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Transcultural Practices of International Students as Identity Performances in Digital Settings

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ABSTRACT

Guided by an interdisciplinary approach, this study seeks to illustrate the digital practices of international speakers on social media. The practices of international users are especially valuable due to the presence of various audiences in their networks, some rarely researched. For this purpose, the study examines the social media practices of 16 international graduate students (IGSs), who experience a transnational mobility in the United States. The data is collected through semi-structured interviews with participants and their social media data. The analysis includes quantitative assessment of participants' social media activities and qualitative analyses of interviews and digital practices. The findings of the study illustrate how individuals with transborder experiences engage in identity work by sharing transcultural content with a multitude of audiences in their networks. The study concludes that digital practices involving the transcultural flow of content present opportunities for IGSs to work and realign various facets of their identities.

INTRODUCTION

Societal dynamics across the world have experienced dramatic changes in terms of cultural and linguistic diversity through the phenomenon of globalization. The changes are marked by global flows of people, materials, currencies, as well as discourses, images, symbols, and signs. According to Pennycook (2007), these 'circles of flow' (p. 122) involve complex networks of people, among which diverse forms are circulated, changed, exchanged, overlapped, blended, and/or re-used for various purposes. Because of the complexity of these globalized networks and circles of flow, the diversity of cultural and linguistic practices in these spaces is sometimes called 'super-diversity'; a concept introduced by Vertovec (2007), and defined as a 'dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small, scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants' (Vertovec, 2007: 1024). Unlike the categorization of migrants being limited to their languages, nationalities, and ethnicities, the concept of superdiversity approaches diversification 'in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration' (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011: 1), and characterizes the dynamic nature of interaction in an increasingly globalized and mobilized world.

The increase in such flows and mobility has been further facilitated by the advent of digital technologies. New media has intensified the contact and exchange between people with a variety of linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds. Such a complex, mobile, and often unpredictable diversification has had an impact on the social practices of communities within superdiverse networks and has transformed the practices at both individual and societal levels (Busch, 2012).

The new, digital ways that we use to communicate, interact, and manage our social relationships challenge researchers to think about the ways they approach texts, resources, and social interactions as well. Coupland (2003) and Blommaert (2003) called for a rethinking of the ways sociolinguistics attempt to address globalization. Blommaert laid the foundations of a response, which later emerged in The Sociolinguistics of Globalization in 2010. The call also precipitated a number of other theoretical and methodological reflections on the shifts occurring in between the local and the global (de Fina & Perrino, 2013), and on the study of language at the intersection of heterogeneity (Blommaert, 2010). As reported by Androutsopoulos and Juffermans (2014), these various theoretical and methodological suggestions have appeared in journal issues and edited volumes including the works of Coupland (2010), Pennycook

(2010), and Thurlow and Jaworski (2010). While the concept of superdiversity emerged as a theoretical construct, methodological approaches were often guided by metaphors such as flow, movement, and fluidity rather than notions of fixation and stability (Androutsopoulos & Juffermans, 2014). In connection with concepts of flow, researchers have started to employ notions such as re-entextualization and re-semiotization, which indicate an appropriation of a semiotic resource, and translocalization, which places emphasis on the transfer of a local content or value into another context.

Guided by these concepts, the researchers began to address the travel of discourses and cultures across the globe as in both society and individual-level phenomena. Some of the scholarship in this area explores how globally circulating materials such as manga, references to global secret societies, or tattoos are localized through individual practices in social media spaces (e.g., Jonsson & Muhonen, 2014; Leppänen, Pitkänen-Huhta, Piirainen-Marsh, Nikula, & Peuronen, 2009; Stæhr, 2014). The availability of semiotic resources and their roles in the ways people perform their identities in superdiverse settings are also examined (Androutsopoulos & Juffermans, 2014). Despite a growing body of research in the scholarship, the research has yet to document the digital practices of individuals, who experience transnational mobility, in online participatory spaces.

In order to contribute to the scholarship in relation to the practices in digitally diverse spaces, the current study is informed and guided by theories from sociolinguistics, and seeks to illustrate the digital practices of international speakers in the contexts of superdiversity. The practices of international users are especially valuable due to the presence of a multitude of audiences in their networks, some rarely researched. For this purpose, social media practices of international graduate students (IGSs), who are experiencing transnational mobility in the United States, are investigated through a mixed-methods approach in the present study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There is a wide recognition of the role of globalization on bringing social, cultural, and linguistic diversification across many societies in different parts of the world together. Emerging complex sociocultural practices beyond nation-state-only affiliations and identifications are facilitated by mobility in modern day. Characterized by such mobility, complexity, and unpredictability, this heterogeneity is conceptualized under the umbrella term of 'superdiversity' (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). Through the contextual lens of superdiversity, we see clear-cut notions such

as 'migrant' and sociocultural essentialisms of those migrants becoming transcended (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011), and the formation of a wide range of increasingly complex networking practices marked by mobility and heterogeneity (Busch, 2012). It is often acknowledged that digital technologies, which "offer shortcuts to globalization" (Blommaert, 2010: 3), intensify the global flows of people, discourses, and semiotic resources (Androutsopoulos & Juffermans, 2014; Deumert, 2014). Such transcultural and transnational flow of people and discourses not only influence language practices, but also shift the image of language from being a static and immobile to a dynamic and mobile one (Blommaert, 2010).

An increasingly globalized circulation of discourses, materials, and people gave birth to the reconsideration of conventional concepts and methodologies that had been developed and employed earlier to conceptualize language use in spatiotemporally bounded contexts. We witness the development of concepts, which reinforces the diverse textual and multimodal forms being circulated, blended, re-purposed, or exchanged. In parallel with these, the concept of superdiversity started to be used as a conceptual construct, which offered an up-to-date perspective on language and social life by several scholars (e.g., Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Offering a contemporary perspective on language and social life, superdiversity was interpreted as "a potentially fruitful way of conceptualizing the complexity of linguistic repertoires and language practices in globalization" (Mc Laughlin, 2014: 29), and a notion, which "encourages us to grapple with the inherent complexities of the social world and provides a theoretically comprehensive critique of many of the traditional tools and approaches of sociolinguistics" (Deumert, 2014: 116).

Offering an insightful lens for the interpretation of interactions and practices in superdiverse environments, Blommaert (2010) emphasized the unfinished, consistently moving nature of language in globalization, and developed some conceptual tools for a sociolinguistic approach to globalization. One of the essential concepts he suggested is translocalization. This term signifies the dynamic of localization, delocalization, and re-localization of localities / local resources (Blommaert, 2010). Even though localities are transported, they do not necessarily lose their local features because of translocalization patterns.

As Pennycook (2007) argues, a purely synchronic analysis is not enough for the investigation of semiotic and cultural resources, and dynamic uses and re-uses in multiple modes should be looked at as well. Superdiversity can be especially useful since it focuses on individuals and

the ways flow of resources are employed for the purpose of positioning and encourages a combination of methodologies such as microanalysis and ethnography (Deumert, 2014). Superdiversity and interdisciplinary approaches with contemporary analytical toolkit can help us examine the impact of globalization on individual practices and community membership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The presence and use of a wide array of mobile modes and spaces of digital communication necessitate the analysis of digital practices in order to understand changing social and cultural contexts of language and interaction in these spaces. Examining digital practices and connections between offline and virtual contexts is important for a better understanding of superdiverse societies (Blommaert & Varis, 2011), evaluation of superdiversity as a conceptual notion (Mc Laughlin, 2014) and the ways superdiversity is indexed in the digital practices of users.

The scholarship on digital diversity includes research investigating the role of digital language practices in superdiverse contexts and exploring the relevance of superdiversity as a theoretical approach for analyzing digital language practices. The main findings across these studies focus on the presence and deployment of available semiotic resources in superdiverse settings and the ways people manage their transnational networks and perform local and transnational identities by means of them (Androutsopoulos & Juffermans, 2014). Some of the research shows how the local uses of globally circulating materials and discourses (e.g., manga, the Illuminati, tattoos) are localized through individual digital practices (Jonsson & Muhonen, 2014; Leppänen et al., 2009; Stæhr, 2014). Intensification of transcultural flows of resources through digital media and its role in local and global identity performances of individuals and communities have also been illustrated (Fabrício, 2014; Jonsson & Muhonen, 2014; Leppänen et al., 2009; Sharma, 2014). The emerging scholarship has approached digital practices through the lens of various transnational practices of individuals of different nationalities (Africa, East Asia, Europe and particularly Scandinavia) in multiple web environments (diasporic online websites, YouTube, Facebook, a combination of multiple platforms). A large diversity of tools was employed for methodological purposes in these studies. While online ethnographic data collection from the examined web spaces (e.g., online communities, blogs, and social media) was popular, researchers also collected data through classroom observations and interviews. Apart from these, Juffermans et al.'s (2014) data included homework and textbook materials of individuals, and Heyd

(2014) and Mc Laughlin (2014) followed a corpus-based approach. The analyses conducted across these studies were often qualitative in nature and informed by discourse analysis. While interviews were employed in some of the research, it seemed that digital practices of participants were prioritized over the voices and interpretations of participants.

A close look at the research reveals a need for further analysis of the digital practices of individuals. Despite a number of great contributions, we have yet to see the experiences of individuals from the Middle East or Spanish-speaking Central and South America documented in digital superdiverse contexts. Moving across different geographical areas and contacting individuals of other nationalities and speakers of various languages, the digital practices of international graduate students (IGSs) warrant close examination as the variety of content they share contributes to the superdiversity of online social networks. A fine-grained qualitative analysis of individuals' voices may offer a rich account of globalized practices by granting a combination of etic and emic perspectives. Making use of the resources afforded by online social networks, individuals can position different aspects of their identities by employing both multilingual resources, and the type of content they share by addressing certain audience groups in their networks. In order to document these practices and contribute to the scholarship at the intersection of superdiversity and digital spaces, the current study aims to respond what kinds of transcultural content are shared by IGSs for which audiences in their online social networks.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study is part of a larger project, in which 90 international graduate students (IGSs) took part in an online survey developed by the author (Solmaz, 2015, 2017, 2018). For the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 IGSs, who volunteered, and their social media data were collected in order to ensure the triangulation of the data. The participants (aged between 22 and 49 years) included both male and female students, who were enrolled in Masters or PhD programs and represented a diverse mixture regarding their country of origins, fields of study, and length of stay in the U.S. (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Information (*All the listed names are pseudonyms)

Name* (Gender)	Home Country	Field of Study	Pursued Degree	Length of Stay
Ahmed (M)	Egypt	Applied Linguistics	PhD	4 or more yrs
Carlos (M)	Costa Rica	Linguistics	PhD	4 or more yrs
Elif (F)	Turkey	Special Education	PhD	more than 4 yrs
Estella (F)	Spain	Hispanic Studies	Masters	more than 1 yr
Gabriel (M)	Colombia	Applied Linguistics	PhD	more than 2 yrs
Gloria (F)	Mexico	Arid Lands Resources Sciences	PhD	more than 3 yrs
Isabel (F)	Chile	Teaching and Teacher Education	PhD	more than 4 yrs
Jiao (M)	China	Computer Science	PhD	more than 3 yrs
Mariela (F)	Spain	Legal Studies	Masters	4 or more yrs
Mihret (F)	Ethiopia	Natural Resources Environment	Masters	more than 4 yrs
Nara (F)	Indonesia	English as a Second Language	Masters	less than 1 yr
Nissa (F)	Thailand	Applied Linguistics	PhD	more than 3 yrs
Thomas (M)	Germany	Economics	PhD	more than 3 yrs
Wang (F)	China	East Asian Studies	PhD	more than 2 yrs
Yeong (F)	S. Korea	Communication	Masters	more than 1 yr
Zahra (F)	Pakistan	Applied Linguistics	PhD	more than 3 yrs

Semi-structured interview was preferred over a structured version since participants of the study possessed diverse backgrounds and potentially various ways and habits of using social media. Each of the interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded. At this stage, the researcher asked the volunteers to add him to their social network online. Two types of social media data of the participants were collected: 1) SNS data that were automatically extracted from Facebook through an application for Social Network Analysis, 2) SNS data that was manually collected from participants' Facebook profiles. A total of 1,939 posts/status updates were collected and the average number of activities per participant was 74 (see Table 2). The collection period covered a minimum of one year. However, this duration was as long as two years for some participants, who were less active.

Table 2:
Multilingual Practices of Participants*

Name	L1 *(First language)*	L2 *(English)*	ML *(Multiple languages)*	Total
Ahmed	32	37	8	77
Carlos	10	4	16	30
Elif	163	50	15	228
Estella	53	27	15	95
Gabriel	18	10	11	39
Gloria	30	7	11	48
Isabel	165	60	30	255
Nara	131	290	72	493
Nissa	102	108	51	261
Thomas	1	29	3	33
Wang	70	101	40	211
Yeong	20	22	28	70
Zahra	4	83	12	99
Total Number	799	828	312	1,939
Percentage	41.21%	42.70%	16.09%	100%

* The quantitative data do not include the posts of three participants. Mihret and Mariela's total number of posts were less than 15 even though they were actively present on Facebook. Since many of Jiao's posts were automatically transferred to Facebook from third party applications, he was excluded as well.

The content analysis of the interviews and the qualitative analysis of the social media data were done through the methodological lens of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) (Herring, 2004). CMDA is particularly useful as it applies to four different domains of language, which are structure (e.g., word formations, the use of special typography), meaning (e.g., meaning of words, speech acts) interaction (e.g., turn-taking, topic development), and social behavior (e.g., linguistic expressions of power, group membership) (Herring, 2004). An organizational framework was formed through the themes and sub-categories emerging across the multiple types of data following the analyses. Both inductive and deductive analyses of data (Glesne, 2010) were performed in a cyclical nature (i.e., in a non-linear way). This allowed the researcher to rerun the analysis multiple times and find examples of data for each emerging category and its subcategories. As a result, fluidity across the different sources of data was made possible, interview data and SNS data analyses were blended, and findings were enhanced.

While the systematic analysis carried out was based on the various aspects of participants' interactions in their social networks, the present study mainly focuses on participants' interactions with their two major audiences: Home Country Audiences (HCA), the people currently residing in the country of the participants, and Non-Home Country Audiences (NHCA), non-home country citizens who either live in the U.S. or in a country other than participant's homeland. The intended audiences of participants' posts are based on researcher's observations, the interviews with the informants, and the researcher re-contacting participants for further explanations when needed. Such categorization can be beneficial especially for approaching cross-cultural flow of content with multiple audiences in an individual's network. While this research employs notions such as HCA, which may be considered essentializing categorization and seem in contradiction with the theoretical background of the study, the focus is on the transcultural flow of content across a multitude of audiences and how individuals draw from the entextualization and translocalization of their digital practices in identity work. Furthermore, coding categories such as HCA were preferred over labels such as the country of birth, origin, or residence and the same principles were applied to all participants in order to carry out a systematic analysis of their engagement in the flow of culture and language between multiple audience groups. As can be seen in the analysis below, in which an analytical toolkit involving enoughness, translocalization, and entextualization are used, the terms `local` and `global` are often intertwined in participants' posts despite being placed under certain categories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data revealed that the variety of content shared with diverse audiences created a multidirectional, dynamic flow of transnational content traversing an individual's online social network. The participants' transcultural content exchanges were examined in two main categories: exchanges with HCA about Home (Country) and about the U.S. The findings regarding each of these groups are presented with the company of social networking data of participants and interviews with IGSs below.

Digital practices addressing home country audiences about home country

The analysis of the data showed that one of the major digital practices of IGSs included posts addressed to their home country audiences (HCA). Some of these practices were about the home country (HC) itself,

and included posts such as participating in anniversaries and celebrations at HC, sharing a collective grief, cultural products, posts that are related to politics, economics, and environment, and maintaining relationship with people.

Individuals of the study participated in the celebrations and anniversaries of national events in their home countries. For instance, Nara wished her Indonesian/Muslim audience a 'Happy Eid', one of the two Islamic festivals celebrated once a year. Elif stated 'Happy Republican Day to us' (see Figure 1) in Turkish by including herself and adding a smile emoticon, thus participating in the celebrations for the anniversary of Turkey's foundation despite her physical absence in the HC. Similarly, Carlos also wished 'Happy Birthday' for the occasion of Costa Rica's Independence Celebration Day. As observations of customs and momentous events are identity signifiers (Soon & Kluver, 2014), we can argue that by celebrating national and/or religious festivals in their home countries online, participants claim affiliation and index themselves as legitimate members of their national/ethnic communities.

Figure 1
Elif's status update regarding the Republic Day in Turkey

October 29, 2014 ·

Cumhuriyet bayramimiz kutlu olsun:)

Apart from the celebrations of anniversaries, participants were observed to cheer for their national teams competing in the FIFA World Cup. While Thomas shared photos from his house where he and his friends followed a game in a room ornamented with the flags of Germany, Carlos shared his joy of Costa Rica's historical success by posting a photo of himself and his Costa Rican friend with the national flag and jokingly framing the post in Spanish as: "Costa Rican colony celebrates in Tucson" (see Figure 2).

Carlos stated during the interview that he "certainly posted this photo to reconnect with Costa Ricans because it is only two of us and shows how lonely and miserable we are in Tucson" (Interview with Carlos). He also mentioned that the photo was almost exclusively liked and commented by Costa Ricans, thus suggesting that he successfully engaged in a

conversation with his HCA around a celebratory event. He exhibited his sense of belonging and attachment to Costa Rica by mainly using the flag and text, which functioned as identity signifiers. Blommaert and Varis (2011) note that "one has to 'have' enough of the emblematic features in order to be ratified as an authentic member of an identity category" (p. 4). When we apply the 'enoughness' benchmark as a critical tool for Carlos' identity work, we see that the flag and choice of Spanish as the language of framing activate his Costa Rican identity very clearly. Beyond this individual action, a globally available content is localized (i.e., World Cup event being re-contextualized).

Figure 2:
Carlos' photo of World Cup celebration for Costa Rica's success

As much as the happy moments were celebrated, the national tragedies and grieving were shared. For instance, Nara shared a post on the tenth anniversary of the Aceh Tsunami, while Isabel mentioned posting about the earthquake Chile had endured and the tragic mining accident in which 33 miners had been trapped underground. Similarly, Elif shared her grief over the tragic mining accident in Soma by using #soma in one of her posts. Finally, Yeong reported that she was involved in the discussions that

occurred during and after a ship with a lot of high school students sank. These events also functioned as opportunities for IGSs to produce signifiers of national identities as they employ emblematic features that can be recognized by their HCAs.

Local and cultural products of home countries were also found to be on display. Appearing in several multimodal formats, it was often observed that IGSs shared resources associated with their home countries. For example, Zahra repeatedly brought such localities into her own network by sharing a series of videos in which certain aspects of Pakistani culture were depicted in a funny way. She posted updates of a popular user (ZaidAliT) who posted self-made videos depicting certain aspects of Pakistani culture in a funny way. Referring to Pakistani and Indian people as 'Brown' and typically Caucasian Western people as 'White', the videos often consist of a short movie version of a daily life instance in which certain situations as experienced dramatically differently by 'Brown' and 'White' people are shown (see Figure 3). During the interview Zahra was asked whom she addressed by sharing these videos and she responded:

> My Pakistani friends, I would say, my 'Brown people' who are just like me doing these things but sometimes they don't know. But they would understand it. Because we, on an unconscious level, do the same thing. We have been victims of these things. So that's why it is just funny to think about them. (Interview with Zahra)

While specifically stating her target audience, she made certain lexical choices such as 'my Brown people' and collective subjects of 'we' thus indexing her membership among HCA. Despite the fact that Zahra mainly addressed her HCA, since the content of the video exhibits an intercultural comparison which requires an understanding of another culture, we can argue that Zahra's post has the potential to display her as someone who is familiar with two different educational traditions and mentalities. In addition to that, regardless of her target audience, her post can be seen by her NHCA as well; thus, the local culture and context is globalized by means of a multimodal discourse practice.

Figure 3
Zahra's video post on 'White' vs. 'Brown' teachers

Local cartoon characters, memes, TV shows and series were among the commonly shared localities. It was sometimes a well-known female cartoon character in Colombia (Aleida) or photos of a cute and sassy Thai comic character (Jay the Rabbit). In another case, Elif re-contextualized the Turkish artistic movement of #şiirsokakta (#poeminthestreet) in Arizona context by tagging one of her posts with #şiirarizonada (#poeminarizona). In these examples, participants globalized their home localities and reaffirmed their position as a legitimate member in their respective countries regardless of their actual purpose. Sometimes the features employed in identity work can be through a small number of recognizable resources such as a hashtag or a single semiotic element like a cartoon character. In Blommaert and Varis' (2011) terms, such semiotic 'dosing' is "enough for a certain identity discourse to be activated" (p. 7).

The analysis of the data also revealed that SNSs functioned as a valuable source to keep track of what was going on in HC and participants

often involved in the discussions through sharing news or making comments on various topics such as environment and politics. Among the environmental topics were a mine spill and a potential nuclear power plant construction project in home countries of participants. A series of updates about elections in Costa Rica, Pakistan, and Turkey along with critical and humorous updates regarding the situation of Chilean politics were shared. Of all participants, Ahmed experienced arguably the most powerful engagement while participating in political discussions around the Egyptian revolution. He expressed the reason behind his online participation:

> I thought that my Facebook was my way, my gate to contribute to what was going on. People were protesting. I couldn't go protest but I could raise awareness of why those people protest…. I took it as a mission. People do something there. I should do something if I cannot do something physically. I can, at least, raise awareness, question things, and discuss, debate. (Interview with Ahmed).

Ahmed continued to participate in the events that followed the revolution when he was in the United States. Interestingly, he noted during the interview that some of his HCA criticized him and questioned his credibility for sharing his opinions despite not being present in Egypt. Similarly, Estella expressed that she stopped sharing political posts because of a number of negative impressions she observed from some of her HCA. She stated that she wanted to know what was going on, but she did not know if she was capable of sharing this type of content now that she was not there. These are important examples showing how participants' physical absence in HC can affect their membership in the communities they belong at HC.

Overall, it was found that IGSs who were physically away from their home countries managed to reconnect with their home country audiences and exhibit their sense of belonging through posts, which assisted them to constantly display themselves as members of their respective communities. By translocalizing and repurposing some of the local resources into new contexts for their HCA, informants communicated with HCA within a frame of meaningful shared background repositioning their affective alignments.

Digital practices addressing home country audiences about host country

The re-contextualization of local U.S. culture and resources into new contexts for HCA was the second most common type of interaction with HCA and they appeared in various forms such as delocalization and re-localization of host country resources and products. Apart from posts

regarding their daily life instances in the United States, IGSs shared about events happening around them, cultural products of the U.S., their traveling experiences, feelings towards living in the U.S., and their observations about life and people in the U.S.

First and foremost, informants of the study shared their daily life experiences and observations regarding living far from home. One of the participants, Gabriel, often shared his experiences of living with his wife and two children in the U.S. In one of those cases, Gabriel shared a video post, in which his daughter was performing in a musical show with her classmates. He framed the post with English language integrated into Spanish text, stating "More of J…. [the name of his daughter] and her healthy me musical" (see Figure 4). While the posts regarding daily life experiences may seem mundane and not interesting, what makes them valuable is the transfer of ordinary U.S. localities to be re-contextualized. Because, Gabriel exhibits his daughter's successful socialization and artistic practice in her second language through a video in which her daughter and her friends performed in English on a stage, where U.S. localities such as flags of the state of Arizona and the U.S. are present. Nissa, who similarly shared photos from her road trip in California, often used Thai texts to provide explanation for her audience and she mentioned during the interview that those photos were mainly for people in Thailand. Stating his wish for his audience to see what his life was like, Carlos specified that he posted about things happening around him in the U.S. so that people back home could know about them.

While landscape or urban photos from participants' trips were often re-contextualized in a virtual social space without any text, entextualized posts included more purposeful choices regarding the type of the post and the audience addressed by providing more insights about the translocalized practices. In one of these cases, Mariela shared photo from her visit to New York City in which she was displayed sitting in front of a typical midtown Manhattan house while smiling happily before the camera (see Figure 5). Re-semiotizing the house, Mariela entextualized her photo with the text "Here lives my friend Sara Jessica Parker" in Spanish. Mariela, who stated during the interviews that her HCA often left comments such as 'oh, just like in the movies' on her photos depicting her life in the U.S., brought the house of the leading actress of the popular TV show, Sex and the City to the attention of her HCA. Since she did not provide any information about Sara Jessica Parker, it is clear that she was aware of the fact that her HCA would be familiar with this locality of the U.S., which had already traveled across different cultures through television channels.

Figure 4:
Gabriel's video post of his daughter's musical at school

Figure 5:
Mariela's photo sharing in New York City

In another case, Nara, the Indonesian Master's student, went on a trip during the winter break and shared a series of updates. In one of the photos, she posed in front of the Statue of the Liberty wearing a t-shirt on which I heart Lumajang was written (see Figure 6). By captioning the photo as 'a country girl' and specifically pointing out to her attachment to her

Indonesian hometown, she showed her strong sense of belonging to her roots from a location which is a remarkable structure often representing not only the metropolitan city of New York, but also the entire USA. As seen from this example, a U.S. locality, (The Statue of Liberty) which can also be considered a 'global locality' in Blommaert's terms, became a way for Nara to construct a social and cultural environment to express herself, while simultaneously and meaningfully aligning herself with the local and the global. Serving as an embodied action, the statue is re-semiotized; meaning that it went through a process of redefinition and repurposing in order to better serve the purpose of a speaker. Nara's t-shirt also functioned as a powerful medium for her to activate her local identity and allowed her to signal a strong semiotic 'dosing'.

Figure 6:
Nara's photo update in front of the Statue of Liberty, NY

"A country girl"
No matter where I go, no matter where I am, I'll always be that ((complicatedly) simple) country girl from Lumajang. I love my hometown, it's the place I was born and grew up 🙂

The national holidays of the U.S. and the events occurring in town were among the commonly transported host country localities by IGSs.

While dressing up for Halloween and sharing photos of carving pumpkins, Halloween candies, and outfits of friends and family members were shared at the end of October, photos from Thanksgiving-oriented gatherings naturally peaked around late November, and Christmas decorations and trees appeared as early as the first week of December. For example, Nissa, who assumed that her HCA was familiar with pumpkin carving during Halloween, stated that the city she lived in did not really match the picture of the United States her friends had in their mind. So, sharing photos from her visit to a pumpkin field in the desert was one of the ways of showing the perceived 'American' experience as she stated: "Hey we do have pumpkin as well, but it is in the desert" (Interview with Nissa). It is interesting that Nissa switched to collective 'we' by representing the U.S. localities, thus performing a scale-jumping from personal to impersonal level. It can be speculated that re-contextualization of these resources creates opportunities for IGSs to display themselves as knowledgeable members of different communities.

Defining local and global is not always easy since resources in a particular space are dynamically experiencing shifting. In one of such cases, Estella took a picture of a page from a student-run daily newspaper in the U.S. and shared her excitement with her HCA by framing her post in Spanish as "What a beautiful way to start the day! Jarabe de Palo in Tucson!!!" (see Figure 7). She was very excited that Jarabe de Palo, her favorite Spain-based rock band, would be in her U.S. town. The cultural reference was apparent to her Spanish audiences as they positively reacted and engaged in a conversation with her. In this particular case, both the newspaper and its content as U.S. localities gained new meanings following Estella's re-contextualization. The interesting point is that Jarabe de Palo, a Spain locality, had already been re-localized within U.S. context thus becoming a U.S. locality before being re-localized back to Spanish context with a different purpose.

Overall, it is seen that localities are not stable and different localities do not necessarily become more 'global' because of translocalization patterns that are present across the SNS posts of IGSs. The important aspect of this process is how local U.S. resources are imported into local systems of meaningfulness after being changed, interpreted, and/or repurposed for home country audiences. IGSs exhibit their knowledge and experience of U.S. culture and life through such digital practices, which allow them to display transnational aspects of their identity.

Figure 7:
The photo Estella shared regarding her favorite band's concert in the U.S.

In sum, the examples drawn and presented from the data show that IGSs communicated with both their HCA and NHCA about their home countries by reworking and reconstructing on their identities in an online space.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study examined the social media practices of international graduate students, specifically the transcultural content they shared with a multitude of audiences in their networks. The findings show that IGSs actively contribute to the transfer of cultural flow across their HCA and NHCA about their home countries while engaging in identity work. Analysis of the findings illustrates the multidirectional nature of transcultural flow of content across IGSs' digital practices. Pennycook (2007) suggests that we need to focus on translocal and transcultural flows, while a number of researchers also approach such flows as opportunities for the construction of self and the mediation of identification categories (Higgins, 2011; Leppänen, 2012; Stæhr, 2014). The current study joins this strand of research and argues that digital practices involving the transcultural flow of content present opportunities for IGSs to work and realign various facets of their identities.

The study reveals that IGSs index their membership through producing recognizable resources (L1 and the familiar content) through

participation in home country-related events and performing local aspects of their identities and showing their expertise. The present study argues that such affiliation signals (i.e., emblematic features of local home culture) are particularly crucial for individuals experiencing transnational mobility, because they serve a function for negotiation of their legitimate membership status within their home country communities.

IGSs exhibit their affiliations with NHCA by entextualizing their HC-related posts in L2 and sharing expertise with novices (NHCA). They also project their local identities by sharing content or emblematic features that are recognizable enough by HCA. By sharing insider jokes, memes, local (U.S.) news and events, thus developing a critical perspective on certain issues, IGSs exhibit themselves as legitimate members within their host communities. They seem to establish their legitimacy by entextualizing the posts in L2 and sharing content recognizable to NHCA. IGSs are also likely to signal their legitimate membership status within NHCA to their HCA through these posts. In all of these digital practices of sharing transcultural content, we see how IGSs signal their belonging to different discourse communities through resources which are meaningful and recognizable by target groups thanks to 'shared interpretive systems' (Bruna, 2007).

An important finding of the study is the exhibition of globalization processes in a digital superdiverse space, where 'it is not only people that are on the move; rather, many different cultural features and phenomena, e.g. artifacts, trends and activities, are constantly on the move across different sceneries' (Jonsson & Muhonen, 2014: 89). This transcultural flow is often multidirectional (from center to periphery, and the other way around), often unpredictable, mobile, dynamic and shifting process. We see examples of both localization of globally available content (see Figure 6), and globalization/re-localization of localities (see Figure 7). As seen in Estella's case (see Figure 7), local and global often intertwine, regain meanings, and re-localize an already localized resource. Blommaert (2010) argues that when a locality is transported into another locality, 'the localities do not necessarily become more 'global' or 'deterritorialized' because of such patterns of trans-localization" (p. 79). The present study supports this claim through the examples such as Nara's Statue of the Liberty. What we observe is that meaning making processes help localities gain new meanings and IGSs make use of this potential by performing multiple identifications with the use of such localities in their digital practices.

Overall, the findings confirm that a myriad of forms are changed, overlapped, re-purposed, re-contextualized, re-semiotized, and circulated

across globalized networks, a process which is intensified by digital technologies. Such fluid movements are not easy to investigate as digital spaces are dynamic, unbounded, and superdiverse in nature. Gallucci (2014) argues that such changes, especially the evolution of identities, occur more rapidly in new social and cultural contexts including specific experiences of border crossing. However, it is not easy, as 'legitimacy' of one's affiliation with particular communities is challenged by the intersection of the local and the global, and the center and periphery (Warriner, 2007). Blommaert and Varis (2011) warn that "One is never a 'full' member of any cultural system, because the configurations of features are perpetually changing, and one's fluency of yesterday need not guarantee fluency tomorrow" (p. 12). This may be even more difficult for individuals with transborder experiences, for whom participatory web spaces, and specifically SNSs, become valuable mediums to maintain ties with affiliated communities without geographical limitation. The affordances of these spaces present opportunities for individuals to display their 'fluency' and exhibit their 'up-to-date' fluencies frequently and preserve their legitimacy as members of various communities and cultures with which they are affiliated.

Approaching identity as "the emergent product rather than pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005: 588), and aligning with post-structural perspective of identity as dynamic and shifting (see Duff, 2015), the findings of this study show that IGSs display multiple affiliations in order to maintain and renew their positionality as legitimate members in particular groups, thus presenting and managing cosmopolitan personae. (Re-)Entextualizing and re-semiotizing transcultural content by deploying semiotic resources and their multilingual repertoires, they perform and project a transnational identity while successfully participating in digital interactive superdiverse settings. Therefore, it is concluded that IGSs develop and maintain identities, which help them move back and forth between different linguistic and cultural forms, and that they successfully extend this facility into participatory web contexts where they manage their dynamic and complex identities while contributing to the superdiversity through transcultural flow of content in SNSs.

Since the present study is meant as a descriptive exploration of the diversity in IGSs' digital practices, the study does not include IGSs who do not use any type of SNS. Furthermore, the diverse background of the participants and the difference in their use and frequency of social media presented a limitation for the author as a researcher. However, the close contact with participants and the recursive nature of the data collection and

analysis facilitated the researcher's familiarization with the data. Besides, the researcher's positionality as an international graduate student proved to be helpful. These limitations aside, the interdisciplinary nature of this research allows the findings of the study to contribute to scholarly discussions in areas such as the research on international students, sociolinguistics of globalization, and digital superdiversity. While the study theoretically aims to make a value-added contribution to current thinking of online superdiversity, it becomes a part of up-to-date discussions centered around globalization in online spaces and may stimulate new conversations about the functions of social media practices, semiotic resources, and transcultural content in relation to identification performances. The methodological contribution of the present study is the embodiment of IGSs' voices through semi-structured interviews. Such a methodological approach may offer a richer account of globalized practices through a combination of both etic and emic perspectives.

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