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Performing Identities in Social Media: Focusing on Language Learners' Identity Construction Online

Mettre en œuvre son identité dans les médias sociaux – Perspectives sur la construction de l'identité des apprenants de langue en ligne

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Résumés

English Français

This article starts with an introduction into common public discourse regarding the impact social media has on identity construction (in particular children and youth) and why this is of concern to educational stakeholders. Next, some of the ways in which identity has become a recognized factor in language learning theories are summarized, followed by a brief discussion of conceptualizations that have been applied to the construction of online identities and their link to technology-enhanced language learning processes. This is followed by a study that shows how analysis of online presentation and production can integrate an agentive, performative perspective in order to better understand the fluidity of identity in formal and informal learning environments and how this can enhance language teaching and learning practices.

Cet article étudie d'abord le discours lié à l'impact des médias sociaux dans la construction de l'identité (en se centrant sur les enfants et les jeunes en particulier) et montre en quoi les éducateurs doivent lui prêter attention. Puis il résume certaines des théories sur l'importance de l'identité dans le processus d'apprentissage de la langue et discute brièvement des conceptualisations qui ont été appliquées à la construction des identités en ligne et leur lien avec les processus d'apprentissage des langues s'appuyant sur l'utilisation des technologies de communication. Ensuite, une étude montre comment l'analyse de l'identité basée sur la présence et la production en ligne peut intégrer la perspective "performative" et agentive, ce qui permet de mieux comprendre la fluidité de l'identité dans des environnements formels et informels d'apprentissage et comment cela peut améliorer

l'enseignement des langues et les pratiques d'apprentissage.

L'article présente enfin une étude de cas de l'une des 34 étudiants qui ont participé à un cours de méthodologie dans un cursus de formation d'enseignants d'anglais langue étrangère (TEFL), Nora. Les étudiants devaient créer des pages d'accueil individuelles afin de se présenter à leurs pairs en ligne avec lesquels ils effectueraient un échange pendant toute l'année scolaire. Quelques semaines après l'achèvement des pages d'accueil, les étudiants ont été regroupés en équipes plus petites, qui ont ensuite dû échanger des commentaires sur les projets d'enseignement des langues qu'ils concevaient et qu'ils réaliseraient lors de leur stage dans différentes écoles d'enseignement primaire de leurs pays respectifs.

L'analyse montre que le sujet de l'étude de cas, Nora, "met en œuvre" ses identités grâce à l'utilisation compétente de différents outils et ressources technologiques. Il apparaît que Nora est consciente de son public cible dans chaque utilisation et qu'elle est également consciente des avantages offerts par chaque plate-forme ou outil. En même temps, elle utilise la technologie, en particulier sa page d'accueil personnelle, les messages MMS et, dans une certaine mesure, les discussions avec les pairs en ligne comme moyen d'expérimenter et de présenter diverses identités, et pas seulement ses identités en tant que "étudiante" ou "enseignante".

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : médias sociaux, identité, apprentissage des langues
Keywords : social media, identity, language learning
Thématiques : médias sociaux
Rubriques : Points de vue / échanges

Texte intégral

1. Introduction

1   Recently, there has been considerable attention in public discourse about the role of technology in today's globalized world. In some cases perspectives have been quite optimistic and in others, gloweringly negative, or at most, contradictory in themselves. As Stern (2008) explains it:

> A curious mix of intrigue, disdain, and apprehension continues to characterize many adults' sentiments about the creations young people place into the public eye on the Internet. Indeed, it is common to see journalists, educators, and parents oscillate between promoting youth Internet expression and denouncing it in practically the same breath (Stern, 2008: 95).

2   One arena that has received substantial focus is the impact of technology on education (in particular, social media and language learning; see Parr, 2014). Public debates often explore how educators can and should meet society's demands in the globalized, interconnected geopolitical situations of today. Voiced concern about learners (as future "global," "digitalized" citizens) regarding what skills and competencies that they must have, what knowledge they are constructing–formally and informally–through the use of social media are prevalent in public debates. These worries are especially predominant when talking about younger generations, largely because youth are seen as the principal users and consumers of social media. Public apprehension about new forms of social interaction, coupled with a general consensus that childhood and adolescence are key points of formation in a person's life, often converge in

alarmist public discourse about the overall debilitating effect of social media. In contrast, among more optimistic parley, social media is often seen as the panacea for inherent deficiencies in current educational systems around the world.

3   From a more neutral perspective, it can be argued that technology is neither totally benevolent nor completely pernicious. Particularly in education (as these debates indicate), how users interrelate with technology must also be taken into consideration.

> We need to think hard about the "social technologies"–[as a means of] social interaction–and the types of pedagogy that surround the technology, and which crucially determine how it will be used (Buckingham, 2008: 17).

4   So, yes, the technology itself must be under examination, but also the way in which users interact with it. We must also be aware of oversimplifying the role of technology and its impact on social structures, education and identity.

5   Studies of learner identity in technology-enhanced language learning must take into account the inherent complexity of participants, context and the numerous other human and social factors involved in the learning process.

> Focus on identity requires us to pay close attention to the diverse ways in which media and technologies are used in everyday life, and their consequences both for individuals and for social groups. It entails viewing young people as significant social actors in their own right, as "beings," and not simply as "becomings" who should be judged in terms of their projected futures. (...) Understanding the role of digital media in the formation of youthful identities requires an approach that is clear sighted, unsentimental, and constructively critical (Buckingham, 2008: 19).

6   Thus, this article will begin by interrogating the more prevalent discourses on technology and its impact on its users and consumers and how this interrelates with identity construct in online language learning events (both formal and informal). Perhaps, most importantly, we interrogate where we are writing from. As Herring (2008) has succinctly pointed out, a good deal of the discourse about Internet and young users has been vocalized by adults, indeed, the much-discussed influential presence of social media is, in a large part, created and controlled by grown-ups, thereby reflecting both "the normative prescriptions" of society while "acting in loco parentis" to "construct youth's online behavior" (Herring, 2008: 75).

> More insidiously, mainstream media commentators interpret new technologies and youth practices in normative, moral terms (...). New media scholars also view the Internet through an adult lens, applying labels such as "unprecedented" and "transformational" from their historically situated perspectives in ways that exoticise technologically mediated communication and its youthful users (Herring, 2008: 72).

7   Endeavouring to maintain a self-critical perspective, the next section will provide a brief outline of popular discourse concerning the assumed social impact of modern technological advances in communication, especially upon children and youth's identity construction (who are predominantly viewed as the most susceptible to said impact). This is followed by a closer look at the role of identity in language learning and how it has been dealt with in SLA (Second Language Acquisition) research as well as in studies of identity and social media. Finally, to illustrate how identity construction can be analysed through a "performative" perspective, a case study of one university student's identity construction is described and analyzed, as she moves back and forth through institutional (formal) and personal (informal) social media.

2. Technology Impact and Identity Construction: A Brief Overview of Popular Discourse

8　　In his book *Youth, Identity and Digital Media*, Buckingham (2008) discusses the current multifaceted debate about social media impact, which often "veer[s] between celebration and paranoia" (2008: 12); encompassing views of both immense individual and community resources "for personal liberation and empowerment" and "dangers to privacy (...) inequality" and potential for "addiction" and "victimization through pornography" (2008: 13).

> Such arguments are routinely recycled in popular debates [and] have a long history. (...) The telephone, for example, was celebrated for the way in which it could make business more efficient and facilitate more democratic forms of social life, yet it was also condemned for its disruption of intimate relationships and its unsettling of established social hierarchies. Needless to say, there are striking similarities between these debates almost a century ago and those that currently surround the use of digital technology (Buckingham, 2008: 12).

9　　Among popular discourse, the younger generation is often seen to be at risk of both physical dangers (eg online predators) and psychological ones (eg dissociative identity construction between "virtual" and "real"; antisocial behavior, educational underachievement, lack of creativity; see Buckingham, 2000). This is often contrasted with a "relentlessly optimistic view" (Buckingham, 2008: 14) of the potentially democratizing effect of technology on this same generation, in which online interactions help construct "civic identities,"

> This inevitably ignores many of the down sides of these technologies—the undemocratic tendencies of many online "communities," the limited nature of much so-called digital learning and the grinding tedium of much technologically-driven work (Buckingham, 2008: 14).

10　　According to Buckingham, much of the public discourse stems from a perspective that technology is a neutral process of scientific research and development (what he calls "technological determinism") that does not take into account the "social contexts and processes" (2008: 12) in which it interacts. This leads to a vision of autonomous technology, disconnected from its social history and context, while at the same time positioning technology as highly influential on "a new mode of social organization" (2008: 13). On the other hand, the completely opposing view that technology is values-free and entirely configured by users' volition is also simplistic; that is, claiming that technological impact is merely a matter of the way in which individuals make use of it ignores the affordances and constraints which limit and shape not only its use, production and circulation but also subsequent social interests that arise from them.

11　　This polarity in common rhetoric concerning technology also tends to ignore the reality of how children and youth actually live and interact with social media and technology. As Bourn (2006: 51) indicates, there is a paradox in the way in which youth experience globalization. "Young people are in one sense citizens of a global culture but at the same time struggle for a sense of acceptance in the local societies in which they live." Equally, the extremely optimistic view of the new "digital generation" does not account for the fact that most youth make banal use of media; they are not necessarily engaged in "spectacular forms of innovation and creativity" (Buckingham, 2008: 14; see also Holloway & Valentine, 2003;

Livingstone, Bober & Helsperm, 2005).

12   Similarly, discourse on the impact of technology and identities, in particular children and youth, often tend to be both simplistic and overly dramatized. Research into online identities may focus only on certain instances of social media use (for instance during class time) or on newsworthy behaviour (eg cyberbullying[1]), implying that the identity that emerges in a given time is fixed and static. This does not account for the fluidity and negotiation of social identities as individuals respond to the environments in which they are participating.

> Identity is not something that can ever be achieved once and for all (…).
> Similarly, the structural features or characteristics of digital production (…)
> reflect a broader view of identity as an ongoing process, one that is always
> under construction but that also has a permanence or longevity (Weber &
> Mitchell, 2008: 43).

13   Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that all young people access and use technology equally and in the same way, nor that their life is only digital. They still interact with others in the "real world" and both on and offline activities have an impact on their construction of self-identity. Still, it cannot be denied that we are living in a technological environment unlike any ever seen or lived and it is therefore of utmost importance that we try to understand the mediating role of technology in social interactions, identities and learning.

3. Understanding Identity in Social Media and Language Learning

14   In this section, identity is theorized from a basis of discursive identity: identities are influenced by an interconnectivity and fluidity between the individual and discourse communities, however, this is not sufficient for understanding the way in which language learners may interact with social media to construct identity. Identity is therefore also understood in this section as having sociocultural dimensions, although, admittedly, categories of culture and identity, once established, are "intrinsically unstable" and "heterogeneous" (Harklau, 2000: 37). Perhaps most importantly, identity is conceived as an ongoing process, a continuous "performance" (as used by Goffman, 1959) of "identities-in-action" (Weber & Mitchell, 2008), enacted through different communicative resources available to the individual, including those online. Arguably, the complexity of identity construction–and in particular the newest element of "digital identity"–is especially relevant for educators as "it focuses attention on critical questions about personal development and social relationships" (Buckingham, 2008: 18).

15   Moreover,

> as educational settings become more linguistically and culturally diverse,
> there has been a growing recognition across many sub-disciplines of
> education that the multiple identities which students bring with them affect
> learning in powerful but unpredictable ways (Menard-Warwick, 2005: 253).

16   According to Harklau (2007), both theory and research in SLA have begun acknowledging the significant influence of learner identities, especially in relation to how learners see themselves and others within the context of the target language and culture.

17   However, as Menard-Warwick (2005) indicates, how identity is to be defined within language learning contexts is still under debate. For SLA scholars whose understanding of language learning focuses principally on the social processes (see

Block's, 2003, discussion of the "social turn" in language teaching theories), language learners are seen as active participants who enact particular social roles while negotiating their situated identities with others (Lam, 2000, 2004). As such, language learner identity should not be seen as a fixed singularity, but as developmental and pluralistic; language learner identity is directly related to the ways in which they understand their relationship to the target language and to the social world mediated through that language (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) and will fluctuate according to different language learning contexts.

18   Along similar lines, there is a growing recognition that language learning takes place both in and outside of the formal language classroom, especially in regards to the use of social media (see also Georges' discussion of the role of digital communication in the development of social media users' cognitive schemas in this special issue, 2017). Barron (2006: 195) refers to "*learning ecology*" to help conceptualize learning as bridged across the spaces of home, school, work and community. According to Barron, the learning ecology is contextualized–but not limited to a singular context. What takes place in the learning ecology is shaped by both the context(s) and the learners' individual interests and opportunities in formal and informal settings so that "what is learned outside of school can shape what is learned in school" (Greenhow & Rebelia, 2009: 122), and vice-versa. In short, the language learner is "a dialogical self, contextually interdependent with others and with contexts, moving between different positionings but still part of continuities" (Linell, 2009: 113).

19   Some researchers have used the term "social identity" to highlight the agency of the language learner's "dialogical self." In their discussion of identity in online communities Palloff and Pratt (2007: 43) argue that representation of a social identity requires the intentional development of a social presence online so that a member of the community can "portray oneself as a real person." Transferred to language learning environments, it could be said that the learner aspires to membership in a targeted community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and learning entails the projection of a "social identity" in that community (for instance, a French-speaking group in Second Life). Nonetheless, even with increasing emphasis on social aspects of identity, the term remains elusive.

> Ochs' definition of social identity is more precise than most: "a cover term for a range of social personae, including social statuses, roles, positions, relationships, and institutional and other relevant community identities one may attempt to claim or assign in the course of social life" (1993: 288). However, her use of the words "cover term" and "a range" continue to reflect the vagueness in the literature (Menard-Warwick, 2005: 254).

20   Along with concepts of the socially dialogical, the notion of "reflexivity" has been employed to understand learner identity. This term entails the intricate connection between identity and social practices. For instance, in their discussion of the way in which individuals use media production to construct online identities, Weber and Mitchell (2008) propose that the use of imagery in social media is inherently reflexive and that this is critical to the way in which today's generation construct identity online:

> By this we mean to suggest three things: Firstly, their own media production (both through its processes and its outcomes) forces young people to look at themselves, sometimes through new eyes, providing feedback for further modification of their self-representations. Secondly, the source materials and modes of young people's media production are often evident or transparent; the choices and processes that they use reveal and identify them in ways that they themselves might not even realize. Thirdly, through

built-in response mechanisms or simply through audience response, media production invites other people's feedback and readings, sparking a dialectic that is inherent to mediating and reshaping how we see ourselves and how we think others see us (Weber & Mitchell, 2008: 41).

21   However, as mentioned earlier, we must be careful about theorizing offline and online identities as completely separate. Weber and Mitchell remind us that even online identities are linked to physical bodies–technology and social media merely provide new means of "embodied" identities (for more information on early theories of "embodiment," see Butler, 1990; Grosz, 1994).

> Although we may forget our bodies when cruising in cyberspace, all our actions are taken through them. Indeed, if there is anything that gives a sense of permanence and stability to the flux of identity processes, it is the body, which even as it changes in appearance, remains at the heart of identity. While theorists may ignore the role of actual bodies in both individual and collective identities (they seem to prefer theoretical ones), young people most certainly understand that identity is always embodied. For example, by posting photos of themselves which they have taken, often deliberately posed (eg, à la Hillary Duff) [they] are examining, modifying, dressing, adorning, and putting their bodies out there (Weber & Mitchell, 2008: 42).

22   All of the abovementioned approaches to identity have several notions in common: identity as socially situated (Buckingham, 2008; Norton, 2000); identity as dynamic and in constant movement and flux (Kanno, 2003; Turkle, 1995); identity as dialectal and reflexive (Weber & Mitchell, 2008); and identity as fragmented, shifting and partial (Turkle, 1995). Allocating these same parameters to computer interaction implies that the construction of online identity must be perceived as

> work-in-progress, an evolving active construction that constantly sheds bits and adds bits, changing through dialectical interactions with the digital and nondigital world, involving physical, psychological, social, and cultural agents" (Weber & Mitchell, 2008: 43).

23   All of these conceptions of identity place emphasis on a process that is performative (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). "Identity is something we *do*, rather than simply something we *are*" (Buckingham, 2008: 8).

24   The importance of the agentive, "performative factor" in language learning has long been established (in particular in studies of heritage language learners; see Norton & Toohey, 2004; Leeman, 2005). As Park puts it, "performative factors play an important role in completing the linguistic identity (...) self-identity can be released outward through the performative factors" (Park, 2008: 218). Or as Korhonen (2014: 68) explains it, identity is a "multi-layered process" and for the language learner, he or she is continually

> making sense of oneself over time and space (...) involving questions such as Who am I as a FL learner and user? Where do I belong? Where do I come from? Where am I going?

25   There have been fewer studies into the role of performativity in online identity construction, although there are some recent theorists who are beginning to explore the notion of "performing the self" as a dramaturgical performance in social networking sites (see boyd, 2008; Liu, 2007; boyd & Ellison, 2007) through both discourse and imagery. In order to best entail and describe the performative construction of social, digitalized, identities, this article adopts Weber and Mitchell's (2008: 44) term "*identities-in-action*."

26   The case study described below makes use of "dramaturgical identity"

(Goffman, 1959) and reflexivity (see also de Nooy's discussion in this special issue, 2017, of "positioning theory," built on Goffman's dramaturgical theory, which conceptualizes how identities "are interactionally constructed in social media, using the range of affordances offered by this mode of communication" (Goffman, 1959: 240). Appropriate performance of one's "dramaturgical identity" requires reflexivity, given that a sense of identity will necessarily rely on others: becoming a member of a group implies adhering to expected behaviors–ones which are sanctioned and recognizable by other community members. Often these behaviors are socially conditioned through formal and informal learning structures.

> Learning how to manage impressions is a critical social skill that is honed through experience. Over time, we learn how to make meaning out of a situation, others' reactions, and what we are projecting of ourselves. (...) Diverse social environments help people develop these skills because they force individuals to reevaluate the signals they take for granted (boyd, 2008: 129).

27   It is important to underscore Goffman's insistence not only on the performative aspects of identity formation but also his emphasis on individual agency. In other words, as Buckingham (2008) argues, online interactants are neither passive consumers of technology nor are they completely in control of how their social interactions are mediated. Likewise, it behooves educators to have a better grasp of how learners are performing and negotiating their identities in social media–as both consumer and producer–in order to advance language teaching beyond the banalities of common discourse about Internet. The following case study illustrates a close analysis of how performative construction of identity in social media may be carried out.

4. Case Study: Context and Participants

4.1. The course and participants

28   The subject in the case study (Nora) was one of 34 students who were taking part in a methodology course in teacher education: Teaching English as a Foreign Language II (TEFL). The class covered two semesters (eight months total) and was the continuance of a previous methodology course (TEFL I). At the beginning of the course, students were required to create individual home pages in order to introduce themselves to online peers with whom they would be carrying out an exchange throughout the academic year. A few weeks after the completion of the homepages, students were grouped into smaller teams who then had to give each other feedback on language teaching projects that they were designing and which they would then be implementing during their internship in different primary education schools in their respective countries. None of the students were native speakers of the target language (English). English was used as the language of instruction in all the activities of the course.

4.2. Subject of study

29   Nora (fictional name) has been chosen for the case study because, from the beginning of the course, she indicated that she was an avid user of social media.

She also held diverse interests that are often associated with online communities (Anime, Manga, online gaming). Her ample online presence provided an opportunity to compare different instances of "identity-in-action" during moments when activities were institutionally instigated as well as instances when she produced media output at her own initiative. Similar to many of her classmates in Barcelona (Spain), Nora (20 years old) attended classes full-time and worked part-time. She gave written permission to visit and capture data from her personal websites and contributed extracts of text chats from discussions with her online peers after revising them to choose the data she felt comfortable sharing. (Nora got her peers' permission as well.)

4.3. The data corpus

30   The corpus consists of different data sets (see below for more detail of how the data was collected):

- Screenshots of the front pages of two homepages belonging to Nora (main subject of study);
- Screenshots of all the links from the homepages;
- Screenshots of Nora's interventions in students' open forum;
- Transcripts of text chats between Nora and colleagues discussing the teaching sequence;
- Multimedia message service (MMS) texts between Nora and colleagues.

4.4. The technological environment

31   The online exchange was run through a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) which had been designed specifically for this course, with funding from an EU project, and was run by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (it is no longer functioning). The VLE could be accessed by everyone enrolled in the courses (teachers, researchers and students in both countries). In comparison to most commercial and free online social media, the platform was a rather rigid system; users had access to an interface that allowed them to create pages and add content to those pages through a rich-text editor and attachments, although they had minimal control over the visual design of their homepages since there were very few templates to choose from. All the members of the two-class platform could view and comment the homepages, in forum-type threads.

4.5. The analyzed activity

32   Students were required to post at least one comment to each member of their small online (international) teams on each member's homepage as an introduction at the beginning of the course. During the course, the format for discussion about the teaching projects (feedback) was open–the team members had to set up schedules and decide which social media (text chats, VOIP, Voice Over Internet Protocol, etc.) that they preferred. The students were encouraged to use the target language of English as much as possible because they were training to become teachers of this language (as mentioned, none of the participants had English as their L1).

4.6. Data compilation and management

33   The data were collected during the eight-month course and then categorized into data type (screenshots of homepages, links from homepages and forums, etc.). The screenshots were taken by the teacher and only consist of links that were made public by Nora. The interactions between Nora and other colleagues were collected by Nora and sent to the teacher-researcher, implying that there is self-selection by the subject concerning data that is included. Due to this self-selection, it is impossible to know with certainty what interactions were left out.

34   The collection and interpretation of the data sets are informed by the role of the author as a participant researcher. Stating this acknowledges that the author was directly involved in documentation and analysis of the data collection as researcher as well as been implicated in the "learning ecology" (Barron, 2006) as teacher and course designer. All names of participants have been changed to protect their identity. Screenshot images have been modified to remove identifying markers of the participants.

5. Methodological Approach

35   The study departs from boyd and Ellison's (2007) framework of identity construction in social media that proposes four core concepts of how individuals develop their online profiles in social networks and take part in online community processes:

- *Impression management* deals with personal identity formation and how users define their own identities through the information they provide in their profile (they can make it public or private in the community, etc.). (See also Zourou's, 2017, explanation of Goffman's concept of impression management and how it has been extended to include social networked practices in this special issue).
- *Friendship management* has to do with impression management–their choice of displayed profiles; choice of friends and so on. These are identity markers that they and other users can access as a benchmark for establishing levels of social interaction.
- *Network structure* links to the roles in the social community in which they participate. Users can be passive members or active posters of information who may even establish other groups and communities and encourage interaction.
- *Bridging* of online and offline social networks.

36   Because this framework does not allow for sufficient exploration of the concept of reflexivity, these concepts are combined with Goffman's notion of performed "dramaturgical identity" (1959). Goffman (1959) argues that just as stage actors fulfill certain roles, people create and maintain different images for themselves which they "perform" in accordance to perceived social circumstances (for a more detailed discussion of how individuals position themselves in regards to a multi-layered social media community see the introduction to this special issue authored by Baldauf-Quilliatre, Develotte, & Ollagnier-Beldame, 2017). Individuals perform their different identities through their understanding of these social circumstances and their "audience" (what Goffman, 1959: 19, calls their "impression of reality"). These are their frontstage identities, whereas more private roles, maintained for themselves or an intimate few, are their backstage, or private, identities. The way

in which these identities are enacted or performed constitute their impression management, which includes "audience segregation"–performances must be managed so that "audience members" are not allowed to witness backstage identities. This is akin to boyd and Ellison's (2007) notions of friendship management and network structure.

6. Findings (i): Different Identities-in-Action through Contrasting Homepages

37   The first case study extract begins with a comparative analysis of Nora's homepages. The homepage within the closed classroom platform (the institutional VLE) will be referred to as the "institutionally-sanctioned" homepage (ISH) while Nora's individual webpage (maintained outside of the VLE) will be called "personal homepage" (PH).

38   The first screenshot shows Nora's ISH in which she demonstrates an acute awareness of her audience. She uses her knowledge of the target language as a resource to strategically demonstrate to her teachers, classmates and online student peers that she is able to manage this language according to normative rules of use. She also endorses and encourages her relationships with both audiences (teachers who are potentially evaluating her "student" performance) and peers (with whom she may be required to collaborate with during language tasks and assignments) by performing a frontstage identity of someone who is friendly and open to communication with others.

Figure 1–Nora's Institutionally-Sanctioned Homepage.
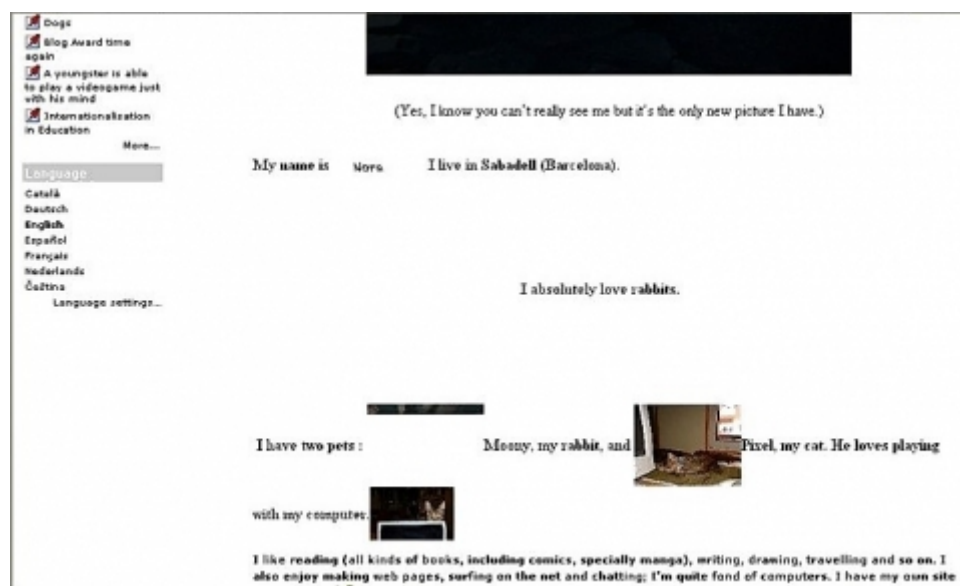
39   Despite the more restrictive parameters and affordances of the ISH platform, Nora is able to construct her "identity-in-action" through appropriation of the technological affordances of this rather "minimalist" platform. She also makes use of her own multiple literacies (knowledge of the target language, knowledge of conversational norms for pleasant self-presentations and digital knowledge of visual and textual combinations) to create her "frontstage" identity and to perform "impression management." As it can be seen in the screenshot, Nora adheres to "expected behaviors" (Goffman, 1959) of the community in which she is participating (future teachers of English as a Foreign Language); to wit: correct

English usage, topical discussions of EFL content (pets, likes and dislikes, etc.) and fully expressed ideas (no abbreviations, full sentences, etc.), even in reference to themes that are often discussed amongst community members with highly specialized jargon (eg Manga comics).

40   Nora not only uses her ISH for impression management at the more professional level (student, future teacher), she also engages in "friendship management" in the ISH. It is interesting the way in which she does this, despite the fact that this particular platform does not have a technological function that allows for listing and segregating friends and followers (as is usual for other social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Tumblr or Myspace). She does so by first mentioning that she has another website and then displaying the link for anyone interested in finding out more about her, thus, in effect, building the bridge for others to explore her "learning ecology."

41   In her personal website production, Nora employs various tools available in the website platform to fashion a "public-private" (Weber & Mitchell, 2008) frontstage identity that uses both images and words to create a visual and textual collage.

Figure 2–Nora's Personal Homepage.

42   This aggregate of words and images employs multilingual resources and inventive wordplay (eg Englishing) that display Nora's linguistic competences in Spanish, English and "manga." The collage also performs important "audience segregation" (Goffman, 1959) with the use of highly specialized manga jargon (eg FYGK[2]). In the "institutionally sanctioned" homepage, Nora's postings do not make claim to any group identification (apart from an implied connection with animal-lovers) whereas in her personal website content, the textual and visual collage and other postings constitute a declaration of belonging to specific peer groups related to distinct popular cultures, along with links to these identifying traits (see Figure 3).

Figure 3–Video linked to Nora's text "Kagami no Miko."

43   In a sense, Nora is co-constructing identities with others who have similar attributes or interests (eg manga fans, online gamers), as well as appropriating the digital resources from these websites for her own social identity, in this case someone interested in gaming that features Japanese animation (see Herring & Demarest, 2017, in this special issue for more discussion on how individuals use different online communicative modalities for self-expression). In both homepages (ISH and PH), Nora is able to orchestrate multiple discourses as a means of "establishing dialogic relations with others" (eg competent use of more than one language to introduce herself and make others aware of her different possible identities), while at the same time she manages to be "recognized and validated as an expert" (Vitanova, 2005: 162, quoted in Menard-Warwick, 2005: 269) in several cultural fields (appropriate use of jargon and technology to demonstrate her belonging to highly specialized groups). This is evidenced in another of her links to a forum with well-informed commentators on Manga comics (Figure 4).

Figure 4–Forum linked to Nora's text FYGK.

44   The identity Nora constructs in both of her online websites is of a young woman who is sociable, sensitive and inquisitive. Through her textual-visual collages, she evokes her multiple interests and her values, while affirming her identity as

someone who has many skills and ample knowledge of varying topics.

45   Learning to relate with others involves a process of acquiring proficiency in reading social cues and reacting accordingly. Inevitably, social cues and impression management varies greatly by culture (Briggs, 1999) and in online environments, individuals must learn to interpret situations and manage impressions differently. Nora uses both websites to "author" herself through the appropriation of multiple discourses (Greenleaf & Katz, 2004), including appropriate use of language(s) for impression management, audience segregation and bridging of her off and online identities. This performative aspect of identity coincides with the results of work carried out by Stern (2008) in her study of girls' homepages for self-expression.
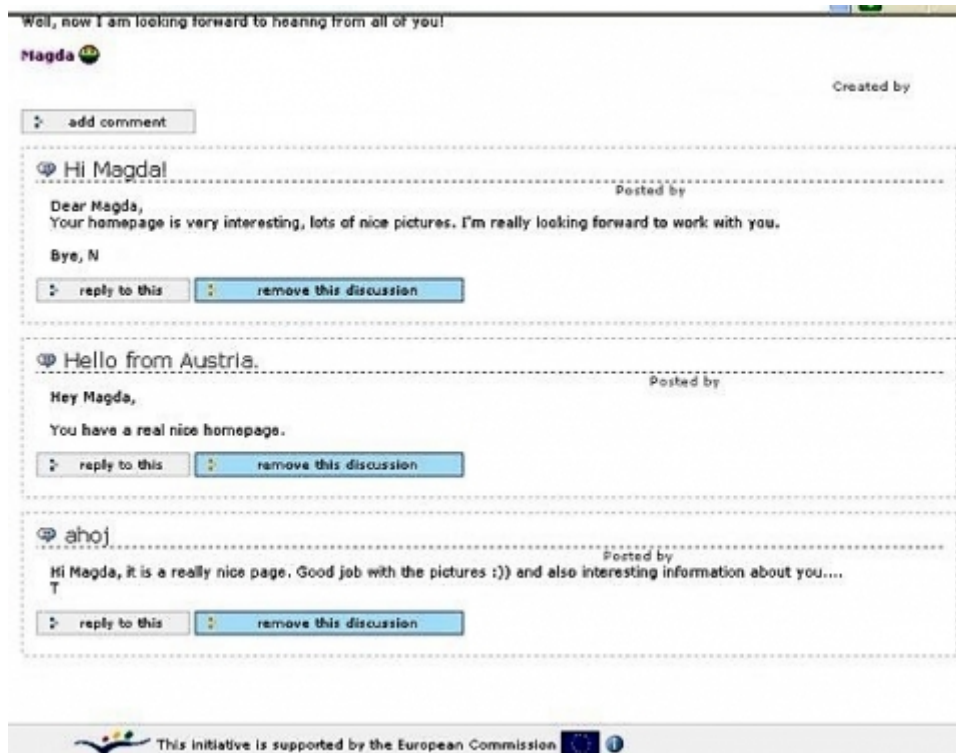
> Youth authors use their personal sites to engage with their culture and to practice ways of being within it. They concern themselves simultaneously with how they appear to themselves and to their audiences. Although this process is not unique to online self-presentation, the deliberate nature of the construction magnifies the experience. Indeed, if, as has been argued, all presentation is performative and we constantly evaluate ourselves from the perspective of the "other," then moments of self-appraisal and self-presentation meld into one another, especially online. (...) Performing and playing with their identities in online public spaces is especially gratifying, because it is viewed as less risky but potentially more validating than experimentation in other arenas (Stern, 2008: 113).

46   Similarly, Nora is far more experimental in the PH than in institutionally-sanctioned one. There are elements of experimentation and authenticity which are not evident in the ISH. If exploration is seen as a means to learning, then, arguably, more learning has taken place outside of the teacher-directed learning ecology than within it.

7. Findings (ii): Different Identities-in-Action through Forum Messages and Text Chats

47   The network structure of the institutional platform allowed other members of the class community (made up of teachers and students belonging to both classes) to post comments on each ISH. The performative behavior of the student-members of the community was, on the whole, quite uniform, as can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5–Comments posted to student's ISH.

Well, now I am looking forward to hearing from all of you!

Magda 😊

Created by

⟩ add comment

💬 Hi Magda!

Dear Magda,
Your homepage is very interesting, lots of nice pictures. I'm really looking forward to work with you.

Bye, N

⟩ reply to this　　⟨ remove this discussion

💬 Hello from Austria.

Posted by

Hey Magda,

You have a real nice homepage.

⟩ reply to this　　⟨ remove this discussion

💬 ahoj

Posted by

Hi Magda, it is a really nice page. Good job with the pictures :)) and also interesting information about you....
T

⟩ reply to this　　⟨ remove this discussion

This initiative is supported by the European Commission 🇪🇺 ⓘ

48　　The students posted comments that are similar in format to forum threads, taking the ISH as a cue for the type of turn-taking that occurs. For instance, in Figure 5 Magda has "invited" others to respond to her ISH by publishing: "Well, now I'm looking forward to hearing from all of you!" This is followed by posts from her online peers within a conversational turn-taking structure. Notably, in this exchange, the posts do deviate somewhat from the normal sequentiality of turns which is often repeated in forum threads–that is, answering to the thread that directly precedes the post (Antaki et al., 2006). Instead, all of the posts are referentially oriented back to Magda's original invitation which was open to "all of you" (including Nora, who is the first to respond to Magda's ISH).

49　　It can be argued that Magda has competently negotiated a plural audience for her "frontstage identity" and is active in setting up a community of like-minded peers (diligent students creating and commenting homepages) with whom she may eventually have to work. The other students respond in kind, fully aware that not doing so could provoke an identity of "uncooperative" peer. Along similar lines, the students posts were all within the established deadlines, tended to be short and, as in Nora's ISH, conform to the "expected behaviors" (Goffman, 1959) of the community of future teachers of English as a Foreign Language in the standard use of the target language (English). This coincides with other observations of multilingual students interaction that "includes many monolingual moments, which result from their situated orientation to particular addressees or topics" (Androutsopoulos, 2013: 17). As this author points out, the participants make their language choices according to their "orientation to networked audiences" (Androutsopoulos, 2013: 17).

50　　With their comments, the student-teachers participate within the available network structure (boyd & Ellison, 2007) in order to consolidate readily recognizable roles of "good student" (someone who does the assigned online tasks in the media stipulated by the teachers) as well as "good peer" (cooperative and sociable, willing to get to know others in order to collaborate with them). The student-teachers are also engaged in their "identities-in-action" (Weber & Mitchell, 2008) as future teachers of English as a Foreign Language through their use of the target language for communication among them (even in the case of postings between peers who share the same L1).

51   This identity-in-action is carried on in the "institutionalized" meetings the online teams held for discussion of each individual teaching project. As it is illustrated in extract 1, the predominant use of "teacher-talk," constituted by a specific repertoire, content and indexicality, allows the dialogue participants to perform the appropriate identity that can be recognized by the others for membership into that community, thereby enabling them to co-construct a shared identity of foreign language teachers.

52   Extract 1 – Shared "EFL Teacher Identity."

> Nora says: ok of all the documents, look at SRD II Part 1 and SRD II Part 2
>
> Irene says: ok Nora
>
> Nora says: the others are just supporting materials, you can look at them if you want, but they're hard to edit
>
> Chang says: will you make a detailed lesson plan?
>
> Nora says: yes, I'm far behind you guys in that, mainly because I don't know how to sequence these materials
>
> Chang says: do you also in charge of craft? if then you can connect craft and lesson material
>
> Irene says: but Nora, is your unit based on the grammar-based apporach or the topic-based one? or maybe none of them...
>
> Nora says: topic based: animals

53   The three participants engage in the use of very specific teacher jargon (SRD II, supporting materials, grammar-based approach, topic-based, etc.). The participants make reference to their knowledge of teaching as is evidenced by the mention of detailed lesson plan, sequenced materials, connecting disciplines. That none of these statements cause confusion or create the need for clarification indicates a shared cultural and social identity of "teachers."

54   The analysis of several different "institutionalized" chats (not included here) in which Nora took part indicates that this "shared" teacher identity was far more relevant than any other available identities that the participants could have deployed (student, pet-lover, Austrian, Manga fan, etc.). In fact, there were few incidences in all of the transcripts in which other ("offline") identities were made relevant, despite the fact that Nora had very carefully constructed an online introduction of herself which could be performed to a general audience and which could have, potentially, been referenced during the online conversations.

55   Arguably, these other, potential identities do not come into play because Nora is aware of the need for appropriate performance of her "dramaturgical identity" and she is mindful that this performance involves reflexivity (she must make the others aware that she is a "good" student to work with). Moreover, Nora and her online peers have adopted the behaviors they deem necessary in order to be viewed as belonging to the group of future teachers. At the same time, they do not yet pertain to this community of teachers (at least they did not at the time of the online chats). In this sense, the social media tools provided them with a space for active exploration and apprenticeship into the community in a safe arena for rehearsing different aspects of this identity.

56   This enactment or performance of "teacher identity" in the "institutionalized" text chats contrast sharply with texts exchanged between two online peers through social media outside of the classroom (both students gave permission to use this data from their personal MMS (multimedia message service) messages and facilitated the researcher with copies).

Figure 6–Screenshot of informal chat.
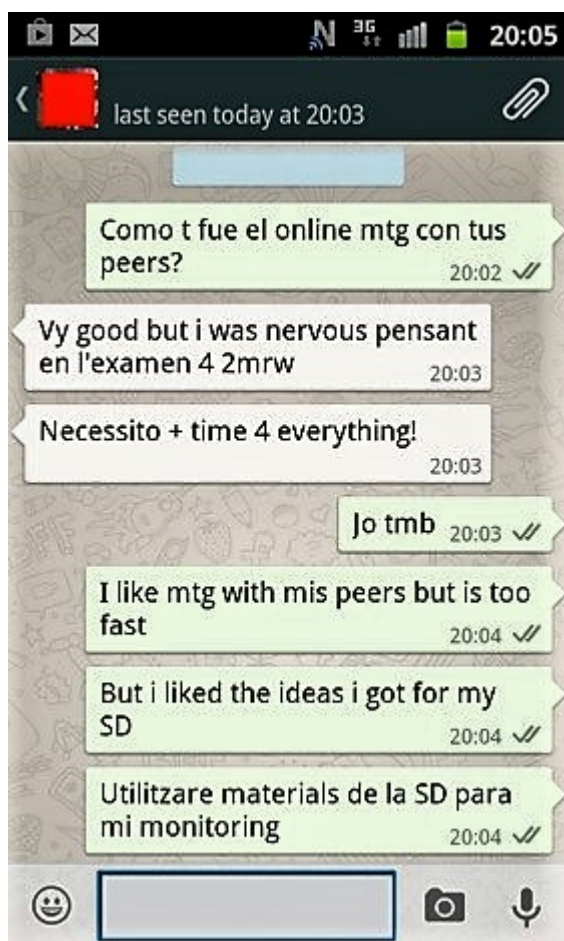
57   Extract 2 – Transcription of informal chat.

Nora: Como t fue el online mtg con tus peers?

[How was the meeting with your online peers?]

Jana: Vy good but i was nervous pensant en l'examen 4 2mrw. necessito + time 4 everything!

[Very good but I was nervous thinking about the exam for tomorrow. I need more time for everything!]

Nora: Jo tmb. i like mtg with mis peers but is too fast. But i liked the ideas i got for my SD. Utilitzare materials de la SD para mi monitoring.

[Me too. I like meeting with my peers but it is too fast. But I liked the ideas I got for my SD (Seqüència Didàctica or Teaching Sequence). I will use materials from the SD for my monitoring (reference to an extracurricular job)

58   Despite the fact that both Nora and Jana are fully competent in Spanish and Catalan, their MMS messages are composed of multilingual resources, including English (their L2 and the target language to be used as much as possible in their classes and during the online meetings with their peers). These MMS messages indicate that the two students recognize themselves as multilingual communicators who are capable of re-appropriating linguistic and cultural resources (note the use of typical MMS shorthand, along with numerals and symbols) in order to navigate across social (they are friends and colleagues) and professional identities (Nora makes explicit reference to the development of her teaching materials). This heterogeneous use of multiple languages stands in stark contrast to the predominantly monolingual, non-abbreviated short messages left in the forum posts as well as the online meeting content from their peer meetings

in which the student-teachers carefully construct themselves as future EFL teachers with competent use of the language they will be teaching.

8. Conclusion

59   The analysis demonstrates that the subject in the case study "performs" identities through competent use of different technological tools and resources. It is evident that Nora is aware of her target audience in each use and that she is equally cognizant of the affordances each platform or tool provide and knows how to use the available resources to perform "frontstage" identities and carry out "impression management" (Goffman, 1959). She brings some previously acquired knowledge concerning online "performativity" into the interactions in the formal learning situation and, at intervals, appears to present identities to demonstrate her competence as an assumed member of the community she aspires to join–professional EFL teachers–by complying with "expected behaviors" (Goffman, 1959).

60   At the same time, she uses the technology, in particular the Personal Homepage, the MMS messaging and, to some degree, the online peer discussions as a means of experimenting and presenting various identities, not only her "student" or "professional" identities. She offers a view of these identities to others but does so in a manner that one might call a "side door" to the "frontstage identity." In other words, through links on her institutionally-sanctioned homepage, she invites others to explore her other identities, rather than creating her media collage directly on the ISH. Nora's "impression management" performance shows that she is aware of the complexity and challenges that lie in competently performing identities in situations where the power infrastructure is not tipped in her favor (she must correctly enact her "professional" identity for her teachers) and that there is an inherent risk in other "front stage" identities that might contrast with her professional one. This may be one reason that she uses multilingual resources, including English, even in her PH where she performs other identities such as Manga comic fan or gamer.

61   For language educators, it is important to take into account that Nora is far more experimental with languages and other semiotic codes in the PH than in institutionally-sanctioned one. There are elements of experimentation and authenticity which are not evident in the institutional personal website. If exploration is seen as a means to learning, then, arguably, more learning has taken place outside of the teacher-directed learning ecology than within it. She also comes into the formal language learning environment with previously acquired competences in the delicate balance of using online social media for transacting exchanges and performing appropriate identities for segregated audiences.

62   It has long been hailed that learning best takes place when it starts from the students' previous knowledge and experience but there is still little evidence that language teachers are taking students' existent digital competencies into account when designing technology-enhanced language learning environments; indeed, students are often expected to "leave their digital identities at the door." Acknowledgement of the dynamic, reflexive, multi-layered identities (both on and offline) of the students is one more step towards a recognition of language learners as "beings," and not simply as "becomings" (Buckingham, 2008: 19). This also provides wider resources for the language teacher to explore, as well as helping students improve their own ability to "perform" appropriate identities (again, on and offline) in the target language.

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Notes

1 The United States of America's National Crime Prevention Council defines cyber-bullying as "the process of using the Internet, cell phones or other devices to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person".

2 FYGK stands for the manga series "Fushigi Yuugi Genbu Kaiden".

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Pour citer cet article

Référence
Melinda Dooly, « Performing Identities in Social Media: Focusing on Language Learners' Identity Construction Online », *Alsic* [En ligne], Vol. 20, n° 1 | 2017, mis en ligne le 02 mai

2017, Consulté le 14 août 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/alsic/3005

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