

## **English Language Learner's Literacy and Identity Work in Online Spaces**

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Based on the data from a two-year-long ethnographic study, this article examines literate and social practices of an adolescent English language learner (ELL) who is participating in a Korean popular culture (K-Pop) online fan site called Soompi.com. Drawing upon the theoretical strands within New Literacy Studies and Multimodality, this article describes how new technologies and popular culture provide the ELL youth with opportunities to develop her English language and literacy skills and to enact various identities. Findings reveal that through her participation in the activities on Soompi.com, she integrates multiple forms of modes, media, and languages to create and remix her work in purposeful ways, challenging the traditional print-based monolingual literacy, makes global social connections, and constructs multiple social identities. Based on the aspects of the youth's digital literacy practices, this study suggests some ways that language and literacy teachers can use to better meet students' needs and to make their classrooms motivating and interactive learning communities.

[popular culture/ internet- and multimedia-based language education/  
대중문화/ 인터넷과 멀티미디어 언어 교육]

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1. Statement of Problems**

Recent rapid expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has influenced everyday communication and language use. The digital natives (Prensky, 2001), who literally grew up with the Internet as an integral part of their literate lives, in particular, are transforming the ways we think about language and literacy. With digital technologies

at their fingertips, today's youth are practicing an array of new ways of communicating by integrating multiple semiotic modalities, such as written text, images and music in means of producing multiple kinds of literacies in their daily lives (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). In addition, many teenagers have the opportunity through the Internet to share their work with a broader community and an authentic audience. In other words, adolescents today are utilizing the interactive capabilities of the Internet as they actively produce, rather than merely consume popular culture and share their own multimodal creations with people they are interacting in both real and virtual worlds.

Undoubtedly, this explosive growth in youth's use of digital media has enormous effects on how youth read, write and process information (Luke, 2003). However, language instruction and learning at school still remain "the Institution of Old Learning (IOL)" (O'Brien & Bauer, 2005, p.120) in that only print-based linguistic competences are emphasized and often time, students are confronted with instruction which emphasizes memorization of discrete facts or information. While students today have authentic language learning experiences through online spaces, little effort has been made in language classrooms to value and integrate the multiple forms of literacy practices that students bring into the classroom (Williams, 2005). This 'digital divide and disconnect' reinforces students' disengagement in language classrooms (Gee, 2004).

## 2. Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose in this study is to learn about how online networked spaces like Soompi.com harness the female English language learning youth to engage with various literate activities using new digital technologies and popular culture. Soompi.com features a variety of subsections from up-to-date information about K-Pop (e.g. entertainment news, popular Korean drama, movie, music and celebrities), social networking (e.g. blog and fan club) to fan creations (e.g. fanfiction, fan art and performance). Among these various activities, this study mainly focuses on fanfiction. Fanfiction refers to original stories which fans create based on the characters and the storyline of their favorite books, television series, films, anime, and other media and popular culture (Jenkins, 1992). I was specifically interested in finding out various kinds of literacy practices and learning around fanfiction and K-Pop through examining her social relations and multimodal composing as part of communication practices in Soompi.com. Also, I will discuss the ways the youth constructs and presents her identities through participating in the site including their fanfiction texts and interactions with the readers of her fanfiction. Finally, I am hopeful that I will be able to inform second language (L2) and literacy educators and researchers to understand the potential capacities that online spaces and popular culture have for language teaching and learning within the classroom. To these ends, this study was guided by three

central research questions:

- 1) What multimodal literacy practices is this female ELL youth engaged with as she author fanfiction in Soompi.com?
- 2) What kinds of social relationships and identities does she construct through participating in the site?
- 3) What implications can be drawn for educators and researchers who are working with ELL youth?

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1. Sociocultural Approaches to Literacy, Language, and Identity

Literacy was considered as the cognitive skills to encode and decode texts. However, drawing from sociocultural theories, New Literacy Studies (NLS) emphasizes social and cultural practices and views literacy practices varying across different contexts (Street, 1995). This is why literacy is increasingly used in the plural form as *literacies*. The concept of literacies recognizes different literacy practices situated in particular social and cultural contexts but it is the New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996) who coined the term, *multiliteracies*. The New London Group (NLG) developed the concept to call for literacy pedagogy to extend beyond the traditional monolingual and print-based reading and writing to acknowledge “our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies” and “the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 9). One example of multiliteracies would be a Malaysian youth who is passionate about the K-Pop interacts with other fans by participating in the web site and sharing her creations, such as fanfiction trailers for the fanfiction author she met on the site. The multiplicity of literacies indicates that people cannot be literate in the absolute sense but only in certain contexts and practices.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research up to date has been conducted under the rationalistic epistemology, which stresses the importance of establishing universals and principles (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Kern & Shultz, 2005). As a result, much of SLA research thus far frames English language learning as learning a discrete form of language inside the classroom in the form of standard grammar and spelling (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). This approach to English language learning does not take into account the various contexts in which the language is used, such as text messaging to friends, watching Japanese anime series in English subtitles, or writing an academic essay for homework.

Also, while meaning is increasingly being made in multimodal ways, many of SLA research have looked at only language learners' reading and writing skills of print texts. Taking a NLS perspective, my research is aimed to conceptualize language use and learning to account for the multiple literacies needed in relation to contexts.

## 2. Multimodality: Meaning-making through Design

Multimodality is defined as the multiplicity of modes, such as textual, visual, audio, and spatial and the integration of these modes to create whole meanings (Kress, 2003). In recent years, literacy has expanded beyond learning to read and write a print-based text only and moved to encompass multiple literacies in multiple modes (New London Group, 1996). This shift was brought up as more and more people engage in various literacy practices to communicate in various new ways of meaning making associated with new media and technologies.

Theory of multimodality has prompted us to think of how different modes of representation and communication contribute to meaning-making in different ways. Kress (2003) uses the term 'affordances' to refer correspondence between a semiotic resource and its properties and author's meaning-making purposes. As Kress views multimodality as juxtaposing multiple modes which have distinct affordances from one another in complementary ways, this requires the author to decide which mode(s) he/ she will use to convey the meaning he/she intended. In other words, the authors have to be engaged with the *Design* (New London Group, 1996) process where they exploit and manipulate the affordances of each mode to make decisions for creating their text. There are three layers to design: 1) Available Design, 2) Designing, and 3) The Redesigned. In short, the broad idea of design includes the resources we have to make meaning including linguistic, visual, audio, gestural (Available Design), the active process of making meaning and connecting Available Designs for purposeful literacy work (Designing), and the product that represents transformed meanings and remixed textualities — the transformative product (The Redesigned).

Multimodal literacy practices blur the distinction between writer and reader, producer and consumer as in the example of fanfiction writer who reads or consumes manga and creates her own stories different from the original text. The participatory culture coupled with new digital technologies where anyone can be an author and a producer offers unlimited resources for young people today to express and share who they are with wider audiences more than ever before (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison & Weigel, 2006). In other words, today's students inside the classroom are getting used to new forms of discourse, new forms of authorship, new forms of identity construction which do not necessarily match with their school (Kern, 2006).

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 1. Context: Soompi.com

Soompi.com is an Asian, mainly Korean pop entertainment site dedicated to entertainment news, events, fan clubs and community. For the teenagers who use Soompi.com, it is one of their primary means of getting information about Korean entertainment, sharing their web creation (e.g. fanfiction, images, clips of their singing and/or dancing performance) with each other and making friends from all over the world.

Based on the profile information of users, most of Soompi.com users are female teenagers. There are various groups of users with different interests within Soompi.com. Main population of the site is Korean 1.5 or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation who live in outside of Korea and miss Korean entertainment or their idol stars and want updates about them and share information, such as new images, news about new album releases or video clips of TV shows that their favorite star appeared on with others. Another major users of Soompi.com are Asians, especially Pilipino, Chinese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Singaporean and Japanese, due to the influence of Korean Wave (韓流, “*Hallyu*”), which refers to the recent surge of popularity of Korean popular culture in other countries, especially in Asian countries.

I chose Soompi.com as my research site because it is suited to the purposes of this study in several aspects. Foremost, many of the Soompi.com members speak English as their second language. Since one of my primary foci of this study is to examine the role of digital technologies and popular culture for the youth's English language learning and use, I was interested in what kinds of literate and social practices the youth is involved in on the site, which may lead to their English language learning. Secondly, Soompi.com is a participatory site in that its users create online content which is both textual and multimodal, share the contents with online users from across the globe, and build relationships through both an on-site personal message (PM) function and other social network sites. Lastly, Soompi.com is one of the biggest and most popular K-pop sites on the web. Therefore, I became interested what factors attract many adolescents, particularly ELL youth to the site.

#### 2. Participants

The focal participant for this study is Nataya. Nataya was 16 years old and an 11<sup>th</sup> grader when I first met her in 2010. Nataya was born in Thailand and raised there until she was nine and a half years old. She moved to the U.S. in 2003 because of her parents' business. Her native language is Thai and she speaks it at home. As an English language learner

(ELL), she does not feel confident about her English. She sometimes cannot understand what her teachers and English speaking peers are talking about in class so has to ask her teachers after class or to use her translator to look up the words she does not understand. Nataya considers verb agreements to cause her most difficulties in using English:

English is confusing. My grammar tense is horrible. I don't know when to add -ing, -s, or -ed. I don't know when to use lie, lean, lies or sit, sat, or go, went, or who, whom. The list will be going on and on and on if I try to list them all (and I don't even think it's possible for me to list them all, it is just too much). (Interview, 2010)

Nataya joined Soompi.com on December 2006 but was not very active. Nataya basically went to the site only to get pictures and updates on her favorite celebrities without creating her own contents or interacting with other members. Around 2008, when she was 14 years old, she saw a fanfiction thread and there found the poster of a fanfiction with her favorite celebrities as a couple and this is how she became interested in fanfiction. Nataya considers that this is the time when she became “an active reader which means I reply to the thread each time I read” (Interview, 2010). Nataya enjoys reading fanfiction so much it became a part of her daily routine:

I used to read them whenever I have time or whenever I'm bored. But it has become a habit that I MUST read at least a chapter of fan-fiction before I go to bed which usually takes around 15-45 minutes per chapter or else it is impossible for me to go to bed because I would have the feeling that there's something that I need to get it done but I haven't done it. But on daily basis, I read about 2-3 chapters which takes me up to 2 hrs per night. (Interview, 2010)

Nataya only read fanfiction on Soompi.com at first and it wasn't until June in 2008 when she started writing her first fanfiction. According to her, she never thought she would write her own fanfiction because of her lack of confidence in English and at first, she only came up with plot bunnies, which means ideas for fanfiction, hoping that someone would pick them up and write a story based on her ideas. Then, she decided to start and write her own fanfiction instead because her online friends urged to do so saying she came up with the original plot so she should try to write it on her own. She has so far written one fanfiction with eighteen chapters.

### 3. Data Collection

The data for this [manuscript] are from a two-year-long virtual ethnographic study for

my dissertation. According to Hine (2004), virtual ethnography is “ethnography *of, in and through* the virtual – we learn about the Internet by immersing ourselves in it and conducting our ethnography using it, as well as talking with people about it, watching them use it and seeing it manifest in other social settings” (n.p.). This research was conducted thoroughly in the online context to understand what literate and social practices Nataya is participating in on Soompi.com. I have spent two years as a “moderate” participant observer (Spradley, 1980, p. 60) in this study to “engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation” (p. 54). More specifically, as a participant at Soompi.com, I interacted with Nataya by reading her fanfiction and other multimodal productions and posting feedback or comments that she received from her audience. In addition, I paid a close attention to updates on Korean entertainment and popular celebrities provided on the site so that I could understand Nataya's work and her activities on Soompi.com and communicate with her better at a more personal level. These provided me with more chances to gain situated understanding what aspects of online affinity spaces like Soompi.com draw many young people to the site and furthermore, what possibly promote their language and literacy development.

Adopting qualitative methods, I gathered data from multiple sources to obtain “a full variety of evidence — documents, artifacts, interview, and observations” (Yin, 2003, pp. 19-20). Multiple sources of data include: semi-structured interviews, observations, informal conversations, fieldnotes, and artifact collections (e.g., fanfiction texts and the accompanying multimodal products produced by the participants). These various sets of data helped me to gain detailed understandings about Nataya and her literacy practices related to K-Pop and fanfiction. Moreover, by collecting data from multiple sources, I intended to minimize my bias as a researcher and strengthen the validity of my findings.

#### 4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and recursive throughout the data collecting process as recommended in the qualitative research paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The data analysis was unfolded in three steps. The first step was repeated reading of data to refine the analysis reminding myself of the research questions and the purpose of the study. During this step, I did inductive analysis of my data. I made initial annotations in my research log to record my thoughts, reoccurring themes, which became open codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) to conceptualize and categorize my data. Using open codes, I later created axial codes, which are according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (p. 90).

After I got sense of my data in the first stage of data analysis, in the next step, I selected

certain parts of fanfictions, reviews, and written interactions, which I considered as representative of my participant's discursive practices on the site. Then, I followed Gee's (1999, 2004) guidelines for discourse analysis. For example, I broke down Nataya's fanfictions into idea units, or sentences or clauses that introduced new information. Then, I numbered each line and underlined key words that represented significant information in relation to themes or issues. Next, I organized the lines into stanzas, which are according to Gee (1999), "sets of lines about a single minimal topic, organized rhythmically and syntactically so as to hang together in a particularly tight way" (p. 94). In this way, I was able to group pieces of information according to topics.

#### IV. FINDINGS

This section describes the literate and social experiences of Nataya, who has engaged in sophisticated literacy practices and identity constructions on Soompi.com, through examining her representational fanfiction writing. Discussion of the findings will start with the basic information about the fanfiction and explanation of what makes it representative of Nataya's fanfiction work. Then, her multimodal designing of their fanfiction will be described.

##### 1. Nataya's Miss Spoiled Brat! (MSB!)vs Mister Protector

Nataya's interests in fanfiction started when she found a poster featuring her favorite celebrities as a couple in the fanfiction forum of Soompi.com. Nataya reminisced about how she became interested in fanfiction:

Around the beginning of the year 2008, I was about 14 years old. I seen the fanfiction thread for a while but I have no interested in them at first. I started to become interested when I see L's Devil Besides Me's poster. The poster was of Zhang Li Yin<sup>1</sup> and TVXQ<sup>2</sup>'s Kim Jun Su with their back leaning against each other. I read the

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang Li Yin is the first Chinese singer who debuted and became successful in the South Korean music industry. Her name is romanized as Zhang Li Yin as well.

<sup>2</sup> TVXQ (Tong Vfāng Xien Qi) is the name of the band in Korean and is romanized as Dong Bang Shin Gi. However, due to its extreme popularity in Asia, especially in Chinese speaking countries, the band is also called as Tong Vfāng Xien Qi (東方神起) in Chinese and its acronym, TVXQ is commonly used among fans. Nataya often used TVXQ to indicate the band in emails and informal exchanges with the researcher.

Therefore, TVXQ will be consistently used for the band's name throughout the paper.

prologue and other reader's comment and it sounds really good and got interested in fan-fiction since then. (Interview, 2010)

Since then, she read fanfiction daily for about two hours and started to leave comments in the forum. For Nataya, the most important criterion in choosing which fanfiction to read is the coupling. As an ardent fan of TVXQ and one of the members, Kim Jun Su in particular, Nataya does not want him to be paired with any other female celebrities but Zhang Li Yin, her favorite female singer (smooshed into 'SuYin'). Currently, Nataya reads and writes only SuYin fic, which is a way of refer to fanfiction featuring Kim Jun Su and Zhang Li Yin as a romantic couple. Regarding what aspects of SuYin fic attract Nataya, she explains:

I personally thinks that 99.8% of the fan-fiction that's floating around the internet are romance genre XD, but what makes me love reading them is almost the same reason why I write them: to see our favorite idols interacts with each other as a couple, off-screen. Even though we don't know if there even was a possibility of them being a couple in real life or not but everything is possible in the fan-fiction since we're the one who creates them. I smiles every time there's a cute sweet scenes, it makes me day. (Interview, 2010)

What draws Nataya to SuYin fic is that she gets a sense of the private lives of her favorite celebrities, even their love relationships, which she cannot see on screen. Although Nataya is aware that the relationship between Jun Su and Li Yin is imaginary, she is excited about and absorbed into their romance and even wishes that they were couple in real life. Moreover, similar to what May said in the earlier section, when Nataya writes SuYin fic, she feels empowered or takes control over the text since she can make whatever she wants in real life happen in her fanfiction. In other words, empowerment or control that Nataya feels is the very source that provides her pleasure and motivation to keep writing fanfiction (Williams, 2009).

According to Nataya, the genre of MSB! is romantic comedy. The main storyline of MSB! is the development of love between a millionaire's spoiled daughter, Li Yin, and Jun Su, a bodyguard hired by Li Yin's father to protect her. Before Nataya wrote MSB!, she used to follow about 40 different fanfiction threads all of which have SuYin as main characters. From all the fan-fiction she read about them, Ri In was always polite, sweet, and most of the time poor while Jun Su is this spoiled rich kid. While Nataya enjoyed romance storyline of SuYin fic, she wanted to put a new spin on the stereotypical characterization of the couple. Therefore, Nataya decided to start her own fanfiction, MSB!.

## 2. Collaborative Fanfiction Writing

MSB! is the first fanfiction that Nataya ever wrote. Nataya wrote Chapter 1 of MSB! by herself without help of her beta reader (shortened to 'beta'), which is a common fanfiction terminology for a person who reads fanfiction to improve grammar, spelling, and general style of writing prior to its publication. However, feeling incompetent of her English grammar and overwhelmed by burden of writing by herself, Nataya asked her close online friend, May, to help her with writing the fanfiction. May accepted her request.

Nataya and May collaboratively wrote eleven chapters until May quit collab due to her demanding schedule. Nataya explains how the collab worked for them:

Most of the time, the way we divide our writing is that first I will create a rough draft of the chapter by bulleting an ideas and events that will occurs in the chapter. Then I am responsible for writing SuYin scenes, and May unnie is responsible for JaeBoMin [Name smooshing of other characters in the story] parts. Even though May unnie wrote her part based on what I planned out, sometimes she would add little scenes and details in it too. After we finish writing our part, she would send her part to me and I would combined our parts together and organize the chapter. When I'm done, I would send it back to her because it's her job to edit all the grammar errors and mistakes. She would send it back to me once again when she's done, and I'll coded it and then upload it onto MSB! thread in Soompi. (Interview, 2010)

As Nataya said, she and May shared different responsibilities. In terms of writing, Nataya was in charge of the main couple, SuYin, and May took responsibility for writing the rest of the main characters in the fanfiction. In addition, Nataya was responsible for combining the different parts that each wrote and posting the completed chapter on Soompi.com while May proofread the draft. Nataya's explanation of their collab experience shows that through the collaborative interaction where they communicate ideas and share roles according to their interests and strengths, Nataya and May were able to build upon and extend the knowledge and skills that each brought (Y. Yi, 2008).

In addition, the interactive collaboration experiences are especially important for ELLs like Nataya from the language and literacy learning perspectives. For one thing, Nataya was able to implicitly learn English in meaningful, authentic contexts by having numerous conversations with May through emailing and Instant Messaging to negotiate ideas for the fanfiction. Besides, Nataya had more explicit language and composition related learning opportunities (Thorne, Black & Sykes, 2009). Regarding what she has learned from the collab with May, Nataya explains as follows:

I learn a lot. She have give me a lot of tips about writing since she's more experienced. She told me to plan out my chapter before writing them out, I used to just start writing with an idea in my head, and sometimes that doesn't work out so well so she told me to make a draft of the story first before start writing. I also used to use a lot of ! and ~ and she told me that it's too much, and it makes the writing looks messy. Well, I learn when May was my co-author because she points out the mistakes and explains to me on how I can improve, it did help me improve in English. (Interview, 2010)

As Nataya pointed out, she has learned from May, who is the more experienced fanfiction author on Soompi.com. May provides Nataya with advice on writing fanfiction, such as planning a chapter before writing and refraining from using an overly informal writing style. In addition, Nataya was able to develop her English because May pointed out and explained the grammatical errors that Nataya consistently made in her writing.

### 3. Features of Nataya's Fanfiction Writing

The following excerpt is from Chapter 13 of MSB!, which Nataya posted in January of 2010. Stanzas 1-4 are notes that Nataya wrote to readers. Nataya posted the previous chapter in September of 2009. Stanza 1 contains Nataya's greetings and apologies to readers for the late update due to her health condition and academic demands. Nataya makes a promise to update the next chapters soon and also, thanks readers who have patiently waited for MSB! In Stanza 2, Nataya expresses her gratitude to her audience for their support and comments and gives them a promise that she will reply to every reader who leaves a comment on her chapter as a means to show how much she cherishes every single comment she receives. In Stanza 3, Nataya tells readers that she will make an official trailer of MSB! based on the results of the poll she posted in the previous chapter to ask readers' opinion on that matter. Nataya concludes her A/Ns by using Korean expression for "thank you" in bold type. Stanza 5 contains a part of the narrative text of Chapter 13 of MSB! and the link to the accompanying music that Nataya chose.

#### **A/N: Please Read**

**Stanza 1:** *Ahnyong* [Korean word for hello], *my lovely readers! I am finally back with a new chapter. I know that it has been a very very very very very long time since I last updated. (4 months and 2 days to be exact) I am truly sorry for keeping you all waiting for so long but I never have any intention go on hiatus. Currently, my health isn't at its best condition and school just drives me nuts. It always keep me so busy that I don't have*

*time to do anything else. I sincerely apologize for my long absent. But I promise you that the next chapter will be post up in no longer than 10 days. I am truly thankful for all you lovely readers for being so patient with me.*

[omitted due to space constraints]

**Stanza 2:** *Thank you for all the supports that you guys have been given to me. I read every single comments that you guys posted and I always feels bad when I am not able to reply to them. You guys might have not known but each and every word you guys posted are very meaningful to me. I promise I will do personal replies for the next chapter 🙄*

**Stanza 3:** *For the Poll: **Should there be an official trailer for MSB!?***

*Yes!!! o(^O^)o [91.18%]*

*Nah! o (>^<) o [0.00%]*

*I don't care~ o ( ▭ ▽ ▭ ) o [8.82%]*

*It's a decide then, I will make an official trailer for MSB! Can't promise you when I'll get it done though but hopefully before next month.*

**Stanza 4: *Kamsahamnida!*** [Bold in the original] [Korean phrase for thank you]

[the beginning of narrative text omitted due to space constraints]

**Stanza 5:**  **OST:** Gavy N.J. - A Love Story

As Ri In opens the door and was about to head down stair, she saws Jun Su, who was already showered, walking up the stairway with.

"Why are you....."

"Since I didn't see you come down stair yet, I thought you weren't feeling well so I bough dinner to you instead. I made some porridge."

Jun Su read her mind and show her a tray with a bowl of porridge in his hand.

[the rest of the chapter omitted due to space constraints]

The excerpt above displays several features of Nataya's fanfiction writing. To begin with, Nataya maintains social connections with her audience through A/Ns (Author's Notes) and interactive tools, such as poll. In her A/Ns, Nataya apologizes for the long wait, thanks readers for their support and patience and keeps them updated on any news or changes regarding MSB! In other words, for Nataya, A/Ns are the channel to communicate with her audience sharing her feelings and everyday aspects of her life as well as fanfiction related matters. As Nataya uses A/Ns as a personal message toward audience, her language use and style is less formal. As examples, she repeats words and inserts emoticons in her writing to emphasize how she feels.

In addition, Nataya uses the poll function provided on the fanfiction forum to ask the

audience's opinion before making a decision on the matters that she believes readers care about, such as whether it is better to have an official trailer for MSB! as shown in the excerpt above or which celebrity will be better suited for a character in her fanfiction. Nataya's interaction with her audience shows a glimpse of literacy practices that today's youth are engaged in around participatory popular culture through which, they gain "real understandings of the role of audience awareness in writing" (Williams, 2009, p. 61). In other words, for Nataya, the audience is not someone who is distant and passive but someone who is interactive and leaves comments on her work. Therefore, Nataya's composition is not author-centered in that she constantly considers what her readers think about her creation and often reflects their opinions in designing her work.

Moreover, Nataya integrates Korean words and short Korean phrases in communication with readers as well as in her fanfiction. Nataya learned most of the Korean words and expressions through watching videos which are fansubbed, in other words, translated by fans and subtitled in either Thai or English. Regarding her Korean proficiency, Nataya said:

I don't know a whole lot, just some phrases I remember from watching Korean variety shows and dramas. When I heard it, I will also try to use it on my daily basis. For example, I heard girls in drama exclaim 'Omo!' or 'Omona!' [Korean expressions to show a surprise] and now instead of 'Oh my god!' I actually say 'Omo!' (Interview, 2010)

Nataya brings her own background knowledge of Korean, including set phrases for common everyday language, into fanfiction writing. As shown in the excerpt above, she often uses simple Korean expressions, such as 'ahnyong' (hi) and 'kamsahamnida' (thank you) without explaining their meaning, expecting readers to have some background knowledge of basic Korean words because of their shared affinity to Korean popular culture. Nataya explains why she inserts Korean in her fanfiction as follows:

I guess to give the readers that Korean-ish feeling when they read. I mean, if I use 'Wazzup!' and other American slangs, it would give the readers the American-ish feelings won't it? (Interview, 2010)

Nataya's remarks indicate that Nataya's choice of using Korean language is purposeful in order to design her fanfiction in a way to add more authenticity to her fanfictions set in Korea with Korean celebrities as main characters. In addition, by using Korean in the texts, Nataya is able to display her own transnational identities and multilingual abilities (Black, 2009).

Last, Nataya uses features found in popular media for her fanfiction. For example, Nataya selects and inserts music that fits a scene to help readers get in the mood of what they read. According to Nataya, she got an idea of interweaving music with her fanfiction from watching TV dramas which often use background music to create and set the mood. Nataya reflected on why she added music to her fanfiction:

I start doing this because I want to add the mood to the story, and personally, I love listening to the music while reading. I also think that if I choose the right music for each specific scene, it might also get the readers into the mood of each scenes better too. For example, if you watch a drama and the main girl is crying because she just loss something she love, it makes it even sadder with a heart breaking melody playing as a background music right? (Interview, 2010)

Nataya understands affordances that music can provide, which is, to exert dramatic effects as the story's plot occurs and to touch the heart of audience. Through multimodal acts of meaning making, where she leverages different resources she encounters in her daily life, she is able to express herself and to convey the meanings in more varied ways (Flood, Heath & Lapp, 1997).

## V. DISCUSSIONS

This [manuscript] described how ELL female youth, Nataya, composes fanfiction using multiple semiotic resources, builds and maintains social relationships with online peers, and constructs identities in an online K-Pop based fan site, Soompi.com. This section will synthesize the findings focusing on Nataya's 1) Designing her fanfiction using multiple modes and languages (New London Group, 1996), 2) making social connections and using them as resources for composing her fanfictions, and 3) constructing online, textual identities as a transnational youth, an avid fan of K-Pop, and an author.

### 1. Fanfiction Composition as Multimodal Designing

Nataya displays her ability to use available multimodal resources, and manipulate and integrate them with her knowledge of K-Pop to construct her own fanfiction. Jenkins (1992) described the fans of popular culture media as creative agents and producers who are "raid mass culture, claiming its material and social interactions" (p. 18). Nataya uses available cultural materials in ways to make meanings and to affiliate with other fans in the K-Pop community. For example, Nataya integrates music for building up the mood of her

story for her audience. In addition, Nataya watches K-Pop TV dramas, movies, and shows which have been subtitled in English or in her native language and purposefully hybridizes English and Korean in order to design her fanfiction to display her understandings and knowledge of Korean language and K-pop, and to add more authenticity to her story. These illustrate how this youth engages in an active process of Designing (NLG, 1996) to connect and remix available semiotic resources, such as linguistic and audio by exploiting and manipulating the affordances of each mode for purposeful literacy work.

Nataya's multimodal design also demonstrates how she turns the consumption of popular culture into active production (Jenkins et al., 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008) to interact with other members in Soompi.com. In other words, in the participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2006) they are living in, young people like Nataya are offered abundant opportunities to express themselves in diverse ways and share it with a wide range of real audiences as they can be authors and producers using popular culture and new technologies rather than being a passive consumer only.

## 2. Social Connections as Resources

The social nature of literacy (Gee, 1996; Street, 1995) is evident in Nataya's participation in the online fanfiction forum. Through authoring and publishing fanfiction in the online community, she is able to make social connections with other fans from all over the globe who share a similar interest in K-Pop. This transnational social networking provides the youth with opportunities to improve her fanfiction. As discussed earlier, Nataya, who was not confident about her English and composition skills, collaboratively authored her fanfiction with her online friend, May, by sharing tasks based on their strengths and exchanging ideas for the story. Through collaboration with May, more experienced author, Nataya was able to have learning experiences in terms of English language and fanfiction composition like today's youth who develop a variety of knowledge through informal mentoring and apprenticeship available in online spaces (e.g., Gee, 2004). In other words, Nataya is able to access distributed knowledge through interacting with other members on Soompi.com (Gee, 2004). As Y. Yi (2008) pointed out, youth's social connections and collaborations "put[s] a new face on voluntary literacy practices — one that involves students co-constructing knowledge and understanding in a community setting" (p. 671).

## 3. Online Identities as Transnational Youth, K-Pop Fan, and Author

As Nataya writes fanfiction, she builds identities in different ways. First, Nataya represents her transnational and multilingual identity through her fanfiction writing. As

mentioned earlier, she leverages her multilingual and multicultural resources and produces hybridized fanfiction texts in ways to display her multilingual and transnational identities and affiliation with K-pop (Black, 2009). In addition, similar to the youth in Yi's (2008) study who created an online community to meet and to build a transnational relationship, Nataya is able to connect with other fans through K-Pop related activities without being restricted by physical distances.

In addition, by using her favorite celebrities as main characters in her stories, she represents herself as an avid fan of K-Pop. Moreover, in developing her stories, Nataya takes "imaginative and agentic approaches" (Black, 2009, p. 417). For example, through writing romance fanfiction, Nataya can choose with whom her favorite male celebrity is coupled, portray romance as she envisions by making the celebrities play roles, and imagine the personal lives of the celebrities which she cannot experience in reality.

By publishing her fanfiction in this online community, Nataya is able to share her imagination and knowledge of K-Pop with a larger real audience who value her work, give her supportive feedback, and anxiously wait for the next installment of her fanfiction. Through interacting with audience using channels, such as A/Ns, Nataya can construct a textual, social identity as an author. For Nataya, the audience is not as someone who is distant and passive, but someone who talks back to the author frequently and immediately in the online space (Williams, 2009). As indicated in Nataya's A/Ns, her identity as an author motivates her to participate in Soompi.com and to enjoy writing (Gee, 2004).

## VI. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This [manuscript] takes a close look at how a millennial youth is engaged in fanfiction writing outside of classrooms through K-Pop and new technologies. Even though fanfiction helps researchers and educators to understand the kinds of literacy practices that today's youth find interesting and motivating, this does not mean that teachers should incorporate fanfiction into the classroom. Rather, educators and researchers should understand the intriguing elements that lead youth willingly to devote their time and effort into literacy practices in out-of-school spaces, and try to incorporate those in language instruction and assignments.

To begin with, teachers should understand and embrace kinds of writing activities today's youth finds meaningful and relevant to their life. Sometimes, teachers are too quick to judge popular culture, considering it as less valuable than what students learn at school. However, adolescents are incorporating popular media into their writing outside of school. In this regard, it is important for educators to provide their students with an array of authentic writing activities where they integrate multiple modes to make meanings and

convey them through their writing.

One possible way to do so in class is, as fanfiction successfully does, to encourage students to incorporate technology and popular culture that they are already so familiar with so that they can design their writing more creatively and critically with the available resources. These can be particularly beneficial for language learners, who may find it easier to express their ideas using technologies and popular media as scaffolds than to write from scratch solely depending on the target language as a medium to convey meaning.

In addition, teachers should create social spaces for their students to publish and to get feedback on their work from each other as the online fanfiction sites do. It is difficult for students to have an identity as an author when they have to work by themselves, and know that there is usually one adult teacher who reads their work to grade. Writing activities in class should be interactive in ways that students collaborate and discuss their writing with their peers. In this way, students will be motivated to write more and better, being aware of their readers. It is high time for educators to let students bring a rich repertoire of writing practices and competencies that they have in their out-of-school spaces into classroom.

Drawing upon the sociocultural approaches to literacy, language, and identity as a theoretical framework, my investigation focused on rich and meaningful literacy practices one female ELL youth engages in outside of school and their role in her language learning and use and identity construction, rather than on her writing skills per se. In this regard, one possible direction for the further research might be on how out-of-school literacy practices, such as fanfiction, can promote language learners' improvement in writing skills by analyzing the complexity and the accuracy of different areas, such as grammar, sentence structure, and word choice.

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**Examples in: English**

**Applicable Languages: English**

**Applicable Levels: Secondary**

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