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Building Intercultural Competence through Blogging

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Abstract

The study explored the effects of blog interactions on foreign language learners' intercultural competence. It involved 17 English majors at a private university in Taiwan and 19 American students at a university in Pittsburgh. They took East Asian Food Culture courses offered in their institutions and participated in a 4-week blog interactions. These blog entries written by Taiwanese students, comments from their American partners, and replies were collected for a content-analysis based on Byram's model of intercultural competence. A 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire on students' perceptions of the blog use was distributed at the end of the semester and analyzed. Research results showed that blogging had positive effects on EFL English majors' intercultural competence as the blog entries revealed four different categories of intercultural competence. Among these categories, the most frequently occurred one was "knowledge about one's own and others' culture for intercultural communication," followed by "interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own cultures to others." In addition, the majority of students held positive attitudes toward the use of blogs in the classroom.

Keywords: Intercultural competence, blog interaction, food culture

以部落格書寫培養跨文化溝通能力

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摘要

本研究旨在探索部落格互動對外語學習者跨文化溝通能力的成效。參與本研究的為台灣一所私立大學的 17 位外文系學生，和美國匹茲堡一所私立大學 19 位不同科系大學生。他們選修兩校所開設的東亞飲食文化課程，並參與了為期 4 周的部落格互動。本研究收集了台灣學生寫的部落格貼文和回覆、美國學生回應作內容分析，分析依照巴倫跨文化溝通能力指標。期末問卷採五等尺度量表，調查學生對使用部落格的觀感。研究結果顯示部落格互動對英語系學生跨文化溝通能力的培養有其成效，部落格貼文呈現四種不同種類跨文化溝通能力。其中最常見的是有關本身或他人文化的知識，其次是獲知他人文化生活和介紹本身文化給他人的興趣。此外，大多數學生對課堂使用部落格抱持正面態度。

關鍵詞：跨文化溝通能力、部落格互動、飲食文化

Building Intercultural Competence through Blogging

Introduction

Intercultural competence, the ability to communicate with people of other cultures, has been regarded as an important component of foreign language education in the age of globalization. The need to develop learners' intercultural competence stimulates L2 educators to seek "an effective means of providing their students with acquisition-rich interaction through cross-cultural communication" (Lee, 2009, p. 440). In response to the need, foreign language teachers have tried to incorporate intercultural learning activities to develop intercultural competence in the foreign language learners.

An increasing body of studies have investigated the development of intercultural competence in intercultural/international interactions (e.g., Carney, 2007; Chun, 2011; Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Lee, 2009, 2011; Liaw, 2006; Schenker, 2012). Telecollaborative projects that involve foreign language learners from two different countries are often set up to enhance students' intercultural competence. In these projects, e-mails (Schenker, 2012), blogs (e.g., Carney, 2007; Ducate & Lomicka, 2005, 2008; Lee, 2009, 2010, 2011), e-forums (Chun, 2011; Liaw, 2006), videoconferences (Chun, 2011) were used as mediating tools to develop intercultural competence in the foreign language classroom. These studies reported positive effects of these computer-mediated-communication tools.

However, most of the previous studies were conducted in the English-speaking countries to facilitate cultural learning of European languages such as German, French, and Spanish.

Very few of these studies involved Chinese-English collaboration. In addition, the potentials of blogs for fostering the development of intercultural competence have not yet been fully explored in the EFL contexts. Reviewing previous studies, Ducate and Lomika (2008) pointed out research on the use of blogs in foreign language learning and teaching “is in the beginning stages” (p. 12). As the need to cultivate students’ intercultural competence and linguistic competence continues to grow in the age of globalization, more studies that involve the collaboration between EFL learners and English-speaking people have to be done.

The present study was based on a collaborative project conducted by the author of the paper and an American professor of International Studies in the U.S. The instructional goal of the project was to provide intercultural learning experiences for their students in Taiwan and the U.S. and develop intercultural competence in English majors in the foreign language learning contexts. It was designed to explore the effects of blog interactions on the EFL learners’ development of intercultural competence and their perceptions of blog interactions with English-speaking learning partners.

Literature Review

Intercultural Competence in Foreign Language Education

Intercultural competence is regarded as an important component of foreign language education. It has been defined differently by various researchers (e.g., Byram, 1997, 2000; Deardorff, 2006, 2009). Among these definitions, Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence (1997, 2000) has been widely accepted and used for assessing

the development of intercultural competence in the foreign language classrooms (e.g., Elola and Oskoz, 2008; Liaw, 2006; Moeller & Negent, 2014; O'Dowd, 2003).

Intercultural competence, according to Byram (2000), is composed of five interdependent components: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. The first component, attitudes, refers to a learner's "curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" ; The second one is "the knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction"; the third and fourth components refer to the "ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own" and the "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (p. 3). The last one is "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p. 3).

These five components serve as the guidelines for assessing foreign language learners' intercultural experiences. The assessment proposed by Byram has five categories: 1) Interest in other people's way of life, 2) ability to change perspective, 3) ability to cope with living in a different culture, 4) knowledge about another country and culture, and 5) knowledge about intercultural communication (2000, pp. 5-11).

Byram's model of intercultural competence, as commented by O'Dowd (2003), took into account key characteristics of intercultural learning and the elements of the learning process should aim to develop in students. In addition, it "offers a comprehensive approach that deals with the skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical awareness which have been seen to constitute intercultural competence" (p. 120). Due to clear objectives and assessment for each of the components, Byram's model has already been put into wide use in foreign language classrooms. As a result, classroom teachers and researchers have adopted or adapted this model for classroom practice or research.

Byram's model (2000) has been adopted or modified to assess the development of intercultural competence (Chu, 2011; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Lee, 2009, 2010, 2011; Liaw, 2006; Liaw & Bunn-Le Master, 2010; O'Dowd, 2003). Liaw (2006), for example, investigated the development of intercultural competence of sixteen first-year foreign language majors in Taiwan. She set up an e-forum for them to discuss their responses to English articles on Taiwanese culture with their English-speaking peers in the US. Content-analysis of these e-forum entries showed different types of intercultural competence. The most frequent type is "knowledge about one's own culture and others' culture for intercultural communication"; the least frequent one is "ability to change perspective." Again in another study of similar design by Liaw and Bunn-Le Master (2010) on the intercultural interaction between freshman English majors in Taiwan and pre-service teachers in education programs in the U.S., Category C—the knowledge about one's own culture and others' culture—is the biggest category.

Following Liaw's adoption of Byram's intercultural competence guidelines, Elola and Oskoz (2008) explored how the American learners of Spanish in the study-abroad program in Spain and their peers at the U.S. home institution fostered intercultural competence through blogging. The American students in Spain became cultural informants, or mediator for their home-based partners. They found that the blog interactions between the two groups had positive effects on learners' intercultural competence. Similarly, Lee (2011) found that blogging about cross-cultural issues helped the sixteen American students in Spain develop their intercultural cultural knowledge and skills. Blogs, in these studies, provide a medium for intercultural learning. Schenker's telecollaborative project (2012) involved sixteen American learners of German at an American university and sixteen German learners of English at a high school in Germany. The foreign language learners discussed different cultural topics with their partners via email. These email exchanges showed that most of Byram's objectives of intercultural competence were achieved. In a similar fashion, Chu (2011) found online exchanges between German and English learners via asynchronous forums and synchronous text chat played an important part in the development of the learner's intercultural competence.

It is important to note that the telecollaboration plays a significant role in the development of intercultural competence. Synchronous (chat room, discussion forum, videoconferences) and asynchronous (e-mails, blogs) are mediated tools to foster intercultural competence. Among these tools, blogs have gained popularity in recent years for their potential educational uses (Ducate and Lomicka, 2005).

The Use of Weblogs

Weblogs or blogs have been used to enhance intercultural interaction and to develop intercultural competence (Campbell, 2003; Carney, 2007; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Jones & Nuhfer-Halten, 2006; Lee, 2009, 2010, 2011; Ward, 2004). Critical thinking about the target culture is one of the benefits of blogging. “Writing and reading blogs are one way in which students can gain different perspectives about the target culture. The blog can be used, for example, as one of the products students use to learn about the practices and perspectives of the target culture” (Ducate and Lomicka, 2005, p. 415).

Elola and Oskoza (2008) used blogs as a means for American college students in the Spanish as a foreign language classroom and a study abroad program in Spain to share and reflect upon cultural topics addressed in the classroom. They found the positive effects of using blogs in foreign language instruction on the development of intercultural competence because instances of the five categories of intercultural competence have been found in the blog posts of both groups. These blog posts provided high percentage of instances of students’ knowledge about one’s own and others’ culture intercultural communication. Elola and Oskoza concluded their study with two benefits of blogging: creating an intercultural learning context that develops cultural awareness and a new space for discovering self and others. Presence of intercultural competence was also found in the blog exchanges set up by Carney (2007) between the EFL classes in Japan and college-level Japanese class in the US. In a similar vein, Lee (2011) created three types of blogs—personal blogs, a class blog, a project blog—for foreign language learners in study-abroad programs to discuss cross-cultural issues.

Blogging did not only promote learner autonomy but also develop intercultural competence because it allowed learners to actively engage in the process of reflection on their writing about cross-cultural observations (Lee, 2011).

In recognizing the benefits of blogging, the Cross-cultural Rhetoric Project launched by Stanford University also set up a project blog for participating instructors and students from the U.S., Sweden, Singapore, Egypt, and Australia to explore varying cultures' perspectives on world issues. The researcher of the present study browsed the project blog for instructional materials and found international students wrote and responded to blog posts categorized as Rhetoric of Food. Students explored the meaning of food in different cultural contexts (http://www.stanford.edu/group/ccr/blog/stanford_rhetoric_of_food/). Specifically, one of the groups focused on how awareness of the globalization of food commodities can shed light on the global food crisis. A blog entry posted by Egyptian students on Education and Food Choice in Egypt received 19 comments from participating students in the U.S. The collaborative blogs with other digital technologies provided channels for cultural connections that foster understanding, awareness, and intercultural competencies (O'Brien and Eriksson, 2008).

The Collaborative Project

The collaborative project aimed to create intercultural learning opportunities for EFL English majors and to foster their development of intercultural competence through interaction and collaboration with speakers from the target culture. To achieve this instructional goal, the researcher collaborated with a professor of International Studies at an

American university in Pittsburg, to seek opportunities for their students to collaborate online. They discussed via email one year before the project actually took place in the spring of 2014 and finally decided on offering East Asian food culture courses that involved their students in collaborative activities. In the collaborative relationships, Taiwanese students served as the intercultural speakers who wrote about their home culture and perspectives on East Asian food culture on the class blog; American students played authentic English audience who were interested in Asian culture. Other collaborative tasks and activities were translating and interpreting for a research team of six American students led by the American professor to investigate women-led restaurants in Taiwan. This paper only reports on the blog interactions between Taiwanese and American students in April and May of 2014. It has the following three research questions:

- 1) What are the effects of the blog interactions on EFL English majors' development of intercultural competence?
- 2) How do the blog interactions between Chinese-speaking bloggers and American readers take place?
- 3) What are EFL English majors' perceptions of the use of blogs?

Method

Participants and Settings

17 English majors (all females) took the course "Food Culture and Writing: East Asia" with the Taiwanese teacher-researcher at a private university in Taiwan; 19 American students

enrolled in the course “Eat, Drink: East Asia” offered by the American professor at a private university in Pittsburg. The Taiwanese students were first paired up and then two of the American partners were assigned to them by the American professor. 8 groups of 4 students, 2 Taiwanese and 2 American students, were formed for the online interaction. Before blogging online, they had a video conference on Ang Lee’s movie *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* via Skype or Google Hangout. The purpose of the online discussion was for the students from the two classes to introduce themselves to their group members.

The Food Culture Courses

The course entitled “Food Culture and Writing: East Asia” was proposed by the instructor-researcher with an aim of enhancing English majors’ intercultural competence. The course description is detailed below:

This class is designed in intercultural collaboration with the elective entitled “Eat, Drink: East Asia” offered at Chatham University. It involves students from both universities in an exploration of food, culture, and writing in the East Asian context (China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan). Students will study the meanings of food culture in East Asia, gender and family dynamics, and the transformations of the East Asian cuisines in the U.S. To help students approach these major topics from local and global views, a class blog will be set up to facilitate intercultural collaboration/peer interaction. The course materials consist of different genres, such as nonfiction, cookbooks, short essays, films, TV shows, blogs, and websites. Students will read/watch the aforementioned texts with critical eyes, participate in

food blogging, conduct a field trip, and collaborate with their American partners to complete a project.

“Food Culture and Writing” was an 18-week seminar for juniors and seniors in the Foreign Languages and Literature Department, starting from mid-Feb to mid-June, 2014. The students met once a week, for two 50-minute class periods. “Eat, Drink: East Asia,” on the other hand, was a 4-week intensive elective offered by the American instructor in May. Due to the different school and class schedules, the two instructors emailed on a regular base to finalize the time and tasks for intercultural collaboration.

The major texts chosen for the course were Fushia Dunlop’s award-winning nonfiction *Shark's Fin and Sichuan Pepper: A Sweet-Sour Memoir of Eating in China* (2008), Jennifer 8 Lee’s *New York Times* best seller *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food* (2008), Ang Lee’s *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* (1993), Juzo Itami’s *Tampopo* (1985), and selected episodes from *Jewel in the Palace (Daejanggeum)*.

The Blog Writing Assignments

The blog writing assignments (see Appendix A) were designed to foster intercultural interaction between the Taiwanese students and their American learning partners. The Taiwanese students were required to write four 200-word blog posts, each on a major text selected for the class. The blog posts, given in sequence, start with an exploration of self-identity through a favorite food, discussion of the Chinese food in the foreign aspect of a British journalist Fushia Dunlop, an investigation of the American Chinese food (especially fortune cookies) launched by an American-born Taiwanese, Jennifer 8 Lee, and finally back

to one's home culture presented in *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*, a movie directed by Ang Lee. Each of the four blog post entries has to address one of the three topics written by the American instructor (for these topics, see Appendix A). It is hoped that these topics for discussion would serve as a springboard for intercultural interactions between the Taiwanese and American students. However, due to the time restriction, the American students were unable to post on the class blog, but used these topics for their discussion in class and other assignments. The Taiwanese students, on the other hand, posted these entries on the class blog. Then the American learning partners responded to these blog posts.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The aforementioned blog posts, comments, replies were collected for a content-analysis. Byram's guidelines for the assessment of intercultural competence were adopted to analyze the content of the blog entries and replies. Byram's intercultural competence includes the five categories: "(1) interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own culture to others, (2) ability to change perspective, (3) ability to cope with living in a different culture, (4) knowledge about one's own and others' cultures for intercultural communication, and (5) knowledge about intercultural communication processes." Category 3, the ability to cope with living in a different culture, was deleted because it did not apply to the participants in the current study.

The coding procedure was composed of the following steps. First, the two coders—the researcher and her English-speaking graduate assistant—read five students' blog entries together and marked any presence of the four categories of Byram's intercultural competence.

These marked passages were classified in four types: A, B, C, D. They discussed reasons of their classification and discrepancies in numbering and coding. Then each of the coders coded the first blog entries individually. Next, they met to compare and finalize the categories that they had discrepancies on, and then finalized the categories assigned to the blogs. They went through the same coding procedure for the other three blog posts, discussed the discrepancies until an agreement on categorization was achieved.

A 10-item questionnaire based on a five-point Likert-scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) about students' perception of the use of the class blog was distributed to Taiwanese students at the end of the class. 16 questionnaires were collected for a descriptive analysis.

Results and Discussion

The Development of Intercultural Competence through Blogging

The Taiwanese students in the project produced a total of 68 blog post entries on the course texts during a one-month period of blog interactions with American learning partners. They received 38 comments from their American learning partners: 6 comments on blog post 1; 7 comments on blog post 2; 11 comments on blog post 3; 14 comments on blog post 4. In response to these comments, 18 replies are given. These 68 blog posts and 18 replies to American students' comments revealed instances of intercultural competence described by Byram (2000). Table 1 shows the four categories and examples of intercultural competence found in the blog interactions.

Table 1***Examples of Intercultural Competence from the Class Blog***

Category	Description	Examples from the blog posts and comments
A. Interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own culture to others	--I am interested in other people's experience of daily life, particularly those things not usually presented to outsiders through the media. --I am also interested in the daily experience of a variety of social groups within a society and not only the dominant culture.	I'm so glad to know that you also like to eat the spicy food, I am curious about America's spicy food. I think it will be totally different from Taiwan's spicy food, And thank you for your sharing. (Alison, blog post 1)
B. Ability to change perspective	--I have realized that I can understand other cultures by seeing things from a different point of view and by looking at my culture from their perspective	Wow! That's a [different] perspective to look at the scene. I really liked the fact that we think differently. This gives me a lot more to think about! Thank you for your comment. I think I have to find some time to watch the movie again now: D (Jennifer, blog post 2, Reply)
C. Knowledge about one's own and others' culture for intercultural communication	--I know some important facts about living in the other cultures and about the country, state and people. --I know how to engage in conversation with people of the other culture and maintain a conversation.	Last summer, I have spent a month in a language school at Brighton, England.... I had already heard lots of comments about how bad British food.... In the an-hour lunch time after class, I was so eager to buy a sandwich from the supermarket for my lunch. When I tried the first bite, I really wished there was a microwave for me to heat the sandwich. The bread was as cold as ice, and hard as a stone.... I guess it partly because the speed of their living style. They like to do things fast, in order to save more time. (Ashley, blog post 2)
D. Knowledge about the intercultural communication process	--I know how to resolve misunderstanding which arise from people's lack of awareness of the view point of another culture. --I know how to discover new information and new aspects of the other cultures for myself.	It is a misunderstanding that we eat everything...Because of the different climate and groups of people in China, Chinese people have never been afraid of trying anything eatable. Therefore, using different kinds of material in the dishes bravely is a kind of Chinese specialty. Sometimes, Chinese food just need more appreciation and patient to make you in love with them. I am very afraid of pig's leg until recently I try to cook them and start to realize the flavor and the texture of pig's skin.... Therefore, if people would like to try them, they will finally in love with most the material that you think it is strange at first. (Jane, blog post 2)

As shown in the table, four types of intercultural competence were found in the blog entries: A) interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own culture to others, B) ability to change perspective, C) knowledge about one's own and others' culture for intercultural communication, and D) knowledge about the intercultural communication process. Table 2 presents the numbers and categories of intercultural competence in the four blog posts:

Table 2

Numbers and Categories of Intercultural Competence in the Four Blog Posts

Category	Blog post 1	Blog post 2	Blog post 3	Blog post 4	Total
A	13	6	3	7	29
B	0	5	2	1	8
C	6	10	17	14	47
D	0	1	0	0	1
Total	18	22	23	22	85

As shown in the table, the most frequently occurred category is C. "Knowledge about one's own and others' culture for intercultural communication"; followed by A. "Interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own culture to others." The least occurred category among the four is D. "knowledge about the intercultural communication process."

The 47 blog entries and replies in the Category C showed that the students knew some

important facts of living and eating in the US. They discussed globalization of food and compared the original Chinese dishes with American Chinese food in the US. In these blog entries, they also explained to their American partners the meaning of the Sunday dinner in Ang Lee's movie *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* and food as an expression of love.

The 29 blog entries and replies in the second frequently occurred categories revealed students' interest in introducing their culture and knowing American life. Most of the entries were from Blog Post 1. Self-introduction. The students introduced their favorite food and the cultural meaning of food. Most of the food they described were traditional Chinese/Taiwanese cuisine such as hotpot, dumpling, rice, and homemade food. Some of them described their favorite western food and expressed their interest in foreign cuisines.

What is noteworthy is that only one blog entry fell under Category D. This entry was from Blog Post 2—Shark's Fin and Sichuan Pepper. The student tried to resolve the misunderstanding of a cultural stereotype reported by Dunlop in her book: Chinese eat everything. This category had the least number of the blog entries probably because the Taiwanese blog writers mainly responded to the assigned texts about East Asian food cultures and their home cultures. As a result, the blog interaction provided limited chance for resolving misunderstanding and discovering new information and aspects of other cultures.

Blogging, as evidenced in the blog interactions, builds intercultural competences in foreign language learners. In line with previous studies (Carney, 2007; Ducate & Lomicka, 2005; 2008; Elola & Oskos, 2008), this study found different categories of intercultural competence defined by Byram (2000). Like the study-abroad students in Elola and Oskos's

study (2008), the Taiwanese students in the current study played “cultural informants” for their American partners. Knowledge about one’s own and others’ culture for intercultural communication (Category C) and interest in other people’s way of life and introducing one’s culture to others (Category A) were identified as the most frequent categories of intercultural competence in both studies. However, the only difference is that the present study did not find any instances in the category regarding ability to cope with living in a different culture because the Taiwanese participants developed their intercultural competence through blog interactions with American students, not through living in a different culture.

What is noteworthy is that the present study shares similarity with Liaw’s study (2006) in terms of the types and frequency of categories of intercultural competence. Though both studies used different CMC media to foster intercultural competence, they shared similarly significant findings. This is probably because the reading materials used in both collaborative projects were related to home cultures. Liaw selected *Sinorama* magazine articles on the lifestyles and cultures related to Taiwan, whereas the researcher of the present study chose English texts about Chinese food culture written from western perspectives. Instead of reading texts about the target culture, the Taiwanese participants in both studies read texts about home cultures and engaged in cross-cultural discussion with American partners. The results show the benefits of using CMC media for fostering intercultural competence in foreign language learners in the EFL contexts.

Blog Interaction between Taiwanese Bloggers and American Readers

The collaborative writer-reader interactions signal the presence of intercultural

competence as defined by Byram. The interactions show the successful partnership of telecollaboration. Table 3 presents the numbers of entries, comments, and replies in the four blog posts.

Table 3

Numbers of Blog Entries, Comments, and Replies in the Four Blog Posts

Features	Blog post 1	Blog post 2	Blog post 3	Blog post 4	Total
post entry	17	17	17	17	68
comment	6	7	11	14	38
reply	4	4	4	6	18
Total	27	28	32	37	124

As shown in the table, the numbers of the comments given by the American partners on the four blog posts and Taiwanese student bloggers' replies to these comments increased gradually. Blog Post 4 received most comments, followed by subsequent replies. In other words, most of the blog interaction between the Taiwanese students and American students centered on the discussion of Ang Lee's movie *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*. This is probably because students were more familiar with the home culture presented in the movie and they had a video conference via Skype or Google Hangout to discuss the movies during the time of the blog interactions. One example of the intercultural interaction via the class blog is presented below to illustrate how blog interactions took place.

Blog Post 4: Food Serves as a Bridge Toward Human Relationships (posted on April 27, 2014 by Jenny Chang)

I noticed that the Sunday dinner rituals are not only a force for the family to gather

together, they are also when the Chu family tends to announce “big news” during their Sunday dinners. For the three daughters, the Sunday dinners are no longer a chance for them to catch up with each other’s lives. Rather, they have turned into a burden, a burden that they had to stick to. However, throughout the end of the film, food is also the crucial element that solves all of the problem in their lives. It is through eating and cooking that Jia-Chian learns to understand Chu and starts to cherish each other once again. I think it is truly brilliant of Ang Lee to choose a necessity in our daily life to represent the complex of human nature.(excerpt)

Comment by Gabriel Blake on May 8, 2014

I think that you make some really excellent points here. The Sunday dinner rituals, while they are supposed to be a time where a father and his daughters (as well as some close family friends) can come together and catch up on each others’ lives, end up becoming more of a “torture ritual” for all involved. I also do agree that food is the means by which all of the problems are solved at the end, but it’s also an integral part of progressing the plot and of marking the passing of time. Food takes on so many roles and meanings in this film: it enables Jia Chen to open up to her ex-boyfriend about her past, it is the means by which Old Chu expresses his affection for his daughters and for Shan Shan and, while it ends up being the means for solving many problems at the end of the film, food is also used to avoid facing and discussing problems several times throughout in the film (e.g. during Sunday dinners when characters would look at the food on their plates or place food into their mouths so as not to have to speak to one another.) I agree that Ang Lee’s choice to use something as universal as use food to depict family life in Taiwan is brilliant; it makes the film that much more accessible to people from every culture.

Reply by Jenny on May 17, 2014

Wow you have some really great insights of the movie! To be honest with you, when our teacher told us that you guys are watching “Eat, Drink, Man, Woman” as well, I was quite worried. I thought you guys might not enjoy the movie very much since both the dishes and the character’s behavior might seem awkward and foreign to you, and you wouldn’t be able to understand what Ang Lee is trying to convey. But I am genuinely so happy that you seem to enjoy the movie and that you have such interesting thoughts of the movie. You sure have touched upon some perspectives that I have never thought of. Thank you so much for sharing them with me :)

The blog interactions between Jenny Chang and Gabriel Blake revealed evidence of intercultural competence. The blog post on the Sunday dinner rituals in *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* illustrated three components of intercultural competence: interest in introducing one’s own culture to others, ability to change perspective by looking at the Sunday dinner from American perspective, knowledge about one’s own culture and others’ culture for

intercultural communication by engaging in a conversation. Similarly, another blog interaction between Joanne Wu and Sharon Smith on Japanese food revealed Wu's interest in knowing other people's way of life, ability to change perspective by seeing Taiwanese stinky tofu from a Japanese perspective. The excerpts of the blog interactions are given below:

Blog Post 2: Weird Food in Japan

(posted on April 30, 2014 by Joanne Wu)

Natto is a type of fermented soybean, popular as a breakfast food in Japan. I remembered it was on the fifth day I traveled to Japan, Natto was served as a breakfast. One of my Japanese friends asked me to give it a try and I did. I can't describe that special but weird taste of Natto, which I didn't like. I only took a mouthful of it and left it all to my Japanese friend. I think what I feel about Natto is like what my Japanese friend feel about Taiwanese sticky tofu. When I took my Japanese [friend] to eat stinky tofu, he just had a little bite of it and made a distasteful facial expression. I know he felt a disgust at stinky tofu. I think that's the most interesting part when traveling to a foreign country: to stimulate our tastes and feel the cultural difference.

Comment by Sharon Smith on May 20, 2014

Your thoughts on Natto and Stinky Tofu are intriguing. It seems that liking either one of the two foods is an acquired taste –not something that many foreigners can easily adapt to. Is it possible that a true Taiwanese person can withstand and/or like Stinky Tofu and that a true Japanese person can withstand and/or like Natto?

The American student's question at the end of her response to the post "Weird Food in Japan" would certainly lead to reflection on the different cultural meanings of Japanese and Taiwanese weird food. However, the interaction did not continue due to the time constraint. One of the problems encountered by the instructor and the student bloggers was the delayed responses to the blog posts caused by the differences in the class schedules. Due to the fact that the class in the US was two months behind the one in Taiwan, the Taiwanese students did not receive immediate feedback from their American learning partners right after these entries were posted.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned blog interactions that developed different aspects of intercultural competence show the following characteristics of successful partnership discovered by O'Dowd (2003) in his study on intercultural learning in Spanish-English e-mail exchanges:

- Students had opportunities to express their feelings and views about their own culture to a receptive audience.
- Students were encouraged to reflect critically on their own culture through questions posed by their partners.
- Students engaged in dialogic interactions with their partners about the home and target cultures and consequently this led to a growing awareness of differing perspective on the two cultures' products and practices. (p. 137)

An interactive reader-writer relationship is built in the collaborative environment of the class blog. The authentic readers and communicative languages are exactly the benefit of blogging: (Ward, 2004). Blog posts are "on-line journals" that can be "used in collaborative ways"; the class blog provides an "interwoven net of information" (Godwin-Jones, 2003, p. 13) and "a practice environment where students can think, reflect, and create language slowly for a real-life audience" (Pinkman, 2005, p. 14).

In conclusion, the intercultural interactions confirm the potential benefits of blog interactions on the development of intercultural competence. The collaborative writer-reader relationship developed during the one-month interaction helped students foster the different components of intercultural competence defined by Byram (2000). The blog assignments involved interactions with English-speaking audience in order to acquire skills and knowledge and to gain awareness of different cultural meanings of Asian food from

American students. The blog interactions also offered students the opportunities to be aware of their own culture and how it was viewed by American students.

Students' Perceptions of the Class Blog

The results of the survey revealed students' positive attitudes toward the blog interaction and the usefulness of the blog in their responses to the questionnaire. Table 4 shows the Taiwanese students' perceptions of the blog assignment.

Table 4
Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviation of Students' Perceptions of the Blog Assignments

Statements of the Survey	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
1. I like to write blog posts on Food Culture.	0	0	7	7	2	3.7	0.70
2. I like to share my ideas with my American peers via blogging.	0	0	5	7	2	3.9	0.77
3. I like to receive comments from American peers.	0	0	5	4	7	4.1	0.89
4. The blog assignments helped to develop my ability to communicate with students from the American culture.	0	0	7	4	5	3.9	0.89
5. The blog assignments helped me to reflect upon my own culture and foreign cultures.	0	0	1	6	9	4.5	0.63
6. Reading American students' comments on my blog posts helped me gain different cultural perspectives and reflect on my own beliefs.	0	1	3	4	9	4.4	0.81
7. I hope that I can receive more comments from American peers.	0	0	4	6	6	4.1	0.81
8. I hope that I can read blogs posts by American peers.	0	0	0	7	9	4.6	0.51

9. To gain insights into one's own culture and foreign cultures is important to FLLD students.	0	0	0	3	13	4.8	0.4
10. Taking Food Culture and Writing helped me develop intercultural competence.	0	0	0	5	11	4.7	0.48
Note: 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= somewhat agree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree							

As shown in the table, students perceived the helpfulness of the blog assignments to their reflection upon their own culture and foreign cultures (Item 5, $M=4.5$). They also reported that American students' comments helped them gain different cultural perspectives and reflect on their own beliefs (Item 6, $M=4.4$). What is noteworthy is that the students expressed their hope to read blog posts by American peers (Item 8, $M=4.6$), but did not seem to hold favorable attitudes toward writing blog posts (Item 1, $M=3.7$) and sharing ideas via blogging (Item 2, $M=3.9$). This is probably because the bloggers did not receive immediate responses after posting blog entries online. To maximize the effects of blog interactions, the instructor-researcher needs to solve the problem caused by time and schedule differences mentioned earlier.

Nevertheless, the result of the survey (items 9 & 10) show that the food culture class had potential effects on developing intercultural competence. As shown in the table, students considered gaining insights into one's own culture and foreign cultures important to foreign language learners ($M=4.8$) and taking Food Culture and Writing helped them develop intercultural competence ($M=4.7$).

Students' perceptions toward blogging offer valuable insights into the use of blogs for

the development of intercultural competence. The findings of the project confirm the benefits of blog interactions reported in previous studies (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Lee, 2009, 2011). The participants found the course and the blog project enhanced their cultural knowledge. They were fond of writing blogs and reading comments from American partners and found the experiences rewarding. As suggested by researchers (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Lee, 2009, 2011), blogging enhanced students' interest and engaged them in cultural learning. The participants in Ducate and Lomicka's study (2008) gained cultural knowledge from different perspectives through reading blogs written by native speakers of Spanish. They said that blogs offered "a window into the target culture that they would never get from their textbook alone" (p. 24). One of the students in the present study reflected on the rewarding experiences: "Learning from others' perspectives always help us rethink and *make* [italics added] self-examination. If the U.S. students did not pay attention to my blog post and share their opinions, I would never gain any confidence to express my unique wired ideas." Another wrote, "Those experiences become my motivation to not just stay here but move forward to touching all the culture that I have read in my literature books." These words revealed the value of blogging as a pedagogical tool in building intercultural competence in English majors in the EFL contexts.

Conclusion

The collaborative project aimed to foster English majors' intercultural competence through reading and writing about East Asian food culture. It provided an opportunity for

them to communicate their viewpoints with English-speaking audience who are interested in East Asian food culture. Both the qualitative and quantitative data collected for the project showed that the one-month cross-cultural blog interactions fostered the development of intercultural competence. The class blog provided a collaborative environment for the Taiwanese students to share and enhance their understanding of Asian food culture. Consequently, they learned to look at their home culture from different perspectives through the comments and questions of their American learning partners. They were also made aware of the different meanings of East Asian food from local and global views. It is important to note that the American students' comments on the blog posts helped the Taiwanese students think critically about important issues of Chinese food culture. These interactive entries posted on the food culture illustrated the four-interrelated components of intercultural competence.

In addition, the project also found the potential benefits of blogs as a mediated tool for developing intercultural competence. Blogs offer students a space to share and shape their understandings of East Asian food. The Taiwanese bloggers in the collaborative project became the cultural informants or speakers who shared their home culture and viewpoints about other Asian cultures. The American audience's responses made the Taiwanese students reflect and think more deeply about some aspects of food culture. Both groups benefited from this collaborative relationship.

Bloggging, as evidenced in the qualitative and quantitative data, builds intercultural competence in foreign language learners. Despite the time constraint caused by the different

course schedules of the collaborative parties, the blog project shows that blogging fulfills the course objectives of the food culture and writing seminar. However, instructors still need to take into consideration some pedagogical issues when implementing a blog project in their classes. First, more time needs to be allocated to cross-cultural discussion on blogs in order to maximize the effects of blogging on the development of intercultural competence. Second, different types of blogs can be set up to foster intercultural partnership. For example, inter-class or inter-school blogs can be set up to involve participants from different cultures in global communication (Pinkman, 2005). Participants can be encouraged to have their own personal blogs linked to the class blog. Publishing the blog on the Internet encourages both ownership and responsibility on the students who write for real audience (Goldwin-Jones, 2003). Third, instructors may combine blogging with other synchronous CMC media such as videoconference via Skpy or Google Hangout. Real-time cross-cultural discussion is lacking in the delayed post-comment structure of blogs. Lee (2009; 2011), for example, combined multiple media to facilitate cultural learning and motivate foreign language learners. Finally, it is important for instructors to design blog assignments and tasks that meet the objectives of their courses effectively.

The project revealed evidence of EFL English majors' development of intercultural competence through blogging. However, it was unable to assess to what degrees these students have developed the attitudes, skills, and knowledge of intercultural competence. Due to the time constraint, the blog interactions only lasted for one month. The time constraints caused by different university schedules inevitably led to a limited level of interaction. As

Lee (2009) suggested, “collaborative writing using blogs should evolve over a longer time span (e.g., one semester) with more time allocated to each assignment in order to develop a long-term effect on L2 writing” (p. 439). To maximize the effects of blog interactions on the development of intercultural competence, researchers need to prolong the time for intercultural interactions online. It would also be interesting to investigate how English-speaking students benefit from the blog interactions. A comparative study of the learners and the speakers of the target language would provide further information for successful intercultural collaboration.

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Appendix A

Writing Assignment: Blog Posts

Write 4 blog posts. Each post should be about **200 words** with images and links if necessary. You need to exchange your drafts with your partners before posting your blog entries online. Your American learning partners will read your blog posts and give you comments.

The topics of the blog posts are listed below:

Blog Post 1: Self-Introduction

We are what we eat. Food and the way we eat food in daily lives reflect who and what we are. In this blog, introduce yourself and your favorite food to your American learning partner. Try to provide vivid description of the food and experiences of eating the food. Tell a tale of you and your favorite food. If you like, you can also provide recipes and pictures of the food.

Blog Post 2: Shark's Fin and Sichuan Pepper

Choose one of the three main points from Dunlop's *Shark's Fin and Sichuan Pepper*. Share your thoughts with Chatham readers. You can draw on your personal/other's experiences and/or Dunlop's sweet-sour memoir of eating in China to support your idea.

1. It is not easy for a traveler to go completely native in her tastes, because food traditions are an essential part of our cultural identity (p. 13).
2. Appreciating different food texture is a key element in Chinese gastronomy. "Texture is the last frontier for Westerner learning to appreciate Chinese food. Cross it, and you're really inside. But the way here is a wild journey that will bring you face to face with your own worst prejudices, your childhood fears, perhaps even some Freudian paranoias" (p. 135).
3. The first and most important cooking tool in Chinese cuisine is the knife.

Blog Post 3: The Fortune Cookie Chronicles

Choose one of the three main points from Lee's *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*. Share your thoughts with Chatham readers. You can draw on your personal/other's experiences and/or Lee's adventure to support your idea.

1. Many dishes served in Chinese restaurants in America are unknown in China, because they have been invented in the U.S. by Chinese cooks who wanted to appeal to American tastes.
2. American cultural identity was once compared to a melting pot, then later to a mixed salad: Lee would like to compare it to a stir-fry in which the ingredients remain distinct but are blended together by a common sauce.
3. The Chinese restaurant industry in the U.S., especially at the lower and more rural ends of the scale, is a large network of loosely associated entrepreneurs who share information and personnel through communication channels that operate mostly in the Chinese language. Individuals in this system often work long hours for low pay and may have minimal contact with mainstream U.S. society and culture.

Blog Post 4: Eat, Drink, Man, Woman

1. Discuss the Sunday dinner rituals/The dinner table as a symbol of family in the changing modern society. What is the meaning of the Sunday dinner? Observe the power relationships between the father and his three daughters. Who is cooking and who is eating? How about Jia-Chian and her boyfriend? What do you think of the traditional family role each of them (Father and three daughters) plays in the movie? How about your family? Is there a family meal similar to the Sunday dinner? What do you think of the family meal?
2. The traditional values revealed in Chef Chu's culinary arts
3. Food as a communicative element in the movie