

The Impact of Digital Communication on the Language Development of Chinese Adolescents: A Comparative Perspective with the UK

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Abstract

This study conducted a comprehensive investigation into the impact of digital communication on the language development of Chinese adolescents, and supplemented it with a systematic comparative analysis with the UK. The research employed a rigorous mixed-method design, including a questionnaire survey of 300 participants, a textual analysis of 300 digital chat records, and semi-structured interviews, to meticulously document the widespread use of internet slang, significant grammatical simplification, and language practice differences resulting from platform variations among Chinese adolescents. It further elaborates on the crucial regulatory role played by institutional educational policies and familial communication dynamics. By integrating extensive secondary data from the UK context, including Ofcom's annual media use reports, seminal linguistic works by Crystal and Tagliamonte & Denis, and national digital literacy frameworks, this paper constructs a detailed cross-continental comparison. This analysis reveals the convergent trend in the adaptation of digital language, such as lexical innovation and fragmentation. However, it also emphasizes the significant differences resulting from different cultural norms, educational concepts, and regulatory approaches. These differences are manifested in various outcomes such as the ability to switch codes, the degree of mastery in formal contexts, and the recognition of the legitimacy of digital dialects in academic settings. The study concludes with a set of culturally nuanced, evidence-based recommendations targeting educators, parents, and technology platform designers in both China and the UK. These recommendations aim to foster resilient, adaptable, and critically aware language competencies in an era of ubiquitous digital mediation.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Conservation; International cooperation; Actor-Network Theory; Ta Keo Temple; Foreign Aid Projects; Heritage Diplomacy

1. Introduction

The emergence and widespread adoption of digital communication technology have triggered the most rapid and profound transformation in human language behavior since the invention of the printing press. For adolescents who are in crucial stages of cognitive, social and identity formation, digital platforms are not merely tools but rather influential environments that shape their communication methods, social norms and language identities. In China, this transformation is particularly notable. Platforms such as WeChat, QQ, Douyin (TikTok) and Bilibili have become the primary venues for adolescents to engage in social interaction, entertainment activities and information consumption. The China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2024) reported that the internet penetration rate among Chinese adolescents has reached a nearly saturated level of 97.8%, highlighting the comprehensiveness of this digital immersion. This environment has fostered a distinct linguistic ecology characterized by rapid lexical innovation (e.g., “yyds”, “绝绝子”, “摆烂”), syntactic compaction, and pragmatic rules distinct from those governing face-to-face or formal written communication. However, despite the wide recognition of these phenomena, academic research often lacks coherence. As Xu & Zheng (2018) and Zheng & Zhu (2019) pointed out, the existing studies mainly focus on classifying online buzzwords or analyzing the structure of online society, leaving a significant gap in understanding the systematic language features of vocabulary, syntax, and pragmatics, as well as their longitudinal impact on core formal language abilities, which are crucial for academic and professional success.

At the same time, some unique concurrent development trends with distinct backgrounds can also be observed among the youth population in the UK. British adolescents have also deeply integrated into the digital ecosystem. The report of the Ofcom (2023) shows that 96% of adolescents aged 11 to 17 use social media, mainly through smartphones. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and TikTok dominate their communication fields. Pioneering and ongoing research by scholars such as David Crystal (2006, 2011) and Sali A. Tagliamonte (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008) has extensively documented the linguistic creativity and adaptation within these spaces, noting the proliferation of acronyms, initialisms, neologisms, and a distinctive “texting” register. This background in the UK also contains a rich history of sociolinguistic research on language varieties and changes, providing a solid theoretical foundation for exploring the impact of digital technology (Cheshire et al., 2011).

However, there is a crucial flaw in comparative and cross-cultural studies, namely that these studies fail to conduct a comparative analysis of the digital language development of adolescents from completely different social language environments, such as China and the UK. Although both of these groups are active digital participants, their language policies (top-down standardization and descriptive literacy skills), cultural values (the subtle differences between collectivist hierarchy and individualist egalitarianism), and educational systems are all different. Understanding these differences is not merely an academic pursuit; it is a practical necessity for formulating effective teaching strategies, parent guidance frameworks, and responsible platform governance in the context of globalization.

Therefore, this study has three main objectives. Firstly, to conduct a systematic and empirical analysis of the typical language features exhibited by adolescents when communicating on mainstream digital platforms. Secondly, to assess the perceived and potential long-term impacts of these digital activities on their formal language abilities. Thirdly, to explore the regulatory role of domestic cultural norms and institutional policies in China. What sets this research apart is that it also incorporates a fourth comparative element: the findings from China are interpreted within the broader context of British adolescents’ digital language usage, drawing on authoritative materials such as reports from the British Communications Office and existing Western academic research findings. This comparative perspective aims to distinguish the universal impact of digital technology from the unique influence shaped by specific cultural and institutional structures, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the overall language development of global adolescents in the 21st century.



2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Digital Communication and Adolescent Language

2.1.1 The Chinese Landscape

The research on the online language used by Chinese adolescents has progressed from the early stage of merely providing a descriptive vocabulary list of online slang to a more complex level of sociological and linguistic analysis. The Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (2024) highlights the dynamic, cyclical nature of internet buzzwords, often reflecting broader social sentiments and youth anxieties, such as “内卷” (involution) and “躺平” (lying flat). Xu & Zheng (2018) expounded on online language use from the perspective of “generalized relationships and differential sequential communication”. They argued that digital platforms not only expanded but also complicated the traditional Chinese social networks (guanxi), and language was an important marker of membership. Similarly, Zheng & Zhu (2019) studied the “circular” dissemination phenomenon of online language, that is, specific words and styles become fixed within certain sub-cultural groups on platforms such as Bilibili or Douyin, thereby forming language-based “echo chambers”.

However, there is a consistent critical viewpoint in this series of studies, which is that their main focus lies in the innovation of vocabulary. In contrast, detailed corpus-based research on the grammatical and syntactic changes brought about by digital communication is relatively scarce. There are still many issues that have not been fully explored: To what extent does the short phrase style of instant messaging weaken the complex sentence structure? How does the parallel, emoticon-laden speech flow in social media comments affect the narrative coherence? This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a systematic syntactic analysis of digital texts.

2.1.2 The UK Landscape

In contrast, the research on digital languages in the West, especially in the UK and North America, has a longer development history and often employs quantitative linguistic research methods. Crystal’s (2006) foundational work positioned “Netspeak” as a new and legitimate language variety, which has its own grammar and conventions. Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) conducted a corpus analysis of instant messages and proved that although adolescents used a large number of abbreviations and non-standard forms, these forms were systematic and followed certain rules, and did not indicate a decline in language. Their research showed that even in very informal digital communication environments, the core grammatical structures were well preserved.

The research also focused on exploring its effects. Wood et al. (2011) conducted a study on the impact of text messages on children’s reading ability, and found that there was a complex relationship involved: familiarity with text abbreviations might be positively correlated with certain speech skills, but it was not necessarily related to broader writing abilities. Ofcom’s annual reports (e.g., 2023) provides macro-level data on usage patterns, device ownership, and network activities, offering social background information for linguistic research. Furthermore, the UK Council for Internet Safety’s framework (UKCIS, 2020) adopts a policy-oriented approach, emphasizing “digital literacy”, which includes a critical understanding of online communication methods, in order to bridge the gap between informal digital practices and formal education.

2.2 Key Theoretical Frameworks

This study is informed by two key theoretical frameworks. First, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides a lens for understanding the symbolic function of digital language. The adoption of specific buzzwords, acronyms, or communicative styles has become a marker of membership within digital peer

groups, fan circles, or subcultures. For instance, the expression “家人们” in China, or specific meme references in the UK, all play a role in either including or excluding members, establishing social boundaries, and strengthening the cohesion of the internal group. This theory helps explain language innovation and the motivations behind following specific platform norms.

Second, the concept of Cultural Capital, particularly in its linguistic form, is crucial for analyzing differential outcomes. The work of Livingstone and Helsper (2007) on the “digital divide” extends beyond access to include gradients in usage, skills, and the benefits derived from digital media. In the context of language, families with higher social educational capital may adopt “mediatization” or “co-learning” approaches, discussing internet slang and its applicable contexts, thereby helping adolescents develop metalinguistic awareness and code-switching abilities. In contrast, families lacking such resources may experience “language silence”, where digital language becomes a barrier to intergenerational communication rather than a shared resource. This framework is crucial for explaining the moderating effect of family dynamics observed in both China and the UK.

2.3 Identified Research Gaps and This Study’s Position

The relevant literature has revealed different research approaches: Chinese studies have delved deeply into the sociocultural significance of digital vocabulary within specific cultural contexts, while UK/Western studies have provided powerful models for analyzing the systematicity of grammar and its educational impact. However, few studies have conducted direct and structured comparisons. The key gaps addressed by this research include:

1. The lack of integrated analysis connecting platform affordances, concrete linguistic changes (especially syntax), and moderating cultural factors in a single Chinese study.
2. The absence of a sustained comparative perspective that contrasts the Chinese experience with that of a Western, English-speaking nation like the UK, where digital adoption is similarly high but cultural-institutional frameworks differ markedly.
3. The need to move beyond lexicon to a holistic analysis encompassing vocabulary, syntax, and pragmatics in assessing digital language’s impact.

These disparities collectively highlight the need for more comprehensive and cross-cultural research methods. By conducting the study of Chinese cases within a global context, this research not only addresses the methodological shortcomings but also enriches the theoretical understanding of the fact that the evolution of digital languages is both a universal phenomenon and culturally distinctive. This research approach enables a more comprehensive assessment of whether digital communication will lead to language convergence or strengthen the existing boundaries of sociolinguistics.

3. Research Methodology

To address these complex, multi-layered questions, a pragmatic mixed-methods research design was employed, following the principles outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017). This approach fully leverages the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The former is used to identify universal patterns and correlations in larger samples, while the latter is employed to gain in-depth understanding of motivations, cognition, and actual experiences, which are rich and contextually informed content.

3.1 Research Design and Participant Sampling

3.1.1 Chinese Cohort Study

Quantitative Survey: A structured online questionnaire was developed and disseminated via the widely used Chinese platform “Questionnaire Star.” Participants were recruited through school networks and online community channels to ensure diversity. The final sample comprised N=300 Chinese adolescents aged 13-



18, spanning multiple provinces (including Beijing, Guangdong, Sichuan, and Henan) to mitigate regional bias. The questionnaire contained 17 items across four sections: (A) Digital media usage habits (platforms, daily screen time); (B) Awareness and use of specific internet buzzwords; (C) Self-perceived impact of digital communication on formal writing/speaking; (D) Perceived influence of school and family on language use. Qualitative Components:

1. Textual Analysis: A corpus of 300 naturally occurring digital texts was compiled. This included 150 private/group chat logs from WeChat and QQ, and 150 public comments/posts from Douyin (TikTok). Texts were anonymized to protect user privacy.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews: Among the survey participants, 10 individuals were deliberately selected to cover various aspects such as screen usage duration, self-reported academic performance, and family background. These interviews were conducted online and each lasted for 45 to 60 minutes. The interview protocol covered the following topics: the conscious adaptation of language in different contexts (in school and online); the experience of the school's language policy; detailed discussions with parents/classmates about digital language; and the individual's reflection on the role of online communication in one's own language development.

3.1.2 UK Cohort Study

Given scope constraints, the UK analysis is based on a systematic review and synthesis of existing authoritative data and research. Key sources include:

1. Official Statistics: Ofcom's "Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report 2023" provides foundational data on platform penetration, usage time, and device access among UK teens.

2. Academic Research: Seminal and recent studies by Crystal (2006, 2011), Tagliamonte and Denis (2008), Wood et al. (2011), and Cheshire et al. (2011) provide evidence on linguistic features, systematicity, and social variation in digital language use.

3. Policy Documents: The UK Council for Internet Safety's "Education for a Connected World" framework (UKCIS, 2020) outlines the official educational approach to digital literacy, including language and communication.

4. Sociological Studies: Work by Livingstone and Helsper (2007) on digital inclusion and parental mediation informs the analysis of socio-economic and familial moderators.

This secondary data was analyzed thematically to construct a coherent profile of UK teenage digital language use, which served as the point of comparison for the primary Chinese data.

3.2 Data Analysis Procedures

3.2.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using statistical software (SPSS). Analysis included:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies and percentages for all items.
2. Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for multi-item scales within the questionnaire, showing good internal consistency (Section B: $\alpha=.78$; Section C: $\alpha=.82$).
3. Comparative Analysis: Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were performed to examine relationships between variables, most notably between daily screen time categories (e.g., <2 hrs, $2-4$ hrs, ≥ 4 hrs) and self-reported language fragmentation, and between family discussion frequency and buzzword usage intensity.

3.2.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

A hybrid thematic analysis approach was used, combining deductive codes from the research questions

and inductive codes emerging from the data itself (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

1. Textual Analysis: The 300 digital texts were manually coded for: (1) Presence of specific buzzwords from the survey; (2) Sentence length (in characters); (3) Sentence complexity (use of subordination, conjunction); (4) Punctuation density; (5) Use of emoji/emoticons as syntactic or pragmatic markers. These were compared against baseline metrics derived from standard Chinese middle school textbook passages.

2. Interview Analysis: Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were coded iteratively using NVivo software. Major themes that emerged included: “Performance of Identity Online,” “School as Linguistic Gatekeeper,” “Family as Mediator or Barrier,” and “Code-Switching Fatigue.”

3.2.3 Comparative Analysis

The preliminary analysis results of China and the secondary review results of the UK were presented side by side in a structured comparison table format and discussed in narrative form. This comparison focused on the common aspects (general numerical effects) and the different aspects (cultural-specific manifestations), and was guided by the research goals related to language features, influences, and regulatory factors.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Linguistic Characteristics of Digital Communication

4.1.1 Lexical Innovation and Semantic Nuance

The survey data from China reveals the hierarchical structure of buzzword, and this structure is closely related to emotional expression. “摆烂” (bǎi làn, meaning to openly embrace failure or mediocrity) led at 79.25% usage, powerfully encapsulating a generational sentiment towards pervasive academic and social pressure. This was followed by “家人们” (jiā rén men, “homies/fam”) at 60.38%, which repurposes a kinship term to create digital affinity, and the translingual hybrid “yyds” (forever god) at 58.49%. Platform specialization was clear: “家人们” thrived in the quasi-private, group-based dynamics of WeChat, while “摆烂” dominated the performative, emotion-driven space of TikTok comments.

In the UK, lexical innovation follows different patterns. While also creating in-group markers (e.g., “simp,” “ghosting,” “cheugy”), the influence of a globalized, American-dominated internet culture is stronger. Acronyms like “LOL,” “BRB,” and “IMO” have been standardized for over a decade (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008). The creativity often lies in meme culture, where phrases from videos, shows, or tweets (“That’s so meta,” “It’s giving...,” “Ok, boomer”) gain rapid currency. Unlike the Chinese phenomenon of compressing whole phrases into character-based neologisms (“绝绝子”), UK digital lexicon frequently expands or alters the meaning of existing English words through ironic or contextual reuse.

4.1.2 Syntactic Simplification

The analysis of the Chinese text provides clear quantitative evidence of grammatical changes. The average sentence length in the digital corpus is 12.5 characters, which is only half of the 25.8 characters in textbook prose. The density of punctuation marks has decreased from 0.21 (the number of punctuation marks per character) in textbooks to 0.12 in digital texts. This is reflected in expressions such as “下课了 食堂 速” (“Class is over. To the cafeteria. Hurry up.”) where the subject, predicate, and conjunction are omitted, relying largely on pragmatic inference.

Research in the UK has confirmed a similar trend, namely that language expression tends to be concise and in parallel structure. Crystal (2011) notes the predominance of simple or compound sentences over complex ones in texting and instant messaging. Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) found frequent omission of subjects (especially “I”), auxiliaries, and determiners in their corpus of Canadian instant messages (e.g., “Going out now. Back later.”). The driving factors are similar: speed, convenience, and adaptability to



screen size and interface design. However, the degree of fragmentation may be influenced by the underlying grammar of the language; English relies more on word order and necessary subjects, so even in a concise form, its structure may show a certain degree of clarity that is not as evident in Chinese, as Chinese relies more on context and topic prominence.

4.1.3 Pragmatic Code-Switching and Platform Logic

Chinese adolescents have a keen awareness of context-based language transformation. The interview data show that they consciously “optimize” their language expression when completing school assignments, communicating with elders in family WeChat groups, or interacting with teachers. The platform itself also stipulates practical norms. For WeChat used for multi-purpose communication (family, school, friends), it requires more context-sensitive language expression. While as a short-video dissemination medium, Douyin encourages the use of exaggerated, emotional, and often deliberately non-standard language to attract attention.

In the UK, there is also a similar phenomenon of language transformation, but this transformation may not be strictly regulated by formal authorities. Adolescents make content choices based on different “audiences” on various platforms - from carefully planned Instagram posts, to brief Snapchat stories, to chaotic group WhatsApp chats. The work of Cheshire et al. (2011) on Multicultural London English (MLE) shows how digital and face-to-face peer interactions can drive rapid linguistic change that later permeates wider youth culture. These practical rules are equally complex, but they may have a lower degree of association with hierarchical obedience (which is an important value in Chinese Confucian culture) and are more closely linked to the norms of calmness, authenticity, and internal unity within diverse peer networks.

4.2. The Impact of Digital Engagement

4.2.1 Screen Time and Linguistic Fragmentation

A key finding from the Chinese quantitative data was a strong positive correlation between high daily screen time (≥ 4 hours) and the self-reported perception of one’s own language becoming more “fragmented,” “simplified,” or “difficult to switch back” to formal style. This group was 3.5 times more likely to report such perceptions compared to low-frequency users (< 2 hours). This aligns with the “cognitive cost” hypothesis discussed later.

The research from the UK provided more detailed analytical results. Wood et al. (2011) found that familiarity with text abbreviations (“textism”) does not have an adverse effect on reading ability, and may be associated with a stronger phonological awareness (a crucial reading skill). However, they also cautioned that this does not mean that writing ability will be enhanced as a result. Data from Ofcom (2023) indicates a high level of participation, but it does not directly measure the influence in terms of language. This difference might lie in the different measurement methods: this Chinese study captured the subjective perception of the impact, while studies like those by Wood et al. measured the objective performance in specific tasks. Both types of findings are valid, indicating that there might be a certain gap between adolescents’ feelings about language and their actual abilities, which is a very suitable area for future cross-cultural research.

4.2.2 Impact on Formal Writing and Expression

In China, the most direct impact is that, without strict control, a large number of internet terms have flooded into the formal written language. In schools without strict policies, students reported accidentally using words like “栓 Q” (thank you) or “破防” (emotionally overwhelmed) in essays. The interview data revealed a more subtle concern: People tend to rely too much on digital shorthand when expressing their emotions. One respondent said: “When I need to write a reflective diary, sometimes I have difficulty finding the right words to describe my feelings... But online, I would use emojis or say ‘我emo了’.”

In the UK, in the past, people’s focus was on spelling and grammar issues (“u” for “you,” lack of punctu-

ation). However, research by Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) argues that adolescents possess a “digraphic” competence, understanding the difference between informal texting and formal writing. The greater concern voiced by UK educators, as reflected in the UKCIS (2020) framework, is not the degradation of grammar, but rather skills such as constructing coherent arguments, evaluating online information, and understanding tone and audience in the digital space. These skills go beyond the binary opposition of “formal and informal” language.

4.3. The Moderating Role of Cultural and Institutional Factors

4.3.1 The Power of School Policy

The Chinese data demonstrated the powerful influence of top-down policy. In schools with explicit rules banning internet slang in assignments, 79% of students reported “rarely or never” using it academically. One elite Beijing high school’s policy of a 5-point deduction per internet word resulted in a mere 7% usage rate in student writing, compared to 35% at a university with no such policy. Schools play a major role in implementing the “standard Mandarin” concept.

The approach in the UK is completely different. Although schools do teach standard English, as emphasized by the UKCIS framework, the policy focus is on developing “digital literacy”. This includes the ability to use technology effectively and critically, as well as an understanding of how language operates in different online environments. There are no such strict prohibitions in the UK. Instead, there are more guiding discussions regarding appropriateness, audience, and purpose. This reflects a more descriptive and functional language education model, which contrasts sharply with the more prescriptive and standardized model in China. Both have strengths and weaknesses: The Chinese model may better maintain formal writing standards in the short term, but it might suppress creativity and cause a significant gap between school education and students’ actual language environment. The British model aims to achieve integration and critical awareness, but when dealing with the widespread phenomenon of digital informal language, it may struggle to adhere to traditional writing norms.

4.3.2 Family Dynamics

The findings in China strongly support the cultural capital model. Adolescents who frequently have explanatory discussions with their parents about internet slang are 57% less likely to be classified as “high-frequency, uncritical users”. One participant (S8) described that explaining “yyds” to his mother made him more consciously aware of his language choices. This kind of “family language co-learning” plays a natural and intrinsic regulatory role.

Livingstone and Helsper’s (2007) discovered a similar hierarchical pattern in their research in the UK. They describe “enabling” mediation styles in educated families, where parents discuss online content and practices with their children, fostering critical thinking skills. In contrast, more restrictive or laissez-faire approaches in other families can lead to different outcomes. In the context of a significant social and economic disparity in the UK, the benefits brought by family mediation may show more pronounced differences. The key point is that the family is not merely a passive background factor but an active participant, playing a crucial role in shaping the way adolescents integrate their digital self with their offline self.

4.4 Synthesis and Comparative Discussion

The comparative analysis reveals a core paradox of digital language development in the 21st century: The characteristics of technology have brought about a strong pressure for convergence, while deeply rooted cultural and institutional structures have led to persistent differences in the outcome.

Convergence is seen in the universal adaptation of language to the demands of speed, brevity, and social signaling on digital platforms. Adolescents in both China and the UK are innovative, creating new lexical items and simplifying syntax. They are skilled pragmatists who can flexibly switch their expression meth-



ods in different situations. Both the educators of the two countries are concerned about the possible trade-offs in terms of cognition and expression, such as the reduction of patience for complex grammar, or the reliance on fixed expression methods to convey emotions, etc.

Divergence is rooted in the different “linguistic ecosystems.” The language ecosystem of China is characterized by a strong, centralized tradition of language standardization, a collectivist culture with clear hierarchical communication norms, and an educational system that emphasizes mastery of a canonical written form. Digital language here exists in a tense, often adversarial, relationship with this official ecosystem, leading to sharp context-switching and explicit policy battles.

The ecosystems in the UK are more diverse and fluid. Although standard English enjoys a high reputation, people’s acceptance of language diversity (e.g., regional accents, multicultural vernaculars) has also increased. This educational philosophy is increasingly inclined to emphasize critical reading skills rather than mere formalism. Here, digital language, though influential, is more readily accepted as a new language form, belonging to one of the various language varieties. This contradiction no longer lies between “standard” and “non-standard”, but more between “critical/effective” and “uncritical/limited” communication methods.

This disparity indicates that there is no universal solution applicable to all situations. Therefore, intervention measures must be adjusted according to the cultural context. In China, effective strategies might involve leveraging the respect for institutional authority by having schools lead “critical appreciation” courses on digital language, formally bridging the gap. In the UK, strategies might build on existing digital literacy frameworks, empowering adolescents to analyze the pragmatics and persuasion techniques within their own digital spaces.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study has confirmed that digital communication plays a transformative role in the language development of adolescents. Its impact is neither entirely positive nor entirely negative; rather, it is fundamentally constrained by social culture and institutional environment. This fundamental research in China reveals a situation where there is a coexistence of the rich creativity of vocabulary and the obvious simplification of grammatical structures, while also placing a high emphasis on pragmatics based on context. The perceived negative impact on formal language is real for heavy users, but it is greatly mitigated by two key forces: explicit school policies that defend the boundaries of formal writing, and engaged family communication that fosters meta-linguistic awareness and code-switching flexibility.

This contrast in the UK reveals another approach to addressing similar challenges. Although the language adaptation methods of British adolescents are similar, the environment they are in is not so strictly dichotomous. Their response is not to reinforce the barriers of standard English, but to attempt to expand the concept of “reading and writing skills” to include the field of digital communication. Both approaches encounter the same core challenge: how to equip young people with flexible and resilient language skills so that they can succeed in various diverse communication fields in the modern world—from a university essay to a TikTok video, from a job interview to a WhatsApp group.

The study ultimately concluded that the “impact” of digital communication cannot be evaluated in isolation. It is the result of the continuous negotiation among individual users, the technical characteristics of the platform, and the entire framework encompassing culture, education, and family. Ignoring any one of these aspects will lead to an incomplete understanding of this impact.

5.2. Recommendations

The following suggestions are derived from a comprehensive analysis of findings in China and an in-depth understanding of the relevant background in the UK. These suggestions are designed to be flexible, as

effective intervention measures must be culturally compatible and institutionally feasible. Our aim is not to propose a one-size-fits-all solution, but to provide some strategic directions so that stakeholders can make adjustments based on their specific circumstances.

5.2.1 For Educational Institutions

1. China: Move beyond simple prohibition. Develop and pilot “Digital Sociolinguistics” modules in junior and senior high schools. These courses would analyze and compare online buzzwords and classic idioms, study the grammatical differences between online posts and classic essays, and explore the pragmatic adaptation in different contexts. This turns digital language from a threat into a legitimate object of study, fostering critical awareness within the authoritative framework of school.

2. UK: Deepen the implementation of existing digital literacy frameworks (UKCIS, 2020). Move from general skills to specific, language-focused analysis. For example, an English course could analyze the rhetorical strategies and audience adaptation in influential Twitter posts or YouTube videos, and link them to traditional concepts of rhetoric and style.

5.2.2 For Families and Communities

For these both contexts, we should advocate the “family language co-learning” model. Community centers, schools and parenting websites should provide relevant resources to help parents understand the basic vocabulary and functions of adolescents’ digital culture. This is not to regulate it, but to open up channels for communication. Initiatives like the “Family Language Co-learning Camp” in Shanghai are exemplary.

As for the specific tasks, they are to hold low-intensity “language exchange” activities at home on a regular basis. Parents and adolescents should take turns explaining new words or phrases in their respective fields to enhance mutual understanding and accumulate language capital.

5.2.3 For Technology Platform Designers

1. Platforms like Douyin should explore guidance mechanisms in their models targeted at adolescents. For users whose content always employs extremely fragmented grammar, the algorithm can occasionally intersperse some carefully produced, longer-form video content (e.g., mini-documentaries, storytelling) in the pushed content, so that they can be exposed to different language patterns.

2. Platforms should collaborate with linguists and educators to create optional “language insight” features. For instance, Bilibili or YouTube could offer a “transcript” or “vocabulary highlight” tool for educational videos, explicitly linking spoken informal language to more formal written forms.

3. Develop a secure and privacy-respecting dashboard feature that enables families to view, rather than control, aggregated and anonymized information about communication patterns, which may be related to the school-led digital literacy goals, thereby promoting a tripartite partnership among adolescents, families, and schools.

In conclusion, the language of adolescents in China, the UK, and across the globe is being dynamically rewritten in the digital crucible. The challenge for society is not to resist this change but to guide it with wisdom, equipping the next generation not only with the grammar of the past but with the critical capacity to navigate and shape the communicative landscapes of the future.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Yang Tongtong, Han Yixuan; Methodology: Yang Tongtong; Software: Yang Tong-



tong; Formal analysis: Yang Tongtong; Investigation: Yang Tongtong; Resources: Yang Tongtong (Chinese cohort), Han Yixuan (UK data and literature); Data Curation: Yang Tongtong; Writing – Original Draft: Yang Tongtong; Writing – Review & Editing: Yang Tongtong, Han Yixuan; Supervision: Lin Luzhou; Project Administration: Yang Tongtong.

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