



# College Students' Network Speech Community under the New Media Environment

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## Abstract

Since the emergence of the Internet, the most active contemporary college students, have plenty of time and are good at accepting new things. For some social problems reported on the Internet, they rely on the new media to express their views and opinions even give advice. Chatting on the network, establishing network forums for information exchange, forming large and small virtual communities. This paper first illustrates the code-switching form of college students' speech community. Secondly, it illustrates the characteristics and communicative mode of network speech community. Finally, it shows that contemporary youth rely on the communication mode of openness, equality and interaction of new media to construct youthful identity and promote the ideological collision between young people in different countries.

## Subject Areas

Journalism and Communication

## Keywords

Network Speech Community, New Media, College Students

## 1. Introduction

With the development of economy and science and technology, the Internet has turned the world into a global village. Relying on the Internet, people can exchange views with people from all over the world without the limitation of space. At the same time, in order to complete specific academic tasks, people will even have online meetings with European and American countries with a time difference of several hours which means relying on the Internet so that people can get rid of the limitation of time. However, traditional speech community which

means the speech community in the real world is separated from the virtual environment of the Internet and restricted by multiple factors. Speech community is usually defined as “a group of people who live in a certain region, have a specific cultural background and a similar way of life and abide by the same speech rules in the process of communication” [1]. However, people in the network speech community usually share one or two common characteristics. They have similar language and can carry out normal communication and hold similar views on a certain thing. Fans who like the same idol can form a fan group only when they share the same language topics. At the same time, they are familiar with which network phrases can express their love for idols, such as “我宣你，大神，神仙姐姐。” Meanwhile, they are familiar with which network language can express their love for the idol as well as the gestures and symbols. From this point, through the social network of people gathering, and constitute a form of speech communities relying on the Internet. It breaks through the limitations of geographical location and time. Although its members have different social and cultural backgrounds, holding a common characteristic that means mastering certain network knowledge and having the motivation through social media to communicate with others and abide by the norms of network communication. Compared with other speech communities, it has its own characteristics that are universality, mobility and equality. Language is closely related to social development. With the increasingly extensive communication between countries and nations, it is necessary to be able to conduct code switching appropriately according to the linguistic environment in order to adapt to modern life. Since the 1970s, the study of code switching has become a hot topic for sociolinguists at home and abroad. Chinese scholar Jiang Shan said in an article in 2013 that code-switching became a hot topic in the 1970s mainly because of the reform and opening up. The frequent communication between China and the outside world and the close trade between countries due to economic development, provided motivation for the study of code-switching [2]. Generally speaking, code-switching is a very common sociolinguistic phenomenon in people’s communication in bilingual or multilingual communities. The new network speech community constructed by college students provides a place for us to conduct code-switching and we will have a deep understanding of the concept of speech community.

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of speech community can be traced back to Saussure who is the father of linguistics. Later Bloomfield also defined this concept in structural linguistics. According to him, a speech community is “a group of people who interact with each other through words”. Since his beginning, many famous sociolinguistic experts at home and abroad have redefined speech community [3]. Some foreign scholars believe that speech community is “a collection of human beings that carry out regular communication by virtue of common speech sym-

bols and are distinguished from similar groups by differences in the meaning of language use". As for the boundary of speech community, Mr. Xu Daming, a famous Chinese sociolinguist, puts forward the view that "community comes first and language comes second" [4]. And further puts forward the five elements of speech community "population, region, interaction, identity and facilities" [5]. Yang Xiaoli believes that speech community only needs three basic elements: population, interaction and identity. Zhou Mingqiang pointed out that these five elements have a certain dialectical relationship. For example, the population is both flowing and stable; regions are both space-time and non-space-time [6]. Zhang Yi points out that the internal identity of speech communities is characterized by the same attitude towards the language variant rules used by community members and the same language emotion [7]. Liu Lanfang discusses the nature of speech community and its important role in sociolinguistic studies by studying the different definitions of speech community by different scholars [8]. As the way of language being and the unit of language research, speech community is being paid more and more attention [9]. After reviewing relevant literature at home and abroad, it is found that there are few kinds of research on network speech communities especially college students who are the main force of using the Internet. So it is necessary to study network speech communities of college students under the new media environment and it can also provide a reference for future language policy planning.

### **3. Code-Switching Forms in College Students' Speech Communities**

#### **3.1. Code-Switching between Mandarin and Native Dialect**

College students come from all over the country and they all have their own dialects. Therefore, there is no doubt that mandarin is needed as the first language of campus communication. On campus, if two roommates are from the same hometown, they will subconsciously communicate in their native dialect. But when a third joins the conversation, they will use mandarin.

#### **3.2. Code-Switching between Mother Tongue and Foreign Language**

Learning English and speaking English is a trend in college campuses and the phenomenon of English mixed with Chinese expressions can be seen everywhere. This phenomenon is more obvious in the college of foreign languages. Influenced by foreign language culture for a long time and the particularity of the major, the students in the foreign college will unconsciously mix English words to express their thoughts at that time.

#### **3.3. Code-Switching between Everyday Expressions and Network Hot Words**

Internet new words emerge endlessly and college students are always at the forefront of Internet fashion. Their thinking is full of vitality and they are eager to

express their current mood through buzzwords so network words frequently appear in college students' daily life communication. For example, “绝绝子，加油鸭，冲鸭。” This kind of code-switching makes college students' daily communication speech full of fresh vitality.

## 4. Network Speech Community

### 4.1. Features

First of all, there is a large population which is a salient feature of the real world speech community [10]. Due to the emergence of new media, long-distance communication has become a reality. College students from different countries can exchange and collide with each other on the Internet which increases the number of people participating in the same online speech community. In reality, due to geographical limitations, the number of people in the same speech community is small. Second, there is extensive exchange of ideas between China and the West. Through the Internet, Chinese college students have academic exchanges with their European and American counterparts to discuss the latest research achievements in different fields. Due to different social and cultural backgrounds and ways of education, people may have different views on the same issue. It is more conducive to the development of a country's culture to “absorb its essence and discard its dregs”. However, in the real world, speech community cannot achieve cross-regional communication so they cannot keep abreast of the latest academic achievements of other countries. “Making a car behind closed doors” is not conducive to the realization of the goal of cultural power. Third, the population is highly mobile. In the virtual speech community, college students need to register and log in before they can communicate online. They can join their favorite post bar, fan group and microblog interactive group according to their own hobbies and interests. If they are not interested, they can delete their accounts and quit the group chat at any time. College students are active in thinking and have a wide range of hobbies. They may join two or three network speech communities at the same time to express their opinions and ideas freely in the same community. However, speech communities in the real world such as college campus clubs which need to go through a series of approval procedures to apply for membership. It is tedious and takes a long time so resulting in a slow population flow. Finally, the silent communication in the network speech community has the unique multi-mode communication mode of digitization. College students are catching up with the trend of using special emoticons in various chat software to express their current emotions and even mix Chinese, English, numbers and emoticons in a sentence. Emoticons are unique products in the new media environment. Without using language, emoticons can make others fully understand what the speaker wants to express through dynamic expressions of characters. For example, 🤔 a crying face indicates that the listener is speechless at what the speaker is saying. 😄 Grinning means happiness. 🎉 Applause means the listener congratulates the speaker on

his or her achievement. The language use in network speech communities is more complex and diversified than that in real life.

## **4.2. Communication Mode**

### **4.2.1. “Point-to-Point” or “One-to-Many” Two-Way Communication**

Point-to-point communication is instant communication. As the name implies, the two communicators engage in simultaneous, real-time conversation. For example, post bar, forum and wechat group. When the teacher posts important learning tasks in the wechat group, students immediately divide tasks and discuss in the group so as to achieve timely online communication between the two parties. One-to-many communication mode is a form of communication with asynchronous response also known as delayed communication. For example, in email and phone message, the sender aims to deliver the information accurately to the recipient without the recipient’s immediate reply. This delayed communication mode is often used for the release of important information [11].

### **4.2.2. Multi-Mode Communication Mode**

Emoticons are used to express how the speaker is feeling at the moment. In network speech community, college students are jumping on the bandwagon and are more likely to use emoticons to communicate online. With the rapid development of Internet technology, network buzzwords emerge endlessly. Online chatting tends to be a mixture of Chinese characters, numbers, English letters and emoticons which results in a multi-modal conversational communication mode. College students are more receptive to new things and they are more receptive to this kind of communication. With the emergence of emojis and acronyms, such as “yyds” and other language variants, college students have been randomly linking and matching in online speech communities which have gradually become a new type of Internet language. Especially among fans, this phenomenon is more common. Fans create the font shapes and colors of conversation text at will by using gestures, labels and colors favored by their idols which better reflects the fan culture and multi-modal online communication mode behind this network speech community.

## **5. Contemporary Values**

### **5.1. To Highlight the Identity of “Youth” through the Circle Speech Community**

The discourse communication mode in the digital age has strengthened the characteristics of young people who are unconventional and lead fashion. As the representative of young people, college students are keener to express their characteristics through language. The development of new media has created a new type of speech community. In different micro-blog, post bar and forum to form all kinds of virtual language community. Sharing opinions about something in the same community and communicating with college students in different online languages can better demonstrate their “youthful” identity [12].

## 5.2. To Promote the Collision of New Ideas

The context of new media expands the spatial nature of social background and builds a new platform for contemporary teenagers to understand international affairs and participate in international topics. In the 21st century, with the acceleration of internationalization, China is committed to cultivating new young people with a global vision who are familiar with international communication modes and can express their opinions confidently and appropriately in international conferences so as to improve China's ability to participate in international issues. In the context of new media, contemporary youth actively participate in international topics through multilingual media, communicate with youth from different countries, use different forms of code-switching at different international conferences and rely on network speech community to let the world hear "China's voice". Different from the real community, network speech community is not limited by time and region. College students can communicate with young people from other countries and make ideas clash and spark, for example, how to improve energy efficiency, research and development of renewable clean energy. College students from different countries can freely express their views and opinions through the channel of new media and college students with the same views will form another speech community to discuss more specific measures. In this speech community, college students from different countries use different languages but they are all lovers of network communication. In order to communicate smoothly, they will form new network languages. In the same speech community, members understand each other's purpose of communication thus promoting meaningful communication.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis of speech community cannot be separated from the background of The Times. Since the formation of a new type of speech community, we can not avoid it. It is evolved with the new trend of The Times and the impact of the speech community theory is also very profound [13]. Due to the limitations of time and space, this study is only a small-scale preliminary study and mainly involves Chinese college students without taking into account those from western countries. There are limitations such as small sample size and short research period. In order to make the research results more convincing, future studies should explore the changes in college students' network speech communities in different countries and compare their similarities and differences so as to provide powerful information for a deeper understanding of this concept. The emergence of the virtual community is in the context of rapid economic development and science and technology constantly improve. Population coverage is wide, strong liquidity, multimodal communication and collision between Chinese and western thought which make its characteristic and communication mode very different from the speech community in the real world. It is of great significance for our further study of speech community this theory. In addition,

the modern value of the new media on college students' network speech community becomes more and more embodied in the building of the international youth identity which means letting the world see China's confidence and decent youth image. It can also promote cultural exchanges between China and western countries and the thought collision. Under the different growth environments or cultural backgrounds of young people treating the same event can have different methods. Mutual learning and achieving common progress, ultimately promote the prosperity and development of the entire global village.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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