

Abstract

Responding to calls in literacy and writing research to locate English writing, teaching, and research in the context of other languages and (trans)national mobility, this study examines the literacy practices of Chinese students at a major Midwestern state university in the US and a public university in Guizhou, China. The multi-sited design is intended to allow for cross-cultural comparisons through a fine-grained mapping of situated multilingual, multimodal, and translingual literacy practices across local and global contexts. In targeting young women who are mostly first-generation college students with experiences as “left-behind children (1),” this study examines various mobility parameters (literacy, geographic, social, and digital) that mediate their identities, languages, and practices within and across institutional, national, and global ecologies. In observing literacy learning at the intersection of languages, digital tools, national policies, and globalizing processes, this study aims to develop contrasting portraits of students across sites (as students attending Chinese and US universities respectively are often perceived to occupy positions on opposite ends of the social spectrum). Such an approach is key to mapping exigencies and consequences of literacy practices in shaping and being shaped by mobility parameters.

Overview

Responding to calls in literacy and writing research to locate English writing, teaching, and research in the context of other languages and (trans)national mobility, this study examines the literacy practices of Chinese students at a major Midwestern state university in the US and a public university in Guizhou, China. The multi-sited design is intended to allow for cross-cultural comparisons through a fine-grained mapping of situated multilingual, multimodal, and translingual literacy practices across local and global contexts. In targeting young women who are mostly first-generation college students with experiences as “left-behind children (1),” this study examines various mobility parameters (literacy, geographic, social, and digital) that mediate their identities, languages, and practices within and across institutional, national, and global ecologies. In observing literacy learning at the intersection of languages, digital tools, national policies, and globalizing processes, this study aims to develop contrasting portraits of students across sites (as students attending Chinese and US universities respectively are often perceived to occupy positions on opposite ends of the social spectrum). Such an approach is key to mapping exigencies and consequences of literacy practices in shaping and being shaped by mobility parameters.

Central to this less bounded approach is a conceptualization of multilingual language work as mobile, mediated, embodied, and negotiated within a wider rhetorical repertoire and ecologies (Fraiberg, 2010; Gonzalez, 2018; Leonard-Lorimer, 2014; Horner et al. 2013). Drawing on this broader framework, this study attends to various historical trajectories (personal, regional and national) and mobility parameters (literacy, social, geographic, institutional) that mediate young women’s literacy practices across national/international and formal/informal contexts. More specifically, this research will address four key questions surrounding these issues: (1) What linguistic and semiotic resources do students draw on to navigate literacy, academic, social and professional practices across formal, informal, and digital contexts? (2) What human (parents, teachers, friends) and non-human (texts, tools, objects, spaces) agents mediate their literacy practices and identities? (3) How do mobility parameters embedded in wider institutional, cultural, and global ecologies mediate the literacy trajectories students develop across sites? (4) How can a more comprehensive mapping of these issues inform our research frameworks and pedagogies in relation to literacy learning in national and international contexts? This research

argues that such moves are key to challenging certain North American and monolingual assumptions on which current literacy pedagogy and research were based.

Literature Review

With China's rapid economic growth and urbanization in the past decades, its population of migrants moving from inner, rural areas to coastal, industrial centers has increased from 70 to 247 million from 1990 to 2017, accounting for 16.5% of the total population of China. Such labor movements have led to shifts to family structures due to compounding factors, such as low-paying jobs performed by migrant workers, crowded living situation, and the hukou household registration system, which classifies China's citizens as either rural or urban residents, therefore preventing migrant family from accessing urban public services, including housing, healthcare, social security, and above all, education (Naughton, 2007). One consequence has been an increasing population of "left-behind children," defined as "children under 18 who have

been left behind at their original residence while both parents migrate for work, and have been not living with them for at least six months" (Wang, et al., p. 885). As estimated, there are 61 million children left behind in rural areas by parents and 29 million children who accompany their parents to cities. While parental migration often leads to enhanced socioeconomic status, reduced parental care negatively influences a child's development, with lessened family control and supervision, weakened parental support and guidance, and undermined parent-child bonding contributing to damages to a child's psychological and physical health. Researchers have documented overall lower levels of well being for left-behind children, as indicated by vulnerability to emotional (e.g. depression, anxiety), behavior (cheating & stealing), and health (obesity) problems (Mo. et al., 2015). Additionally, researchers have discovered more girls are left-behind than boys (Wang et al., 2017), making left-behind girls a particularly vulnerable social group. While an emerging body of research has examined the detrimental effects of an exclusionist policy that limits migrant children's access to public schools in urban areas (Hsin, 2017; Lan, 2014; Lai, et al., 2014), very little research has explored the social circumstances that shape the learning of left-behind children, with even less understanding of the implications of such experiences on such children's literacy learning and trajectory. Such an issue is of particular urgency because of the profound impact parental migration and sustained separation have on children's access to literacy resources, processes, and practices (Alvarez, 2018).

Literacy research conducted in North American contexts has yielded useful theoretical and methodological tools to examine the intersection of language practices, digital tools, and migration. 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 remittance, and navigate transnational bureaucracy. In particular, researchers have examined how digital literacies provide transnational youth with opportunities to negotiate multiple identities, languages, and networks (Barton & Lee, 2011, Black, 2005; Lam, 2009; Yi, 2009). Others have examined how migrants develop a broader range of literacy and cultural practices to navigate institutionally sponsored spaces (Leonard-Lorimer, 2014; Guerra, 1998; Viera, 2018). From such research, we have learned that migration-driven literacy-learning is an important dimension of multifaceted transnational migration, as those "left behind" learn new ways of writing in anticipation of their own geographic mobility, economic solvency and emotional intimacy. In important ways, literacy and multilingual repertoire constantly shift in reaction to social circumstances, bureaucratic structures, and ideological structures that position languages and literacies differently, leading to tension and innovation (Leonard-Lorimer, 2015). Together, these

scholars have argued for the need to examine the “social and geographical space of migration” as a learning environment (Valentin 2012) that foster informal literacy work necessary in navigating globalizing processes (Newman et al. 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Often bound up in literacy mobility research are attempts to understand migrants’ multilingual, multimodal and translingual practices (Canagarajah, 2014; Fraiberg et al. 2018; Wang, 2017). Moving away from a bounded or “archipelago” model (Prior, 2013) in which languages are imagined as discrete varieties (e.g., business, French, Spanish), this move entails a shift towards a practice-based framework that treats language work as involving various acts of translating meaning across genres, languages, and modes (Alvarez, 2018; Gonzalez, 2018).

Identified as the “traffic model” (Horner, 2012), this approach attends to language work as embodied, mediated, distributed, and remixed in the context of everyday practices. Yet despite such calls, situated studies of multilingual composing remain limited, with the majority of research on multilingual writing adopting a narrower “positivistic, scientized approach” (Atkinson and Connor, 15) as opposed to a situated stance that traces the production, circulation, and reception of texts in naturally occurring settings. In fact only recently is research emerging (Canagarajah, 2016; Fraiberg et al. 2018; Wang, forthcoming) that offers rich descriptions of multilingual or multimodal writing practices inside and beyond North American borders. This broadened understanding of multilingual transactions—simultaneously coordinated with multiple semiotic tools and agents distributed across geographic and temporal borders—is critical for uncovering various geographic, social, educational, and institutional parameters mediating the literacy and mobility of migrants and their children.

Despite such moves, little yet is known about the ways in which national policy, institutional context, family circumstances, and digital tools intersect with the language and literacy practices of multilingual writers in contexts outside of North America. In fact only recently is research beginning to address literacy learning as intersecting with local and global scales of multilingual resources in European contexts (Blommaert et al. 2015; Stornaiuolo & LeBlanc, 2016). Perhaps most forcefully foregrounding these concerns, Dong & Blommaert (2015) examine how a group of Chinese migrant elites navigate literacy and identity resources at various scales to construct their identities, with attention to the complex manner in which Chinese migrants draw on multiple languages, texts, identity scripts, and cultural artifacts to construct literacy and social identities. There is therefore much need for systematic examination of the literacy and social practices of those positioned on the social periphery beyond north American contexts.

An emerging body of research has worked to various forms of mobility that shapes literacy practices that are increasingly negotiated across multilingual, multimodal, and multi-sensory resources. Previous research on transnational, multilinguals’ literacy mobility has underscored the importance of understanding composition as innovative enactments of a multilingual and multimodal repertoires, which not only facilitates the movements of meanings, texts, and identities across times and spaces, but also creates opportunities for physical, intellectual, and imaginative movements (Lam, 2009; Lorimer-Leonard, 2015; Yi & Hirvelra, 2015; Fraiberg et al., 2018; Wang, 2017). While the field of writing studies has a long history of teaching and researching

composing processes (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Prior & Shipka, 2003; Smagrinsky et al, 2010; Tayaroshi, 2017), it has largely directed its analytical gaze on human agency and the production of print-based texts in academic, disciplinary and workspace contexts. Global migration and ubiquitous uptake of digital technologies, however, has compelled theoretical attention to composing as complexly entangled in physical, figurative, and imaginary traversals across geographical, linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries. Increasingly, scholars have called for dynamic conceptual frameworks to examine composing processes as inherently heterogeneous, layered, and co-constituted with a resources, agents, and practices with varying mobile capabilities. Using theoretical constructs of rhizome and assemblage (Leander and Rowe, 2006), sponsorscaapes (Wargo, 2015), networks (Lam, 2009), knotwork (Fraiberg et al., 2017), and nexus of practice (Roozen, 2009b), scholars have examined literacy unfolding in intersecting

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assemblages of actors, artifacts, practices and semiotic resources, which remain fluid, mobile, and negotiated as they circulate and reconfigure across spaces and times

A mobility lens requires a theoretical un-bounding of spaces, which are no longer imagined as bounded containers within which literacy activities take place, but as socially-produced processes-in-becoming (Leander & Sheehy, 2004). Scholars have examined the complex relationship composers form with spaces-in-the-becoming (Ehret & Holett, 2014; Kell, 2015; Pigg, 2014), suggesting that the materiality of spaces (social objects, activities, physical location, and human bodies) produces certain forms of sociability, shapes the trajectories of bodily and textual movements, and enables the projection of mobile meanings across times and spaces. Theorizing composing and space as co-becoming facilitates a holistic understanding of literacies conventionally assigned to discrete spheres as connected through intertextual and interdiscursive pathways (Roozen, 2012) and reacting to one another in resonating and dissonant ways.

Understanding mobility also compels closer attention to the role non-human agents in navigating cross-border relationships. Scholars have examined how textual artifacts (e.g. passports, immigration papers) and material artifacts (e.g. computers, software) embody political, economic, institutional, and ideological circumstances to mediate literacy mobility (Lorimer Leonard, 2015; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010; Vieira, 2011). In this view, material artifacts and digital tools mediate innovative enactments of multilingual and multimodal repertoires by creating opportunities for physical, intellectual, and imaginative movements (Shipka, 2016, 2019). A compelling example can be found in Lam's (2009) study of Kaiyee, a transnational youth who assembles multiple languages, semiotic modes, and digital tools to seek social and symbolic affiliations across local and translocal networks.

Together, such research has provided partial illustrations of literacy learning as what Paul Prior calls "a trajectory of semiotic becoming" that is "embodied, dispersed, mediated, laminated, and deeply dialogic" (2018, n.p.) On the one hand, research has attended to mobility as a phenomenon of fluidity, with much research providing celebratory accounts of writers moving across ever-loosening borders with flexibility and dexterity. Such a lens recognizes the indeterminacies of meanings-in-becoming and seeks to trace "ways meaning bubbles up in interactions among people, texts, and thing" and "the emergent, felt, mobiles dimensions of literacy practice" (Stornaiuolo et al. 2017, p. 77). On the other hand, researchers have called attention to moments of fixity, suggesting the contingency and instability of mobile practices cannot be fully understood without consideration of border- and boundary-enforcing forces that restrict or regulate mobility. Indeed, scholars have observed "the "paradox of mobility" as a central feature of mobility, pointing to multilingual, transnational individuals' literacy lives as inflected with inequality, struggles, and suppression (Lorimer-Leonard, 2013; Fraiberg, et al., 2017). A useful concept is that of "regimes of mobility" (Glick Schiller & Sazalar, 2013), which suggests that the contingency of literacy practices on the move cannot be fully understood without consideration of border-enforcing forces (e.g. border-agents, Chinese hukou system) that restrict/regulate movements (Stornaiuolo, Smith and Phillips, 2017; Lorimer-Leonard, 2013).

Weaving together and extending such conversations, this multi-sited ethnographic study explores the literacy mobility of two populations of first-generation, female college students, international Chinese students attending Michigan State University (USA) and children of migrant-workers attending Hainan University (China). Drawing on interview, student artifacts, and participant observation data, this study provides accounts of students' lived experiences with mobility in transnational and national contexts. In so doing, this research contributes to studies of literacy mobility by a.) providing a layered account of various mobility regimes operating at local,

national and translocal contexts, and b.) describing the agentive ways in which multilingual individuals work with, through and against mobility regimes to manage their own geographic, academic, social and professional movements. I examine the various mobility parameters that mediate the literacy and language practices of left-behind children who have achieved educational and social mobility despite the odds working against them. In doing so, the proposed project complicates current research in several ways. First, it complicates an overall celebratory stance towards transnational literacy, especially with regards to the agentive roles transnational migrants take towards their literacy learning. In attending to the consequences of imposed geographic immobility on left-behind children, this research points to the perils as well as rewards of migration in relation to literacy learning and child development. Second, it complements current scholarship on multilingualism and translanguaging by suggesting that migration taking place within national contexts also has important implications for children's development of multimodal-multilingual repertoire and translanguaging practices/dispositions. Such a perspective on translanguaging further enriches current efforts in examining multilingual activities as an important dimension of and resources for the everyday literate acts of multilingual and monolingual individuals alike (Horner et al., 2011). Last, the framework guiding the study disrupts multiple binaries that limit our understanding of literacy mobility. In locating multilingualism within a wider semiotic repertoire that is negotiated across contexts, it traces such literacy practices across spaces (formal, informal, digital, national, transnational) and observes them unfolding under the influence of local, translocal and global ecological forces. In sum, the proposed project extends the literature on multilingual writing in at least four key ways.

- The study attends to translanguaging practices in *process* and as mobile and negotiated rather than their products as static and immobile.
- The study focuses on translanguaging practices and multimodal practices as parts of a broader rhetorical repertoire.
- The study traces the unfolding of literacies across multiple spaces and through an extended historical trajectory.
- The study attends to the materiality of literacy by focusing on the ways that languages embody intersecting time-space relationships and complex cultural and *global* ecologies.

The Study

Institutional Contexts. The research sites for this transnational project are basic writing courses at Michigan State University (MSU) and Department of English in Hainan University, China. This multi-sited approach is key for understanding the intersection of literacy practices and literacy mobility. The differences between the sites allow for nuanced accounts of mobility at national (HNU) and international (MSU) scales as complexly mediated by personal, institutional, national, and global ecologies and trajectories. The rapidly increasing population of Chinese students at MSU now comprises 7% (Office of the Registrar) of the student body, as the result of a rapidly expanding Chinese middle class and insufficient higher education capacity to meet the country's needs. HNU, on the other hand, is the only key 211 public university in the island province of Hainan, which recruit students from the broader southeastern region, an under-developed region yet to fully reap the benefits of China's economic boom. The two student bodies present important differences (socio-economic status, class status, academic achievements) and similarities (diverse linguistic and dialectical profile and shared experiences as left-behind children) that are useful in mapping out mobility parameters (e.g. gender

expectations, geographic locations, access to educational resources, language and dialectal repertoires) that shape and are shaped by everyday text and identity-making practices.

In the past five years, Dr. Wang has conducted a series of studies in the context of the bridge writing course at MSU as she traces the translingual, multimodal, and multilingual literacy practices of Chinese international students. In the summer of 2018, she completed a six-week Fulbright Specialist assignment at HNU, where she engaged in teaching and research activities. 6 focal students were selected at HNU based on (a) the extent to which they leverage multiple languages and literacies to navigate social, academic and institutional parameters that enable or support their mobility, (b) the students' literate histories as mediated by experiences as left-behind children, (c) and their use of digital technology to navigate transnational connections and identities. .

Data Collection. A case study approach was employed to construct fine-grained descriptions of multilingual-multimodal literacy practices as mediated by mobility parameters. Data collection employed a range of ethnographic methods, including using theory informed pedagogy (e.g. identity poetry, translation narrative, writing theory cartoon) to surface literacy histories, identities and practices, participant-observation and field notes (e.g., coffee hour meetings of international students) to document literacy practices in informal spaces, artifacts collection (e.g., sticky notes, drafts, instant messages) to construct ethnographic portraits of campuses, and semi-structured and elicited interviews with participants and administrators to identify ecological forces. Such tracing across spaces will support close examination of exigencies and consequences of mobility (e.g. experiences as left-behind children in connection to moving, decision-making and career aspirations) in connection to the continuous remix and reconfiguration of literacy practices across spaces, modes, and times. Particularly useful for this study was the pedagogical enactment of "I am from" poetry, which invited young women's reflection on their experiences with mobility and therefore served as prompts for in-depth interview.

Data was analyzed to construct thick descriptions of students' literacy practices, integrating grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2007) and intertextual (Prior, 1998) techniques. The wider aim will be to identify relevant themes and patterns in literacy identities, practices and trajectories, to describe the multilingual repertoire and translingual practices students employ to navigate literacy tasks across spaces, and to develop a grounded understanding of how students develop strategies (linguistic, rhetorical, social) with and against mobility parameters.

Findings:

We have come to identify various types of mobility regimes that simultaneously constrains and support young women's geographic, academic, social, and professional mobilities. While we are still analyzing data, we hope to use the workshop to discuss the following findings (still under development):

- National policy has led to inequitable distribution of economic, educational, and social resources, thus compelling migrant worker's departure for better opportunities. In the mean time, the human registration system prevents migrant children from accessing educational and social resources, leading to them being left behind.

- Gendered identity script regarding girls as “filial,” domestic, and sheltered led to less educational resources provided, less opportunities to pursue higher education or certain career trajectories, and loss of geographic mobility.
- Multilingual and multi-dialectal repertoires are deeply entangled in mobility: young girls taking up a dialect to avoid social segregation, studying English to achieve geographic and social mobility, learning Japanese and hoping to visit Japan because of participation in affinity spaces of Anime culture, learning Thai to achieve professional mobility.

Glossary:

Left-behind children: an increasing population of Chinese “children under 18 who have been left behind at their original residence while both parents migrate for work, and have been not living with them for at least six months.”