

Linguistic Identity Positioning in Facebook Posts During Second Language Study Abroad: One Teen's Language Use, Experience, and Awareness

Roswita Dressler
University of Calgary

Anja Dressler
University of Calgary

Abstract

Teens who post on the popular social networking site Facebook in their home environment often continue to do so on second language study abroad sojourns. These sojourners use Facebook to document and make sense of their experiences in the host culture and position themselves with respect to language(s) and culture(s). This study examined one teen's identity positioning through her Facebook posts from two separate study abroad experiences in Germany. Data sources included her Facebook posts from both sojourns and a written reflection completed upon return from the second sojourn. Findings revealed that this teen used Facebook posts to position herself as a German-English bilingual and a member of an imagined community of German-English bilinguals by making a choice on which language(s) to use, reporting her linguistic successes and challenges, and indicating growing language awareness. This study addresses the call by study abroad researchers (Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2009, 2013; Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, & McManus, 2015) to investigate the effects of social media, such as Facebook, as part of the contemporary culture of study abroad, and sheds light on the role it plays, especially regarding second language identity positioning.

Résumé

Les adolescents qui affichent sur le site social Facebook dans leur environnement familial continuent à le faire pendant leur séjour à l'étranger. Ces adolescents utilisent Facebook pour documenter et réfléchir sur leurs expériences dans le pays hôte et pour se positionner par rapport à leur langue et à leur culture ou aux langues et aux cultures. Cette étude a examiné le positionnement d'une adolescente par rapport à son identité à travers des messages Facebook lors de deux séjours différents en Allemagne. Les données de ces expériences incluent des messages Facebook provenant des deux séjours et une réflexion écrite complétée à son retour du deuxième séjour. Les résultats ont révélé que cette adolescente a utilisé les messages Facebook pour se positionner en tant que bilingue allemand-anglais. De plus, elle a démontré faire partie d'une communauté imaginée de bilingues allemand-anglais en choisissant une langue spécifique selon le contexte et en rapportant les succès et défis linguistiques qu'elle a vécus. Elle a également démontré un certain éveil aux langues. Cette étude comble les besoins d'étudier l'usage des médias sociaux tels que Facebook et le rôle du positionnement identitaire des adolescents qui font des séjours à l'étranger. Ces besoins ont été démontrés par des chercheurs qui travaillent

dans le domaine (Coleman, 2013 ; Kinginger, 2009, 2013 ; Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura et McManus, 2015). L'usage des médias sociaux tels que Facebook et le rôle qu'ils ont à positionner l'identité linguistique des adolescents qui étudient à l'étranger sera le thème de cet article.

Linguistic Identity Positioning in Facebook Posts During Second Language Study Abroad: One Teen's Language Use, Experience, and Awareness

There must be something wrong with me... i just thought about opening the window while thinking "*ich brauche frische luft*" in my head... but im gonna do it anyway...

—Teen, *first sojourn*

Introduction

This study examines one Anglophone Canadian teen's experiences with two separate second language (L2) study abroad (SA) sojourns in Germany through an analysis of her Facebook posts. As the epigraph illustrates, teens use Facebook as a mediational means to position their identity while on SA (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). In this post, *Teen*, our chosen moniker for the participant in this study, positions herself as a bilingual sojourner: Posting in two languages and using non-standard capitalization of a German noun (lower case *luft* instead of upper case *Luft*), she comments on the host culture's perceived preoccupation with the need for fresh air having entered her own thoughts and acknowledges both her discomfort with these thoughts ("something wrong with me") and her contradicting desire to be part of the host culture ("im gonna do it anyway"). While Facebook posts such as this provide a glimpse into identity repositioning while on SA, and while SA researchers have called for greater scrutiny of participants' in-sojourn social media use (see Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2009, 2013; Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, & McManus, 2015), there remains very little work examining the use of Facebook by teenage or youth participants in the host culture (Back, 2013; Godwin-Jones, 2016). Certainly, posting on Facebook is a product of creation whereby teens process their L2 SA experience through "masspersonal communication" (Bazarova, Taft, Choi, & Cosley, 2012) by making random private thoughts public. Thus, in our study, we ask the question: What do one teen's Facebook posts during SA reveal about her identity positioning? To explore this question, we use Facebook data, supplemented by a reflection completed upon return from the second sojourn. The analysis of the data is informed by Harré and van Langenhove's (1991) understandings of positioning, Norton and Toohey's (2011) concept of imagined communities, and Pavlenko's (2007) recommendations for analysis of autobiographic narratives. This study responds to an identified gap in SA research around how teens use Facebook during SA experiences.

Literature Review

In the past two decades, identity has emerged as a significant topic of inquiry in L2 education research generally, as well as in study and residence abroad research and research on L2s and digital technology more particularly (Godwin-Jones, 2016). Researchers have

conceptualized L2 identity in various ways, focusing not only on how L2 learners feel about their identity, but also on how they are perceived as L2 learners. Identity, how a person sees herself in the world, is dynamic and situational (Norton, 2013). Norton's (2000) examination of five adult women learning English in Canada sheds light on the power dynamics and situational constraints that had an impact on their struggles and successes. She proposed "investment" as a dynamic construct to replace the static notion of motivation for describing the effort that L2 learners are willing or able to put into their language learning. Meanwhile, Byram (2008) noted that L2 learners are "acting interculturally" when they build on the intercultural competencies they develop as they learn the language and interact with and in the L2 culture. As the result of living in naturalistic situations, they become "bicultural" (p. 59). Kramsch (2009) explored how "multilingual subjects," those people who use more than one language in everyday life, express their sense of self through the use of language as symbolic power. This sense of self includes the representation of themselves, their ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. The multilingual subject takes advantage of language learning to create an identity, sometimes embracing new ways of thinking and acting. Block (2014) defined L2 identity as the "assumed and/or attributed relationship between one's sense of self and a means of communication" (p. 46). These relationships can be seen as expertise, affiliation, or inheritance. Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott and Brown (2012) maintained that dimensions of L2 identity include identity-related aspects of L2 proficiency, linguistic self-concept and L2 mediated aspects of personal competence. None of these classifications are to be taken as essentialized categories, but rather viewed as heuristics to facilitate our understanding of the L2 learners' identity positioning. While there may be elements that a person asserts as fixed, how she constructs her identity or how others perceive her identity are influenced by the context, the people in that context, and across time (Norton, 2013). Dervin (2016) encouraged a "liquid realism" in conceptualizing L2 identity and the competencies that emerge, that is, finding simple ways to represent the complexities and even inconsistencies one observes in L2 learners' expressions of identity. This study adopts this "simplicity" by exploring how one teen uses Facebook as a mediational means to position herself as bilingual and bicultural.

Contexts of SA provide fertile ground for L2 identity research. Block (2014) noted that one prominent aspect of SA is the effect on the sense of self. This effect is influenced by the context of the SA, the duration of the sojourn, and the identity security of the sojourner. The differences among SA contexts are numerous. Studies have noted that not all sojourns provide automatic access to native speakers, naturalistic language, and positive encounters with locals, especially contexts in which students perceive the differences to be greater than they had anticipated or are unable to negotiate the complexities of the cultural differences (Mitchell et al., 2015). For example, Plews (2015) has identified that some sojourners align more with an intercultural identity and less with a national identity as a result of experiences during SA, but that this could not be said for all sojourners in his study. Also, while Dwyer (2004) indicated that, the longer the time spent abroad, the greater is the likelihood of language learning and contact with locals, McKeown (2009) argued that the quality and nature of the interaction is more important than length of time alone. When an environment is culturally unfamiliar, a sojourner's identity can become insecure and the sojourner must negotiate this insecurity in order to consider the experience positively (Jackson, 2008). However, Block (2014) noted that not all sojourners are able to successfully negotiate the challenging situations they find themselves in, returning from their sojourns disappointed and disillusioned. For second language learners (L2Ls),

becoming or being bilingual is not only an identity, it is also membership in or affiliation with an imagined community in which they may not be accepted without expertise or inheritance (Marx, 2002). Ecke (2013) reported that students often judge the success of SA sojourns by the degree to which they are able to construct an imagined bilingual identity and interact with the target community (see also Moyer, 2004; Piller, 2002). In Kinginger (2004), the sojourner Alice aspired to construct an imagined bilingual identity as a cultured French speaker, such as those she perceived before her SA in France. Yet the negotiation of an imagined identity is rarely an explicit goal of sojourners. Sometimes, as in the case of the sojourner Lola in Wolcott's (2013) study, the expressed goal is personal enjoyment. Nonetheless, previous research findings reveal SA as a context in which identity negotiation takes place, shedding light on the interplay between context, time abroad, and the (in)security of identity positioning.

Research in L2 learning contexts mediated by technology has also revealed its use for exploring L2 identity. Godwin-Jones (2016) maintained that purposeful use of digital technology during SA can assist students in forging an L2 identity and provide a space for negotiating the challenges of L2 learning in SA. Ortega (2009) noted that these technological environments provide "symbolic and affective returns" (p. 250) for L2Ls who engage in them. For example, Black (2009) documented the out-of-school practices of English language learners engaging in fan fiction websites, revealing that they are able to position themselves as capable and creative in this medium, despite any challenges with the language or previous inexperience with the technology. Certainly, the various digital technologies available to L2Ls provide unique opportunities for identity positioning. Especially, social media offers a mediational means for students to play with their identity. Each site or app has its own culture, styles, and conventions. The culture of the social media site Facebook, for example, is based on how people post status updates and comments or "like" the posts of others and thereby also influences how its users write (E. B. Lee, 2012), self-present (boyd, 2014), and evaluate others (Maiz-Arevalo & Garcia-Gomez, 2013). Facebook provides a "popular agora for writing identity into being" (D'Arcy & Young, 2012, p. 532); knowing this, its users might present themselves differently on Facebook from how they might present themselves on other sites or offline. Second language learning (or proficiency) presents a further dimension of complication as users attempt to express themselves in a different language and negotiate when and how often they post in their language(s), making decisions about translation, code-switching, and linguistic commentary. K. Lee and Ranta (2014) reported that Facebook served as a creative and collaborate space for English as a foreign language students to explore their plurilingual identities. Pasfield-Neofitou (2012) found that students of Japanese constructed their online identities in a number of ways, not only as L2Ls, even if this was their main identity positioning. As well, Riley (2013) noted that Spanish-English bilinguals used Facebook status updates as a means for communicating their identity in unique ways. When on SA, teens use their posts specifically to document their experiences with the host culture and position themselves with respect to the language(s) and culture(s) [Kelly, 2010]. However, researchers who have been interested in students' out-of-class use of Facebook have often had limited access to posts and are restricted to analyzing the amount of usage or posts out of context (Kelly, 2010; Levine, 2014; Mitchell, 2012). One exception is Back (2013), who was able to "friend" her three participants for 10 months and take screen shots of their Facebook walls, documenting L2 use that she later investigated during a post-sojourn interview. Certainly, Facebook posts serve as micronarrative snapshots of L2

identity positioning over time, and the ubiquity of teens' interactions with Facebook, currently the number-one social media site (Duggan & Smith, 2013), would suggest that a study specifically examining all of one teen's SA Facebook posts is both warranted and timely.

Methodology

This qualitative study examines one teen's Facebook posts during two SA sojourns in order to explore her identity positioning. Identity can be expressed by self-positioning in narratives or conversations through one's choice of words by ascribing certain characteristics to one's identity or by making claims in opposition to an "other" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). Norton and Toohey (2011) recognized that this positioning can be used to affiliate oneself with a community to which one wishes to belong. This is especially pertinent to L2Ls who "can, but sometimes cannot, appropriate more desirable identities with respect to the target language community" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 2). Through language, a person positions herself in keeping with her perceived L2 identity (Pavlenko, 2007). The choice of a qualitative research paradigm for this study allows for more in-depth, nuanced exploration of identity positioning during SA and is in keeping with other identity research in this field (see Guardado, 2012; Kramsch & Candlin, 2003; Norton, 2010). Our after-the-fact use of the Facebook posts as data provides an etic perspective, whereby we have stressed what is important to us currently as researchers, while the involvement of the author of the posts, Teen, as one of the researchers, also enables the emic perspective of sojourner-participant. These two perspectives strengthen this qualitative exploration of identity.

Pavlenko (2007) listed language memoirs, linguistic autobiographies, and learners' journals and diaries as sources of written language often analyzed for the identity positioning of L2 speakers because they offer insight into private lives, highlight connections between language learning and other aspects such as identity, and provide insight into specific contexts that are often difficult to analyze without such sources. Social networking sites such as Facebook resemble diaries or journals since the nature of posting on Facebook involves communicating personal thoughts and experiences. However, posts also differ in several ways. The communication on social media is masspersonal. Posts are written as if personal, but distributed to large numbers of readers. While the nature of posts might appear intimate, most users, especially teens, have large numbers of friends (E. B. Lee, 2012) and they cannot be sure who is reading their posts at any given time. Depending on a person's Facebook settings, posts may be read by anyone, friends of friends, acquaintances and friends, or friends only. Yet, Facebook posters often perceive that they have written for a specific audience and may write more freely than if they kept in mind the openness of the forum (Warrell & Jacobsen, 2014). Examining their posts may give some indication of their perception of audience, but consultation with the specific Facebook author strengthens the validity of claims regarding the intended audience. Also, the timescale of posts is dynamic since they stay in one's newsfeed (history) and can be read days, weeks, or years later, including by people who were not yet friends at the time of writing (Page, 2010). While posting behaviour may change as users mature, older posts, which may no longer represent their current views or self-positioning, usually remain, as users rarely review their posting history or make changes. This makes the nature of Facebook as a mediational means quite different from L2 diaries or journals, which are

usually only read by the writer, or perhaps an instructor if graded or a researcher if collected as data. In light of this difference, Facebook posters might be upset if they discover that researchers have used the writing out of context or for a different purpose (Markham & Buchanan, 2015). It was important to keep in mind both the similarities and differences between Facebook and other written narratives when conducting this study.

Teen's Profile

The teen in this study is the second author of this paper and actively participated in the data collection and analysis. We have chosen the moniker *Teen* to stand for the type of person she was at the time of gathering data: a white, teenage, Anglophone, western Canadian female of German heritage. Her parents are professionals and she is the second of four children. She took part in two separate SA sojourns in Germany, from August, 2010, to January, 2011, and from April to August, 2014. For the first sojourn, she was abroad for the first semester of Grade 11 (the second-to-last year of senior high school). While on this sojourn she turned 16. Traveling to Germany on a Canadian passport and, since she stayed longer than the 90 days permitted by her visitor status, she registered with the local authorities as a visiting foreigner.

Between exchanges, Teen completed the course sequence of high school German by attending an accredited German language school, graduated from high school, and began university. During this time, her mother discovered that she, herself, was considered a dual citizen under German law and as a consequence, her children. As a result, Teen obtained a German passport in time for the second sojourn. Having the German passport allowed Teen to travel to Germany the second time as a citizen of the European Union. Although she still had to register her residence, entry and exit procedures were facilitated.

For the second sojourn, Teen was 19 and a declared linguistics and languages major. At university, she qualified for advance placement in senior German courses and completed three semesters of a German minor (seven half courses or 21 credits) before embarking upon her exchange in the second half of her second year. The second sojourn occurred in place of the second semester of her second year of university. The university courses she was taking abroad counted for credit toward her domestic degree and upon return she switched her major to German.

Settings and Social Media Habits

The first sojourn was a private exchange arranged with relatives with whom Teen lived while attending a *Gymnasium* (German academic high school) in a small city in North Rhine-Westfalia. The family consisted of a mother (Teen's first cousin once removed), a father, and two daughters, one of whom was the same age as Teen. This daughter included Teen in her social circles and her youth group at church. Teen had a unique program at school, attending English for students in the highest grade, a number of classes at her grade level, and German classes with Grade 6s and 7s, in which the homework was closer to her level of German. She attended dance class twice a week, church youth group, and a community German class at the town's *Volkshochschule* (community school) once a week.

During the first sojourn, Teen was new to Facebook, having been permitted by her parents to join the site one month before leaving. Facebook was the only social media site of which she was a member and she only accessed it on her laptop while at the sojourn

home. Pictures had to be transferred from a camera to her laptop and, as a result, she only occasionally uploaded her own photos into the photo album of Facebook, usually in large unsorted quantities. She posted status updates on average three times a day.

The second sojourn took place in Teen's second year of university as a part of an official exchange program between her western Canadian university and a university in Lower Saxony. She lived in a *Wohngemeinschaft* (cooperative student housing) with seven German and four international students (two Eastern European, two African). The students shared a kitchen, which served as a common place to socialize. Teen requested that her housemates speak to her in German, but there were some students with whom she spoke in English due to their lack of proficiency in German. Additionally, she had friends from classes and the international program, with whom she spoke in German approximately half of the time. Several of these friends formed a group that socialized together on a regular basis, often in English. However, there were also frequent weekends when Teen visited relatives, including the family of her first sojourn, and these visits were conducted in German. She attended five university classes, two taught in German and three taught in English. She dropped one English course at the end of the term and received transfer credit for four university classes.

Teen's social media habits in the second sojourn were influenced by changes in social media and her own personal situation. Between the two sojourns, Facebook developed a smartphone app and messenger function. It was also during this time that Teen acquired a smartphone. As a result, she posted less often and used the messenger function for personal interactions. This resulted in fewer posts overall and the status updates were less intimate or personal in nature. Since her phone had a camera and an inexpensive data plan, she would access Facebook multiple times a day and could upload pictures immediately after taking them. Two months into the sojourn, her new friends insisted that she sign up for Instagram and Spotify. Teen posted some of her pictures to Instagram, but chose not to share those on her Facebook newsfeed. She also signed up for Spotify, an online music streaming service that had been in Germany since March 2012 but had not yet debuted in North America and was new to her. Spotify sent automatic notifications to her Facebook account, but she set up Facebook settings such that these notifications were not visible on her newsfeed. Therefore, despite their interconnected natures, Teen's visible Facebook posts did not reveal her involvement in other digital media platforms.

Upon Teen's return from the second sojourn, the first author proposed a collaboration and we, the two authors, discussed this collaboration with the Chair of our institution's research ethics board (IREB) to ensure ethical requirements had been met. Warrell and Jacobsen (2014) noted a gap in Canadian ethics policies in online research settings and recognized the challenge of properly crediting online writing. Keeping this in mind and considering Teen to be an author, rather than a research participant, we proposed to the Chair that we be considered as co-researchers. The Chair concurred, under the understanding that the data sources be limited to those posts authored by Teen.

Data Sources and Analysis

Data sources for this article include Facebook posts from two sojourns of approximately 5 months each, supplemented by a reflection completed upon return from the second sojourn. The format of the reflection was determined by the first author upon the second author/participant's request for structure. The first author provided the following

guiding questions: How were the two experiences similar/different? How was my relationship with Facebook similar/different? This post-sojourn reflection served to strengthen the analysis of the Facebook posts.

Teen requested her personal data from Facebook.com. These data arrived as a large text file of all of her Facebook posts since the beginning of her membership. We reduced the file by deleting all data except those created during the time frames of the two sojourns: August 16, 2010, to January 25, 2011; and April 2 to August 20, 2014. Then, the text file, opened in Microsoft Word, was imported to Microsoft Excel in order to separate the data entries. The two sojourn time frames were kept separate and data entries that were not relevant to the study were removed as follows. Status update headers (i.e., “[Teen] updated her status”) and time stamps (e.g., “Thursday, August 21, 2014 at 12:37am UTC-06”) were deleted for readability and the file was saved under a new name. The original file was referenced later to determine the chronology of the postings during later stages of analysis. Friend updates (e.g., “[Teen] and [Friend] are now friends”), photographs and posts written by others (e.g., “Happy Birthday [Teen]!!!! Hope it's wonderful. :D <3 you”) were removed for ethical reasons to avoid identifying individuals. Although photographs are a part of the multimodal aspect of Facebook, they were not included in the data file. We did not seek IREB permission to use them as data, since we felt that Teen’s picture taking and uploading frequency differed greatly between sojourns and an investigation of this aspect of her Facebook use would require a different method of analysis to be productive. However, comments on pictures remained as part of the data set. Lastly, Spotify notifications (e.g., “[Teen] listened to Die Nacht by Frittenbude on Spotify”) were removed. These notifications appear in the data, but were never visible on Teen’s newsfeed. Since Spotify emerged in Germany between the two sojourns and Teen only started using it partway through the second sojourn, the notifications hint at, but do not fully illustrate, the language of her musical choices. After deletion of these elements, 495 posts from both sojourns remained.

The analysis occurred in three stages. First, each entry was coded for language: German, English, or bilingual entries. Then, the entries were labeled according to three major themes in the SA literature: (a) language awareness—displays of explicit knowledge about language, (b) identity positioning, and (c) cultural learning. While we were most concerned with identity, each category proved to be relevant as there was overlap among them. Each grouping was then further analyzed to determine commonalities and overlaps. The analysis of the data is informed by Harré and van Langenhove’s (1991) understandings of positioning, Norton and Toohey’s (2011) imagined communities, and Pavlenko’s (2007) recommendations for analysis of autobiographic narratives. Pavlenko especially called for attention to which languages are used and how they are used as well as differences that arise over time. We therefore not only documented which languages were used, but also paid attention to how they were used, especially in posts that contained code-switching or were written in one language, but addressed to an audience that might not understand it as well as Teen. We also reconsidered the data through the use of post-sojourn reflection questions and cross-checked the meaning of postings by searching for them in context on Teen’s Facebook page or the master file with timestamps if the sorting for analysis left them decontextualized. Of course, an insider perspective that would otherwise have been lost on the first author was possible since Teen is one of the co-researchers. For the purpose of this article, we focus on the posts that reveal identity positioning over the course of the two SA sojourns.

Findings

We have organized the findings of Teen's Facebook posts into linguistic categories that emerged during our analysis: language use, language acquisition, and language awareness. The findings in these categories most clearly contributed to her identity positioning. We present them here chronologically by sojourn.

First Sojourn

Language use. Language use in this study refers to both the frequency and complexity of Teen's use of German. Throughout she posted in English ($n = 261$), German ($n = 55$) or in both English and German ($n = 26$). Regarding German, she began with isolated words or small sentences. As Teen's linguistic competence developed, some of those posts were longer and more grammatically complex. By the end of the first sojourn, she chose to write whole posts in German or in both languages. Clearly, her linguistic performance of self on Facebook became actively more bilingual. Table 1 illustrates the numbers of German and bilingual posts, broken down by the week in which such posts appeared, with one example per week. Examples appear as they were written, followed by English translations in square brackets where applicable.

The first of 55 German posts started at week 2. Early posts consisted of high frequency phrases: "*mir ist muede*" [I am tired] (week 2); "*ich kann aufschlafen [sic]!!!!!!! JAAAAAAAA!!!!* [I can sleep in. YES!]" (week 5); and "*ok, ich gehe ins bett, gute nacht zusammen* [Ok, I am going to bed. Good night all]" (week 6). Starting in week 10, her German posts became longer and more complex in structure. "*[Teen] und [Freundin] sind jetzt sauber :P Und die Pizza ist gleich fertig fuer essen :D* [Teen and Friend are now cleaned up. And the pizza is almost ready to eat]." She included 26 bilingual posts such as "*frohes neues jahr!!!* happy new year!" (week 20). Notably, she posted some German-only ones without translations "*...die katze hat mich gefunden...* [the cat has found me]" (week 21). As well, she also appropriated German slang. For example, she used the German equivalent for "whatchamacallit" ("*dingsbums*") in the following post from week 23. She wrote "*wieder zur schule :P ich habe jetzt uhh... dingsbums... CHEMIE! ok, chemie, tschuess* [off to school :P I now have uhh . . . whatchamacallit . . . Chemistry! Ok, chemistry, bye]" (week 23). Using this strategy protected her from drawing attention to any deficits in her vocabulary while allowing her to show off colloquial speech. The German and bilingual posts demonstrate how she was becoming more proficient in German and positioned herself as a proficient L2 speaker.

Table 1
German and Bilingual Posts in First Sojourn

Week	German	Bilingual	Example
2	0	1	most exciting German I've learned all day: <i>träum was süßes</i> [sweet dreams]
4	3	0	<i>mir ist muede</i> [I am tired]
5	2	1	<i>WIE SUESS!!!</i> [HOW SWEET!]
6	1	1	<i>mir ist langweilig</i> [I'm bored]
7	4	8	so it says "20 JAHRE DEUTSCHE EINHEIT" 20th YEAR GERMAN REUNIFICATION
8	3	1	<i>ich bin stolz auf mich</i> [I am proud of myself]
10	3	1	ok, <i>gute nacht</i> <3 [ok, good night]
11	4	3	<i>ich hab nur 3 monaten noch in Deutschland...</i> mixed feelings :(:) [I only have 3 more months in Germany]
12	4	0	<i>jetzt schlafe ich... ok, gleich</i> [I am sleeping now... ok, soon]
13	2	0	<i>meine frage ist: wo bist du?</i> [my question is: where are you?]
14	3	0	<i>mutti... WO BIST DU? Ich will mit dir reden....</i> :([Mom... WHERE ARE YOU? I want to talk to you... :(
15	5	1	<i>WARUM IST ES SO KALT?!?!?</i> [why is it so cold?]
16	2	0	<i>lesen... und dann schlafen... ok... ich schaffe das...</i> [read... and sleep... ok... I can do it]
17	2	1	<i>[Freudin] hat mich rausgeschmissen... das hat wehgetan</i> [Friend threw me out...that hurt]
18	3	2	<i>...es schneit...</i> [it's snowing]
19	2	2	<i>ist krank...</i> is sick...
20	2	1	<i>bist du bescheuert?</i> [are you crazy?]
21	4	0	<i>mein bauch spricht</i> [my stomach is talking]
22	1	1	<i>DEUTSCHLAND HAD AUF PRO SIEBEN THE BIG BANG THEORY.</i> [GERMANY HAS THE BIG BANG THEORY ON THE PRO SIEBEN CHANNEL]
23	3	1	<i>ist total muede.... ich geh jetzt schlafen... nacht</i> [is completely tired... I am going to sleep now... night]
24	2	1	<i>ich fliege morgen!!! im flying home tomorrow!!! es ist traurig, dass ich von euch weg muss.</i> [it is sad that I must leave you] I am happy to see all my canadian people soon <3
Total	55	26	

Chronicles of successes and challenges. The language development Teen chronicled on Facebook included noting milestones in language acquisition, successes, and challenges. Throughout the 24 weeks of her first sojourn, even small accomplishments sometimes brought great joy. One of the first accomplishments was learning how to play with German word order. In this stream-of-consciousness post from week 8, she plays with the placement of the adverb *jetzt* [now]. “& ok... *jetzt gehe ich... jetzt... ich gehe jetzt... mhmm, stimmt...* [ok, now go I . . . now. . . I go now. . . mhmm, true]” (week 8). Another success was learning how to type in German: “hehe, i just figured out how to make umlauts with my computer :P ä muahahaha” (week 10). At the halfway mark, she experienced an upsurge in language ability that caused further celebration. She posted “milestone: can now write my journal in German. muahaha” (week 12). Facebook, with its culture of posting on the “status” of one’s life, provided her a natural means to document and celebrate these small accomplishments in language development.

Teen’s initial successes spurred on her desire to expand her knowledge of the German language in a more formal manner. In week 13 she posted “compiling a whole crap load of charts and such on German cases, I will win.” The “I will win” indicated her view of language learning as a battle in which she imagined herself competing against the formidable foe of German grammar. She positions herself as a non-native bravely fighting a battle of grammar mastery.

Along with success, she also noted challenges that emerged. One such challenge was negotiating the influence of German on her English. “You know your brain is crapped when you start using the other languages structure and wording in your first language: i have that made, i say you a sentence. I am screwed. although its a good thing” (week 11). Her sentences (e.g., “I have that made”) are examples of English sentences with a German word order. She feels her brain is “crapped” and she is “screwed,” yet she remarks “although, it’s a good thing.” Although she does not want learning German to negatively impact her English, she recognizes and validates that she is becoming accustomed to German word order. In doing so, she positions this challenge as a mark of success in language development.

Language awareness. As Teen became more proficient, she observed similarities and differences between her two languages. This language awareness was expressed through posts with orthographic, morphemic, and semantic observations. She wrote “i love their SS (S-zet?) [sic]” (week 8) and “i just realized the german word *Lied* [song] and the english word *lied* are written the same.... wow...” (week 22). Regarding morphemes, she experimented with code-switching by adding an English plural ending to a German word: “and one of the (I can only think of the German word....) *Rathauses* [city halls]” (week 7). She also mused on semantic issues. Regarding her own language, she wrote that “The English language should have more words for expressing your feelings for a person” (week 3), in reference to the variety of German expressions for “I like you” (e.g., *ich habe dich lieb; ich mag dich, ich habe dich gern*). Regarding German, she noted “amusing thing i realized recently: *slagzeug* [sic] is really just *slag* and *zeug*, which in english is hit and thing. so the German word for drums is really just ‘hit-thing’” (week 17). Teen draws on her increasing linguistic competency to interpret her new language with increasing confidence, recognizing where English is no longer adequate to express her thoughts and how she can interpret words in German in a new way. Demonstrating this language awareness, she positions herself as an increasingly competent L2 user.

An analysis of Facebook posts from the first sojourn documents the progress of Teen's growing linguistic competence in terms of bilingual language use, milestones of successes and challenges, and language awareness. Whereas toward the beginning she positions herself as a non-native speaker or L2 learner battling with the German language, as her proficiency increases, she positions herself as a bilingual who can begin to play with the language and comment on her language acquisition, as well as similarities and differences between the languages.

Second Sojourn

Language use. In examining language use in the second sojourn, we note that there were fewer total posts than in the first sojourn (153 in comparison with 342). Of those, 127 were in English, 22 were in German and four were bilingual. Table 2 illustrates Teen's use of German over the weeks of her second sojourn, again with one example per week.

During the second sojourn, Teen posted primarily in English ($n = 127$). Her first of 22 posts in German took place in week 3. Far fewer of her posts were bilingual. The length and complexity of the posts varies from week to week. Facebook posts are generally not long and are often incomplete sentences, a feature we see in Teen's posts as well. One of her longer German posts occurs in week 18, toward the end of her sojourn ("*Diese nächste drei Wochen [...]*" [The next three weeks ...]). This longer post demonstrates proficiency in the use of German word order in a subordinate clause (i.e., the verb "*fliege*" at the end of the clause that begins with the conjunction "*bevor*"). In addition, this Facebook post served as a reminder to herself of her resolve to make use of the remaining time as her sojourn drew to a close and her motivation to improve her German intensified. In writing this post, she also positioned herself as a L2L who was invested in the activity of language practice in a naturalistic situation.

Table 2
German and Bilingual Posts in Second Sojourn

Week	German	Bilingual	Example
3	1	0	<i>ich bin um 15 Uhr in [City] :) [I will be in [City] at 3 o'clock]</i>
5	2	0	<i>Ich hab eine Pflanze gekauft! [I bought a plant]</i>
9	0	1	No one cross me today, I'm <i>sauer</i> [upset]
10	1	0	<i>Kann jemand mir sagen, wo die Musik herkommt? [Can anyone tell me where the music is coming from?]</i>
11	1	0	<i>[Vacation town], gestern Abend [yesterday evening]</i>
12	3	1	<i>Cocktails und Fußball! [Cocktails and soccer] Go Germany!!!</i>
13	1	0	<i>Weil ich im ersten Zug geschlafen habe, habe ich mir einen Kaffee gekauft. Hoffentlich heißt das, dass ich jetzt im zweiten Zug ein bisschen Hausaufgaben machen kann :P [Because I slept in the first train, I bought myself a coffee. Hopefully that means that I can now get some homework done in the second train :P]</i>
14	3	1	<i>Immer wieder 10 Minuten länger zu schlafen ist so schön wie immer wieder noch eine Süßigkeit zu essen [Frequently sleeping 10 minutes longer is as nice as frequently eating yet another candy]</i>
15	4	0	<i>[Freundin] wir sollen heute vorbeikommen [[Friend] we are supposed to drop by today]</i>
16	2	2	<i>Keine Lust auf meine Hausarbeit :([Don't feel like doing my final paper]</i>
17	1	0	<i>Ich habe noch 23 Tage in Deutschland... [I still have 23 days in Germany]</i>
18	3	0	<i>Diese nächste drei Wochen sind "Deutschsprachige" Wochen für mich, ich muss mehr üben, bevor ich nach Hause fliege :) [The next three weeks are "German-speaking" weeks for me, I must practice more before I fly home]</i>
20	0	1	New Word of the day: <i>befürchten</i> [to fear]
Total	22	6	

Chronicles of successes and challenges. During the 20 week second sojourn, Teen still used Facebook for chronicling her language development. For example, in a post during week 20, she wrote: “New Word of the day: *befürchten* [to fear].” This announcement of a newly acquired verb alluded to an enjoyment of the sound and semantic nuances of her growing vocabulary. It also demonstrates her awareness of her intermediate/advanced language acquisition as new words came less often, but represented more nuanced communication.

Examples of challenges were more common in the second sojourn. With increased linguistic proficiency and nuanced communication, she recognized that she now understood more of the conversations around her, including ones she would rather not understand. For example, after listening to housemates tell stories about bodily fluids, she posted “Sad is it that I understand almost everything in German these days. Earlier was it easier, I missed all the bad stories” (week 8). With increased expertise she was no longer protected from exposure to complicated narratives about topics she found offensive.

The German grammar system that she rallied against in her first sojourn was the theme of another post:

Personal confession: for the past two days I have had conversations about this one paper form thing I need for school and have been too lazy to look up the gender of “*Zettel*.” Therefore, I have probably 35 times used the word “*Zettelchen*” instead just to avoid dealing with either asking one of the many Germans around me or just looking it up on my phone. So far no one has caught me. (week 18)

While she bemoans the three grammatical gender system of German in this post, she also demonstrated the effective use of circumlocution as a language strategy. Yet, she positions herself as a “lazy” L2L (i.e., non-expert) for not looking up the word. Although a linguistics student at the time, she was not aware of this strategy as an explicit language learning strategy and felt she had discovered it herself. She positions herself as an imposter, trying to hide the fact that she does not know the grammatical gender of the word: “no one caught me.”

Despite the language strategies that helped her to position herself as a German-English bilingual, her affiliation with the imagined community of English-German bilinguals was still tentative at times. This is exemplified by a post toward the end of the second sojourn:

I just received an email back from my instructor about the fact that I asked if I could do my presentation in English. He answered and told me that he is familiar with my German from office hours and thinks that I would have no major troubles presenting in German. Oops. I guess I couldn't pull the wool over his eyes. (week 18)

Here, she positions herself with respect to the other students in her class, who were expected to present in German, seeing herself as a non-expert for whom the task would be too difficult. When that positioning is challenged by the instructor, she confesses to her Facebook audience that she “couldn't pull the wool over his eyes,” as if to admit that she

knew all along that this positioning was tentative and not aligned with her previous positioning of herself as a capable presenter in German.

Yet, at other times she positioned herself more confidently as an insider. On May Day (May 1) she posted “And half an hour later my ears are still ringing. Happy first of may everyone :)” (week 4). Her post provided no explanation or description of what she did, as if assuming that everyone would know what happens in Germany on May Day or intentionally “othering” those who do not. Similarly, while sitting with other Germans in a hostel in London, she cheered for Germany in a World Cup match: “Huddled with other Germans watching the game in London. Gooo Germany!!!” (week 11). Notably, she referred to “other Germans” indicating she was included as a German in this context. These posts indicate a less tentative positioning as a German-English bilingual.

Language awareness. The posts that Teen made about language during her second sojourn were less about the structure of German than they were cross-linguistic observations about how language was used in her environment and how she could use it.

In week 3 she posted “We climbed a German mountain today :)” in reference to a hike she had taken on a university excursion weekend. Her exchange supervisor had announced to the group that they would be climbing a “mountain,” using what he deemed to be the appropriate translation of the German *Berg* [mountain or hill]. This announcement left Teen feeling apprehensive about the footwear she had on, having not been warned in advance. However, upon completing the walk and discovering that the mountain was in fact a hill with a paved path, she felt compelled to post the comment about the German mountain. This post positions her as someone who was reminded that the German word “*Berg*” and the English word “mountain” can evoke two very different connotations, a subtlety other German-English bilinguals would understand.

During this sojourn, Teen noticed how English was used for marketing purposes in Germany, often with some creative license. In response to the advertising caption to a picture of a shower head and the slogan “How do you doosh?” she posted “see here the importance of a proper English education” (week 6). She recognized that the advertiser was referencing the German word for shower (“*Dusche*”), but attempting to situate it in an English sentence with English-like orthography. In doing so, this slogan, in the eyes of an English speaker, made reference to out-dated feminine personal hygiene, using a word now considered an insult. This use of English is something Teen felt was the consequence of a lack of awareness that the words *Dusche*/douche were false cognates: hence the need for “proper English education.” Here she positions herself as an expert in English, superior to the non-expert German speaker of English who created the advertisement.

Similarly, on a different occasion, she noted on a different picture caption the incorrect spelling of the English word “selfie” as “celfie” on a T-shirt for sale. She posted this picture to draw attention again to the non-expert, positioning herself once more as the expert. Later, however, she referenced this T-shirt in her own picture caption on one field trip as “Beer tour celfie!” (week 7). This inside joke is one that can only be understood by a German-English bilingual, so by using it, she positions herself as one, while calling on all members of this imagined community to recognize the joke and laugh along with her.

Some of Teen’s expressions of linguistic awareness on the second sojourn built on the cultural familiarity that she had with Germany thanks to her previous experience of living there. For example, she was surprised to discover that the company that made her favourite candy, which was only available in Germany, had changed the recipe. This

resulted in a new taste that she did not like: “Stupid company changed the recipe to my favourite candy. No one cross me today, I’m *sauer* [upset]” (week 9). She code-switched to “*sauer*” because she felt that the German word more aptly expressed her feelings than the English equivalent “upset” and its similarity to the English word “sour” fit in this situation. This particular code-switch shows a growing awareness of the nuances possible between the languages and positions her as a creative German-English bilingual.

Thus, similarly, one emotional post near the end of her stay summed up her positioning as someone who belongs to two cultures.

Up until around an hour ago I was ready to go home. . . but then I took a longer thought about what I would not have back in *Kanada* and now I am sitting here wondering why I let myself fall in love with another country and all my people here, it hurts. (week 16)

While she speaks of going home, meaning Canada, she chooses the German spelling for the name of her home country (“*Kanada*”). This spelling is in a language that she now feels she possesses and also positions Canada as foreign in the English sentence. Canada is home, but soon to take her place in it again after having studied abroad in Germany, she can no longer see it as the “Canada” she once did as a monolingual; rather, “*Kanada*” is a place where, from now on, she will be a German-English bilingual. Meanwhile, Germany is positioned as “another country,” a second home she “let [herself] fall in love with.” This deliberate use of both of her languages, drawing attention to her apparently conflicted and yet integrating feelings, points to her identity positioning as a German-English bilingual.

Post-Sojourn Reflections and Discussion

Our analysis of Teen’s Facebook posts during her SA sojourns reveal how she used this form of social media to position herself in relation to her two languages, language learning, and the host culture. She used both of her languages in strategic ways, chronicled the successes and challenges of her language development, and made observations that demonstrated growing language awareness. In posts during both sojourns, using her languages strategically allowed Teen to position herself as a competent L2L of German. In her first sojourn, she posted high frequency phrases and then longer and more complex German sentences to prove her ability. In her second sojourn, she felt less compelled to display her now intermediate competency in posts in the target language and instead referred in English to devoting time to German (“the next three weeks are ‘German-speaking’ weeks”). We now draw on Teen’s post-sojourn reflections to facilitate the discussion of her thinking behind her Facebook use during each sojourn.

Teen reports in her reflection that her goal was to “get some life experience and learn German” when she embarked upon her first sojourn. This goal reflects her investment in the SA experience (Norton, 2013). In keeping with the culture of Facebook (boyd, 2014), she made “random private thoughts public” by chronicling her milestones and her thoughts and feelings about them. She described her first two months as “just building up my German enough that I was able to function” (post-sojourn reflection). In week 6 she announced her intentions to post occasionally in German only: “[Teen] has decided to start commenting in German on Canadian peoples posts. Watch out, and keep google translate open” (week 6). Regarding the German-only posts, she reflected “I remember even writing in German to Anglophones just to show off my skills (knowing they would use a

translator)” (post-sojourn reflection). In doing so, she positioned herself on Facebook as a competent L2L (“can now write my journal in German”), able and confident enough to post in German (“*ich gehe jetzt*”). However, she also positioned herself as a combatant, fighting to learn German. At times she expressed this positioning with great confidence (“I will win”) and at other times, she expressed mixed emotions over her inevitable victory, noting that she could feel “screwed” and “it’s a good thing” all in the same post. Her posts, positioning herself as both a competent L2L and combatant with German, reflect the challenge to identity that SA can bring to one’s linguistic self-concept (Benson et al., 2012) and the symbolic power that she gains from knowing German (Kramersch, 2009).

In Teen’s second sojourn, since she had attained a high intermediate level of language, her Facebook posts focused less on positioning herself as becoming bilingual and more on being bilingual. She wrote that she had “a very different relationship with German . . . I felt that rather than learning German my second exchange was about using my German and living in it” (post-sojourn reflection). Her posts reflected her comfort and expertise in German. She no longer needed to prove herself as she had in some of her German posts in her first sojourn. She remarks, “My German had improved to the point where it was common for me to converse with people without them realizing that I had grown up on a totally different continent” (post-sojourn reflection). Part of her new comfort came from her official affiliation and inheritance afforded to her by her passport: “Being able to enter the country just like any other German gave me a level of confidence that enabled me to face challenges that occurred in a different way” (post-sojourn reflection). Having German citizenship, alongside her Canadian citizenship, manifested itself in an identity that was “more intercultural, no less Canadian” (Plews, 2015, p. 292). Still, there were times when she chronicled challenges with the language. She still wrestled with German grammar and while she artfully used circumlocution (“*Zettelchen*”), she felt the need to confess this strategy, as though she could not be proud of it. Also, when her instructor would not excuse her from presenting in German despite her request, she felt that she had been exposed as an imposter.

Despite these instances, most posts during the second sojourn reveal sufficient familiarity with the language to claim membership in the imagined community of advanced L2Ls. When reflecting on her first sojourn she wrote: “I used German on Facebook at every opportunity I could, in part to prove to everyone back home and to myself that I was capable” (post-sojourn reflection). By contrast, there came a point in her second sojourn when she posted in German on Facebook no longer for others to translate, but rather to communicate with those social media friends who also spoke German. In other words, once her membership in the imagined community of advanced L2Ls was established in her mind, this belonging, ironically, did not necessarily require using German. Teen’s linguistic self-concept (Benson et al., 2012) thus changed from the first sojourn to the second.

Expressions of language awareness were a feature of Teen’s Facebook posts over the two sojourns that also contribute to her identity positioning. During her first sojourn, she revealed her attention to orthographic, lexical, and morphemic aspects of German in comparison with English. Posting about these linguistic observations enabled her to position herself as an emerging, but competent, German-English bilingual. During her second sojourn, she focused more on semantic variations and even incongruence between the languages, showing her awareness of the nuances of translation. She commented on the unintended connotations and implications of the use of words and played with them as an English expert and German-English bilingual insider. With her increased experience and

language proficiency came language awareness that afforded her additional means of positioning herself as a member of the imagined community of German-English bilinguals. Teen drew upon her experiences also as bicultural (Byram, 2008) or as a cultural insider (“stupid company changed the recipe”) to align herself with the imagined community of German-English bilinguals. Her advanced knowledge of, and creative competence in, German afforded her symbolic power (Kramersch, 2009) as she identified “as a person who exists in two cultures and two languages” (post-sojourn reflection). However, as Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, and Brown (2013) pointed out, this linguistic self-concept is in relation to the particular context, which may explain why she wrestled with conflicted feelings about what she would not have “back in *Kanada*.” These conflicts speak to the affective and symbolic returns of bilingualism (Ortega, 2009), a love for the languages and increased linguistic self-concept, yet a negotiation of belonging in two cultures. Teen’s Facebook posts certainly demonstrated the interrelatedness of L2 proficiency and identity recognized by other SA researchers (Benson et al., 2012), albeit to a different depth and breadth as a result of having spent two sojourns abroad, in the same country, learning the same language.

Conclusion

Study abroad is a fruitful environment for L2 identity research since sojourners are faced with the feeling of insecurity that comes with learning their L2 in a naturalistic setting (Jackson, 2008). In this study, Teen often used Facebook to assert her membership in an imagined community of German-English bilinguals while on SA, but at other times she expressed conflicted emotions about that positioning. Her identity construction centred on positioning herself as an increasingly proficient speaker of German, yet, as L2 identity research often contends, this positioning was dynamic and nonlinear. While Teen frequently referenced her L2 proficiency in her posts, that increasing proficiency also gave her an awareness of what she still did not know, which in turn caused her at times to doubt or hold back on confidently positioning herself as a competent L2 speaker. Any confident positioning as an L2 speaker coincided more with situations in which she would be positioned by others as competent or situations in which she could demonstrate proficiency by posting about a linguistic success, a challenge overcome, or an insight that resulted from her growing cross-linguistic language awareness.

Aspects of Teen’s positioning are also connected to her relationship with the digital medium. As she matured over the course of two sojourns, her access to and use of Facebook changed. In her post-sojourn reflections, she noted that from her first to her second sojourn she realized that her audience didn’t “need to know every random detail of [her] life.” She showed awareness of Facebook’s nature as masspersonal communication (Bazarova et al., 2012) and how her positioning might be perceived by others—as a Facebook poster with something to prove in German—and so positioned herself according to how she would, later, rather be perceived—as an expert German-English bilingual, but not at the exclusion of others.

Any study that focuses on one individual’s lived experience is limited in its scope. The use of Facebook by one white middle-class teen with German heritage and acquired dual citizenship who had the resources to go on two SA sojourns in no way represents the positioning of all SA sojourners. Second language learner identity research would benefit from additional studies that examine more diverse first-time (or second-time) sojourners’

use of Facebook and other forms of social media, including those whose L2 likely occurs infrequently on Facebook among their home culture digital social networks (e.g., especially learners of languages other than English). In addition, the lack of access to the multimodal and dialogic aspects of Facebook due to ethical constraints posed limitations on this study. Much insight might be gained by examining the choices and uses of pictures, music, and video, and shared posts especially as they relate to how monolingual and bilingual digital social network friends interact with each other.

Despite these limitations, we maintain that this study sheds light on L2 identity positioning via Facebook in the L2 SA context. It indicates that a novice L2 learner might choose to use the L2 in social media posts to assert her new linguistic identity, recording successes, challenges, and observations, with little concern for her audience's comprehension, but that this strategy might be dropped in favour of expert cross-linguistic commentary about, but not necessarily in, the L2 as proficiency becomes more advanced. Certainly, due to its common use among current SA participants, social media, and Facebook specifically, provide a natural choice of a mediational means to construct and, likewise, to investigate L2 identity. Investigating both the linguistic and multimodal ways in which SA sojourners negotiate their identity positioning via social media would provide the field of SA research with an expanded understanding of an integral part of the SA experience.

Correspondence should be addressed to Roswita Dressler.

Email: rahdress@ucalgary.ca

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