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## **Understanding the Translingual Practices Among International Students in Multilingual Cities**

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### **Abstract**

The impact of global mobility and technology innovations on urban linguistic diversity poses a key challenge to understand how and to what extent international students are immersed in the target language. Such diversity of languages and modes of communications has pointed to a fundamental transformation in the way that international students interact with both online and offline resources. The translingual practices of Chinese international students presented in this study suggest that, instead of being a language learner in an English-dominant country, these students make use of but go beyond their full repertoires to conduct various online and offline activities when living in a translanguaging space. An evaluation of both online and offline practices demonstrates how their online translingual practices were merged into offline contexts, to create opportunities for learning and social engagement. Understanding international students' experience with both online and offline resources provides useful insights into the translingual practices and processes adopted by them when living and studying in a multilingual city.

**Keywords:** international students; translingual practice; Australia; New Zealand; technology; multilingualism; higher education

## **1.Introduction**

While undertaking different degree programs, international students travel thousands of miles from their home country to live and study in new linguistic and cultural environments. It is often assumed, and expected, that international students will improve their language skills effortlessly as a result of living and studying in their new linguistic environments. This idea is applicable to studying in English-speaking countries like Australia and New Zealand (Benzie, 2010; Phakiti, Hirsh & Woodrow, 2013). However, global mobility has had a deep impact on the linguistic landscapes of many English-speaking countries, with the dominant role of English in everyday interaction diminishing due to the emergence of diverse linguistic communities. In turn, English language learning in such contexts may now require additional effort. Meanwhile, the development of digital technology has shortened the psychological distance between host and home countries for international students, which may impact the degree to which they engage with the local community. In the virtual space, the “local easily becomes the global or glocal” (Jonsson, 2013, p.108). Coleman (2013) thus suggests an exploration of technology use as a part of the “rapidly and profoundly changing social context” (p.27) when researching language learning abroad. Considering the significant impact of both the Internet and urban multilingualism, this study will build our understandings of the complexities of translingual practices among international students by examining the technology-mediated translingual practices of six Chinese international students studying in Sydney, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand. Specifically, it investigates how these students use online resources to transverse their everyday practices in different languages in host countries. By taking a holistic view of the translingual practices in both online and offline environments, this study offers new perspectives of international students’ linguistic practices

and their language learning opportunities when studying and living in a multilingual environment. Hence, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are international students' translingual practices when conducting online activities?
2. How are the translingual practices of international students in online and offline activities connected to promote opportunities for English learning and use?

## **2. Translingual practices**

Embedded in the notion of translingualism is the belief that speakers can choose their language resources in the process of communication, knowledge construction and meaning conveyance (Canagarajah, 2013). Many scholars have proposed different concepts around the discussion of translingualism over the years, such as translanguaging (García, 2009), translingual practice (Canagarajah, 2013), translanguaging space (Li, 2011), and transglossia (Dovchin, Pennycook & Sultana, 2018). All of these concepts represent a view that language is a transformative act or a practice in everyday social interaction, which involves the use of multiple linguistic and semiotic resources (Pennycook, 2010; Dovchin, 2017; Mazzaferro, 2018). What makes translingualism different from other frameworks is that it values the speakers' personal experiences, social backgrounds, their communicative strategies and entire linguistic repertoires in everyday language encounters. As emphasized by Canagarajah (2013), all speakers are translingual to a certain degree, since languages are "open to being adopted by diverse communities for their own purposes" (p. 8). In his view of translingual practice, one can implement diverse language resources - regardless of proficiency and competence, strategically. Language users adopt different strategies to negotiate meanings and achieve communicative goals. In addition, Canagarajah also states that the translingual practices become more conspicuous in a digitally-connected and globalized context. In the translocal

space, instead of adopting the norm of native speakers, migrants and other multilingual speakers negotiate and re-construct their own language norms into new translingual norms. To understand the dynamic language uses in a globalized world, Otsuji and Pennycook (2010) coin “metrolinguistics” to refer to the way people of different backgrounds interact with various social activities through languages in contemporary settings. This concept is further developed by the authors as *mundane metrolingualism* to focus on the complexity of *spatiotemporal entanglement* in everyday practices. The presence and use of mobile phone for different purposes extends the *spatial repertoire* and brings together the daily activities happening simultaneously in different geographical locations.

Li (2011) offers a related concept called “translanguaging space” to refer to “a space that is created by, and for, translanguaging practices - and a space where language users break down the ideologically laden dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual, and the social and the psychological, through interaction” (p. 23). Wei argues that translingual practices enable a “social space” in which language users make decisions about their language choices in specific social settings. In everyday interactions, translingual practices contain both textual and visual fractures involving multimodal resources. As highlighted by Hua, Li, and Lyons (2017), a translanguaging space is where “multilingual, multimodal, multisensory and multi-semiotic resources” (p. 413) integrate with each other to create new zones for communication.

Seen from this perspective, the notion of translingual practices and translanguaging space are particularly relevant to the contemporary social setting, as it often involves interactions and connections with people of different locations, social classes, educational backgrounds, and ethnic minorities, as well as speakers of different languages and dialects. Translingualism states that language is ecologically embedded and interconnected with diverse semiotic resources. It also allows research to go beyond the traditional view of language and

mode by shifting the focus from the languages, to the speakers of the languages. Combining the central ideas from these translingualism concepts, this paper seeks a new understanding of how the translingual practices of Chinese international students are carried out in digital environments, and how such practices influence their English learning and use.

### **3. Translingual practices with technology**

Languages used for online interactions are a vital part of people's everyday linguistic practices. Virtual environments with multimodal functions open a space for different forms of language practices such as writing, reading, speaking, and listening (Barton & Lee, 2013). In a digitalized world, the modes of communication are not only limited to the text, but also include different symbols, icons, images and sounds. The multimodalities of internet technology embody translingual features of online interactions (Canagarajah, 2013; Blommaert, 2020). Previous empirical studies have discussed the digitally-mediated language use of multilingual speakers in virtual spaces. Androutsopoulos (2015) found that secondary school students of Greek-background in Germany used different languages including iconic signs interchangeably on Facebook, when engaging in multilingual interactions. The author consequently suggests that "social networking sites must be seen as important sites of contemporary multilingual practice in a globalized and mediatized world" (Androutsopoulos, 2015, p. 202). A similar study undertaken in Australia by Oliver and Nguyen (2017) reports on Aboriginal students' translanguaging practices on Facebook, and uncovers the use of different dialects, languages, and multimodal resources. Oliver and Nguyen found that social networking sites such as Facebook, could support creative language learning and multilingual identity development among Aboriginal students.

The data and findings in these studies suggest an online and offline nexus (Blommaert, 2020) created by the use of technologies, as well as a deepened interconnection between virtual and physical worlds. However, because of the generalized spread of internet technology, the online virtual world becomes part of reality in our everyday social practices. People's online practices represent their cultural expression, identity and perspective in real life, especially among the young generation. As Dovchin, Pennycook and Sultana (2018) point out, "being online is very real, and being offline is permeated by the online" (p.16), so simply treating online and offline activities as separate can be problematic. The proliferation of mobile technology furthers the *spatiotemporal entanglements* in contemporary social life (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2020). The online and offline activities are interconnected and intertwined across space and time. Translingual practices in online environments have generally been investigated with specific focus on a singular social media platform (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp), or through an implied division between online and offline activities. However, international students' everyday online activities in the host country is more complicated and dynamic, and their digital practices are not limited to just one or two social media platforms. As being digitally-connected increasingly features in people's lives, it is then impossible to address the offline daily activities without paying attention on the online engagements, and vice versa. Dovchin, Pennycook and Sultana (2018) remark that "[c]yber speaking is not restricted only to online contexts but can also be stretched to offline contexts..." (p.21). Because of the specific focus on both online and offline interactions in this study, we are interested in the relationship and interconnections between online and offline activities. Thus, we started from the exploration of international students' online translingual practices, and then investigate how these practices can be 'stretched' to the offline context.

#### **4. Sydney and Auckland: From multilingual to translingual cities**

Multilingualism is a key feature of the linguistic landscapes of Australia and New Zealand. Within these countries, metropolitan cities such as Sydney and Auckland are popular destinations for immigrants (Forrest & Dandy, 2018). Each country's unique immigration selection criteria and visa categories attracts both migrants and short-term visitors including international students from all over the world, which brings notable changes to the linguistic landscape of the cities. In Sydney, 35.8 per cent of the population uses a language other than English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Multilingual speakers represent 30.1 per cent of the population of Auckland (StatsNZ, 2018).

The terms 'multilingualism' or 'multilingual' often refer to the use of more than one language among individuals or society (Cenoz, 2013). However, those terms may not be able to explain a complicated communicative practice in a transnational context brought by "the co-presence of multilingual talk (exercised by de/reterritorialized speakers) and electronic media... using different languages and communicative codes simultaneously" (Jacquemet, 2005, p.265). Translingualism, on the other hand, moves beyond multilingualism, which means transcending the named languages and the artificial boundaries between them. From a translingualism view, multilingual cities like Sydney and Auckland can be seen as translanguaging spaces where people strategically choose between and beyond multiple linguistic resources to construct meanings for communication (Li, 2011). Additionally, the notion of spatial repertoires proposed by Pennycook and Otsuji (2014) is also relevant to our understanding of the linguistic practices in urban space, as it describes the interconnections between languages, human activities and physical space. Both of these concepts highlight diversity of the language and all types of semiotic and multimodal resources that exist around multilingual speakers in an urban city.



## **5. International students in Australia and New Zealand cities**

Compared with other English-speaking destinations, Australia and New Zealand have a relatively high proportion of international students attending higher education. Most recent data show the estimated international student population of Australia is 758,154 (Department of Education, 2019), and in New Zealand it is 118,300 (Ministry of Education, 2018). The rise in numbers of international students thus creates widespread debate and interest, particularly in the discussion of their English language proficiency and integration into the host community. Early studies of international students in Australia and New Zealand have represented them as being excluded or as living in their ‘bubbles’ and barely participating in community activities (e.g., Zhang & Brunton, 2007); or as having too-limited English skills to study or work in the host country (Sawir, 2005). Some recent media reports view international students merely as sources of revenue for universities, or portray international students as an outgroup, one that is commodified and homogenized, further discounting them as individuals who use languages for diverse purposes ((Burton-Bradley, 2018; Bodis, 2021). Characteristics such as poor English skills, self-isolation from the local community and struggling with the academic requirements set by the host universities, are often linked to representations of international students (Collins, 2008).

While cross-broader education is claimed to result in countless benefits for international students, the attention often focuses on their English language proficiency, especially those who arrive from countries where English is taught as a foreign language (e.g., China, Korea, Japan). It is noteworthy that simple overemphasis on the English skills of international students may have negative effects. As found in Dovchin’s (2020) study, international students in Australia hold a strong belief that their English proficiency is a measure of their success and intelligence. Canagarajah (2013) also suggests that “English and the elite varieties of that

language are the assumed linguistic capital in such studies, given the global status of English in higher education, development, and professional communication” (p.159). Previous studies show that the English language ability of an international student is correlated with his or her academic achievement when pursuing a degree in an English-speaking country (Ramburuth, 2001). Although much of the current literature stresses that studying in an English-speaking country provides opportunities to learn and use English as the target language (Kingtoner, 2009), the boundaries between English and other languages are being increasingly blurred in today’s world, even in an English-dominant society (Canagarajah, 2013). The monolingual view of English as a dominant language does not reflect the current reality of a diversity of language uses and needs among multilingual speakers. Therefore, translanguaging is much more appropriate to explain the transcending of individual languages in communications, due to the “changing language in a changing society” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 2), brought by the process of globalization.

## **6. The study**

The review of literature provided a rationale for, and the theoretical perspective upon which our exploration of the translanguaging practices of international students is based. Although investigations into translanguaging practices in multilingual environments have gained currency over time, there remain many unexplored areas. Some studies focus primarily on the migration group or on long-time stayers (e.g., Androutsopoulos, 2015; Yates and Zielinski, 2019). Given that immigrants may have quite different language needs and learning trajectories compared with students, limited attention has been paid to the voices and perceptions of international students. International students are of considerable interest in this study for two reasons. First, they comprise a significant proportion of the student populations in the two research site cities.

Their language practices and needs are inseparable from the cities' linguistic landscapes. Second, although most academic activities are conducted in English, students are still exposed to a highly resourced translingual environment when doing everyday online and offline activities outside of classroom. In light of these factors, examining the translingual practices of international students will provide interesting insights into how they employ their suite of linguistic resources when studying in the host countries.

## **7. Participant summary**

This study examined the translingual practices of six Chinese international students studying in Sydney and Auckland. The data presented in this article comes from a subset of 30 international student participants in a longitudinal study that was conducted in the two cities during 2018-2019. Participants were selected through both purposive and snowball sampling methods. Participants were recruited based on two criteria. First, participants had to be international students who are enrolled in tertiary education institutions in Australia or New Zealand. Second, given that Chinese students represent the largest proportion of international students studying in Australia and New Zealand, participant recruitment was limited to international students from China. All participants were chosen from those who initially responded to an advertisement circulated on Chinese social networking sites (WeChat, Douban, Weibo) and notice boards on university campuses in both Sydney and Auckland. Several of the participants were referred by their friends and classmates through snowball technique. The 30 participants represented three different levels of university programs, namely undergraduates, postgraduates, and graduates. The six students from which data were collected for this article were selected because they provided a complete set of diary entries detailing

their digital practices. All participants speak Chinese as their first language. Their demographic information divided into the three groups, is recorded in Table 1.

**Table 1** Demographic information of international students

	Name	Gender	City	Field of study	Length of stay	Overseas Experience
<b>Undergraduates</b>	Blair	F	Sydney	Accounting	2 yrs.	No
	Samantha	F	Auckland	Food science	3yrs.	No
<b>Postgraduates</b>	Aimee	F	Sydney	Accounting	1yr.	No
	Dylan	M	Auckland	Engineering	1yr.	Yes
<b>Graduates</b>	Luna	F	Sydney	Accounting	4 yrs.	No
	Cathy	F	Auckland	Computing	3 yrs.	No

## 8 . Data collection and analysis

Digital diary and semi-structured interviews comprised core data for this study. These two complementary instruments had different investigative purposes to gain a clearer perspective on the research phenomenon. The digital diary provided an overview of participants' everyday online activities and the language involved in those activities. Using digital diaries for data collection is especially effective when seeking evidence that would not otherwise be accessible to researchers because the phenomena are internal or inaccessible (Bailey & Ochsner, 1983). Each participant was asked to keep a digital diary for seven days, using the Diaro app on their mobile phones. The Diaro is a free App available across different mobile phone platforms. The diary entries included hourly records of their digital activities, a note of the activities they engaged in, and a record of the language(s) they are using (see example in Figure 1). In their digital diaries, participants noted their language use in relation to their digital routines. Digital routines include any activity conducted via the use of a mobile phone, tablet, computer, laptop, e-reader with different apps, and software, as well as any games played using a game console

or a TV series they had watched. Each diary entry was written in the participant's L1 (i.e., Chinese) as per the participant's preference.

The semi-structured interview is particularly useful for investigating self-reported thoughts and perceptions, with a level of flexibility that allows researchers to elicit additional data from participants (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The interview was conducted with each participant after they had written their digital diaries. The first part of the interview included diary-based questions. Prior to the interview, the first author read diary entries carefully and generated a set of questions. For the second part, questions were used across all participants, with adaptation to cater for individual practices. Each interview was conducted in Chinese for approximately 40-60 minutes, and audio-recorded. The recordings were transcribed in Chinese first, and checked by the participants for further confirmations and clarifications (Bazeley, 2013). The interview excerpts included in this article have been translated into English, with an accuracy check being performed by an accredited professional Chinese-English bilingual translator.

When interpreting data, we used a narrative analysis approach (Polkinghorne, 1995), in which narrative data was created through the research process. We first categorized their diary entries according to the languages used. This helped us capture an overview of their language uses and how it changed at the two data collection points. The participants' digital diaries were used as a starting point to explore the offline aspects of their lives and their rationales for using certain language(s) to conduct particular activities. In the second phase of the data analysis, both the diaries and the interview transcripts collected in Year 1 and Year 2 were combined to write up narratives for each participant, that highlight their translingual practices (Pavlenko, 2002; Benson, 2014). The multiple data sources collected over two years helped to strengthen the reliability and trustworthiness of our narrative writing (Benson, 2014). Afterwards, and guided by the research questions, individual narratives were analyzed thematically through

constant comparison. By using thematic analysis, shared themes and individual differences across the narratives emerged, and we focused on how the participants made use of their linguistic and multimodal resources to learn and use English, and to conduct academic or professional tasks in an English-speaking setting (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

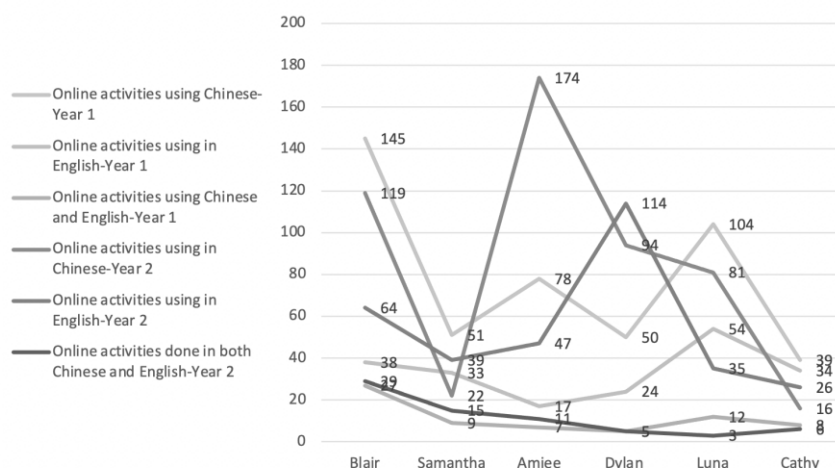
**Figure 1** Example: Blair's digital diary with English translation

<div> <div>Entries list</div> <div>Monday, 08 Oct 2018</div> <div>17:49</div> </div>	<div> <div>Monday, 8 Oct 2018</div> <div>17:49</div> </div>
<div> <div>My Digital Diary</div> <div> 6:00闹钟响了，开手机看时间，刷了一下微信朋友圈 中文  7:00 Google map查bus的到达时间 英文：坐车期间和朋友聊微信 中文  8:00看微博 中文  9:00用Safari查资料 中文：跟朋友聊微信 中文：打开日历记事本 中文  10:00上课用有道词典查单词 英文-中文  11:00拍照（黑板作业）英文  12:00有道词典查单词 中文-英文  13:00 Google map 英文：微信聊天 中文：朋友圈 中文：QQ音乐听歌 中英  14:00没有用手机  15:00朋友圈 中文：电脑玩游戏 中文  16:00用韩剧TVapp看韩剧  17:00睡觉没有看手机  18:00朋友圈，中文 闹钟：查看微信消息 中文：微博 中文  19:00打开Opal travel 给交通卡充值。英文：打开电脑玩游戏-多梦小镇 中文  20:00有道词典查单词：微信翻看朋友圈 中文：看豆瓣里的帖子 中文  21:00 仍然是有道词典查单词，因为需要用电脑完成作业 中文，英文  22:00 韩剧TV看视频 韩语中字：翻看朋友圈 中文：用苹果手机自带软件-天气，查看明天的天气，中文：设置明天的闹钟 </div> <div> <div>Digital</div> <div>Select tags</div> <div>Awesome</div> </div> </div>	<div> <div>My Digital Diary</div> <div> 6:00 Alarm rang, checked time on my phone; Checked WeChat Post, in Chinese  7:00 Checked bus timetable on Google Map, in English  Chatted with my friend on WeChat on the bus, in Chinese  8:00 Checked new posts on Weibo, in Chinese  9:00 Searched things using Safari browser, in Chinese  Chatted with friend on WeChat, in Chinese  Wrote digital diary, in Chinese  10:00 Checked vocabulary in Youdao Dictionary in class, in both English and Chinese  11:00 Took photo of the assignment, in English  12:00 Checked vocabulary in Youdao Dictionary, in both English and Chinese  13:00 Google map, in English  Chatted on WeChat, in Chinese  Checked WeChat posts, in Chinese  Listened to music on QQ music, in both Chinese and English  14:00 Did not use any technology device  15:00 Checked WeChat Post, in Chinese  Played game on computer, in Chinese  16:00 Watched K-drama on TV App, with Chinese captions  17:00 Took nap  18:00 Checked WeChat Posts, in Chinese  Checked WeChat messages, in Chinese  Weibo, in Chinese  19:00 Topped up Opal card using Opal Travel App, in English  Play computer game, in Chinese  20:00 Checked vocabulary in Youdao Dictionary, in both English and Chinese  Checked WeChat Posts, in Chinese.  Read post on Douban forum, in Chinese  21:00 Wrote assignment.  Checked vocabulary in Youdao Dictionary, in both English and Chinese  22:00 Watched K-drama on TV App, with Chinese caption  Checked WeChat posts, in Chinese  Checked Weather report, in Chinese  Set alarm </div> </div>

## 9. Results

### 9.1. Frequencies of first language (L1) and second language (L2) uses online

To gain a holistic view of the different language uses by participants, the frequencies with which they used Chinese, English, and Chinese and English for online activities at two data collection points (Year 1 and Year 2) were calculated, based on their digital diary entries. When comparing the total number of online activities they conducted over the 7-day time frame, Chinese was used online more frequently than English (Figure 2). However, when comparing the data from Year 1 and Year 2, the participants generally used English more often than Chinese in their digital practices, except for Luna. This exception could be explained by the fact that Luna's overall digital use decreased in Year 2. In comparison, the Sydney participants engaged in more online activities than their Auckland counterparts over the 7-day timeframe. Moreover, the difference in frequency between Sydney students using Chinese and English was more substantial, compared with the students in Auckland. Furthermore, our participants used more monolingual practices online in either Chinese or English only, with very few bilingual activities reported in their dairy entries (Figure 2). Some additional languages, such as Japanese, Korean and Italian, were also used occasionally for online activities by a few participants, but the frequencies were not substantial.



**Figure 2** Frequencies of Chinese and English use online in a week

The frequencies with which Chinese and English were used in the virtual environments, revealed an overview of the online aspect of the international students' everyday language practices. While we found that participants did not have much exposure to the English language online using technological devices, further investigations are needed to better understand their purposes for conducting the online activities, and how they make use of online resources to engage in a new physical environment.

## 9.2 Translingual practices for learning and using English

Most participants indicated that they regularly used their L1 for online activities and interactions, despite studying and living in an English-speaking setting (Figure 2). Such an intensive online use of L1 may reveal the complexity of English learning and use in an English-speaking environment. This section explores how the participants used their full linguistic repertoire to learn language, and conduct various academic and professional activities in their host countries.



Regarding the undergraduate participants, when asked about their goals of pursuing an overseas degree, both Blair (Sydney) and Samantha (Auckland) reported a strong desire to improve their English skills. Prior to arriving at their respective host countries, they both had expectations of not having too much contact with their L1 Chinese community and trying to use English as much as possible. However, Blair and Samantha described that the reality was significantly different to what they had expected. During our first interview, Blair was taking an English language course with many co-national classmates and a few non-Chinese international students. In class, Blair often used a dictionary and translation Apps on her mobile phone to translate English words into Chinese. She also used translation tools when writing her assignments and searching for references on the Internet (see Appendix A, Excerpt 1). Blair had different classroom activities in Year 1, including group assignments, presentations, and campus tours with local students. These classroom activities offered her opportunities to interact with Chinese nationals and other international students. Blair reported that she and her classmates used Chinese during online and offline group discussions. She stated that even discussions were carried out using a Chinese App and mainly in Chinese, but she found herself using English words and phrases quite often in those conversations with her classmates: “I had a chat group on WeChat with all my Chinese classmates, in which we could have a space to do group discussion and talk about other academic related topics.” (Blair, Year 1)

Samantha regarded English as a global language, and demonstrated a personal interest in the English language. While living in Auckland, she experienced difficulties interacting with local students as well as other Chinese nationals (Excerpt 2). Instead of going to the university on a weekly basis, Samantha spent most of her time at home listening to lecture recordings online. She also commented that most of her classmates would not physically visit the university campus to attend lectures. Samantha adopted online learning as a part of her study life in Auckland, and used various online tools and platforms for language learning. For

instance, she followed several English learning channels on Chinese social media and video sharing websites. This provided an opportunity to learn English vocabulary and expressions from either Chinese or native-speaker influencers. She paid attention to the captions written by native speakers on Instagram and would replicate them when she wrote her own posts. Having lived in Auckland for four years, Samantha believed that the Internet and the overall language environment in the city promoted opportunities for her to use English and to understand the local culture, regardless of the language it involved:

I don't think I should delete my Chinese apps and start to use English ones when I am in Auckland. I use both English and Chinese in my everyday interactions; using WeChat is essential as I need to keep in touch with my family and friends in China and in Auckland. I use English apps just because I feel like they are more convenient and accurate in this English-speaking context, not because I should use them to act like a Kiwi. (Samantha, Year 1)

Regarding the postgraduate participants, their desire to learn English was linked closely to their future employment goals, regardless of whether or not they were planning to return home. Aimee's (Sydney) motivations to improve her English were shaped by her belief that an ability to speak English and having a degree from an overseas university are a 'door opener' for big companies in China (Excerpt 3). In this way, she wanted to obtain a good score on her language tests and for her university courses. In Year 1, Aimee was completing a pre-Masters English course, similar to Blair. Aimee also had a WeChat group with her Chinese classmates which they mostly used for discussions and information sharing about academic activities, with most of the interactions being carried out in Chinese. Aimee did not think technology could benefit her English learning directly, as most of her online activities were conducted in Chinese

using Chinese language apps and websites. But the language environment in Sydney offered her numerous opportunities for using English, such as shopping in a grocery store or going to the bank. As Aimee explained:

I didn't know the word 'avocado' before coming to Australia, but it didn't cause any trouble for me to buy an actual avocado in the market, because I could see it and I knew how it should look like. Then I noticed the label of it and that was how I learnt the word 'avocado'. (Aimee, Year 1)

In Year 2, Aimee was struggling with the assignments and examinations, but she overcame this by attending private tutoring sessions, during which she could review her university work with a tutor in her L1. As she further commented:

It is a shortcut, which can save my time during exam preparation. Reading everything in English is time-consuming, it takes much longer time for me to remember all the key points in English. I know it is not a good way, but I just want to be more effective. (Aimee, Year 2)

Unlike the other international students in our study, Dylan (Auckland) worked in Singapore and China for two years before arriving at New Zealand. He had a clear goal to settle down in Auckland after finishing his degree. Dylan mentioned the importance of English in every aspect of his future life, including future employment at a local company and networking within the wider community. In Year 1, Dylan experienced difficulties reading academic journals and writing essays. He believed that much of the challenge of reading and writing resided in a lack of practice. He then started to read online newspaper articles each day on his

mobile phone. In Year 2, Dylan's persistence made a significant difference in terms of his reading speed in English. He described himself as a 'slow learner', but he nonetheless committed himself to this learning journey (Excerpts 4 & 5).

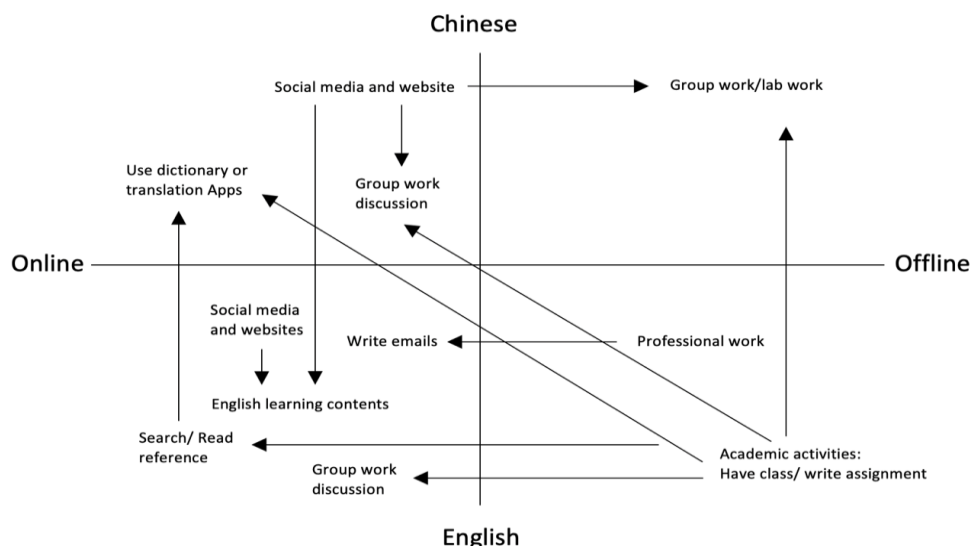
Compared to the undergraduate and postgraduate students, the recent graduates aimed to use and learn English for a better life in Sydney and Auckland, as they transitioned into professional settings. They believed that English is an essential skill for employment and basic communication. Both Luna (Sydney) and Cathy (Auckland) were in the process of applying for a permanent residence in their respective countries. Luna compared her current English use to how it was previously as a student, and reported that her opportunities for using English increased after she left school. In Year 1, Luna worked at a Chinese-owned company in the Sydney CBD where she used both Chinese and English in daily interactions. The 'half English, half Chinese' conditions at her workplace were unsatisfactory to Luna, so she pushed herself to learn more English by watching TED talk videos, BBC News, and listening to English podcasts (Excerpt 6). In Year 2, Luna transferred to a new company that was culturally and linguistically more diverse. As such, she could use English for professional purposes all the time and interact with colleagues and clients in English (Excerpt 7). However, Luna encountered difficulties in reporting her work in English, and in engaging in 'small talk' at work. These problems that presented in day-to-day interactions in the workplace, made Luna a more active language learner. She started to imitate the expressions used in emails by her colleagues, and made an effort to figure out 'how to think in English'.

Compared to the other participants, Cathy demonstrated a strong desire to speak only English while studying in Auckland. However, she soon found out her living and working environments were the main reasons that she did not speak English as much as she would have liked (Excerpt 9). Similar to Luna, Cathy wished to work in a company with locals in a pure English environment (Excerpt 8). However, the language environment at her workplace at that

moment was not compatible with her expectations, as she could only find jobs with Chinese-speaking colleagues that paid a low income. Cathy expressed that her limited language proficiency was a hinderance to her achieving her preferred position. To create an English language environment at home, Cathy watched YouTube videos without Chinese subtitles. Both Luna and Cathy wanted to develop intercultural competences such as knowing how to engage in ‘small talk’ appropriately in the workplace, understand memes and slang, use more native-speaker-like vocabulary when interacting with colleagues, and write emails in English.

### 9.3 Highly fluid and variable linguistic practices in online and offline spaces

Similar to the study by Dovchin and her colleagues (2018), the data in our study shows there was no clear separation between the participants’ online and offline activities. By analyzing individual cases from a translingual perspective, we show how the participants’ online activities could trigger various offline activities in both Chinese and English. Figure 3 provides a visualization of the participants’ translingual practices using both Chinese and English for the purposes of English language improvement. The arrows in the Figure indicate how an activity was completed in Chinese or English either online, or offline. The arrow directions move across different quadrants, thus indicating interactions using other languages in other spaces.



**Figure 3.** The visualization of participants’ translingual practices for language learning and academic achievement

Furthermore, the cases show how participants made full use of their linguistic and multimodal resources to learn and use English, and to conduct academic or professional tasks in an English-speaking setting. Both Blair and Aimee used a Chinese social media app (WeChat) for academic work and to have discussions with Chinese classmates. Samantha used Chinese social media and websites to learn English after class. These online activities afforded different access points to language learning opportunities. The in-class offline activities could move to related activities online, using Chinese or English. Participants generally appreciated the L1 support system in their cities, enabling them to ‘pick and mix’ the languages freely to get things done, and to accommodate their communication needs. Therefore, studying at an overseas university in a multilingual city with access to various online resources provided the international students with more opportunities to be multilingual rather than monolingual. Using social networking apps or other technology in L1 created a translingual space for them to make use of their resources pragmatically to solve problems, and to collaborate with their co-nationals, or potentially, students from other countries. It also allowed them to personalise

their own learning methods to suit their needs. The examples highlight that participants' English-only beliefs were changed over the time because of the translingual reality of the local context, and they became more comfortable to draw upon their full linguistic resources purposefully from both online and offline contexts.

## **10. Conclusion**

Taking a holistic view of both online and offline translingual practices, this article reports on an investigation into the language uses of six international students studying in Sydney or Auckland. The study seeks to expand the understanding of issues affecting language learning in multilingual urban cities, through the lens of translingualism. The examples of students' translingual experiences in this study signify the highly fluid and variable linguistic practices that were considered to create opportunities for learning and using English. Language learning does not only occur in formal, explicit linguistic activities that use the target language, but also through translingual practices in which learners can draw from various semiotic and spatial resources for successful learning outcomes.

The findings of our study echo those reported in earlier research by Androutsopoulos (2015) and Oliver and Nguyen (2017), who concluded that using Internet media can support translingual practices and language development. There is increasing concern that the frequency of international students' use of L1 media can impinge upon their level of local community engagement. This study argues, however, that the multimodal and fully-resourced online and offline environments create a new translingual space for international students to make meaning. It also reveals why translingualism influenced the role played by language(s) in the interactions of the participants while living in a multilingual context. Lastly, it also

demonstrates how the international students online and offline activities are bound together in their everyday practices. Both online and offline environments open up a translanguaging space (Li, 2011) for translingual practices in which international students are active agents in choosing their language(s) and resources during their overseas stays.

This finding is contrary to the often-stated goal for studying in an English-speaking environment, which over-emphasizes the importance of using only English for every daily activity. International students nowadays may not pay a great deal of attention to language choice per se when living and studying in a multilingual city. Instead, they ‘move in and out of English’ and ‘jump on and off the Internet’ to communicate across languages and platforms. The general discourse associated with international students not using English in host countries could be interpreted differently from translingual perspectives. While living in a multilingual city, international students are given options to ‘mix and match’ their linguistic and semiotic resources to accomplish academic or work-related tasks, to explore the wider local community, or even to gain economic, cultural, or social capitals (Bourdieu, 1986). While understanding international students’ experiences and interactions with both online and offline resources provide useful insights into the translingual practices and processes adopted by them, there remains a role for the strategic use of these L1 online resources and information to scaffold language development and cultural adaption. Rather than solely aiming at English language improvement, international students may opt for economical and efficient use of languages and integrate various online and offline sources to achieve their communicative goals, and to explore the city in which they live.

These international students’ translingual practices changed over time, and were influenced by the diverse translingual resources available around them. Placing the spotlight on international students’ English language proficiency, and assuming that international students should use and speak only in English in host countries, does not reflect the translingual



reality of contemporary societies. Such views assume that international students only attend higher degree institutions to improve their English skills - there is little recognition of their diverse needs when studying and living in a new language environment (Sawir, 2005). For many international students, learning English may just be part of the reason for them to travel thousands of kilometers to another country, as they adjust their language learning and life goals for different purposes at different stages of study, while living in their host countries. What we found in our study demonstrated the complexity and dynamic nature of international students' language use. These are valuable because it could help us to provide better support not only for their language development, but also preparing them to become global citizens.

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## Appendix A

### Interview excerpts

This appendix presents excerpts of the interviews conducted with selected participants in this article. Information potentially identifying the participant has been removed from the notes.

No.	Excerpts
1	“ I use the English to Chinese dictionary on my phone while I am having class, writing my assignment and searching reference online. Sometimes I even use it to check the English words I see on the street.” (Bair, Year 1)
2	“Instead of sticking with my friends when I was in my home country, I do everything by myself in Auckland. Most of my friends are Chinese, I feel quite hard to fit in and get alone with people from other countries.” (Samantha, Year 1)
3	“I think getting a desired job in China is very challenging, because they all want people with good educational background. You need to have a degree from a decent university (985 university) to work in some top companies as a receptionist. An overseas degree is like a door opener to big companies.” ( Aimee, Year 1)
4	“I struggled to read academic journals in the first place, I can understand the content, but my reading speed is slow. I have to finish assignments before deadlines, so I need to read faster.” (Dylan, Year 1)
5	“Now I can read way more faster than before. Reading news articles helped me to improve my reading skill and speed. I am not saying that I am a smart person, I am a slow learner, but I can feel my progress and I will keep reading news articles.” (Dylan, Year 2)
6	“I work in a small company, all most everyone in my company can speak Chines, so we use Chinese for most of the time, but we use English in all the email correspondences. I

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would say it is half English half Chinese. To be honest, I am not enjoying it, I want to work with local people and use English as the professional language.” (Luna, Year 1)

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**7** “I am now working at a new company with people from different backgrounds. We speak English at workplace. It is harder than I thought, I get so stressed by reporting my work at meetings... I don’t know how to do the small talk with my colleagues during lunch break, I don’t know how to carry on the conversation.” (Luna, Year 2)

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**8** “I want to speak English as much as I can, I want a pure English environment.” (Cathy, Year 1)

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**9** “I work at a Yum Cha restaurant, we have many English-speaking customers every day, but the language required for those conversations were very basic, I just need to remember the name of those dishes. When I get back home after work, I could only speak Chinese with my roommates. I cannot speak English very often since I am living and working in a Chinese-speaking environments.” (Cathy, Year 2)

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	Name	Gender	City	Field of study	Length of stay	Overseas Experience
Undergraduates	Blair	F	Sydney	Accounting	2 yrs.	No
	Samantha	F	Auckland	Food science	3yrs.	No
Postgraduates	Aimee	F	Sydney	Accounting	1yr.	No
	Dylan	M	Auckland	Engineering	1yr.	Yes
Graduates	Luna	F	Sydney	Accounting	4 yrs.	No
	Cathy	F	Auckland	Computing	3 yrs.	No



Monday, 8 Oct 2018

17:49

**My Digital Diary**

- 6:00 Alarm rang, checked time on my phone; Checked WeChat Post, in Chinese
- 7:00 Checked bus timetable on Google Map, in English  
 Chatted with my friend on WeChat on the bus, in Chinese
- 8:00 Checked new posts on Weibo, in Chinese
- 9:00 Searched things using Safari browser, in Chinese  
 Chatted with friend on WeChat, in Chinese  
 Wrote digital diary, in Chinese
- 10:00 Checked vocabulary in Youdao Dictionary in class, in both English and Chinese
- 11:00 Took photo of the assignment, in English
- 12:00 Checked vocabulary in Youdao Dictionary, in both English and Chinese
- 13:00 Google map, in English  
 Chatted on WeChat, in Chinese  
 Checked WeChat posts, in Chinese  
 Listened to music on QQ music, in both Chinese and English
- 14:00 Did not use any technology device
- 15:00 Checked WeChat Post, in Chinese  
 Played game on computer, in Chinese
- 16:00 Watched K-drama on TV App, with Chinese captions
- 17:00 Took nap
- 18:00 Checked WeChat Posts, in Chinese  
 Checked WeChat messages, in Chinese  
 Weibo, in Chinese
- 19:00 Topped up Opal card using Opal Travel App, in English  
 Play computer game, in Chinese
- 20:00 Checked vocabulary in Youdao Dictionary, in both English and Chinese  
 Checked WeChat Posts, in Chinese.  
 Read post on Douban forum, in Chinese
- 21:00 Wrote assignment.  
 Checked vocabulary in Youdao Dictionary, in both English and Chinese
- 22:00 Watched K-drama on TV App, with Chinese caption  
 Checked WeChat posts, in Chinese  
 Checked Weather report, in Chinese  
 Set alarm

Figure 2

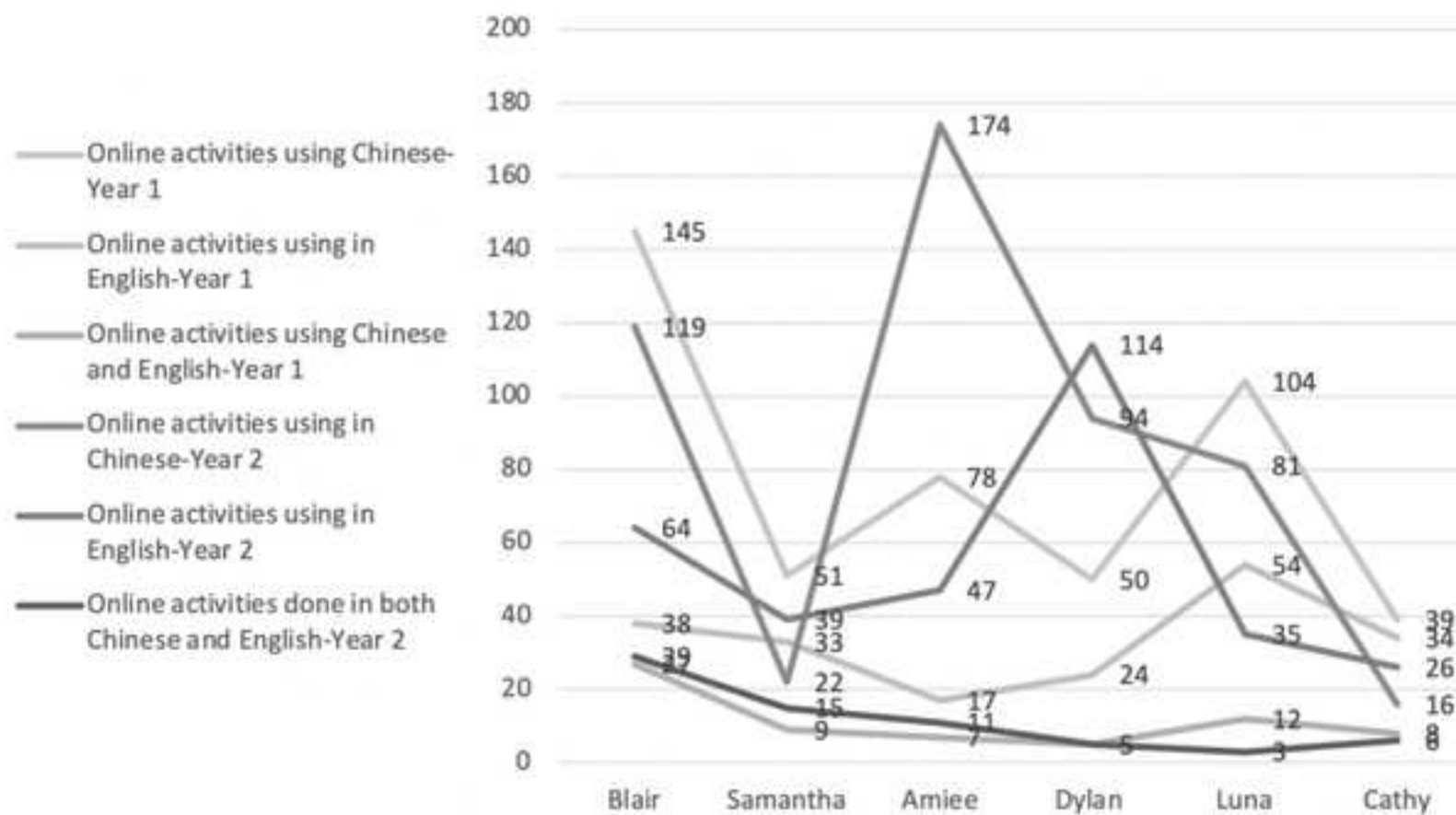


Figure 3

