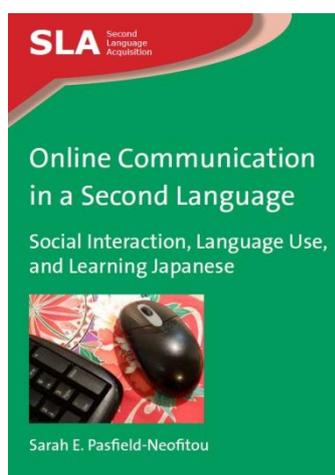## *How can we learn Asian languages online?*

New Book: Online Communication in a Second Language

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In October, *Online Communication in a Second Language: Social Interaction, Language Use, and Learning Japanese* was launched at the annual Languages, Cultures and Linguistics School Conference at Monash University, Caulfield Campus by Associate Professor Helen Marriott, who described the book's subject matter as "a most relevant topic for us in teaching and research these days". Based on extensive research, the book challenges traditional categorisations of computer mediated communication (CMC) mediums and the conceptualisations of the language produced via these mediums. Although past research has largely centred on English and other European languages online, *Online Communication in a Second Language* explores the use of CMC in social settings in which speakers and learners of Japanese are involved. The study comprises longitudinal case studies of up to four years, and analyses over 2000 instances of communication via blogs, emails, videos, mobile phone messages, video games, and websites, coupled with interviews with learners and their online contacts. In addition to the main focus languages of Japanese and English, Chinese, Korean, and Spanish were also present in participants' communication.

The book, described by Sharifian as "an impressive and timely contribution to the field", explores the acquisition of an Asian language (Japanese) via contextual resources, repair, and peer feedback. As Liddicoat commented, "This book takes the study of language learners' use of technology into new directions by investigating the use of technology as autonomous, active participants in online communication".

Book display at launch

Launch party at Caulfield

Stockwell, at Waseda University in Japan, described the book as an "important contribution [that] furthers our understanding of how social interaction can play a role in the learning of Japanese".

Participation in typed communication is particularly important in non-alphabetic languages such as Japanese, Chinese, and Korean, among others. As *Online Communication in a Second Language* outlines, "on the whole, there appears to be little research on the use of dictionaries by learners of non-alphabetic languages, despite the groundbreaking innovations new forms of resources offer students, such as being able to easily look up a character without knowing its pronunciation" (p. 166). Yet it is not only the digitization of

dictionaries which has been of benefit to students, but the relative anonymity and privacy afforded by communicating from behind a screen. In one study of Korean students carried out by Chung *et al.*, learners communicating in English stated that having the freedom to use a dictionary made them feel less nervous while chatting online.

Another major finding relevant to a number of Asian languages outlined in *Online Communication in a Second Language* was the identification of code and orthographic switching patterns, a feature unique to CMC where languages employ different character sets. In addition to switching between languages (code switching), participants must also make the choice whether or not to switch between character sets (orthographic switching). When inputting a language like Japanese, the extra step of switching the input method when swapping between languages or character sets (e.g. English to Japanese, or *Hiragana* to *Katakana*) was found to affect participants' employment of code-switching between languages, in terms of where in a conversation switches took place. As Huang argues in the context of Chinese-English business communication, when an orthographic switch is necessitated, code-switching should be thought of as a conscious choice. Being able to type quickly, and effectively switch between orthographies is a valuable skill in fast-paced CMC, such as the typical chat conversation or online game. While accuracy is often emphasises in formal educational environments and assessment tasks, typing speed appears to be a vital competency in communication.

Online Communication in a Second Language is available in hardback, paperback, and ebook versions on the Multilingual Matters website: http://www.multilingual-matters.com/display.asp?isb=9781847698247

Book launch

Chung, Yang Gyun, Barbara Graves, Mari Wesche, and Marion Barfurth. "Computer-Mediated Communication in Korean–English Chat Rooms: Tandem Learning in an International Languages Program." *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes* 62, no. 1 (2006): 49 - 86.

Huang, Li-jung Daphne. "Code-Switching and Language Use in Emails: A Case Study of a Network of Chinese-English Bilinguals in Taiwan." PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, 2004.

Pasfield-Neofitou, Sarah E. *Online Communication in a Second Language: Online Communication in a Second Language*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2012.