

**Transcultural awareness and multimodality in YouTube
videos among international students
in higher education, Thailand**

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Chittima Sangiamchit

School of Humanities, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Thailand

chittima_san@utcc.ac.th

Mabel Victoria

The Business School, Edinburgh Napier University, The United Kingdom

m.victoria@napier.ac.uk

Abstract

YouTube is one of the biggest and most popular global online video sharing and social media platforms. Owing to its multimodal features and rich user generated contents covering hugely diverse themes, it has the power to bring together billions of viewers from across countries and continents. This results in the blurring of linguistic and cultural borders leading to the creation of a dynamic and vibrant space where English serves as the preferred medium of communication across languages and cultures. This paper examines YouTube and how its users have transformed it into a “transcultural space” that becomes a repository of highly multilingual and multicultural contents presented through multimodal resources. The term “transcultural” is adopted in this paper to reflect the complexity of cultures. While the popularity of YouTube has exponentially grown in recent years, little is known about its transcultural nature. This study employs a mixed methods approach to investigate how transcultural awareness is represented and constructed by the research participants aided by the multimodal resources of YouTube videos and the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF). It deepens our understanding of the role of YouTube towards the construction of the transcultural in a multimodal context. The findings of the study carry significant implications for ELT pedagogy whereby the multifaceted online platform can be mined to enrich cultural and language learning experience.

Keywords: Transcultural Awareness, Transcultural Space, Multimodality, Multilingual and Multicultural communication, YouTube, Online Communication

1. Introduction

YouTube has 37.30 million users in Thailand making it the second most popular social networking site platform after Facebook (ICT, 2022). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly resulted in a surge of the number of users and time spent online on popular social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, YouTube and Line, according to a survey by the Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA) (Bangkok Post, 2021). YouTube's availability on smart phone application in both iOS and Android operating system further contributes to YouTube's popularity in Thailand, even more than TV.

YouTube has now grown into a platform for knowledge sharing and construction, not only a site for entertainment. This paper shall argue that YouTube has been transformed into a “transcultural space” where creators, influencers and audiences from different first linguistic and cultural backgrounds (English as a lingua franca: ELF) are connected through either language and cultural representation and construction (discussed in detail in Section on various topics ranging from personal hobbies such as games, sports and lifestyles to trendy topics, such as mask wearing and vaccination. Consequently, communicative practices associate with multicultural, multilingual and multimodal resources, emphasizing the dynamic and fluid linguistic and cultural nature of the platform where videos are created, shared and watched online.

While YouTube offers a number of opportunities due to its multimodal platform as mentioned above, it is still not yet fully understood in terms of transcultural awareness within this dynamic context. Many studies have delved into its roles and the benefits towards English language learning (Wang & Chen, 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021). YouTube, however, has not been adequately researched from a transcultural communication perspective and thus warrants further investigation. This study investigates how the multimodal resources of YouTube video help its users construct their transcultural awareness and in what sense. In order to systematize this inquiry, the following research questions are asked:

- 1) How do participants represent and construct cultures through their interactions on YouTube?
- 2) In what ways does YouTube, given its multimodal features raise the participants' transcultural awareness?

The findings could add to a deeper understanding of language, culture, communication and the intercultural in applied linguistics. They can be incorporated into ELT and provide some guidance into how to incorporate the multimodal platform with the pedagogical and enable students to apply their transcultural awareness to interact successfully in multiple and diverse cultures from local to global. Data were collected from International Programme Students at the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC) as they are English users who belong to Generation Z (younger than 20) and Generation Y (aged 20-39), who were identified as the most frequent users of YouTube (Bangkok Post, 2021).

This paper begins with a discussion why/how the notion of “transcultural practices” enables us to understand the fluid, dynamic and complex nature of intercultural communication in the multimodal media platform. Multilingualism and multimodality are then explored including their roles and effects towards transcultural awareness in this context. Then we turn specifically to cultural representation and cultural construction in YouTube as a transcultural space. Afterwards, the methodology based on mixed methodological approaches are presented and data analysis is discussed thematically.

2. Theoretical Framework: From Intercultural to Transcultural Communication

The term “intercultural” is polysemous due to its interdisciplinary nature (Baker, 2015). Although the prefix ‘inter’ in “intercultural” immediately evokes a sense of being in-between two or more entities, what cultures that the participants are in-between or “inter” in intercultural communication are not very clear (Baker and Sangiamchit, 2019). Furthermore, given the high interconnectivity and mobility in today’s world, it is questionable whether ‘intercultural

communication' can account for all the aspects of super-fast changing and transformed features and/or modes of global communication, particularly given the lasting effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. Poe (2011) argues that the world has moved into "beyond culture" era where identities are related to a mix of diverse historical (national) and new invented cultures rather than a firm link to a particular national culture. Facilitated by the technological advancement and the Internet, people can communicate relatively freely beyond geographical boundaries. Thus, it is undeniable that its users have unlimited opportunities for 'transcultural communication' through their interactions with people of different lingua cultures and its various media products. This results in hybrid, multiple and fluid nature of intercultural communication. Arguably, the current transformation of media has brought the transcultural everyday life to its users.

The multifaceted nature of global interconnectivity today as discussed above forces us to reconsider some of the fundamental concepts in intercultural communication and the use of the term itself (Baker, 2020). It is worth pointing out that the term 'transcultural' is emerging in response to the dynamics and complexity of intercultural communication in digital media (e.g. Pennycook, 2007). It involves processes of communication that transcend individual cultures (Hepp, 2015). 'Transcultural communication' is, thus, adopted in this study to delineate the free movement of cultures which are not bound to nation, language and culture correlations but rather move across networks of communication (Baker, 2016). Baker and Sangiamchit (2019) emphasize that apart from different linguacultural resources that users bring into their online communication, multimodal features of virtual spaces also move and transform linguistic, cultural and modal boundaries in the process. Consistent with Pennycook (2007), cultures always move, change and are refashioned into new identities in diverse contexts from local to global and vice versa. Cultural flow in online communication is then rather heterogeneous, which are reproduced and re-formed based on locality and tradition. In this

sense, cultures are in dynamic processes. Therefore, the term ‘transcultural’ can be a metaphor for visualizing complex cultural phenomena of intercultural communication on online media which we argue is suitable for the context being analysed here.

3. Multilingualism Online

Multilingualism inevitably characterizes transcultural interactions. The transcendence of geographical boundaries and globalization in the virtual world has brought different languages in contact. There are approximately five billion online users from around the world with Asia having the highest number of Internet users (2,917 billion), followed by Europe (747 million) and Africa (602 million) respectively (Internet World Stats, 2022).

The number of global Internet users from different countries highlights not only the role of the Internet as an important platform for local and global connection and communication, but the distinct configuration of English as a lingua franca speakers who are mostly from Asia and other non-native English-speaking countries. English has indeed become the preferred medium of communication on the internet creating mutual understanding among its users from different linguacultural backgrounds. With higher interconnectivity through the Internet, it is noted that other languages have increasingly played a critical role online, such as Chinese (19.4) and Spanish (7.9). English, however, continues to dominate and is used for online communication by 25.9% of the users and making it the most dominant language used in this medium (Statista, 2022). Nevertheless, it is worth considering multilingualism on the Internet due to the significant rise of language diversity and availability of resources for online communication practices (Crystal, 2006).

Multilingualism involves multiple linguistic resources which multilinguals bring into their online interactions. As Crystal (2006:229) states, the Internet “offers a home to all languages.” Indeed, information and communication are independently produced and shared in

multilingual texts and contents. Available media affordances have further contributed to more complicated forms of multilingualism through not just words, but also images, videos, emoticon or a combination of all these (See Section 4 for a detailed discussion). Affordances and possibilities offered by online media foster new forms and mixing of languages across the globe. While multilingual online users usually employ the languages they know, they also learn other languages that appear on diverse online media and communication, supported by online translators, for example. As such, new forms of multilingual encounters are made possible online (Lee, 2015). In the next section we discuss the multimodal features of YouTube, a powerful social networking system.

4. Multimodality and YouTube

YouTube is the 2nd largest search engine after Google (GMI Blogger, 2021). It is the de facto video-sharing platform on the Internet where users can share their own videos and viewers are enabled to comment and express their ideas towards the video contents. As previously mentioned, YouTube is one of the largest and most popular video distribution online platforms. There are more than 100 hours of video per minute uploaded on YouTube while people watch over a billion hours of video and generate billions of views every single day (GMI Blogger, 2021). It is interesting, however, to consider the growth of YouTube, not only in terms of the number, but also in terms of expansion across the globe (Grusin, 2009). It is accessed almost everywhere that computers are connected to the Internet. YouTube as such is one of the best ways to communicate to a large audience, whether sharing entertainment, promoting products and/ or services and providing information to students.

It has been well known that YouTube encompasses the entire range of online multimodality. It is “prosumers” (consumers + producers) where users can generate their own contents using a combination of pictures, texts and videos. Besides the video itself, prosumers

can also deploy diverse mix of multimodal features as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, YouTube also integrates interactivity aspects such as comments, icons, clickable items such as a like/ unlike button, and share links of videos to other applications, i. e. , Gmail, Facebook Messenger and Line, for example. Its users, therefore, can interact with the platform in a multi-complicated way. According to Benson (2016), YouTube is often seen as no more than a place to watch videos, but also its pages can be read and analyzed as complex, multi-authored, multimodal texts, emerging dynamically from processes of textually mediated social interaction. Three defining characteristics of YouTube videos can be identified—the use of multiple semiotic modes, multiple authorship and dynamic quality owing to user texts and other generated contents.

Semiotic modes are significant resources of YouTube. These resources support meaning-making and organize our understanding of the world in a systematic way. It is a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning and includes elements such as images, texts, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image and soundtrack (Kress, 2013). The choice of semiotic mode is related to the notion of modal affordance or “meaning-making potential” or the “potentials and limitations” (Kress, 2013). The term affordance can be illustrated by the variety of semiotic resources in which meaning-making is based on available modes or specific resources in the meaning-making situation. The choice is also dependent on what people want to say, and to whom, depending on the affordance of different resources. In other words, meaning making is never made at random, rather more or less conscious choices are made (Danielsson and Selander, 2021). In YouTube videos, semiotic modes are pictures, texts and videos while it offers multimodality or possibilities for semiotic affordance in terms of subtitles, comments, icons, clickable items and share links to other modes as mentioned above. Therefore, semiotic modes are normally combined differently with semiotic affordance in this digital platform.

Multiple authorship involves users who generate contents. Benson (2016) explains that much of the texts on the page is generated by user comments. Consequently, YouTube pages become highly dynamic with the contents constantly changing in terms of how they oriented between user texts and other generated content. Indeed, as Jewitt et al (2016) claim that social communication is always multimodal.

Owing to its multimodality, YouTube can be said to facilitate the creation of a “transcultural space” where YouTube creators (also known as YouTube influencers) and audiences from a variety of linguacultural backgrounds come into contact and interact through the use of multimodal, multilingual and multicultural resources. Thus, there are many opportunities where users represent different respects of their cultural identities and construct their cultural experiences by drawing on their discursive and multimodal affordances. The next section discusses how YouTube is considered as a “transcultural Space” through a cultural representation and cultural construction in YouTube.

5. YouTube as a Transcultural Space through Cultural Representation and Cultural Construction

Transcultural communication is interrelated with trans-perspectives. As discussed in Section 1, it refers to complex communication practices where interactants move through and across, rather than in-between, cultural and linguistic boundaries (Baker and Sangiamchit, 2019). The Internet facilitates transcultural communication when users come into contact with other users who share different first languages and cultures; these users can “travel” beyond the bounds of different national and local cultures, communities of practice and so on. In other words, borders become collapsible and blurred.

Kern and Develotte (2018) claim that video blogs like You tube, mediated through screen, makes possible an affordance which brings people from various linguacultural

backgrounds and locations into ‘audiovisual contact’. Given the multimodal features of YouTube, it can be further stressed that the platform is transformed by its users as a dynamic “Transcultural space” — it is socially constructed where users from different-linguacultural backgrounds are enabled to interact and experience multilingual, multicultural, multimodal and multi-sensory repertoires. As this element of transculturality is established, creation and ongoing interpretation and re-interpretation of meanings of various contents emerge. For instance, multi-linguacultural users can create their videos using a combination of various multimodal features of the platform while multi-linguacultural audiences can experience and react to these by posting and commenting on videos. In this sense, users do not only express their creative contents via multimodal resources; indeed they crystallize their critical ideas by employing communicative practices that transgress boundaries of conventional norms and practices. Through using resources creatively and critically, users can constantly modify their socio-cultural identities and values, and hence participation in this transcultural can be argued to be transformative (Li, 2001).

5.1 Cultural Representation

This interplay of communicative practices is arguably related to cultural representation and cultural construction. Sperber (1996: 33) explains that cultural representation is a fuzzy subset of mental and public representations inhabiting a given social group. It exists inside the mind of users, such as in the form of a memory, a belief, an intention, and a preference while a public representation may also exist in the environment of its users which involve several users and include signals, utterances, texts and pictures, for example. These mental and public representations can be understood through interpretation. Cultural representation involves the use of language, signs and images (Hall and Open University, 1997).

5.2 Cultural Construction

Cultural construction refers to the nature of individual ideas about different things in the world. Burr (1995: 2-3) explains cultural construction through social constructionism in that people “take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world (including ourselves)”. People can exchange knowledge with others through daily interactions and negotiate meanings and therefore can be said to co-construct knowledge. Over time, through repeated interactions these ‘social constructs’ become widely accepted and are treated as matter-of-fact.

The concepts of cultural representation and cultural construction are relevant to the transcultural practices on YouTube in which its users from different linguacultural backgrounds share their interests, perspectives, knowledge, etc., using a variety of features available on the platform (e.g. texts, photos, and videos) for either direct or indirect cultural representation. At the same time these users learn these from their communication and interactions and construct their knowledge about others from their exposure to different languages and cultures. According to Pauwels (2012), different multi-features facilitate cultural representation of the users while at the same time an interplay of these different features allows them to understand the communicative meanings and develop their own construction and understandings of the interaction. Thus, there is a mutually shaping relationship between cultural representation and cultural construction.

6. The Study and Methodology

This study aims to understand how YouTube users represent and construct their transcultural awareness on this media and how YouTube multimodality raises their awareness of this transcultural space. Mixed methodological approaches were adopted to collect data for this research, consisting of online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, in order to

understand the dynamic nature of intercultural interaction on the multimedia platform. The online questionnaire helped to reach many of the targeted participants, provided an overview of the data and assisted in the selection of participants for subsequent stages of the data collection. The semi-structured interviews were used to probe how participants described and perceived their experiences on YouTube through English. These interviews enabled the researcher to acquire a deep understanding of the participants' cultural representation and construction and what their view of cultures. As Dörnyei (2007) suggests, the semi-structured interview is suitable for investigating a phenomenon after the researcher has an overview of participants' data from the questionnaire survey and can create related or follow-up questions for interviews. The structures of the interviews and the questions are adjusted and altered in accordance with the interview circumstances (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, the online questionnaire was conducted through the electronic system called MS Form. Then, those who actively used YouTube were selected for the semi-structured interviews.

The participants were international students at International School of Management (henceforth ISM), University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC). As international students, it was deemed that they have higher likelihood to access multi-linguacultural contents and interact with other users from different first languages and cultures using English. Access to the the participants was facilitated by the principal investigator's employment at the university so rapport was already established even before data was collected.

The recruitment and selection of participants were governed by a non-probability sample (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2007), consisting of convenience snowball and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling was initially applied to recruit participants (Cohen et al., 2011). This strategy allowed the principal investigator to select participants who were suitable for the research through her personal network, such as the researcher's students, staff and administrators of the ISM. Snowball sampling was then utilized to recruit additional

participants for the research. This sampling, also known as the ‘chain-referral methods’ (Cohen et al. , 2011), was useful to increase the number of the participants given that the existing ones acted as informants. Furthermore, through this method, further contacts were identified via their own social networks and personal contacts. Employing this sampling strategy, the researcher could build and develop interpersonal relations with the participants and then gain permission and consent to proceed with the interview process. The participants who responded to the questionnaire were then ‘purposively’ selected for the subsequent semi-structured interviews to obtain in- depth details of their YouTube intercultural experiences, perspectives and intercultural awareness.

A total of 23 students participated in the online questionnaire and seven of them were purposively selected to take part in the interview based on their replies with regards to their experiences of using YouTube and their voluntary participation in the interview. Seven sets of the semi-structured interviews were carried out at different points in January 2022. The interviews were conducted online in both Thai and English via WebEx videoconferencing platform. A few were interviewed face-to face, in person depending on the participants’ convenience and preference. The semi-structured interviews, lasting up to 30 minutes, were intended to supplement information from the questionnaires and to provide more details about participants’ experiences on cultural representation and construction on the YouTube videos. These interviews were recorded for data analysis with the participant’ consent.

7. Results

This study initially employed a quantitative analytical approach to analyze numerical data from the online questionnaire survey. Data from different sections of the questionnaire from each participant were firstly tabulated. Afterwards, frequency distributions were utilized

to calculate these data in order to understand the investigated phenomenon and inform the semi-structured interviews. This section presents results from the questionnaires and the interviews.

7.1 Questionnaire Results

The results are presented based on 3 parts of the questionnaire format and the details are as follows:

7.1.1 Participant Background and Demographics

The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Personal Background Information, Experience and Interaction on YouTube Videos and Transcultural Awareness from YouTube Experience. There were 23 respondents in total for the questionnaire. Many of them were female (65%) and the rest 35% were male. Their ages were mostly between 20 and 25 years old (78%) while 9% aged 26 and only 4% aged 18, 19 and 35 respectively. They self-identify as Thai (52%), Chinese (22%), Vietnamese (9%) and Burmese (9%), Spanish (4%) and Singaporean (4%). Most of them were 4th year students (78%) from different disciplines, such as Bachelor's Degree of Business English or BA (87%), Bachelor's Degree of Accounting (9%) and Master Degree of Business or MA (4%). In addition, there was 4% of the respondents from the 1st year BA student, 4% from the 3rd year BA student as well as 4% from the 1st and 2nd year MA in Business Programme each. They were mostly multilingual speakers (74%) and competent English users (95%). In terms of their English use experiences, majority have used English with non-native English speakers (NNESs) everyday (43%) more than with native English speakers (NESs) (22%).

7.1.2 Experience and Interaction on YouTube Videos

This section focuses on the participants' experiences of watching YouTube video interactions

YouTube was the second most popular social media platform used among the participants (26%) while Facebook was the first at 43%. Instagram was third with 22% while

other social media sites such as NetFlix accounted for 9%. The majority of the participants used YouTube many times a day (48%) and a few times a day (26%) through mostly mobile devices including smart phone (52%) and tablets (34%). The types of YouTube videos frequently watched were about international contents (65.2%), foreign language learning (43.5%) and educational videos (43.4%). A total of 65% of the participants indicated that they do not watch YouTube videos made by popular influencers (65%). Their main reasons for watching the YouTube influencers' videos were: interesting contents (17%); searching convenience (13%); and the huge variety of the contents of the videos (13%). The majority of the participants interacted with the YouTube videos by passively watching (87%) while the rest actively interacted with these in different ways (9%), such as posting comments, pressing like and unlike buttons and sharing links. The most important purposes of watching YouTube videos were to learn about international cultures (87%); following to support self-entertaining (78.3%); keeping up dated with news and activities (73.9%), practicing the English language (73.9%); and to keeping updated with global issues (65.2%).

7.1.3 Transcultural Awareness and YouTube Experience

This part emphasizes the participants' transcultural awareness in what they learnt about cultures from their YouTube experiences.

According to their responses on the questionnaire, most participants expressed their positive experiences of transcultural learning. Over 95% of them thought that it was important to watch YouTube videos to learn about other cultures. Regarding the cultural construction, approximately 90% of them believed YouTube videos opened up their world while the videos and comments posted by other audiences helped them in constructing their knowledge about other cultures. More than 80% of the respondents were willing to discover either familiar or unfamiliar cultural information from YouTube. They indicated that they can also apply the knowledge learnt from YouTube videos to their interactions, both face-to-face and online, with

people from different cultures. English is the most important language for presenting contents and communicating with other audiences about the YouTube videos and understanding cultures of people from other cultural backgrounds (78.3%). It is notable that most of them think that the cultures they experienced on YouTube videos were not related to a particular nation of YouTube videos' creators and/or influencers (73.9%). Under 50% would like to express their personal perceptions about other cultures on YouTube videos contents.

7.2 Interview Results

The interview results are elucidated according to the three key themes of the study's main points - cultural representation, cultural construction and transcultural awareness from YouTube experiences. Table 1 below demonstrates the seven participants' profile for in-depth discussion..

Table 1 Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nationality	Current Year of the Study	Faculty and Discipline	Multilanguage Competence
1.Participant 1	Male	20-25	Chinese	4th	Business English	Thai (Weak)
2. Participant 2	Female	20-25	Vietnamese	4th	Business English	Thai (Weak)
3. Participant 3	Male	20-25	Chinese	4th	Business English	Thai (Weak)
4. Participant 4	Female	20-25	Thai	4th	Business English	N/A
5. Participant 5	Female	20-25	Thai	4th	Business English	Portuguese – (Satisfactory)

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nationality	Current Year of the Study	Faculty and Discipline	Multilanguage Competence
6. Participant 6	Male	20-25	Chinese	4th	Business English	Spanish (Weak)
7. Participant 7	Male	20-25	Thai	4th	Business English	Chinese (N/A)

7.2.1 Cultural Representation through Interaction on YouTube videos

This section discusses how users represent their transcultural awareness using multimodal resources available on YouTube videos. Excerpts of the interviews are shown below.

Extract 1: Participant 1

- 1) “I just watch the YouTube videos, umm no comments, no reply 555 just watch.
- 2) It is my... it’s just my way to watch YouTube. To me, I think YouTube is
- 3) err....err...watching videos platform. So, I separate um...I apply different
- 4) applications in different functions.”

Extract 2: Participant 3

- 1) “Usually, usually not. Usually, I...I read the comments sometimes. But usually, I 2
don’t really comment on YouTube. Sometimes I don’t understand some points in 3
the VDOs I need to read a comment. May be people get to explain something like I 4
can know more, I can make an understanding.”

Extract 3: Participant 4

- 1) “I only watch YouTube videos. I don’t like share my ideas in social media. I
- 2) prefer expressing my ideas in one-to-one communication because I’m scared the
- 3) social media when people disagree with my ideas. So, I’m not really OK with

4) sharing my ideas on the social media platform.”

Participant 4 showed awareness of how others perceived her behaviors and/or images as seen in Lines 2 and 3. According to Leary (1996), self-presentation can affect others’ perceptions toward the person who presents him/herself. This implies why most of the participants did not want to post or express their ideas on the YouTube platform.

Nevertheless, two of the participants who mostly watch the videos on YouTube state that they normally posted their comments if they found the videos very interesting.

Extract 4: Participant 2

- 1) “Err....I do post my videos there but likes only for like assignments hahaha.
- 2) So I...I put it other listed like only the people who got err....err the link can watch
- 3) it only. Sometimes, I will comment, randomly comment if I feel it’s super
- 4) interesting I will comment and then I will state my ideas, my err....perspectives
- 5) there.”

Extract 5: Participant 7

- 1) “Sometimes, I posted on the YouTube videos if I’m interested in the videos and
- 2) also other comments about the videos. I think sharing my ideas towards these is a
- 3) good way to discuss and learn from others’ responses.”

Based on the results of both survey and the interview data, it can be understood that cultural representation on YouTube is the participants’ preferred option. As the key feature of YouTube is a video platform, it is not surprising that most participants engage in the videos exposure rather than publicly posting and/or commenting about the videos’ content. Indeed, in Extract 1 (lines 2 and 3), participant 1 articulated his thought that YouTube is the video’s platform where he meant to only watch his interested videos. He preferred to share his ideas on other social media but not on YouTube. The data suggest that cultural representation on YouTube cannot be seen through language use by most participants in this study but is

accessible via other forms of signs (Hall and Open University, 1997) and multimodal features of the site the like and unlike buttons to show emotional expression, sharing and downloading the links and subscribing. These ways of non-verbal interactions can be argued to represent mental beliefs and ideas of what participants think about their watching of the videos. Communicative meanings can be made, distributed, received, interpreted and remade using non-linguistic modes (Jewitt, 2009) and multimodality offers ways to understand cultures and cultural production (Leander and Vasudevan, 2009).

7.2.2 Cultural Construction through an Interaction on YouTube videos

The data indicate that cultural construction is more visibly manifested from the participants' interaction on YouTube videos. Most participants (95.6%) agreed that they learnt about other cultures from watching different types of YouTube videos. Additionally, YouTube videos helped in broadening their world views (91.3%). Below is an excerpt from an interviewee to show how the diverse types of YouTube videos including lifestyles and activities, educational videos expose them to different perspectives:

Extract 6: Participant 2

- 1) Researcher: "What kinds of your favorite YouTube videos?"
- 2) Participant 2: "Errr...like I don't know....I don't have like a specific
- 3) favourite....err....type of video but I watch...I watch documentary, I watch blogs
- 4) like I watch beauty blogger, beauty guru hahaha. And also, I watch like people
- 5) review about err.... film movies and also about games, game contents like a lot.
- 6) And err... like I watch kind of like educational contents like Ted Talk."

Most of the participants were able to construct their knowledge of other cultures from YouTube videos by reading comments of other viewers shown under the videos. Examples of detailed answers below has brought into better understanding the participants' cultural

construction. As Participant 3 explained in lines 3 to 4, reading comments of others about the videos boosted his better understanding on the videos contents.

Extract 7: Participant 3

- 1) “Usually, usually not. Usually, I...I read the comments sometimes. But usually, I
- 2) don’t really comment on YouTube. Sometimes I don’t understand some points in
- 3)the videos I need to read a comment. May be people get to explain something like I)
- 4 can know more, I can make an understanding.”

Participant 5 further articulated her YouTube experiences that comments from other audiences on YouTube made her learn not only the video contents but also constructed her cultural awareness of other people from other cultural contexts.

Extract 8: Participant 5

- 1) Participant 5: “Erm...I like reading from all comments on the videos. There
- 2) were some interesting jokes which I didn’t initially got their meanings. But after I
- 3) spent my time reading these over, I could understand these jokes. I personally
- 4) think the joke can represent different cultures based on the communication
- 5) contexts.”

Contents of the YouTube videos themselves also encourage the participants’ construction of different cultures. Participant 1 elucidated that he could construct his knowledge from watching a range of different YouTube videos. Extract 1 demonstrates, the participant’s awareness of transcultural communication.

Extract 9: Participant 1

- 1) Participant 1: “..... I have many ex..experiences.....err...in....interculture...
- 2) err...in..intercultural experiences from watching Youtube. Err...the most
- 3) impressive is err..youtuber whose name Mark Weins. He is American and
- 4) he...he...he’s famous, introducing Thai food culture. Errr...He also goes to

- 5) other countries to share the American cultures, Indian cultures and err...he went
- 6) to many countries and makes videos.. According to his videos, I know, I know
- 7) some Thai local cultures, such as Isan cultures and err...He also goes to Phuket as
- 8) well. I have learnt a lot of different cultures from him.”
- 9) Researcher: “What’s his name?”
- 10) Participant 1: “Mark Wiens”
- 11) Researcher: “So, you said you have learnt a lot of different cultures from him.”
- 12) Participant 1: “Yes, especially the Thai cultures. I’ve found even in Thai cultures,
- 13) there are different kinds.”

Clearly seen, the participant was aware of multiple cultural resources: moving from local L1 identity toward more global orientations (lines 3 to 8). Although the influencer is an American, the interviewee finds his content global, and thus relevant to not only to American culture but also to multicultures around the world.

Participant 5 also confirmed that YouTube and/or influencers create various video contents and go beyond their own countries. Mostly, the video contents are created for audience entertainment and this supports a construction of her understanding and awareness of multicultures from her YouTube experiences.

Extract 10: Participant 5

- 1) Participant 5: Umm....from my experiences, there might be some but not always.
- 2) As I have watched, YouTubers’ contents have a variety. The contents are not
- 3) necessarily related to their own homeland. They create fun and interesting
- 4) contents mostly.

Relating to the cultural construction, the study’s participants asserted that YouTube is a good source of learning useful information and different cultures. They learnt a range of different things from YouTube. In lines 6 to 10, the participant 2 explained that cultures can be

seen and learnt from other people' practices in their daily lives, such as openly greeting with general people.

Extract 11: Participant 2

- 1) Participant 2: "I have learnt a lot from YouTube like of course about the
- 2) language but also about like their daily lives like the daily cultures like how they
- 3) interact with people like and what is the it...it's not.....it's underneath the surface
- 4) something like that something like...."
- 5) Researcher: "Can you give me some examples? Do you remember?"
- 6) Participant 2: "Errr....like urm....well....may be talking about international
- 7) contents like because I usually watch err...English..errr...contents so err....I
- 8) learnt about how they interact with people like their personality...like would be
- 9) more open like if they go out and they meet random people they will ask like
- 10) what's the...how's the day, and yeah they really open and I learn about this."

Similarly, the participant 5 also learnt manners and reactions of people in different situations from YouTube Talk Show VDOs, such as sneezing. She asserted that she couldn't experience this kind of reaction in her other occasions.

Extract 12: Participant 5

- 1) Researcher: "Do you think YouTube can help you learn new issues or various
- 2) cultures from international people?"
- 3) Participant 5: "Ummm that a lot. I learnt something that I've never known before
- 4) from YouTube. Especially Talk show programmes, I can learn different manners
- 5) of people, such as people say "Bless you!" when other people sneeze. Something
- 6) that we might not see from communicating with international people or even
- 7) native English people. I mean we might not notice it. But in Talk show, we can
- 8) notice it because we pay very well attention to it."

She also added below that YouTube supports her learning about her interested topics such as science and even helps her prepared herself before she went to Brazil for the student exchanged programme (lines 3 – 8).

Extract 13: Participant 5

- 1) “I remembered one situation very clearly. Before I went to the
- 2) student exchanged programme in Brazil in 2016, I watched general scientific
- 3) VDO clip on YouTube, there were comments under the clip that a technical
- 4) medical term could be easily understood if you learnt Latin and/or Spanish. Once
- 5) I read the comments, I was confused how was it easier than English. But I started
- 6) learning Latin and Spanish in order to get into it. Then I realized that medical
- 7) words and/or vocabularies were from Latin. So, it really helped me understand
- 8) English technical terms easier.”

7.2.3 Transcultural Awareness from Multimodal Interaction on YouTube videos

Many participants indicated that multimodality of YouTube enhanced their cultural construction. Participant 6, for example, clearly pointed out that pictures, music, lyrics and emotional buttons (Like and Dislike) raise his cultural construction.

Extract 14: Participant 6

- 1) Researcher: “How do you construct your knowledge on different cultures from
- 2) your YouTube experiences?”
- 3) Participant 6: “I like watching music videos. I can see different scenes on the
- 4) videos and listen to sounds as well as read a song’s lyrics. These all help me build
- 5) my knowledge about other cultures. I can see other people’s ideas about the songs
- 6) from a Like and/or Dislike buttons. I can see the trend of the current popular songs
- 7) these days and musical styles of many different people.”

Participant 7 also agreed that various modal features on YouTube encourage his cultural construction. He confirms that these features build his understanding on other people's beliefs and perceptions from the videos contents, subtitles on the videos, other audiences' comments as well as sharing number.

Extract 15: Participant 7

- 1) Participant 7: "Well, I think various items on YouTube are really helpful. The
- 2) contents of the videos and subtitles shown in the videos help me make more sense
- 3) of the videos meanings. Number of sharing and comments also indicates other
- 4) people's ideas towards the videos. I do learn cultures from these."

Based on the interview data, it can be claimed that all participants have active cultural construction from their YouTube experiences. They gain a lot of multicultural knowledge from the videos' contents, pictures and sounds, from other audiences' comments, emotional buttons (Like and Dislike), as well as from shares and subtitles. These multimodalities seem to strongly encourage the participants' representation and cultural construction. The next section discusses the participants' responses from both online questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews, providing answers to the study's research questions.

8. Discussion

This study investigated how multimodal resources of YouTube video help its users construct their transcultural awareness and in what sense. Based on the combined results of the survey and the semi-structured interviewees with 7 voluntary participants, the two main research questions can be answered as follows:

- 1) How do participants represent and construct cultures through their interactions on YouTube videos?

- 2) In what ways does multimodality available on YouTube raise participants' transcultural awareness?

The study employed qualitative thematic content analysis for gaining an insight into the questionnaire results and the investigated areas. The analytical procedures involved various steps: (1) transcribing the data, (2) pre-coding and coding the data and (3) interpreting the data and drawing conclusions (Dörnyei, 2007). The analysis included the three different themes for in-depth discussion: (1) cultural representation, (2) cultural construction and (3) multimodal supports to transcultural awareness.

The analysis suggests that the participants believe that multimodal resources on YouTube support their cultural representation and construction. Although most of them did not represent themselves through video uploads and/or comments of their feedback as well as personal ideas on the platform (see Extracts 1 - 3), they still did it when it was necessary such as for assignments (see Extract 4) or when they desired to express personal ideas (see Extract 5). It can be interpreted from one of the participants' main reasons for not uploading and/or posting on YouTube in that it was because she was worried about public reaction towards her comments. Most participants were afraid of not being accepted and reacted negatively from others towards their posted comments (see Extract 3). YouTube is clearly a collaborative environment where users can share their ideas on forums contributing to the discussion (Denci, 2017), thus it can be explained that the study's results were reflected through the lens of consumers (or users) who aim to watch the videos for their specific individual purposes such as entertainment, news and (global) activities updates, intercultural and languages learning, for instances. They were not prosumers who meant to generate their contents by using various available multimodal features on YouTube. Participant 1 confirmed this point in that he considered YouTube as a video sharing platform where he aimed to only watch a range of videos here but nothing else (See Extract 1).

When looking at cultural construction from their experiences on YouTube, the participants expressed that they have increased knowledge of different cultures, practices, and behaviour of other people through the video sharing platform. The extracts presented various topics of cultural construction occurring at multiple scales simultaneously from their interactions on YouTube. While the participants watched YouTube videos, they did not only enjoy unknown contents and/or entertained, but they also analyzed and acquired more in-depth meanings of the videos from both YouTubers or influencers and comments of other YouTube users (see Extracts 6 – 8). In accordance with Burr (1995), cultural construction occurs through the social process to understand the world. In these ways, cultures are constructed in a dynamic sense as the participants experienced the highly dynamic cultures through English and other languages such as Latin and Spanish (see Extract 13) from both YouTubers/ influencers and other watchers. The participants further interestingly informed that they were open to any VDOs creators and did not particularly limit to only native English speakers (see Extract 10). They can then construct new knowledge they haven't learnt and/or experienced before, practices, identities and cultures in diverse global contexts.

In terms of how YouTube's multimodality facilitates transcultural awareness, it can be argued that different cultures are presented in multiple ways through pictures, videos, subtitles, emotional reactions (e.g. Like and Unlike), sharing links and so on (see Extracts 14 and 15). Cultures are clearly not bounded by the geographic origin of the YouTubers/ influencers. For example, American YouTuber presented different cultures around the world on his YouTube channel (see Extract 9). Further, considering the fact that YouTube watchers come from diverse linguacultural backgrounds, their posts and/or comments on YouTube videos are as such that they are not in-between any cultures in these interactions. At this point, cultures are not necessarily associated a priori with any particular nation (Baker, 2015) but fluid and complex making irrelevant the 'origin' of particular linguistic and cultural forms or practices (Baker and

Sangiamchit, 2019). Relating to these points, YouTube has brought various cultures into “transcultural space” where its users from different first languages and cultures can share, learn and interact with each other utilizing multilingual, multicultural and multimodal resources. In accordance with Kern and Develotte (2018), YouTube can be an ‘audiovisual contact’ among people from various linguacultural backgrounds and locations.

9. Conclusion

Considering the fast changes in global communication today, which has moved significantly from face-to-face to social media and online communication, scholars have begun to recognize the complexity of intercultural and transcultural communication and the use of English as a global multilingual franca. This paper has attempted to highlight the phenomenon of transcultural communication in one of the most popular global online media. As YouTube has been widely used worldwide, we aimed to look at the complexity of cultural interactions influenced by multimodal features in this forum and gain new insights on naturalistic transcultural communication.

Drawing from the participants’ experiences on YouTube, the complexity and multiple levels of meaning and interpretation for constructing cultures in transcultural communication have been illuminated. The multimodal options of the platform has brought not only entertainment and new knowledge to the users, but also in-depth understanding of the underlying messages of wording, gestures, performances from the videos and comments from other users.

It is apparent that multilingual-cultural users are connected through the platform. They create, share, and even learn diverse issues from local to global topics, turning YouTube into a superdiverse setting. YouTubers/ influencers generally do not limit their video contexts to their original places or nationalities, but customize their video contents, vis-à-vis their multicultural,

multilingual target viewers. Varis and Wang (2011: 71) indicate that “the diversity of languages, cultures, and communities present online gives rise to unprecedented opportunities for intercultural and transcultural communication and represents ‘superdiverse space par excellence – space of seemingly endless possibilities for self-expression and community formation’”. Throughout the findings, we can see how the participants make use of the multimodal platform (i.e. photos, audio, music, comment, emoticon, sharing) to experience multilingual (i.e. English, Chinese, Latin, Spanish) and multicultural (i.e. different cultural references and practices such as local, national, and global references) from a range of different videos created by diverse YouTubers and responded to by a number of watchers.

This study suggests that multilingual and transcultural approaches are important to global communication through Englishes and other languages. In particular relation to English language and intercultural communication courses, these approaches would be useful in promoting a basic understanding of the subjects in order to raise students’ awareness to naturally occurring interaction. However, it is argued that the multilingual and transcultural dimensions of the interactions on You tube have received little attention from researchers. Given that the use of English as a multilingual franca for intercultural and transcultural communication is an everyday part of many of our lives, we would argue that it is important, and also hopefully of interest, to students and teachers of English and intercultural communication.

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