Multiliteracy Practices of Chinese Immigrant Children in Britain

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1. Introduction

Since the 1980s when the study of Chinese children in Britain began, the identity formation and biliterate development of Chinese immigrant children – those who come to Britain later with their parents and have received some Chinese education in China (Swann, 1985) – still remain under-explored within sociology and sociolinguistics. The research described in this paper is grounded in New Literacy Studies (NLS) theory (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Street, 1995) and an approach to Activity Theory in language loss (Jimenez, 2002). My research explores a range of elements implicated in ethnic minority children’s mother tongue development and the relationship between the identity formation of Chinese immigrant children and their bilingual development. The research is based on three case studies. The research approach is ethnographic.

On the basis of two examples from one case study associated with digital technology use, I argue 1) the internet is not simply a resource, but also a social domain where children can interact with others; 2) Chinese immigrant children’s language loss is associated with on-line identity, constructed by the knowledge provided by websites, such as forum templates; 3) different cultures may construct similar identities which make it possible for this group of children to go back and forth between two different cultures.

2. Research Context and Theoretical Framework

This research began from twelve interviews about Chinese children’s mother tongue maintenance that I concerned about as part of my MA studies. Among the twelve families interviewed, the first group were British-born Chinese children; and the second group are the children who emigrated from Mainland China. To my surprise, even the second group of children were unable to read and write Chinese well after several years’ stay in Britain, though a range of them went to primary school in China initially. Literally, the language phenomenon happened to the second group of Chinese immigrant children is called “first

2.1 New Literacy Studies

NLS theory is different from the traditional view that literacy only means “text”. It “offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another” (Street, 2003:1). Using the concepts of “literacy activities” (what people do with the text) “literacy event” (aspects of literacy activities) and literacy artefacts (a material aspect is maybe as transient as a spoken word or as durable as a book, and / or an ideal or conceptual aspect) (Hamilton, 2000; Bartlett, 2002), Barton and Hamilton (1998) point out the nature of literacy practices as follows:

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making

In addition, Hamilton (2000:17) proposed the following building blocks of a social theory of literacy which may be used to analyse literacy events:

Participants --- Who is involved in an interaction with a written text?
Activities --- What they do with the text (and this is not just reading or writing, it can be displaying it, passing it on to others, or even erasing it).
Settings --- Where they do it physically
Domains --- the institutional spaces that organize particular areas of social life, and the literacy associated with it, e.g. work, religion, or health
Resources --- these might be cognitive skills and knowledge; they might also be paper, a
Therefore, literacy events and literacy activities are social and historically embedded and can be investigated in different domains. Literacy artefacts, as the material aspect of literacy practices, not only play mediating roles, but also convey social cultural values. The distinctions between “literacy activities”, “literacy event” and “literacy artefacts” makes data accessible and analysable. Applied to my research, by observing how Chinese immigrant children read, write and negotiate “text”, it is possible for me to document the relationship of social cultural values conveyed by “literacy artefacts”, how Chinese children identify themselves and Chinese immigrant children’s bilingual language use.

2.2 A Social Cultural Approach to Language Loss

Most language loss research studies carried out to date are in the micro linguistic field. They focus on lexical, grammatical and phonetic changes. Few research studies on language loss have been taken account of the social context and even fewer research studies have been carried out within literacy area. In the first part of this paper I will describe a sociocultural approach to language loss that links literacy and language loss theories. This framework helps me to investigate the relationship between the elements in the language environment, Chinese children’s identity change, the Chinese language itself, and Chinese children’s bilingual development.

The sociocultural approach is based on Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory and extended by Jimenez (2002), as a language loss framework.

Figure 1: Activity system on language loss
The activity system in the second part of the above framework originates from the first layer --- the interrelationship among “instrument”, “subject” and “object” by Vigotsky. Engestrom (1987: 13) develops the activity system into two layers and generalized the following hierarchical structure of activity as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Rules</th>
<th>Division of labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning III</td>
<td>Collective subject</td>
<td>Methodology, ideology</td>
<td>We-in-the-world</td>
<td>Societal network of activities</td>
<td>Societal</td>
<td>Societal division of labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning II</td>
<td>Individual subject</td>
<td>Models</td>
<td>Problem, task</td>
<td>Collective organization</td>
<td>Organizationa l Rules</td>
<td>Organizationa l division of labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning I</td>
<td>Non-conscious</td>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Immediate Primary group</td>
<td>Interpersonal Rules</td>
<td>Interpersonal division of labour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Engestrom (1987: 8) points out the contradiction --- reproductive and productive --- within learning II provokes human activity move from learning II to learning III. This contradiction within the communication may cause of range of attempts, such as “pauses”. Pauses or momentary withdrawals from the interaction are crucial as people reformulate the problem with the help of others. Engestrom, Leonet’ev, and Jimenez explains that the whole activity system is driven by three levels: activity, action and operation. Activity level is driven by an object related motive and explains why something is done. Action level is driven by a conscious goal and accounts of what is done. Operation level explains how something is done and it comprises physical and temporal circumstances under which activities take place.

Jimenez explores the to develop a framework for for analysing language loss. Jimenez argues that language loss is due to lack of control of the language people use. The language loss is a manifestation of the communicative break down. There are three possibilities which may result in communicative breakdown: task difficulty, language problem, or conceptual problem. In order to deal with this communicative breakdown, people may use different kinds of regulatory strategies:

“Self-regulatory strategies are attempts to maintain the self during the communicative breakdown or, in other words, when maintaining self in communicative act regulates choice of strategy”. (Jimenez: 2002:71)

Other-regulatory strategies: When self-regulation cannot be maintained and self-regulatory strategies are not available at the time of the breakdown, the speaker can rely on other-regulatory strategies to regain control over the task. (Jimenez: 2002: 73)

Object-regulatory strategies: These types of strategies are employed when the speaker cannot rely on himself or on the interlocutor to solve the communicative problem.”
In my research, children’s Chinese language difficulties can be explored as I document literacy events, no matter whether they talk to me or talk to their parents. If children change their regulatory strategies during the conversation, it indicates that they have language difficulties. In my research, the meanings of triangle are consistent with the building blocks presented by Hamilton (2000), in which subjects paralleled with participants, instruments paralleled with languages, object paralleled with literacy artefacts, community paralleled with domains, rules division of labour paralleled the potential rules driven each literacy events. Therefore, it is possible to know children’s language difficulties and the influence of each element on children’s language performance by analysing each literacy event.

2.3 Identity Theories

“Identity” as an important issues in children’s language development always goes with language. ‘Identity’, as a concept, is proposed first by Erikson (1950) in his writing Childhood and Society. According to Erikson (1950:50), “ego identity …” is the awareness of … self-sameness and continuity … [and] the style of one’s individuality [which] coincides with the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others in the immediate community”. As Schwartz (2001:8) points out, “Erikson’s definition was multidimensional, broad, and inclusive, as is his theory as a whole, and it paved the way for nearly half a century of further theorizing, exposition, and research on identity.” After proposition of the notion of ‘identity’, the exploration to this concept goes into two directions: Erikson and his followers (Marcia, 1966, 1980; Phinney, 1990, 2001) developed the theory of ego identity formation at psychic field, focusing on individual change --- developmentally (Phinney, 1990: 502)

On the basis of debates among social constructionism, deconstructionism, and postconstructionism, social constructionists points out as things such as a flower only can be identified by ‘others’ within specific social contexts, the so-called “personality” (personal identity) is influenced by ‘others’, constructed within social contexts and embedded in ‘social discourses’ (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1974, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1981). ‘Discourse’, as a notion, goes with the arbitrary nature of ‘language’ (Derrida, 1991) and is present in culture. The discourses of age, gender, education, ethnicities, etc shapes people’s opinions, believes, and attitudes which “can be thought of as instances of discourses, as occasions where particular discourses are given the opportunity to construct an event in this way rather than that.” (Burr, 1995). In this sense, human beings live in the web of power relations conveyed by social discourses. The person who uncovers the mystery of ‘discourse’, power and knowledge is Foucault. “Power, as a ‘sovereign’, as Foucault argues, is a unitary and centralized construct (Foucault, 1980:115, Wickham, 1986:169), and hence primarily repressive in character. From Foucauldian perspective, it can be concluded that different versions of knowledge are exercised within power relations and through discourses.

With the development of individualization, it has been gradually realized that human being, as social agents, are agentic and not imposed on by social discourses passively. Social cognitive theory, presented by Bandura (2001:2) points out “to be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions…Human agency is characterized by a number of core features that operate through phenomenal and functional consciousness. These include the temporal extension of agency through intentionality and forethought, self-regulation by self-reactive
influence, and self-reflectiveness about one's capabilities, quality of functioning, and the meaning and purpose of one's life pursuits."

Therefore, human beings, as agents, acquire their knowledge from different social contexts (discursive practices). Human beings' knowledge is shaped culturally and exercised within power relations and through discourses. Human beings are not passively obliged by social discourses. Rather they are embedded social discourses and able to make remarkable "improvisation" (Holland et al, 1998:276)

Currently, researchers from different philosophical backgrounds access identity issues mainly from two perspectives --- Erickson explore it within psychic field, while Foucault etc. sociologists investigate it from sociological and historical perspective --- and theories from two dimensions develop separately and rarely have intersections. Even so, current scholars from both perspectives start to realize that it is hard to draw a whole picture of identity simply from sociological perspective, or psychic perspective and attempt to combine these two perspectives together.

In the book *Identity, Formation, Agency and Culture*, Côté (2002) points out the relationship between social identity, personal identity and ego identity, and how identity are constructed with the social structure and social interactions. The framework is shown as follows:

*Figure 2: The social psychological levels of analysis applied to the study of identity*

The framework, shown in Figure 2, is developed by House (1977 cited in Côté 2002:6). It is the fundamental model illustrating "identity" from "personality" level involving intrapsychic domain of human functioning traditionally studied by developmental psychologists and psychoanalysts, from "interaction" level concerning the concrete patterns of behaviour that characterize day-to-day contacts; from "social structural level" referring to the influence of the political and economic systems on identity formation. In this sense, ego identity focuses on self-conscious (subject-subject) level; personal identity focuses on "otherness" (subject-other) level; and social identity focuses on "social structure" (subject-social structure)
The contributions of the above framework are significant. Firstly, different from social constructionism, “ego identity”, as an important part of identity, is legitimised. Through self-reflection of interaction with the outside world (figure 2), the subjects can consciously deal with the ambiguity that they confront and acquire a self-perception on themselves, which is different from themselves from other people’s eyes. Secondly, it shows the whole process of culture construction, in which subjects play an active role. Individuals are not passively imposed by social discourses as social constructionism argues. Rather, human agents are the producers of cultures and change the trajectory of social structure, social cultures and social discourses. Therefore, Côté (2002) clearly illustrated “identity” from interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives, all of which are neglected in sociological literature for a long time. Nevertheless, this framework has limitations as well. Influenced by theories on the social structural period from Mead (1970), Côté (1996)’s understanding on social structure (shown as figure 5) is constraint to the postfigurative (primitive cultures in which youth learns what they need to know from their parents), cogfigurative (historic cultures in which both children and adults learn from their peers), and prefigurative divisions (contemporary post-World War II cultures in which children’s learning is primarily shaped by the period in which we live) (Mead, 1970, cited in Clark, 1972: 117) in that no matter whether in pre-modern, early-modern, or late-modern societies, children/adolescents’ learning is always influenced by parents and peers, and shaped within social culture contexts. It is also hard to evaluate to what extent children/adolescents are influenced by their immediate social contacts, or shaped by social culture issues as whole. Therefore, in terms of meaning of “role location in the society” (shown in figure 4), the dimension of “positionality of identity” argued by Holland (1998: 128) from sociological perspective is more valuable. “Positionality of identity” emphasize on the influence from “others present, greater or lesser access to spaces, activities, genres, and through those genres, authoritative voices, or any other voice” on a subject’s apprehension of their social position, and the arbitrary nature of social discourse from social constructionism makes more sense too. Likewise, the description of the process of personality within the change from pre-modern to late modern societies is problematic as well.

From the theoretical and methodological framework shown above, the process of generalizing literacy practices is a materialized process (Hall, 2000, DeMarris, 1996) through which social discourses, ideological issues and identity formation can be assessed and interlinked. The link is complex. Gregory (2004) describes this kind of complexity with the word “syncretism”, which focuses on “the activity of transformation” and “disparities in power”. According to Gregory (2004:4), “first, syncretism is understood to be more than a mixing of existing cultural forms (Apter, 1991). It is, instead, a creative process in which people reinvent culture as they draw on diverse resources, both familiar and new. The focus is on the activity of transformation, not on fossilized cultural forms. Second, syncretism is described as an inherent feature of cross-cultural encounters and negotiations, and is often characterized by contradictory elements arising out of disparities in power.” In this sense, I would like to following Gregory (2004) to call the identity of ethnic children in Britain “syncretic identity”, which indicates ethnic children’s perceptions of themselves and their surroundings on the basis of their transformed immigration history and social culture background. Therefore, I present the following diagram which generally describes the identity formation from both
sociological perspective and psychic perspective:

![Diagram: Literacy research and identity]

**Figure 3: Literacy research and identity**

The above diagram shows that social discourses are materialized into literacy events, which make social discourses accessible. Ideologies are constructed through discourses and power relations. Ideologies are the effects of social discourses. The conceptual issues such as culture, nation, etc construct people’s identities and are influenced by people’s identities likewise. Social identity and personal identity are socially constructed. Social identity is indicative of people’s social status. Personal identity is representative of people’s social roles in their social interaction. Ego identity is people’s self-perceptions about themselves and cannot be neglected by sociological research.

3. Methodology

Theoretically, my research lies within the framework of New Literacy Studies. Methodologically, it follows an ethnographic approach developed by anthropologists (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984:3, cited in Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 57) and widely used in literacy studies. A variety of research methods are used in data collection, including life history interviews, participant observation, and tape/video recording. Data collection includes three in-depth case studies by participant observation, life history interviews and video recording.

3.1 Research Subjects

Three case studies are the central focus of my research. Three Chinese immigrant families in Lancaster are involved. The criteria for selecting Chinese families are: (1) Parents are from Mainland China. (2) Children are born in Mainland China. (3) Children’s mother tongue is Mandarin Chinese. (4) Since moving to Britain, they have learned some English. The criteria are not strict, as the research sample selection is constrained to the geographical features by
Lancaster city --- the absolute numerical majority are local British people, while Chinese families are dispersed.

The details of three case study Chinese families are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Duration in the UK (years)</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Su</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Su’s father is working at local University as a research associate. Both Su’ parents graduated from universities of Mainland China. Su’ mother had a B.A. degree, and her father had a PhD degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ming is studying in a high school and going to take an A level examination. He moved from Mainland August, 2004 with her mother. Ming’s mother is doing her PhD project at local University. Both Ming’s parents obtained at least B.A. degree in China. Ming’s father is in China presently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ying</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ying is studying in a high school. Ying’s father is working at local university as a researcher. Both Ying’s parents obtained B.A. degrees in China. Ying’s father has a PhD degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another issue on research subjects I would like to address here is why the above Chinese families involved in my research always have an academic background.

Lancaster, in the north west of Britain, is a small town where British people are the absolute majority. 2001 census shows that Chinese people in Lancashire account for 0.2% and mainly consist of two groups --- Hong Kong Cantonese and Chinese people from Mainland China. Historically, in Britain, the first group of Chinese immigrants in Britain were Chinese seamen from the southern coastal provinces of China who were brought to East London, and Liverpool (Pan, 1999). After the Second World War, for the purpose of boosting the economy in Britain, the 1962 immigration action was passed. After the 1962 act, the number of Chinese people from China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia steadily increased. “A National survey by the Policy Studies Institute of London published under the title Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage in 1997 puts Cantonese speakers at 66%; Hakkas 11%, Mandarin speakers 10% percent and Hokkien 2%.” (Pan, 1999: 357) These percentages indicate that people speaking Cantonese are the major group of Chinese in Britain; in contrast, the number of people from Mainland China is very small. As increasing numbers of Chinese people from Mainland China come to Britain to study, work and settle down, different features of this group are gradually distinguished from their counterpart --- Hong Kong Cantonese.

In Lancaster, Hong Kong immigrants also from the majority of Chinese people and most of them are engaged in the catering business. The 2001 census shows that in Lancashire, Chinese people engaged 57.5% of those who had no jobs or are aged under 16. The rest are doing catering, repairs and retail businesses. Most of them originate from Hong Kong and speak Cantonese. My first contact was the Lancaster and Morecambe Chinese Association, in which
the committee members are the owners of Chinese take-aways. As these take away owners in Lancaster area are derived from Chinese seamen from Liverpool or London, it was hard for them to obtain a good education when they were young. In addition, most of their children were British-born Chinese as they moved to Britain fairly early. In contrast, three of my research families are from Mainland China and Mandarin speakers. Parents in the three Chinese families obtained at least a B.A. degree in China. Their purpose in coming to Britain is to get a good job or to obtain a higher degree.

Accordingly, on the basis of Chinese people’s social economic and historical background as introduced above, two points need to be clarified: (1) Hong Kong Cantonese people in the L&M area, who are middle aged, are considered the second generation immigrants while middle age Mandarin Chinese speakers are the first generation immigrants. Linguistically, their language choice patterns are different. (2) As a result of their different immigration history, Hong Kong Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese are engaged in different careers and have different educational backgrounds. Therefore, as parents, the two groups of people have different aspirations for their children’s development. This is the main reason why I focus on this Mandarin Chinese group who are from Mainland China only and why most of my research subjects are from the academic area.

3.2 Research Methods

The overall research data includes three case study data and complementary data. The research method of complementary data is structured interview, which is the last stage of my research and are yet to be completed. The research methods used in three cases studies include participant observation, non-structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and video recording. Between Feb, 2006 to Sep 2006, I visited each family every month and mainly talked to the children.

(1) Participant observation is used to collect data at children’s schools and home, focusing on the following issues:
   - the reaction of the classmates of the research subject towards me
   - the activities that the teachers engaged in
   - the close friends of the research subject
   - the ways that the research subject deals with me in the classroom
   - the attitudes of the research subject towards my research.
   - the school and teachers’ attitudes towards ethnic minority children
   - decorations of children’s room, including literacy artefacts
   - children’s reactions to my visit
   - what children play, read, write during my visit

(2) Non-structured interviews are used to collect data during my visit to children. I sometimes choose a literacy event/activity and ask children to tell me more about it. If children initiate things interesting, I usually try to pursue more.

(3) Semi-structured interviews are used to collect data from Chinese parents. I interview each parent of each Chinese family about Chinese immigrant children’s biliteracy practices,
covering the process biliterate development, access, values, roles, networks, contexts of biliteracy and historical context.

(4) As I collect data in different domains, I video record what the children do when they are at the hospital, at the beach, park etc. At the children’s home, I also used to video to record what TV program they watch and what kind of on-line games they play.

A Summary of Data Collection Stages

4. DATA ANALYSIS: Digital Literacy Practices

Nowadays, the influence of new technologies on people’s lives is significant. This influence can be seen in my data. Whilst I have collected many examples of children using printed texts, all three of my case study children engage with electronic technologies, sometimes for extended period of time. The internet and various video and audio devices not only bring people with convenience and entertainments but also provide them with various channels to learn. In this section, I discuss a range of Ying’s literacy activities associated with on-line and MP4 use as data analysis examples. I will focus on the interrelationship of Ying’s identity formation, and bilingual language uses, both of which are embedded in literacy events.

Ying is one of my research subjects. Currently, she is 13 years old and studying at a local high school. Ying’s parents, Dr Xia and Mrs Xia, used to be lectures in Ning Po University in China. Mrs Xia had a B.A. degree in China and specialized in designing computer games and programming. Dr Xia obtained his M.A. degree in China in 1991. In 2000 Dr Xia started his
PhD degree at local university. After graduation in 2003, Dr Xia was employed as a research associate.

**SAMPLE: Ying’s on-line forum analysis**

**4.1 Context of Ying’s on-line forum**

Ying’s room is located at first floor, and her computer is beside her window. Ying’s computer is a desktop and she is still using the Windows 98 system. Ying always complained about her computer because it is old-fashioned and slow. Ying’s family uses the wireless internet. The main control of the internet is via Dr Xia’s computer. Therefore, Dr Xia knows what websites Ying accesses, using a kind of software. “I told Ying not to go to bad websites, as I would find out. I seldom checked her, but I knew that she usually went to game websites.” Dr Xia told me.

Every week, on at least one day, Ying played with her best friend, Anna. Anna is a local British girl. Anna’s parents are working class and her father is a postman. From Dec, 2005 to Jan, 2006, one of Ying and Anna’s interests was associated with a girls’ club webpage, namely BFFL. Though this webpage was named as a “girls’ club webpage”, it was written, maintained and updated by Ying. Anna gave Ying some suggestions occasionally. Ying also helped Anna register a similar webpage. Both Ying and Anna’s web pages were based on www.freewebs.com, a website providing individuals with a free webpage account and supporting them to design their own web pages using templates. Nine children signed in as BFFL members in the end, and all of them are Ying’s friends and classmates. They know each other in their real lives and localities. English is the only language used in this on-line forum. Dr Xia, Ying’s father, recommended this webpage to Ying for the purpose of encouraging her to record everyday life in Britain.

There are a range of consistent literacy events consisting of Ying’s personal webpage literacy activity. Nevertheless, I couldn’t trace any particular fixed events, as Ying stopped updating it when I started to visit her. Therefore, I consider the whole process of Ying’s designing and using her web pages from Dec, 2005 to Jan, 2006 as a literacy event. Even though I couldn’t witness this event directly, but from the internet, I can still see what her web page looks like and talk to her about it. Another literacy event is my visit to Ying on Feb, 2006. During my visit, Ying told me what she considered interesting and important when she talked about her web page. Also, from Ying’s conversations with me, I can deduce her Chinese language difficulties from her changing language regulation strategies (Jimenez, 2002)

The network analysis of Ying’s webpage design and use, as a literacy event, is as follows:

- **Participants:** Ying’s father, Anna, Ying’s friends
- **Literacy artefacts:** web pages.
- **Domain:** home, internet
- **Resources:** computer skills

The network analysis of my visit to Ying, as a literacy event, is as follows:
Participants: Ying, and me
Literacy artefacts: web pages
Domain: home, internet
Resources: Ying’s ability to Chinese

4.2 Identity Analysis

From the above descriptions, it is clear that Ying’s personal web page event is not a typical Chinese use literacy event and not particularly associated with her Chinese ethnic identity. Though Ying’s father Dr Xia is involved in this event, his purpose is not to encourage Ying to use Chinese. He tends to supervise and direct Ying about what she can and should do on line. Rather, in this event, if we only consider Ying’s language use and social network. Ying is more or less with a British identity in that all members who signed in Ying’s web page are local British girls, and English is the only language used at Ying’s web page. Nevertheless, while her Chinese identity is not evident, a range of Ying’s other identities are tightly embedded in how she designs and values these web pages.

As a girl, Ying named her personal web page as “A BFFL girls’ club”, which indicate a strong gender identity. In addition, on the left side column of Ying personal web page, Ying listed a range of linked web pages, including guestbook, chat, beauty, cringe, horoscope, puzzles, FAQs, members, top ten…, photo album, membership on-line application form, and a forum. From beauty, Ying is a girl who is interested in skin, hair care and recipes; from cringe page, Ying is a girl who would like to share embarrassing moments with her local English friends; from puzzles and websites pages, Ying is a girl who likes on-line games, creating e-dolls, and sorting out difficult puzzles; from photo album, Ying is a fan of Green Day (a boy music band). All of these Ying’s interests and social network indicate that Ying’s teen identity and gender identity. In spite of so many personal interests shown on Ying’s web page, during my visit, Ying didn’t talk to me about skin and hair care etc, but happily mentioned what she did in her on-line forum, one of an important link on her personal webpage shown on the left column.

The whole forum includes five sub forums. Each forum has a main theme. “Announcements” is a sub forum only for administrators and moderators to publish maintenance information, forum rules etc; therefore “Announcements” subforum is a read-only forum. Runescape is a very popular on-line game website. “Runescape” forum is for members to discuss their opinions about Runescape. Interview Forum is a special subforum to recruit new moderators. As Ying is the person who registered this on-line forum, she is the administrator of this forum.

In order to understand what Ying can do within an on-line forum, I registered a forum at the same website --- InvisionFree Network (http://z6.invisionfree.com). The first person who registered the forum is usually the administrator. The administrator is the most powerful user within the forum. The central control panel, a template provided by InvisionFree Network, allows the administrator to change system settings, control forum members, manage word filter, emotions, and recount statistics etc. In addition, the forum control template allows the administrator to appoint moderators. The powers of administrators and moderators are
unequal. The administrator is in charge of the whole forum; while moderators control subforums. The administrator has the power to set up system configuration, manage users. Administrators also had the power to appoint moderators, suspend and warn members if members disobey the forum rules. The “users and groups” template provided the administrator powers to find/edit/suspend/validate users. If forum users reach a certain warning level, they could be banned or suspended. Warning level is shown as “percentage”. Powers always go with knowledge. Some parts of the forum need the administrator to have basic ability of using computer languages, for example html language and CSS language.

Within the forum, Ying is very aware that she is the administrator of her forum. As the initiator and maintainer of this forum, Ying also had special powers. Special powers were not endowed by Ying herself but came from the template of the InvisionFree Network forum websites discussed above. At Ying’s forum, Ying designed the on-line membership as the following levels: “head member, deputy head member, normal member, above normal member, chartroom mod”. The unequal power of forum administrator, moderators and common members also can be seen from their avatars. Avatars show children’s membership level within the club, post numbers, membership No., the date when they joined in the club and warning level. Ying, as the initiator and maintainer of the forum, is the administrator; therefore, in Ying’s avatar, there is no warning level. Ying is the only one could not be banned by others.

As a forum administrator and designer, Ying made a great deal to learn how to design, program and maintain the whole forum. These efforts are shown from a range of announcements published in “Announcements” subforum in Jan, 2006 as follows:

I spent ages getting the CSS done. But it didn't turn out like I wanted. I think it looks really bad now. I am going to create a poll on Talk About Anything page, please check it out because if there is a lot of "No, I don't like it", then I will turn the forum back to the old self. --- Jan 13, 2006

1. Because of the new style sheets, some of the writing on the deep purple area might be hard to read. To read it more clearer, highlight the writing.
2. Some people might find logging in everytime annoying; you can either click Remember me so the computer will log you in automatically when you come on this forum OR if you are using a shared computer, scroll down and log in by "Quick Log In"
3. By clicking "Portal" at the very top allows you to view your personal messages (PM), Site Navigation, My controls, My assistant, Online Users and Latest Discussions
4. Need help? Then lick on "Help" on the top of the page, above "My Assistant" and below the "Welcome" sign.
--- Jan 14, 2006

CSS is a kind of computer language. Ying learnt how to CSS to change the appearance of their forum. A poll is a survey forum page. Ying put this poll in Talk About Anything page, so that members could vote if they liked the forum appearance. Ying briefly introduced a range of functions of the forum in announcements on Jan, 14. Besides learning computer
languages, creating forum topic and polls, Ying also used the control panel to create a program which could change the swearing words into “&%#*”. If Ying saw these symbols, she knew the member made swears and could take suspending actions.

Having powers also means to put powers into practice. Ying, together with Anna, wrote the forum rule and put it at the very top of the whole forum. The rule says as follows:

Hi and welcome to our forum! Feel free to post anything but no swearing or offensive language please!
These are the rules that Anna and I agreed to:

1. No Swearing
2. Be nice and helpful
3. No offending people
4. If you are a moderator, no suspending people for no reason for you will get suspended for a day.
5. No asking to be a moderator; only the best who follows the rules will become a mod.

Thank you for following the rules. If your warning level reaches 100%, you will get banned.

The above rules indicate that Ying’s concern is mainly associated with members’ behaviours, moderators’ powers and the result if members disobey the rule. From a forum discussion between Ying and another forum member computergeek, it is possible to know why Ying created this forum rule. Alberlisity in the following example is Ying’s screen name.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screen Name</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alberlisity</td>
<td>well as i woz a newbie on runescape, sum1 told me tat u can trim armours and i got tricked so when i woz wif a friend, this guy came up to us and said i can trim ur armour do you want me to trim it?? to my friend as he woz wearin full black and he somel beside us said 'u cant trim armour' and that con man said okay den explain how black with gold trim comes from. because i woz i newbie, i didnt no wot they were on about so i argued that u can trim armour (very big mistake because there was a mod nearby and saw me argue) and that mod muted me, then Jagex banned me, well they gave me a warnin sayin if u do anythin lyk that again, they will ban me again. then i told this guy who is suppose to b a friend what happened as i trusted him, and because my sister had offended him, he reported me as scamin and then i woz banned for another 3 days do i was really fed up with runscape and left.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above Ying’s explanation, it is clear to see that the forum rule creation is not from no reason, but from Ying’s experience at Runescape forum, where she was warned first, and then banned.

Therefore, at this on-line forum, an administrator is an important Ying’s on-line identity. Ying’s on-line forum as part of InvisionFree Network forum websites was a socially
embedded on-line community. Though Ying’s forum is a teen forum, it is created by Ying according to her personal experiences in other forums and the similar social hierarchies within adults’ world. During designing this forum, Ying learnt how to use computer languages, acquired how to be an administrator to control an on-line community, using the templates.

4. 3 Identity and bilingual language use

As mentioned above, my visit to Ying, as a literacy event had two purposes: firstly, I wanted to find out about issues that Ying thinks are important in her literacy activities; secondly, I would like to know Ying’s Chinese ability when she talked to me. In this session, I would like to discuss Ying’s identity formation and her bilingual uses in her conversations with me.

The following example is an extract from Ying’s discussion with her friends at Runescape sub forum. This extract indicates how she applied the rule to the forum members. The screen name of Ying is alberlisity. Anna’s screen name is trasaskia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screen Name</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Ying’s explanation when she talks to me during my visit</th>
<th>Translation of Ying’s explanation when she talks to me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ganster</td>
<td>oh well %#!? them!! tats just so wrong</td>
<td>ganster是一个guest，他unregisgted。我不知道他是谁。然后，他骂人了么……如果他骂人，我设计的一个东西会变成这个样子的“%#!?”。所以，我才知道别人骂了没有。</td>
<td>Ganster was a guest, he was unregistered. I don’t know who he is. He swore… if he swared, the programme I designed changed his words to “%#!” . Therefore, I know who he swore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alberlisity</td>
<td>wuts de big ide?! u cant even swar on des</td>
<td>这是我的，我suspend他了。</td>
<td>I suspened him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screen Name</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Ying’s explanation when she talks to me during my visit</th>
<th>Translation of Ying’s explanation when she talks to me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>trasaskia</td>
<td>hiya!!!!!!! i banned pegeek</td>
<td>Y: during the interview, computergeek annoyed trasaskia. She (trasaskia) disliked him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trasaskia</td>
<td>hяхahahaha i banned pegeek hahahaha</td>
<td>Y: In the interview, computergeek went to the interview as well... Y: Yeah. All interview contents were deleted by me. As my friend (trasaskia) disliked it and she asked me to delete them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linguistically in terms of processing and organizing a kind of language, according to Gee (1999:100), words can be divided into content words and function words. “Content words (lexical words) belong to the major parts of speech: nouns, verbs, and adjectives. These categories are said to be ‘open categories’ in the sense that they each have a large number of members and languages readily add new members to these categories. Function words (grammatical words) belong to smaller categories, categories which are said to be “closed categories” in the sense that each category has relatively few members and languages are resistant to borrowing or inventing anew such words. Such categories are determiners (e.g. “the”, “a/n”, “this/that” etc.), pronouns (e.g. “he/him”, “she/her”, “it”), prepositions (e.g. “in”, “on” etc.) and quantifiers (e.g. “some”, “many”).” As function words consist of the main structure of the sentence, they are considered “informationally less salient” than content words.

I underlined the content words that Ying did not express in Chinese when she talked to me. The words that Ying did not express Chinese when she talked to me are “unregistered, suspend, ban, moderator, rule”. Together with the content words in the forum rules, these words are “rule”, “suspend”, “power”, “moderator”, “unregistered”, “swearing”, “offensive language”, and “warning level” and “ban”. Code-switching, according to the language loss theory from Jimenez (2002) indicates people’s regulatory strategy change which originates from conceptual problems or language task difficulty. Interestingly, all of words that makes Ying did codeswitching are associated with forum rules shaped by on-line forum template, and reflect Ying’s interests, as an administrator as well.

4.4 Summary

The internet nowadays is not only a kind of resource providing children with information or knowledge, but also an important place to communicate. In this sense, the internet is an important powerful social domain, which is not constrained by time and place.

Ying, as a Chinese immigrant living in Britain, is actively involved in out-of-school on-line activities, including her personal web page design and forum discussion. As all participants...
are English language speakers, English is the only language used in the forum. From a range of literacy activities associated with the on-line forum discussion, Ying has an important and powerful social role --- an administrator, besides her gender and teen identity. Ying’s administrator identity is very strongly constructed on-line. Thus construction is particularly related to two facts: (1) Ying’s powers are shaped by on-line forum templates (2) Ying’s interests --- creating and practising rules --- are derived from her previous experiences in other forums. Ying’s interests are strongly associated with her administrator identity. Ying’s interests can be interpreted from forum rule design, her discussion in Runescape sub forum, and how she used her power to suspend members. Also, Ying’s interests are shown in her explanations to me about what happened in the forum, during my visit. More interestingly, the content words that Ying had to use in English during Ying’s code-switching are the words about forum rules, such as “moderator”, “suspend”, “ban” etc. All of these words are also representative of Ying’s interests in her administrator role and likewise, associated with her administrator identity, which is embedded in the English language, not in Chinese.

In shot, Ying’s language use is associated with her on-line administrator identity; and this important identity is constructed by Ying’s personal experiences in other forums, and shaped by on-line templates.
REFERENCE:


