SECOND LANGUAGE CYBER RHETORIC:
A STUDY OF CHINESE L2 WRITERS IN AN ONLINE USENET GROUP

Joel Bloch
The Ohio State University

ABSTRACT

It has been argued that the expectations of traditional L2 writing classroom can be problematic for Chinese students, particularly in the area of argumentation and critical thinking. On the other hand, writing on the Internet has been shown to be substantially different in ways that may liberate the students from the constraints of the classroom. This argument, however, has typically focused on American writers, ignoring how cyberspace is being appropriated by those outside of the Western tradition of rhetoric. In this study, I examine how Chinese writers use the Internet as an alternative writing space to produce a rhetoric that incorporates traditional Chinese rhetorical forms expressed in English. The study focuses on how a group of Chinese writers respond on the Internet to a television segment accusing the Chinese government of planting spies. I found that the Chinese writers use the Internet to build a collective response to the television show using a variety of rhetorical strategies, even to the point of forcing the television network to meet with them. By situating their arguments in the tradition of Chinese rhetoric, I found that these alternative forms of writing found in cyberspace are affected by the traditions of Chinese rhetoric.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese literacy began over three thousand years ago with writers etching the plastron shell of the turtle (Chang & Chang, 1978). As the technology of literacy evolved, first with rice paper and now with the computer and the Internet, this tradition of literacy has also evolved. The most recent incarnation of this revolution has been directed to what has been called computer-mediated communication (CMC). Research into writing on computer networks, on the Internet, and in cyberspace has begun to explore the implications of technology on Western forms of rhetoric (e.g., Bolter, 2001; Johnson-Eiola, 1997; Landow, 1997). However, there has been little research on cyberspace literacy from non Western perspectives. Although the ease with which writers can compose in their native language on the Internet has been developing rapidly, English remains the lingua franca of cyberspace (Aycock & Buchignani, 1995). The result has been, as Warschauer (2000) points out, that the predominance of English on the Internet can be problematic for non-native English speakers. Writing before the tremendous explosion of Internet usage, Phillipson (1992) warned against what he called "cultural synchronization" where "the Centre cultural products serve as models for the Periphery, and many aspects of local-cultural creativity and social inventiveness, evolved over centuries, are thrown into confusion or destroyed" (p. 61). The "US-centricness" of the Internet would seem to compound this problem, leading to an even more Americanized form of English, especially in the area of rhetoric, which as Kachru (1997) has pointed out, is often deeply embedded in the culture of the user. How non-Westerners negotiate this space and perhaps affect its development is a crucial issue for understanding CM, particularly in English

There is little doubt that computer-based writing can affect the writing process and the writing (see, e.g., Pennington, 2003); however, the extent of the effect is uncertain. Writing about word processing, Haas (1996) has argued that the computer is neither a transparent medium that has no effect on writing nor a deterministic one that dramatically alters the process view that rejects Phillipson's deterministic model

of language interaction. Bakhtin (1981) offers an alternative model of language interaction, what he calls "hybridization." He defines hybridization as "an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical and compositional markers to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems" (p. 304), which results in a blurring of the boundaries between the two languages. Thus, Internet literacy may emerge as a hybridization between the English embedded in the technology and the native language of the writer.

The Nature of Computer-Mediated Discourse

What is it about the nature of computer-mediated discourse that allows this hybridization? Several researchers have found that cyberspace provides a different context for writing than does the print medium or the classroom. In Sproull & Kiesler's (1991) study of e-mail in a corporate context, they argue that the distances that separate members of an Internet discussion group may allow them to take liberties that they would not take in other contexts. This freedom may allow writers to use rhetorical strategies on the Internet they do not feel comfortable with in other contexts.

For Chinese students who come from a country that has traditionally imposed a rigid structure on all forms of expression, the Internet may provide an opportunity to write with new freedom. For example, the use of cyberspace after the Tiananmen Square massacre to counter official government accounts has often been cited as a potentially liberating aspect of the Internet (Heim, 1991). Sproull and Kiesler (1991) observed that Chinese students used "computer bulletin boards and electronic mail to share their fears, confusion, anger, and information about the suppression of dissent in their homeland" (p. 13). For these students, the Internet was a medium for creating a community that could coalesce around a single issue. As Gurak (1997) argues, the language of such groups formed for social or political actions shows a complex series of relationships between external forms of language and forms unique to computer-mediated communication. In other words, CMC may itself be constrained by the traditional forms of rhetoric the writers themselves use and be liberating for writers who do not want to conform to the constraints traditionally placed on their expression.

CMC may be a fertile context for the development of hybridization, which, in turn, could make it an alternative writing context to that found in the classroom. It may provide the possibility of liberation for L2 writers in areas such as argumentation and critical thinking that are especially difficult for L2 writers (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). For all students who may feel marginalized because of either a real or perceived fear of having their writing negatively critiqued, cyberspace gives them the freedom to talk about issues without having to explain them to those who may have different values or perspectives (Canagarajah, 1997). Warschauer (1999) describes how Hawaiian students used the Internet to try to control how their image was being projected and to counter some of the stereotypes they found of themselves. The Internet also provides a linguistic freedom that may not exist in the classroom. As Warschauer (1995) has argued, the Internet provides the opportunity for ESL students to take risks with the language they are learning without the fear of correction. For these reasons, writers in cyberspace may produce a different type of writing than that found in the classroom. Cyberspace can become what Canagarajah calls a "safe house," where marginalized students can discuss issues away from the constraints of the classroom.

One possible explanation for this "safe house" may lie in the differences in the architecture of the traditional classroom and cyberspace. There has been much research on the problems some L2 writers have with the traditional L2 composition classroom: For example, the role of critical thinking (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999); the students' identities as authors (Harklau, 2003); classroom interaction (Carson & Nelson, 1996); and the role of the students' home culture (Kubota, 1999, 2001). As Lessing (1999) argues, decisions about Internet architecture, such as how the predominance of English is closely tied to the structure of the Internet, can profoundly affect how the technology is used. While traditional classrooms are limited to the physical space inhabited by the instructor and the students; as Sproull and

Kiesler (1991) argue, electronic communities allow for interaction based on shared interest and not physical proximity, thus allowing members of an Internet community to be simultaneously linked and buffered from one another. As a result, many of the social norms that restrict interaction in the classroom either are absent or greatly reduced in significance in cyberspace. There is some evidence that this freedom can also have a positive affect on the L2 classroom. Smith (2003) argues that CMC in general can increase the amount and quality of classroom participation. Sullivan and Pratt (1996) argue that technology can affect traditional power structures within the classroom, which can, in turn, reduce the level of anxiety for L2 writers. Ma (1996), for example, argues that on the Internet, Asian students may be more direct and more open than they would be in face-to-face contexts. The lack of face-to-face contact can reduce the possibility for a "loss of face," which could occur in a classroom if the student demonstrates inappropriate social or linguistic behavior. Shifting patterns of identity can have a profound affect on the writing process (Harklau, 2003), even in a face-to-face classroom. These shifts may be more dramatic in cyberspace because the Internet can be a place where writers can try out alternate senses of themselves to see how their audience responds (Turkle, 1995).

This study focuses on how traditional forms of rhetoric, in particular, forms of argumentation, are manifested in an alternative writing context by focusing on how members of a Usenet group, whose first language is Chinese, communicate over the Internet using English. The study demonstrates how non-native English speakers can take control of the discourse on the Internet for their own purposes even when having to write in a second language.

METHOD

Collection of Data

Much of the research on English as a Global language has focused on the morphological, phonological, syntactic, and pragmatic forms of English with little attention to rhetorical structure (Yano, 2001). One area where a global form of rhetoric might be found is asynchronic Usenet or listservs where individuals from all over the world with similar interests can discuss issues of particular interest to them (e.g., Aycock & Buchignani, 1995; Baym, 1995, 1998). Usenet is a worldwide distribution system for information consisting of numerous "newsgroups," usually organized around specific topics. Many Usenet or listserv groups bring together individuals who may have no connection except for the issue that is the main focus of the Usenet group (e.g., Aycock & Buchignani, 1995; Baym, 1995). Such a Usenet group with which I was familiar is the one studied here, namely, "social.cultural.China" (soc.cul.China). This group is unmoderated, which allows for a freer exchange than in a moderated group, where contributions can be "censored" or "killed." There is no control of the number or content of the messages nor is there any time lag between the writing and publication of the message. The discussion examined here simply began with a posting from someone who viewed the show and then after about three weeks of discussed, the messages about this topic ended. As Kemp (1995) argues, "there can be no beginning, middle, or end to a transcript that is not controlled by a singular purpose or authority" (p. 189).

The study focused on the discussion of one topic that began on May 26, 1994, with a posting that responded to a television show that had been aired that evening on the CBS television network in the United States concerning alleged Chinese spying. This show was hosted by Connie Chung, who was and still is one of the most prominent Chinese Americans in the media today. She was discussing a book that claimed the Chinese government was sending spies or potential spies to the United States along with the thousands of students who were coming to study.

The initial comment that began the Usenet discussion was a personal posting on the very evening of the broadcast of Chung's report:

1) I watched the CBS news tonight and thought I would see another big strongly evidenced case like the Ames. To my disappointment, it was all allegation toward the public. It used words such as

"fish on the bottom" and your "neighbor next door" to hint than many Chinese in this country are potential spies. The allegation is particularly pointing to people in the Internet. Most important, the report may impose greater difficulty for Chinese nationals in this country to find job.[1] The news was reported by Connie Chung.

For the next three weeks, I collected all the messages responding to this program. In addition, I collected a new set of messages that was posted in October concerning the resolution of this issue for a total of 153 messages posted on this topic.

Analysis of Data

For the analysis of the data, I used a five-stage approach suggested by McCracken (1990). Stage one consisted of reviewing the postings and creating categories that fit the data. In stage two, the observations were connected to evidence from other observations and the literature. I then chose examples of e-mail from the sample that could illustrate the categories. In stage three, I attempted to make more general observations about the rhetorical strategies being employed. In the fourth stage, judgments were made about the larger themes that were emerging from the data that could be integrated into a more comprehensive analysis (Strauss, 1987). In the final stage, I attempted to connect the research to a more generalized discussion of rhetoric and the pedagogical implications of the study.

Based on this analysis, four categories were created to describe the rhetorical strategies used in the discussion:

- *The Relationship Between the Individual and the Group:* This category is concerned with how the writers divided their argument between appeals for the welfare of the individual and for the group.
- *Deconstructing Connie Chung:* This category is concerned with how participants used the listserv to develop a profile of Connie Chung.
- *Cyber Cross Talk:* This category contained only one message, but it was a unique example of how a writer could use the architecture of e-mail to mimic one form of traditional Chinese discourse.
- *Organizing a Collective Response:* This category is concerned with how the participants used the Internet to organize a joint response to the television show.

These categories were not meant to be exhaustive, but it was felt that they give a good representation of the rhetorical strategies found in this data set.

DISCUSSION

The Relationship Between the Individual and the Group

The first category contained examples of argumentation that reflected both the interests of the individual and the interests of the group. No topic has raised more controversy in the study of the relationship between Chinese culture and rhetoric than the relationship between group identity and individualism. The critical issue in this discussion has been the extent to which a person sees herself as part of a group rather than as an isolated individual, as is often seen in the West. While this relationship has often been seen as dichotomous, some have recognized that these terms do not necessarily need to be separated. As Mao (1990) argues, the individual cannot always be separated from the group. Mao uses the term "personhood" to explain the interaction between the individual and the group. This concept implies that an argument should include not only the possible effects on the group but also on the individual. The Chinese often use the term *guanxi* to refer to this connection. *Guanxi* has been translated as "connections" or "interpersonal relations," which can be based on such factors as locality, family, coworkers, classmates, and teachers/students (King, 1991). The ethics of an action can be evaluated in terms of how it affects the fate of the group.

In this category, examples demonstrates how the welfare of both the individual and the group are used frequently to attack Chung's broadcast.

2) You are a potential Chinese spy now. You will be a potential American spy if you go back to China. The best way to handle this situation is to stop watching CBS, and write a letter to tell them that.

Chung's broadcast was seen by many of the participants as a threat both to how their culture as a whole is viewed in the United States and how they themselves might be viewed as individuals. In (2), the writer directly addresses his audience, warning that each of them will be labeled a spy simply because one Chinese person had been labeled a spy. In this way, the writer recognizes the extent to which an individual action may have consequences for the group, a concept that might not have been foreseen by an American-born Chinese like Chung.

Similarly, attention was immediately shifted to how the group might respond as a whole to the perceived charges.

3) American Chinese should have their congress and senate people and strong advocate group. In this country Big Voice talks. That's the way to survive.

4) Does anyone know which companies have commercials on that program? We can write to those companies to pressure on that program or we will boycott their products.

5) That is the high time we need a organization such as IFCSS [Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars]. Why not protest. Don't bark at China, show your courage, IFCSS leaders, this is a good time for you to claim that you can represent majority Chinese students. Come on, show your courage.

Responses 3-5 are early attempts to call for a response. In (3) and (4) the discussion turns to possible political responses that the group could initiate. In (5), there is a call for existing organizations to take a leadership, including IFCSS, a committee of Chinese students that had often been maligned on the Internet for failing to take a strong leadership role.

These responses focus both on the possible effects of the program on each individual Chinese residing in the United States as well as on a call for a group response, the combination of which illustrate Mao's previously mentioned claim about the relationship between the individual and the group. The fact that the messages contained such emotional responses seems to contradict the traditional view of Chinese rhetoric that emphasizes harmony. In this situation, when the "harmony" of the group was threatened, many felt a strong, potentially divisive response was necessary. There seemed to be some awareness of this contradiction. In (6), a writer argues that any strong form of "fighting back" would contradict the tradition of Chinese passivity even though this passivity has caused the Chinese problems in the past.

6) This is attitude brings Chinese into trouble all the time. Always there are people saying, I'm not involved. I don't care. If you search around for the history of oversea Chinese in the last century, you will find out that Chinese make the same mistake again and again.

In (7), there is a similar criticism about how Chinese people have not responded in a way the writer seems to feel is appropriate.

7) …we Chinese as a community have not stood up and made our voices heard as forcefully as other ethnic communities have. I shall say that, as individuals, we are second to none in values, abilities and achievements; unfortunately, as a community we have yet to demonstrate the cohesiveness and togetherness other communities have shown.

The writer here criticizes certain aspects of the Chinese community while praising others, reflecting his own mixed feelings about the community. By praising the "values, abilities, and achievements" of the

Chinese people, the writer is first praising the community as a whole before attacking its faults, an excellent rhetorical strategy for gaining the allegiance of the audience for what may be a sensitive issue.

Traditional Chinese rhetoric differentiates between general or universal arguments (*shuo*) and arguments for a particular audience (*shui*; Garrett, 1993). In the examples discussed so far, the writers make both general arguments about the nature of Chinese society and more particular arguments about the consequences of Chung's broadcast for individual members of the group. There was not only concern for the Chinese people but also for how the report could affect the future chances of individuals to obtain a job in the United States.

> 8)   When any Chinese show up on the door of the personnel office of a company, the manager don't pay too much attention whether the candidate is from Mainland or from Taiwan or from HK [Hong Kong]. The only thing the manager can think about is that person is a Chinese, therefore there is a possibility as a communist spy.

There was also the fear expressed that each individual himself or herself may now be thought to be a spy.

> 9)   I work in a computing "information" environment (Aren't we all), nothing sensitive and I take effort to avoid the sensitive, but I still feel outraged just to have any hint my colleagues, my next door neighbour (who happens to know I work with computers) would it a second thought if this nice Chinaman is a communist spy!

The writer focuses on the possible response by his colleagues, thus implying that the story had consequences for him, just as others had felt it had consequences for the group. These arguments are expressed as directly as one would expect in Western rhetoric, a point that Wu and Rubin (2000) have found in their study of Chinese students writing in Chinese. This kind of discourse differs from other discours found in other contexts, for example the classroom (e.g., Carson, 1992) or the formal academic paper (Bloch & Chi, 1995).

Deconstructing Connie Chung

Usenet discussions allow groups of writers to develop a collective interpretation of an issue or topic while still allowing for possible dissident opinions. As Rheingold (1993) has argued, the Internet seems to foster an ability to collectively deal with an issue in ways that might be more difficult in traditional print cultures. The architecture of the Internet fosters such collective responses by allowing messages to be widely distributed, saved, and responded to with as much of the original postings as the writer wishes. Since these responses are shaped by the values participants bring to the discussion, they may be as subjective as the response of an isolated individual sitting in front of the television set.

One example of this collective process was the way in which Connie Chung herself was deconstructed throughout this discussion. Along with the text of the show, Chung herself became a text that could be discussed and analyzed. For example, although Chung referred to only one spy, the participants concluded that the result of the show would be that every Chinese in the United States would be considered a potential spy. The producers of the television program and Connie Chung did not seem to foresee this interpretation, as they would argue later. It may have been that the more individualistic nature of Western culture, where the actions of the individual are separate from the group, may have prevented the producers of the show from understanding how the Chinese views would conflate criticism of an individual with criticism of the group.

This interpretation concerning the possible effects of the show emerged early in the discussion and seemed to be generally agreed upon by all the participants. What also began to emerge in the discussion was an image of Chung as being trapped between her Chinese heritage and her role in the U.S. media. From the traditional Confucian perspective, Chung, as a prominent member of the community, was expected to act in a way that promoted the harmony of that community. However, for many of the

participants, she had raised a sensitive issue that could, in fact, harm that community. The result was a series of messages attacking her loyalty to the Chinese community.

10) I don't trust Connie Chung. She never consider herself as Chinese related. Few years ago when she went back to China, she even tease her own relative on TV. She's a Jewish-influenced bitch.

11) Connie Chung has no Chinese in her at all except her looks, and she is proud of that. So she reports or other American reports make no difference to me. Don't expect Chinese face will be friendlier to me was first hard lesson I learned in USA.

12) I have noticed that all the reporters with Chinese origin are quite anti-Chinese themselves. You have Connie Chung in US, we have Jane Wong (for Beijing office of Globe and mail) in Canada. This women wrote all kinds of disgusting stories about China. She never mentions Chinese progress in any aspect during many years even though all she reports was about China. I am wondering whether it is because they were selected due their anti-Chinese stands or they have to behave in this way to survive in that world?

Since Chung herself does not physically exist in this discussion, she could not at this point directly respond, but instead is deconstructed as a text in terms of her responsibilities not only as a journalist but as a Chinese. The space allowed the writers to impute a variety of motives to Chung's actions, although there was no direct evidence as to her motivations. In these responses, for example, the writers argue that the story Chung tells violates her obligations to her group. In (10), the reference to publicly teasing her relatives, a clear violation of the obligation to her family, confirms to the writer that Chung has assimilated into the dominant, white culture and rejected her Chinese heritage. In (11) and (12), the writers extend the argument concerning the concept of *guanxi* to all Western-born Chinese. The claim in (11) that "She (Chung) never consider herself as Chinese related" reflects a concern that American born Chinese do not have loyalty to China but have become Americanized. In (12), a Canadian writer supported this argument with similar evidence from Canada, arguing that it is common that Chinese who want to "make it" in the West will betray their own people, going as far as to argue that they may be chosen by the white establishment primarily because of their anti Chinese biases. One participant wondered whether Chinese reporters are expected to have different loyalties than non Chinese. Other writers, however, were almost shocked that a Chinese person would betray her own people. One writer used the term "*shu dian wang zhong*" (forgets where ancestors originally came from) to describe how some Chinese, such as Chung, will "betray" their own people.

One of the more controversial aspects of these posts is the use of obscene terms and racial epithets. For example, terms like "Jewish influenced bitch" were used to extend the argument that Chung had broken the connection to the Chinese community, and at the same time raising the issue of what is appropriate language on the Internet. As Daisley (1994) points out, the use of this type of language questions where boundaries for appropriate language can or should be placed. She argues that as in any form of play, there are inevitable confrontations, or "flame wars," that may not be as acceptable or controllable in writing contexts as in the classroom. Sproull & Kiesler (1991) have argued that flames are a direct result of the lack of contextual clues and face-to-face contact on the Internet, which results in a greater degree of anonymity and freedom than found in other forms of communication.

Throughout this discussion of Chung, these flames were not addressed to other members of the newsgroup but only to Chung. Taken as whole, the forms can be seen as mini biographical or psychological profiles that, for the most part, were agreed upon by the participants. During the development of this thread, individual writers could coalesce and produce a group story about Chung and her relationship with the Chinese community. The Internet provides a space where these stories can be told, elaborated on, and discussed interactively to a different, and perhaps wider, audience than can a traditional print story (Aycock & Buchignani, 1995).

The process by which this persona of Chung was created is also of interest here. One of the differences between the research discussed here and what has been found in research in other contexts is the degree of consensus developed in electronic discussions. Sproull and Kiesler (1991) found that electronic mail can allow for more diverse opinion. In this Usenet discussion on this topic, there seemed to be a much higher degree of conformity and consensus. Although there was some dissent, the vast majority of postings were highly critical of Chung. Very early in the discussion, the group coalesced around one interpretation of the story with only minor dissent. This story differed greatly from the one that Chung would later tell about her motivation for the show. She would argue that her broadcast intended to demonstrate the repressive nature of the Chinese government and the continual suffering of Chinese students after the Tiananmen Square massacre. She argued that her story was intended to reinforce her concern with the destiny of China and the Chinese people and thereby reinforce her connection with the Chinese student community.

None of the participants gave a viewpoint even remotely similar to the one that was offered by Chung. One could look towards the group orientation of the Chinese as a possible explanation for this lack of diversity although, as will be shown later, there were a number of instances where conflicting views were expressed. Nevertheless, if one hopes that the Internet will foster diverse viewpoints, one could be very disappointed.

Cyber Cross Talk

In this section, I will examine how one extended message exemplifies the bringing together of the architecture of the Internet and the rhetorical traditions of its users. One form of rhetoric that seems well-suited for the Internet is called "pure talk" (*ching tan*). Pure talk is concerned with metaphysical or ethical controversies (Garrett, 1993). In pure talk, for example, the disputation between a host and guest is divided into "rounds" composed of "exchanges" that could go on for days.

The feature of the Internet found in the following example is the ease with which the writer cut another messages into pieces and then responded to it in ways that resemble these traditional forms of disputation. In (13), this feature is used by a participant, consciously or unconsciously, to create a form of pure talk called "cross talk" (*xiang sheng*), where two people trade insults with each other. In one form of cross talk, one performer hurls insults at a silent partner. In this example, the writer takes advantage of how the architecture allows a writer to both recopy and edit previous messages to create this kind of disputation A piece of text, in this case a letter from Eric Ober, then the president of CBS news, plays the role of the "straight man" who is to be insulted. Ober had responded to a letter composed by the group by explaining the position of CBS. By cutting the letter into a number of segments, and then by responding to each segment, the writer creates a "cyber" cross talk with Ober.

13) On May 19th, we reported the Chinese Ministry of State Security
>has <u>recruited hundreds</u>[2] of ordinary Chinese citizens to steal U.S.[3]
Can CBS news tell the difference between "hundreds of" and planeloads of? Why did CBS report "planeloads of" instead of "hundreds of"? Can CBS tell the difference of dozens of and hundreds of?
>military, technological, trade, and computer secrets.
>This, according to the United States Defense Information Agency in
> Washington.
Is there a grammar mistakes here? or an incomplete sentence?
>Between 1986 and 1993, one in eight of all illegal export
>enforcement cases closed by US Commerce Department involved the
>People's Republic of China. Security experts have told CBS News that many of the spy cases
>uncovered are then hushed up and the
>suspects deported, so <u>the problem may</u> be even greater than we

>reported.

Doesn't the above statement show that CBS did not report correctly as they understood that the problem may be even greater than they reported.

Shouldn't CBS have reported that the problem might be even greater than CBS was reporting. Should CBS report, not planeloads, but city load, provinceload, countryload?

>Our report was responsible and important. We stand by it. In

>doing this story, we in no way intended to suggest that the

>recruits represent anything other than a minority of the Chinese

>population in this country and we not believe that we, in an

>way suggested otherwise.

>Furthermore, we have led network coverage of those brave,

>freedom-loving Chinese who have fought government repression. We

>have risked censorship, and worse, to bring those stories to the

censzorship?

>American public. However, our job is to bring ALL stories to the

Very good! Why don't you bring the letter from IFCSS and Mr. ___ [4] to the attention of the public. Thank you for doing it.

The writer seems to be using this form of "cross talk," to work logically through Ober's argument, attempting to refute each point Ober had made. As the writer worked through the dialogue, there is a change in the authorial stance in regard to the letter. At first, the writer raises specific questions concerning the arguments Ober made. These questions seem to be addressed directly to a general audience. However, about midway in the dialogue, the writer's stance begins to shift towards directly addressing the author of the letter. This shift in stance can produce a type of critical thinking often not seen in the classroom (Harklau, 2003).

In the virtual world of cyberspace, the writer seems comfortable engaging a powerful man in a dialogue, something that would probably never occur in a face-to-face context. Daisley (1994) points out that since in cyberspace the boundaries between different forms of discourse are not clearly delineated, the writer has the opportunity to play with her own boundaries, something the Chinese writer in this example takes full advantage of. The dialogic potential of the discourse, the ability to intervene both visually and verbally with another author, allows the writer to enter the discourse to raise questions as Socrates did in Plato's dialogues. This opportunity can give the writer a sense of empowerment often lacking in the classroom.

Organizing a Collective Response

About halfway through the discussion, the participants began to discuss how they would respond to the television show. In addition to the production of collective interpretations of events or individuals, the Internet provides a means to respond collectively. As mentioned earlier, one of the earliest calls was for a collective response to the perceived insult of the show, which eventually would result in organizing letter campaigns, setting up committees, sending out newsletters, and finally sending a delegation to lunch with Eric Ober and Connie Chung.

The desire to take action raised an interesting problem for some of the participants. Some felt that since they were, for the most part, not "Americans;" therefore, they did not seem to feel that they had the right to protest the injustice they perceived. Like the more recent anti-American protests in response in Beijing to the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Serbia, this incident allowed some of the participants to vent their hostility towards the United States. In example (14), the writer cites what many Americans would consider one of the most idealistic aspects of American society, the well-known quotation of John F. Kennedy "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" and sarcastically parodies it to ridicule the accusations of Chinese spying.

14) Ask NOT what your country can do for you, but ASK what you can do for your country. You can help your beautiful country by helping these bodacious spies. As many as they are, these spies, being from an inferior race, are quite stupid and therefore quite easy to catch.

There are elements of satire and irony in the use of these references to ridicule the content of Chung's report. Here again we see how the Internet can allow for the expression of an emotion that we may not find in other contexts.

Others wanted to go beyond merely attacking America to organizing a protest or suing the CBS television network. Interestingly, the threat of a lawsuit, a tradition clearly more American than Chinese, became a popular response. One writer argued that the lawsuit by a group of African-Americans alleging racism at Denny's restaurant could be used as a model for a possible suit against CBS. Another asked whether the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), an organization that frequently participates in lawsuits over racial discrimination, would help in preparing a suit. Some believed a lawsuit could be used to protect themselves against future slander. Unlike those who had been more critical of American society, some felt that making a public display, such as filing a lawsuit, represented the American right to exercise freedom of speech.

15) One of the best ways is to go public, either individually or collectively. I believe the very foundation of American type of democretics is free-speech.

In (16), the author argues that they have the same "right" to speak out as American citizens do even though they are not citizens.

16) You have many rights of US citizens. That's the reality. No matter how unhappy, you must accept it.

Not everyone agreed that they did have the right to fight back. In (17), the writer reminds the others of their position in the United States and the appropriate manner of behavior a guest should exhibit.

17) No point to cry around, we are guest here, if a guest doesn't enjoy his stay, what he can do is to say goodbye to host and leave.

There is a trace in (17) of the Confucian ethic of acting in a way appropriate to one's position in society. Just as Confucius admonishes a ruler to act like a ruler, the writer admonished his fellow Chinese, whom he considers to be guests in American, to act like guests. He then went on to flame those who opposed this view (18), echoing a general distrust of intellectuals that had long been held by many leaders of the Communist Party, particularly Mao Tse-Dung.

18) Do you have any idea what etiquette is? You INTELLECTUALS?

Another participant opposed making a public response out of a fear of how more publicity might harm other Chinese, a fear many immigrants have had about hanging out one's dirty linen. The writer worried that the Chinese community would be put into danger by calling attention to itself. In (19), he asks what the point is of publicizing this problem:

19) To fuss around so that more Americans will notice the Chinese student spy problem?

For many, however, it was important that some form of protest be initiated. As mentioned earlier, there was already a Chinese organization, IFCSS, which could initiate an action although its effectiveness and political orientation had long been a subject of debate

20) IFCSS leaders, this is a good time for you to claim that you can represent majority Chinese students. Come on, show your courage.

IFCSS had been involved in a number of controversies, including the debate over the Most Favored Nation Treaty. A number of writers, however, were frustrated at having to rely on IFCSS to organize this protest. One frustration was that IFCSS would be ineffectual.

21) I called IFCSS last night about 6:30 pm. The guy over there told me that they didn't know any thing about the incident or the report. The IFCSS guy told me that they were very busy and always very busy, certainly he also told me that they were pushing the MFN[5] and human rights issues very hard at congress. It really made me mad although I didn't say anything more to that guy.

However, IFCSS eventually did respond. On May 26th, they sent a "letter of inquiry" to CBS. Then, on May 28th, they established the IFCSS CBS Incident Committee, and on May 29th, created a listserv account dedicated to a discussion of this incident. Much of the activity on this topic then died out until October when CBS responded to the allegations of the committee and even arranged a lunch in New York with Eric Ober, then president of CBS news, Connie Chung, and members of the committee.

During this period, there were also individual attempts to reach CBS and inform them about their displeasure. At the beginning of the discussion, the person who had posted the first message reported how he had drafted a print letter to be mailed to CBS to protest the program. The letter was posted three times and revisions were made before it was sent to CBS. Although many comments were not publicly posted, the writer acknowledged receiving them and using some of them in his revisions.

The Internet allowed these writers to receive comments from a real audience with a real purpose but without the artificial constraints of a face-to-face classroom, constraints that have been noted by researchers such as Atkinson (2003) and Carson and Nelson (1996). The writers who offered criticisms of the letter through the Internet did not seem afraid of making critical statements, as their counterparts in the classroom might (Carson & Nelson, 1996). Many of the revisions between the first and third drafts demonstrated the writer's knowledge of the relationship between grammar and rhetoric. For example, in response to a suggestion to make the tone more forceful, the writer changed the phrase "may contribute to a damaging stereotype" to "will contribute to a damaging stereotype." At the end of the first paragraph, the writer added a possible additional consequence:

22) Such language will create serious distrust, even hostility between the majority of American people and people with Chinese national origin.

Beyond providing a space for collaborative writing, the Internet provided the writer with a rich language experience, something the classroom cannot always do. Throughout the discussion of the letter, the writer displays a deep sensitivity to the rhetorical consequences of his act. In (22), the writer stresses possible problems that might result from airing the show, particularly the potential for discrimination against Chinese, an argument to which CBS might be particularly sensitive. Throughout the letter, the writer used a variety of arguments that incorporated the American ideals of democracy, freedom, innocence until proven guilty, the Constitution, and the First Amendment, all of which attempted to situate the Chinese response within an American framework.

The effect was to strengthen the argument that the report could cause some damage. Another interesting change was to mitigate the ad hominem attack on Connie Chung. Although she was mentioned prominently in the letter, changes were made to shift the responsibility from her to CBS. In one instance the phrase "Connie Chung's report" was changed to "the CBS report." In another instance, the name of the show was changed to "the CBS report by Connie Chung," thus utilizing passive tense to shift the direct responsibility for the report away from Ms. Chung. The writer of this letter did not always accept the comments but used the Internet to negotiate the comments with other participants. In one case, the writer acknowledged that many people wanted him to emphasize how the report would fuel anti-Chinese hatred,

but since he felt that this claim could not be supported at that time, he argued it should not be included in the letter.

Unlike the earlier section that discussed how a consensus was developed about the character of Connie Chung, here there was truly a diversity of voices over the merits of such responses. In (23), the writer argues that the audience for the letter should be even broader.

> 23) There is not much we can do. But we have to show our concern
> >and dissatisfaction. I plan to send copies to their competitors
> >NBC and ABC. Please furnish me with mailing addresses to any
> >party you suggest to send.
> I agree, please add my name to the list of signatures. In addition,
> I just wish we had a strong national organization that can anticipate
> and response to such negative slanderous reports in timely manner with
> strong authority.

In (24), in response to an appeal not to send the letter, the writer argues that not sending it would be the same mistake that Chinese have made in the past by not responding to perceived injustices.

> 24) >>This attitude brings Chinese into trouble all the time. Always there
> >>:are people saying, I'm not involved, I don't care. If you search around
> >>:for the history of oversea Chinese in the last century, you will find
> >>:out that Chinese make the same mistake again and again.
> > What's wrong with my attitude? Why do I have to care things not
> > interesting me? Aren't most human beings just like me?
> I didn't say it is wrong, and this is the traditional Chinese attitude
> towards the problem.

As discussed above, the issue had already been raised prior to the writing of the letter. In the following examples, people from both sides of the argument go back and forth over what is an appropriate response.

> 25) >When Taiwan is unfairly boycotted by America for the endangered species
> >issue, where is the supportive voice from the mainland Chinese netter?

> 26) Ms. Chung just reflect some unhealthy thoughts among some Americans, but
> : that doesn't mean the Chinese should not fight for their own rights,
> :just like Black, Jews, Mexicans. It is one of the good things in
> :America, that everyone has a chance for his own rights.

In (25), the writer seems to wonder why there was concern for this issue when there had been traditionally little support among the participants for their compatriots in Taiwan. In (26), on the other hand, the writer seems to feel that protesting the television was justifiable in the same way other groups had protested for their rights.

Some responded with even stronger objections to sending the letter, going as far as to defend the show's premise. In (27), the writer argues that Chung had every right to air the show, basing his argument on the same American values that had previously been used to support political action in response to the report. In (28), the writer also defends the CBS report by revealing he himself had been asked to become a spy, indicating that there was some plausibility to the charges.

> 27) >What's the unhealthy thoughts by Ms. Chung? What rights of Chinese
> >have been violated by Ms. Chung? (The funny thing is that in a newsgroup
> >I have seen some Chinese netters said Chinese should talk about money
> >instead of human rights.) And what about the freedom of press?

28) I myself was summoned to Bureau of Security before I came to US. And they tried to ask me to "help" them in the future. Of course, I don't want to do anything for them, and they didn't follow up either. But that is the CCP's[6] practice on using ordinary people. I cannot deny the CCP policy, In this sense, I think CBS just discovered this and exposed it.

Since writers can easily hide behind the anonymity of the Internet, it would be impossible to verify this allegation. His charge was unanimously dismissed, highlighting the difficulty users of the Internet often face in verifying information. One writer flamed this person as "a liar and a stupid one," and another referred to him as having "no common sense."

In fact, there were few, if any outright flames posted directly to the newsgroup. Most of the criticisms were similar to the opinion expressed in (29) against not sending the letter.

29) Seems you just arrived America yesterday. Well I think I should rest my case here.

There was, however, nothing between the participants as inflammatory as the reference to Connie Chung as a "bitch." Nevertheless, it would be impossible to conclude that Chinese writers did not engage in critical personal attacks when they seemingly felt justified to do so.

CONCLUSION

As Yano (2001) argues, English has changed dramatically in the last 500 years and will probably continue to change. Bolter (2001) maintains that the rise of the Internet has greatly accelerated this change. I have tried here to indicate ways in which the Internet can further that change. This research suggests that, provided that writers such as those in this study have access to the Internet and control of what they discuss, the use of CMC can be liberating for non-English speaking students even when they must use English in their communications. The English found in these discussions can be considered a form of "World Rhetoric," a hybridization that encompasses the traditional forms of Chinese rhetoric expressed in English. Although the strong feelings often expressed in these messages may not be typical of all the exchanges found in this newsgroup, they do show the potential of the Internet to provide an alternative rhetorical context. In this kind of rhetorical space, we have seen how Chinese incorporate various rhetorical strategies in an argumentative context when they are appropriately motivated to do so.

This study gives us a unique insight into the nature of argumentation Chinese writers can produce outside the classroom. This argumentation can be consistent with traditional Chinese rhetoric while countering what Phillipson (1998) calls the "homogenizing" purpose of English (p. 101). As the writers struggled to agree on a response to CBS, they expressed personal and emotional opinions in ways Elbow (1994) called "reasonant" and "authentic." It cannot be argued conclusively that it was the Internet or the nature of the "assignment" that produced these rhetorical forms. Nevertheless, there is the possibility that using CMC "freed" the writer from the traditional forms of rhetoric usually found in the classroom, a point that merits further research.

Pedagogical Implications

The examination of CMC can also have useful pedagogical implications. Tella (1996) argues that we see the potential of the Internet for allowing hybrid forms of discourse into the classroom to produce meaningful forms of written discourse. As Swales (1997) argues, introducing these kinds of non-standard registers of writing can liberate the student

from overarching domination of anglophone native-speakerism, from consuming attention to the ritualistic surface of their texts, from an authoritarian and received world view of academic and technical texts as "objective," and from a dependence on imitation, on formulas, and on cut-and-paste anthologies of other writers' fragments. (p. 381)

This factor is particularly important in developing an alternative, and more positive, attitude towards non-Western forms of rhetoric in the L2 classroom. Kachru (1997) argues that it is important to recognize and incorporate these alternate forms of rhetoric not only in the classroom, but in all areas where writing is used as a form of communication These differences can be liberating for L2 writers. Swales (1997), for example, suggests that such alternative forms of rhetoric can be introduced into the L2 composition classroom to liberate students from the tyranny of conventional forms.

We have seen here that on their own, writers can develop their own forms of rhetoric to express deeply held beliefs argued with great passion to produce discourse much richer than what is often found in traditional assignments. Assignments that may seem important in a Western context, but with which the students have little knowledge or connection, may not produce the intended level of critical thinking as much as tasks that more directly affect students' lives. However, there are limitations as well. Here as with other areas of CMC, we have found vicious, often racist and bigoted discourse that does not always admit any dissenting voices. It can be difficult to completely control such outbursts. Some students may be offended by some of the language found in these exchanges or may not want to risk being attacked in such a way, and so will drop out of the discussion. As with any aspect of technology, the challenge is how to implement the potential of CMC but also anticipate possible abuses.

Despite the pedagogical potential of CMC, this study may be limited in its pedagogical value because of its inability to control for actual classroom constraints as well as for understanding the writers' own feelings about what they were doing. Although this study clearly shows the potential for using the Internet as a writing context, it also reiterates the importance of choosing assignments that can tap into areas where writers already have a strong background and strong opinions. The extent to which CMC can be brought into the L2 classroom will vary according to the context of the writing: between ESL or EFL classes or between expressive or genre-based assignments.

This type of research can also help present a broader and more complex view of non-Western rhetoric that reflects the ability of non-English speakers to control the forms of language they are using, which can help counter the argument that ESL teachers devalue the language and rhetoric of L2 writers (e.g., Kubota, 1999, 2001). As Selfe (1999) argues, the rise of the Internet forces us to extend our definitions of the nature of both print and technological literacies. In an ESL context, that means including non-native forms of rhetoric into the L2 classroom without always labeling them as "problematic." By allowing these alternative forms of English-language rhetoric into the L2 composition classroom, we can extend our understanding of what it means to be literate.

NOTES

1. I have transcribed these postings verbatim without changes to spelling or grammar.

2. The author actually marked the texts with a series of carets (^^^^^^^^^^), which I have interpreted as being underlined for emphasis.

3. I have tried to preserve the format of the interchange here.

4. The names of the writers have been removed.

5. The most favored nation treaty was coming up for a vote in the United States Congress. Many in Congress wanted to punish the Chinese for human rights violations. The Chinese community was divided over how the failure of the most favored nation treaty might negatively impact on the economic situation there.

6. The Communist Party of China

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joel Bloch teaches ESL composition at The Ohio State University. He has a PhD in Rhetoric from Carnegie Mellon University and has published previously on Chinese rhetoric, contrastive rhetoric, and plagiarism. He is currently working on a book on technology in L2 composition classes.

E-mail: bloch10@yahoo.com

REFERENCES

Atkinson, D. (2003). Writing and culture in the post-process era. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 12*(1), 49-63.

Aycock, A., & Buchignani, N. (1995). The e-mail murders: Reflections on "dead" letters. In S. G. Jones (Ed.), *Cyberspace: Computer-mediated communication community* (pp. 184-231). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (Trans. by C. Emerson & M. Holquist). Austin: The University of Texas Press.

Baym, N. K. (1995). The emergence of community in computer-mediated communication. In S. G. Jones (Ed.), *Cyberspace: Computer-mediated communication and community* (pp. 138-163). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Baym, N. K. (1998). The emergence of on-line community. In S. G. Jones (Ed.), *Cyberspace 2.0: Revisiting computer-mediated communication and community* (pp. 35-68). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bloch, J. G. & Chi, L. (1995) A comparison of the use of citations in Chinese and English academic discourse. In D. Belcher & G. Braine (Eds.), *Academic writing in a second language* (pp. 231-274). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Bolter, J. D. (2001). *Writing space: Computers, hypertext, and the remediation of print.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Canagarajah, A. S. (1997). Safe houses in the contact zone: Coping strategies of African-American students. *College Composition and Communication, 48*(2), 173-195.

Carson, J. G. (1992). Becoming biliterate: First language influences. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 1*(1), 37-60.

Carson, J. G**.,** & Nelson, G. L. (1996). Chinese students' perceptions of ESL peer response group interaction. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 5*(1), 1-19.

Chang, R., & Chang, M. S. *Speaking of Chinese.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Daisley, M. (1994). The game of literacy: The meaning of play in computer-mediated communication. *Computers and Composition, 11*(2), 107-119.

Elbow, P. (1994). *Voice and writing.* Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press.

Garrett, M. M. (1993). Classical Chinese conceptions of argumentation and persuasion. *Argumentation and Advocacy, 29*(winter), 105-115.

Gurak, L. J. (1997) *Persuasion and privacy in cyberspace: The online protests over Lotus MarketPlace and Clipper Chip.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press

Haas, C. (1996). Writing technology: Studies on the materiality of literacy. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Harklau, L. (2003). L2 writing by "Generation 1.5 students": Recent research and pedagogical trends (from P. K., Matsuda, A. S. Canagarajah, L. Harklau, K. Hyland, & M. Warschauer, Changing currents in second language writing research: A colloquium). *Journal of Second Language Writing, 12*(2), 151-179.

Heim, M. (1991). The erotic ontology of Cyberspace. In M. Benedikt (Ed.), *Cyberspace: First steps* (pp. 59-80). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Johnson-Eilola, J. (1997). Nostalgic angels: Rearticulating hypertext writing. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Kachru, Y. (1997). Cultural meaning and contrastive rhetoric in English Education. *World English, 16*(3), 337-350.

Kemp, F. (1995). Writing dialogically: Bold lessons from electronic text. In J. Petraglia (Ed.), *Reconceiving writing, rethinking writing instruction* (pp. 179-194). Mahwah, NJ: Lawerence Elbaum.

King, A. Y-C. (1991). Kuan-hsi and network building: A sociological interpretation. *Daedalus, 120,* 63-84.

Kubota, R. (1999). Japanese culture constructed by discourses: Implications for applied linguistics research and ELT. *TESOL Quarterly, 33*(1), 9-35.

Kubota, R. (2001). Teaching world Englishes to native speakers of English in the USA. *World English, 29*(1), 47-64.

Landow, G. (1997). *Hypertext 2.0.* Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press.

Lessing, N. (1999). *Code and other laws of Cyberspace.* NewYork: Basic Books.

Ma, R. (1996). Computer-mediated conversations as a new dimension of intercultural communication between East Asian and North American college students. In S. Herring (Ed.), *Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social, and cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 173-185). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

McCracken, G. (1990). *The long interview.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mao, L. M. (1990). Persuasion, cooperation, and diversity of rhetorics. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 19*(4), 131-142.

Pennington, M. C. (2003). The impact of the computer in second language writing. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Exploring the dynamics of second language writing* (pp. 287-310). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Phillipson, R. (1998). Globalizing English: Are linguistic human rights an alternative to linguistic imperialism? *Language Sciences, 20*(1), 101-112).

Ramanathan, V., & Atkinson, D. (1999). Individualism, academic writing, and ESL writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 8*(1), 45-75.

Rheingold, H. (1993). *Virtual communities.* Reading, PA: Addison-Wesley.

Selfe, C. L. (1999). Technology and literacy in the twenty-first century: The importance of paying attention. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Smith, B. (2003). The use of communication strategies in computer-mediated communication. *System, 31,* 29-53.

Sproull, L., & Keisler, S. (1991). Connections: New ways of working in networked organizations. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social sciences.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Sullivan, N., & Pratt, E. (1996). A comparative study of two ESL writing environments: a computer-assisted classroom and a traditional oral classroom. *System, 24*(4), 591-501.

Swales, J. M. (1997). English as Tyrannosaurus rex. *World Englishes, 16*(3), 373-382.

Tella, S. (1996). Foreign languages and modern technology: Heaven or hell. In M. Warschauer (Ed.), *Telecollaboration in foreign language learning: Proceedings of the Hawaii symposium* (pp. 3-17). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center.

Turkle, S. (1995). Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet. New York: Simon & Shuster.

Warschauer, M. (1995). E-mail for English teaching: Bringing the Internet and computer learning networks into the language classroom. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Warschauer, M. (1999). Electronic literacies: Language, culture, and power in online education. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Warschauer, M. (2000). Language, identity, and the Internet. In B. Kolko, L. Nakamura, & G. Rodman (Eds.), *Race in Cyberspace* (pp. 151-170). New York: Routledge. Retrieved November 29, 2003, from http://www.lll.hawaii.edu/web/faculty/markw/lang.html

Wu, S. Y., & Rubin, D. L. (2000). Evaluating the image of collectivism and individualism on argumentative writing by Chinese and North American college students. *Research in the Teaching of English, 35*(2), 148-178.

Yano, Y. (2001). World Englishes in 2000 and beyond. *World English, 20*(2), 119-131.