



## Multilingual and Multimodal Literacy Beyond School: A Case Study of an Adult Vlogger in China

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Second language literacy research in recent years has attended to emerging genres and various literacy practices. Less explored, however, are the innovative ways of meaning-making and communication facilitated by the use of multimodal resources in a foreign-language context. To bridge the gap, this study investigates how a Chinese-English bilingual speaker coordinates and orchestrates design elements in her vlogs and how decision makings are informed by various factors. Interview data and vlog analysis show that the participant is skillful in using digital technologies, anticipating audiences' needs, fulfilling rhetorical purposes, and negotiating with constraining contextual factors. This study challenges the view that learners in an EFL country have limited opportunities to use the language due to the lack of contact with the target language community. It also suggests that EFL educators could build on what learners do on their own while encouraging them to repurpose the use of vlogs and mobile technologies.

**Keywords:** multilingual, multimodal literacy, vlog, English as a foreign language

### Introduction

The past twenty years have witnessed a significant expansion of research scope in literacy studies (Mills, 2010a). Researchers in the field have shifted their focus from a set of reading and writing skills to a broader range of socially embedded activities, most of which are facilitated by digital technologies and nonlinguistic resources (e.g., Yi, 2007; Yi & Hirvela, 2010). Previous studies have brought to the fore the diversity of literacy practices by multilingual students (Stewart, 2014; Yi, 2005, 2007, 2010). Well explored in the literature is how these students, usually in an English-dominant environment, strategically travel across linguistic, cultural, and social contexts and how they actively make connections between these seemingly separate spaces (e.g., Lam, 2000, 2009; Stewart, 2014; Yi, 2010).

In contrast, a large part of the existing discussion on EFL literacy is situated in instructional settings and constrained within the scheme of language development (e.g., Cimermanová, 2015), thus downplaying the interactive, dynamic, and social nature of literacy in a digital era. The literature of the second language (L2) and literacy education hence points to the need for more studies on multilingual users' multiple forms of meaning-making in various contexts (Dagenais, Toohey, Bennett, & Singh, 2017). The current study, therefore, aims to bridge the gap by investigating a Chinese EFL speaker's voluntary engagement in bilingual video blogging, also known as vlogging. Rooted in the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1995, 1997), the concept of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), and the social semiotic theory (Kress, 2000, 2003, 2010), this study understands vlogging as a digitally mediated literacy practice that involves the use of different semiotic resources. Through the analysis of interviews

and published vlogs, this study intends to shed light on how the participant mobilizes and orchestrates design elements and what lies behind her decision-making process. By looking at the skills and awareness exhibited in such self-directed practices, this study hopes to provide implications on how multiliteracies pedagogy could build on students' existing knowledge while expanding learning possibilities.

## Theoretical Perspectives

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) emerged in response to the Literacy Debate in the 1990s, when the polarized positions toward literacy dominated the discussion (Street, 1997). The NLS scholars (e.g., Gee, 1991; Street, 1995) have advocated viewing literacy as socially embedded practices rather than a set of technical skills acquired at school. Having taken the call to study language and literacy as they occur naturally in sociocultural contexts, researchers have attempted to document a wide range of literacy practices within various cultural and linguistic groups (e.g., Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Educators and scholars are particularly interested in examining students' out-of-school literacies, with the hope of tearing down the false dichotomy between literacies practiced in different physical spaces (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Rothoni, 2018; Schultz & Hull, 2008).

Along the same line, the New London Group (1996) invented the term *multiliteracies* to account for the increasing diversity in communication channels and the growing global connectedness. The prefix "multi" foregrounds two renewed understandings of literacy and literacy education. The first one is related to "the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making" (New London Group, 1996, p. 64), while the second aspect deals with linguistic and cultural differences in an increasingly globalized era. In envisioning the "what" of literacy pedagogy, the authors (1996) proposed the concept of *design* to encompass both the available semiotic resources and the process of utilizing them. The term emphasizes "the relationships between received modes of meaning, the transformation of these modes of meaning in their hybrid intertextual use and their subsequent to-be-received status" (New London Group, 1996, p. 81). In other words, design involves "the orchestration of existing representational resources—such as linguistic patterns, genres, dialects, registers, and discourses/ideologies, as well as nonlinguistic modalities—in potentially transformative ways to achieve the designer's communicative and cultural purpose" (Lam, 2009, p. 379). Specifically, six design elements in the meaning-making process were highlighted: Linguistic Meaning, Visual Meaning, Audio Meaning, Gestural Meaning, Spatial Meaning, and the Multimodal patterns of meaning (New London Group, 1996, p. 78).

The last one, *multimodal meaning*, has received extensive attention from the field of literacy studies in recent years. Underlying a multimodality theory is the assumption that "humans use many means made available in their cultures for representation precisely because these offer differing potentials, both for representation and for communication" (Kress, 2000, p. 194). The *mode*, which serves as the basic unit of data analysis in this study, is understood as "culturally and socially fashioned resource for representation and communication" (Kress, 2003, p. 45). Previous research, both theoretical and empirical, has concurred that modes have particular potentials and limitations (Kress, 2000, 2003; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Jewitt, 2006). The concept of modal *affordance* is therefore theorized and defined as "the fit between a semiotic resource, with its inherent properties of organization, and the meaning-making purpose at hand" (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 229). Thus, the coordination and orchestration of multimodal resources require sign-makers to be aware of the modal affordances and to combine "a plurality of signs in different modes into a particular configuration to form a coherent arrangement" (Kress, 2010, p. 162).

## Research on L2 Literacy

In the past two decades, there has been a growing number of L2 literacy research whose focuses extended beyond examining linguistic demands and developments. Following the paradigm turn in the 90s, an increasing number of studies have looked at language learners' literacy practices in various contexts, shedding light on how literacy is bound up with specific sociocultural contexts and power relationships (McLean, 2010; Stewart, 2014; Yi, 2007; Yi & Hirvela, 2010). For example, Yi's studies (2005, 2007, 2010) on the Korean generation 1.5 adolescents have uncovered their involvement in a wide range of genres and discourse communities. Most of these literacy practices, such as keeping print-based and online diaries, posting on a weblog or social media, and sending emails and instant messages, were performed outside of the school and on a voluntary basis (Yi, 2005, 2007, 2010). In addition, the research has found that multilingual writers have a rich repertoire of semiotic resources which allowed them to travel adeptly across various linguistic, cultural, and social borders and to construct hybrid identities (Lam, 2009; McLean, 2010; Stewart, 2014; Vazquez-Calvo, 2018). Behind the active participation by these immigrant adolescents, many of whom were newcomers to an English-speaking country, is the desire to express oneself and to seek a sense of belonging in affinity spaces (Lam, 2000; Yi & Hirvela, 2010).

Research on foreign-language speakers' literacy practices, on the other hand, is relatively scant. L2 writing scholars have agreed that the foreign language context is fundamentally different, in the sense that there is little access to the target language in the surrounding environment and that the purpose for developing literacy skills is often unclear (Leki, 2001; Reichelt, Lefkowitz, Rinnert, & Schultz, 2012). As a result, foreign language literacy is often discussed in relation to language acquisition and linguistic development (Cimermanová, 2015; Fukunaga, 2006; Warner & Dupuy, 2018). For example, Fukunaga's (2006) study on Japanese as foreign language learners suggested that reading animes could contribute to the development of word recognition, listening skills, pronunciation, and cultural awareness. Another study has analyzed EFL students' literacy practices in the language classroom, with special attention to the media of communication (Nabhan & Hidayat, 2018). It is reasonable to believe that foreign language literacy practices also occur in multiple contexts and involve various communication channels and semiotic resources (e.g., Nabhan & Hidayat, 2018; Rothoni, 2018). Focusing only on the linguistic aspect would seriously undermine the complex nature of literacy. This study, therefore, intends to understand how the focal participant, an adult EFL speaker in mainland China, engages in bilingual vlogging, if the lack of linguistic resources and communicative motivation in the immediate surrounding works against the odd, as assumed in the literature (Leki, 2001; Reichelt et al., 2012). Although this study focuses on a particular genre of computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Sauro, 2012), the issues raised in this study regarding semiotic choices and the composing process are pertinent to the discussion of L2 literacy in general.

## The Current Study

Vlog, as a newly emerged genre, has received increasing attention from both the public and academia. Vlogs are described as "user-generated videos of short duration that are distributed online where others may view, subscribe, or comment on them" (Snelson, 2015, p. 322). Although vlogs at the early stage were usually filmed at home, recent years have witnessed a shift from home-based to mobile settings (Snelson, 2015; Raby, Caron, Théwissen-LeBlanc, Prioletta, & Mitchell, 2018). Together with the change of context is a growing diversity in topics and publication platforms (Raby et al., 2018).

In analyzing the participant's experience with vlogging and her published vlogs, this case study intends to provide a detailed and situated description of this particular literacy practice. More specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How are diverse design elements mobilized and orchestrated in the vlogs?
2. What informs and influences the participant's decision making in the designing process?

## Method

### Study Background

This study uses a qualitative case study method (Sanjani, 2020) to investigate a Chinese adult's voluntary vlogging practices. The focal participant, Chloe (pseudonym), is a Chinese national in her late twenties, whose first language is Mandarin. She grew up in Southeastern China and is now working as a full-time human resources staff at a large state-owned enterprise in Nanjing. I got to know Chloe through a local language exchange activity called Mundo Lingo, during which she was busy filming for a vlog. Later, I recruited her for this study. Due to the long geographic distance between us, all our communications during this study were facilitated by digital devices.

I recruited Chloe for the following reasons. First, she has been actively engaged in vlogging for over a year at the time of this study. She regularly produces and uploads vlogs on the public platform, although more frequently at the beginning of her vlogging journey. Second, she uses both English and Chinese in her vlogs. There are also many cases of code-switching and code-mixing, which indicates her ability to draw from linguistic and cultural repertoires and to use these resources in creative ways.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data consists of four online interviews and 13 published vlogs. The interviews were conducted on WeChat, a multi-functional social media application widely used among the Chinese community. Each interview lasted around 30 minutes and was recorded with consent from the participant. During the interviews, I invited Chloe to share her language learning experiences, stories with vlogging, the process of producing vlogs, and other insights concerning being a vlogger. I have also asked questions about specific choices of content, languages, non-linguistic elements, and so on. The interviews were carried out, transcribed, and coded in the dominant language—Mandarin—shared by Chloe and me to ensure that “the phrases and concepts are securely embedded in context, and the risk of misinterpretation and loss of participants' intended meaning is minimized” (Smith, Chen, & Liu, 2008, p. 3).

Another part of the data set includes 13 vlogs that Chloe has published so far. The vlogs were publicly accessible on her public WeChat account<sup>1</sup> “LordChloe.”<sup>2</sup> She publishes a variety of genres on that account, including vlogs, short stories, fictions, songs, and proeses. For this study, I have limited my data to the publications that are tagged as “vlog.” I have further restricted my selection of data to vlogs that have linguistic elements while excluding ones that only feature background music and visuals. The selection resulted in a total of 13 episodes to be collected. The vlogs were downloaded with Chloe's consent and arranged in chronological order.

The analysis of vlogs followed Bezemer and Jewitt's (2010) model of multimodal analysis. First, I watched each episode carefully and wrote descriptive accounts of the vlogs. These video logs serve as synopses of what was happening in the video and how the author conveys information. In writing the video logs, I paid special attention to visual elements, spoken language, subtitles, and other written texts. The video logs were then imported and analyzed in MAXQDA, a professional tool for qualitative data analysis. The data analysis was grounded in Saldana's (2016) coding manual. In the first round of coding, I noted the existence of different design elements and their roles in meaning-making. For example, the

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<sup>1</sup> The public WeChat account, also known as official account, is a platform that allows the distribution of multimedia texts to WeChat users. Individual users can register and run a public account with almost no costs.

<sup>2</sup> To protect the participant's privacy, the article has replaced her real name, wherever it appears, with the pseudonym.

original sentence in a video log “The vlog starts with Chloe saying into the camera ‘Hey, this is Chloe.’” would be coded as both “speaking English” and “greeting the audience.” This was followed by the second round—pattern coding, in which I tried to group coded segments into a smaller number of categories (Saldana, 2016). Likewise, the interview transcripts also went through several rounds of coding. I also kept an analytical log along the way to link the interview data with coded vlog segments and account for the general patterned identified in the vlogs.

## Findings

### Background Information on Chloe

Chloe was born to a middle-class family in Southeastern China. She received all her education in the Southeastern region and has a bachelor’s degree in Tourism Management. Although Chloe has not studied or lived abroad, she speaks fluent English and demonstrates advanced intercultural communicative skills. She assessed herself as being excellent in pronunciation, but relatively weak in academic writing. Apart from her full-time profession as an HR, Chloe also works as a part-time English teacher at a private institution.

Chloe’s early memory with English learning dated back to kindergarten, when her mother would “play Disney cartoons with the original soundtrack” and have her watch “pedagogical DVDs from the US” (Interview 1). Formal English education started in the third grade in primary school and continued all the way to college. English education in junior and high schools was “traditionally exam-oriented” (Interview 2).

It is interesting to note that since high school, Chloe has been actively engaged in informal learning beyond classroom. A significant source of input was popular songs and movies, as Chloe explained:

When I was a teenager, I liked listening to English songs as early as in high school.... I think this has had a great impact on me, because the English (in songs) is alive, not like the rigid and lifeless one in textbooks. (Interview 1)

Also noteworthy is Chloe’s effort to build social networks and to communicate with English speakers. She identified herself as an outgoing person who enjoys talking to people from different cultural backgrounds. For example, she has maintained a good relationship with several expatriates in Nanjing who she got to know through social media or offline activities.

In addition, Chloe has shown keen interest in online writing. As mentioned earlier, she has published a variety of writings on the WeChat platform. She also wrote and published short poems in English on Instagram. The vlogging practices started in Spring 2019 when she was invited to produce English vlogs for a newly developed platform. She took the offer and quickly learned how to shoot and edit videos on her phone.

In general, English learning for Chloe was associated with positive memories and a sense of pride. By engaging in various English-mediated activities, she has sought opportunities to improve communicative skills, establish social networks, experience target language culture, and express her identity.

### Orchestrating Design Elements in Vlogs

Textual analysis of the video logs revealed that Chloe does not confine to a specific style of vlogging and that she uses a variety of linguistic, visual, and auditory cues to construct meanings and to interact with the audience. The lengths of vlogs vary from one minute to over six minutes. The vlogs, which center around her daily life, were shot in various settings, such as the workplace and gathering with friends.

In general, Chloe uses simple camera language that places the person or people being filmed at eye-level, creating an equal symbolic relation between the actor and the viewer (Jewitt & Oyama, 2011). *Frontality*, another salient feature of her vlogs, potentially engages the audience to directly confront whatever is included in the video (Jewitt & Oyama, 2011). Chloe appears in all vlogs but the last one. In most cases, she is seen talking into the camera while attending to something else (e.g., walking, eating, taking a taxi). In her monologic narratives, usually in English, she explains what she has done recently, how she feels, what she is up to, and so on. It is interesting to note that Chloe uses several linguistic strategies to interact with her viewers. Six out of the 13 vlogs begin with a short greeting to the audience (“Hey, this is Chloe” in Vlog 10). The interpersonal interaction is heightened by complementing the moving images with the use of imperatives (“Check out my buddies” in Vlog 12), rhetorical questions (“Do I sound normal? Do I look different today?” in Vlog 5), and second-person pronouns (“Guys, I don’t know what *you* [emphasis added] do, but I never take the paper ticket when I take the railway” in Vlog 8). For example, in a vlog on braces, Chloe first describes what her braces look like and then pulls the camera close to her teeth, asking, “Guys, can you see it?” (Vlog 5). There are many other cases where she uses close-ups and engaging language to create an intimate personal relationship between the viewer and the object(s) being presented.

When she interacts with other people in the vlog, the linguistic soundscape becomes more complex and dynamic, featuring both Chinese and English and frequent instances of code-switching. In one type of interaction, she invites others to greet the viewer by saying simple English phrases like “hello” and “what’s up.” In longer and more spontaneous conversations, they tend to use Chinese as the dominant language. For example, in a gathering with three friends (Vlog 4), Chinese is used as the only language for communication throughout the video. There is also one case where the linguistic shift is explicitly solicited. In Vlog 6, Chloe documents an occasion of wine appreciation at a friend’s home. When Chloe alternates between English and Chinese, her friend jumps in and says, “咱们这期说中文吧[Let’s speak Chinese in this episode]” (Vlog 6). It is evident that language choices are contingent to the immediate environment in which the communicative events take place.

In places where verbal elements are missing, the visuals assume the narrative function. In such cases, the moving images attempt to fill in the “blanks” between two major events, connecting the otherwise separate junctures. For example, in the vlog on wine appreciation (Vlog 6), Chloe slips in images of streets, shops, and a bundle of flowers before showing her arrival at the friend’s place, prompting the viewer to imagine what she has done on the way to her destination.

The subtitles also present fascinating instances of the author’s agency in designing multimodal texts. In the first eight vlogs, subtitles are the accurate visual representations of dialogues and narratives. Subtitles in these vlogs are bilingual and shown at the bottom of the screen, with English appearing above the Chinese translation. Wherever Chinese is used for communication, the two languages are placed in a reversed order in the subtitles. Starting from the 9<sup>th</sup> video, however, we see a drastic reduction from fully bilingual subtitles to primarily Chinese ones sprinkled with English keywords. For example, the beginning of Vlog 9 features a half-eaten chocolate cake. We hear Chloe’s voice saying, “I can’t wait but eat a lot of cotton candy.” Concurrently, the subtitle reads “吃了好几个棉花糖 [eaten several marshmallow] Cotton candy/marshmallow” (Vlog 9).

It is interesting to note that the subtitles do not always match the content of conversations or narratives, in translation or otherwise. In nine videos, I have found instances where additional information is provided in subtitles to summarize, explain, complement, and anchor actions or speech. For example, in a scene where Chloe reads aloud from a menu, the subtitle shows “\*reading the whole menu\* 报菜名” (Vlog 5), instead of spelling out the actual names of the dishes. In other cases, additional information is usually bracketed to complement or expand on the original words. For example, accompanying the subtitle “now that my quilt is on vacation (like Forrest’s dad)” (Vlog 7) is a narrative that captures only the first half of the sentence. Similarly, emotions and feelings can be textualized and made explicit through subtitles. For instance, when introducing the person who made the chocolate cake, she said, “The guy is a chef,” putting emphasis on the last word. Accordingly, the Chinese subtitle reads “这个人是大厨 (激动) [this person is a chef

(excited)]” (Vlog 9). In this way, the paralinguistic aspect of her speech is materialized into written symbols, which, together with other design elements, contributes to a magnification of the whole meaning.

Written texts, however, are not relegated solely to the bottom of the frame. Instead, written language appears right next to moving images or in place of visuals in 10 vlogs. Three categories of functions were identified: (1) demarcating the end of a vlog, (2) amplifying details, and (3) complementing the narratives. First, six vlogs end with a black screen and sentences in the middle. The sentences typically send out greetings (“LordChloe | 七夕快乐 [Happy Chinese Valentine]” in Vlog 9) or say goodbye to the viewer (“See you next week (;” in Vlog 8). The second use of written texts is to amplify or lay bare certain aspects of facial expressions, attitudes, and interactions that otherwise would be unnoticeable. For example, in the vlog on wine appreciation (Vlog 6), she uses texts “\*sounding lame\* 外行口吻 [amateur tone]” and “\*sounding pro\* 内行口吻 [expert tone]” to highlight her judgment of herself and her wine expert friend. Lastly, the written language helps to construct a full semiotic landscape by carving out space for nonlinguistic auditory modes without compromising the semantic wholeness. For example, Vlog 12 documents a concert-like performance in which Chloe participated. In the last six seconds, a sequence of group photos flashes through. Accompanying each photo is a fragment of the sentence, which, taken together, reads “借我项链, 项链, 靴子, 皮衣...的可爱的人们... [Lovely people who lend me the earrings, necklace, boots, leather jacket...]” (Vlog 12). The images change precisely in time with the fast-pace musical beat. The orchestration of language with image and music allows the message of gratitude to be delivered in a dynamic and lively fashion.

In short, this section identifies the salient patterns in Chloe’s effort to orchestrate available resources. It is clear that she has attempted to, quietly creatively, fit the linguistic and semiotic signs into the nonlinear logic of multimodal representation. The next section will try to account for the factors that inform and influence her choices in producing the vlogs.

## Influencing Factors

The analysis of interview data has identified four categories of factors that might influence her decision makings in vlog production. These include autobiographical identity, intended audience, rhetorical purpose, and immediate environment.

### Autobiographical identity

Autobiographical self, an essential part of the writer’s identity, emphasizes the aspect “associated with a writer’s sense of their roots, of where they are coming from” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 24). It is socially constructed, fluid, and captures the central idea that “it is not only events in people’s lives, but also their way of presenting these experiences to themselves which constitutes their current way of being” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 24).

The analysis revealed that Chloe’s sense of herself plays an essential role in determining the choices of language, content, and styles. She identified herself as “a person who speaks good English” (Interview 3). The EFL speaker identity is further supported by the affordances of digital communication, as she mentioned:

A small part [of doing vlogs] was to record my life, and a large part was to put English to use because I can talk about anything in the video. I can also examine the way I speak English to see if any mistake is made without me noticing it, or hoping that someone could correct me after the vlog is published. (Interview 1)

It is interesting to note that Chloe considered vlogging a learning opportunity and paid close attention to reflective practices. Her confidence in English proficiency, as well as the conscious effort to increase output, might explain why she chose to use English in most of her vlogs.

In addition, Chloe also wanted to create a persona of an extraverted, interesting observer of life. When asked what aspect of herself she wanted others to see in her vlogs, she answered:

First of all, positive aspects. I would never publish things that contain negative energy.... And then positive attitude toward life, constantly seeking interesting things. Some people used to suggest that I do something more exciting, like live streaming a bungee jumping. But I wouldn't do those kinds of things. [My vlogs] are about my daily life. Thus, I want to be seen as a person who discovers fun moments in mundane life. (Interview 3)

Here, I would like to highlight Chloe's agency in decision making and negotiating with viewers' expectations. Although she admitted that she wanted "more views and recognition" from the audience (Interview 1), she pushes against the idea of including attention-seeking behaviors and taking adventures for the sake of producing vlogs.

The autobiographic identity might have also determined the way she chose to present her experiences. As analyzed in the previous section, she used simple camera language and arranged her narratives in a straightforward way. When asked whether she would collect and edit materials according to a predetermined topic, Chloe answered that this was hardly the case:

I was pretty hasty in choosing topics. I record things whenever it comes to my mind. And if the recorded materials are good, I would edit a vlog out of them. I was hasty in recording the materials too. In general, there wasn't much theme-picking. (Interview 1)

In short, the writer's identity of a funny, interesting bilingual speaker is rooted in Chloe's perception of herself, which, in turn, influences what is included in the vlogs and how the content is presented.

## **Intended audience**

Chloe has demonstrated a keen awareness of audience in choosing linguistic register and designing subtitles. Chloe explained that at the beginning, her targeted audiences were "people who think their English is not good enough but are interested in learning English" (Interview 1). In other words, her vlogs are intended for Chinese EFL speakers who seek alternative ways of learning the language. Among this group, Chloe has identified her social networks, including friends, family members, colleagues, and students. Throughout the vlogs, she used low-register English and interactive language with minimum hierarchical implications. However, having vlogged for a year, Chloe said she has come to a point where she has to rethink about her audience:

The most difficult thing right now is to choose the right content. I don't know what people are interested in. I've become a little utilitarian now, and I just want people to watch and subscribe. So, I'm thinking about whether I should cater to the audiences' interest. And if so, how can I find out about their interest. (Interview 1)

Moreover, in her vlogs, the written texts sometimes assume common knowledge of Chinese culture, indicating that her intended viewers are most likely Chinese. For example, in a vlog published on May 20, a short sentence "Happy 5.20" appears at the bottom of the last shot (Vlog 2). The numerical combination "520" is homophonic to "I love you" in Chinese. Thus, May 20 is usually celebrated as a day of expressing love. The note "Happy 5.20" would be of no significance to those who are not familiar with Chinese culture.

The change of style in subtitles can also be attributed to her perception of the audience's need. Chloe explained her reason for replacing bilingual subtitles with a mix of Chinese subtitles and English keywords:

I have also learned from other people's videos and I think this might work just as well because if you understand English, you can simply listen to the sound. The Chinese words are for those who do not understand English. Adding English keywords fulfills the purpose of learning. (Interview 3)

The quotes above suggest that Chloe has attempted to balance her own interest and effort with the anticipated interest of the viewers.

## Rhetorical purpose

The analysis underlines Chloe's acute awareness of how certain design elements could be mobilized to achieve and strengthen the rhetorical purpose. For example, choosing to include a note at the end is more of a conscious move to interact with reviewers rather than blindly following the genre convention, as Chloe reasoned: "Other vloggers don't necessarily include the endnotes .... Some only include beautiful clips and do not care about interacting with the viewers. But I wanted to make connection with viewers" (Interview 4).

The same can be said about the use of written texts alongside visuals. In general, the purpose of using written words was to highlight the humorous and funny aspect of her vlogs. She explained her reason for doing so and the integration process: "Sometimes I have that [adding written words] in mind when acting, sometimes it comes to my mind while editing. In fact, I kind of like the comic effect. It's kind of like the comics" (Interview 4). More specifically, she mentioned getting inspired by a Japanese manga-based drama called *From Five to Nine*. Chloe said she really likes how the human actors in the drama were able to act out the comic effect that is characteristic of manga. Although she has never read the original manga, she was able to understand the "transformation" process (Kress, 2003) in meaning-making and eventually reshape the form of resources in relation to her own needs and interest.

## Immediate environment

The interviews suggest that vlog production was a dynamic process susceptible to many contextual factors. Chloe has to take into account not only what she wanted to achieve in the videos but also how the environment supports or constraints her effort. For example, in Vlog 4, Chinese is used as the only language for communication. The decision can be seen as an eclectic approach to balance various aspects of concern:

If I'm alone, I will choose English. When I'm with someone else, if that person speaks English well, I will choose English. In that video [Vlog 4], the others do not really speak English. Thus, I had to speak Chinese to maintain a good atmosphere. If they were forced to speak English, that would be awkward, and the vibe won't be ideal. (Interview 3)

The estimated time and workload of making vlogs is another important factor to consider. This is best reflected in the reduction of subtitles. Apart from the abovementioned reasons, Chloe also emphasized the time spent on adding subtitles, saying that "[it was] partly because I'm lazy. Making bilingual subtitles takes too much time and effort, and people just skim through" (Interview 3).

## Discussion

By analyzing the orchestration of semiotic resources in 13 vlogs, this study has shown what the bilingual speaker is capable of accomplishing in noninstructional contexts. The focal participant Chloe is skillful in managing the design process, anticipating audiences' needs, fulfilling rhetorical purposes, and negotiating with constraining contextual factors. This study has also accounted for some decisions made in collecting materials, editing video clips, and using multilingual and multimodal resources.

The findings confirm that composing multimodal texts by ESL/EFL speakers is shaped by prior experience, identity construction, and efforts to accommodate perceived audiences (Cimasko & Shin, 2017; Yang, 2012). In addition, although Chloe positioned herself as an EFL speaker and showed a willingness to improve her English proficiency, the "imagined community" (Norton, 2001) she has invested in through vlogging involves far more than just "the native culture." In this study, English is primarily used, with occasional adaptations to the local culture, to connect with other Chinese EFL speakers. This confirms but also complicates Norton and Gao's (2008) argument that "English is not only associated with the target language culture, but an imagined community of 'Chinese elites'" (p. 111). This study provides a glimpse into the ever more prevalent, creative, and flexible use of English in a non-English dominant context, and thus prompts us to consider what it means to be literate in a foreign language in a digital era (Rabbidge, 2020).

Meanwhile, Chloe's case can only be interpreted when situated in her language learning history and the sociocultural context. The interview data suggests that she has had access to linguistic, cultural, and social capital (see Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton & Toohey, 2011) since a young age, which plays a vital role in the development of bilingual literacy. In addition, Chloe is also an active member of various online communities (e.g., Instagram and WeChat), which might explain her adroitness with digital technologies and digital literacy. Her outgoing personality and willingness to communicate may have contributed to her comfort in vlogging and interacting with the viewers. If vlog is to be used as a pedagogical tool, the individual differences, such as prior experience with similar activities, and access to digital and social resources need to be taken into consideration.

In discussing the possibilities of incorporating vlogs into language or literacy classrooms, I want to go beyond simply arguing for replicating what Chloe has done on her own. Rather, as Van Leeuwen (2015) noted, "If schools and universities are to contribute something meaningful to the lives of their students, it will have to be something that is not already available elsewhere" (p. 584). In the rest of the section, I will focus on what is "not already available" in Chloe's vlogging practices, in the hope of providing solid implications for EFL literacy pedagogy.

First of all, Chloe considered vlogging primarily as a way of documenting and sharing her life with others. The particular role assigned to mobile-assisted vlogging conforms with Lai and Zhang's (2018) assumption that self-directed language learners "perceived close connections between mobile phones and daily life, but tended to associate laptops with serious study" (p. 309). Using vlogs to record day-to-day life, although motivating, might restrict learners from developing a critical awareness of interacting with social discourses. As Warner and Dupuy (2018) argued, multiliteracies pedagogy is of special importance to foreign language education at the current moment when "students' 'ability to cope with the written messages that surround them [...] and that affect their behavior,' described by Phillips (1978, p. 281), is ever more pertinent and ever less contained to the imagined community of the foreign country" (p. 125). Such an ability is not likely to be cultivated through autonomous and interest-driven behaviors (Mills, 2010b). Thus, L2 writing teachers who are interested in critical pedagogy might want to consider helping learners repurpose the use of mobile technology and using vlog as a low-stake, informal channel to promote civic and political engagement (Raby et al., 2018).

Second, as an advanced speaker of English, Chloe is intrinsically motivated and internationally oriented (Yabukoshi, 2020). Although she has demonstrated rhetorical awareness at different stages of vlogging, some of her choices seemed to be a result of expediency. For example, she admitted that there is a lack of effort to design her videos around a particular topic and that she was "hasty" in shooting and

editing the videos. At times, she also showed uncertainty about how to appeal to audiences more effectively. While this could be a manifestation of agency and self-efficacy, literacy teachers and educators need to address the designing process through explicit discussions and scaffolded instructions (Mills, 2010b; Van Leeuwen, 2015). As Mills (2010b) convincingly argued, “Teachers of English need to do more than incorporate the out-of-school literacy practices, interests, and predilections of youth. They must also extend the range of multimodal practice with which students are conversant” (p. 42). In this study, Chloe acquired and possessed basic knowledge of making and publishing a video, interacting with the audience, and foregrounding certain aspects of her identities. English education can build upon the existing knowledge and encourage students to think about various rhetorical situations that are not immediately familiar to them (e.g., introducing a scientific phenomenon or theory to a general audience; Hafner, 2014). Apart from the pedagogical practices well discussed in literature, such as providing a meta-language to describe modal affordances (Shipka, 2013), modeling the production process (Angay-Crowder, Choi, & Yi, 2013), and having students write reflections (Hafner, 2014), I would like to suggest that teachers create space for students to explore how they could approach writing and literacy in outside classrooms and how literacy practices in different contexts are interconnected with each other.

## Conclusion

This study explored a Chinese EFL speaker’s voluntary vlogging practices. By investigating what the participant is able to accomplish through self-directed practices, this study has provided implications for English literacy pedagogy in an EFL setting.

I would like to note that this study does not attempt to draw a conclusion on vlogging among multilingual speakers. Instead, the primary purpose is to bring such innovative ways of practicing language and literacy into our attention.

In addition, the analysis of vlogs is far from exhaustive and comprehensive. In fact, to capture the general patterns of using semiotic resources, I need to negotiate between the depth and breadth of analysis. As a result, I had to exclude many subtleties from the analysis, such as the font of subtitles and written texts, background music, and the use of emojis and other symbols. There are far more data to be explored and examined in the vlogs. As mentioned earlier in the findings, Chloe has demonstrated multiple identities in the videos using various design elements. A more fine-grained multimodal discourse analysis (Norris, 2004) on the data can help us understand how multilingual speakers construct and display identities in this particular context. Moreover, the current study suggests that the lack of contact with target language community does not necessarily mean insufficient opportunities to engage in literacy practices. Future studies may explore how English education in an EFL context can take advantage of the interactive, emerging forms of communication to construct an immersive language environment.

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