

Designing English digital stories for global audiences

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Abstract. Viewing digitally-mediated multimodal composing as a new literacy practice, this research investigates how English Language Learners (ELLs) serve as multimodal designers to reach a global audience. Grounded in the perspective of literacy as social practice and the notion of ‘designing’, it reveals that the two focal groups of this study employ local and global resources for multimodal designing. In addition, their family experience, literacy practices, video experiences, and their interactions with friends, instructors, and peers mediate how they select, expand, and orchestrate the cultural resources at their disposal. In relation to intercultural blending, this study reports that ELLs employ ‘authenticating strategies’ and ‘playful strategies’ to reach their global audience. This finding encourages us to reflect upon strategies that can be used to examine the emerging playful or non-traditional multimodal composing that the global youth continues to consume and produce.

Keywords: multimodal composing, new literacies, intercultural blending, learner agency.

1. Introduction

In recent years, a growing number of second/foreign language (L2) educators have started to implement multimodal projects in their classrooms. To understand what L2 learners gain from these projects and how they approach multimodal composing, researchers have investigated multimodal composing as a pedagogical intervention and as a new literacy practice.

Conceptualizing multimodal composing as a new literacy practice, scholars have coined on the notion of *designing* (The New London Group, 1996). Based on

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How to cite this article: Yang, Y.-F. (2018). Designing English digital stories for global audiences. In P. Taalas, J. Jalkanen, L. Bradley & S. Thouéšny (Eds), *Future-proof CALL: language learning as exploration and encounters – short papers from EUROCALL 2018* (pp. 313-318). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2018.26.856>

Cope and Kalantzis (2009), *designing* is a process that involves the transformation of the ‘Available Design’ (i.e. available resources in L2 learners’ repertoire) to the ‘Redesigned’ (i.e. appropriating available resources in an unconventional way). For example, in a digital story production, the image of ‘parents’ and their associated texts can be seen as L2 learners’ ‘Available Design’. However, when these resources are used repeatedly or assembled in different creative means, they function as the ‘Redesigned’ for the progressing story (Nelson, 2006).

Notably, during the designing process, designers or learners act on their socio-cultural mediated interests, consider their audience, and reflect their social context for their ‘Available Designs’ and ‘Redesigned’ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In relation to audience awareness, Hafner’s (2015) notion of *intercultural blending*, the assemblage and the orchestration of multiple cultural resources, can be useful to understand the designing of multimodal ensembles “that is meant for a global audience to create an intercultural blend” (p. 504).

Valuing digitally-mediated multimodal composing as a new literacy practice, this research investigates how ELLs serve as multimodal designers when working on one type of multimodal compositions, digital storytelling, to reach a global audience. In particular, how ELLs negotiate and re-contextualize culturally and linguistically diversified resources in relation to ‘designing’ (The New London Group, 1996) when performing intercultural blending (Hafner, 2015) is emphasized.

2. Method

2.1. The video-based digital storytelling project

This study is conducted in an undergraduate course focusing on multimedia and English communication in a university in Taiwan. To enrich students’ multimodal experiences, it requires students to produce a three to five minute collaborative video-based English digital story, with an aim of reaching global audiences. Students work in groups for the project, approach two international students of different regions for peer reviews, and then revise their work before the final presentation.

The topic of the project centers on ‘cultural space’, a physical site in a local community, a virtual space on the Internet or a metaphorical space that carries personal or collective cultural memories and stories. Students are encouraged to

incorporate meaningful scenes, plots, people, social relationships, artifacts, etc., to reflect the aesthetics, cultural values, beliefs, lifestyles, cultural memories etc. of a specific cultural space in their stories (e.g. a renewed building, a historical site, a specific cultural community). In addition, they are advised to think creatively for content development instead of solely presenting the factual information of a cultural space.

2.2. Participants and data collection

Participants of this study consist of 39 ELLs who are in their 20s. Both local students from Taiwan and exchange students from Europe and Southeast Asia participated in this study. This paper analyzes the experiences of eight students who work in two separate groups. The first group includes four English major students who are from Taiwan, and the second group consists of four European exchange students who major either in Business or Computer Science. Data collections include students' digital stories, interviews, journals, questionnaires, and class presentations.

2.3. Data analysis

This study applies [Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's \(2014\)](#) guidelines for data analysis. The researcher first analyzes participants' journals, class presentations, and interviews to locate the vital 'Redesigned' and the 'Available Designs' through provisional coding. She then triangulates the data by examining the final digital story and the video segments the participants produced. Through constant comparison, the identified 'Available Designs' are categorized as local, translocal, and global resources and displayed in a chart. In addition, participants' journals, class presentations, and interviews are re-analyzed again to examine their designing process. Their (re)interpretations, (re)imagination, and recontextualization of cultural resources are identified and compared. Finally, [Hafner's \(2015\)](#) notion of *intercultural blending* is used to identify the 'Redesigned' and the 'Available Design' that purposefully aims at a global audience. Participants' strategies of deploying cultural resources for a global audience, including authenticating strategies and playful strategies, emerge as important themes during the data analysis process in this study.

3. Findings and discussion

This study found that these two groups of ELLs employ local resources, translocal resources, and global resources in their design (see [Table 1](#)). Their family, literacy,

and video experiences as well as their friends’, instructor’s and peers’ comments mediate how they select, expand, and orchestrate the cultural resources at their disposal.

Table 1. Examples of local, translocal, and global resources

	Group 1: Home is Home	Group 2: Heart Threat
Local Resources	-The stubborn father; the daughter who wants to practice filial piety; a gossip neighbor -A Buddhist court; the scooter rider without helmet; the sticky tofu stand; the fruit stand -The local park; an old family photo -Taiwanese soap operas; Taiwanese language; Mandarin Chinese language, etc.	-A taxi driver who cannot speak English -taxi driver’s Chinese oral narration -local sceneries along the Love River; local harbor views; tourists’ boats -love signs along the Love River
Translocal Resources	-Thai commercials	-A doctor who can speak English “Kaohsiung Daily,” a local English newspaper
Global Resources	-English subtitle; English monologue; English songs; English slogan -The concept of home	-The YouTuber style -Foreign exchange students -Love; lovers holding hands together; the color of red; pink flowers -English subtitles; English slogan; marketing videos

However, their performance of intercultural blending demonstrates different orientations. While the first group endeavors to employ ‘authenticating strategies’, the second group works to incorporate ‘playful strategies’ for intercultural blending. For example, in the first group’s video-based digital story, local images, local languages and local values are incorporated to provide opportunities for global audiences to “experience the local tradition as how one would experience authenticity in a foreign language movie” (Interview). Thus, local images and dialogues emphasizing a stubborn father (i.e. local resource), a gossip neighbor (i.e. local resource), and a caring daughter (i.e. local resource) are designed and orchestrated to present the image of home (i.e. global resource) for global audiences.

In addition, this group struggles to define the role of Taiwanese (i.e. local resources) and English (i.e. global resources) when attempting to imitating the style of a typical Taiwanese soap opera in their story. Experiencing the ‘inauthenticity’ of a local conversation presented in English, their exploration and negotiation of how to best arrange Taiwanese oral narrations, English oral narrations, and English

subtitles to reach global audiences and to uncover the local cultures of family relationships remains salient. This finding manifests that intercultural blending (Hafner, 2015) not only can involve assemblages of multiple cultural artifacts but also orchestration of multiple languages.

Interestingly, the second group works to incorporate ‘playful strategies’ for intercultural blending. Playful yet illogical designs that resemble the YouTuber style are incorporated. Through the design of the ‘taxi driver’ who rides a scooter, the taxi driver who wears a mask and sunglasses or the ‘shining beautiful lady’ besides the river, their digital story attracts global audiences through the humor that global youth can easily follow. Such findings encourage us to further explore the role of genre play (Tardy, 2016) in multimodal composing.

4. Conclusions

This paper reports ELLs’ exploration of intercultural blending in their designing of multimodal composing. How students select and orchestrate local and global cultural resources to reach a global audience is presented. Students’ playful multimodal designs challenge us to reflect how to further examine the emerging non-traditional multimodal composing that the global youth may consume and produce. Genre play (Tardy, 2016) or other related frameworks may continue to advance our understanding about non-traditional multimodal compositions.

5. Acknowledgements

This research is part of a large study funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology in Taiwan, R. O. C. (MOST 106-2410-H-110-038-).

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Published by Research-publishing.net, a not-for-profit association
Contact: info@research-publishing.net

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Future-proof CALL: language learning as exploration and encounters – short papers from EUROCALL 2018
Edited by Peppi Taalas, Juha Jalkanen, Linda Bradley, and Sylvie Thoušny

Publication date: 2018/12/08

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Cover layout by © 2018 Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)
Drawings by © 2018 Linda Saukko-Rauta (linda@redanredan.fi)

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-22-1 (Ebook, PDF, colour)

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-23-8 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-21-4 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)

Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, UK: British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: Décembre 2018.