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Developing Multilingual Repertoire at Intersecting Mobility Scales

Xiqiao Wang

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH, USA

Lifang Bai

HAINAN UNIVERSITY, CHINA

Yixuan Jiang

SURUGADAI UNIVERSITY, JAPAN

Abstract: This article draws on and extends research on literacy mobility (Fraiberg et al., 2017; Lam, 2009; Lorimer Leonard, 2017) to examine one writer's multilingual repertoire and literacy practices at the intersection of global processes of migration that shaped her personal, professional, and academic pursuits at a Chinese university. Taking up the concept of scale (Blommaert et al., 2005), this article explores how the student's multilingual repertoire is complexly motivated by her own geographical, imaginary, and literacy mobilities, which were themselves shaped by access to scaled semiotic resources, valuation systems, and tropes of migration. More specifically, we explore how Yi, the focal student, mobilizes semiotic resources and literacy practices from school- and self-sponsored literacy and professional activities to develop her multilingual repertoire; we then discuss how Yi's multilingualism is complexly shaped by geographical, professional, literacy, and imaginary mobilities at intersecting scales.

Reflection

Our commitment to under-represented students stems from our life trajectories as multilingual writers, biliterate scholars, and transnational individuals working in institutional and disciplinary contexts that operate with distinct orientations towards knowledge-making practices.¹ Our own struggles to add

¹ Please read the opening statement for this collection, "Editing in US-Based International Publications: A Position Statement," before reading this chapter.

academic English to our linguistic repertoires formed our commitment to understanding diverse students' language and cultural differences as assets rather than deficits.

Xiqiao discovered the possibility for international collaboration from the 2015 IRC workshop, which led her to meeting her wonderful colleague Gita Dasbender, who reported on her research conducted through the Fulbright Specialist Program. At the time, Xiqiao had been working on collaborative multi-sited research studies that investigated international students' literacies, identities, and mobilities, which culminated in her co-authored book entitled *Inventing the World Grant University: Chinese International Students' Mobilities, Literacies and Identities*. Such research has led her to examine the role of globalization and digital technology in enabling the mobility of people, ideas, and narratives at national and international scales, which manifest in the literacy practices and identities of newly mobile and affluent international students migrating in a global marketplace of higher education. While such research has revealed the creative and innovative ways in which international students mobilize languages, literacy resources, friendships, and networks globally to achieve academic and professional success, it has also called attention to the increasing disparity and social fragmentation that imposed detrimental effects on migrant laborers in China, whose work has contributed to the rapid accumulation of wealth but whose sacrifices are inadequately recognized and theorized.

Xiqiao and Lifang met through our joint participation in a visiting scholar program in a U.S. university and our collaboration has grown with subsequent collaborations in research and professional development initiatives. In 2018, Xiqiao completed a Fulbright Specialist assignment in collaboration with Lifang at HNU. It is through this Fulbright assignment that we began to explore the possibility of integrating translingualism into the existing curriculum at HNU and to pursue deepening theoretical questions by shifting our analytical attention from mobile, privileged international students to first-generation college students who grew up as left-behind children during China's labor migration. Yixuan, one of the nine undergraduate students who participated in the summer course, provided invaluable insights in the ongoing development of the project.

To prepare for this study, Xiqiao had conducted pilot studies through projects funded by internal grants from Michigan State University, which allowed her to develop preliminary exploration of young women's literacy learning in China. Subsequent to the 2018 collaboration, Xiqiao had also gathered data from a cohort of 33 participants in Anhui and Guizhou provinces, two economically underdeveloped regions with large out-bounding migratory

populations. On one hand, these pilot studies have revealed important themes about how national and transnational processes of labor migration has disadvantaged and victimized young women growing up as left-behind children; on the other hand, it also called for the need to develop methodological tools to systematically account for and further delve into young women's experiences developing expertise and resources despite unfavorable circumstances that limit their geographical, social, and professional mobility.

Currently, Xiqiao and Lifang are planning for further collaboration, which will allow them to pursue the issue with additional methodological tools adapted from social geography (e.g., mobility journal and mobile interview) and new literacy studies (e.g., digital storytelling). These tools will allow us to further describe young women's experiences with rural and urban spaces as well as the literacy resources embedded in such spaces. Such a move is critical in generating "thick" descriptions of how left-behind children work through, with, and against social, political, and educational structures to achieve mobility. In so doing, we hope to further unravel how movements across borders create practical, intellectual, emotional, and imaginary demands, thereby spurring needs for new forms of communication using multiple languages and modalities. It is with such knowledge that literacy educators can begin to imagine equitable, asset-based pedagogies for supporting the literacy learning and development of diverse learners.

Institutional Context

The research was conducted in the College of Foreign Languages at Hainan University (hereafter referred to as HNU), which is the only university with 211 and Double World-Class Discipline designations (indicators used in a national ranking system used in China) in the island province of Hainan, China. Following the university's Double World-Class Discipline designation in 2017, the mission statement of the college was revised to reflect the elevated strategic position of the university in the region's economic development under the national Belt and Road Initiative. The revision included outcomes such as these: to help students "draw on multiple languages to discover, analyze, and solve problems embedded in everyday, workplace, and international contexts" and to develop students' ability to "craft and communicate significant stories across languages and cultures" ("Learning Outcomes"). Aiming towards these revised learning outcomes, the English department had been working to reinvent its curriculum by developing new professional and digital writing courses, which ran as addendum to traditional, proficiency-based courses in English Pronunciation, Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing.

In 2018, Xiqiao and Lifang collaborated to offer a six-week summer course as part of the institutional effort to develop an asset-based curriculum that prepares students for communication in globally-oriented workplace and professional contexts. In this course, we explored ways to integrate translanguaging theory (Horner et al., 2011), aiming to help students develop translanguaging dispositions and practices through assignments that position students' languages and cultures as assets for learning, encourage students' theorization of cross-language relationships, and invite students' inquiry into language differences. In particular, we focus on "translation" (Gonzales, 2018; Horner & Tetreault, 2016; Wang, 2020) as a useful metaphor to help students recognize and develop strategies for moving meaning across languages, modalities, genres, and life worlds. Course assignments (Translation Narrative, Writing Theory Cartoons, I am from Poetry) invited students to practice and reflect on their own practices of translating texts from their home language into English (Kiernan et al., 2017), to theorize and represent language and cultural differences (Wang, 2017), and to consider their multilingualism as shaped by powerful literacy brokers and spaces (Stewart & Hansen-Thomas, 2016). Positioning students' languages and cultures as sites of inquiry, such assignments created many opportunities to identify, discuss, and gather data about students' multilingual repertoire in connection to their experiences with and expectations for geographical, academic, and professional mobility. An asset-based pedagogy not only invited students to share, reflect on, and theorize their own multilingual repertoire as shifting and transformative, but also provided us with the opportunity to complicate the ways in which multilingual repertoire are co-constituted with mobility. It is from this research context that this project emerged.

This article draws on research on literacy mobility, which has yielded useful theoretical and methodological tools to examine language learning and literacy practices at the intersection of advancing digital technologies and global processes of migration (Fraiberg et al., 2017; Lam, 2009; Lorimer Leonard, 2017). With such research focusing on transnational migrants who move across geographic, linguistic, and cultural borders, literacy researchers have examined how migrants leverage old and new literacy practices to sustain social networks, send financial and social remittances, and navigate transnational bureaucracies of immigration. Such research has not only examined how digital literacies provide transnational youth with opportunities to negotiate multiple identities, languages, and networks embedded in online and offline spaces (Barton & Lee, 2011; Black, 2005; Wang, 2017; Yi, 2009), but has argued for the central role of literacy in enabling migrants' navigation of institutionally sponsored spaces that control and regulate individual mobility (Lorimer Leonard, 2013). Such

scholarship has positioned literacy as an important dimension of transnational migration, as those on the move learn new ways of reading and writing in anticipation of their geographic mobility, economic solvency, and emotional intimacy (Vieira, 2019). In important ways, multilingual writers constantly reconfigure their language repertoire in reaction to social, bureaucratic, and ideological structures that privilege languages of the powerful and render the languages and narratives of the vulnerable invisible. In this article, we use literacy mobility to explore the ways in which multilingual students move, attune, and assemble dynamic semiotic resources for strategic gains. Mobility allows us to explore the dynamic ways in which students' multilingual repertoire enables mobile potential for meanings and experiences through such practices as translation and interpretation; it provides a way to observe how different languages in an evolving multilingual repertoire are negotiated, valuated, and leveraged according to contingent communicative needs; it also alerts us to the possibilities to observe literacy mobility as mobilized and mobilizing by other forms of geographic, physical, and imaginary movements fueled by personal, professional, and academic needs.

Whereas current research has often celebrated transnational migration for enabling the fluid movements of social, learning, and financial resources across international borders, such a celebratory stance has often risked creating "contemporary silences about internal migration," or ways in which migratory experiences are powerfully shaped by nation states and narratives of national identities (Schiller & Salazar, 2013). Indeed, recent scholarship has complicated metaphors of fluidity for their narrow focus on how languages and resources flow across ever-loosening borders and boundaries. Such research has called attention to the complex ways in which multilingual writers work with and against power-invested linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical differences embedded in social, political, and institutional structures that often stall movements (Lorimer Leonard, 2017; Wang, 2020). In this chapter, we provide a detailed account of how one multilingual writer from a Chinese university works with, through, and against national initiatives, regional development plans, and institutional practices to manage her own geographic, academic, social and professional movements.

Situating the Research

With China's rapid economic growth and urbanization, its population of migrants moving from rural areas to urban centers has increased from 70 to 247 million in the past three decades, accounting for 16.5% of its total population. More recently, China's expansionist agenda has been accompanied by outward

labor migration and new forms of immigration through geopolitical policy plans such as the Belt and Road Initiative (Haugen, 2012; Lee, 2017). Hainan province, where this research took place, presented a telling example of how regional economic structures evolved in reaction to such national mobility-oriented initiatives. Located at the southernmost point of China and facing the South China Sea, the island is an important node of the “Maritime Silk Road” under the Belt and Road Initiative. As China’s largest special economic zone, the island province was to be developed into a globally influential, high-level Free Trade Port (FTP) by the middle of the century. At the time of our study, President Xi Jinping had just delivered a keynote speech in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Special Economic Zone’s establishment. Xi announced the national plan to develop and promote a “free trade zone with Chinese characteristics” around the island, with renewed governmental commitment to helping the province achieve “phenomenal social and economic growth” by means of dedicated support to develop its “tourism, modern services, and high-tech sectors.” Development in such sectors is expected to facilitate “multi-level and multi-field cooperation with countries and regions along the Belt and Road.”

Such national and regional development initiatives had important implications for lived and anticipated migration at local, national, and global scales. For one thing, as the only university in the province with a 211-research designation (a national ranking system), HNU was expected to lead in research efforts in tandem with the development priorities set out in the national policy. In addition to serving the 38,000 domestic students from 34 provinces within China, HNU had been actively developing new forms of global collaboration by recruiting international students from countries targeted in the Belt and Road Initiative, forging collaboration with elite research centers globally, and developing joint international colleges. While the intertwining of internal and outbound labor movements at the national level has enabled social mobility, shifted social structure, and displaced families (Lee, 1998; Naughton, 2007), students attending HNU were also re(imagining) their educational and career aspirations in response to opportunities and challenges embedded in lived and imagined mobilities promised in the national initiative. Therefore, HNU provides an interesting site for examining how various forms of mobilities materialize in students’ literacy learning.

Scale as an Analytical Tool

Researchers of literacy mobility have used scale to explore how semiotic and identity resources are unevenly distributed and mobilized in transnational

contexts (Lam, 2009; Wang, 2017). Scale is a concept borrowed from social geography to capture the complex stratification of spaces, which are power-invested structures that exist in hierarchical relationship to one another. Jan Blommaert (2015) has theorized scale as semiotized space/time, or “invokable [chunk] of history that provide meaning-attributing resources [and] historically configured and ordered tropes” (p. 111). Scale therefore provides a means of tracing the invocation of historically developed semiotic resources across time-space relationships as students develop their multilingual repertoires.

To trace the movement and invocation of semiotic resources, it is useful to attend to the horizontal dimension of spatiality (Blommaert et al., 2005), which organizes spaces at local, translocal, national and transnational scales (e.g., street, neighborhood, city, state, country and continent). Simultaneously, scale operates vertically to account for the asymmetrical manner in which the mobility of people, texts, and semiotic resources are enabled, directed, or limited. While horizontal ordering of scaled spaces allows us to trace how semiotic resources travel, vertical scales allow us to observe the power differentials that enable global centers (e.g., world-renowned universities, powerful nations, global lingua franca) to exploit the resources on the peripheral (e.g., regional college, developing countries, non-dominant vernaculars). Scale is therefore a useful concept to capture the complex ways in which languages are positioned and valued in relation to each other—processes that are mediated by resources unevenly located at local, regional, national, and transnational scales. Such a view is especially important in studying multilingual practices and identities because scale allows us to trace and theorize how historically developed resources, norms, and imaginaries about why and how people move are invoked to mediate local performance and valuation of language work.

Scholars have used scale to describe how power asymmetries can unfold in practices to disadvantage particular groups and their multilingual repertoire as well as creating exigencies for negotiation (Dong & Blommaert, 2016; Kell, 2015; Stornaiuolo & LeBlanc, 2016). Together, such research situates the mobile potential of literacy as mediated by and negotiated with historical meanings embodied by semiotic resources, artifacts, and networks. While such research has directed our attention to the contentious labor of producing texts as layered by scaled resources, there has been little understanding of multilingual students’ active and strategic working and reworking of such resources as dynamically tied to institutional, regional, and national structures.

In this chapter, we consider how one student’s multilingual repertoire was complexly motivated by her own geographical, imaginary, and literacy mobilities, which were themselves shaped by access to scaled semiotic resources, valuation systems, and tropes of migration. On one hand, we observe Yi’s

ability to access and leverage language resources at horizontal scales through efforts such as offering English tutoring in her immediate community (local), taking courses in foreign languages (university), providing translation services at an international forum (regional and international). On the other hand, we observe how scaled languages are hierarchically arranged and valued based on their social and economic values through such practices as acquiring an internationally accredited certificate to participate in a global marketplace, learning a foreign language to facilitate geographic mobility during travel, or leveraging one's translation practices to facilitate the transnational mobility of idea and commodities. In approaching scaled semiotic resources from horizontal and vertical perspectives, we grapple with the various power structures that shape the students' effort to recognize, attune, and strategize their multilingual repertoires for strategic gains. The following questions guide the present study: How does Yi (the focal student) mobilize semiotic resources and literacy practices from school- and self-sponsored literacy and professional activities to develop her multilingual repertoire? How is Yi's multilingualism shaped by geographical, professional, literacy, and imaginary mobilities at intersecting scales?

Methodology

Through the summer course, we worked with nine sophomore English majors at HNU to explore their literacy mobility and multilingual repertoire. Yi was purposefully selected because of the dynamic ways in which she leveraged multiple languages to pursue academic, professional, and social mobility within and beyond the university. We focused on Yi's multilingual repertoire as co-evolving with a wealth of school- and self-sponsored literacy activities she developed. In so doing, we explore how Yi's multilingualism co-evolved with her changing career aspirations, which reverberated with mobility tropes from national policy initiative, regional economic plans, and shifting missions of the university.

Data Collection & Analysis

To fully explore Yi's multilingual repertoire and literacy mobility, we attended to her ongoing drafting of assignments as sites of inquiry. That is, we used Yi's evolving drafts, which provided descriptions of and reflections on her multilingual experiences, to guide semi-structured and discourse-based interviews, which prompted additional observations of Yi's literacy activities inside and outside the classroom. The following strands of data were collected (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: Data Collected

Data Strand	Count	Study Objectives
Semi-structured interview	2 (Total: 120 minutes)	Literacy identities, history, and practices Physical and imaginary movements
Field notes and audio recordings of in-class invention and drafting activities	4 (Total: 160 mins)	Sharing of ideas individually, in pairs, and in groups
Writing Artifacts	2 drafts of <i>I am from Poem</i> (Chinese & English) 1 draft of Translation Narrative 1 draft of Translation Narrative with two peer reviewer comments 2 drafts of Writing Theory Cartoon 3 pages of Japanese Art Journal	Yi's ongoing description, reflection, and theorization of her multilingual repertoire and experiences moving across languages, modes, and life worlds
Field notes of informal literacy activity observation outside the classroom	1 (Total: 60 mins)	Yi's routine movement on and off campus tied to professional aspirations and literacy activities

Note: We gathered different types of ethnographic data to achieve a rich understanding of Yi's literacy activities across contexts.

Data analysis began with interview transcripts, which were segmented and coded at the clause level to identify themes, such as literacy sponsor (e.g., parent, foreign teacher), mobility (e.g., move to gain access to resources, plans to study abroad), literacy practices (e.g., help a foreign teacher prepare bureaucratic documents, engage in fandom-based activities, provide interpretation services at a conference), and translanguaging theorizing (e.g., contemplation of language differences and irregularities, consideration of cross-language relations). These codes were then verified and refined through a triangulated reading of artifacts, classroom recording transcripts, and field notes. For instance, Yi's discussion of cross-language relations as a strategy to develop her multilingual repertoire during interview was triangulated with discourse-based interview about her *I am from* poem, which contained telling examples of code-meshing and translation; her Translation Narrative, which contained detailed discussion of how she mobilized strategies developed across multiple languages to engage with translation; and classroom

recordings, which contained an episode of her and a classmate discussing linguistic features of multiple languages.

Our second move was to further explore types of mobility (e.g., geographical, literacy, imaginary) as mediated by semiotic and professional resources and norms located at different horizontal scales (e.g., local, regional, transnational). We noted in particular how each type of mobility might acquire different scalar qualities vertically. For instance, Yi's discussion of how she utilized multiple modes of transportation to acquire bureaucratic documents from the custom office was coded as geographical mobility at local scale; but such local mobility was entangled in anticipated international travel of her foreign teacher's cat, which was coded as geographical mobility at transnational scale. Such analysis often revealed vertical qualities of scales, such as how transnational mobility was enabled through bureaucratic procedures conducted in English, which came at the cost of labor-intensive mobility work at a local scale (e.g., repeated trips made to local agencies or extensive translation labor to prepare documentation). See Table 7.2 for an outline of Yi's mobilities.

Table 7.2: Mobility Across Scales

Mobility at Different Scales	Description
Geographic	Movements of physical bodies across multiple geographic locations at local (villages), regional (province), national (within nation state), international (between nation states), and global (fluidly across national states) scales.
Literacy	Movements of life experiences, life worlds, and meanings across languages, through writing, translation, adaptation, and remix (e.g., using transnationally distributed media content to learn Japanese to get access to fandom resources at national scale)
Imaginary	Imaginary movements of peoples, ideas, financial resources, technologies as laid out in strategic plans, visions, narratives, and discourse (e.g., learning a foreign language to enhance one's employability at transnational scale)
Disciplinary/Professional	Movements of expertise, strategies, and knowledge across disciplinary and professional fields to enable the accumulation of academic and professional credentials (e.g., acquiring educational credential recognized at international scale)
Social/Class	Movements across social and class strata, often connected to geographic movements in search of work, remittance of technologies, money, and literacy artifacts, and consequent accumulation or loss of family wealth (e.g., working hard so that parents achieve regional mobility by relocating to a new city with better healthcare)

Note: This table summarizes our ongoing effort to theorize different types of movements manifesting Yi's life and shaping her multilingual repertoire.

Findings

Yi, a sophomore English major at the time of the study, came from a family of Chinese herbal medicine practitioners. As her parents' work often kept them from home, Yi grew up under the care of her grandparents. Having witnessed how hard her parents worked to obtain professional certification for their practice, Yi placed much value on her education. Although Yi indicated her preference for finance and medicine on her college entrance application, her testing score fell short, resulting in her placement as an English major. This outcome was celebrated by her parents, who saw the major as promising a less stressful career.

At the university, Yi described herself as an average student with mediocre testing scores, but she also placed value on a wealth of extracurricular activities she pursued, which were fueled by multiple personal and professional aspirations. She argued that academic studies only occupied a small parcel of her daily routine, as she invested much time in student government, fandom-based clubs, professional development initiatives, and part time work. It was through her engagement with this rich writing extracurricular (Gere, 1994) that Yi recognized the value of and the need to continuously cultivate her dynamic multilingual repertoire consisting of Chinese, English, French, Japanese, and Indonesian. In what follows, we begin with an account of Yi's multilingual repertoire as co-evolving with a wealth of literacy practices operating with semiotic resources at varying scales. We then discuss how her multilingual repertoire is entangled in physical and imaginary mobilities at local, regional, national, and transnational scales.

Recognizing Cross-Language Relationships

Yi's *I am from* poem (see Figure 7.1) contains rich olfactory details in memory of her childhood, which was embodied by the scent of "herb cans" containing "dried tangerine" and "reed's roots"—commonly used ingredients in Chinese herbal medicine. Her childhood "was immersed in pleasant scents of herbal medicine" and marked by "failed attempts to steal a sip from ancient herb alcohol" her grandfather brewed. She provided Chinese annotations to her English poem, partially because she wanted to supply the cultural resonance lacking in words translated from Chinese into English. For instance, she provided the name of the traditional Chinese medicine (陈皮) next to its English translation "dried tangerines," which to her had deprived the concept of all cultural connections to the history, practices, and art of practicing

herbal medicine. The visible movements of ideas across languages observed here were rooted in her interests in language studies in general. Below, we discuss how code-meshing manifested in her poem provides a window into her strategic, routine traversal across multiple languages, which provided useful strategies for developing her poem immediately and her multilingual repertoire in general.

As an avid fan of Japanese TV drama, Yi had spent three years in intense, self-sponsored Japanese learning. Since high school, Yi had enthusiastically followed the work of Ninomiya Kazunari, a Japanese TV actor, and Oda Kazumasa, an award-winning Japanese musician. Yi had begun taking French in fulfillment of the departments' requirement for second foreign language learning. While she followed the assigned textbook and worksheets to learn French, she resorted to Japanese TV dramas and online tutorials to study Japanese. Daily traversal across these languages helped her develop a disposition towards open inquiry into language differences.

I Am From Poem

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I am from the herb cans

From dried tangerines (陈皮) and reed's root → 中药

I am from the aroma of ink → 家里很多旧书

Mild, moldy, with flower's scent

I am from the sequoia (水杉) → 院子里的

Tall, straight and silent

I am from fireworks and homemade lanterns → 春节习俗

From Duan Qirui and Hegui → 外祖母的叔伯

I'm the medical books and wards → 常去父母工作的地方

From "Go and finish your homework!" and "Want more books?"

I'm from soul of my ancients, mixed with ash of paper ingot (锭) → 祭祖

I'm from the capital of crayfish (小龙虾) and the hometown of the Emperor → 江苏盱眙

Fried prawn slices on the table of family assembly, and hot fish pans → 鱼锅

✓ From the adversity my dad had to chase his "dreaming of university"

✓ The sleepless nights in which my mom worked to get the certificate for assistant practicing doctor

In an old drawer made by camphor (香樟) spilling some albums

Concealing his suit, her wedding dress and my childhood

I'm from those moments going on my way to a city faraway

Figure 7.1: Yi's I Am From poem. This poem emerged from inventive activities offered during the class to help Yi reflect on important aspects of her culture and family heritage.

In her translation narrative, she explored how English was connected to other languages:

Learning other languages helps me develop my English, like Japanese and French. French follows similar inflection rules like English does and you see so many English words that were borrowed from French. When I study French, I take extensive notes of similar usages in French and English. Learning French helps me learn English. Similarly, Japanese has many borrowed words from English. Studying across these three languages helps to expand my vocabulary. I begin to summarize lexical rules for inventing new words across languages. This is an area where rote memorization never helps a learner. (Personal communication, June 10, 2018)

Evidenced here is an emerging, metalinguistic understanding of languages as linguistic, rule-governed structures that are dynamically related to each other. The metalinguistic awareness Yi demonstrates here is mirrored in Robert Jiménez et al. (2015), which explores how middle school students learned to collaboratively translate carefully selected excerpts from grade-appropriate literature in Spanish. These authors not only observe how translation activities encourage students to “draw on their cultural and linguistic knowledge to derive meaning” (Jiménez et al., 2015, p. 249), but also argue that translation is an especially important metalinguistic activity because it requires students to compare, reflect on, and manipulate multiple languages (p. 251). For students like Yi, dynamic negotiation of meaning through translation is already a routine part of their linguistic reality. Her theorization of cross-language relationships manifests in her evolving metalinguistic knowledge of vocabulary as partially determined by grammatical overlap and divergence between English, Japanese, and French, which have a history of cross-fertilization and borrowing despite surface understandings of them as seemingly discrete and bounded languages. This informal theory, one that begins to consider how grammatical and lexical features across different languages can be strategized to facilitate her learning of English immediately and to cross linguistic barriers in her interest- and professionally-driven activities, mirror a translingual view that position languages as evolving in relationship to each other (Horner et al., 2011).

Mobilizing Fandom-based Literacies

Yi's linguistic traversal was an important dimension of her transnationally dispersed literacy landscape. As an avid fan of Japanese TV drama, Yi had developed a wealth of literacy activities that enabled her participation in an

online community where fans from Japan, China, and South Korea shared news about concert tours, media releases, and celebrity gossip. Her activities in the forum, primarily conducted in Japanese, further motivated Yi to develop other self-sponsored Japanese learning activities, such as watching dubbed Japanese TV drama without subtitles, following and interacting with Japanese fans and celebrities on Instagram, and using her “naturally grown Japanese (野生日语)” to translate Japanese TV shows and write fan mails to her idol. Such self-sponsored learning had translated into a professional credential- Yi had passed Level 3 of Japanese Language Proficiency Test.

Her fandom activities not only motivated daily traversal in the digital world, but had compelled her geographical mobility at a transnational scale. In the summer of her freshman year, Yi took advantage of a university-sponsored study-abroad program to spend two weeks in Japan. In addition to participating in school activities, she spent the last few days exploring several destinations, including Waseda University, a prestigious institution of higher education that a number of her idols attended, as well as scenic locations where memorable scenes in her favorite TV series were shot. She described her excursions as a means of paying homage to people whose artistic achievements inspired her. Additionally, she documented her travel experiences in Hobonichi, an Otaku-inspired literacy practice known as Japanese art journal, in which she blended texts, images, and colors to document her experiences (See Figure 7.2).

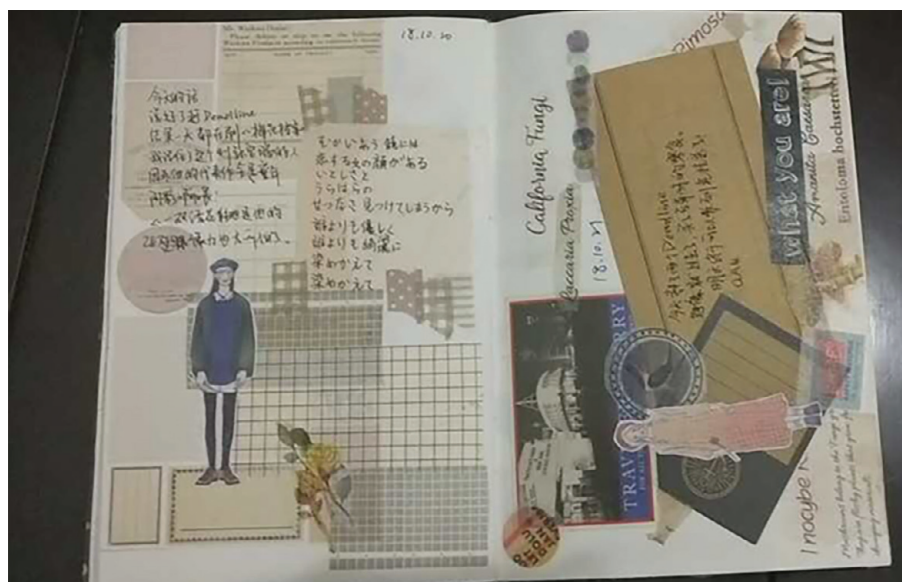


Figure 7.2: Yi's Art Journal. Yi routinely used Art Journal, a fandom literacy practice, to record and reflect on important life experiences.

Her experiences with Japanese had important implications for her creative writing across languages. In one stanza of her poem, Yi wrote about “the aroma of Ink” from shelves of old Chinese herbal medicine books in her family home as “mild, moldy, with flower’s scent.” When asked about her uses of “aroma” and “scent,” she suggested that she carefully considered the nuances and connotations entailed in words such as “fragrance,” “aroma,” and “perfume,” which led her to an understanding of an important lexical difference between Chinese and English. Whereas Chinese compounds a shared root word “香 a pleasant smell” with affixes to evoke different smells of books (书香), flowers (花香), and ink (墨香), English operates with distinct lexical units such as aroma (food), fragrance (flower), and perfume.

More importantly, the use of “scent” helped her invoke a rhyming pattern she had learned to appreciate from studying Japanese. Noting that rhyming was not discussed or required in the assignment, Yi explained that “poetry has to have rhyming” and suggested that she worked hard to make sure she “switched to a different rhyme every other two lines.” Instead of using “fragrance,” her first choice, she used “scent” to create a rhyme with “root.” This understanding of genre convention was developed through her regular performance of Japanese poetry, as she explained,

I often record my own covers of songs from Japanese idols and when I go to KTV with my friends, I sing these songs. Such performances have led me to recognize the rhymes embedded in the lyrics. One of my favorite songs is “Fairy Tale.” Written in Japanese, it operates with “a” rhyme for the first two lines of a stanza and then switches to the “no” rhyme in the second two lines. Rhymes switch every two lines, and I love that. I tried to do that in this poem. (Personal communication, July 10th, 2018)

In discussing another feature of her writing—her use of precise verbs, such as “chase” and “spill,” she mentioned that she was particular about using precise words rather than rhetorical flourishes because of her experiences as a fanfiction writer. In writing the poem, she put much emphasis on achieving clarity and resonance with her audience rather than showing off her techniques. This approach was informed by extensive experiences with fanfiction writing:

I write fanfiction based on Japanese TV series. In my stories, I like to carve out details. Rather than replicating characters and plots found in the original, I focus on storytelling because I

am not confident that I have a good grasp of human nature or psychology, which is often an important aspect of Japanese TV drama. I like to tell a good story through good details. Even if the story is told through rough language, it is great because it draws readers into it. Readers in these communities are more interested in stories and you will get teased if you use too much rhetorical flourishes. (Personal communication, June 10th, 2018)

From a mobility perspective, it is important to attend to textual meaning as emerging through the convergence of multiple literacy trajectories accumulated over the course of a literate life and operating at different scales. The seemingly simple act of writing the poem draws on “cultural, rhetorical, and technical skills [developed] through lived experiences” to transform meaning across languages (Gonzales, 2018, p. 11). In addition to drawing on memories scattered across moments and spaces, the writing itself takes shape through creative reconfiguration of writing knowledge, practices, and strategies that are necessarily heterogeneous, multi-sensory, and multivocal. Her access to transnational fandom-based online communities powerfully shapes her approaches to writing.

It is also important to attend to creative ways in which Yi leveraged rich semiotic resources located at different scales, most notably transnational fan activities, which privileged the use of Japanese. However, Yi mobilized writing-related strategies (e.g., rhyming, vivid writing) located at the transnational scale to facilitate her English poetry writing for a limited audience. Writing a poem in English involved constant traversal across multiple languages and literacy spheres, which invited ongoing efforts to access multilingual texts, assess alternatives, and negotiate rhetorical differences. Indeed, the choice of a detail or a verb mobilizes many moments embedded in Yi’s reading and writing lives within and beyond the university, across genres and spanning multiple scales, for different purposes and audiences, and subjected to different assessment standards. In this recursive process of defining meaning, negotiating differences, and connecting with her audience, Yi repurposed writing knowledge and strategies developed through previous literacy activities in innovative ways.

Brokering Labor Migration at Transnational Scale

As a member of the Public Relations Committee in her college’s Student Government, Yi had worked as a student liaison whose charge was to facilitate the settlement of new foreign teachers (外教 *wai jiao*, a label used to describe instructors with native-level fluency in a certain language from a country

in which the language is dominant). She provided support to help foreign teachers navigate social and institutional processes entailed in transnational migration of international faculty. During her two years at the university, she had picked up arriving faculty at the airport, made arrangements for accommodations, sent packages domestically and internationally, and gathered and completed government documents on behalf of faculty. Completion of such tasks required constant and creative leverage of her multilingual repertoire:

My foreign teacher's cat has been sick and she needs to bring it back to the UK for medical treatment. I have been learning a lot about what it takes to bring a kitty from China to the UK. I have taken her to various offices, like veterinarian clinics, custom office, and health department, to get all necessary documents for custom clearance upon departure and arrival. I ordered medications and thermal containers for her online. What made these tasks challenging was the medical jargon. I often found myself scrambling on the spot, translating back and forth using my phone. But she could not have done any of these without my help. (Personal communication, June, 8th, 2018)

As seen here, Yi's multilingual repertoire is entangled in various forms of mobility at intersecting scales. Transnational processes of talent migration are at work, as they manifest in the hiring and settling of foreign teachers; Yi plays a central role in brokering difficult transitions and adjustments entailed therein. The institution's recruitment of foreign teachers partially responds to pressures to position itself as a world-class university that embraces international collaborations and attracts global talents. In addition to the need to provide students with access to authentic linguistic and cultural knowledge locally, the preference of international faculty with native-level fluency is also complexly intersecting with a global hierarchy that orders countries and languages in a center-peripheral scheme, with the English language and native speakers from English dominant countries placed above students' multilingual and multi-dialectical repertoires, the needs of such faculty satisfied at the cost of students' physical and intellectual labor (Blommaert et al., 2005). In part, the very existence of student liaisons emerged in connection to the flow of transnational labor from the center to the peripheral, the direction of such flow partially determined by the hierarchical privilege awarded to English as a global *lingua franca*.

Tellingly illustrated in the example is also the complex ways in which mobility at the global scale is enabled by mobility at local and national scales.

Yi leveraged multiple modes of transportation (e.g., school-reimbursed cab services, ride-share bike rental, bus) to travel to various governmental offices as she researched and completed the paper trail needed to register and vaccinate the cat, to apply for custom clearance, and to arrange for international travel. A nationally implemented supply chain is also at work to enable such transnational mobility. To pick up her online order of a thermal container and medication necessary for the cat's international travel, we walked to one among many "delivery pick-up centers" on campus, which housed hundreds of delivery items for students and faculty. Outside the crowded warehouse, small trucks made multiple runs daily to deliver online orders; drivers riding electric scooters waited to collect items for delivery to campus locations for those who were not willing or able to physically visit the center.

Additionally, Yi's literacy mobility, particularly her translation skills, played a central role in enabling the transnational movement of bodies and artifacts. It has been argued that multilinguals carefully cultivate, configure, and leverage their semiotic repertoire to achieve mobility for themselves and their loved ones (Vieira, 2019) and multilingualism accrue social and economic value by staying mobile. As in the example of Khadroma, a graduate nursing student whose translation and interpretation skills accrue economic and cultural value through service provided to stakeholders (Lorimer Leonard, 2017), the daily translation services Yi provided was similarly a practice with tremendous mobile potential. Translation provided Yi with the opportunity to engage in the intellectual, emotional, and physical labor of working with, through and against internally diverse, interpenetrating, and fluid languages at the intersection of local and transnational scales (Gonzalez, 2018; Wang, 2020). The strategic nature of her translation manifested in ongoing effort to broker an otherwise stalled communication between two stakeholders—the instructor with an urgent travel need, and local police and custom officers struggling to communicate institutional processes to an English speaker. The sheer amount of physical labor involved in such work (multiple trips to gather necessary forms), the emotional reward from doing so (many informal dinners with her teacher and learning a family recipe from the teacher), and the intellectual growth achieved (conversations about British movies, music, and daily life), helped Yi develop cognitive and linguistic dexterity, a disposition of openness, and a growing aspiration towards multilingual expertise.

Reinventing a Global Imaginary of Mobility as Opportunity

Yi's continuous honing of her multilingual repertoire was also fueled by a nationally inculcated imaginary that positioned the island as a hub of

international collaboration and trade. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, the island was envisioned as a prosperous trade zone bustling with transnational movements of people, corporations, and technologies, a vision that quickly figured into the career and professional realities of students. Yi, along with a group of her peers, was selected to serve as a volunteer at 2018 Bo'ao Forum for Asia Annual Conference. Yi worked hard to secure a position at the conference, where she provided simultaneous interpretation for a keynote speaker who delivered a talk on recent developments in agricultural technology. After the conference, she translated the speech into Chinese, which was then worked into promotional materials and media reports broadcasted locally and nationally. Even though the experience felt rushed and stressful, she embraced the opportunity as intellectually and professionally rewarding.

Although I have been practicing my interpretation skills, I still felt unprepared for the job. Between the acceptance notice and the assignment, we were only given a week to prepare. I didn't receive the speaker's PPT until the night before his talk and it took me 4 hours to translate it for my own preparation. The next day, I didn't get to meet the speaker until ten minutes before his talk and the check-in was brief. He would only pause every 5–6 sentences instead of pausing at the end of each sentence like I asked him to, leaving me feeling very nervous and awkward. But I was so happy to see my translation appearing in the website update for the program. (Personal communication, July 18th, 2018)

What struck Yi was the tremendous economic and social values of her multilingualism as well as the consequences of failing to leverage it successfully. On one hand, Yi felt incredibly proud to find herself positioned at the center of the global traffic of ideas; she was an indispensable bridge between the speaker, a researcher from a U.S. university, and his audience, consisting largely of entrepreneurs, government officials, and Chinese university researchers. On the other hand, she felt great pressure to continuously hone her multilingual repertoire, which was important in her job search immediately and her pursuit of further educational credentials in the long term.

Yi's multilingualism was cogently positioned and valued at intersecting scales. Within her department, a small cohort of students with demonstrated expertise were chosen, as they were expected to be seen as an embodiment of the university's mission, the quality education it offered, and its ability to lead the region's economic and technological development. The strategic

vision for the university, as well as the professional trajectories of its students, are connected to the national Belt and Road initiative, an ambitious strategic plan that seeks to expand China's global influence by developing a trans-continental path of trade and investment. The impact of the initiative was further illustrated in the university's rush to offer more classes in foreign languages. The positioning of the island as a geographic hub connecting China with neighboring Southeastern Asian countries, such as Lao, Indonesia, and Thailand, led to the college's introduction of a new course in Indonesian, which was actively promoted to students for providing highly marketable skills needed to enhance regional collaboration between China and its trading partners. Yi had just begun her first semester taking a class in introductory Indonesian.

Whereas Yi actively worked to add multiple languages to her linguistic repertoire, English remained at the front and center because of its position at the hierarchical center. At a national scale, Yi's proficiency in English would greatly enhance her ability to cross disciplinary borders and obtain nationally recognized educational credentials. On a global scale, such proficiency enables the materialization of a cosmopolitan imaginary of the global elite, whose lifestyle was marked by global footprints through leisure and business travel, professional affiliation with fortune 500 companies, and fulfillment of consumeristic aspirations (Dong & Blommaert, 2016). Yi had been studying for the chartered financial analyst (CFA) certificate, which is a globally-recognized, coveted professional credential. For Yi, the certificate "exudes prestige" if only for the fact that all available studying materials and exams were conducted in English.

Manifested here are various imaginary mobilities, including the imaginary of the global elite who travels around the globe and the positioning of the island as a global center for trade and technological innovation. Such imaginaries, premised on the island's ability to enable the movements of professionals, companies, and technologies, directly translates into positive recognition and valuation of Yi's multilingual repertoires. Events such as the Bo'ao Forum and international trade shows help to construct a narrative that celebrates mobility as engendering regional progress and global growth. Such an imaginary worked at national, institutional, and personal levels to alert students to the importance of linguistic dexterity as well as the values of versatile professionals who not only participate in, but also propel the global traffic of people, commodities, and financial resources. However, missing from such imaginaries are profound ways in which global economic injustice reverberates, with regards to the different valuation of privileged languages such as English versus languages on the periphery, such as Indonesian.

Conclusion

Yi's multilingual repertoire is constantly valued and reevaluated in accordance with national development initiatives, regional economic structures, institutional policies, and personal aspirations. While our discussion seems to portray a top-down reverberation of economic incentives and political priorities, which seem to dictate how literacies and languages move, Yi has shown us the strategic ways in which multilinguals fashion fluid semiotic resources to specific ends (Lorimer Leonard, 2013). Literacy mobility, manifested in her attempt to move meaning across languages, is entangled with other forms of mobility at different scales, such as the daily movements between Chinese and Japanese culture through digitally mediated fandom spaces, physical movements at a local and transnational scales (e.g., organizing travel itinerary in accordance with the literacy footprints of celebrities or visiting local offices to gather documents), professional mobility (e.g., learning multiple languages in anticipation of studying or working in a global marketplace), and imaginary mobility (e.g., policy initiatives in motion to facilitate anticipated movements of people, technologies, and ideas). A view towards intersecting mobilities lends to an understanding of linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary border-crossing as an important dimension of her rhetorical repertoire.

Scale offers a way to observe the circulation of material, cultural, and semiotic resources across spaces and to capture the reconfiguration of such resources in developing multilingual repertoires. Foregrounding scale allows us to trace the flow of tropes, imaginaries, and trajectories of mobility across interconnected spaces, ultimately allowing us to understand the effects national, regional, and institutional structures have on what people can do and can become in them. Scale captures the horizontal distribution of linguistic resources and vertical, hierarchical ordering of those resources in various dimensions of Yi's literacy landscape. The coupling of scale's horizontal and vertical qualities allows us to examine the complex ways in which Yi's multilingualism is co-constituted across spaces when languages, norms, and strategies are differently valued and therefore dynamically reconfigured.

Although the portrait presented here seems to focus on the fluid manner in which life experiences, writing-related knowledge, and ideas for writing travel seamlessly across ever-loosening borders and boundaries, we are reminded of the fact that literacies and languages are differently valued, with relations of power rendering certain repertoires and literacies invisible and irrelevant (Lorimer Leonard, 2017). For instance, Yi's literacies, creatively honed in the writing extracurricular, rarely traveled into the academic sphere, where grades are the basis for awards, scholarships, and internships. Even as she

prepared her application for graduate schools in Japan, a TOEFL score was required. Her work as a student liaison was barely compensated in financial terms. Multilingual writers work with and against power-invested linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical differences embedded in social, political, and institutional structures. We argue that an understanding of the geographic, affective, and embodied crossings is not complete without attention to these moments of frictions—even as this attention makes difficult the necessary task of positioning personal aspirations within powerful hierarchical structures.

Glossary

Belt and Road Initiative: A global infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013 to invest in nearly 70 countries and international organizations. It is a centerpiece of Chinese leader Xi Jinping's foreign policy.

Double World-Class Discipline Designation: A tertiary education development initiative launched by the Chinese government in 2015 to construct world-class universities and first-class disciplines (Double First-Class Initiative) to adapt to changes in the educational environment at home and abroad. It aims to develop elite Chinese universities and world-class disciplines by 2050. It represents a new way of ranking Chinese universities, with impact for funding distribution.

Literacy mobility: The movements of meaning and ideas from one language, person, mode, rhetorical tradition, and cultural context to another.

Mobility: Physical, imaginary, and symbolic movement across linguistic, physical, political, economic, class, and virtual borders.

Scale: Semiotized space-time relationship, with historically formulated meanings and norms that can be mobilized. It can be used as a horizontal way of rendering spaces in hierarchical relationship to each other and in vertical way by differently valuing semiotic resources and tropes at different scales.

Semiotic Resources: An assemblage of resources or tools that people use when they communicate (such as speech, image, text, gesture, sign, gaze, facial expression, posture, objects and so on) that can be reconfigured in synergetic ways in fulfillment of communicative purposes.

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