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L2 Literacy and the Design of the Self: A Case Study of a Teenager Writing on the Internet

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This article presents a case study that uses ethnographic and discourse analytic methods to examine how electronic textual experiences in ESL figure in the identity formation and literacy development of the learner. First, the article reviews some recent work in literacy studies, L2 learning, and computer-mediated communication to provide a conceptual basis for studying discursive practices and identity formation in L2 learning. The results of a case study of a Chinese immigrant teenager's written correspondence with a transnational group of peers on the Internet then show how this correspondence relates to his developing identity in the use of English. This study develops the notion of textual identity for understanding how texts are composed and used to represent and reposition identity in the networked computer media. It also raises critical questions on literacy and cultural belonging in the present age of globalization and transborder relations.

Current research on L2 literacy (e.g., McKay, 1993, 1996; Kern, 1995) has demonstrated the contextual nature of literacy practices and raised questions about how literacy experiences in a nonnative language influence the identity formation of the learner. The relation between identity and literacy development in TESOL warrants critical examination in the present age of globalization as "virtual communities" emerge on the Internet and cultural products, symbols, and images circulate transnationally. How do communities on the Internet act as contexts for L2 literacy use and development? What kinds of textual forms and cultural discourses are used and developed in these literacy practices? How are learners' identities in the L2 constructed through networked computer media? These are some of the questions that guided this study.

In this article, I introduce constructs from L2 literacy research and communication studies to develop a conceptual basis for studying literacy development in ESL in the contexts created through electronic

media. The theoretical concepts relevant to this study are *identity*, as described in L2 literacy research (e.g., Peirce, 1995); *voice*, which refers to the construction of roles and identities through discursive choices (Kramsch, in press); *design*, the use of representational resources to construct meaning (Kress, 2000); and *self* as a discursive formation (Kramsch, in press). These constructs are seen in action through Goffman's (1959, 1981) dramaturgical view of interaction, that is, role play and drama, in Internet-mediated environments. I then present results from a case study of a Chinese immigrant teenager's correspondence with a transnational group of peers on the Internet. I examine how this correspondence relates to his identity formation and literacy development in ESL: how he constructs a textual identity by composing texts and using them to represent and reposition identity in the cross-cultural milieu of Internet communication. The analysis shows the use of a variety of discourses and a distancing of the narrative and biographical selves by the focal student in constructing his social relations with a transborder network of Asian youth. This study raises critical issues in textuality and identity for literacy education and research in TESOL as the world enters an increasingly networked, electronic, and globalized age.

LITERACY IN CONTEXTS

The majority of research in L2 literacy has focused on the cognitive and linguistic demands of reading and writing in a nonnative language, examining L2 reading and writing from a psycholinguistic perspective to unveil the mental operations involved and identify learners' processes and strategies with L2 texts.¹ Other research (e.g., Christie, 1999; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Hasan & Williams, 1996; Hyon, 1996; Swales, 1990) has broadened to include the study of genres in academic contexts, in which the theory of genre varies from linguistically based to socially based views. Research within the New Literacy Studies (e.g., Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Baynham, 1995; Gee, 1996; Luke, 1996; Street, 1993) extends beyond both approaches by illuminating the contextual nature of reading and writing, and the way literacy is intimately bound up with particular sociocultural contexts, institutions, and social relationships. As a socially situated practice, literacy appears in multiple forms that have political and ideological significance; hence, it is more appropriate to

¹ See, for example, Auerbach and Paxton (1997), Grabe (1991), Lee and Schallert (1997), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), and Raimes (1991) for reviews and recent research; see Pennycook (1996) for a critique.

refer to *literacies* in multiple manifestations that bear no universal consequences. From this perspective, the cognitive skills, rhetorical styles, and interpretive strategies involved in any act of reading or writing are largely influenced by the prevailing beliefs, practices, and social relationships in a particular institutional setting or sociocultural group (Cushman, 1998; Heath, 1983; Ivanic, 1998; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Literacy learning is understood as a process by which the individual is socialized for group membership in specific literate communities and, in turn, participates in shaping the social practices of these communities. Accordingly, a central construct is the language user's *identity*, for in practicing any form of literacy, the user is at the same time enacting a particular social role and membership in a particular group.

One of the more influential theorizations on literacy and identity is found in Gee's (1996, 2000) work. Gee uses the term *Discourses* (with a capital *D*) to refer to the many socially specific practices of literacy in society, which include using oral and written language in tandem with other symbol systems, such as thinking, believing, valuing, acting, interacting, gesturing, and dressing, and using tools and technology. Gee (2000) argues that

a Discourse is composed of distinctive ways of "being and doing" that allow people to enact and/or recognize a specific and distinctive socially situated identity (e.g., being-doing an "appropriate" first-grader in Ms Smith's progressive classroom; an "appropriate" sort of U.S. generative linguist; or an "appropriate" sort of Los Angeles Latino teenage street gang member, etc.).
(p. 2)

Here, in Gee's formulation, identity is understood as social: as membership in particular social groups and discourse communities.

However, this theory of discourse and identity, although noting the heterogeneity of discourses in society, does not address how these diverse discourses might interact on the individual level and create alternative, contextually defined identities vis-à-vis these discourses. Poststructuralist theories of discourse and identity (e.g., Fairclough, 1992b; Threadgold, 1997; Weedon, 1997) suggest that an individual may participate in a multiplicity of discourses and that these discourses may exist in various relations of complementarity, contradiction, or conflict with one another. As Weedon (1997) points out, identity is inherently unstable, and social identity, although constituted and governed by prevailing practices, is capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory and competing practices. In this context of contradiction, learners somehow construct their identities through the selective appropriation of literacy resources.

Designing Identity Through Voice

In studying L2 literacy development, researchers (e.g., McKay & Wong, 1996; Peirce, 1995) have shown how identity affects the ways in which learners develop and demonstrate their competence in the L2 and how they draw on diverse discourses and identities to assert and develop their voice in the L2. For example, Peirce (1995) has argued that learners' *investment*—a complex relationship of language learners to the target language contexts—influences their successes and failures in accomplishing their goals in the target language. Accordingly, when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers but are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Zamel (1997) reveals the reflective and generative power of writing for learners in creating their own voices in an L2. Instead of viewing discourse practices as discrete sets of conventions or processes of enculturation that overdetermine the learners' identities, Zamel argues that students could appropriate elements from a diversity of discourses to create a new written voice.

Kramersch (2000a, in press) elaborates on this concept of voice, defining it as the process by which people create, maintain, or transform institutional roles and identities through the discursive choices they make. Whereas the notions of role and identity index the historical and social or collective formation of identity, the notion of voice reveals the inadequacy of historical and social categories to encompass all enunciable experiences. Kramersch (in press) describes voice as

the act of meaning making itself (Bruner 1990: ch. 4), the choice of which role we will play, which identity we will put forth in our interaction with others. If identity and role stress the socially constructed nature of institutions, the concept of voice reminds us that institutions are created, maintained and changed by the individual utterance in discourse.

Kramersch (in press) notes that her notion of identity versus role versus voice shares an affinity with Goffman's (1981) three production formats in *discursive interaction*: principal, animator, and author. A *principal* is "someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken. . . . [who is active in] some special capacity as a member of a group, office, category, relationship, association, or whatever, some socially based source of self-identification" (p. 145). In other words, the principal is an identity that is established by social institutions (e.g., Chinese vs. Chinese American, immigrant, limited English proficient, masculine vs. feminine). An *animator* is "someone who openly speaks for someone else and in someone else's words, as we do, say, in reading a deposition or

providing a simultaneous translation of a speech, without taking the position to which these words attest” (pp. 145–146). In other words, the animator is the actor type enacting existing social roles in society (e.g., a Chinese American youngster playing the role of model minority in the United States). Finally, an *author* is “someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded” (p. 144). The notion of voice captures this discursive process of consciously selecting, juxtaposing, or reworking existing social roles and identities in the representation of self and other.

This perspective of voice as a means of constructing one’s identity is further elaborated by Kress’s (2000) concept of *design*, which refers to the transformative use of available representational resources in the production of new meaning. Poststructuralist literacy scholars such as Kress (2000) and others in the New London Group (1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) have suggested that design is an essential textual principle at a time when articulating one’s voice can involve the complex orchestration of multiple modalities through electronic media within a growing diversity of linguistic and cultural affiliations. The concept of design is used to capture the transformative and innovative aspect of meaning making, in which language use is not only a matter of deploying existing representational resources according to conventions, but also a dynamic process of adopting and reshaping existing resources in different measures to create new meanings and ways of representing reality. As Kress (2000) remarks, “an adequate theory of semiosis will be founded on a recognition of the ‘interested action’ of socially located, culturally and historically formed individuals, as the remakers, the transformers, and the re-shapers of the representational resources available to them” (p. 155). Design involves the orchestration of existing resources—such as linguistic patterns, genres, and discourses—in potentially transformative ways to achieve the designer’s communicative purpose, particularly when the designer’s interest is at odds with existing representations of social reality. Through their collaboration in designing, people may alter and renegotiate their identities within their social communities. As a consequence, the communities in which they obtain representational resources are critical to the design of their identities and their literacy development.

Collective Identities in Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a vehicle for the metaphorical construction of community, the crafting of multiple personae and collective identities, and the assumption of social roles in the temporal frame of on-line exchanges. The self-conscious and reflective

nature of design in CMC makes computer-mediated contexts an ideal site for observing Goffman's (1959; 1981, pp. 146–157) dramaturgical concept of discursive interaction in action. In Goffman's view, social life is akin to a staged drama in which individuals, as social actors, manage others' impressions of them and influence the context of interaction through their "personal front" (1959, p. 24)—their conduct and manner of self-presentation. Discursively, this personal front appears in the social role and manner of speaking one adopts in interaction, the production format (as principal, animator, author) that signals the particular relation of the words to the speaker, or the use of an embedded first-person pronoun that serves as a narrative voice for the speaker. In Goffman's (1981) terms, the embedded voice is "figure in a statement who is present only in a world that is being told about, not in the world in which the current telling takes place" (p. 149). Like the poststructuralist conception of identity, Goffman's view of the self is "something of collaborative manufacture" (1959, p. 253) that must be produced and developed in specific interactions. Like stage actors, social actors enact roles, assume characters, and play through scenes when engaged in the everyday rituals of communication with one another. Research on CMC has provided some evidence of the significance of alternative social collectivities, role play, and stylistic innovation in CMC environments.

Researchers in communication, linguistics, and cultural studies have pointed out the widespread use of *community* as a metaphor for CMC and examined the processes of its construction. For example, in her study of the asynchronous communication of newsgroup discussions,² Baym (1995) suggests that certain social dynamics in CMC, such as group-specific forms of expression, identity, social relationships, and behavioral norms, promote a sense of community. Tepper (1997) analyzes the use of *trolls*—insiders' jokes and peculiar forms of spelling—as a boundary mechanism for consolidating group culture and distinguishing insiders from outsiders.

The construction of community as a frame for interaction in the synchronous communication of Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is discussed by Bays (1998). By portraying in words the imagined physical setting of their conversation and the behaviors of the participants that form the context of their social encounter, the participants in the IRC group that Bays studied collectively constructed a sense of community as a notion associated with familiarity, sharing, and working together for the common good. For example, this group developed what Bays calls the *cookie*

² In *asynchronous* communication, participants read and post messages to one another without having to be on-line simultaneously. Another form of CMC is *synchronous*, in which all participants are on-line at the same time and respond to one another immediately.

convention, in which members give cookies to each other as a sign of generosity and goodwill. Sanction is meted out to violators of the communal atmosphere, such as somebody who “acts aggressively” by using swear words. Aberrant behaviors as such are penalized by equally scathing comments or the threat of being “kicked off” the channel. Bays notes that “physicality exists within the world of IRC as a frame in which the rules of interactive conduct and ‘reality’ within the CMC are based” (n.p.).

Some researchers suggest that one attraction of CMC is the variety of options it offers participants for designing their identities. Bays (1998) analyzes the crafting of nicknames as an aspect of the face that one adopts in negotiating one’s identity in CMC. Composed of letters, numbers, punctuation, or other notations, the nickname is a sign of individuality and a carrier of sociological cues, such as age, gender, and interest. Hence, as some scholars (e.g., Turkle, 1995) argue, the donning of nicknames and other attributes in CMC makes it a social arena in which people may construct multiple roles and personae.

One reason for the many voices an individual might adopt through CMC is that the physical self is not presented through CMC’s commonly used modes. CMC is believed by some to hold the potential for a “democratization of subject constitution” (Poster, 1997, p. 211; Turkle, 1995) because of the attenuation of highly conspicuous social cues (e.g., indicators of gender, ethnicity, or class) that come with face-to-face communication. Moreover, social norms and categories tend to be subverted in an arena that is more accepting of experimentation and in which the risks of social sanction are not as high. Yet, depending on the politics and social interests of the group and individuals, social norms can just as easily be intensified in the *bodyless pragmatics* (Hall, 1996) of CMC, in which communication relies heavily on the textual media. For example, Hall shows how participants in a feminist discussion list collectively construct particular linguistic practices that highlight what they believe to be the attributes of the female gender in order to promote feminist beliefs and protest the sexual harassment they experience elsewhere on the Internet.

Given its use for the expression of both community and individual identity, CMC has come to be seen as a *rhetorical device* (Lanham, 1993), in which a dramatic tension exists between unself-conscious verbal involvement and self-conscious textual design. Werry (1996) notes the interplay between involvement and detachment in the synchronous communication of IRC:

When communicating on IRC there is a different sense of connection to the word; it does not belong to the speaker in the sense that a spoken word does Yet at the same time, words exist in a temporal framework which

approximates oral discourse, which requires interactivity and involvement, and which invites the fabrication of the texture and signature of an individual speaker's voice. (p. 59)

Some analogues to oral discourse found in the written dialogues of IRC include using abbreviation, ellipsis, and a telegraphic style to simulate the speed and informality of oral conversation; signaling paralinguistic and prosodic cues by punctuation, capitalization, and spelling; and attempting to inscribe behaviors and gestures through words and emoticons. However, compared with face-to-face communication, this orate mode (a mode of language closer to everyday conversation; see, e.g., Kramsch, 1993), peculiar to IRC communication, is often characterized by a greater degree of reflectiveness and playful attention to form. Bays (1998) observes that the distinctive combination of textuality and temporality in IRC offers the opportunity to experiment with one's identity as an on-line presence.

L2 Identity Through CMC

The many and varied opportunities for ESL learners to engage in literacy experiences on the Internet have not been investigated in depth. The aim of the present study, therefore, is to explore how literacy in an L2 is related to the discursive construction of identity as writing enters the electronic age and new forms of social networking emerge through World Wide Web-based communication. I draw on Goffman's (1959, 1981) dramaturgical view of interaction (the assumption of roles and characters in social interaction), Kramsch's (in press) notion of voice (the discursive construction of social and cultural affiliations), and Kress's (2000) semiotic notion of design (the transformative use of available discourses and norms of representation) to examine how a teenager constructs his textual identity in ESL in written correspondence with a transnational group of peers on the Internet via a home page on the World Wide Web and synchronous and asynchronous communication.

In discussing the learner's literacy experiences, I use the term *textual identity* as an attempt to characterize the discursive strategies that he uses to articulate and position himself in written texts (and other semiotic media) as he negotiates diverse discourses on the Internet. Through this case study, I present an analysis of how texts are composed and used to represent and reposition identity in the cross-cultural milieu of Internet communication. By examining the relation between textuality and identity in the networked computer medium as it engenders literacy development in ESL, I draw implications for an expanded vision of literacy education in ESL in an age of global electronic communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

Context

The case study reported here forms part of an ongoing ethnographic research project that explores the cross-cultural literacy practices of adolescent immigrants in a city on the West Coast of the United States. In fall 1996, I began meeting students as a classroom observer in an urban high school where I had taught ESL and Chinese bilingual classes a few years before the study began. From the classroom and the school as a starting point, I interviewed the students about what they read and wrote, and observed some out-of-school settings where they practiced forms of literacy in their native and nonnative languages. The research takes an ethnographic approach to theory construction that is grounded in the everyday life of the people studied, their social activities in specific contexts, and the meanings these activities hold for them (Erickson, 1986; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Watson-Gegeo, 1988).

As a case study that emerged out of the larger ethnographic project, this investigation aims not to generalize from its findings but to expand and provide alternative visions of literacy development (see, e.g., Dyson, 1995). The in-depth study of cases helps illuminate the situated nature of learning to read and write, and the complexity of individual persons and the practices of literacy. It holds the potential to destabilize conceptual boundaries and contribute to new understandings of the concepts under study (Stake, 1995).

For this case study, I first interviewed the student in the fall of 1996 as part of the broader ethnographic project. I was away from the field site for the spring and summer of 1997 and, on my return in fall 1997, found that the student was actively involved in the Internet and that his ability to write in English had improved dramatically. Hence, I found it compelling to study how this student was learning English through the Internet.

Procedure

Over a 6-month period beginning in fall 1997, I used participant observation, in-depth interviews, and textual documentation to gather data on the student's computer experiences and activities, his personal background, and his schooling experiences. With his permission, over that period I collected 50 log files of his on-line chat (real-time conversation on the Internet) and e-mail and documents from his home

page. Hence, I was able to observe the progression in his correspondences with some on-line chat mates and e-mail pen pals. I took field notes from direct observation of the student's computing activities while he showed me how he used different programs on the Web and from the files and documents that were stored on his computer. Field notes and documentation were also gathered from my own exploration of the Web sites and chat systems that the student used. I carried out four tape-recorded interviews that lasted approximately an hour each and conducted about seven brief exchanges (in person, on the phone, via e-mail, and via on-line chat) with the student to gather information on his personal background, history of computer use and Internet involvement, retrospective reflections on the texts that he produced on the Internet, and English learning experiences.

Besides using inductive thematic analysis to identify patterns in the field notes, interview transcripts, and Internet data, I also used Goffman's (1981) method of *interactional analysis* to examine the production format or speaking roles in the discursive exchanges of chat and e-mail. Through the research methods of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992b; Huckin, 1995; Kress, 1990), I examined how language as discourse—system(s) of beliefs and practices—was involved in the production, maintenance, and transformation of social relations and identities. In critical discourse analysis, discourse is viewed as a form of social action that has effects on social structures as well as being determined by them and so contributes to social continuity and social change. Specifically, I analyzed the use of metaphors, deictic pronouns, and modality in the discursive construction of social identities and relations in documents on the Web server and home page, in on-line chat, and in e-mail exchanges.

The Focal Student

Almon³ emigrated from Hong Kong to the United States with his parents and younger brother in 1992, at the age of 12, and, once settled, the family rented a small apartment on the outer fringes of the Chinatown community. When I met Almon, a high school senior, at an after-school tutorial class in fall 1996, he expressed frustration over the fact that his English skills were still insufficient even though he had been in the country for 5 years. All of the friends he had made in and out of school were Chinese speakers. Most of his classes at school were ESL, bilingual, or remedial courses, which stigmatized him as a low-achieving student. For instance, he was enrolled in a remedial composition class

³ The data presented here are also discussed in Kramsch, A'Ness, and Lam (in press). The names of the informant and his correspondents are pseudonyms.

designed for students who had failed the mandatory high school composition test that was required for graduation. All of the students in the class were immigrants and ESL learners, and the teacher put a great deal of emphasis on imparting the correct linguistic code to them through the use of grammar charts and corrections on their essays. On several occasions, Almon expressed worry about his future life and career, and considered his difficulty with English a crucial part of the problem:

The Chinese are prospering quite okay here. The problem is mainly with discrimination. The Chinese have more problems with English, and so it's more difficult for them to find jobs. Even those who have been here for a long time don't speak like the native-born Americans . . . English is my biggest problem. . . It's like this place isn't my world, I don't belong here. I guess it's going to be very hard for me to develop my career here. And I have a feeling that my English won't be that good even in 10 years.⁴ (interview, October 15, 1996)

Here, Almon reveals a sense of his marginalized position in society and a perception that his inability to speak English like a native will hinder his prospects in life. English both signifies and constitutes his feeling of not belonging.

In fall 1997, when I returned to the field site after being away for 6 months and reinterviewed some of the students that I had first met a year before, Almon described to me how he had become actively involved in learning about the Internet in the latter part of his senior year. After attending an introductory class on e-mail and browsing for information on the Web in the high school from which he would soon graduate, he continued to look up different Web sites for tutorials on how to make personal home pages and conduct on-line chat. By fall 1997, when he began his studies at a local junior college, he had almost completed a personal home page on a Japanese pop singer, had compiled a long list of names of on-line chat mates in several countries around the world, and was starting to write regularly to a few e-mail "pen pals" (Almon's term; interview, September 2, 1997).

Almon pointed out to me that it was easier to express what he wanted to say by writing it out than by speaking in front of others. And in terms of his writing ability in English, he had made great strides and noted a "visible improvement" (interview, September 2, 1997). He could now write more fluently in school and was planning to take a public speaking class to improve his oral delivery skills. Commenting on the change in his writing, he said,

⁴Quotations from recorded interviews are translations from Cantonese. Underlining represents Almon's code switching to English.

[about learning to write English in school] I've always been poor in my English, writing in English. I couldn't write anything, and my mind just went blank all the time. Especially for the topics that I wasn't interested in, the writing topics, I couldn't write out anything . . . I wasn't interested, like the way things are expressed in English is not that good, not as good as Chinese. . . . At first when I was using ICQ [pronounced "I seek you"; on-line instant messaging software], I don't know why, but my English is much better now than at that time. At that time when I typed, I was typing so slow, like typing space by space, and didn't really know how to type it. Later, after many times, I realized I could, even if it's still not very good, I can express myself much more easily now It's not a matter of typing skill, it's the English. . . . Now I've improved, it's because of ICQ or e-mail or other reasons. . . . Now it's somewhat different, before I was the type who hated English, really, I didn't like English. Maybe it was a kind of escapism, knowing I wasn't doing well at it, and so I used hating it as a way to deal with the problem. But I think it's easier for me to write out something now . . . [to] express better. (interview, October 5, 1997)

This qualitatively different relationship to English came with a newly discovered ability to express himself in writing via the electronic media, which also helped him overcome some of his fear and worry about the future:

I've changed a lot in the last 2 months, actually. I have kind of changed my determination. I'm not as fearful, or afraid of the future, that I won't have a future. I'm not as afraid now. . . . When I was feeling negative, I felt the world doesn't belong to me, and it's hard to survive here. And I felt not many people understand me, or would. I didn't feel like I belong to this world. . . . But now I feel there's nothing much to be afraid of. It really depends on how you go about it. It's not like the world always has power over you. It was [names of a few chat mates and e-mail pen pals] who helped me to change and encouraged me. If I hadn't known them, perhaps I wouldn't have changed so much. . . . Yeah, maybe the Internet has changed me. (interview, October 5, 1997)

Given the changes that Almon experienced through writing on the Internet—from a sense of alienation from the English language in his adopted country to a newfound sense of expressivity and solidarity when communicating in English with his Internet peers—what sorts of identities was he designing for himself as an English user on the Web, and what was the nature of the discourse community that supported his English learning?

RESULTS: DESIGNING A TEXTUAL IDENTITY

Almon constructed a personal Web site through an international server, called *GeoCities*, advertised on the Web as follows:

Welcome to GeoCities, the largest and fastest growing community on the Internet. . . . At GeoCities, we provide members with free e-mail accounts, home pages and the best page building tools and online help resources to make personal publishing and community building as easy as writing a letter to a friend. More than 2 million people have already joined, and thousands more are signing up every day. . . . GeoCities is a thriving online community of people just like you. We call our members "homesteaders" because they've staked a claim on their own plot of "land" on the Internet. . . . There are 15 themed avenues (Entertainment, Arts & Literature, Sport & Recreation etc.). . . . From the neighborhoods, you can peruse the best home pages, visit our exciting, interactive avenues, or just cruise the suburbs. . . . (*Geotour*, 1998, n.p.)

This ad shows that Web technology offers not only the virtual base for the construction, storage, and retrieval of electronic texts but also a full-fledged metaphor for the building of social and cultural communities. The fusion of the words "home" and "page" merges the two overlapping tropes "publishing" and "urban landscape" in an American lifestyle that is exported over the Internet. One can "peruse" the creative aspects of *texts* (or home pages) by "cruising" down the neighborhoods and suburbs of *contexts* (or themes). The names and themes of the more than 40 neighborhoods (with branches called *suburbs*) are characteristically empty symbols filled with stereotypical content. For example,

Paris is the neighborhood of: Romance, poetry, and the arts

Broadway: Theater, musical, show business

Athens: Education, literature, poetry, philosophy

Vienna: Classical music, opera, ballet

Madison Avenue: Advertising

Silicon Valley: Hardware, software, programming

Wellesley: A community of women

Tokyo: Anime and all things Asian (*Geotour*, 1998, n.p.)

Almon chose to settle his home page in "Tokyo," where a global community of Asians gathers around Japanese pop culture. Almon's on-line chat mates were located in such diverse sites as Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, and the United States.

Design

Almon designed his home page on a young Japanese popular (J-pop) singer (or *idol*, in Japanese parlance) named Ryoko Hirosue out of his interest in J-pop music. He bought J-pop music and magazines in a Japantown district a few miles from his home. He followed the trends in J-pop culture closely by reading magazines, watching television programs imported from Japan on a local channel, and searching the growing number of Web sites on J-pop music and particular singers. He was able to understand some of the Japanese language used in these media because he had attended Japanese language classes in school. On why he chose Ryoko as the subject of his home page, Almon said, "Well, I am always into Japanese things . . . and she was my idol at that time. . . . If you are introducing some idols who are attractive, then people may read it." According to him, the intended audience of his home page are "those people who are interested in Japanese pop stars . . . teenagers" (interview, November 10, 1997).

Almon designed his Ryoko page by using materials and sources from magazines and other Web sites on J-pop music and celebrities. He chose a pseudonym, Mr. Children (also the name of a J-pop music group), to designate himself; hence the home page is called *Mr. Children's Ryoko Page* (<http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Garden/5088/frame.html>). It appears on the computer screen with a main page that presents a written introduction, an animated cartoon of Ryoko next to her name in Japanese *kanji* (Chinese characters in Japanese script), and a song of hers playing in the background. A side panel shows a list of buttons indicating the other parts of the home page that can be opened by clicking on them: a profile of Ryoko; a history page with her biographical information; a large selection of photos; a music section with songs that visitors can listen to on-line or download to their computers; several video clips; a section called "My Favorite Links" that provides, for example, links to other personal and institutional Web sites on J-pop music, particular singers like Ryoko, and Japanese animations; and a page with an Internet search engine. In a guest book, visitors may write comments or view other people's comments.

In the written text on the main page, Almon presents the topic of his home page, Ryoko Hirosue, and introduces himself as Mr. Children. Almon makes abundant use of the deictic pronouns *you* and *I* to address the audience of J-pop fans and himself throughout the text, and he refers to Ryoko as *she*. This usage creates an addresser-addressee relationship even as the discussion revolves around Ryoko. Almon highlights his ownership of the home page by the use of the first-person possessive in "my site" and "my homepage," and establishes himself as a knowledge-

able and helpful member of the international J-pop community in statements like “No problem! ^_^ you’ll find out anything about her in my site.”⁵ In the second paragraph, Almon provides multiple channels of communication (e-mail and on-line chat using ICQ) through which Mr. Children and his readers/visitors can establish and maintain contact. Clearly, the home page introduces and represents not only the singer Ryoko but also Mr. Children, a participant in J-pop culture. Through his choice of linguistic features in the Web page (i.e., deictic pronouns to signal affiliations), Almon discursively constructs (Kramsch, in press) his new position as a member of the global J-pop community.

In the section “My Favorite Links,” Almon forms associations with other home pages on Ryoko and various aspects of J-pop music, including animation (*anime*, as it is commonly abbreviated in Japan), and extends these associations to other interests of Internet users, friends’ home pages, and computer games, a few of which contain the Chinese language. In regard to J-pop music, the section not only presents factual information but actively seeks to galvanize the J-pop fan community. This is exemplified in the use of imperatives (e.g., “Let join there . . .”, “Go check it now . . .”, “*Must Visit*”) and the modal auxiliary verb *can* (e.g., “A lot of Ryoko’s pictures you can get here,” “You can try to hear the brand-new songs . . .”, “Here you can download a tons of mp3 files of song,” “You can find all TK family official homepage here”). In statements like “If you think you are J-pop fan, but you have (n)ever visit this site and don’t know what it’s about, than I don’t think you really are a J-pop fan,” there is an active construction of who J-pop fans are and what they are supposed to do and know. Being a member of the J-pop fan community involves helping define one another’s identity.

The rhetoric that runs through the page promotes both the music culture and industry and Almon himself in that culture, as can be seen in his adoption of the nickname Mr. Children. The descriptor for the link to the home page of the music group “Mr. Children innocent world” reads, “Please don’t mistake this, this is not my home page. This is a regular Mr. Children page. *Check it out, and see why I like this group so much* [italics added]. They are so great!!!” Here Almon adopts an iconic figure in the music industry as an identification badge for a J-pop fan. The advertising discourse of the global music and high-tech industry becomes a vehicle for Almon to introduce himself as a knowledgeable, valued member of the global J-pop community and participate in

⁵ Almon uses both Western and Japanese versions of emoticons. The Japanese smiley ^_^ is more easily recognizable as a face than the Western version :-) because it is right-side up rather than sideways (rotated to the left), although the mouth does not curve upward as in the Western version (Pollack, 1996; Sugimoto & Levin, 2000).

promoting its interests and resources. Almon actively acquires and deploys the promotional rhetoric of the Web as a discursive norm or design (Kress, 2000) that he uses not only to perpetuate the viability of the Web and music industries but to construct new social networks for himself with a transnational group of Asian peers.

Dramaturgical Interaction

Almon's dialogic exchanges with his on-line pen pals constructed gendered social roles that evidence Goffman's (1959; 1981, pp. 146–57) dramaturgical view of social interaction. The gendering aspect of their written exchanges is seen in Almon's preference for and closer relationship with his female pen pals:

. . . maybe I feel, I don't know, more comfortable with females. It doesn't have to be some kind of relationship, but with females, I like to, and can talk more easily. . . . Boys . . . they give you a different kind of encouragement. It's like encouraging you to talk. But the kind that the girls give is the encouragement to believe in yourself. (interview, December 12, 1997)

As opposed to the camaraderie between boys, Almon believes that girls are more able to foster self-knowledge and confidence. Female pen pals take on a nurturing, motherly, supportive role. Before writing the following posting to Ying, a Chinese female pen pal from Hong Kong, Almon had presented himself as a shy person in need of support, and Ying had responded accordingly:

Hum . . . you said you can share my happiness or sadness, that's great. It is a very important thing to be a good pal. So don't try to hide when I need to share things with you, okay. Also I would like to listen, if you have anything you want to share too. :-) (e-mail, August 25, 1997)

Seiko, a Japanese female living in the United States, gave him advice to which he responded:

Seiko, arigatoo for your advice to me (>_0) [wink] I will try to more open myself, and be more talkative. But, it takes time to change. Hey, you know what, something can always control my sentiments. Can you guess it? . . . Yeah, right. It's music. (e-mail, November 25, 1997)

Here is Almon's on-line exchange with Ada, a Hong Kong Chinese living in Canada:

Almon: I have some photo scans of my childhood and fellowship, I don't know if you are interesting to take look . . .

- Ada: oh . . . i'm interested . . . I'm curious to see how you look when you're young.
- Almon: Ok, I hope you don't feel sick by look at my pic. hehe ^^
- Ada: I'm sure I won't . . .
- Almon: the pic is very blur
- Ada: You are very happy and cute when you're small : >
- Almon: Yeah, I like my smile when I was a kid. But, I don't know will I smile like that again . . hee hee.
- Ada: . . . you'll have a smile like the one you had when you're a baby. . . if you can be as simple as a baby . . . I mean it in a nice way. . .
Remember Jesus told us that we have to be like a child if we want to go to heaven.
- Almon: Yes, I'm 100% agreeing what you're saying. That's what I always thinking, so I very like the people childlike outside, but also mature inside . . . (chat, October 22, 1997)

In this dialogue, Almon's hesitations about presenting and recovering the image in his childhood picture are exemplified in several negative statements ("I don't know if you are interesting"; "I hope you don't feel sick"; "I don't know will I smile"). These are reversed into the affirmative in Ada's replies ("i'm interested"; "I'm curious"; "I'm sure"; "you'll have a smile like the one you had"). Ada transforms the negative modality⁶ of Almon's statements into a categorical and positive mode of declaration ("you *are* very happy and cute when you're small", "you *ll* have a smile like the one you had when you're baby . . . if you *can be* as simple as a baby" [italics added]). By using the genre of electronic verbal exchange as a friendly counseling session, Ada fits squarely into the role of the nurturing female that Almon helps create through the way he presents himself textually in the dialogue.

Furthermore, these postings sound both very personal and very much like a role play. The hedges and qualifiers ("you know what?"; "Can you guess it?"; "hehe"; "oh"; "hum"; "okay") and the ellipses that signal pauses and hesitation, as well as the emoticons of the genre (>_0), establish a distance between Almon the author and Almon the narrator—between the world that is spoken about and the world in which the speaking occurs (Goffman, 1981, p. 147).

The distancing of the author (the composer of a text) and narrator (a role or character in the text) also allows them to adopt a mutually supportive, nurturing role across gender lines in the context of intentional friendship over the Internet. This is seen, for example, in an on-line circular posting between Almon and Ada, in which the first- and

⁶ As discussed in Simpson (1993), "*modality* refers broadly to a speaker's attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence. It also extends to their attitude towards the situation or event described by a sentence" (p. 47).

second-person pronouns serve as the deictics for narrative roles that can be associated at will with any speaker:

You are my friend and I hope you know that's true.
No matter what happens I will stand by you.
I'll be there for you whenever you need.
To lend you a hand to do a good deed.
So just call on me when you need me my friend.
I will always be there even to the end.
Forward this promise to all your friends to show your friendship and see who sends it back. (chat, December 5, 1997)

In the following exchange, Almon consoles Ying after she has expressed frustration over her relationship with her boyfriend:

Ying, I hope you don't mind, I don't know how to say things to cheer up others. But I really hope you will feel better. Don't be troubled by those people who are not true to you . . . You're so kind and understanding . . . You'll surely find somebody who truly loves you . . . I give you my blessing! ^_^ (e-mail, January 13, 1998)

Here Almon brackets his own authorial authority through the use of hedges ("I hope"; "I don't know"; "I really hope"). It is as though the utterances that follow the initial qualifiers do not belong to the speaker in the normal sense but are an animation of a gendered narrative voice that he has adopted in this situation (Goffman, 1975, pp. 508–550). In fact, one has the feeling that Almon is crossing gender lines and is taking on the nurturing, supportive voice usually associated with the female identity.

As a form of communicative exchange that relies heavily on writing, the genre of electronic dialogue constitutes a highly visible medium for the scripting of social roles (Goffman, 1959). This textual mode of role scripting may variously fall within existing gender stereotypes or move beyond them. Almon's expectation and discursive construction of his interlocutors as "nurturing females," and his own partial adoption of this gendered role, show how normative gender relations can be both reproduced and destabilized in textual communication within an electronic friendship network.

The gender roles adopted by the interlocutors reinforce the impression that they are developing textual or rhetorical identities that are related to but different from their biographical identities. Almon tries to explain this to one of his pen pals:

I believe most people has two different "I", one is in the realistic world, one is in the imaginal world. There is no definition to define which "I" is the original "I", though they might have difference. Because they both are

connect together. The reality “I” is develop by the environment changing. The imaginative “I” is develop by the heart growing. But, sometime they will influence each other. For example me, “I” am very silent, shy, straight, dummy, serious, outdate, etc. in the realistic world. But, “I” in the imaginational world is talkative, playful, prankish, naughty, open, sentimental, clever, sometime easy to get angry, etc. . . . I don’t like the “I” of reality. I’m trying to change myself.

But, I think you usually would see “I” in imaginational world because I’m very open to writing e-mail to people. ^_^ How about you?? Do you have two different “I”?? hee hee. (e-mail, January 13, 1998)

DISCUSSION: IDENTITY AND LITERACY

What does all this have to do with English learning? One could argue, following Gee’s (1996, 2000) theory of discourse, that Almon is actively acquiring, and also actively reproducing, the many discourses and narrative roles in the English networked electronic environment—Madison Avenue advertising (e.g., *GeoCities* promotional talk), adolescent Internet talk (e.g., emoticons, oral forms of language), popular psychology (e.g., the need to share and care, to change oneself), and religious discourse (e.g., references to Jesus). One may wish that Almon would acquire a more “proper” or “standard” written English. Yet it is precisely this worldliness of English and the discourses that adhere to its global spread (Pennycook, 1998) that have provided Almon with the linguistic tools to enter into a multicultural world of Japanese pop culture, where he finds a community that understands and supports him.

The adoption of a variety of discourses and the distancing of one’s narrative and biographical selves could be characterized as the discursive strategies that Almon used to construct his identity and relations with a transborder network of peers on the Internet—an identity that is not available to him in the social environment and institutions of his adopted country. Although these discourses and narrative roles are often constrained by the dominant discourses in society (Fairclough, 1992b, 2000; Gee, 1996), they may be appropriated and rearticulated in one’s own voice for one’s own purposes in the process of meaning making and literacy development. For Almon, the imaginative *I*, or the textual self, has in some instances blurred the boundaries of stereotypical gender roles and destabilized national borders as the defining characteristic of his minority social identity. Electronic networks may hold the potential to bring the textual and the social into creative tension with each other and serve the decentering function of what Lanham (1993) describes as the stylistic play on transparent reality.

The English that Almon acquired through his Internet involvement is the global English of adolescent pop culture rather than the standard

English taught in ESL classes. Whereas classroom English appeared to contribute to Almon's sense of exclusion or marginalization (his inability to speak like a native), which paradoxically contradicts the school's mandate to prepare students for the workplace and civic involvement, the English he controlled on the Internet enabled him to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness to a global English-speaking community. Almon was learning not only more English but also more relevant and appropriate English for the World Wide Web community he sought to become part of.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR L2 LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

This case study describes how an immigrant teenager discursively constructed his identity in English with a transborder group of peers on the Internet. It compels us as TESOL practitioners and researchers to reconsider the significance of identity formation in the process of learning to read and write in an L2. The development of L2 literacy in networked electronic media is shown here to involve a generative process of self- and other fashioning in a particular communicative group. I have used Kress's (2000) semiotic notion of design and Kramersch's (in press) identity concept of voice to examine the discursive construction of textual self in Web-based communication, in which identity is understood not simply as a process of socialization into existing social groups and discourse communities, but also as a reflective and generative process for constructing alternative social networks and subject positions through the textual media.

Reinventing a Model of Communication

Indeed, networked electronic communication may have reinstated the significance of role play and drama (Goffman, 1959) in the understanding of language and literacy development in TESOL (see also Kramersch, A'Ness, & Lam, in press). In *Communication as Culture*, Carey (1988) has contrasted the transmission view of communication, which is by far the more common in most industrialized countries, with the ritual view of communication, which is less prominent but reaches far back in history and may provide an important but overlooked perspective. The transmission view of communication is signified by the conduit metaphor of "imparting," "sending," "transmitting," or "giving information to others" (p. 15) and leads to a view of language as transparent, objective, analytical, and a tool or instrument for action. A ritual view of communi-

cation, on the other hand, stresses the common roots of the terms *communion*, *community*, and *communication*. It sees communication as directed toward the formation of social relations and shared beliefs, and sees language as a symbolic process for creating, maintaining, or transforming social reality. Carey illustrates the ritual view in regard to newspaper reading:

A ritual view of communication will focus on a different range of problems in examining a newspaper. It will, for example, view reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed. News reading, and writing, is a ritual act and moreover a dramatic one. What is arrayed before the reader is not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world. Moreover, as readers make their way through the paper, they engage in a continual shift of roles or of dramatic focus. . . . The model here is not that of information acquisition, though such acquisition occurs, but of dramatic action in which the reader joins a world of contending forces as an observer at a play. (pp. 20–21)

To understand the development of L2 literacy in the new networked computer media requires a model of communication that looks at how learners' identities are created through a ritual of role play and dramatic acts. As shown in this case study and the studies of CMC (see Murray, this issue), a prominent aspect of Internet-based communication is the use of textual and other semiotic tools to create communal affiliations and construct social roles and narrative representations of self. Within Almon's electronic peer-group network, some of the discourses that he adopted carry the dominant codes of commercial interests and gender relations, but Almon also appropriated them as a means to create an alternative self and social affiliations.

Hence, as computer technology becomes increasingly integral to the practice of TESOL in the 21st century, we as TESOL professionals need to reinvent an age-old model of communication to help students critically reflect on the social roles and relations they are constructing through their rituals of dramatic acts on the Internet. For example, we can guide students to become more critically conscious of the types of discourses they are adopting as they develop facility with these discourses (Delpit, 1995; Fairclough, 1992a, Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999). Although the computer has often been portrayed as a pragmatic and informational technology, it can also be recognized and used as a creative forum for the construction of new forms of identity and solidarity that promote positive changes in society. (See Hawisher & Selfe, 2000, for a number of case studies that show how Web-based multimedia are used to promote social critique and social change.) For

instance, with Almon, who is already quite conscious of the power of language to create a textual self, a teacher could reflect on and analyze the discursive choices he made in constructing his narrative voice (Kramsch, 2000b) and how those choices replicated or altered dominant discourses and gender relations. The use of computer technology in TESOL calls for both an imaginative and a critical approach to the production and reception of texts in the electronic media that allows the textual to produce a new design for the social (Kress, 2000). It underscores the importance of constructing *possible worlds* (Bruner, 1986) and transformative pedagogies (e.g., Pennycook, 1999a, 1999b) in the teaching and development of literacy in TESOL whereby students develop strategies of articulation that question dominant discourses and power relations and produce alternative visions of reality.

A Critical Conception of Language and Literacy

This study also raises critical issues for language and cultural identity in an age of globalization, transborder relations, and the popularization of Internet-based communication. The changes that Almon experienced in relation to the English language—from a sense of alienation relative to native-born Americans in U.S. society to a growing confidence in his expressive ability with a transnational group of peers—illustrate the variable nature of the use of varieties of English for exclusion or inclusion. Together with the current rethinking of the concept of culture in anthropology and cultural theory (see, e.g., Atkinson, 1999), this study calls into question the conjuncture of language with national culture, which often happens in the teaching of second or foreign languages, and argues for the recognition and valuing of multiple linguistic and cultural affiliations.

Facilitated by electronic media, the English language is becoming increasingly tied to the cultural expression of various groups of native and nonnative speakers around the world (see Warschauer, this issue). Rather than signifying Englishness, Americanness, or other exclusive cultural ideologies, the language may well be used to represent Japanese popular culture or diasporic Chinese relations. All this calls for a critical assessment of how students' chosen target language may diverge from the standard language in the English classroom and how their choice of target is simultaneously an act of investment and desire and a reaction to their marginal position in the English-speaking classroom and society (Ibrahim, 1999). TESOL in today's global, multicultural world needs a broad and critical conception of language and literacy that is responsive to students' relations to multiple target languages and cultural communities, and that actively creates opportunities for the students to use their

positioning in other target languages to challenge and expand their notion of that standard as they are learning it. In this way, the development of literacy or multiple literacies in ESL may become not only an opportunity for gaining access to the standard language or dominant discourses but also a creative process of self-formation in light of diverse practices and ways of representing human experiences.

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