

Title: Re-envisioning Language, Literacy, and the Immigrant Subject in New Mediascapes

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Abstract

This paper explores how networked electronic communications have given rise to new social spaces, linguistic and semiotic practices, and ways of fashioning the self beyond the national context for immigrant youth in the United States. It presents two case studies of immigrant students' communicative practices on the Internet, one involving a diasporic chat space and another related to the creation of global anime multimedia. Analysis of discourse, interview, and observational data show that, within these transnational social spaces, the young immigrants created new learning experiences, competences, and representations of their linguistic and cultural identities in the use of language and literacy. These evidences of changing language and literacy practices in the context of globalized communications call for a re-evaluation of the predominantly monolingual, monocultural, and nation-centered views of the adaptation and educational trajectory of immigrant students.

Re-envisioning Language, Literacy, and the Immigrant Subject in New Mediascapes

This paper considers how trans-border social networking and cultural flows in Internet communications have given rise to new contexts of language learning, literacy development, and socialization for immigrant youth in the United States. Through an evaluative synthesis of the research literature and in-depth analyses of three immigrant students' communicative practices on the Internet, I argue that the new mediascapes – the changing scopes of space and time, modes of representation, symbolic materials and ways of using language associated with networked electronic media – compel us to re-think our nation-centered views of immigrant students' adaptation and their language and literacy development.

Reading the immigrant subject within/beyond the nation

Immigrant students and their educational experiences in the United States have traditionally been defined within the national imagination, where public institutions such as schools serve as major instruments for assimilating new immigrants into the social and moral fabric of society. The “foreignness” that immigrants exhibit, for example in their cultural and linguistic practices, are often construed as a problem to be solved or a deficit to be remediated through accelerated English language instruction accompanied by a perennial suspicion toward bilingual education. (Crawford, 2000; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Asato, 2000; Ovando, 2003) However, the notion of assimilation, in contrast to its popular connotation, does not automatically translate into the pursuit of the American dream, i.e. joining the ranks of middle-class America. Historically, both inclusionary/assimilationist and exclusionary/segregationist forms of educational policies and practices have been used to incorporate new immigrants into the social and economic structure of the American society. (Moreno, 1999; Olsen, 1997)

On the one hand, language and literacy education has been used to induct immigrant students into the moral and symbolic universe of the nation through teaching a monolingual standard of English at the expense of other languages or dialects, which are by and large viewed as a hindrance or deterrence to the acquisition of standard English if placed within the public domain of schooling. (Olsen, 1997; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002) On the other hand, the fear and stigmatization of “un-Americaness” that is part and parcel of assimilationist practices find their expression in the disproportionate tracking of immigrant students into remedial, special education, and vocational classes. (Nieto, 2004; Morena, 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988). Moreover, immigrants gradually move from an identification to their linguistic, cultural, and national origins to becoming identified with particular racial categories within the U.S. (Olsen, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) Through these processes of stratification and racialization, immigrant students are safely incorporated into particular social classes and racial groups in American society.

However, in the contemporary period of globalization, the trans-border circulation of cultural and symbolic materials is accelerated with electronic and digital media and providing new avenues for people to construct social relations and identities beyond a bounded notion of national belonging. (Appadurai, 2001, 1996; Hannerz, 1996; Luke, 2004; McCarthy et al., 2003; Kelly, 2004) Networked electronic communications have become gathering points for youth in different parts of the world to share their interests in popular music, animation, computer games, fan fiction, and other forms of youth culture. (Darling-Wolf, 2004; Jenkins, 2004; Sefton-Green, 1998) Younger generations of immigrants use email and chatting as less expensive forms of communication (compared to long-distance telephoning) to maintain ties with friends and families in their native countries, and Internet webpages, blogs, chatrooms, and newsgroups

provide opportunities for people in diaspora to socialize and organize around mutual interests of various nature – be it for social, cultural, or political purposes. (Landzelius, in press; Miller & Slater, 2000; Mitra 2001; Valverde, 2002)

Within this context of globalized communication and the forging of transnational relationships, the logic of migration may be changing from that of *acculturation* (socialization into the culture of one's adopted country) to *transculturation* (socialization to multiple modes of belonging and participation across national boundaries). Acculturation has been a major concept used by scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to understand the adjustments and changes that take place within individuals as they move from one society to another. (Fuligni, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) Even though the concept of acculturation is meant to depict processes of change, its frame of reference is primarily anchored in the host society; in other words, immigrants are studied as to how well they adapt to the structural conditions and cultural practices of their adopted country, and to what extent they are able to reconcile their “home culture” with the “host culture.” Yet, in an era of intensified population movement, trans-border flows of cultural and economic capital, and global media culture, practices that foster multiple forms of cultural belonging and participation across national borders are becoming more prevalent and viable. In the following, I discuss how digital communication has given rise to new social spaces, linguistic and semiotic practices, and ways of fashioning the self beyond the nation.

Language, Literacy, and Identity in New Mediascapes

Digital Literacies and the Logic of Pluralism

A growing body of research on technologically-mediated literacy has shown how young people's computer-mediated activities involve the use of multiple representational resources;

formation of identities and sociocultural communities across virtual and material spaces; polyfocal orientation to time and space; and learning in socially situated communities of practice that are sometimes transnational in scope. (e.g., Author, 2004; Black, 2005; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Gee, 2003; Hagood et al., 2003; Jones, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Lewis & Fabos, 2005)

Networked electronic communication has redefined the scope of time and space in the socialization of new generations of youth. It's not hard to find an adolescent immigrant sitting in the cramped living space of an urban ethnic enclave or in a school computer lab doing some homework or project while simultaneously interacting online in a chatroom, message board, email, or parallel chat lines, etc., with other young people living in different geographical spaces and time zones around the world. In these concurrent timespaces, the adolescent computer user may be presenting herself as an immigrant in the U.S., but this identity is simultaneously meshed with or resignified by that of a diasporic Indian (Mitra, 2001) or Filipino (Ignacio, 2005) or Trinidadian (Miller & Slate, 2000) in a global community of diaspora youth interacting in an online chat space. Moreover, the status of an Asian immigrant as an ESL learner gets translated into the linguistic mainstream once he enters an online fan community of Japanese pop culture whose members are located in different parts of the world where English is mostly spoken as a second or foreign language, and a virtual cross-cultural identity becomes the source of privilege and pride (Black, 2005; Darling-Wolf, 2004). Hence, as immigrant students traverse different timespaces in their daily lives, it is important to note how their identity formation and socialization in the use of language(s) are defined not only by the imagined community of the nation state (Anderson, 1983/1991) but also by various imagined communities on a global scale (Appadurai, 1996).

On the pedagogical front, scholars of multiliteracies have argued that, given the growing scope of cultural and linguistic diversity occurring in both public and private spheres of society, and the burgeoning of new forms of texts and communication in the networked electronic and mass media, literacy pedagogy needs to move beyond its largely formalized/rule-based, monolingual, and monocultural framework that is centered around the nation state. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Jimenez, 2003; Luke, 2003, 2004) As the New London Group (1996:64) astutely pointed out: “Effective citizenship and productive work now require that we interact effectively using multiple languages, multiple Englishes, and communication patterns that more frequently cross cultural, community, and national boundaries.” For literacy pedagogy to work productively with multiplicity and difference, there needs to be a re-direction or expansion of pedagogical focus from a heavy emphasis on the teaching of the standard version of the national language in the form of print literacy to the growing importance of cultivating the skills and orientation necessary for understanding and engaging with linguistic and cultural diversity in multiple representational media. As I discuss below, these pluralistic forms of literacy and their potential effects on pedagogy and learning are situated in the wider semiotic and cultural economies of productive labor and consumption behaviors around texts, and the use of semiotic resources to fashion personal identities and life trajectories.

Semiotic Production and Shape-Shifting Practices

The nature of work and leisure in post-industrial economies is increasingly centered around the production and consumption of “texts” in various forms, including oral language, visual and graphical representations, audio records, print documents, and digital and online communications. (Reich, 1992; Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004) This *semiotic turn* takes place in a bifurcated service and information-based economy

where “knowledge workers” or “symbolic-analysts” are the new professional class and in a cultural economy where children and youth of diverse socioeconomic status are exposed to and start developing facility with video games, MTV, MP3 files, iPod, and other multimedia pop cultural texts early on in life. In these popular semiotic practices, the roles of producer and consumer are at times destabilized and blended as more people gain access to means of production on the Web for wide dissemination in particular cultural niches. Examples of such are seen in the creation of webpages on a myriad variety of shared interests, from file swapping to the creation of fan arts and fiction; multi-party blogs as informal journalism or public discussion forums; personal blogs or life journals to chronicle and design particular representations of self and promote social-networking online; and video games that provide opportunities for role-playing, problem solving, teamwork, and creating alternative “worlds” and storylines. (Fox, 2002; Gee, 2003; Godwin-Jones, 2005)

These informal means of production foster skills and qualities that are not unlike those privileged in the new workplace of "postFordism" (Piore & Sable, 1984) or "fast capitalism" (Gee et al., 1996) – such as creativity, flexibility, innovation, thinking and speaking for oneself, teamwork, goals setting and systems thinking, and learning how to learn. Gee and his colleagues (Gee, 2002; Young, Dillon, & Moje, 2002) suggest that these skills and qualities involved in semiotic production are becoming part of the cultural repertoire of new generations of youth. They use the term *shape-shifting portfolio* to characterize the dynamic self-fashioning of personal attributes and achievements that young people engage in as they seek to make sense of and succeed in changing social, cultural, and political economies. As Gee (2002:62-3) remarks:

Shape-Shifting Portfolio People are people who...believe they must manage their own risky trajectories through building up a variety of skills, experiences, and achievements in terms of which they can define themselves as successful now and worthy of more success

later. Their set of skills, experiences, and achievements at any one time constitutes their Portfolio.

Young et al. (2002) contend that the shape-shifting portfolios and practices of youth are not universal but influenced by social and structural variables such as race and ethnicity, native language, social class, gender, popular culture, digital technologies, geographic and social space, etc., which constitute part of portfolios and affect how young people define and equip themselves to attain specific goals in life.

With the new communicative practices and pluralistic forms of literacy in networked electronic media, the questions I want to raise are: How do young immigrants use language and literacy to “shape shift” in online communicative contexts, in particular to fashion new learning experiences, competences, and representations of their linguistic and cultural identities that span beyond the nation? What kinds of linguistic and semiotic practices are involved in the design of these learning experiences and representations of self? And what sorts of transnational imagination are fostered in these digitally-enabled social environments? To provide some preliminary answers to these questions, two case studies will be discussed, one of which involves two female high school students who had turned to a bilingual Hong Kong chatroom to develop their fluency in English. Through their linguistic practices in the chatroom, the girls re-defined their English-speaking identity within a global emigrant Chinese community. Another case study examines how a high school senior’s web project on Japanese animation provided an alternative avenue for his development as learner, designer, and English user with a multi-ethnic group of anime fans around the globe.

The Larger Study: Literacy and Language Learning on the Internet

The case studies discussed in this paper are drawn from an early phase of an ongoing research project that investigates the nature of second language literacy in the globalized media

of Internet communication and how new forms of social networking in electronic media are providing alternative contexts of language/literacy development and socialization for young immigrants in the U.S. An in-depth study of the experiences of four working-class Chinese immigrant youth in the early phase of the project demonstrated that the young immigrants' adoption of English in various online media – webpage, e-mail, instant messaging, chatroom – was intertwined with a process of socialization and identity construction. Whereas at school they had difficulty interacting with their English-speaking peers due to de facto segregation between different ethnic and linguistic groups and the social disparagement they received for their foreign accents and newcomer status, on the Internet they used English to create social, cultural, and ethnic identifications with other young people around the globe.

Methodology and Research Process

Using a multi-site or connective ethnographic methodology (Burawoy et al., 2002; Hines, 2000; Leander & McKim, 2002; Marcus, 1998), I carried out fieldwork in both the urban high school where the focal youth were learning English in the American school system and the electronic social spaces on the WWW where they were networking through English and other languages with young people around the globe. Over an eight-month period from January to August, 2001, I used participant observation, in-depth interviews, and textual documentation to gather data on the students' computer experiences and activities, their personal backgrounds, and their schooling experiences. I visited their classrooms, “shadowed” them in the hallways, cafeteria, library and other places in the school, and observed them doing class assignments alongside other social activities both online and offline in the computer lab. In addition, I gathered data from my own exploration of the technical set-up, content, and social dynamics of

the web spaces that the students frequently visited. Extensive field notes were taken from my participant observation in both the school site and on the Internet.

I conducted eight tape-recorded interviews with each focal student that lasted approximately one and a half hours each time to learn about their computer use, progress and reflection on their Internet activities, experiences at school, experiences learning English, and other relevant background information such as immigration, family, and living situation.

Electronic records of the students' Internet activities were made with their permission in an evolving fashion over the course of the study.

The discussion of the two case studies presented here reflects results from inductive thematic analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) that was carried out on the entire data set of field notes, interview transcripts, and Internet data. Key thematic units and analytical categories were identified and recursively coded through a triangulation of the students' descriptions of their activities and relationships with their online peers in the interviews, records of their electronic texts, and participant observation conducted by the researcher.

Language and Ethnicity in a Diaspora Chinese Chat Space¹

Yu Qing and Tsu Ying² are cousins who had emigrated to the U.S. from China for three years and were enrolled in transitional English language classes and some mainstream content area classes at the time of this study. The girls mostly stayed within a circle of Chinese-speaking students in the school and seldom interacted with other students in English, which was a reflection of the social and linguistic segregation prevalent in the school grounds. The girls' sense of social distance from their English-speaking peers was most prominent with regard to monolingual English-speaking Chinese-Americans with whom they shared the same ethnicity

but not the linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For example, Yu Qing said the following regarding the difficulty of talking to their English-speaking peers:

We don't know how to speak and we don't dare to speak. And even though some of them are also Chinese, they are *ABC* (American Born Chinese) and their educational background is different from ours...You feel like Chinese tend to laugh at you more than the others. Those people other than Chinese are more carefree, they won't go like ahhh over little things. (laughs) But if you talk to your own kind, the Chinese, you get embarrassed if you can't say something. (interview, February 18, March 6, 2001)³

Yu Qing and Tsu Ying were introduced to the Hong Kong chatroom by some friends at school and had been participating in the chatroom for close to a month when I met them. The girls had checked out some Chinese language chatrooms but decided to stay with the HK chatroom to practice more English, since they were always speaking Chinese already. Tsu Ying noted:

The English one is better...cause I can learn more English...and the kinds of friends I meet are broader. The people come from different places. (interview, June 6, 2001)

The young people that Tsu Ying and Yu Qing communicated with regularly in the HK chatroom were located in North America, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Australia, and used a mix of English and romanized Cantonese. The girls described their community of friends in the chatroom as a global Chinese emigrant community that shared experiences of cross-cultural living:

We're all Chinese who have emigrated to different places, so we share a common feeling when we talk. It's like when we are chatting, we feel closer to each other. Many of the Chinese in the chatroom are emigrants, cause you can ask them, and some would ask you how long have you been here. Many have come here for 6, 16, or 11 years. Or like they have been in one place for this many years, and then another place for that many years. (interview, March 6, 2001)

The girls didn't interact much with Hong Kong chatters who only wrote in Chinese characters and ethnic Chinese growing up overseas who wouldn't use romanized Cantonese or

hold negative attitudes toward its use. Regarding the latter group whom the girls generally called the “ABC”⁴, Yu Qing said:

Sometimes they talk about different things, cause they talk about things here, where they live, or they were born here and know those things, but you don’t know that well, so you can’t talk that well. And sometimes, they say they don’t understand Chinese sounds, so they say it’s boring and start waiting for the other *ABC* to come, or those who live in certain places. They wait for these people to come in and talk with them. (interview, June 1, 2001)

This last comment is exemplified in several instances of social alignment and conflict that I had observed where language difference was foregrounded.

On example of a full-fledged verbal conflict in the chatroom happened when I was observing in the computer lab on March 29, 2001. As usual on this school day, Yu Qing and Tsu Ying quickly logged onto the chatroom after their classes were over. There were four or five other participants, including *icon* (19-year-old male who had moved to the US from China for two years), *Cloud* (a teenage boy in Hong Kong), and *Little Angel* (a Chinese-American adolescent girl); all three of them were frequent participants in the chatroom. At one point when *sure* (Yu Qing’s nick), *spring* (Tsu Ying’s nick) and *icon* were chatting jovially with each other, *Little Angel* started a tirade against *sure*, saying, for example, in several lines:

Little Angel: go study more English and type faster b4 u come here
ur fobby language annoyz me
u just scare u bitch
talk

Here, the diminutive term “fobby” (as in FOB, Fresh Off the Boat) signifies the “ignorant and pathetic” immigrant status that is ascribed to *sure* and refers disparagingly to her language that incorporates “foreign” elements as in the use of romanized Cantonese. When *Cloud* intervened and said: “what’s wrong with u ar⁵, LA?”, *sure*, perhaps emboldened by *Cloud*’s retort, exclaimed that: “everything is wrong with her.”

Little Angel continued her verbal aggression on *sure* until a friend of *Little Angel*'s, nicknamed *Star*, entered the chatroom and the two of them began conversing with each other. Below is an excerpt of their conversation where *Little Angel* again mentioned “fobby” in counterdistinction to “ABC.” The two girls put into writing a colloquial form of English with elements of AAVE (African-American Vernacular English) which signifies a category of English-user different from (and perhaps superior to) emigrants like *sure* and others.

Little Angel: hey star...u kinda like my cuzin
Star: we're both bitches
Little Angel: agree
Little Angel: my cuzin is in chicago
ABC
(missing lines)
Little Angel: not fobby
Star: u planin to do sumtin dis weekend?
Little Angel: no skol tmr

Upon entering the chatroom, *Star* also greeted *sure* and asked why she always saw her in the chatroom, to which *sure* answered:

sure: i'm here everyday ga
if u want to know me
everyday u can
i mean whenever

One would suspect that, in this instance, *Little Angel* might be attacking *sure* for her popularity in the chat room, since *Little Angel* had nobody to talk to at the beginning and *sure* was calling attention with her verbal glib and exchanging lighthearted jokes with her two friends, *icon* and *Cloud*. The fact that *Little Angel* used a racial discourse to attack *sure* by castigating her language as foreign and substandard shows that the distinction between emigrants (FOB) and native-born Chinese Americans (ABC) was particularly salient to her. This distinction or social differentiation was most notably signified, and stigmatized, through linguistic differences, where one form of language use – i.e., the form that *Little Angel* had mastered – was considered more

acceptable than another. Hence, it seems that the adoption of an adolescent vernacular typography by *Little Angel* and *Star* was as much a conscious attempt to construct the identity of an ABC that is cast as superior to an “FOB,” as *sure’s* and her friends’ hybrid language use was an act of identity to construct a category of English speakers in the online environment that is distinct from monolingual English speakers of Chinese descent.

In fact, this category of English speakers who use romanized Cantonese was actively co-created among the girls and their friends even though they exhibited varying degrees of proficiency in the Cantonese language. Appendix 1 shows some examples of the hybrid language of these young people and how they teach each other romanized Cantonese.

Two of the participants in the excerpt are *LAMBORGHINI DIABLO* (US-born Chinese American boy) and *LoVeLy CuTie SweeTy Cool HoT aNGeL* (teenage girl who moved with her family to the Netherlands from Hong Kong as a young child). Although both of them are fluent in English and socialize extensively with other youth who were born and raised in English-speaking or other Western countries, they also interact frequently with bilingual emigrants and Hong Kong residents, switching comfortably to romanized Cantonese in their conversations. The excerpt shows *LoVeLy* and *LAMBORGHINI* using romanization with each other and teaching it enthusiastically to *DICK TRACY U LUV THAT?!*, a girl of Chinese descent living in Australia. *spring* (Tsu Ying) and *sAtAn* (in Australia) are also participating in the conversation.

In one of the two interlacing conversational streams shown in this extract, *LAMBORGHINI* begins with a remark to *LoVeLy* that their mutual interlocutor, *Handsome* (in Hong Kong), has “just left” (“jow jor la”) the chatroom after having a fight with *Cloud Jai* (“jai” is used as an endearment term to address a young man in Cantonese). *LoVeLy* responds to *LAMBORGHINI* in line 8 with a show of surprise (“ng haiya” or “not really”) and then a sigh

(“haai”), perhaps of disappointment, after *LAMBORGHINI* emphasizes that what he said is true (“hai ar” or “really”). Their exchange in romanized Cantonese provokes *DICK TRACY*’s interest in refreshing her memory of the Cantonese words that they are using or ones she has encountered elsewhere in the chatroom (like “ng” and “ngo”). While *LoVeLy* eagerly explains the romanized words to *DICK TRACY*, *spring* expresses surprise that “tracy don’t know that?” in line 29, revealing an assumption that romanized Cantonese is commonly understood among the girls’ interlocutors, even for those who are growing up in English-speaking countries. This assumption is further affirmed by *DICK TRACY* who insists that “I know most Chinese” in line 35 especially after *LoVeLy* teases her for being a “kwai mui jar” (little Western girl).

As shown in the extract, these English-speaking youth, who were part of the online social network of *Tsu Ying* and *Yu Qing*, expressed a sense of comfort and familiarity with romanized Cantonese that is hugely different than the case of *Little Angel* and other English-speakers who refrained from interacting with Cantonese speakers in the chat room. By intermingling varying amounts of Cantonese elements into an English script, the girls and their multinational online peers adopted a hybrid communicative code that not only signifies their dual linguistic affiliations but also serves to create a diasporic sociolinguistic community among young ethnic Chinese around the world who may hold oral but not written proficiency in the Cantonese language.

The girls both expressed that they felt more comfortable speaking English after joining the chatroom. *Yu Qing*, in particular, shows a sociolinguistic consciousness of the relevance of multiple Englishes or contextualized varieties of the language when describing her newfound sense of competence in English:

I didn’t dare to speak English before because my English was poor, like in pronunciation and grammar. I was afraid to say something wrong, and then people would laugh at me,

and I would feel embarrassed...After you've been going to the chat room for a while, you get used to talking, and you spend more time on it and feel more open about it. Even though you may not feel as comfortable speaking in other places, you get into the habit. It's like as you become more open, you feel it's no big deal, and I can talk to you a bit more...And outside you can't always talk like all *grammar* like you are preaching or reading a novel, you need to learn some local languages, how people speak. (interview, April 1, 2001)

Through their hybrid linguistic practice in the HK chatroom, Yu Qing and Tsu Ying adopted a new form of English to their linguistic portfolio and shape-shifted to a new identity as multilingual English speakers of Chinese descent that runs counter to the binary opposition of dominant vs. minority languages in their adopted country. While the girls experienced social and linguistic segregation between English-speaking Chinese-American and Cantonese-speaking Chinese in an American school and to some extent also in the online environment, they were able to cross these socially-constructed boundaries through their linguistic acts that disrupt the monolingual coherence of the English code. The hybrid language produced on the Internet represents a departure from the monolingual imperative and opens up a new sociolinguistic space for the girls to inhabit as multilingual speakers or learners of English in a global diasporic community. In the next section, we see the case of another adolescent immigrant who had redefined himself as a learner, designer, and English user in Web-based multimedia.

Lee: Webmaster in Global Anime Multimedia

Lee's family emigrated to the U.S. from Hong Kong when he was 9 years old. When I told Lee at our first interview meeting how pleasantly surprised I was to hear him speak fluent Cantonese even though he had come to the U.S. at a young age, he chided that his Cantonese was good because he was "surrounded by Cantonese speakers." (interview, January 28, 2001) The only places where he used English were at school, other public places such as cafes and markets, and on the computer. While he could go through a day without speaking much English in school

or other public places, his main language was English on the computer. He spent most evenings working on his anime webpage and corresponding with people through online chat and e-mail.

Lee began exploring the Internet and webpage making when he was 11, and had spent many years working on his anime website. He consulted some books and friends who were knowledgeable in webpage design, and was still learning new programming scripts at the time when we met. In comparison to his enthusiasm for computer activities, Lee seemed passive and laid back in school. A teacher at the high school commented that Lee was a “good-spirited young man, but the problem is with motivation.” (fieldnotes, March 27, 2001) Lee described himself as “one of those who are more eager to learn on the computer than at school.” (interview, April 17, 2001) I noted from observing him in class that he could have high expectations for his work but could also easily “turn off” depending on the interest level and the performance of his peers. For example, in doing a write-up for a group project in the environmental science class, Lee started out being very meticulous about his sentences and careful to avoid messing up the page with too many corrections. However, when he saw the relatively short write-up from another group, he remarked that he didn’t have to do so much either. He seemed to see no purpose or peer validation (as opposed to his webpage activities) for high quality work but considered the project as just an assignment for the teacher’s evaluation to get a grade or pass the class. What seemed to be lacking in Lee’s classroom experiences was the satisfaction that comes from pursuing work that is interesting, relevant, and challenging among a group of peers who share similar goals and interests. This is the kind of learning experience that Lee sought out on the Internet.

As opposed to his homogenous social circle in school, Lee carried out his webpage project and socialized in English in a global population of anime aficionados. Moreover, he

gained a different status as an English speaker on the Internet given that many others also spoke English as an additional language and he was a well-respected webmaster of anime. When asked how the Internet had influenced his English, Lee said “it doesn’t influence much, it actually helps.” (interview, January 28, 2001) In terms of vocabulary, he had acquired a large number of new words because some of his interlocutors, e.g. college students, used more difficult words and he had to look them up in the dictionary. He wrote a lot especially when explaining some procedures about the computer, and he could readily put to use the new words he had acquired. Besides chatting, he learned to write by checking out other people’s webpages about anime.

In short, whereas at school Lee found little interest and peer validation in his work and tended to confine to a circle of Cantonese-speaking friends, the Internet provided him with a global community where he gained a different status as an English speaker, socialized with a multi-ethnic group of anime fans, and developed fluency in the language of Internet talk and specialized terminology of anime multimedia. In the following, I describe Lee’s involvement in anime on the WWW and examine how he developed his identity as an anime aficionado/webmaster.

Constructing Ataru Mitsui in Anime Multimedia Fandom

Lee adopted the Japanese name *Ataru Mitsui* (derived from a character’s name in an anime series) to designate himself as the webmaster and called the website *Ataru’s Homepage*.⁶ Although his main language was English on the Internet, he exhibited his trilinguality by posting anime songs in three languages (Japanese, Cantonese, and English) on the website and entering his names also in the three languages in the biographical note on the webmaster. He indicates in the biography page that he prefers to be called by his Japanese name, and it is the name he uses throughout the webpage. A knowledge of Japanese affords Lee not only the emblem of an

integral member of anime culture but also access to the original anime videos in Japanese language. Watching videos in Japanese allowed him to practice and stretch his comprehension of the language given that he had already studied it for two years and was planning to take more Japanese classes in college.

Ataru's Homepage (Appendix 2) is a multimedia ensemble of anime images and wallpaper (selected for their boldness and originality, according to Lee), anime videos, songs, and lyrics (assembled with consideration of audience's needs and requests), written texts (with webpage progress and updates, directions on how to access materials, help notices to seek collaborators, exhortations to solicit participants for anime arts contests, a message board, a 17 item FAQ page, etc.), and dark background colors to signify the maturity and playful but serious attitude of its designer. The webpage draws visitors from North America, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, with the number of visits totaling 119833 on June 9, 2001. Of the many fellow anime fans he had met through the webpage, he had maintained regular contact with 30-40 of them, some of whom were his collaborators in Canada, Mexico, and Australia who helped to provide server space and manage the anime videos and a second-hand anime store on his website.

Lee considered his multimedia website as serving the interest of anime fans around the world, especially those who had few anime imported to their countries and weren't familiar with how to look things up on the Internet. He preferred to address his fellow anime fans as "friends" because they would "share their resources" and help each other out with their "projects" on the Internet.⁷ Indeed, Lee often used the English term "project" to describe his webpage activities and portrayed the files sharing services provided on the website as part of a grassroots movement to democratize the enjoyment of anime music and movies: "Some people can't find the songs, so we want to put them on the Internet, so everybody can have it." (interview, January 28, 2001)

In fashioning himself as an anime webmaster, Lee shows his vision and dedication in developing the website on the progress page *What's New*. The notes entered on this page indicate what projects the webmaster is working on at different times, report on their progress (“Lyrics page half done”, “MP3 pages updated”) and future directions of the website (“Ataru’s Homepage will be expand bigger...”, “Decided to buy a domain name”). The webmaster also shows himself to be methodical and systematic in organizing his webpage projects, troubleshooting, and making short-term and long-term plans; this is seen, for example, in the following interview excerpt:

...I’m going to re-do the *anime link*, cause there are too many *broken links*, and I have to *update* them all over again. I’ll be doing this *project* for at least three months. It’s gonna be quite tough. And..I’m making an *anime store* to sell stuff, sell *anime*...At first I was *doing by hobby*. But I think it’ll [the website] become bigger, and will *share* much more stuff, *share* more new *anime* stuff, anything related to *anime*. (interview, March 27, 2001)

As a dedicated and methodical webmaster, Ataru Mitsui expects high quality not only in the design of the webpage but also in the anime works and resources that are submitted for posting on the website. This is seen in the calls for submission and help notices posted throughout the site; two examples are shown below.

Ataru Mitsui is looking for fan arts that have very very good quality, which mean is must have color. “CG” I don’t want any copy or trace work.
If you are the anime artist. It is welcome to send me your artworks. Please compress your artwork to a zip file. (*Anime Wallpaper Page*)

Looking for people that can help me manage this Ataru’s Anime Lyrics page.
If you are interesting please contact me.

-Requirements
—html skills 2 yrs.
—must like anime.
—must update this page everyweeks.
Send me your resume or ICQ me...
(*Anime Lyrics Page*)

This professional image of the webmaster of Ataru's Homepage had led his peers to consider and value him as an expert. Indeed, when I asked Lee how making the anime webpage had affected him, he noted that more people had come to know him, and they asked him a lot of questions and treated him like a "*master*." (interview, January 28, 2001)

It seems obvious that, compared to his experiences in an American school, Lee's online anime network provided him with a different social and cultural environment in which to define himself as a learner, designer, and English user. Whereas at school he found little interest, purpose, and peer validation in his work and was surrounded by a homogeneous Cantonese-speaking peer group, on the Internet he initiated and collaborated on Web projects with people in other parts of the world and interacted on a daily basis with young people from a range of ethnic and national backgrounds. In designing the multimedia website, not only did he acquire literacies related to webpage genres, the technical language of anime multimedia, and the production, processing, and display of multimedia files, he was able to fashion himself as part of a global economy of semiotic workers whose productive labor or engagement with "texts" involves thinking creatively, setting goals and plans, gauging cultural trends, seeking out collaboration and teamwork, and pursuing self-initiated, just-in-time learning. Such a literacy portfolio stands in contrast with a schooling culture of standardized curriculum and well-defined tasks that are handed down to students.

In addition, Lee's use of English as a language of wider communication in this global online environment was tied to a trilingual identity that he showcased with pride by assuming a Japanese name, developing proficiency in the language, and introducing anime songs that had been translated into Cantonese and English. The trilingual presentation of song lyrics and access to anime movies in the Japanese language represented a multilingual milieu that surrounded the

use of English. It was in this online context that Lee developed a different status as an English speaker/user – one for which the acquisition of English is less a matter of assimilation to a monolingual national (e.g., American) or racial-ethnic (Chinese-American) identity than affiliation with a global anime youth culture that crosses national boundaries.

Conclusion and Implications

The two case studies presented in this paper show the self-initiated efforts by three young people in fostering learning experiences and redefining themselves as competent learners/people/workers in diverse digitally-mediated social environments where English is used. Within these digital environments, the focal students constructed global identities as English speakers that were different from their local identities as minority immigrants learning English in the U.S. Their global identities as participants of a Chinese diaspora network (for Yu Qing and Tsu Ying) and international anime youth culture (for Lee) re-positioned their use of English beyond that of acculturation to an English-speaking nation. Through their textual and semiotic production, these youth were fashioning learning experiences, competences, and representations of self – their literacy and cultural portfolios – that extend beyond the nation state and the nationally defined school curricula that are increasingly driven by monolingual language policies, particularly in regard to the education of immigrant students, and renewed emphasis on basic skills and standardized testing and pedagogies. (Gutierrez et al., 2000; Luke, 2004)

All this is not to say that online communications and literacies necessarily produce salutary effects on learning or empowerment for the learner. The fact that Lee communicated with other young people of diverse ethnic and national backgrounds on a daily basis on the Internet does not mean that their interactions had enhanced intercultural understanding among the youth or appreciation of difference. In many ways, their shared interest and common

purpose had overshadowed any substantive need for negotiating across linguistic and cultural differences. Similarly, Yu Qing's and Tsu Ying's creative use of language and social alignment with other young people of Chinese descent produced new enabling identities for them but also precluded the need to interact with participants in the bilingual chatroom who subscribe to other linguistic practices or to critique their subject positions and relations with other ethnic groups in the U.S. society. In other words, while Web-based communicative technologies may foster new kinds of social networks, practices, identities, and learning communities for new generations of youth, they do not necessarily provide the analytical tools that may empower youth to critique and change existing social structures in positive directions.

Without viewing technology as the panacea of educational problems, I want to suggest that the creative ways in which the students took charge of their own learning and constructed multilingual and multimedia forms of linguistic, cultural, and literacy portfolios in their "extracurricular" activities on the Internet provide a new lens to look at the language and literacy development and educational trajectory of immigrant students beyond a nation-centered perspective. While this study involves only Chinese immigrant students, evidence of transnational digital communication among diverse migrant populations is accumulating in the fields of media studies and international migration research. (see, e.g., Landzelius, in press; Morton Lee, 2003; Miller & Slater, 2000 for recent studies of diasporic online communities among people of African, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Pacifican origins) Given the growing visibility of online connectivity and practices among migrant groups, more research with diverse groups of immigrant youth is necessary in order to identify convergent and divergent forms of digitally-mediated language and literacy practices, the varied effects of these practices on the youths' development pathways, and the role of socioeconomic status and

regional technological infrastructure (among other social variables) in affecting the nature and extend of the youths' social networks and practices online.⁸

As a collection of cases, this exploratory study aims not to generalize from its findings but to expand and provide alternative visions of language and literacy development, in particular, the relation of literacy to identity formation in the global contexts of digital communication. As Dyson (1997) argues, the study of cases holds the potential to destabilize conceptual boundaries and contribute to new understandings of the phenomena and concepts under study. In the following, I draw from the foregoing discussion and case analyses to suggest how the U.S. educational profession may need to re-evaluate our approach to language and literacy development and the education of immigrant students in the context of globalized semiotic economies and transborder relationships.

From Acculturation to Transculturation

As suggested at the outset of this paper, our new global conditions, both economically and culturally, require us to re-think immigrant adaptation, schooling, and the linguistic and cultural resources that immigrant students bring to our schools and society. Instead of restricting our vision of immigrant socialization to processes of acculturation or how well they adapt to the monolingual policies of mainstream schooling, a more optimal way of facilitating the educational achievement and societal contribution of immigrant youth would be to affirm and foster their multiple linguistic and cultural competences which may not only strengthen their sense of self but develop skills and attributes that are highly important in an increasingly interconnected world. The implications of globalization on immigrants' identity formation is that, to be productive and contributing citizens of a society, it is no longer necessary nor advisable to succumb to an anachronistic view of identity as an achievement that involves

overcoming the baggage of other cultural identifications. Instead, as pointed out in Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard (2004:22):

...youth who are players in a global stage must cultivate the multiple identities that are required to function in diverse, often incommensurable cultural realities. Rather than theorizing identity as oriented toward “either” the home culture “or” the host culture, many immigrant youth today are articulating and performing complex multiple identifications that involve bringing together disparate cultural streams.

Hence, rather than seeing diversity as a problem to be managed, we need to consider linguistic and cultural diversity as a resource to be cultivated to improve the life chances of people in the new workplace and to strengthen our global and transnational relations. Viewing diversity as resource in a globalized world means going beyond the portrait of multiculturalism as (often aestheticized) cultural heritages that are acknowledged to exist within a given society. It means that we need to start thinking about diversity in the form of transculturation – the development of multiple modes of cultural belonging and participation that extends beyond the national borders and is constitutive of the experiences of more and more people in the contemporary historical period.

Once we start to “rethink the boundaries of social life,” (Levitt & Schiller, 2004:1003) we recognize that the logic of migration as acculturation or adaptation to the structure of a single society does not characterize the diasporic relations that Yu Qing and Tsu Ying developed or the semiotic cultural production that Lee participated in or the economic, political, cultural and religious practices of an increasing number of migrants (and even non-migrants). Neither would taking the nation-state as the boundary of adaptation help us to address the demands and realities of the world’s interdependent political economies. Translated into educational terms, viewing diversity as a global resource should lead us to set as a priority in educating immigrant students the fostering of bilingual or multilingual competence and cross-cultural understanding, not only

to promote optimal learning opportunities for students with the diverse linguistic and cultural experiences they already bring to school, but also to enhance their future contributions as workers, citizens, and intercultural bridges in a world where boundaries have become more fluid and interlocking.

New Blended Forms of Language and Literacy

With digital communications and technological media becoming an integral part of the new professional workplace and everyday lives of the younger generations, especially in post-industrial societies, comes the clarion call for educators to develop a more complex understanding of language and literacy and how to go about designing pedagogies that foster new kinds of competence. The hybrid language and communicative practices of the focal students in this study put into question traditional notions of print literacy, language, and second language acquisition that are by and large premised on: the supremacy of standard grammar, vocabulary, and orthography; the clear-cut distinction of oral and literate genres, and of one language from another; the unequivocal ties between language, culture, people, and nation; and the process of acquisition as stage-wise approximation toward the norm of monolingual speakers. In contrast to these canonical views, the students' practices demonstrated that the acquisition of medium-appropriate registers of language use, the skillful representation of self across linguistic and cultural borders, the creative manipulation of multimodal and multilingual semiotic resources, as well as the ability to command empathy and respect in a second language are all crucial elements in the learning of language and literacy in new times. (Author & Kramsch, 2003)

The merging of producer and consumer roles and the creation of new social networks and identities in Web-based media show that, in their present formations, digital technologies favor the *productive* use of literacy both for manipulating existing representations of knowledge and

reality and for designing alternative and novel representations. Such communicative practices call for literacy pedagogies that are productive or transformative in orientation, in which the concern goes beyond familiarizing learners with the regularities of linguistic and discursive forms to promoting learners' engagement with heterogeneity and alternative meanings and realities.

Critical Reflection on Systems and Practices

As we move the productive and creative components of technologically-mediated literacies to a more center stage in a new vision of language and literacy education, it is important that we don't overlook the essential role of critical analysis and reflection to develop deep understanding of representational practices within their social and historical contexts. A critical literacy with digital technologies would combine analytical activities that are both active and reflective. It would capitalize on the tradition of textual criticism to evaluate the rhetorical forms of semiotic representations, how these representations are situated in time and place (politically, economically, and historically), and how language and other semiotic media are used to construct social reality and shape popular opinions. Yet, a critical literacy with new media will not stop at critique but will engage with the results of critique further by producing new representations that reflect changing understandings of social and physical realities.

For example, in the focal students' Internet-mediated practices, a critical dimension would involve them in analyzing and reflecting on the social relations they were developing with their peers around the globe and how these relations were constructed and represented through the use of language, symbolic media, and forms of communication. Their social networks online could also be used as a point of comparison to reflect on their subject positions as minority immigrants and their social relations with other ethnic groups in the U.S. society, and to analyze

the social conditions that facilitate or hinder their interaction with speakers of English and other languages. The results of such analyses would form a basis for action for designing representational (e.g., dealing with language and racial ideologies) and communicative practices that aim to promote interethnic relations and understanding across difference. This critical and transformative aspect of a new vision for language and literacy education with immigrant students would address a much neglected part of educational practice, which is the cultivation of the abilities to understand and act on the ways in which language and symbolic-technological media are involved in the structuring of individual lives as subjects in society.

Notes

1. This case study is discussed in Lam (2004) with extensive linguistic analysis of the mixed-code language of the subjects. Here I focus on processes of group differentiation and alignment among the focal students and other chatroom participants.
2. All names are pseudonyms.
3. Quotations from recorded interviews are translations from Cantonese. Italics represents the interviewee's code-switching to English.
4. The term "ABC" or American Born Chinese is widely used among people of Chinese descent in the U.S. to differentiate between immigrants (first generation) and native-born Chinese (second and subsequent generations). It is arguably a "marked" term used among immigrants to distinguish themselves from their co-ethnics who are born and raised in the U.S. In the case of the girls, the term was extended to include all chatroom participants who were born and raised in English-speaking countries in the North and West.
5. "ar" stands for the romanization of an utterance-final particle in Cantonese which has the modal function of signaling an interrogative. Another Cantonese particle "ga" used by *sure*

later in the same interactional episode is roughly equivalent to “as a matter of fact” in English. Cantonese particles figure prominently in the hybrid language of the girls’ social community in the chatroom partly as a way to introduce a Cantonese conversational tone into an otherwise English dialogue.

6. Lee’s Japanese name and the name of the webpage are changed for anonymity. The URL of the webpage is kept confidential due to the identifying information that is found in part of the page.
7. The terms and phrases in quotations were spoken in English by Lee on most occasions during our interviews and conversations.
8. In a current research project, we are conducting multi-method comparative studies with adolescent immigrants of diverse national origins (comparison groups include Korean, Latino, Polish, and South Asian) on how the students use English and other languages on the Internet to organize relationships and construct knowledge with young people in other parts of the world. In addition to exploring broad patterns through surveys and focus groups, we adopt a longitudinal approach to examine closely how participation in these transnational contexts affects the developmental pathway of young immigrants in their use of language and literacy, their ethnic identification, and their global and cross-cultural awareness.

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Appendix 1: Excerpt of dialogue recorded from the Hong Kong Chatroom, May 30, 2001.

1	 LAMBORGHINI DIABLO (TWIN TURBO) HANDSOME JOW JOR LA
2	 DICK TRACY U LUV THAT?! NAH
3	 spring good looking?satan
4	 LAMBORGHINI DIABLO (TWIN TURBO) HAVE FITE WITH CLOUD JAI AGAIN
5	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL jow jor la?
6	 sAtAn handsome? hey, that is my middle name....lol
7	 spring haha.....
8	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL ng haiya 😞
9	 DICK TRACY U LUV THAT?! LOL
10	 LAMBORGHINI DIABLO (TWIN TURBO) HAI AR
11	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL xxx'hai'xxx
12	 DICK TRACY U LUV THAT?! WHATS NG AGAIN?
13	 LAMBORGHINI DIABLO (TWIN TURBO) MM
14	 Get your free personal web site at http://www.JustHomepage.com iiiiiiii.iiiiii. http://www.JustHomepage.com 😊
15	 LAMBORGHINI DIABLO (TWIN TURBO) NG
16	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL ng= 5 = no
17	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL hehe 😊
18	 LAMBORGHINI DIABLO (TWIN TURBO) SEE
19	 DICK TRACY U LUV THAT?! OH YEH
20	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL hehe
21	 DICK TRACY U LUV THAT?! WHAT NGO?
22	 LAMBORGHINI DIABLO (TWIN TURBO) DUH 😊
23	 sAtAn oh well, at least my gf thinks i am good looking...hehe
24	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL ngo = me
25	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL ori

26	 DICK TRACY U LUV THAT?! OH YEH
27	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL satan> u have gf ma 🤔
28	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL hehehehe 😄
29	 spring tracy don't know that?
30	 DICK TRACY U LUV THAT?! FORGOT
31	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL tracey is a kwai mui jai ar ma
32	 spring oh.....
33	 sAtAn NG = NO GOOD
34	 LoVeLy CuTie SWeeTy Cool HoT aNGeL whahahahaha 😄
35	 DICK TRACY U LUV THAT?! I KNOW MOST CHINESE
36	 Open your own private room and invite your friends !!"!!", !"Rooms", "New", !!!!!!2L !!!!! !!!!!! 😄

Appendix 2: Front page of Ataru's Homepage.

Address: [http://\[redacted\].cyril.com/](http://[redacted].cyril.com/) go

[redacted]'s Homepage

Welcome to [redacted]'s Homepage

Shortcuts
Shortcuts [dropdown] GO!

Menu

- [Home](#)
- [What's new](#)
- [Wallpaper Archive](#)
- [Music Archive](#)
- [Movie Archive](#)
- [Buy CD](#)
- [Anime Link](#)
- [Top Link List](#)
- [Link to us](#)
- [About us](#)
- [F.A.Q](#)
- [Credit](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Friends & Fans](#)
- [Anime Awards](#)
- [Anime Contests](#)

[Sign Guestbook](#)

[View Guestbook](#)

What's New
Check out what's new in [redacted]'s Homepage Now. We will update the pages Frequently.

Music Archive
Anime Series Opening & Ending Song, Cantonese & English Anime Songs, and Anime Song Request.

Buy CD
Anime Soundtracks, Games, Books, Anime Poster, Anime Wallscroll, & Other stuffs.

Link to us
Please choose either one of the banners in the Link to us page to link to [redacted]'s Homepage.

F.A.Q
Some common questions people asked me all the time.

Wallpaper Archive
We got alot of anime wallpapers. Such as; Ah My Goddess, and Sailormoon. Fans's Arts.


Movie Archive
Anime Opening and Ending, Anime MTV, and Anime Episode. Such as; Magic Knight Rayearth & EVA.

Anime Link
Help us build our website bigger. More than 50,000's Anime links, and Anime Top 100 Links List.


About us
History of [redacted]'s Homepage, and little info about the Webmaster.

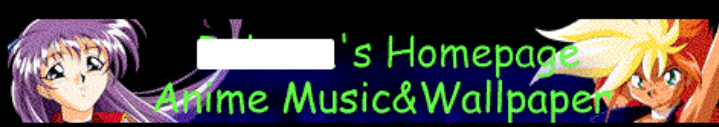
Friends & Fans
The people who had link to [redacted]'s Homepage, and the page that trade link with us.

[redacted]'s Computer Recycle Program



DiabloII Expansion Only \$29.99





[redacted]'s Homepage
Anime Music & Wallpaper

[Contact us](#) [Credit](#) [Awards](#)

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Last updated on Thu May 23 12:34:43 2002