touches on the products of the situated roles of participants and tentative relationships among them. For tools, the analysis mainly uses *situated meanings*, *discourses*, and *intertextuality*. The first tool looks into the discursive process of communicating contextual, negotiated meanings in a single status update; the second tool addresses the process of any symbolic behavior based on social-cultural practices in a broader sense; the third tool is used to reveal the process of linking a single status update to other surrounding online or offline discourse in the context. These areas and tools are intertwined with each other during interpretation and analysis of the excerpts. Focal areas and main tools to be used are altered if necessary.

3.3 Presentation of Data

In presentation of the selected status updates, their physical layout on Facebook is retained (see Appendix I for a sample of status update). For confidentiality reasons, all photos are removed and all names are replaced by pseudonyms. Very minor editing (e.g., removal of sexist languages and confusing Hong Kong slang) is conducted for better presentation. In presentation of interview data, interviewees' original or translated wordings are reported within quotation marks; square brackets in quotations indicate additional notes or grammatical corrections. Lines of status updates, except the date and time of each entry, are numbered for convenience of references in analysis.

4. Results and Analysis of Representative Excerpts of Status Updates

The newcomer's chitchat in status updates illustrates a kind of back-and-forth, fluid membership during workplace socialization. The following sections will provide snapshots which characterize how Sam moves between his attachment to the newcomer identity, gradual integration into the community, and addressing of nearly full membership.

4.1 Chitchat Indicating Attachment to the Newcomer Identity

The database focusing on Sam reveals that there are three kinds of chitchat practice which can characterize his identity as a newcomer in Hana-809. All of them occur in status updates initiated by other colleagues, but not those launched by Sam himself. Three representative examples are selected for in-depth analysis.

4.1.1 Articulating the Marginal Membership

Context of example 1: The black rainstorm signal was issued tonight, which meant that very heavy rain had fallen over Hong Kong. Owing to the lousy weather, the store was messed up by a lot of take-out and delivery orders.

- | | | |
|---|---------|---|
| 1 | [photo] | Derek |
| 2 | | black Friday~
18 November 2011 at 22:24 |
| 3 | | [Joseph and Wilson like this!] |
| 4 | [photo] | Sam black storm attack our store causing many injuries, sam is the most serious... |
| 5 | | 19 November 2011 at 0:57 |
| 6 | [photo] | Sam If I made mistake, derek gor plz forgive |
| | | 19 November 2011 at 0:58 |

- 7 [photo] **Derek** u hv done very well ar =] call me derek ok
19 November 2011 at 1:06
- 8 [photo] **Sam** “hv done very well”... over exaggerate
19 November 2011 at 1:07
- 9 [photo] **Sam** I just a part time guy.....
19 November 2011 at 1:08

Here Sam explicitly reveals his trivial position in the chitchat with Derek, a peer who has the similar working tenure but works full-time in Hana-809. This interpretation is supported by two aspects. When Sam replies to Derek’s status update (lines 4-5), he subordinates himself by addressing Derek “Derek gor” (“gor” means “elder brother” in Hong Kong slang). Following this, Sam requests Derek to forgive the previous mistakes he made (line 6). Even when Derek compliments him and deflates the status difference (line 7), Sam still keeps humbling himself and calling himself “just a part time guy” (lines 8-9).

Sam’s awareness of the newcomer identity is manifested through his observing informal respects (Mak, 2009) and using the pseudo-sibling addressing term (Kadar, 2005) in the chitchat. In particular, his self-devaluation suggests that he considers himself to be unimportant and inferior to the community. These politeness strategies signal that he is keeping a safe, deferential distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987) from another colleague.

The next example will demonstrate that his distance from other colleagues can be shown from another perspective as well.

4.1.2 Deviating from Group Interactions

Context of example 2: Derek was assigned a new kitchen duty tonight due to lack of manpower, and he was complained by a difficult customer afterward. “Port” in line 6 is the abbreviation of “Chicken Spaghetti with Portuguese Sauce”.

- 1 [photo] **Derek**
2 bad day =[
10 October 2011 at 21:40
- 3 [Wilson likes this!]
- 4 [photo] **Anna** WHY?
10 October 2011 at 23:26
- 5 [photo] **Derek** >< done the port,also complained by customer
11 October 2011 at 1:12 [2 person like this!]
- 6 [photo] **Wilson** why u did the port!?
11 October 2011 at 2:45
- 7 [photo] **Anna** Why to complain you?
11 October 2011 at 2:53
- 8 [photo] **Sam** Customers are always right...
2 minutes ago

Sam’s participation deviates from the collective chitchat practice in Hana-809. Whereas Wilson and Anna, two integral colleagues, are being concerned about what trials and tribulations Derek has faced tonight (lines 4, 6 & 7), Sam provides an indifferent response “customers are always right” (line 8). Although this saying is famous in the field of customer services, it objectifies the personal hardship of Derek, and proposes a merely business-oriented view to look at the incident. Derek was assigned a duty with which he was unfamiliar; worse still, he was complained by a difficult customer. This may be why he says it was a “bad day” for him (lines 1-2). In the interview, Derek stated that “I wanted to share with the [colleagues] I trust”. His status update is aimed at asking for emotional support, but not business lectures.

That Sam detaches himself from Derek’s personal feelings can be attributed to two possibilities: one is that he misunderstands Derek’s purpose of posting this status update; another is that he intentionally shows no apathy to Derek or the incident. The former suggests Sam’s lack of knowledge of the unwritten norms of interaction (Holmes, 2004; Mak, Chui, et al., 2012) in Hana-809; the latter implies his undeveloped relationship with

colleagues (Cooper-Thomas, Anderson, & Cash, 2012). Anyhow, both possibilities can implicate a distance and a difference from other core members like Wilson and Anna, which highlight his new membership in the workplace.

In other circumstances, this membership is consolidated through his preferences to be standalone in collective activities.

4.1.3 Emphasizing Individuality beyond Work Hours

Context of example 3: Derek had some painful experiences sometime ago (as shown in example 2), and now he encourages himself by posting another status update. There will be a beer gathering outside the store at the same time.

- 1 [photo] **Derek**
 2 being -ve can help to prepare for the worst =[
 yesterday at 1:16
 3 [You like this!]
 4 [photo] **Wilson** ar u talking to Sam!? and tmr will you go to Howard home
 5 to drink!?
 yesterday at 1:21
 6 [photo] **Derek** NO la!!!! very tired today ar
 yesterday at 1:23
 7 [photo] **Sam** I don't drink, also dunno taste drinks
 yesterday at 1:28
 8 [photo] **Sam** just know "beer is for initmates only"...this principle...
 yesterday at 1:29
 9 [photo] **Wilson** =□=...drinking beer only...too serious
 yesterday at 1:39
 10 [photo] **Sam** I never point at anyone...:
 yesterday at 1:40

In this chitchat, Sam highlights his individual preference of leisure time. While the update originates from Derek's self-encouragement (lines 1-2), Wilson jokes that the encouragement can be directed at Sam as well. Then, Wilson invites Derek to join in the beer gathering tomorrow (lines 4-5). Although nobody explicitly asks whether Sam will join in, he proactively declares that he does not drink (line 7), and adds a saying quoted from somewhere (line 8). The quotation implicates his belief that congenial company is necessary to a gathering. Subsequently, Wilson replies that Sam takes the gathering too seriously (line 9), though Sam clarifies with a smiley that he does not intend to attack anyone (line 10). Wilson in the interview commented, "he quoted something, but colleagues think [that] drinking is a good thing [...] he didn't need to say so". From Wilson's viewpoint, Sam's response is somewhat unexpected and self-centered here.

Reinstatement of personal autonomy beyond work hours emphasizes his maintenance of a mere work relationship with other colleagues. His immediate refusal to participate in social activities, which leaves no space for negotiation, reflects his attachment to himself as an individual, rather than a potential member of the CofP. Such individuality prevents him from participating socially in the collective activities, and it usually implies the lack of sense of belonging (Wenger, 1998) and commitment (Bauer et al., 1998) during organizational entry.

The above three examples delineates the occasions in which Sam un/consciously reveals his newcomer position through chitchat. Nonetheless, he does not always behave in such a reserved manner. When he moves towards integration, his participates differently. The next section will demonstrate it.

4.2 Chitchat Indicating the Process of Intergration into the CofP

This section portrays a slightly different picture from that in the previous section. There are many moments in which Sam tries to be adaptable and integrative to Hana-809, by optimistically responding to other colleagues' status updates and actively posting status updates himself. He enacts three kinds of practice characterizing such a transition manner. It is worth-emphasizing that these integrative moments sometimes intersect with the instances

described in section 4.1.

4.2.1 Mentioning Inclusion and Partnership

Context of example 4: Derek was off-duty from the day shift, and he posted a status update in the evening. Sam worked on the night shift this week, however.

- 1 [photo] **Derek**
 2 hv a basketball match after work~exercise!!! already good ^^”
 14 October 2011 at 18:46
 3 [photo] **Sam** ofcoz la~~my partner~~work so hard~~*o*...
 16 October 2011 at 0:22
 4 [photo] **Derek** hehe^^”
 16 October 2011 at 9:01

Albeit one day later, Sam not only appreciates Derek’s leisure activities after work, but also acknowledges his hard work (line 3). In particular, Sam calls Derek “my partner”, which clearly points to their dependency at work. The use of wave dashes and an emoticon of being amazed also imitates his joyful and friendly attitude towards Derek, who provides a positive response afterward (line 4).

Explicitly stating the close work partnership with a colleague reflects Sam’s being attentive to his position and role in Hana-809. His optimistic tone also indicates that he is open to develop a relationship with another colleague. These two signals are indicators of starting integrating into the community (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012; Korte, 2009). Sam commented on this chitchat in the interview; “at that time he and I often work[ed] like neighbors in the kitchen, so it [was] good to encourage each other [on] Facebook”. Compared to himself in example 3, Sam seems to be more willing to extend his work-based relationship to settings beyond work hours and outside the workplace. The following example displays a snapshot in which he even talks about work in chitchat.

4.2.2 Articulating the Opinions on Work Arrangements

Context of example 5: As a newcomer, Sam was assigned to different positions to learn different duties before. However, he has kept working in the frying position these two weeks.

- 1 [photo] **Sam**
 2 want to try other position later...
 16 October 2011 at 0:05
 3 [You like this!]
 4 [photo] **Wilson** Go flouring lo tmr
 16 October 2011 at 3:18
 5 [photo] **Sam** heahea~~ flouring so imp of coz for some master la @@
 16 October 2011 at 14:36

This status update is commenced by Sam himself. The goal is to articulate his request for changing to another work position (lines 1-2). In the interview, he added, “I hope the team leader can see this. I feel boring to do the same jobs like a machine [...] I want to keep changing [my duties] to remind or relearn things”. Although the team leader has not replied, the chitchat between Wilson and Sam demonstrates that Sam has his own preference. Wilson suggests an exchange of positions tomorrow (line 4), but Sam does not want to take the role of Wilson (line 5). Interpretatively, Sam wants to have more space for selection.

It remains unclear whether Sam is successful in rearranging the work assignments at the end. But still, his attempt in this status update illustrates that he will articulate his voice in relation to changing the transactional order of Hana-809, at least on Facebook. The chitchat reveals that he wants to fulfill his expectations of roles in the workplace. Intentions to change the CofP environment are vital indicators of workplace socialization (Mak, Liu, et al., 2012), so this example describes a point in which Sam is integrating into the CofP.

When Sam develops his own thoughts about work arrangements, the degree of his interests in the job is increasing as well. This will be evident from his participation in example 6.

4.2.3 Showing Interests in the Workplace and Work-Related Activities

Context of example 6: Like other chain restaurants, Hana Pizza will conduct promotion through selling particular entrées with favorable prices in a weekend or a public holiday. Such activities will increase both the workload of colleagues and daily income in each branch on that day. A promotion of pizzas with the price of HK\$49 each is coming soon.

- 1 [photo] **Sam**
 2 OT again*...
 3 [A photo of a leaflet of the \$49 promotion of the store]
 4 November 2011 at 12:39
 4 [photo] **Sharon** just received the leaflet from 610XDD
 4 December 2011 at 18:29
 5 [photo] **Kerry** wait to see u guys performance~
 4 December 2011 at 20:53
 6 [photo] **Sam** any difference?
 5 December 2011 at 11:05
 7 [photo] **Sharon** date, store name different, dec 3rd and 4th
 5 December 2011 at 12:45
 8 [photo] **Sharon** other parts should be the same
 5 December 2011 at 12:46
 9 [photo] **Sam** no difference!! how to specialize our store?!
 5 December 2011 at 23:47

The chitchat indicates that Sam becomes interested in some joint enterprises in Hana-809. The status update, with the leaflet of promotion (see the sample in Appendix I), is initiated by Sam. It aims to draw the attention of other colleagues (lines 1-3), and it receives Sharon (Sam's peer) (line 4) and Kerry's (Sam's superior) responses (line 5). When Sam knows that there are not many differences between the promotion brochure of Hana-809 and that of Hana-610 (lines 6-8), Sam asks "how to specialize our store", followed by a question mark plus an exclamation mark (line 9). While the chitchat ends here, it indicates that Sam becomes concerned about not only the high-profile workplace activity, but also the uniqueness of the branch where he is working. Behind this concern is his increasing sense of belonging to the workplace at a cognitive level (Korte & Lin, 2013).

The motivation to socialize is obvious through this chitchat in that he symbolizes his sense of local community (Taormina, 2009) in the important promotion period. His announcement of "OT again", which means "working overtime again", states the perceived collectivity at work due to the upcoming special event. The chitchat in particular implies his antagonistic view towards other stores, which can originate from his engagement to Hana-809. As Sam said in the interview, "the promotion is like competition between stores, to compete [for] business [performance]. So I thought the promotion brochures [would be] different. I was surprised that they were the same".

The 60 representative status updates mainly fall into the instances which demonstrate his gradual integration into Hana-809. From time to time, Sam even participates as if he was already a full member in the CofP, though such participation is temporary and short-lived. The final three examples will illustrate these occasional moments briefly.

4.3 Chitchat Indicating a Nearly Full Membership Status

This section illustrates several kinds of chitchat which can show that occasionally Sam almost addresses full membership in Hana-809. Like the majority of Facebook users, he sometimes constructs "hope-for possible selves" (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1830), which are better or more integrated than his offline self in Hana-809. When he is in this position, he behaves like an integral and experienced veteran who has three kinds of active participation in status updates. Once again, these moments do *not* necessarily happen after the status updates in sections 4.1 or 4.2.

4.3.1 Searching for Amusement at Work

Context of example 7: As shown in example 6, a promotion of pizzas with the price of HK\$49 each is coming in early November. Sam appears to be excited about the activity. There is another status update initiated by Sam on

the same day in example 6.

- 1 [photo] **Sam**
 2 this sat and sun come 49 war again..... there maybe helpers from other stores
 3 again..... work hard to win them fight!!! ^_^
 4 November 2011 at 1:12
- 4 [You and Wilson like this!]
 5 [photo] **Sam** Wilson, vs again!!! what to play this time??????
 4 November 2011 at 1:19
- 6 [photo] **Wilson** you vs me flouring lo! I should only make pizzas that day
 4 November 2011 at 1:20

At the beginning, Sam gives himself and other colleagues encouragement by provoking an atmosphere of competing with the helpers from other branches. He explained the reason in the interview, “we will borrow colleagues from other stores for promotion. They will gossip their experience in our store. This is related to our images and bonus, of course we should do our best”. Thus, he calls the promotion a “war” in which they need to “work hard to win” the helpers from other branches (lines 1-3). This attitude clearly strengthens his engagement with Hana-809. In order to further demonstrates his enthusiasm, Sam even proposes playing a contest game versus Wilson, a more experienced peer (line 5). Wilson also accepts the challenge and suggests competing in making pasta (line 6).

In many ways, Sam intends to create fun and good feelings at work through this status update. Having this motivation is a signal of full membership in the workplace (cf. Mak, Liu, et al., 2012). In principle, only after a colleague masters the basic work skills will he or she think about extra amusement at work. Say the least, here Sam perceives himself to be already familiar with the basic duties. Relevant to this is his acquisition of insider knowledge and tactics at work.

4.3.2 Recalling Insider Strategies

Context of example 8: Since Hana Pizza provides delivery service, each branch will assign delivery work to one to two colleagues every day. This is the same in Hana-809. Insiders call these colleagues “soldiers”.

- 1 [photo] **Sam**
 2 Sometimes I really really like to be a soldier... why? because I can take a break
 3 during busy hours!!!
 23 hours ago
- 4 [Sharon likes this!]

Strictly speaking, this status update may not completely qualify as chichat, because it is only responded to by Sharon’s “liking” (line 4) as a signal of readership (West, 2013). Yet, the soliloquy shows that Sam not only has acquired the insider jargon word “soldier”, but also has understood the tricky way to have a break during busy hours, which is to be the “soldier” (lines 2-3). In the interview, he said that not everybody likes to be a soldier, but it is true that “if you are the deliveryman, you can leave the store for a while and escape from the peak”. While this somewhat denotes a strategy of being “workshy”, the self-disclosure states that Sam has caught some unofficial ways of doing things. This is a salient indicator of high-degree integration into the workplace (Korte & Lin, 2013).

Knowing the unwritten working norms and insider jargon is undoubtedly an important step to complete socialization into the workplace (Louis, 1980; Mak, 2009). This may be why sometimes Sam even provides other newer colleagues with useful work-related information. The final example will unveil an interesting instance.

4.3.3 Transmitting Information to Other Newcomers

Context of example 9: The Christmas week will be a peak period of Hana-809. In order to prepare for the period, the store has imported a large number of food into the refrigerator. A number of colleagues, including Sam, were asked to well manage the food today.

- 1 [photo] **Sam**

- 2 today(19/12), is prologue of xmas...
20 December 2011 at 01:10
- 3 [You like this!]
- 4 [photo] **Joseph** for wt?
20 December 2011 at 01:38 [one person likes this!]
- 5 [photo] **Sam** workload...
20 December 2011 at 01:40
- 6 [photo] **Wilson** joseph u will know what we call sokoban
20 December 2011 at 01:43
- 7 [photo] **Sam** open the door...like a wall...
20 December 2011 at 01:51
- 8 [photo] **Sam** should ask someone...take a photo...
20 December 2011 at 01:52

Although the chitchat is started with a few words only (lines 1-2), it attracts the attention of Joseph and Wilson immediately (lines 4 & 6). Compared to Sam, the working tenure of Joseph in Hana-809 is even shorter. He seems to not understand the upcoming peak period. Wilson then tells Joseph that managing the refrigerator will be similar to playing Sokoban (line 6), a classic video game in which the player needs to push boxes in a warehouse to get each located at the target point. In turn, Sam echoes Wilson, elaborating how overwhelming the refrigerator will appear when they set the food in order (line 8).

Interpretatively, Sam aligns or identify himself with Wilson (a veteran who has been working in Hana-809 for three years), thereby demonstrating an identity of a more integral member, compared to Joseph. As Sam commented in the interview, “Joseph is newer than me, so he may not know the terrible refrigerator, and then we tell him”. In addition, the alignment and identification with Wilson illustrate an essential aspect of socialization, namely the preference of facilitating relationship with key old-timers (Korte, 2009).

5. Discussion

This study, by means of discourse analysis, investigated how workplace socialization could be understood through the chitchat between a newcomer and colleagues in status updates. Over the period of three months, Sam’s chitchat revealed that he irregularly moved forward and backward to the integrated membership in Hana-809. This phenomenon showed a “dilemma” between staying at the newcomer membership and inching towards the veteran membership. While this finding echoes the understanding in the existing literature that workplace socialization is an unstable and non-linear process (Mak & Chui, 2013b; Mak, Liu, et al., 2012), it provides an extra insight that despite the irregularity, a newcomer usually falls into a relatively moderate position between the new and the integral. In other words, a newcomer’s chitchat with his or her colleagues rarely points to the completely new or fully integral opposite ends. Instead, there is usually competition between the newcomer identity and the desirable veteran identity. As a consequence, the membership constructed by chitchat is often changeable in the middle of a continuum. The process can be further investigated from the socialization and CofP perspectives.

5.1 Chitchat between a Newcomer and Other Colleagues in Status Updates

The newcomer in this study had variable participation in chitchatting in status updates. Attaching to the entry status, Sam sometimes acknowledged his newcomer position, deviated from the conventional norms, and emphasized his autonomy. In addition, he seldom launched status updates directed at colleagues, but merely responded to those posted by them. These features could be attributed to his awareness of his freshman state (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012), insufficient acquisition of workplace knowledge (Mak, 2009), and underdeveloped sense of community (Korte & Lin, 2013). Nevertheless, the majority of Sam’s chitchat illustrated that on the whole he was moving towards integration. He implied his concrete role in Hana-809, voiced his opinions on work arrangements, and showed interests in everyday work. In these circumstances, he would started status updates drawing his colleagues’ attention or inviting them to comment. Such an approach to doing chitchat could be credited to the increasing experience of teamwork, deepening understanding of the workplace ambience (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012), emerging demand for job satisfaction (Taormina, 2009), and cultivation of sense of belonging (Korte & Lin, 2013). Since Sam was socializing into the workplace, from time

to time he would address desirable full membership in Hana-809. When he underwent active socialization, he searched for entertainment at work, replayed insider knowledge, and even behaved as if he was already a veteran. Such occasional situations could be ascribed to the enhancement in familiarity with duties and colleagues (Mak, Chui, et al., 2012), sophisticated practice of going about work, and instantaneous alignment with integral members (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012).

To sum up, a newcomer's participation of chitchat in status updates construes the back-and-forth, unpredictable process of integration into the workplace. Owing to incomplete socialization and various aforementioned reasons, sometimes the newcomer's manner in one time may be very different from, if not conflictual to that in another. The process can be theorized by the following continuum:

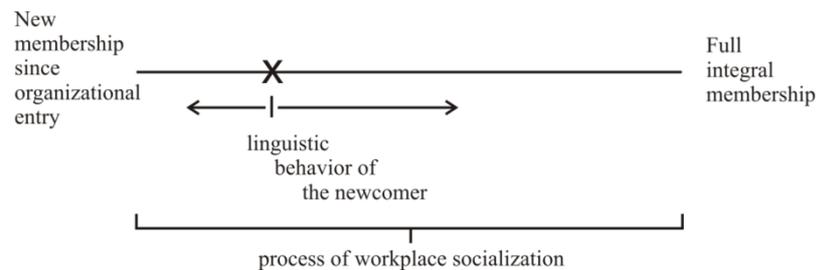


Figure 1. Language and communication in workplace socialization

Such a process is seldom unidirectional. It may become more unstable and uncontrollable when the chitchatting is conducted after work hours and outside the physical workplace, due to less driving force and weaker obligation to integration. Any identities created in a single status update may be largely ephemeral, but successful socialization will assume a general inclination to the full membership. So to speak, these arguments have a good match with the prevailing understanding of status updates that their contents are somewhat casual, pointless, and loose, but invisibly meaningful (Mak & Chui, 2013a). Since they can be preserved and retrieved (West, 2013), they create part of the history of a newcomer's workplace socialization, which is functional, memorial, and humanistic ultimately.

5.2 Chitchat as a Shared Repertoire of Computer-Mediated Talk in Workplace CofPs

This study called for refined understanding of the CofP model as the theoretical framework in WDA studies which look at online talk. Thanks to the development of information communication technology, almost everywhere could be considered to be "the workplace" (Bell, 1995). Mutual engagements outside the physical workplace and/or beyond work hours might replay part of the joint enterprises as well (Mak & Chui, 2013a). The analyzed examples revealed that participation in status updates assumed specific work-related information or knowledge of the research site. But still, while the participants, including Sam, appeared to use English as a shared repertoire in status updates, no obvious patterns of chitchat were seen from other integral members of Hana-809. This result might be due to the large space for personal variants of communication style on Facebook (Bazarova, et al., 2013). The lack of visible shared repertoires explained why Sam tended to vary his participation and construct fortuitous relationships with colleagues in chitchat. Their goals of initiating or responding to status updates were incredibly individual, so even the short-term joint enterprises were not always seen. Likewise, their mutual engagements were sometimes invisible, because one could read the status updates without any comments or backchannel devices, namely "like" and "share" (cf. West, 2013). This result originated partly from the general genre of microblogging, and partly from the technical affordances of Facebook.

In view of these results, this study proposes that personal reification largely dominates collective participation in status updates, due to the paradigm of individuality on Facebook and the possible intersections of CofP and non-CofP members on the News Feed (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Consequently, socialization into the workplace CofP through chitchatting in status updates is more self-motivated and less restricted by any existing shared repertoires than in face-to-face settings. To some degree, this tendency explains the consensus in the literature that social practices and identities created on Facebook are often implicit but complicated (Zhao et al., 2008).

6. Conclusion

Employers can ban the use of Facebook in office computers, but they cannot deter employees from using it outside the workplace. Therefore, it is not uncommon for a newcomer to interact with the integral members in status updates when they are off-duty. Indeed, chitchat in status updates can be an informal indicator of socialization into the workplace. Whereas a newcomer varies his or her chitchatting manner and contents in status updates, they can reveal different snapshots which characterize the process of moving from being a new member to being a full member on the whole. This is not to say that more chitchat means more degree of integration, but this genre of small talk can often unveil the particular psyche during workplace socialization and the relationship between the new and the integral.

Chitchat in status updates is only one side of the coin. Further studies should investigate its relations with the other side, namely face-to-face chitchat in the physical workplace. This implies that more sophisticated methodological design is needed. In addition, since a newcomer's chitchat in status updates pertains to other socialization aspects, such as uncertainty, past workplace experience, job satisfaction, information-seeking, etc., more studies should examine how these aspects can be understood in other genres of talk, such as gossip and rumor, in a computer-mediated environment. Finally, workplace socialization is a two-way process involving both the new and the integral, so the role of full members in such chitchat is in no way negligible as well.

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Appendices

Appendix I. A Sample of Status Update as Microblogging on Facebook

 OT again*... — with  and 7 others.



 ·  ·  · 5 November at 12:39

  just received the leaflet from 610XDD 
4 December at 18:29 ·  ·  1

 wait to see u guys performance~ 
4 December at 20:53 · 

 any difference? 
5 December at 11:05 · 

 date,store name different,dec 3rd and 4th 
5 December at 12:45 via Mobile · 

 other parts should be the same 
5 December at 12:46 via Mobile · 

 no difference !! how to specialize our store?
!
5 December at 23:47 · 

Appendix II. Official Titles and Working Tenure of Main Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Position in the store	Working tenure in the store (*at the end of the data collection period)
Kerry	Team leader	4 years
Cindy	Senior crew member	2 years
Anna	Senior crew member	1 year
Wilson	crew member	3 years
Sharon	crew member	2 years
Derek	crew member	9 months
Sam	crew member	6 months
Joseph	crew member	4 months

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