Multimodalities and Chinese Students' L2 Practices

POSITIONING, AGENCY, AND COMMUNITY

Min Wang

FOREWORD BY JAMES PAUL GEE

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To Bowen, my son, my inspiration.
I love you with all my heart.

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Foreword

In the publishing world there is an interesting Catch 22. If you want to publish a "trade book" (a mass market book, not an academic one aimed at a narrow audience) you have to have an agent (a business person who deals with the publishers; most good trade publishers will not take book proposals directly from authors who have no agent). However, usually you cannot get a decent agent if you have not already published a trade book. It is a "Catch 22." It seems there is no way to win, even to start.

All humans face just such a Catch 22 problem when they come into life and have to acquire their first language. To acquire our native language, we need to understand the language spoken to and around us; however, we cannot understand it because we don't yet know any language. Note that this problem cannot be solved by someone telling you things. Telling you what the language around you means when you have no language obviously won't work.

This language Catch 22 problem is solved by the intervention of a mentor/teacher (parents and other speakers) who encourages young children to take the risk to do something they cannot yet do. The child talks or makes a noise (and often gesture) in an attempt to signal an intention. The mentor/teacher treats what the child does as meaningful; treats it as an attempt to accomplish something. The teacher then shows the child in words, in gestures, and by arrangements of the environment how to do it a bit better. Of course, this is just a version of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The ZPD requires trust and safety. When we learn our first language, we usually are part of a loving family that wants us to become a member of the family. So, for most humans, the language acquisition Catch 22 problem is not like the publishing Catch 22 problem. The publishing industry doesn't

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know you and doesn't love you. It is interested in limiting and sorting the people who publish trade books.

However, there are cases where we humans face a language acquisition Catch 22 problem more akin to the publishing problem and less to the first language problem. When we have to acquire a new "register" (a new style of language used for specific functions by a specific group of people devoted to those functions) we, once again, cannot speak meaningfully since we cannot understand, let alone produce, any of the specific meanings of the group. But here the group is a "club" that is interested in entry requirements, limiting members, and enforcing standards, rules, and sorting. Trust and a feeling of safety are often hard to come by.

This is what happens when someone tries to learn the language of law, street gangs, game design, or physics in order to be a lawyer, street gang member, or a physicist. After all, these groups and many more like them have "standards."

There is no tight separation between learning one's first language and becoming and acting as a member of a family and community of a certain sort. But usually they want us or have to have us. There is no tight separation between learning the language of law, street gangs, game design, or physics and becoming and acting as (engaging in the practices of) a lawyer, street gang member, game designer, or physicist. But these clubs, groups, or "Big D Discourses" do not always want us and even less often need us, especially when we are beginners.

This register Catch 22 is, of course, just the problem of status. In many situations among humans, status plays a major role. In fact, humans are biologically tropic to status as social creatures (and as primates). They care profoundly what other people think about them and deeply fear social failure. And such failure is no more probable than when one seeks entry into a "prestigious" club whose members all know each other and have their own established pecking order.

Status is a very vexed thing for humans. On the one hand, functional groups need to ensure that their members (be these plumbers, lawyers, professors, game designer, doctors, or gangs) are good at what they do. It is hard to do this without making and enforcing distinctions about who is better and who is worse. It is hard to do it without tests and trails that involve the possibility of not just failure but total failure (denial of membership).

On the other hand, status for us humans is very often faked, abused, and misapplied. It is often hard to know whether people are using status, status judgments, and assessments to hide their own agendas, prejudices, fears, and insecurities or are engaging in important, just, necessary, and veridical work. Some clubs are fake, some are not, some are in-between, and, in some cases and situations, it is just hard to tell, especially for beginners.

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Anyone who wishes to help people solve the status-riddled Catch 22 problem of acquiring registers (to acquire Discourses) must become a student of status. He or she needs to study how distinctions are made and changed; when they seem necessary and appropriate, and when and where they do not; and how people can meet them and avoid the pitfalls of faked, abused, and misplaced status (and its cousin power). Only with such studies can we even begin to gain good theories of how Catch 22 learning problems can be solved, in a more human and fair manner. Only then can we help learners at the start of their journeys when trust and safety is sometimes hard to find.

The problem of acquiring registers for Discourses is hard enough for native speakers of English who are learning a new register of English on their home ground. It is vexing indeed for non-native speakers to acquire a new register of English off their home ground. It is this latter case that can really show us a great deal about the problem, the pain it causes, and ways to deal with it. Through the act we can learn a great deal about language, society, institutions, and humans. Min Wang's *Multimodalities and Chinese Students' L2 Practices: Positioning, Agency, and Communities* is an illuminating, insightful, and important contribution to these very deep and vexed issues.

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Introduction

My dad sent me a picture of plum blossoms through WeChat before this Chinese New Year. This picture reminds me of a famous Chinese epigram: 宝剑锋从磨砺出, 梅花香自苦寒来, which means one makes a sword sharp by sharpening it, and, the fragrance of plum blossoms only arises from the bitter cold. My dad wants me to be persistent and tough like plum blossoms blossoming in the dead of winter. This picture was very important to me since I faced many difficulties when I first came to the United States as an English language learner.

—Joey's narrative of his keepsake

One day, when I was talking about American fast food with my international classmates in my speaking and listening class, I said I like one kind of beef hamburger in maidanglao (麦当劳in Chinese) (Macdonald's), but they did not understand me. I was surprised and anxious. I thought to myself: maidanglao (麦当劳) is very famous in the world. Why do they not know it? I took out my notebook and wrote a huge "M" on it. They saw it and said: "Oh, Macdonald's." I felt embarrassed because I did not know how to say it in English. Even though I saw the big sign of Macdonald's almost everywhere, I did not pay attention to its pronunciation. I was really embarrassed, so I decided to talk about this topic in our WeChat discussion group: Learning English from our daily life.

—John's narrative of a WeChat discussion

When I was ordering a meal at a fast food restaurant, I had problems to understand the waiter. I did not know how to say the names of the food I wanted. I used my figure to point to it on the menu. It was embarrassing.

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> When the waiter asked, "what drinks?" I got totally lost, so I asked him "what?" After his repetition of this phrase many times, I realized that he was asking what kind of drinks I wanted. I felt stupid when I could not understand him. I even did not understand a simple phrase. A few days later, I recognized that using "what" to ask for clarifications is not polite, but I used it many times. I should have said, "excuse me?" or "pardon?" or something like that, but. . . . The waiter might have thought that I was a very rude guy or did not have education. I felt terrible.
>
> —Smith's narrative of experience in a restaurant

The quotes above reflect the experiences of authoring selves (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 1998) of three Chinese international students: Joey, John, and Smith (all names are pseudonyms) through utilizing multiple modes to make meanings of their identities in actual and virtual environments. These Chinese international students' incidents in their daily lives that they believed were significant for their positioning as a certain kind, such as an ambitious L2 learner who claimed power for a desired position, through discourse in a specific social, cultural, and historical context. They narrated their life experiences as stories to tell people who they were and what they hoped to become while they were learning English as a second language (L2) in the United States.

L2 learning and L2 learners have attracted second language acquisition (SLA) researchers' attention since last century. After Norton Peirce's (1997) advocacy for considering the influence of L2 learners' identities and power relations on their language learning, issues of identity have become central to the SLA field. Norton (2013) argues that identity theory "highlights the multiple positions from which language learners can speak, and how sometimes marginalized learners can appropriate more desirable identities with respect to the target language community" (p. 2). She also contends that relations of power can limit or offer L2 learners' opportunities for language learning formally and informally. Since identity is influenced by social practices and resources, investigation of the practices and resources, including symbolic and material resources—social and historical contexts and of L2 learners' various access to those practices and resources in particular—provides a means to theorize how identities are constructed and negotiated. However, social structures do not completely determine L2 learning because learners "who struggle to speak from one identity position may be able to reframe their relationship with others and claim alternative, more powerful identities from which to speak, read or write, thereby enhancing language acquisition" (p. 3).

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As an L2 learner myself, I experienced identity negotiation and transformation while learning English in the United States. I struggled with understanding my classmates, professors, and other English language learners and with making myself understood. For example, one day, one of my classmates suggested to me, "Hi Min, Let's do lunch someday." I was waiting for her to tell me when we could have lunch together. Gradually, I realized that this utterance probably just showed her kindness. Or perhaps it was just a greeting. Taking it literally made me doubt my classmate's trustworthiness and reflect on myself as to whether I did anything wrong that led to my classmate to change her mind. I was also wondering, like some other L2 learners, how and why American people sell their yards without selling their houses while seeing the sign "yard sale" in someone's yard. I was also confused about "Why is Amy under the weather since the weather is nice?" while hearing the idiom "under the weather." I was also curious about how my American friend would give a shower to her student's newborn baby when she had a baby shower party. These linguistic and cultural differences confused me and also intrigued me, which triggered my sustained interest in exploring more and made me a keen researcher in SLA.

When one of my participants in my pilot study shared her feelings about speaking English with me, I immediately realized that that was "I." The following is her narrative:

> Speaking English is like dancing with shackles. I do not know how to stretch my legs and arms. It is very painful to participate in class discussions because when I speak English, my tongue is tied up. Sometimes I feel stupid and awkward if I do not know the answer related to the target culture. Whenever my teacher asks me questions, I just want to hide or disappear, because I do not understand what she is talking about and do not know how to answer her questions. She might think I am dumb. Even though I know the answers sometimes, I do not want to raise my hand, because I am afraid of making mistakes. If I make mistakes, my classmates would laugh at me. I think I am irrelevant to the class. I feel like there is a mark on my face: "you are a failure." I do not want people to know I am an ELI (English language institute) student. I feel like I am inferior to others, especially those Chinese students who already started their undergraduate programs. I just want to escape from my ELI classes because I do not belong to this group. Unfortunately, I have to stay at ELI until I pass the TOEFL test. I am the only child in my family. My parents have high expectations for me. I cannot disappoint them. I have to try very hard to improve my English in order to start my program studies.

In her narrative I saw myself because I was there. I was a struggled L2 learner who experienced the dilemma of taking a risk to speak or keeping silent. This struggle made me feel that attending a class was to go to a battle.

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Although listening to my professors' lectures was enjoyable, sometimes it was painful because I was like walking around with earmuffs on. I could hear people talking to me, but something they said was muffled and unintelligible. My self-criticism and self-doubt that resulted from the embarrassing experience in class overshadowed my self-efficacy. I became someone else whom I never knew. I also doubted my Chinese name that is supposed to make me intelligent. It seemed as if it has lost power because I was unable to engage in class interactions. Oftentimes, I remained silent, which made me feel as if I lost myself completely. So, attending a class was a dilemma: I looked forward to it, but, at the same time, I was terrified of class discussions. On one occasion, I remember that one of my group members turned to me after everyone contributed to the discussion and asked me, "Are you going to say something?" I felt shameful and stupid because his question, intonation, and facial expression made me feel as though I were an unanimated object—a chair or a desk—in class. He might have positioned me as an unmotivated and incompetent L2 learner. This assumption made me feel bad about myself as a person. Although I had a strong desire to practice L2, I gave up investing in the L2 practice because of this specific discourse. The unequal relation of power excluded me from the language practices in that classroom (Norton, 2013).

What was worse was to give a presentation. I was struggling to present a book chapter for my research methods class when I was pursuing my PhD studies. Reading and comprehending the chapter was a challenge. Using English to present the chapter was like a nightmare because nearly all of my classmates were English native speakers, which made the classroom environment intimidating. I chose to present a chapter in the second to last class so that I had enough time to prepare. I spent months preparing for that presentation, but when the day was approaching, I became very anxious. I thought to myself that it would be easier to die than to do a presentation. I did not die; I survived. When my participants in the research for this book told me that they spent days preparing for their presentations and that they were anxious about their presentations, I had an immediate flashback to the time I was asked to present a chapter in my methods class.

I understand their struggles because I had the same experiences. My struggle to participate in L2 literacies mirrors many language learners' learning realities. However, as a "digital immigrant" (Prensky, 2001), I am different from the young generation of L2 learners who live in globalized and digitized worlds that "constrain as well as enable the exercise of human agency" (Norton, 2013, p. 22). Their digitized L2 learning embedded and featured with multimodal and multilingual literacies demonstrates uniqueness, complexity, and particularities. This new generation of L2 learners'

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use of multimodality—meaning making through using all the senses—"an interweaving of cultural, social, cognitive, and biological processes" and "an integration of mind, body, and society" (Kendrick, 2016, p. 3), digital devices, such as smartphones and laptops, and multiple languages (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003, 2009; The New London Group, 1996), has changed the way in which they are positioned and position themselves as a certain kind. L2 learning has extended as L2 literacies practices in which L2 learners' self-becoming and self-recreation take place through multimodal means in multiple learning communities (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Literacy became plural because it is tightly tied with "a vast array of social, technological and economic factors" (Kress, 2003, p. 1). Literacies have been conceptualized as providing multiple skills, including linguistic, cultural, social, and technological skills, and a rich knowledge base to mediate oneself within the specific context. Agency takes shape in the process of L2 learners' identity forming and shaping when they utilize multiple modes, such as languages and signs, and technological devices, to participate in practices of literacies (Kress, 2009; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). The development of modern technologies and globalization have been shown to provide L2 learners with alternative ways for identity remaking and agency development, which triggered my interest to explore how digital tools and multiple modes influence L2 learners' positioning and agency and how the interplay between positioning and agency mediated by multimodality impacts their L2 literacies.

The book is for young adult language learners who study a second or new language in a foreign country because these L2 learners' English learning experience can be inspirations for them to positively position themselves in desired ways to motivate and empower them to become successful language learners and users. Also, these L2 learners' lived experiences while they were engaging in different communities of practice can serve as exemplary models to construct and negotiate agency for establishing community membership and building a sense of belonging.

This book is also for teachers, educational practitioners and administrators, and university professors who are wondering how to teach L2 learners and who are seeking for the best practice techniques that can be implemented to make them successful students. This book does not provide a list of directions about how to teach; rather, it offers perspectives on who the L2 learners are and how they participate in L2 literacies. It also serves as a guide for thinking knowledgeably and critically to make informed and agentive decisions and to implement culturally relevant pedagogy for all. Research has shown that L2 learners are labeled as linguistically deficient, culturally worthless, and socially insignificant (Haneda & Sherman, 2016; Yoon, 2008). Evidence

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suggests that teachers are often blind to L2 learners' diverse linguistic and cultural experiences, and that L2 learners are frequently treated as uninvited guests in their classrooms (Yoon, 2008) because we only see L2 learners as language without bodies (Kasun & Saavedra, 2016; Wang, 2016). Oftentimes, L2 learners are treated as stepchildren, who do not have equal access to rich educational opportunities. The essence of teaching is to consider learners and students as human beings. Therefore, knowing L2 learners is key to humanized pedagogy. This book has the potential to guide teachers in finding optimal approaches to know their students in order to conduct effective and efficient teaching.

In addition, this book is for scholars and researchers who are interested in SLA and L2 learners and multimodality. Because of the influences of modern technologies, multi-languages, multi-cultures, and other multiple modes on their learning practices and learning outcomes, digitized and globalized L2 learners are different from the students of the old generations of L2 learners. They display different literacies strengths and face different struggles and dilemmas. I am writing this book in the hope that researchers in SLA will better understand this new generation of L2 learners, explore their complicated L2 learning realities, and generate new theories to inform L2 teaching and learning.

THE STUDY

This book consists of four parts and six chapters. Part I (chapter 1) addresses relevant theories and methodology. Part II (chapter 2) discusses the L2 learners' cultural understandings of themselves. Part III (chapters 3, 4, and 5) narrates the L2 learners' life in America. Part IV (chapter 6) concludes findings and implications. The section below specifies the content of each chapter.

In chapter 1, I briefly examine some examples of SLA research regarding positioning and agency, multimodality and L2 literacies, and community of practices and the conceptions of L2 learners and L2 learning. I then introduce my research questions, the setting of the research, and the methodology.

In chapter 2, I present three L2 learners' cultural experiences by displaying the narratives of their Chinese names and keepsakes. An analysis of why and how these L2 learners selected to tell and interpret their names and keepsakes follows. It seems as if these L2 learners cherished their Chinese names and keepsakes with utmost significance because they believed that they were connected with their life experiences. I, therefore, argue that these L2 learners' narratives of their symbolic and material artifacts can be a source for their positioning acts and agency representation.

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In chapter 3, I display these three L2 learners' interactions with native English speakers in naturalistic social contexts after their arrival in the United States. Their interactions indicate how their agency either prohibited or enhanced by their experiences when they positioned and were positioned as a certain *kind* in and through discursive practices. Joey's embarrassing experiences in a restaurant and Walmart are described in depth: Facing a cook's question "Can you speak English?" Joey chose to maintain silence because he believed that the cook questioned his ability to speak English; he was humiliated by the cook's verbal and non-verbal language. When he faced a cashier's question "Why do you speak Chinese in public in America?" Joey chose to respond to her by asking "Why should I not speak my own language in America?" Joey exercised his agency differently in different contexts by positioning himself as a legitimate customer who had dignity—one who should be respected and a bilingual speaker who had the right to speak his mother tongue whenever needed or wanted to. Similar to Joey's encounters, Smith's experience in a restaurant also showed his struggle for communication. When a waiter asked him what drinks he wanted as he was ordering a meal, Smith was unsure about what the waiter was inquiring so he asked the waiter "what?" for a clarification. He felt uncomfortable and bad about using "what" instead of using polite expressions such as "pardon me?" or "excuse me?" for clarification. John's encounter at an airport showed his limited command of English, but his nine requests for clarifications demonstrated his practice of taking risks and his strong agency to understand the officers' demands. I present an analysis of the interplay between their positioning and agency and consider their negative experiences as a powerful source for their agency negotiation and enhancement because the L2 learners made endeavors to change their unwanted positionings by employing multimodalities in various settings.

Chapter 4 focuses on the three L2 learners' interactions in the WeChat discussion group by using discourse analysis (Gee, 2014). I examine how these students selected discussion topics, how they used a certain language to exchange information, produce knowledge, and express opinions, and how their decision-making in terms of selection of topics and language use interplayed with their positioning and agency. I demonstrate the ways in which these L2 learners' positional identities in this social networking site embodied and concretized their agency development through multiple modes and means.

In chapter 5, I describe these three students' L2 literacies practices in the community of the ELI to offer examples of their use of multimodality with digital devices. Their positioning as cultural brokers, diligent and strategic L2 learners and users, and international citizens is addressed. I argue that the L2

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learners' interactions with multiple modes in communities of practice offer alternative ways for desired positioning and enhanced agency.

In chapter 6, I discuss theoretical and pedagogical perspectives and issues emerging through the process of the research to address how teachers and teacher educators might support L2 learners in their struggle in L2 literacies to promote critical and culturally relevant pedagogies in classrooms. Finally, I outline possible future research approaches in exploring L2 literacies, positioning, and agency of L2 learners.

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Part I

THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY

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Chapter 1

Theories, Setting, and Methods

POSITIONING AND L2 LEARNING

> SLA [Second language acquisition] theorists have struggled to conceptualize the relationship between the language learner and the social world because they have not developed a comprehensive theory of identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context. Furthermore, they have not questioned how relations of power in the social world impact on social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers. . . . I use the term identity to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands the possibilities. (Norton, 2013, pp. 44–45)

Norton's (2013) powerful statement above has resulted in a revolutionary turn in SLA research. SLA researchers had shifted their attention from the traits of L2 learners to the positional identities of speakers and their interactional practices and circumstances since then. Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990, 1999), which examines the influences of rights and duties that speakers and listeners claim or are assigned when they engage in a conversation or narrative, becomes a fruitful theoretical framework to elicit the discursive nature of identity (Dennen, 2011). Positioning theory studies the co-construction of positional identities between the speaker and the listener (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Drawn from cultural and discursive psychology, feminism, and post-structuralism, positioning theory aims to understand the role of ascriptions and resistances of ascriptions of rights and duties in daily conversations and storytelling because "not everyone involved in a social episode has equal access to rights and duties to perform particular kinds of meaningful actions at *that moment* and with *those people*" (Harré, 2012, p. 5; emphasis in original).

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Positioning theory offers three analytic lenses: positions, storylines, and speech acts (Davies & Harré, 1990). These three components mutually determine one another in an unfolding social episode (Harré, 2012). Unlike the concept of "role" (Davies & Harré, 1990), a position is "a cluster of beliefs with respect to the rights and duties of the members of a group of people who act in certain ways" (Harré, 2012). Role is a core aspect of one's identity and relatively static, but a position is flexible, situation-specific, and negotiable (Herbel-Eisenmann, Wagner, Johnson, Suh, & Figueras, 2015; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Warren & Moghaddam, 2018) because it emerges in and through discursive practices. However, when ascriptions of duties and rights that determine a position endure into longer obligations, they become the "birth place" of a role (Moghaddam, Harré, & Lee, 2008). The dynamics of positions is positioning—that is,

> processes by which rights and duties are assigned, ascribed, or appropriated and resisted, rejected, or repudiated. The upshot of acts of positioning is a pattern of explicit and implicit beliefs, held by individuals and among the relevant group in which the action is going on. (Harré, 2012, p. 193)

In social positioning research, two relevant perspectives on positioning are fundamental: (a) reflexive positioning, also called intentional self-positioning, and (b) interactive positioning or other-positioning. Self-positioning guides people to think about their roles and assignments, such as taking responsibilities to act the roles because "[w]hen a person is engaged in a deliberate self-positioning process this often will imply that they try to achieve specific goals with their act of self-positioning. This requires one to assume that they have a goal in mind" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1998, p. 224). Interactive positioning or other-positioning means that people assign positions to others (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1998). Through discursive practices, the speaker and the listener take on various positions and constantly offer or deny people opportunities to say or do certain things (Kayi-Aydar, 2014, 2019).

Storylines are social events, characters, and moral struggles, which are organized and developed in and through conversations (Davies & Harré, 1999). Storylines are also described as patterns of interaction unfolding in a strip of life (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). The patterns consist of multiple semiotic resources, including verbal and nonverbal language (Pinnow & Chval, 2015). Warren and Moghaddam (2018) consider storylines as "a loose cluster of narrative conventions" (p. 322), such as plots in a playbook when multiple storylines operate at once. They suggest that speech acts are meaningful utterances with illocutionary force (Austin, 1962) to form and shape storylines. Speech acts include "not only spoken language but also

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other semiotic resources employed for social purposes among participants" (Pinnow & Chval, 2015, p. 5). In response, Herbel-Eisenmann and colleagues (2015) propose a replacement of "speech acts" with "communication acts," which is a significant aspect of positioning theory when it is used to examine L2 learners' social interactions because oftentimes they use multiple semiotic resources to make meanings for participation in interactions with each other.

Positioning theory organizes this triangle of interactions (i.e., positions, storylines, and speech acts) around first-, second-, and third-order positioning (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). First-order positioning refers to the way positions are initially introduced by interactants, who draw on various categories and storylines, in the local moral order (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Wagner & Herbel-Eisenmann, 2009). In real-life situations, people do not always accept first-order positioning. Therefore, the negotiation of positions takes place. For example, if a teacher tells her L2 learner student, "When you watch the movie *Gone with the Wind,* you can put the Chinese subtitles on," the L2 learner says, "I do not think I need that." In this exchange, the L2 learner challenges her teacher's first-order positioning as someone who might have difficulty to understand the movie. This assigned positioning may mismatch the student's sense of self. By challenging the first-order positioning, the L2 learner engages in second-order positioning by repositioning herself as a person who is able to understand the conversations in the movie. In this sense, second-order positioning refers to the ways in which interlocutors try to assert their own positions by creating and altering assigned positioning in storylines. Third-order positioning deals with positioning in a metadiscursive fashion, which takes shape in "retrospective discussion of previous acts of positioning" (Deppermann, 2015, p. 373). Take the same example above to illustrate third-order positioning. After the teacher and student have had a conversation about the Chinese subtitles, the student narrates the event to her roommates. The line goes like this: "My teacher asked me to use Chinese subtitles when I was watching the movie *Gone with the Wind* and I told her that I was able to understand the movie." In this new storyline, the L2 learner refers to a previous storyline to position herself and her teacher in a certain way. The student therefore engages in third-order positioning.

The primary contribution of positioning theory is that it accentuates the interpretation of rights and duties as fundamental explanatory elements for social interaction. Harré (2012) suggests that the main goal of this theory is to highlight social practices that prohibit certain groups of people from saying or doing certain things. In this sense, positioning theory can help SLA researchers better understand L2 learners' positioning acts while they engage in L2 learning practices in order to promote social justice and equity.

Positioning theory has been proved to be a fruitful theoretical framework and an analytic method in SLA research. For example, in Menard-Warwick's

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(2007) research, three adult women L2 learners' interactions with their teacher and peers manifested in such a way that social positioning affects language learning. The teacher, who taught a unit on employment skills to Latina immigrant women in California, positioned her students as homemakers based on the common societal discourses of gender and employment. One of the learners contested the interactive positioning as a homemaker, but another appropriated the homemaker positioning to her own ends. The findings reveal that social positioning was concretely manifested through the ESL classroom discourse and significantly affected L2 learning in this context. The study, therefore, argued that the classroom should be a place for vocational ESL teachers to provide space for learners' active self-positioning and support for questioning the assigned identities by the societal discourse. Yoon's (2008) study examined three classroom teachers' self-positioning with regard to English language learners (ELLs) and the relationship between their pedagogical practices and ELLs' reactions. Findings suggested that teachers' self-positioning shaped the teachers' teaching approaches and ELLs' participatory opportunities. This study offered a new way to understand the complex interactional classroom dynamics that determines the teaching and learning of ELLs. In addition, Martin-Beltran (2010) investigated the social construction of language proficiency in a fifth-grade, dual-immersion classroom and contended that the perceived proficiency was seen as a major determiner of positioning ELLs as (non)members of discourse communities, in which teachers and students worked collectively to "enact perceived proficiencies and position learners as (non) participants across different school contexts" (p. 257). This inquiry indicated that established patterns of participation limited access to turn-taking for those who were positioned as newcomers with limited language proficiency.

Kayi-Aydar (2014) examined two talkative L2 learners' interactions in an ESL classroom, where Tarek and Ahmad occupied polarized positions. Tarek who engaged in teacher-like positions, displayed his knowledge and experience, and used humor as a communicative strategy to gain the group membership. Ahmad, however, who displayed linguistic competence and dominated classroom discussions by producing long turns was refused to be accepted as a group member because his classmates positioned him as an outsider. Interestingly, Tarek's reflexive and interactive positionings created opportunities to learn, but positionings of Ahmad did not allow him to benefit from the opportunities because his classmates avoided interacting with him. The social positioning of students impacts the nature and quality of their communication with each other. Further, it either limits or gives learners access to linguistic and communicative resources for language learning. Similarly, Pinnow and Chval (2015) investigated the influence of positioning on the development of a Latino English learner in a third grade math class

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and found that positioning practices are inextricably intertwined with L2 learner access to classroom interactions, which affect the trajectory of L2 learner's improvement of interactional competence. Claiming positioning as a conceptual and methodological tool to analyze and understand agency in language learning classrooms, Kayi-Aydar (2015) explored the intertwined and complicated relationship among agency, positioning, and opportunities for L2 learning. Mounir, the participant, positioned himself as knowledgeable, special, unique, smart, and confident in his speaking class, through which his agency was actively deployed, emerged, and co-constructed. Yet, at the same time, it was constrained because his classmates did not confirm his strategic and powerful positionings. He was therefore positioned as an outcast and marginalized L2 learner. These contradictory positionings thus limited his access to participation and interaction. His agency fluctuated according to his reflexive and interactive positionings of others. Kayi-Aydar argued that agency emerged and was negotiated in and through interactions, and positioning either facilitated or impeded agency.

Pu and Evans (2019) examined Chinese postgraduate students' use of critical thinking skills in their thesis writing through the lens of positioning theory, Findings revealed that the students' use of critical thinking skills not only demonstrated their writing competence but also their positioning, which was directed by their specific goals for personal development. They, therefore, argued that positioning was an inherent component of the students' use of critical thinking skills in their thesis writing.

Although positioning theory has been applied to linguistic research as a theoretical framework and analytical tool, it has notified several shortcomings. For example, Beth Herbel-Eisenmann and her colleagues (2015) point out that concepts of position and positioning are confusing. They believe that Harré's (2012) definition of position as "a cluster of beliefs with respect to the rights and duties" (p. 196) is problematic because it does not present its dynamic nature. They hold that position and positioning should be interchangeable because they are considered as *processes* instead of *objects* (Emphasis is added by the author). Kayi-Aydar (2019) also suggests that "positions emerge from ongoing conversations, storytelling, and narrating, and therefore they are dynamic, very much like positioning" (p. 153). In addition, the distinction between position and role lacks clarity (Dennen, 2011; Deppermann, 2015; Herbel-Eisenmann et al., 2015). In the writing of van Langenhove and Harré (1999), the role of a teacher and a student in a storyline was presented as positions, which blurred the distinctions between the two notions. Again, a position is dynamic and temporary, but a role is more stable and fixed. Herbel-Eissenmann and her colleagues' (2015) explanation below made the difference between position and role quite clear:

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> Davies and Harré (1999) saw role as a transcendentalist concept and position as immanentist. Although earlier work focused on distinguishing positions and roles, this distinction was described later as occurring along a spectrum. Moghaddam et al. (2008) stated that assignments of rights and duties, as they endure into longer obligations, are the "birth place" of a role. Harré (2012) also seemed to support this view when he wrote that long-term positions come "close to" the concept of role. (p. 188)

This explanation further distinguishes the difference as well as the relationship between the concepts. A student can be positioned or position herself as a teacher in discursive practices. This student role can also affect the language choices that the student uses to construct and negotiate positions because "As people interact with others, they cannot isolate their roles from the context or social interaction" (Kayi-Aydar, 2019, p. 154).

Another concept in positioning theory that has received some criticisms is storylines. What is a storyline? How does a storyline work with positioning acts? The notion of storyline has not been developed fully in positioning theory. The examination of storylines in existing empirical research has not been adequate. Kayi-Aydar (2019) thus advocates that a further conceptualization of storylines and the interaction among different storylines are needed for attention.

AGENCY

The definition of agency varies from different theoretical perspectives, including social cognitive understanding, ecological approach, poststructuralist perspective, and sociocultural standpoint. In social cognitive theory, Bandura (2001) defines agency as the capability "to intentionally make things happen by one's actions" (p. 2). In this view, the core component of agency is perceived efficacy. The perceived efficacy impacts people's behaviors, goals, expectations, and courses of action to take. Bandura suggests that other fundamental components of agency include intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. He believes that humans exercise agency through cognitive, motivational, affective, and choice process to create and transform environments in and through which they are produced and shaped. Individuals are motivated and guided by their beliefs to make a change in their lives.

The ecological approach to agency originally appeared in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) research and then was developed by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015). Emirbayer and Mische define agency as "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the

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temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (p. 970). Priestley and colleagues placed an emphasis on the "ecological conception of agency-as-achievement" (p. 627). They argue that agency is informed by one's past experiences, orientated toward one's future, and enacted in the present. This enactment is influenced by "cultural, material and structural resources" (p. 627).

The poststructuralist perspective on agency is represented by Davies (1990, 1991). She defines agency as a form of discursive practice. She explains that individuals use discursive practices available to them to formulate their motivations and desires. She expounds:

> Embedded within those discursive practices is an understanding that each person is one who has an obligation to take themselves up as a knowable, recognizable identity, who "speaks for themselves," who accepts responsibility for their actions, what is as one who is recognizably separate from any particular collective, and thus as one who can be said to have agency. (p. 343)

In this sense, agency is discursively produced. Davies (1991) contends that a discursively constituted and reconstituted individual has access to a subject position, has the right to be linguistically visible and audible, such as authoring one's own multiple meanings and desires, and has the ability and choice to negotiate new meanings through a certain discourse. Since self is discursively constituted, agency is the capacity to "recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted" (p. 51). Therefore, agency is linguistically expressed, shaped, and realized. In Davies' definition of agency, desire is the fundamental indicator of one's essential self. Although one may make decisions based on rational analysis, desire may overthrow rationality because "[d]esires are integral to the various discourses through which each person is constituted and are not necessarily amenable to change through rational analysis" (p. 43). Davies also defines an agent as one who is able to speak with authority—the ability that is derived from a discursive positioning to mobilize "existing discourses in new ways, inverting, inventing and breaking old patterns" (p. 51) of discourse, to use "the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse or go beyond the other, both in terms of her own experienced subjectivity and in the way in which she chooses to speak in relation to the subjectivities of others" (p. 46), and "bring about fundamental changes in the possible ways of being that are available to oneself and others" (p. 52). In other words, authority, with a focus on authorship, is the power to speak or write to articulate one's meanings, purposes, and desires for making one's voice heard, seeking truth, and changing the status quo.

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From a sociocultural standpoint, Ahearn (2001) proposed a provisional definition of agency, which refers to "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112). She highlighted the social nature of agency and the influence of culture on individuals' intentions, beliefs, and actions. Differed from Bandura's (2001) emphasis on self-efficacy in his definition of agency, Ahearn centered the multiplicity of motivations when agency was addressed because one's agentic actions are embodied and externalized by their complex and sometimes contradictory motivations. Even though the four frameworks discussed above share several similarities, such as the focus on goals and transformation through interactions in conceptualizing agency, each differs regarding its own fundamental emphasis. While authority, power, and emotions are foregrounded in post-structural understandings, for instance, culture and mediation are the main highlights in the sociocultural perspective. The section below will discuss the application of agency in second language acquisition research, including language teacher and language learner agency.

Language Teacher Agency

Teacher agency has attracted increasing attention from educational research because "teacher agency is an indispensable element of good and meaningful education" (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015, p. 624). Teacher agency was conceptualized as "relational, social, and contextual rather than an individual trait, possession or competence" (Kayi-Aydar, Gao, Miller, Varghese, & Vitanova, 2019, p. 1). Teacher agency is shaped by personal factors, such as one's past experience and future goals, and contextual elements, including discourse and power. Teacher agency, therefore, is "unpredictable and contextually complex" (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019). Specifically, teacher agency has been viewed as being rooted in teachers' professional convictions or visions, which motivate and guide teachers to "actively challenge restrictive practices and other obstacles in order to best fit the needs of their students" (Vaughn, 2013, p. 121). Yazan (2018) argues that teacher educators' agency is "resourced, constrained, and bounded by the space they are afforded to become the kind of [teacher educator] they envision" (p. 142). Kayi-Aydar (2019) considers language teacher agency as intentional authority to make decisions and respond to her direct contexts. Teng (2019) believes that language teacher agency is "an interplay of individual efforts, available resources, institution system, and contextual and structural factors" (p. 72). Taking a poststructuralist position, Benesch (2018) suggests that emotions can serve as valuable agentive guides for language teacher activism and educational reform.

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Language Learner Agency

Learner agency has been regarded as a fundamental construct in understanding language learning, classroom interactions, and learner identities. Many of the post-structurally informed studies on identity have viewed learners as willing and able to exercise their agency to make decisions about identity and position themselves within and in response to local and larger social enablements and constraints (Deters, Gao, Vitanova, & Miller, 2015; Duff, 2013; King & Lanza, 2019; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Magalhaes, Cotterall, & Mideros, 2019; McKay & Wong, 1996; Mercer, 2012; Muramatsu, 2018; Said & Zhu, 2017; Teng, 2019; van Lier, 2008). Agency is not viewed as an individual's property, but a "relationship that is constantly constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with society at large" (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 148). Agency is action potential, mediated and shaped by sociocultural, historical, political, ideological, and institutional constituents. In the similar vein, van Lier (2008) emphasizes that learners can express their agency by deliberately not acting. Agency is also linked to how one assigns relevance and significance to things and events (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This consideration of agency becomes particularly consequential in understanding L2 learners who are frequently labeled as linguistically deficient, culturally insignificant, and socially invisible.

Advancing Ahearn's notion of agency, Miller (2010) proposes that agency is "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act and ability to assign relevance and significance to such acts emerge as individuals are positioned as (potential) agents within ideologically defined spaces" (p. 466). Miller goes one step further to explain that individuals make sense of themselves, (re)enact those selves, and respond to the positions assigned by their interlocutors when they interact with each other linguistically to speak for themselves through discursive norms and conventions. One's response to assigned positions can reconstitute or resist ideological views of how individuals engage in interactional and linguistic activities. Miller contends that agency "must be understood as inherently unstable and as inevitably enabled and constrained in the ongoing co-construction of identity and social reality" (p. 467). Like other studies on SLA (Ros i Solé, 2007; Vitanova, 2005), Miller's understanding of agency responded to Pennycook's (2001) advocacy for rethinking how we address and research agency among L2 learners:

> It is necessary to theorize one's agency within structures of power and to theorize ways in which individuals are allowed for possibilities of action and change. Based on this view, agency can be understood as "a constant recycling of different forms of power through our everyday words and actions." (Pennycook, 2001, p. 120)

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This understanding has been extended and advanced in the most recent scholarship on SLA. For example, Deters and colleagues (2015) argue that L2 learners' active use of discourses to address power relations through language has become an integral component of learner agency. This view of agency features three central characteristics in L2 classrooms: "[T]he learner's ability to self-regulate, the socially mediated nature of sociocultural context and an awareness of one's responsibility for one's own acts" (p. 5). Said and Zhu (2017) examined children's agency in language use and socialization at the dining table and found that the children actively and successfully used the knowledge they gained from their daily language socialization to either attract their parents' attention or challenge their parental status. The language use through conversations became a distinctive context for the children to navigate and pursue their agency. De Magalhães, Cotterall, and Mideros's (2019) examination of two doctoral students' identity, voice, and agency reveals that the social and academic contexts either afforded or constrained these students' opportunities for agency negotiation. Muramatsu (2018) suggests that agency enables L2 learners to make informative decisions for taking charge of their own learning. Teng's (2019) research on learning English as a foreign language (ELF) reflects the similar view of agency as Muramatsu's. He contends that EFL learners consciously took initiatives to challenge themselves instead of passively following the requirements from their teachers and curriculum.

Taking a poststructuralist perspective, I understand L2 learner agency as authority (Davies, 1991), which derives from discursive positioning that one has access to. When an individual is discursively constituted as author, he or she claims or gains authority to represent his or her own multiple meanings and desires through mobilizing existing discourses and breaking old patterns to create new discourses. For example, when a marginalized L2 learner, whose mother tongue is Chinese, actively utilizes his cultural and linguistic repertoire to explain the significance of his Chinese name to create a new understanding of himself through narratives in the English dominant discourse, he is considered as having authority or agency. This poststructuralist understanding of discursive construction of self is critical of rationality which controls and negates emotions. The discursive constitution of self is a process of liberation from the burden of rationality and embracing one's feelings and emotions. Emotions are the beacons of his or her true self because "they provide [one] with an inner perspective for interpreting and responding to experience" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 215). Poststructuralists conceptualize emotions as physically manifested but socially constructed (Benesch, 2018). In this sense, I also view L2 learners' emotions as essential for agency because when L2 learners are marginalized, excluded, and ignored in various contexts, their emotions become significant resources to understand how they

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manage, develop, and negotiate their agency to participate or non-participate in language acquisition. For example, when Joey, one of the participants in this research, encountered the casher's rhetorical question "Why do you speak Chinese in public in America?" his anger and feeling of humiliation became the very site for his agentic action. It is important for L2 learners to "identify how their emotions inform the ways that their emotions expand or limit possibilities in their [learning], how these emotions enable them to think and act differently" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 232), and how these emotions promote or inhibit agency.

An L2 learner with agency has autonomy to recognize power and force generated from discursive practices to imagine subcultural counterpower and counterforce and to realize that his or her subculture has the potential to disrupt hegemony and challenge marginalization. L2 learners with agency audaciously challenge and resist the status quo that represents coercion, suppression, and marginalization through discourses, such as verbal language and nonverbal language (e.g., deliberate silence). In this sense, L2 learner agency is self-enabling through reflexivity (Archer, 2007), which requires self-conquering: overcoming one's self-constraints, such as struggles and dilemmas to achieve what one wants for him or herself. Learner agency is also other-conquering: acknowledging and taking advantage of structural enablements or tweaking or transforming structural constraints.

Agency has become an important and timely topic that appeared in the books of L2 teaching (Haneda & Nassaji, 2019; Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019; Teng, 2018) as well as L2 learning (Deters, Gao, Miller, & Vitanova, 2015; Fogle, 2012; Muramatsu, 2018; Zeng, 2018). However, none of them have examined agency through the lens of positioning theory and the connection of identity work with digital technologies and multiliteracies. To bridge this gap, this current inquiry explores and presents the complexities and particularities of learner agency by utilizing theories of positioning, community of practices, and multimodalities and multiliteracies.

MULTIMODALITY AND MULTILITERACIES

Globalization and the development of modern technologies have catalyzed cultural and linguistic diversity and the proliferation of communication channels and media, such as the internet, Facebook, YouTube, and smartphones. Born in this era and grounded in Halliday's (1978) social semiotic theory, multimodality extends beyond the theory of language and claims that meaning is realized in a variety of modes (Kress, 2000, 2003, 2010). Kalantzis and Cope (2012) view multimodality as a theory about meaning making in which the written text, as a major mode of meaning, interfaces

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with "visual, audio, gestural and spatial patterns of meaning" (p. 191). Chanier and Lamy (2017) define multimodality as the complicated relationship "that develops between multiple tools and modes when they are co-deployed in different combinations, in learning situations to work toward particular objectives" (p. 430). Modes should be understood as regularized and motivated sets of resources (Rowsell & Walsh, 2011). Selected modes either work together or separately to accomplish a special effect in texts. Compared with traditional linguistic text features, such effects are designed, composed, and displayed in differentiated ways. Some other semiotic resources, such as artifacts and practices, also function as modes to make meanings (Albers & Harste, 2007).

Jewitt and Kress (2003) identified four main aspects that consist of representation of meaning, including materiality, framing, design, and production. Design is the core of multimodality (Albers & Harste, 2007; Kress, 2003) because it demands imagination, creative and critical thinking, rich and broad cultural and social knowledge, and abilities to analyze and synthesize the functions and affordances of different modes. Design differs from traditional, social, and semiotic goals of competence (Kress, 2009), which are anchored communication in social and cultural regulation; design, on the other hand, foregrounds meaning makers' realization of their interest by using semiotic resources. Specifically, design is all about communication and meaning based on an ideal of equitable participation in shaping and reshaping the social, cultural, and semiotic world. Design captures contemporary representation and communication. It transforms social forms and structures, remakes power relations, and changes formation of subjectivity and identity (Kress, 2000, 2003, 2009). Design provides meaning designers with opportunities to exercise agency and develop their positional identities by participating in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998b).

In this sense, multimodality can be viewed as an intersection, integration, and co-orchestration of physical materials and modern technologies, and verb and nonverbal languages, which interweaves cultural, social, cognitive, and biological processes (Kendrick, 2016). Based on this understanding of multimodality, literacy should not be understood as isolated from a vast array of social, cultural, artifactual, linguistic, technological, and economic factors. Multimodal and multilingual literacies can be more reasonable to characterize new forms of representation and communication. The notion of multimodal and multilingual literacies captures several features: (1) reading and writing are part and parcel of meaning making; (2) new and digital media are used to practice literacies; (3) multiple modes offer more learning opportunities; (4) multiple languages are used to construct and negotiate identities; (5) leaners are meaning designers who design through unique ways to negotiate and express meanings; and (6) meaning making is viewed as transformation,

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transforming the meaning maker and designer and their social and cultural world.

Also, the notion of multilingual and multimodal literacies emphasizes the role of identity and agency in meaning making and meaning designing for representation and communication. The process of developing multiliteracies is to create "a kind of person, an active designer of meaning, with a sensitivity open to differences, change and innovation" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 10). The meaning maker as a designer selectively and creatively draws from infinite social, cultural, linguistic, and technological resources available to make up complex layers of their past and new experiences. Therefore, the act of representation is motivated, directed, and purposeful. Learning itself is a process of self-making and self-remaking.

As an emergent theory, multimodality has attracted a great number of SLA researchers' interest in exploring the influence of modern technologies and social medial on language learning, such as youths' digital engagement in facilitating digital innovation (Mirra, Morrell, & Filipiak, 2018), EFL students' perceived benefits in relation to multimodal video making (Yeh, 2018) and increased autonomous learning and a sense of full scholarship through collecting multimodal resources to create multimodal texts (Lee, Lo, & Chin, 2019), college students' text studies in English to foster multimodal communicative competence (Coccetta, 2018), affordances of social tools that affect and enhance L2 learners' writing practices (Elola & Oskoz, 2017); and digital games-based L2 learning (Reinders, 2017; Reinhardt & Thorne, 2016; Sundqvist, 2019).

Specifically, multiliteracies and L2 learners' identity construction has gained popularity in the literature of multimodality and multiliteracies. For example, Black (2008, 2009) explored ELLs' participation in online fan communities to co-construct and negotiate new identities through language use and socialization. Findings indicate that ELLs took advantage of the tools available in online communication to develop identities that are not available to them in traditional language classroom settings. Klimanova and Dembovskaya (2013) discovered that their L2 learners of Russian, through interaction with their Russian pen pals, utilized the multimodal linguistic and cultural resources in a Russian social networking site, called Vkontakte to negotiate and develop dynamic L2 learner-user identities. In Thorne, Black, and Sykes' (2009) review of studies on L2 use, learning and gaming in online communities were examined. They argued that participation in online fan communities and gaming facilitates the ecological associations between "forms of language use and identity dispositions" (p. 815). Jiménez-Caicedo, Pablo, Lozano, and Gómez (2014) examined L2 learners' blog-mediated language learning activities and found that this new form of learning provided these learners with motivations and purposes for their literacy and language development.

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Also, a number of researchers have investigated how L2 learners constructed and negotiated their identities in different social network sites through translanguaging, such as L2 youth's participation in online fan-related activities to enact cosmopolitan identities (Black, 2009), students' deliberate and flippant decisions on language uses in their social media compositions on Facebook to demonstrate their translanguaging identities (Depew, 2011), and college students' use of English and other semiotic resources to index both their local, cosmopolitan, and global identities in Facebook communication (Chen, 2013; Klimnova & Dembovskaya, 2013; Schreiber, 2015; Sharma, 2012). Various social networking sites have brought L2 learners' benefits in many ways. As Lam (2006) comments, "Networked electronic communications have given rise to new social spaces, linguistic and semiotic practices, and ways of fashioning the self beyond the national context for immigrant youths in the United States" (p. 171). However, not all-technological communication leads to positive identity outcomes. In Kramsch and Thorne's (2002) research, American learners of French in the United States and French learners of English in France had very limited understanding of the larger cultural conventions, which resulted in problematic digital exchanges. Also, this internet-mediated language learning might not provide L2 learners with analytical tools to question and transform existing structural conditions. L2 learners who engage in multimodal and multilingual literacies practices have displayed new ways of thinking, representation, interaction, and learning, and also posed new and more complicated issues in terms of negotiation and co-construction of positional identities and agency when they engage in L2 literacies practices. It is necessary for SLA researchers to develop more sophisticated analytical tools to better understand L2 learners when they participate in multimodal and multilingual literacies engagement.

Furthermore, a few studies addressed multiliteracies and learner agency in the context of technologies and social media. For instance, Cimasko and Shin (2017) examined a college ESL student's composing process and her authorial agency and found that the student's choice and orchestration of multimodal resources were shaped by her textual identities, audiences' preferences, and her previous experiences. The researchers, therefore, suggest that the student's multimodal writing interplayed with the discursive processes of her authorial position negotiation and performing in the linguistic, social, and cultural contexts.

In addition, Zeng (2018) explored EFL learners' decision to use or not use technology for English learning in China and suggested that students' agency was mediated by the English learning context in which they either used or refused to use technology for learning. He suggested that students' (non) use of technology is not one's own choice but a contextually mediated decision. He thus conceptualized agency as "socially and historically

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constructed subjectivity in relation to language learning" (p. 173). Although a small number of students purposefully used online multimedia to "break away" from limited exposure to English, Zeng believed that context had a strong mediational power over their choices and behaviors to use or not use digital technology.

The burgeoning use of social media, such as WeChat, Facebook, and Tweeter, as social, communicative, and pedagogical tools, has attracted researchers' attention in their investigations of teaching, social, and cognitive presence in semi-synchronous language exchange (Wang, Fang, Han, & Chen, 2016), learning Chinese as a second language facilitated by WeChat affordances, such as a casual space with easy access, authentic meaning-focused communication, linguistic resources and multiliteracies, and space for new identity creation (Jin, 2018), critical thinking disposition of EFL learners (Ding, 2016), EFL learners' perceptions of mobile-assisted feedback on oral production (Xu, Dong, & Jiang, 2017), students' willingness to use WeChat in listening and speaking (Chai, 2014), English language learners' motivation and immersion (Shi, Luo, & He, 2017), learner-centered college English learning (Wu & Ding, 2017), Tweeter's facilitation of cultural enrichment and function for enhancing socio-pragmatic awareness of L2 learners (Blattner & Dalola, 2018), and Facebook as valuable additional educational environments where students interacted with their instructor in an authentic and spontaneous fashion (Leier, 2017).

However, Chun, Kern, and Smith (2016) warn that since technologies and social media has influenced contexts and forms of expression and communication, it is necessary for language teachers and researchers to make informative decisions on how to incorporate technology into their pedagogical practices or research agenda.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Based on the understanding of the social nature of human beings, Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998a, 1998b) consider learning as social participation in a community of practice. Lave and Wenger defined a community of practice as a vast array of relations and interrelations between people, activities, and situated contexts over time and across multiple communities. To support this view of learning, Hanks (1991) states:

> Learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. . . . It is the community, or at least those participating in the learning context, who "learn" under this definition. Learning is, as it were, distributed among coparticipants, not a one-person act. (Hanks, 1991, p. 15)

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Commenting on Lave and Wenger's theory of community of practice, Hanks emphasizes the importance of how social engagement and participation provide learners with proper contexts for learning and experiencing meaning negotiation instead of merely focusing on cognitive process and conceptual structures because cognition is originated from and rooted in social action, interaction, and engagement (Watson-Gegeo & Nielsen, 2003).

This social theory of learning integrates four components that characterize social engagement and participation as learning and knowing, meaning ("learning as experience"), practice ("learning as doing"), community ("learning as belonging"), and identity ("learning as becoming") (Wenger, 1998b, p. 5). This theory highlights social participation and identity because participation not only refers to individuals' engagement in activities with one another but also refers to individuals' active interaction "in the *practices* of social communities and construct *identities* in relation to these communities" (Wenger, 1998b, p. 4; emphasis in original). Wenger further explains that when learners develop a practice they not only engage with each other but also recognize each other as participants. The process of engagement and recognition constantly involves meaning negotiation either silently or audibly. In other words, practices in a community deal with the complicated and profound issue of being or becoming a human being. Therefore, fashioning a community of practice is also an ongoing process of negotiation of identities.

In community of practice, learners practice their identities through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. For example, when L2 learners participate in community of practices, they coproduce or adopt routines, stories, ways of thinking, speaking, and gesturing, and discourse by using a second language in a foreign country. They engage in and contribute to creating the community through certain practices in which they are shaped and reshaped by their practices as community members. When learners participate in a certain community, they take on the positions they claim or are assigned and give the position specific meanings through engagement in practice. Similar to Wenger's notion of "identity in practice," Holland et al. (1998) propose the concept of "practiced identities." They explain that practiced identities take shape in several contexts of activity (e.g., "figured worlds" and "positionality"). Figured worlds are figures that carry dispositions, social identifications, and personification. In figured worlds, one practices identities through thinking, speaking, and gesturing in a way of sending messages to oneself and others and at the same time placing oneself in social fields. Positionality is inevitably associated to power, social status, and rank because community of practice recasts both practices and productions of community members as "power/knowledge" (p. 75). Knowledge and position coexist and mutually shape and reinforce each other. In this sense, identities

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become significant outcomes of engagement and participation in communities of practices.

The theory of community of practice lends itself to exploring L2 learners' experiences in a target linguistic and cultural setting. For example, Toohey (2000) argues that moving focus from individual learners to the second language context and activities in L2 acquisition and socialization has permitted analysis of relations within settings and examination of learning that inevitably associates social practice and participation. Communities might

> provide more or less desirable, powerful or equitable positions for participants within them, but—through the practices in which participants engage—all participants learn. What they might learn is shaped by the kinds of positions they might occupy. (p. 15)

This is because the "social structure of the community of practice, its power relations and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (i.e., for legitimate peripheral participation)" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98).

Duff (2007) pays close attention to the relationship between the concept of community learning and second language socialization. She holds that community of practice involves old-timers and newcomers who mutually engage in various activities, which build the foundation for learning. A sense of belonging is an essential component of a learning community and identity formation. Community of practice, which has a major impact on second language socialization, is used to examine activities and communities into which L2 learners are being situated and socialized and how activities facilitate or hinder L2 learners' legitimate participation and identity development within their learning communities.

With regard to the three L2 learners' narratives that I analyzed in this book, my observations in their classrooms, and their discussions in the WeChat group, I considered and examined participants as members of multiple communities of practices. These communities of practices functioned as a set of relations among a group of people who engaged together in joint enterprises and shared repertoires. It was helpful to see the classrooms and WeChat discussion group as the primary community of practice to focus on its structural conditions, including the positions it provided for these L2 learners as well as the fabrics and dynamics of the practices that bound it.

Although the theoretical frameworks, including positioning, agency, multimodality and multiliteracies, and community of practices, reviewed above differ in terms of their primary emphases, they share some similarities. For example, multimodality and multiliteracies highlight L2 learner positional identities and agency in meaning designing through which a certain kind of person is constructed and developed. The theory of community of practices

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also emphasizes subjectivity and agency through exploring "how the experiences of subjectivity arises out of engagement in the social world" (Wenger, 1998b, p. 15). In addition, power and meaning, as important components in community of practice theory, are foregrounded in positioning and agency. Grounding in the shared similarities of the four theories, this current research will investigate four research questions, which will be addressed in the following section.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I have been interested in how positioning and agency influence L2 learners' literacies when they engage in different communities of language practices (e.g., language use and socialization) in the multimodal and multilingual context. My research takes a post-structuralist perspective to understand L2 learners' L2 literacies practices. I viewed positional identities and agency as socially and discursively constructed, contradictory, dynamic, and entailing power (Davies & Harrė, 1990; Norton, 2013; Toohey, 2000). I applied community of practice theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998a, 1998b) that suggests relations and practices among members of communities constituting members' learning, positioning, and agency performance. From this perspective, I see learners' positional identities and agency, as well as their learning constructed in the practices of the communities in which they are situated. The theory also recognizes that some participants have more access to and more experience in the use of various resources of the communities' mediating means (e.g., material and symbolic artifacts and language) than others, and that some participants are more and some less advantageously positioned in their community. Given that a classroom and the WeChat networking site are different kinds of communities, one can examine the communities of practices not only in terms of how they identify learners and how the learners take up and are assigned positional identities, but also in terms of how differential access to the actual and virtual resources for literacies practices is conducted. For young adults learning a second language and practicing L2 literacies, part of constructing voices for themselves is coming to be seen as particular sorts of "selves" in different communities, that is, coming to have multilayered identities as L2 learners and users. I investigate how the L2 learners came to inhabit particular positions through exercising agency in different communities of practice. I have also attempted to understand how those positions and positionings might determine or affect what these L2 learners can do and say, and in what kinds of conversations they are either permitted or actively engage in while they exercise or do not exercise agency. Thus, the questions I tried to explore are as follows:

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(1) How do positioning practices affect the access of three L2 learners to daily conversations with English native and non-native speakers in different communities of practices for L2 literacies?
(2) How do these L2 learners exercise or not exercise agency when their assigned positioning mismatch their claimed positioning while engaging in different communities of practices for L2 literacies?
(3) How do positioning practices enable or constrain agency for classroom participatory engagement while engaging in L2 literacies?
(4) How do agency practices enable or constrain opportunities for positioning when the L2 learners engage in different communities of practices for L2 literacies.

METHODOLOGY

The research site of this study was located in a southeastern US University, which enrolled more than 30,000 students and offered bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in more than 200 fields of study. The number of international students at this university had dramatically increased in recent years, making up 3.8 percent of the total population of students with Chinese students being the most populated (information from the university's website). The three Chinese international students (Joey, John, and Smith) who participated in this study were conditionally enrolled in undergraduate programs at this university. Due to their limited English proficiency, they were not qualified to take program courses. Therefore, it was mandatory for them to take English classes in the English language institute (ELI) first and then pursue their programs of study after passing the TOEFL or IELTS test. To facilitate English improvement of these international learners, the ELI offered a year-round, six-level Intensive English Program (Reading/Writing, Speaking/Listening, and Structure) for students with limited English proficiency. Full-time students took twenty hours per week for core classes (basic language skills development), two to four hours for Culturally Speaking activity (offered in spring and fall), and Friday afternoon seminars. Also, the ELI offered extracurricular programs for ELI students to improve their English proficiency, such as Coffee Hour (e.g., speaking practice); Workshops for iBT TOEFL, IELTS, and pronunciation; ELI Seminars (including American idioms, spelling in English, Civil Rights, and cultural events); and Student Activities (including movies, concerts, shopping, recreational sports, and weekend trips to nearby attractions).

The core classes were divided into six sessions a year and each session lasted eight weeks (in spring and fall) or six weeks (in summer). In the summer, there were two sessions, including Summer I (from May to June)

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and Summer II (from June to July). Specifically, the ELI offers six levels of intensive English classes from level one (low beginning) to level six (high advanced) (referring to the ELI website). There were twenty-six English instructors at the ELI, all of whom had master's degrees in TESOL and some of whom lived and taught overseas in the past.

All the students in the ELI were encouraged to use social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and WeChat, to socialize with native and non-native speakers to not only improve English skills but also enrich cultural knowledge. Using WeChat to connect with family members, friends, and Chinese classmates became a daily activity for Chinese ELI students. As a Chinese instructor at this university, I was invited to join the WeChat group by one of the ELI students in December of 2014. This WeChat group functioned as a platform not just for making connections but also for information exchange both in Chinese and English, which triggered my research interest to investigate Chinese ELI students' English learning experiences through WeChat. I contacted all the Chinese international students at ELI through WeChat to invite them to participate in my study. Four of them gave me permission to do so: Joey, John, Smith, and Desiree. Due to her busy schedule, Desiree did not continue participating in this research.

Among the three participants, Joey and Smith came from Chinese middle-class families, but John came from a working-class family. Joey attended a college in his hometown for one year before coming to the United States; however, John and Smith were high school graduates when they came to the United States. Table 1.1 below summarizes the participants' profiles.

This research project developed into a case study. The data collection took place in January of 2016 and ended in June of the same year. The data consisted of three sources, including interview narratives, class observations and field notes, and WeChat screenshots. I interviewed all three L2 learners to know their cultural, educational, and linguistic background and their interest in using WeChat as a platform for L2 literacies practices. The interview data served as a predominant source of the data. I collected sixty-three WeChat screenshots, including written texts, their head icons, and emoticons, with their permission, which served as a secondary source of data. I also observed

Table 1.1 Three Chinese International Students' Profiles

Name	*Age*	*Gender*	*Former Education*	*English Level*	*Projected Major*	*Stay in the United States*
Joey	21	Male	Freshman	4, 4, 5	Marketing	4 months
John	19	Male	High school	5, 5, 5	Civil engineering	4 months
Smith	19	Male	High school	6, 6, 6	Unknown	8 months

Source: Created by author.

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their classes including listening and speaking, reading and writing, and the structure of English to investigate their interactions in a classroom community of practice.

For the L2 learners' preference, I used their mother tongue (Mandarin Chinese or Putonghua) to ask them questions at the interviews. I interviewed each L2 learner three times. Each time lasted 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews took place in January, March, and June respectively. Based on the literature on translating interview transcripts, I employed multiple ways to minimize misunderstanding and misinterpretation. My knowledge about English and Chinese cultural background helped increase trustworthiness of the interview data. I listened to all the tapes carefully and transcribed them into written texts in Chinese. After sending the texts to all the participants to check if I understood their stories accurately, I started translating the Chinese transcripts into English. Also, I invited a Chinese American professor who taught linguistics at this university to proofread all the interview transcripts including the Chinese versions and English ones. This professor's bicultural and bilingual backgrounds also increased the transparency and validity of the interview data. In addition, I participated in the activity of cross-checking as a proofreader. I asked the participants to do member-checks three times to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data.

These three students voluntarily formed a micro-WeChat discussion group to practice English weekly or biweekly depending on their schedule. The discussion started from January until June 2016. Their discussion topics varied, including sleeping, procrastination, the myth of human beings, education, testing, virtual reality, the dominance of language, the difference between American English and British English, and learning English in daily life.

The class observations started in March and ended in May. I observed and discerned what was going on in the class to map out a holistic picture of the L2 learners' language learning experience, such as how they interacted with various modes and tools to make meanings in a class community; how they participated in class activities; how they interacted with their instructors, their non-Chinese international classmates, and their Chinese classmates through using multimodality; how they positioned themselves and how they were positioned by their instructors and their peers. The total amount of time for the class observations was 15.15 hours.

I took field notes including a diagram of the layout of the setting, verbal descriptions of the L2 learners and activities, direct quotations of what they said, and my comments in the margins of the field notes. I wrote down notes as much as I could when I was observing the class activities and interactions. I also documented my comments on my emotions, interactions, and initial perceptions and interpretations.

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I used narrative analysis to analyze the interview and WeChat screenshots data and discourse analysis to analyze the class observation transcripts and field notes. Narratives have been widely studied as windows into the analysis of human communities and individuals in various areas. Narrating, as another discourse activity, is a situated discursive practice. Pavlenko (2001) advocates for the contribution of narrative that helps L2 researchers understand L2 learners and their language acquisition and socialization. She states:

> L2 learning stories . . . are unique and rich sources of information about the relationship between language and identity in second language learning and socialization. It is possible that only personal narratives provide a glimpse into areas so private, personal and intimate that they are rarely—if ever—breached in the study of SLA, and at the same time are at the heart and soul of the second language socialization process. (p. 167)

Norton (2013) comments that SLA researchers who are interested in language learners' identities have methodologically focused on narratives through fieldwork data or from existing autobiographical accounts. This methodological focus foregrounds "an individual's sense-making of their experience as well as the complexity of individual/social relationships" (p. 14). An L2 learner's personal story is a way to recount his or her life events and experiences. It is also an important instrument by which positional identities are shaped. Also, an L2 learner's personal story gives us a glimpse into his or her use of agency for constructing their life experiences because personal narratives are "loaded with intentionality and the learner has to interpret her own actions and translate them for the listener" (Ros i Solé, 2007, p. 208). In sum, a narrative inquiry lends itself to understanding social positioning and agency of the L2 learners who engaged in different communities of practices.

Also, the purpose of discourse analysis was to study "how language is used to create, maintain, and destroy different social bonds and is in line with the postmodern perspective on the human world as socially and linguistically constructed" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 226). I examined how these L2 learners interacted with each other in a classroom; how they positioned and were positioned through conversations with their instructors and peers; what strategies they used to participate in classroom activities for L2 literacies; how they interacted with each other in terms of the way they used different languages (e.g., English and Mandarin Chinese) and turn-taking to gain purposeful, identifiable, and identified membership of this community of practice.

I began the analysis of the data collected in the study in terms of the practices by which the L2 learners came to construct and be assigned positions

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when they participate in activities in different communities for L2 literacies. Chapter 2 starts that exploration. As I introduce the L2 learners based on their understanding of themselves through the symbolic and material artifacts, readers can have a sense of who they were and how and why they perceived and positioned themselves in this foreign land as L2 learners and also as Chinese people.

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Part II

NARRATING L2 LEARNERS' CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

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Chapter 2

Stories of Chinese Names and Keepsakes

In some cultures, a child's name directly represents parents' hope and anticipation for their child's success. Levitt and Dubner's (2009) argument accounts for this statement clearly. They describe:

> Obviously, a variety of motives are at work when parents consider a name for their child. They may want something traditional or something bohemian, something unique or something perfectly trendy. It would be an overstatement to suggest that all parents are looking—whether consciously or not—for a "smart" name or a "high-end" name. But they are all trying to signal something with a name, whether the name is Winner or Loser, Madison or Amber. . . . What the California names data suggest is that an overwhelming number of parents use a name to signal their own expectations of how successful their children will be. The name isn't likely to make a shard of difference. But the parents can at least feel better knowing that, from the very outset, they tried their best. (Levitt & Dubner, 2009, p. 207)

Scott Momaday (1976) believes that one's name has the power to orient his or her life. He states, "A man's life proceeds from his name, in the way a river proceeds from its source" (p. 1).

In this chapter, I introduce three L2 learners, Joey, John, and Smith. I include narratives about their Chinese names and keepsakes, which are based on their understanding and interpretation of these cultural symbolic and material artifacts. The three L2 learners gave detailed information about the origin, literal and metaphorical meaning, and significance of their Chinese names. One's name is important "because it distinguishes her as a unique person and identifies her as herself" (Hagström, 2012, p. 81). Also, our names are and

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have always been part of our lives and our experiences. Therefore, by reading the stories of their Chinese names, we will gain a first impression of who they were and how the events in their lives unfolded. The three L2 learners also told stories about their keepsakes, that is, keepsakes they brought to the United States, where they came from, when and for what reason they received the keepsake, why they brought them here, what the meanings the keepsakes conveyed, and what the value of the keepsakes carried. These keepsakes that symbolized family connections and bonds carried rich and unique meanings, which evoked powerful feelings when the L2 learners faced difficulties upon arrival to the United States. Also, these keepsakes opened up worlds that brought in new positional identities and self-understandings (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010), so we can call them artifacts of identities (Holland et al., 1998). Artifacts of identities resurrect what Holland and colleagues describe as "figured [worlds]," which are "contexts of meaning for actions, cultural production, performances, disputes, for the understandings that people come to make of themselves, and for the capabilities that people develop to direct their own behavior in these worlds" (p. 6). These L2 learners, each of whom were the only child in their extended families, were like kites floating in the sky when navigating the new world by using English in which they were not fluent. These keepsakes reminded them of being resilient and persistent when they faced hardships in their academic and daily lives. They also comforted them in a variety of ways.

These stories about the Chinese names and keepsakes the L2 learners told provided a sense of how important their cultural background and histories were for them to perceive and understand themselves as both Chinese and L2 learners in a foreign land. They also showed how complex these components and their understandings of these components were to contribute to their self-image portraits. This chapter guides us to recognize and understand these L2 learners through their storytelling of their cultural interpretations of themselves.

THE CHINESE NAMES

Like most ELI students, Joey had two names: one Chinese and one English. He considered that it was easier for his American instructors and international classmates to address him by the English name, but he kept his Chinese name for himself and his Chinese classmates and friends. John and Smith, however, did not have English names. They preferred to be called by their Chinese names because they claimed that their Chinese names had become part of their lives and important aspects of their identities. For each one, the Chinese name told a story. The following are their stories.

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Joey's Chinese Name

Joey was a twenty-one-year old, male, and from a relatively wealthy family. Joey shared his first name (given name) with me and considered this name very meaningful and special. He stated:

> My Chinese first name is Chéngdòng given by my grandfather. Chéng means becoming; dòng means a large column for a magnificent building. This is a metaphor. It actually means becoming a great person for his country. My family wants me to become successful so that I can contribute to the society. This is also my goal.

As Lee (1998) argues:

> [S]emantic meanings are central to Chinese names (not so much with family names, because one cannot change them and there is no room for negotiation). It is an infant's birth name [a given name . . .], that is frequently a site of negotiation. (p. 290)

Therefore, in the analysis thereafter, I only discuss the L2 learners' first names. According to his narrative, Joey's first name consisted of two Chinese characters: Chéng and dòng. The meaning of these two characters is Chéng wėi dòng liáng 成为栋梁 in Chinese (to become a column). The first word of his name, Chéng (becoming), refers to an ongoing process, which requires constant effort and endeavor. It also has the connotation of improvement and refinement through motivation and effort. The second character dòng means a pillar that supports a building or a monument. It connotes its importance metaphorically. To emphasize the meaning of this character, Joey used three positive adjectives, including "large," "magnificent," and "great," and a metaphor to describe and highlight the significance of this word. Joey made his name noteworthy and underscored that this name was imbued with anticipation for and expectation of him from his family. This name also symbolized Joey's self-design—becoming—someone who is notable to the society.

Joey also mentioned two individuals in this narrative: his grandfather and himself. It seems that Joey considered his grandfather as an authoritative figure, who had the knowledge, ability, right, privilege, and obligation to give him this name. In Chinese name giving practice, a person's name should be carefully and purposefully chosen or created because a name is believed to "have transformative powers" and is "an important form of self-expression" (Watson, 1986, p. 618). Chinese people believe that their names "have an efficacy in their own right" (p. 622) and one's name strongly influences his or her destiny and fate. In this sense, Chinese parents always consult astrologers, fortunetellers, academics, and even monks to create a given name for their child. A Chinese

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name not only demonstrates a family's creativity, education, and socioeconomic status but also represents its expectation of a child. Joey considered that his grandfather had the power to give him a proper and powerful name.

Joey's interpretation and explanation of his Chinese name can be a process of self-positioning. His statement "This is also my goal" not only demonstrated his understanding of his grandfather's intentionality for naming him Chéng dòng, but also is a manifestation of his ambition to reach this goal. Also, his agency constructed and emerged in the narrative. The commitment "This is also my goal" made his agency concrete, specific, and tangible. In fact, Joey's narrated positionings simultaneously displayed his agency in multiple ways. First, as a narrator, Joey chose to tell the story about his Chinese name. He mentioned two names, but he made a decision to emphasize his Chinese name because he believed that his Chinese name represented his cultural and ethnic identity as a Chinese person. He was able to speak with authority because of his discursive positioning (Davies, 1991): a Chinese native speaker who understood and represented his native culture. The discursive construction of himself through narrating made his self-understanding and a sense of self-worthiness a salient feature. In addition, his understanding of his Chinese name made him author of his own multiple meanings and desires (Davies, 1991). His storytelling was a creative process of meaning designing and meaning making itself. It was also the theorizing of himself as a person who carried special cultural and linguistic meanings and understandings.

In the same interview, Joey also described his success in the Chinese Gāokǎo (National Higher Education Entrance Examination), which was different from that of his Chinese classmates at the ELI, who either failed Gāokǎo or escaped having to take it. As a freshman in a Chinese college in his hometown of Hangzhou, Zhejiang, Joey ran for the president of the Student Union because he wanted to have a promising future. Even though he did not get that position, he was selected as the head of the Liaison Department of the Student Union, where he was in charge of making connections with the International Exchange Program in his college. At the same time, he ran a small business with his like-minded friends. Gradually, he realized that English was important for his success in business in this globalized society, so he decided to come to the United States to improve his English and pursue a business degree. He left the college in Hangzhou a year after. Although this episode does not seem to be part of his name telling, it reflects the core meaning that his name indicates.

John's Chinese Name

John was a nineteen-year-old male from a working-class family in China. John's socioeconomic status was different from those of other ELI students

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because most Chinese international students are from nascent wealthy families (Stevens, 2012). However, John's presence at this university could be explained by the following three reasons. First, John failed the Chinese Gāokǎo, which means that he lost the only chance to go to college in China. Even though he could have attended a vocational school for his future career, he would not have much chance for better social mobility. Second, education in China is highly valued. The high value of education in China is evidenced by the following saying: "Many pursuits are consequential, but education outweighs them all." Chinese parents consider that "education is the key to a family's prosperity and happiness" (Wang, 2016, p. 611), so the more education their children secure, the better future they will have. Third, John's parents believed that higher education in Chinese colleges was not as good as in colleges and universities in the United States, so they sent him to the United States to advance his education and seek for more opportunities. As John explained:

> My parents believe that American education is better than Chinese education. If I study here, I have more opportunities. In China, competition is fierce. I failed the Chinese Gāokǎo, so it was very hard for me to get into a university. Even if I were admitted to a university, I could not get into a good program. So my parents and my relatives encouraged me to come here to study.

Interestingly, John did not want to talk about his real name given by his parents; he named himself as Lǐhuá (李华). He explained:

> When I was in high school**,** my English teacher always asked us to use the name, Lǐhuá as a sender, to write English letters to Lǐhuá as a recipient, so I want to use this name to ridicule my English teacher's teaching in my high school.

John's self-naming is a satirization. Apparently, he was discontent with the English teaching in his high school. According to his narrative, John's English learning experience was negative and unsuccessful. Using the same name, Lǐhuá, as both the sender and recipient in a letter was problematic. John implicitly criticized his English teacher's pedagogical practice by borrowing this name from his English class as his own name. Naming himself as Lǐhuá indicated his dissatisfaction and disappointment with his English teacher's teaching, which can be partly blamed for his limited command of English proficiency. John added:

> My English teachers emphasized memorization and drills, de-emphasized communicative skills, because their teaching was highly test-driven. Even though I have been studying English since elementary school, I am still unable to communicate with Americans. I studied "dumb and deaf" English (yǎbayīngyǔ,

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> 哑巴英语), which is ridiculous. My English teachers taught me how to take tests, but they did not care if I had the ability to communicate in English.

In the narrative above, John explicitly criticized his English teachers' test-driven teaching style because it resulted in his low level of English speaking and listening. Naming himself as Lǐhuá can be understood as his self-positioning as a victim of the failed English teaching in his hometown, which symbolized his ineffective learning experience. John's negative emotions, such as dissatisfaction and disappointment, became primary resources for his agency (Benesch, 2018; Davies, 1991; Zembylas, 2003). So that he decided to name himself as Lǐhuá. However, John's self-naming was not just an action of criticism or derision. In fact, he deliberately used this name as a reminder to change himself for the better. The realization of outdated and test-driven English instruction made John a critical thinker who was audacious enough to challenge his teachers' teaching, which is not common among Chinese students. In other words, John made himself a recognizable and recognized community member. This self-making is considered as agency.

John also viewed himself as a Gāokǎo failure and used the very fact to invert and break old patterns and existing discourse (Davies, 1991) to change his marginalized identity (he was marginalized in China, because of his failing in Gāokǎo. He kind of lost his miànzǐ (face) and his family's miànzǐ. Miànzǐ is an important ideological concept and belief in Chinese culture (Wang, 2016). John's failing in the Chinese Gāokǎo not only brought shame to himself but also to his family. However, John had a strong desire to regain his miànzǐ. John perceived himself as goal-oriented. He said that he was the only child in his family; his parents placed all of their hope on him. He bore the familial responsibility to change himself as his name Lǐhuá warned. He explained: "I am confident and active in class. I must be like this, because I am here to study English." He used the modal verb "must" to signify his self-positioning as a son of filial piety (*xiàoshùn*, 孝顺). Actually, John's self-naming claimed power and authority, and deepened his self-understanding.

Smith's Chinese Name

Smith was a nineteen-year-old male Chinese student who had studied at the ELI for eight months when I started collecting data. He was from a middle-class family. Like Joey, Smith's name carried his family's expectations as well. He noted:

> My Chinese first name is very unique because it combines my parents' first names, hóng and mǐn. The first character of my first name is hóng (鸿), which means a big bird that can fly far and high. It is kind of an American eagle. My

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> parents and my grandparents want me to soar like a hóng. The second character of my first name is mǐn, which means smart. I am not smart enough, but I can make myself smart if I study hard.

The first character of Smith's first name hóng has an important place in Chinese ancient poetry, such as shījīng, chǔcí, Han poetry, and Tang poetry. Hóng symbolizes a strong determination to actualize goals. It seemed that Smith was proud of his Chinese name since he used "unique" to describe it. He also emphasized the first character of his first name *hóng* to show its meaning and significance. Similar to the second character of Joey's first name, this character is also a metaphor, which demonstrated his parents' hope for him. They wished for his promising future: flying high and far. The second character of Smith's first name *mǐn* means intelligence and swift. This meaning originates from Confucius' *lúnyǔ* (*Analects*). Confucius remarks, "敏而好学,不耻下问" (A smart and studious person never feels ashamed learning from those intellectually inferior to him or her). Smith's understanding of his Chinese name functioned as an indicator for his eager embrace of his familial expectation. Smith's understanding and interpretation of his Chinese name confirmed Kohli and Solórzano's (2012) argument that one's name "frequently [carries] cultural and family significance. Names can connect children to their ancestors, country of origin or ethnic group, and often have deep meaning or symbolism for parents and families" (p. 444). Smith did not simply interpret his family's hope, but also conveyed his belief in his Chinese name that it can bring him strength and power to cope with difficulties and that someday, he can soar in the sky—he will achieve greatness as his name indicates. Also, he believed that he could become smart if he was diligent.

In his narrative, Smith also positioned himself as a dream chaser. Unlike Joey, Smith did not take the Chinese Gāokǎo when he was in China; instead he attended English classes at a preparatory school that specialized in preparing students for American universities. He explained, "I did not have to take Gāokǎo, because I wanted to study in America, my dreamland." Smith was determined to improve his life through a good education, so he came to America to pursue his dream. Smith stated that he admired and had a high respect for his father's success in business and administration because his father was a manager of aftersales service in a large company in Shanghai. He viewed his father as his role model, but he strove to outshine him. He explicated:

> I think my dad is very successful compared to his classmates and colleagues, but I want to be better than he is, because 青出于蓝而胜于蓝嘛 (Blue comes from the indigo plant but is bluer than the plant itself).

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Smith used a Chinese idiom from Hsun-Tzu's *Encouraging Learning* to express his attitude toward learning and understanding the significance of learning. To better understand Smith's self-explanation and self-concept by using this idiom, we need to refer to several other sentences in *Encouraging Learning* (translation by Burton Watson):

> The gentleman says: Learning should never cease. . . . Ice is made of water but is colder than water ever is. . . . If the gentleman studies widely and each day examines himself, his wisdom will become clear and his conduct be without fault (君子曰：学不可以已。青，取之于蓝，而青于蓝；冰水为之，而寒于水 . . . 君子博学而日三省乎己，则知明而行无过矣).

It seemed that Smith considered this idiom as a source of his authority or agency to engage in continuous learning. Even though he viewed his father as successful, he was hoping to become someone who is better than his father in the future. His self-understanding and plans for future located him in a position as ambitious and determined.

CHINESE KEEPSAKES

Joey's Keepsake: A Picture of Plum Blossoms

Joey told me that he brought several keepsakes with him when he came to the United States. His keepsakes included his favorite books, souvenirs representing Chinese culture, and some birthday presents from his family. He claimed that those keepsakes comforted him when he felt lonely and depressed. There was another keepsake, a picture of plum blossoms, which Joey cherished very much. He continued his story below:

> My dad sent me a picture of plum blossoms before this Chinese New Year. This picture reminds me of a famous Chinese epigram: 宝剑锋从磨砺出，梅花香自苦寒来, which means one makes a sword sharp by sharpening it, and, the fragrance of plum blossoms only arises from the bitter cold. My dad wants me to be persistent and tough like plum blossoms blossoming in the dead of winter.

In Joey's understanding, this picture, like his Chinese name, had very special meanings. First, this picture was a present given by Joey's father who was selected to represent his family. Second, this present was received right before the Chinese New Year. Last, the plum blossoms symbolized determination and resilience, which was presented by Joey's quote: 宝剑锋从磨砺出，梅花香自苦寒来. In Chinese history and literature, the plum blossom is often used as a subject of poems and paintings because it is a

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symbol of industriousness, indomitableness, and willingness to face and cope with difficulties. This epigram indicates that excellence results from resolution, diligence, and resilience and encourages and inspires people to realize their goals by continuously working hard. Joey referred to *The Wisdom of Ancient Aphorisms* (*The Section of Diligence*) to show his understanding of this picture. More importantly, he positioned himself as a devoted son who agreed with his father and decided to become persistent and resilient as his father expected. This keepsake seemed to have given him power, inspiration, and courage to cope with hardships while learning the second language and studying in a foreign country.

John's Keepsake: A Nail File

Different from Joey, John only brought one keepsake to the United States. This keepsake was a nail file (as shown in figure 2.1), which was made by his father. John treasured this simple but special keepsake because it exemplified his father's love and hope for him. John noted:

> I brought a nail file with me. My dad made it by hand. He thought the old one was not easy to use. I thought my dad was too fussy. It was not necessary to make a new one. But he insisted on making it. The new one is much better than the old one. When I was packing my suitcase at home, my dad asked me to take it, so I brought it here. Every time when I use it I feel like I am at home.

Figure 2.1 John's Nail File and Manicure Set. *Source*: Photo by author.

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This nail file was simple and inconspicuous, but it was useful and important to John because it "symbolizes and represents relationships and events that matter" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 1). This nail file was an embodiment of his father's deep affection for him. His father could have bought him one nail file in a store, but he insisted on making a new one. The nail file, as a material artifact, evoked John's beautiful memories about his father and his family in China, all of which implied the connection with his home, a place full of love and care. This nail file carried John's emotional attachment because it made John feel like at home even though he was far away from his family. The nail file was also a powerful symbol of his identity (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 1) because a keepsake someone owns conveys a lot about what he or she values in his or her lives and it embodies who he or she is (Curasi, 2011). This nail file can also bring John comfort when he was homesick. John, as a meaning maker, understood why his father insisted on making him this red nail file and understood why his father asked him to bring it with him. He also understood that this nail file was not just a tie that connected him and his family, but also an emotional support to help him situate and locate in this foreign land.

Smith's Keepsake: A Parents' Photo

Like John, Smith brought one keepsake to the United States. This keepsake was his parents' photo. Smith told me that this photo was taken in a photo gallery in Shanghai right before he came to the United States. He put his parents' photo on his desk so that he could see it while he was studying. He said that this photo conjured up his memories about his parents and his life in China. He also said that it comforted him when he was lonely because whenever he looked at the photo, he felt encouraged and heartened. Smith's keepsake was assigned meanings both by his parents and himself. He saw this photo as a special object because it tightly tied Smith with his parents even though they were far away from each other. Smith's interpretation of this photo confirmed Blumer's (1969) observation of symbolic interactionism, who stated that "[t]he nature of an object—of any and every object—consists of the meaning that it has for the person for whom it is an object. This meaning sets the way in which he sees the object, the way in which he is prepared to act toward it, and the way in which he is ready to talk about it" (p. 11). It seemed that Smith understood how important the photo was to him, helping him focus on how he was supposed to and wanted to create his ideal identities.

Interestingly, all the narratives about the L2 learners' keepsakes were associated with their family members (i.e., parents). These physical objects symbolized familial affection and care. Also, even though all the three L2 learners addressed the textual, contextual, social, and symbolic meanings of these

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keepsakes, they focused on their symbolic sense. It is also worth noting that all the L2 learners emphasized the background information about the keepsakes as a way to interpret the symbolic sense that the keepsakes carry. For example, Joey explained that he received the picture of plum blossoms before the Chinese New Year. This information seems to indicate Joey's remembering his parents because Chinese people believe that happy holidays make one think of his or her family members even more (每逢佳节倍思亲). It appears that this contextual information Joey emphasized held special meaning about the keepsake. Living in a foreign land without family members is difficult, especially for those who are unable to communicate in the target language. These L2 learners' intentionality for narrating their stories concretized the intangible feature of agency because these keepsakes are not significant or insignificant in themselves. Significance is bestowed and entitled based on the L2 learners' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and their future goals. Also, because of the symbolic meanings that emerged out of a time-specific context, their keepsakes might serve to link the L2 learners' past to the present thereby to bridge a transition between the familiar and unfamiliar in order to project their future (Baxter, 1987).

DISCUSSION

Storying Chinese Names as Positioning and Agency

When people tell stories about themselves, their identities are narratively constructed in the storytelling, through which they understand themselves and take actions because

> people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities. (Holland et al., 1998, p. 3)

Cultural understandings of their Chinese names provided the L2 learners with opportunities to reconstruct themselves as Chinese persons. They claimed power to position themselves as educated and literate in Chinese or critical about their past experiences (e.g., John). They understood, embraced, and valued their cultural upbringings and heritages. They identified themselves as ambitious, motivated, and purposeful learners with awareness of familial aspirations and responsibilities. Oftentimes, L2 learners are considered as *empty* cultural, linguistic, and ethnic beings because of ignorance and marginalization of their cultural and linguistic contributions

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to and importance in multicultural and multilinguistic environments. These self-understandings, through the lens of their valued culture and tradition, enhanced a sense of self-worth and self-pride and are extremely important for L2 learners not only to appreciate their home culture and language but also accept the target culture and language, both of which are beneficial for their L2 literacies.

Specifically, both Joey and Smith drew on their cultural knowledge to interpret their Chinese names and also assigned relevance and significance to their names to demonstrate their agency (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Joey and Smith positioned themselves positively and powerfully. Their positive positioning can be a source for their agency construction and enhancement, which in turn can reinforce their positive positioning because positional identities can be possibilities for mediating and refining agency (Holland et al., 1998).

John's self-naming constructed his agency as a predominant characteristic of himself. He critically and reflectively recollected his English learning experience when he was in China and courageously and ironically named himself Lǐhuá. This action of name changing is similar to that of a revolutionary female in Chinese history, Qiu Jin (meaning rare jade), a forerunner and advocate for Chinese human rights and women's education in the early nineteenth century. Qiu Jin violated the naming rules of her time. She discarded Mrs. Wang, the name given by her husband's family and reclaimed Qiu Jin given by her parents. She also gave herself a Zi (字) (Jìng Xióng, 竞雄) and a Hào (jiànhú nüxiá 鉴湖女侠), which were names granted to educated or wealthy adult males, not females. Qiu Jin bravely ended her unfortunate marriage and advanced her education in Japan. Her new names demonstrated her decision and willingness to become a *new* female who refused to be weak, oppressed, and insignificant. The action of changing her old name to these new names displayed her strong sense of agency. Similarly, John gained strength and agency from his naming because "the act of naming is an act of power" (Guenther, 2009, p. 412). This act of naming also showed John's resolution to dispose of the yoke of the "deaf and dumb" English.

Even though it is believed that one's name carries familial and cultural significance and can have magical power and a self-fulfilling effect (Cheng, 2008), to "achieve [one's] own naming and [one's] own becoming" (Lee, 1998, p. 298) depends on the individual. Understanding one's name and embracing the familial and cultural expectation is the first step to accomplish one's own naming and becoming. More importantly, to live up to positioning oneself in a positive and powerful way as one's name suggests is crucial in becoming someone as the name signifies. For the L2 learners, their Chinese names were not just labels people can reference, but the sites of meaning negotiation and identity (re)construction. Their Chinese names were not only

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the significant components of their identities but also the representations of their culture and tradition. Furthermore, their emphasis on and appreciation of their Chinese names reinforced their cultural roots and cultural identities, which would enable them to navigate this foreign country through the target language. In addition, these L2 learners created opportunities for themselves to have access to the subject positions "in which they have the right to speak and to be heard" (Davies, 1991, p. 51). Importantly, when the three L2 learners discursively constructed themselves as Chinese persons, they authored their own multiple meanings and desires about their Chinese names in which they borrowed existing meanings and forged something innovative, through combining previous related and unrelated discourses to understand and represent themselves as agents.

Storying Chinese Keepsakes as Positioning and Agency

These L2 learners' treasured keepsakes had different functions in their lives when they studied English as a second language in the United States. Each keepsake was unique in a sense that they had assigned special meanings to it. Also, each keepsake represented the life experience of each one of the participants. Because keepsakes "convey meaning and create new conditions for meaning making in our daily lives" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 49), the process of narrating the stories about the keepsakes not only illustrated these L2 learners' understanding of their culture, tradition, and beliefs but also displayed their creativity as meaning maker and meaning negotiator. More importantly, their storytelling of these keepsakes became a site for their agency construction and performance because they constructed and gained discursive power and realized positive positioning of themselves. Take Joey's narrative of the plum blossoms picture as an example. He did not simply tell me about his father's intention for sending this picture, but he cited one sentence from a very famous Chinese poem (as quoted below) to emphasize his understanding of this special gift:

> If you do not take care of your farms, you will not harvest. If children do not learn, they will not become intelligent. One makes a sword sharp by sharpening it, and, the fragrance of plum blossoms only arises from the bitter cold. If you do not study hard when you are young and strong, you will regret it when you are old and feeble because it is too late to study. 有田不耕仓廪虚, 有书不读子孙愚。宝剑锋从磨砺出，梅花香自苦寒来。少壮不经勤学苦，老来方悔读书迟.

The sentence "One makes a sword sharp by sharpening it, and, the fragrance of plum blossoms only arises from the bitter cold"

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(宝剑锋从磨砺出，梅花香自苦寒来) also conveyed his determination and resilience for learning how to cope with difficult circumstances because he said that he had faced tremendous challenges when he arrived to the United States—a topic that I will discuss in chapter 3. In addition, the reference to this sentence revealed his rich cultural knowledge and purpose for valuing his culture. Informed by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, Holland and colleagues (1998) make it very clear that people frequently use culturally constructed artifacts as signals to monitor their psychological processes. They explained,

> [A] typical mediating device is constructed by the assigning of meaning to an object or a behavior. This symbolic object or behavior is then placed in the environment so as to affect mental events. (p. 36)

These keepsakes, as close family ties, connected the L2 learners with their families. They functioned as emotional attachment and emotional support because the cherished keepsakes "attain their significance through psychic activities or transactions" (Csikszentmihalyi & Halton, 1981, p. 173). According to Parrott (2003), when people engage in self-positioning, they oftentimes display their emotions. For example, if one is ashamed of something, he or she feels lowered in status in someone's eyes; if one is proud of something, he or she takes credit for something that has value. This statement is aligned with Pahl and Rowsell's (2010) suggestion that artifacts "call up deep emotions" (p. 49). When these L2 learners used their keepsakes as a vehicle to position themselves, they expressed strong emotions and deep feelings. Claimed as devoted sons, these L2 learners were proud of their keepsakes. They were also proud to be Chinese who embraced and valued their cultural upbringings and heritages.

The keepsakes not only played a profound role in the construction and preservation of personal and cultural identities (Curasi, 2011) but also played a profound role in the construction and development of their agency because "[the] agency given to the meaning maker through the invocation of lifeworlds is greater in the act of creating the artifact" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 46). As meaning makers, these L2 learners referred to their lived experience and cultural appreciation to create narratives to exemplify who they were and how they survived. These cultural and self-understandings empowered their transformation of the habits they developed through their past experiences with the new adaptations that are possible for integration into the new communities of the target culture. These L2 learners' emotions generated from their storytelling the keepsakes became sites for crafting their identities and developing their agency.

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Multimodal Interpretation of Selves as Positioning and Agency

These L2 learners intentionally drew on their cultural embodiments to show people who they were and why they valued who they were. The use of the embodiments not only highlighted their cultural and ethnic value but also underlined their positioning as resourceful. Joey and Smith positioned themselves as cultured by referring to the Chinese idiom and poetry to interpret the symbolic and material artifacts (e.g., Joey's keepsake and Smith's name). This storytelling, featured as multimodal interpretation (e.g., culture, language, literature, symbolic and material artifacts, oral representation), was a site for them to re-practice and re-gain L1 literacy skills, which, in turn, can provide significant foundations for their L2 literacies. First, cultural understanding offers rich story materials (resources) for them to participate in L2 literacies while socializing with their community members. I will discuss how they positioned themselves as cultural brokers in chapter 4. Second, drawing on Chinese culture and literature as a vehicle to understand themselves provided possibilities for positive and powerful positionings when engaging in L2 activities. The recognition and realization of their cultural value helped them build cultural repertoire and re-develop their L1 comprehension and competence, which would contribute to their L2 literacies (Cummins, 2000; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005). In other words, they can translate their Chinese cultural repertoires into English communication and representation. This multimodal interpretation of selves signaled an important message that, as cultural representatives, these L2 learners' cultural understanding of themselves was vital to their survival and success in a new country. Oftentimes, L2 learners' home culture and language is devalued or ignored by the dominant discourse, which has the greatest danger when L2 learners start to doubt their roots or their cultural worth and uniqueness. Home culture and language can "impact their aspirations, motivations, and love for their culture and themselves (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 449). These L2 learners' self-understandings have the potential for reinforcing the goal for multicultural environments.

CODA

These L2 learners' Chinese names and keepsakes, as a means of multimodal representations, contributed to perceiving and portraying themselves through their linguistic and cultural attributes, histories, and futures (Duff, 2012). They constructed positive positioning and agency not only through cultural acknowledgment and appreciation but also through recognizing familial

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responsibility and rebuilding familial bonding. Positive self-positioning generated in the narrative of cultural understandings can have a significant influence on L2 learners' identity negotiation and agency development. These cultural, symbolic, and material artifacts created a site for them to relive their lives, reconstruct their positional identities, and construct and negotiate agency. L2 learner agency can be understood as authority to assign their symbolic and material artifacts with significant meanings and translate these meanings into their language learning and activities. Positive positioning requires agency and also enhances agency. Agency guides people to position themselves positively. Listening to L2 learners' story, their names, and cultural signs and symbols is an effective way to understand them and also it is a prerequisite for implementing humanized and culturally relevant pedagogy. Also, Chinese names and keepsakes, due to their semantic meanings, constitute a rich area for studying discursive power in L2 research.

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Part III

LIFE IN AMERICA

For young adult L2 learners with limited English proficiency, living in America is a challenging venture. Learning the language, adjusting to the target culture, and dealing with local and nonlocal people are full of struggles and negotiations. For example, Joey felt humiliated when a cook asked him "Can you speak English?" in a Japanese restaurant. John almost missed his flight as he was unable to understand announcements at an airport. Smith's limited listening comprehension resulted in a long line of customers waiting for him to pay for his groceries at a cashier. Although three L2 learners had difficult time in different situations after they arrived in this country, they strove to create and seize upon opportunities to not only survive but also thrive. All the L2 learners transformed their local and ephemeral positionings as incompetent and inadequate to confident and competent L2 users through enhanced agency by participation in practicing L2 literacies in various communities of learning. The L2 learners' anticipated positions functioned as resources for agency adjustment and development. For example, in the community of the WeChat discussion group, these learners positioned themselves as WeChat chatters to engage in discussions related to topics and issues including education, language, culture, and virtual reality. Their discursively empowered agency contributed to their desired positioning activities, which featured them as bilingual text makers and meaning designers. Most often, they used formal and academic languages to show their curiosity about and seriousness of knowledge co-construction, but sometimes, they used informal languages to ease the tension in the discussion whenever a topic was considered to be sensitive. This WeChat discussion group served as a site for these L2 learners to make and negotiate meanings, voice their arguments, change power relations, and design textual identities. The interactions among the three not only focused on exchanges of information but also on exchanges of thoughts

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and perspectives for their L2 literacies, in and through which they combined genres of mixed dialogues, narratives, and arguments to participate in the smartphone, network-mediated communication.

In Part III of this book, I will display these L2 learners' difficulties in learning and daily conversations, attempts for learning opportunities, and strategies used to transform themselves. Specifically, chapter 3 investigates the L2 learners' embarrassing experiences and attempts for opportunities to reconcile these negative experiences; chapter 4 examines the L2 learners' interactions in the WeChat discussion group; and chapter 5 explores the L2 learners' experiences in L2 literacies in the community of ELI.

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Chapter 3

Narratives of Embarrassing Experiences and Attempts for Opportunities

Agency is conceptualized as the capacity to recognize and transform existing discourses that dominate and hegemonize individuals' identities because

> agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted. It is the freedom to recognize multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity. (Davies, 1991, p. 51)

Similar to Davies' conception of agency, Butler (1997) considers agency as "an effect of power" (p. 139) because "[i]f the subject is produced in speech through a set of foreclosures, then this founding and formative limitation set the scene for the agency of the subject. Agency becomes possible on the condition of such a foreclosure" (p. 139). This chapter will focus on these three L2 learners' agency negotiation and development while they were positioned and positioned themselves in a certain way.

EMBARRASSING EXPERIENCES

Joey's Encounters in a Japanese Restaurant

Going out for a meal is no less than natural and enjoyable for English native speakers; however, it is struggling for non-native speakers because it requires courage and it also involves constant, sometimes, unpleasant, or even painful meaning negotiations. Joey's experience in two restaurants is a case in point. He narrated:

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> One day, when my Chinese friend and I went to a Japanese restaurant to have lunch, I walked to the counter to order a meal. The cook seemed like Chinese, so I talked to him in Chinese. But he did not understand me. I was a little bit nervous. I started to use my finger to point to the ingredients on the counter. He said something I totally did not understand. I continued to use my finger to show him what I wanted. Eventually, he lost his patience and asked, "Can you speak English?" After he said that, he gave me a scornful look and then shook his head. . . . He made me feel terrible. I could have said something like "of course, I can speak English. Do you think I am an idiot?" but I did not say anything. If this happened in China, I would not keep silent, but I am in a foreign country. His words put me down dramatically. It was a big shame. I will remember his words forever. I told myself, "I will speak English like a native someday."

In this interview excerpt, Joey explained his encounter with a cook in a Japanese restaurant, which revealed his frustration, humiliation, and resolve to speak English like a native speaker. Both Joey and the cook's self-positioning (claiming identities for oneself) and other-positioning (assigning identities to others) (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1998) emerged from the account. The cook's utterance "Can you speak English?" was compelling. Seemingly, this was a yes-no interrogative. In effect, the cook did not request an answer because the illocutionary act (Austin, 1975) of this utterance was a directive—an utterance used to get the listener to do something (Searle, 1976). Although the cook might have attempted to seek information with respect to Joey's ability to speak English, as a cook, his job was to know about his customers' needs and wants so that he could accommodate them, so his utterance "Can you speak English?" was an actual demand based on this situation. However, he did not directly demand Joey to speak English; instead, he delivered this directive indirectly, which showed his self-positioning as a polite professional. Unfortunately, his nonverbal language—for example, the facial expression ("a scornful look"), the gesture ("shook his head"), and perhaps his intonation when uttering this sentence—betrayed his intention in a way that positioned as rude and unprofessional by Joey's accounts. The conversation breakdown demonstrated Joey's agency (maintained silence purposefully) that emerged directly out of the cook's verbal and nonverbal language. Joey could have said something to contribute to the exchange, but he did not. His refusal to answer the cook's question highlighted his resistance to power, which was claimed by the cook as a privileged English speaker. In other words, Joey's agency was triggered and facilitated in and through this discursive practice. Also, his emotions, constructed in cook's verbal and nonverbal language became the sites for his resistance, self-determination, and self-transformation.

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Joey's encounter showed his struggle with using English. Joey's anxiety along with fear that resulted from the discourse led to a conversation breakdown, which did not allow for a repositioning or second-order positioning to occur (see Harré & van Hangenhove, 1998). Kayi-Aydar (2019) corroborates this claim by arguing that individuals, as subjects of discourse, "create and circulate power, which results in domination or differential access—if any—to discourse itself, rights, or duties" (p. 21). Positioned as a powerful English native speaker, the cook considered Joey as deficient. The cook's utterance and nonverbal language signaled a message: contempt. The cook's disrespect angered Joey, so he refused to answer his question. Positioned as a powerless foreigner, Joey decided not to negotiate a new positioning through discourse. Instead, he made a resolution to improve his English. Joey's silence did not mean that he accepted this undesired positioning; instead, he rejected it by remaining silent. His rejection demonstrated his power—power of silence—power of agency. Even though the discourse did not contribute to second-order positioning, third-order positioning took place in the narrative, in and through which Joey positioned himself as horrified but determined and the cook as unprofessional and domineering. This third-order positioning served as a manifestation of Joey's agency to claim and negotiate power.

Joey's Encounter at the Airport

When he landed in Detroit Airport, Joey was looking for a restaurant to have lunch. He walked in a fast-food restaurant and looked at the menu on the wall, but he did not know how to utter the names of food in English. He tried to have a conversation with a waiter, but the waiter did not understand him. Joey started to use his finger to point to the meal on the menu and said: "Number 1." In the following excerpt, Joey described what he saw and how he felt when he was unable to converse in English:

From his (the waiter's) facial expression, I realized that he did not understand me.

> I kept saying "Number 1, number 1." I almost screamed, "I am hungry!" I used my finger to point to the picture of the food and said "number 1" again. I felt like a little child.

After using gestures and very limited English to negotiate meanings, Joey received a big tray of food and the check surprised him tremendously.

> "My God! Forty-seven dollars!" I was really upset with myself. If I could speak English well, I would not spend this much. I got very nervous when I did not know how to speak English. I even did not remember how to say "hamburger"

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> at that moment. I felt shame and embarrassed. I started to criticize myself. Even though I was hungry, I did not enjoy the food. I will speak English like a native. . . .

Joey's limited English proficiency resulted in the direct loss of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). He could spend less if he would express his needs clearly by using English. Apparently, Joey did not expect to spend forty-seven dollars on a meal in a fast-food restaurant. His repetition of "number 1" caused the waiter's misunderstanding, which led to the extra expense. What upset him the most was his low level of English skills. Being unable to talk in English, Joey used gestures; however, pointing to the food with his finger immediately sapped his dignity as an adult and lowered his social status. Getting nervous worsened his English speaking. He even forgot how to utter common words. His emerged positioning as a poor L2 speaker was located and constructed in this interaction with the waiter.

In this narrative, the social interaction happened between two characters: a waiter and an eater, a native speaker and a non-native speaker, and an American and a Chinese. Joey did not describe much about what the waiter said and how he acted in the discourse of the unsuccessful conversation. This narrative mainly expressed Joey's embarrassment and regret. The position of an inadequate English language user emerged from his narration. At the same time, a reflective and determined L2 learner was molded in and through the discourse as well. Both his verbal and nonverbal language constituted his subject position as an insufficient English speaker in this episode. His limited English skills seemed to prohibit his agency when he interacted with the waiter. However, his self-reflection and self-criticism originated from his shame and regret made him agentic. In other words, his emotions functioned as signals that his limited English proficiency should be changed. His desire for self-transformation was constituted in and through his narrative.

Joey's Encounter in Walmart

Joey's encounter in Walmart showed his self-positioning as a Chinese person who had the right to speak his mother tongue in public when he was blamed for not speaking English, the legitimate language. Joey explained:

> When my friend and I bought some groceries in Walmart, we were about to leave. The cashier, an elderly lady, came to me and asked me to give her my receipt. I did not understand why she took my receipt back. My friend asked me what happened in Chinese. I said that the lady wanted to check my receipt. She might want to know if I paid for the groceries successfully. When the lady returned my receipt and heard me speak Chinese, she asked me: "Why do you

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> speak Chinese in public in America?" I was very angry and talked back: "Why should I not speak my own language in public in America?"

In this narrative, three characters appeared: the cashier, Joey, and Joey's friend. The main characters were the cashier and Joey, so the social interaction mostly occurred between them: an American and a Chinese, a female and a male, a cashier and a shopper, and a native speaker and a non-native speaker. For Joey, the cashier's behavior seemed a little unusual. Interestingly, he did not ask why the cashier took the receipt back. He just simply speculated that the cashier might want to check if he paid for the groceries correctly. The more unusual behavior was the cashier's utterance: "Why do you speak Chinese in public in America?" This was a rhetorical question and it did not request an answer because the answer was embedded in this question or the question contained the answer: you should not speak Chinese in public in America. According to Austin (1975), the locutionary act of this utterance was a wh-interrogative. The illocutionary force was a directive (speak English!). This demand delivered through the form of a question indicated the cashier's accusation of Joey's use of Chinese, which angered him and triggered his agency, so he objected the cashier's demand by delivering a wh-interrogative as well: "Why should I not speak my own language in public in America?" The illocutionary force was an expressive (objecting the cashier's demand), so the perlocutionary act (the actual effect of this utterance) could not be realized because of Joey's rejection.

Both Joey's and the cashier's positionings emerged immediately out of their utterances: the cashier positioned herself as someone who advocates the supremacy of English over other languages and, therefore, claimed the right to demand Joey to speak English, but Joey did not accept this demand; in effect, he objected to the cashier's first-order positioning (see Harré & van Hangenhove, 1998) and claimed his Chinese linguistic identity as a second-order positioning instead. Joey's repositioning showed his strong sense of agency, which protected his right as a Chinese speaker. He also claimed power to realize his desired self-positioning: a Chinese person who was proud of being Chinese and of speaking Chinese. Joey explained:

> Even though my English is bad and I should practice English as much as I can, the cashier did not have the right to tell me not to speak Chinese. I was born with this language. How can I not speak my mother tongue? Her words really offended me so I talked back.

While Joey believed that he needed to practice English as much as possible, he did not want to lose his Chinese identity. He, therefore, repositioned himself as a confident and authorized Chinese speaker in this foreign land and

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the cashier as a rude native English speaker who did not have the right to reprimand him. The cashier's first-order positioning was questioned and Joey's second-order positioning occurred (see van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Joey believed that it was necessary to challenge the cashier and emphasize his right to speak Chinese, although his repositioning seemed to conflict his envisioned self-positioning: speaking English like a native speaker. The exchanges between the interlocutors confirmed van Langenhove and Harré's (1999) argument, "Fluid positionings, not fixed roles, are used by people to cope with the situation they usually find themselves in" (p. 17). As a socially, culturally, and linguistically embedded speaker (Ahearn, 2001), Joey used the counter-discourse to both express and shape his positioning and agency. He claimed power for the ownership of his first language and freedom to choose the language he wished to speak. Again, Joey's narrative foregrounded his emotions, such as anger, which became the very driving force for him to challenge the existing dominant discourse to create a new and desired one, that is, Chinese language was also legitimate in public in America.

John's Encounter at the Airport

John's "deaf and dumb" English seemed to be responsible for his inability to understand the announcements at an airport when he flew from China to the United States. He reported:

> When I was at Chicago Airport, I heard some announcements, but I did not quite understand them. I asked nine officers to see if my flight had been changed. After asking eight officers, I figured out that I needed to go to Terminal 3 to wait for my flight instead of in Terminal 2. I rode a train to Terminal 3. I was waiting at Gate 19 as I understood. My flight was going to take off in 15 minutes, but not many people were at the Gate. I got panicked. I asked the officer at the Gate and was told that the Gate was changed to Gate 12. I ran to Gate 12 with my carry-ons. As soon as I got onto the plane, the Gate was closed. It was really embarrassing; fortunately, I did not miss my flight.

Asking nine officers for clarification showed John's limited speech comprehension, which implied his positional identity as an incompetent L2 user; however, the situation did not discourage him. Initiating nine conversations helped him successfully get on board. These initiatives for clarification demonstrated his courage and persistence. However, these conversations also made John feel uncomfortable and awkward. He added:

> I felt embarrassed because I did not understand them. I showed them my tickets. I also used gestures to help communicate. Sometimes, my Chinese words just popped out involuntarily. I kind of tried all means to figure out the information about my flight because I did not want to miss it.

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John's Visits to the Bank

John also narrated his story about his bank visits. He reported:

> Even though I just got here for a week, I went to my bank three times already. On the second day after my arrival, some staff from a bank came to the campus to help me apply for a debit card. Unfortunately, when I wanted to use the card to buy something online, I could not remember my user name and password. I went to the bank to ask for help. I was sitting there waiting for an officer and practicing how to tell the officer what happened to me. When I saw him, I did not know what to say. I did not remember if I was nervous or forgetful. Fortunately, it did not take that long to get back my user name and password. Several days later, I forgot my password again; I had to go back to the bank to reset my password. I really did not want to go back because I was so afraid that people could not understand me or I could not understand them, but I did not have a choice. I went back to the bank. People were very friendly, which eased my nervousness a little. I told myself to calm down, but it did not help. When the officer asked me to go to his office, I started stuttering. I even could not say: "nice to meet you!" The more I was nervous, the worse my speaking was. I just remember it took very long to reset my password. The third time I went to the bank because I forgot my password again and I could not find my note, on which I wrote down my password and username. I went to the bank again. Even though the officer was still nice to me, I felt embarrassed, especially when I could not express myself correctly and clearly.

John's visits to the bank three times seemed to be a struggle. He prepared his conversation before he met the officer in the first time, but because of his anxiety, he did not know what to say when he met the officer. During the second visit, John was so nervous that he stuttered when he saw the officer. Even though the officer was very professional, John still felt uncomfortable. John felt embarrassed not just because he could not recall the username or password of his debit card but also his struggle to use English. He was worried that he might not be able to successfully communicate with the officer. John situated himself in a vulnerable position as a newly arrived L2 learner and speaker. His limited command of English made his life difficult. It also worsened his feeling about his ability to speak English.

John's Interaction with His Roommates

John claimed that living in a dorm with American students was beneficial in terms of opportunities for practicing the target language; however, it can also be difficult. John explained:

> One night, my roommate David asked me: "Do you mind if I invite a friend to come over to watch a movie tonight?" I said no. I asked him if I could join

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> them. He said yes. We watched an English movie together. There were no English subtitles, let alone Chinese ones. I could not totally understand this movie, but I did not ask them for explanations because I did not want to bother them. Sometimes they laughed very loudly. I did not understand why they thought it was funny.

As a roommate, John played a part in the relations of engagement that constituted the dormitory community (Wenger, 1998b); however, John construed his lack of knowledge and competence of English as a personal deficit that resulted in his self-positioning as an outsider. Even though John tried to participate in this community of practice, he felt laborious to become a recognized and accepted member. John continued to tell his story:

> Sometimes three of us had lunch together in a cafeteria. We talked while eating, but sometimes I did not understand them. I would ask them to tell me again about what they said, but when they told me several times and I still did not understand, I just quit asking. It is embarrassing. They might think I am an idiot or stupid.

According to Wenger (1998b), identity is "an experience and a display of competence" (p. 152). John's experience in this community of practice appeared not to facilitate his positive self-positioning. Even though John's participation in the lunch conversation can gain access to linguistic and cultural resources, his occasional inability to understand the interlocutors and a constant request for meaning negotiation did not seem to help him with membership establishment. It is very likely that John's unfamiliarity with topics of the conversations along with his linguistic incompetence formed his positioning as foreign, unproductive, and unwieldy, which emphasized his status as an outsider.

Smith's Encounters

Coming from a middle-class family in Shanghai, Smith was not accustomed to the environment of a small university town. He described his situation when he arrived at this town:

> It (the small town) is totally different from Shanghai. The public transportation service is poor. I did not know there is a shuttle bus. I walked for hours to a grocery store to buy food in the first week after my arrival. It was very dangerous, because there are no sidewalks on the street. And the store is far from my apartment, so I only shopped once in the first week. I did not have enough food to eat afterwards. I was dying of hunger. In the second week I decided to walk to Walmart with my Chinese roommate. We walked for a while, but we quit,

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> because it was too hot. And Walmart is really far. We almost got sunstroke. I was so depressed because I had never faced this kind of problem. I wanted to tell my parents about my situation, but I did not, because they are far away from me. Also, I have to stand on my own two feet. I do not want to let them down.

Smith faced a "survival" challenge, but he decided to overcome it by himself. He strove to become an independent person because he did not want to disappoint his parents. Like Joey, Smith felt a sense of loss when he was unable to understand a waiter in a fast-food restaurant. He described his experience in that situation below:

> When I was ordering a meal at a fast food restaurant, I had problems to understand the waiter. I did not know how to say the names of the food I wanted. I used my finger to point to it on the menu. I felt I was like a little child, which was embarrassing. When the waiter asked, "what drinks?" I got totally lost, so I asked him "what?" After his repetition of this phrase many times, I realized that he was asking what kind of drinks I wanted. I felt stupid when I could not understand him. I even did not understand a simple phrase. . . . A few days later, I recognized that using "what" to ask for clarifications is not polite, but I used it many times. I should have said "excuse me?" or "pardon?" or something like that, but. . . . The waiter might have thought that I was a very rude guy or did not have education. I felt terrible.

Smith used a series of affective adjectives, including "embarrassing," "stupid," and "terrible," to describe his feelings when he was conversing with the waiter. These negative words highlighted Smith's psychological and mental process while ordering the food. As a customer, Smith believed that he had the duty to understand the waiter and make himself understood, but he failed to fulfill this duty although he used his gesture to help him make and negotiate meaning. Emerging from the interaction with the waiter, Smith's negative feelings seemed to have resulted from a mismatch between his expected himself (self-positioning) and his current positioning (an incompetent L2 user).

Smith mentioned another incident happened in a grocery store, which he thought was also embarrassing:

> Another thing was really embarrassing when I was shopping in Target. I picked some items and went to the cashier. I swiped my card, but it did not work. I had to enter my card number and the security code according to the cashier's instruction. It was really difficult to understand her sometimes. I was anxious. I was worried if I could not use my card, I had to put back the groceries. That was going to be very embarrassing! Also, I was worried about the people behind me. They might not be patient. They might think I was a stupid Chinese student. I wanted to get the problem fixed as quickly as I can, but the machine

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> did not cooperate with me. Fortunately, I could read words on the screen of the machine, which helped me understand what the cashier said. After I tried so many times, I was able to pay for the grocery. I said sorry to the people who were standing behind me. I felt like I was a little kid who made a huge mistake. I feel terrible.

Although Smith's proficient reading skills enabled him to understand what he was supposed to do, he still felt embarrassed because he did not understand the cashier completely. He also felt embarrassed because he made people wait. He was worried about how others might have positioned him. Smith positioned himself as a sensitive, vulnerable, and anxious newcomer in this narrative.

Smith also faced difficulty in making friends with Americans and international students. He had a lot of Chinese friends, but he realized that it was not a good idea to stay with Chinese friends all the time because it would not be helpful for his English. He tried to speak English to his Chinese roommate once, but he eventually stopped as described in the following narrative:

> I asked my Chinese roommate in English: "What are you doing?" He responded to me in Chinese: "我在做饭." (I am cooking). I realized that he did not want to speak English with me. I have never spoken English with him since then. It is natural to speak Chinese to my Chinese classmates and friends. I am used to it. It is a habit. Also, my English is not good at all. I think it is strange to speak English to Chinese people. I have a strong Chinese accent. My pronunciation is not correct sometimes. My English speaking might confuse Chinese people. . . . It is not easy to make international friends, because we have different cultural backgrounds, languages, and hobbies. I do not want to bother them. . . . I realized that speaking Chinese does not help my English learning. I think active participation in class activities and reading more books helps me improve my English. I need to change my situation, but I do not know how to change it.

Smith recognized that he needed to practice more English, but staying in a Chinese community did not provide him with opportunities to use English. It seemed to be a dilemma for him to keep this membership and also speak English in this Chinese community. He also mentioned that he felt as if he were in China sometimes because he was surrounded by Chinese students. Even though he lived in the United States he did not have to speak English except for attending classes in the ELI. It appeared that Smith wanted to break up the "China Town"—a community in which Chinese students remain together to form a group that appears like an isolated island within a university, but he did not know how to do it. The struggle to speak English for L2 learners is not solely a result of convincing oneself to be brave enough and confident to speak it; the L2 learner must also convince others to recognize and accept his or her bravery to speak English.

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ATTEMPTS FOR OPPORTUNITIES

Joey's Attempts

Since L2 acquisition is a process of acquiring new knowledge of culture and language (Watson-Gegeo & Nielsen, 2003) by socializing and interacting with expert and competent language users (Lave & Wenger, 1991), it is crucial for L2 learners to have access to participatory positions in communities of practice. Joey told me that he had a conversation with two American fans of house music, which provided him with opportunities to practice his L2 literacies skills. He explained:

> One Sunday, while I was listening to house music at home, I heard somebody knock at my door. I thought something bad happened. I opened the door and saw two Americans. I asked them: "Excuse me?" They said something I totally could not understand. One of them pointed to my headphones and said "Hardwell" again and again. I realized that they were interested in house music. I let them in and we listened to the music together. We also discussed music a little bit. It was hard to communicate because my English is not good. Fortunately, one of them could speak some Chinese. Sometimes, I used my phone to look up words to help me express myself. Sometimes we used body language to communicate. Before they left, I asked them to leave their phone numbers. Sometimes I invited them to play table tennis and basketball; sometimes we just got together to listen to music. We became friends eventually.

The conversation with two Americans was difficult, but Joey used his smart phone to facilitate the communication. He also used body language to mediate the verbal interaction. He actively bonded with these two Americans in order to participate in the local community of practice. He tried to develop friendship with them through table tennis and basketball, which could be a way to establish easy access to both linguistic and cultural capital.

Joey also mentioned that he went to the Student Recreation Center to exercise as well as make new friends. His table tennis skills helped him make a new American friend. He said that he happily became his new friend's "table tennis coach." However, one problem was that he did not know how to teach him in English. He tried to use gestures in the very beginning, but it was very difficult. Joey told his friend that he would teach him later. Joey stated:

> I went back to my apartment and called my friends in China to ask them how to teach table tennis in English. Also, I visited several Chinese websites to collect information about playing table tennis. I looked up dictionaries to translate Chinese into English. After doing homework, I contacted my friend and invited him to the Student Recreation Center to play table tennis again. Before long we became friends. I was so proud of myself.

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Not only did Joey take advantage of his social networks in China; he also drew on modern technological tools for his preparation to teach his American friend table tennis. His ability to use multiple tools and modes allowed him to create opportunities for symbolic recourses (Bourdieu, 1986) and symbolic competence (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007) to participate in the community of L2 literacies practice.

John's Attempts

According to van Lier (2004), language learning takes place "in a context of communication and interaction" (p. 133), so it is important for L2 learners to gain access to local communities of practices in order to develop membership and accumulate cultural and linguistic resources. John's participation in Culturally Speaking provided him with multiple opportunities to interact and communicate with his conversational partners. The Culturally Speaking activity functioned as a community of practice in which John had the opportunities to develop a sense of himself, because "learning involves the (re)construction of identities" (Swain & Deters, 2007). His L2 literacies practices in this community constituted his positional identities through concrete markers of membership (Wenger, 1998b). John commented on his learning experience in Culturally Speaking below:

> I think Culturally Speaking was good for my English learning. . . . The main purpose was to practice speaking and listening. The topics of conversation were broad, including family, technology, culture, computer, and video games. One time we talked about polygamy, but I did not know the word by that time. I figured it out by the conversation with my American partner and my international partner from Saudi Arabia. I think this activity was interesting.

As a newcomer, John did not have a rich English linguistic repertoire, so he was confused about the meaning of the word "polygamy," but he understood it by participating in the conversation with his American partner who was a competent native speaker and his international partner who was a cultural representative. The conversation of this triad mirrored Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualization of language learning; that is, meanings are historically and socially constructed. Meaning occurs through dialogical interactions, which served as scaffolds for John to engage in the community of practice by more knowledgeable members. Engagement in Culturally Speaking had the potential for John to not only acquire cultural knowledge and linguistic skills, but also broaden his horizon on interdisciplinary topics. During John's involvement in this conversation, he voiced who he was and how he interacted with his conversational partners as an active meaning negotiator in this community of practice. Also, interactions and engagement in this community might

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have helped him build more social networks full of possibilities for cultural, linguistic, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). The involvement in Culturally Speaking could be understood as a move for John to improve his L2 literacies skills in order to change his positioning as an incompetent L2 user.

Roomed with three American students, John had more chance to practice L2 literacies, which can be seen as having a positive impact on language acquisition and socialization. He stated:

> I had three American roommates before. Sometimes we had lunch together, but it was hard to talk to my American roommates. For example, I wanted to tell them a story or what happened to me, but I did not know how to say some words. I did not know how to organize a sentence. Sometimes I needed to use three or four sentences to explain one word to them. I liked to observe how they did certain things. One day, I wanted to clean up my bedroom, so I asked one of my roommates to lend me the vacuum cleaner because I saw a student come to borrow it from him one day. My roommate said: "It is over there. You can use it whenever you want. It doesn't belong to me." I realized that the cleaner is for three of us.

Even though limited vocabulary and a struggle to organize sentences reduced John's opportunities to participate in oral interactions, observing his roommates' activities was a way to prepare for the next participation in conversation, which became an instrument for his fully fledged and more proficient member of this dormitory community (Duff, 2002). This episode showed that John was a clever English learner. Although verbal communication is a predominant way for L2 literacies practice, other strategies, such as observation, listening, mimicking, and gesturing are alternative modes for creating opportunities to learn. The initiative of the conversation with his American roommate seemed challenging, but beneficial. This initiative created access to the community of L2 practice, because language is structured and emergent, and is acquired through social interaction (Bakhtin, 1981). Even though it was difficult to initiate a conversation with his roommates, John made an effort to create opportunities to interact with them, which again confirmed his self-positioning, "I am goal-oriented."

Smith's Attempt

Smith participated in the local community of practice, BCM, which stands for Baptist Campus Ministries, to create access to not only building social networks but also obtaining material and symbolic capital. He stated:

> I did not take part in Coffee Hour or Culturally Speaking, but attended BCM activities before this May. I went there every Thursday to practice speaking and listening. It was helpful for learning English and learning about the American

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> culture. For example, I was told about American holidays, like Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter. Also, I was taken to the baseball field to watch games and listen to the explanation of the rules. . . . The conversations were helpful for me to deepen my understanding of American culture. I am not afraid of making grammatical errors because I went there to study English.

As a newcomer in this community of practice, Smith's linguistic performance was mediated and enhanced by those native speakers. Participation in the BCM activities seemed to have provided Smith with opportunities to become an active and full participant in this particular group. Smith's situated learning in this community also demonstrated "the dialectic relationship between the acquisition of language and culture, and the importance of human agency in the acquisition process" (Swain & Deters, 2007, p. 824).

Perceptions of Learning in the ELI

Even though these L2 learners attended different activities or organizations for access to communities of L2 literacies practice, they all highly valued their communication and engagement in their classroom activities with their international classmates in the ELI. They became members of various communities of practice. These communities functioned as a predominant platform for them to co-construct knowledge, enrich linguistic repertoires, and gain membership—attributes which are crucially linked with agency, difference, similarity, and positioning (Duff, 2002; Wenger, 1998b). For example, Joey was immersed in his communities (the community members hailing from different countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, India, South Korea, Japan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine, and Thailand), which allowed him to gain access to linguistic and cultural resources. This immersion also enabled him to reconstruct and renegotiate his agency for self-positioning to regulate self-improvement by actively engaging in mixed-group learning. Joey positioned himself as a Chinese expert who transmitted and expanded Chinese culture to his international classmates. He added:

> I feel like an international citizen in the community because my group members come from different countries. They are interested in Chinese culture. I am the only Chinese person in my group. I am like a Chinese authority. They asked me about my Chinese name, like "Why did your parents give you this name?" "What does your culture look like?" "Does your government control everything?" I told them what I know.

Joey developed multiple positionings in his community learning, including his status as an international citizen and a Chinese authority. These self-positioning activities contributed to his sense of self-worth and fulfillment. The

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process of positioning construction and negotiation not only attributed to his Chinese cultural repertoire but also his willingness and ability to use multiple modes and tools to facilitate participation and interaction. Joey continued to introduce his activities in the ELI:

> Sometimes, I have to search for information about Chinese history, traditions, and policies and then talk to them. I used my phone a lot to show them videos and pictures when I told them Chinese culture and tradition. It is hard to use words to express my meanings sometimes, but it is a lot easier to use pictures to show them what I am talking about. I am very proud when I introduce Chinese culture to them.

Establishing Joey as a culture broker, the use of multimodality enabled him to expand Chinese culture to his international classmates. Also, the inclusive and diverse learning environment in this community helped him become a confident L2 learner. He said, “I am not nervous, because our English proficiency is almost the same.” At the same time, he was influenced by other cultures as well. Knowing other peoples and cultures inspired him to understand Chinese culture in greater depth, and more successfully, which built a sense of national pride. He explained:

> I learned a lot from my international classmates as well, like Turkish people do not eat pork; married Muslim women do not talk to strange men; there is a huge gap between the rich people and poor people in Colombia; and Japanese eat sushi a lot. I am so proud of my culture and myself as well.

This community learning required cooperation and scaffolding, which illustrated an understanding of how competent socializers, artifacts, and a structured environment synergistically promote novices’ engagement in communicative practices. Joey was an expert in Chinese culture, but a novice of other cultures. Scaffolding and being scaffolded, Joey shifted his multilayered positionings to build a sense of belonging. Also, using multiple modes and tools increased his authority and reinforced a sense of cultural ownership. This community of practice increased Joey’s sense of affiliation, which in turn helped him re-value his self-worth and re-adjust his agency.

Like Joey, John claimed space for speaking and for being heard in his community of practice as well. He constructed different identities in one of the communities as a learning activity participant and a learning leader to guide and encourage his group members to converse with each other. Positioned as a group discussion leader, John deliberately avoided silence by transitioning from one topic to another. He acted as a competent expert or teacher to scaffold less accomplished peers. He described:

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> Sometimes, I guide the topics and encourage them to talk when we are in a group discussion. When everybody was shy and quiet, I started to talk. After finishing one topic, I transition to another. If necessary, I would lead my group members to discuss something else to avoid silence. The more capable you are, the more responsibility you have to take. They trust me, because I always share my ideas with them. They expect me to write my answers on the white board all the time.

In addition to his linguistic knowledge (Duff, 2002), John's participation in the community allowed him to reveal and develop aspects of his identities, abilities, responsibilities, and interests. John perceived the community as a safe place to build a sense of belonging because "there is no discrimination here, because we are all internationals." John's communication with his international peers in class enabled him to explore both Chinese culture and his peers' cultures, through which he performed as a culture broker like Joey. He said he introduced Chinese traditional music to his classmates. He selected three instruments—Suona, Erhu, and Pipa. He explained:

> I did a lot of research on these three and learned that Suona expresses happiness, Erhu expresses sadness, and Pipa expresses joy sometimes, which helped me explore more about Chinese music, musicians, and instruments.

John stated that he was proud of himself and his country because he expanded his culture to his international classmates by using English. He also claimed that he had the opportunity to learn new things from others' cultures, such as Japanese cartoons, sushi, kneeling, and tatami. The role of the culture broker reinforced his cultural identity. John indicated that the engagement in the community of practice transformed him from a Gaokao failure to a Chinese cultural representative. In addition, the participation in L2 literacies practices triggered his interest in exotic cultures, which raised his awareness of multiculturalism and further increased his respect for and appreciation of diverse cultures. The inclusive classroom discourse foregrounded the differences and interconnectedness among John and his international peers, which in turn enriched his linguistic and cultural knowledge as evidenced by the following comment.

> It is really hard to communicate sometimes because we all have strong accents. One day, I asked one of my classmates: "do you know the answers to the first question?" He said: "I have no idea what the answers are to the fourth question." However, I always carry a pen and notebook with me so that I can write down what I say and what they say when we have conversations, which minimizes misunderstandings. Since I do not have a big vocabulary, I draw pictures or use my phone to search for pictures or videos to help understand.

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Strong accents seemed to hinder the conversations between ELI students, because it increased difficulty in understanding each other, but John used multiple tools and modes to improve the conversational situation. As a "digital native" (Prensky, 2001), John not only used his phone as an important tool for information but also used a pen and notebook to facilitate understanding. These multiple ways for communication characterized his positioning as resourceful and motivated as well as developed his agency for engagement and membership.

Smith also had the same experience as Joey and John did when he engaged in communities of learning. The community of L2 literacies practices situated Smith in a rich and diverse linguistic and cultural community, through which Smith honed his L2 listening and speaking skills. Participation in this community also opened his eyes to a world where people lived different lives with different cultures, traditions, values, and ideologies. Smith noted,

> Mixed group discussions help me know about other cultures. For example, my Mexican classmate showed me all kinds of Mexican ponchos on his phone. I asked my Mexican classmate: "what are they made of? How are they made? When do people wear it?" My Mexican friend told me that those are made of linen. People wear them on holidays. I think the ponchos are really beautiful and I want to buy one and take it back to China as a souvenir.

The community of practice offered Smith opportunities to become a responsible person. He explained:

> I also told my partners about Chinese culture, traditions, and values. I introduced Chinese unique cultural features and practices, like meanings of names, proverbs, and so on. Before I told my group about China, I did research to make sure everything was correct. I wanted them to know I am a real authority of Chinese culture. I have the duty to tell them what is true about China and what is not. I have a sense of responsibility.

Smith was both a novice and an expert in the mixed group. He scaffolded less competent classmates to learn; in the meanwhile, his classmates' cultural and linguistic competence and diversity mediated and motivated his L2 literacies practices. All his classmates, including Smith himself were cultural representatives who were constitutive and constituted the social milieu, which provided numerous affordances (Kress, 2003; van Lier, 2004) for L2 literacies practices. Mixed group learning addressed the complex interactions between individuals acting with mediational tools and sociocultural context (Swain & Deters, 2007). Smith claimed that his classmates' strong accents and their limited vocabulary increased difficulty in communication.

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However, he used his smart phone to facilitate the verbal interaction with his classmates. Smith described:

> When I speak English, I try to speak clearly, slowly, and correctly to make myself understood, because my classmates have strong accents. Also, our vocabulary is small, so it is hard to communicate with one another, but we try to make each other understood by using various means, such as using smart phones to look up vocabulary, visit websites for information, search for pictures and videos to help understand.

DISCUSSIONS

> With positioning so basic to being, belonging, and becoming, it must be the case that people are likely to *feel* strongly about the way they are positioned in a situation, especially if that position contrasts with the ways they want to position themselves. Emotions, thinking, and power relations, then, are unified in analysis of positioning. (May, 2005, p. 428; emphasis in original.)

Based on the understanding of intertwined relationship between positioning and emotion, thinking, and power relations, I attempt to highlight how three L2 learners felt about themselves when they interacted with local and nonlocal people. In the sections below, I will present my discussion of second-order positioning and agency, multimodal representation and communication, and positioning and agency through establishing community membership.

Second-Order Positioning and Agency: A Struggle or Dilemma?

Joey's interpretation of the cook's utterance along with his nonverbal language (e.g., the facial expression and gesture) did not allow a second-order positioning to happen because Joey misinterpreted the cook. He believed that the cook considered him as an idiot, which was evidenced by Joey's storytelling, "of course, I can speak English. Do you think I am an idiot?" Joey's misinterpretation possibly stemmed from the cook's paralinguistic features, such as his intonation, facial expression, and gesture. It seems that Joey construed the cook's questions as a challenge instead of a demand. That's why he chose not to talk to the cook anymore. Joey's case poses a question in terms of second-order positioning. When and why does a second-order positioning take place? According to Kayi-Aydar (2019), second-order positioning occurs "when there is a need to question or negotiate first-order positioning" (p. 12). Apparently, Joey did not accept the cook's original other-positioning

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as an idiot, but he did not negotiate second-order positioning. Second-order positioning happens based on a condition that both the interlocutors understand each other and both of them are able to use the language to negotiate second-order positioning. Even if Joey understood the cook's utterance as a demand, he might not be able to use the language to negotiate an ideal position because he was a newcomer with limited command of English. Also, the unequal power relation between the two interlocutors (one claimed power as a native speaker, but the other was a non-native speaker) can deny an L2 speaker the chance to reposition him or herself in a satisfied situation.

From Joey' case, his misunderstanding and the cook's powerful other-positioning prohibited him from repositioning or second-order positioning. Although Joey did not negotiate second-order positioning, he challenged the cook's initial positioning through the purposeful silence, which can be understood as a revelation of his agency because he explained the reason why he deliberately silenced himself in that situation: "If this happened in China, I would not keep silent, but I am in a foreign country. His words put me down dramatically. It was a big shame. I will remember his words forever. I told myself, 'I will speak like a native someday.'" Joey's narrative here indicated his self-positioning as a foreigner who might not have many advantages as a local would have. Also, his language can be a big disadvantage. He might have thought that it was not wise to explicitly challenge the cook's utterance. However, he explicitly communicated his future goal or imagined identity. He also evaluated this incident as a shame and expressed his feeling of unhappiness or despondence. Joey realized his second-order positioning through third-order positioning in this storytelling, in which he performed and reinforced his agency.

Defending his Chinese identity in the Walmart encounter while longing for improving English speaking and listening, Joey explicitly negotiated his second-order positioning when he encountered the cashier's demand. It seemed that speaking Chinese in public in America was a foreclosure (Butler, 1997), but Joey seized the opportunity to make his agentic action to take place: he bravely challenged the cashier's belief, privilege, and authority that English is the only legitimated language to speak in this country. The statement of "my own language" manifested Joey's self-positioning as Chinese who had the right to choose which language he wished to speak. It also demonstrated Joey's strong will to negotiate a position as a human being who can speak a language that represents his heart and soul. Joey's second-order positioning presented his agency to dispute or reject unwanted assigned positioning to negotiate new and desired positioning. Also, Joey's second-order positioning challenged the controversy between "being authorized to speak" and "speaking with authority" (Butler, 1997, p. 157) because he claimed authority to speak without being authorized to speak. Joey's case confirmed Pennycook's

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(2001) definition of agency, which is a "constant recycling of different forms of power through our everyday words and actions" (p. 120). Joey used his linguistic competence to enable the "[constraint] from the outset" (Butler, 1997, p. 16). Joey made his subject positions salient through discursive constitution and ideological reorganization. He successfully resisted the norms and transformed the dominant discourse through his own power (Miller, 2010). Although positioning oneself as agentive in a narrative does not cause one to be agentive, such storytelling has the potential to provide the predominant site for us to "organize all our agentive encounters in the world" (Quigley, 2000, p. 189) as recognizable subjects in a storied world.

Based on Joey's case, I define L2 learner agency as claimed power or authority to dispute or reject unwanted assigned positioning to negotiate new and desired positioning through actively negotiating positionings. Joey's case makes it clear that it is crucial for teachers to acknowledge the importance of second-order positioning. More importantly, teachers need to provide L2 learners or language learners with possibilities for second-order positioning.

Multimodal Representation and Communication: A Dilemma or Solution?

As digital natives, the L2 learners I have interviewed used multiple modes and digital devices creatively to facilitate their representation and communication in various contexts. For example, when John was struggling to figure out his flight information, he capitalized on cognitive, social, and artifactual components to negotiate and make meanings. To teach the American friend table tennis, Joey employed both traditional and modern technologies to gain English skills so that he could become an understandable "coach." Smith also used various means to gain knowledge about his own culture and other cultures through interactions with his international classmates. Interestingly, all of them consciously and unconsciously used gestures (e.g., finger pointing to food) to communicate when they were unable to speak the language. Their paralinguistic aspects not only contributed to representation and communication but also contributed to the interpretations of their speech acts. This is why Herbel-Eisenmann and colleagues (2015) propose that "speech acts" should be replaced with "communication acts," which includes "not only speech but also gestures, physical positions, and stances" (p. 193). Similar to this suggestion, Pinnow and Chval (2015) argue that L2 learners' navigation for dynamic interactional terrain to locate avenues for agency through multiple semiotic resources can be a way to demonstrate their capabilities instead of their deficiencies. However, all the L2 learners indicated that using gestures made them feel awkward. For example, when Joey used his finger to point to the menu, he felt like a little child. Smith felt the same way when

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he was unable to name the food in English in the restaurant. Although using gestures helped the L2 learners communicate, it also led them to position themselves as inadequate and resulted in unwanted assigned positionings. In this case, using gesture can be problematic because gesture was not considered as a favored mode for communication among these L2 learners. They believed that it degraded and devalued their self-competence and mismatched their ideal self-positioning.

Positioning and Agency through and for Community Building

In the narratives, all three L2 learners participated in various communities of practices for their L2 literacies. They became cultural brokers and representatives by expanding knowledge of Chinese culture to their international classmates. They positioned themselves as responsible and knowledgeable group members to manifest their agency through the use of digital tools, semiotic resources, and other multimodal means. They considered the classes in the ELI as communities that mutually engaged in community practice to pursue joint enterprise by sharing their cultural and linguistic repertories. Their home culture heritage became a valuable resource for them to find a unique place and construct unique positional identities in a community.

Although these L2 learners faced difficulties in communication because of their cultural differences and self-perceived speaking accents, they found solutions to avoid dire situations. For example, John always brought a pen and notebook with him in addition to his smart phone. He positioned himself in a positive and powerful way so that he could manage and overcome the obstacles and drawbacks. He actively negotiated meanings to make himself understood and understand by his community members through multiple modes and tools. He built good relationships with his group members, which was evidenced by his account that “they trust me, because I always share my ideas with them. They expect me to write my answers on the white board all the time.” John positioned and was positioned as a trustworthy group leader and competent group member. Also, all the L2 learners reported that they made effort and spent time doing research on Chinese culture before they introduced it to their group members. Communities of practice, as the sites of “engagement in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises . . . hold the key to real transformation—the kind that has real effects on people’s lives” (Wenger, 1998b, p. 85). These communities of engagement, participation, and interaction have become sites for positioning activities and agency development. Also, their positive positioning experiences and agency performance have contributed to establishing multiple communities. Based on the narratives about their communities of practice, I define L2 learner agency as power and authority to gain rich and

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equal access to linguistic, social, and cultural resources to transform dire learning conditions.

CODA

Apparently, the L2 learners' narratives about becoming community members in different groups described an ideal environment for language socialization and L2 literacies practices. As John claimed that there was no discrimination among the ELI students, these L2 learners felt very safe to take initiatives and even make mistakes. They were not afraid of being mocked and criticized. However, L2 learners have to be placed in mainstream classrooms with native speakers, which can be intimidating for them when taking risks. The question is: How do teachers make L2 learners feel welcomed and valued instead of feeling like uninvited guests who are ignored and devalued? In addition, since sociocultural contexts can adversely affect L2 learners' success in learning English, how can teachers make the classroom safe, inclusive, and tolerant? In support, Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck (2005) suggest that

> (1) [certain] acts are legitimized and valued, but others are constrained and devalued; (2) one's multilingual and multicultural repertoire is assigned differential value and function; (3) one's positional identities are formed by self-positioning and assigned by others. (p. 203)

Furthermore, positioning L2 learners as deficient users of the language "can motivate and enable socially preferred ways of acting, namely, learning the dominant language" (Miller, 2010, p. 481); however, how can teachers help L2 learners appreciate and embrace cultural and linguistic diversity through recognizing and cherishing their own heritage? Because one's appreciation of his or her own cultural and linguistic heritages can be beneficial for their L2 literacies, teachers must consider this as an essential and important factor to help them become successful learners of English.

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Chapter 4

Interactions in the WeChat Discussion Group

Meaning making and designing involves one's agency and identity formation and construction because

> what the meaning maker creates is a new design, an expression of their voice which draws upon the unique mix of meaning making resources, the codes and conventions they happen to have found in their contexts and cultures. The moment of design is a moment of transformation, of remaking the world by representing the world afresh. Creativity, innovation, dynamism and divergence are normal semiotic states. This is a prospective view of semiosis, a view which puts imagination and creative reappropriation of the world at the center of representation, and thus learning. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 11)

Cope and Kalantzis' view about the intertwined relationship among meaning making, agency, and identity resonates with Wenger's (1998b) understanding of learning. He explains:

> Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming—to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person. (p. 215)

This chapter will address and extend the understandings of meaning making, agency, and positioning through looking at these three L2 learners' learning experience in a WeChat discussion group.

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) have recently received considerable attention. Mobile-assisted and computer-assisted networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Vkontakte, and fan fiction writing community, open up spaces for

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second language (L2) learners' identity construction, literacies development, and translanguaging (Black, 2009; Canagarajah, 2011; Chen, 2013; Depew, 2011; Klimnova & Dembovskaya, 2013; Schreiber, 2015; Sharma, 2012). Similar to Facebook, WeChat, a relatively new instant messenger, has proven to have multiple affordances, which involves both text and voice recognition, such as real-time one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many platforms of communication (Ding, 2016; Xu, Dong, & Jiang, 2017), asynchronous, semi-synchronous and synchronous collaboration and interaction (Wang, Fang, Han, & Chen, 2016), and multimodal linguistic and semiotic resources (Jin, 2018; Wang et al., 2016). Figure 4.1 below displays the interface of WeChat chat similar to that of Wang and colleagues (2016).

The burgeoning use of WeChat as a social, communicative, and pedagogical medium has attracted researchers' attention in numerous areas of investigation: teaching, social, and cognitive presence in semi-synchronous language exchange (Wang et al., 2016); learning Chinese as a second language facilitated by WeChat affordances, such as a casual space with easy access, authentic meaning-focused communication, linguistic resources and multiliteracies, and space for new identity creation (Jin, 2018); critical thinking disposition of EFL learners (Ding, 2016); EFL learners' perceptions of mobile-assisted feedback on oral production (Xu et al., 2017); students' willingness to use WeChat in listening and speaking (Chai, 2014); English

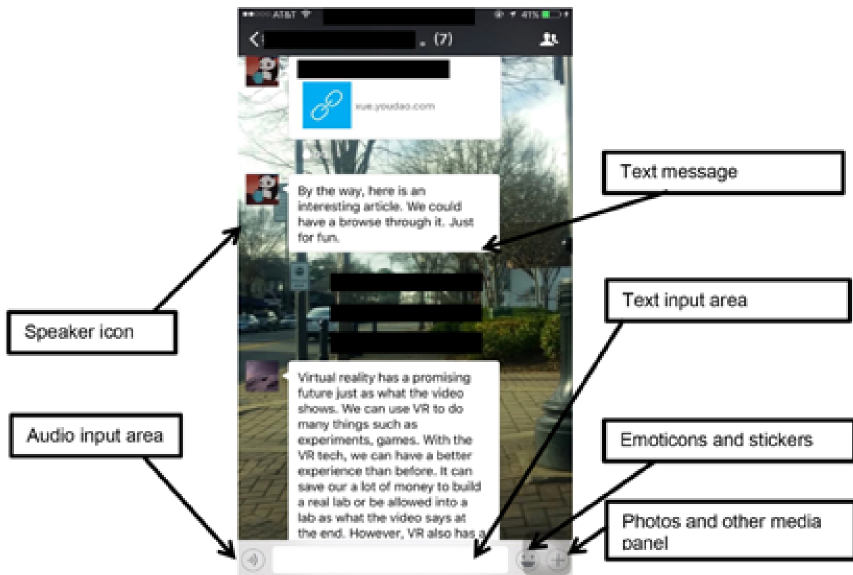

Figure 4.1 The Interface of WeChat Chat. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

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language learners' motivation and immersion (Shi, Luo, & He, 2017); and learner-centered college of English learning (Wu & Ding, 2017).

This chapter explored how three L2 learners positioned themselves and others through text messaging and how their positionings interacted with their agency in the process of meaning making and negotiation through WeChat discussions while studying English in the ELI. All the discussion group members were considered as contexts of and for each other. Their written texts, head icons, and emoji genres were viewed as main contexts in understanding how they designed and negotiated meanings to construct their positional identities and exercise agency. Findings indicate that these L2 learners' positioning as critical, humorous, resourceful, analytical, and knowledgeable discussants, knowledge co-producers, collaborative community members, and meaning designers and makers concretized and contextualized their agency through carefully selecting "meaningful," "interesting," and "novel" discussion topics that engaged their group members. Moreover, they actively interacted with each other to locate themselves in desired positions. These positional identities functioned as a fundamental aspect of the social and cultural context in this discussion group and promoted their agency development through meaning designing and text making.

I used discourse analysis to examine WeChat discussion exchanges to identify patterns and functions of communication and interaction. I believe that Fairclough's (2003) discourse analysis serves as one of the most conducive frameworks to understand these L2 learners' WeChat exchanges and interview narratives because "language is an irreducible part of social life" and discourse analysis pays close attention to "the linguistic features of texts" (p. 2). Also, text analysis is not only linguistic analysis but also interdiscursive analysis—that is, "seeing texts in terms of the different discourses, genres and styles they draw upon and articulate together" (p. 3). In addition, Fairclough considers text-makers as social agents, who are socially constrained, but are not completely socially determined because they "texture texts, they set up relations between elements of texts" (p. 22) through language to position themselves and others in discourse. I, therefore, adopted Fairclough's three main elements of discourse analysis—including genres, discourse, and style—to explore how these participants positioned and were positioned in this discussion group and how they interacted with each other in terms of the ways in which they used English and turn-taking to gain purposeful, identifiable, and identified membership of this community of practice.

Gee's (2004) discourse analysis is also beneficial for my examination of the participants' English practices in the WeChat discussion group because he explicitly argues that discourse theory is "about seeing interactive communication through the lens of socially meaningful identities" (p. 25). I adopted his three building tasks of discourse analysis—"significance," "practices,"

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and "identities"—to analyze the WeChat discussions among the L2 learners whom I have investigated. For example, by reading the WeChat discussion exchanges, I asked the following questions: What was the participant's topic? Why did he select this topic? How did he respond to others in terms of content and language use? How did the participant use a certain piece of text to connect to another? How did this participant use certain words or sentences to enact his positionings and also help others recognize him as a legitimate group member? How did others react and interact with this participant?

In the section below, I will mainly present three topics discussed by the three L2 learners: virtual reality in education, the dominance of English, and education in China. I chose these three topics because all three students participated in each of these discussions, which had potential to represent their self- and other-positioning and agency construction and negotiation.

TOPIC 1: VIRTUAL REALITY IN EDUCATION

Based on the TED presentation, *This Virtual Lab Will Revolutionize Science Class*, the topic Virtual Reality was one of Joey's leading discussions (see figure 4.2 below) in this WeChat discussion community.

Figure 4.2 Joey's Leading Discussion on Virtual Reality. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

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In the screenshot, Joey provided the group with a link and presented an introduction to the topic. In the introduction, Joey used three sentences to inform his group members about his opinion on virtual reality. In the first sentence, Joey demonstrated a strong commitment to the truth of virtual reality in entertainment. The discourse marker "as we all know" and the adverb "always" emphasized the common sense that virtual reality is a popular form of entertainment. This declarative statement was not his personal opinion but an inclusive "we" community common experience, which added validity to his statement. He used another discourse marker, "at the same time," to introduce another fact or possibility (since he used the modal verb "can"): virtual reality is also used in education. The selection of the second discourse marker implied his proposition that the influence of virtual reality on education should be taken into consideration. Also, this discourse marker served as a contrastive connector, which indicated his emphasis on standpoint. In the next sentence he explicitly showed his intention that virtual reality could be used to improve education. The last sentence functioned at two different levels: one was Joey's purpose for introducing this topic; the other was his implicit request to his group members to watch the video. This second level served as intertextuality that provided background information for the discussion.

In this introduction, Joey used the first person plural pronoun "we" and "us" once, which shortened the distance between him and his community members. In other words, the plural pronouns signaled the assignment of membership and inclusion. He positioned himself as a discussion initiator, an information sharer, and an opinion expresser. As an L2 learner with limited English proficiency, Joey challenged himself to become an L2 user by text making and meaning designing. His choice to take a risk, which would not have happened in other situations, can be understood as a form of agency (Davies, 1990). To be sure, one of the potential successes WeChat can bring is that it provides a conduit through which L2 learners can take risks and challenge themselves in the process of engaging in L2 literacies.

In response to Joey' discussion, the community members reacted actively. For example, John wrote seven sentences to respond to Joey's initial discussion of virtual reality (see figure 4.3).

In this screenshot, John expressed three aspects of his thoughts on virtual reality: his interest in Joey's topic; his unawareness of the influence of virtual reality on education; and his realization of the contribution of virtual reality to education. Specifically, in the first sentence of his response, John made an evaluative statement by using the adverb "really" and the adjective "interested," which expressed his enthusiasm about this topic. In the second sentence, he used a compound adjective "epoch-making" to stress the significance of virtual reality in society. Again, the second evaluative statement

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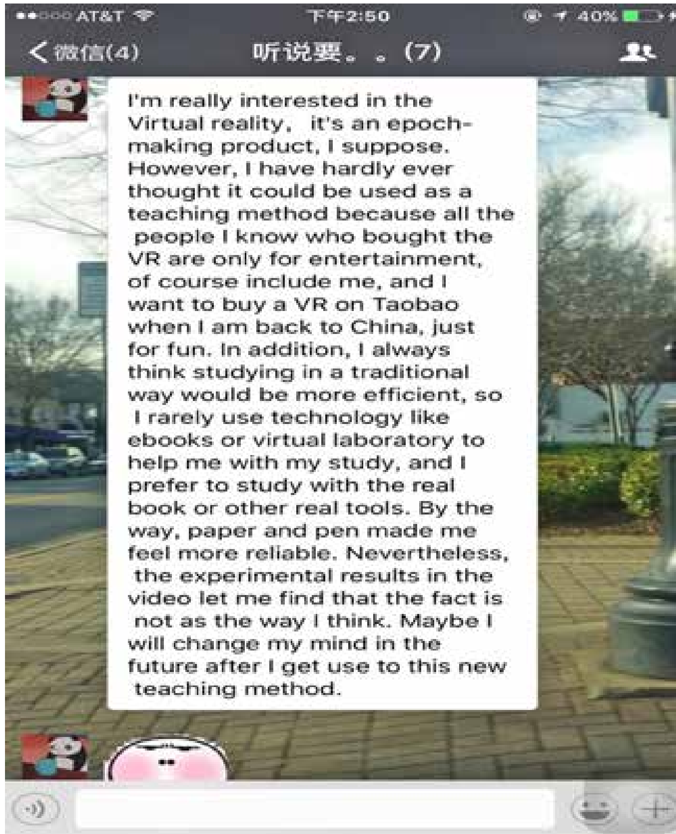

Figure 4.3 John's Response to Joey. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

directly demonstrated his interest in and support for this discussion. John's self-positioning as an active participant emerged from his response. His interaction also positioned Joey as a good discussion topic selector, which functioned as a backdrop, and contoured his self-positioning as a logical and reasonable thinker. For example, in the following three sentences, John used compound-complex sentences to elaborate on his lack of familiarity with the influence of virtual reality on education. His writing aligned with Joey's advocacy of virtual reality in education in his introduction. To make himself understandable to his community members, John used a series of adverbs, such as "hardly," "ever," "always," and "rarely" to explain his unawareness of virtual reality in education because he preferred traditional learning to virtual learning. He also used sentence connectors "in addition," "by the way," and "and" to provide additional information for emphasis of his preference. In addition, he used a series of transitional words or phrases,

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such as "I suppose," "however," and "by the way" to continue his argument, which strengthened the cohesiveness of his analysis of preference for traditional learning. As a text-maker and meaning designer, John used compound sentences and high-level vocabulary to show his linguistic competence. This showcase was accentuated and highlighted in and through his choice of language, which was a concrete form of his agency. Also, John's positioning as logical and argumentative directly demonstrated his agency.

Like John, Smith also showed his enthusiasm about Joey's topic (see figure 4.4).

In this screenshot, Smith started with an evaluative statement (Fairclough, 2003) that "virtual reality has a promising future just as what the video shows," through which he made an evaluative proposition by using the word "promising."

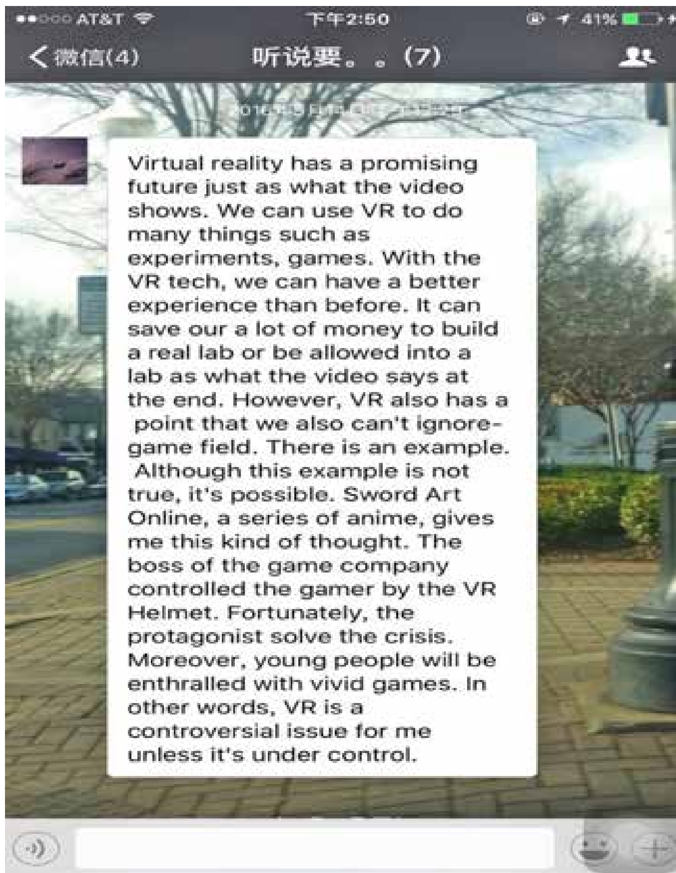

Figure 4.4 Smith's Response to Joey's Virtual Reality. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

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In the following three sentences, he listed a set of possibilities that virtual reality would benefit human beings by using three "cans." The three modalized statements not only marked Smith's evaluative propositions but also echoed the word "promising." In the fifth sentence, Smith used "however" to contrast the possibilities with reality because he believed that virtual reality had negative influences on human lives. In the last sentence, Smith made a conclusion that virtual reality was a controversial issue. Apparently, Smith's attitude toward virtual reality experienced a shift from positive to negative. Smith combined evaluative statements with epistemic modality and deontic modality (Fairclough, 2003) to present his argument. In other words, Smith displayed statements both in terms of their knowledge and duty or obligation from an ethical standpoint. This shift displayed his analytical and critical thinking process, which made up his positional identities as an active discussion participant and a critical thinker. At the same time, he exercised his agency through choosing different discourse markers and using sophisticated expressions to highlight his self-positioning.

TOPIC 2: THE DOMINANCE OF ENGLISH

John's initiation of the topic on language triggered a heated debate (see figure 4.5).

In this screenshot, John presented nine lines to describe the popularity of English in the world. In the first sentence, he used a declarative statement to introduce his topic. In the following three sentences, he stated the fact that English is "the world's most widely spoken second language" illustrated by specific numbers of English speaking people and countries. In the next sentence, he used a contrastive sentence connector "however" to set up a contrast between the popularity of English and some dying minority languages. In the last three sentences, he asked three questions to elicit answers. He directly gave an answer to his first question by stating that it was possible that English would become the world's dominant language. This statement as a fact was implicitly expressed in the former sentences. However, he considered the dominance of English as a "problem," which directly showed his value judgment on this topic. Unlike Joey, John used the second pronoun "you" to address his group members, through which he positioned himself as a discussion leader and others as discussion followers. The second person pronoun "you" signaled a demand instead of an invitation for participation.

Smith took the first turn to respond to John's prompt:

> Darwin said "survival of the fittest." In my opinion, it's suitable for not animals but language. If people find a kind of language is easier to learn or having more advantage than another one, more and more people will turn to it.

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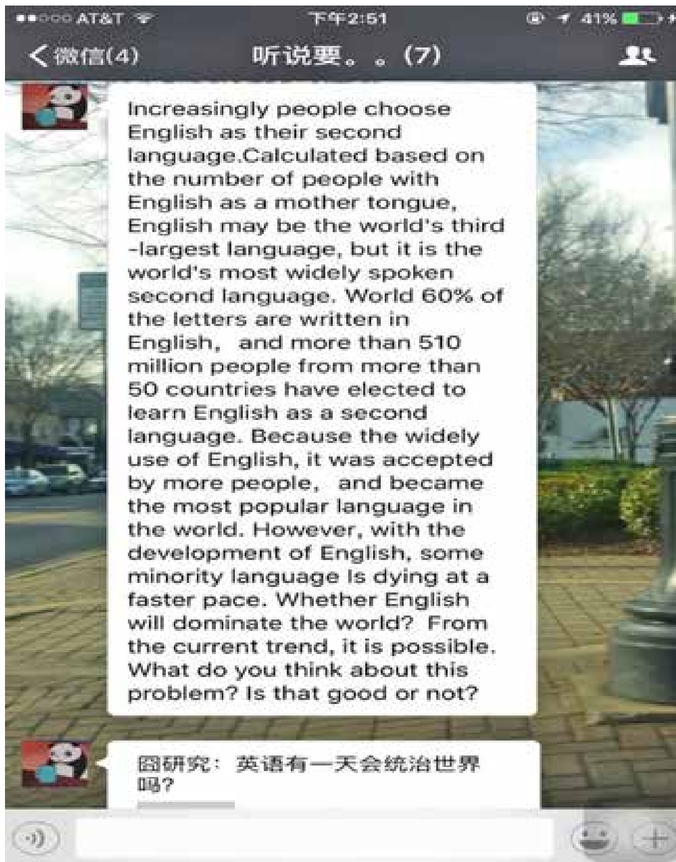

Figure 4.5 John's Leading Discussion about the English Language. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

Smith cited Darwin's evolutionary theory as intertextuality to support his opinion: Natural selection also applied to language, which not only brought other's voice to the text (Fairclough, 2000) but also had the value for persuasiveness. In addition, the connection between Smith's meaning of the theory of evolution and John's initial commenting on dying languages showed Smith's ability to link information as a means to generate new ideas. To further explain his opinion, Smith used a conditional statement about language to discuss the hypothetical situation and its consequence: if learning a practical language has many advantages, that language will become popular. Even though he did not directly answer John's questions, his statement indicated his attitude toward the dominance of English because of its usefulness or practicality, which differed from John's seeming advocacy for language diversity. Smith's

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self-positioning as a knowledgeable and independent thinker and a strong sense of agency emerged from his response to John's questions.

In response to Smith's statement, John wrote:

> Yes, I agree with you, but from a cultural point of view, no one wants to see their culture be invaded. Language always stands by the culture of a country, so it should not be abandoned because of the minority. The disappearance of language can destroy the cultural diversity.

John first showed his direct agreement with Smith; however, he used a contrastive conjunction "but" to display his disagreement. He further gave explanations for his statement and suggested from a moral standpoint that people had the responsibility to preserve the diversity of language and culture. He used the modal verb "should" and action verb "destroy" to show his negative attitude toward the dominance of English. John's self-positioning as an advocate for language diversity was constructed and foregrounded through his argument. Also, John's response positioned Smith as indifferent to language diversity. Both of them functioned in the very context, which allowed them to highlight their self- and other-positioning and agency. Interestingly, even though John and Smith did not agree with each other, they did not directly use the sentence "I do not agree with you." Instead, both of them expressed their disagreement in a subtle way.

Joey responded to John's questions by saying: "As to the question whether English will dominate the world, 这个真的不好说。(It is hard to say)." His reaction to John's question seemed unclear. "这个真的不好说" was similar to the English expression "sit on the fence." His answer in Chinese could be understood as an indirect refusal to the question because the topic seemed sensitive, or Joey did not have the right answer by that time. It was also possible that he did not want to agree or disagree with either John or Smith. His use of Chinese avoided a communication breakdown, which enabled him to participate in the discussion without giving a legitimate answer. Joey's use of English and Chinese showed his positional identity as a bilingual, who did not give his opinion on this topic.

John responded to Joey's vague response by stating, "Each language has its charm. You should learn to accept and appreciate it" (see figure 4.6). John used the deontic modality marker "should" to urge people to take the responsibility to embrace and respect diverse languages and cultures. He strongly insisted on his proposition. Interestingly, he added a chuckle face emoji to the end of his response. It seemed that he either wanted to ease the atmosphere of this discussion community since the genre of their text exchanges appeared to be a debate or he was trying to give Joey a piece of advice but he did not want to seem rude in his text. Again, Joey showed his uncertainty about his

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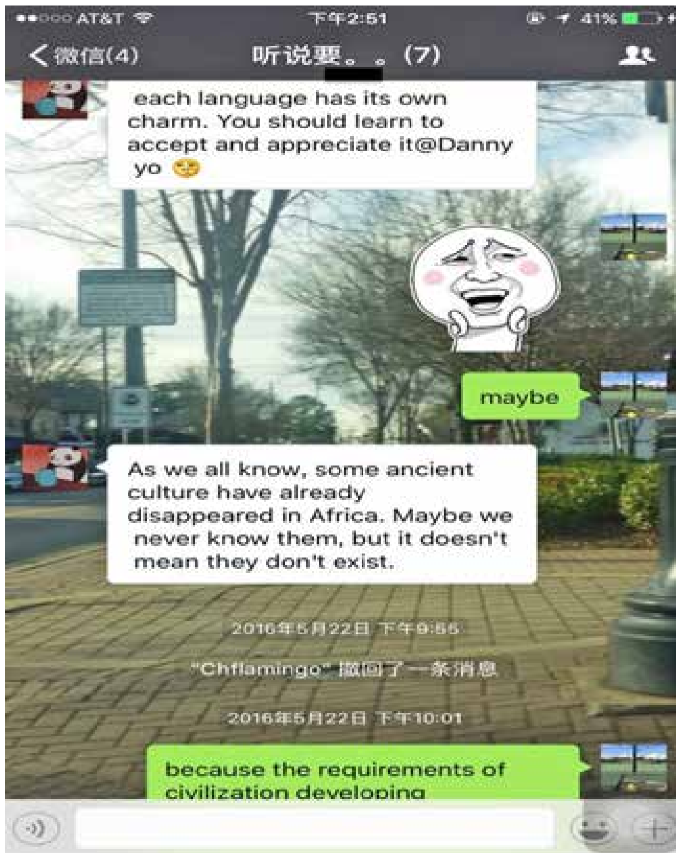

Figure 4.6 John's Argument on Language with Joey's Responses. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

stance by using "maybe" with an enlarged smiling face to respond to John's suggestion.

In an effort to try to convince his group members, John went one step further to point out, "As we all know, some ancient culture [*sic*] have already disappeared in Africa. Maybe we never know them, but it doesn't mean they don't [*sic*] exist." To respond to John, Joey wrote, "because the requirements of civilization developing" as a way to show his opinion, which was aligned with that of Smith. It was worth noting that each individual's self- and other-positioning and agency were co-constructed and negotiated in and through these textual interactions among the three: John persistently insisted on linguistic and cultural diversity, but Smith advocated for the dominance of English; Joey, however, seemed not certain about this topic in the beginning.

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Eventually, he indirectly expressed his opinion in favor of English dominance. Also, John seemed to position his community members as indifferent in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity because he repetitively expressed his position as an advocate. It seemed that Joey and Smith positioned John as someone who was worried too much about diversity.

TOPIC 3: EDUCATION IN CHINA AND AMERICA

Like Joey, Smith chose a TED Talk as the background information for his topic. He posted the link to the talk and wrote an introduction (see figure 4.7).

In this screenshot, Smith presented a link first and then initiated a discussion beginning with a greeting. This greeting showed his politeness as a

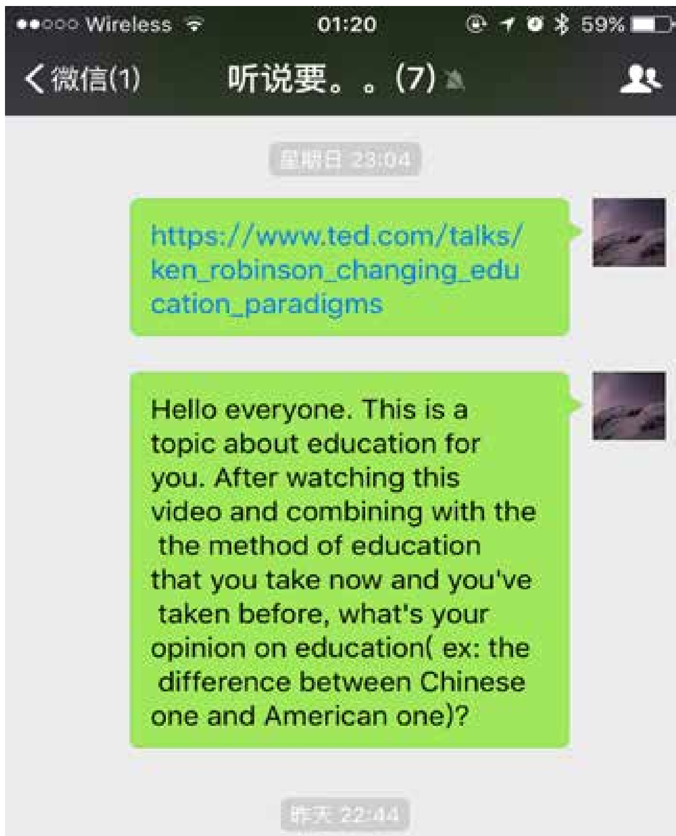

Figure 4.7 Smith's Leading Discussion on Education. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

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discussion initiator and it also seemed to have a function to attract his group members' attention. In the second sentence, he clearly told his group members about the discussion topic. In the last sentence, he directly invited his group members to watch the video and then make a comparison of Chinese Education to American education. Like John, Smith also used the second-person pronoun "you" to address his group members, which not only showed his self- and other-positioning but also widened the distance between him and his group members. Again, this second person pronoun signaled a demand for participation and reinforced his voice as a discussant. Joey wrote two responses to Smith's topic. In his second piece, he wrote six lines to convey his opinions on education in the United States and China (see figure 4.8).

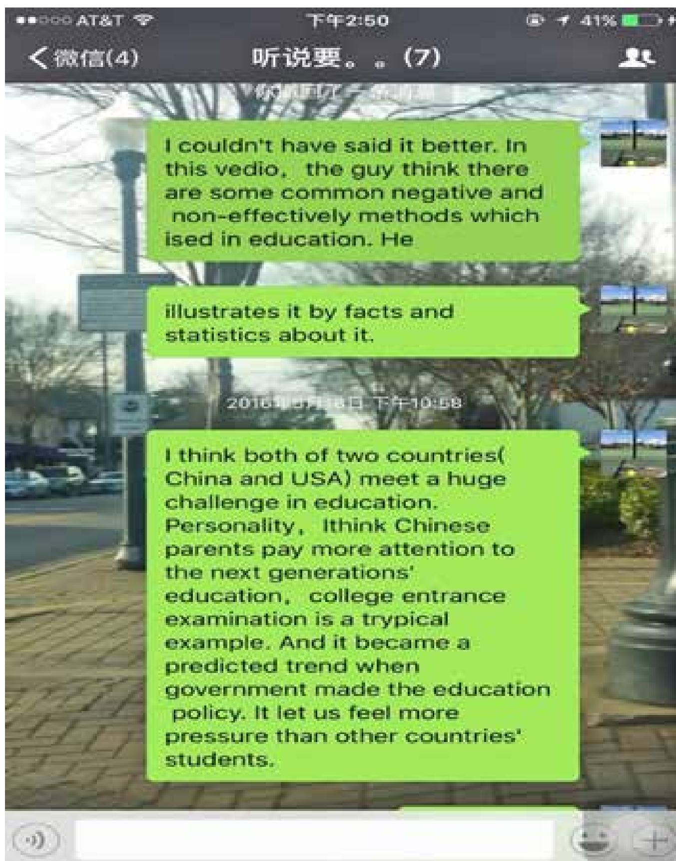

Figure 4.8 Joey's Response to Smith's Topic on Education 1. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

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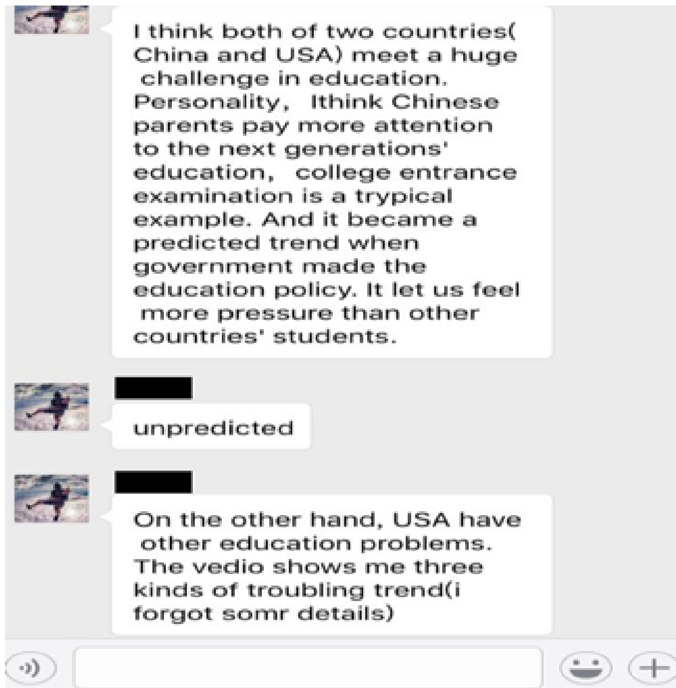

Figure 4.9 Joey's Response to Smith's Topic on Education 2. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

To express his personal perspectives, Joey used two cognitive statements marked by "I think" to show his thinking and knowing that both countries faced challenges. He elaborated on the problems that Chinese education encountered and, therefore, claimed that Chinese students suffered more pressure than did students in America. Joey used the first plural pronoun "us" to indicate that he and his group members were the witnesses of Chinese education. Joey used a contrastive connector "on the other hand" to discuss America's education problems, which emphasized his proposition that both China and the United States faced challenges in education (see figure 4.9).

Smith responded to Joey by saying: "Well. That's right, but we can't avoid it. What we can do is to choose the way we like." "Education is associated with our future and our country's future." In Smith's first response, he used a discourse marker "well" to indicate his hesitation for the agreement. This discourse marker signaled a concessive indication: Joey's analysis of Chinese students' suffering from the Chinese Gaokao seemed reasonable; however, Smith indirectly pointed out that it was unlikely to change the policy for Gaokao. In his second response, Smith highlighted the importance of education both in individuals' future and their country's future, which implied his

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Figure 4.10 Joey's Response to Smith's Topic on Education 3. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

positive attitude toward Chinese parents' attention to their children's education. Again, Smith indirectly expressed his disagreement with Joey.

Interestingly, in his response to Smith, Joey wrote four sentences to directly show his agreement with Smith first (see figure 4.10) and then to express his hope for and concerns about China's education. The discourse marker "I hope" presented his affective mental process, which illustrated his wish for his government to take actions to improve Chinese education. He also used a modal verb "can" to indicate that there might be possibilities for the Chinese government to support its education. In the third sentence, Joey used a contrastive connector "however" to change his attitude toward his government by admitting its contribution to education. In his interaction with Smith, Joey changed his perspective on Chinese education from criticism to support education revolution, which manifested these two participants' function as the context of and for each other to mediate their agency and positioning. Again, his agency was embodied through discourse and the interaction.

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DISCUSSION

Community of Practice as Positioning and Agency for L2 Literacies

As I analyzed Joey, John, and Smith's L2 literacies interactions in this discussion community, what immediately stood out was the extent to which positioned and positional identities and L2 literacies practices were reciprocally and synergistically constitutive while they engaged in this community of practice: L2 literacies practice shaped positioning, whereas positioning, in turn, influenced L2 literacies practice. It is safe to argue, then, that the L2 learners' engagement in L2 literacies "becomes a mode of belonging and a source of identity" (Wenger, 1998b, p. 174). This engagement not only shaped and transformed this community but also shaped and transformed the members of the community. In addition, these L2 learners' engagement in L2 literacies became a site for them to claim power because each one of them negotiated their enterprises, which thus constructed the very context in which they formed and experienced positionings of competence. Also, their multilayered and dynamic positionings and L2 literacies trajectories functioned as the very contexts that shaped and reinforced their agency, which consequently facilitated and advanced their L2 literacies. The reasons for this argument are as follows.

First, the interaction among these L2 learners accentuated their self- and other-positioning and agency performance through text making. They considered each other as information providers who had knowledge to share and contribute to the discussion. They also positioned each other as evaluators who assessed each other's responses. Take John's opinion as an example. He stated:

> I paid attention to the numbers of responses. If there were many responses, I can tell that my leading discussion was successful. Also, I paid attention to the content of the WeChat messages. If they agreed with me, I was happy. If their ideas were different from mine, I would like to figure out why they were different. They might have thought about it from different perspectives.

These other-positionings seemed to motivate their participation and interaction because they highly valued their group members' involvement and contribution. The other-positionings realized by texting messages functioned as one of the main resources for them to construct and enhance their self-images, which formed the entire process for their desired self-positioning. For example, Smith reported, "I have very high self-expectations." Joey added, "my responsibility as a leading discussant forced me to deliberately prepare each topic for the discussion," John continued, "I highly value my

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face (死要面子), so I wanted to make a good impression on my community members."

In other words, the text messages embodied and materialized their self- and other-positionings, in and through which they exercised and developed their agency. I, therefore, argue that not only does deliberate self-positioning require one to assume that "they have a goal in mind" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1998, p. 224), but deliberate other-positioning also requires one to assume that they have a goal in mind because these purposeful positioning acts and activities inspired them to be active and agentive community members.

Further, when Smith positioned himself as a teacher to Joey by correcting his grammatical error (see figure 4.11), Joey did not respond to Smith. In the text, Joey wrote, "It is an interesting vedio [*sic*] about build [*sic*] human

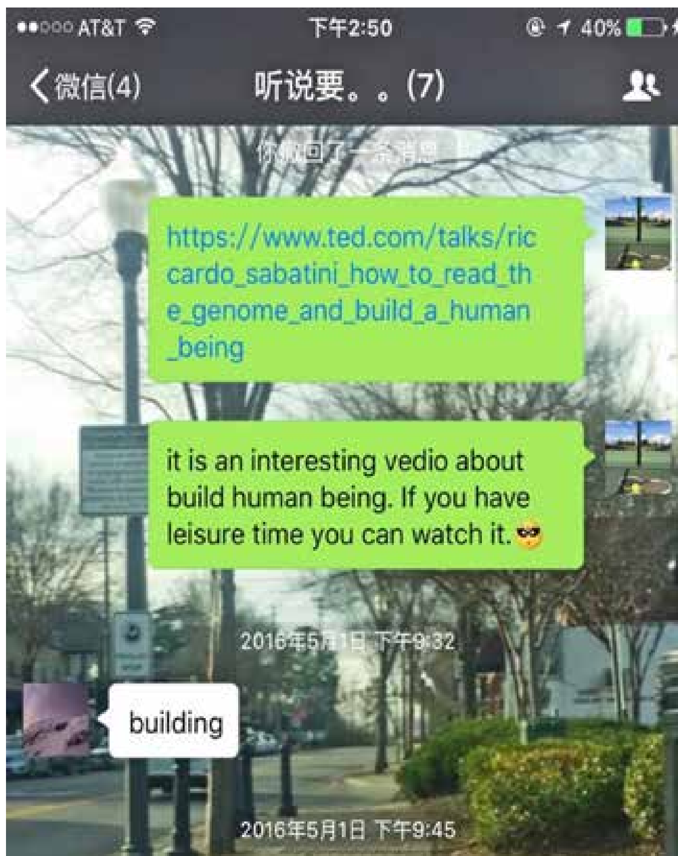

Figure 4.11 Smith's Correction for Joey's Grammatical Error. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

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being [*sic*].” Smith responded to Joey with one word “building,” which was an indication to Joey that he should use “building” instead of “build.”

Joey’s nonresponse carried loaded information. He might have refused to accept this other-positioning as a student to Smith. Or he may have silently accepted the assigned positioning. This episode confirms Ray’s (2009) argument on agency that “human beings are neither independent and autonomous agents nor are they shaped and controlled entirely by external influences” (p. 116). Likewise, when John brought up a topic on learning English from daily life by asking questions about how to pronounce common names like McDonald’s and brand names like Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, and Calvin Klein, his group members did not seem to be interested. Smith responded, “Trust me it doesn’t matter.” Joey replied, “It’s fine.” John positioned his community members as curious L2 learners who were interested in names, but their lukewarm responses proved him wrong. This refusal of other-positioning verified Kayi-Aydar’s (2014) argument that “while certain positions may enable one to become agentic, agents can also actively resist certain positionings” (p. 96). In sum, these WeChat users were agentic beings who were able to critically respond to and shape their responsiveness to the situations they encounter in their learning experiences.

However, taking on agentic positions, Joey, John, and Smith also selectively participated in group discussions. For example, when Smith became inspired by a TED Talk on sleeping and decided to lead a discussion on that topic, no one responded to him. When I asked John and Joey why they did not respond, they both said that the speaker had a very strong accent that made it difficult for them to understand, so they chose not to participate. Smith felt really upset with himself because of his group members’ nonparticipation. He positioned his group members as advanced L2 users; unfortunately, they were not able to take on this positioning.

Although these three L2 learners expressed their divergent thinking skills through WeChat discussions, no one showed direct disagreement with each other, such as “I did not agree with you.” All three indirectly indicated their disagreement through the use of a contrastive connector, such as “but,” or “however,” or through using the register “well.” Indirect disagreement implied one of their Chinese cultural values: harmony without uniformity. This consideration could be understood as their self-positioning as keepers of Chinese traditional cultural value.

It is also worth noting that all the participants changed their WeChat user names more than once, their head icons, and the backgrounds of their personal profiles more than once—changes that consisted of aspects of their positional identities. These changes showed their desires to transform their self-positionings in different situations and the different time periods—aspects, which highlighted and concretized their agency. Interestingly, all three L2 learners

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did not use voice messages to respond to each other. This can be understood as their uneasiness and apprehension speaking to each other in English. Or they might have wanted to demonstrate their reading and writing skills, which were considered to be stronger than their speaking and listening skills.

Multimodal Linguistic and Semiotic Resources as Positioning and Agency for L2 Literacies

Jin (2018) claims that lower level Chinese as second language learners took advantage of multimodal linguistic and semiotic resources, such as Chinese characters, pinyin, memes, and emojis to engage in authentic text-based conversations on WeChat. However, unlike Jin's participants, the three L2 learners with different English levels in this WeChat discussion group also appropriated multimodal linguistic and semiotic resources to construct and negotiate positional identities and agency, such as formal and informal language. For example, all participants used academic-like expressions (e.g., "hardly," "nevertheless," "in addition," and "although") and complex syntax (e.g., "However, I have hardly ever thought it could be used as a teaching method because all the . . ."). Sometimes, they used less formal language: "Well. That is right, but we can't avoid it."

They also shuttled between English and Chinese to develop their propositions and perform agency. For example, when John discussed the difference between American English and British English, he wrote (see figure 4.12):

> OMG, 这些单词在 英国和美国千万别弄混 了. 否则, 后果很严重. (These words have different meanings in British English and American English, so do not mix up; otherwise, the consequence would be serious).

When I asked why John chose to use two languages here, he explained:

> I wanted to draw my group members' attention to this topic. They can understand what I am talking about after reading the topic. Also, I used "OMG" to raise their awareness of the difference of British English and American English. I made a mistake due to lack of necessary knowledge about the difference between the two, so I do not want my group members to make the same mistake like I did.

John's explanation clearly showed his positioning as a knowledgeable, responsible, and bilingual group member. He was willing to and felt a responsibility to share what he knew and what he thought was important for his group members. Also, his initiative of translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2011, 2013; Garcia & Sylvan, 2011; Zheng, 2017) was a clear indicator of agency

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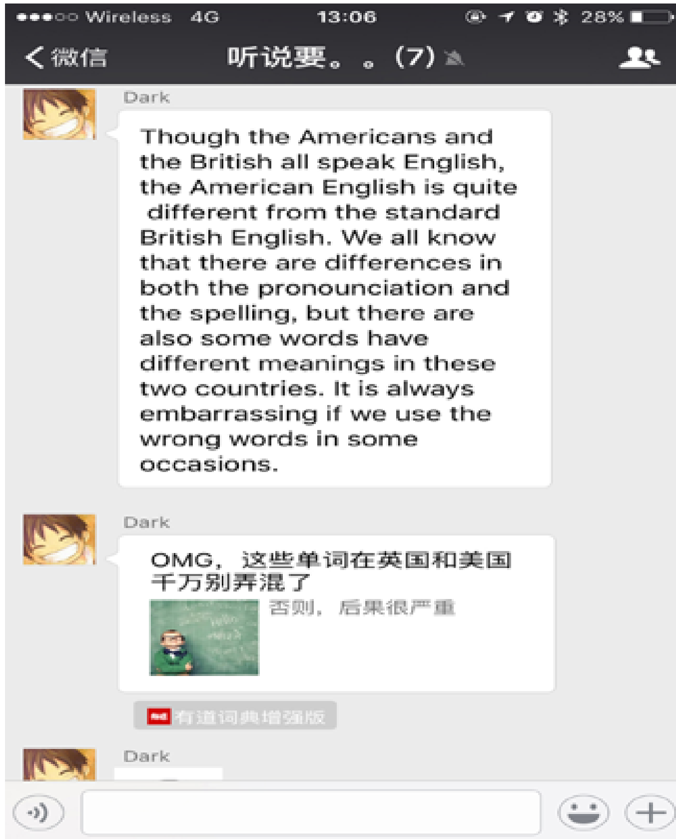

Figure 4.12 John's Translanguaging Activity. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

(van Lier, 2008). His positioning through his translanguaging activity seemed to reinforce his agency performance.

Interestingly, when Smith initiated a topic about testing, Joey responded to him by saying "因却斯艇 (yinquesiting)," which is the pronunciation of "interesting" (see figure 4.13). It is much easier to directly send the word "interesting" to the discussion group, but Joey deliberately employed Chinese to represent the pronunciation of "interesting." He explained that his speaking and listening teacher once told him that his English pronunciation was poor. This comment really upset Joey, so he wanted to prove that he was working on his pronunciation and in an effort to make some progress. Joey's use of the Chinese characters (the logograms) to demonstrate his unique design for the pronunciation of the English word can be understood through his self-positioning as creative and selective. This design also showed his sense of humor as well as bilingual competence.

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Figure 4.13 Joey's Pronunciation of the Word "Interesting" by Using Chinese Characters. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

Mediated by translanguaging, the interactions between and among the three L2 learners improved their agency so that they could transform the situations of L2 literacies practice to realize their anticipated positioning as translingual users. They used English most of the time, but they also used Chinese whenever they deemed it necessary. Their translingual identities as linguistic resources facilitated their L2 participation and engagement. They brought their Chinese language to this discussion community to perform their bilingual identities because they considered their Chinese identity as an advantage. Their use of Chinese did not hinder their L2 learning; instead, it enriched their meaning designing and increased opportunities to interact with each other. This anticipated and desired translanguaging identity orientation helped them build a sense of worthiness because they were language users who were able to freely shuttle between two languages. The L2 learners in the WeChat discussion community viewed the use of more than one language as valuable resources for meaning making and positioning construction, which demonstrated their selective and creative self-designing and agency improvement.

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These L2 learners also combined Chinese, English, and emoticons to express a sense of humor, ease the intense linguistic atmosphere when they encountered heated debates or sensitive topics, avoid communication breakdown, and demonstrate linguistic improvement: "这个真的不好说. It is hard to say . . ."; and "怪我咯? Are you blaming me?" More importantly, the use of linguistic repertoires and other semiotic resources in textual utterances highlighted these L2 learners' multiple positional identities (see figure 4.14). The mix of English, Chinese characters, stickers, and the animation of an animal head not only illustrated their intention for meaning design but also their agency to show who they were and how they engaged in this discussion group. In this sense, I suggest that both the verbal and nonverbal texts, as

Figure 4.14 The Combination of English, Chinese, and Emoji Genres. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

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social actions, textualized these participants' representations, positionings, and agency. These L2 learners used WeChat as a platform to build a community that was considered safe for them to freely *express* themselves, to *be* themselves, and to *feel* good about themselves. Even though they made grammatical errors, they were willing to take risks to position themselves in desired and powerful ways using various semiotic signs to design texts and make meanings.

Discussion Topic Selection as Positioning and Agency for L2 Literacies

All the participants expressed their positive attitude when they were asked to comment on the WeChat discussion at the interview. Joey considered the WeChat discussion as a forum in which everyone could voice their opinions. John saw the WeChat discussion as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998b), where he participated in L2 literacies. Smith's comments were similar to those of Joey and John. He described his thoughts as follows:

> I think the WeChat discussion is a platform for knowledge and idea sharing. It not only practices my linguistic and thinking skills, but also offers opportunities for self-presentation. I always want to be the best. I tried my best to lead discussions and interact with each other.

The L2 learners believed that choosing a good topic was essential for initiating a discussion. All three had their own standards for selecting discussion topics based on their personal preferences as well as consideration for their group members' interest. Smith followed three principles for selecting a discussion topic: "meaningful[ness]," a topic should be "interesting," and should be "guiding our life." Similar to Smith, John also pointed out that a topic should be interesting and meaningful because

> an interesting topic not only can catch my group members' attention, but also can trigger valuable thinking. Also, a meaningful topic has the learning value because we can learn not only English, but also something else, such as awareness of something that we were not aware of it before, thinking skills, and cultural knowledge.

John's explanation for selecting good discussion topics reflected his self-expectation. The topic *The Dominance of English* not only attracted his group members' attention but also generated an intense discussion. John's consideration of choosing a new topic matched with that of Joey's standard: "If my topic is not novel, nor meaningful, nobody will follow me." Their

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self-positioning and other-positioning mediated and promoted their agency; so all of three participants enacted and performed positional identities in the discussion group.

The discussion topics came from three different sources, including TED Talks, academic and nonacademic reading materials, and lived experiences. Joey's two topics were based on TED Talks. When I asked why he chose TED Talks for his discussion topics, he explained, "I like TED Talks. Some of them are very interesting. I want to share the interesting stuff with my group members. Also, I want to be a TED presenter someday." Joey's reason for utilizing TED Talks as the source of his topics mirrored his personal preference and his specific goals. While John was inspired by TED Talks and Youdao Dictionary (有道词典) (a search engine by Chinese NetEase), his three topics were derived from his lived experiences. He narrated:

> I select topics that are close to our lives, because first of all, we are familiar with them, so we have something to say. Secondly, I think we should learn English from our daily life because we live in an English environment. We have chance to learn English anytime and anywhere. One day when I went to M town to take the IELTS test, I saw a sign: "one way," which is one road in Chinese. I thought to myself: apparently, this is one road. Everybody knows it. Why did people put a sign here? And then I saw the same sign in many different places, which piqued my interest. I googled "one way" on my phone and figured out that it means one direction road in Chinese. I was inspired by this incident so I chose *Language* as one of my topics.

John's lived experience became one of the resources for his L2 literacies. It also became one of the resources for his self-positioning as a reflective L2 learner. To meet three standards for selecting discussion topics, Smith chose both TED talks and his lived experiences as discussion topics, which also manifested his self-positioning as creative and practical.

CODA

The L2 learners' engagement in the WeChat community of practice required the ability to participate in meaningful and purposeful interactions and produce sharable artifacts. These artifacts became not only the sedimentation of L2 literacies but also the sedimentation of their self- and other-positioning and agency. Their engagement, participation, and nonparticipation in this community of L2 literacies practices afforded them access to freedom to break the shackles that constrained them from free self-representation in many of their everyday non-WeChat activities. In this WeChat community, all the members acted as free text message writers and positioned themselves

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as responsible community members, who claimed ownership of knowledge and languages. They voiced their opinions, perspectives, desires, and thoughtful accounts through mutual engagement, joint enterprises, and shared experiences, all of which facilitated the process of positioning and enabled agentive performance. This WeChat community also permitted access to power, which allowed these L2 learners to explore new positionings and investigate new relations. They used the power they had acquired through WeChat to both explicitly and implicitly grapple with conflicts. But most often, they used power to negotiate meaning, shape positioning, and exercise agency. In sum, this WeChat community not only provided these L2 learners with opportunities to design L2 literacies but also to design themselves as agentive individuals who aspired to freedom and power for representation and communication.

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Chapter 5

Practising L2 Literacies in the ELI

One's physical place in the social world represents and reflects not only Discourse (Gee, 2014) but also agency, as Bourdieu (1984) claims,

> One's relationship to the social world and to one's proper place in it is never more clearly expressed than in the space and time one feels entitled to take from others, more precisely, in the space one claims with one's body in physical space, through a bearing and gestures that are self-assured or reserved, expansive or constricted ("presence" or "insignificance") and with one's speech in time, through the interaction time one appropriates and the self-assured or aggressive, careless or unconscious way one appropriates it. (p. 474)

One's agency is believed as power that encourages people to take initiatives for self- and other-transformation in order to remake the world. This belief mirrors Inden's (2000) understanding of agency:

> When I use the expression "human agency," I mean the realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposefully and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses or action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view. (p. 23)

In this chapter, I will present how the three L2 learners found their own ways to pursue opportunities for L2 literacies practices, such as self-seat arrangement, the use of smartphones to collect information and facilitate

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communication, and leveraging their cultural and linguistic repertories for community participation and engagement. In the presentation of their learning experiences, I will highlight their expressed agency through narratives and performed agency through my class observations in the ELI. In the section below, I will describe their classroom performance and interactions in detail.

The ELI was housed in the building of the International Services Center, where I observed the three L2 learners' classes. The ELI setting demonstrated a strong sense multilingualism and multiculturalism (see figure 5.1). On the wall on one side of the ELI hallway, there was a large picture that represents languages and cultures of the ELI students; on the other side of the hallway, there were many flyers that announced local cultural activities and events sponsored by the university and other organizations, which offered international students opportunities to not only practice English and learn about the local culture and tradition, but also to develop a sense of place and community. Figure 5.1 displays the cultural and linguistic acceptance and inclusiveness of the ELI.

I observed the three classes of each of the three L2 learners once. The content of the three classes were speaking and listening, reading and writing, and the structure of English. The speaking and listening class lasted one hour and twenty minutes; the reading and writing class lasted two hours and fifteen minutes; and the structure of English class lasted one hour and thirty minutes. Each classroom was equipped with a computer, a projector, and a large screen TV. There were pictures hung on the walls in all the classrooms that symbolized diverse cultures and languages. There was a language lab in the same building for L2 learners to practice L2 literacies. One of the extracurricular activities, Culturally Speaking, took place in this lab. Students could also receive English tutoring in the lab. Each class had between seven and fifteen

Figure 5.1 A Glimpse of the ELI Hallway. *Source*: Photo by author.

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L2 learners, who hailed from numerous countries of origin, including Mexico, Brazil, China, South Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Turkey, Russia, and France. The L2 learners aged from sixteen to fifty, including females and males.

The listening and speaking class was intended to provide a format for students to practice listening to spoken English and speaking English through activities such as group discussions, presentations, debating, and role-play. The reading and writing class was designed as an interactive and reflective experience for L2 learners to practice reading comprehension skills and writing abilities. The structure class was intended to explain grammar rules to L2 learners through direct instructions and students' oral and written exercises. In the section below, I will describe each L2 learner's class activities, including classroom sitting,[1] participation or non-participation, and interaction with their classmates and instructors.

JOEY'S CLASS PERFORMANCE

Joey's speaking and listening class was divided into two sections. The first section took place in the language lab, which was equipped with numerous computers and a large screen TV. There were fourteen international students in this class, including six Saudi Arabian male students, four Chinese male students, two Colombian male students, one Colombian female student, and one Japanese male student. The instructor was a young female American. In the first section, the instructor asked students to collect information on controversial topics, such as drones and vaccination. Joey was sitting in the front of the classroom, right next to the TV screen. When the instructor explained the topics for this class and projected the instructions on the screen, Joey took a picture of the instructions by using his smart phone. After the instructor asked students to form groups of four by each student saying a number from "one" to "four," Joey stood up and turned around facing the class. He showed his index finger and said: "Number one. Who is number 1? Okay, come here." Joey summoned a gathering of his group members, namely all the students who were assigned the number "one." Joey was the only Chinese student in this group. When his group came together and each member sat in front of a computer, he started searching for the controversial topics on the computer. Sometimes he checked his phone to make sure his spelling was correct. He also checked his phone to refer to the instructions the instructor had presented before. He was the first one who found a video on YouTube and excitedly told his group members: "I found a video very interesting. The title is Vaccination: Parents Conclude Vaccinations Are Not Safe for Their Children." His group members huddled by his side and watched the video together. Joey also suggested that they write a summary about the video in their notebooks.

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Ultimately, Joey found five videos for this topic. He watched all the videos and took notes in his notebook on the main ideas of these videos. Joey also googled the subject of vaccinating children in developing and developed countries because he planned to make comparisons and contrasts of how people perceived vaccination in different countries.

After they finished collecting information, the instructor asked all the students to go to another classroom to discuss their topics. Each leading discussant in his or her group had fifteen to twenty minutes to discuss the topic. Joey was the first leading discussant in his group. He initiated dialogues with his group members by asking five questions: "(1) What do you think about vaccination? (2) What is the law about vaccination in your country? (3) What your government should do in the future? (4) Do you think vaccinations should be taken at one time or in multiple times? (5) And in developing countries, how do people know about vaccination?" After the group discussion, the instructor asked the class to address their opinions on vaccination. Joey was the first one to answer the instructor's question. He said, "I think it is important to vaccinate children. Also, we have responsibility to help people to know importance of vaccination in developing countries." The instructor praised him. After another leader in his group finished leading the second round discussion on Drones, the instructor asked the class to address their opinions. Joey was again the first one to respond to her. He said, "Drones could be good or bad for human beings. It depends on the purpose." Joey's response again received his instructor's positive feedback.

Joey's reading and writing class had seven students, including four Turkish males and one Turkish female and two Chinese male students. Joey was sitting in the back row of this classroom, right next to a Chinese male student. The instructor was a young American male. The topic of the class I observed was "Reading and Writing 4: Introduction Styles." The instructor led the class to review five ways to introduce a writing passage through a question-answer fashion. When the instructor called upon one student to answer a question, Joey used his phone to check a word and then he took notes. The instructor introduced a new task for this class: learning how to write three body paragraphs. He asked the class to look at two examples: one about the death penalty and the other about handguns. Students read the two essays given out by the instructor. Joey used his phone again to check new vocabulary. After reading, the instructor guided the class to discuss the introduction styles of these two essays and how the writers organized the essays, but Joey was still working on one of them. Joey was called upon to answer a question, but it appeared that he was not sure about how to answer it. He looked confused and responded in a very soft voice. The instructor said "okay" and moved to another question. When compared to his speaking and listening class, Joey acted quite differently in his reading and writing class. Most of the time with

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little verbal communication, he only nodded or shook his head to express agreement or disagreement when the instructor asked questions.

The topic of Joey's English structure class that I observed was about the passive voice and how to correctly use passive voice to speak and write. The setting of the English structure classroom was the same as that of the reading and writing classroom, but the class was full. There were sixteen international students, including four Turkish male students, two Turkish female students, five Chinese male students, and one Japanese female student. Joey was sitting in the first row of the classroom. The instructor was a young female American. After a short introduction, the instructor placed students into groups of four to discuss "Exercise 10" in the textbook. Joey seemed to enjoy this class. He actively asked his group members questions or answered their questions during the group discussion. Also, he voluntarily answered his teacher's questions five times when the instructor led the whole-class discussion. For example, when the teacher wrote the sentence "The Chinese speak Mandarin" on the white board and asked the class to change it into the passive voice, Joey answered: "Mandarin is spoken by the Chinese." When the teacher asked the class to tell her the differences between the two sentences, Joey explained, "The subject in first sentence became object in the second sentence. Put a preposition 'by' before object. Object in first sentence became subject in second sentence." "Excellent!" said the instructor.

It appeared that Joey's participation in his speaking and listening and English structure classes was quite active. His engagement can be evidenced by his classroom sitting and interactions. He sat in the front of the classrooms. He performed as a group leader in his speaking and listening class, such as gathering his group members and answering his instructor's questions. Joey also seized the opportunity to interact with his instructor in his English structure class. It seemed that the communities of practice provided Joey with the very locus for acquiring and creating knowledge (Wenger, 1998b). In his reading and writing class, however, Joey did not engage much in class interactions. He sat in the back of the classroom, which can be understood as an intention for distancing himself from his instructor and the class. In addition, Joey's unintelligible answer to his instructor's question indicated his uncertainty about his input and low self-confidence.

JOHN'S CLASS PERFORMANCE

There were ten international students in John's speaking and listening class, including two Saudi Arabian female students, one Turkish female student, one Japanese female student, one Turkish male student, one Kuwaiti male student, two Chinese male students, one Saudi Arabian male student, and

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one Yemeni male student. John was sitting in the middle of the third row of the classroom (there were six rows.), next to one of the Saudi Arabian female students. The instructor was a young American male. He instructed the class to take a small listening quiz first. Then, each student had to briefly talk about his or her presentation topic. The listening practice was about marketing. It lasted six to ten minutes. Before playing the audio, the instructor asked each student to be ready to take notes. After the first round of listening, students started answering ten questions based on the audio. John scored ten points out of ten. The second section of this class was for students to talk about their presentation topics. John gave a talk for two minutes, which related to mechanical engineering. He looked a little bit nervous while he was introducing his topic. The instructor suggested that John should provide more details about his topic.

There were eight international students in John's reading and writing class, including two Saudi Arabian female students, one Turkish male student and one Turkish female student, and four Chinese male students. John was sitting in the middle of the second row of the classroom (there were five rows). His instructor was a middle-aged American male, who guided the class to discuss a micro-novel, *The Chaser*, by John Collier. While the instructor was distributing reading materials to the class, he said: "I am going to read the story to you. If you see a word that you do not know, please mark it." When the instructor was reading the story, the students were marking new words. After reading the story, the instructor asked the class questions. John actively engaged with his instructor and his classmates. For example, when his instructor asked the class to define the word "love," John said, "Oh, it is a kind of feeling, a positive feeling." When the instructor asked the students to get into pairs to discuss the words they marked, John joined an Arabian female classmate to discuss the marked words. John asked: "Do you know what creaky stairs mean?" His group member told him what it meant, and he wrote down its meaning on the margin of the reading sheet. When the instructor asked the class about the meaning of the word "imperceptible," John answered, "It means that we are not able to understand." The instructor confirmed that was a good guess and also gave john a hint to refer to the context. John paused for a while and said, "It is not detectable." The instructor praised him by saying "excellent." John answered approximately twenty questions in this class. His active engagement facilitated his L2 literacies, which made him a vigorous L2 learner in this community of practice.

In John's English structure class, there were ten international students, including three Chinese male students, three Saudi Arabian male students, one Norwegian male student, two Turkish female students, and one Japanese male student. John was sitting in the middle of the second row of the classroom (there were four rows). His instructor was a middle-aged American

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male. The instructor discussed modal verbs in a fashion of question-answer sequence. In the beginning of the class, the instructor asked the students about their weekend. The classroom dialogue is in italics. My observations are in roman font.

Teacher: Did you go to the movies last weekend?
John: No. I am too busy.
Teacher: You mean you were too busy?
John: Yeah. I was too busy.
Teacher: Let's review today.
Teacher: Present tense: She is sick. She must be sick.
John: She might be sick. She may be at home.
Teacher: How about past tense. Where was Zelda?
John: He was in Atlanta. I know for sure.
Teacher: What some other answers?
Student A: He might have been at home. He might have had some emergency.
John: He could have gotten a flu.
Teacher: He could have been getting the flu.
Teacher: When is been necessary?
Student B: When the verb is be.
John: Yeah.
Teacher: Why do I use been here? Sick is an adjective.
Teacher: How did David get to the campus?
John: He might have walked to the campus. He might have come here on foot. He might have been on foot.
Teacher: He could have walked here.
Student C: He must have broken his arms. He could have an accident.
John: He must have been falling down when he was driving.
Teacher: He must have fallen down.
John: Right.

John wrote down the corrected sentences in his notebook.

John seemed relaxed and confident in this class even though he made several grammatical errors. In the dialogue above, the instructor's recast provided John with opportunities to repair his utterance in an indirect way, which protected John from being humiliated and frightened. John seemed as if he did not merely parrot what his instructor responded as a way to correct him; rather, John internalized the grammatical knowledge through mediated dialogue with his instructor. John's internalization confirmed Lantolf and Thorne's (2006) theory of corrective feedback and negotiation, in which the authors contended, "[development] in this context is the internalization of the mediation that is dialogically negotiated between the learner and others that results in enhanced self-regulation" (p. 211). The mediational dialogue between John and his instructor facilitated John's "developmental progression from other-regulation

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to self-regulation" (p. 211). John's active participation in class interaction empowered him to fashion his positioning as a proactive and fast L2 learner. Also, John's sitting arrangement in which he placed himself in the center of the classroom can be another sign for his positive positioning as an engaging L2 learner.

SMITH'S CLASS PERFORMANCE

There were seven students in Smith's listening and speaking class, including one Ukrainian female student, one Saudi Arabian female student, three Chinese male students, one Thai male student, and one Yemeni male student. The instructor was a middle-aged American male. The class was fashioned as a debate, which was about traditional schooling versus online learning. Smith was teamed with the Ukrainian classmate and the Saudi Arabian classmate to focus on aspects of traditional schooling. Smith was the third debater. The group that argued in favor of online learning included one Chinese male student, one Thai male, and one Yemeni male. The last Chinese student was in charge of keeping time. The instructor flipped a coin and then declared that the group that favored online learning provided the initial statement. While they were stating their positions, Smith attentively listened to them and also took notes in his notebook. After all the three members in the positive side finished stating their arguments, the teacher asked the negative side to start. While his two team members were stating advantages of traditional schooling, Smith was also taking notes. It was Smith's turn to express his position. He looked at his notes and stated:

> Traditional education provides students with facilities and necessary equipment for them to enrich learning experience. Learning is by doing. So students have more opportunity to practice thinking skills, problem solving abilities, and hands-on capabilities, which are extremely important for their future careers. Students might be more efficient when they take classes in school, because the teacher and classmates might help them to finish homework or school work.

After one of his teammates finished her statement, Smith added: "Degrees from traditional education is more valuable than ones from online learning." After the rebuttal, the teacher asked the students to have a group meeting. Smith turned to his team members to talk about the questions they had for their opponents. During their question-and-answer period, Smith asked one question; unfortunately, he was not able to express himself clearly, so he did not receive any answers. The teacher summarized the debate and gave them

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feedback immediately. After class, Smith told me that he was nervous, so he did not think he did a good job on this debate, but he said that he learned a lot from his classmates.

Smith's English structure class was small, and included five students: one Thai female, one Chinese female, one Thai male, and two Chinese male students. Smith sat in the first row of the classroom. His male Chinese classmate sat behind him. His instructor was a young American female. The instructor taught conditional clauses, including first, second, and third conditional. First, the instructor guided students to review the content of the previous class by asking them questions. Smith answered two questions related to content from the previous class. The teacher then introduced the new content for this lesson. Smith took notes. When the instructor asked Smith to change the sentences, "It's cold today. I am not wearing a coat," into a conditional mode, Smith did not do it correctly first. However, by following his teacher's hint, Smith corrected his mistake himself. The dialogue is shown below:

Teacher: It's cold today. I am not wearing a coat.
Smith: It was cold today. I wish I wore a coat.
Teacher: Can you please read the first two sentences again?
Smith: It's cold today. I am not wearing a coat.
Teacher: Pay attention to the tense of the two sentences.
Smith: Oh! It should be "It is cold today. I wish I were wearing a coat."
Teacher: Good!

When Smith was asked to read the sentences again, he realized that he made a mistake.

He corrected himself immediately. The teacher did not point out his mistake. Instead, she requested that Smith read the first two sentences again. This dialogue between Smith and his instructor functioned as a mediational tool for Smith to understand the specific grammatical content related to conditional clauses.

The instructor asked the class to work on exercises by filling out the blanks in the textbook and then form groups of two or three to discuss the exercise, but Smith already finished all the blanks. Before Smith joined his group, he asked his instructor about the pronunciation of the name "Elena," which was in one of the sentences in the exercise. His instructor showed him how to pronounce it. In the group activity, Smith took turns to ask his group member questions or answer his questions, such as "Do you have an airplane?" "No. I wish I could have one." "Can you fly?" "No. I wish I could fly." In the group work, Smith performed actively. Sometimes, he took initiatives to lead his group. After the group discussion, the instructor asked the class if they had any questions about the conditionals. The instructor asked Smith, "Do you

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have questions, Smith? You look confused. Are you okay?" Smith said he did not have any questions. The instructor directed the class to do one more exercise and then the class was dismissed.

There were twelve international students in Smith's reading and writing class, including three Chinese male students, one Chinese female student, seven Saudi Arabian male students, and one Saudi Arabian female student. The instructor was a young American male who guided the students in a discussion of the book *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. Smith sat in the middle of the classroom and his Chinese classmates were sitting around him. His other non-Chinese international classmates sat scattered throughout the classroom. Smith was active in the class activities as well. When the instructor asked the class about the name of one of the sisters in the book, one student said her name was 精梅 (Jīngméi), but Smith seemed not to agree with him. Smith took out his smartphone and visited 百度百科, a Chinese search engine, to search for the sister's name. He found the name in 百度百科 and he also read the relevant sentences in the book and then he told the instructor:

> The sister's name is 精妹 (Jīngmèi), not 精梅 (Jīngméi). The first Chinese character of the two compound words is the same, but the second Chinese characters are different. These two names are pronounced similar, but the meanings are different.

The instructor was amazed by Smith's correction and said, "I am glad that you helped us figure out the right name. Thank you!" Smith smiled. After the discussion of the book, the instructor asked the class to discuss the reading comprehension questions listed on the reading sheet. Smith actively contributed to the discussions. He answered five questions out of six and all the answers were correct. When the instructor and his classmates were hesitating to answer Question 4, which asked for the meaning of "immediate," Smith confidently told the class that the right answer should be c. The dialogue is shown below.

The question, "The immediate cause is a virus that is carried by tiny creatures called mites, which live on honeybee's bodies." What does the word "immediate" mean? The answers are below:

a. adj Happening without delay;
b. adj Very close; nearby; or
c. adj Just before or just after something in a sequence.

The instructor said that the answer should be a. Smith did not agree with him and explained:

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> According the context, the word "immediate" emphasizes the sequence, not time. So I think right answer should be c. Also, I got information from the last sentence. It says "[intensive] research has revealed that the causes of CCD are complex." There might be many causes, including direct and indirect ones. So "the immediate cause" should be understood as "just before or just after something in a sequence."

When the instructor asked if others had any opinions on this question, nobody offered input. The instructor checked the right answer on a piece of paper and said, "Smith, you are the winner. You won again." This episode illustrated Bakhtin's (1984) emphasis on the importance of dialogue in truth seeking. He argued that "truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person. It is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (p. 110). Smith explored knowledge and sought for truth by initiating a dialogue with his instructor, in and through which his self-positioning as a knowledge explorer and truth seeker was constructed and completed.

NARRATIVES OF CLASS ACTIVITIES AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

After the class observations, I interviewed all the three L2 learners about their perceptions of class activities and strategies for improving L2 literacies. They all expressed that their speaking and listening classes were beneficial and that they had made progress in some degree. They also claimed that they used different modes and tools to facilitate their L2 literacies. In the section discussed later, I will present each L2 learner's narrative.

Joey's Narrative

Joey indicated that his listening and speaking classes were most helpful for his L2 literacies practices, especially his 30-Day Project. He said that he overcame a series of challenges and setbacks to make a 3D ship model (see figure 5.2) for his project. He explained:

> I like 3D ship model, so I planned to make one. When I was designing and making this model, I faced many difficulties. The programming for the ship model was very crucial, which required precision and carefulness. If there is a little error, the whole design will be ruined. The selection of the materials is important too. If the material does not match the programming, the 3D printer in the library cannot print it out. This project took me so much time and effort.

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Figure 5.2 Joey's 3D Ship Model. *Source*: Photo by author.

Joey also said that except for difficulty in material selection, the language of instruction for programming was another challenge for him because it was written in Spanish. Joey invited one of his classmates to translate the instruction into English. After finishing the programming, Joey made an appointment with a librarian to print out this ship model. The last challenge for this project was to present how the process and product of making the 3D ship model unfolded to his classmates and his instructor in his listening and speaking class. After fine preparation, Joey presented what he experienced and felt as he designed and made this model. Joey stated:

> I used PowerPoint to give a presentation to my class about the 3D ship model. I also brought the ship model to the class and showed it to my classmates. All of them were surprised when they saw it. They said, "Wow!" "It is amazing." "This is beautiful." One of my classmates asked, "Did you make it?" I said, "Yes." She said, "You are so talented." They gave me applause. I was so happy. I told them that I learned a lot from making this ship model. I said: "l learned to be careful; I must be careful." I used animation to display these words and I highlighted the word "Careful" on the PowerPoint slides. My teacher asked me to pass around the 3D ship model in the class. I was so proud of myself.

Joey's positioning as an L2 speaker with L2 literacies skills manifested through his presentation. First, he designed PowerPoint slides to present what he had learned through this 30-Day Project. Joey stated that he repetitively displayed the word "careful" in black bold font in the PowerPoint because he tried to emphasize the importance of carefulness and circumspection in making the 3D ship model. Joey explained that he had learned a lot from this project, but one of the most important takeaways was carefulness. To centralize this idea, Joey developed a compositional configuration for visual salience based on his description. This theme of Joey's PowerPoint was foregrounded through an ensemble of written and oral text, color, animation, and typography. The layout of the text situated the theme of this project within Joey's

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L2 learning experience, which embodied not only his agency but also his positional identities as a careful 3D ship model designer and meaning maker. He added, "Making this ship model required rich imagination and good time management. I did it. I think I have the talent for designing." In addition, Joey's self-positioning as confident and talented emerged from his explanation. Secondly, Joey practiced listening and speaking by communicating with his classmate to translate Spanish into English and making an appointment with a librarian to print out the 3D ship model. As a result, Joey became a recognizable and recognized community member in his class through making this 3D ship model. He added, "My teacher said that my pronunciation was bad. But after this presentation, she said that my pronunciation was better than before." This recognition can be a powerful motivation for Joey to further enhance L2 literacies.

Joey attributed his embarrassing encounters at the restaurants and the grocery store to his poor English listening and speaking ability, especially his speaking, so he decided to improve his oral English skills by seizing and creating opportunities to communicate. Joey explained:

> In class, I grab every chance to speak with my instructors; sometimes I create opportunities to talk to them. In group discussions, I tried very hard to practice listening and speaking.

Joey credited his competence for leading the discussion of controversial topics in his class presentations. He reported:

> In speaking and listening classes, we always do presentations. The preparation for a presentation is a process of collecting and processing information. I visit various websites to gather relevant materials to make PowerPoint. The preparation for a presentation is also a process of practicing speaking. I practiced many times before I presented. So, when I took part in this discussion, I just did what I learned from my previous presentations.

Joey viewed his smart phone as an indispensable tool for his English learning, especially for expanding his vocabulary. He described:

> I mainly use my phone to look up words by using the Youdao dictionary. I type word by word to learn pronunciations and meanings. While I am typing a word on my phone, I memorize its spelling. For example, this morning I learned a lot of words, such as "praise and grace." As long as I have time, I take out my phone to review old words and study new ones.

In addition to using his smartphone to improve vocabulary, Joey also used it to google pictures and videos for communication and class presentations.

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Joey stated that he often used the Chinese search engine 百度百科 to search for information regarding Chinese culture and history if he found it necessary to do so. He added:

> Last time, my instructor asked us to search for the Chinese traditional holiday, Dragon Boat Festival. I visited 百度百科 and got a lot of information about this festival, which I did not know before.

Joey claimed that he used his smart phone to study English anytime and anywhere because smartphone use was convenient. Without his smart phone, Joey's English learning would have been very difficult. When asked why his performance in the reading and writing class was different from other classes, Joey explained, "He [the instructor] talked too fast and unclearly. It is very difficult to follow him." I asked Joey if he told the instructor that he had a difficult time to understand the lessons. Joey said he tried once, but the instructor did not change his approach. Joey communicated this problem to one of the administrators in the ELI to try to solve it; unfortunately, the instructor still spoke very fast based on Joey's account. Joey considered that the instructor did not care whether he understood him or not.

By the end of the first session of the ELI class, Joey passed tests of reading and writing, and English structure for level 4, but he failed speaking and listening, so he had to re-attend the class of level 4 for speaking and listening.

John's Narrative

Like Joey, John claimed that his listening and speaking class was interesting, engaging, and very helpful. Both John and Joey were in the same class when they first attended this ELI program. John conducted a 30-Day Project, which was running fifty miles in thirty days. He said that he decided to run one mile a day and document the experience and feelings about this project and upload his narratives to Facebook every Sunday night (see figure 5.3). The last part of this project was to present the process and outcome of this project. Before the presentation, John wrote a script and developed Power Point slides in preparation. He considered the preparation challenging. John explained:

> I made several slides of PPT (PowerPoint) for my presentation. The first slide was a picture of an obese sleeping boy, through which I wanted to accentuate my topic: Keep Fit. Also, I wanted to use it to explain the word "adiposis," which was difficult to understand. Even though I was going to explain it by using words, since I have a strong Chinese accent, my explanation might be confusing. Therefore, I contemplated using a picture of a half-naked man with

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My project is running 50 miles in 30 days. At the beginning of this 30 days, I think it's pretty hard, because I do not like running any more! However, now I feel it has no challenge at all, and I can even do much better, maybe 70 or 80 miles! In brief, the most important thing is to insist on it, and success belongs to the persevering.

Figure 5.3 John's 30-Day Project Update on Facebook. *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

> many muscles to emphasize my topic, but I thought that would be inappropriate, because I might offend my Muslim female classmates. Eventually I used written words in bold black fond instead. After designing my PPT, I started practicing my speaking. I recorded my speech and listened to it and recorded it again and again. I practiced about 40 times until I was content with my pronunciation.

John's 30-Day Project not only required physical endeavors but also demanded cognitive initiatives. Documenting the experience and feelings of this process and uploading it to Facebook was a challenge. Also, presenting this project in class was another. Although the whole project was challenging, John finished it as he anticipated. John's well-designed presentation illustrated his willingness to become a more competent group member because he had a strong desire for recognition, security, and affiliation. He said, "I did a good job on the presentation. I just want to speak like a TED presenter." John's self-positioning as a TED presenter facilitated his agency in regulating his investment in practicing linguistic competence. His self-positioning, then became his goal, which guided and motivated his efforts.

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This language-mediated project encouraged John to "[look] at an apple seed and [see] a tree" (Wenger, 1998b, p. 176). Moreover, his consideration of his Muslim classmate's religion made his self-positioning responsibly and respectfully salient, which highlighted his deliberation to display not only his purpose for the topic accentuation but also his sensitivity to his community members' religious diversity. John's deliberation signified his agency, which considered the feelings and needs of his community members; this consideration reflected his acknowledgement and appreciation of cultural and religious differences.

John's class presentations enhanced his linguistic competence in terms of grammar and pronunciation. These presentations also increased his self-esteem and self-efficacy and became sites for his continuously changing self-positioning toward perfection; he constantly challenged himself to become someone with greater wisdom and moral authority who he wished to. He reported:

> I still remember the first time when I was presenting a project; I was scared to death because I never did that when I was in China. I only needed to talk for 3–4 minutes, but I prepared for it very long, including choosing a topic, searching for the relevant information, writing a script, memorizing the script, and practicing speaking. I am a perfectionist, so I do not want to make any mistakes. Perfecting put so much pressure on me. But it was rewarding. In the end, I got 96 out of 100.

John's participation in class presentations confirmed Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning; that is, "learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities—it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person" (p. 53).

John also stated that his lived experience became an inspiration and encouragement to practice and enhance L2 literacies. He told a story about his pronunciation of Macdonald's in his speaking and listening class, which was introduced in the introduction of this book. John used this instance to initiate a topic on pronunciation of common names and brand names in the WeChat discussion community, which indicated his awareness of sharing information and gaining knowledge from everyday experience. In addition, John's story about the use of "toilet" at the new ELI student orientation became the inspiration for his topic on the difference between American English and British English for the WeChat discussion. John reported:

> I kind of had an emergency at the orientation, so I walked out of the classroom and went to the hallway. I saw a staff member and asked him, "Excuse me!

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> Can you please tell me where the toilet is?" The man was confused. He asked, "Sorry, Sir, can you please speak it again?" I repeated what I said, but the man still did not understand me. I thought to myself that I might have made some mistakes. I know there are some words referring to bathroom. Maybe Americans do not use "toilet" to refer to "bathroom." I remember that I saw the word "bathroom" at airports and somewhere else. I changed "toilet" to "bathroom" and asked him again. This time, the man understood me completely.

John also considered his smart phone as a main auxiliary tool for studying English as it could assist him in various ways, such as looking up new words and checking grammatical errors. John accounted:

> If I want to say a sentence, but I am not sure if it is right, I enter the sentence to my phone and then I check the Chinese translation. If the translation makes sense to me, I will use the sentence. If I do not know a word when I am reading, I just need to put my phone above this word, so the pronunciation and meaning of the word will appear on my phone. (See figure 5.4)

In addition, John used his smart phone to search for pictures on the search engine 百度百科 to assist in communication with his international classmates. For example,

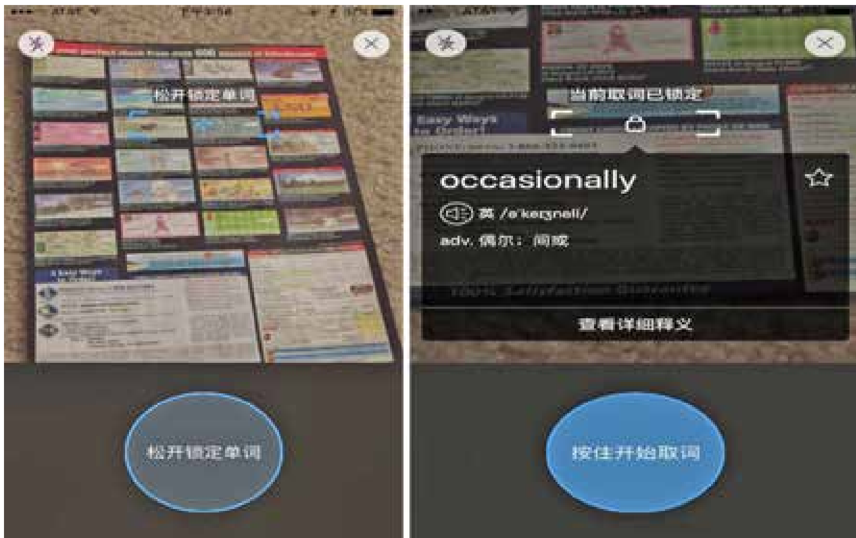

Figure 5.4 John's Use of Smart Phone to Look up the Word "Occasionally." *Source*: Screenshot provided by author.

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> When my Japanese classmate talked about Kabuki, I told him that it is similar to Peking Opera, but he had no idea what I was talking about. I googled Peking Opera on my phone and showed a picture to him. He understood me immediately.

John was awarded a scholarship from the ELI based on his progress in L2 literacies. He described:

> I got a scholarship from the ELI, which was a big honor for me. I was encouraged and motivated by this award. Even though it was small money, it meant a lot to me. I will spend more time on improving my English to speak like a native speaker.

Like Smith, John always sat in the front row or the middle of the classroom because he believed that doing so would provide more opportunities to interact with his instructors. Except for interaction with his instructors, he actively participated in group discussions, especially in his reading and writing class. John successfully passed all the tests in the first session of English learning. He was granted to learn English at level 5 in University's first summer session. John told me that he planned to graduate from the ELI in the second summer session and start his programs of study in the fall.

Smith's Narrative

When I asked Smith why he sat in the middle of the classroom in his reading and writing class, He explained:

> It is easy to get my teacher's attention if I am sitting in the middle of the classroom. And then I have more opportunities to interact with him. I like his class, because he uses the Internet, websites, pictures, the projector, gestures, and actions to help us learn English. His class is interesting. I have never fallen asleep in his class. The most impressive part is his talent for mimicking sounds of animals and instruments. He could mimic the heartbeat to show the meaning of the word steady and an infant's cry to tell us what is squeaky. I tried to use different ways to learn vocabulary like my teacher does. I think it is really helpful.

Smith physically positioned himself in the middle of the classroom; actually, he positioned himself as the center of the class. He listened attentively to not only his instructor but also his classmates. Smith was also willing to acquire knowledge, explore new arenas of inquiry, and pursue truth through multiple ways, such as using his smartphone, referring to the textbook, and taking notes.

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Like Joey and John, Smith also claimed that his speaking and listening was very helpful. He said that the debate was very interesting. He described:

> That was my first time to debate in English. I was excited, but a little bit nervous. I wrote a script according to the topic and familiarized myself with the script. At the debate, I listened to my opponents very carefully to look for their weaknesses in order to attack them. I needed to react quickly. It was very helpful for speaking, listening, and the ability of quick reaction.

In addition, Smith stated that he did a lot of research on advantages of traditional schooling before the debate, such as visiting websites and reading articles. Smith believed that the cooperation with his team members and competition with his opponents shaped him as an active and critical debater. Smith believed that he made progress in L2 literacies through class presentations. For example,

> I presented formation of hurricanes in one of my speaking and listening classes. Before this presentation, I had no idea about hurricane. I learned how hurricane formed and where it occurred. I also made PPT slides to present this topic. My PPT combined written words and pictures. Pictures vividly and directly expressed how hurricane occurred. Sometimes a picture can convey meanings but written words cannot. PPT gave me hints while I was presenting. It piqued my classmates' interest and caught my classmates' attention.

Smith claimed that his smartphone was a very important tool to learn vocabulary and facilitate communication. He downloaded the Youdao dictionary like Joey and John, so he could look up words anytime and anywhere. He described:

> If I do not know a word, I just type this word on my phone and then I can know its' pronunciation and meaning immediately. In communication, if I do not understand a word, I will ask my interlocutor to enter that word into my phone and I can know it right away. For example, when I was at BCM, I always did not understand something. Sometimes even though they explained it to me, I still did not understand. I asked them to type the important words into my phone so that I could google them, especially names of places and people. And then I understood what they were talking about.

He also visited numerous websites to search for written information, oral texts, pictures, videos, and audio materials to improve his English by using search engines and useful online resources, such as Google and the Youdao dictionary. Smith reported that his smartphone not only helped him practice English but also boosted his self-confidence for learning English. He

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perceived himself as a competent L2 learner and information consumer by constantly interacted with his smartphone and websites.

Smith believed that the more exposure he had to the linguistic and cultural environment, the more experience he would gain. He also suggested that reflection on mistakes and setbacks was helpful for improving his English skills. Other strategies like asking questions, observing what native speakers do and say, and predicting and fast responding helped him learn. Smith also added, "As long as you work hard enough, you will conquer yourself." At the end of this interview, Smith told me that he had passed all the tests. He said, "I have graduated from ELI and I am so excited. I am much more confident than before because I can speak fluent English now."

DISCUSSION

Place, Positioning, and Agency

These L2 learners claimed class space for them to become visible, not just physically but linguistically, culturally, and socially. They regarded that sitting in the front or the middle of the classroom was significant, not only for attracting their instructors' attention but also for their opportunities to gain access to increased levels of interaction and improvement. More importantly, their self-directed and self-selected seat arrangement had the potential for them to become full members of communities of practice. For example, Smith fully participated in class discussions when he chose to sit in the middle of the classroom in his reading and writing class. The community of practice in which he spent days interacting with each other made anticipated positions available to him. Similar to Smith, John always placed himself in noticeable locations in his classrooms. These physical positions signaled a message of a strong sense of agency for participation, improvement, and recognition. Although Joey sat in the back of the classroom in his reading and writing class, he positioned himself as an active and confident L2 learner in his other classes.

These L2 learners' seat arrangements were different from the findings in Wang, Pratt-Johnson, and Li's (2017) study. The research participants in Wang and her colleagues' study reported that their Chinese ELI students had very limited opportunities to practice English and experienced little sense of community with the class as a whole when they sat in the back of the classroom. One of the instructor participants stated:

> People sitting in the back already sent me a silent message, "Do not call on me. I do not know what I am doing. I am not prepared and not confident. I am in the

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> safe zone, so do not bother me." Siting in the back created a distance between [them] and me. It also limited [their] opportunities to communicate with [their] classmates. (p. 13)

According to the participant's statement, the Chinese ELI students sitting in the back of the classroom could be a sign of "not knowing" or "not able" (McDermott, 1993). They distanced themselves from the instructor and other non-Chinese ELI students to express their unwillingness for interactional and communicative resources, which directly demonstrated their low self-confidence and low driven force for classroom engagement. However, the three L2 learners, especially Smith and John, located themselves in the important spatial positions in their classrooms. This place of their physical location became a metaphor of their self-positioning—the center of the class. They challenged and empowered themselves to become confident and powerful L2 learners by occupying the desired *place* or *space* in their classrooms. They were not afraid of being found as "unable" or "incompetent" if they made mistakes because they regarded making mistakes as opportunities for improvement. Using Smith's word, sitting in the middle or the front of the classroom was an action of and strategy for self-conquering: conquering fear, conquering unwillingness for risk-taking, and conquering the mindset of face losing.

These L2 learners positioned themselves as risk-taking, confident, and engaging in the classroom communities through selecting their desired place to sit, a location where they made themselves visible, audible, recognizable as well as capable. Their physical presentation also "became another kind of 'discourse'" (Toohey, 2000, p. 72) in their construction and negotiation for positioning and agency. Their physical positioning allowed them to create opportunities for more and better resources, which directly and indirectly contributed to their L2 literacies practice and enhancement. These enhanced L2 literacies skills became a significant reference and consideration for their classroom positionings—namely, self-positioning and assigned positionings—because a classroom community systematically and sociopolitically ranks its members based on their linguistic and academic competence and performance (Foucault, 1979; Toohey, 2000). Also, these L2 learners' sense of place and positioning confirmed Barnes' (2000) argument on the relationship between identity and place: One's identity is inextricably linked to the place one situates.

Although social positioning takes place through discourse constituted and enacted in a particular community or institution (Foucault, 1972, 1979), it does not necessarily occur through verbal language. Non-verbal language, such as these L2 learners' classroom sitting, became a vehicle and reference for self-positioning. While each L2 learner's sitting and participation became

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part of shared historical knowledge of the community, this knowledge was not linguistically signaled. Therefore, I argue that a community member's positional identities not only develops through moment-to-moment discursive practices but also through *place* and *space* that one claims in community practices. This understanding of the interrelationship between and among social positioning, agency, and place is in alignment with Benwell and Stokoe's (2006) observation, in which they discussed:

> We can begin to see how identity is bound up not "just" in talk and text, but also in other "practices-in-interaction" such as bodily movement in physical space. However, "physical space" is not an objective, neutral phenomenon but inescapably socially constructed by human agents and their semiotic practices. (p. 208)

Communities of practice in the ELI seemed to provide a L2 learner-friendly sociocultural context that prioritized and valued language and cultural diversity. The classroom communities allowed L2 learners time for organizing language and thoughts. These communities also allowed and tolerated L2 learners to make mistakes, take risks, and take initiatives. It would have been very difficult for these L2 learners to sit in the front or the middle of a classroom had they been in a mainstream classroom setting. Given the intricate relationship between physical presentation and social positioning, how do teachers encourage L2 learners to make agentive, courageous, and powerful choices to present themselves in physically visible positions in order to present themselves in linguistically, culturally, and socially recognizable positions in mainstream classroom communities?

Multimodality, L2 Literacies, and Self-Conquering

The three L2 learners deemed their active and frequent classroom participation as power and knowledge that improved their L2 literacies, which echoed Hall's (1993) argument on sociocultural competence. She argued:

> Active and frequent participation in the oral practices of one's group leads to the development of sociocultural competence and the ability to use the resources to display and/or modify this competence. (p. 143)

All three L2 learners positioned themselves as digital natives, who used their smartphones as the main tool to collect information for oral presentations, download pictures to facilitate conversations, check and accumulate vocabulary, and take notes for later references. Drawing on smartphones to search for information allowed these L2 learners to become resourceful and competent. Interestingly, by positioning himself as a digital native, John customarily carried a notebook and a pen to assist in his communication

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with other non-Chinese ELI students. This practice became a sign for his positioning as a digital immigrant. For example, when John's classmates did not understand him because of his incorrect pronunciation of McDonald's in his speaking and listening class, he wrote a big "M" on his notebook. This written letter became an important clue for John's classmates to understand him. John's use of traditional tools for L2 literacies not only helped him clarify himself but also created an opportunity for second-order positioning; that is, John was a legitimate community member who tried to make himself understood to continue communicative interaction. John's use of traditional tools for L2 literacies also allowed him to reflect on his English learning experience, which became an inspiration for his later L2 literacies practice in the WeChat discussion.

John's relying on modern technologies and traditional tools produced and reinforced his agency for becoming better and more competent because he strove to rid himself of the yoke of "deaf and dumb" English. To reach this goal, John took full advantage of classroom conversations with his instructors and classmates. Take his English structure class as an example. John almost dominated the class interaction although he made several grammatical errors. He did not consider a mistake as a threat; instead, it was seen as an opportunity for learning, achieving, and becoming. He explained, "The class is for learning. We always learn from our mistakes." Moreover, he claimed that opportunities were more important than the right answers. John seemed to gain power through active and frequent community participation and engagement. This power made him agentive. Also, his agency made him powerful. In addition, John constructed a thoughtful, responsible, and resilient community member through presenting his 30-Day Project in his speaking and listening class. While positioning for perfection became a site of struggle, it also became a site for recognition and success.

John's positionings as digital native and digital immigrant was a manifestation of his agency, which brought him rich learning resources and more opportunities. I, therefore, define agency as authority or power to leverage resources for both greater learning autonomy and increased community participation and engagement for the purpose of maximizing learning outcomes.

Similar to John's understanding and experience of L2 literacies, Smith believed that "as long as you work hard enough, you will conquer yourself." This statement aligned with the interpretation of his Chinese name. The word "conquer" indexed his agentive stance (Duff & Doherty, 2014). Smith considered that he had weaknesses and problems, but he could control these shortcomings to make himself better through diligence and persistence. This belief generated his agency, which encouraged him to conquer self-constraints, such as struggles and dilemmas to achieve what he wanted for himself. For example, in terms of classroom location, Smith centered himself

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in his reading and writing class to contribute to the community by means of acquiring knowledge and engaging in creative activities. He used his Chinese cultural and linguistic repertoires to facilitate his community members' understanding of the sister's name when they discussed Amy Tan's book *The Joy Luck Club*. Smith's contribution gained recognition and reinforced his agency.

Community of Practice: Constraints versus Possibilities

As a sociocultural configuration, Joey's reading and writing class, did not seem to provide him with as many opportunities as he wished for transforming his learning situation and further improving his learning outcomes through agency. This class made him feel less agentive than his other classes, such as his speaking and listening class. Joey's sitting in the back of the classroom can be understood as a practice of resistance to the centrally defined classroom activities. Positioned as less active and less powerful in this class, Joey seemed to give up the opportunity to overcome the structural constraint: the instructor's fast and unclear speech. In the very beginning, Joey spoke with the instructor in terms of his difficulty in following the instructions, but the situation did not seem to change. Joey tried to report the problem to one of the administrators in the ELI; unfortunately, the problem was still not resolved. Although Joey had the will (Gao, 2010) and capacity to act (Ahearn, 2011), he was unable to convince the instructor to speak slowly and clearly. Even though Joey was placed in that community of practice, he did not have the power to negotiate *access* to the community for participation and engagement. As Mick (2015) suggested,

> Learning a language is also about negotiating access to a language community and, thus, it is embedded in power relations. All this implies that learning a language is related to agency. (p. 91)

Joey's performance in his reading and writing class demonstrated a struggle between the interaction of structure and agency (Block, 2014). Joey's perception of his instructor's fast and unclear speech acted as structuring structure that weakened his agency to participate in activities in this class. This narrated microstructure seemed to be a reason for Joey's decision to sit in the back of the classroom; namely, his decentralization became a result of this microstructure. This less central position symbolized his peripheral community participation, which also can be understood as an effort to avoid being found as unable or incompetent. Joey's deliberate seat arrangement was an embodiment of his agency, which limited his opportunities for oral participation in community engagement.

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In this community of practice, the instructor, as an experienced and more able participant, had more power than did Joey. This unequal power relationship between the newcomer (Joey) and old-timer (the instructor) constituted the very structure, which prohibited Joey's authority from acquiring opportunities for access to rich educational resources. Joey's unsuccessful negotiation for participation and engagement positioned him as an inactive and less able participant in this classroom community. Joey's struggle for ideal positions concretized and broadened by his classroom activities, such as occupied checking new words, nodding, or shaking his head. If the community of practice were not supportive, could Joey make a difference through self-conquering? As an integral constituent of structure, a classroom community should build emancipatory spaces for L2 learners to practice multimodalities and multiliteracies through "a participatory model of learning that honors the cultural wealths and deep knowledges of all learners" (Kennedy, Oviatt, & De Costa, 2019, p. 68) to produce and reinforce learner agency as a means of facilitating their success.

CODA

Joey, John, and Smith made the communities of practice "a privileged locus for the *acquisition* of knowledge [and] for the *creation* of knowledge" (Wenger, 1998b, p. 214; emphasis in original.). Also, the communities of practice made the L2 learners agents, who purposefully positioned themselves in positive and powerful ways. However, of great concern is that if John were in a mainstream classroom, his teacher and classmates might not have had the time and patience to wait for him to write down the big M and to explain what kind of food he was referring to. He might not have a chance to establish or negotiate a second-order positioning through the use of multiple modes and tools when his classmates could not understand him. Research has shown that L2 learners in mainstream classrooms remain silent when they have limited command of English. L2 learners' opportunities for second-order positioning (negotiation for better positional identities) depend on the social structure—classroom discourse and power relations. A tolerant and safe classroom discourse allows L2 learners to use multimodality to construct and negotiate desired positions. But in mainstream classrooms, L2 learners are very often deprived of opportunities for multiple ways of self-expression and self-explanation because of the micro-, meso-, and macro-level discourses (Anderson, 2009). As teachers we need to ask an imperative question: How should we structure supportive and encouraging structural conditions to foster and support L2 learners' agentive growth and development in order to become successful whole individuals?

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NOTE

1. I used term "sitting" as opposed to "seating" because these L2 learners actively chose the seats by themselves. The former term possesses the active, intentional connotation of one's willingness and ability to locate oneself in a preferred place in a classroom, while the latter possesses a more passive, rule-governed notion whereby an individual other than oneself decides the placement of the students in a classroom.

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Part IV

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

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Chapter 6

Concluding Remarks and Takeaways

The interview narratives, WeChat exchanges, coupled with class observations, and field notes in this study have displayed a whole picture of three L2 learners' literacies practices in various communities, which evidenced the complicated relations and interactions among multimodality, positioning, and agency. These L2 learners recognized, appreciated, and appropriated affordances of multiple modes and digital tools for their L2 literacies practices, in and through which they positioned themselves as confident, able, and competent, but sometimes as struggled and ambivalent L2 users. Also, multimodality enabled them to become "makers and remakers of signs and transformers of meaning" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 175). The practice of making, remaking, designing, and redesigning demonstrated these L2 learners' agency, which motivated and inspired them to (re)produce and (re)create meanings for the purpose of presenting desired and anticipated positionings. Positioned as cultural and social beings, these L2 learners presented their self-understandings and self-representations through symbolic and material artifacts, interactions with local and nonlocal people, and engagement in the WeChat discussions and ELI learning. They were members of multiple communities. They also created their own community—the WeChat discussion group. To obtain multimembership, these L2 learners assumed rights, obligations, and expectations to become legitimate or struggle to become legitimate community members. They tried to reflect on wanted or unwanted positions, devised strategies to change negative circumstances, and took actions to develop their interests and achieve their desires, in which their agency was promoted or limited in their social and cultural environments, ongoing interactions, and existing and newly established discourses.

Interestingly, these findings are different from what SLA research has suggested with regard to Chinese international students' English learning

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experiences (Duff, 2002; Hu & Fell-Eisenkraft, 2003; McKay & Wong, 1996; Miller, 2000, 2003, 2004; Liu, 2001, 2002; Stevens, 2012). Results constantly have shown that Chinese international students had been reported as interactional withdrawn learners. For example, Duff (2002) found that when the teacher attempted to provide speaking opportunities for nonlocal students (mostly Chinese international students), the students avoided oral interaction by keeping silent because "[non]-local students said they were afraid of being criticized or laughed at in class because of their English. Silence protected them from humiliation" (p. 312). Hu and Fell-Eisenkraft (2003) also observed that Chinese immigrant students were quiet and hesitant to participate in oral representations in class interactions. In addition, Stevens (2012) revealed a similar observation on Chinese international students' class performance. He argued:

> What remains unchanged, however, is a distinct lack of participation in classroom and extracurricular activities. The causes of this lack of engagement may be rooted in deep cultural and political differences between Chinese and U.S. students and faculty. (p. 3)

Chinese international students were also considered as "Chinatown inhabitants" (Stevens, 2012; Wang et al., 2017). Stevens (2012) warned that Chinese students in the ELI tended to avoid interactions both with American students and other internationals, which significantly limited their language socialization and interaction. Their nonparticipation in communities of English learning tightened the same social and ethnic bonding. The longer they confined themselves in "Chinatown," the more likely they would face social exclusion in the target language communities. Also, intensive instruction in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary in the ELI might have limited value when L2 learners had little opportunity to participate in wider communities.

A number of factors have contributed to these differences. First, all three L2 learners experienced embarrassment due to their limited English proficiency, which became a driving force for determination and resolution in changing their learning situations to improve learning outcomes. Because of their aspiration to change their positional identities as incompetent and illegitimate L2 users, they developed various strategies to reach their visible and valued goals, such as using smartphones to expand vocabulary and visit websites to collect information available to facilitate communication in and out of class. The development of these strategies increased possibilities for them to participate in class activities.

It is also important to note that even though previous research on Chinese international students' L2 acquisition and development mentioned technology

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in L2 learning, such as instant messaging, creating websites, and online writing (Lam, 2009a, 2009b, 2013; Nelson, 2006), few studies paid attention to integrating smartphones into ELI learning and teaching. The paucity of literature on smartphone use among L2 learners as a means of fostering and developing their L2 skills seems to demonstrate a need among L2 acquisition researchers to search for alternative ways to limit setbacks—such as embarrassment and humiliation—and promote successful L2 learning experiences. Smartphone use could be one of the main reasons why the L2 learners were able to actively engage in class activities.

Second, their strong sense of agency that was generated and enhanced in the interactions with their valued Chinese artifacts, setbacks, multimodality, and classroom activities might have made a significant difference in the communities of practice for L2 literacies, an argument that I will address in detail later in this chapter. All three participants set a specific short-term goal: attaining a good command of English in order to start their program studies ("escape from ELI" was their mantra). This goal made their agency a salient feature for their self-positioning, which helped them visualize and achieve valued success and provided them with positive guidance for performance. To reach this goal, these L2 learners created access to local communities of practices to increase their L2 learning opportunities in order to maximize the outcomes of L2 literacies.

Third, the classroom environment, which I consider as a micro-social structure, had provided these L2 learners with supportive and favorable affordances to facilitate L2 literacies practice and improvement. This classroom environment is different from the research settings found in the studies of Liu (2001, 2002), Miller (2000, 2003, 2004), McKay and Wong (1996), Hu and Fell-Eisenkraft (2003), and Duff (2002). The research had been completed in mainstream K-12 classrooms, where American students were the majority and who constituted the sociocultural and linguistic milieu, one of the main components of the micro-social structure. This micro-social structure has the potential of producing intimidating learning environment that can result in students' reluctance to participate. For example, Duff (2002) concluded that the nonlocal students' interactional disengagement

> attracted disdain from local students (who confirmed this), for whom silence represented a lack of initiative, agency, or desire to improve one's English or to offer interesting material for the sake of the class. The NNES [non-native English speaking] students were therefore caught between what appeared to be two unfavorable options: silence or mockery and hostility. (p. 312)

However, the three L2 learners presented in this book were situated in an ELI, where all learners were international students, who constituted diverse

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cultural and linguistic backgrounds. There were no perceived discriminations or privileges awarded. As John stated, "There is no discrimination in the ELI. We are all international students. We are here to study English." John made it clear that discrimination can result in nonparticipation in class activities. This perceived safe classroom environment could be an "externally driven structure" (Block, 2013) for John's self-positioning as international and purposeful. John's self-positioning can be understood as a result of his agency that was shaped and reinforced by this very structure (the tolerant and inclusive class culture). This micro-social structure seemed to have enabled the L2 learners to exercise a great deal of agency for taking actions in terms of community engagement.

Furthermore, gender might have made a difference in terms of the L2 learners' agentive growth and development. All the L2 learners in my study were male Chinese students. Some might argue that having male L2 participants can be an explanation for the outcome as males have been more active than female Chinese immigrant students. This finding could be explained by Chinese traditional cultural values where women are represented as reserved and quiet, and are often perceived by non-Chinese people in this way. However, such an explanation represents a distorted view in that not all Chinese females of past generations were or seen as taciturn, and modern Chinese values might be increasingly more accepting with regard to increased agentive enablements for both females and males. Also, age may play a role in the difference in that the L2 learners were young adults.

As mentioned above, these L2 learners' agency has made great contribution to their community participation and engagement in order to satisfy their valued ambitions. Agency is not a property someone possesses (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), but is one shaped by social structures (Archer, 2007; Block, 2013; Butler, 1997); therefore, agency is relational, contingent, negotiable, and contradictory. In the section later, I will discuss how these L2 learners' agency was influenced by their symbolic and material artifacts, setbacks, and multimodality, how their developed or negotiated agency shaped their positioning activities, and how their positioning, in turn, shaped their agency while they were engaging in communities of practice for L2 literacies.

ARTIFACT BECAME DISCOURSE FOR AGENCY

Artifacts are products of social and cultural practices and activities. They are symbols of cultures, values, histories, and identities. Throughout human history, people have told their life stories by referring to their treasured and cherished artifacts because they were significant in their lives. The three L2 learners introduced themselves by choosing to tell the stories of their Chinese

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names and keepsakes. The way of their self-introduction was creative and unique. They claimed personal power and demonstrated uniqueness through storytelling. The storytelling itself was a process of unfolding their pasts, presenting their presents, and projecting their futures. This storytelling not only functioned as a vehicle for them to construct and display their positioning but also functioned as a vehicle for them to negotiate and manifest their agency because storytelling is involved in tremendous deliberation about decision making, such as what to tell and how to tell it.

Most importantly, telling stories about themselves through the artifacts seemed to empower the L2 learners to overcome obstacles, especially at times when they were disadvantaged. For example, Joey told the story about the picture of plum blossoms by referring to a Chinese poem in order to project himself as a resilient and determined individual who was willing and able to grapple with difficulties. Joey's agency was mediated and strengthened through the storytelling of his keepsake. Also, John's self-naming in his storytelling signified his agency emergence and salience. It required courage to name himself as Lĭhuá because this name referred to the unpleasant experience that he encountered: John's unsuccessful English learning experience in China. It seemed that John used this name to remind himself to become a person who had a good command of English. Smith's mantra "青出于蓝而胜于蓝" (Blue comes from the indigo plant but is bluer than the plant itself) revealed his determination to surpass his father in success through continuous learning, which was aligned with his English learning strategy: *self-conquering*.

Family responsibilities originating from their Chinese names and keepsakes can be burdens that result from adverse circumstances, on the one hand, but also can be driven forces for possibilities, on the other. These L2 learners seemed not to regard familial responsibilities and anticipations as burdens; instead, they considered them as power for self-transformation. They also valued their parents' expectations as support and encouragement for overcoming setbacks and obstacles. They believed that their symbolic and material artifacts, such as their Chinese names and keepsakes, were fundamental because they were imbued with rich and meaningful cultural senses and values.

Through storytelling of their Chinese names and keepsakes, these L2 learners positioned themselves as important, ambitious, and goal-oriented individuals. These positioning activities not only concretized their agency but also enhanced their agency as well. The L2 learners seemed to have gained inspiration from the artifacts to redefine who they were and explain why they valued who they were. The artifacts that these L2 learners chose to represent themselves functioned as an indicator of emotions and power between the negative circumstances and their agency.

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SETBACK BECAME DISCOURSE FOR AGENCY

One's social and cultural practices constitute social structures at different levels, which are referred as the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Social structures, in turn, shape (either enable or disable) individuals' social and cultural practices. These L2 learners understood their situations as newcomers in a foreign country, and they were aware that it was beneficial to interact with local people (English native speakers) to improve their linguistic abilities and enrich their cultural understandings. They, therefore, tried to take risks in interaction with locals in their daily lives. Unfortunately, as a result, they encountered setbacks in different situations. For example, Joey's unpleasant experience with the cook in the Japanese restaurant was a case in point. Facing the cook's interrogative "Can you speak English?" Joey chose not to respond to him. This decision to keep silent was a result of the cook's verbal and nonverbal language, which made Joey feel offended and humiliated. The social structure characterized as the unequal power relation between Joey and the cook in this episode significantly limited Joey's agency. Indeed, choosing not to respond to the cook was a form of agency; however, Joey could have expressed his anger and indignity verbally to let the cook know that his behavior was offensive and unprofessional. Instead, Joey's silence became a form of resistance according to his own explanation of his response in this encounter.

In contrast to the Japanese restaurant episode in which he kept silent, Joey chose to verbally express his rights and protect his dignity when he felt interrogated and violated by the cashier in Wal-Mart. When the cashier asked Joey "Why do you speak Chinese in public in America?" Joey responded to her by saying "Why should I not speak my own language in public in America?" Joey's positioning and agency was co-constructed through his utterance. Also, the cashier's interrogation that represented the English domination ideology, which functioned as the situated social structure, failed to disable Joey's agency; instead, it provoked his agency to show the cashier who he was and what he should do.

Similar to Joey's encounters, John and Smith also experienced uncomfortable situations when they interacted with local people. While these encounters or setbacks did make them doubt themselves, they did not discourage them. Rather, these negative encounters became driven forces for them to practice English and change themselves to become able and competent L2 users. They all set goals for themselves based on their self-understandings and their encounters. One of the important goals was to have the initiative to speak like a native. These setbacks seemed to function as mediators that reinforced and fortified their agency to make positive changes in their English learning.

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MULTIMODALITY BECAME DISCOURSE FOR AGENCY

L2 learners come with various linguistic abilities, multiple cultural identities, and different perspectives. Given the heterogeneity in their backgrounds, it is natural for them to exhibit varied learning preferences. These L2 learners used multiple modes (e.g., pictures, videos, audios, and gestures) and tools (e.g., smartphones, computers, and laptops) to expand their vocabulary, negotiate meanings, facilitate conversations, and produce and reproduce oral and written texts to develop complicated, dynamic, and multilayered positional identities when they participated in various communities of L2 practices. The L2 learners' smartphones combined with other digital tools and multiple modes served as fundamental linguistic and cultural ecologies for them to socialize through L2 to become recognizable and acceptable community members. In other words, these participants, as meaning makers and designers, used (available) designs to reconstruct available resources to transform meanings, learning situations, and themselves (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012) in the smartphone, network-mediated communities. For example, they used their smartphones to clarify misunderstandings, improve pronunciation, and enhance speech comprehension in different discourses, such as Joey's instructions for teaching table tennis to his American friend, Smith's dialogues with American students in BCM, and John's listening and speaking activities in Culturally Speaking. The findings suggested that their smartphones were not just serving as auxiliary tools for learning English, but represented an integral aspect of L2 literacies practices. The use of smartphones helped form their positioning as efficient, capable, and confident L2 users.

These L2 learners also claimed that the WeChat discussions honed their interactional and communicative competence in this smartphone facilitated online community. They practiced L2 reading and writing by designing written texts generated from audio and video materials and their lived experiences. The interactional text messages were the product of communicational and representational ensemble, which embodied the L2 learners' "creation and organization of the presentation" (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 14). Moreover, text messages exteriorized and materialized these meaning designers' personal preferences, cultural and social considerations, understandings of all modes used in design, and their agency and positionings. Positioned as both producers and consumers of multiple modes and digital tools in physical and virtual spaces, these L2 learners innovated and transformed their L2 literacies practices "by drawing on their vast cultural and linguistic repertoires and creative talents" (Duff & Byrnes, 2019, p. 5) and their agency mediated in and through the understanding and use of multimodalities.

According to van Lier (2004), a classroom is a place where both the teacher and students are able to use rich semiotic resources to make and negotiate

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meaning. Teachers' use of multimodality inspires and encourages students to explore and expand the ways for them to become multimodal meaning makers and designers. For example, in Smith's reading and writing class, the instructor used various material and symbolic resources to contextualize vocabulary learning. A switch on the wall became a tool to teach students what the noun "switch" meant. An action of switching a switch became a mode to teach students what the verb "switch" referred to. The instructor also googled pictures of pollen to show the class what the meaning of this word was. After looking at the pictures, Smith said, "Wow, this is pollen. I saw it every day on the way to ELI." Even though he saw pollen every day, he did not know what it was; he did not know how to say it in English. The pictures simplified and visualized the abstract concept in a way that students could understand and internalize easily. In addition, the pictures functioned as a generator of dialogue, which invited L2 learners to have meaningful and purposeful conversations with each other and their instructors to negotiate meanings.

These L2 learners' L2 learning trajectories showed an intertwined relationship among agency, multimodality, and positioning. More importantly, this multimodal-enhanced classroom culture formulated by the L2 learners and the instructors protected and triggered these L2 learners' agency for desired positioning as digital natives who were flexible when using both modern and traditional technologies to facilitate learning. These L2 learners' interaction with their smartphones and multiple modes created and increased possibilities for community engagement, which enabled them to realize their desired positioning and develop agency. I, therefore, argue that the L2 learners' use of multimodalities functioned as a mediator for their agency promotion and satisfied positioning activities.

VIRTUAL AND PHYSICAL POSITIONING BECAME DISCOURSE FOR AGENCY

Consistent with evidence demonstrating their multimodality-mediated agency as displayed earlier, these L2 learners narrated and displayed a virtual *place* in which they were encouraged to use digital devices, such as smartphones and multiple modes, to facilitate L2 literacies practices when they positioned themselves as freedom participants and active interactants in communities of practice. Not only did the L2 learners display a virtual place in various environments in which they engaged in their academic, workaday, and leisure activities; physical place, too, played a major role in their agentive development. For example, their physical positioning in classrooms evidenced their autonomy for their preferred sitting. For these L2 learners, sitting in the front or the middle of a classroom not only required a lot of courage and

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self-confidence but also required linguistic and academic competence. In addition, this sitting decision-making mirrored these learners' ambition to challenge themselves and desire for participation and improvement. These L2 learners' sitting reflected their reflexivity, which is one of the significant components of agency. As Archer (2007) explains,

> Reflexivity depends upon a subject who has sufficient personal identity to know what he or she cares about and to design the "projects" that they hope (fallibly) will realize their concerns within society. Equally, it depends upon the objectivity of their social circumstances which, under their own (fallible) descriptions, will encourage them to follow one course of action rather than another. Deliberation consists in people evaluating their situations in the light of their concerns and evaluating their projects in the light of their circumstances. (p. 34)

These L2 learners seemed to know that sitting in a physically noticeable place meant both a benefit and a challenge, but they purposefully and reflexively decided to sit in a place, where they believed that they could benefit their learning situations and outcomes.

These L2 learners' virtual and physical positionings, situated in the ideal *place* that constituted a fundamental form of microstructure, promoted their social positioning and further activated their agency. Thus, I argue that these L2 learners' virtual and physical positioning served as a facilitator for them to enhance and demonstrate their agency. This spatially facilitated agency can be understood as the L2 learners' courage and decision to locate themselves in a desired place for their community involvement to achieve their social, cultural, and linguistic recognition and accomplishment.

STRUCTURING MICROSTRUCTURES FOR POSITIONING AND AGENCY

Structure and agency are inseparable because agency produces structure, which in turn, enables or constrains agency (Bakewell, 2010). Since structure and agency tightly interact with each other, improving L2 learners' agency requires structuring favorable microstructures in classrooms. To do this, L2 learners should position and be positioned as social actors. Bakewell defined social actors as

> agents who are self-aware in the sense of continual monitoring of the effects, both intended and unintended, of action and the modification of their behavior accordingly. While their action may be constrained, people's agency ensures that they always have some degrees of freedom—some room to manoeuvre. (Bakewell, 2010, p. 1695)

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Classroom teachers, as powerful representatives and executive makers of micro-social structures, need to ask: How do we define and expand the "some room" for L2 learners "to manoeuvre" in our classrooms? How do we structure microstructures, such as teacher guided classroom interactions, to allow for L2 learners' greater agency and autonomy for positive positioning and community engagement? For example, had the instructor considered his learning situations, Joey could have been an active participant in his reading and writing class. In reality, however, his instructor's teaching practice—speaking too fast without appreciating, empathizing with, and considering student understanding—prohibited Joey's agency and, therefore, further made Joey a marginalized participant in the classroom community. Again, the Chinese international students' silence in Duff's (2002) study exemplified how microstructures constrained language learners' agency. This weakening agency can be responsible, in part, for their nonparticipation or marginalized participation. Although silence is considered a form of agency, this silence cannot help them obtain opportunities for interaction; instead, it resulted in their invisibility in communities of practice. In sum, this microstructure, featured as unequal power relations between the local and nonlocal students, prohibited these newcomers' agency from claiming for power and positioning themselves in desired and aspired ways. The classroom microstructures formulated by local students' domination did not seem to allow much room for agency negotiation and reconstruction, thus making the environment difficult for second-order positioning to take place. Although Duff's participants found other ways through the constraints produced by the structuring structures (Bourdieu, 1977) to change their positioning as purely passive participants by participating in activities they thought they were worthwhile, had the microstructures been more inclusive and tolerant, her participants could have been more empowered in terms of their agency.

It is not uncommon that L2 learners are positioned as uninvited guests by hidden powers, such as instructors and native speakers in mainstream classrooms. For example, Yoon's (2008) findings from her class observation and interview data revealed that teachers' self- and other-positioning affects classroom interactional dynamics, which limited ELLs' agency to negotiate powerful positionings for interactional activities. One of the teacher participants stated,

> I have never seen myself as an ESL teacher. I don't do a lot of special things for my ESL students. I don't. I don't know how bad it is [laughs], but also we are not trained at all like how to work with ESL teachers or regular classroom teachers. I work hard with them [ELLs] as much as they are willing to, but I don't teach specifically for them. . . . I think the ESL teacher's job is to make their time beneficial. (p. 508)

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Since this teacher regarded the teaching of ELLs was ESL teachers' job, his two ELLs were disengaged in and irrelevant to his class. Yoon described:

> The two students, Jun and Natasha, looked nervous and uneasy throughout the semester. They rarely presented their ideas in whole class discussions. Even when they did, they spoke with very soft voices. While many of their American peers sat on a rug and exchanged their ideas, these two students usually listened at their desks without coming down to the rug. (p. 510)

These ELLs' disengagement in classroom activities as a result of their teachers' beliefs about teaching ELLs led Jun and Natasha to become inacceptable community members by their mainstream peers, who considered them as worthless and inferior. This hidden power generated in and through the microstructure further limited ELLs' access to the community of practice. Even though ELLs had linguistic competence for community learning, this competence was often doubted or not recognized by mainstream peers. For example, one of the ELLs was able to spell the word "deserves," but his peer asked Yoon (2008) for conformation. She reported:

> When I approached Jun's group, one boy asked me how to spell "deserves." As soon as Jun heard it, he spelled it clearly and with confidence, "d-e-s-e-r-v-e-s." The first boy looked at me doubtfully and asked whether it was right. I said, "Yes, it is correct." Referring to this incident, Jun later stated, "They don't trust me. They don't think I know a lot of words." Jun attempted to position himself as knowledgeable, but his positioning was challenged by his classmate who refused to accept Jun's positioning. Jun's agency, with which he attempted to position himself as a strong student, was inhibited by his classmate's perceptions. (p. 512)

Yoon, therefore, urged that teachers should pay close attention to students' acceptance and interactions by positioning them as cultural and social beings with complicated realities and various needs, not simply viewing them as language learners. Also, teachers' guidance for helping mainstream students to recognize and appreciate ELLs' linguistic and cultural competence is crucial for building an inclusive and appreciative classroom culture—one which can free ELLs from the constraints of the micro-social structure. As Toohey (2000) suggested, viewing language learners as community members requires educational researchers to examine conditions for learning and appropriation of practices. In this sense, educational research should focus more on

> the variety of positionings available for learners to occupy in their communities, social relations in particular communities, and the design and structure of the practices which bound the community. Conditions in different communities

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> vary with regard to ease of access to expertise, to opportunities for practice, to consequences for error in practice and so on. All of these matters are important in analyzing how particular communities organize learning. (p. 126)

Toohey's suggestion highlighted the emphasis on social structures of communities of practice because social structures shape positioning, which, in turn, further shapes agency. For example, in Shi's (2011) research, the Chinese international student participants' agency was significantly limited by linguistically and culturally unequal power relations in their classrooms. These students believed that their American peers' frequent use of idioms and colloquial English, fast pace of speaking, rapid change of turn-taking, and their lack of familiarity with the local culture restricted their access to symbolic and material resources for classroom interactions. They thus chose silence as a strategy for saving face. These students were positioned and positioned themselves as incompetent and powerless within the social structure in that particular community. Although they did not want to take on the negative positionings, it seemed that they did not have a choice to position themselves in positive situations or gain desired positionings assigned by their American peers. Agency is not just *self-conquering*—recognition of one's shortcomings and strategies to overcome these shortcomings, such as fear of making mistakes, dilemmas and ambivalence to take initiatives to transform oneself for the better, and the myth that knowledge is based on talent and intelligence instead of effort—but also *conquering others*, such as grappling with negative circumstances that are produced and reproduced by social structures and everyday practices. Agents do not simply reproduce social structures; instead, they transform social structures to enhance their biographies (Beck, 1992) in particular and the whole society in general. However, the transformation needs a supportive force from the social structure, which is a positive result of the interaction between agency and social structures.

Classroom interactions that allow for positive positioning activities encourage L2 learners to exercise and promote agency, which in turn fosters desired and powerful positioning. John's and Smith's classes provided evidence for this argument. The humanized teaching approaches of their instructors, such as recasting classroom questions or statements in classroom discourse, sensitivity to their facial expressions, and creative and meaningful projects to tailor their needs for speaking and listening, are crucial for L2 learners' desired positioning and agency development. Moreover, their instructors' orientation and guidance for recognition of and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity helped build a tolerant and appreciative classroom culture: an integral component of microstructure, which generated power for them to position themselves in ways that they found to demonstrate their value and self-worth.

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In addition, structuring microstructures for positioning and agency should profoundly take L2 learners' cultural and linguistic diversity into consideration because their cultural and linguistic repertoires are fundamental inspirations for their self-positioning and agency development. For example, Joey and Smith not only considered their Chinese names as a symbol of themselves but also as power for their agentive actions. Although John did not mention his real name, he used Lǐhuá, a common Chinese name to remember his past and envision his future. Their keepsakes, which carried meanings of familial obligations, expectations, and bonding, represented their identities and reinforced their agency to seek opportunities for self-transformation. However, L2 learners' cultural artifacts are often devalued and even ignored in teaching practices. For example, in Kohli and Solorzano's (2012) study, the names of students of color became cultural jokes and bases of humiliation because their teachers were unable to pronounce them. The students felt insulted and often shamed because they were teased by their peers. One student wrote, "I didn't find that comparison humorous the way he did (or the rest of the class who began laughing too), but I definitely felt it was demeaning being ridiculed in front of my classmates" (p. 453). One teacher even changed his student's name "Nitin" to his own name "Frank" because he deemed that the student's name was difficult to pronounce. Kohli and Solorzano argued, "Names are very personal and cultural, and often carry a great deal of meaning for families. Nitin is a Hindu name that means *right path* in Sanskrit" (p. 452). Disregarding the religious and cultural significance of this name, the teacher renamed the student after himself, which deprived this student of an important aspect of identity. Because a name refers to a cultural origin, which represents strength, power, and hope for one's future, making jokes or acting flippantly about one's name or changing one's name to something else "fostered an environment of cultural disrespect" (p. 452). The teachers did not realize how important a name was to a student. Their ignorance of and disrespect for the names of students of color contributed to very negative consequences for the students' "aspirations, motivations, and love for their culture and themselves" (p. 449), which have the danger to cause the students to position themselves negatively and further weaken their agency.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the nature of this research with respect to sample size, time, gender, age, and the special setting, future research can be conducted to minimize these limitations. First, future research will need to expand the sample size in terms of participant numbers, gender, different ages, and different cultural and educational backgrounds to investigate the similarities and differences

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of L2 learning experiences resulting from these factors. Also, future research may consider longitudinal ethnographic case studies to explore the interaction between structure and agency in these increasingly complicated sociocultural contexts characterized as highly digitized, multimodal, and multilingual, and multicultural social networks for understanding L2 learners' learning trajectories and language use. Current research on SLA has focused more on L2 learner agency. However, because of the complexity of L2 learners' diverse multilingual and multicultural repertoires of meaning-making resources and positionings mediated and shaped by digitized and globalized interactions, a concentration on understanding how the interrelationship between social structure and agency shapes L2 learners' positioning while they participate in the practices of L2 literacies needs to be emphasized.

To construct a more comprehensive and complex understanding of language learning and use in order to address L2 learners or English language learners' social, cultural, and linguistic well-being and issues of educational equity and equality, I plan to investigate how L2 learners' agency change based on structural conditions in classrooms by asking following questions: (1) How do L2 learners (post ELI students) position themselves and others in interactions with their professors and classmates in mainstream classrooms? (2) How do the professors and classmates position themselves in relation to the L2 learners? (3) How does the L2 learners' agency change based on the positioning and the interactions in classroom activities? and (4) How does the interaction between structure and agency influence the L2 learners' learning situations and outcomes? In order to obtain a more robust picture of L2 learners' learning experiences, I plan to interview L2 learners' professors and their classmates. I also plan to observe their classes and take field notes, which can be the primary data source because classroom activities can offer greater evidence for me to understand the interaction between structure and agency. Documents, including homework sheets, copies of schoolwork, test papers, essays, and other artifacts, will be collected as a supplementary data source. Through this case study, I hope to form a holistic and ecological understanding of how teachers and schools should and can do to foster a beneficial social structure at different levels to facilitate language learners to become agentive beings.

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