

IDENTITY PRACTICES OF MULTILINGUAL WRITERS IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SPACES

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This study examines the literacy practices of two multilingual writers in social networking communities. The findings show that the multilingual writers explored and reappropriated symbolic resources afforded by the social networking site as they aligned themselves with particular collective and personal identities at local and global levels. Through the designs available to them in these online environments, multilingual writers constructed multiple identities that were dynamic and developmental over time. The writers demonstrated that they adopted different strategies and subject positions when participating in online-networked discourses. Analysis and understanding of these digitally mediated multiliterate practices—by researchers, teachers, and learners alike—may provide insight into pedagogies that recognize and even affirm these practices.

Keywords: Technology-Mediated Communication, Social Networking, Identity, ICT Literacies

APA Citation: Chen, H. I. (2013). Identity practices of multilingual writers in social networking spaces. *Language Learning & Technology*, 17(2), 143–170. Retrieved from <http://llt.msu.edu/issues/june2013/chen.pdf>

Received: December 1, 2011; **Accepted:** January 12, 2013; **Published:** June 1, 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, there has been a move in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) from a concern with the linguistic and cognitive consequences of literacy acquisition towards a broader consideration of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1993). In the latter view, literacy learning, regardless whether it pertains to a first language (L1) or second language (L2), is understood as a social process in which language learners/users actively participate, enacting particular social roles and negotiating their situated identities (Lam, 2000). As such, identity should not be seen as a fixed, singular possession but as developmental, plural matters that are shaped and reshaped through learners' ongoing interactions and negotiations with others in specific communities of practice (Buckingham, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). The identity of the language learner indicates the ways in which language learners understand their relationship to the target language and to the social world. Examinations of how learners socially construct and transform identities across time and space thus help teachers discover the learners' language learning journey (Norton, 2000).

While much attention has been focused on learner identity and the L2 enculturation process in face-to-face communities, Internet-mediated communities such as social networking sites (SNSs) have not been extensively explored for their potential in shaping the interdependency of learner identity and literacy learning (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). With the growth of the Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools, new technologies such as Web 2.0 tools (e.g., blog, wiki, video games) and other CMC technologies have altered human communication, information media, and most importantly, the ways in which language is used and how information is presented (Williams, 2009). The Internet and digital tools have challenged traditional views of literacy and literacy learning as acquiring linguistic elements that are fixed, rule-governed, monomodal, and static; they have redefined *literacies* as social practices that are fluid, sociocultural, multimodal, and dynamic. In addressing the relationships between literacy/-ies and the rising demands of technology and increasing lingual and cultural diversity, a

multiliteracies perspective emphasizes the multiplicity and multimodality of literacy as social practices in human communication and how such features of literacy affect language learning and teaching (New London Group, 1996). Recent literature in SLA has shown the potential of emerging technologies for their educational value, as well as their promise for L2 literacy development, social engagement, authorship and readership, agency promotion, intercultural understanding, and community construction (e.g., see Belz, 2003; Black, 2008, 2009; Gee, 2007; Kramsch, A’Ness, & Lam, 2000; Lam, 2000, 2004, 2009; Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007).

Despite the many advantages of CMC tools identified by SLA scholars, the dynamics of multilingual writers’ literacy practices and identity constructions in social networking communities are still unclear. Yet, as multilingual writers often enjoy simultaneous membership in a number of diverse cultural communities, complexity is added to their literacy learning, identity formation, socialization, and engagement in online communities (Canagarajah, 2002, 2006, 2010). Questions arise that remain unexplored: How do multilingual writers participate in literacy practices and construct identities in the online social networking space? How do these identities change and develop over time? Empirical studies that address these questions could shed light on SLA and identity studies in relation to CMC.

In order to explore these research questions, this study adopts a case study approach and examines two multilingual writers literacy practices and their construction of online identities in one social networking site, Facebook, over a two-year period. I use the term *multilingual writer* in this paper to refer to people who use more than one language in everyday life, specifically, those who write in more than one language. As such, with digital tools afforded by SNSs, multilingual users engage in varying writing activities and write themselves into SNSs (boyd, 2007). A longitudinal study of L2 users’ social networking activity with a particular focus on literacy development and identity representation yields valuable insights into L2 and multilingual learners’ meaning-making process (Choi, Kim, Sohn, & Sung, 2011; Duff, 2008; Jackson, 2008). Drawing on poststructuralist perspectives on identity, I conceptualize identity as socially contingent relations between the learner and others, in that it is multiple, complex, and a site of struggle (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2002). Such a view challenges the monolingual and monocultural bias in SLA research and argues for a dynamic perspective that views multilingual individuals as members of multiple ethnic, social, and cultural communities with multidimensional identities.

Through mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology, this study explores how the multimodal choices afforded by Facebook allowed the two multilingual writers to develop and negotiate multiple identities and affiliations within/across diverse networks. An analysis of status updates, information sharings, and other SNS-mediated activities provide valuable insights into the diverse, complex, and dynamic choices multilingual writers make when entering and socializing in new discourse communities. The aim is to further understand how social networking sites and other Internet-mediated online communities provide opportunities for language learners/users to participate and navigate across multiple identities in various social and cultural networks. From a pedagogical perspective, the exploration of multilingual writers’ use and appropriation of various symbolic resources in online communities can not only contribute to our knowledge of the interdependency between literacy, identity, and Internet-based communication but also serve as a window to examine learners’ meaning-making and socialization process over time. An understanding of the ways learners construct and transform identities from a longitudinal perspective helps language teachers uncover learners’ learning trajectories, further allowing language teachers to assist learners in developing symbolic competence and critical awareness of the affordances of digitally mediated meaning-making resources for identity formation.

Social Networking Sites and Second Language Learning

Social networking sites (SNSs) such as MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, have grown in popularity worldwide, attracting millions of users in the past few years. As of October 2012, Facebook, the leading SNS, had one billion active users around the world, with approximately 81% of Facebook users being

located outside of the United States and Canada. Facebook is available in 70 languages and embraces multilingual and multicultural users (Facebook, 2012). This evidence shows that Facebook has become a medium for communication across the globe, providing a cosmopolitan and plurilingual linguistic landscape for its multilingual users.

With their various technological and networking affordances (i.e., profiles, status updates, shared links, synchronous chats, asynchronous messages, photo sharings), SNSs like Facebook allow users to maintain and develop social ties, both online and offline, through participation in a multifaceted and multisensory environment (Jones & Bronack, 2008). While Facebook allows various writing activities, each writing practice affords and constrains certain texts and requires that users possess specific digital literacy skills. For example, status updates, a popular feature of Facebook, allow users to post text-based messages, photos, and videos for all their designated friends to read. Facebook users can also share information such as hyperlinks, videos, images, and news articles through the share function. Furthermore, what makes SNSs unique is that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks through public displays of friend lists and wall-to-wall postings (boyd & Ellison, 2007) to “networked publics,” groups of audiences that are bound together through technological networks (boyd, 2007, p. 8). The interactions and affiliations between members of the networked publics are mediated through various literacy activities such as status updates and information sharings and also symbolic actions including *Friend*, *Like*, *Tag*, *Poke*, *ReTweet*, and *Share* that are afforded by Web 2.0 tools (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008).

Such social networking communities appear to have significant affordances for language acquisition and potential as pedagogical tools in support of L2 learning (Godwin-Jones, 2008). Vie (2007) states that SNSs afford language learners various writing activities and provide a naturalized space for socialization by situating literacy practices and human activities in particular online contexts where learners are exposed to authentic language use for particular social purposes. Mills (2011), examining SNSs in a French-as-a-foreign-language classroom, discovered that by using Facebook as an authentic environment for enhancing communication, interaction, and discussions in French, her students were able to meet the grammatical, functional, and linguistic objectives of her French language course. She found that the incorporation of SNSs like Facebook in L2 classrooms creates authentic opportunities for learning, fosters multimodal literacy, and promotes learners’ meaningful social interactions, development of community memberships, and shared cultural understanding. Similarly, Blattner and Fiori (2011) observed 15 L2 learners in an intermediate Spanish course and found that over the course of a semester, learners, through the Facebook-mediated awareness-raising tasks, developed linguistic repertoire and socio-pragmatic competence such as greetings and leave-takings. Hence, SNSs provide opportunities for L2 learners to develop socio-pragmatic competence (e.g., Blattner & Fiori, 2009, 2011; McBride, 2009), a sense of community (e.g., Mills, 2011), authentic language interaction and discussion (e.g., Godwin-Jones, 2008), cultural understanding (e.g., Mitchell, 2012), and learner motivation and engagement (e.g., Haverback, 2009) while learners are observing and engaging in multifaceted SNS literacy practices.

In SNSs, identity is constructed through impression management, network structure management, and bridging of online and offline social networks (boyd & Ellison, 2007). To explore the sense of “who we are and the relationship to the world” (Kanno, 2003, p. 3), SNS users create virtual “subject positions” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 20) for themselves through the discursive choices and selective appropriation of symbolic resources in words, photos, videos, and other modalities. Due to the public exposure of SNS participants, users’ posted literacy practices reflect how they project themselves in relation to others in the SNS space, and more importantly, how they want others to perceive them in particular social networks. SNS users exercise their agency and relate to the question of “who am I” through deliberate choices and appropriations of language, discourse, social role, and projection of cultural values and beliefs. SNS posts therefore reflect the dynamic development of an individual’s identity/-ies.

Identity Construction of L2 Users/Learners in Social Networking Spaces

To understand how language users/learners construct identities in online communities like SNSs, it is important to investigate the extent to which network-mediated literacy practices promote new forms of identities through hybrid textual practices in online environments. Lam (2004) studied the language used by two adolescent Chinese immigrants to the United States in a bilingual Chinese and English chatroom. She found that the Chinese youth, Yu Qing and Tsu Ying, used a hybrid form of English and Romanized Chinese to represent their dual linguistic identities available in “neither the social categories of English-speaking Americans nor those of Cantonese-speaking Chinese” (Lam, 2004, p. 45). Through this mixed-code variety of English and Chinese, the Chinese youth adopted and negotiated new forms of use and developed textual identities that indicate group affiliation. In another case study, Lam (2009) investigated the instant messaging practices of a Chinese adolescent immigrant in the United States and found that the student negotiated multiple identities and created affiliations with a local Chinese immigrant community, the translocal network of an Asian American youth group, and transnational relationships with her peers in China through varying digitally-mediated textual practices such as vernacular English use and multidialectal use of Cantonese, Mandarin, and Shanghaiese. Communication technologies like instant messaging provided a space for the youth migrant, Kaiyee, to engage in an ongoing dialogue, and in the process design her multilayered identities and affiliations with various social groups, both translocally, and transnationally.

In a study of learner identity and L2 use in SNSs, Pasfield-Neofitou (2011) examined the informal use of SNS by native speakers of English and Japanese across two SNSs, Facebook (English-medium SNS) and Mixi (Japanese-medium SNS). The learners were shown to align themselves with a reference group and positioned themselves with various identities through conscious selections of different languages in the Japanese and English domains. The L2 learners’ language choices reflected their sense of ownership of a particular language and indexed their online identity as foreigners. For instance, Kaylene, the Australian learner of Japanese in the study, highlighted her foreignness with an opening statement in her Mixi Profile “I’m sorry, this blog will probably end up being very badly written and the Japanese is that of a foreigner, or even Kaylese,” which foregrounds her non-native identity (Pasfield-Neofitou, 2011, p. 102). The studies conducted by Lam (2004, 2009) and Pasfield-Neofitou (2011) provide evidence that the hybridity and diversity of language practices and linguistic repertoires of language learners become mediating tools for meaning-making and participating in the digitally mediated activity (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999).

Extending Lam’s (2000) notion of *textual identity*, which privileges the role of language in identity formation in online discourse, the term *multimodal identity* has emerged with the multimodalities available in SNSs. Analyzing an SNS page as a dynamic, multimodal hypertext reflecting the user’s identity, Knobel and Lankshear (2008) examined the socially recognized ways, meaningful content, encoded texts, and participation in discourses evident in the Facebook profiles of two individuals. They found that the users’ different qualitative use of wall posts, status updates, and collocations with other technologies reflect their socially identifiable ways of engaging in the SNS space. Thus, SNSs are ideal places for the virtual construction of self since the users can design their profiles with multimodal resources such as texts, photos, videos, and hyperlinks. Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) looked at how Facebook users present their “hoped for possible selves” by “showing rather than telling” (p. 1816). They showed that identity construction on an SNS profile tends to be rather implicit (through affiliations with certain activities) than explicit, since SNS like Facebook gives users resources but also constraints, and users are forced to adhere to the SNS’s layout.

While more studies on identity formation and SNSs have been done in L1 contexts, several studies have examined identity representations among multilingual learners on SNSs. Depew and Miller-Cochran (2010) examined the choices of languages, registers, and technological tools of three L2 advanced students—an undergraduate senior, a master’s student, and a doctoral student—in social networking

spaces. They concluded that engagement in text-based practices relied on the technological features of SNSs and that the students' hybrid literacy practices were driven by their anticipated audience. Depew and Miller-Cochran's study indicates that the L2 writers wrote themselves visually, textually, and aurally into online spaces and represented themselves with different identity constructs in relation to global and local discourses. Continuing this line of inquiry through an in-depth case study, Depew (2011) examined the writing strategies that three L2 students adopted in designing their visual self on SNSs and concluded that the students, with different writing strategies, shuttled between the linguistic and cultural repertoires. While Bakul, a student from India speaking Gujarati as her L1 and Hindi and English as L2s, shifted between formal and informal registers in her linguistic production on Facebook profile pages; Dhanesh, a generation 1.5 student speaking Gujarati as his L1 and English, Hindi, and Polish as L2s, negotiated his Indian heritage identity and American identity through his deliberate choice of account name with the term "desi" and shared links to the university organizations he was engaged in with comments like "I am Hindu and I am proud to be one!" to signal his Indian heritage (Depew, 2011, p. 66).

To summarize, these studies highlight the multiplicity and complexity of multilingual learners' subject positions and identities and recognize the ways in which language, identity, agency, and cultural beliefs are inextricably intertwined in digitally mediated literacy practices. The research shows that online communities such as chat rooms, instant messaging, and SNSs, afford multilingual learners—like Yu Qing and Tsu Ying (Lam, 2004), Kaiyee (Lam, 2009), and Bakul and Dhanesh (Depew, 2011)—a hybrid, dynamic "third space" (Bhatia, 1994) that enables new and alternative identity options and allows multilingual learners, with their semiotic repertoires and cultural values, to navigate across multiple languages, identities, and cultures. With the affordances of digital tools, SNSs provide learners an additional space in which they construct and reconstruct identities while engaging in multimodal SNS-mediated activities.

Building upon previous research, this study explores how two multilingual writers use the semiotic resources available to them through Facebook to construct and develop their identities over a two-year period during their graduate studies in the United States. Sojourner students present an interesting group because they are second language learners/users "who have both physically and symbolically crossed the border" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2001, p. 174). With pre-established connections with their home countries and cultures, these students come to the host country and engage in situated literacy practices in the new community, both online and offline, with their multilingual and multicultural repertoires; these students may encounter challenges in terms of facing language barriers, achieving academic goals, and experiencing social/cultural adjustment in the host country (Trice, 2003). As SNSs allow unique affordances for the process of designing self, and moreover a recorded history of acts of self-presentation and interaction, an analysis of identity construction in Facebook status updates and posts can help in discovering the different ways in which multilingual users can participate in online discourse and, in so doing, take up space in different social worlds.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Two multilingual writers, Jane and Cindy (pseudonyms), participated in this study. Jane and Cindy were international graduate students at a university in the southwestern United States. Both writers were in their mid 20s and began their graduate studies in fall 2009. Both speak Mandarin Chinese as their L1 and started learning English at the age of 13 at middle schools in China.

Jane was a doctoral student in the field of Applied Linguistics. She arrived to the United States in August 2009 from China. Jane was born and raised in a city in the Henan province in Central China and moved to Shanghai, a cosmopolitan city, for undergraduate and graduate studies. Before coming to the United States, Jane had received a bachelor's and master's degree in English Literature in China. Based on my

participant observation in offline settings, Jane mostly socialized with American peers in her program and/or international friends she met at social events or at church. Jane lived with her husband who is also Chinese. Jane was very aware that she had little exposure to English at home, speaking only Chinese with her husband, and she wanted to practice more English with her school friends in both online and offline contexts. When asked about her experience with social networking sites, Jane acknowledged that she had joined Facebook in January 2009 but had minimally interacted. While still in China, Jane had actively participated in RenRen, a leading Chinese-medium SNS. RenRen, founded in December 2005, is a Chinese social networking service that exists as the Chinese remake of Facebook. With similar functions as Facebook, RenRen allows users to develop social networks and connect with one another through synchronous chats, asynchronous messages, photo postings, information sharings, and other SNS-mediated features. As of October, 2012, RenRen had over 70 million users in total, with 31 million active monthly users (RenRen, 2012). Jane, like many other Chinese students, was an active RenRen user prior to her departure to the United States. However, she commented that after arriving to her PhD studies, she used Facebook with increasing frequency as a means to build local friendships, participating in RenRen much less.

Cindy was a master's student at the same institution but in a different discipline—Chinese Linguistics. She began her master's degree in August 2009, the same year that Jane entered her doctoral program. Cindy also came from China and was born and raised in a major city in the Sicuan province in southwestern China. After her secondary education, she moved to Nanjing, China for undergraduate and graduate studies, both in Chinese Literature. She was admitted to an MA program in the US institution during the final year of her master's degree program at a Chinese institution. She earned her first MA degree from the Chinese institution after two semesters in the United States while continuing with studies for a second master's degree in the US institution. Cindy joined Facebook in January 2009 and actively participated in RenRen even after her arrival. Based on her own assessment, Cindy mainly used RenRen to maintain friendships in China and Facebook to communicate with new friends in the United States. In offline contexts, Cindy often socialized with her Chinese peers who were enrolled in the same program and/or Chinese friends she met at social events held by the Chinese student association at the university. Cindy commented "I felt awkward when I speak English because my English is not good" (Interview with Cindy, November 4, 2011). Even if Cindy expressed that she made attempts or wished to improve her English, she had few opportunities to interact with native English speakers due to the scarcity of native English speakers in her program. Her discomfort in speaking English also prompted her to live in an apartment with another Chinese girl from her program.

Overall, Jane and Cindy demonstrated similar profiles in many ways, but varied in their ways of interacting in and through Facebook throughout their studies in the United States. Their profiles also show how a group of sojourned students, with multilingual and multicultural repertoires, take diverse pathways in entering the host country (Jackson, 2007). It is thus of interest to examine the ways these learners participate in the literacy practices and construct identities while socializing into the new community over time, and more importantly, in an online networked discourse.

Data Collection and Analysis

A case study approach was adopted in this study¹ in order to contextualize the analysis of the participants' online practices and tracking changes over time (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). To understand more holistically how the multilingual writers participated in the social networking site Facebook, I built the study using multiple data sources including: (a) participants' Facebook pages and SNS use, (b) semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 1998), and (c) field notes from participant observation, both online and offline. Facebook was chosen for the study due to its popularity in the United States. Background surveys were conducted prior to the project to gain insight into the writers' language learning histories and experiences with social media. The writers' SNS use over two years was collected for frequency and content analysis (Jones et al., 2008). Semi-structured interviews were conducted after the initial content

analysis to assist in the interpretation of their experience with Facebook. As Androutsopoulos (2008) points out, such case studies that take into account the participants' awareness and interpretation of their own practices can prove invaluable in arriving at more integrated conclusions.

As an international graduate student who has pursued a doctoral degree in the United States, I have been involved in the international student community and share the experience of studying abroad. My proficiency in Mandarin and familiarity with the local student community helped me develop a degree of rapport with the participants. I socialized with them both in person and on Facebook, which allowed me to observe their participation and interactions with others in both online and offline contexts. Field notes were taken during my participant observations.

While qualitative approaches are advocated by many scholars to be the best approach to investigating online communities such as SNSs (Thomsen, Straubhaar, & Bolyard, 1998), a quantitative approach allows a more holistic view of language practices in educational contexts, particularly in a longitudinal study (Johnson, 1992). With the permission of the participants², I collected their SNS postings from January 2009 to May 2011 and adapted Jones et al.'s (2008) content analysis to analyze their Facebook pages. The frequency analysis documented patterns and changes in the writers' use of literacy practices (e.g., status updates, wall-to-wall posts, information sharings). The number of status updates (SUs) and information sharings (ISs) were recorded as was the language used and the identities reflected in each post. It should be noted that SUs and ISs were chosen on the basis of their salience in the participants' SNS use compared with other practices (e.g., chats, messages). Although SUs and ISs share many similarities, I distinguish ISs from SUs based on one significant difference: the availability of links to outside information. While both ISs and SUs allow users to post print words and multimodal texts such as photos and videos, Facebook users can only post photos or/and videos that are stored in their own computers when composing SUs. ISs, in contrast, enable users to share hyperlinks to external sources that they encounter in other webpages. While SUs contain messages that users want to share with their friends, ISs, such as videos, hyperlinks, and other multimodal contents, also signal personal interests and investments and thus present aspects of a user's identity (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008). For example, in one of the SUs, Jane posted, "So we don't have stats class this week, right?" (see Figure 1, on the left). This text-based SU about a graduate-level statistic class indicates Jane's student identity that seeks class information. In an IS activity, Jane shared multimodal contents from the PHD (Piled Higher and Deeper) Comic, a web comic strip that deals with issues of life in graduate school, with external hyperlinks (see Figure 1, on the right). In these two examples, although the SU is more text-based and the IS involves multimodal contents from external sources, both activities index Jane's identity as a graduate student.



Figure 1. Jane's status update about a graduate-level statistic class (left), and information sharing of the PHD Comic (right).

In addition to the frequency analysis, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the SNS posts, specifically focusing on identity representations. Viewing identity as indexical and constructed through symbolic practices, a colleague and I first read and tagged each post with specific identities and discussed the posts where we did not agree. Through a process of grouping and re-grouping, we identified 12 categories: five indexed traditional roles (human, friend, girlfriend, student, and teacher), and seven indexed cultural and community participation (general, Chinese, local, American, global, university, professional). Coded categories, definitions, and examples are presented in the [Appendix](#). My colleague

and I then went through the same sets of posts again to tag them using the 12 categories, allowing for double or triple categorization when necessary. We reached an inter-rater reliability of 98%. The intention here was not to advocate absolute categories, but to uncover the multiplicity of identities performed in SNS-mediated activities. Based on the primary categorizations, the data was organized into three periods: pre-arrival (March 2009 to July 2009), the first academic year (August 2009 to July 2010), and the second academic year (October 2010 to May 2011). The aggregated and distribution frequency and percentages of identity categories across years (pre-arrival, year 1, and year 2) and totals are presented in the findings.

Finally, the participants were interviewed as to their authorial intent, their perceptions of SNSs, and their experiences in SNS-mediated activities. I then transcribed and analyzed the interviews with their SNS posts, corresponding to the research questions. The semi-structured interviews helped uncover participants' actual practice and their own voices and beliefs (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), which allowed for a more complete analysis.

FINDINGS

This section reports findings in terms of (a) numbers and patterns of the two multilingual writers' status updates and information sharings, (b) language choices of their postings, and (c) identity representations in their postings. The interview data and observation field notes are presented here to triangulate with the quantitative data.

SNS Literacy Practices Over Time

Overall, the two multilingual writers displayed increasing participation on Facebook over time, as evident in their SUs and ISs, two of the most common SNS practices on their Facebook pages. As an example, Cindy first joined Facebook in January 2009 when she was in China, but as Figure 2 shows, she did not actively participate in Facebook posts between January 2009 and August 2009, the period when she was in China. Cindy, however, did begin to participate in Facebook use from September 2009 shortly after arrived to the United States, and her activity increased throughout her US graduate studies. Jane also demonstrated an overall increase in involvement in SUs and ISs. Similar to Cindy, Jane did not actively engage in SNS practices until she came to the United States in August 2009, with her SNS use increasing over time (see Figure 2).

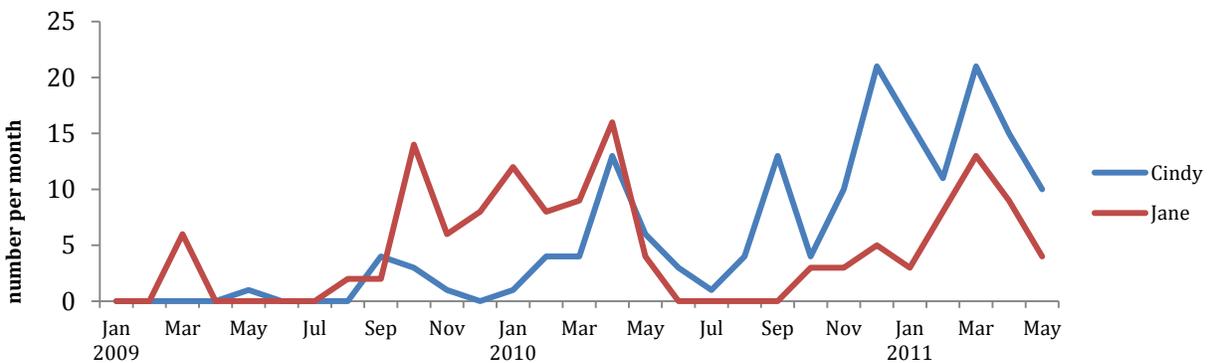


Figure 2. Cindy's and Jane's total SNS practices (status updates and information sharings).

The SNS activities of both were minimal between June 2010 and August 2010, when both were in China for summer vacation. This minimal participation on Facebook is attributed to the fact that Facebook was prohibited in China from July 2009 after riots broke out between police and protestors in the Xinjiang province. In the interview, Jane confirmed the observation and commented "I didn't use Facebook when I went back to China because it was blocked in China, and I didn't have access to Facebook" (Interview with Jane, November 15, 2011). This Facebook activity decrease supports Villarreal Ballesteros's (2010)

claim that SNS use and reflective online identity work could be promoted or constrained by social and cultural contexts, ideologies, and power structures.

Types of Literacy Practices

These two SNS practices, SUs and ISs, require users to interact with other members on Facebook by exploiting different sets of skills and socially developed ways of using technology and knowledge (Scribner & Cole, 1981). An examination of the multilingual writers' participation in the SNS in terms of SUs and ISs thus can help to uncover the ways the writers generate, communicate, and negotiate meaningful content through "the medium of digitally encoded texts of various kinds in contexts where they interact as members of Discourses" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008, p. 259). The literacy choices individuals make in participating in the SNS thus reflect how they want to present themselves and be perceived by others in the online space.

A close investigation of the percentages of their SUs and ISs shows that both Cindy and Jane started with SUs as the dominant literacy practice in their early SNS use. As indicated in Figure 3, Cindy began information sharing in September 2009, while Jane began in November 2009. This practice emerged only after they began their US graduate studies.

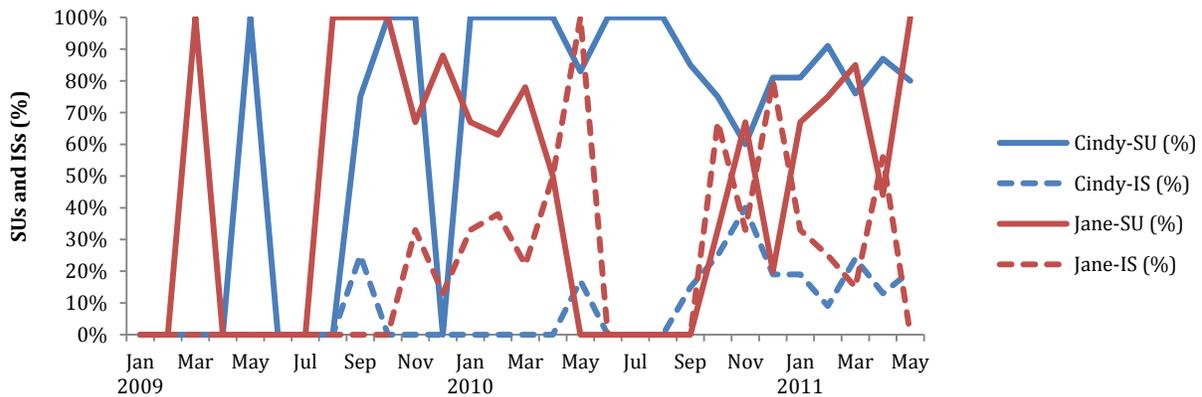


Figure 3. Percentage of Cindy's and Jane's status updates and information sharings.

Although Jane and Cindy were engaged in both literacy practices on Facebook over time, Cindy engaged less frequently in ISs. SUs dominated Cindy's SNS activity. When interviewed, Cindy commented on her preference for SUs over ISs:

Sometimes you want others to know more about you...*yourself*. You want to share your current status and what happens to you. You want your friends to follow you too. *Sharing information is good too, but it is not really about yourself*. (Interview with Cindy, November 4, 2011; italics are the researcher's emphasis)

Cindy's remarks indicated that she viewed SUs and ISs as two distinct literacy practices with different socially recognized goals. For Cindy, while SUs seem to focus more on self-sharing, ISs involved more concern with others. In pursuing a specific goal of sharing with others about her life, Cindy perceived and exploited the affordance of the SUs as self-reflection/self-sharing to help her achieve that goal.

Jane, however, displayed increasing exploitation of ISs over time, indicating that she gradually shifted from a more self-centered writing practice like the SU to a more other-involved writing practice like IS, as evident in her response to her increasing use of ISs over time (see Figure 3). In the interview, she commented that she first observed her American friends sharing information and links on Facebook when she started engaging in SNS activities. Jane remarked,

I wasn't used to share information. But I noticed that there are more and more people sharing information on Facebook now. Sharing is more fun than status update I think.... Well, I like to know about others' lives, but sometimes I doubt if they are interested in knowing what's happening in my life. I like to see the postings others share.... I got to see some interesting videos and issues around the world. It's a good way to bring people with similar interests together. And it sometimes can generate good discussion! *When I share information, I think about my audiences a lot. I only share information what may be interesting for them.* (Interview with Jane, November 15, 2011; italics are the researcher's emphasis)

Through this exposure, Jane appropriated IS practices and shared links that attracted her attention and those she believed could generate discussions and appeal to her audiences. As Cindy and Jane both observed functional and communicative differences across digital literacy practices like SUs and ISs, the literacy choices the writers made thus reflected their beliefs about which practices can best support their explorations and participations in SNSs.

Language Selections in SNS Activities

A close examination was made of which of their available languages were used in what situations. While both Mandarin (L1) and English (L2) were used in the two writers' SUs and ISs, the two languages were selected differently by the two writers in terms of quantity and quality.

Table 1. *Frequency Counts of Cindy and Jane's Status Updates and Information Sharings Language Selections*

	Status Update				Information Sharing				Total			
	Cindy		Jane		Cindy		Jane		Cindy		Jane	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
English	47	34%	94	100%	6	23%	39	95%	53	32%	133	99%
Mandarin	93	66%	0	0%	20	77%	2	5%	113	68%	2	1%
Total	140	100%	94	100%	26	100%	41	100%	166	100%	135	100%

As Table 1 reveals, from Cindy's 166 total SNS posts (including SUs and ISs), 53 (32%) were composed in English, and 113 (68%) were in Mandarin. In the case of Jane, in a total of 135 posts, 133 (99%) were composed in English, and two (1%) were in Mandarin. Cindy switched regularly between Mandarin and English in her SUs and ISs (the language used within a given link post). In a total of 140 SUs, Cindy posted 47 updates (34%) in English and 93 updates (66%) in Mandarin (see Table 1). In a total of 26 ISs, six of the sharings (23%) were written in English and 20 of the sharings (77%) were written in Mandarin. Surprisingly, over the two years, Jane chose to use English in all her 94 SUs and in nearly all her ISs. From a total of 41 ISs, 39 (95%) were written in English and two (5%) in Mandarin.

When looking at the two writers' language choices over two years, notable changes in their use of English and Mandarin can be identified. Cindy, for example, used English exclusively in her SUs between September 2009 and February 2010 (see Figure 4). In the interview Cindy rationalized that since those were her first five months in the United States, she felt that she had to post more in English not only to use English more frequently but also to communicate with her American friends and to be more involved in the new English-speaking community. However, after four months, she started to make more Chinese friends at graduate school through the Chinese student association. This permitted her an increased usage of Mandarin on Facebook as she built and maintained relationships with her new Chinese-speaking

friends. Mandarin thus became the dominant language used in Cindy's SNS activities after March 2010, indicating that Cindy viewed her Chinese-speaking friends as her primary audience in the Facebook community.

On Facebook, I use Chinese to communicate with my Chinese friends who are in Tucson and who are in the U.S. but in other states. *I just feel more comfortable using Chinese with them.* But I sometimes use English too because I also want to connect with my American friends, and since they can't read Chinese, I post in English. (Interview with Cindy, November 4, 2011; italics are the researcher's emphasis)

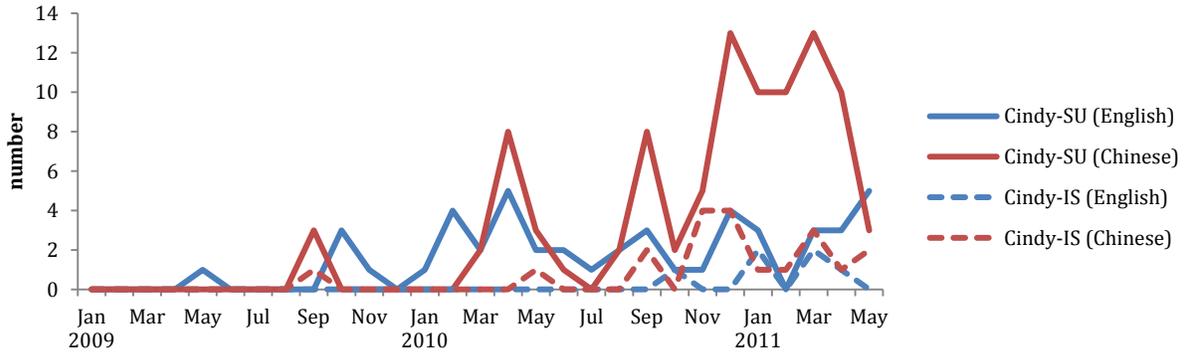


Figure 4. Frequency of Cindy's selections of English and Mandarin in status updates and information sharings.

Cindy seemed to identify language choice (of either English or Mandarin) with the two main divisions of her Facebook audience: Americans and Chinese friends. This division of two languages was also evident in her ISs where Mandarin was used in association with content related to China or Chinese culture in general that she wanted to share with her Chinese peers; English was used when shared information was not Chinese-specific and which she hoped to share with her American friends (see Figure 4). While acknowledging the accessibility of both languages and various social networks to her Facebook posts, language became a strategy for Cindy when addressing different audiences within her Facebook networks.

In contrast, as revealed in Figure 5, Jane showed an exclusive use of English, her L2, in her participation in Facebook literacy practices. In the interview, Jane remarked that she viewed Facebook as a space to use English and to share her thoughts with her multilingual friends:

While composing my status, I always have people in my program as the audience in mind.
Because the people in my program have multilingual and multicultural backgrounds,

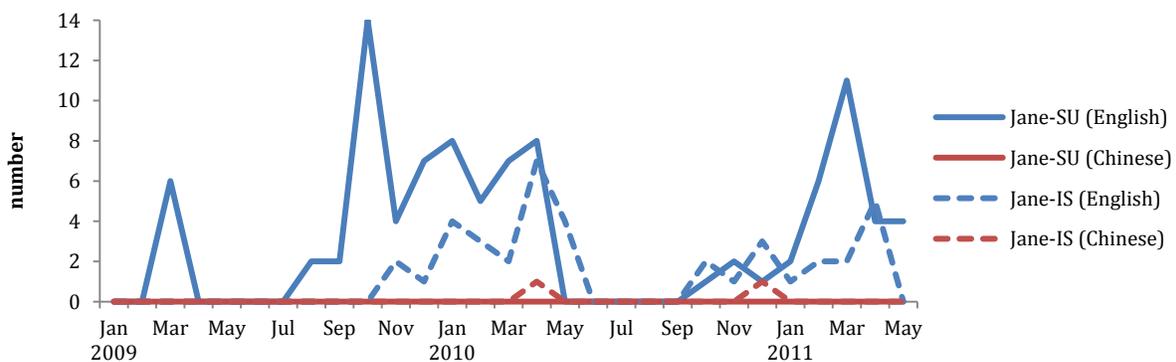


Figure 5. Frequency of Jane's selections of English and Mandarin in status updates and information sharings.

English seems to be the main communicative language on Facebook. (Interview with Jane, November 15, 2011; italics are the researcher's emphasis)

Her perception of Facebook as an English-as-an-international-language space was reflected in her extensive use of English in Facebook activities as was identified by Jane in the local program-related community. Through her use of English as the medium for participating in Facebook activities, Jane positioned herself as an international English user rather than learner, as well as other social and cultural identities, which will be discussed in the next section.

It is also important to look into the qualities of these language-specific postings and their communicative purposes. A qualitative examination indicated that Mandarin was often used by Cindy in association with her home culture, self-reflection on life, and expressions of humor. In the interview, Cindy indicated that her choice of language in Facebook posts was primarily motivated by the audience she wanted to communicate to through those posts. Cindy often used Mandarin to reflect on her life in the United States, and joke with her Chinese friends, building social bonds with them through humor.

Sometimes I just don't want to think in English. It is too tiring to read in English and type in English even on Facebook! It is also hard to express your true emotions in English, so I use Chinese to say things about me ... about my feelings living here. I want to talk with my Chinese friends about my feelings. They are fun to talk to, and they know how I feel. Using Chinese is just easier and more relaxing. (Interview with Cindy, November 4, 2011)

English, however, was often used by Cindy to reflect her feelings toward school and to raise questions that she anticipated would be answered by her American friends. Although Cindy expressed her feelings sometimes in Mandarin and sometimes in English, what drove her language choice was based on the specific group of audience that she desired to reach.

Another important factor that motivated the writers' language choice on Facebook was their conceptualization of the Facebook site. In the interview, Cindy expressed her perception of Facebook as an English-occupied space:

There are not so many differences between Facebook and RenRen (Chinese SNS) in terms of functions and features. But Facebook is more like an *English-occupied space* that just *doesn't belong to Chinese people...* you know... because people in China can't use Facebook! People use English the most in that space. (Interview with Cindy, November 4, 2011; italics are the researcher's emphasis)

Cindy's conceptualization of Facebook as an English-occupied space implies that, for her, languages other than English are less valued on Facebook. She could not see herself fitting into that space, and she expressed a sense of discomfort when sometimes communicating in English on Facebook since her Chinese friends could read her posts as well. Although Cindy viewed Facebook as an English-occupied space, she still constructed her Facebook postings mostly in her L1, Mandarin, because she perceived herself as an English learner and felt marginalized and uncomfortable "socializing into this English space." When interviewed she expressed that when she was tired of reading texts and articles written in English from her classes and wanted to take a break from studying, she surfed on Facebook. Therefore, not only did she see Facebook as English-occupied, she also conceived that Facebook is a non-academic, casual, and relaxing space and a site of leisure where she could use her L1 to connect with friends of a shared culture. Consequently, how she conceptualized the social networking environment determined her engagement in literacy practices and language choices, encouraging or discouraging particular social actions.

In sharp contrast, Jane's SNS activities were dominated by English, her L2. Jane actively engaged in reading news feeds and information in English and responding to others' postings in English. When asked about her extensive use of English in SNS postings during the interviews, Jane indicated that because

Facebook is an English-mediated space, she tried to use the language and establish herself as an English user, rather than an English learner to fit into that multilingual space.

I don't consider myself an English learner while engaging in the Facebook activities and socializing with my friends there. I *use English* to communicate with friends and to share with others what happens in my life. *I want to fit in that place!* Only when I shared information about China, my home country, I then associated myself more with someone who possesses Chinese culture. But even though the information is about China, I still *use English* in the caption because *I want my international friends in the US to know more about my culture.* (Interview with Jane, November 15, 2011; italics are the researcher's emphasis)

While Cindy viewed Facebook as an English-occupied context in which she was trying to find her own voice through negotiations of linguistic repertoires, Jane saw Facebook as an international community and a multilingual, multicultural space. Cindy's and Jane's different conceptualizations of Facebook in turn influenced their approach to participation, identity representation, and literacy use in the online community.

Identity Representations in SNS Literacy Practices

Due to the simultaneous presence of multiple social networks on Facebook, Jane and Cindy seemed to draw on the SNS practices to reach out to various communities and present multiple identities. Table 2 and Table 3 give the aggregated and distribution frequency and percentages of SNS posts (SUs and ISs) in which they indexed particular identities across years (pre-arrival, year 1, and year 2) and totals. The analyses of the posts demonstrated that Cindy and Jane took on a variety of identities, including cultural identities (i.e., Chinese, local resident, global citizen), social identities (i.e., friend, graduate student, teaching assistant), professional identities (i.e., researcher), and other identities while composing their SNS posts on Facebook (see Appendix for detailed examples of each identity category). As shown in

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage (%) of Cindy's Posts According to Identity Indexed

	Pre-arrival	Year 1		Year 2		Totals		
human		14	(35%)	27	(22%)	41	(25%)	
friend		2	(5%)	9	(7%)	11	(6%)	
girlfriend	1	(100%)	1	(3%)	4	(3%)	6	(4%)
student		12	(30%)	38	(30%)	50	(30%)	
teacher		1	(3%)	2	(2%)	3	(2%)	
general		0	(0%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	
Chinese		6	(15%)	33	(26%)	39	(24%)	
local		2	(5%)	5	(4%)	7	(4%)	
American		1	(3%)	4	(3%)	5	(3%)	
global		1	(3%)	0	(0%)	1	(1%)	
university		0	(0%)	3	(3%)	3	(2%)	
professional		0	(0%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	
Totals	1	(100%)	40	(100%)	125	(100%)	166	(100%)

Table 2, Cindy largely presented herself as a Chinese cultural participant, a graduate student, and a teacher. Jane identified herself most often as a Chinese speaker, a graduate student, a novice researcher, a teacher, and a local Tucson citizen. While Jane used Facebook to establish memberships with multiple cultural communities locally and globally, Cindy used Facebook more like a diary to reflect her feelings and emotions and associate herself more with her Chinese identity. The examination of Jane's identity development over two years showed that there were some posts that indexed Jane's identity as a Chinese cultural participant on Facebook, but these decreased between year one and year two (see Table 3). While posts that indexed participation in American and global culture also decreased in frequency, posts that reflected identification with local (i.e. city, regional, and state) culture increased from year one to year two. This may be indicative of a growing sense of identity connected to local contexts. At the same time, the frequency of Jane's posts indexing a professional identity as a researcher increased from year one to year two, mostly in the form of shared links, but also with statements about professional activities like conference attendance.

An investigation of Cindy's posts over time demonstrated that a good number of posts indexed the general identity of simply being human reflecting her life (See Table 2). While her posts that indexed her identity as a Chinese participant increased from year one to year two, the posts that indexed her other cultural identities (i.e., local, American) remained the same, perhaps indicating that Cindy mainly used Facebook to connect to her home cultural identity rather than the host cultural identity. Posts that reflected Cindy's identity as a member of the university emerged in year two, while there were no posts that indexed her identity as a researcher or other professional identities throughout the two years, indicating that Cindy viewed Facebook as a more personal space rather than academic/professional space. This corresponds to her perceptions of Facebook as a casual, relaxing space, as presented earlier in the paper. While a quantitative analysis shows a holistic view of multiple identities the writers presented in SNS over time, a close examination is needed to further elucidate the complexity and multiplicity of the multilingual writers' subject positions and identities. In the following section, I will present some

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage (%) of Jane's Posts According to Identity Indexed

	Pre-arrival		Year 1		Year 2		Totals	
human	4	(67%)	8	(10%)	4	(8%)	16	(12%)
friend	1	(17%)	2	(3%)	3	(6%)	6	(4%)
girlfriend			2	(3%)	1	(2%)	3	(2%)
student	1	(17%)	24	(30%)	8	(17%)	33	(24%)
teacher			0	(0%)	7	(15%)	7	(5%)
general			2	(3%)	0	(0%)	2	(2%)
Chinese			13	(15%)	1	(2%)	14	(10%)
local			7	(9%)	4	(8%)	11	(8%)
American			9	(11%)	6	(13%)	15	(11%)
global			9	(11%)	0	(0%)	9	(7%)
university			1	(1%)	6	(13%)	7	(5%)
professional			4	(5%)	8	(17%)	12	(9%)
Totals	6	(100%)	81	(100%)	48	(100%)	135	(100%)

qualitative observations of identity development by Jane and Cindy respectively, drawing from the identity categories and examples illustrated in the [Appendix](#) as well as other examples from the data.

Jane: Expanding Old Identities, Adding New

The two multilingual writers created a space for designing multiple identities, and more importantly, their multiple identities changed and shifted over time during their two years of study abroad. For example, Jane composed herself into this virtual space as an English L2 student in one of her earliest status updates when she first joined Facebook. In an early post “What is the comparative form of “shy”? “shyer” or “shier”?” (October 20, 2009 at 11:07am), Jane perceived the Facebook affordance of typing any comments she wanted others to read and acted upon that affordance to pose questions about a specific English usage, here, the comparative degree of the word *shy*. By asking this question on language in her status update, she positioned herself as a curious English learner and attempted to reach out to the audience of Americans or native speakers (NS) of English within her Facebook networks.

Over time, Jane’s initial self-position as an English learner started to change and shift to the identity of an international English user. The notion of language user focuses on the language user’s personal and social identities and emphasizes the writer’s orientation to discourse, relating meaningfully to other persons in different contexts (Kohonen, 2010, p. 7). For instance, in one of the posts a year later, Jane played with metaphorical language use to describe her identity as a graduate student who was overwhelmed by semester finals (see Figure 6). More importantly, Jane engaged in creating symbolic meanings and connecting herself with the discourse through various language usages by describing herself as a wound up clock spring. Jane showed strong agency and high capability in utilizing linguistic resources and positioned herself as an exhausted graduate student and an expressive user of English.



Figure 6. Jane’s descriptive status update.

As time went by, Jane started to negotiate her identities as a graduate student (e.g., “finally, no more exams before spring break, yay!” March 10, 2010 at 1:33am) with her newly established identity as a teacher as she began her teaching assistantship in her second year. Her posts on Facebook sometimes indexed feelings towards teaching: “is amazed at her students’ talent!” (August 26, 2010 at 2:43pm). While there was a decrease in percentage of posts from a student identity from year 1 to year 2, posts that indexed her identity as a teacher and professional identities as a researcher emerged and increased throughout her second year. As illustrated in Figure 7 (on the left), she reflected on her first international conference experience in a status update, writing that she “had her first conference experience and learned a lesson: people get dressed up in conference, even in Tucson!” (January 29, 2010 at 8:41pm). Here she projected an image of herself as being an active member in her academic field, an identity that she would want her Facebook community to perceive. Consequently, through negotiation of her multiple identities as a graduate student, a teacher, and a professional academic, Jane created her own voice on Facebook while engaging in SNS-mediated literacy practices.



Figure 7. Jane’s status update about conference experience (left), and status update about Chinese grammar (right).

Another example that highlighted her professional identity as an applied linguist is evident in her reflection on Chinese grammar from one of the linguistics classes she was taking during the time the status was posted (see [Figure 7](#), on the right). Jane commented that as a doctoral student in applied linguistics, her academic training in linguistics helped her understand the structures, forms, and meaning of languages including her L1, Chinese. Her knowledge of grammar and syntactic structures in Chinese and her feelings of relief and gratitude about not having to learn Chinese as an adult not only indexed her identity as an applied linguist, but also reinforced her identity as a Chinese native speaker.

Jane's self-perceived identity as a proud Chinese citizen was also performed in her other SU and IS activities (see [Figure 8](#)). Through sharing the photos and hyperlinks of news about Li Na, a Chinese female tennis player's performance at the Australian Open in January 2010, Jane exploited and appropriated various resources such as hyperlinks of the news, photos of Li Na, and text-based comments "I'm proud of you girls! So is China!" to design her Facebook posts and present the identity of a proud Chinese citizen to her Facebook friends.



Figure 8. Jane's status update about a female Chinese tennis player (left), and information sharing about a female Chinese tennis player (right).

Not only did Jane present herself as a proud Chinese citizen, she also showed a great concern with local issues in the Tucson community in her later posts during her second year and presented an identity of a responsible local resident in SNS. In a status update, she wrote "was disturbed for the whole afternoon by the insane idea about carrying guns on campus. What kind of nuts would come up with such an idea :(" (March 11, 2011 at 12:37pm) to express her frustrations about a local issue. In one of her news sharings (see [Figure 9](#)), Jane expressed, through posting hyperlinks, sharing images, and comments ("feel extremely upset that the state legislature allows guns on campus..."), her emotional response to the shooting in Tucson that had happened in January, 2011 and to new state legislation on gun control.

These combined multimodal practices afforded by Facebook allowed Jane to create a strong persona of someone against the then pending state legislation allowing guns on campus and perform multiple identities of a local Tucson resident, an international graduate student, and a digital citizen³. While all posts were in English, through active participation in discussion about political, social, and cultural issues in the online community, Jane exercised agency in expanding her old identities and taking on new identities as cultural participants in her home and host discourses through various SNS-mediated literacy practices.



Figure 9. Jane’s information sharing about a new state legislation on gun control.

Cindy: Life Struggles

Cindy created a strong presence on Facebook through her projected identities as a human, a graduate student, and cultural identities, associating herself more toward her Chinese identity. The largest percentage of Cindy’s SNS posts indexed the identity of an emotional human. She frequently expressed philosophical statements and emotional feelings on Facebook such as “今天不要惹我，火大” [“leave me alone, had a bad day!”] (January 28, 2011 at 12:36pm) (see Figure 10, on the left), “yeah, I feel OK last night!!!great!” (February 12, 2010 at 9:32am), “太伤心了~~~” [“heartbreaking”] (June 16, 2010 at 8:53am). These posts were reflexive in nature, and could not be directly associated with any other identity. However, there were posts that indexed her emotional connections with particular identities. In her early posts, Cindy used English, her L2, in constructing the messages by reflecting on her new life as a struggling graduate student. For example, in Figure 10 (on the right), Cindy wrote “I do not want to continue my paper! I wanna have a long long rest!” (October 4, 2009 at 2:44pm). During the interviews, Cindy reflected that she had a hard time adjusting to the life in the United States because she had never lived abroad in a foreign country for such a long time.



Figure 10. Cindy’s status update on feeling upset [leave me alone, had a bad day!] (left), and status update about the feelings as a graduate student (right).

Cindy struggled with her new identity as a Chinese graduate student studying in the United States, even though she had received a master’s degree in China prior to her arrival. She commented:

I really had a hard time when I first got to Tucson. Everything is so different. The studying here is hard and much more demanding than the studying in China. Perhaps that’s because of the language.... *I am not very good at English. The life in the US is not easy... I sometimes use Facebook to release my stress...* (Interview with Cindy, November 4, 2011; italics are the researcher’s emphasis)

Her struggles as a student were evident in her other SNS posts such as “exhausted” (November 24, 2009 at 7:13pm) and “why do I look so tired?” (February 24, 2010 at 12:58pm). Her identity as an emotional human with frustrations about life and doubts about her life goals were also reflected in her later posts including general statements “I am not myself~” (February 3, 2010 at 10:58pm) (see Figure 11, on the left) and “I feel I am not the human I am” (March 19, 2010 at 8:04pm), emotional feelings “I feel better with you all. Thank you!” (February 15, 2010 at 11:06pm), and philosophical comments “人生的意义是什么

?” [What is the meaning of life?] (September 11, 2010 at 10:52am). Through these reflective messages throughout the two years abroad, Cindy viewed Facebook as a personal space where she could share her personal feelings and emotions toward her life and surroundings with her Facebook friends.



Figure 11. Cindy’s status update on feelings about herself (left), and status update about grading [I spend so many hours grading student homework! God!] (right).

As a graduate teaching assistant, Cindy also constructed her identity as a teacher in her online posts. In Figure 11 (on the right), she reflected on her multiple social identities as a student and as a teacher, commenting that “每天都要改幾個小時的作業，天啊！！！！” [“I spend so many hours grading student homework! God!”] (March 3, 2011 at 4:06pm). Cindy’s reflective message in fact captured the dual identities (as a graduate student and a graduate teaching assistant) many international graduate students may experience during their graduate studies in US universities.

With all the struggles in her life, posts that reflected identification with Chinese culture increased from year one to year two, indicating that Cindy associated herself more with her home identities through SNS posts that related to Chinese culture. For example, Cindy wrote in a post, “finished my last Chinese made noodles” (October 8, 2009 at 11:39pm). When asked about the motivation of this post, she acknowledged that she missed the food and life in China two months after her departure. She felt down when she ran out of the instant noodles she brought from China. She also shared links about Chinese news and/or television shows in her profile pages and indicated that she often browsed Chinese websites and videos to know what was happening in China. As exemplified in Figure 12, Cindy shared a link on the news about Hu Jintao, the leader of China during the time the news was posted, and his political actions during the Chinese New Year in China, reflecting her identity as a concerned Chinese citizen. Posts on Chinese-related events or holidays such as “大清早起来看春晚~~~大家春节快乐！” [“woke up early to watch Chinese New Year Show~~Happy Chinese New Year, everyone!”] (February 2, 2011 at 7:27am) (see Figure 13, on the left) and “祝大家中秋节快乐！！！” [“Happy Moon Festival, everyone!!!”] (September 21, 2010 at 9:21pm) were also observed in Cindy’s SNS pages. While posts that indexed participation in Chinese culture were composed by Cindy in both languages, English and Chinese, more Chinese-language posts were found to reflect this identity, which also explains the increasing use of Chinese in her SNS activities over time. This may be indicative of a growing sense of identity connected to her home discourse throughout the two years of study abroad.



Figure 12. Cindy’s information sharing about Chinese news [The Chinese leader, Hu Jintao, visited formal politicians during the Chinese New Year].

While establishing an identity of a Chinese cultural participant, Cindy, in her second year, started to present identities that were linked to the university through posting status updates about school events (e.g., football game, social event on campus). For instance, in one of her posts “totally forget it is



Figure 13. Cindy’s status update about Chinese New Year [woke up early to watch Chinese New Year Show~~Happy Chinese New Year, everyone!] (left), and status update about school-related events (right).

Saturday and it is football game day~” (September 18, 2010 at 9:21pm) (see Figure 13, on the right), Cindy constructed an image of herself as a member of the university, an identity that she would want her Facebook friends to perceive. With the choice of her L2, English, Cindy intended to reach out to her American friends and seek information about their plans on the game day. With an awareness of the role of football in American culture as part of important social norms in US university life, Cindy represented agency to establish herself as a more legitimate member in the newly entered university community.

DISCUSSION

Facebook as a Third Space for Shuttling Between Languages and Identities

In line with Canagarajah’s (2010) claim that multilingual writers come with multiple identities, this study shows that Facebook provided a hybrid third space that allowed the multilingual writers Cindy and Jane to navigate across multiple languages, cultures, and identities, including their social, cultural, and professional identities through various literacy practices, language choices, and contents. These multilingual writers, however, in spite of their biographical similarities, presented themselves differently in the form, quantity, and quality of their SNS use. For Cindy, Facebook became a site for reflection. Through deliberate choices of Mandarin, Cindy positioned herself as a friend with shared culture in relation to other Chinese-speaking graduate students and created social bonds with them through reflections on her life in the United States as well as other projected social identities as a struggled student and a teacher. Cindy used English in SNS not only to reflect her feelings toward school but also to establish her membership as a legitimate member of the university and hoped to reach out to her American friends. With an awareness of audience, Cindy used language as a resource to strategically make conversations and build relationships with audiences across different social and cultural groups.

In the case of Jane, however, movement between her multiple identities was manifested not through her use of linguistic resources (since she mainly communicated online in her L2—English) but through her selection from the types of literacy practices available on Facebook, increasing use of information sharings, and the contents of those postings. In addition to engaging in text-oriented practices on Facebook like status updates, Jane also actively participated in multimodal practices such as posting hyperlinks, sharing videos, and creating images. Jane exploited the technological affordances of Facebook to link outside sources, to share information, and to connect herself to the world not only at local but also global levels. For Jane, Facebook became a set of “third cultures/spaces” where two or more cultures create “localized versions of the global culture” (e.g., glocalization⁴, Wei & Kolko, 2005, p. 210). While establishing an international identity as a multilingual speaker, Jane created a close bond with the local Tucson and university community through discussions about local issues while not abandoning her other identities as a proud citizen of China as well as a multilingual and multicultural cosmopolitan global citizen. Although many popular SNSs like Facebook are designed as artifacts of or for the dominant culture (DePew, 2011, p. 58), Jane created a third space where she explored complex identity work and negotiated her global and local identities. With available semiotic tools, SNSs allow multilingual writers and cosmopolitan citizens like Cindy and Jane to perform and develop their multiple identities.

This finding supports Pavlenko and Blackledge’s (2004) characterization of the “hybrid identities and complex linguistic repertoires of bi- and multilinguals living in a contemporary global world” (p. 5). On the one hand, Jane composed her SNS activities in English, her L2, as a means of creating new global, local, cultural, and social identities, rather than as a marker of an American identity, reflecting her

multilayered social (e.g., student, teacher, friend, researcher) and cultural repertoires (e.g., Chinese native, American participant, global citizen, local Tucsonan). On the other hand, Cindy, often shuttling between Mandarin and English, experienced constant negotiation of language choices and cultural identities as she continued to perceive herself on the periphery of the host discourse and focused on her identities as a Chinese native and a struggling student. This finding shows that construction of identities is not limited to linguistic codes but to the symbolic resources that are available to multilingual learners to explore the sense of who they are and their relationship to the world.

Identities as Multifaceted and Dynamic

Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) suggest that Facebook is used to maintain existing offline relationships or solidify offline connections, as opposed to meeting new people. Thus, how multilingual learners perform their identities in online communities reflect the face-to-face reality in which they are situated. The connections between users' online and offline identities can be observed in the two writers' literacy practices on Facebook. Cindy and Jane viewed Facebook as an extended space for their real life experiences. In the interviews they both expressed that Facebook was part of their lives and reflected their extended relationships and identities. While viewing Facebook as a personal space for reflections on her emotions and struggles as a sojourn student, Cindy acknowledged that she usually socialized in person with her Chinese friends after school, while using Facebook to maintain those friendships, which motivated her choice of Chinese in her SNS activities. Similarly, Jane also regarded her Facebook use as a way to solidify friendships with not only Chinese friends but also her international friends with whom she had established relationships offline, acknowledging that Facebook helped strengthen the bonds with friends in real life.

Notably, the writers' SNS use and online identities were promoted or constrained by their different ideologies and attitudes toward English, their L2, and Facebook. For Cindy to be literate in English means to be literate in academic writing. Informal English, the register often used on Facebook, was much less valued by her. Cindy conceived Facebook as an English-occupied space in which she, as an English learner and outsider, had no right to enter except with her L1, Mandarin Chinese. This set of attitudes in large measure affected her participation in SNSs and determined her choice of languages and literacy activities. In contrast, Jane conceptualized Facebook as an English-mediated space that welcomes English users like her. Jane, to fit into that space, consciously constructed her identity as an experienced international English user. Jane further commented on the potential of Facebook for English learning:

I don't think Facebook language can enhance your academic writing ability, but I think Facebook contains lots of pragmatic English use, particularly expressive language use, and I think that is very important for English learning in general. I mean, learning how to express your feelings in English is important. (Interview with Jane, November 15, 2011)

Multilingual writers' identity construction in SNSs are not only driven by sociocultural contexts but also motivated by their own perception of SNSs and language learning.

Viewing Facebook as an extension of their real life experiences and exploration of who they are, Cindy and Jane built friendships, constructed identities, and created communities through their SNS use. However, different online identities were designed by the two writers. Jane, for example, identified herself as a language learner when she began her US graduate studies in 2009. During the time of exposure to the host country, Jane's identity as a language learner started to shift to an identity of an international English user. While SNS posts that reflected her identity as a Chinese native decreased, those that indexed her identification with local culture increased from year one to year two, indicating that Jane invested herself more in the identity as a local cultural participant, an identity transformation manifested in her increasing participation in SNS activities, the different types of literacy practices with which she was engaged, and different contents she shared in SNS. Jane's transformed literacy practices demonstrated progress from legitimate peripheral participation to gradually assuming a more central role

as a local participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991). While new identities emerged, Cindy still struggled with her marginalized participation as a sojourn learner in the United States and continued to use Facebook as a way to release tensions and reflect on those struggles. Her sense of being on the periphery in the host country thus prompted her to embrace her Chinese ethnic identity once again, as evident in her participation in online discourse and her growing sense of identity connected to her home culture throughout the two years of study abroad.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the ways in which multilingual writers design and construct identities in a social networking community. The longitudinal examination of the writers' SNS use shows that the two multilingual writers developed multiple, and sometimes competing identities through different types of literacy activities and social interactions in the social networking community. This finding argues for a developmental model that views multilingual writers' identities as multifaceted and dynamic. The multilingual writers' re-appropriation of linguistic and cultural resources to navigate across social, cultural, and professional identities challenges the monolingual bias or one language-one people view and argues for a multilingual and heterogeneous view of the options available to multilingual individuals, with a focus on how symbolic resources like languages are appropriated in construction of particular identities. While this multilingual perspective has become well recognized in the fields of SLA and applied linguistics, this study, through qualitative and quantitative methods exploring the issues of identity, multilingualism, digital literacies, and communication in new media, contributes to demonstrating how languages and literacies function as symbolic resources within digitally mediated spaces as promoted by globalization and emerging technologies.

While the multiliterate choices observed in the study are shown to be indicative of the writers' representation of identities, the multilingual writers Cindy and Jane, with different conceptualizations of Facebook, exercised agency and enacted particular social roles, took different participatory trajectories, and employed different strategies in writing themselves into the online discourse. This finding points to the need for a multilingual pedagogy to literacy learning that views language learning as symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006) that places students' semiotic choices of resources, meaning-making processes, and identity formation in the center of language learning. To become multilingual subjects, language learners/users need to create a semiotic repertoire of multiple modes of communication, develop an ability to understand and interpret the symbolic value and meaning of different symbolic forms, and negotiate appropriate subject positions and identities between languages and discourses, local and global (Kramsch, 2009). To do so, we as teachers must first identify the different communicative situations where our students are invested in particular discourses and how their participation in these discourses shapes their identities so that teachers can develop materials that embrace students' multiple voices, foster their personal growth as multilingual subjects, and engage their real life practices and purposes.

While participating in social networking communities, students, in these informal settings, acquire practices that enable them to strategically navigate, respond, and incorporate multiple communication channels. These literacy practices that students acquire in informal settings extend their communicative capacities and thus should not be dismissed or overlooked but incorporated into formal school contexts. Students' participation in online discourse should be seen as consisting of acts of identity that are fluid and constructed in linguistic, symbolic, and social interaction. This effort could be accomplished with integration of bridging activities (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008) that extend students' vernacular literacies and formal literacies to increase student agency and to raise student awareness of the interrelationship between specific rhetorical choices and desired social-communicative outcomes and symbolic values.

While acknowledging that learners engage in symbolic practices other than SNS-mediated activities, SNSs offer researchers as well as educators a window through which to examine multilingual writers' developmental identities and literacy use over time. This study also calls for a critical perspective of L2

learning as a continuous process of identity negotiation, prompting us to reconsider the significance of identity formation in the process of L2 literacy use and socialization. Learners' online literacy practices should receive more attention because these practices provide insights into how they present themselves in relation to others in Internet-based discourses and how they engage online, linguistically, socially, culturally, and historically. Consequently, a close examination of these learners' chosen strategies and the ways in which they construct social networks and negotiate diverse identity positions with their friends in digital spaces like SNSs, has implications for our understanding of the socially constructed relationship of learners to the target language and discourse community. This understanding of the ways learners give the symbolic meaning to themselves, to their perceptions, reactions, and thoughts that orient their relationship to others provides teachers with critical perspectives of viewing language learners not as L2 learners but as multilingual subjects (Kramsch, 2009, p. 18).

Further longitudinal ethnographic studies on multilingual writers' participation in other SNS practices (e.g., comments, chats), between different SNSs (e.g., RenRen, Mixi), across different online discourses (e.g., blogs, instant messaging), and across online and offline discourses, will be valuable in better understanding language learners' literacy development, subjective experience, and symbolic competence in our multilingual, multicultural world.

NOTES

1. The data presented below represents only a small portion of a larger project that involved more participants.
 2. The research conducted was entirely in accordance with the international review board (IRB) guidelines and had IRB approval.
 3. A digital citizen is defined as a person who makes "use of electronic resources or environments to fulfill his or her duties as a citizen" (Bentivegna, 2002, cited in Greenhow & Robelia, 2009, p. 125).
 4. *Glocalization*, opening up from the local to a wider international sphere, is evident in cyberspace—people are expanding the extent of their social reach while also binding themselves more deeply to their local communities. Glocalization results from strong local connection and wide-ranging global interactions (Fernback, 2007, p. 53). This concept of glocalization helps us interpret Jane's participation in her literacy practices on Facebook.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Jonathon Reinhardt, Chantelle Warner, Joe Stefani, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to the two students who participated in the study.

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APPENDIX. Examples of the indexical identity in SNS posts

Category	Description	Examples
1. human	The “human” category included posts that indexed the general identity of simply being human.	<p>“the night seems gloomy...” (Jane, October 26, 2009 at 12:15pm)</p> <p>“今天不要惹我，火大” [leave me alone, had a bad day!] (Cindy, January 28, 2011 at 12:36pm)</p> <p>“人生的意义是什么？” [what is the meaning of life?] (Cindy, September 11, 2010 at 10:52am).</p>
2. friend	The “friend” category included mention of friends directly or indirectly.	<p>“Thank you, everyone! I just had the best birthday ever!!!” (Jane, October 15, 2010 at 12:16pm)</p> <p>“爱 fenglin!” [lovefenglin!] (Cindy, April 3, 2011 at 10:29pm)</p> <p>“今天早上才知道 ~ ~ terry 大叔上週摔傷了，斷了一根肋骨，bless him!” [just realized that Terry hurt his back last weekend. Bless him.] (Cindy, February 9, 2011 at 1:15pm)</p>
3. girlfriend	The “girlfriend” category included posts that indicated the identity as a girlfriend and later as a wife.	Because of the personal nature of these posts, they are not presented here, although it should be noted that both participants felt comfortable enough to post them publicly to their friends in SNSs.
4. student	The “student” category included posts that indexed the identity of a graduate student or a language learner.	<p>“What is the comparative form of “shy”? “shyer” or “shier”?” (Jane, October 20, 2009 at 11:07am)</p> <p>“finally, no more exams before spring break, yay!” (Jane, March 10, 2010 at 1:33am)</p> <p>“I do not want to continue my paper! I wanna have a long long rest!” (Cindy, October 4, 2009 at 3:44pm)</p> <p>“stay up for my paper~too sad~” (Cindy, May 2, 2010 at 12:08am)</p>
5. teacher	The “teacher” category included posts that indexed the identity of a graduate assistant teacher.	<p>“is amazed at her students' talent!” (Jane, August 26, 2010 at 2:43pm)</p> <p>“每天都要改幾個小時的作業，天啊！！！！” [I spend so many hours grading student homework! God!] (Cindy, March 3, 2010 at 4:06pm)</p>
6. general	The “general” category included posts that indexed the identity of a general cultural observer or participant, not	“The autumn tiger is coming!” (Jane, October 20, 2009 at 11:16am)

	identifiable to any specific cultural group.	
7. Chinese	The “Chinese” category included posts that indexed the identity of a Chinese cultural participant.	<p>“my stomach is crying for Hongyouchaoshou. -_- ” (Jane, October 22, 2009 at 2:19pm)</p> <p>“after taking the Chinese grammar class I feel lucky that Chinese is my native language. It saved me a lot of troubles to learn the language when I was young” (Jane, January 28, 2010 at 3:19pm)</p> <p>“finished my last and my Chinese made noodles” (Cindy, October 8, 2009 at 11:39pm)</p> <p>“中国几千年解决不了的重男轻女问题，竟然让房地产解决了” [the longstanding issue of gender inequality in Chinese is solved by real estate!] (Cindy, January 26, 2011 at 6:48pm)</p>
8. local	The “local” category included posts that indexed the identity of a local cultural participant (i.e., city, regional, state culture).	<p>“was disturbed for the whole afternoon by the insane idea about carrying guns on campus. What kind of nuts would come up with such an idea :(” (Jane, March 11, 2011 at 12:37pm)</p> <p>“Blue man show 最新情况！No discount for the A seat group! 价格是 55 刀” (blue man, tickets are \$55/per ticket) [Blue man show update! ... A ticket costs \$55] (Cindy, January 31, 2011 at 11:17am)</p>
9. American	The “American” category included posts that indexed the identity of an American cultural participant.	<p>“It’s a wired weekend: parties are competing with each other!” (Jane, October 24, 2009 at 5:38pm)</p> <p>“First time to make pancake!” (Cindy, April 23, 2011 at 2:15pm)</p>
10. global	The “global” category included posts that indexed the identity of a global cultural participant (i.e., national, international, globe culture).	<p>“My first attempt to make Pad Thai is an epic failure!” (Jane, July 22, 2011 at 12:39pm)</p> <p>“Two hours later, Spain is coming~~~” (Cindy, June 16, 2010 at 4:42am)</p>
11. university	The “university” category included posts that indexed the identity of a university member.	<p>“Keep my finger crossed for Saturday. If we can beat Duke, we can beat anyone. Go UA!” (Jane, March 26, 2011 at 2:50am)</p> <p>“totally forget it is Saturday and it is football game day~” (Cindy, September 18, 2010 at 9:21pm)</p>
12. professional	The “professional” category included posts that indexed the identity of an academic/professional member.	<p>“had her first conference experience and learned a lesson: people get dressed up in conference, even in Tucson!” (Jane, January 29, 2010 at 8:41pm)</p>

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