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Spatial repertoire, translingual creativity, and identity in Chinese speakers' online intercultural experience

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ABSTRACT

This paper uncovers L1 Chinese speakers' online intercultural communication where they deploy English as a lingua franca and other spatial repertoires to co-construct translinguaging practices with their interlocutors and present three-fold identities - translingual, L1 Chinese, and legitimate users of English, leading to the argument that non-native English speakers and spatial repertoires play agentive roles in shaping English in the trends of globalisation and digitalisation.

本文揭示中文母语者在在线上跨文化交流中以英语为通用语，调用空间资料，与对话者共构跨语实践，展现跨语者、中文者及合理使用英语者三重身份；从而指出非母语英语者和空间资料正能动地塑造全球化数字化趋势下的英语。

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Introduction

The intersection of globalisation and digitalisation, which are central themes of the current times, has intensely increased intercultural communication to highlight the role of English as a global lingua franca. In Seidlhofer's (2011, p. 7, original italics) definition, English as a lingua franca (ELF) refers to 'any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option'. A body of research has documented language practice centring on the role of ELF in face-to-face intercultural communication, which accentuates linguistic hybridity, interculturality, and shared linguistic repertoires between interactants, who appropriate language forms and accommodate each other to achieve the solidarity in intercultural communication (e.g. Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2011; Mauranen, 2012; Pitzl, 2018a, 2018b). While the research on ELF practice in online intercultural communication is still marginal, online ELF practice is presumably more complicated than face-to-face ELF practice.

The rapid expansion of social media has made translinguaging, transmodality, and transculturality normal in individuals' language practices and transformed mono and multilingual speakers to translingual speakers (Dovchin, 2015, 2020a). In online communication, speakers can access diversified communicative modes and an expanding range of semiosis such as text, images, emoticons, videos, and hyperlinks for meaning, affect, and identities; they can also challenge and transform languages conventionally labelled in ideological terms associated with established standards and codifications (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019; Dovchin, 2015, 2020a; Li, 2018). With transcending and meshing becoming popular in social media, a separationist view on languages becomes

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irrelevant for understanding online language practice but a translanguaging perspective is proposed and welcomed by researchers (e.g. Dovchin, 2015, 2020a; Li, 2016, 2018; Sultana, 2016). Reconceptualising what language is reminds us of *not* viewing ELF as isolated from a medley of spatial repertoires or unaffected by lifeless online platforms and technologies.

Although social media allow for diversified and creative language practices, researchers have reported inequalities in terms of different language and cultural forms between mainstream representations and non-mainstream voices as well as self-presentation and identity construction in the Internet environment (Kraidy, 2005; Oh & Oh, 2017). The paradox is remarkably represented in terms of English. English has gone beyond native English speakers' (NESs) territories and arrived at the global ownership (Seidlhofer, 2011). Nonetheless, various biases against non-native English speakers (NNESs) and their English performance are common in the Internet environment among complex ideological issues revolving around English. For instance, Korean speakers' 'Engrish' is mocked for profit-making by a White youtuber, who presumably represents the normative use of English (Oh & Oh, 2017); Chinese speakers are targeted as potential consumers in online sales of English courses, perpetuating the assumption that Chinese speakers often need to improve their English performance (Wang, 2020). It turns out that the Internet environment democratises linguacultural practices but champions the online (re)presentation of some monolingual and monocultural forms. NNES individuals are thus situated between what social media technologies afford and what ideological forces on the Internet favour.

In social media, many Chinese netizens creatively appropriate English to engage with social phenomena and issues in China (Lee & Li, 2020; Li, 2016, 2018, 2020; Li & Zhu, 2019). Conceptualised as New Chinglish, Chinese speakers' translanguaging practice indexes otherness or weakness in China's social capital by operating in anonymity and criticality in online practice (Lee & Li, 2020; Li, 2016, 2018). However, technological advancement and sweeping social media penetrate China unprecedentedly, exposing Chinese speakers to increasingly diversified ideologies, cultures, languages, and values, all of which have roles to play in Chinese speakers' language practice. As Li and Zhu (2019) report, multilingual Chinese speakers welcome some values brought by globalisation and hold up national pride, creating novel words and expressions as well as transcribing practice afforded by digital services to challenge language policy that promotes standardness and conventions in the Chinese writing system.

In this complicated context, studying online ELF practice appears to be necessary. The present study explores how Chinese speakers engage in everyday online interactions – such as everyday chats, business negotiation, and academic discussion – with those who cannot speak L1 Chinese, focusing on their English in online intercultural communication. By investigating how Chinese speakers make meaning and establish solidarities in the online intercultural communication where ELF is relevant, this paper adopts a *trans*-perspective to unpack the ecolinguistic complexity whereby repertoire assemblages, technological affordances, and language ideologies interact with each other to jointly shape language practices and identity construction (Canagarajah, 2018, 2021; Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016; Pennycook, 2017, 2020; Spilioti, 2020), to shed light on the refashioning of English among Chinese speakers in the context of globalisation and digitalisation.

A *trans*-turn for ELF research

A *trans*-turn indicates a departure from a structuralist orientation that treats language as a closed system, a further move from bilingualism to multilingualism, and then the arrival at the concept of translanguaging, which captures the complicated fluidity and interconnectivity of semiotic resources in communication (Canagarajah, 2018; Kusters, 2021; Kusters et al., 2017; Pennycook, 2017, 2020; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Tagg & Lyons, 2021). Such a move gradually finds its way into ELF research. Jenkins (2015a, 2015b) proposes the concept of English as a multilingua franca (EMF) by drawing some inspirations from translanguaging for studying ELF. She postulates that ELF speakers deploy linguistic repertoires interactants previously have and those temporarily

co-constructed on the site for immediate intercultural communication, with ELF as stand-by among various semiotic resources. Cogo (2016) conceptualises ELF as a translanguaging phenomenon and sees ELF speakers' linguistic repertoires as manipulated through overt and covert translanguaging strategies. Researchers have also reported the presence of non-linguistic resources such as laughter, silence, gaze, and gestures in ELF communication (Kaur, 2018). Baker and Sangiamchit (2019) have examined the resourcefulness of translanguaging, transmodality, and transculturality in meaning-making through ELF on SNS across multi-scales in virtual spaces. They further note that *trans*-perspectives on ELF are still an emerging area, with more to be explored. Following the path started in these studies, this paper explores conceptual implications the translanguaging research offers for understanding ELF practice in respect of resource, transgression, and translanguaging space, to prepare for studying ELF practice emerging in Chinese speakers' online intercultural experience.

Resource

The concept of repertoire assemblage helps to understand resources relevant for ELF practice from a translanguaging perspective. It comprises of three conceptual pillars: distributed language, spatial repertoires, and assemblages (Canagarajah, 2018; Kusters, 2021; Kusters et al., 2017; Pennycook, 2017). The notion of distributed language departs from the view of language as structured in cognition to embrace that of language as distributed in social settings, which are, in turn, embedded in holistic pictures that can be analysed in terms of multi-scalar contexts and that include histories, cultures, traditions, trajectories, and life experiences revolving around speakers. Spatial repertoires not only frame distributed repertoires together for speakers' deployment in translanguaging spaces but also play up the role of agentive factors in meaning-making and identity construction. Space is conceptualised as an agentive part of 'an interactive whole' set of repertoires instead of an open platform to display individuals' meaning-making process (Pennycook, 2017, p. 277). In addition, assemblage, that is, 'the way things are brought together', is meaning-making (Pennycook, 2017, p. 278). The notion of assemblage is well reflected in transmodality and transculturality in ELF research. By contrast, the distributedness in the historical and ideological contexts is backgrounded in explaining ELF practice, due to a prevailing focus on the deterritorialisation of English and the conceptualisation of ELF based on blurred boundaries between languages, cultures, modalities, and scales (Seidlhofer, 2011). The agency of space and spatial repertoires is also under-considered in ELF research. While providing broader annotations of resources involved in online ELF practice, the new edges, which open opportunities for researching ELF practice in online intercultural communication, are to be considered in the present paper.

Transgression

Transgression is 'that conduct which breaks rules or exceeds boundaries' (Jenks, 2003, p. 3). In Pennycook's (2006) transgressive theories, transgression of boundaries around languages, modalities, cultures, texts, and localities is a way of satisfying speakers' needs and wants. ELF and translanguaging research have a shared tendency to see transgression and rule-breaking as interesting manifestations of creativity. ELF follows a transformationalist perspective to address the exclusive ownership of English by NESs and the power asymmetry between NESs and NNEs, by seeing variations of English made by NNEs in their own right and rejecting English monolingualism centralising on NESs (Dewey, 2007). Jenkins (2015a) makes it explicit that instances of non-conformity to established native English norms are often criticised as errors from a perspective of English as a foreign language but might be recognised as innovations from a perspective of ELF. Researchers are interested in analysing ELF creativities with a focus on how they work effectively in intercultural communication. Translanguaging, with transformativity at its core, 'challenges understandings of language as regulated or determined by existing contexts of power relations' (Canagarajah,

2018, p. 32). Li (2011, p. 1223) defines creativity in translanguaging practice as ‘the ability to choose between following and flouting the rules and norms of behaviour, including the use of language’. He further points out that examples of translanguaging practice can ‘cause turbulence in both a linguistic sense and a socio-political sense’ (Li, 2020, p. 245). Speakers construct translanguaging practices for the ‘playful subversion’ of imposed normativity, critical engagement with social issues, and positioning themselves as marginal in mainstream ideologies (Dovchin, 2015; Lee & Li, 2020; Li & Zhu, 2019, p. 145). In translanguaging studies, researchers not only unpack texts but also make inquiries into ‘the complex process’ by which individuals manipulate semiotic resources as a way of confronting and resisting in social and historical footage (Dovchin, 2015; Dovchin et al., 2016). Therefore, adopting a translanguaging perspective on ELF practice would mean going beyond the analysis of ELF speakers’ creativities in terms of English variations and delving into how individuals deploy semiotic resources creatively as a way of redefining what language is and claiming their ownership of English.

Translanguaging space

Translanguaging space draws our attention to a complicated network of identities in online ELF practice. Zhu et al. (2017, p. 412) draw on theories about social space and conceptualise translanguaging space as the ‘sociocultural organisation of space’ materialised through the network of semiotic resources. As a concept for understanding social relations, it is a space where different identities ‘combine together to generate new identities, values and practices’ (Li, 2011, p. 1223). In this sense, it opens an understanding of how different identities combine to form solidarities between ELF speakers in intercultural communication. Bearing in mind that translanguaging space is not pre-defined but ‘created by and for translanguaging practices’ (Zhu et al., 2017, p. 412), researchers can trace identities enacted and constructed by speakers in online intercultural communication by analysing translanguaging practices in the interactions. Pennycook (2017, p. 277) reminds us that ‘we may appear to live in a world of fluidity but fixity is always at play’. That is, researchers should attend to not only the contingency and flexibility of language but also what has been repeated through practice to become sedimented in understanding language practice. Li’s (2011) research shows that Chinese speakers’ L1 and L1-bound cultures have impacts on their translanguaging practice, implying the operation of L1-bound identities in translanguaging spaces. Both fluidity and fixity embedded in translanguaging practices will help to understand identities.

Translanguaging space is compatible with ELF research for understanding ELF speakers’ ownership of English embedded in their language practice. As Li (2011) explains, the space is both self-contained and connected with other spaces situated in wider socio-cultural, historical, and ideological environments. His notion that speakers in the space have the power of deciding rules and interpretations of language practice resonates with ELF researchers’ (e.g. Pitzl, 2018b; Wang, 2013) discussion of the endonormativity of ELF. In this sense, the ownership of English and the legitimacy of translanguaging practices are decided by speakers within translanguaging spaces. In the meantime, the boundary around the translanguaging space is fluid due to the interaction between translanguaging space and wider environment (Li, 2011). This explains translanguaging, transgression, and transmodality as a result of speakers’ choices among, negotiation with, and transformation of various spatial repertoires on the basis of their mediation between translanguaging space and wider environments that incorporate many other spaces. Thus, translanguaging space allows for understanding a complex profile of the speakers’ identities in online intercultural interactions, which results from the speakers’ selections and negotiations among a variety of spatial repertoires, positions, and norms for their needs and desires.

In a nutshell, a *trans*-perspective on ELF research calls for our understanding of spatial repertoire, translanguaging creativity, and translanguaging space that ELF speakers create through translanguaging practice for meaning-making, identity construction and negotiating with ‘territorialised norms of bounded places’ (Canagarajah, 2018, p. 50; Zhu et al., 2017).

Methodology

This paper focuses on the data collected among 62 Chinese speakers in an ongoing qualitative research project, which explores Chinese speakers' language practices and identities in online intercultural experiences. Formal ethical approval was granted by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Southampton (Ethics number: 67330). A research assistant sent potential participants information sheets and permission forms to collect data and their permissions to use the data. The participants sent us screenshots documenting their online intercultural communication, which included emails and social media communication records. It was impossible to capture complete interactions between interactants in the returned screenshots of emails or posts which displayed limited sections of communication trails. This paper thus scoped the analysis to private chats on social media platforms, which presented interactions and exchanges at moments or over some time. Given the research interest in ELF practice in online intercultural interaction, the analysis further excluded those screenshot scenarios which presented no trace of English or interactants on two sides. As a result, 764 screenshots recording 191 interactive scenarios were included as valid data for the paper. The data contributors supplied general information about their screenshot interactions, which included the interlocutors' L1 backgrounds and the social media platforms where the chats took place. The reported L1 backgrounds included Arabic, English, Filipino, Kazakh, Malay, Spanish, Thai, and Turkish. The platforms were WeChat and WhatsApp. According to the contents of the chats, the interlocutors included the data contributors' friends, fellow students, colleagues, acquaintances, second-hand trading partners, and business partners.


In analysing semiotic resources that research participants used for meaning-making and solidarity-building, I adopted what Pennycook (2006) frames as transsignification for analysing transmodality and translanguaging, which expounds that the meaning of a sign/text needs to 'be understood productively, contextually and discursively' (Pennycook, 2006, p. 53). The same framework was used in Dovchin (2015) and Sultana (2016), both of which offered implications for my interpretation of data in terms of the pretextual, contextual, and subtextual interpretations of the signs that my research participants made. I explored *the pretextual history* of the texts, *the contextual relations* in which the texts exist, *the subtextual meanings* of the texts in socio-cultural and historical environments, and *the intertextual echoes* regarding the meanings of the texts (Dovchin, 2015; Pennycook, 2006, p. 53, original italics; Sultana, 2016). I examined Chinese speakers and their interlocutors' reactions to the signs in online interactions to explore posttextual meanings, i.e. 'the meanings participants read into the sign' (Pennycook, 2006, p. 53), due to the interest to understand if and how Chinese speakers achieved their purposes of interactions in ELF practice they produced. The analysis unpacked spatial repertoires mobilised from multi-layered contexts to the texts produced for Chinese speakers' online intercultural communication. It also illuminated Chinese speakers' transgression and translanguaging practices that account for online ELF practices and their identities in translanguaging spaces. Three themes emerging in the data are discussed below, respectively.

The deployment of spatial repertoires

Chinese speakers' deployment of spatial repertoires in the present study echoes the findings of previous studies in three aspects. First, transmodality and technological affordance are salient features of online communication (e.g. Dovchin, 2015, 2020a, 2020b). Chinese speakers deploy spatial repertoires that encapsulate various 'distributed' semiotic resources such as images, texts, emoticons, stickers, 'truncated' languages (Blommaert, 2010), registers, styles, creative forms of ELF, audio messages, and video clips, to name just a few, for effective communication and identity construction. Second, intercultural communication depends on 'assembled spatial repertoires in the situated social environment' (Ou & Gu, 2022, p. 3). Third, online discourses are inseparable from offline experience (Androutsopoulos, 2018).

This section delves into the spatiality and agency of spatial repertoires, which Chinese speakers deploy to form ELF practice in online intercultural communication. The spatiality frames the

distributed repertoires in translanguaging space and incorporates Chinese speakers' online and offline experiences embedded in historical, socio-cultural, and ideological contexts for meaning-making and identity in online intercultural encounters. Example 1 illustrates the spatiality embedded in Chinese speakers' online ELF practice.

Example 1 – ‘alcohol’			
A: L1 Chinese speaker; B: L1 English speaker			
A-1	do you need anything else?	A-6	
B-2	Just clothes, shoes, handbags or alcohol lol	B-7	Hahaha noo just drinks
	2020年9月7日 07:06		Yesss
A-3	We don't have any more alcohol. Maybe you can go to Boots. So sorry 😞		That's why I asked
	But we have some vodka, and we have Gin 🍷		
B-4	Hahahha vodka and gin are alcohol		
A-5	👉 I thought you wanted medical alcohol		

The screenshot records the interaction between A and B on WeChat. It clearly shows the availability of a range of semiotic resources, which included texts, emoticons, and a picture of a few bottles. A also deployed spatial repertoires distributed in a broader context beyond the textual level. In making sense of *alcohol* in B's question, A offered two interpretations. The interpretation of medical alcohol related to the global spread of COVID in the subtextual environment (lines A-3, A-5). The online exchange occurred in September 2020 – as shown in the screen background, when the globalised COVID epidemic was at its height and medical alcohol disinfectant was in high demand for routine sanitisation, as commonly seen in China and among Chinese overseas students. A advised B to try Boots, a chain retailer selling everyday health, beauty, and pharmacy products in the UK (line A-3), suggesting that A interpreted *alcohol* in B's mention as regular sanitisation products. In line A-5, A confirmed such an interpretation.

Meanwhile, A drew on contextual relations revolving around B's mention of *alcohol* to try a second interpretation. That is, B asked about recyclable luxury items such as clothes and bags, as B might have asked for alcoholic beverages, which were sold as luxury goods rather than medical products. The interpretation was not isolated from the pretextual history that B approached A through a second-hand trading group on WeChat. Beverages are closer to the luxury category for second-hand trading than medical alcohol. In the posttextual interpretation, B's reaction (line B-4) helped A to decide which meaning was correct. In turn, A posted a picture to show B that they had alcoholic beverages for sale (line A-6). B followed up by confirming again (line B-7), presenting what is common between ELF speakers who support each other for solidarity communication (e.g. Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Mauranen, 2012). From a perspective of ELF, A and B reached a shared understanding of what B meant by *alcohol* through negotiation.

In the translanguaging space, the online ELF practice presented a variety of repertoire assemblages across pretextual, textual, contextual, and subtextual environments, with A transcending between online and offline spaces for meaning-making and solidarity-building. A used emojis to express her embarrassment and awkwardness, while B typed 'hahaha' to indicate laughter and mitigate the awkwardness. While the mixture of pictures and texts facilitated meaning-making, the use of emoticons helped to express emotions and build solidarity. A also showed friendliness and support to B by offering information about where alcoholic sanitiser could be found. The pretextual

history and contextual relations helped to bring out the meaning. The subtextual process of meaning-making involved A's knowledge of COVID and common hygiene practice, knowledge of local shops and possibly, the widespread reactions to COVID among Chinese speakers. The subtextual life experience and knowledge of the world and locality supplemented the online interaction to explain the spatiality embedded in online ELF practice.

Space does not stay an inanimate site displaying various semiotic resources but plays 'active, generative, and agentive' roles (Canagarajah, 2018, p. 33) in meaning-making and repertoire development. As seen in Example 2, the WeChat platform serves as an agentive space that plays a role in meaning-making, embodied in the line *Just whechat me*.

Example 2 – 'whechat'	
C: L1 Chinese speaker; D: L1 English speaker	
D-1	Ok. I think so too. Thank you for checking. 2019年12月28日 下午14:10
C-2	You are welcome If you need any information about the tour. Just whechat me 😊 2019年12月28日 下午14:16
D-3	Last question - so sorry - is there high speed train from Xi'an to Hangzhou? Which hotel do you suggest for Hangzhou?

As 'words are mobile signifiers located in space and time' (Canagarajah, 2018, p. 34), it is not difficult to figure out that *whechat* was a variation of *wechat* or *WeChat* and used as a verb in line C-2, according to the contextual relations revolving around the word and the medium where communication took place. In the WeChat interaction, C politely reacted to D's expression of gratitude, suggested how to contact her if D needed further information, and used an emoji to end the turn. Before the creation of the line *Just whechat me*, WeChat merely acted as a passive platform bearing various semiotic resources and providing technological affordance for online communication. With the emergence of the text *Just whechat me*, not only was *WeChat* transformed into a verb (according to the contextual analysis), but also the WeChat platform played an agentive role in the meaning-making process in two ways (according to the subtextual analysis).

First, WeChat as a platform where communication took place inspired the enregisterment in C's textual production. To put it differently, if both parties were communicating through emails or over the phone, C might come up with the text *just email me* or *just phone me*. The immediate access to WeChat prompted the textual production *Just whechat me*. Second, the spelling of *whechat* for *wechat* revealed the mediation of technology in online communication. C might not capitalise letters but spell *wechat* for *WeChat* for convenience. But C was unlikely to intentionally type an extra *h* between *w* and *e*, since *WeChat* is a commonly known word. C was unlikely to accidentally type the extra *h*, because the letter *h* is far from *w* and *e* on the keyboard. The only possibility for the extra *h* was the result of the mediation of AI and digital technology immanent to WeChat. When C typed *we*, the letter *h* might be automatically inserted to change *we* to *who* in the automatic association function of the WeChat technology. Although six minutes' gap between line 2 (at 14.10) and line 3 (at 14.16) allowed for reflection, the innovative spelling neither caused concern for communicative effects nor triggered any attempt to rewrite it. It is possible that C welcomed or tolerated AI intervention in online communication. In the translanguaging space constructed by the translanguaging practice, the innovative word *whechat* was a result of the mediation of digital technology and the inspiration from the WeChat platform for enregisterment in meaning-making and customer support.

In short, online intercultural experiences create translanguaging spaces, which frame spatial repertoires deployed by interactants to reflect what Canagarajah (2021) conceptualises as ‘material ecology’. Chinese speakers deploy spatial repertoires distributed in multi-scaled contexts, transcend across different spatiotemporal frames, and collaborate with agentive space and technological mediation to engage their interlocutors and co-construct ELF practice with them.

Translingual creativity

The data analysis uncovered the complicated process of Chinese speakers’ deployment of spatial repertoires distributed in multi-scalar contexts that is manifested in the transgression and rule-breaking concentrated on ELF practice in online intercultural communication. Through the pre-textual, contextual, subtextual, intertextual, and posttextual analysis, the deployment reveals Chinese speakers’ creativities in translingual resourcefulness in three interrelated ways. First, Chinese speakers appropriate English and contravene English norms in the analytical focus on ELF as a salient feature of translingual resources. The data spread across three categories that Pitzl (2018b) develops for understanding ELF creativities through her work on metaphors, namely, (1) variations from the ‘existing’ English expressions, (2) absolute novelties ‘created ad hoc by the speaker’, and (3) transplantations from other languages. Second, the data present what other researchers have observed as the ‘creative and critical deployment of semiotic resources in communication that transcends normative boundaries between named languages’ (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019; Dovchin et al., 2016; Lee & Li, 2020, p. 558; Sultana, 2016) and ‘a transgressive mixture of modalities’ (Dovchin, 2020a, p. 31) in the analysis of transmodality as a whole picture. Third, the transgression is manifested beyond the textual level and operating in socio-cultural, historical, and ideological contexts, as revealed in the subtextual analysis. The three ways stood out along with the analytical progression from rule-breaking English forms to transmodalities, from the contextual to the subtextual level.

This section presents three examples to illustrate how observable ELF creativities in Chinese speakers’ language practice emerge from underlying translingual creativities, with each example corresponding to one of the three categories that Pitzl (2018a, p. 238) defines.

In Example 3, a marked expression *the train ... has opened*, which contravenes conventional English norms, stands out among an array of interplays between asynchronous and synchronous engagements in online intercultural communication, between voice message and text message, between linguistic semiotics and emoticons, and between English and Chinese repertoires.

Example 3 – ‘the high-speed train ... has already opened’ E: L1 Chinese speaker; F: L1 English speaker	
	2019年12月28日 下午13:26
E-1	Hi Aric I check the Internet also.It said the high-speed train from Datong to Xi'an has already opened.I think this is not the right information.I double check on the train booking system.No high-speed train tickets is available. From Datong to Xi'an. There is one flight ZH9737 11:45-13:45 If you take the flight.I can help you book the flights
	2019年12月28日 下午13:35
F-2	Very interesting. So glad to have your help with this. Sometimes information can be confusing.
E-3	You are welcome 😊

The arrow icon in line E-1 helps to understand the pretextual history that the message in the line was originally in voice mode and then converted to text mode under technological affordance. In the contextual terms, E delivered the message, without causing any difficulty or breakdown in the interaction. Subtextual analysis showed that E drew on L1 Chinese repertoire for the intercultural communication. The verb *open* points to the Chinese character 开 pronounced as ‘kai’, a hypernym of a few words like *move*, *drive*, *depart*, *leave*, and *open* used respectively in different collocations. The creative expression thus juxtaposed the recognisable native English structure *Subject + Verb* with the word *open* in L1 Chinese semantics. The boundaries between English and Chinese became blurred when contextual and subtextual analyses were brought together. By translating *kai* (开) to *open* instead of other possibilities, such as *depart* or *leave*, in the collocation with train, E assigned a new meaning to the word *open* in English. E ‘stretched’ the word *open* to ‘new limits’ (Clark, 2006, p. 272) to make it a synonym for *depart* or *leave*. While the new meaning derived from the Chinese language, the word choice of *open* sit comfortably in the English structure, with the Chinese semantics seamlessly merged into English. What Makoni and Pennycook (2012, p. 447) see as *lingua franca* provides the explanatory potential for this variation: ‘Languages are so deeply intertwined and fused into each other that the level of fluidity renders it difficult to determine any boundaries that may indicate that there are different languages involved’.

Example 4 contextualises an innovative expression, that is, *same old same old*, which in Pitzl’s (2018b, p. 63) word, bears no or ‘low cognitive congruity’ with conventional languages and is created at the spur-of-the-moment in communication.

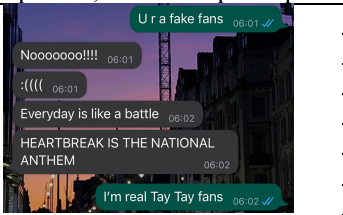
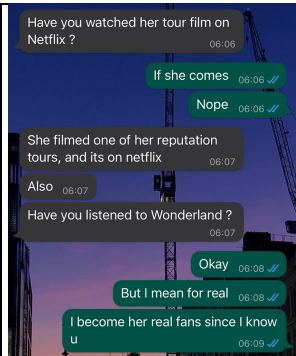
Example 4 – ‘same old, same old’		G: L1 Chinese speaker; H: L1 Kazakh speaker	
		How is your boyfriend?	G-1
		You guys still together?	
H-2	We r		
	Kinda		
	He moved away. See each other once a month		
		wow	G-3
		He still works in Hangzhou?	
H-4	No he moved to another city		
	I’ m moving to Shanghai soon too		
	Just need to sort out my visa problems		
		ok	G-5
H-6	How’ s is everything at “\$ → education” ?		
		When does your current visa be expired?	G-7
H-8	In a month		
		11-23-21 21:02	
		Same old same old, still running	G-9
		No how’ s is everything at “Stanley education” ?	
H-10	I can get two one month humanitarian visas but I don’ t want to. Better to get it approved this time		
	That’ s good		
	h : Same old same old, still running		
		Yeah, I wish everything works out for you	G-11

The pretextual history of the innovation implied the acquaintance between G and H. The interaction took place out of working hours, as suggested by the information about time in the screen,

i.e. 9.02 pm on 23 November 2021. G asked H about the latter's boyfriend (line G-1), and H asked G about the business that G worked for (line H-6). In contextual relations revolving around the innovation, the interaction looks formal, with both speakers mainly adopting linguistic semiotics and following a recognisable native English structure. After a pause between line H-8 and line G-9, G created a marked expression *same old same old*, which shows English-like quality but cannot be understood within a monolingual English framework. Given the precontextual history and the contextual clues, the playfulness of the innovation helps to disrupt the formal atmosphere and ease the possible awkwardness caused by the pause. In the postcontextual interpretation, H's response *That's good* suggests the effective delivery of the meaning of the expression *same old same old*, although H has a non-L1-Chinese background. In line with an ELF perspective, the markedness stands out as an ad-hoc, deliberate transformation of English in the conversation to exert the effects of (1) creating a sense of humour, (2) enhancing the solidarity and closeness between two interactants and, (3) easing the possible awkwardness caused by the pause between line H-8 and line G-9.

In the subtextual analysis, the innovation draws on spatial repertoires beyond the contextual level. The novelty finds its roots in L1 Chinese discourse. In oneway, reduplication is commonplace and serves various pragmatic purposes, such as enhancing or softening the tone, and expressing emotions in communication. In another way, the innovation spells out the meaning in L1 Chinese, that is, *(the) same (as it was in the) old (times)*. The word *old* indexes the past or the old times in the innovation. Thus, the innovation covertly juxtaposes English with the L1 Chinese discourse. From a translanguaging perspective, the transformation invokes the playful subversion of English norms and deliberate languaging practice, with G breaking established rules of English to assemble *same* and *old* together. Thus, the ad-hoc ELF creativity works effectively in a holistic view of the space repertoires that bring together the momentary communication, the long-term relationship and online solidarity, blurring the boundaries between English and Chinese repertoires.

Example 5 presents the online intercultural communication between J and K, who talked about fans' loyalty to Taylor Swift. The word *fans* as a plural form in conventional English was recontextualised to express the meaning of a singular form in the online ELF practice. It can be redefined as an innovation in Pitzl's (2018b) categorisation of 'transplantation', which groups innovations relocated from other languages to ELF practice.

Example 5 – 'fans'		
J: L1 Chinese speaker; K: L1 Filipino speaker		
J-1		
K-2		K-4
		J-5
		K-6
J-3		
		J-7
		

At the contextual level, J deployed a transgressive mixture of internet slang (*u r*), informal register (*Nope, Okay*), rule-breaking English forms (line J-7), and the background knowledge of Taylor Swift's song lyrics. The word *fans* as a singular form appeared three times in the interaction (lines J-1, J-3, and J-7), suggesting a naturalised treatment of *fans* as a singular form. In subtextual analysis, the word *fans* as a singular form has its root in J's L1 Chinese repertoire. The marked form *fans* is a transliteration of the Chinese script of 粉丝 pronounced as *fensi*, which according to baidu baike, a

Chinese counterpart of Wikipedia, refers to a group of people who admire or support a celebrity, a fashion, or an activity (<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%B2%89%E4%B8%9D/6368045?fr=aladdin>, accessed on 15 April 2022). The Chinese discourse does not always differentiate between plural and singular forms of nouns. The subtextual practice explains the non-differentiation relocated to the online intercultural communication. The occurrence of *fans* as singular aligns with Polzl and Seidlhofer's (2006, p. 155) remark that an ELF speaker's L1 repertoire is their 'natural habitat' and of 'sociopsychological significance' to them.

The subtextual analysis further exposed a more complicated transcending process behind the treatment of *fans* as a singular form than the one-way relocation from Chinese to English. The word 粉丝 (*fensi*) in Chinese merely referred to a kind of food material in China. Its meaning expanded to *fans* in China along with the quasi-homophonic word *fans* in the global entertainment culture travelling to the Chinese entertainment culture. A trajectory thus became clear: the word *fans* as a plural form in the global entertainment culture entered the Chinese discourse to become *fans* as a generic term and then, I used it as a singular form in the online intercultural communication in Example 5. The trajectory well explains the transcultural flow between the global and the local. It exposes the transcending between English and Chinese, between the global scale and the local scale, and between the subtext and the text. In this sense, the extraction of resources from L1 Chinese repertoires for intercultural communication should not be considered an arbitrary choice but compatible with expressions in global cultures. In another word, a Chinese speaker would not arbitrarily 'transplant' some expressions only Chinese speakers understand for intercultural communication.

To recap, Chinese speakers' online intercultural communication shows translingual creativity, which highlights ELF creativities emerging in the complexity of spatial assemblage in translanguaging spaces. The 'transsignification' analysis (Pennycook, 2006, p. 54) exposes the complicated process whereby Chinese speakers transcend through and across different languages, modalities, and spatial repertoires distributed in multi-scalar contexts.

Identities in translanguaging spaces

Three overarching and interrelated identity themes are evident in Chinese speakers' online translanguaging practices that explain not only their transmodality, transgression and contravention of English norms but also their social relations in translanguaging spaces. As Example 6 illustrates, Chinese speakers perform themselves as translingual, Chinese, legitimate users of English at the equal footing as NESs to freely communicate and establish solidarities with their interlocutors in online intercultural communication.

Example 6		L: L1 Chinese speaker; M: L1 English speaker			
M-1	<p>2020年7月13日</p> <p>Hey, I'm making a PowerPoint about effective visuals in presentations for the professional.</p> <p>15:18</p> <p>I would like a picture of famous Chinese designer or artist or communicator (and nothing controversial)</p> <p>15:20</p>	L-4	<p>Jack Ma is more influential in Chinese people's daily life. I bet if you choose him as a communicator and ask Chinese students to introduce him to you, they will be very willing to talk to you about Jack's enterprise Alibaba and Taobao</p> <p>17:38 ✓</p> <p>Taobao is like Amazon but more than Amazon, it more represents a social phenomenon in fast-developing China</p> <p>17:40 ✓</p> <p>I wonder whether if you could include the Chinese characters in your slides? It may get your students more involved and make you closer to them?</p> <p>17:43 ✓</p>	M-7	<p>If I have a class of all Chinese speakers then I'll ask for your help with putting some Chinese on the slides 🙏🙏🙏</p> <p>17:45</p>
L-2	<p>Great idea! It's very important to include some Chinese elements in your slides when you are facing a group of Chinese students 🙏</p> <p>17:55 ✓</p> <p>Guo pei is an influential lady</p> <p>17:55 ✓</p>			L-8	<p>You're very welcome 🙏🙏🙏</p> <p>17:45 ✓</p> <p>But I think if you also have some Thai and Saudi characters in your slides, you can also include their original names in their languages (a little bit multilingual sense)...I think it's not only about get students involved but also a kind of respect for those characters... Just my idea 🙏...You can sure make your decision, but I know no matter what way you choose, your class will be great! 🙏</p> <p>17:52 ✓</p>
M-3	<p>Great, is there someone I could have as a communicator? I know it's a little strange</p> <p>17:51</p> <p>Could an influential business owner work? Jack Ma?</p> <p>17:51</p> <p>Many of the students study business and art so is like to include people they may know!</p> <p>17:52</p>	M-5	<p>Chinese characters' Chinese name... 🙏</p> <p>17:44 ✓</p> <p>I won't include the Chinese as there are some students who speak Arabic and Thai</p> <p>17:44</p> <p>But maybe in my class I will do this 🙏🙏</p> <p>17:45</p> <p>Thank you for the information - it's really helpful, I'm glad they seem to be good examples to use 🙏</p> <p>17:45</p>		
		L-6			

The interaction took place on WhatsApp between L, a L1 Chinese speaker, and M, an L1 English speaker. The contextual analysis presents an unobstructed view of L performing as a translanguaging speaker in the online interaction. L deployed a range of spatial repertoires, which included linguistic semiotics, emoticons, rule-breaking English forms, the knowledge of Chinese celebrities in the Chinese context and the global context, and views of international classroom teaching. Being translanguaging, L effectively communicated with M, expressed her emotions and feelings, and maintained solidarity with M. L adeptly deployed emoticons among various spatial resources to express meaning and emotions, show friendliness, support and agreement with the interaction partner, and offer advice. Specifically, a smiley emoji followed an explicit expression of endorsement and an exclamation mark to enhance the support (line L-2), when responding to M's request for the recommendation of a Chinese celebrity to be used as an example in class teaching. L used another emoji at the end of a long message (line L-4). While the length of the message might give a feeling of showing-off the knowledge of Chinese celebrities, expressing embarrassment has an effect of showing modesty and thus transforming the showing-off into open-mindedness. L intersected emoticons with text messages in line L-8, showing her shyness of being frank about what she thought personally (*Just my idea* 😊) and her support to M (*your class will be great!* 🍀). In terms of the deployment of linguistic semiotics, L contravened native English norms (for example, line L-8). In the subtextual analysis, L addressed Guo Pei by following a Chinese naming culture and Jack Ma by an English culture, which might converge with a global culture to show Jack Ma as a global celebrity. L also deployed her knowledge of Chinese socio-cultural and economic background in the subtextual repertoires to satisfy M's request for examples of Chinese celebrities (namely, *Guo Pei* and *Jack Ma*) at the contextual level, transcending between the contextual and subtextual levels. Apart from the translanguaging and transcultural practice, L explicitly expressed a multilingual awareness and defended the value of multilingualism to show a positive attitude towards multilingual repertoires. She tried to convince M to incorporate a *multilingual sense* in teaching (line L-8) by adopting the Chinese name of Jack Ma in Chinese characters (line L-4) and articulated her belief that multilingual elements would help M as an L1 English speaker to connect with students from multilingual backgrounds (line L-8). The multilingual awareness L articulated supported her identity as being Chinese and provided a note for positioning herself on an equal footing with an NES in the online intercultural communication, which are to be discussed in what follows.

Being Chinese is highlighted in L's identity. As revealed in the contextual and subtextual analysis of the example, it was co-constructed between two speakers and indexed by L's connection with China and her sense of national pride. As Bhatia (2020, p. 12) remarks, 'the material component of any situation (that is, actors, places, time, objects present or referred to)' is resourceful for ethnicity construction and identities are co-constructed between interactants. In Example 6, L drew on resources in various material components of the Chinese culture and society to co-construct her identity as a 'China' expert with M, who showed an expectation of L's contribution of the knowledge of 'China'. Specifically, L showed her knowledge of China, Chinese socio-cultural and economic background, and Chinese people's everyday lives as well as her confidence in understanding Chinese students' language needs and interests, based on which she subtextually advised how to engage Chinese students. The confidence in knowing revealed a keen sense of being a 'China' expert. At the subtextual level, L also expressed her pride in China underneath her appreciation of Guo Pei and Jack Ma's business in line L-4 (*more than Amazon, fast-developing China*). In line with Anderson's (1983) theory of nationalism, the communion with the Chinese community contributes to L's construction of the Chinese national identity. In addition, M's expectation, which provided some pretextual background for L's performance, and M's reaction to L's contribution, which presented her posttextual interpretation of L's performance, combined to show her support to L's identity as being Chinese.

The ownership of English is shared between L as a NNEs and M as a NES in the translanguaging space. In the contextual analysis, English is apparently a significant feature of the interaction and

rule-breaking English is evident in L's performance. Literature has widely critiqued the hierarchy between nativeness and non-nativeness and the issue of ownership (e.g. Jenkins, 2015a, 2015b; Seidlhofer, 2011, Widdowson, 1994). In the pretextual background, M is a British speaker of English. The contextual information reveals that M is a friend to L and knows L's L1 Chinese background. L's performance showed no sign of concern with rule-breaking English or non-native-like English. Neither did it show a sign of pressure from the engagement with a NES. L played an active role in the conversation, contributing long lines and trying to convince M to take her points about multilingual elements for teaching. Even when M politely rejected the idea of including multilingual elements in teaching, L was still proactive and continued to persuade. She focused on providing the knowledge of Chinese celebrities and making suggestions about multilingual awareness. She thus displayed a 'content orientation', which Mauranen (2012, p. 52) sees as crucial in self-defining a legitimate user as opposed to a learner of English, who would rather be subject to established language norms. It is fair to say that L and M acted on an equal footing as legitimate users of English in the translanguaging space, with the difference between nativeness and non-nativeness as irrelevant. Thanks to the transformative power of translanguaging space (Li, 2011), L's English performance has become self-governed within the translanguaging space.

The interpretation of the three identities is intertextually echoed across the data. As Examples 1–5 show, Chinese speakers communicate and establish solidarities with their interlocutors through various spatial repertoires and translanguaging practices. Although being translingual inevitably invokes the role of different languages in identity construction, being a Chinese speaker and being a legitimate user of English are not shadowed by the translingual identity but make distinctive contributions to Chinese speakers' engagement with their interlocutors. Chineseness is exhibited in expressions like *wechat me*, *the train has ... opened*, *same old same old*, and *fans* as a singular form, all of which are sourced from the L1 Chinese repertoire and cultural background. In addition, Chineseness is commonly revealed in the data through Chinese speakers' acting as 'China' experts in online intercultural experience. While often asked by their interlocutors for information about China, the Chinese language, and the Chinese culture, Chinese speakers are happy to offer information or advice. Although technological affordance allows for correction or reflection on language performance, no Chinese speaker has attempted to correct 'broken' or 'ungrammatical' forms of English, with full attention paid to social activities, for example, second-hand trading, travel booking, visa application document preparation, and social exchanges. Despite the power asymmetry between nativeness and non-nativeness in English that operates in other contexts such as education and testing, online intercultural communication has created translanguaging spaces where Chinese speakers display a sense of ownership of English, constructing a user identity who enjoys the playfulness in the creative process of languaging or translanguaging, moving away from a learner identity, which is constrained by an essentialist focus on pre-defined language norms.

Discussion

Focusing on Chinese speakers as the subject of study, this paper uses transsignification as an analytical framework to explore meaning-making and identity construction in ELF practices manifested in online intercultural communication. It unpacks the 'translinguistic resourcefulness' (Li & Zhu, 2019, p. 158) that Chinese speakers' online intercultural communication evokes in their deployment of spatial repertoires for meaning-making and identity construction. While synergising findings about spatial repertoires identified in other studies, the paper draws attention to the spatiality and agency of spatial repertoires that contribute to Chinese speakers' online ELF practice. The spatiality breaks the boundaries around the translanguaging spaces where the communications take place through translanguaging practices and brings together online and offline contexts, ad-hocness and lastingness, and synchronicity and asynchrony. The agency explains the mediation of space – social media in the present study – in meaning-making and identity construction. ELF creativity as a defining feature of ELF practice is examined through a translanguaging perspective. The

analysis shows the connection between ELF creativity and translingual creativity. While ELF creativity is observed at the superficial level, translingual creativity is uncovered as multi-layered to bring about the former. Interestingly, L1 Chinese language and culture, which are part of translingual repertoires, operate at the subtextual level to motivate Chinese speakers' ELF creativity at the contextual level. Thus, translinguality as a whole is one side of the coin, while the other side is casted by L2 English, L1 repertoires, and agentive space in mediating online intercultural communication.

The paper expands our understanding of solidarities in ELF practice from a translanguaging perspective. In understanding social relations in ELF practice, ELF researchers are dedicated to the concept of Community of Practice (CoP), which emphasises shared repertoires and joint endeavours among community members (Seidlhofer, 2011). It follows that ELF researchers tend to focus on the solidarity, in-betweenness, and sharedness among ELF speakers in intercultural communication (Ehrenreich, 2010; Jenkins, 2015b). L1-bound identity attracts scholarly attention as an interesting paradox. Researchers often explicitly recognise L1-bound national identity as relevant for ELF speakers and, simultaneously, leave it under-researched by claiming that L1-bound national identity is not as important as global identity for intercultural communication (e.g. Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019; Holliday, 2010, p. 168). Seidlhofer (2011, p. 77) remarks that as 'a matter of social fact', ELF speakers might 'mark out linguistic boundaries' for their L1-bound group identity, though needing data in place. Nonetheless, when investigating Chinese speakers' identities in their intercultural communication, Wang (2012, 2018, 2020) finds the co-existence of Chinese speakers' solidarity with their interlocutors and their L1-bound identities in their intercultural communication. To explain this co-existence, she considers both CoP and 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) as relevant for understanding Chinese ELF speakers' multiple identities. Inspired by the translanguaging research, Baker and Sangiamchit (2019) argue that L1-bound national identities and hybridity combined cannot sufficiently explain the transculturality in intercultural communication. The present paper sees translanguaging space as constructive for analysing ELF speakers' identities in engaging with their interlocutors. The analysis offers empirical evidence to the claim that solidarity does not mean homogeneity and illuminates a network of identities that Chinese speakers enact in translanguaging practice, with being translingual, being Chinese, and being legitimate users of English as overarching identities. The three overarching and interrelated identities explain and support each other within the translanguaging spaces co-constructed between Chinese speakers and their interlocutors.

The refashioning of English, which has been documented in studies in many other contexts (e.g. Bhatia, 2020; Spilioti, 2020), indexes the ownership of English being expanded globally. The present study goes beyond surveying language practice to delve into identities in translanguaging spaces, revealing the ideological edge of the refashioning of English within the fluid networks of spatial repertoires that materialise online intercultural communications. The ownership of English that Chinese speakers enjoy in translanguaging spaces cannot be understood as isolated from the identities in trinity. A sense of ownership of English arises with the investment of L1-bound identity in the translanguaging spaces, where Chinese speakers construct identities as China experts, providing their interlocutors with L1-Chinese consultancy, Chinese socio-cultural background information, and Chinese cultural knowledge. Being translingual points to a redefinition of what language is in translanguaging spaces where transmodality is normal and constructional. The L1-bound investment and the redefinition of language work together with the power rebalancing between NESs and NNESSs within the translanguaging space.

Conclusion

The impetus of globalisation and digitalisation drives Chinese speakers towards online intercultural communication, which ushers them into super-resourceful translanguaging spaces. Understanding translinguality as a general picture and studying diversified particularities among ELF speakers from different L1 backgrounds are not mutually exclusive but complementary. Being translingual,

being Chinese and being legitimate users of English triangulate in Chinese speakers' deployment of spatial repertoires for online intercultural communication. Although ELF is central to intercultural communication, the refashioning of English cannot be understood comprehensively if we place translanguilistic resourcefulness, L1 and technology in the background. Only by foregrounding them for analysis can we productively understand the ownership of English, which is now dramatically spreading outside native English-speaking communities due to agentive NNESS' intercultural communication afforded and mediated by digital technology.

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