

Multiliteracies on Instant Messaging in Negotiating Local, Translocal, and Transnational Affiliations: A Case of an Adolescent Immigrant

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ABSTRACT

Through an in-depth case study of the instant messaging practices of an adolescent girl who had migrated to the United States from China, this qualitative investigation examines the development of multiliteracies in the context of transnational migration and new media of communication. Data consisted of screen recordings of the youth's digital practices, interviews, and observations. Data analyses included qualitative coding procedures and orthographic analysis of the use of multiple dialects and languages in the youth's instant messaging exchanges. These exchanges illustrate the process of social and semiotic design through which the youth developed simultaneous affiliations with her local Chinese immigrant community, a translocal network of Asian American youth, and transnational relationships with her peers in China. The construction of transnational networks represents the desire of the youth to develop the literate repertoire that would enable her to thrive in multiple linguistic communities across countries and mobilize resources within these communities. This study contributes to new conceptual directions for understanding translocal forms of linguistic diversity mediated by digital technologies and an expanded view of the literate repertoire and cultural resources of migrant youth. As such, this study's contributions are not limited to the domain of digital literacies but extend to issues of linguistic diversity and adolescent literacy development in contexts of migration.

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of research devoted to understanding how young people are incorporating digital media into their everyday lives and the kinds of literacy learning and socialization that take place with the use of new media (e.g., Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Hagood, Leander, Luke, Mackey, & Nixon, 2003; Ito et al., 2008; Sefton-Green, 2006). However, in the United States, the study of literacy and socialization with new media has dealt relatively little with young people whose first language is not English or who have allegiances to multiple linguistic communities, despite their current demographic importance in the United States. Although digital media, and the Internet in particular, has been conceived as a global technology that provides social and information linkages across geographical space, research has rarely examined the technoliteracy practices that young people of migrant backgrounds use to develop and maintain social relationships and affiliations across countries. This is despite the fact that migrancy and new forms of media and technologies are both indicative of larger patterns of globalization and transnationalization of our societies

(Lam, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). As Jiménez (2003) suggested in regard to research of literacy learning among migrant students, not only is the transnational character of literacy in these students' lives an underexplored area of research, but also such literacy is "increasingly shaped by the potential and the continuously shifting realities created by newer forms of technology, particularly those that extend our communicative reach" (pp. 124–125).

In this article, I present a case study derived from a larger qualitative comparative study of the transnational digital literacy practices of immigrant youth of Chinese descent. The central research questions in the larger inquiry are as follows: (a) How do migrant youth of Chinese origin use digital media to negotiate social relationships with diverse linguistic and cultural communities across countries? and (b) How does participation in multilingual and transgeographic online networks affect youths' literacy use and learning; in particular, how are diverse linguistic resources mobilized to develop social networks across countries? This case study presents analysis of the use of instant messaging (IM) by an adolescent

girl to develop simultaneous affiliations with her local Chinese immigrant community, a translocal network of Asian American youth, and transnational relationships with her peers in China. The diverse social networks facilitated through IM and other communicative contexts reflect the youth's migratory history that involves maintaining and developing personal ties across the United States and China and also her participation in online communities across the two countries.

As a major form of digital communication that has become pervasive in the lives of young people in the United States and many other countries, IM involves private, synchronous, and mostly dyadic exchanges that are carried out via computers connected over the Internet. The interfaces of most IM software programs are multiwindowed, with the primary interface consisting of a contact list with the names of one's IM partners and a text window where written exchanges take place. There are a great number of IM programs in existence, some of which are regional in nature and are commonly used within specific countries, whereas others are global and adopted widely across countries. The present study examines how the focal youth employed multiple IM programs in conjunction with other online media to cultivate a dispersed set of multilingual networks across countries. Although this study focuses on the use of a specific technological media (i.e., IM), the issues raised in this study in regard to transnational networking and literacy development across multiple linguistic communities are broader and deeper issues that remain pertinent, even as the technology of IM changes and new forms of communicative media replace older ones.

In the following, I first discuss several areas of research that have informed this study, including the multiliteracies framework, the study of literacy in the transnational context of migration, and recent research on literacy and learning in online networks. Drawing on theoretical perspectives derived from these areas of research, I examine the IM practices of the focal youth as a process of social and semiotic design in which she constructs a transnational set of social networks that allows her to access and develop multiple linguistic resources, including vernacular forms of English and multiple (mutually unintelligible) dialects in Chinese, to construct her affiliations with different groups of people across the United States and China. Analysis shows that, by developing and maintaining her affiliation to multiple groups, the youth's literacy practices are characterized by the synchronic movement across lifeworlds and the development of multiple reference points in the positioning of self. The construction of simultaneous networks and the movement across lifeworlds represent the desire of the youth to develop the literate repertoire that would enable her to thrive in multiple linguistic and semiotic communities and mobilize resources

within these communities. This study contributes to new conceptual directions for understanding translocal forms of linguistic diversity mediated by digital technologies and an expanded view of the literate repertoire and cultural resources of migrant youth. As such, the contributions of this study are not limited to the domain of digital literacies but extend to issues of linguistic diversity and literacy development in the context of transnational migration.

Theoretical Perspectives

Multiliteracies in Changing Societal Contexts

Given that the interest of this study is to examine how literacy is practiced and taken up in the social contexts of migration and digitally mediated communication, I approach literacy from a social and cultural perspective that considers the situated and contextual nature of reading and writing. Research from this perspective (e.g., Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Gee, 1996; Pahl & Rowsell, 2006; Street, 2005) has illuminated how particular rhetorical styles, interpretive strategies, and semiotic systems that are involved in any act of reading or writing are predicated on, and in turn give meaning to, the beliefs, practices, and social relationships of particular sociocultural groups. Hence, literacy, as a situated practice, appears in multiple forms that are contingent on the sociohistorical relationships and ideologies that are in place.

Although the concept of multiple literacies allows us to recognize the diverse and socially specific practices of reading and writing, scholars associated with the New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis & Cope, 2001; New London Group, 1996) proposed the concept of multiliteracies to describe the literate abilities to navigate and negotiate across diverse social practices and text forms that are integral to our changing societal contexts. These contexts are characterized by (a) the increasing salience and ubiquity of cultural and linguistic diversity across localities and globalized relations across national borders, and (b) the growing variety of hybrid text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. The changing demographics of most postindustrial and industrializing countries resulting from the migration of labor associated with our globalized economies have meant that people are increasingly inhabiting multiple lifeworlds—"spaces for community life where local and specific meanings can be made" (New London Group, 1996, p. 70)—and moving across multiple lifeworlds in their daily lives. At the same time, the changing communicative landscape facilitated by new media and technologies has been marked by

diverse kinds of online networking and a syncretism of representational forms.

To capture the dynamic processes of meaning making that are involved in such cross-cultural movements and navigation, Kress (2003) and the New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996) suggested an approach to understanding semiotic activity as *design*. Design involves the orchestration of existing representational resources—such as linguistic patterns, genres, dialects, registers, and discourses/ideologies, as well as nonlinguistic modalities—in potentially transformative ways to achieve the designer's communicative and cultural purpose. The social semiotic concept of design is helpful as we consider how immigrant teens draw upon various representational resources to (re)define their identities and relations to multiple localities and communities in the process of migration.

Yet, although the multiliteracies perspective offers a conceptual vision for expanding our notion of literacy in changing cultural and communicative environments, it does not provide a basis for theorizing the new forms of ethnic and linguistic diversity and literacy practices in globalized communicative contexts. In the following, I discuss other bodies of literature that have informed the present study—first, in relation to the practices of transnational migration and, second, with respect to the communicative landscape of digital media.

Language and Literacy in the Context of Transnational Migration

In the last decade and a half, the development of a transnational perspective on migration has spurred the empirical study of various kinds of cross-border connections that are created in the process of migration and how the identities of individuals and groups of people are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place (e.g., Kennedy & Roudometof, 2002; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2004). A conceptual frame that has emerged from research on transnational migration and that could be helpful for thinking about new forms of cultural and linguistic diversity is the notion of “simultaneity” (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Simultaneity refers to the fact that individuals who have migrated from one country to another may continue to incorporate daily routines, activities, and institutional affiliations that connect them to their country of origin, even as they are actively engaged in their everyday lives in their destination country.

In the field of language and literacy studies, Farr (2006), Guerra (1998), and Sánchez (2007a) have documented the role of language use in the simultaneous negotiation of interpersonal relationships among Mexican immigrants with their families and extended kinship on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border. In particular,

Farr and Guerra each showed that it was in the context of such transnational relations negotiated through regular traveling across the border that the speech and rhetorical practices associated with their research participants' ethnolinguistic identities were maintained and affirmed. Rubinstein-Ávila's (2007) case portrait of a teenage Dominican immigrant noted how the youth asserted her transnational affiliation through her choice of texts for voluntary reading (books that relate to the Dominican Republic) and her relation to media (watching and discussing television *novelas*—Spanish-language soap operas).

Indeed, the negotiation of simultaneous affiliations across borders is increasingly mediated by new and different kinds of communicative media. In Yi's (2009) research of the online activities of a local community of Korean American teenagers in the Midwestern United States, she found that their IM screen names and website postings to one another contained a copious mixing of English and Korean and frequent references to practices in both Korea and the United States. Similar multilingual practices and representations of transnational experiences are also described in McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg, and Costa Saliari's (2007) study of two Bengali American and Colombian American youths and a Jewish American adolescent with strong affiliation with Israel. These young people used their personal profiles and narratives in online journals and social networking sites to express their identifications with multiple communities across border.

In theorizing linguistic practices across transnational contexts, communication scholar Jacquemet (2005) argued that the mobility of people, languages, and texts in our contemporary world has resulted in an increased intensity and expanded scale of multilingual transactions across local and distant territories. Jacquemet proposed the concept of “transidiomatic practices” to describe “the communicative practices of transnational groups that interact using different languages and communicative codes simultaneously present in a range of communicative channels, both local and distant” (pp. 264–265). He further noted that such practices are constituted by

the co-presence of multilingual talk (exercised by de/reterritorialized speakers) and electronic media, in contexts heavily structured by social indexicalities and semiotic codes. Anyone present in transnational environments, whose talk is mediated by deterritorialized technologies, and who interacts with both present and distant people, will find herself producing transidiomatic practices. (Jacquemet, 2005, p. 265)

What is noteworthy about these practices is not that multilingual discourse, code-mixing in texts, and communication across borders are new phenomena of this

era; what is impressive about such practices, according to Jacquemet, is the copresence of multiple languages and simultaneous local and distant interactions facilitated through a multiplicity of communicative channels.

Drawing on Jacquemet's (2005) work, in this study, we are interested in how simultaneous networks may be developed through digital media for youth migrants to interact and negotiate their relationships with multiple social and linguistic communities across borders and how particular literacy practices are accessed and reinforced within these diverse sets of relationships. To further develop a conceptual frame for examining such horizontal movements across digital networks, I turn to recent studies of digital media and literacies.

Digitally Mediated Literacies and Social Networks

A growing body of research on digitally mediated literacy has brought to our attention the new epistemologies and reading and writing practices associated with posttypographic and networked digital technologies that diverge from print-based typographic book culture (e.g., Coiro et al., 2008; Hagood et al., 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). The connectivity and cross-linked associations between different textual forms and online communities that are promoted by networked technologies have meant that reading and writing in these environments often involves making meaning across a variety of social, cultural, semiotic, and information sources (Luke, 2003; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). In this regard, a range of researchers have pointed out how literacy in digital environments is embedded in distributed networks, which may be networks of hypertexts (texts linked to each other on the Web) but more importantly are networks of relationships where one can access and develop textual or semiotic resources within multiple communities (e.g., Gee, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Luke, 2003). By developing a broad and diverse set of relational networks, one is able to access a wider range of knowledge and resources, which is especially pertinent in a globalized and fast-changing world (Gee, 2004).

In the limited literature on IM literacy, researchers (Jacobs, 2005, 2006; Lewis & Fabos, 2000, 2005) have highlighted the role of the design of networks as part of youth practices of IM. Focusing mainly on European American adolescents, these studies have shown that the youth actively designed their social worlds by using IM to develop, reinforce, and extend particular social relationships that they value (Lewis & Fabos, 2005) and to gather and distribute information and ideas among peer groups (Jacobs, 2006). Although the youths' IM networks tend to mirror their offline or face-to-face relationships, their use of this media serves to complement

other channels of communication to facilitate a sense of connectedness and access to a variety of information sources from their peers. These practices of fostering social relationships, affiliations, and resource networks have been extended to the use of social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook (Boyd, 2007; Knobel & Lankshear, 2008).

Another prominent aspect of digital literacies is the crossing over or syncretism of representational modes and forms, as described earlier in relation to the multiliteracies perspective. Research has examined such syncretic representation in young people's online journaling, IM, and personal profiles on social networking sites, among other practices, that often juxtapose and integrate different textual conventions and modalities to achieve particular communicative purposes (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Jacobs, 2005; Perkel, 2008). This kind of hybridized textuality is demonstrated in the IM practices of the participants in Jacobs's study, as these youth integrate in their exchanges the conventions of IM discourse to approximate speech, the conventions of standard written English that they learned in school, the lexicon and cultural references familiar to European American middle class teens, and occasionally the language of hip-hop or urban youth culture. Such hybridized discourse reflects the youths' awareness of and identification with multiple norms and conventions associated with both middle class schooling and European American youth culture and, to a limited degree, with linguistic influence from their experience of an urban environment and urban popular culture. Lewis and Fabos (2005) further noted that the design of language on IM is audience sensitive, with the IM users having to shift voices moment to moment to address different audiences as they manage multiple parallel dialogues within the same space/time. Hence, these researchers argued that the ability to flexibly read and write across genres and modes and to perform different voices and versions of one's self dependent on the audience has come to characterize the aesthetics and epistemology of IM as a form of digitally mediated literacy.

The Present Study

For the case study presented in this article, I use the theoretical perspectives discussed above to analyze the ways in which an adolescent girl, who had migrated from China to the United States two years previously, designed her social networks and use of language through her activities on IM with multiple communities across the United States and China. I examine how the youth's literacy practices within these diverse communities are characterized by the synchronic movement across lifeworlds and syncretism in the use of representational resources to (re)define her relations to multiple localities and communities in the process of migration.

Such cross-border relationships mediated by IM and other communicative media constitute a distributed or dispersed set of multilingual networks from which the youth accessed and drew upon diverse linguistic resources, including vernacular forms of English and multiple dialects in Chinese (including Cantonese, Mandarin, and Shanghainese), to construct her simultaneous affiliations to different groups of people across the United States and China.

Cantonese, Mandarin (known as *Putunghua* in China and *Guoyu* in Taiwan), and Shanghainese are three different varieties of Chinese that are mutually unintelligible, even though Mandarin is the national language, and Cantonese and Shanghainese are ascribed the status of dialects within the sociolinguistic history and present-day policy of China. Of all the Chinese dialects, only Mandarin has an established writing tradition that is officially codified as Modern Written Chinese and recognized as the standard written language in present-day China. Together, the spoken standard (Mandarin) and written standard (Modern Written Chinese) constitute what is termed *Modern Standard Chinese*. Cantonese, which is spoken widely in the southern Chinese provinces Guangdong and Guangxi and the two special administrative regions Hong Kong and Macao, stands as a prestigious dialect, with a highly developed written language that is prominent in the mass media of Hong Kong (Li, 2000; Snow, 2004). Written Chinese texts in Hong Kong that are of a less “official” or formal nature—from creative writing to advertising to the less formal genres in newspapers and magazines—are characterized by the presence of at least some Cantonese elements. Some diary novels that have wide readership in Hong Kong are written entirely in Cantonese.

As a weaker dialect compared with Cantonese in regard to prestige and the number of speakers, and especially given the strong promotion of Mandarin in Shanghai, Shanghainese is marked by the relative absence of written usage (Chen, 1999; Xiao-quan, 2001). Although dialect writing in Shanghainese had existed in folk drama scripts, folk songs, stories, and other literary genres for various periods of time until the early part of the 20th century, written Shanghainese in the print media or environmental signs in the cityscape in present-day Shanghai can hardly be found (Chen, 1999; Xiao-quan, 2001). Yet, there is an indication that, with the recent popularization of the Internet in China, the use of regional dialects in electronic discourse is becoming a visible phenomenon (Gao, 2006). In this study, I explore how the focal youth acquired and made choices among different written conventions in English and varieties of Chinese within the multiple social networks that she developed on IM. I examine how her language and orthographic choices allowed her to develop affiliations with different communities across geographical

borders and how she mobilized social and semiotic resources from her transnational networks.

Method

Study Background

Data for this research are taken from a larger comparative case study of the digital literacy practices of immigrant youth of Chinese descent across transnational contexts. A case-study approach is adopted for this project, with the aim to generate a contextualized analysis of literacy use and learning (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Erickson, 1986), especially given the paucity of research on immigrant adolescents’ practices with digital media. Cases developed from this project examine how the focal adolescents use the Internet to organize social relationships, use and produce information and media content across countries, and develop cross-cultural orientations in their language and literacy learning. The six youths who participated in this project were attending high school in a metropolitan Midwestern city at the time of the study.

Recruitment of the youth participants was carried out through a survey and screening interviews. We administered a survey on transnational communication to students at a comprehensive high school with a large immigrant population from Latin America and Asia. Close to 19% of the survey respondents were of Chinese origin, among whom 73% indicated that they used the Internet to communicate with people in China. Based on the survey responses, we invited 20 students of Chinese origin who had indicated engagement in different forms of transnational communication to participate in one-time focus-group interviews. From these interviews, we recruited case-study participants who showed both similar and diverse patterns of media use and received formal consent for their participation in this research.

The key informant for the present study was Kaiyee (all names are pseudonyms), a 17-year-old junior who immigrated to the United States with her parents and a younger brother from Shanghai, China, when she was 15 years old. I focused on Kaiyee for this study of IM practices across transnational contexts for two main reasons. First, Kaiyee was the focal participant with whom I was able to develop the strongest rapport and gather data on her use of IM extensively over an eight-month period. Second, Kaiyee, having originated from Shanghai, was the only participant in the study who was not a native speaker of Cantonese and was acquiring Cantonese in a Chinese immigrant community that had a majority of native Cantonese speakers. Hence, her case allows us to explore to a greater extent the multilinguality of online networks that an immigrant youth may develop across

social and geographical spaces. The focus on Kaiyee for the present study is, therefore, based on accessibility and the opportunity to learn (Yin, 2002).

As an emigrant who moved to the United States from Hong Kong at the age of 16 years and is now a university researcher, I have been personally involved in the Chinese American community and had taught in a high school with large numbers of students of Chinese origin. My proficiency in Cantonese and Mandarin and familiarity with the local immigrant community have helped me to develop a degree of rapport with the study participants that is essential for exploring literacy practices in the personal domain of their social life. Although Kaiyee and I conversed mostly in Mandarin and English, we would often consult with each other about Shanghainese (Kaiyee's first language) and Cantonese (my first language) when discussing her IM activities in these languages. When we were deciding what language to use for our interviews, Kaiyee expressed an interest in practicing speaking English with me. Hence, most of our interviews were conducted in English and included various amounts of code switching to Mandarin and Cantonese.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study took place between February 2007 and September 2007 and consisted of home observations of Kaiyee's online literacy practices, semistructured interviews, screen recordings of her IM exchanges and retrospective reflection on these IM exchanges with Kaiyee, and selected observations of her activities in her school and the local Chinese immigrant community. I visited Kaiyee at her home to conduct observations of her online practices biweekly between February and September 2007. For each home visit, which all lasted approximately one and a half to two hours, a screen recording was made of Kaiyee's online interactions (using Spector Pro, Spector Soft, Vero Beach, Florida), our conversations were recorded through a voice recorder, and field notes were written to provide a narrative description of Kaiyee's activities and our interaction during the observation.

During several early observations, Kaiyee described to me each of the close to 70 contacts that she maintained on two IM programs. On the basis of her description, I was able to gain an understanding of the major social networks that she maintained online. With Kaiyee's permission, we began screen recording her real-time IM exchanges with six individuals in her social networks. The six individuals were selected by Kaiyee and were friends of hers with whom she regularly conversed online. This article focuses on recorded exchanges between Kaiyee and three of her IM interlocutors who were associated with her major online networks. These exchanges provided a diverse range of data with which to examine the different kinds of linguistic resources that Kaiyee mobilized to develop social networks across countries. Table 1 shows the pseudonyms of these individuals, their gender and relationship as reported by Kaiyee, the primary languages they used when communicating on IM, and the recording dates of the IM exchanges that are used for this study.

Kaiyee notified her friends about our research before we commenced recording of their IM exchanges. Whenever I recorded an IM session that involved these IM partners, Kaiyee would inform them that I was there and that their exchanges were being recorded. Over the course of the study, 14 hours of screen recordings were made of Kaiyee's use of IM.

The 12-hour time difference between Midwestern United States and China posed a challenge to the scheduling of recording sessions that would allow us to capture the IM exchanges between Kaiyee and her friends in China. Our scheduling allowed us to record Kaiyee's exchanges with one of her IM partners in China on several occasions but did not allow us to record any real-time exchanges between Kaiyee and Rong, a childhood friend and former schoolmate of Kaiyee's. To help us address this problem, Kaiyee provided a 50-minute IM dialogue with Rong recorded on her IM program on June 20 for the study.

The data sample of recorded IM dialogues for this analysis includes 200 entries (an entry being a message that is posted in a continuous dyadic exchange)¹ from

Table 1. Kaiyee's Instant Messaging Partners

Name	Gender	Relationship with Kaiyee	Primary languages for communication	Recording dates of instant message exchanges
Dawei	Male	Friend and schoolmate in the United States	Mandarin and Cantonese	May 24, June 7, June 23, July 18
Ricky	Male	Friend and fellow gamer from an online game in the United States	English	April 17, April 27, May 17, July 4
Rong	Female	Childhood friend and former schoolmate from China	Mandarin and Shanghainese	June 20

Kaiyee's dialogues with each of her three IM partners described in Table 1. With respect to the exchanges that Kaiyee conducted with Dawei and Ricky, which were recorded on four dates, the first 50 entries of each of the four recorded sets of IM exchanges were compiled for analysis. With the one extended IM record between Kaiyee and Rong, I used the first 200 entries of this dialogue for analysis. Altogether, these subsamples comprised the 600 entries of Kaiyee's IM exchanges that were used for analysis.

I conducted eight interviews in person with Kaiyee, ranging from one hour to one and a half hours each, outside of the observational and recording sessions. These interviews were semistructured (Patton, 2002), audiotaped, and transcribed to written record. Beyond the initial interviews that were topically oriented and explored the daily routines of Kaiyee's use of IM, most interviews involved retrospective reflection with Kaiyee on the content and language use in one or more of her IM texts. Consistent with inductive research methods (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Kvale, 1996), the interview questions were developed in an ongoing fashion, based on the activities observed during the recorded IM sessions.

Additional data were gathered through observation of Kaiyee's activities at school to get a sense of her peer group and her participation in classroom activities. I shadowed Kaiyee on three school days between April and June and conducted informal interviews with four of her teachers to get their perceptions of Kaiyee and her work in their classes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved using qualitative procedures of inductive and interpretive coding, cross-comparison of codes, and triangulation across data (Charmaz, 2006; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Analysis was carried out on the data set of interview transcripts, recordings of 600 entries of IM exchanges, and field notes and audio-recorded transcripts from observations. My theoretical perspectives provided an interpretive frame for the development of codes as I related instances in the data to concepts such as social affiliation, design of online networks, social and semiotic resources, hybridity in language use and representation, and mobilizing of resources across networks. Using the method of constant comparison (Miles & Huberman, 1994), I looked for key linkages among various pieces of data, signaled by the reoccurrence of the same codes, to examine patterns within and across data types. The patterns that were identified were placed in larger analytic categories that incorporated a number of related codes. These larger categories within and across data sources were then grouped conceptually to provide a basis for the themes presented in the findings.

In addition to inductive coding of the content of the IM exchanges, I analyzed the use of multiple dialects and languages in the youths' IM exchanges within different social networks. Specifically, I examined the use of both standard and nonstandard orthographies to represent standard and nonstandard forms of Chinese and English. Following Sebba (2007) and Androutsopoulos (2000), I adopt a social and cultural, or ideological, as opposed to a technological view of orthography (Street, 1984), whereby the use of orthography is seen as not just the employment of a set of written conventions for representing language but is itself a value-laden practice that reflects the particular stances and identities of an individual or a social group with regard to linguistic variation and its representation in writing. The manifestation of stances and identities in the use of orthography is seen, for example, in how professional British writers writing in English-lexicon Creole distance themselves from the standard British model through particular spelling choices, some of which reflect the speech characteristics of Creole while others are homophone spellings that serve mainly to accentuate their difference from mainstream British English (Sebba, 1998). Hence, orthographic choices constitute a form of semiotic design in which people construct their identity and affiliation with particular social groups and practices. I analyzed the orthographic choices that Kaiyee made in her written exchanges on IM to represent her affiliation with different social and ethnic vernaculars of English and regional dialects of Chinese.

For example, with the sample of IM dialogues between Kaiyee and her Asian American friend from an online game in the United States, I examined how these two incorporated linguistic features of African American Vernacular English and lexicon related to hip-hop culture in their written exchanges and how the use of a hybrid vernacular English allowed Kaiyee to develop affiliation with Asian Americans who participate in an urban-identified youth culture. With the IM dialogue sample between Kaiyee and her Chinese-speaking peer in the local community, I examined how dialect alternation between Mandarin and Cantonese and diverse orthographic conventions are used in constructing a multidialectal basis for negotiating their social relationship in a Cantonese-dominant immigrant community.

In my analysis of the IM dialogue sample between Kaiyee and her friend in Shanghai, I received assistance from Dr. Dingxu Shi, professor of Chinese and Bilingual Studies at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, who has researched and written about the Shanghai dialect and was consultant for this project. Dr. Shi identified the orthographic representation of the Shanghai dialect in the IM exchanges, noting in particular the use of nonstandard Chinese characters to represent Shanghainese-specific morphemes. With Dr. Shi's assistance, I examined the

nature and extent of the blending of Shanghainese and Mandarin in the IM texts. Results from these analyses were triangulated with the analytic categories developed from inductive coding of the entire data set to generate the themes or assertions discussed below.

Results

Background Information on Kaiyee

Kaiyee and her family had been living in the United States for slightly over two years when the study commenced. The family rented a small single-family home in a mixed-income neighborhood that had significant populations of Latino and Asian immigrants and was 10 minutes away by car from the Chinatown neighborhood. Kaiyee's mother worked full time at a small garment factory and sometimes took on domestic housekeeping jobs, and Kaiyee's father worked two shifts a day as a chef in a Chinese restaurant.

Kaiyee's mother tongue was Shanghainese but she had received schooling only in Mandarin when she was living in Shanghai, given that Shanghainese, as a regional dialect, does not have official status and is restricted from being used in institutional settings. Although Mandarin is the language of all major public institutions and media, Shanghainese remains the language of the home and everyday communication among most native residents of Shanghai. Kaiyee remarked to the researcher that she had been equally fluent in Shanghainese and Mandarin before she immigrated to the United States but soon began using Mandarin as a primary language when interacting with her immigrant peers who were predominantly native Cantonese speakers and bilingual in Mandarin. Kaiyee further noted that, although she had become increasingly comfortable with Mandarin through daily use, she felt that she had stagnated in her Shanghainese proficiency because she realized that there were some new vocabulary and colloquial terms that she had to figure out from communicating on IM with her friends in Shanghai. At the same time, Kaiyee showed an eagerness to become more fluent in English, the dominant language of the society in which she was now living, and also in Cantonese so that she could interact more easily with her friends and people in the Chinese immigrant community, as is discussed later in this section.

The social groups of age-similar peers that Kaiyee associated with, both inside and outside of school, were primarily young immigrants from China who had come to the United States in their middle childhood to midadolescence. Although I noted and Kaiyee admitted that she was an outgoing person with a good sense of humor, she was hesitant to speak English at school for fear of embarrassment from people making fun of

her. Kaiyee said that she had been laughed at before and would refrain from speaking English unless she was confident that she could say something accurately. Such reticence among adolescent immigrants to speak English amidst their English-speaking peers for fear of being teased has also been noted by other researchers who studied Latino- and Polish-speaking adolescents (Rubinstein-Ávila, 2007; Szuber, 2007). In the spring semester during this study, Kaiyee was enrolled in a transitional English survey literature class that was designed to be an intermediary course in the transition from the English-as-a-second-language program to the mainstream English program. Even though Kaiyee remained relatively quiet in the survey literature class, her teacher commented that Kaiyee performed well on her written work and specifically pointed out that Kaiyee was 1 of 8 students among the 120 students he was teaching who received a near-perfect score on an argumentative essay, which was one of the major writing assignments for the semester.

Kaiyee began using the Internet in China when she was 13 years old. Because her family had never owned a computer in China, she would go online at Internet cafés, which were easily accessible in Shanghai. Soon after settling in the United States, her parents bought a desktop computer for Kaiyee and another one for her brother. Hence, Kaiyee had exclusive use of her computer and used it for several hours every day to IM with her friends, play video games, and check out websites related to her interests in both Chinese and English.

The two IM programs that Kaiyee used were Windows Live Messenger and Tencent QQ. Windows Live Messenger is an IM client developed by Microsoft and has a user demographic that spans the globe. Tencent QQ (QQ for short; Tencent Holdings Limited, Shenzhen, China) is the most popular IM program in China and has been used in South Africa for several years. Kaiyee had started using QQ in China and adopted Windows Live Messenger after coming to the United States so she could use it to communicate with people both locally and overseas.

Kaiyee had more than 40 contacts on Windows Live Messenger, among whom 14 were her schoolmates in the United States, 10 were people she had met at online game sites (primarily on a massively multiplayer role-playing game called *Maple Story* [Nexon Corporation, Seoul, South Korea]), and 15 were contacts in China, which included friends and relatives in Shanghai and people she had met on Chinese discussion forums. Among her contacts on QQ were 12 friends and relatives in Shanghai, many online friends in China but only 5 with whom she communicated on a regular basis, and 17 schoolmates and friends in the United States. Because most of Kaiyee's immigrant peers also used QQ, there existed a significant amount of overlap of her local

contacts on both IM programs. In the following, I examine three major social networks that Kaiyee developed and maintained through the use of IM and how diverse linguistic and orthographic conventions are mobilized in her IM exchanges to construct her affiliations with different social groups and practices across the United States and China.

Asian American Youth and Hip-Hop Influenced Vernacular English

Six months after she came to the United States, Kaiyee started playing Maple Story, an online game marketed in several language versions targeting specific countries or regions. Kaiyee decided to play the version called Maple Global, which was in English, where the majority of the players were located in North America. Kaiyee explained her choice to play this English version of the game as a deliberate intention to learn English: "When I decided to play the game Maple Story, it got Chinese version and English version, I decided to play English version because I want to improve my English.... This is the purpose that I use English to chat" (interview, June 21, 2007; all quotations of Kaiyee's words are derived from verbatim transcriptions of recorded interviews). Most of the players that Kaiyee associated with and recognized as friends were known to her as being 15- to 20-year-olds of Asian origin residing in the United States. Among the 10 game players whom she added to her IM contact list, almost all identified themselves as Asian except for one who identified himself as black and another who identified himself as mixed Portuguese and Spanish. IM was used as a way to extend their relationships beyond the game environment.

The double sense of affinity (Gee, 2004) among Kaiyee and most of these online friends of hers as game players and as people of Asian descent led her to consider them as good resources for improving her English. Kaiyee noted the following in regard to the people whom she met on the game, especially a male friend named Mike whom Kaiyee knew as somebody who was of Cambodian descent and was born in the United States:

Because I talk to people a lot and people there are so eager... *is that how you say it?* [spoken in Mandarin] [Interviewer: Eager to talk.]... Yeah, and when I just met my first friend, whose name is Mike, I didn't talk a lot...And I told him I can't speak good English and he said he can help me, that doesn't matter, something like that. And we became better friends. (interview, March 17, 2007)

Regarding another friend, Ricky, who was known to Kaiyee as being of mixed Cambodian and Chinese descent who had come to the United States at a very young age from Cambodia, Kaiyee said the following:

We know each other like almost one year...He told me he was so pressure when he came to the U.S. cuz he couldn't speak English well, too, either. So, he can feel what I feel now cuz he was there, he was like that too. (interview, February 10, 2007)

Among Kaiyee and some of her IM contacts from the game, their Asian affinity included the shared experience of being multilingual persons living in an English-dominant society, which led Kaiyee to feel comfortable developing an English-speaking voice with these peers: "I feel more comfortable talking to Asians...they won't laugh at me" (interview, June 21, 2007). Kaiyee related her improvement in English through chatting to a greater degree of fluency with vernacular English:

I learned a lot of vocabularies from chatting with my Internet friends...I think I improved a lot through the [last] half year...cause I can understand more listening to the conversation when people talk in school, cause I used to don't get what they're talking about and I know more now because I know more oral language...I can talk more now when people talk to me first. (interview, June 7, 2007)

Hence, although Kaiyee felt insecure about her ability to communicate in English with her English-speaking peers, she developed a network of friends through the online game environment who were mostly Asian and with whom she was developing a pan-ethnic and linguistic affiliation. How Kaiyee and some of her Asian-identified peers designed and signaled their affiliations through writing on IM was marked by the influence of African American Vernacular English and hip-hop culture.

Kaiyee observed that her online friends from the game, including Mike and Ricky (who were mentioned in the previous quotes from Kaiyee), tended to adopt, in her words, a more "oral" and "black" style when interacting with each other. Regarding this style of English, Kaiyee remarked, "I think it's cool, and my friends type like that too, and I don't like to type proper, it sounds like a nerd" (interview, June 21, 2007). In particular, Kaiyee noted that Ricky, who identified himself as a breakdancer and often shared his interest in hip-hop music with her, "likes to speak more black." An excerpt of Kaiyee's IM exchange with Ricky dated April 27th is shown below. Right before this segment of the exchange, the two youths were talking about being bored by certain classes at school before Kaiyee brought up the notion of proper grammar in contrast to Ricky's style of language. In the beginning of the excerpt, Kaiyee mentioned that Mike had told Ricky that he had to use "proper grammar" if he wanted to talk to Kaiyee. Ricky and Kaiyee had just met in the game at the time when Mike made the comment, and Kaiyee observed to me when reflecting on this excerpt that Mike worried

that Kaiyee would not understand Ricky's language because Mike knew that Kaiyee was not a native speaker of English. (Line numbers and time stamps are shown in the left columns; glosses of emoticons and abbreviations appear in parentheses.)

- 1 20:27:32 Kaiyee: haha i remember Mike told you: You have to speak proper grammar to her.
- 2 20:27:40 Kaiyee: do you remember what you answered?
- 3 20:27:44 Ricky: no
- 4 20:27:47 Kaiyee: o.o (puzzled expression)
- 5 20:27:50 Kaiyee: -_____ - (perplexed expression)
- 6 20:27:57 Kaiyee: "Dam, thats hard!"
- 7 20:28:01 Ricky: hahahaha
- 8 20:28:05 Kaiyee: -_____ - (more perplexed)
- 9 20:28:05 Ricky: i hate talkin like this
- 10 20:28:09 Kaiyee: -.- (nonchalant or matter-of-fact)
- 11 20:28:09 Ricky: i like talkin like diz
- 12 20:28:12 Ricky: diz is way better
- 13 20:28:13 Kaiyee: o.o (puzzled)
- 14 20:28:20 Kaiyee: dis is more complicated
- 15 20:28:23 Ricky: no
- 16 20:28:25 Kaiyee: YES
- 17 20:28:27 Ricky: diz is wayyyy ez
- 18 20:28:33 Kaiyee: HARD
- 19 20:28:35 Ricky: who diz nigga be
- 20 20:28:38 Ricky: who dat
- 21 20:28:41 Ricky: did i do dat?
- 22 20:28:43 Kaiyee: -_____ - (perplexed)
- 23 20:28:48 Ricky: thats how i talk!
- 24 20:28:50 Kaiyee: PUNK
- 25 20:28:52 Ricky: ahahaha
- 26 20:28:55 Ricky: SHY ASS
- 27 20:28:57 Kaiyee: o.o (puzzled)
- 28 20:29:02 Kaiyee: i aint shy -.- (matter-of-fact)
- 29 20:29:05 Ricky: lol (laugh out loud)
- 30 20:29:12 Ricky: i have to call my friend
- 31 20:29:15 Ricky: but i dont want to
- 32 20:29:19 Ricky: i dont like to call people
- 33 20:29:20 Ricky: -.- (matter-of-fact)
- 34 20:29:23 Kaiyee: me 2!

This excerpt contains a metacommentary on linguistic variation and verbal style couched in an adolescent form of banter. Although Kaiyee seems to be arguing with Ricky on what form of language would be more appropriate or easier to use, it is cast in a playful way, in line with the genre of teasing. Yet, this pretend argument highlights the two young people's meta-awareness of the effects of their orthographic choices in signaling their knowledge of and stances toward different conventions of English. These conventions include (a) standard written English (as demonstrated in the use of standard syntax and mostly standard spellings, especially in lines 1, 2, 3, 9, 23, 30–32); (b) African American Vernacular English associated with urban youth culture (as seen in the use of "diz/dis" to represent voiced TH-stopping in lines 11, 12, 14, 17, 19–21; absence of subject-auxiliary inversion and the use of habitual *be* in line 19; copula deletion in line 20; and the use of the compounding form *-ass* as an intensifier in line 26); and (c) IM adaptations of English to approximate speech, speed up response time, maintain the floor and interactional coherency, and generally signal a sense of creativity (e.g., abbreviations, short entries and sequential entries used to maintain the floor, lexical substitutions through the use of numbers or single letters, and the use of emoticons as a visual form of paralinguistic cue [Baron, 2003; Jacobs, 2005]; the predominant use of emoticons that have upright "faces" in Kaiyee's exchanges signifies an Asian influence, even as these emoticons are increasingly popularized in English-language online environments associated with Japanese animation and online gaming [see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emoticon, accessed January 31, 2009]).

Ricky and Kaiyee signal their cross-linguistic knowledge by bracketing the display of African American Vernacular English in largely standard English (lines 1–9, 23, 30–32). This is demonstrated by Ricky as he contrasts the use of the standard spelling "this" and the nonstandard spelling "diz" to symbolically differentiate the variety of English that he affiliates with from standard English or "proper grammar." The spelling "diz/dis" is prominent in hip-hop lyrics and serves an indexical function (Androutsopoulos, 2000) in this IM text to relate this nonstandard spelling to a larger set of conventions associated with African American Vernacular English and urban youth culture influenced by hip-hop.

It is difficult to evaluate Ricky's use of "nigga" in line 19 ("who diz nigga be"), which appeared only once in the IM exchanges analyzed in this study, without a contextualized knowledge of Ricky's background. The term *nigga* is fraught with complex racialized meaning, being both related to the racial epithet "nigger" and also reclaimed by some African Americans as a positive in-group term (Smitherman, 1999). Childs and Mallinson

(2006) found that the writing of the word “nigga,” with the orthographic representation of postvocalic *r*-lessness, was used as an in-group marker in the IM messages of a white teenager who was an integral member of a black community. Other researchers have found that Asian American youth, particularly those of Southeast Asian origin, use the linguistic resources of African American Vernacular English to mark their affiliation with other urban-identified teenagers of diverse ethnicities (Bucholtz, 2004; Chun, 2001; Reyes, 2005). Given Kaiyee’s knowledge of Ricky as a participant of hip-hop, it appears that Ricky’s display of African American Vernacular English in this instance serves to signal his affiliation with an urban youth culture.

In analyzing the other three excerpts of IM exchanges between Kaiyee and Ricky (the content of which revolved around references to each other, their friends and families, and online gaming), I found that Ricky incorporated features associated with African American Vernacular English in 7 out of 18 verbal entries that he made in the excerpt dated April 17, 5 out of 26 entries that he made in the excerpt dated May 17, and 7 out of 16 entries that he made in the excerpt dated July 4 (in calculating these verbal entries that Ricky made in the IM exchanges, I excluded the entries that only contained emoticons; ellipses; brief interjections, e.g., “haha”; or letter strings to signify gestures, e.g., “lol”). These linguistic features involve the use of *diz/dis*; habitual *be*; copula deletion (as in “she more chinese than khmai”; Khmai is a youthful and in-group synonym for Khmer, the romanization of the name for the majority ethnic group in Cambodia, and is commonly used among young people of Khmer descent in North America); zero marking of the third-person singular in present-tense verbs (as in “she speak khmai”); absence of subject-auxiliary inversion in questions (as in “why u always get in trouble by ur mom”); the compounding form *-ass* as an intensifier; and hip-hop expressions, such as “homeboiz,” “dont bite my style,” and “daz my thing.” In a later excerpt dated July 4, Kaiyee incorporated features of African American Vernacular English and hip-hop language in her dialogue with Ricky. Below is an excerpt of the dialogue:

- 1 13:58:24 Ricky: watchu gonna do today
- 2 13:58:37 Kaiyee: hmmm iono (short for I don’t know)
- 3 13:58:42 Ricky: lol (laugh out loud)
- 4 13:58:42 Kaiyee: maybe go out later
- 5 13:58:52 Kaiyee: aha imma start to celebrate my bday from today -.- (matter-of-fact)
- 6 13:58:54 Kaiyee: hahaha
- 7 13:59:03 Ricky: lol (laugh out loud)

- 8 13:59:09 Ricky: ill shoot a firework jus for u
- 9 13:59:10 Kaiyee: till tomorrow midnight -.- (matter-of-fact)
- 10 13:59:17 Ricky: and say diz dedicated to Kaiyee
- 11 13:59:20 Kaiyee: 😊 (smile)
- 12 13:59:25 Ricky: =] (smile)
- 13 13:59:46 Kaiyee: haha
- 14 13:59:52 Kaiyee: how are you recently o.O (wondering/puzzled)
- 15 13:59:54 Ricky: so proper now eh
- 16 13:59:55 Ricky: lol (laugh out loud)
- 17 14:00:00 Kaiyee: o.O (puzzled)
- 18 14:00:04 Kaiyee: i always be proper -.- (matter-of-fact)
- 19 14:00:09 Ricky: lol smart ass

Here we see Kaiyee using “imma” (line 5) instead of the standard English form “I’m going to” or informal speech form “I’m gonna.” Imma is popularized in hip-hop lyrics and has been shown to be adopted very occasionally and only in a playful manner in IM exchanges by middle class European American adolescents in Jacobs’s (2005) study. However, in this case, I found that Kaiyee used the term extensively in her IM exchanges, sometimes even when she was dialoguing with me on IM. In our reflection over this term, Kaiyee noted that she liked using it because her English-speaking online friends used it and she had seen it in song lyrics, such as in *Umbrella* (The Dream, Stewart, T., Harrell, K., & Jay-Z, 2007; the song is a mixed rhythm & blues/pop/rap song that topped the music charts worldwide in 2007), which was a favorite song of hers. Moreover, in the excerpt, Kaiyee showed that she could switch styles by using the habitual *be* in line 18 in response to Ricky’s teasing of her for sounding proper in the way she asked him, “how are you recently?” (lines 14–15).

By designing a hybrid variety of English that incorporates the standard orthography of written English, nonstandard orthography to represent the linguistic features of African American Vernacular English and hip-hop, and IM conventions to approximate colloquial speech, Kaiyee was constructing an English-speaking voice for herself and developing an affiliation with Asian Americans who participate in an urban-identified youth culture. This literacy practice and affiliation that Kaiyee developed in the textual environment of an online affinity community had allowed her to position herself beyond the social peripheral status of a new immigrant and, according to Kaiyee, had enabled her to interact more easily with other teenagers at school.

Multidialectal Interactions With Chinese Immigrant Peers

As described earlier, Kaiyee's peer group in her local community revolved around friends she made at school who had also immigrated from China. Kaiyee described the use of IM among her local friends as follows: "It makes me keep in touch with my friends and I get to know each other better. [Without IM] I'll have less chance to talk to my friends, um, and usually, if we decide to go out together, we usually talk on IM" (interview, March 17, 2007). The role of IM in allowing young people to be in touch, to stay in the know, to organize activities, and to nurture particular relationships that they value has also been documented by Lewis and Fabos (2005) and Jacobs (2005) among European American adolescents.

However, the sociolinguistic environment in the Chinese immigrant community contributed to a more complex situation among Kaiyee and her peers. Given that the local Chinese community was mostly Cantonese speaking and populated by successive waves of migration from the Guangdong province of China, Kaiyee found herself as a linguistic minority of sorts in this community. Hence, even though she was fluent in and proud of her Mandarin, and most Chinese residents in the community could speak Mandarin, Kaiyee was aware of the value and utility of Cantonese in her social relationships and the local economy of the Chinese immigrant community. In this regard, Kaiyee noted, "there is not a lot of Mandarin speakers here...I'd rather speak Cantonese more fluently" (interview, June 7, 2007). In mentioning a Chinese community organization that hired a large number of teenage interns and where she wanted to find a job, she remarked that most places "require their workers to speak fluently Cantonese and English. They don't mention you have to speak fluently Mandarin" (interview, June 21, 2007).

With this awareness of the social and economic cachet of Cantonese, Kaiyee was eager to improve her proficiency in the language. When communicating on IM with her friends, Kaiyee would choose to type in Cantonese at times because, in her words, "I think it's getting more close to people who are Cantonese...I just feel it's interesting to speak Cantonese to people" (interview, June 7, 2007). She noted that she was learning to speak Cantonese at school from listening to her friends and learning how to type Cantonese from their IM exchanges.

The orthography of Cantonese writing includes the use of both standard and nonstandard Chinese characters. Standard Chinese characters are used to represent lexical items that are common to both Cantonese and Modern Standard Chinese. Nonstandard characters are used to represent words that are specific to the Cantonese dialect. Hence, when Kaiyee typed in Cantonese on IM

with her friends, she was acquiring a set of logographic conventions for representing Cantonese in writing. Even though I have focused on the use of different Chinese dialects among Kaiyee and her friends in the foregoing discussion, it needs to be noted that Kaiyee also used English with some of her local friends. Within the scope of this article, I have chosen to focus on how Kaiyee negotiated a multidialectal Mandarin/Cantonese voice with her Chinese-speaking peers.²

In the four excerpts of IM exchanges between Kaiyee and Dawei that are analyzed, Cantonese writing appeared in 2 out of 42 verbal entries in the excerpt dated May 24, 18 out of 43 entries in the excerpt dated June 7, 3 out of 45 entries in the excerpt dated June 23, and 10 out of 46 entries in the excerpt dated July 18 (in calculating these verbal entries, I excluded the entries that only contained emoticons, ellipses, or brief verbal interjections [e.g., 噢uh, 嗯mhm, 哈哈haha] that are unclear in regard to their status as Cantonese or Mandarin). The rest of the entries in these excerpts were written predominantly in Mandarin, except for a few proper nouns and terms in English. Although it seems obvious that Mandarin would be used more frequently in these two young people's IM communications given that both of them received schooling in Mandarin in China, the extent of use of Cantonese in their IM exchanges was quite significant. Moreover, in the two excerpts where Cantonese was less used, it was Kaiyee who wrote in Cantonese in both of the entries that contained Cantonese in the excerpt dated May 24 and two of three entries that contained Cantonese in the excerpt dated June 23. An extract of Kaiyee's IM exchange with Dawei dated June 7 is shown below. Prior to this exchange, the two young people had not spoken for a few days because of an argument they had had. A day before this exchange, Dawei had sent an IM message written in Cantonese to Kaiyee when she wasn't online and asked that they get over the argument and stop avoiding each other. In the excerpt below, Mandarin is indicated with regular font and Cantonese is indicated with bold font. Glosses of emoticons appear in parentheses. Translations of the Mandarin and Cantonese appear in brackets.

- 1 20:03:34 D: **昨天发你的.....懂我意思麻?**
[the message I sent you yesterday.....you got my meaning?]
- 2 20:03:40 Kaiyee: 噢...
[uh...]
- 3 20:04:03 Kaiyee: **你do乜用廣東話講啊。**
[how come you said it in Cantonese]
- 4 20:04:04 Kaiyee: -- (slightly perplexed)
- 5 20:04:14 D: 國語說出來怪怪的
[it sounds weird to say it in Mandarin]

6 20:04:19 D: 你懂吧?
[you got it?]

7 20:04:22 Kaiyee: 噢噢。明白
[uhuh. I understand]

8 20:04:32 D: 真的懂。?? 厉害...
[you really got it. ?? You're good...]

9 20:04:37 Kaiyee: 😕 (puzzled)

10 20:04:43 D: .. 真的懂吧?
[you really got it, right?]

11 20:04:49 Kaiyee: 當然啦 -_- (slightly perplexed)
[of course]

12 20:05:01 D: 就是没必要这样麻对不
对..... 好幼的
[it's like there is no need to be like this right.....so childish]

13 20:05:17 Kaiyee: 嗯。
[mhm]

14 20:05:23 Kaiyee: 聽日你返唔返學啊
[are you going to school tomorrow]

15 20:05:31 D:我听日吾返学
[.....i'm not going to school tomorrow]

16 20:05:37 D: 返学无野做
[there is nothing to do at school]

17 20:05:41 Kaiyee: 噢。好多人都唔返
[uh. a lot of people are not going]

18 20:05:43 D: 你他媽的广东话真厉害
[damn, your Cantonese is really good]

19 20:05:45 D: 好犀利!
[so good!]

20 20:05:45 Kaiyee: 啊哈哈
[ahahaha]

21 20:05:49 D: 个个都唔返
[everybody is not going]

22 20:06:00 D: 无senior返...有一个...
yukong
[no senior is going...one person is...yukong]

23 20:06:08 Kaiyee: -_____-(perplexed)

24 20:06:35 D: 所以今日我咪主动咁同
你讲野咯
[that's why today i just stepped up to talk to you]

25 20:06:42 D: 我都覺得好主动嘎啦.. 我平
時都吾主动
[i feel like i'm taking a big step already.. i don't usually make the first move]

26 20:07:18 Kaiyee: 知啦。其實好多次我都想同
你講野。又唔知定開口
-_- (perplexed)
[i know. actually i've been meaning to talk to you many times. but i didn't know how to say it.]

27 20:07:26 Kaiyee: 嗯嗯。你長大了 -。- (matter-of-fact)
[mhm. you've grown up]

28 20:07:35 D: 吾知点开口mar
[.... didn't know how to say it mar]

29 20:07:45 D: 对我长大了。我成熟好多
了!~~~~
[you're right i've grown up.. i've matured a lot!~~~~]

In this excerpt, there are multiple orthographic conventions being used: (a) standard Chinese orthography to represent Mandarin; (b) standard and nonstandard orthography to represent Cantonese (including the use of logographic forms, i.e., Chinese characters, and one instance of romanization in line 28); (c) nonstandard orthography (character and romanization) to represent Taishanese, a dialect in the same dialect family as Cantonese that is spoken in Taishan, a coastal county of Guangdong province (though the two dialects are not entirely mutually intelligible; Cantonese serves as a high-prestige lingua franca in the region), seen in the interrogative pronoun in line 3 “do乜” (*dou moot*, how come); (d) simplified Chinese characters (used by Dawei) and traditional Chinese characters (used by Kaiyee); (e) proper nouns written in English (“senior,” “yukong”) related to the young people’s experience in American school; and (f) conventions popularized in IM and other forms of electronic discourse, for example, the use of romanization to represent Cantonese words and morphemes (Lam, 2004; C.K.M. Lee, 2007), punctuation being used less often and, when used, sometimes employed for its symbolic meaning (e.g., ellipses to signal pauses, hesitation, and trailing off of speech).

Overall, Cantonese is used as a means of self-disclosure or intimacy (Dawei’s initiation of the use of Cantonese to seek reconciliation), expression of solidarity (Kaiyee’s choice to respond in Cantonese and continue its use further along), and, ultimately, to enact a rapprochement between the two young people in this exchange. Kaiyee’s utterance in line 3 (“你do乜用廣東話講啊,” how come you said it in Cantonese) seems to question/protest Dawei’s use of Cantonese in his prior message (revealing the assumption that Mandarin is the default language to use) but at the same time acknowledges her understanding through her own use of Cantonese. In addition, her adoption of the Taishanese interrogative pronoun “do乜” (*dou moot*, how come),

which differs slightly from its Cantonese equivalent “做乜” (*jou mat*), serves to signal her understanding of Dawei’s language, given that Dawei’s family was originally from Taishan, as were some of Kaiyee’s other Cantonese-speaking peers. After a series of confirmation checks and responses initiated by Dawei to make sure that Kaiyee understood his message (lines 6–11), Kaiyee enacts her competence in written Cantonese by writing in Cantonese on a different topic (line 14), to which Dawei responds likewise in Cantonese. This written (literate) performance of Kaiyee’s Cantonese proficiency triggers Dawei’s multiple exclamations in praise of her Cantonese fluency (lines 18, 19). Dawei then continues writing several lines in Cantonese, first on the immediately preceding topic of who would be attending school the next day, and then back to the original topic of getting the two of them back on talking terms. Kaiyee responds likewise in Cantonese about her similar desire and hesitancy to talk to Dawei.

Within this exchange, we also see some indication of corrective feedback of written Cantonese provided by Dawei. In line 26, Kaiyee incorrectly uses the character 定 *ding* to represent a Cantonese morpheme meaning “how to,” as the character doesn’t match the sound of the morpheme. Dawei recasts the representation to 点 *dim*—a more conventional character for representing the morpheme—with a jocular/teasing tone that is indicated by a switch to romanization (*mar*) to represent the utterance-final particle (嘛) that signals a questioning intonation (in C.K.M. Lee’s [2007] research on IM practices among young adults in Hong Kong, she noted that the use of Cantonese romanization was sometimes associated by her informants with a sense of playfulness and fun). Such a jocular tone may serve to enact a sense of intimacy in the process of rapprochement between the two young people and may also help to attenuate the implicit correction made to Kaiyee’s writing of the particular Cantonese morpheme.

By using Cantonese to communicate on a difficult and sensitive aspect of their relationship, the two young people are designing through writing a multidialectal basis for negotiating their friendship to achieve mutual understanding and solidarity. Through her IM exchanges with friends such as Dawei, Kaiyee was developing and practicing a literacy in Cantonese that enabled her to navigate social relations in her local peer group and the larger linguistic economy of the Chinese immigrant community. Kaiyee’s adoption of a multidialectal voice in the context of the Chinese diaspora is also symbolically indicated by her use of traditional Chinese characters, which are commonly used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and most overseas Chinese communities, rather than the simplified characters that she had learned and used while growing up in China. Whereas she tended to switch between the use of simplified and traditional

characters in writing on IM with her immigrant peers, she would maintain the use of simplified forms when interacting with her peers in China.

Transnational Relations and Regional/Cultural Linguistic Affiliation

The people in China with whom Kaiyee kept in touch through IM included her friends, former schoolmates, cousins, and some online friends she had met on Chinese discussion forums. Among Kaiyee and her friends and cousins in Shanghai, their IM exchanges served to keep them abreast of the events happening in their lives across the two countries. Because some of Kaiyee’s friends and former schoolmates from the vocational secondary school that she had attended in China were either poised for entry into the workplace or had already started their careers, Kaiyee was able to learn, through their exchanges on IM, what the economic and societal environment in Shanghai was like from the perspective of this sector of youth and young adults. Maintaining contact with her friends in China not only allowed her to learn about the happenings and changes in Shanghai from their perspective but also provided her with the social connections that would facilitate her return visits to China: “they’re my good friends and if I go back to China, I will go out with them” (interview, March 17, 2007).

Kaiyee and her friends’ written communications on IM were mostly carried out through a mix of Mandarin and Shanghainese. Even though writing in Shanghainese is almost invisible in the print media of China, the recent emergence of Shanghainese writing in online environments had allowed Kaiyee to acquire written usage in the dialect. This new form of literacy is seen in Kaiyee’s induction into the use of written Shanghainese when she started using IM at the age of 13:

Before, like a couple years ago [meaning some years ago], there was no Shanghainese being typed. And people started typing it, and I feel it was interesting, and it’s like, it’s for people, it’s good for Shanghainese [Shanghai people] and I just typed it. At first I saw my friend type it in um, netcafe. And he chatting with, he was chatting with his friends and when he typed it, it’s in Shanghainese, like some words in Shanghainese. It’s just like he just typed the way and pronounced the way we talk. And I think it’s interesting, and more and more people start typing like that...I just used Mandarin to talk before that. (interview, March 17, 2007)

Through their electronic practices, Kaiyee joined other people of Shanghai in popularizing written conventions for their regional dialect. At the same time, she was trying to keep up with the new Shanghainese terms and colloquialisms used by her peers as part of the youth culture in Shanghai; as she noted, “the young people

are creating more and more words” (interview, August 21, 2007).

Hence, by developing transnational ties with her friends and relatives in Shanghai, Kaiyee was able to access and nurture the social relations and linguistic resources that kept her connected to the social, economic, and cultural changes in her hometown. This connection is in no small part related to a regional and cultural identity that is celebrated among Shanghainese people (Xiao-quan, 2001). Kaiyee affirmed this regional/cultural identity as follows in one of our interviews:

E: There wasn't much writing before, but now people can write in Shanghainese. How do you feel about this?

K: To be a Shanghainese?

E: Yeah, and to write in Shanghainese.

K: Yeah, yeah, yeah, really proud [laughs]...And if on the BBS (discussion forums), uhm, we find a person who's Shanghainese and then we'll, we'll write in Shanghainese, and we'll feel more, more **亲切** (*qin-qie*, a sense of closeness) [spoken in Mandarin]. (interview, August 21, 2007)

Among the childhood friends that Kaiyee had kept in contact with primarily through IM was Rong, an 18-year-old young woman who was on the verge of entering the workplace during the time of this study. In the IM log record of her exchange with Rong that Kaiyee shared with us, the topics of conversation ranged from social banter, venting of problems with family members, comments on each other's recent photos that they had exchanged through file sharing on IM, to some serious discussion of the socioeconomic situation and career opportunities in Shanghai. An excerpt of Kaiyee's exchange with Rong dated June 20 is shown below. This IM dialogue occurred a few weeks after Rong had graduated from the vocational secondary school in Shanghai where the two young people had been classmates. Prior to this segment of the exchange, Kaiyee and Rong had been conversing on the kinds of jobs that Rong was looking for. Included in the conversation was the amount of income that Rong could expect to obtain from the jobs for which she was applying. They both acknowledged that the income range that Rong mentioned was relatively low, and Kaiyee noted that her cousin in Shanghai was also living on a similar income. This observation led to Kaiyee's remark at the beginning of the excerpt that it seemed hard to make a living in Shanghai. In this excerpt, Mandarin is indicated with regular font, and Shanghainese is indicated with larger bold font for the sake of clarity. Glosses of emoticons appear in parentheses. The correct form of a typo is indicated in parentheses in line 12. Translations appear in brackets.

1 10:42:26 Kaiyee: **听上去好像老难生存下去
额样子。**。。。

[it sounds like it's really hard to make a living...]

2 10:43:31 Rong: **恩**

[mhm]

3 10:43:33 Rong: **上海人的饭碗**

[the bread and butter of Shanghai people]

4 10:43:36 Rong: **都被外地人抢了**

[has been snatched by people from outside (other parts of China)]

5 10:43:40 Rong: **都到上海来了**

[they've all come to Shanghai]

6 10:43:43 Rong: **表面上**

[on the surface]

7 10:43:47 Rong: **RMB升值**

[RMB (Renminbi, official currency in Mainland China) has gone up in value]

8 10:43:54 Rong: **其实都被外国人赚走了**

[in fact the profits have gone to people from other countries]

9 10:44:04 Kaiyee: **哇哇。你功课老好额嘛**

[wow. you're so well-studied]

10 10:44:09 Rong: **报纸看看 新闻看看**

[just looking up the paper and the news somewhat]

11 10:44:20 Rong: **多了解下形势嘛**

[to learn more about the situation]

12 10:44:39 Rong: **多(对)以后创业有帮助嘛**

[it'll be helpful in the future when I start a business]

13 10:44:42 Kaiyee: **我都不知道我以后要做什么**

[i don't know what i'm going to do in the future]

14 10:44:46 Rong: **你学什么专业**饿****

[what kind of specialty are you studying for]

15 10:44:48 Kaiyee: **老迷茫额**

[it's all so uncertain]

16 10:44:51 Rong: **真**饿**想做生意的话 好叫说**

[if you really want to go into business, you'd better say it]

17 10:44:59 Rong: **回来 偶和你一起做**

[come back, you and I can be partners]

18 10:44:59 Kaiyee: **。。。没专业**

[。。。no specialty]

19 10:45:01 Rong: **外国来的户籍**

[with foreign residency]

- 20 10:45:06 Rong: 大学生
[a college graduate]
- 21 10:45:09 Rong: 上海的政策老好的
[Shanghai policies look really good]
- 22 10:45:15 Rong: 老多优惠饿
[there are lots of benefits]
- 23 10:45:20 Kaiyee: 是伐?
[is that right?]
- 24 10:45:22 Rong: 恩
[mhm]
- 25 10:45:27 Rong: 一起从小店开始
[we can start with a small shop]
- 26 10:45:29 Kaiyee: 噱夸张
[sounds so incredible]
- 27 10:45:39 Rong: 就是鼓励外国人来投资吖
[that's to encourage people from other countries to come to invest]
- 28 10:45:59 Rong: 10年世博都要开了
[Expo 2010 is just around the corner]
- 29 10:46:09 Kaiyee: 呵呵。那时候我差不多大学毕业了。 - (matter-of-fact)
[ah. by that time i'll be almost graduating from college]
- 30 10:46:13 Rong: 你来上海投资嘛
[you come to Shanghai to invest]
- 31 10:46:17 Rong: 到时候我也有社会经验了
[by that time i'll already have some social experience]

The orthographic conventions that go into the making of this written dialogue include the following: (a) standard Chinese orthography to represent Mandarin; (b) standard and nonstandard orthography to represent Shanghainese; (c) conventions associated with IM and other forms of electronic discourse, such as the minimal use of punctuation, use of spacing in place of punctuation, and the adoption of a newly popularized word 偶 *ou* (line 17) for the first-person pronoun in Mandarin that would conventionally be represented as 我 *wo*.

The still nascent form of Shanghainese writing promoted through electronic communication is seen in the less extensive adoption of Shanghainese writing in Kaiyee's exchange with Rong as compared with the use of Cantonese exemplified in the previous excerpt of Kaiyee's IM dialogue with Dawei. In marking the characters that represent Shanghainese in this and other excerpts, we only marked a whole sentence in an IM entry as Shanghainese when the sentence could be read entirely in Shanghainese. As long as we found in

the sentence one Mandarin word that was used in place of a colloquial Shanghainese word, only the individual characters that were used to represent Shanghainese-specific morphemes are marked as such. Hence, in the lines where only individual Shanghainese morphemes are marked, the use of Shanghainese and Mandarin in these sentences might actually be much more blended than is indicated by the markings, as some standard Chinese characters could also be used to represent lexical items that are common to both Mandarin and Shanghainese.

For example, a case of multiple blending is seen in line 16, where the second clause of the sentence (“好叫说 *hoa-jioa-se*,” which could be translated as “you'd better say it”) and one particle in the first clause (饿 *e*) are markedly Shanghainese. The lexical item in the first clause that ruled out the interpretation of this clause as entirely Shanghainese is the second particle in the clause (的 *de*), which is a Mandarin word. The rest of the lexical items in this clause could be read in either Mandarin or Shanghainese. Hence, the exact point(s) in the clause where the switch from Shanghainese to Mandarin occurs is not transparent or clear-cut. In fact, the way that Rong switched between the use of the Shanghainese particle (饿 *e*) and an equivalent particle in Mandarin (的 *de*) by first using the Shanghainese particle and then the Mandarin particle, even in the same clause in line 16, suggests a process of conscious design of blending Shanghainese and Mandarin in these hybrid dialectal utterances. Such a form of switching between the two particles is also seen in the sequential phrases in line 21 (“老好的 *loa-hao-de*,” really good) and line 22 (“老多优惠饿 *loa-tu-yeu-we-e*,” lots of benefits).

Of the 200 entries of Kaiyee's exchange with Rong that were analyzed, 33 entries contain the use of both Mandarin and Shanghainese-specific words, and 15 entries can be read entirely in Shanghainese. The blending of Shanghainese and Mandarin in their IM exchange suggests a design process to incorporate Shanghainese elements in their written communication even though the majority of the text is written in Mandarin, the language through which Kaiyee and Rong acquired literacy in China in a sociopolitical environment where the Shanghainese dialect was rarely represented in written media. The nascent development and popularization of Shanghainese orthography in electronic discourse seems to signal the assertion of Shanghainese identity among the younger generations, both native residents of the city and its diaspora (cf. a news article on sina.com.cn, a website in China, entitled “海外年轻人玩转上海方言 [Overseas young people having fun with the Shanghai dialect]” [Qian, 2005], which describes the recent rise of the use of the Shanghai dialect in Web-based electronic communication among both local and overseas youth of Shanghainese heritage). Through her

digital practices, Kaiyee was joining these young people in the use and propagation of Shanghainese writing and keeping in contact with new linguistic expressions.

Through her IM exchanges with her friends and cousins in Shanghai, Kaiyee was able to gather an understanding of how these young people, most of whom were not able to receive higher education, perceived their career and economic prospects within the increasingly competitive job market of Shanghai. In the particular exchange examined here, Kaiyee is positioned as a potential returnee to Shanghai whose perceived privileged status as a future college graduate with foreign citizenship would benefit both Rong and Kaiyee herself in staking out their entrepreneurial careers in Shanghai. Her dual-subject positions as someone who was a native of Shanghai and might “come back” to the city (line 17) and as someone who has residency rights in another country (line 19), as constructed in the IM text, marks Kaiyee as a potential transnational actor who could mobilize her multiple ties in crafting her future pathway.

Discussion and Implications

This study examines how an immigrant youth uses IM to negotiate social relationships with multiple linguistic and cultural communities across countries and how her participation in these multilingual and transgeographic online networks affects her literacy use and learning. As an in-depth case analysis, the aim of this study was not to generalize from its findings but to expand and provide alternative visions of literacy development and suggest some productive analytical perspectives for further comparative study, particularly in regard to understanding the relation of language and literacy development to new forms of ethnic and linguistic diversity mediated by digital communications.

As discussed earlier in this article, the multiliteracies perspective has emphasized the need to broaden our understanding of literacy to account for the multiplicity of textual practices associated with cultural and linguistic diversity and multimedia communication in a globalizing society. Such diversity of textual practices is particularly salient in transnational contexts, as people negotiate relationships across local and distant territories using multiple languages and modes of communication (Jacquemet, 2005). This study builds upon these perspectives by examining the multiliteracies that are developed in the context of transnational migration and digitally mediated networks. Our analysis of the case of the focal youth shows the diverse sets of networks that she developed and sustained through IM and other online media—networks that include her local peer group in a Chinese immigrant community, online affinity relations with English-speaking Asian American youths

in the United States, and transnational social ties with her peers in Shanghai. Such multilayered and dispersed social networks are associated with the multiple lifeworlds that she had to navigate as she developed and maintained simultaneous affiliations with diverse social and cultural communities across national borders. Through her IM practices that were embedded within these communities, Kaiyee accessed and used a range of linguistic and semiotic resources in constructing her simultaneous affiliations across borders. A transnational view on migration and digital communication, therefore, provides the analytical vantage point for seeing how Kaiyee’s multiliteracies development involves participating in an expanding set of linguistic and semiotic practices associated with diverse communities across her native and adopted societies.

Indeed, Kaiyee’s linguistic and literate identity cannot be simply encapsulated in our traditional problematic of majority–minority relations or in the shuttling between and tension between the dominant societal language (standard American English) and her home language (which might easily be interpreted as a monolithic “Chinese” language rather than the multiple Chinese dialects that she navigated both locally and transnationally). Her linguistic and literate repertoire includes standard American English, hip-hop English, the Shanghainese dialect that she used in her family, Cantonese and Mandarin that predominated in her immigrant community, and both Mandarin and Shanghainese that connected her to people and events in China, particularly her hometown Shanghai. Such a linguistic and literate repertoire is associated with the diverse multilingual milieu experienced by the youth across local and translocal social spaces.

Moreover, these languages were often used in mixed and blended forms in her IM writing as she navigated the complex linguistic and semiotic economies within which her social networks were embedded. These linguistic and semiotic economies include the cachet of African American Vernacular English and hip-hop vernacular in the multiethnic urban American youth culture, the historical dominance of Cantonese in a local Chinese immigrant community that was at the same time multilingual and multidialectal, and the new assertion of Shanghainese writing in electronic discourse in a sociopolitical environment where the Shanghainese dialect had been suppressed as a medium of literacy. Hence, the multiliteracies of Kaiyee’s IM practices involve not only crisscrossing multiple digital interfaces, genres (adolescent banter, rapprochement, career talk), and modes of communication (verbal and visual modalities, different networking and technological platforms) as observed by researchers of digital literacy (Kress, 2003; Lewis & Fabos, 2005) but also reading and writing across these surfaces, genres, and modes with

respect to the multiple linguistic and cultural communities, each with its prevalent and valued forms of linguistic and semiotic practices, in which she participated.

Given our analysis of Kaiyee's negotiation of the complex semiotic practices in her digital networks across countries, I suggest that for further development in our understanding of language and literacy learning among migrant and multilingual youths, researchers would need to take into account translocal forms of multilingualism mediated by networked technologies and an expanded view of the literate repertoire and cultural resources of migrant youth.

Translocal Multilingualism and Literate Repertoire Across Borders

Building on prior research of literacy practices in transnational contexts of migration, as discussed previously in this article, this case study of a Chinese migrant youth shows that the linguistic and literate repertoire of this youth needs to be understood not only with respect to the local migrant community with which she was affiliated but also in relation to her transnational connections and social ties. At the same time, this youth was developing and enacting her social and symbolic affiliations with the pan-ethnic category of Asians and multiethnic urban youth culture in American society through an online affinity environment. An important finding of this study is that the multilayered and multilingual identifications of this youth across social and geographical spaces were maintained and developed simultaneously through the use of multiple semiotic and communication tools. In other words, what we see in the case of this youth is that a digital medium, like IM, works in conjunction with other modes and contexts of communication—face-to-face exchanges with her local peers, the history of relationship with her peers and family in Shanghai, online game and discussion forums with her Asian American peers and online friends in China—to constitute a dispersed set of multilingual networks from which the youth developed various social and linguistic resources that are functional in her life. Such synchronic movement across social networks also represents the desire of the youth to develop the literate repertoire that would enable her to thrive in multiple cultural and linguistic communities and mobilize resources within these communities.

The increased intensity and expanded scale of multilingual transactions that are carried out in tandem across local and translocal settings and diverse communicative media provide the context for rethinking the kinds of literate resources or “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) that young people of migrant backgrounds may bring to our schools. We need a broadened understanding of how these young people's

textual resources are derived from diverse linguistic and cultural communities across national borders. We also need to consider how these textual resources mediate young people's access to different kinds of knowledge that come from diverse communities across local and translocal spaces. In the case of the focal youth, her textual exchanges on IM with her peers in China had enabled her to maintain interpersonal relationships and keep abreast of the social and economic changes in her hometown across long distances. Her digitally mediated textual activities were also used to facilitate her ability to navigate across the multiple communities that she affiliated with in the United States, including her local community and an urban youth environment.

An expanded view of the literate or textual resources of young people of migrant backgrounds would lead us to reconsider how our educational practices may enhance the literacy development of these young people and leverage their linguistic and cultural repertoire as resources for learning. In other words, how may we envisage literacy education that recognizes the affiliations that young people of migrant backgrounds have with diverse linguistic and cultural communities and promotes their ability to draw from the social and textual resources in these communities for their learning? This question is especially pertinent among youth who bring with them experiences and perspectives that are derived from their multiple identifications across countries, although these experiences and perspectives often go unacknowledged in our educational institutions. As Lo Bianco (2000) suggested, “Like spoken language, diversity in the plural literacy practices of minority children is often relegated to the margins of their lives. Yet they have within them the power to open up new intellectual worlds which are, at the moment, linguistically and intellectually closed to us” (p. 101).

The intellectualization of the cross-border and multilingual resources of migrant students is especially relevant in the context of a networked society. As discussed earlier, a range of researchers of new media and literacy have pointed out that the literacy associated with knowledge making in our contemporary world is increasingly mediated digitally through various kinds of social, cultural, and semiotic networks (e.g., Gee, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Luke, 2003). In particular, building on the work of technology theorist Michael Schrage (2001), Lankshear and Knobel argued that digital technologies may be better conceived as enabling new forms of relationship to develop rather than simply providing access to vast bodies of information. In other words, the value of the Internet and new technologies may lie less in their myriad arrays of searchable information and more in their potential to enable the (re)designing and (re)configuring of social relationships to facilitate new ways of producing and

sharing knowledge. As we have seen, the youth in this study was already using digital media to facilitate her participation in multiple social and cultural communities across borders and to design her relational networks to gather linguistic and semiotic resources. A pedagogy that draws on the multilayered affiliations and literate repertoire of youth migrants like Kaiyee would need to consider how these social, cultural, and semiotic networks can be mobilized to enhance learning.

Although this study does not provide an empirical basis for offering pedagogical recommendations, I would simply venture briefly to speculate that one possible approach to redesigning social relationships to promote knowledge making is to leverage the cross-border social networks and multilingual literate repertoire of youth migrants as intellectual resources for approaching problems from multiple perspectives or vantage points. Such an approach would involve a transnational framing of relevant curriculum topics (e.g., immigration, the global economy, environmental health) that would allow students to mobilize their developing skills in multiple languages to learn about these issues from various local, translocal, and transnational points of view. We could ask students to gather perspectives on how these issues are affecting the diverse communities with which they are affiliated in the local setting; how these issues are represented in the U.S. media; and how they are portrayed in the print, satellite television, and online news media in the students' countries of origin and perceived through the experience of the students' friends and relatives in those countries. Other scholars of immigration and education have also noted the importance of drawing on the transnational experience and multilingual skills of immigrant students to enlarge the range of perspectives and textual resources that are used for knowledge making in a global era (Sánchez, 2007b; Suárez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007).

Further research conducted at diverse geographical sites with participants who come from a variety of migratory backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and genders would allow us to understand the different ways and extent to which youth migrants negotiate transnational relationships and literacy practices through the use of new communication technologies. Although migrants residing in industrialized nations may enjoy relatively convenient and affordable access to the Internet, their likelihood of communicating across countries is also dependent on the extent to which their friends and family living elsewhere can gain access to the attendant mode of communication technology. Hence, comparative studies of youth migrants who originate from different countries and different parts of a country (e.g., rural vs. urban) with varying technological infrastructures would shed light on the constraints and opportunities of digitally

mediated literacy practices in different migratory contexts. In cases where a lack of technological infrastructure or close personal ties to the place of origin (especially for youth who migrated at an early age) limit the extent to which these youth engage in direct interpersonal communication across borders, researchers could explore how some of these youth participate in transnational online activities through accessing social and information websites based in their native countries (J.S. Lee, 2006). Among youth who are second generation or migrated early in life, there is some indication from sociological and media studies (H.M. Lee, 2006; Panagakos, 2003) that their transnational digital networks may be more dispersed across a wider migrant diaspora than simply clear bilateral ties between the countries of origin and settlement. Hence, empirical studies with a diverse range of participants would provide a broader picture of the transnational character of the literacy practices of youth migrants and children of immigrants. These and other investigations of the literacies of transnational digital communications of migrant youth hold the potential to expand our vision of how young people of diverse backgrounds are engaging with new media technologies and to contribute to the design of pedagogies that leverage the linguistic and semiotic resources of these young people to make literacy education not only more relevant to the experiences of transnational and multilingual youth but more relevant to a globalized future that many youth will be living in.

Notes

¹What I call an *entry* here is a typed message that is transmitted when a user hits the return key on the computer. It is the most basic message unit that is brought to the attention of one's IM partner and that may prompt a response from the partner. Others who approach IM discourse from perspectives of conversation analysis have called this message unit a "turn" (Baron, 2004) or an "utterance" (Jones & Schieffelin, 2009). Because there are messages that may only contain an iconic representation (e.g., a smiley or emoticon, or an ellipsis that indicates pause or hesitation), the status of these messages as utterances in a conversational sense is debatable. Given that the focus of analysis of the IM exchanges in this article is on linguistic and orthographic representation rather than conversational turn-taking, I use the term *entry* as a basis for a quantitative description of the number of message units of IM exchanges that were included in the study. I use the term subsequently in this article when I discuss the extent of presence of particular linguistic and orthographic features across a corpus of message units.

²Kaiyee used the pinyin method to input Chinese characters on the computer, as did many of her peers who came from China and had learned the pinyin system of romanization for Mandarin early on in their schooling. Common pinyin implementations on the computer allow the user to input Chinese characters by entering the pinyin of a Chinese character and then presenting the user with a list of characters with that pronunciation that are prioritized based on the linguistic context of the sentence and prior usage statistics. Because the pinyin method is available on many widely used computer operating systems, Kaiyee could switch the language mode of an IM message from English to Chinese with the touch of a control key. Kaiyee used the pinyin method as well to enter characters

for the other Chinese dialects (Cantonese and Shanghainese) that she used in her IM exchanges, given that the character database of pinyin contains most of the characters in these dialects. A newly designed input method based on Shanghainese romanization was just emerging at the time of this research, and the input methods based on Cantonese require the user to learn Cantonese romanization schemes, of which Kaiyee was not knowledgeable. The typing of these dialects with the pinyin method means that Kaiyee had to map two phonetic systems for the characters that she used—the Cantonese or Shanghainese phonetic system for contextualizing the meaning of the characters in Cantonese or Shanghainese and the Mandarin phonetic system for finding the characters through the pinyin input method. Such cross-dialectal dexterity is a literacy skill that is developed out of a mostly grassroots movement to popularize dialect writing in online contexts in China and the Chinese diaspora.

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