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***Multiple, Dynamic and Complex:
An Investigation of Investment in English as a
Second Language on Facebook***

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Abstract

Social networking sites such as Facebook permeate many areas of modern life and are being used by second language users and learners. How they use these spaces for language use and development, and the impact that it has on them, is an under-researched area.

This thesis expands on Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment to investigate how target language users of English take up the right to speak, or more accurately in the context, the right to post, in English on Facebook. It takes a posthumanist perspective on investment, a perspective that has been garnering increasing attention in applied linguistics and second language acquisition, but which has not been used to investigate investment.

The research focused on thirteen individuals from a variety of walks of life and their interaction on Facebook in English. Data were gathered through multiple face-to-face and online interviews, as well as online participant observation of Facebook interaction over an extended data collection period. A thematic analysis of these data examined the extent to which participants were invested in the use of English on Facebook. The analysis revealed that the infrastructure, the functionality of Facebook, and the affordances that arose from that functionality were essential to participants' investment in using English. Through these affordances, including visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability (boyd 2014), participants made use of their social, linguistic and cultural capital. They positioned themselves not as non-native English language users, but as friend connections and experts in certain fields, and received validation for these subject positions. They scaffolded their English competencies through the use of spatial repertoires such as language tools and with recourse to language processing time, thus bolstering their language confidence and broadening opportunities to invest in the language. Facebook played to the language and social media competencies of some participants, and they engaged in identity production via impression management. Participants' audiences were culturally and

linguistically diverse, as well as belonging to different arenas of their social worlds. Participants were strategic about how they posted themselves into being on Facebook, sometimes making themselves less visible and at times requiring no audience at all.

These findings suggest that Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment needs to expand to encompass the importance of the sociomateriality of Facebook. Investment needs to be viewed as arising from capacities produced from the entanglement of intra-actions, that is, as an assemblage, in relation to Facebook. These assemblages produced different capacities for investment dependent on the participant and the nature and coalescence of the intra-actions involved, and brought an added complexity and dynamism to investment. Social capital, data-as-capital, the language functionality of the site and its ubiquity produced Facebook as a space of legitimate English language use.

This research contributes to knowledge about second language acquisition in digital settings. The findings are of use not only to researchers in language education and digital education, but to teachers and second language learners who can use them to gain a greater understanding of how investment in social networking sites can occur or be hindered. It contributes to the call for new pedagogies, theories and policies to account for language use and learning in online spaces (Darvin and Norton 2016a). By placing investment in a sociomaterial context, this thesis brings the concept of investment into the arena of social networking sites, and provides a theoretical framework for further research in this area.

Lay Summary

Individuals from all walks of life, including non-native English language users and learners, are using social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook. I am interested in facilitating adult learners' opportunities for second language use and learning. To this end, my research investigated the extent to which non-native English language users and learners felt they had a right to post in English on Facebook, how this right was produced, and how it was put into practice.

I gathered data for this research from thirteen adult individuals, all of whom were non-native English language users and learners, between 2017 and 2018. My research participants were located in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Data were collected through online questionnaires, online and face-to-face interviews, and in some instances, online observation of participants' Facebook interaction in English over an extended period of time.

After analysing these data, it became clear that understanding how research participants made use of their right to use English on Facebook fundamentally needed to take into consideration the functionality of the site. By functionality I refer to what Facebook allows people to do, for example, produce and share their own content in the form of written text and images; use a variety of languages and translate these languages; in addition, users can edit and delete content. Also of importance were the affordances of SNS communication: visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability. These refer to the ability one has to make oneself visible on Facebook (visibility) with one's content which then remains after one has left the site (persistence). This content can be shared by oneself and others (spreadability) and can be located with the use of search engines (searchability).

I also found that my participants were able to see themselves as friends, and experts in certain areas, as opposed to being positioned as non-native

English language speakers and learners. They experienced their right to use English in relation to their social capital (the relationships with their friends on Facebook) and their cultural knowledge, as well as their ability to produce and share many kinds of content. They were also able to employ online language tools to bolster their English language abilities on Facebook.

My research findings contribute to existing knowledge on second language learning in that I have taken a relatively novel approach to it. I have considered a learner's language ability to not only reside in that learner's head, but also in the situation, people, and matter - that is the stuff - with which that individual is surrounded. As such, non-native speakers' abilities to use Facebook as a place in which they can legitimately use English has to take into consideration the digital infrastructure of the site.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene

Interaction on social network sites (SNSs) is an aspect of daily life for many. Such sites have deeply impacted how communication occurs in the 21st century (Rainie and Wellman 2014). With English as the most commonly studied language (Lyons 2021), it stands to reason that non-native English-speakers are using English in these online spaces. This thesis presents research which focused on the use of English as a second or other language on the social network site Facebook. The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent are users of English as a second or other language invested in the use of English on Facebook?
2. How does this investment occur?

The fundamental theoretical concept of this research is Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. Yet, this model is also expanded here in order to take into consideration the sociomateriality of Facebook use. To this end, a posthumanist approach has been incorporated, thus broadening the poststructuralist concept of investment in order to uncover the significance of materiality within it.

This research can best be characterised as a virtual ethnography which focused on thirteen (twelve female and one male) non-native English-speakers' use of English on their personal Facebook pages. Recruitment was via volunteer and snowball sampling. Participants ranged in age from between early twenties to late forties. Ten individuals were students in Ireland or the UK at the time of data collection. The three remaining participants were living and working, or seeking work, in Ireland. Eight participants were Chinese nationals; the remaining seven were from Argentina, Italy, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Thailand. All participants met the

criteria for inclusion in the research by having an English language proficiency of at least upper intermediate.

In terms of positionality, ten participants were, or had been before the research commenced, my English language students. Five of these individuals were members of my personal Facebook friends' network prior to the research, and five others became connected to me in this way for purposes of data collection.

The fact that personal Facebook pages, including my own, were the field sites of this research raises ethical issues, in particular regarding informed consent. Ethical concerns were carefully considered during the design and implementation of this study, and these issues will be more fully discussed in Chapter Four ([4.9.1](#)).

While my focus was on participants' English language use on Facebook when engaging with other English language users, participants' Facebook were pages where multilingual spaces. As such, these spaces contained multiple languages, including English.

Data collection methods comprised multiple interviews, online and face-to-face, as well as online participant observation of a number of these individuals' English use on Facebook over an extended data collection period. These data were analysed through thematic analysis in order to identify the workings of participants' investment assemblages.

1.2 A brief overview of Facebook

For introductory purposes, this section provides a short overview of Facebook, as the research context of this study. An extended description of the platform is presented in Chapter Four.

Established in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg (Kirkpatrick 2010), globally, Facebook is the most popular SNS, with approximately 2.85 billion monthly active users in the third quarter of 2021 (Statistica 2021a). This compares

favourably with other social media sites' rates of active users. For example, within the same timeframe, other Facebook owned companies WhatsApp and Instagram had 2 billion and 1.4 billion monthly active users, respectively (*ibid.*). The number of active monthly users of TikTok (732 million) and Twitter (397 million) are dwarfed in comparison with rates of Facebook utilisation (Statistica 2021a).

Ellison and boyd (2013, p. 158) define an SNS as:

a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (emphasis in original)

Facebook is, therefore, a space where people can gather to create, consume and interact with content. Like other SNSs, it is where people go to make themselves visible (Ellison and boyd 2013). In 2014, Rainie and Wellman observed that:

Facebook has become each person's "go to" page: their home base. It *is why we stay on Facebook for so long* (2014, p. 144).

While new social media platforms, for example Telegram, continually challenge Facebook for supremacy, it appears the site is still a "home base" for many.

1.3 Cornish and the *shadow* research project

This thesis reports on research which focused on participants' English language communication with other English users on their personal Facebook accounts, and, to a limited extent, it has investigated some participants' use of English in Facebook group spaces. Yet, the research project I originally planned was somewhat different to that presented here. It was necessary to radically adapt my original research strategy in order to manage unanticipated events which occurred during the progress of this study. Glimmers of this *shadow* research project are still evident within this write up. Therefore, to pre-empt confusion on the part of the reader, in particular in Chapter Four, and to contextualise research choices made, I present a brief review of the shadow research project here.

This research developed from a study conducted as part of my master's degree in E-learning at Moray House, the University of Edinburgh. That project investigated Cornish¹ language learners' use of a Facebook group dedicated to the learning of that language. During that study, I encountered Norton's (2013) concept of investment, and found it to be a valuable way of understanding the role of capital within minority language learning. I wanted to further investigate investment in minority language learning (Cornish) and majority language learning (English) in relation to Facebook groups which aimed to encourage their members' language development in my doctoral thesis. Due to difficulties with participant recruitment, the original plan for this research had to be amended. Rather than an investigation into Cornish language learners and English language learners, and their use of their own respective Facebook groups for language development, I have moved the focus to explore non-native English language users investment in English in their personal Facebook spaces, with some incidental analysis of their

¹ Cornish is a minority language which has been revived and is now used by a small, but growing number of individuals, within Cornwall, part of the United Kingdom (Ferdinand 2013), and in other areas, such as Australia, where members of the Cornish diaspora of the 19th and 20th centuries reside.

interaction within Facebook groups and Messenger. (A more detailed description of this *shadow* project is provided in Chapter Four.)

1.4 Justification of the research

This research examines investment in English on Facebook, and takes a posthumanist approach to this investment. Social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook belong to a category of online tools referred to as social media (boyd 2014). These tools enable users to create, share and react to online content, as well as socialise in digital spaces (*ibid.*). Social media are more than tools, however. boyd has referred to them as a “mindset” (*ibid.*, p. 222) and “a set of sites and services that are at the heart of contemporary culture” (*ibid.*, p. 6). SNSs have grown so much in importance that they have been referred to as “a sociotechnical phenomenon” (Zourou and Lamy 2013, p. 1). In 2013, Ellison and boyd encouraged research into SNSs on the basis of their ubiquity of use across a wide variety of areas of society, including across academic disciplines. Comparable encouragement could be given on similar grounds in 2021. For example, Facebook, the world’s largest SNS, had approximately 1.93 billion daily active users in the third quarter of 2021 (Statistica 2021b). With so many people using the site, it is crucial that we continue to develop our understanding of:

how individuals interpret the technological artifacts of SNSs or how individuals work to challenge expectations about how they are supposed to engage with the systems (Ellison and boyd 2013, p. 168).

Indeed, the ubiquity of Facebook was the reason for my choice of this site as the field-site of my research.

With the growing significance of SNSs, it stands to reason that target language² users are utilising these online spaces. SNSs provide a variety of

² A target language is a language other than an individual’s mother tongue which that person is using and/or learning.

opportunities for access to target languages and their users (Kern 2014; Lomicka and Lord 2016). For example, people are able to cross national borders (Lam and Smirnov 2017) while staying in one place. Individuals can communicate in informal “digitally wild” spaces beyond the language learning classroom (Sauro and Zourou 2019, p. 1). There is a need to understand what target language users are doing in these spaces, not only because the Common European Framework for Languages has placed emphasis on self-directed learning (Morgan 2012), but also because these digital arenas are being utilised so widely (Reinhardt 2019). There is a need to comprehend how SNSs’ functionality and cultures-of-use impact target language learning and communication in the target language there (*ibid.*). It is necessary for teachers to be aware of how their students are utilising these spaces (Lee and Dressman 2018), especially if they are going to facilitate their students’ engagement in these environments. It is also useful for target language users to develop their own awareness of the nature of SNSs. For example, they need to know that SNSs are businesses and that users’ interactions are monetised (Reinhardt 2019). With such information, individuals can make informed choices as to their frequency and style of use of these areas.

Beyond this, the ability to productively engage with SNSs such as Facebook for target language use relates closely to the concept of investment, and this concept is core to this research. Investment in target language use has been established as an essential element within second language acquisition (Kramsch 2013; [see Section 3.2](#)). The majority of research into investment has focused on offline language use (for example, Bearse and de Jong 2008; Cervatiuc 2009; Cole *et al.* 2016). Online spaces, however, provide particular opportunities for target language use and investment (Darvin 2016). These opportunities have developed because new technologies, such as SNSs, enable “new modes of productivity, representation and socialisation” (Darvin 2016, p. 526).

SNSs are not ideologically neutral. Indeed, as transnational, multilingual and multicultural spaces, a plurality of ideologies are at play within SNS use. Therefore, just as power relations impact investment offline, so they do

online. As a result, Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment, which focuses on ideologically based evaluations of capital, and resultant subject positions made available to, or denied, target language users, is useful in examining how people utilise SNSs such as Facebook. It is also crucial that language educators and target language learners develop an understanding of how learners can effectively negotiate these spaces as legitimate target language users (Darvin and Norton 2018).

To explore investment on Facebook, I have taken a posthumanist approach. There is a developing interest in what posthumanism has to offer our understanding of second language acquisition (Canagarajah 2018a; Pennycook and Otsuji 2014; Toohey 2019). This perspective recognises that language use is not restricted to *language* use in terms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, for example. Rather, the ability to use a second or other language is distributed across the sociomateriality of the context of communication (Canagarajah 2018a). The digitally-mediated nature of online communication brings matter to the fore of language use and learning. For example, such communication is impossible without the digital infrastructure of a SNS platform or the hardware of a mobile phone or tablet. With target languages being used on SNSs, there is a need to understand how this language use is taking place. Yet, up until this point, there has been a dearth of research in the area. This thesis addresses this gap in research and develops the concept of investment to take into account the significance of sociomateriality within it. This requires the identification of intra-actions within assemblages which produce capacities for investment.

1.5 Orientation to this thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. This introductory chapter is followed by Chapter Two, in which I present my theoretical framings. These comprise Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment and a posthumanist approach to investment. This means that I consider investment to be best

understood in sociomaterial terms, which encompasses identity, ideology, capital and the functionality of Facebook, as well as the affordances this functionality gives rise to - visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability (boyd 2014).

A review of the literature relevant to my thesis is presented in Chapter Three. As a piece of interdisciplinary research, my literature review encompasses material from the areas of applied linguistics, sociological research into digital education, communication and new media studies, social-psychology, human-computer interaction and marketing, and social media theory. Divided into five sections, the chapter offers an examination of the importance of investment in second language acquisition, and a review of Norton's research on the concept. This is followed by three sections - capital, identity and ideology - which mirror the elements of Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. The aim of these sections is to present the literature from second language acquisition, online language learning, and social media studies which appertain to each area of Darvin and Norton's model: capital, identity and ideology. The final section of the chapter comprises a change of direction. It moves to focus on the small, but growing, area of posthumanist research into second language acquisition, academic literacies and online language learning.

My research methods are presented in Chapter Four. Here I outline and justify the methods chosen to investigate the extent to which participants were able to invest in English on Facebook, and how such investment arose. I begin the chapter with a review of the "shadow research project" - the research that was planned and begun, but not completed - as it has a bearing on the actual research that was undertaken. I then outline my research approach, before moving on to describe the field-sites and data collection methods (multiple interviews over an extended period of time, online participant observation of Facebook interaction). Participant recruitment and sampling factors are also discussed. I outline my research paradigms, and then present how the thematic analysis was conducted.

Ethical decisions and the limitations of the study are elaborated in the final section of Chapter Four.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present a discussion of my findings by way of a sociomaterial interpretation of participants' investment in Facebook spaces. This analysis broadens the understanding of my participants' investment in English on Facebook beyond the intersection of identity, capital and ideology. In my analysis I present this type of investment in terms of assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Fox and Alldred 2017). These investment assemblages were formed of entanglements of intra-actions such as identity, capital and ideology as well as the functionality of Facebook and the resultant affordances of visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability. Chapter Five focuses on how these intra-actions coalesced to produce Facebook as a legitimate space of access for participants in which they were able to take up the right to post as legitimate English language users. I also examine how participants' control over their impression management in these areas arose, and the capacities for investment that were produced from entanglements of intra-actions including spatial repertoires within investment assemblages.

Chapter Six presents an investigation of the many facets of the Facebook audience, and how these facets were intra-actions entangled within affective flows in participants' assemblages to produce investment in English on Facebook. There is an emphasis on the attention economy and the multicultural, multilingual and multi-competent English language using audiences as intra-actions which coalesced to produce capacities for investment. Other characteristics of participants' Facebook audiences - the imagined audience, disembodied, future and unintended audiences - are also examined as intra-actions which entangled in different ways across participants' various investment assemblages. The chapter closes by highlighting the importance of the ideology of sharing on Facebook, and participants' resultant visibility, by examining instances when audience reactions were not necessary for participants' investment on the platform.

Chapter Seven comprises an investigation of participants' decisions to post or not to post in English on the platform. I closely examine the subject positions that were available to participants on Facebook, and consider them as intra-actions in participants' investment assemblages. I also investigate in more detail participants' self-censorship, and consider it in relation to investment.

Having taken a naturalist inquiry approach (Guba and Lincoln 2005) to my data, I replace a conclusions chapter with a chapter presenting my working hypotheses. As such, Chapter Eight outlines the main points of my research, and offers them for the reader to decide upon their transferability to other contexts. In very broad terms, one major working hypothesis which comes from this study is that an understanding of investment on Facebook has to take into consideration the functionality of the platform, and the affordances that arise from this functionality. Embracing the functionality and affordances of Facebook requires looking deeply into the business model of the company and identifying how that gives rise to capacities for participants' investment in English on the site.

Chapter Eight closes with some pedagogical implications, ideas for future research, and contributions to the field of knowledge that my research may make.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framings

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to establish the theoretical framings of my research which investigated to what extent were target language users of English able to invest in the use of English on Facebook. As this study is interdisciplinary, these framings have developed from a reading of a relatively broad scope of literature, including from philosophy of education, second language acquisition, communication and new media studies, and posthumanism.

The chapter commences with a brief outline of the rationale behind my choice of theoretical framings ([Section 2.2](#)). It then moves to provide an overview of Norton's original conceptualisation of investment as well as Bourdieu's understandings of the concept. An examination of Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment follows. Subsequent to this, a detailed examination of the three elements of Darwin and Norton's (*ibid.*) model of investment is provided in [Section 2.3](#). These are: identity, capital and ideology. These areas are examined not only from the poststructuralist and Bourdieusian perspectives which underpin them within investment, but also from relevant positions evident within studies on social media use. Therefore, the chapter includes an analysis of identity production and ideological forces at play within SNSs contexts ([Section 2.4](#)). This comprises a focus on boyd's (2014) affordances of SNS use, as well as context collapse and impression management in these spaces.

As my theoretical framings have expanded to incorporate posthumanist concepts, areas appertaining to this body of thought in relation to identity and ideology are also examined in [Section 2.5](#) and [Section 2.6](#). The chapter closes with a focus on Norton's concept of agency, and how a posthumanist stance impacts considerations of agency within my theoretical framings ([Section 2.7](#)).

Throughout the chapter, I make clear my own understandings of identity, capital, ideology and investment, based on the work of Bourdieu, Norton, Darwin and Norton, research on social media, in particular boyd's (2014) SNS affordances, as well as posthumanism.

2.2 Rationale for selection of these framings

Originally, Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment was my chosen theoretical framework. This model is founded on poststructuralist and Bourdieusian principles. In terms of poststructuralism, investment posits that language and discourse are the main concepts which help us understand the production of social reality. Bourdieu's (1977a) thought is evident in terms of legitimate speaker status: positioning oneself, or being positioned, as a legitimate speaker of English occurs when one's capital is positively evaluated in an ideological context (Darvin and Norton 2015). During data collection and analysis, however, it became evident that the functionality of Facebook, and the concomitant affordances that interaction on the platform gives rise to, were significant factors in the development of participants' investment in target language practices on the site. In order to capture how sociomaterial aspects of Facebook use influenced research participants' investment, I have adopted a posthumanist approach alongside one of investment in order to analyse and understand my data. This is a novel approach to investment which will uncover new ways to understand the concept in relation to target language use on Facebook.

2.2.1 Norton's original conceptualisation of investment

Norton began to develop her theory of investment in the 1990s while undertaking ethnographic research on non-native English-speaking migrant women's engagement with English language practices in Canada (Norton Pierce 1995). She found that theories of motivation prevalent at the time were insufficient to explain her participants' complex engagement with

opportunities for English language learning and use. Target language users were regularly viewed as either motivated or unmotivated, and these levels of motivation were used to explain their engagement with the target language.

To address this situation, Norton constructed her sociocultural theory of investment to be applied alongside theories of motivation within second language acquisition (2013). Whereas the latter considered identity as innate and unchanging, ignoring power relations inherent in language learning, investment placed these relations at the centre of a learner's desire to interact in the target language (Norton Pierce 1995). Now target language users were positioned as social beings whose engagement with the language was better understood through an investigation of their identities within social contexts of power (Norton 2013). (It should be noted that such ideas about motivation have since developed to encompass the socio-cultural aspects of identity (Ushioda 2011a, 2011b).

Heavily influenced by Bourdieu, from whom she borrowed the metaphor of investment (Norton and McKinney 2011), Norton's theorisation of investment can be understood as an exchange. Target language users invest in target language practices, within or beyond the classroom, if they identify that in doing so they will make a return on their effort; this return is viewed in terms of capital (Darvin and Norton 2015; Norton Pierce 1995, 2013):

If learners 'invest' in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic resources (language, education, friendship) and material resources (capital goods, real estate, money) which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power

(Norton 2013, p. 6)

Investment in the target language, therefore, takes place with a view to future gains. As language users' capital increases, they are able to reassess their sense of selves and their hopes for what is possible for them in the future (Norton 2013). (Capital will be further developed in [Section 2.3.2.](#)) In addition, when target language users are able to acknowledge the value of the capital they bring to communicative events, they are able to take up the "right to

speak” (Norton Pierce 1995, p. 18) and take advantage of opportunities for target language use.

In order to develop my own conceptualisation of investment, in the next section I revisit Bourdieu’s understanding of the concept and compare it with that of Norton.

2.2.2 Bourdieu and Investment

Bourdieu’s concept of investment has been likened to an economic metaphor (Norton and McKinney 2011). While this metaphor is valuable, there is another way to understand investment. Indeed, Bourdieu shied away from the economic associations that come with the employment of the term investment (Bourdieu 1984). He relates investment to his concept of “*illusio* (from *ludus*, the game)” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 98). We are all engaged in a game, the aim of which is the search for legitimacy (Bourdieu 1984). That is, we endeavour to avoid “being considered as a negligible quantity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 98). This legitimacy is provided through the attainment of capital.

Norton likens investment to a struggle (Norton 2010; 2014a). Target language users struggle within the evaluation of their capital - the capital from which they can position themselves as legitimate speakers of the language. While Bourdieu maintains this element of struggle for capital (1984), he also points out the link between investment and enjoyment. He gives the example of the “art-lover” who seeks out art for the sake of it, for the pleasure it gives. This “pleasure” and “enthusiasm” are “preconditions of successful investment” (Bourdieu 1984, p 79). Investment here is not a struggle in the sense of labour, as can be read into Norton’s conception, but a search for fulfilment. This is a movement away from the economic connotations suggested by Bourdieu’s use of economic vocabulary. As observed by anthropologist Ghassan Hage (2013), when Bourdieu refers to the unequal distribution of capital in the world, he is also referring to the unequal

distribution of “being”. The individual desires to live a fulfilling life, and this is accomplished by the “accumulation of being”.

One way to achieve this is to be invested in the game: to see meaning in it and to gain fulfilment from engaging in it (Hage 2013). The search for capital is the search for being; the outcome is a life of fulfilment. I would like to suggest that the investment of participants in this study was tied to the attainment of fulfilment in life by way of developing and maintaining their social capital, as opposed to pursuing economic or educational gains, which have often been associated with investment in target language practices (Dagenais 2003; Norton *et al.* 2011; Sharma 2020).

Continuing an emphasis on Bourdieusian concepts, the next section comprises an examination of Darwin and Norton’s model of investment.

2.2.3 Darwin and Norton’s Model of Investment

In a 2015 article co-authored with Ron Darwin, Norton developed an expanded model of investment. The concept was broadened to take into consideration the impact of globalisation and associated developments in mobility and new technology, and their impact on target language users’ commitment to target language learning and/or language practices:

In the new world order characterized by mobility, fluidity, and diversity, operating within the paradox of flow and control, identity has been impacted by more complex issues of structure and agency. In the digital age, the spaces of language learning continue to multiply and evolve with distinct and increasingly invisible structures of power with concomitant implications for conceptions of “good” language learning ... and “learners’ strategies”

(Darwin and Norton 2015, p. 51)

The new model responds to these developments by expanding investment’s remit from power relations at the micro-level within local exchanges, to incorporate the macro level, and consider how larger structures, such as globalisation and neoliberalism, impact investment (Darwin and Norton 2015). A more macro view helps to place:

learners in this complex web of power and to recognise how these ideological sites shape disposition, social position, and the conditions in which learners can claim the right to speak

(Darvin and Norton 2015, p. 51)

With the new model, investment in target language learning and practices encompasses a consideration of ideology, as well as identity and capital. Investment is now situated at the intersection of these three elements (Darvin and Norton 2015).



Darvin and Norton's model of investment (2015, p. 42)

The new model demonstrates the links between target language users' identities, capital, and the ideologies in which language use occurs. When these individuals are able to acknowledge the value of the capital they bring to the contexts of target language use, regardless of the ideological constraints on that value, and utilise their capital as an affordance, they can take up subject positions from which take up their "right to speak" (Norton Pierce 1995, p. 18) and in so doing, challenge "systemic patterns of control" (Darvin and Norton 2015, p. 36) which may deny them access to spaces of, and opportunities for, target language use. When they do this, they are invested in the target language.

In subsequent sections of this chapter I examine these three factors of the new model of investment: identity, capital and ideology. I analyse them in terms of SNS use, and as such, integrate the work of boyd into my understanding of them. I additionally incorporate a posthumanist perspective to each area. In addition, as agency is also significant to investment, and

because a posthumanist perspective has implications for how this concept is perceived, the chapter will conclude with a focus on agency.

2.3 Identity and capital as related to investment

This section comprises a description of two of the key concepts of Darwin and Norton's model of investment: identity and capital. It includes an examination of their poststructuralist and Bourdieusian underpinnings. Identity and capital are examined together as they are deeply interlinked within Darwin and Norton's model. In terms of identity, I focus in particular on Norton's sociocultural theory of identity as this is the foundation of Darwin and Norton's model. With reference to capital, I outline Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field as they relate to this concept. The three areas of capital most pertinent to this thesis: social, symbolic and linguistic capital, are then discussed, respectively, and in relation to their salience to subject positions in investment.

The section concludes with a focus on the importance of the imagination, including the concept of possible selves, on Norton's concept of identity, and ultimately, on investment.

2.3.1 Norton, poststructuralism, and identity

Before exploring Norton's poststructuralist influences in the area of identity, a note on terminology. Norton often uses the terms "identity" and "subjectivity" interchangeably (see Norton 2013, p. 162 for an example). The choice of subjectivity as a synonym for identity is deliberate. Following feminist poststructuralist thought and practice, the word subjectivity is used to highlight the relational nature of identity - that identity encompasses the manner in which we are constantly positioning ourselves and others, and being positioned within social space (Norton 2010).

Based on poststructuralism, Norton defines identity:

as the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future

(Norton 2013, p. 4)

Therefore, how we experience ourselves, and how others experience us, is intricately connected with the fluctuations of our social environments. For this reason poststructuralists such as Norton view identity as “a social process as opposed to a determined and fixed product” (Block 2013, p. 129).

This social process is highly influenced by language and discourse (Weedon 1997). Unlike humanist approaches, which view language as a neutral tool for the expression of a reality external to the subject, poststructuralists consider reality as formed through language. Encompassed by this reality is our own subjectivity (*ibid.*). Learning to use language, therefore, is learning to *be* as we develop an understanding of the world as formed and presented through language.

This learning to be through language is founded upon the view that language comprises discourse: “complexes of signs and practices that organize social existence and social reproduction” (Norton Pierce 1989, p. 404). Discourses are a powerful means by which we make meaning of the world around us, and develop an understanding of who we are in that world. Therefore, as subject to discourse via language production and interaction, the individual is “engaged in identity construction and negotiation” (Norton 2013, p.4). Just as discourses are constantly in flux, so is one’s identity (Norton 2013; Weedon 1997). That is, the manner in which an individual constructs and experiences their identity is co-constituent with the discourses with which they are surrounded.

This leads us to a fundamental aspect of Norton’s thought on identity/ subjectivity: positioning. Influenced by the work of Weedon (1997) and Davies and Harré (1990), Norton perceives the target language user to be discursively positioned within communicative events. These subject positions

are socially constructed “ways of being” (Weedon 1997, p. 83). They can act as an ‘illocutionary force’ (Davies and Harré 1990, p. 45) by which, through speech and paralinguistic cues (such as dress and gesture), we seek to socially position ourselves and others according to prevailing discourses. Thus, a subject position is constructed which:

incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire

(ibid. p. 46)

One’s subject position becomes a locus from which to view the world as presented through discourse.

The array of subject positions one can take up is limited by “historical specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society” (Weedon 1997, p. 91). Structures such as gender and race can restrict access to certain subject positions. When positioned by others, the resultant subject position can impact the manner in which one is interacted. In addition, individuals may also choose to struggle to take up subject positions which are difficult to attain.

For Norton, the ability to take up subject positions, and the process of being positioned by others, is dependent on Bourdieu’s concept of capital. Indeed, Norton develops a concept of communicative competence which is not limited to accurate and appropriate language use, but includes “an awareness of the right to speak” (Norton Pierce 1995, p. 18). That is, target language users need to develop a critical awareness of how their language use is impacted by power relations, and develop knowledge of “whose interests these rules serve” (*ibid.*). When they are able to do this, they can invest in target language use or learning.

The following section comprises an outline of capital as it relates to Norton’s theory of identity within investment. However, to understand capital, one has to consider Bourdieu’s related concepts of habitus and field. Therefore, an outline of these three areas is provided here, before I move on to consider how capital influences Norton’s concept of identity as related to investment.

2.3.2 Habitus, field and capital

As discussed in [Section 2.2.2](#), according to Bourdieu (and Norton) we are all engaged in a game, in a competition “for recognition or cultural validation” (Greene 2013, p 141). This competition is the struggle for capital (Bourdieu 1989). Capital can take a variety of forms. For example, economic capital is financial wealth. Cultural capital is developed through one’s formal educational experience and achievements, leading to one’s appropriate evaluation and understanding of cultural artefacts such as art and literature (Bourdieu 1991). To explain how capital attains value in society, Bourdieu provides the concepts of habitus and field. These are considered below.

We are all guided by habitus, which is a:

system of schemes of perception and appreciation of practices, cognitive and evaluative structures which are acquired through the lasting experience of a social position

(Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19)

As we engage in social arenas, we are exposed to ways of being, in terms of both actions and ideas. These ways of being become internalised with continued contact, eventually forming our habitus (Bourdieu 1989). Thus, habitus encompasses the deeply, often subconsciously, held dispositions which are acquired through interaction with the social and material environment (Bourdieu 1991). It is a social force which regulates our being within an environment:

The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less “sensible” and “reasonable”

(Bourdieu 1977b, p 79)

Habitus is a major Bourdieusian concept, yet, to a large extent, it is an area of Bourdieu’s thought that is “tacitly reject[ed]” by Norton (Menard-Warwick 2005, p. 259). This rejection occurs in particular in relation to matter and its role in social production. While Norton has turned her attention to the impact on investment of access to digital tools, such matter, that is the hardware and

software of these tools, is represented either as a conduit for communication and development of imagined identities (Norton *et al.* 2011), or an opportunity to develop a skill which will positively impact the user's capital (Norton and Williams 2012).

For Bourdieu, however, matter has much more significance. It is involved in the development of habitus (Bourdieu 1991). One's alignment with habitus develops not only through language, but also through the body (Bourdieu 1977b). Bourdieu refers to "*hexis*" (*ibid.* p 87) to explain how habitus develops:

Body hexis speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values

(Bourdieu 1977b, p. 87)

We learn to be, therefore, through our physical and mental interaction with the sociomaterial world - the world made of things and social practices in interaction with each other.

Therefore, matter matters in Bourdieusian thought. As he states in Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977b, p. 91):

the mind born of the world of objects does not rise as a subjectivity confronting an objectivity: the objective universe is made up of objects which are the product of objectifying operations structured according to the very structures which the mind applies to it.

The individual develops habitus, learns to be and to do, in relation to matter. The human subject, therefore, is constructed with recourse to its relation, not only to discourse, but also to matter. This perspective has informed my analysis and supports the contribution to the theorisation of investment made in this thesis: the subject is formed through a process of mind and matter influencing each other.

2 3.2.1 *Habitus and symbolic capital*

Habitus is inextricably linked to Bourdieu's concept of field, his term for social space. Each field is:

an autonomous universe, a kind of arena in which people play a game which has certain rules, rules which are different from those of the game that is played in the adjacent space

(Bourdieu 1991, p. 215)

We learn the rules of this game as it applies to a field through the development of habitus. Fields are spaces in which capital is at play, and dependent on the value of one's capital within a field, one is socially positioned (Rawolle and Lingard 2013). As Block (2013, p. 135) states, fields are social spaces in which we are assigned positions of status: "of inferiority, equality and superiority" with reference to the legitimised dispositions of that context. It is the flow and evaluation of capital within fields that governs the production and reproduction of social hierarchies (Block 2013).

Capital is not evenly distributed across social fields; therefore, we do not all have the same access to it (Bourdieu 1989). It is the unequal nature of this distribution within society that explains how social inequalities arise, and how social power is maintained (Rawolle and Lingard 2013). The evaluation of our capital impacts our identity within certain social milieux because the extent to which our capital is legitimised impacts the opportunities available to us (Bourdieu 1991).

When an individual's capital is recognised as having value in a field, it is transformed into symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1989). Symbolic capital is "the *recognition*, institutionalized or not, that [individuals] receive from the group" (Bourdieu 1991, p. 72, emphasis in original). Replete with symbolic capital, some members of society are able to exert symbolic power which provides them with legitimacy (Bourdieu 1989). That is, with symbolic power, they are able to sanction and maintain social reality in line with their symbolic capital (1989), therefore, maintaining the social world as a place wherein they have an advantage. Habitus lays down the conditions for symbolic power to be

effective by disposing us to accept its power as the norm; however, this power is never total:

there are always, in any society, conflicts between symbolic powers that aim at imposing the vision of legitimate divisions, that is, constructing groups

(Bourdieu 1989, p. 22)

Capital also exists in its social and linguistic symbolic forms (Bourdieu 1991). As these types of capital are of particular significance to the analysis within this thesis, and to target language user identity, they are explored in more detail below.

2.3.2.2 Social capital

Social capital refers to the resources available to a person through the network of individuals and groups to which they are connected:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition

(Bourdieu 1986, p. 21)

Therefore, social capital gives one access to the resources held by the group to which one belongs. While Bourdieu uses the terms “institutionalized relationships” to indicate formal social ties, I consider social capital also to be the product of informal, personal relationships (Coleman 1988), as these relationships can provide group members with access to essentials such as information, social networks, and emotional support, all of which benefit one in the struggle for capital. They also aid the development of one’s being, and thus, in Bourdieu’s terms, help one lead a fulfilling life (Hage 2013).

Social capital is developed and maintained through “an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 22). This resonates clearly with my thesis. I will argue that Facebook affords such efforts of sociability, not

only because it enables the maintenance of development of social capital across virtual spaces, but also because social capital is necessary for investment in target language practices on Facebook.

2.3.2.3 Linguistic capital

Linguistic capital refers to competence in a standard form of language (Bourdieu 1991), or in “socially valued language varieties” (Menard-Warwick 2005, p. 256). Those with mastery of the standard language are awarded “dominant competence” (Bourdieu 1991, p 56). This competence provides the holder with opportunities to accrue yet more capital through access to education, professional opportunities and social networks (Bourdieu 1991).

Linguistic capital functions within a linguistic field: “a system of specifically linguistic relations of power based on the unequal distribution of linguistic capital” (Bourdieu 1991, p 57). In this field, if individuals do not have dominant competence, that is, their language competence lacks capital and has little social value, they can be “*de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence” (Bourdieu 1991, p 55, emphasis in original). For Bourdieu, then, language production is never just a case of one individual sharing meaning with another. What is said and how it is said is completely embedded in the social context. The type of language one uses is indicative of what type of person one is socially seen to be: it is part of one’s identity.

Linguistic capital, therefore, provides “legitimate speaker status”, that is, “the power to impose reception” (Bourdieu 1977a, p. 648). This “right to speak” (Norton Pierce 1995, p. 18) is of critical importance as it is the culmination of investment. However, if one takes this view of linguistic capital as competence in a standard language, competence that reflects the language of those in “education, administration, high society, etc.” (Bourdieu 1977a, p. 654), then relatively few target language users would gain linguistic capital through their own non-standard language competencies. In turn, they would

be *condemned to silence*, and denied the right to speak. Fortunately, this is not the case.

The power to impose reception is linked to the fields in which speakers communicate and in which their linguistic capital is evaluated. While Bourdieu links linguistic capital to expertise in standard forms of language, he also leaves room for the importance of contextually appropriate use of language (Bourdieu 1977a). Developing a knowledge of situationally appropriate language use in different contexts through habitus, interlocutors produce and anticipate the production of a variety of linguistic genres, for example, formal or colloquial, dependent on the field of communication (*ibid.*). People modify their language depending on:

their own position and their interlocutors' positions in the structure of the distribution of the specifically linguistic capital and, even more, the other forms of capital

(Bourdieu 1977a, p 657)

One is, therefore, guided in the application of one's linguistic resources - the genres and forms of speech one can command - dependent on the relationship with one's interlocutor and the social context of that relationship (Bourdieu 1977a). Therefore, for Bourdieu, the distribution of capital between interlocutors impacts the formality with which they address each other. This leaves room for target language users to take up the right to speak without linguistic capital as defined as competence in standard language use.

Norton (2013), herself, extends the reach of capital within her concept of the right to speak. This right can be taken up on the basis of other capital, not only linguistic. Norton views invested target language users as those who are able to value their own capital - their experience, skills and knowledge, for example – which they bring to communicative events. In so doing, they transform them into symbolic capital which they can then leverage as an affordance with which to take up subject positions from which to speak. The significance of capital and subject positions in relation to communicative competence is examined in the next section.

2.3.2.4 Capital, subject positions and communicative competence

Subject positions are of particular importance to individuals in multilingual settings (Pavlenko 2002). These individuals are involved in attempts to take up subject positions from which to speak, while at the same time, being positioned (not always in their favour) on account of their capital - linguistic or otherwise (*ibid.*). As already stated with reference to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of investment ([Section 2.2.2](#)), it is for this reason that Norton refers to identity as "a site of struggle" (2010, p. 350). For Norton, target language users are in a constant struggle to reframe themselves, and in so doing, attempt to take up subject positions from which they can present themselves as legitimate speakers (Norton 2014a).

This is such an important process that Norton suggests it becomes part of a target language user's communicative competence, to complement accurate and appropriate target language use (Norton Pierce 1995). I will argue that a particular type of communicative competence relevant to Facebook utilisation is necessary for investment in target language use on this platform. This communicative competence includes a target users' ability to harness their social and linguistic capital to make, and take up, opportunities for English language use within the specific contexts of Facebook usage.

Norton's perspective on identity is not limited to the language, discourse and capital. Also important is the target language user's imagination. The next section comprises an outline of how the concepts of imagined identity, imagined communities and Markus and Nurius' (1986) concept of dreaded possible selves impact investment in target language use.

2.3.3 Imagination: imagined communities, imagined identities and possible selves

Influenced by Anderson (1991), Norton's theorisation of identity encompasses the imagination. One's identity is influenced by the "imagined communities" one constructs (Kanno and Norton 2003). These are "groups of

people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of our imagination” (*ibid.*, p. 241). They encompass affiliations which cannot be experienced in their entirety, such as nationality, but which nevertheless impact how we view ourselves (Anderson 1991; Kanno and Norton 2003).

For Norton, of particular significance to investment and target language users are the imagined communities, such as economically secure communities, these individuals aspire to join once competence in the target language has been achieved (Kanno and Norton 2003). Target language users can also aim to re-join imagined communities, such as professional groups, with which they have lost touch, possibly as a result of migrating to host countries in which the languages they speak do not act as capital with which to gain employment (*ibid.*; Norton 2013).

Implied in the concept of imagined communities is that of “imagined identity” (Norton and Williams 2012). This is a future identity, or “identity options” (Norton 2008, p. 4), one aspires to embody in time to come within one’s imagined community. An imagined identity can be constructed around professional aims or more personal aspirations (Kanno and Norton 2003).

Imagined communities and imagined identities act, therefore, as a spur to investment in target language learning and practices (Pavlenko and Norton 2007). This element of investment offers the hope of achieving desired subjectivities in the future. Should these subjectivities not be realized, however, the opposite can be true, and target language users may take action to avoid using the target language (Kanno and Norton 2003).

Another link between the imagination and identity construction is presented with Pavlenko and Norton’s (2007) reference to Markus and Nurius’ possible selves. These:

represent individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation

(Markus and Nurius 1986, p. 954)

As with imagined identities, possible selves act as drivers for action, and are directly linked to subjectivities one would like to attain in the future. Possible selves arise within the structures and restrictions of a social context. They are influenced by one's social and cultural milieu in that one is able to look around and select individuals who one would like to emulate in the future (Markus and Nurius 1986).

Past selves can also be possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986). One can desire to become again what one was, or to avoid becoming that once more (*ibid.*). Possible selves are not solely positive. The concept also encompasses the "dreaded possible self" - "the alone self, the depressed, the incompetent self, the alcoholic self, the unemployed self" (*ibid.*, p 954). The desire to avoid negative possible selves can be a significant impetus for action. Indeed, the importance of the concept of possible selves is that it links the present self with possible future selves. It provides criteria with which we are able to evaluate the present, and take steps to draw near or to avoid imagined futures based on that evaluation (Markus and Nurius 1986).

From my reading of Norton, her reference to possible selves in Pavlenko and Norton (2007) is the only time investment is linked to fear. Typically, investment is associated with positive engagement in practices which will lead to opportunities which will help establish an enhanced sense of self. I would like to argue in my analysis, however, that investment can be equally directed at the avoidance of negative outcomes, as the accomplishment of positive ones.

To summarise this section on Norton's conception of identity, Norton views identity as a social process, not as an innate and unchanging characteristic. Target language users are constituted, and attempt to constitute themselves, within language and discourse. Language, therefore, is an essential element of identity. While target language users may lack linguistic capital as characterised as dominant competence in a standard form of language, if they are able to use the target language appropriate to a situation, and draw

on their social capital, they can take up subject positions from which to command the right to speak.

The imagination also plays a role in the production of target language users' identity. Who they aspire to be, the communities they wish to join or re-join, the possible selves they wish to become or avoid becoming are aspects of identity that impact investment in target language practices. On a more tangible plain, Norton conceives of identity as produced in relation to the communities we find ourselves in or which we seek to join.

Norton, therefore, posits a complex sociocultural theory of identity. Influenced by language and discourse, target language users' identities are framed through the evaluation of the capital they bring to communicative events. In this way, they can be positioned as legitimate or illegitimate users of the target language, which, consequently, impacts their opportunities for language use. Also at play in their identity construction is target language users' imagination. The types of futures they see as possible, both positive and negative, and the imagined communities they aspire to join, also comprise their identities and impact their investment in target language use.

Retaining a focus on the identity and capital elements of Darwin and Norton's expanded model of investment, I now move to the online arenas of this research, SNSs, and examine how identity is produced in these contexts, and outline how this impacts the way in which identity production in SNSs spaces should be considered in relation to my analysis.

2.4 Identity construction in social network sites

As this research concentrates on investment on SNSs, my theoretical framings of identity need to encompass how these spaces impact identity construction. The next sections, therefore, comprise a shift in focus from philosophy and education to communication and new media studies. These sections (2.4.1 – 2.4.1.4) outline boyd's (2014) four affordances of SNS use: visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability. With emphasis on

these affordances, the theoretical framings move into concentrating on the significance of the sociomaterial for investment in English on Facebook. This is followed by a discussion of how these affordances impact identity construction on SNSs.

2.4.1 boyd's social network site affordances

SNSs are places of identity construction (Donath and boyd 2004; Trottier 2014). In these spaces, we know we are being watched and we construct our identities accordingly (Marwick 2012). Integral to the manner in which we perform identities online is the infrastructure of the platform being used, and the affordances that infrastructure provides. boyd (2014) has identified several affordances of SNS use which have an impact on online identity construction.

Drawing on Gibson (1986, p. 127), affordances are “properties” an environment “offers” which enable certain actions. For example, a pen affords the ability to write, when used by a person who is literate. An affordance, therefore, provides potential for action that arises from the mutual relationship between the object, the user and its intended use (Schrock 2015). Consequently, the potential of any affordance lies in the relationship between the object and the user (Gibson 1986). That user needs to be able to recognise an affordance within an object for the affordance to be realised (*ibid.*). In this way, the boundary between user and object, between subject and object is blurred (*ibid.*).

boyd (2014) assigns four “affordances” to SNS spaces. These affordances enable and can even encourage “certain types of practices, even if they do not determine what practices will unfold” (*ibid.*, p. 10). They comprise:

- *persistence: the durability of online expressions and content;*
- *visibility: the potential audience who can bear witness;*
- *spreadability: the ease with which content can be shared; and*

- *searchability: the ability to find content.*

(boyd 2014, p. 11)

Persistence:

Unlike spoken, unrecorded interaction, SNS communication remains visible long after it has been published due to the affordance of persistence. For this reason, SNS users are often “on the record” (boyd 2014, p. 11). Their content can be revisited long after it has been composed and published.

Visibility

SNS communication is also visible as it is often produced for an audience (boyd 2014). This audience can comprise consciously selected individuals, individuals unknown to the SNS user, or both. The affordance of visibility is so important to SNSs such as Facebook that default settings maximise it; one has to consciously make the effort to change one’s privacy settings to maintain control over one’s visibility on the platform.

Spreadability

The concept of sharing, the backbone of SNSs, is the driver of the affordance of spreadability (boyd 2014). Facebook’s “Share” button enables automatic dissemination of content across one’s network of friend connections, and beyond, dependent on one’s settings. In addition, content can be copied and pasted, and so easily moved from one context of online publication to another (boyd 2014).

Searchability

SNS content also has the affordance of searchability. Unless one eliminates this possibility via one’s privacy settings, Facebook content can be made searchable, or “traceable” (Beaulieu and Estalella 2012, p. 28) by search

engines such as Google. Even within Facebook, one can search for specific content within the groups to which one belongs, and also search a friend connection's content for specific items, if that person has enabled this functionality.

Highlighting the affordances which are integral to SNS use brings into sharp focus the difference between online and offline communication. I will argue for the significance of these affordances in relation to participants' investment in English on Facebook.

The next section of this chapter retains a focus on boyd's affordances. I relate how these affordances, in particular visibility and persistence, impact identity construction on SNSs. There will be a focus on the deliberate, mediated, curated, co-constructed nature of identity construction on social media, as well as the significance of the existence of an audience on identity construction.

2.4.1.1 Identity construction on SNSs: deliberate and mediated

Identity construction on SNSs is deliberate. In offline spaces, we can be present without having to make an effort: we are visible and can be heard because we take up and share physical space. One does not have to draw attention to oneself to be present. SNSs are different, however, in that a concerted effort must be made to exist in these spaces. As Sundén (2003, p.13) writes, to be online, one has to "type oneself into being". By "deliberate", therefore, I mean that one has to decide to produce oneself online - one has to engage in actions of visibility in front of an audience in order to exist there (boyd and Ellison 2008).

As the phrase *type oneself into being* suggests, identity construction on SNSs is mediated by the functionality of the platform being used (Rainie and Wellman 2014). One is made visible in certain ways dependent on the site's functionality - what the platform allows one to do. Facebook, for example, enables multimodal communication. Users can present themselves through

semiotic resources other than text. They can post photographs, add links to digital content, and upload their own video content. The ability to make oneself visible through such multimodal content suggests that Sundén's (2003) typing oneself into being could be replaced with *posting oneself into being*.

Algorithms are also at play in the construction of identity on SNSs. As stated in [Section 1.3.1](#), prior to the implementation of the news feed, Facebook users needed to intentionally seek out content on their friend connections' timelines (Ellison and boyd 2013). However, algorithms now surface content dependent on previous use of the platform. For example, my Facebook friend connections are presented with my content on their news feeds dependent on their interest (or disinterest) in my posts as evidenced by algorithmic analysis of their Likes and their other reactions to my content. As a result, I am posted into being on their Facebook spaces through the filter of machine learning. My online identity is not only formed by what I post, but also by what Facebook algorithms select from my content to present to my friend connections. Because my existence online is dependent on my visibility, I am constructed on their Facebook spaces, in part, through the platform's algorithms (boyd *et al.* 2014).

Not only is a Facebook user's identity mediated in its presentation to others, but it is also mediated as it is presented to oneself. Reactions to one's content via comments, Likes, emojis are indications of who is interested in ones' content, and, by extension, to whom one is meaningful as a person (Zuboff 2019). That is, subject positions on Facebook are reflected back to the user via feedback on one's content. Therefore, not only do Facebook users post themselves into being, but they are also *posted into being* through audience reactions. They are made visible to themselves as particular subjects via the reactions of their audience. In this sense, they *read themselves into being*.

2.4.1.2 Identity Construction on SNS: Curated and co-constructed through impression management

Engaging in SNS communication has been described as an act of curation (Darvin 2016; Trottier and Lyon 2011). One can curate one's identity through the thoughtful selection of content published on one's profile, through the posting of images, and the type of content one "likes" or shares. Through these actions, users are able to emphasise particular aspects of their identity, that is, their different subjectivities (Rainie and Wellman 2014).

This online curation of identity encompasses acts of impression management. Impression management refers to the manner in which one aims to project oneself to others (Goffman 1959). Offline, it can be manifested via "sign vehicles" (*ibid.*, p. 1), such as one's appearance and tone of voice. On SNSs, impression management not only entails the curation of one's identity through one's own content, but it is also dependent on the actions of others with whom one is connected (boyd 2006b). The friend connections one makes, their content and the manner in which these individuals react to one's own content all impact the ability to control the impression one makes online (*ibid.*). The affordances of visibility and persistence, the fact that our audience is able to draw conclusions about us from our own published content and the content of those with whom we are connected (*ibid.*), means that our online identities are constantly being co-constructed through our own actions, the actions of friend connections, and the reactions of those friend connections as an audience (Marwick and boyd 2010).

The aim of impression management is not only to make a good impression, but also to avoid making a bad one (Marder *et al.* 2016b). Behaviour on social media can be influenced by a "chilling effect": "the normalizing of behavior when under surveillance, in line with perceived standards, expectations and values of the perceived surveyor" (*ibid.* p. 583). The chilling effect is aligned with the prevention of negative feedback to one's content and can lead to self-censorship online (see [Section 2.4.1.4](#) below).

The chilling effect can be equated with a person's desire to avoid dreaded possible selves ([Section 2.3.3](#)). In both cases, steps are taken by the individual to avoid a particular undesired imagined future.

Identity construction online, which includes impression management, is therefore socially and materially constructed. Affordances arise out of the functionality of SNSs platforms. Persistence, visibility, spreadability and searchability are properties which exist because of our interaction - and the interaction of other human beings - with SNS functionality. Mindful of how these affordances can produce us in SNS spaces, we attempt to maintain control of our (online/offline) selves through impression management.

The extent to which SNS users are successful in such endeavours is not dependent on their human agency alone. They have to encompass the functionality of the infrastructure which mediates their being online. They also have to include the influence of that which can view, can share, can search and can amplify us online: that which is both spectator and supporting player in their digital performances – the audience.

2.4.1.3 Identity construction on SNS: Imagined audience

The significance of the imagination has already been noted with reference to investment, imagined communities and imagined identities ([Section 2.3.3](#)). The imagination also plays a role in identity production on SNSs. One's success with regard to impression management is linked to one's audience. Depending on privacy settings and the number of friend connections, SNSs provide users with potentially large audiences. Such an audience can comprise individuals from diverse areas of one's life, all potentially with differing views of that individual. Yet, while one may be visible to one's audience, one's audience in its entirety is not visible to oneself at the time of content production and publication. The affordances of visibility, persistence and searchability result in an unpredictable and unstable audience which the SNS user can never fully anticipate.

As boyd (2007) notes, producing content for such an audience has a journalistic quality. It is impossible to meet the individual expectations of each friend connection with whom one is engaging; therefore, unless directly addressing an individual or a group of individuals, the user imagines an audience (Litt 2012).

This does not mean there are no clues to help SNS users engage in this imagination of their audiences. Indications that aid the production of the audience can be found in various places, one such being SNS policies. For example, Facebook stipulates the use of real names, as opposed to pseudonyms, on signing up for an account (Litt 2012). The infrastructure of the site is also relevant. This governs the manner in which users can interact with each other, and provides further evidence for how to imagine one's audience (*ibid.*). For example, the type of emojis available for use and how they are used reflect back on the audience and signal the type of audience one has.

The norms of use associated with each SNS also influences one's imagined audience (Litt 2012). The user develops a perception of these norms through the visibility and persistence of friend connections' content; that is, a user gains a feel for how to act in an online space through exposure to published material (boyd 2014). Users observe how others behave, and act accordingly, thus aligning themselves with SNS norms (*ibid.*). In so doing, individuals publish content which they feel will be acceptable to potential readers (boyd 2007; boyd and Ellison 2008; Marwick and boyd 2010). With one's identity established via posting oneself into being, and the expectation of being read into being by a prospective audience, the imagined audience and its norms and expectations also impact identity construction on SNSs. As will be shown in the discussion of findings, how one expresses one's subjectivities online is, therefore, co-constructed with the perceived expectations of one's audience.

2.4.1.4 Identity construction on SNS: Context collapse and being read into being

It is not only the imagined audience that is involved in the production of identity in SNS spaces. The permeability of boundaries between audience groups is also productive of identities in these areas. SNS use facilitates communication between the one and the many: between the user and their friend connections. While Facebook provides the functionality with which one can limit one's audience through use of privacy filters, one's visibility is increased if one posts to multiple people simultaneously. As noted above, a result of such a broadcast style of communication is that individuals, or groups of individuals, from diverse areas of one's life have access to the same post, with the same content. This can lead to "context collapse" (boyd 2014, p 31).

A context collapse occurs when people are forced to grapple simultaneously with otherwise unrelated social contexts that are rooted in different norms and seemingly demand different social responses (boyd 2014, p. 31). A post, therefore, can be interpreted very differently by the various people who constitute one's friend connections. This means one can be read into being in different ways, depending on who is engaging with the content.

Also significant is the temporal element of context collapse. Because SNS content is persistent, searchable and spreadable, one can be read into being with content posted long before it is accessed by, for example, a new friend connection (boyd 2014). In such circumstances, one's SNS identity is apt to be constructed by one's audience based on a reading of content that is outside the temporal context of that content's production and publication.

The avoidance of the misunderstandings which can arise as a result of online identity production, or posting oneself into being and being read into being, in an environment of context collapse, requires the employment of certain strategies (Fulton and Kibby 2017). Facebook users, for example, can make use of the platform's infrastructure and use privacy filters to target a limited number of Friends.

Research also indicates that self-censorship is another way to manage context collapse (Das and Kramer 2013; Hargittai and Marwick 2016; Lampinen *et al.* 2009; Trottier 2012). This involves avoiding potentially controversial topics such as religion and politics; eschewing the publication of content of an emotional type (Hargittai and Marwick 2016) and of content that might result in future repercussions (Trottier 2012). In both instances, the avoidance of dreaded possible selves is achieved by making oneself less visible.

Overall, it can be seen that identity as produced on SNSs is deeply bound up with digital infrastructure of the platform and the affordances which arise from that infrastructure. To be online, that is, to produce oneself on SNSs, one must deliberately post oneself into being with the multimodal communication tools provided by the platform. In a mediated environment of visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability, one is read into being not only on the basis of one's own content and actions, but also on those of the users to whom one is connected. This reading into being is carried out by a potentially diverse audience with a variety of expectations of how the SNS should be used and with preconceptions of how their friend connections should comport themselves therein. It is impossible, therefore, to consider identity production on SNS without taking into consideration the material environment in which it occurs. One does not post oneself into being *on* a SNS as much as *with* it.

This intricate interlinking of factors which gives rise to identity production on SNSs has led me to look for a way beyond poststructuralism to posthumanism in order to theorise my participants' investment in English on Facebook. This chapter now moves to present a discussion of elements of posthumanist thought which are used, alongside poststructuralist and Bourdieusian ideas, in the analysis presented in this thesis.

2.5 Posthumanism

As has become evident from the previous content on identity construction on SNS, the infrastructure of the online platform and the affordances it gives rise to are critical for an understanding of identity construction on social media. Poststructuralist conceptions of identity, with their emphasis on the importance of language and discourse, cannot do justice to the complexity of identity construction in the digitally-mediated spaces of SNSs. To address this situation and account for the importance of matter, not only for identity construction on SNSs, but for investment in target language use in its entirety in these contexts, my theoretical framings have expanded beyond investment to encompass a posthumanist stance. The following sections provide a definition of posthumanism, including essential factors such as the assemblage / phenomenon, relata, and affects / intra-actions. An outline of how subjectivity is considered from a posthumanist perspective is then provided. The section concludes with my own theoretical framing of identity.

2.5.1 Posthumanism and the turn to matter

Posthumanism is an umbrella term that encompasses various “theoretically diverse” (MacLure 2013, p. 659) ontological and epistemological positions which share a number of fundamental tenets (Coole and Frost 2010). Actor Network Theory (Latour 2005), new materialisms (Coole and Frost 2010; Fox and Alldred 2017), nomadic theory (Braidotti 2011), agential realism (Barad 2007) and post qualitative inquiry (St. Pierre 2019) are some of the perspectives encompassed by the term “posthumanism”.

Underlying posthumanist thought is the importance of matter. This “turn to matter” (Fox and Alldred 2015 para. 2.1), influenced, in part, by poststructuralist thought, involves thinking about human agency and subjectivity in new ways (Fox and Alldred 2015). Guided by the work of Spinoza (1632-1677) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), posthumanism rejects the Cartesian dualism of mind versus matter in preference of a flat

ontology which sees no separation between mind and matter (Fox and Alldred 2017).

At the same time, humanist anthropocentric perspectives are challenged (Pennycook 2018). While language and discourse are still seen as significant for an understanding of social reality, posthumanism aims to extend “discussions about culture, subjectivity, identities and bodies” (Clough 2008, p. 1) which had already commenced with poststructuralism by reintegrating the material as salient to these debates (Coole and Frost 2010; Fox and Alldred 2015). Matter, all matter, can therefore be considered to be productive of the social world (Barad 2007; Fox and Alldred 2017). A posthumanist approach focuses on matter in relation to, and in connection with, other matter (Martin and Kamberelis 2013). It is not interested in what matter is, but what matter does (Barad 2007).

2.5.2 The assemblage / The phenomenon

Crucial to an understanding of posthumanist thought is the concept of the assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), or a phenomenon (Barad 2003, 2007). An assemblage, or a phenomenon, is a constantly changing amalgamation of “relata” (Barad 2003, p. 815) - entities existing in relation to each other. These can be tangible (for example, books, computers, people) and intangible (ideas and emotions). These entities are engaged in a dynamic and continuous process of entanglement (Barad 2007) - conjoining and detaching processes which fuel the productive power of the assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 3) describe the assemblage as an “*abstract machine*” (emphasis in original) which encompasses productive processes of differentiation and consolidation.

Entities within an assemblage have affect, that is, they can impact, and be impacted by, each other (Barad 2007; Deleuze and Guattari 1987). All matter, human or non-human, tangible or intangible, within an assemblage is

affective (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, p 2). Within the rhizomatically³ structured assemblage, any affect has the potential to engage with, and influence, any other affect via “flows of affect” (Fox and Alldred 2017, p. 104). These flows produce “capacities” (*ibid.*), for example, the capacity for action, for emotion, or for thought.

An assemblage, therefore, is a collection of entities linked by flows of affect which give rise to affective capacities. Barad uses the term “intra-action” (2007, p. 139) to describe the products of these affective flows. An intra-action is distinguished from an ‘interaction’. The latter refers to action that takes place in entities that are seen to exist prior to their interaction (*ibid.*).

Intra-actions, however, are productive of the phenomenon, or assemblage; that is, the entities within the phenomena are produced by these intra-actions. It is not enough to say that an observer and the object of observation are highly contextualised by the research event in which they are intra-acting (Fox and Alldred, 2017). More than that, they are produced as a particular observer and a particular object of observation by the entanglement of their intra-actions within the “phenomenon, event, or action” (*ibid.* p. 19). Reality thus becomes viewed as an “agential reality” (Barad 2007, *passim*) which cannot be divided along dualistic lines of causality. A social phenomenon does not pre-exist the intra-action between relata, nor do relata, in the manner they arise within the phenomenon as intra-actions, pre-exist the phenomenon. It is the change that takes place in relata as they arise as intra-actions entangled with other intra-actions within a phenomenon that is “constitutive of reality” (Barad 2003, p 817).

One also needs to understand the affect economy (Clough 2004) which links flows of affect (or flows of intra-actions). The affect economy produces

³ A rhizome is “an image of thought” (Holland 2013, p. 11); a network, like a root-system, of “omni-directional” connections (*ibid.* p. 38) which encourages us to look for how capacities are produced, as opposed to how structures are linearly organised.

change in entangled affects/intra-actions, and as such, is the motor of the assemblage (Fox and Alldred 2017).

A focus on the micropolitics of the assemblage uncovers how power travels through an assemblage. As Fox and Alldred (2017, p. 172) state:

a micropolitical reading of data [enables one] to understand what bodies and things in assemblages can do, and what limits and opportunities for action are available within an event.

Fox and Alldred (2017) also identify different types of affects (intra-actions). “Aggregating affects” (p. 85) are stabilising intra-actions in that they “act similarly on multiple bodies” (p. 102). There are also “singular affects” (p. 33). In contrast to aggregating affects, these are highly contextual, meaning that the capacity that arises from a singular affect is only influential in a local context. It does not impact bodies in a general manner (Fox and Alldred 2017). Singular affects can give rise to what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have termed a line of flight which produces capacities for new and creative ways of being (Fox and Alldred 2017).

Affects or intra-actions can also be understood in terms of relations of exteriority. This refers to the production of varying capacities dependent on the assemblage a relata is “plugged into” (Fox and Alldred 2017, p. 57). This occurs as a relata, entangled as an intra-action with new intra-actions within different assemblages, will produce new capacities (*ibid.*).

This is where matter comes to matter. It is not enough to look to language and discourse as manipulated by humankind as the font of reality. If matter entangled as intra-actions with other matter gives rise to reality, all matter, human and non-human, tangible and intangible, needs to be taken seriously as productive of the world. Matter is no longer merely considered to be a tool of the human hand, to be taken up, discarded and replaced with no impact on the action in which it is being used. Now both human and tool are entangled facets, co-produced in intra-action, giving rise to certain capacities for action.

Assemblages of intra-actions, therefore, are productive of the world (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Where structuralists and poststructuralists may look at

structures and constructs to explain the social world, posthumanist commentators will look to an assemblage (*ibid.*) or a phenomenon (Barad 2007). Thinking about the world through this concept means an acceptance of the complexity of being (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). No one element can be identified as the sole cause of an effect. Instead, one looks to the capacities that arise from the dynamic entanglement of intra-actions as productive of the world.

2.5.3 The posthumanist subject

The flat ontology of posthumanist thought - the lack of separation between mind and matter - gives rise to a particular view of the human subject and concomitant subject positions. Following poststructuralism, in particular feminist poststructuralism (Davies and Gannon 2011), the subject is viewed as fragmented, forever changing, and multiple, rather than singular, static and innate (Coole and Frost 2010). It is also perceived to be highly influenced in its construction by discourse and language (Pennycook 2018). Poststructuralists and posthumanist thinkers would largely agree that subjectivities arise through engagement with the world, and as such, they are performed (Barad 2007).

Where some poststructuralists and posthumanists may diverge, however, is with regard to their conceptions of the human subject as it relates to matter. Posthumanist thought holds that the subject arises from the affective capacities within an entanglement of all matter within a phenomenon (Barad 2003) or assemblage. Thus, the subject is not only a development of language and discourse, but also of the objects, practices and ideas with which it is surrounded (Brown and Tucker 2010).

This subject is stabilised through repeated performance within “regulatory practices” (Barad 2007, p. 62). Yet, at the same time, as it arises from an entanglement of intra-actions within an assemblage, intra-actions which are by their nature unpredictable, the subject is given an added dynamism in

posthumanist thought (Brown and Tucker 2010). As Hayles (1999, p. 3) states, the posthumanist subject:

is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction

There is no standing apart from the assemblage or phenomenon for this subject because it arises with the coalescence of intra-actions within it; the subject is produced through intra-action with the world (Barad 2007; Massumi 2015; Watkins 2010). The subject is not unitary, stable or unchanging, but emerges and dwindles through one's engagement with matter. Subjectivity, therefore, is best understood as a verb, a "doing" (Barad 2007, p. 62), as opposed to as a noun – an attribute.

Influenced by posthumanism and poststructuralism, I consider identity or subjectivity to arise within an assemblage of intra-actions. These intra-actions can involve the tangible and the intangible. On SNSs, the identity arises within a phenomenon of entanglements that include the digital (infrastructure or architecture of the platform), the social (friend connections and expectations between these individuals), the semiotic (the use of text or multimodal resources such as emojis), and ideologies or norms (expectations of how one should use a SNS). It is the mediated nature of SNS communication that brings to light the significance of matter - of all matter - in the process in which identity or subjectivity arises.

Identity is only one facet of Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. Within the next section I set out my own theoretical framings in relation to ideology as informed by investment, ideologies in relation to SNS, and posthumanist views on ideology.

2.6 Ideology and the new model of investment

Commencing with a brief review of ideology in Darwin and Norton's model of investment, the section goes on to concentrate on how ideologies impact the

target language user. Subsequently, in order to take into consideration the ideological underpinnings of SNS use, an outline of genres, media ideologies, neoliberal values and the design of Facebook infrastructure and how they impact SNS use is provided. Next, posthumanist approaches to ideological structures and norms which are relevant to this research are discussed. The section closes with my own consideration of ideology and its place within my theoretical framings.

As already noted, Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment considers investment as situated at the intersection of identity, capital and ideology. Ideology was significant in the former iteration of investment (Norton 2013) in terms of the evaluation of capital and subsequent subject positions made available to target language users dependent on that evaluation. However, the focus of the earlier model was on target language communication on a local level (Darvin and Norton 2015). Their new model seeks to extend this to the macro level to take into consideration the ideological impact of globalisation and associated developments in mobility and new technology in order to identify how these impact investment in target language practices (*ibid.*).

Following Bourdieu (1977b), Darvin and Norton (2015, p. 43) consider ideology to be a "normative set of ideas" constructed by symbolic or world making power. These ideas can impose particular versions of reality which we become disposed to accept as common sense through the workings of habitus (Bourdieu 1977b; Darvin and Norton 2018).

Darvin and Norton (2015) view ideology in the plural, preferring to refer to ideologies, rather than ideology. This is to emphasize ideologies as "a complex, layered space where ideational, behavioral, and institutional aspects interact and sometimes contradict one another" (*ibid.*, pp. 43-44). This processual rendering of ideologies enables Darvin and Norton to reframe them as dynamic and sometimes in conflict with each other, rather than "static [and] monolithic" (2015, p. 43). Ideologies do not only act in a top-

down manner - as in coercion - but, acting as “consent” (*ibid.*, p 43), they are also evident in consensual exchanges.

2.6.1 Ideologies and the target language user

As stated, a focus on ideologies also enables an understanding of target language users’ investment in target language practices in contexts resulting from heightened mobility which have arisen as a result of globalisation (Darvin and Norton 2015). Ease of travel (for some) and the development of online spaces has resulted in target language users’ increased ability to move between spaces and so potentially encounter a wide variety of worldviews in multicultural and multilingual contexts. It is crucial to consider how target language users’ “skills, knowledge and resources” (Darvin and Norton 2015, p. 379) - their capital - can be differently evaluated in such environments, and how their capital can be mobilised to enable users to take up legitimate speaker status (Norton 2017).

As target language users move between spaces, or in Bourdieusian terms, between fields, their capital can become “subject to different orders of indexicality” (Darvin and Norton 2016a, p. 28). Their investment in target language practices in such environments of mobility, therefore, may become more complex as they are required to activate their capital not in one ideological space, but many. As a result, the subject positions language users can take up are repeatedly influenced by ideological evaluations of their capital as these individuals move between spaces (Norton 2015). These individuals are, therefore, involved in a constant game of evaluation with the measuring instruments changing from context to context. As Norton (2015, p. 380) states:

As learners ... navigate across online and offline spaces, ideologies collude and compete, shaping learner identities and positioning them in different ways.

In this melee of mobility and shifting subject positions, examining a context of ideological forces and their impacts enables a targeted focus on power

relations within communicative events. Consequently, the new model of investment allows for an analysis of how ideologies, or “systemic patterns of control at both macro and micro levels” (Darvin and Norton 2015, p. 43) act to afford or limit access to target language practices and spaces. This is of particular importance to interaction in digital spaces in which investment becomes more complex (Darvin and Norton 2016a). This is because with more choice of communication options, and with the increasing “fragmentation” (*ibid.* p. 33) of the communication arena that this brings, it is easier to disengage from, as well engage in, communication. Learners have the power, therefore, to choose which areas in which to invest and from which to divest (Darvin and Norton 2015).

Having examined the issue of SNSs and ideological forces in relation to investment, I now move to a detailed consideration of these forces and how they impact behaviour in these spaces. This entails focusing on new media ideologies in terms of the design, infrastructure (for example, algorithms), and neoliberal capitalist ideologies that go to produce SNS use.

2.6.2 SNSs and ideologies and being read into being

There are a variety of ways in which ideological factors come into play in the use of SNSs. Rainie and Wellman (2014, p. 6) describe the formation of online social networks, which includes the use of SNSs in terms of “networked individualism”. This is an “operating system” (*ibid.*, p. 7) which encompasses how people use online tools to communicate. The choice of the phase *operating system* is relevant to how ideologies play out online as:

[i]t underlines the fact that societies - like computer systems - have networked structures that provide opportunities and constraints, rules and procedures

(Rainie and Wellman 2014, p. 7)

There are, therefore, rules to abide by when using SNSs. Jenkins *et al.* (2016) refer to these rules as “genres” (p. 65) or “styles and conventions” (*ibid.* p. 60) which are rooted in, and performed in the use of, online media.

Jenkins *et al.* (2016, p 65) characterise these genres not as “rigid formulas or sets of fixed and textual features”, but as dependent on the outlook of the reader. Genres arise, therefore, as a result of the “interpretative strategies readers bring to their encounters with texts” (*ibid.*) in social media environments.

As already noted ([Section 2.4.1.4](#)) it can be said, therefore, that, just as Facebook users post themselves into being, they are also read into being by their audience, and this reading into being is dependent on the poster’s compliance with the norms of the platform. Gershon refers to such norms as user-developed “media ideologies” - “beliefs, attitudes and strategies about the media they use” (Gershon 2010, p. 391). Such ideologies establish the acceptability of practices across different platforms (Gershon 2010). For example, such norms establish online spaces such as Facebook as “deliberately playful” (Pearson 2009, para. 30), or as places of relationship maintenance (Pearson 2009).

Unsurprisingly, SNS infrastructures also influence the norms of use that arise around these platforms (Thatcher 2004). These norms are grounded in the values of the platforms’ owners and designers. Facebook, for example, is an ideological space, influenced in its design by the Western-centric, neoliberal values of its founder, Mark Zuckerberg, and its designers - mainly young, white American males (van Dijck *et al.* 2018). The influence of these values is evident in the platform’s adherence to the ideology of relentless freedom of speech, for which it has garnered criticism in the era of fake news (Paul 2021).

Algorithms also influence SNS ideologies of use. SNS norms are developed socially, by observing other users’ content and communication styles (Gershon 2010). On Facebook at least, this content is algorithmically surfaced. As a result, what users are exposed to is not only dependent on the actions of other users, but is also reliant on machine intelligence. Algorithms, therefore, are also at play in the development of media ideologies and norms.

Another crucial ideological factor within Facebook is its commercial imperative. Facebook is a business dependent on the collection, amalgamation and sale of access to its users' data to advertisers (Couldry and Meijas 2019). Zuboff has characterised Facebook's business model as one of "surveillance capitalism" which "claims human experience as free raw data material for translation into behavioral data" (2019, p. 8). This data are then used by advertisers to sell goods and services back to Facebook users (*ibid.*). So important is the monetisation of its users' data that Facebook has been labelled an advertising company, rather than a communication platform (Fuchs 2017; Kirkpatrick 2010).

Facebook users, therefore, are involved in Facebook's neoliberal capitalist outlook: they are an essential factor of the company's business model. It is to Facebook's advantage to maintain users' attention and to encourage them to contribute to the site, hence the significance of the Like button. "Liking" content produces data. Hence one's attention is monetised: the more attention one gives to Facebook, the more Likes, or content, is contributed, and the more data is captured and access to it sold to advertisers (Gillespie 2018).

Sharing, or "spreadability" (boyd 2014, p. 11), on Facebook is also a key ideological component within its use. Sharing is crucial for Facebook's business (John 2013). A cursory look at Facebook functionality reveals it to include encouragements, of various forms, for us to share ourselves with the platform; for example, "Add photo here", "Like", "Reply", "Comment", "Add to your post" and, of course, "Share". Facebook equates sharing with caring (*ibid.*), in so doing, monetising emotion.

In order to keep its users sharing, whether consciously or not, Facebook is constantly updating its interface in an attempt to maximise data extraction (Trottier and Lyon 2011), because it wants its users to keep producing and consuming content in order to maintain its profits (Stutzman *et al.* 2012). This means that Facebook users comprise an attention economy in which their attention is constantly being demanded by new content (Kirschener 2015).

Facebook is designed to capture its users' attention and to gain their reactions as a way to maximise profits.

With investment arising from the conjunction of identity, capital and ideologies, it is clear that an analysis of investment in target language use on Facebook needs to take into consideration the ideological forces within this context. These forces include new media ideologies which develop from the influence of software designers and algorithmic decision-making, as well as the foundation of the site as a business enterprise within a neoliberal capitalist context. As these ideological elements encompass the materiality of the Facebook platform itself, its infrastructure and the behaviour the infrastructure affords, I am extending Darwin and Norton's (2015) concept of ideologies beyond the abstract - such as anticipated norms of language use - to include the sociomaterial elements of the platform infrastructure itself. This will entail a posthumanist approach to ideology.

The next section contains an exploration of the significance of ideological structures in posthumanist thought. In addition, I propose my own position concerning their importance in relation to investment in English on Facebook.

2.6.3 Ideologies, structures and posthumanism

It has already been shown that posthumanist thought looks to the entanglement of intra-actions within an assemblage to understand the production and functioning of the sociomaterial world, and how power is dispersed through it (Barad 2007; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Fox and Alldred 2017). As a result, for some commentators, for example Latour (2005), there is a reduction in the significance given to ideological structures such as neoliberalism and patriarchy in the production and reproduction of society (Fox and Alldred 2017).

Nevertheless, the new materialisms of Coole and Frost (2010) retain the salience of structures within its posthumanist framework. While structures are not viewed as the only explanation for sociomaterial reality, they remain

significant in relationship with other matter (*ibid.*). Matter is seen as having a direct influence on how these entities function (*ibid.*). As Coole and Frost (2010, p. 19) state:

For new materialists, no adequate political theory can ignore the importance of bodies in situating empirical actors within a material environment of nature, other bodies, and the socioeconomic structures that dictate where and how they find sustenance, satisfy their desires, or obtain the resources necessary for participating in political life.

Thinking in terms of ideologies and structures is still an important way to understand the routes and influences of power within society. They play a role in how we live in the world. However, their potency should not be overstated (Coole and Frost 2010; Fox and Alldred 2017). Instead of looking to how ideologies and structures construct the individual's relations within society, Coole and Frost's (2010) approach is to look at how matter is productive of them, and subsequently, how an individual lives within these sociomaterial entities. It is not enough to view reality as socially constructed, constructed from "ideas and beliefs" (*ibid.*, p. 25). There is also a need to focus on how life is lived by bodies and how these bodies are impacted by life.

Influenced by the new materialisms of Coole and Frost (2010), I consider ideological factors such as social structures and norms to be of importance to investment in target language practices on Facebook. I consider them to be intra-actions within assemblages; as such intra-actions, they can entangle with other intra-actions and so give rise to, or impede, capacities for investment in language practices. In this regard, I make a place for these ideological forces within investment assemblages, but I do not view them as overarching explanations for the workings and production of social reality.

The next section of this chapter comprises a change of focus. An awareness of Norton's perspective on agency is essential to an understanding to investment, whether the original iteration or Darwin and Norton's (2015) model. The final section of this chapter, therefore, contains an exploration of

Norton's view of the concept of agency, which I go on to align with posthumanist thought.

2.7 Agency

Although agency is not one of the three aspects of the new model of investment, it is significant in an understanding of this concept. This section contains an outline of Norton's understanding of agency in relation to Bourdieu's concept of legitimate speaker status. I offer an extended perspective of Norton's view of agency, based on Bourdieu's concept of legitimate discourse. I believe this view is more suitable to a sociomaterial perspective of investment than that offered by Norton. As a posthumanist stance underpins my theoretical framings, I then move on to outline agency from this perspective. The section concludes with my own view on agency as it appertains to investment in English on Facebook.

2.7.1 Norton, Bourdieu and agency

Underlying investment is human agency, which Norton characterises in this way:

the subject is not conceived of as passive: he/she is conceived of as both subject of and subject to relations of power within a particular site, community, and society

(Norton Pierce 1995, p. 15)

Norton goes on to state that a target language user's ability to use their own agency is explained by investment in target language communication (2016). That is, when one is invested in target language use, one is able to engage in the process of transforming one's capital into its symbolic form. Through this process, one can position oneself in such a way as to take up the right to speak (Darvin and Norton 2015; Norton 2013). Therefore, when one is invested, one has agency. While Norton does not explicitly define agency,

the above characterisation implies a typically poststructuralist view of the concept, as Miller (2010, p. 465) describes:

agency is discursively constituted as individuals position themselves and are positioned as (potential) agents within ideologically defined spaces

Consequently, for poststructuralists such as Norton, agency is considered to be discursively produced, and co-constructed within a socio-cultural milieu. Having said that, while Norton does not consider agency to arise solely from the human subject, she nonetheless gives weight to notion of the individual's ability to use their agency relatively unfettered. I see this as evident in the significance of counter discourses in investment in relation to Bourdieu's concept of legitimate speaker status. In spite of being customarily positioned as "illegitimate speakers of English" (Norton 2013, p. 168) due to unequal power relations within society, Norton nevertheless suggests that target language users only have to mobilise their capital, form a counter discourse through which to reposition themselves, and the right to speak will become available. Legitimate speaker status is available to all, therefore, if one only uses one's will to *lean in* and take it, regardless of the ideologies which may act as gatekeepers which debar one's access to it.

Gaining legitimate speaker status, therefore, becomes an act of will, regardless of the structures in place that might make it elusive. In my opinion, this is to undervalue the role of the audience within the concept of legitimate speaker status. Legitimate speaker status is dependent on the production and reception of legitimate discourse (Bourdieu 1977a). Legitimate discourse is characterised by several factors: it is "uttered by a legitimate speaker ... [and] in a legitimate situation"; in addition, it is "addressed to legitimate receivers" (Bourdieu 1977a, p. 650). The context of communication and the audience is therefore essential for legitimate speaker status to be achieved. As Bourdieu (*ibid.*, p. 649) states, "speech presupposes a legitimate transmitter addressing a legitimate receiver, one who is recognised and recognizing".

The relationship between the transmitter (the Facebook poster) and the receiver (the Facebook reader/viewer), within the context of communication is significant to this thesis. Because SNS communication is deliberate ([Section 2.4.1.1](#)), both need to recognise the legitimacy of the other for legitimate poster and legitimate reader status to be achieved, and with that, investment in target language use. Bourdieu likens this shared recognition of legitimacy to Homer's "*skeptron*" (1977a, p. 649), the symbol taken up by a speaker before an audience that indicates her/his legitimate speaker status, and, significantly, the legitimated hearer status of the listeners.

I will argue that on Facebook, both the poster and the reader are required to be endowed with legitimate status for an individual's investment in the target language to take place. In this way, Norton's concept of agency as act of will, albeit restricted by habitus and the evaluation of capital within a field, is replaced with a view of agency as distributed across the context of communication, the poster and the reader. I would like, therefore, to suggest that capital, in particular social capital, acts as a *skeptron* in Facebook spaces, providing target language users with the right to post, but only when they view their audience as legitimate. In addition, as this status is taken up in a context of digitally-mediated communication, the target language users' agency is also impacted by the sociomateriality of the infrastructure of Facebook. This factor is developed below.

2.7.2 Posthumanism and agency

From a posthumanist perspective, agency encompasses more than the human sphere (Coole and Frost 2010; Pennycook 2018). It is not a prerequisite only of "human intentionality or subjectivity" (Barad 2003, p. 826). Rather, it arises from entanglements of intra-actions (which can be human and/or non-human) within a phenomenon or assemblage. Therefore, it cannot be assigned to "'subjects' or 'objects' (as they do not pre-exist as such)" (*ibid.* p 823) beyond how they are produced as intra-actions. As such, agency is distributed across human and non-human domains (Bennett 2010).

This does not mean that all posthumanist thinkers assign agency in the same way to all matter: not all consider the non-human as having the same agentic capacities as the human (Appadurai 1990; Kipnis 2015; Miller 2005). For example, the applied linguist Pennycook, in his application of posthumanist thought to the area of second language acquisition and second language use is wary of giving objects ontological “equal weight” (2018, p. 10) with other matter. However, what is significant about the inclusion of the agentic capacity of matter - its ability to influence other matter - is the way that it impacts our consideration of meaning-making (*ibid.* 2018).

The significance of Facebook’s infrastructure and the affordances that it gives rise to has already been mapped out in [Section 2.4.1](#). The affordance of visibility, for example, has been shown to impact identity performance on SNSs. In addition, the neoliberal capitalist ideology foregrounding Facebook’s platform design has been shown to influence activity on the site ([Section 2.6.2](#)). The Like button, for instance, promotes ease of sharing, arguably detracting from the publication of considered written responses which would sap the resources of the attention economy. Consequently, the materiality of the platform itself impacts target language users’ agency when using the site.

I understand agency, therefore, as produced within assemblages comprising entanglements of intra-actions which produce certain agential capacities. Agency in relation to investment in English on Facebook has to be considered as distributed amongst the entangled intra-actions of these assemblages. This means that the capacity to take up the right to speak, to position oneself as a legitimate user of English on Facebook, the capacity to invest in that use, is also distributed across the sociomaterial intra-actions that comprise these assemblages.

2.8 Summary

To conclude, this chapter has presented and discussed the theoretical framings within which my data analysis has been conducted. Norton's original concept of investment in concert with Darvin and Norton's new model remain foundational theories within this thesis. Yet, as I have explained throughout this chapter, restricting investment in target language use to being produced at the intersection of discursively constructed identity, capital and ideology fails to encompass the full complexity of SNS communication, and therefore can only provide a limited understanding of investment in these contexts.

As SNS communication is mediated by digital technology, which gives rise to affordances and access to communicative functionality, investment in the use of any target language in these spaces has to take into consideration the impact of the sociomateriality that produces these spaces.

Identity (one of the tripartite factors of Darvin and Norton's model of investment) is conceptualised in poststructuralist *and* posthumanist terms in this thesis so that the sociomateriality of its production can be brought into the understanding of investment. In accordance with poststructuralism, I consider identity to be dynamic and ever apt to change. Retaining Norton's (2013) and Darvin and Norton's (2015) Bourdieusian thinking, identity is seen to be given social expression in the subject positions one is ascribed or able to take up founded on the ideologically-based evaluation of one's capital within a social field. One's imagination is also important for how one views oneself, both in the present and future, and, as Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest, it can act as a factor which inspires or inhibits certain action based on one's fears and desires for one's future self.

Where I deviate from Darvin and Norton (2015) is in terms of the significance of language and discourse in identity formation. I consider these to be important, but not foundational for identity production. The technologically mediated nature of SNS communication forces one to take the matter

involved in identity production online seriously. One cannot be online without this matter. Therefore, language and discourse are considered to be two intra-actions among many others which entangle to give rise to capacities for identity production online.

In accordance with Darvin and Norton (2015), I consider ideologies to be important to investment. They are involved in capital evaluation, and therefore identity production. Nevertheless, as I take a posthumanist stance to investment, the significance of ideologies is reduced. They have their place along with other intra-actions in the production of social reality. Restricting one's understanding of the productive capacities of the Like button, for example, to an emphasis on the neoliberal capitalist ideology within which it resides would limit one's understanding of its meaningfulness in society today. One also needs to develop an understanding of how the preponderance of the sociomateriality of the Like button across online spaces and platforms produces ourselves online, for example. I therefore view ideologies as intra-actions, and in so doing, reject any assumption that they can be looked to as an overarching explanation for social reality.

Finally, taking the agential capacities arising from entanglements of intra-actions of matter seriously has implications for how agency is considered. I view agency as distributed, rather than residing within the human will which is influenced by ideological beliefs and structures. Again, taking a posthumanist approach, human agency is understood as a capacity which arises from affective flows produced by entangled intra-actions. If being invested means one has agency, as Norton suggests (2013), and if agency is considered to be distributed across the sociomaterial landscape of intra-actions, then investment also needs to be considered as so produced.

Having clarified my theoretical framings, the next chapter presents a review of the literature salient to my research topic, investment in English on Facebook.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

With my theoretical framings established, I now move on to present a review of the literature salient to my research questions:

1. To what extent are users of English as a second or other language invested in the use of English on Facebook?
2. How does this investment arise?

The aim of this chapter is to locate these questions within the landscape of the literature. My research sits at an intersection between multiple disciplinary areas such as applied linguistics, academic literacies; anthropology, sociological research into digital education, communication and new media studies, social-psychology, human-computer interaction, and marketing and social media theory. Therefore, this literature review covers a complex terrain, which does not always lend itself to ease of navigation. As a result, there is a considerable amount of movement between disciplines within this review.

This chapter is divided into five sections. It commences with [Section 3.2](#) which presents an outline of the significance of investment in applied linguistics, in particular in relation to second language acquisition. This is followed by a review of Norton's research on investment in [Section 3.3](#). Homing in on Darvin and Norton's (2015) expanded model of investment, the next three sections concentrate on each of the model's components in turn - capital ([Section 3.4](#)), identity ([Section 3.5](#)) and ideology ([Section 3.6](#)). The aim of these sections is to provide a review of studies not only from applied linguistics and second language acquisition, but also from the areas of online language learning and social media studies in order to show how capital, identity and ideology are perceived from these disciplinary standpoints.

The majority of the literature presented here adopts a social constructivist and/or poststructuralist perspective. Nevertheless, there is a small, but

growing, element of second language acquisition and academic literacies research that takes a posthumanist approach. Therefore, this chapter closes with a review of such literature in [Section 3.7](#), with the aim to highlight the promise of this perspective for second language acquisition.

3.2 The significance of investment in second language acquisition

With her “seminal call to examine a learner’s social identity in relation to language learning” (De Costa 2010a, p. 100) in her article “Social Identity: Investment and Language Learning” (Norton Pierce 1995), Norton confirmed second language acquisition as an endeavour that should be firmly placed in the realms of the social. Prior to this, second language acquisition had veered towards a view of second language learning in terms of “linguistic input and output” (Norton 2015, p. 378) as opposed to considering language learners in relationship to their social context.

Norton’s ideas about identity and language learning came at a time when scholars were becoming increasingly aware of the need to focus on social interaction, and move forward from the psycholinguistic emphasis within second language acquisition that preceded it (Kramsch 2013). This “social turn” (*ibid.*, p. 194) arose with the translation of Vygotsky and Bakhtin into English which directed attention to second language learning as social practice (Kramsch 2013).

Norton’s theory of investment in language learning and use was inspired by her lack of confidence in motivation as a concept by which target language users’ employment of the language could be explained (Norton Pierce 1995; Pittaway 2004). For Norton, neither “instrumental” motivation (learning a language to achieve some form of tangible goal, such as to gain employment or a qualification), nor “integrative” motivation (language development for social integration) addressed her participants’ “complex relationship between relations of power, identity and language learning” (Norton Pierce 1995, p.

17). It was not enough to assign confidence or reticence in target language practices and learning to the character trait of motivation (Norton 2013). Rather, any understanding of target language user engagement had to also encompass power relations between target language users, their social identities, and their interlocutors (Norton 2013).

Early in her academic career, the influence of Norton's work on the field of second language acquisition became apparent. Her ideas about identity were the focus of a special issue of TESOL Quarterly in 1997, and in 1990 she won the Malkemes Prize as an emerging scholar (Norton 2019). Another special issue was dedicated to her work in 2008 (the Journal of Asian Pacific Communication), and in 2016, along with Ron Darvin, she received the "TESOL Distinguished Research Award" for the 2015 article introducing the new model of investment (Norton 2019, p. 305). As Kramersch states:

Once in a while, the scholarly work of a well-known applied linguist like Bonny Norton acquires a momentous historical significance because it captures an important shift in the spirit of the times

(Kramersch 2013, p. 192)

While Norton was not the first to highlight the importance of identity in second language acquisition (De Costa 2010a), she was influential in her approach to the concept. Her work highlighted the relevance of identity in terms of power relations by giving it a human face in the form of the five participants of her 1995 research (Kramersch 2013). Also, notable was that Norton made identity "contingent" (De Costa 2010a, p. 101). It was not to be seen as innate, but developed in context. Identity is complex for Norton, and impacts language learners in complex ways.

Norton's work has inspired research into various areas of English language learning, such as adolescent learners (McKay and Wong 1996); adult immigrants (Skilton-Sylvester 2002; De Costa 2010b) and learners in postcolonial settings (Flowerdew and Miller 2008). Norton's concepts have been used to understand users' relationships with languages other than English, such as Dagenais' (2003) work on French immersion programmes

and Potowski's (2004) study of Spanish/English immersion classes. Individual students have been the focus of studies on investment (Hajar 2018; Lee 2014), as well as groups of young bilingual language users in Japan (Kanno 2003) and a group of professionals in Canada (Cervatiuc 2009).

In order to provide a comprehensive perspective on Norton's original concept of investment through to her development with Ron Darwin of the new model, the next section provides an overview of Norton's application of investment within her research, including her developing interest in online language use.

3.3 Investment: Identity, capital and ideology

As stated in Chapter 2, Norton's highly influential article (Norton Pierce 1995), concentrated on five immigrant women in Canada, all ESL students. This poststructuralist longitudinal study focused on their socially constructed identities and how this impacted their abilities to take up opportunities for target language use. It is possible to identify a number of important aspects of this research which have been influential in Norton's subsequent work.

First (and as outlined in Chapter Two) is the significance of identity for the target language user: in contrast to assumptions inherent in structuralist theories of language, the target language cannot be understood as a neutral conduit for communication which has no impact on the user or her interlocutors. Rather, its use is intrinsically an act of identity, and one that requires language users to negotiate their identities in relation to their social context (Norton Pierce 1995).

These acts of identity negotiation lead to the most significant element of Norton Pierce's 1995 article. Based on Bourdieu (1977a) she proposes that target language use entails investment in one's identity as a target language user. This investment is in the form of a type of bargain: the target language user takes up opportunities for language learning and use dependent on the

gain they anticipate in return. This gain may take the form of access to a “wider range of symbolic and material resources” (p. 17).

Here the emphasis is placed on the importance of capital. As already described in Chapter Two, the target language user functions in a field in which their capital is evaluated. Investment holds that language users need to employ their capital in order to take up a subject position from which to speak. At this point, they have “the power to impose reception” (Bourdieu 1977a, p. 648). When target language users speak they do so from the subject position they take up, or are assigned, according to their social identity.

By way of an example, Norton Pierce (1995) provides the case of Martina, a non-native English-speaker and fast-food restaurant worker who was marginalised by her young co-workers. This marginalisation restricted Martina’s opportunities for English language use, and she was effectively silenced. Nevertheless, Martina pulled upon her subject position as a mother of girls of a similar age to her co-workers, and challenged her silencing. She was able to use her cultural capital as a mother, and transform it into a symbolic resource with which to impose reception on her colleagues.

In light of such research findings, Norton Pierce (1995) called for the need to broaden the concept of communicative competence. She suggested that it be expanded from a focus on the ability to produce accurate language, and comprehend and act upon it effectively. She envisaged communicative competence to encompass the ability to take up legitimate speaker status within communication, based on the subject positions available to the user dependent on the evaluation, and re-evaluation, of that language user’s capital within an ideological context.

A review of Norton’s work uncovers her developing interest in the application of investment in a variety of contexts of language use. In association with other scholars, she has focused on investment among middle school students in Pakistan (Norton and Kamal 2003), and young immigrant pupils in Canada (Norton and Vanderheyden 2004). Since her collaboration with

Kanno (Kanno and Norton 2003), the impact of developments in online communication have become evident in Norton's work. Exposure to expanded possible futures (made potentially feasible by engagement with digital technology) and its impact on investment, is evident in Norton's research in rural Uganda (Norton *et al.* 2011; Norton and Williams 2012; Norton 2014b).

In 2014, Norton published her first article with Ron Darvin (Darvin and Norton 2014). In this paper they drew attention to expansions in transnationalism made possible by the internet and cheap travel. With these increases in mobility online and offline mobility, target language users' capital can be subject to new evaluations as they move across ideological landscapes of language use. Drawing on Blommaert's sociolinguistics of mobility (2003), Darvin and Norton (2014, pp. 58-59) characterise target language users' linguistic resources as:

subject to different orders of indexicality, that is, their styles and registers, are measured against a value system that reflects the biases and assumptions of the larger sociocultural context

This can be a problem for these individuals if their linguistic resources do not travel well, and provide them insufficient capital to take up the right to speak.

In order to address the growing significance of capital and ideology, Darvin and Norton (2015) developed their new model of investment. As stated in Chapter Two, under the new model, investment lies at the intersection of capital, identity and ideology (*ibid.*). With this "multi-layered and multidirectional approach to investment" (Norton 2019, p. 305), the new model can be used to uncover flows of power "at both the micro and macro levels" (*ibid.*) and so identify instances and reasons for target language users having the opportunity to speak, or being subjected to silence, based on the changing evaluations of their capital.

The next section of this chapter focuses on the research conducted on the three components of Darvin and Norton's expanded model of investment: capital, identity and ideology. Commencing with capital, I pull on the literature

to show the significance of data-as-capital and social capital with regard to opportunities for target language use in online spaces.

3.4 Capital and access

In the era of globalisation and extended mobility, Darvin and Norton (2018) state that it is important to consider how target language users gain access to online spaces. The ability to use a language does not necessarily translate into opportunities for its use. The work of Blackledge and Creese (2008), Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) Norton Pierce (1995) / Norton (2013) and Pavlenko (2001) have shown that target language users' access to target language spaces can be limited by ideological evaluations of their capital. Access, therefore, is not only about being in the right place at the right time: it is also an issue of power.

3.4.1 Data-as-capital, social capital and access to SNSs for target language users

It has already been shown that Facebook relies on a constant supply of users' data as an element of its business model (see Sections [1.4](#) and [2.6.2](#)). It is to Facebook's benefit to make access to its platform as easy as possible, as with more access comes more use, and with more use, increasing levels of access to amalgamated data can be sold to advertisers (Kirkpatrick 2010).

Darvin and Norton's (2018) ask how target language users gain access to online spaces. The simple answer is data-as-capital. Data is the capital required to gain access to SNS spaces. This is a type of capital that one does not have to struggle to gain or have validated: it is ubiquitously dispersed among the human population by dint of existing and sharing their existence on SNSs. Within the neoliberal capitalist milieu of SNSs, users are able to exchange their data for visibility in the act of signing up for a SNS

account. The link between neoliberal market forces and SNSs enables access to these spaces (Fuchs 2017; Zuboff 2019).

With entrance to SNSs enabled, social capital comes into play. A reason to use SNSs is to engage in relationships. As the name suggests, the focus of social network sites is sociality: “social network sites such as Facebook are structured around the principle of sociality, the relations between self and others” (Bucher 2012, p. 479). People join SNSs to maintain and develop relationships (Rainie and Wellman 2014). Once joined, users can use their connections as resources and such resources encompass the further development of social capital (Ellison *et al.* 2007).

Research into SNS use established on the basis of shared interest or shared background indicates that these spaces can be beneficial in the development of social capital. Work by social media researchers Ellison *et al.* (2007) has shown that social capital can be developed through Facebook by way of providing access to information and potential new relationships. In the arena of language learning, research conducted by Akbari *et al.* (2015), Alm (2015), Arnold and Paulus (2010), Boon and Beck (2013) and Sebastian and Martinsen (2015) all found that the establishment of Facebook groups for language learning aided the development of social capital amongst their participants. This increase in social capital in turn extended their opportunities for target language observation and use.

Continuing in the area of applied linguistics, Shafie *et al.*'s (2016) investigation into Malaysian university students' investment in English language on Facebook produced promising findings in terms of social capital development. This study investigated “digitally wild” (Sauro and Zourou 2019, p. 1) Facebook use: that is, “informal language learning that takes place in digital spaces, communities, and networks that are independent of formal instructional contexts” (*ibid.*, p. 2). All their participants joined Facebook groups based on their interests. All participants were open to communicating in English with individuals within these groups.

Second language acquisition research has also favourably reported on the use of online spaces, such as Facebook (Kabilan *et al.* 2010; Mills 2009) and Livemocha, a language learning social network site (Brick 2011), on the basis that they offer access to meaningful communication opportunities in the target language. Blattner and Lomicka's (2012) investigation of English language learners in France and French language learners in the US, and their communication in a private Facebook group, found that participants enjoyed engaging in discussions and learning about French culture from French speakers. They appreciated the opportunity to use the target language meaningfully for a "real audience" (para. 29).

Having a *real audience* has also been found to benefit the development of learners' sociopragmatic competence - their ability to use language appropriate to the sociocultural context of communication. Significantly, this has been achieved through interaction with native speakers on Skype (Morollón Martí and Fernández 2016) as well as by taking advantage of being able to observe language on Facebook (Blattner and Fiori 2011).

Research into second language acquisition in online environments suggests, therefore, that online communication can aid target language users' development of social capital, and with that, it appears to address the perennial problem of providing such individuals with access to opportunities for target language use. However, even when access to SNSs is granted through data-as-capital, and social capital is available, such opportunities are dependent on the SNS activity of one's SNS connections (Bailey *et al.* 2017; Prichard 2013). This was made evident in Mitchell's (2012) research into the digitally wild use of Facebook by adult users of English. One participant's sporadic use of the platform was assigned to a lack of Facebook use by her friend connections.

Lomicka and Lord's (2012) investigation of Twitter use between native French users and French language users produced similar findings to those of Mitchell (2012). Although the non-native French speakers had access to social capital in the form of native French speaking followers, as the latter

failed to tweet, the language learners' opportunities to observe or use French were limited. Therefore, while data-as-capital and social capital can provide access to audiences for one's target language use, it cannot guarantee the rate of interaction of those audiences.

This situation is of particular relevance to Chinese nationals and their utilisation of Western social media. These individuals also have data-as-capital as a result of the neoliberal capitalist ideologies underpinning Facebook as a business. Therefore, they can gain access to potential English language audiences on the platform. However, this access is limited within China by the Chinese government's "Golden Shield" project (Rainie and Wellman 2014, 289) which blocks access Facebook and Twitter in China on ideological grounds. As a result, Chinese individuals, such as English students studying abroad, unlike their non-Chinese peers, need to develop social capital on these sites from the beginning if they want to use them to interact in the target language.

To summarise, SNS are an easily accessible space for target language users, due to the sites and the site users' being part of the neoliberal capital ideology that governs much online communication. Users can exchange access to their information for access to the SNS. Once joined, these arenas show promise for language users' ability to develop their social capital, and utilise it as a resource for language use and observation. However, such opportunities are dependent on these users' friend connections and these friend connections' manner of utilisation of the site, including their language use.

This section has concentrated on data-as-capital and social capital; however, these are not the only capital important in the literature on investment. As other types of capital are intricately linked to identity and ideology in terms of investment, these aspects of capital will be further addressed throughout this chapter.

The following section focuses on literature on identity as it relates to investment in a target language, both online and offline. This involves

attention being placed on the subject positions target language users are able to take up. The section then moves to concentrate on identity formation in online spaces, and subsequently, the subject positions these spaces offer target language users. I emphasise literature on digital vernaculars as they bring into sharp focus the material aspects of online communication and how they interact with target language users' identity production in these arenas. The section closes with the role of imagination in investment, the development of the SNS audience, and, ultimately, SNS user identities.

3.5 Identity

3.5.1 Norton, subject positions and target language use

As already explored in Chapter Two, poststructuralism views the human subject as discursively constructed through language, and so the subject is limited in its potentialities and imaginings through the normalising power of discourse (Norton and Morgan 2013). As such, language is not a neutral tool of communication, but an area in which one's subjectivity, or identity, is constituted. This leads to the perception of identity or subjectivity as one of change, multiplicity, dynamism, and sometimes, contradiction (Norton 2013; Pavlenko 2000). This stance is evident in Norton's focus on subject positions as a way to understand language users' identity or subjectivity, and it has been influential in second language acquisition research.

Research on contexts within and beyond classroom environments indicate that the subject positions available to language users are an important route into understanding their engagement with the target language (Menard-Warwick 2005). Within the classroom, for example, Morita's (2004) research into investment in target language practices demonstrated a link between students' ability to take up subject positions as legitimate members of the class, and so as legitimate target language users, and engagement in classroom discussions in the target language.

Cervatiuc's (2009) study sheds light on the importance of subject positions outside the classroom. Concentrating on "linguistic and cultural identity" (p. 254) she focused on a group of adult immigrants in Canada, all highly proficient English-speakers, who perceived themselves as professionally successful. She found that the creation of a discourse with which they could counter the marginalised subject position of non-native English-speaker was important for seeking out and taking up opportunities for English use. By recognising the value of their life experiences and knowledge (their cultural capital), these individuals re-positioned themselves as multilinguals who were in the process of successfully expanding their English language proficiencies. In doing so, they were able to gain access to native English-speaking social networks and take up the right to speak (Cervatiuc 2009).

While subject positions are crucial for engagement in a target language, they are complex, sometimes leading to an apparent contradiction between language users' desire to develop their target language, and their actions (McKay and Wong 1996; Norton 2013; Potowski 2004). A study by Cole *et al.* (2016) of first-generation immigrant middle school students in the US indicates the complexity of language learners' identities. They refer to Fernanda, a student who had been identified by her school as lacking English skills, but proficient in her primary language, Spanish. Fernanda took up different subject positions in relation to English and Spanish dependent on the social context of language use. Her example indicates the importance of the social context with regard to the subject positions language users choose to take up. Investment in a language is not all or nothing, but can be impacted by how one views oneself, and the subjectivity one wishes to express, in a particular context. Actions which may appear contradictory to others actually are indicators of the different subject positions target language users select at a given time.

Just as different subjectivities of the same student can lead to varying investments, the same can be said for subjectivities encompassed within a single classroom. Barse and de Jong's study (2008) investigated secondary Latino and "Anglo white" (p. 335) students learning Spanish in a

Spanish/English immersion language programme. The two groups included individuals who were invested in developing Spanish for different reasons. The Anglo white group saw ability in the language in terms of improved work prospects in the future. The Latino group was more invested in the language in relation to their present cultural identity, that is, their home, not their school identity. Varying types of investment, therefore, can be present in the same context of language use, dependent on the subjectivities involved in the process of investment.

Having outlined the significance of subject positions within the research on second language use, I now address identity production in online spaces. This requires a focus on research on SNS use both within ([Section 3.5.2](#)) and beyond ([Section 3.5.3](#)) second language acquisition contexts.

3.5.2 Identity production in online spaces

As stated in Chapter Two, identity on SNSs is curated and performed in the context of the platform's infrastructure. What one can do on a platform, the affordances that platform offers, is productive of one's identity in these spaces. The online profile, for example, acts as "a stage on which users can make public or semi-public presentations of themselves" (Wilson *et al.* 2012, p. 210). It is an area where SNS users engage in self-presentation because it affords this type of activity (Davis 2010). boyd and Heer (2006) characterise the profile as "a digital body, a social creation" (para. 72). It is a sociotechnical performance of identity (Trottier and Lyon 2011) which occurs in a digitally-mediated space, influenced by those who have access to it.

Retaining the use of poststructuralist and social constructivist perspectives, identity production in online spaces can be characterised as situated. What individuals bring to a digital platform, and who or what they attempt to be on that platform, is linked to socio-economic, cultural and historical factors inherent in each individual. Yet, it is also tied up with the infrastructure of the medium and the audience involved in the construction of that identity (Donath

and boyd 2004). The use of SNSs, therefore, involves social surveillance (Marwick 2012): we watch others and others watch us. It is in this context of mutual surveillance that identities are produced and performed.

In this context of visibility and mutual connection, new media research into identity has indicated that it is produced in relation to those with whom one is linked: it is co-created. boyd's (2006b) research into Friendster, a now defunct, but influential SNS, described the interlinked structure of users' content which led to the audience forming "an image of who people are through their Friends" (p. 9) as individuals navigated between profiles. Brandtzæg *et al.* (2010) arrived at similar findings in their social psychology-related research on Facebook use in relation to privacy and sociality. They highlighted the "co-creative way" (p. 1023) that identity is produced through one's own content, and that of friend connections' online reactions to it. Trottier and Lyon (2011) found that identity construction is not restricted to content: SNS users even use the number of friend connections to form an impression of each other.

The identity production of SNSs users is, therefore, impacted by their audiences. In addition, their identity performances can also be curtailed by it. Tied to friend connections by "nonymous" relations, (Zhao *et al.* 2008, p.1818) by which people known to each other can verify identity claims made, Facebook users are limited in the identities they produce. Nevertheless, they are able to perform different persona, or subject positions, in different online spaces, dependent, on the norms and expectations of the SNS of use (boyd 2014). This is the "*networked self*: ... a single self that gets reconfigured in different situations as people reach out, connect, and emphasise different aspects of themselves" (Rainie and Wellman 2014, p.126, emphasis in original).

To *be*, that is, to have an identity in social media spaces, therefore, requires engagement with an infrastructure which in turn provides an audience. SNS users' "existence is made possible because they exist in direct or perceived interaction with others" (Markham 2005, p. 795). It is a *being* which develops

in interaction with others and the functionality of the platform. Of course, this is the same context in which target language users produce their online identities.

3.5.3 Target language use online and subject positions

In order to understand target language users' engagement with the target language in online spaces, it is important to consider identity construction in these contexts (Darvin and Norton 2016a). A review of research on language learners' online interaction by Thorne *et al.* (2015) indicates that this context provides target language users "with a range of possibilities for engaged self-representation and the construction of identities as capable communicators" (p. 229).

SNS infrastructure provides particular roles for target language users. By affording, for example, the ability to post, comment, and share, related subject positions are offered. Language users can be publishers of their own content; they can become interlocutors with others by commenting; they can be friends by adding friend connections (Sockett 2014). They can interact, whether via written text or via multimodal semiotic resources such as emojis (Douglas Fir Group 2016). In this way, not only are roles embedded in the infrastructure, but the infrastructure also scaffolds communication (Sockett 2014).

SNS infrastructure also furnishes important routes for target language user validation. Vanek *et al.* (2018) investigated the use of a private Facebook group, associated with, but not restricted to, classroom use. This group was established for adolescent English language learners in East Africa. They found that participants felt their content to be validated by Likes and comments received. The more legitimisation, the more participants wished to post in English. This validation, enabled through the functionality of the site, encouraged engagement in English language practices on Facebook.

The affordances of SNS infrastructure are, therefore, important for language identity production. This is borne out in Tudini's (2007) research on Italian learners' use of chat rooms with native Italian speakers. Participants were able to initiate language negotiation, indicating a lack of domination of communication by native speakers. Tudini assigns this ability to take up the right to post to the asynchronous nature of online written communication. Asynchronous communication reduces the capacity of one interlocutor to talk over another, thus setting the scene for a certain equality of turn-taking (*ibid.*).

Already evident in these studies is the importance of the online audience in relation to subject positions available to target language users. It offers validation (Vanek *et al.* 2018) and opportunities for language negotiation (Tudini 2007), for example. The significance of the audience in relation to identity production on SNSs is explored in more detail in the next section.

3.5.4 SNSs, subject positions and audience

The relationship between one's perception of Facebook as a space for communication, one's audience, and subject positioning was also salient in Chen's (2013) research on Facebook. Taking a social practice view to language learner identity, its impact on the target language, and learners' social environs, Chen investigated two visiting students or "sojourners" in a US university and their investment in language use on Facebook. As sojourners, Cindy and Jane were temporarily resident in the US as part of their postgraduate studies. Chen identified significant differences between each participant's use of Facebook.

Chen found that reasons for Facebook use impacted literacy practices, which in turn affected the subject positions Cindy and Jane were able to take up there. Cindy, who experienced difficulties integrating into life in the US, used Facebook as a diary and as a place to express herself in Chinese. As a result, she was never able to view Facebook as a space which she could not

legitimately use in English; therefore, she always experienced herself as an English learner on Facebook.

Jane, in contrast, used the platform to make connections both locally and internationally, and to post on local and international topics mainly in English. Not only did Jane report that she felt like an English user on Facebook, but her manner of utilising Facebook indicated that she felt legitimized in using English on the platform.

Chen's work shows the significance of the SNS' audience in the production of subject positions from which target language users can take up the right to speak, or the right to post.

Klimanova and Dembovskaya's (2013) study also emphasises the importance of the online audience. They adopted investment as their theoretical framework for research into SNS use for Russian language development. Employing *VKondakte*, the Russian equivalent of Facebook, learners of Russian in a US university were assigned native Russian-speaking key pals (individuals who were learning English in Russia and Ukraine) and given communicative tasks to complete. The researchers found that the Russian language learners foregrounded and minimised particular subject positions (for example, Russian learner, American international student) as part of their communicative strategies.

Of particular significance was the positioning of heritage Russian learners⁴.
⁴One participant, Anna, was positioned as an illegitimate user of Russian, despite being a heritage user and having some proficiency in informal Russian use. Her native Russian-speaking interlocutor failed to recognise Anna's informal language use as cultural capital, and corrected her Russian language use. Power relations were clearly at play in this interaction with Anna attempting to position herself as a legitimate Russian speaker, and her

⁴ Heritage languages are those being learned for identity and/or cultural reasons outside the geographical area (country or region) of typical use; for example, Korean being learned by members of the Korean diaspora in the US (Dorian 2010)

interlocutor failing to validate this attempt (Klimanova and Dembovskaya 2013).

Klimanova and Dembovskaya concluded that *VKondakte* was not merely a place to practice one's language, but also an environment in which Russian learners constructed, claimed and withdrew "their first and second language identities when responding to demands of international momentum and/or the requirements of the assignment" (2013 p. 82). They expanded Prensky's (2009) concept of digital wisdom to encompass not only the cognitive augmentation that the digital holds, but to also encompass the social. They used this concept to highlight that a learner needs to be "digitally wise" (Klimanova and Dembovskaya 2013, p. 70) in order to make use of the opportunities digital technologies offer:

to legitimize his or her social power as an L2 speaker beyond the socially limited setting of the L2 classroom (2013 p. 70).

What Chen's (2013) and Klimanova and Dembovskaya's (2013) studies indicate is that target language users' online audiences retain a powerful significance within how they position themselves on SNSs. Their influence, in effect, contributes to the production of target language users' identities in these spaces.

Online language users and their audiences can develop particular ways of using the target language, as well as different genres of the language. The next section focuses on the literature on such digital vernaculars in relation to identity production in online arenas.

3.5.5 Digital vernacular literacy practices and identity

Many studies on language learning via new media are underpinned by social constructivism (Vygotsky 1978), emphasizing social interaction in online communities (Lee 2006). From this perspective, the significance of online communication is that it grants access to target language users of a higher language proficiency. In these environments, learners can interact with more

knowledgeable others, and so develop their language skills. However, another line of research has arisen; one that does not privilege the development of native speaker competence as the necessary result of online interaction.

With the rise in use of the internet, bringing with it multilingual audiences which can gather on the basis of shared interest (boyd 2014), researchers have become interested in vernacular literacy practices. These are literacy practices which do not privilege the development of native speaker competency. Vernacular literacy practices are defined as “rooted in everyday experiences and serve everyday purposes” (Barton and Lee, 2012 p. 283) and are produced voluntarily, circulate at a local and informal level, and are beyond the reach of formal social institutions (*ibid.*). Offline, they comprise artefacts such as notes, cards and diaries. In online spaces, they include the utilisation of multimodality such as photographs (*ibid.*) and emojis (Lantz-Andersson 2016); the deployment of “mixed -code variet[ies]” of multiple languages (Lam 2004, p. 45), as well as “peripheralized Englishes” (Dovchin 2020, p. 1). The latter are Englishes that contain features that are deemed lacking in grammatical accuracy, and in some way ill-formed (*ibid.*).

This is digitally wild target language use, as it sits outside the reach of the classroom (Sauro and Zourou 2019). Studies have found that the use of such digital vernaculars holds promise for language users’ ability to positively position themselves and take up the right to post. For example, while Lam’s (2000) investigation into a Chinese-American student’s interaction in a virtual community pre-dates the advent of Web 2.0, it nevertheless indicates how computer-mediated communication can enhance learners’ perceptions of themselves as successful target language users, without displaying native speaker-like language use. Lam investigated the online communication of Almon, a US high school student from Hong Kong. Almon felt marginalised in his language classroom due to his lack of English competence. Yet, by constructing his own website and using it to express himself with other individuals via a shared non-standard English variety, he developed a sense of pride in his English language ability.

Lam's (2000) research shows how an online context can help target language users reposition themselves from being people who struggle with the target language, to being individuals who are able to harness their capital, in Almon's case his computer skills, and harness it to find a context from which to post and an audience for whom to do so.

Lam's 2004 research project also focused on identity. Using investment as a theoretical framework, she investigated the chat room experiences of two young Chinese women in the USA. As with Almon, these women experienced difficulties communicating in English offline within their school environment. However, their membership of a Hong Kong chat room, one popular with immigrant Chinese young people around the world, enabled them to develop new identities as English-speakers which were not available to them offline. These identities were formed via the use of a "mixed-code variety of English that includes writing in romanized Cantonese" (p. 45). Through meaningful interaction with others within the chat room, the young women came to re-position themselves as bilingual (English-Cantonese) speakers, rather than non-native English language users. These identities impacted their language use offline, with them feeling more confident using English with their peers than prior to joining the chat room.

Black's (2006) ethnographic investigation of adolescent online fan fiction writers also highlights the importance of the development of digital vernacular literacy practices, with an audience, for production of legitimate language user identities. Fan fiction is a genre of writing where fans create their own content around TV or film characters and/or settings. Black focused on 'Nanako', a Chinese native speaker residing in the USA who published highly popular online fan fiction in English on a fan fiction website. Nanako made use of feedback from, and the support of, her readership to develop her English literacy and fan fiction writing skills. In so doing, she constructed a more positive English language user identity than she previously held. She was able to use the resources of the fan fiction site to build and project a legitimate identity as an English language user. While outside the site she felt like she was in a position of 'deficit' (Black 2006, p.181) compared with native

speakers, online she was able to perform another aspect of her identity, as a successful communicator and author.

Up to this point, the focus has been on target language user identity construction in the context of written textual practice. Barton and Lee's (2012) study, however, focuses on identity construction on Flickr, an online photo-sharing SNS. They studied content in the form of digital vernacular literacies posted on an English language using Flickr group. Research findings indicated that participants engaged in English language user identity formation through the vernacular literacy practices Flickr offered, for example, the construction of profile information, tagging, entitling photographs and posting comments. In the loosely constrained context of Flickr in which participants could share their creativity and have it openly appreciated by their audience, they were able to position themselves as legitimate and valued English language users.

These studies demonstrate the subject positions available to target language users as multilinguals in their own right, without comparison with native speakers. The environments of language use that chat rooms, websites and Flickr offered were constructed around shared interest, or shared background, and not centred on status as an English user. In these spaces, individuals were able to use their capital - their computer skills, their multilingual skills, their literary skills, their photography skills - as a reason to be part of a community. The significance of these studies, and crucial to this thesis, is the importance of matter in the production of the subject positions described. Software was also a crucial element of the development of an online audience (Lam 2000; Lam 2004; Black 2006); the use of mixed-code varieties of language (Lam 2004), as well as the ability to post oneself into being by way of images (Barton and Lee 2012).

The participants described in these aforementioned studies were able to take up subject positions in online contexts that were not available to them offline. It has to be said, therefore, that their online identities as target language users were produced in relation not only to the positive evaluation of their

capital within the ideological norms of their respective online contexts, but also the online technology that enabled their interactions. These online communities were dependent on digital infrastructures and internet connectivity for their existence. In these informal spaces, participants were able to take up subject positions as language users unavailable to them offline.

It is difficult to dismantle cause and effect linearity within these studies. To ask, which came first, subject position or online community or capital, only serves to illuminate the coalescent nature of these factors.

Also important to identity production in investment is the imagination: that of the target language user and of others whose imaginings impact target users' investment. This section on identity, therefore, closes with a review of the literature related to imagination, investment, matter and the online imagined audience.

3.5.6 Identity, imagination and investment

Norton has focused extensively on the link between Imagination and investment in target language practices (Norton 2001; Norton and Kamal 2003; Kanno and Norton 2003; Pavlenko and Norton 2007; Norton *et al.* 2011; Norton and McKinney 2011; Norton and Williams 2012). Investment can occur because individuals have constructed an imagined identity related to an imagined community which they wish to join or re-join, and they feel that target language learning or use can bring these imaginings into reality ([Section 2.3.3](#)).

Through acts of imagination, adult English language users are able to re-position themselves as belonging to an imagined community of multilingual speakers, as opposed to non-native English-speaking immigrants (Cervatiuc 2009). Pavlenko's (2003) research into language teachers' identities also highlighted the importance of the imagination for self-positioning within social contexts. She found that target language users can also be offered ways to

imagine themselves more productively during classroom discussion, and so re-position themselves. This re-positioning necessitates the reimagining of themselves as legitimate “multicompetent speakers” (p. 261), as opposed to non-native language users.

Pavlenko’s (2003) research clearly shows that the actions of others can have an impact on how one imagines oneself. The impact of other people’s imaginings on an individual’s engagement with target language practices is also evident in research by Dagenais (2003) and Kanno (2003). Dagenais (2003) studied immigrant families in Vancouver who had enrolled their children into French immersion programmes. Parents in these families were invested in a “transnational identity” (p. 280) for their children, which once developed through multilingualism, would enable them to join imagined communities of economic success. In contrast, Kanno’s (2003) ethnographic research based in four schools in Japan found that children were prepared for different types of bilingualism dependent on the schools’ imaginings for the child’s future. As a result, “in this stratification, it is the least privileged bilingual children who are socialised into the most impoverished imagined communities” (p. 285).

It is not only the imaginings of the target language user, therefore, that impacts their investment. As Pavlenko (2003) observes, imagination is more than personal and private, but has a social aspect. The socio-economic contexts surrounding the language user, and the imaginings of those who have the power to influence opportunities for language development, are also important.

3.5.7 Imagination, matter and investment

If, as research by Dagenais (2003), Kanno (2003) and Pavlenko (2003) indicate, there is a socially constructed aspect to one’s imaginings of self, it stands to reason that matter also should be considered as relevant to these

imaginings. What can be imagined is interlinked with what one is presented with as possible to imagine. This perspective reflects Appadurai's concept of mediascapes (1990) and foregrounds the relevance of matter to investment. Writing prior to the development of the internet, Appadurai describes mediascapes as "large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ethnoscapes" (p. 9) provided by mass media. This is a form of globalisation which functions through homogenising processes, for example, advertising, which act in the same way as Bourdieu's habitus. One becomes disposed to certain actions and ways of thinking as a result of exposure to such repertoires, which, eventually, influence what one can imagine for oneself.

The mediascape of mass media has now been augmented by that of the internet (Higgins 2011). It is an important arena in which target language users can broaden their imaginings of their futures (Darvin and Norton 2016a). Indeed, it is in the context of the use of new media and its concomitant hardware in relation to target language users' imaginings of future selves, that Norton, albeit obliquely, signals the importance of matter to investment. Her work on the implementation of a digital literacy course in Uganda showed how students' engagement with it helped to expand their imagined futures through their development of digital literacies. In this way, they were provided with a "wider range of identity options for the future" (Norton *et al.* 2011, p. 580).

Similar findings arose from research in Uganda on "eGranary digital portable library" (Norton 2014b, p. 111), a hard drive containing a multitude of educational materials and documents, which could be attached to a computer and accessed with no internet connection. Developments in participants' digital literacies through use of eGranary impacted existing language user identities as their new skills enabled them to develop a "trainer" identity (*ibid.* p.121) in the present. Individuals were also able to broaden their imagined future identities as eGranary use was associated with "improved academic performance, enhanced possibilities of employment, increased financial resources, and greater access to social networking" (Norton 2014b, p.122).

Access to material artefacts such as eGranary and the aforementioned digital literacy course further emphasise the importance of matter in investment in target language practices and learning. In practical terms, they enable the development of skills that can be turned into symbolic capital and afford access to employment and educational opportunities (Norton 2014b). In more ephemeral terms, they afford extension of what is “socially imaginable” (*ibid.*, p. 123) by providing exposure to other ways of being. As Henrietta, a participant in the Uganda research stated, she felt that “they had joined the group of knowledgeable people around the world” (Norton *et al.* 2011, p. 580), and with that, other opportunities could follow.

A stable theme within Norton’s concept of imagined identities is their futurity (Darvin and Norton 2016a). One invests now to draw nearer to an imagined future desire. The imagination also plays an important role in SNS communication, but its significance is not restricted to its impact on the future. The next section indicates the significance of the imagination within SNS communication, highlighting imaginations’ sociomaterial aspect within investment in target language use in these spaces.

3.5.8 Imagined audience online

Imagination plays an important role in SNS communication. As stated in [Section 2.4.1.3](#), the size and mediated nature of SNS use requires the production of an imagined audience. Social media researcher Eden Litt (2012, p. 311) defines the imagined audience as “the mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating”. The less tangible or known an audience, the more important the imagined audience becomes (Litt 2012). This is very important for SNS use as social media audiences can be large and potentially diverse (*ibid.*). As has been shown with reference to Norton’s imagined identities, the imagined audience is not produced in a social vacuum, but in a social context.

The sociomaterial circumstances of the online audience has implications for how it is imagined. With a lack of embodied paralinguistics such as tone of voice and gesture, the ability to effectively imagine one's audience and pre-empt what it expects of us is crucial (Litt 2012). This importance lies not only in enabling us to avoid unintentionally causing offence, but, as already shown ([Section 3.5.2](#)), because one's identity on SNSs is produced in relation, in part, to this audience.

A variety of factors impact the construction of the imagined audience. The SNS being used, the reason for its use, the affordances of the SNS, for example, tagging, sharing, and filtering our audience into groups (Tagg and Seargeant 2014), also, one's expertise in the use of that SNS (Litt 2012) are involved in the imagining of an audience. Moreover, this imagining is constructed with reference to the actions of friend connections on the platform. In this way, norms of use develop through the "technical affordances and immediate social context" (Marwick and boyd 2010, p. 115).

As SNS designers created these affordances, they are also involved in these imaginings. Depending on the inevitable social and cultural biases of those who design the infrastructure, social norms of use can be created by encouraging certain behaviours rather than others (Litt 2012). The manner in which audience members can react to each other, for example via Likes or emojis, all provide cues for how to envision one's audience (*ibid.*).

There are, therefore, many elements involved in the production of the imagined audience. Reasons for use, the functionality of the platform, one's friend connections and their actions, the beliefs of software designers – all these elements go to produce the audience. Put in more posthumanist parlance, these elements can be described as intra-actions engaging in (and disengaging from) affective flows which give rise to capacities for SNS users to imagine their audiences.

Research provides a view on how SNSs' imagined audiences give rise to certain ways of being in these spaces. Marder *et al.* (2016b), writing from the discipline of marketing, refer to the "strongest audience effect" (p. 57). They

found that Facebook users tailor their content to the audience members who are the most influential in their lives. They pay the most attention to these individuals, and self-censor or delete content accordingly, with their attention “determined by the perceived social and economic losses and gains that an audience has the power to inflict” (Marder *et al.* 2016b, pp. 56-7).

Tagg and Seargeant (2014), applied linguists working in the area of new media, also identify power relations at play in the construction of the imagined audience. They remind us that on SNSs, one’s audience may include “overhearers” (2014, p.126): individuals who are not directly addressed, but who nevertheless remain in the mind of the poster because of the assumptions they may draw from their content. This is an element of context collapse (Marwick and boyd 2010): when a variety of audiences have access to content ([Section 2.4.1.4](#)).

The imagined audience is associated with the “chilling effect” (Marder *et al.* 2016a, p. 582): the constraint of behaviour dependent on online surveillance ([Section 2.4.1.2](#)). This can result in “the normalizing of behavior when under surveillance in line with perceived standards, expectations and values of the perceived surveyor” (*ibid.* p. 583). The chilling effect is a type of impression management, but one that attempts to avoid a negative impression being made, as opposed to producing a positive impression (Marder *et al.* 2016a, p. 582).

Facebook’s news feed algorithm is also an important element in the production of the imagined audience. The news feed effectively produces much of one’s audience on the site (boyd 2014), so one’s imagined audience may not even be presented with one’s content because of the workings of the algorithm in relation to one’s friend connections’ interaction with one’s content ([Section 2.4.1.1](#)). In addition, as boyd (2014) found in her research on teenagers’ use of Facebook, one’s audience may comprise unanticipated individuals: people one has forgotten one is connected to. In addition, the highly transient nature of social media audiences (Markham 2005) further complicates the accurate production of one’s audience.

The imagination is, therefore, a potent factor for identity production online and offline. In both contexts, what one can imagine is socially constructed. Offline, it is impacted by discourses, and by the imaginings of others for us. Online, the same factors are salient, but more sociomaterial elements are also involved, such as algorithms and the design of platform infrastructure. The imagined audience, and therefore users' identities, are produced within infrastructures which, of course, are designed by socially and ideologically situated human designers (Litt 2012). It is crucial that this is understood, as while it is the imagined audience that guides one's SNS use, it is the actual audience that judges this use (*ibid*).

To summarise, this section has focused on the ways in which target language subject positions are constructed offline and online. The manner in which identity is mediated and co-created in online spaces means that the digital infrastructure, and the online audience are involved in identity production. The affordances of the infrastructure provide particular subject positions, such as content producer and consumer - positive positions from which to post oneself into being. Online spaces also offer extended imaginings for one's future identities. A supportive audience willing to share its interests can provide opportunities for target language engagement. Nevertheless, if the target language users' capital is not validated by the audience, as was the case presented by Klimanova and Dembovskaya (2013), target language users can fail in their endeavours to present themselves as legitimate language.

This brings us to the significance of ideology in relation to SNSs, and its impact on how target language users post themselves into being. The next section commences with an aspect of Norton's research uncovering ideological influences on investment in English in online spaces. Then, the ideological forces which underpin Facebook are outlined, along with their impact on the development of new media ideologies. The section closes with an examination of how ideologies impact opportunities for target language engagement in online spaces.

3.6 Ideology

3.6.1 Norton, ideology and investment

Crucial to a poststructural approach to language development is a focus on how language and discourse are at play in the:

constitution and reproduction of ideologies and social relations, and the role of language ideologies and social dynamics in the processes of additional language learning and use

(Pavlenko 2000, p. 87)

A focus on ideology allows us to concentrate on the manner in which power circulates in social practices within and beyond the classroom (Darvin and Norton 2015; [see Section 2.6.1](#)). That is, by taking into consideration the effects of ideology, it is possible to uncover the extent to which power is present in linguistic exchanges in which target language users are engaged. It can uncover how power has a role in the construction of subject positions and how it impacts language users' ability to take up the right to speak/post.

Ideologies have always been important to investment in their role in the valuation of language users' capital (Norton Pierce 1995; Norton 2013); however, they have gained particular salience in Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. As stated in Chapter Two, the new model focuses on engagement in target language practices in our era of extended mobility. In the transnational spaces, such as online spaces, that this mobility produces, multiple ideologies may co-exist in the same context. Target language users need to be able to navigate these arenas, and make use of their capital, even if its evaluation is unpredictable, in order to take up legitimate speaker status (*ibid*). At the same time, language users need to be aware of the ideological assumptions *they* bring to communicative events, and how these can impact their engagement with the target language (Darvin and Norton 2014).

To clarify the impact of ideologies on language user investment, Darvin and Norton (2015) revisit Norton *et al.*'s (2011) research into the development of

digital literacies in Uganda, juxtaposing these findings with another piece of research including Ayrton, an affluent Filipino teenager in Canada. Ayrton is able to utilise his economic and social capital to translate them into symbolic capital which gives him a sense of agency in his online entrepreneurial activities. This symbolic capital also enables him to position himself as a legitimate English user in these spaces. The neoliberal ideologies in which he is ensconced as part of Canadian society, as part of an online community, and as his father's son, also a successful entrepreneur, enables Ayrton to position himself as " 'an entrepreneur of one's self' (Foucault 2008)" (Darvin and Norton 2015, p. 51). His imagined future in banking is assured to Ayrton, in part because of the ideologies within which he lives (*ibid.*).

In Uganda, Henrietta lives under a different set of ideologies. She resides in a rural area which lacks the energy and digital infrastructures to give her easy access to the internet. Darvin and Norton (2015) assign the state of these infrastructures to discourses which construct rural areas of Uganda as less appropriate for government funding than urban areas. Such discourses and their concomitant ideologies which obstruct Henrietta's online access, result in her self-positioning as "not sufficiently 'knowledgeable'" (*ibid.*, p. 49). Ideologies, therefore, directly impact her perception of herself.

Ideologies have been raised as important factors in target language user identities in a number of contexts. Chun (2016) has written compellingly on the neoliberal ideologies which are evident in the positioning of English language learners. With the commercialisation of English language education, in particular in the private sector, English proficiency comes to be portrayed as a commodity which can be bought. Under this commercial ideology, the student is given "the neoliberal subject position of the customer" (*ibid.*, p. 564). English ability is "promoted as an essential ingredient to an identity invested in global success" (Chun 2016, p. 565).

We can hear the echoes of investment in Chun's characterisation of the neoliberal English language student. Yet, when viewed from this perspective, the opportunities encompassed by imagined future identities - opportunities

which are realised through investment in target language learning and use - lose their social justice ring. They take on a more mundane nuance when the student is the customer, English is the commodity, and the teacher is the supplier. Re-positioned as such within neoliberal discourse, human agency is harnessed to enable the “neoliberal self” (Chun 2016, p. 565) through interaction with a world re-shaped in the image of the marketplace.

Nevertheless, ideologies are not always obstacles to target language learning and use. Drawing on Blommaert’s sociolinguistics of globalisation (2003), De Costa’s (2010b) Singapore-based research sheds light on the positive influence language ideologies can have. Concentrating on Jenny, a girl from China learning English in an English medium school in Singapore, he found that she was able to harness ideologies privileging the development and use of standard English for her own benefit. While Jenny’s alignment with these ideologies can be ascribed to the norms of the school and her family, that is, to top-down forces, she was nevertheless aware of the value of standard English for her imagined future as an executive in a global company. Her privileging of standard English played a role in her investment in studying the language, and her investment reaped rewards, with Jenny achieving a high-level grade in crucial middle school exams.

In stark contrast, investment-related research by Menard-Warwick (2007) indicates a less than favourable impact of ideologies. Focusing on English language teachers’ ideologically motivated positioning of their Latina students in the USA, she found these instructors constantly positioned their students as homemakers, even when these individuals attempted to challenge these positionings. Outside a learning environment, Blackledge and Creese (2008) found language ideologies imposed on heritage speakers of Bengali in the UK. These were powerful forces, but some individuals were able to contest the manner in which they were positioned by them.

More recently, investment crossed an academic disciplinary divide as evidenced by a paper published in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. This article by Karam *et al.* (2017) examined English language

teachers' investment and its impact on their students' language development. This important research was undertaken in "non-formal education (NFE) centers in Lebanon" teaching Syrian refugees under "Education in Emergency" contexts (Karam *et al.* 2017, p. 169). They found teachers' ideologies and subsequent investment in their teaching and their students' learning were crucial for language learning.

It is clear, therefore, that ideological forces such as norms ascribed by teachers and students, are influential aspects of investment in target language practices across different types of language use and languages used. Within the next section, the significance of such ideological forces on the use of Facebook is examined. This comprises a focus on norms of use and the attention economy, both factors which strongly impact how individuals utilise SNSs.

3.6.2 Ideology and SNS

3.6.2.1 Facebook and neoliberal capitalist ideology

Ideological factors also come into play in the use of SNSs ([Section 2.6.2](#)). Facebook is an ideological space heavily influenced by the neoliberal capitalist, Western-centric values of its predominantly white, male, American designers (van Dijck *et al.* 2018). Neoliberal capitalism is an ideology that emphasises the importance of market forces (Darvin and Norton 2018; Zuboff 2019). Fuchs (2017, p. 53) defines it as "a market fundamentalist ideology" which places importance on choice, consumerism and privatisation over workers' rights and effective public services (Fuchs 2017). In relation to social media:

The extension and intensification of advertising and consumer culture into the realm of online data is an expression of large-scale capitalist privatization and commodification under neoliberal condition (Fuchs 2017, p. 53)

This means that while social media communication may promise a democratisation of communication, at the same time it sits in “a commercial and lightly regulated market” which can conflict with “democratic ideals” (Beer and Burrows 2007, para. 3.7). Even friendship on Facebook is produced and enacted within this marketplace (Bucher 2012).

Facebook’s neoliberal capitalist ideology privileges sales growth (Fuchs 2017; Zuboff 2019). As sources of data, Facebook users are part of the company’s business model ([Section 1.4](#)). It is to Facebook’s advantage to maintain users’ attention and to encourage them to post on the site. Attention is monetised, with users’ time spent viewing advertisements impacting the company’s profits (Fuchs 2017).

Facebook’s infrastructure is designed against a backdrop of this neoliberal capitalist ideology. Users are constantly encouraged to interact with the site, for example, via the Like and Share buttons (John 2013; Zuboff 2019). This is because revenue from advertisers is reliant on a constant stream of content being shared on the site (Gillespie 2018; [Section 3.4.1](#)). This sharing has itself been identified as an ideology in its own right (John 2013). Such digital labour is provided for no financial exchange (Fuchs 2017); rather, users barter their data for visibility and connection.

3.6.2.2 Norms of use

The infrastructure of new media sites impacts the norms that arise around their use (Thatcher 2004), and Facebook is no different. Research at the intersection of social psychology and technology studies suggests that the infrastructure can promote certain habitual activities by affording particular actions (Davis 2010). There are “culture cues” (boyd 2006a, para. 34) programmed into the software of the platform that indicate how to use, and therefore, how to be on the site. Therefore, new media are not neutral, but “restrain and reinforce certain communication possibilities and corresponding rhetorical and cultural patterns” (Thatcher 2004, p. 306). These are sites on

which users' behaviour is influenced by the ideologies of the business model, which is embedded in the infrastructure.

Commentators from anthropology as well as information studies and sociology indicate that within such contexts, SNS users develop media ideologies – “beliefs, attitudes and strategies about the media they use” (Gershon 2010, p. 391). These media ideologies influence views of what should and should not be done on SNSs (Gershon 2010). While considering them as multiple and contradictory, Gershon views these ideologies as affordances for what can and cannot be done using media technology. Indeed, Baker's (2013) longitudinal study of young adults' Facebook use in the UK (conducted within the disciplines of social science and education) found that media ideologies impacted their behaviour online. Participants constructed varying understandings of how the platform should be employed, and through engagement with the site, acted accordingly.

New media ideologies develop through “network effects” (boyd and Heer 2006, para. 20). Once joined, new users develop norms of use by observing the actions of those around them (*ibid.*) and receiving feedback on their own behaviour (Gershon 2010). These actions are, in turn, developed in the context of algorithms. As content is surfaced by way of algorithms, the content users are exposed to is not only reliant on the actions of friend connections, but also the calculations of machine intelligence. Algorithms, and of course, the biases and backgrounds of their designers, also impact the source material from which norms develop (Litt 2012).

New media ideologies can differ across cultures. Peters *et al.*'s (2015) human-computer interaction-based research into Facebook use of people in Namibia and the USA found that while 56% of US participants Friended strangers, 79% of Namibians did so. Such findings are important for an understanding of interaction on transnational online spaces such as Facebook. They indicate that it is not possible to assume that others share the same understandings as yourself (Markham 2005). As Facebook communication occurs in an environment of context collapse, in which

individuals from various areas of one's life can be addressed at the same time ([Section 2.4.1.4](#)), such variations in new media ideologies have the potential for misunderstandings among users.

Research from Zhao *et al.* (2016) in the area of social media theory sheds further light on the impact of new media ideologies on SNS communication. They investigated US based participants' use of Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn and Instagram. They found that norms of use differed across platforms. The decision to use a particular SNS was based on the appropriacy of content for the audience. Anticipated types of interactivity were also important. For example, SNSs were selected according to participants' desire for self-expression versus sparking audience reaction. Zhao *et al.* concluded that "audience and content are intersecting parameters" (p. 93). That is, new media ideologies, which impact content publication, are formed around both the types of audience a platform attracts, and the content that audience anticipates.

3.6.2.3 Attention economy

SNS users exist within an attention economy ([Section 2.6.2](#)) in which their attention is constantly being demanded by exposure to new content (Kirschner 2015). Within Facebook's new media ideology of sharing users' attention, the time taken over posts and users' reactions to them is an essential element of Facebook's business model. In this attention economy, time spent consuming content is monetised due to the relationship between the site and advertisers. Facebook users' content is embedded in this market for attention. This is beneficial in terms of target language use opportunities. Users' attention can be transformed into symbolic capital to gain access to SNSs (Darvin and Norton 2016b) ([Section 3.5.7](#)).

There is little research on the attention economy outside of the marketing arena; however, there is some evidence that new media ideologies develop within the context of the attention economy. For example, as Marwick (2015)

observes in relation to microcelebrities' use of social media, posting a photograph with a short piece of text is a more effective way of gaining an audience on Facebook than publishing a long tract of text which might not be read within the milieu of the attention economy.

Again, although not related to target language use, Zhao *et al.*'s (2016) social research study on the use of a variety of SNSs, including Facebook, is pertinent. Their participants made editorial choices to avoid "overwhelming their readers" (p. 93) with too much content. Zhao *et al.* do not refer to the attention economy by name, but it is clear that their participants were aware of this economy. For example, one participant remarked,

There's so many other things on Facebook ... I know I use it more so for stories and videos of random things that had nothing to do with my close friends. I'm thinking that other people use it as that, too. So [if I post on Facebook] they might scroll down and miss the picture that I want them to see, whereas on Instagram it's like you can't really miss it

(Zhao *et al.* 2016, p.93, omission and addition in original)

The scrolling functionality is active in producing the attention economy in which Facebook content is posted. The functionality, the amount of content, and anticipated audience reactions produce the norms of the attention economy (Zhao *et al.* 2016) in which Facebook users post themselves into being.

It is clear, therefore, that ideologies, present in the design and infrastructure, and which spread through network effects, influence how SNSs are used. Nevertheless, use of SNSs is not uniform: cultural factors, audience and content coalesce to give rise to norms of SNS use. These norms are produced within the attention economy, which itself is a production of the affordances of the infrastructure (for example, the ability to scroll through content) and the moneymaking imperative of Facebook as a company.

Having established the significance of ideological forces within social media use, I move on to review the literature on how ideologies within social media, including SNSs, impact target language use in these spaces.

3.6.3 Ideology, SNS and target language use

As learners move fluidly across spaces, ideologies collude and compete, shaping learner identities and restructuring opportunities to listen, speak, read, and write, both on and offline

(Darvin and Norton 2018, p. 4)

Second language acquisition research indicates the influence of ideologies on target language engagement in online spaces. Studies by Kabilan *et al.* (2010) and Reinhardt and Zander (2011) draw attention to the need for participants to position Facebook as a legitimate space for target language development. Both studies focused on individuals' development of English for academic purposes. While they reported favourable findings in terms of language and language user identity development for some participants, issues arose in terms of how other participants positioned Facebook in relation to their language development. Kabilan *et al.*'s participants did not assign a high value to the language learning that had occurred through Facebook interaction. One participant observed that:

to grasp and enhance the English language ... it must be through academic reading of books, articles, journals, newspapers or websites with academic values only

(Kabilan *et al.* 2010, p.185)

In the case of Reinhardt and Zander, some participants failed to identify use of Facebook as a meaningful space for language learning. Facebook use was not considered relevant to their goals of developing their academic English.

The effect of language ideologies and new media ideologies is clear here. With language and context of language use entwined, not only the language developed, but also the place of development were devalued by participants. Reinhardt and Zander (2011) suggest that language learners with these views need to be encouraged to develop discourses that they can use to "define their student identity very differently" (p. 340), and so recognise

Facebook as a place appropriate for language learning. Of course, such *encouragement* is a call to participants to align themselves with an ideology which Reinhardt and Zander feel is beneficial for language development through the use of Facebook.

Research by Hanna and de Nooy (2003) further underlines the significance of online space and its associated norms for engagement in target language practices. The researchers focused on French language learners' use of discussion groups on the website of the French newspaper *Le Monde*. They found that learners needed to utilise the site according to its norms to encourage other users to engage with them. Participants who used the group according to its norms and as intended, that is for discussion, had success in engaging with other group members, despite their truncated French repertoires (Blommaert 2010). Participants who flouted these norms and approached the group as language learners, were not so successful.

Hanna and de Nooy (2003) interpret the manner in which the participants positioned themselves in the group as significant. Those who positioned themselves as French learners did not fare as well as those who positioned themselves as co-contributors to the discussion. The participants needed to accept the norms of the group, and position themselves accordingly, in order to employ it as an area for French language use. Those who were able to do so were able to "participate in a cultural practice in and on the same terms as native speakers" (p. 81).

The online environment in which communication occurs was also found to be significant in Pasfield-Neofitou's (2011) study. She carried out research on Japanese language learners and their use of social media, including blogs, social network sites and email, as a forms of communication with their Japanese contacts. One participant, Hyacinth, encountered difficulties when engaging with users of *Webkare*, a Japanese online SNS and simulation dating site. By way of their new media ideologies, users identified *Webkare* as a space for Japanese individuals due to the large amount of Japanese language use and the presence of a Japanese moderator. As a non-

Japanese person, Hyacinth was exposed to anti-non-Japanese views on the site. She assigned the publication of such content to Japanese users experiencing an “invasion of a domain that [is] mostly Japanese” (Pasfield-Neofitou’s 2011, p. 101) (addition in original). As an easily identified non-native Japanese speaker, her capital was not valued, and she was not viewed as a legitimate Japanese speaker by some other users of the site.

It is clear, therefore, that ideologies can restrict target language users’ engagement with online spaces. Nevertheless, when discourses of informality arise around digital environments, they can ease target language use. Korean heritage language users experienced the popular Korean website Cyworld as a welcoming space in which they could explore their Korean identities by playing with the language (Lee 2006). In contrast to Klimanova and Dembovskaya’s (2013) findings with reference to the use of the SNS *VKondakte* ([Section 3.5.4](#)), heritage Korean users could include “intended deviations from standard Korean form” (p.105) and position themselves as legitimate language users by experimenting with Korean.

Discourses which positioned online spaces as informal environments also facilitated language use. Lee’s (2006) participants experienced *Cyworld* as an informal arena in which they could use Korean without the fear of being judged for language errors. Sockett’s (2014) study of English language students’ use of Facebook revealed that Messenger was viewed as a relaxed space of language use. Its positioning as an informal environment also reduced language users’ anxiety associated with making language errors.

In summary, social media are ideological spaces. From macro-structures such as the neoliberal capitalist ideologies that underlie the infrastructure of Facebook, to the micro-structures of an online community’s norms, ideologies inform the use of these contexts. Ideologies impact access to target language use. They are active in the positioning of SNSs as legitimate spaces for language development. They are also salient in SNS users’ positioning of others as legitimate users of SNS environments. When discourses and ideologies produce norms of informality, target language use

can be encouraged. When they produce norms of insularity, they can be an obstacle to language use.

Up until this point, this chapter has concentrated on the salience of the components of Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment - capital, identity and ideology - in relation to offline and online target language use. It is evident that these three factors are accompanied by the sociomaterial elements of online spaces, such as the affordances of the infrastructure, for target language engagement.

The last section of this chapter reviews the burgeoning amount of literature within second language acquisition and academic literacies which calls for a move towards a posthumanist stance to be taken in relation to second language acquisition.

3.7 Posthumanism, applied linguistics and academic literacies

The final section of this chapter comprises a review of the literature on the areas of second language acquisition and academic literacies which has been influenced by posthumanist thought. Commencing with research inspired by an article by the Douglas Fir Group (2016), an article to which Norton contributed, I present a review of studies carried out by Canagarajah and colleagues, and by Toohey, which identify the distributed nature of second language use and acquisition

Moving to the area of translanguaging, the significance of sociomateriality in some examples of this research is outlined. This is followed by a focus on the work of Pennycook on spatial repertoires and the developing understanding of language competence as coalescing with the sociomateriality of the context of language use. Moving away from second language acquisition, Lesley Gourlay's work on academic literacies is presented as it illustrates that human agency within literacy practices is entangled with the tools of these

practices. Then, turning back to second language acquisition, research on identity from a posthumanist stance is presented. This chapter closes with a review of the posthumanist literature on online target language learning and use.

3.7.1 A posthumanist approach to applied linguistics

Although not widespread, there is increasing call for a posthumanist stance to be taken to applied linguistics (Canagarajah 2018a, 2018b; Pennycook 2016; Toohey 2019). Indeed, elements of posthumanist thought have been evident in language learning and literacy arenas for some time (Pennycook 2016). In 2014, Block's critique of the "lingual bias" (p. 56) in second language acquisition requested that language competence be seen as more than the development of lexical, phonological and grammatical skills, and that room needed to be made for the importance of non-verbal matter in any understanding of how languages are used and learned.

Blommaert's linguistic landscapes (2013), Kress's (2010) work on multimodality and language, and van Lier's (2000) perspectives on ecological linguistics have all focused on materiality as well as discourse and language to understand language learning and language use. Atkinson (2019) has suggested that second language acquisition studies move beyond "cognitivism" (p. 724) and the mind/body duality and look to embodiment and multimodality as integral to language use, and for them to be theorised accordingly.

An article by the Douglas Fir Group (2016) calling for a new interdisciplinary approach to applied linguistics which can address developing forms of language use in a context of extended mobility has been particularly influential in encouraging posthumanist research into second language acquisition. This movement is important because it gives rise to the perforation of cultural and ideological boundaries (*ibid.*). Resultant transnationalism leads to superdiversity which "spawn[s] an ongoing process

of deterritorialization of meaning making” (*ibid.*, p. 23). In this context, there are more opportunities for meaning making, and, importantly, for misunderstanding (*ibid.*). The Douglas Fir Group calls for a new way of understanding language competence in a context of technologically mediated interaction. Such views echo Darvin and Norton’s (2015) reason to develop their new model. This is unsurprising as Norton was herself involved in the development of Douglas Fir Group framework (Norton 2019).

In reaction to the Douglas Fir Group’s (2016) article, Canagarajah (2018a) and Toohey (2019) have highlighted the need for “an integrated model ... to move theory and pedagogy forward” (Canagarajah 2018a, p. 268) in the realms of applied linguistics. To this end, Canagarajah makes a convincing case for a new definition of second language competence, based on a “materialist orientation” (2018a, p. 269).

Using the work of Barad (2007) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Canagarajah reports on research into English language users’ teaching and research in STEM subjects in a US university (Canagarajah 2018a, 2018b; Minakova and Canagarajah 2020). Rejecting the “arboreal” (Canagarajah 2018a, p. 270) conception of language competence provided by structuralism, which posits that there is a linear, yet divergent progression of forms, skills and genres of language that should be taught in succession, Canagarajah appeals for a more rhizomatic perspective. Focusing on Jihun, a South Korean non-native English-speaking academic writer, Canagarajah shows how the competence which enabled Jihun to produce an academic article was “networked” (*ibid.*, p. 279). That is, competence was seen as a “bricolage” (*ibid.*, p. 282) of people, texts, discussions, word processing packages, spaces, time and Jihun’s organisational skills. Jihun is not viewed as the sole originator of his journal article; rather, the text is produced by “the network of resources and agents” (*ibid.*, p. 283) which assembled in its production. Competence, therefore, is not placed in the individual, but is distributed throughout an assemblage of entities which coalesce to produce the competence.

In an article co-authored with Minakova, Canagarajah maintains attention on the distributed nature of competence which produces an academic publication. This study investigates Alexey, a Russian native speaker working as a teaching assistant in a university in the USA (Minakova and Canagarajah 2020). Again, challenging the arboreal understanding of second language acquisition, Alexey is less concerned with his ability to publish in English than to use the language informally in conversation. As with Jihun, with his publications produced within an assemblage of intra-actions, such as a proof-reader, writing collaborators, his laboratory work and equipment, Alexey has more confidence in his ability to publish than to use English in informal contexts.

Moving from the area of publication to the classroom, Canagarajah (2018b) focuses on Tan, a Chinese mathematics teaching assistant in a university in the Midwest of the USA. A second language English user, Tan is characterised as a highly successful teacher. His efficacy is assigned to his board work and body language while teaching, which entangled with his spoken English, enable himself and his class to mutually and successfully engage in and produce meaning-making in English.

Canagarajah's interest in the sociomateriality of target language use clearly demonstrates that successful communication in a target language does not arise with the use of verbal language alone. Success in publication and teaching is produced within a distributed competence. Taking this position, non-verbal matter is no longer a bit-player in target language competence (Canagarajah 2018b). For example, context is not to be considered as merely a supporting backdrop for verbal meaning-making, and there is no longer any place left for positioning space "as dead matter to be shaped by human cognition and language" (*ibid.*, p. 33). Now, matter needs to be reconsidered as part of a communication assemblage. It is necessary to understand it as entangling with other intra-actions to produce capacities for target language communication.

Also influenced by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), as well as MacLure (2013), Toohey (2019) proposes a “new materialist” (p. 937) approach to afford innovative understandings of language learning, teaching and research. She revisits an ethnographic study she conducted under a sociocultural framing, undertaken two decades previously. This longitudinal analysis focused on a group of young children in a primary school class, all English language learners. In her re-analysis, Toohey identifies how the children’s English language production arose within assemblages of entities comprising their children’s voices, their physical characteristics, toys, classroom spaces and their imaginations. Children who were initially silent in English developed capacities for target language use when they intra-acted within an assemblage of these intra-actions.

In another article, Toohey *et al.* (2015) describe new materialist research into the developing literacy practices of English language school children based around making video content. The authors show how these children’s literacy practices arose (and failed to arise) within an entanglement of matter such as positioning within the classroom, access to an iPad, a digital app, sound, children’s bodies and voices.

3.7.2 Translanguaging and posthumanism

Other pockets within second language acquisition research can be recognised as retaining an interest in sociomateriality. Work focusing on embodiment and multimodality has arisen from the area of languaging and translanguaging.

The concepts of languaging and translanguaging are associated with García and Li (2014) in particular. Viewing communication through a languaging lens, one concentrates on the person and the language as an indivisible whole (Creese and Blackledge 2019). The focus is not on language as dissected into phonemes, lexical items, and grammatical structures, but on the interactivity between people which language affords. What is important in

linguaging is the embodied language, such as tone of voice, gesture and body movement (*ibid.*).

Translanguaging retains this emphasis on the inseparable nature of the language user and the language being used, but also puts emphasis on the interaction as occurring across biographical, social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of users. As Creese and Blackledge (2019, p. 801) explain:

Translanguaging refers to the communicative practices in which people engage as they bring into contact different biographies, histories, and linguistic backgrounds

Elements not associated with language, such as “dress” and “posture” (Creese and Blackledge 2019, p. 801) are factors within translanguaging.

In the arena of translanguaging, Gurney and Demuro (2019) take the concept of the assemblage and apply it to language, and appeal for scholars to take the concept of the language assemblage seriously. Of particular salience to my thesis is their perspective on assemblages and ideologies. They state that thinking about language, languaging, and translanguaging in terms of assemblages can help to identify language ideologies and so enable us to respond to them. These ideologies are not all powerful, but intra-actions in themselves in the assemblages, and by identifying them and how they work, the capacities to which they give rise can be challenged when they are produced (*ibid.*).

Lin (2019) takes translanguaging and expands upon it to produce the concept of “trans-semiotizing (for example, co-ordinating gesture, facial expressions, sounds visual images)” (p. 8). These are also part of language users’ semiotic repertoires. She examined these aspects within an English-medium science class in Hong Kong. The research focused on the students’ (all of whom were native Urdu speakers) and the teacher’s use of distributed semiotic resources. Lin showed how relata such as facial and body movements, and shared language resources emerged as entangled intra-actions which produced students’ and the teacher’s capacities for co-construction of meaning.

Creese and Blackledge (2019) conducted a study of the translanguaging that arose around a city library information helpdesk in Birmingham, the UK. They followed Winnie, a helpdesk staff member who had come to the UK from Hong Kong in 1996. They identified the helpdesk as an arena of translanguaging in which Winnie successfully made meaning with library users across a range of English language competencies and language backgrounds. While the sociomateriality of the helpdesk was a factor in this translanguaging, just as significant was Winnie's disposition to the library users she met. Creese and Blackledge describe this disposition as one of "solidarity and reciprocity" (2019, p. 810). Winnie was interested in the languages and cultures of the people she met at the helpdesk, and she was open to learning about them. Her success in communication showed that "cultural competence and disposition were more important than standard grammars" (*ibid.* p. 811). Her effective communication was distributed across her language ability, her disposition towards others, and her willingness to understand and make herself understood.

3.7.3 Spatial repertoires

Pennycook (2016; 2018; Pennycook and Otsuji 2014) has also been drawn towards taking a posthumanist perspective to second language acquisition. He criticises traditional perspectives of applied linguistics for being overly anthropocentric, a stance which no longer sits well within emerging concepts of what it means to be human, and to communicate in mobile, globalised and multicultural settings (Pennycook 2018). In its stead, Pennycook proposes a "posthumanism of applied linguistics" (2018, p.17). From this position, matter, that is space, objects, and the semiotic practices in which they are engaged, can be brought to bear on perceptions of an individual's language competence (2018). Referencing posthumanist thinkers such as Hayles (1999), Bennett (2010) and Latour (2005), Pennycook suggests that a posthumanist applied linguistics negates the:

need to think in terms of competence as an individual capacity, of identity as personal, of languages as entities we acquire or of intercultural communication as uniquely human

(Pennycook 2018, pp. 16-17)

Instead, meaning-making is seen as arising from engagement with “spatial repertoires” (Pennycook and Otsuji 2014, p.166).

Spatial repertoires are an extension of Gumperz’s (1964) and Blommaert’s (2010) work on repertoires. For Gumperz, one’s language repertoire encompasses “the totality of linguistic forms regularly employed in the course of socially significant interaction” (1964, p. 137 cited by Pennycook 2016, p. 450). It is the language competence available to an individual which has been developed during the course of the history of their language use.

In a context of mobility, there is a need to look at repertoires anew, and develop a perspective that will encompass their materiality (Pennycook 2016). Repertoires need to be seen as arising within assemblages including spatial and material entities. A spatial repertoire encompasses the language user’s biographical linguistic resources and the material elements of the place of communication.

The concept of spatial repertoires, therefore, is not merely an encouragement to view the context of communication and how it impacts the manner in which meaning is made, for example, the appropriacy of language use. It is a perception of the sociomaterial context as an essential element, an intra-action or an affect, which in entanglement with other intra-actions or affects, gives rise to linguistic competence (Pennycook 2016, 2018, Pennycook and Otsuji 2014). Pennycook and Otsuji’s (2014) study of language in multicultural and multilingual environments - restaurant kitchens in Tokyo and Sidney - indicates the salience of the concept of spatial repertoires.

In their analysis, Pennycook and Otsuji concentrate on the utterance, “Doozo, pizza mo two minutes coming” (2014 p.177) which comprises Japanese, Italian (also an Italian loanword in Japanese) and English vocabulary, and Japanese syntax. What is important here is the activity is

being achieved through language use. For this activity to be carried out, a variety of resources - including objects, people, their individual language repertoires, the space in which the communication takes place - all come together to produce linguistic competence. As a result, the idea that linguistic competence resides solely in the brain of the user is challenged (Pennycook and Otsuji 2014). In agreement with Canagarajah (2018a), Pennycook and Otsuji regard language competence as sociomaterially distributed. As such, this competence emerges through intra-action between matter; for example, people, language, objects, routines and space (Pennycook and Otsuji 2014).

Pennycook and Otsuji's aim is to move the "locus of language" (2014, p. 179) away from the individual speaker, or from interactions between speakers. They want to show that what people *do* with language, what they *can do* with language, emerges from the sociomateriality of the contexts in which language is used.

Also focusing on Japan, as well as Hawai'i, Higgins and Ikeda's (2019) study of spatial repertoires arising around multilingual signage in tourist areas made use of Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) to find that "language in tourism is a part of an actor network that produces spatial repertoires" (p. 150). These spatial repertoires encompassed not only the English and Japanese used in the signs, but also hard matter, such as transportation routes linking tourist destinations to airports and train stations, as well as the more ephemeral, such as "growing economies, disposable income, and dispositions to travel" (p. 150).

More work on spatial repertoires has been inspired by Canagarajah's research. Sharma (2020) took a new materialist perspective to interaction in an engineering class. He conducted ethnographic research, focused on an Arabic-English bilingual lecturer in a USA university and considered the factors giving rise to his instruction and development of rapport with his students. As with other such research (Canagarajah 2018a, 2018b; Toohey 2019; Minakova and Canagarajah 2020), Sharma identified assemblage of

spatial repertoires, comprising an “entanglement of language with bodies, space, technology, and graphic inscriptions” (p. 16).

Gourlay’s thinking on literacy assemblages can be related to spatial repertoires. In the sphere of academic literacies, Gourlay (2015) has identified links between ideas evident in situated literacies (Lea and Street 1998) and posthumanist concepts. The former rejects literacies as neutral, viewing them rather as influenced by social practices within particular contexts, with any resultant construction of knowledge similarly influenced (Gourlay 2015). For Gourlay, the concept of situated literacies is:

an important staging post in a process of “re-embodiment” in terms of how we view textual practice, reminding us that all reading and writing is particular rather than abstract, and involves human subjects engaged in material processes which are socially, politically, temporally and physically located

(Gourlay 2015, p. 485)

Gourlay’s own research (2015) uses Latour’s (2005) actor network theory and Hayles (1999) work on the integration of academic literacies’ practices with digital technology. Her study of postgraduate students’ academic literacies practices revealed that these participants viewed their writing artefacts, for example, highlighter pens and computers, as more than just tools. Drawing on Latour (2005), Gourlay characterises their experiences of these tools as that of agentic “mediators” (2015 p. 498) within an assemblage. She positions her findings as potentially challenging “taken-for-granted binaries such as that of text and author and device and user” (p. 499) positioning literacy technologies as having agency within text and knowledge production processes.

3.7.4 Second language acquisition, identities and posthumanism

Canagarajah, Toohey and Pennycook have all used posthumanist concepts to focus on target language users’ development of language competence.

Other researchers have used posthumanism to focus on other areas of language development, such as identity.

Ros í Sole's (2016) work on language learner identities is influenced by Braidotti's (2011) concept of nomadology. Taking this approach, she highlights not only the dynamic, changing and multiple nature of identity, but also "emphasises the contingency and the positive force that fractured identities bring to self" (p. 7). As with other posthumanist-influenced work, second language acquisition is not considered to be an incrementally developing and linear process, but one in which the identity of the language learning arises within the entanglements of the matter around them.

In a similar vein, de Freitas and Curinga (2015) call for a new material approach to language and identity in which language learner identities arise within an assemblage of a variety of entities, such as the teacher, the classroom, and other student identities. Unlike poststructuralist considerations of identity, which view it:

in terms of a Russian-doll model, where the public identity is a surface or container covering up other identities (family, race, etc.)

(de Freitas and Curinga 2015, p. 260)

an assemblage approach views identity as less linear, but "as a dynamic tangle or knot of undulating lines" (*ibid.*).

3.7.5 Online target language use

While there is no extensive body of posthumanist research on target language use in online spaces, there is a small number of interesting articles on the topic. Casey and Evans (2011) took a posthumanist stance to describe how learning emerged on Ning, an online language learning social network site, in a context of online connections which afforded students opportunities for new ways of being outside a classroom environment. Bucholtz and Hall (2016) have called for an "embodied sociolinguistics"

(p.173) which recognises meaning making as entangled with the body (for example with paralinguistics and prosody), language as structure, and other entities involved in an assemblage of interaction, including the digital.

Focusing on “rewilding” Thorne *et al.* (2021) investigated the use of “quest-driven mobile AR [augmented reality] game” (p. 108) called “ChronoOps”, and its use in second language development. They used video data of students engaging with the game as they moved through an urban landscape and co-operated in the completion of certain tasks. Thorne *et al.*’s sociomaterial approach found that engagement with the game formed “assemblages of environments, mobile devices, and embodied experience” (p. 106).

Another interesting piece of research into language development in a digital context has been produced by Jiang *et al.* (2020). While not posthumanist in its theoretical framings, it is relevant to my research as it highlights the significance of sociomateriality for investment in target language practices. Jiang *et al.* focused on Tashi, a “Chinese ethnic minority student” (p. 954) - a young Tibetan woman studying in a Chinese university. As a native Tibetan speaker, she had to develop both Mandarin Chinese and English as part of her studies. Tashi struggled with English; she feared speaking it in class and did not experience herself as a legitimate speaker of the language until she started to make digitally-mediated content in English. These were in the form of podcasts and videos, often demonstrating her cultural capital - her knowledge of Tibetan culture.

While Jiang *et al.* (2020) did not conceptualise Tashi’s investment in producing this content in terms of an assemblage and intra-actions, they did emphasise the significance of the sociomateriality in her investment. As they stated, Tashi’s investment was enabled by access to a mobile phone, and later, to a laptop which she purchased once she had earned enough money to do so. In addition, her investment was involved in needing a quiet space, her dormitory rooftop, where she could make her recordings. Tashi’s investment was also required a classroom of people who could make up an

appreciative and supportive audience for her efforts to position herself as a legitimate user of English. In short, the sociomateriality of English language use was essential for her investment in the language.

The final section of this chapter has reviewed the small, but burgeoning area of posthumanism in relation to second language acquisition and academic literacies. The Douglas Fir Group's request for a new understanding of second language competence in the context of increased mobility, both online and offline, has been met with research that has expanded conceptions of language learning and language use. This research does not merely append the sociomaterial to existing understandings, but seeks to understand second language use and learning as essentially entangled with the sociomaterial. What arises from this understanding is the need for new ways to conceive of language competence.

For Canagarajah (2018a), language competence should be viewed as rhizomatic rather than linearly organised in a structuralist arboreal fashion. As Toohey (2019) and Pennycook and Otsuji (2014) would agree, second language competence needs to be understood as distributed across the intra-actions, human and non-human, solid and ephemeral, from which the capacities for second language use arise. In relation to translanguaging, competence also needs to be regarded as a disposition to willingly engage in meaning-making with others (Creese and Blackledge 2019). Spatial repertoires and Gourlay's points on academic literacies' practices show that spoken and written language competences are distributed across environments of communication and the matter within these contexts. In terms of online target language learning and use, research here has also uncovered entanglements between language users, their embodied and disembodied environments of language use, what they do with the language, and how this impacts how the manner in which they experience themselves as target language users.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter I have drawn on interdisciplinary literature, from, for example, applied linguistics and second language acquisition, digital education, and social media studies, in order to map out how capital, identity and ideology - the three areas of the expanded model of investment - can be understood in the context of SNSs spaces.

It is clear that capital, in particular data-as-capital and social capital, are key factors for access to these spaces. Studies encompassing identity production in social media spaces indicate that the development of subject positions has to be considered as fully situated within the online context of language use. In terms of ideology, new media ideologies inherent in the utilisation of SNSs also impact who target language users can be in these arenas. Such ideological structures are not only conceptual, but are also played out in the affordances of the functionality of SNSs.

The chapter has closed with a review of posthumanist investigations into second language acquisition and use, and academic literacies. It is evident that language educators are now able to benefit from a developing body of research which not only acknowledges, but emphasises, the sociomaterial and distributed nature of language competency. For those people who are interested in the ideas within these studies, the brain of the speaker can no longer be considered to be the seat of target language ability. In contrast, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of matter - of the context of language use, of language users' and interlocutors' bodies, of artefacts which are part of literacy practices - as entangled in assemblages of language competencies. If this is the case, there seems no reason why investment should not also be considered in terms of assemblages.

The next chapter of this thesis comprises a discussion and justification of the methods and methodology chosen to undertake this research on investment in English on Facebook.

Chapter 4: Methods and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Before outlining the content of this chapter, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the research process itself. The study focused on thirteen non-native English language speakers' use of English in their personal Facebook spaces, including Facebook groups and Messenger. While my interest was in participants' English language use, and their multimodal communication with English-using Facebook audiences, participants' Facebook spaces reflected their backgrounds, and so were multilingual environments.

Twelve women and one man comprised my respondents. The majority were Chinese nationals (eight) with other participants coming from Argentina, Italy, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Thailand. Nine participants were university students (one undergraduate; eight postgraduate), and three individuals were immigrants living in Ireland. All participants were recruited via volunteer and snowball sampling.

Research into online human communication has ethical implications. Such communication occurs in spaces in which boundaries can be in flux, making the gathering of informed consent and guarantees of anonymity problematic (Beaulieu and Estalella 2012). These were important issues, leading me to approach my participants and their data with an "ethics of care" (Capurro and Pingel 2002).

This chapter presents a discussion and justification of the methods used to conduct this research project which focused on thirteen individuals' investment in English on Facebook. Combining three interviews with each participant (face-to-face and/or online) and data from prolonged participant observation of Facebook interaction, a thematic analysis of these data was used to investigate the manner and extent to which participants were invested in interaction in English on the platform.

The project has changed significantly since its first inception. It has moved from being a piece of poststructuralist research to taking on posthumanist elements with which to approach investment in English on Facebook. In this chapter, I describe and discuss my journey among methods and methodologies. I detail the routes taken, forsaken, and the dead ends. I also provide a justification of the research decisions made along the way.

The chapter comprises ten main sections. In order to contextualise much of the content that follows it, [Section 4.2](#) comprises a description of the shadow research project. This is the research that was planned and begun, but not completed. Nevertheless, traces of it remain evident in the decisions outlined in subsequent sections of this chapter. [Section 4.3](#) outlines the aim of the research and research questions.

[Section 4.4](#) comprises a statement of the research approach taken and its impact on the choice of data gathering techniques. [Section 4.5](#) focuses on research methodology, and so provides an outline of virtual ethnography. In order to establish the transferability of findings developed in this research project, a thick description of field-sites, participant recruitment, and sampling are provided. Information on participants is also included in this section, and complemented in [Appendix 1](#).

[Section 4.6](#) contains an outline of the research methods, encompassing data gathering techniques, how face-to-face and online interviews were conducted, and how online participant observations were managed. Comments on transcription of interview data and resultant positioning of participants close this section.

The research paradigms the study is founded upon are discussed in [Section 4.7](#). The choice of these paradigms is justified, as well as implications for the researcher's role. These are discussed in terms of reactivity. This section also includes an outline of naturalistic inquiry, and justification of the choice of this approach. Issues of credibility, reflexivity and diffraction, working hypotheses and transferability are discussed here. The section closes with a note on representation in this research.

[Section 4.8](#) comprises a discussion of the data analysis process. Justification of the choice of thematic analysis, and a description of the data analysis procedure are presented. The ethical decisions made during the research are presented in [Section 4.9](#). The chapter closes with [Section 4.10](#), which provides a discussion of the limitations of the research.

4.2 Research journey: challenges and changes of direction

This qualitative study originally set out to investigate the development of investment in the context of informal language development through interaction in Facebook groups. This was to be a continuation of research I conducted as part of the dissertation for my master's degree in E-learning at Moray House, the University of Edinburgh. That study had focused on Cornish language learners' use of a Facebook group, pseudonymously named "Develop Your Cornish" (DYC) and how it aided their language development. During the course of this research, I had encountered Norton's (2013) concept of investment, and found it a promising way of understanding language development. The original aim of my doctoral research was to explore investment more extensively, and use the concept to broaden the understanding of Facebook and language development. An aspect of broadening the scope of the research was to include English, alongside Cornish, as a language of focus.

Participant recruitment was my first challenge. I planned to retain the DYC Facebook group as a research field-site. The second group identified for inclusion was a Facebook group established to help its members expand their English language ability. I was a member of both groups, keeping a relatively low profile, but working to build an online impression of myself as a supportive contributor. Both Facebook groups were chosen on account of their language learning focus. They had been established in order to aid the development of learners' English and Cornish, respectively. The regularity of interaction by group members, and the length and quality of the posts and

responses, which were not evident on other groups, were also reasons for selection.

By February 2017, I had approached the administrators of both Facebook groups to gain permission to include their groups in my study. The main administrator of the Cornish group agreed to allow me to pursue my proposed research. The English language group, however, declined to be involved, stating that they felt their members would not be of interest to me. I had worked carefully over the preceding months to cultivate a relationship with this group to the exclusion of others, and as a result, had been left with no access to English language learners using Facebook groups. In hindsight, I should have tried to develop relationships with other Facebook English language groups, simultaneously.

After consideration of the published research on informal language learning on Facebook, and in discussion with my supervisors, I decided to change direction and turn to my own Facebook page for participant recruitment. I was connected on the platform to a number of former students I had taught on a pre-masters English for Academic Purposes course, as well as to a small group of individuals I was teaching on a volunteer basis at a local community centre in Dublin, the Republic of Ireland. I decided to approach these individuals with regards taking part in the research.

Eventually, I was able to recruit more English language participants than Cornish language participants. Recruitment of the latter had been difficult, in spite of great efforts made to reach out to Cornish language learners. A comment addressed to me on the DYC Facebook group and conversations with Cornish language learners at the “Festival *Kernewek*”, a Cornish language festival held in February 2017, confirmed my fears of research fatigue (Clark 2008) amongst Cornish language learners. On mentioning my study, several attendees talked to me about a recent flurry of academic interest in the language. They commented on the low number of Cornish speakers who made up potential respondents for research projects, and consequently, a general feeling of weariness among the language community

with being asked to engage in yet another study. This perception was confirmed at a later date when interviewing one of my Cornish language research respondents.

I was concerned with research fatigue, and had addressed it in the participant information material that I included in the recruitment message I had posted on the DYC group page. I made it clear that findings would be disseminated to interested group members. Even so, I was able to recruit only three Cornish language participants for interview. Of these, two participants completed all three scheduled interviews, and the third participant completed two. This participant failed to reply to emails requesting a third interview, and failed to return a signed informed consent form to me, despite repeated polite requests to do so. As a result, data from this individual were not included in the analysis.

By spring 2021, I had completed my data analysis, as well as my desk study of Cornish identity and language, minority languages and minority language development in online spaces. It became evident to me that within my write-up timeframe, it would be very difficult to complete the PhD if I retained the Cornish aspect of the study. In addition, I was concerned by the small number of Cornish language participants I had recruited. In consultation with my supervisors, I decided to omit the Cornish aspect of the research from this write up. I was now free to concentrate on English language learners' investment on Facebook, and develop my ideas in this area more fully by narrowing my focus.

The final twist this research journey has taken is with reference to the theoretical framings. During the interview process, it became evident that any understanding of investment on Facebook needed to encompass the significance of the sociomateriality of engagement with the platform, and beyond. The research subsequently took a posthumanist turn, incorporating posthumanist concepts with poststructuralist thought into the analysis and write-up. This is discussed in more detail below ([Section 4.7.1](#)).

The next section of this chapter outlines the aim of the research that is presented in this thesis, and the research questions addressed.

4.3 Research aim and research question

4.3.1 Why investment?

In this research project, I wanted to identify and explore the factors that impacted investment in the use of English on Facebook. The reason for my choice of investment as the governing concept in this research harks back to my master's thesis and my interest in Cornish. I had encountered investment during this research, and found it a useful way to understand learners' engagement with the language, in particular in relation to capital.

As already outlined in [Section 4.2](#), this research was designed to incorporate both Cornish and English, two languages of very different sociolinguistic backgrounds. Sociolinguistically speaking, Cornish is a minority language, the learning of which is regularly associated with Cornish identity and/or affinity with the physical region of Cornwall (Kennedy 2016). Proficiency in the language is not associated with gains in financial capital as there are so few employment opportunities related to its use. In contrast, English is a majority language, a lingua franca which is regularly learned in order to broaden educational or occupational prospects (Phillipson 2010). Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment, with its focus on capital, identity and language, offered the prospect of investigating Cornish and English language learners, learners and users of very differently sociolinguistically positioned languages, in terms of the significance of their ideologically evaluated capital and the subject positions that resulted from it.

While the Cornish aspect of this research does not form part of the thesis, I will demonstrate that investment is a fruitful concept with which to investigate English language learners' employment of Facebook. This is because investment provides a way to position and view the target language user as a human being, taking up complex and dynamic subject positions, who

harbours strengths and weaknesses which are impacted by the ideologically situated contexts in which they strive to use make themselves seen and heard in unfamiliar languages (Darvin and Norton 2015; Norton 2013). Investment provides a holistic way of considering these individuals, placing them, not their language competencies or deficits, centre-stage.

4.3.2 Research questions

This qualitative study set out to investigate investment in English language use on social media. The research questions took time to solidify. They remain broadly formulated because, posed in this manner, they capture the complexity of the expanse of features, human and non-human, tangible and intangible, which I have found to be significant in the investment assemblage of the participants in this research.

The first research question is:

“To what extent are users of English as a second or other language invested in the use of English on Facebook?”

This question asks whether it is possible to identify examples of investment in English on Facebook. It also covers instances when participants disinvest from the use of English, in spite of having the opportunity to interact in the language.

The second research question is:

“How does this investment arise?”

While Darvin and Norton’s (2015) model of investment has it that ideology, capital and identity are the elements required for investment in a target language, I will argue that sociomaterialities such as the platform’s infrastructure and the affordances it gives rise to, for example, are also prominent features when considering how investment occurs, and does not occur, on Facebook.

Having set out the research aim and questions, the next section comprises a discussion of the research paradigms which underpin the ontology and epistemology of this study.

4.4 Research approach

Mindful of the interpretivist research approach that I had chosen, participants' experiences were at the heart of this research (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Therefore, qualitative data gathering methods were employed as ways to focus on individuals' situated, "multiple subjective realities" (Hesse-Biber 2010, p. 18). Data were gathered by online pre-interview questionnaires, semi-structured in-depth interviews and online observations of those participants who agreed to engage in this activity. With the use of interviews and observations, my aim was to engage in knowledge co-creation with my participants, by investigating their experiences and opinions, while at the same time being constantly aware of the impact of my own situatedness in my attempts to analyse the data (Holstein and Gubrium 2004).

We now move to Section Six in which the research methodology is discussed. Opening with a characterisation of this study as virtual ethnography, the chapter then moves to present a discussion of the concept of field-sites in relation to research on Facebook. Subsequently, the manner in which participants were recruited is described, and sampling methods are outlined. The section closes with a description of the participants themselves.

4.5 Research Methodology: Virtual ethnography

Aiming to investigate individuals' experience of Facebook use with reference to investment by gathering data through interview and online participant observation, while participating on Facebook myself, this research can be characterised as a virtual ethnography. Virtual ethnography entails investigating how the internet is used by people in society via prolonged

engagement in online field sites (Hine 2000). Such prolonged involvement allows for the development of in-depth co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and research participants within a virtual setting (*ibid.*).

The element of the research that fits most neatly into a virtual ethnography is the online participant observation. This form of data collection involved my “sustained presence ... in the field setting, combined with intensive engagement with everyday life of the inhabitants of the field site” (Hine 2000, loc. 1055/2880). With the consent of participants, I engaged in online participant observation for periods between two and nine months ([Section 4.6.5](#)). This gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in their use of Facebook, and take note of regularities and changes in their interaction on the platform over an extended period of time.

Hine also states that “immersion” does not have to entail being in a “particular field-site, but by engaging in relevant practices wherever they might be found” (2009, para. 69). I was an experienced Facebook user prior to commencing this research project. I have had a Facebook account, which I access daily, since 2007. By considering my own Facebook activity, which continued after data collection had been completed, and during analysis, I was continually able to deepen my knowledge of how the platform can be used, and so might be used by others. I used these experiences of the field-site to inform interview question development and data analysis.

4.5.1 Field-sites: Facebook

A virtual ethnography requires at least one field-site. A field-site is a “naturally occurring” area, not established for research purposes (Kidd 2013, p. 213). The field-sites in this research comprised the personal Facebook pages of thirteen participants, and my own Facebook page. Facebook is a complex collection of online spaces with a wide variety of functionalities. To provide a thick description of Facebook field-sites, the following sections comprise a detailed outline of the platform; its infrastructure and functionality; how

communication occurs, and a brief summary the platform's business imperative. The chapter finishes with some recent problems and controversies Facebook has experienced.

4.5.1.1 Facebook

While Facebook has had its problems (see [4.5.1.4](#) below), globally, it remains the most widely used SNS (Dean 2022). Facebook's worldwide appeal can be assigned to its customisability (Kirkpatrick 2010). While it is fundamentally a construction of the U.S.A, reflecting that nation's ideals, such as freedom of speech and the social benefits of transparency, the site can be adapted. Facebook functionality affords customisability so users can modify the site to suit their needs (*ibid.*). For example, individuals can populate their accounts with their own content; they can use their language of choice (from a selection), and they can add their own friend connections (*ibid.*). Facebook, therefore, can be equated with a chameleon. It retains the same basic structure across users, but it can change its colours or its feel dependent on how individuals utilise and customise it.

4.5.1.2 Facebook infrastructure and functionality

This section focuses on the functionality available to, and used by, participants at the time of data collection for this research (2017-2018): the timeline, news feed, privacy, language and friending functionalities. I provide an overview of how communication on Facebook took place, including the use of Messenger, utilisation of tags, groups, the significance of "sharing", and the utilisation of social buttons. Next, I position Facebook within its neoliberal capitalist ideological setting, and examine how the company generates revenue and how this positions Facebook users. This information is presented here as it is necessary for an understanding of the content within the chapters that follow.

On joining Facebook, new users populate their timeline. This is a “virtual scrapbook” (Abram 2016) including a profile image, background image, and demographic information the user chooses to publish. The profile image identifies subsequent content posted by that individual. The timeline is an important element of Facebook as a form of “self-representation” (Ellison and boyd 2013, p. 153).

The timeline displays, in reverse chronological order, the content a user has posted, and any content in which they are tagged (Abram 2016). This content can be viewed by Facebook friend connections - individuals who the user has permitted to access their content - or a broader audience if the account is public.

If the timeline is a virtual scrapbook, the news feed is a virtual neighbourhood circular. It presents content published by Facebook friend connections and groups to which the user belongs. The news feed surfaces content based on algorithmic decision-making (Kirkpatrick 2010).

Algorithms are software containing “machine-readable instructions that direct the computer to perform a specific task” (Bucher 2017, pp. 30 - 31). When faced with a complicated problem, an algorithm can find a practical way of tackling the issue, but not necessarily the “optimal or rational” (Smith 2019, p. 29) way of doing so.

The introduction of the news feed in 2006 fundamentally changed how individuals accessed information on Facebook. Prior to its advent, users had to search friend connections’ timelines in order to engage with their content. Now, the news feed algorithms present the user with content considered to be of the most interest to that individual, based on previous Facebook use (Kirkpatrick 2010).

The impact of the news feed algorithm is far reaching. Because it surfaces content from friend connections, it influences which individuals to whom one is connected become visible on one’s newsfeed, and which individuals do not (Bucher 2012). Relationships are inevitably influenced by such decisions,

and human friendship on the platform becomes “fundamentally technologically driven and commercially motivated” (*ibid.*, p. 480).

An essential part of Facebook use is populating one’s list of “Friends” with friend connections. These are other Facebook users with whom one is connected on the site: it is effectively one’s “network” (Ellison and boyd 2013, p. 155). This list not only shows who one’s friend connections are, but also indicates friend connections one has in common with other users (Ellison and boyd 2013).

The use of the term “Friend” lends an equalising connotation to the relationship that the label describes; however, it needs to be remembered that power dynamics are involved in these relationships (Markham 2012). For example, one can be “Friends” with one’s manager or one’s older siblings: relationships in which power differentials definitely exist (*ibid.*).

Facebook content is public by default. This means one’s Facebook content is accessible to all Facebook users, and searchable through search engines. The site’s privacy functionality, however, allows users to restrict access to their content, and, by extension, to whom they are visible (Abram 2016). As a result, this functionality is involved in establishing who comprises one’s audience.

As of November 2021, Facebook supported the use of 111 languages (Omnicores 2021). This means that content can be produced in these languages. It also enables Facebook architecture to be visible in these languages, and translations into and from them can be produced via the “See translation” button.

Facebook communication is complex (Warner and Chen 2017). The platform has been described as “a communication toolkit” (Alm 2015, p. 5) on the basis that it facilitates a number of different modes of communication. Communication can be asynchronous or synchronous (Ellison and boyd 2013). It can occur on the basis of one-to-many, meaning that one user can

communicate with many people, but users also have the option to communicate more privately (one-to-one or in within a pre-selected group) using Facebook's "Messenger" facility.

Users can publish their own content in the form of "posts". These can be purely text-based or multimodal (Ellison and boyd 2013). Users are able to upload their own images to Facebook, or link to content from the worldwide web. Content can be edited or deleted during production or after publication. In addition, the content of others can be "hidden" from one's Facebook pages, effectively removing that content from view.

To control visibility of posts, users can "tag" a friend connection. This involves embedding the name of a friend connection into content. Once tagged, the friend connection is notified. This content will then surface on that individual's timeline. Tags can be deleted if desired.

Facebook also offers group functionality. This creates a bounded space within Facebook which individuals can join, and so gather together to engage in shared interests with likeminded others (Abram 2016). Group content is surfaced on one's news feed.

Once on Facebook, the user is constantly encouraged to share. For example, the first thing I see in my news feed is, "What's on your mind, Sarah?". As John (2013, p. 116) states, "Sharing is the fundamental and constitutive activity of Web 2.0 in general, and social network sites in particular". Indeed, there is a "Share" button which affords the convenient dispersal of content among one's friend connections (dependent on algorithmic decision making).

Sharing can be undertaken with the use of the "Check in" button. This allows the users to share their location on Facebook (Abram 2016). Users can also create "Events" on Facebook. Information about an upcoming activity is published and invitations to attend are shared on the site. Individuals who receive an invitation can indicate their intention to attend (Abram 2016).

Users can also share via Facebook's social buttons. These buttons provide quick and easy ways to react to content by posting a "Like" or emoji. They

comprise a number of icons signifying different emotions, such as approval, love, care, humour, amazement, sadness and anger. Even though these icons appear straightforward, their use reveals they can signify more than they suggest at face value (Kress 2010). During interviews, research participants reported that a Like was interpreted as approval, or an acknowledgement that a post had been read, but not necessarily approved of. This social button, therefore, has a different “semiotic effect” (*ibid.*, p. 80) depending on the needs of the users.

In purely functional terms, Facebook is a set of “interrelated profile pages” which are utilised to publish content and react to that of others (Wilson *et al.* 2012, p. 412). Yet, as can be seen from the above description of its functionality, it is far more than this. It is a place in which individuals engage in online sociality (Bucher 2012). It is also an extremely successful business.

4.5.1.3 Facebook as a business

While Mark Zuckerberg claims to the contrary, Facebook has been labelled an advertising company (Kirkpatrick 2010). As Couldry and Mejias (2019, p. 49) state:

Facebook’s business model is premised entirely on its ability to capture data from its users and sell it to advertisers.

The significance of advertising for Facebook becomes apparent on examination of its revenue. By August 2021, the company’s global revenue was more than \$29 billion, of which \$28.5 billion was derived from advertising (Statistica 2021 c). The information users share on Facebook, for example their content and their reactions to the content of others, is commodified and access to it (in aggregated form) is sold to advertising companies (Fuchs 2017; Stutzman *et al.* 2012). Advertisers are then in a position to target the site’s users with advertisements for goods and services in which their data indicate they should be interested (van Dijk *et al.* 2018; Smith 2019).

This commodification of Facebook users occurs through the company's access to *big data* - the mass of information with which users supply Facebook. Big data are produced through the digital collection, amalgamation and algorithmic analysis of vast amounts of multimodal content (Fuchs 2017). With big data, human behaviour can be predicted, usually for financial profit (Fuchs 2017; Thatcher *et al.* 2016).

With this perspective on Facebook, its functionality takes on a different meaning. Exhortations to "share", and the functionality with which one is provided to do so - the "Share" button, the social buttons such as Like and emojis, even the language functionality which affords use of the site in over 100 languages - are all elements within Facebook's business model. This model emphasises the need to encourage and facilitate human interaction on the site, and capture the resultant data for profit. Access to the site may not require a monetary payment, but it is not free: users pay with their data (Fuchs 2017). This, amongst other issues, has generated problems for, and controversies around, Facebook.

4.5.1.4 Problems and controversies

A number of issues have arisen with regard to Facebook. In 2012, it was revealed that the company had been covertly researching the impact of the manipulation of US voting information posted on the news feeds of 61 million Facebook users (Zuboff 2019). Between late 2015 and 2016, Facebook was unwittingly involved in what would become the "Cambridge Analytica" scandal (John 2019). Again targeting electoral processes, this consultancy firm gained clandestine access to between 50 million and 87 million Facebook users' data through a personality quiz hosted on the site (Zuboff 2019).

In 2021, documents known as the "Facebook papers" (Chappell 2021) were released by a former Facebook product manager, Frances Haugen. These documents confirmed Facebook's difficulties in managing misinformation in

Trump's USA (Chappell 2021; van Dijck *et al.* 2018). It also became clear that the company had ignored, or underplayed, findings from its own research which linked Instagram use by teenage girls with a decline in their mental health (Ghaffary 2021).

The Facebook Papers also revealed that the large number of languages used on Facebook, and the company's inadequate content moderation systems, were causing difficulties (Chappell 2021). For example, moderation of content in Arabic was an issue due to the wide variation between dialects of that language (*ibid.*). Problems were also evident in relation to Palestine and Syria. In these areas, the use of particular common words had been banned by the platform, effectively censoring Facebook users (*ibid.*).

Due to the negative press reports that followed the release of this information, in November Facebook rebranded by changing the name of its holding company, but not the social media platform itself to "Meta" (Milmo 2021).

4.5.1.5 Field-sites and boundaries

Facebook is a digital environment in which business and social motivations intersect. It is a place of blurred boundaries. The concept of a virtual ethnography has been problematised on the basis of such field-site boundary issues (Beneito-Montagut 2011; Shumar and Madison 2013). These discussions are based on the development of ideas about boundaries between the online and offline (Carter 2005). With the imbrication of online and offline spaces, clear distinctions between these areas are no longer viable (Beneito-Montagut 2011; Shumar and Madison 2013). As a result, field-site boundaries are increasingly viewed in terms of socially arising spaces (Shumar and Madison 2013) which are linked by "flow and connectivity rather than location and boundary as the organizing principle" (Hine 2000, loc.1073/2880). Indeed, for Markham (2005, p. 802) boundaries should be viewed in terms of "interaction" not "location".

Thirteen participants were involved in this study, each with a Facebook page. If my own Facebook account is included, as it was linked to the nine participants who were engaged in online participant observation, there are fourteen field-sites in total. With the entanglement of the offline and other Facebook areas such as Facebook groups and Messenger which participants chose to refer to in interviews, as well as the links to online content in English that appeared on their Facebook accounts, the notion of a singular field-site becomes increasingly complicated. In addition, the dynamism of the platform, that is, the manner in which its use can be tailored to meet users' individual needs, results in a plethora of Facebooks, and multiple field-sites.

With less focus on the space of a field-site, and more on "the nature of the connectivity between sites" (Jordan 2009, p. 186) virtual ethnography becomes "multi-sited" (Landri 2013, p. 252; Jordan 2009). This was the case with this research. I characterise this research as being multi-sited and linked by flows of connectivity. These flows not only comprised connections between digital content, for example, links to YouTube content, advertisements, emojis and textual content posted by friend connections. Significantly, they also comprised flows of relationships between individuals connected within Facebook.

4.5.2 Participant recruitment

A number of steps were taken to facilitate participant recruitment. The first entailed the design and production of a website. Hosted on Weebly, this website contained a short introduction video of myself explaining the research. The impetus to produce this video was the need to build trust with prospective participants (Andrews *et al.* 2003), and it was hoped that it would help individuals become familiar with me, and so more inclined to engage in the study. The website also contained information on the research, such as participants' information and informed consent forms, as well as a link to the pre-interview online questionnaire. While this website was designed to be

used in the recruitment of participants unknown to me, it remained of use when changes in recruitment had to take place.

As stated in [Section 4.2](#), the original research plan had to be amended due to recruitment issues. With the English language Facebook group closed to me, I needed to consider a different group of potential participants. It was after significant consideration that I decided to contact former and current students to investigate whether they would be interested in participating in my research. These were individuals I had taught on a pre-masters English for Academic Purposes course. After I left that teaching post and the institution, we had connected on Facebook. Six individuals noted an interest and I sent them a link to the research information website. Once viewed, all six individuals agreed to interview and to allow me to observe their Facebook content.

I was also able to recruit two further research participants via “snowball sampling” (Robson 2002, p. 265) ([see 4.5.2.1 below](#)). These individuals, one a former student, the other her friend, had heard about the research, and requested to become involved through another participant.

In order to recruit more English language learning participants, I turned to individuals whom I was currently teaching. At that time, I was a volunteer English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher at a local community centre in Ireland. I sought permission from the manager of the community centre to approach three students, who were already my Facebook friend connections, about engaging in the research project. These three women had been selected because they met the criteria for inclusion in terms of age, Facebook use and English language ability. The manager was provided with written details of my project, along with a verbal explanation. Once permission had been secured, all three students were approached. All agreed to be interviewed and engage in online participant observation. Informed consent was gained, and face-to-face interviews were conducted with these individuals.

In August 2017, it became evident that to gain a more comprehensive picture of Facebook use for the development of investment, it would be beneficial to recruit more research participants. This was achieved by approaching a university in the United Kingdom and gaining permission to contact a new cohort of MA TESOL students. I travelled from Ireland to the United Kingdom to make a brief presentation to these students on my research project. I requested that those interested provide me with their name and email address, on a sign-up sheet, for future communication. Thirty-three people provided me with their contact details. After one initial and one follow-up email was sent, however, only three students agreed to online interviews.

I did not request online participant observation of this cohort of participants. My reason for this was based on the difficulties I had experienced previously recruiting participants. I feared that online participant observation might dissuade potential recruits, and so I decided not to request this form of data collection.

English language participants who were recruited from the university in the United Kingdom were sent a link to the research website, and asked to complete the online pre-interview questionnaire ([Appendix 2](#)). This was to ensure that they met the criteria for inclusion into the research. It has also enabled me to gain information about the participant which subsequently helped me formulate some of the initial interview questions. By being able to tailor questions to each particular participant, I was able to quickly build rapport with participants during their initial online interviews.

Subsequent to my presentation at the university, three individuals completed the online pre-interview questionnaire, and these three indicated an interest in engaging in online interviews. Follow up emails were sent to these participants, and three individuals agreed to be interviewed.

4.5.2.1 Sampling

Research participants were selected through a combination of volunteer, purposive and snowball sampling (Robson 2002; Cohen *et al.* 2007). Volunteer sampling was applied at the pre-interview questionnaire stage: individuals volunteered to complete the questionnaire once the link to the website had been sent to them. Purposive sampling was used on a face-to-face and online basis. Only participants who met the requirements of the research were included. Having said that, criteria for inclusion were not overly specific in order to broadly recruit across Facebook users. Participants had to be non-native speakers of English, with approximately an upper-intermediate level of language ability, or above. This was a stipulation so that participants and myself would be able to engage in conversation on topics relevant to the research, and so that informed consent could be gained. In addition, participants had to be users of Facebook in English. They had to use the platform to read, watch or listen to content in English, or to interact with other users in English.

In the case of participants recruited from the university in the United Kingdom, these requirements were confirmed as part of the online pre-interview questionnaire. Participants based in Ireland had this information confirmed prior to being invited to join the research, or prior to the first interview. In theory, purposive sampling allowed for the inclusion of participants with the most relevant experience and knowledge for the research project (Cohen *et al.* 2007). However, no participants were disqualified for inclusion in the project.

As stated in [Section 4.5.2](#), a further two participants were recruited via snowball sampling (Robson 2002). One individual was a former student of mine, and the other her friend, was also a university student. Before recruiting these participants, I met with them face-to-face to ensure they had the pre-requisite English language proficiency and were users of Facebook in English. Once the first interview had taken place, and informed consent had

been gained, both participants were added as my Facebook Friends, although only one agreed to online participant observation.

4.5.2.2 Participants

In total, the data from thirteen participants, twelve female and one male, is presented in this thesis. All participants were adults, ranging in age from early twenties to late forties. Ten participants were post-graduate university students, six in the Republic of Ireland, and three in the UK. The three remaining participants were living in Ireland: one individual was employed, and the other two were looking for employment at the time of the first interview.

Of the thirteen individuals involved in this project, I had a teaching relationship with nine individuals. I had either taught them on a pre-master's course in Ireland, or I was teaching them on a voluntary basis at a local community centre. I met the other four participants during the course of the research.

Naturally, all participants were non-native English language users, but this does not do justice to their language abilities. Of all those engaged in this research, I was the only person who was fluent in just one language. Participants ranged from bilingual to multilingual, with Zaria able to use five languages.

Having characterised this research as a virtual ethnography, and discussed participant recruitment, I now move on to discuss data collection methods, including the design of the data collection tools, and the data collection schedule.

4.6 Data collection

Initially it was intended that data would be gathered in three stages: pre-interview online questionnaire, online interview and online participant observation. However, as the research project progressed, it became evident that a flexible approach to data collection was necessary in order to accommodate different participants' contexts (Shumar and Madison 2003).

4.6.1 Pre-interview online questionnaire

The original research design required the recruitment of participants from Facebook groups. These individuals would have been unknown to me, and as a result, an online pre-interview questionnaire was written, the purpose of which was to aid the participant sampling process. Questions encompassed demographic information, Facebook use, and English language ability ([Appendix 2](#)). Individuals would be invited for interview based on their responses to the questionnaire.

As the research changed, use of the questionnaire became largely redundant. The majority of participants were known to me, and I did not require the type of information the questionnaire gathered to invite them to join the project.

The questionnaire was retained, however, for the three participants who were recruited from the university in the United Kingdom. They were required to complete this questionnaire as I was not familiar with them and did not know if they were suitable for the study. In fact, all were suitable, and subsequently interviewed.

Access to the pre-interview questionnaire was gained through the research website. This website contained a link to the questionnaire which was hosted on "Bristol Online Survey", now known as "Online Surveys".

With the vast array of distractions present online, engaging participants in online questionnaires can be problematic (Hewson *et al.* 2016). The

questionnaire was developed to maximise its response rate in this unpredictable environment. Clear instructions and an estimated completion time were included (*ibid.*). The questionnaire was designed with a user-friendly layout (Robson 2002). Such a layout needed to incorporate “flow” (Kaczmirek 2008, p. 15). Flow was produced through the incorporation of skip logic which enabled users to answer only the questions pertinent to themselves (*ibid.*). Finally, the questionnaire was piloted to ensure it was not too onerous, as in too long, and to confirm that the questions were clear and fit the multiple-choice answers (Andrews *et al.* 2003).

4.6.2 Interview schedule

This qualitative study called for non-native English users’ experiences and perceptions to be at the fore. Therefore, interviews were chosen as the main method of data collection (Cohen *et al.* 2007). My schedule proposed three interviews for each participant, conducted at two monthly intervals. In most cases, it was not possible to maintain this schedule as participants were all leading active lives (see Table 1 below). For many participants, the interviews spanned the final stages of their academic year. They were busy with assignments and had booked flights home, making scheduling interviews difficult. In some cases, time between interviews had to be shortened, and in other cases, elongated. The shortest time between interviews was two months and the longest, nine months.

In total, 37 interviews with English language participants were conducted. These interviews were between one and one and a half hours in duration. Nine online and 26 face-to-face interviews were undertaken.

Table 1: Interview and online participant observation schedule

	Participant name	Online pre-interview questionnaire	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Online participant observation
1	Li Li	No	03.05.17	03.07.17	30.08.17	Yes
2	Mingmei	No	03.05.17	01.06.17	17.07.17	Yes
3	Chunhua	No	07.05.17	01.06.17	04.08.17	Yes
4	Guo	No	11.05.17	04.06.17	04.08.17	Yes
5	Abda	No	22.05.17	11.08.17	23.10.17	Yes
6	Sofia	No	15.06.17	28.08.17	20.03.18 (online)	Yes
7	Elena	No	16.06.17	21.08.17	03.03.18 (online)	Yes
8	Lijuan	No	18.07.17	10.08.17	13.09.17	Yes
9	Nuan	No	21.10.17	03.01.18	13.03.18	No
10	Zaria	No	25.05.17	31.07.17	10.10.17	Yes
11	Shu	Yes	19.10.17 (online)	--	-	No
12	Lan	Yes	10.10.17 (online)	01.18.18 (online)	29.03.18 (online)	No
13	Areeya	Yes	22.10.17 (online)	10.01.18 (online)	30.03.18 (online)	No

Face-to-face interviews were conducted either at the participant's university, or in quiet cafés that were convenient for respondents. In one instance, two participants were interviewed together. Mingmei wanted her first interview to be conducted with her friend Li Li. I assumed this was due to her shyness even though both individuals were known to me prior to interview as I had taught them on a pre-master's English course. Li Li was happy to be interviewed with Mingmei, and I agreed to Mingmei's request as I did not want to make her uncomfortable and potentially lose her as a participant. She agreed to conduct the subsequent two interviews alone.

A number of online interviews, nine in total, with five participants, were also conducted. These were held via videoconferencing. Seven of these interviews were with students recruited from the university in the United Kingdom: three interviews each for two participants, and one interview with a

third. This was the only participant who was only interviewed once. Our first online interview took place successfully, and the participant said she wanted to engage in Interview Two. Yet, two emails inviting her to schedule the second interview met with no response, and no more interviews took place with this participant.

The other two online interviews were conducted with participants who had been recruited in Ireland. One participant returned to her country of origin after Interview Two. She was enthusiastic about completing the series of three interviews, and I therefore interviewed her via videoconferencing. Another Ireland-based participant had gained employment after Interview Two, and was not able to meet face-to-face; she did agree, however, to complete Interview Three via videoconferencing.

4.6.3 Transcription

All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. They were transcribed verbatim on the same day, or the day after, they had been conducted.

As Cohen *et al.* (2007, p. 365) state, interviews are not only a data gathering exercise, but a “social encounter”. Transcribing an interview loses much of the unspoken communication entangled within the interview. Therefore, transcriptions are not, and cannot be, a reproduction of the interview encounter, but:

are decontextualised, abstracted from time and space, from the dynamics of the situation, from the live form, and from the social, interactive, dynamic and fluid dimensions of their sources; they are frozen

(Cohen *et al.* 2007, p. 365)

While my transcription includes emphasis, pauses, and instances of unclear speech (Cohen *et al.* 2007), I did not transcribe for the speakers’ mood, speed of speech or tone of voice (*ibid.*). To have done so would have helped illustrate the social interaction in the interview, that is, how individuals were engaging in co-authoring the interview data (*ibid.*).

In the context of a book they wrote in collaboration with their research participants, Nespor and Barber (1995, p. 56) refer to “cleaning up” interview data of, for example, hesitations and false starts. They do not view such interventions as rendering an inauthentic reproduction of the interview. Rather, affording their participants the ability to revise their interview data, and re-write it, they are addressing an imbalance. In an interview, participants are asked to comment at length on areas which they may never have thought about before, let alone talked about. As a result, when taken out of their spoken context and transcribed in written form, participants’ utterances can appear unsophisticated and ill-formed. Nevertheless, one must remember that transcriptions are of individuals’ utterances while simultaneously thinking about what to say, and giving voice to their ideas. Such utterances, when placed in published format such as a thesis or a book, can contrast significantly with those of the writer, who has had time to review and edit their texts, which are, produced to be read, unlike interview participants’ utterances (Nespor and Barber 1995).

In terms of my own participants, this contrast between my own written ideas, which have been through a rigorous process of review and editing, and their spoken data may appear stark, in part due to their non-native speaker status. This juxtaposition may highlight their non-native English-speaker subject positions, and so emphasise an imbalance between myself, as a native English-speaker, and my participants. It would be easy to view my participants as in deficit due to their relation to the English language. I would like to reassert, however, that all participants were successful multilingual individuals, most of whom were fluent in more than three, and one, in five, languages. What is presented in the interview are the words of individuals successfully investing in the use of English, and taking up their right to speak and be heard during the interview process.

4.6.4 Interviews

Prior to the commencement of the interview process, interview questions ([Appendix 3](#)) were constructed with reference to Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. Questions focused on capital, ideology and the subject positions available to participants in relation to Facebook use in English. These questions also reflected my own experiences of Facebook use. As interviews progressed, my participants presented me with alternative forms of the platform's use. By employing an approach which allowed me to be responsive to the analysis of previous interview data, my interview questions developed to encompass participants' experiences with, and views of, Facebook in order to investigate their compatibility with the experiences of other participants.

A semi-structured format was followed for all interviews. This approach was selected as it provided me the opportunity to develop a comprehensive picture of participants' experiences (Robson 2002; Cohen *et al.* 2007). In addition, the flexibility of this approach afforded me the ability to respond to the needs of the interview at hand (Newby 2010). I was able to adapt my questions, for example, the wording or the sequencing, to suit the requirements of myself and the participant and so respond to our needs during the interview. Participants were therefore given time to elaborate on certain points, and I was free to explore other topics with them (Denscombe 2007; Opie 2004).

In addition to semi-structured interviews, I also engaged in active interviewing. This method foregrounds the interview as a socially situated event in which meaning is actively co-constructed between the interviewer and the respondent (Holstein and Gubrium 2004). There are, therefore, implications for the adoption of this approach. For example, reliability (that is, the reproducibility by another of the interview) is de-emphasised in favour of the development of an awareness of how knowledge is constructed within the interview itself (*ibid.*). This entails being alert to factors such how the life

experience and background of the respondent and the interviewer may be affecting the co-construction of knowledge ([see 4.7.3 below](#)).

In addition, active interviewing also places an onus on the interviewer to ensure “the respondent’s interpretive capabilities are activated, stimulated, and cultivated in the interview exchange” (Holstein and Gubrium 2004, p. 151). This requires that the respondent be asked to make links between ideas and/or to consider ‘alternative possibilities and considerations’ (*ibid.*). As participants were engaged in successive interviews over a period of time, I was able to ask them to interpret data collected from previous interviews and online participant observations, and ask them for clarification and/or to extrapolate on that information (Holstein and Gubrium 2004).

Indeed, conducting three interviews with each participant over an extended period of time was beneficial to this research in a number of ways. After the initial interview, subsequent interview questions were able to be tailored to the participant (Beneito-Montagut 2011). In addition, when interviews were accompanied by online participant observation, observation data gave rise to questions on areas of Facebook use I wanted to investigate in the next interview. Multiple interviews and online participant observation also enabled the investigation of changes in participants’ Facebook use. In two instances, for example, developments in participants’ personal lives significantly impacted their use of the platform and its significance in their lives. Without multiple interviews and online participant observation over a prolonged period of time, I would not have been able to notice or investigate such events.

4.6.4.1 Online interviews

Three English language participants were interviewed online, with the use of videoconferencing software. Videoconferencing software was chosen as it enabled me to interact with these individuals at a distance, while at the same time being able to see their faces (Hanna 2012; Hewson *et al.* 2016). As a result, I was able to be aware of the paralinguistic cues that accompanied

their spoken communication and, for example, take steps to clarify potential misunderstandings which arose during the interview.

In total, I conducted seven online interviews: two participants were interviewed three times; one participant was interviewed only once. In general, the online interviews went well. Participants were more experienced using videoconferencing than myself, and appeared comfortable communicating through this medium. As I had data from pre-interview questionnaires, I was not commencing the interview “cold”, but had information about the participant that I was able to bring into the conversation, and so start to build rapport. Taking such steps to build rapport with online interview participants is crucial to ensuring the integrity of research (Hewson *et al.* 2016).

Nevertheless, some problems did arise. Mediated by digital technology, online interviews were affected by events beyond my control. Poor internet connections sometimes impacted the flow of the interview, and increased the pressure I felt to respond in ways that would enable me to show I was listening to the respondent, and that they had been heard, while thinking about my next question. A total loss of internet connection to my house one hour prior to one interview resulted in a swift postponement and a very polite request to reschedule. Such occurrences compounded my feelings of having a lack of control with regard to online interviews.

As stated above, online interviews were conducted because I was separated in physical space from certain participants. However, once online videoconferencing connections were made, I found myself inside the homes of my respondents, and they were in mine. While these participants did not have to travel to meet me, unlike face-to-face participants, and interviews were scheduled at their convenience, I nevertheless felt I was encroaching upon them more so than I did when meeting with participants in person. I was not only taking up their time, but connected via videoconferencing, I was taking up space in their homes. Hanna (2012) has commented on Skype videoconferencing interviews as providing a “safe location” (p.241) for online

interviews as there is no encroachment on participants' space due to the fact that interviews often take place while they are in their homes. I did not experience the interviews in this way, and I was not able to mitigate these feelings of imposition by buying them a coffee, as I was able to do when meeting participants face-to-face in a café. Far from experiencing an elevated social position as a researcher, with its potential reactive effects (Barbour and Schostak 2005), I felt a lack of power and control.

4.6.5 Online participant observation

Online participant observation of nine participants' Facebook use took place. Observation was included as a method of data collection because it can help to develop a feel for the field-site (Guba 1981) and develop an awareness of what occurs there. With this knowledge, the researcher is able to contextualise what participants report during interviews (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013), and in so doing, for example, produce thick descriptions relevant to the field-site can be produced (Cohen *et al.* 2007). This is of particular importance in this research because it is part of establishing the study as a piece of a naturalistic inquiry from which working hypotheses can be generated (Guba 1981).

Observation data were used in a "supportive or supplementary" way to interview data (Robson 2002, p. 312). Sitting within a multiple interview format, observation data could be utilised for interview question development (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013). For example, I was able to explore ideas that arose from observing participants' Facebook activity by addressing these points in subsequent interviews. I was also able to engage in observation of Facebook use in order to confirm information provided in interviews (Robson 2002).

As stated, nine individuals agreed to engage in online participant observation. In order to gain access to the field-sites, myself and the participant had to become Facebook friend connections. With this online

connection, I was able to view and interact with content on the participant's Facebook page, and vice versa. At the same time, both myself and the participant were able to conceal content of choice with the use of audience filter functionality. I did not use this functionality, but my participants might have without my knowledge.

Online participant observation took the form of "marginal participant" observation (Robson 2002, p. 318). This type of observation entails adopting a largely passive role in the field-site, while still making one's presence evident (*ibid.*). I did not want to engage to a significant extent in the field-sites. At the time, my concerns were twofold. I was aware that during observation I was in participants' online spaces, and that I had gained access to these spaces through their generosity. I did not want to flout their hospitality by making myself too visible.

In addition, I was aware that I might be made visible on participants' news feeds on the basis of algorithmic decisions which were beyond my control. Therefore, without engaging directly with their content, I could nevertheless be present within their Facebook content. I wanted to be minimally visible to remind participants that I was present ([see 4.7.3 below](#)), but I did not want to be so visible that I flooded their news feeds with my content.

I decided to engage in "unstructured observation" (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, p. 393). This style of observation does not determine what is to be observed in advance (*ibid.*); therefore, it provided me with freedom as to what to attend to and what data to gather. It allowed me to respond to changes in the needs of the research process, and changes in participants' activity.

In agreement with participants, the duration of observation commenced immediately after the first interview, and ceased immediately before the final interview. With three interviews planned to be held at two-monthly intervals, I envisaged an average observation duration of four months. However, participants' schedules and commitments resulted in changes having to be made to this schedule. Some participants were interviewed over a period of

less than four months, and others were interviewed over more than that period of time. This impacted the amount of time I had to observe their Facebook use (see Table 1 [Section 4.6.2](#)).

I checked participants' Facebook timelines either daily or every two days to identify any new content. This type of regular interaction with the site was necessary as Facebook is not static. Facebook users can edit and delete content at any time, in so doing, altering or erasing the traces they leave on their Facebook pages.

Although I spent extended time gathering data through online participant observation and multiple interviews, I do not consider this to have been longitudinal research, which looks for change over time (Hermanowicz 2016; Saldaña 2003). To warrant a longitudinal characterisation, it is not enough for data collection to occur over prolonged periods of time, and for instances of change to be identified and noted. Instead, a research aim needs to be the *investigation of change over time* (Saldaña 2003). While I was able to identify and explore occasions when change occurred, my main focus was not to understand how participants' investment in Facebook use in English *changed over this time duration*. Rather, I was gathering data over a prolonged period in order to facilitate the collection of as rich data as possible. Therefore, it is better to characterise my research as a study carried out over an extended period of time, as opposed to longitudinal research.

4.6.5.1 What was observed

As agreed with participants, observation was restricted to English language content and content posted on the participants' timeline that was visible by accessing a participant's Facebook page from my own account.

At the beginning of the observation phase, I looked for instances and contexts of English language use. This meant I observed how English was used, for example, in a serious or a humorous way. I attended to the length of text; I also focused on the incorporation multi-modality, that is, the use of

text and image, text and emojis, or only emojis, for example. Video content and gifs were also viewed and observed if they were in English. In addition, I was interested in the subject positions that participants were taking up or being positioned in.

As interviews unfolded, my observation changed. I became more focused on looking for correlations between what my participants had told me in interviews and what they did on Facebook (Robson 2002). Online participant observation helped me confirm the statements they made about their Facebook use. I was also able to develop new questions for subsequent interviews from my online participants (*ibid.*). Significantly, I could ask them how they felt about, for instance, receiving certain content, or receiving no replies to a particular post. In this way, online participant observation in concert with multiple interviews helped me deepen my understanding of participants' experiences of Facebook, and check my development of this knowledge with them.

4.6.5.2 Field notes

Observation data were recorded in two ways. I kept a field-site notebook in which I made unstructured observation notes. Data were also recorded in the context of the analysis of participants' interviews. For example, as I read over the transcript of an interview, I made marginal notes on areas to focus on when observing this participants' Facebook pages. In doing this, I was also able to cross reference field-notes made during previous observations and relate them to the transcript I was reading. Field notes also included my own inferences about the data I viewed, some of which were then incorporated into subsequent interview questions.

All observation data were recorded in note form, by hand. No quotes were recorded for ethical reasons (see [Section 4.9](#)).

4.6.5.3 Observing as a Facebook friend connection

As already mentioned, participant observation in my research context involved becoming Facebook friend connections with my participants, and obviously, they had to become “Friends” with me. As such, participants had access to my Facebook space, and access to the part of my online social life that was mediated by Facebook. If they chose, they were also able to scroll back and view past content: the autobiographical traces of my posting myself into being.

I did consider creating a separate Facebook account for this research. I decided not to do this in the name of equity. Connected to my personal Facebook account, my participants had access to the same kind of information about me as I had connected to their accounts, and they were able to observe the same type of interaction in which I engaged on the platform as they did. In this way, to a limited extent, there was a harmony between field-sites. A research-based account would have been devoid of my own Facebook interaction with friend connections. I would have been able to observe my participants, but they would not have had access to my engagement on the site. This troubled me, and I felt it was unfair to put participants, some of whom were my Facebook friend connections prior to the research, into this position.

As the above indicates, boundaries, therefore, were clearly blurred by incorporating my Facebook account as part of the multiple field-sites of this research ([Section 4.5.1](#)). Beaulieu and Estalella (2012, p. 29) refer to this type of blurring of research boundaries in terms of issues of “contiguity”. This means that engagement with technology results in researchers not only acting upon others, but being “acted upon” (*ibid.*, p. 27). I found that becoming visible to my research participants impacted my Facebook activity.

Facebook was no longer a ludic arena for me: a place to be unseen in a professional capacity. With Facebook incorporated into the multi-sitedness of my field-sites, I felt the need to engage in my own impression management, and my Facebook content changed. Hine (2008) refers to the need for

researchers engaged in virtual ethnography to represent themselves online in ways acceptable to their participants. Responding to my imagined Facebook audience, in which my participants were seated in the front row, I began to post less political content than previously, and I restricted the type of the humorous content I published. My use of language also changed. I reduced my use of slang, replacing it with language which I thought either my non-native speaker contacts could understand, or which would be fairly accurately translated by Facebook translation functionality or Google Translate. I also carefully considered the content that I “liked”, considering whether my audience would find it contentious.

None of these changes to my Facebook use were onerous. In fact, I was pleased with the manner in which I was posting myself into being within this context of heightened impression management (boyd 2014). My participants’ perceptions of compassionate Facebook use were influenced my own use of the platform.

Having examined how data were collected for this research, the focus of this chapter turns to the analysis. Section 4.8 comprises a justification of my choice of thematic analysis and provides a description of how this analysis was conducted within a posthumanist approach.

4.7 Research paradigms

The identification of the paradigms of a piece of research sets out the “worldview” (Guba and Lincoln 1994, p. 107) behind the project. This study is informed by a number of paradigms: interpretivist, poststructural, Bourdieu’s constructivist structuralism/structuralist constructivism, posthumanism and natural inquiry. These paradigms do not stand as independent elements within the research, solid and impermeable. Rather, the boundaries between them blur, for example, when they share concepts (Guba and Lincoln 2005).

The interpretivist approach is evident in that it foregrounds individual experiences as a way to investigate how participants make sense of their

worlds (Hesse-Biber 2010). With reality viewed as “multilayered and complex” (Cohen *et al.* 2007) the emphasis of this research includes, but is not restricted to, investigating socially and temporally situated interpretations of the social world (Crotty 1998).

The label “interpretivism” carries different meanings for different researchers (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013). For some it refers to all qualitative research, as this research requires interpretation. For others, such as Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013, p. 26), it characterises “a select group of philosophies that include pragmatism, phenomenology and hermeneutics, and post-critical and post-structuralism”. Weedon’s feminist poststructuralism is one of the foundational concepts of Norton Pierce’s (1995) and Darwin and Norton’s (2015) concept of investment in target language use. As such, poststructuralism is an influential paradigm in this study.

At the heart of Weedon’s feminist poststructuralism is the significance of language and discourse as productive of reality (Weedon 1997). As stated in Chapter Two, language and discourse are not viewed as neutral vehicles for the transportation of meaning from transmitter to receiver. Language does not carry a static meaning which reflects reality. Rather, language is productive of reality and that reality is dependent on the historically and socially situated discourses which “divide up the world and give it meaning” (Weedon 1997, p. 22). Reality, therefore, is not understood as residing outside the individual, but is constructed by human actors through the language and discourse they use (Weedon 1997).

This ontological position has implications for how one produces and interprets meaning. In poststructuralism, meaning is situated in the discursively formed historico-social contexts in which it is produced (Weedon 1997). Any understanding of an action or an event needs to take into consideration its context. It is, therefore, problematic to look for universal truths, because what is “true” is dependent on who is constructing or perceiving that “truth”, which, of course, negates any claim to universality (Norton 2013; Darwin and Norton 2015).

As outlined in Chapter Two, as well as Weedon, Norton Pierce's original concept of investment (1995; Norton 2013) and Darvin and Norton's (2015) new model of investment are highly influenced by Bourdieu. He labelled his thought as "constructivist structuralism" or "structuralist constructivism" (1989, p. 14). He defines structuralism and constructivism separately:

By constructivism, I mean that there is a twofold social genesis, on the one hand of the schemes of perception, thought, and action which are constitutive of what I call habitus, and on the other hand of social structures, and particularly what I call fields and of groups, notably those we ordinarily call social classes.

(Bourdieu 1989, p. 14)

As already stated (Sections [2.2.2](#) and [2.7.1](#)) Bourdieu's significance for Norton is the ideological evaluation of capital and the resultant development of legitimate speaker status (Norton Pierce 1995; Darvin and Norton 2015). Nevertheless, an examination of Bourdieu's definition of his own thought as exemplified in the quote above shows the significance of matter in his philosophy. Bourdieu refers to two of his key concepts here: habitus and field. Field is more evident in Norton's (2013) and Darvin and Norton's (2015) theories of investment. It is from the evaluation of capital in ideologically infused social fields that target language users' are positioned or position themselves as legitimate speakers of English.

As examined in the theoretical framings ([Section 2.3.2](#)), matter has always been significant within Bourdieu's (1991) thought in its relationship with the development of habitus. As children, it is through interactions with the sociomateriality of our environments that we are socialised as individuals. Just as we are formed by language and discourse, we develop dispositions based on our experiences of social space. It should be no surprise, therefore, to involve sociomateriality in a consideration of investment. Even so, this has not previously been done.

4.7.1 Moving into the posthuman

Research design is a continuous process that suffuses the progression of investigation (Markham and Baym 2009). This became evident to me during stage one of my interviews with participants. As already stated ([Section 4.2](#)), at this time I was confronted with the sociomateriality of Facebook use in participants' investment in English on the platform. For example, these individuals regularly referred to digital language functionality such as Facebook's translation function and Google Translate. As my research design comprised repeated interviews with participants, I was able to revisit the salience of this functionality and develop an awareness of its significance in relation to investment in English language use on the platform. I could therefore investigate this aspect of Facebook use which had previously gone unnoticed by me. Having viewed Facebook through the lens of an English-speaker exclusively engaging with English language content, I had not appreciated the importance of these language tools for interacting with English on the platform.

At this point, my theoretical approach started to expand. Reading posthumanist commentators such as Barad (2003; 2007), Hayles (1999) and Fox and Alldred (2017), it became apparent that viewing investment as an assemblage of sociomaterialities would benefit my understanding of participants' English language use on Facebook. It would also open up a new avenue of understanding within studies of second language acquisition in online spaces.

Posthumanism and poststructuralism, especially feminist poststructuralism share commonalities. They both eschew the idea of a monolithic, static truth (Barad 2007). The posthumanist view of knowledge is that it is "always provisional, situated, and to be created anew" (Toohey 2019, p. 941). The human is decentred as arbiter of truth, demanding that the would-be-knower be entangled with what is becoming known (Toohey 2019).

At the same time, there are differences between the two areas of thought. Viewing the world as comprising a flat ontology, mind/body dualities are

rejected (St. Pierre 2019). Matter, including discourse and language, becomes agential (Barad 2007). As stated in [Section 2.7.2](#), while thinkers within posthumanism may differ to the degree of this agency, the impact of matter on the production of human beings and society is not negated, but embraced (Barad 2007; Mazzei 2013). One needs to acknowledge the sociomateriality of language and discourse, and add to them other sociomaterial factors which produce society.

This non-dualistic conception of reality rejects binaries in favour of becomings (St. Pierre 2019). In St Pierre's (2019) view, this has an important impact on how research methods are perceived. Considered to exist in a world of becomings, which is not understood in linear terms of cause and effect, posthumanist research "does not exist prior to its arrival; it must be created, invented anew each time" (St. Pierre 2019, p. 9). This problematises the setting out of any instructions as to how to conduct posthumanist research (Lather 2013).

These similarities and differences impact the research process in a number of ways, such as data gathering techniques and what is viewed as data. It also influences the role of the researcher. This is discussed in the next section.

4.7.2 Role of the researcher

Poststructuralism and posthumanism de-centre the role of the researcher. Under both schools of thought, the researcher is not considered the axis around which the research revolves. Poststructuralist researchers, like any other human beings, are produced in a context of discursive forces and as such cannot stand apart from the data or analysis they produce (Davies and Gannon 2011). Posthumanist researchers are also produced by the discursive, and additionally by other sociomaterialities (Fox and Alldred 2017). As such, they also cannot separate themselves from their research (MacLure 2013). Researcher and research are co-productive of each other.

The posthumanist researcher is, therefore, viewed as produced in the research assemblage.

This gives rise to research findings having to be viewed in a particular way.

As Toohey (2019, p. 943) states:

This entails the recognition that multiple representations (or 'documentations') of any event are inevitable, given different apparatuses of observation, other objects, humans, locations, times, and so on, in unique and changing assemblages. It also means that our expressions of knowledge, our research products, cannot be seen as faithful mirrors of the world, but are rather potentially useful assemblages for ongoing learning

Because the world, including our findings and the findings of others, is considered to be in a state of continual flux and constant becoming, the notion of being able to identify one overarching truth from which generalisations can be produced to fit all contexts becomes problematic. Clearly, this has implications for how research findings are viewed, and has influenced my choice of naturalistic inquiry, in particular trustworthiness, as a way to present my findings. This is discussed in [Section 4.7.4](#).

The next segment of this chapter maintains its focus on the researcher with a discussion of issues of reactivity in a context of posthumanist research.

4.7.3 Reactivity and the researcher

Reactivity is the effect of data collection methods on resultant data (Hammersley 2008). For example, the social status, gender and race of the interviewer may affect the answers respondents choose to give (Miller and Glassner, 2004) with resultant negative effects on the reliability of research findings (Denscombe 2007).

If we accept that research is undertaken within the affective flows of assemblages (Fox and Alldred 2017), then it follows that intra-actions within a research assemblage are productive of each. This means all entangled intra-actions, including research findings, within the research assemblage

arise in intra-action, and they cannot be separated. To separate them would mean that these intra-actions would arise in a new form as they would be produced in an entanglement of different intra-actions within a different assemblage. Taking this position, it may appear redundant to refer to reactivity as a threat to research findings. Reactivity appears to be a “feature” of the research assemblage to be identified and acknowledged, not a “bug” to be eradicated. Therefore, issues of reactivity are discussed here. They remain pertinent as they contribute to the thick description of the research, and so help readers develop their understanding of how to interpret findings (Guba 1981).

Reactivity issues are evident in the relationship between myself and the majority of my participants. At the time of data gathering, I had been, or still was, their English teacher. It is possible that this relationship impacted the information they gave me. For example, participants may have given me information they assumed I wanted to receive, as opposed to their actual opinion (Cohen *et al.* 2007). It was impossible to eradicate this form of reactivity. Nevertheless, the research design which included three interviews with each participant, and, in some cases, participant observation, provided several different avenues of data gathering, thus potentially reducing the impact of this type of reactivity.

There were also reactivity issues involved that were related to information gathering. During online participant observation, my presence potentially impacted the behaviour of my respondents. My participant observation occurred over an extended period of time. Some commentators have stated that reactivity effects decline with such observation as the participants become accustomed to the presence of the researcher (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Robson 2002). However, in order to maintain an ethical research environment, I wanted my participants to remain mindful that I was present, or would be present and observing their Facebook content at some point. For this reason, I reacted to content they posted, by way of a positive emoji. I “Liked myself into being” to remind them I was present.

The next section of this chapter outlines how I propose the quality of this research be judged, that is, in terms of naturalistic inquiry.

4.7.4 Naturalistic inquiry and trustworthiness of research

This research project also encompasses elements of naturalistic inquiry (Guba 1981; Lincoln and Guba 1985; 2000). Emphasising the potential for multiple realities, the situated nature of knowledge development, the decentring of the researcher within the research process and the need to be accountable for factors which influence the research process and findings (*ibid.*), naturalistic inquiry sits well with both poststructuralism and posthumanism. In naturalistic inquiry, there is no room for claims of neutral observer objectivity in the rational sense. It is necessary, therefore, to identify and acknowledge factors that have the potential to impact the research, and account for them. These elements are not eradicated, but assigned their place when presenting the research. This type of research has trustworthiness (Guba 1981).

4.7.4.1 Truth value and credibility

There are a number of criteria that I have addressed in this study in order to build its trustworthiness. First, trustworthiness requires that the researcher establishes the “truth value” (Guba 1981, p. 79) of the study. This relates to the credibility of interpretations made and resultant findings as judged by those involved in the project, for example, the participants (Guba 1981). A number of steps such as member checking and data collection over an extended duration of time, were taken to develop the credibility of this research.

Gathering data over a prolonged period of time can aid credibility (Guba 1981). Two forms of data collection, online participant observation and multiple interviews, spanned various time periods, allowing me the

opportunity to take note of changes in participants' behaviour and ask them for their interpretations of these changes. In addition, using these two different data gathering tools gave me the opportunity to triangulate data provided by participants who engaged in both these forms of data collection (Hesse-Biber 2010). This, too, adds credibility to my findings.

I included member checking (Robson 2002) in my research design as another way of potentially establishing credibility. Member checking is a process by which "data and interpretations" (Guba 1981, p. 85) are compared by those providing the data and those collecting it to attempt to ensure that the researcher's and the participants' production of knowledge are in accord (Blaikie 2010).

In the process of member checking, all participants were sent transcripts of their interviews. They were asked to read over these transcripts and make any changes, or make suggestions as to how to understand their points, and send them back to me. Only one participant engaged in this process. She made no changes, but did add clarifications to a small number of her points.

In hindsight, this was not the most effective strategy to encourage engagement in member checking. While it looked like collaborative meaning making across participant and researcher on paper, in reality it was requesting that participants read over and comment on over three hours of transcribed interview data, in a foreign language, on an area in which they probably were not greatly interested.

The most successful acts of member checking were at the interview stage. During interviews two and three, I was able to put tentative ideas, formed from my initial analysis of their interviews, to each participant, and ask them for their opinion. On occasion, my opinions were confirmed, at other times, participants disagreed with me, and offered other ways of viewing the data, which I considered during subsequent interviews and data analysis.

4.7.4.2 Generalisations, conclusions or working hypotheses

Assemblages are characterised as being in a constant state of flux - ever-changing (Bennett 2010; Fox and Alldred 2017). Making generalisations and recommendations based on such research that takes an onto-epistemological stance based on the dynamism of assemblages is problematic. It is difficult to predict the actions of an assemblage for the reason that it is so intricately entangled within itself, while at the same time, it becomes entangled with new relata as it pulls them into its sphere of intra-actions. In constant movement, assemblages require a flexible last word.

Influenced by naturalistic inquiry, I have chosen to forego generalisations and conclusions in favour of “working hypotheses” (Guba 1981, p. 77).

Generalisations are reductionist in that they are an attempt to simplify reality and reject the dynamism and idiosyncrasies of the world (Lincoln and Guba (2000). Indeed, if one takes seriously the concept of situated knowledge, as poststructuralism, posthumanism and naturalistic inquiry requires one to do, one needs to be wary of any claims made under context-independent generalisations. Guba (1981) refers to these in terms of carbon dating: just as radiocarbon “decay[s]” (p. 80) over time, so do generalisations as they are shifted out of their contexts of origin by social and temporal changes.

The instability of generalisations needs to be acknowledged, and this is done by presenting findings in terms of working hypotheses. These are “tentative both for the situation in which they are first uncovered and for other situations” (*ibid.*, p. 38). What is important, therefore, is that readers are able to judge the transferability of the working hypotheses presented in this thesis to other contexts of interest. One way of doing this is looking for the “applicability” (Guba 1981, p. 79) of research in different contexts.

Viewing the world in terms of multiple realities, and the resultant situatedness of knowledge production, one needs to be able to judge whether the research one is reading is applicable to one’s own context of interest (Guba 1981). It is therefore necessary to present findings in a way so that this judgement can be made. I have attempted to do this by describing elements of the research

through thick description which shows the intricacies of the research context (Cohen *et al.* 2007; Guba 1981, p. 79). These descriptions can be used to help readers develop an awareness of the research in order to judge its “fittingness” (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p. 40) with their own site of interest. The closer the fit, the more likely working hypotheses presented here will be able to be transferred to other research sites (Lincoln and Guba 2000).

4.7.4.3 Reflexivity or diffraction

As previously mentioned, naturalistic inquiry positions the researcher within, not beyond, the research. Researchers are therefore viewed as embedded in the research, influencing it and influenced by it (Guba 1981; Guba and Lincoln 2005). To take account of these influences, a reflexive stance is recommended, as from this position, the researcher can critically reflect “on the self as researcher, the “human as instrument” (Guba and Lincoln, 1981)” (Guba and Lincoln 2005, p. 210).

Reflexivity is an important facet of qualitative research (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013). Researchers who are aware of the impact they may have on the analysis and resultant findings are reflexive researchers (Markham and Baym 2009; Robson 2002). They remain conscious of “what values, attitudes, and research concerns they bring to a given research endeavour” (Hesse-Biber 2010, p. 32). Reflexivity has also been noted as of particular importance in terms of virtual ethnographies (Hine 2000; Markham and Baym 2009). It enables researchers to acknowledge the situatedness of research and the role they play in its construction (Markham and Baym 2009).

Approaching reality in terms of a flat ontology, posthumanists such as Barad (2007) can be sceptical of reflexivity. Drawing on Haraway, Barad (2007) describes a reliance on reflexivity as problematic because it requires one to stand back and look at oneself from a distance. This does not result in a satisfactory awareness of oneself as intra-active within the research process,

but merely mirrors the researcher and the elements of the research (*ibid.*). Diffraction, however, focuses on where difference arises and what the repercussions of these differences are. It lives up to posthumanists' (in Barad's case, agential realists') perspective that one develops knowledge as an intra-action entangled with other intra-actions within the world, rather than by attempting to stand outside it. Such a stance helps produce an objective attitude to one's research. This is not the objectivity that attempts to remove one from the research site, "rather, objectivity [which] is about being accountable to the specific materializations of which we are a part" (Barad 2007, p. 91).

Of course, both reflexivity and diffraction are metaphors which invite us as researchers to develop an awareness of ourselves as influential within the research process (Barad 2007). They both require us to see ourselves as a part of the research, rather than apart from it. This understanding is important in the research process because it forces us to recognise our own actions, thoughts and the research context itself, as constructive of the research (Blaikie 2010), or, from a posthumanist perspective - that ourselves and the research are co-productive.

Diffraction, unlike reflexivity, however, is an attempt to help the researcher uncover the entanglements of intra-actions within the research phenomenon or assemblage while remaining a part of the phenomenon (Barad 2007). A diffractive reading of this phenomenon requires looking for areas where change occurs: thinking about elements of the research, that is, data, participants, data gathering methods, theoretical framings, the researcher, the writing up process, in concert with each other and observing where changes take place and the type of changes that occur (*ibid.*).

While it was difficult for me to develop a diffractive stance, having been academically raised to be reflexive, I did attempt to develop an awareness of myself as productive of, and produced by, the research in a number of ways. Initially, influenced by the call to be a reflexive researcher, I attempted to keep something akin to a reflexive journal, in the form of a notebook, in which

I intended to uncover any biases (Hesse-Biber 2010) and identify ethical issues (Markham 2006), for example. As the research progressed, and I was engaged in the analysis of interviews and online participant observation data, the formation of interview questions and continual desk study, it became increasingly inauthentic to move from, for example, an interview transcript which had spurred certain ideas, to the reflexive journal in which I was to record my thought on my situatedness/entanglement in the research.

I felt that I was keeping a journal because Hesse-Biber and Markham had told me to, while recording my thoughts according to their advice separated the ideas from the data from which they arose, taking them out of the context in which they surfaced. As the research progressed, I found myself increasingly making notes on transcripts, in notebooks devoted to interview question development and in my field-notes journal. Such integrated writing helped me to identify myself as an intra-action entangled with the research.

This section has discussed the various paradigms that have guided the decisions made in this project, and which need to be taken into consideration when considering research methods, analysis and findings. As this research incorporates posthumanist elements, I feel it is necessary to address the issue of representation. This is presented below.

4.7.5 A note on representation

A factor which arises within posthumanist research is a wariness of representationalism. This is the perception that reality can be described independent of the agent undertaking the description (Lather and St. Pierre 2013). Representation is based on a belief in the existence of underlying structures, for example, discourse, which can be relied upon to uncover ways of understanding the social world (Martin and Kamberelis 2013; Pennycook 2016).

From a posthumanist position, the medium of representation, for example, writing, cannot be disentangled from the world it is attempting to describe

(Pickering 1993). Once one attempts to describe a phenomenon, one becomes entangled within it (Barad 2007). This is Barad's onto-epistemology (2007, p. 89): being and knowing coalesce and cannot be separated. They are part of the constantly changing nature of the world, of what is in it and what it produces:

knowing is a material practice of engagement as part of the world in its differential becoming

(Barad 2007, p. 89)

Rather than representationalism, one needs to think of "performativity" (Barad 2007). What one does in order to represent the world also produces that world; "practices of knowing are specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world" (Barad 2007, p. 91, emphasis in original). Taking ownership of how the researcher produces research as an intra-action entangled within its production, is a factor giving rise to objectivity in research (Barad 2007).

I have affinity with such arguments. From a posthumanist stance of production arising from the capacities flowing from entanglements of intra-actions, representation cannot stand. There can be no hermetically sealed description that does not carry traces of the describer or the context of description, for example. Nevertheless, to reject representation is troubling to me. As Lenz Taguchi's research with PhD students found, it is difficult to step outside "the assumed "I" as the taken-for-granted starting point of thinking" (2013, p. 708). It is difficult to slough off a lifetime of living in a world of representation. I agree with Greene (2013) who is concerned that to turn one's back on it "entails a wholesale rejection of qualitative research as currently practiced" (p. 754). I therefore take MacLure's (2013) view that representation is a valid concept, but it needs to be remembered that it fails in its attempts to capture the dynamism and entanglement of reality. Therefore, I will accept that any attempt to represent the world is also part of the production of that world (Pickering 1993). Yet, the ability to represent

ideas is still valuable as long as we bear in mind that representation is performative in its own way.

With my ontological and epistemological positions established, the next section outlines the research approach taken and the implications this had on data collection decisions.

4.8 Analysis

This section comprises a justification of the choice of analysis technique, thematic analysis, and outlines how that analysis was conducted. I also describe how a posthumanist approach was incorporated into the analysis procedure.

My research design included a thematic analysis of interview data. Thematic analysis involves the identification of patterns within data sets, and the organisation of data accordingly (Braun and Clarke 2006). Data are initially ordered into codes, which are subsequently categorised into themes:

a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set

(Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 82)

Thematic analysis was selected for a number of reasons. Results arising from this approach are “generally accessible” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 97) to the public. The first iteration of this research project included Cornish language users, and, as an act of minority language maintenance, I had hoped to disseminate my results to the group of Cornish language users from which participants were recruited. Therefore, accessibility of findings was important.

In addition, a “thick description” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 97) can be rendered with thematic analysis. Such a description is necessary for this research in order to maintain the naturalistic inquiry approach and develop

trustworthiness in the findings (Guba 1981) ([Section 4.7.4](#)). Finally, I had used thematic analysis during my master's degree research, and so I was familiar with this type of analysis.

As the theoretical approach to my research evolved to encompass posthumanist elements, I became concerned about continuing with a thematic analysis of data. My apprehensions arose from some posthumanist perspectives on interpretation which encompasses categorisation as occurs during thematic analysis. Interpretation is challenged if it is taken to be the act of identifying categories and themes from a position "outside of 'the data'" (MacLure 2013, p 660). Jackson (2013) is sceptical about coding believing it upholds a humanistic perception of the world as one which is stable and ordered.

Nevertheless, in consultation with my supervisors, thematic analysis was retained. An important reason for this decision was the flexibility of this type of analysis (Terry *et al.* 2017). Thematic analysis "is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework", but it does require that one's "theoretical position" (Braun and Clarke 2006 p. 81) is declared. This is required because implicit in one's theoretical position are ontological and epistemological assumptions which need to be clarified for the research to be situated and understood ([4.7](#)).

My concerns about the application of thematic analysis to my data were further allayed on finding this type of analysis had been used in posthumanist research. For example, Introna and Hayes (2011) and Marchant and O'Donohoe (2019) both employed this approach for their data analysis. In my case, thematic analysis afforded me the ability to put order on the data, while at the same time, giving me the freedom to seek out entangled intra-actions within the data, follow their capacities and investigate what they gave rise to.

4.8.1 Conducting the thematic analysis

Analysis of interview data had commenced during the interview process. As previously mentioned ([Sections 4.6.4](#) and [4.6.5](#)), some interview questions had been developed with reference to data from previous interviews and participant observation. As a result, I came to the large-scale process of analysis with an awareness of some of the codes that I could apply to the data.

Once all thirty-seven interviews had been transcribed, I printed them anew and started the familiarisation phase of the thematic analysis (Terry *et al.* 2017). I read each transcript to become accustomed to the data and develop a feel for it. I also read over participant observation field notes and related any points therein to relevant parts of the interview data.

Once this stage of the analysis was complete, I moved to phase two and started to generate codes (Braun and Clarke 2006). This entailed uploading all interviews to NVivo, a data analysis software package. NVivo was selected because of my (assumed - see [Section 4.10.3](#)) familiarity with it and its regular use in academic research. NVivo was used to organise data by code and subsequently by theme.

Coding can be carried out inductively - data-driven, or deductively - theory driven (Braun and Clarke 2006). As the names suggest, data-driven codes arise from the data; theoretical codes are imposed on the data by analysing them through the lens of theory (*ibid.*). Braun and Clarke (2006) state that it is necessary for a researcher to decide which type of coding to apply. In the main, my coding at this point was deductive and theory driven. I was focused on finding instances in the data which I could relate to capital, identity and ideology - the components of Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment.

I was also “dredg[ing]” (Fox and Alldred 2017, p. 172) the data for instances of significance to the sociomaterial. This required close attention to empirical data in order to identify the entanglements of intra-actions within

assemblages and the capacities these entanglements produce (Fox and Alldred 2017). In terms of my research, this entailed focusing on, for example, data referring to language tools, such as the translation function and Google Translate.

At this stage, thematic analysis also involves engaging in semantic or latent coding (Braun and Clarke 2006; Terry *et al.* 2017). A semantic approach entails focusing on what the participant has said, while a latent approach requires reading between the lines to:

identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data

(Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 84)

I engaged in both approaches. Early coding was characterised by, but not limited to, a semantic approach. It was employed to identify data relevant to the new model of investment: capital, identity and ideology. I also searched for data relating to the sociomateriality of Facebook. A latent approach to coding allowed me to read between the lines and identify traces of how investment was, or was not, arising in the data. It was particularly helpful in identifying how participants were positioned or positioning themselves as part of their use of English on Facebook. Again, I focused on ideology, capital and identity and how they were linked to sociomateriality in participants' accounts.

Each interview was read, line by line, and NVivo codes assigned to different items of data. After data had been coded, I moved to phase three of analysis in which themes were generated (Terry *et al.* 2017). I used my research questions to guide this stage of the analysis. Examples of themes generated include "attention economy", "social capital", "language tools" and "knower". NVivo was used to organise coded data into themes. In many cases, codes were placed under more than one theme.

Once all themes had been produced, I made thematic maps, by hand, in order to identify and represent relationships and boundaries between themes (Terry *et al.* 2017). At this point, as had occurred during my master's

research, I experienced a coding crisis (Gibbs 2012), or in this instance, a *theme* crisis. With so many themes, it was difficult to find an order to place them within the analysis. In addition, interacting with my data on NVivo was problematic due to the length of the codes: they were too long to be viewed easily on screen. The data began to feel dislodged from the participants who generated it, and their ideas disjointed when reading them on NVivo screens.

In order to overcome these feelings of remoteness from the data, I printed off all data from NVivo to work on by hand. Organised by code and theme, these data comprised several reams of paper. My aim had been to enable me to experience what participants had told me in a more holistic way by which I would be able to retain a focus on the context of what they had said.

Unfortunately, this strategy was not fruitful and in order to regain control of my data, I decided to code the data from scratch again.

I re-coded all interviews on NVivo in a new document. This time I coded more concisely. Rather than putting data under two or more codes, and hoping I would be able to “sort it out” when I came to generate themes, I took my time and produced more concise codes. As in the previous iteration, I analysed the interview data to identify areas significant to Darwin and Norton’s (2015) model of investment. I also looked for *relata*, including matter relating to ideology, identity and capital, and interrogated the data for how they entangled as intra-actions with each other. I looked for the capacities that arose from these coalescences, and how they gave rise to investment in, or disinvestment from, the use of English on Facebook. In addition, I tried to identify singular and aggregating affects, lines of flight and relations of exteriority (Fox and Alldred 2017) ([Section 2.5.2](#)).

In effect, I produced semantic codes, such as “persistence and tailoring content”; “window on others” and “leakiness” by looking for areas of the data that were pertinent to investment and sociomaterialities. I focused on what participants said (and did not say) about ideologies, about their capital, and about how they talked about their subjectivities in the interviews. I also looked for how sociomaterialities played a role in these areas of investment.

In this way, I developed the codes that labelled segments of my data. This coding was theory-driven in that I was looking for ways that my participants were invested in Facebook in English, what gave rise to this investment, including sociomaterial aspects, and a lack of investment, and how that arose. In this way, I coded for investment which arose in sociomaterial assemblages.

I then moved to organising these codes into themes, again on NVivo. I re-used some of the original themes, but many new ones were produced, for example, “closer”, “equalising space” and “not sharing language production space”. These themes were developed by maintaining a focus on the informally worded question: “identity, capital, ideology, and how does matter matter to (for example, Elena’s) investment here?”

Once all themes had been generated, they were reviewed (Terry *et al.* 2017). Again, I found it difficult to work with themes on screen. As before, working with them between screens felt disjointed, and I was not able to experience the data in a meaningful way. I therefore printed off all themed data, and continued analysis by hand. More thematic analysis maps were produced, also by hand ([Appendix 4](#)).

Codes within each theme were checked in order to ascertain their relevance to that theme. In addition, each theme was interrogated for its relevance to the research questions. For example, the theme “not sharing language production space” was interrogated by asking “so what for investment in English on Facebook for [participant’s name]?”. Essentially, each theme had to prove to be relevant to the question in order to be retained. Some were discarded at this point. Others were broken apart, and their codes re-allocated.

After all themes had been revised, they were placed in linear order, and write up commenced. As St. Pierre (2018, p. 85) has stated, “writing is ... a method of inquiry”, and a considerable amount of analysis took place during the writing up process. It was only when I had to grapple, hand to hand, with each piece of coded data, relate it to other data, and position it within the

context of the literature that fine detailed analysis took place. This took a prolonged period of time and involved considerable writing, re-writing, reading and re-reading. I maintained a focus on the aim of the research by asking of each section, sometimes each paragraph, “what about investment in terms of identity, capital, ideology and other matter?”

In effect, data analysis was conducted via a combination of NVivo and manual analysis. NVivo was utilised as a repository for research data; as a tool to label individual items of data – for coding – and then to organise these codes into themes. However, once the number of themes became too unwieldy to engage with on screen, I found it necessary to print off the themed data from NVivo, and work on it by hand.

A posthumanist stance to data analysis privileges mapping over tracing (Martin and Kamberelis 2013). Tracing is associated with representationalism, the idea that it is possible to look from above, outside the milieu, and faithfully represent what is seen (*ibid.*). Posthumanist research, however, favours a cartographic, or ‘mapping’, approach (*ibid.*, p. 70). This entails experiencing the data landscape and looking for the ebb and flow of connections within it (Martin and Kamberelis 2013). Research carried out by mapping:

does not “represent” reality but rather indexes the various ways reality might be produced and how different ways of producing reality have different, social, economic, and political effects

(Martin and Kamberelis 2013, pp. 672-673).

I attempted to map, as opposed to trace, my data during analysis. This involved looking for sociomaterial relata, identifying how they were connected or the basis of their entanglement as intra-actions, and then looking for the arising capacities related to their investment in English language use on Facebook. The extent to which I was successful in this endeavour is discussed below in [Section 4.10.5](#) Before that area is examined, I move on to the crucial topic of ethical considerations.

4.9 Ethical issues

Ethical issues arose at every stage of the research process. This section outlines how a number of ethical decisions were made: the gaining of informed consent, managing anonymity and confidentiality, data storage, and reducing the instances of lurking on participants' Facebook pages. The section also includes an outline of an "ethics of care" (Capurro and Pingel 2002, p. 194) that guided this research project.

4.9.1 Informed consent

It is crucial that participants are able to give their informed consent before they engage in any research (James and Busher 2009). For consent to be "informed" individuals need to be made fully aware of what the research will entail, how they will be involved (Markham and Buchanan 2012), and how their data will be managed.

Participant information sheets were an important aspect of the informed consent gathering process. Four informed consent forms were written, each relevant to the manner of data gathering: pre-interview online questionnaire; online interview; face-to-face interview, and online participant observation. These forms contained information explaining the research project, data management and use, and how issues of anonymity and confidentiality would be addressed. Potential research participants were informed that engagement with the research was on a voluntary basis, and they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, with no explanation necessary. Whenever possible, all documentation aimed at potential research participants was written in English containing low frequency vocabulary and grammar constructions to make it accessible to non-native English-speakers.

Informed consent had to be gained online from the three English language participants who completed the pre-interview online questionnaire and online interviews. These individuals were sent an email, containing a welcome from myself, and a link to the research information website. The website contained

a short video of myself explaining the research. It also included participant information forms relevant to the online pre-interview questionnaire and online interview ([Appendix 5](#)). In the participant information forms, I identified myself, explained the purpose of my research, how data would be stored and used, and how anonymity and confidentiality would be managed (James and Busher 2009).

The research information website also contained a link to the informed consent ([Appendix 6](#)) form relevant to the pre-interview questionnaire. A link to the online pre-interview questionnaire was embedded at the end of this online form with the aim that participants had to access the consent form before they were able to complete the questionnaire. A tick box question was built into the questionnaire, asking participants to confirm they had read the participant information sheet and the informed consent form. Another tick box question required participants to confirm that they gave their informed consent for their online questionnaire data to be used in this project. If participants failed to respond to either of these questions, they were redirected to a message thanking them for their interest in the research, and a statement politely informing them that they were not eligible to proceed to any further with the study.

In addition, online interview informed consent forms were sent to UK-based participants via email. Two online interviewees signed the online interview informed consent ([Appendix 7](#)) form by typing their names on the form, and attaching a copy of it to an email which they sent me from their university email address. One participant printed the consent form, signed it, scanned it, and then sent a copy of the signed form to me via email.

The majority of participants were interviewed on a face-to-face basis. As all but one of the individuals were known to me prior to the first interview, there was no need to ask them to complete the pre-interview online questionnaire. Informed consent for engagement in interviews and for those who engaged with online participant observation was gained in person. Participant information sheets for interviews and online participant observation

([Appendix 8](#)), as well as the informed consent forms ([Appendix 9](#); [Appendix 10](#)), were emailed to participants prior to the first interview. This gave individuals time to familiarise themselves with the information, and formulate any questions for me. Time was set aside at the beginning of the first interview to talk about the participant information sheets and the informed consent forms. Participants were presented with paper copies of all forms and asked to sign and date the informed consent forms. Both myself and each participant retained a signed copy of the informed consent form.

4.9.2 Boundaries and informed consent

As already mentioned, virtual ethnographies have been problematised with reference to issues of establishing boundaries in field-sites ([Section 4.5.1.5](#)). While Hine considers that boundaries should not be established in advance, but “explored through the course of the ethnography” (2000, loc. 1073/2880), it was nevertheless crucial to refer to boundaries when gaining informed consent to conduct online participant observation. I set out temporal and language boundaries, as well as data capture and data presentation boundaries when explaining the research to participants. Individuals were asked if they agreed to the duration of online participant observation; they were informed that only content in English and in graphic form, such as emojis, was to be observed (English). They were also apprised as to how these data would be recorded and eventually presented.

While all steps were taken to ensure participants were able to give their informed consent, “harm or vulnerability can never be understood in advance” (Markham and Buchanan 2012, p. 10). This concerned me, in particular with reference to the “traceability” (Beaulieu and Estalella 2012, p. 28) of online observation data, which means that search engines can be used to identify the source of online content. In order to avoid instances of traceability, no quotations of Facebook content were recorded either digitally or by hand during online participant observation, and no quotations are published in this thesis (Bruckman 2002; Eynon *et al.* 2008).

The blurring of online boundaries and the issue of informed consent also arose with reference to individuals who unwittingly became drawn into the research sphere during my online observation. Because Facebook is used for sociality, my observation of participants' Facebook communication necessarily involved content posted by their friend connections. This presented a dilemma: should I attempt to gather informed consent from participants' friend connections even though their data was never going to be used in the research? I decided not to try, as to garner such consent had the potential to disrupt my participants' Facebook spaces should I attempt to communicate with all their friend connections. In practice, I viewed these ethical considerations in terms of a system of "trade-offs" (Beaulieu and Estalella 2012, p. 36). While I was privy to their content, I did not gather informed consent from participants' friends connections because none of this content was recorded, and therefore it was never included in my data.

4.9.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Participant anonymity is ensured when "the researcher or another person cannot identify the participant or subject from the information provided" (Cohen *et al.* 2007, p 64). Making a guarantee of anonymity when dealing with interview and observation data which can be rich in personal information was not feasible (Cohen *et al.* 2007).

As anonymity could not be assured, data were managed in terms of confidentiality. Under these circumstances, although researchers are able to link data back to the originating participant, they do not make this connection public (Cohen *et al.* 2007). Pseudonyms were therefore used in place of participants' names (Wiles *et al.* 2006).

Even with such steps taken, confidentiality is still difficult to ensure (Wiles *et al.* 2006). Therefore, identifying information in the data has been either omitted or generalised (*ibid.*). For example, the full title of a participant's degree has been replaced with the general subject area. In addition,

sensitive information provided during interview was not transcribed.

Information that might compromise a participant in later life when they return to their country of origin was also omitted.

As already stated, to avoid repercussions of the potential negative impacts of confidentiality being compromised through traceability of data, no quotations of Facebook content have been recorded or reproduced in this research.

4.9.4 Data storage

In terms of data storage, interview data were stored on a password protected computer. All interview data were identified by code, as opposed to the real name of the participant. These codes were not saved on the same computer on which the data were stored (James and Busher 2009). With reference to pre-interview questionnaires, no IP addresses were collected (Hudson and Bruckman 2004).

4.9.5 Lurking

In an embodied context, participant observation regularly entails sharing physical space (Jordan 2009). Online observation, however, takes place in a context of disembodiment. Rather than sharing physical space, one is joined by flows of connectivity (*ibid.*). In order to ensure that I remained visible in these flows, and did not inadvertently become a lurker, I made minimal interactions with participants' content on Facebook to remind them that I was present. This took the form of posting a positive emoji in response to their content. At the same time, I maintained a marginal participant observational stance (Robson 2002) so as not to be overly visible in participants' Facebook spaces ([Section 4.6.5](#)).

4.9.6 Ethics of care

Ethical issues permeate the research process (Beaulieu and Estalella 2012). They are not only relevant to, for example, gaining informed consent, but also to how the researcher approaches participants, builds relationships with them, and how their information is disseminated (*ibid.*). These factors were of utmost importance to me because I was related to the majority of research participants, not only as a researcher, but as a former or current teacher. These individuals were therefore people I knew before the research and in many cases, with whom I would remain in contact subsequent to it.

In this context, an “ethics of care” which respects the dignity of the researched and is attended to in a context of “social responsibility” (Capurro and Pingel 2002, p. 194) was a guiding principle when making research decisions. For example, having a non-researcher connection with participants, some divulged highly sensitive information during interview. I felt that they were talking to Sarah-as-teacher, rather than Sarah-as-researcher. Taking a stance of do as you would be done by (Sikes 2004), these items of data were not recorded in transcription, and so do not comprise part of the data.

Having outlined the ethical decisions made during this research, I now end this chapter with a description of the limitations of this project.

4.10 Limitations

As is the case with any piece of research, this study has its own limitations. These are outlined here and pertain to sample size, reflective/diffractive diary, quoting observation data, online participant observation, coding and posthumanist analysis and posthumanist interview approaches.

4.10.1 Reflective/diffractive diary

A more systematic approach to the achievement of a reflexive/diffractive stance to the data may have been achieved through the maintenance of a diary (Hesse-Biber 2010; Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013). While I did make notes on my transcripts and observation notes, I did not keep this type of diary as it felt that moving between interview transcripts, observation data, and research literature cut my thoughts off from their points of origin. It is possible that had I been able to develop a more systematic approach to recording my thoughts, more pertinent issues would have been uncovered, and, for example, threats of reactivity dealt with.

4.10.2 Quotations

For traceability reasons ([Section 4.9.3](#)), no quotes of Facebook data encountered during online participant observation were recorded or used in this thesis. While I stand by my decision not to include such content, I acknowledge that this type of data would have added to the analysis and write up. They would have contextualised and illustrated participants' experiences and thoughts, and in so doing further justified the points that I make in this thesis.

4.10.3 Coding

NVivo was employed as a data analysis tool. Having used this software for my master's research, I felt confident in utilising it again. When I came to code with this software, however, I was not as competent with it as I had hoped. Time issues prevented me from updating my skills through online tutorials, resulting in my constant difficulties with NVivo. In hindsight, this could have been avoided had I taken more time to familiarise myself with the software before starting my analysis. I also believe that I would have been able to interrogate the data from a broader variety of angles had I been more adept with NVivo functionality.

4.10.4 Online participant observation

My difficulties recruiting participants made me reticent about asking individuals with whom I had no relationship beyond the research to engage in online participant observation. My fear was that requesting observation, on top of three interviews per participant, would dissuade individuals from engaging in the research. The result of my reticence is less online participant observation data than I would have liked. While these data were not as significant as the interview data, more of them would have helped me develop a more extensive understanding of participants' use of Facebook.

4.10.5 Posthumanist stance

In accordance with a posthumanist approach to data analysis, I attempted to map my data, rather than trace it. To an extent, I was successful in mapping entanglements of human and non-human intra-actions in assemblages of investment in English on Facebook. Yet, at the same time, I found myself subconsciously looking at the data for cause and effect. I was seeing the data in terms of "if A then B, and so investment", rather than, "A and B arising as intra-actions and producing capacities for investment within an assemblage". Bringing these two theoretical frameworks together, therefore, posed challenges, and required me to be in a constant state of alertness to ensure that they were both addressed within the analysis.

4.10.6 Interviews

The interview can be considered in a particular way in posthumanist thought (de Freitas and Curinga 2015). For example, in Mazzei's (2013) view, the information interviewees' produce should not be considered a faithful representation of themselves and their experiences, not in humanistic terms as a "construction of herself as a conscious, rational subject - spoken, heard, recorded, and transcribed into words in an interview transcript" (p. 736). Rather, it needs to be seen as "a material-discursive practice that is

inseparable from all elements (human and non-human) in an assemblage” (Mazzei and Jackson 2017, p. 1090). We need to think of voice not just as emanating from the body of the interviewee, but also “as constituted in the entanglement of things (footsteps, squeaky doors, verbal critiques, institutional discourses, feminine bodies, male privilege).” (Mazzei and Jackson 2017, p. 1095).

Therefore, an interview requires not only listening to the interviewees’ voice, thoughts put into words and uttered, but attending to (listening to, watching and feeling, for example) aspects within the interview assemblage of sociomaterialities. This is because the human voice cannot be representative of a subject, as there is no subject which does not arise from the entanglements of the interview, including the voice. What we have from which to making meaning is an assemblage of contingent capacities which cannot be linked to the spoken utterances of one individual (Mazzei and Jackson 2017).

Transcribing for paralinguistic features or emphasis is not enough if voice is to be recorded in this way. To capture the assemblage from which the interview data arises, there is a need to include the sociomaterial setting which Mazzei and Jackson (2017, p. 1095, above) describe. My interview data does not encompass this type of data. The overarching reason for this is that my awareness of the value of posthumanist thought for my analysis developed slowly, after interviews had taken place. Had I approached interviews in a more posthumanist manner, for example, making a note of prosody and paralinguistics, I believe it would have strengthened the sociomaterial stance of my research. It would have given me access to data which was entangled in the investment assemblages in ways unseen under the data collection methods used in this study.

Having said that, I retain an element of scepticism regarding a lone researcher’s ability to gather the type of data that Mazzei and Jackson (2017) describe. It was enough for me to engage in active interviews, attending closely to my participant, building/maintaining rapport, giving them the

chance to engage in interpretation of data, while at the same time thinking about the next question and keeping an eye on the clock without attending to “footsteps [and] squeaky doors” (*ibid.*, p. 1095) for instance, in the cafés in which the interviews took place. The optimal way to capture the traces of such sociomaterialities would be on video, which immediately privileges researchers with access to such equipment, the technical ability to use it, and spaces in which it can feasibly be utilised. With a lack of access to all three, I would be cut out of this type of research assemblage, as would many other students.

4.11 Summary

This chapter has presented a discussion and justification of the methods and methodology chosen to investigate participants’ investment in English on Facebook. Combining the poststructuralist concept of investment with a posthumanist approach, I was able to produce a thematic analysis of the data, which comprised interview and online participant observation data. This analysis enabled me to uncover the complex entanglement of intra-actions within in participants’ investment assemblages. A discussion of the analysis of these data comprises the next three chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 5: Gaining Access and Having Control in Facebook Spaces

5.1 Introduction

This chapter maps the entanglements of intra-actions which produced participants' capacities to invest in English on Facebook. It presents a sociomaterial interpretation of investment in Facebook spaces, and does not restrict investment to identity, capital and ideology, but includes, for example, the functionality of the platform.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. [Section 5.2](#) comprises an investigation of intra-actions that coalesced to give rise to Facebook as a space in which participants had capacities to legitimately access and use English. These factors included the ubiquity of Facebook, the value of the site for the development of social capital, as well as universities' utilisation of the platform. Also important were the positioning of Facebook space in terms of ownership, and participants' recognition of the value of their information to Facebook's business model. Next, [Section 5.3](#) includes a description of impression management and an analysis of its role in participants' investment assemblages. This raised the significance of Facebook functionality within participants' investment assemblages. In the final [Section 5.4](#), the components comprising participants' spatial repertoires are identified, and the ways in which they coalesced to give rise to capacities for investment in English on Facebook are analysed. These spatial repertoires comprised the site's multimodality and functionality in the form of its language settings. Also significant were the capacities involved in asynchronous communication which gave rise to discrete access to language tools for the production and consumption of English content, as well as extended language processing time.

One of the aims of my analysis chapters is to show how capacities that produced participants' investment (and therefore their agency related to investment) arose within entanglements of intra-actions comprising Darwin

and Norton's (2015) model of investment – capital, ideology and identity – and other sociomaterial elements of Facebook. By investigating participants' investment in terms of such complex coalescences, which include the material, in particular Facebook functionality, my focus is on uncovering the many ways participants' agency to invest in English on Facebook was shared with sociomaterial intra-actions.

5.2 Gaining access to Facebook spaces for English use

Access to opportunities for target language use is essential for language development (Norton 2013; Pavlenko 2000). Darwin and Norton (2018) ask how English language users are able to gain entry to digital spaces for such use. Since early research, the internet has been considered to hold promise for access to these language use opportunities (Warschauer 1997). New technologies have been seen to provide more varied opportunities for target language use than classrooms alone can offer (Chapelle 2009). In terms of SNSs, Facebook has been noted as beneficial for affording access to target language users outside the classroom (Akbari *et al.* 2015). I found that a number of factors gave rise to participants' ability to position Facebook as a place into which they felt they had the right of entry, and in which they could legitimately use English.

5.2.1 The ubiquity of Facebook

SNSs such as Facebook are founded on sociality, and they are used as a way to maintain and build social capital (Ellison *et al.* 2007; Joinson 2008; Litt 2012; Wilson *et al.* 2012). Globally, Facebook is the social network site with the most active users (Statistica 2021a, 2021b), and it was the most commonly used such site in 2017 (World Economic Forum 2017) when data for this research were gathered. Its ubiquity of use was an important factor in the production of the site as a place of legitimate English language use.

As “networked individuals” (Rainie and Wellman 2014, p 95) many participants, namely the non-Chinese participants - Abda, Areeya, Elena, Sofia and Zaria - arrived in their host countries with pre-existing Facebook accounts. Therefore, regularly accessing Facebook was an established routine, or a norm, for these individuals prior to their using English on the site. As Sofia explains:

Sofia: I start using Facebook in Italian, because when I opened my account, I was in Italy and my friends are Italian. ... And then, maybe two years after, no after two years, I start to remember my Argentinian friends and start to research their names, or my family that's there in Argentina, and I start to communicate with them on Facebook.

Sarah: So when did you start using English on Facebook?

Sofia: In English? Two months ago [laughs] yeah.

Sarah So why did you start to write in English on Facebook?

Sofia: Uhm, because I am more confidence about the English and because I start to have some friends that speak English. Uh, like, I don't know, for example, I have an Indian friend now and I need to use English because she don't understand Italian or Spanish [laughs]. Now is more easy for her to understand the post, some posts.

(Interview 1)

For Sofia, Facebook had become an arena of “temporal multiplicity” and “spatial multiplicity” (Lampinen *et al.* 2009, para. 57) because friend connections from different times of Sofia’s life and from various geographical locations were brought together in one digital space. Sofia did not have to move to a different online environment to communicate with her English-using friend connections; Facebook ubiquity meant they already shared online space. Sofia and her friend connections’ common language of English, their desire to develop a relationship, and the ubiquity of Facebook as a space for this sociality, were intra-actions linked by affective flows which produced Sofia’s capacities to take up the right to post in English on the platform. They produced Facebook as a space of legitimate English use for Sofia.

Ellison *et al.* (2006, p. 1) have identified “social capital and community formation” as affordances of SNSs. In terms of the development and maintenance of social capital, both non-Chinese and Chinese participants considered Facebook to be a social necessity when broadening their social circle of English-speakers in Ireland. For example, Sofia noted that “*now it’s very usual*” (Interview 1) to be asked for Facebook details instead of a phone number. Guo also mentioned the culture of exchanging Facebook details as opposed to phone numbers when developing English-speaking social capital in Ireland:

Guo: But, you know, if you want to make foreign friends, and if you want to talk to them, maybe social media is the best choice. And you will meet friends and you will if you go to the parties, go out, for the trips with strangers, you will want to be friends with them, but the first thing to ask to them is not their number. I think to directly ask for their number is too impolite, so maybe social media is the best way to get to know them.

(Interview 1)

Li Li highlighted the importance of Facebook for the development of relationships at university in Ireland with English-speakers in starker terms:

*Li Li: If you’re not on Facebook, you’re not alive here. Like everyone is using Facebook although they have other social media channels, so Facebook is still mainstream. And if our class have a party, have a class party, or someone invite us for a birthday party, they will create an ‘Event’ and you will clicking going or not. And they will check that. They **will**⁵ And they will make a picture for the event, so, I think it’s really useful. And, imagine if you’re not on Facebook. Then how can other people find you? They won’t invite you to that event. You are losing so many chance to connect with local people. To make new friends.*

(Interview 1)

Fuchs (2017, p. 39) has described SNSs as “techno-social systems ... that enable and constrain a social level of human activities”. It is possible to see the impact Facebook had on how Li Li understood the development of

⁵ Words that participants emphasised within their interviews are highlighted in bold.

relationships at university: the platform pervaded this experience. Li Li's experience was not uncommon; other studies on the importance of Facebook in young people's lives approximate to the time of my data collection also uncovered the platform's significance (Hargittai and Marwick 2016; Lee and Cook 2015). Because of its importance, and its subsequent ubiquity of use, Facebook was viewed as a necessity: a kind of essential service or utility for the development of relationships with English-speakers.

It was not only the use of Facebook by individuals that produced its ubiquity, but also its utilisation by universities. When asked why she joined the platform, Lan replied:

Lan: Because when I arrived the UK, my R. A. [residence assistant] told me you need to join the Facebook group of the accommodation, yeah. So I created an account and joined the group Because they post a lot of activities in Facebook, yeah

(Interview 1)

While Lan, a Chinese student, would be able to benefit from access to information and opportunities for sociality, it is clear that she joined Facebook because of its use by the university.

Universities also utilised Facebook for course delivery. Abda reactivated her Facebook account because it was necessary to engage in group work:

Abda: ... the lecturer set up, yeah. Because, you know, they put us in teamwork. You have to do this, you have to do this. Yeah. I have to work with other people.

(Interview 1)

University-sanctioned use of Facebook for information dissemination and groupwork positioned the platform as a space which student participants needed to join in order to participate in university life. The pervasive use of the site for sociality (inside and beyond university) and for university life, were more intra-actions linked by affective flows which gave rise to capacities within participants. These capacities produced the site as a space of English use in which participants felt they needed to be present, and so felt they could legitimately be present.

In summary, this analysis has focused on how the ubiquity of Facebook was involved in producing participants' capacities for access to English language-using areas of the platform. Darwin and Norton's elements of investment are evident here: social capital (friend connections on Facebook) and linguistic capital (competence in English in English-using spaces); the norm of Facebook use for sociality and by universities (ideology), and participants' identities as students and friends or acquaintances of people on the platform.

Nevertheless, participants' investment was not produced by these factors alone; also present were the sociomaterial elements of Facebook. In this digitally-mediated space, participants' capacities which produced investment assemblages arose in coalescences of the site's functionality. The ubiquity of Facebook is an example of how this functionality, and therefore the capacities this functionality was agentive in producing, was inextricably bound up with the needs and desires of those involved in Facebook as a business, and the needs and desires of those utilising the platform for their institutional interests. Here I refer to the necessity of Facebook to gather and commodify user-data, and the resultant design of functionality to do so, as well as universities' needs and desires to use the platform for study purposes and information dissemination in an English-language context.

Understanding participants' investment assemblages as coalescences of such intra-actions, along with those of Darwin and Norton's model, is important. From this perspective it is possible to recognise the necessity to view participants' capacities (which encapsulate their agency) for the production of investment as arising from an entangled landscape of elements including these sociomaterialities.

5.2.1.1 Making Facebook friend connections for English use

The crucial aspect of sociality for SNSs such as Facebook has already been noted ([Section 3.4.1](#)). An essential part of the process of Facebook use is building one's network of connections, or friends' network (Joinson 2008),

and so developing one's ability to use the platform for engaging in relationships (Brandtzæg *et al.* 2010; Lee and Cook 2015). As stated, non-Chinese participants had Facebook accounts which were already populated with friends and family members prior to expanding their use of the site to encompass English. Chinese participants, however, due to China's ideologically driven "Golden Shield" project (Rainie and Wellman 2014, p. 289) which bans access to Facebook within China, had to build their friends' network from scratch on entering their host countries (the Republic of Ireland or the UK). Some participants attempted to use Facebook connections as a way to construct a network of English language speakers. Chunhua, for example, initially accepted friend requests from people she did not know in order to build such a network:

Chunhua: Yeah, I did in the beginning when I used Facebook. But now I will reject them because it's strange to be chatted with by some strangers. I don't like this feeling. It's privacy, so. But at the beginning, I didn't pay attention to it. I just think I can practise my English and I don't have many friends using Facebook, so I can accept some foreigners and see their posts. It's psychological in the beginning, but it's different now. Now I have my friends; I have my classmates, so I don't have to the strangers, I don't have to read their posts.

(Interview 1)

Lijuan also experimented with using Facebook to build a network of English language users:

Lijuan: Like, in the first month I've been in Ireland, sometimes I will add native speakers because I want to have more chance to speak English with people. So I thought it should be a opportunity to, uh, read, uh, no, uh, talking English, just text in English. So I think it was a good idea. But now I don't do that anymore because there's a lot of weird people on Facebook and I will be more careful of my Friends.

(Interview 1)

SNS connections can be viewed as resources for the development of social capital (Ellison *et al.* 2006). Initially, Lijuan, Chunhua and other participants took this approach to Facebook friend connections, and considered them as a potential source of contact with English users, leading to opportunities for

target language use. Yet, access to target language users did not always translate into opportunities for target language use. Friending on the basis of gaining access to English resulted in an audience including, in Lijuan's case, "weird people", and for Chunhua, "strangers". Such individuals might have provided opportunities for English use, but did not provide access to what was necessary for investment in target language use. Chunhua's words are salient here:

Chunhua: Now I have my friends; I have my classmates, so I don't have to the strangers, I don't have to read their posts.

(Interview 1)

For Chunhua, access to English had to be entangled with access to social capital in the form of meaningful relationships. It was only then that Facebook use would be involved in giving rise to investment in English.

Chunhua and Lijuan were not alone in being careful as to how they made English-user friend connections. Other participants were highly suspicious of such friending on the site. Shu positioned Facebook as a place of suspicion arising from the act of friending:

Shu: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I won't accept online friends if I haven't met them. ... Because I care very much about privacy. ... Just, like, some people, maybe they just add you as a friend, maybe they think you are beautiful or maybe they think you can help them, or just want you to follow them to have many Likes or something. I don't like that [unclear] because I don't want to spend time on that. I only want to spend time with my friends. Make use of my time.

(Interview 1)

In order to safeguard her privacy and to ensure her time was dedicated to people who were of meaning to her, Shu restricted making friend connections with those she had met face-to-face only. Li Li and Mingmei, whose initial interview was conducted jointly ([Section 4.7.2](#)), were also careful how they made such English-using connections, but for different reasons:

Mingmei: Is it a machine?

Li Li: Yeah, its robotics.

Mingmei: Like a machine.

Li Li: Yeah, like machine. You don't even know it was a real person or a fake account.

Sarah: Could be a bot?

Li Li: Yeah.

(Interview 1)

Mingmei's and Li Li's doubts concerning forming friend connections with unknown individuals arose from suspicions that these accounts might not be connected to actual human beings, but software applications in the form of bots.

Studies on the efficacy of SNS use as a way to extend social capital have produced mixed results. Research into their utilisation by language learners has shown positive impacts on the development of social capital (Akbari *et al.* 2015; Boon and Beck 2013; Sebastian and Martinsen 2015; Shafie *et al.* 2016). Yet these studies focused on sociality in which there was some additional foundation for friend connection. That is, even if participants were initially unknown to each other, they were connected by the teacher or researcher, or through a shared interest. In contrast, the participants in my study either made English-using friend connections with complete strangers with no common connection to them other than being Facebook users (Chunhua and Lijuan), or talked about their suspicions about making such friend connections. In line with Mitchell's (2012) research into Facebook use by English language students, participants in my research found expanding their social capital on Facebook difficult. Their attempts to develop sociality, and with it, gain opportunities for target language use, were either unsuccessful, or deemed to be too risky with which to engage.

In theory, Facebook friending functionality which potentially puts users in contact with millions of other users, had the promise to produce capacities to invest in English on Facebook. Yet, this was not the case. Friending functionality as an intra-action had to be linked within affective flows of trust for capacities to invest in English language use to arise. This functionality

used cold, that is, to connect with strangers, was an intra-action entangled within affective flows to produce capacities for suspicion within some participants, as opposed to investment.

5.2.2 Ownership of Facebook space

This section provides an analysis of participants' relationships performed in Facebook spaces populated by English-speakers and speakers of other languages. As such, participants' focus was not only on English, but on Facebook as a multilingual space. Participants' perceptions of this topic are significant in that they illustrate how these individuals produced such spaces as areas of ownership – an activity that was entangled in giving rise capacities for their investment.

Research indicates that individuals relate to their Facebook spaces and the information within them in terms of ownership (Fulton and Kibby 2017). Participants in the current research viewed their Facebook pages in such terms.

During a section of interview with Elena about her expectations of how friend connections (English- and non-English-users) should behave on her Facebook pages, she likened these spaces to her home, and a friend connection as “*my guest*” (Interview Two). If she did not approve of how a friend connection behaved on her pages, she stated:

Elena: Either keep it calm, or altogether, out of my door! Facebook is like my house and, I. People forget that it's the same.

(Interview 2)

Abda also referred to her multilingual Facebook account in terms of possession:

Abda: ... if I post something on my page, and it's my opinion, and someone doesn't like it and she comes to me and being rude to me, I would do something different. Yeah, you know, that's my page. That's my space, and that's my opinion. If you don't agree with me,

you disagree with me, respect me at least. Yeah, don't be rude on my page.

(Interview 1)

Both Elena's and Abda's feelings of possession towards their Facebook spaces were expressed in terms of control. Elena felt she had the control to evict a badly behaved friend connection from her Facebook space. Abda experienced control through expectations of respectful behaviour on the part of friend connections when interacting on her Facebook pages. Two other participants, Lan and Nuan, expressed their ownership in terms of the content they published:

Lan: I think it's mine because I add my things, and uh, I think it's also I am willing to write something, or I'm willing to read their post, so I think it's mine.

(Interview 3)

Sarah: Ok [pause] Do you think that your Facebook page is yours? Does it belong to you?

Nuan Of course! [laughs] ... It's because I create it and it's all my stuff, it's all my background things that I feel at that time, and things I want to share at that time, yeah.

(Interview 2)

Lan's and Nuan's ownership of their multilingual Facebook spaces was established on the basis of the population of these spaces with their own content and information. Another participant, Lijuan, had a sense of ownership which derived not only from her control over her choice of content, but also her ability to edit it:

Lijuan: I can edit everything I want. I can post everything I want. It belongs to me. I can control it.

(Interview 1)

Facebook functionality encompassing the ability to edit information was therefore an important aspect of ownership for Lijuan. It was influential in her feeling of being able to post as she wanted, including in the language she wanted, on the site.

Chunhua and Zaria associated their Facebook spaces with themselves. Chunhua referred to her account as “a part of me” (Interview Two). When Zaria was asked what made her post something in English, she also stated:

Zaria: Because I like to. It is part of me. Facebook is part of me [laughs]

(Interview 2)

Zaria and Chunhua, therefore, experienced their multilingual Facebook spaces, which incorporated English, as part of their own selves. This echoes Darwin and Norton’s (2016a, p. 22) observation that:

“As a tool that mediates interaction, the digital becomes an extension of the self, and transforms what learners can do and mean, how they think and relate to others, and who they can be”

Norton *et al.* (2011, p. 579) pointed out with reference to their research on a digital literacy course in rural Uganda that “ownership of meaning ... was central to [participants’] investment”. In the current study, ownership was also found to be significant. Ownership arose from capacities which produced Facebook as a space in which participants had agency to legitimately control what happened there (Elena and Abda). In turn, ownership coalesced with other intra-actions to produce participants’ capacities to view their Facebook spaces as aspects of themselves (Chunhua and Zaria). Feelings of ownership of this digital space were entangled with feelings of ownership of content and the functional ability to curate that content via editing. Therefore, although it reads as a contradiction, sharing agency with the platform’s functionality gave rise to capacities to experience Facebook as a space in which participants were able to exert their control. Facebook spaces were not alien ground which participants experienced as trespassers (cf. Pasfield-Neofitou 2011). They were spaces in which participants experienced a legitimacy of residence, and with this, legitimacy of English language use.

5.2.3 Data-as-capital: “user” and “tenant”

The coalescence of intra-actions which gave rise to the capacity to experience ownership in relation to Facebook space was one aspect of the production of the platform as a context of legitimate English language use. Another important factor was the “user” subject position:

Sarah: Do you feel that you have the right to post in English on Facebook?

Chunhua: Yeah, sure. Because you are a user, so you have the right to post.

(Interview 3)

Chunhua felt she had the right to post in English on Facebook, and this right was located in the neoliberal capitalist market forces in which Facebook conducts its business. She contrasted the Chinese-oriented target market of Weibo (a popular microblogging site, similar to Twitter) with that of Facebook:

Sarah: What does that mean, ‘You are a user’?

Chunhua: Because I downloaded it. I’m an active user of Facebook. Facebook can make money from me, so I have a right to post.

Sarah: That’s interesting because I would never use Weibo ...

Chunhua: Weibo is different because you can download it, and try to use it, but it is not friendly for foreign users. It’s all Chinese. Even if you change the settings into English, it’s still, for example, the functions, so it’s not friendly.

Sarah: So that is aimed at a Chinese audience.

Chunhua: Yeah, the customer is only Chinese, not foreigner.

Sarah: Whereas Facebook, the target customer,

Chunhua: The target customer is more international. For example, the Hong Kongese and from Taiwan, they still use English and also Chinese, and their main social media is Facebook, so they can use Chinese and also English. It’s more multinational. And Weibo is different, is only for mainland [Chinese]. I think it’s more for mainland [Chinese].

(Interview 3)

Chunhua's definition of herself as a Facebook 'user' is of importance here, and a number of entangled intra-actions gave rise to this definition. The action of downloading the Facebook app to her phone and subsequent use of the site; her knowledge of Facebook's ability to financially gain from her activity thereon, as well as the platform's "foreign users" -friendliness arising from its global target market coalesced to provide Chunhua with the capacity to position herself as a legitimate Facebook user and a legitimate user of English on the platform. This self-positioning arose from her awareness of herself as part of the economic exchange between Facebook, its users, and those entities that gain access to users' data. She was aware that, as Fulton and Kibby (2017, p 189-190) state, "information is currency in the digital age". She knew her data was the capital – data-as-capital – that legitimatised her access to the site and was involved in giving rise to her use of English there.

Areeya was also aware of herself as entangled in an economic exchange of data-as-capital for Facebook space. She described the platform as a "rental shop":

Areeya: I think it's like a rental shop because he [Mark Zuckerberg] can sell, he can make us see the adverts, like the ads, all the time. And that's kind of like the condition that we have to accept. And if we post something, or share something, he got, he got those kind of data, and he can sell it to someone, like the marketing industry, or something like that. And then they produce something for us to consume. ... I realize that what I do is kind of like trading, uhm, kind of like private public space on Facebook with my information with him.

(Interview 3)

Areeya's involvement in this "trading" with Facebook enabled her to position herself as a Facebook tenant who exchanged access to her information for Facebook space, and, with that, she had legitimacy of use of the platform.

Areeya and Chunhua were aware of their value to Facebook in relation to this capital. The capacities which produced their agency to position themselves as Facebook "user" or "tenant" arose from an entanglement of their knowledge of the platform's neoliberal capitalist motivations, and their

awareness of the role of their data-as-capital within those motivations, as well as the platform's functionality. All these produced Facebook as a space in which Areeya and Chunhua could invest in English.

Data-as-capital was a key intra-action within participants investment assemblages. It was the capital that all participants possessed as soon as they joined Facebook, interacted on the site, and contributed their data which was then monetised. Its impact was so regular, that it can be identified as an aggregating affect (Fox and Alldred 2017).

In this section, I have outlined four powerful intra-actions within participants' investment assemblages: Facebook's ubiquity, friending functionality, ownership, and data-as-capital. I have also identified how these intra-actions coalesced to produce Facebook as a space of access to opportunities for English use. All three of the components comprising Darwin and Norton's new model of investment can be identified within these areas. Participants gained access to Facebook spaces due to the fact that Facebook use was established as a social norm: because of the value of their data, and because of their subject positions as students at an English-medium university. What also needs to be added, however, is the importance of the sociomateriality of the platform: its functionality and how that produced capacities for investment. For example, participants' agency in terms of control over content through edit and delete functionality was entangled with feelings of ownership of Facebook space, and legitimate use of that space. Participants' agency to invest in English on the platform was produced within coalescences of intra-actions comprising the three elements of Darwin and Norton's investment model (identity, ideology and capital) and the sociomaterial functionality of Facebook.

The next section provides a discussion of how Facebook's digital functionality as part of an affect economy was involved in producing capacities in participants for impression management on the platform. With their agency produced within these capacities, participants were able to have control over how they posted themselves into being, or took up the right to post in English

on Facebook. This section underlines the significance of Facebook's digital materiality for impression management.

5.3 Impression management and posting oneself into being

Digital technologies are not only communication tools, but are also involved in identity production (Trottier and Lyon 2011). SNS users engage in impression management in these spaces ([Section 2.4.1.2](#)). This action is an attempt to control the effect one is making on an audience, and it is performed through a choice of content (boyd 2014). It is reliant for its success on the context in which it is enacted. In situations of context collapse, as is the case with SNS use, in which the boundaries between different groups within one's audience are perforated or non-existent, capacities which produce control over one's impression management arise from the affordances related to functionality (visibility, persistence, searchability and spreadability). This is because SNS use heightens one's visibility by providing potentially diverse audiences with diverse expectations of the person posting. It is difficult to meet such expectations with the same content (boyd 2014).

Impression management, therefore, is an attempt to control how one projects oneself online. Yet, as one's agency to control is shared with one's audience, it can also be characterised as a way in which SNS users attempt to exert control over how they are read into being by their audiences. The significance of impression management for participants' investment in English on Facebook became clear during this research. Individuals engaged in it in order to position themselves as certain types of people. That is, they utilised impression management as part of investing in English on the platform.

Participants endeavoured to curate the image they desired to portray for their audiences. This curation was accomplished through decisions made

concerning what content to post, that is, how they made themselves visible, and when not to post, thus limiting their visibility.

Participants took steps to produce themselves in positive ways on Facebook. When asked what type of personality Guo wanted to show on Facebook, he replied:

Guo: Uh, happy, optimistic, hardworking and a good sense of humour. You see I always post something use a sense of humour. Use funny language.

(Interview 2)

Guo was able to position himself as a “*funny guy*” (Interview Three) through his choice of content for an English-using audience.

Li Li, the participant who posted the longest content, and who posted on topics which were generally less light-hearted than other participants, also experienced Facebook as a place where she could position herself as a particular type of person through her content:

Li Li: I want to show that I'm smart [pause]. I'm good at reasoning, so, yeah, I give reasons to support my opinion. Hmm, to show that I go to a lot of events, I have a lot of friends. That's why I “Check in” at a lot of places. And, what else? That I'm normal, just like everyone else.

(Interview 3)

English was an intra-action involved in Li Li's online curation of herself as intelligent, popular and “*normal*”. Yet, English was not the only intra-action entangled in the production of Li Li's agency for her self-curation on Facebook; also involved was the platform's functionality. By utilising the “Check in” function, which enabled her to share her geographical location with her friend connections, Li Li used her agency to produce herself as an active individual who engages with her surroundings. Therefore, in the multimodal context of Facebook, participants did not only write or “type [themselves] into being” (Sundén 2003, p. 13); they also posted themselves into being with the use of the semiotic resources Facebook offered, such as the “Check in” functionality. Investment in Facebook for an English-using

audience, therefore, was not always produced from capacities to post in English, but it also arose from capacities which arose from the multimodality of the site which enabled participants to be visible without producing an English content at all. This is examined in greater depth in [Section 5.4.1](#).

Li Li and Guo not only participated in impression management by actively posting themselves into being through carefully selected content for an English-language audience. They also curated their online images by limiting the topics with which they posted themselves into being:

Guo: No, no no. You just read the stories I want you to see on Facebook. Not the things I don't want you to know. Like, if I got a D in an exam, I won't post that on Facebook.

(Interview 3)

Li Li: I'm an honest person, so that's why I express myself honestly on Facebook. It is me, but honestly does not mean you have to say everything [both laugh]. If I don't say thing, it doesn't mean that I'm not honest. So it's still part of me.

(Interview 3)

Li Li and Guo posted themselves into being through the prudent selection of content. They only shared that which would show them in a good light. Chunhua and Mingmei engaged in the same type of impression management:

Chunhua: Yeah, you will choose the positive side of your life, your very good experience or achievement, and your, some humour. This kind of positive thing. You do not share negative reviews or feelings on Facebook.

(Interview 3)

Mingmei: I don't think Facebook have the same negative influence like social media have ... for my life, because uhm I sometimes, I, I, the contents I post on Facebook has been selected by myself.

(Interview 1)

Chunhua made sure to limit her content so that it illustrated the positive aspects of her personality. Impression management enabled Mingmei to avoid potentially negative repercussions of Facebook use. It is clear,

therefore, that some participants felt they were able to control the impression their audience built of them through the content they either did or did not post. They were able to control the content through which they were made visible, and therefore, retain control over how they were read into being.

Other participants felt less able to control the impressions they made on Facebook, with the key intra-action limiting their capacity for impression management being their English language proficiency. When I asked Sofia what type of person she wanted to show on Facebook in English, she stated:

Sofia: [pause] In English, I think I use my normal identity. Because I know that the person know that I don't understand English very well, I'm no so good to use the grammar at the moment. Yes, I show me like I am normally. I send a message to you, I can't use other words. ... And I prefer to use my basic English. Uh, in the other language, maybe it's more easy to cover sometimes or change something that you want to show others. It's more easy for me to do it. I can use other words, another word. But normally, I show me like I am [laughs].

(Interview 2)

Sofia felt that she did not have the competency in English to create an enhanced impression of herself that was a step removed from her essential, non-refined self. Therefore, she was not able to engage in impression management in the same way in which she was in Spanish and Italian. She was not able to conceal as much of herself when posting in English as she was in her other languages.

Mingmei's English competence, limited in contrast to that of her Chinese language, meant that she felt she was not able to post herself into being in English in a way that expressed the different facets of her personality. She assigned this restricted ability to her limited vocabulary. Mingmei was aware of how this potentially impacted the impression her audience formed of her. She stated that she did not want to give the impression of being either "very very special" or "a very ordinary, normal" person (Interview Two). However, she felt that it was difficult for her to control the impression she made:

Mingmei: Because I'm Chinese, uh, I can't, uh, control their, uh, I can't control because some words, some vocabulary I can't, I may not know the all the meanings because, you know, one word has lots of meanings, so if I speak more, it's easier to let people think this person is weird. Yeah, because they may have some misunderstand, misunderstood me.

(Interview 2)

Mingmei had knowledge of the polysemous nature of English vocabulary (one word may contain multiple meanings). Because she had this awareness, she was nervous about making polysemous errors in her posts. To do so, she feared, would be posting herself into being as “*weird*” (Interview Two). Mingmei’s awareness of her limited knowledge of English vocabulary gave rise to fears of being misunderstood (cf. Fulton and Kibby 2017). Therefore, she restricted how she posted herself into being to avoid being read into being in a context of misunderstanding.

Participants engaged in impression management in English on Facebook just as they would have had they been using their first languages. They utilised multimedia publishing functionality and carefully selected what to post and what not to post. In addition, they had “Check in” functionality at their disposal. On Facebook, therefore, capacities for impression management arose from an entanglement of language use and functionality. This is relevant to Mingmei who, with control over the content she selected to post, had the capacity for Impression management. Yet, at the same time, this capacity was not evident in her attitude to her English competence on the site. Sofia experienced Facebook in a similar way. She assigned her limited capacities to post herself into being in a curated manner to her English language proficiency.

It can be seen, therefore, that investment assemblages on Facebook are not static. Mingmei, for example, was entangled in intra-actions which both produced and failed to produce capacities for investment in English on the platform. The impact of such intra-actions and others are discussed in the next section in terms of spatial repertoires.

5.4 Investment and spatial repertoires

Investment is concerned with target *language* users, with the onus on “language”. Language here refers to elements such as grammar, vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation and appropriacy of use. The multimodality of new technologies brings with them added ways to make meaning, or put in another way, more semiotic resources (Kress 2000). This includes “graphic, pictorial, audio ... and spatial patterns” (Douglas Fir Group 2016, p. 22) which can be integrated with written text, or even replace it.

As already noted, as a result of the multimodal context of the platform, investment in interaction with an English-using audience on Facebook gave rise to participants’ capacities to post themselves into being without the use of English text. For example, they were able to produce themselves on the site with the use of semiotic resources such as the “Check in” functionality. They also posted themselves into being by sharing audio-visual content and posting their own images, and by posting Likes and other emojis. In Pennycook and Otsuji’s (2014) terms, they incorporated these semiotic resources into their spatial repertoires ([Section 3.7.3](#)).

This section concentrates on elements of participants’ spatial repertoires, and analyses how these repertoires were involved in producing capacities within their investment assemblages. The areas discussed are: images, Facebook’s language functionality, discrete access to language and reference tools, discrete interaction with reading content, and language processing time. I show that the concept of investment needs to expand to accommodate the use of these resources, alongside capital, ideology and identity. In so doing, I emphasise the relevance of a sociomaterial approach to investment in English in Facebook spaces.

5.4.1 Images

Participants were enthusiastic users of Facebook’s multimodal functionality. So pervasive was the use of images that participants identified it as a norm:

Guo: It's a habit; I don't know why [laughs]. Even if you see my other social media I will do that, do the photo and the words. If I want to send just the words, I send a personal message. Not on the social media.

(Interview 2)

Chunhua: I think I will always post some image with some short sentence with an emoji. It's just my way to post on Facebook. I think I always post some emojis from my life.

(Interview 1)

An image and a short piece of text, with or without a Like or an emoji, was a recognised norm by which these participants posted themselves into being. These elements of Facebook functionality, firmly established within an ideology of maximising the sharing potential of information for Facebook's and its clients' profit, were intra-actions within the investment assemblage as their entanglement produced the capacities for this norm to develop.

Images were enlisted as collaborators in meaning-making and impression management. For Mingmei, for example, her lack of ability to express her humorous side using English on Facebook was countered, to a certain extent, by her ability to post herself into being with images:

Mingmei: So, uh, if I post Chinese in the Chinese social media, like WeChat, uh, it will be more humour, more meaningful or something. But on the Facebook, you know, I have mentioned, very short, uh, which can express my feelings or my my explain the meaning I want to, uh, let others know. But it, you know, it, I can't guarantee it very funny, funny words or very, uh, humour or very. I can't let people interested in what I post. I think pictures can better show the vivid life or something.

(Interview 2)

The multimodality of the platform clearly came into play as a support for Mingmei's investment in English on the site. While she doubted the effectiveness with which she was able to post herself into being with written English, she was able to reclaim some control through Facebook's functionality. She enlisted images into her spatial repertoire, using them as an intra-action entangled with the intra-action of her English-speaking

audience, and so providing her with capacities to post. In line with Mitchell's (2012) study of English language learners Facebook use, Mingmei successfully incorporated images to *enhance* her "communicative ability" (p. 480). From a posthumanist perspective, Facebook's multimodality, in this case its image functionality, was an element of the spatial repertoire which gave rise to Mingmei's English language competence (cf Pennycook 2018). With this, it can be seen that her communicative ability was *produced* from an entangled assemblage comprising Facebook's multimodal functionality, and the intra-actions which produced that functionality.

Mingmei felt an image together with a short piece of text was the optimal way of expressing herself and maintaining control over how she posted herself into being:

Mingmei: Uhm, by posting some pictures, you know, it's more directly than sentence. If you just post something like 'I'm very beautiful' it can't prove you are beautiful. You know that if you post a very beautiful photo and you post a very beautiful picture, your audience will see that and 'Oh, you are beautiful!'. If you post 'I am happy' it can't prove you are happy. So I think in this way my audience can see the good positive aspect of me.

Sarah: Ok-- through the images you post.

Mingmei: You just match the sentence. If you only post one picture, they will 'Hmm? What is this picture mean to say?'

Sarah: Yeah, so you use the language to make sure they get your message?

Mingmei: Mm mm.

(Interview 2)

In this instance, the image and the written text (in English) existed in an entanglement with other intra-actions which produced capacities in Mingmei for her to make meaning. Her capacity to post herself into being, that is, her ability to take up legitimate poster status, was produced in coalescence with the multimodal aspect of her spatial repertoire.

Other participants also enlisted images as part of their spatial repertoires, and used them as a way to post themselves into being. In these cases, what is significant is the use of images *instead of* written text:

Abda: If I find a picture that's going to save me from writing a post, yeah [laughs] I'll put it [both laugh] Because, you know, some people, they're visualising this. If they just see the pictures, they are, like, saving your time writing the post.

(Interview 3)

For Abda, posting an image saved her from having to produce English text. Nuan also preferred the use of images over written text. She described it as a “*more efficient*” form of communication. This was because:

Nuan: Uhm, it's easier for me to have less English words posted. Like, I don't have to check the grammar or stuff. And then, yeah. And I think, mm, a photograph can more show, can express your feeling, like, you can have, you can post a selfie to express your feeling, yeah. It's more efficient than if you say in words, like, you're really happy. Yeah, it's more visually.

(Interview 2)

Nuan felt that posting herself into being with images was a more effective way of expressing herself than the use of English alone. Echoing Abda's comments, it saved her from having to use English; however, Nuan went further, adding that it prevented her from having to “*check the grammar and stuff*”. In addition, by incorporating the use of images into her spatial repertoire, she gained a capacity of expressing herself more faithfully than with the use of English.

Successful identity production through the use of images on Facebook has been noted by Mitchell (2012) and Vanek *et al.* (2018); in addition, the multimodal semiotic resources of Facebook have been found to aid meaning-making for target language users (Dovchin 2020). It is clear that the participants mentioned were also comfortable taking up the right to post by incorporating the multimodal resources that Facebook afforded them.

Participants' investment in English use on Facebook has to be understood, therefore, by taking into consideration what produces the capacities for this

investment. In this section, the significance of spatial repertoires, incorporating the functionality to post images and emojis, has been shown to be productive of these capacities for investment. Such capacities arose from an entanglement of intra-actions: Facebook as a company which aims to maximise profits by facilitating information sharing between users; the multimodal functionality that enables that sharing; the norm of multimodal, text-light communication on Facebook, as well as participants' social and linguistic capital that provided them with an English-using audience. These intra-actions coalesced to produce participants' capacities to invest in the use of English on Facebook. They also produced participants' capacities to post themselves into being in the presence of English-using audiences with no English language use at all, but with images and emojis. Indeed, for some participants, images usurped English use in some cases. They experienced posting themselves into being with these semiotic resources as better representing themselves than using English.

5.4.2 Language settings

Facebook's language functionality is a crucial part of its global appeal and in making the site as accessible to as many people as possible (Langlois 2012) ([Section 1.3.1](#)). There is little research on the significance of the ability to change the language settings on an internet-enabled device and its impact on target language use. Only Alm (2015) mentions this functionality in relation to English language use and learning on Facebook, and that study restricts the relevance of these settings to the number of participants who had changed them to English. My research, however, found that the ability to adjust Facebook language settings was involved in participants' investment in English use on the platform.

Some individuals chose to set their Facebook language settings to English, as opposed to their first languages. As a result, their content was published in English, non-English text would be translated into English if the "See

translation” function was selected, and Facebook architecture would be visible in English.

Guo’s and Elena’s views point to investment in English through the act of changing their language settings:

Guo: Firstly, you change your language [settings] to English. That means you give up the option of the Chinese language. That means you have the intention to study English. You really want to know that. You really want to improve yourself.

(Interview 1)

Elena: I change the setting mode, the setting language in Facebook. Before it was Italian, now my setting language is English. I want to write more posts in English than Italian.

(Interview 1)

Elena’s and Guo’s investment was enacted by them adjusting their language settings. The platform’s language functionality became part of their spatial repertoires in that their agency to interact in English on Facebook was entangled with this functionality. Both these participants’ investment was entangled with the material infrastructure of the platform. Their investment arose from capacities developed through affective flows between the intra-actions of their linguistic capital (their abilities in their first languages and in English) and that of the language functionality of the Facebook infrastructure. It should be remembered that the platform’s language functionality is firmly embedded in its neoliberal capitalist ideology which emphasises maximisation of profit (Langlois 2012). The more languages that can be used on the site, the more users. The more Facebook users, the more data that can be captured and monetised by Facebook. Therefore, the neoliberal capitalist ideology of the platform was also an intra-action involved in giving rise to capacities to invest in English on the site.

In Elena’s case, the infrastructure alongside the portability of Facebook enabled her to maintain her investment in English on return to Italy:

Elena: Yeah. I prefer to use English, the software, the interface of Facebook is in English, not Italian. I maintain English settings. And,

yeah, it's a good way to continue to have a sort of, uhm, my mind in English. Yeah, I understand that now sometimes I try to translate in Italian, and it's not ok. I try to use interface in Facebook in English because I can liaise in English with other people.

(Interview 3)

Surrounded by Italian, Elena maintained Facebook in English as a factor within her spatial repertoire, and so was able to retain English as part of herself and her life, and a way to preserve her investment in the language.

Lijuan also used her language settings as an element of her spatial repertoire which in itself was agentive in producing her investment in English:

Lijuan: Actually, my phone is completely in English. That's my particular way to practise English. So I set my Facebook on English. Looks more natural.

(Interview 1)

We revisited the topic of “*Looks more natural*” in Interview Two when I asked her what she meant by it:

Lijuan: Just, if you use everything in English, you feel like you are a native speaker of English, so it's like you are natural for English and you get more confidence.

Sarah: So it helps you get more confidence. Can you tell me more about that?

Lijuan: Uh, just like, everybody use Facebook in English, I mean native speakers, so if you use that in English, you feel like you are one of them and there is much less difference between myself and native speakers. That makes me feel I can use what you can use, so that makes me feel more confident.

(Interview 2)

The ability to access Facebook's infrastructure in English enabled Lijuan to produce the site somewhat akin to an immersion language engagement experience. By selecting English settings on her phone and on Facebook, she produced an English language space. In this context of self-imposed English language engagement, Lijuan was able to develop a subject position for herself from which she could feel “*like a native speaker of English*”. She was able to align herself with native English-speakers through engagement

with the digital infrastructure she had enabled on her phone. The manner in which the affect economy of intra-actions within Facebook use gave rise to capacities to produce the subject positions from which participants were able to take up the right to post is important for an understanding of investment in English on Facebook. As a result, it will be further explored in Chapter Seven.

Another important aspect of the site's language functionality was the atmosphere of linguistic permissiveness it produced:

Sarah: Ok, so is Facebook a space that anybody can use English on?

Areeya: Yes, I think so... . Because anybody can sign up for it. And so they can have their own account, And [pause] the thing is, like, you can change the language as well, so the language will be different according to depends on what you want to see, yeah. So I think it's for everyone, it's not a privilege for native English-speakers.

(Interview 3)

Abda also associated this multiple language functionality with permission to use English:

Abda: Facebook is not about the language or where people do they come from. ... It's free for all people from all the world. ... [pause] Ok, you can express your emotions or your opinions, or your thoughts on Facebook in so many different languages. You can use it in Korean, in Arabic, in English. And people from other side of the world, they can use the translation for your thoughts [pause]. I think this arise from the Facebook company. They give you the rights to express your emotion, to express your thoughts in your language, and if you want, in another language.

(Interview 3)

Fundamental to investment is the ability to develop and/or recognise opportunities to take up the right to speak (Norton 2013). Areeya's and Abda's statements indicate the significance of Facebook's multilingual language functionality in their spatial repertoires, and so in their investment. Their investment assemblages coalesced around affective flows between a number of intra-actions. Facebook's neoliberal capitalist orientation towards financial gain; its sharing functionality; the production of opportunities for the

harvesting of users' information, and the resultant sale of access to that information to third parties coalesced as intra-actions which produced a sense of linguistic permissiveness around Facebook use. While Areeya's and Abda's capital (linguistic and social); their "friend connection" subject positions (identity), and the new media norm of sharing (ideology) were agentic in their investment assemblages, these assemblages also required the inclusion of Facebook functionality (in this instance, language settings) for this investment in English use to be produced.

Facebook as a multilingual space, and the permissive attitude to English language use this engendered, stands in contrast with participants' attitudes to Chinese social media. We have already read Chunhua's observations that Chinese social media are not foreigner-user-friendly (see [Section 5.2.3](#)). Ironically, the divide between Chinese social media and non-Chinese social media, which arises from the ideological geopolitical stance of China to sites such as Facebook and Twitter, was also involved in the production of Facebook as a space of legitimate English language use:

Guo: Uh, first of all, I will talk about why I don't use any other language to post on Facebook. As I told you, we have other social media in China. If I want to post something in Chinese, I will not post something on Facebook, because on Facebook, most of the friends I have speak English, so if I want them to read the story, I will definitely use that language, and I'm learning from, from the posts as well.

(Interview 3)

If Guo wanted to communicate with his Chinese friends, he would use Chinese social media platforms such as WeChat or Weibo. Facebook was reserved for English-speaking friend connections. While Guo could have enlisted Facebook's language functionality and incorporated the ability to post in Chinese into his Chinese spatial repertoire on the site, he chose not to do so. As a result, Facebook was *not* produced as a space of Chinese usage. The capacities which produced Guo's agency to choose not to post himself into being in Chinese, but rather to invest in taking up the right to post in English, were entangled with China's banning of Facebook. With his social

media audiences effectively divided according to nationality as a result of the geopolitical ideological acts of the Chinese government, Guo was able to position himself as a legitimate English language user for the English language using audience of friend connections he had amassed on Facebook. In effect, the prohibited status of Facebook in China was an intra-action involved in producing the site as a place of legitimate English language use for Guo.

In summary, Facebook's language functionality was clearly an aggregating affect which produced similar capacities amongst different participants. Incorporating language functionality into their spatial repertoires and changing their language settings to display Facebook in English as opposed to their first languages, was an act of investment for Guo and Elena. For Guo and Lijuan, it changed Facebook from an area of Chinese to one of English, and with that, produced a reason to read and post in English. In addition, enlisting its functionality acted as an aspect of participants' spatial repertoires as it actually made the site completely accessible in English. Facebook was produced as a space of permissive language use in which participants were able to post themselves into being with their language(s) of choice, including English. Unlike Pasfield-Neofitou's (2011) participants use of Japanese social media ([Section 3.6.3](#)), Facebook was not a place of trespass. Rather it was a linguistically cosmopolitan space in which the use of multiple languages, including English, was legitimised.

Uncovering the roles of Facebook functionality within investment required "dredging" (Fox and Alldred 2017) the data for intra-actions which produced that investment. The intra-actions so far identified span a broad area of human and non-human elements. They comprise Facebook's neoliberal capitalist motivations for financial gain through the commodification of user-data; the development of functionality which enables users to produce and share their information (in this case, functionality which supports multiple language use), and more functionality that can harvest user-information as data. Also evident were participants' production of Facebook as a space of permissive multilingual language use; their desires to extend their social

capital with English-users, and to engage in English-language sociality on Facebook, as well as their linguistic capital (English competency) to do so. Yet more intra-actions spanned China's geopolitical stance towards Facebook and its limiting of access to the site in China essentially produced Facebook as a space of English, as opposed to Chinese, use for Chinese students in Ireland. These intra-actions entangled to produce an affect economy – an agentive network - which in turn gave rise to participants' capacities to invest in English on the platform.

This illustrates the significance of Facebook's money-making imperative, and how it produces sharing functionality and sharing norms on the site, as a key intra-action within the entanglement of investment producing intra-actions. Its significance is clearly illustrated when placing Facebook's linguistic diversity into its ideological context. As the global lingua franca (Phillipson 2010) and the language of Silicon Valley and the internet (Lam 2008), Facebook has to be available in English. Here participants' linguistic capital (the fact they are English users) meets the symbolic capital of English - they have a space to use the language because the language is so globally significant. If they were speakers of a minority language in which the infrastructure is not available, Facebook would not appear so linguistically diverse. These language users cannot incorporate Facebook language settings into their spatial repertoires. Also, it should be remembered, there would be a lack of eagerness to enable the infrastructure to be available in that language, because of the lack of language users, and the resultant lack of data that could be harvested from them.

The next section retains a focus on spatial repertoires, and presents a discussion of the analysis of participants' experiences of the discrete nature of Facebook use. It comprises an examination of discrete access to language and reference tools for both content production and consumption, and also investigates the significance of extended language processing time within an asynchronous communicative context. The section, therefore, concentrates on the distributed nature of investment in Facebook spaces.

5.4.3 Discrete interaction with Facebook content as an aspect of spatial repertoires

Facebook enables asynchronous communication. This is entangled with the affordances of persistence, visibility, spreadability and searchability (boyd 2014; [Section 2.4.1](#)). In this communicative context, users are able to engage in discrete interaction with each other and with content, whether as readers, watchers, listeners, or writers/producers. By “discrete” I mean that interaction generally takes place in an environment of physical isolation from interlocutors, and in a context in which there is a lack of shared language production and reception time and space. I characterise this discrete interaction as an element of participants’ spatial repertoires as it was involved in producing their English language competency (cf. Penncycook 2018). In addition, this discrete interaction was entangled with other intra-actions to give rise to capacities which produced both investment in, and disinvestment from, English language use on Facebook.

5.4.3.1 Discrete access to distributed knowledge through language and reference tools: posting oneself into being

The discrete nature of Facebook interaction provides behind the screen access to online and offline reference and language tools. Language tools include paper-based and online dictionaries and thesauri. Facebook users can also utilise the platform’s translation function: by clicking on the “Select translation” button, content can be translated into the language to which the user’s language settings are calibrated. Content can also be copied and pasted into translation software outside Facebook, such as Google Translate. Online reference tools, for example, Wikipedia and search engines, can be utilised to clarify information encountered online. With these resources incorporated into their spatial repertoires, Facebook users had discrete access to distributed knowledge when they interacted on the site. This distributed knowledge enhanced their language competencies to interact on Facebook, both in terms of reading and writing content.

Participants had access to online language during the process of composing their Facebook content. Zaria made use of such tools to translate from Spanish to English, prior to posting in English:

Sarah: Yeah. So do you use translation tools for English?

Zaria: I can't write a lot of sentences, or the letters only, I need to translate for continuing. I write in Spanish and translate into English the majority. First, I write in Spanish and translate into English.

(Interview 2)

Online translation tools played an important role in Zaria's investment in writing. They gave her the English language with which to express herself for her English-speaking audience. Zaria's use of translation tools can be equated with Blommaert's (2010) concept of collaborative work. Such collaborative work takes place, for example, when an individual with a higher level of language competency helps another person make themselves understood. In an online space, Zaria enlisted translation tools as a collaborator in her meaning-making. Online language tools entangled with asynchronous communication (which enabled discrete access to these tools) produced Zaria's capacity to post herself into being in English. In the affect economy of her investment in writing assemblage, they played a crucial role.

Sofia also employed online translation tools, but in a different way:

Sofia: ... maybe I am sure that the words are Ok, but there is something say me, "Maybe the correct word, is not the phrase correct in English" and sometimes I change it is good, and I publish this, uh, posted it. But I need a confirm of my English, some someone maybe, sometimes I ask my husband if near to me, or I check in the Google Translate.

(Interview 1)

While Zaria used language tools to produce English text for her, Sofia used them to confirm her language choices. Her ability to do this reduced the anxiety she experienced when using English on Facebook:

Sofia: It's like, uhm, Google translation is like a pilot to my risks. Maybe I am so calm when I use it.

Sarah: So does it give you more confidence?

Sofia: Yeah.

(Interview 2)

Access to online language tools, as well as to her husband, was clearly important in Sofia's capacity to post herself into being in English. With the ability to check her language choices, she was able to use these tools to scaffold her language use (Sockett 2014), and so she could post herself into being with more confidence.

Zaria and Sofia took advantage of the discrete context of language use on Facebook to incorporate the utilisation of online language tools into their spatial repertoires (Pennycook and Otsuji 2014). With this integration of sociomateriality into their "locus of language" (*ibid.* p. 179), they expanded their capacities to invest in English on Facebook.

Not all participants were comfortable employing language software tools. A number of individuals expressed a lack of trust in such software as a reason for avoiding its utilisation. The online translations participants had experience of generating were described as "very weird" (Lan, Interview Two) and "weird and funny" (Lijuan, Interview Two). Participants also commented on language errors in these translations, for example, "it's not very accurate" (Mingmei, Interview Two). The strangeness of translations and the inaccuracies evident within them made participants reticent about incorporating language tools into their spatial repertoires and posting themselves into being with the language they generated.

Nuan also lacked trust in online translation tools:

Nuan: But I don't really trust that. I worry, like, it will translate into something that I'm not meant to [pause] not meant to express. And then people misunderstand what I mean.

(Interview 1)

Nuan was unsure that Google Translate would translate her Chinese into English in such a way as to retain her meaning. The potential for

misrepresenting herself through use of this tool meant she was reticent about employing it when posting herself into being.

For Chunhua, a lack of trust in online translations arose from them being machine generated:

Chunhua: I don't trust the thing written by some translation, translator system. It's always not right. It's like, how do you say, it's automatic way, it's not manually. ... Yeah, machine cannot, is not reliable. I don't trust them. I never use it.

(Interview 3)

Chunhua would not allow a “*machine*” to speak for her because she considered it inherently unreliable. She would not post herself into being with its use, and thus maintain control of her impression management.

Li Li's views on the utilisation of translation software concurred with Chunhua's, but for a different reason. She felt that English generated by translation software was not her own language. When asked why she limited her use of this type of software to checking single words, as opposed to translating longer tracts of text, she stated:

*Li Li: [pause] That's not **me** then. It's a machine help me to say that sentence. It's not me! Like, the way you compose your sentence, you can express the same, the same meaning with different structure. The way **you** compose your sentence is different from the way others do it, and it's definitely different compared to the machine. And if you translate from a machine, everyone who want to express the same feeling, say in Chinese, they will use the same sentence structured translated into English. it's terrible.*

(Interview 3)

Li Li focused on the idiosyncrasy of human language. For Li Li, this idiosyncrasy means that language use varies from individual to individual, while language generated by a machine is generic. To post herself into being with machine generated language, therefore, would not be posting herself into being at all, because, as Li Li stated, “*That's not **me***”.

Nuan also refused to make use of translation software tools, even though she observed that the resultant translation might be “*better*” than her own language:

Nuan: I'd rather use my own English. I know, like, maybe it's not better than the translation, but I will use my own English.

(Interview 2)

In agreement with Li Li, Nuan drew a distinction between human and machine generated language:

Nuan: Because it's a machine [laughs]. It's just, like, I don't know what that process is, but it's not like a person express her feelings. Just a machine translating her words. So it doesn't feel like those words belong to me, it's not something what I said, yeah.

(Interview 2)

As with Li Li, Nuan focused on ownership of words. Machine generated language did not incorporate her words, and so it would not effectively express her feelings. As a result, she did not use it to post herself into being.

Participants' use of language tools shows how the same relata, entangled as an intra-action in different assemblages, can be involved in giving rise to different capacities. As such, this type of intra-action can be viewed in terms of relations of exteriority (Fox and Alldred 2017). In Zaria's and Sofia's investment assemblages, these tools played a significant role as parts of their spatial repertoires. They were agentive in that they produced capacities for investment in English use on Facebook. By scaffolding her English use, they provided Sofia with the confidence to post herself into being. In Zaria's case, these tools provided her with the actual English language to post herself into being via translations of her Spanish.

Nevertheless, other participants refused to incorporate discrete access to the use of translation tools into their spatial repertoires, and so these tools were absent as intra-actions within their investment assemblages. Lijuan and Mingmei declined to share their agency with translation software on account of the “*weird*” and sometimes inaccurate translations it generated. Rather

than producing capacities to post herself into being in English, Nuan viewed translation software as undermining her own agency. By giving control to translation software, Nuan feared posting content that would misrepresent her on Facebook in English, and so she avoided its use.

In Li Li's and Chunhua's cases, at issue in their avoidance of translation software was ownership of language. To post themselves into being with machine generated language was to post themselves into being with the language of another. Significantly, this was not even the language of another human, but that of a machine. For these individuals, those capacities for English language investment which were produced in entanglements including access to translation software, were anathema. These individuals did not want the software to speak for them. Li Li's and Chunhua considered their investment in English on Facebook to be based around the use of their own language, as opposed to substituting machine generated language for their own. As a result, unlike Zaria and Sofia, they rejected the incorporation of online translation tools into their investment assemblages.

5.4.3.2 Discrete access to language tools and reading

Research into investment often focuses on the production of language, that is, writing and speaking (Norton Pierce 1995; Haneda 2005; Norton 2013; Lee 2014). Nevertheless, investment also entails receiving and understanding language through reading (Norton and Vanderheyden 2004). Participants were invested in reading English on Facebook. Language tools were more readily incorporated into participants' spatial repertoires for reading Facebook content than for producing it. Sofia, for example, employed Facebook's "See translation" functionality to translate English content into Spanish:

Sofia: I use that when, for example, when I have the posts about the news and sometimes they wrote something I don't understand, or the person that write about this news, I don't know [pause] about the politician or something, and I use the sometimes Facebook translate

because not really clearly for me to understand some words in this post.

(Interview 1)

The incorporation of online translation tools into participants' spatial repertoires was involved in the production of capacities which supported reading English, ranging from their use for long tracts of text, as was the case with Sofia, to the translation of single words:

Lan: Yeah, I do. If I don't know the exact meaning in English of that word, I will do it [use online translation tools].

(Interview 1)

Discrete access to such translation tools was important for engaging in academic study. As part of her course, Mingmei had to join asynchronous study group discussions on Messenger. She used translation software to help her follow other group members' points:

Mingmei: I have to understand the opinions from my classmates, like in a study group, I have to, I must understand what he's talking about. Uh, the translation tool is the tool to help me to understand it better.

(Interview 2)

Outside an academic setting, Lijuan made use of translation software to comprehend language use in more informal contexts:

*Lijuan: ... I have an American friend; he always speak informal English on Facebook to me. Really really informal. It's all American stuff, and I have **no** idea what that is [laughs]. Like, "How's things going around your neck?" something like that. I have no idea what that is. Like, "How you doing?" basically. And he just show off [laughs] and I have to Google it, "What does that mean?". And I can say something about that. Yeah, American's always use very different language. Really informal.*

(Interview 3)

Access to Google not only allowed Lijuan to understand informal language use, but also gave her the knowledge to reply, to "say something about that", and in so doing, post herself into being.

It can be seen, therefore, that the incorporation of translation tools into participants' spatial repertoires was an intra-action, coalescing with other intra-actions such as the participants' social and linguistic capital, and Facebook's sharing norm, within participants' reading investment assemblages. Li Li found these tools particularly useful when attempting to understand the highly contextual Facebook content of her student peers because:

Li Li: Sometimes you cannot understand what they're saying. There's no context. Like, so, out of nowhere they said just a sentence. You cannot put that into any environment, so you won't understand what they are talking about. Or when they tag a friend on, uh, a meme that you cannot understand, it's just, uhm, no. But face-to-face, you can always ask them, "What is this?". It won't be very polite if my friends on Facebook tag his or her friends under a picture and I reply to them, "What is this? What does it mean? I cannot understand." No, you cannot do that.

(Interview 2)

Several aspects of Facebook content proved problematic for Li Li. A lack of context hindered meaning-making, so, for example, she found memes difficult to understand. These brief pieces of content, comprising an image and a short piece of text or a sound clip, can be highly culturally specific, their meaning obscured if one does not share the cultural capital of the publisher and their imagined audience. This type of content begged explanation; yet asking for this clarification was problematic. Li Li subscribed to a new media ideology that precluded making such a request. She thought it was rude to reply to a post in which she was not tagged in order to ask "*What is this?*". Nevertheless, access to online translation tools aided Li Li's investment in reading such content as they gave her a way of understanding it.

Discrete access to language tools was an aggregating affect which entangled with other intra-actions to produce capacities for reading English Facebook content. The significance of this affect was the agentic capacities it produced in participants' understanding of informal English. As a ludic space (Pearson 2009), Facebook is an arena for informal and playful language use (Peters *et al.* 2015). With their social capital – their native English-speaking

Facebook friend connections – participants had access to this type of language use. Asynchronous access, for Li Li in particular, entangled with her not being tagged in certain posts, producing capacities that inhibited her posting herself into being (investing in her English use) by way of a request for clarification. Nevertheless, while the functionality which was involved in producing discrete access to English was agentive in reducing Li Li's investment in posting in English, it also coalesced to give rise to another form of investment. It was involved in the production of Li Li's agency to use translation tools behind the screen to read and comprehend high context English on the platform.

As was the case with Zaria in relation to her use of language tools for English production ([Section 5.4.3.1](#)), Li Li's discrete access to language tools took on the role of language collaborator (Blommaert 2010) within her spatial repertoire. In short, with these tools, she had the ability to make meaning from problematic content in a context of a lack of control. These tools entangled with discrete access, and with both encompassed within the spatial repertoires within her investment assemblage, Li Li had the capacity to understand content in an environment in which she felt she could not ask for clarification.

In the next section, I discuss my analysis of discrete access to reading content in English, and the novel capacities for investment in interacting with such a text.

5.4.3.3 Reading in a context of discrete access to content: Abda

The incorporation of discrete access to English content into participants' spatial repertoires did not only give rise to the sharing of English language competencies with language tools. It also produced a certain "personalization" of engagement with content (Kukulska-Hulme 2012, p. 6). This type of engagement enabled Abda to take control of her choice of reading material and her style of interaction with it.

Abda spoke at length about an article a Facebook friend connection had shared with her on the site. This article focused on the story of a young man in the USA who had overcome multiple struggles to eventually be accepted to Harvard University:

*Abda: Because he went through a lot and he was in a very difficult situation. And he was responsible, I think, for his siblings. I don't know. But he did a very good job. I was, "Wow!" I like the English here in that post because it's not like what I usually read. It's more, I think it's more formal, and the words there, it's like [pause] some words there it's strange for me, you know, it's strange, but I haven't seen it before in a post. So I read it once. I read it twice and I said, "That's a good story, I'm going to read it loudly". ... Yeah, I really enjoyed it. And maybe, maybe if I read it today once, maybe I'm going to come back to it tomorrow and I'm going to read it again. You know, it takes time in me to, to, I don't know how to say it, but I **really** want to enjoy this post and these words. Sometimes it's feelings in words, you know.*

(Interview 2)

Abda's attraction to the article arose from its content and its use of language. With discrete access to this text, she was able to engage with it in private, and so read it aloud. By doing so, she was able to take an ephemeral digital text and reproduce it physically with her voice and her body. She could embody it. As a result, she experienced enjoyment of the texture of the language: "*I **really** want to enjoy this post and these words. Sometimes it's feelings in words, you know.*" Discrete access to the article was entangled to give rise to Abda's capacity for control over her interaction with the text. In this context, she was able to invest reading in English by interacting with the article in a way that was meaningful to her.

This investment arose, in part, from the components of Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. For example, Abda's capacity to encounter the article was entangled with her social capital (it originated from a friend connection) and the new media ideology of sharing (that friend connection shared it with her on Facebook). Yet, her investment, her transformation of capital in an ideological context in order to reposition herself as a legitimate English user, would not have been possible in this instance without the digital

functionality of Facebook use which allowed her private engagement with the article.

Abda's capacities in relation to investment arose from entanglements of the digital affordances that made the content visible, persistent and spreadable, as well as her interest in the topic. Coalescing with these factors was the capacity for Abda to engage with the article, not only as a legitimate English user, but as an emotionally and physically engaged English language user. This deepened her English language speaker subject position:

Abda: You know, when I find something I really like, I read it loudly, not once, maybe twice. ... I enjoy reading and I really want to hear myself reading this, reading and understanding. I know it's weird [laughs]

(Interview 2)

Abda's investment in English language use on Facebook was discrete, and therefore invisible to onlookers. It was not an investment in the production of English, but investment in the production of Abda as an English reader, both silently and aloud. The coalescence of Facebook functionality; the social media norm of sharing; Facebook's desire for increasing amounts of financial capital gained from the harvesting and commodification of user-data, and Abda's social capital produced agentic capacities in Abda for her investment in her embodied engagement with this text.

Abda's engagement with English in this context could be seen to be reminiscent of "pedagogical lurking" (Arnold and Paulus 2010, p. 188) by which access to online content offers opportunities for reflection on language use and subsequent language development. Yet there was more occurring here than is encompassed by pedagogical lurking. Online engagement with the article in a discrete context enabled Abda's capacity to repeatedly return to this text in the privacy of her home, and engage with it emotionally (the feelings in the text) and physically (reading it aloud). She was able to work with this text in a manner that would not have been feasible in a formal face-to-face learning setting. Able to take control of her interaction with the text, Abda was able to invest in the reading practices the text offered. These

capacities gave rise to a line of flight (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Fox and Alldred 2017), or a new way of becoming for Abda which enabled her to engage with the text in a novel way, and so experience her English language subjectivity in a new way.

Discrete access to content entangled with other intra-actions to produce Abda's investment in reading English. It was involved in the manner she made meaning from a text, and how she engaged with it. As such, I consider discrete access to be another component of the spatial repertoires Facebook interaction has to offer. Another factor which needs to be included in a consideration of these repertoires is language processing time.

5.4.3.4 Language processing time as an element of spatial repertoires

Since early interest in online contexts for second language development and use, the internet has been considered as having the potential for learning on account of its provision of "time-and-place-independent communication" (Warschauer 1997, p. 747). This independence arises from the asynchronous nature of much online communication. Content produced in this context persists long after first publication (boyd 2014). Such persistence arises from visibility of content and the environment of social connectivity in which this content resides. Unless used synchronously (which can occur on Facebook, in particular via Messenger), there can be less time pressure on Facebook users when producing or interacting with content compared with face-to-face communication. As a result, individuals have more time for language processing: valuable time which can be used for target language comprehension and/or production (Golanka *et al.* 2014; Mills 2009). This extra time has been noted as being advantageous for target language users of Facebook (Alm 2015; Gamble and Wilkins 2014). Elena succinctly describes the positive impact of this thinking time:

Elena: I have all the time that I want to write, to understand what I want to do, or want to say.

(Interview 2)

Elena's perspective represents many participants' appreciation for asynchronous Facebook communication: it provided them with time to understand and compose English. This can reduce anxiety related to target language use. A number of research studies into target language users' experience of SNS have found that participants experience reduced stress as compared with face-to-face interaction (Alm 2015; Blattner and Lomicka 2012; Kabilan *et al.* 2010; Lantz-Anderson 2016; Lee 2006; Sockett 2014). Mingmei, for example, described being less "afraid" (Interview One) communicating on Facebook in English as opposed to using the language in a face-to-face environment. This arose from a sense of control over herself and her language:

Mingmei: ... when I talk to people, my mouth can't catch up with my thoughts [laughs] and uh, I don't want to show people I'm very angry or something when they have a meeting with me. I want to keep the polite [unclear]. But if I just send a message, uhm, it's not show your emotion directly, but it just ask people to do something. It doesn't mean I'm unhappy, but I just ask you to do that thing.

Sarah: Do you feel more powerful?

Mingmei: Yeah, powerful and confident.

Sarah: Why are you more confident?

Mingmei: Because I can first consider and prepare what I am going to write about on the Facebook and can and then I just post it to the person and express what I want to do and what I want you to do. Like that.

(Interview 1)

Mingmei's confidence in herself as an English user arose from extended language production time. As with Elena, thinking time afforded by asynchronous communication provided her with an element of control and heightened agency over how she expressed herself in English which was not available to her offline. With this control, she was able to express herself more faithfully than in a face-to-face context. This control, therefore, was an

element of her spatial repertoire with which she shared her English competency.

Mingmei's and Elena's experience of Facebook use is reminiscent of Promnitz-Hayashi's (2011) research into Japanese English language students use of the platform. That study indicated that the time afforded by Facebook to review and check content prior to publication aided students' development of a sense of control over their content. Significantly, it also found that this control and increased agency alleviated the anxiety which can be associated with other language use.

Mingmei was also clearly relieved to be using English behind a screen in a situation in which she was able to conceal her emotions. Of particular relevance to her experience is Tananuraksakul's (2015) study conducted with Thai participants. This research found that Thai English language learners felt more relaxed using English in a Facebook group because it was not face-to-face communication.

As noted, Mingmei described her face-to-face interactions in English in terms of fear. Lijuan and Chunhua also characterised such instances of English use in relation to negative emotions:

*Lijuan: Sometimes I get nervous when I talk English, because you have to react really fast. You have to understand what they're saying and you have to organise your language in a **really** short time. So I feel more safe and confident on Facebook. You have time for everything.*

(Interview 3)

Chunhua: Face-to-face, I will be more nervous. On Facebook, I can say what I want to say, and I can organise words. I can organize the sentences. But face-to-face occasions, I need to organise immediately. And sometimes I am regretful. After this conversation, 'Why didn't I say this sentence? Why didn't I say this before?', you know, it's kind of weird.

(Interview 1)

Lijuan's and Chunhua's anxiety was related to time pressure. Both women referred to the pressure of having to engage in language processing in short

time periods, and the negative impact this had on their English-language production. Such pressure left Chunhua, in particular, experiencing a reduced control and less agency in relation to how she positioned herself in English in offline spaces. She ruminated on past English conversations, and experienced regret as to how she had represented herself.

In contrast to face-to-face communication, asynchronous Facebook use, which is entangled with visibility and persistence of content, afforded Chunhua more control:

Sarah: Do you find it's easier to control your interaction on Facebook than face-to-face?

Chunhua: Yeah, first you can check before you post. And also you can check before you message someone. You have more control. And, you know, face-to-face conversation, you have to directly think and directly express.

(Interview 2)

With more control because of added language processing time, Chunhua was able to use her agency to post herself into being with fewer regrets.

English language processing time, as well as being an aspect of participants' spatial repertoires, was clearly an important intra-action in participants' investment assemblages. It arose within a coalescence of persistence and visibility, and was dependent on asynchronous online communication for its actuality. It was produced within the Facebook communicative context, and it impacted how participants made meaning and interacted on the site.

Opportunities for extended language processing time produced capacities of control in participants, which they experienced as reduced language production anxiety. In this environment, some participants were able to post themselves into being more faithfully than in a face-to-face situation.

Therefore, language processing time also needs to be included in the online spatial repertoires that are part of participants' investment assemblages.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has examined how participants gained access to Facebook spaces, established and maintained a sense of control of them, and how Facebook functionality was involved in the production of their investment assemblages. It has identified the significance of the entanglement of a number of intra-actions - data-as-capital, social capital, the ubiquity of Facebook use, and the functionality that connected participants with friend connections - which produced capacities in participants to take up subject positions of “owner” or “tenant” of Facebook spaces which incorporated the use of English. These subject positions also arose within intra-actions of Facebook functionality, that is, participants were connected to other Facebook users, thus again highlighting the importance of social capital. With English language-using audiences congregating in a digital space of ownership or tenancy, participants experienced Facebook as a space which they could legitimately enter. Even Chinese nationals, denied access to the platform in China on ideological grounds, were able to position Facebook as a place of legitimate use.

Facebook’s neoliberal capitalist ideologies which privileged users’ data production and collection was evident in the platform’s functionality, that is, its multimodality and support of multiple languages. These functionalities eased participants’ use of English on the site. The capitalist ideology was also an intra-action involved in the production of the site as a place of English language use, thus giving rise to participants as legitimate English language users there. Semiotic resources, such as Likes and emojis, employed in a culture of sharing one’s reactions to the content of others, helped produce Facebook as a place of sociality, and participants’ desires to maintain and develop their social capital by interacting with their friend connections all coalesced in entanglements of affective flows which gave rise to participants’ capacities to invest in English use on the site. Indeed, the ability to post oneself into being with Likes, other emojis and images, and the culture of use of these semiotic resources, entangled with English-using audiences to

produce participants' capacities to invest in English on the site, with no use of English at all.

Investment assemblages also coalesced around entanglements of intra-actions such as Facebook functionality, affordances, and spatial repertoires. boyd's (2014) SNS affordances, especially visibility, persistence and spreadability, provided discrete access to Facebook. With such access, participants had extended English language processing time, which produced capacities to relieve anxiety related to language production and facilitated investment on the site. Participants also had discrete access to language tools during the production of their English content. Such opportunities were also related to the production of capacities for investment, with these tools acting as language collaborators (Blommaert 2010), thus easing English use. Highlighting the complexity of assemblages, however, some participants rejected the use of these tools, and so did not incorporate them into their investment assemblages.

The capacities that arose from entanglements including the use of language tools for reading English text on Facebook were more regularly dispersed across participants' assemblages than intra-actions involved in the production of English content. These tools also acted as language collaborators, facilitating comprehension of high context texts, in particular.

Discrete access to reading material gave rise to capacities for private interaction with English-language content. In Abda's case, such access gave rise to a line of flight: a novel way for her to experience not only an article, but also herself as an English language user.

Significantly, in the arena of online identity production, participants enlisted Facebook functionality, for example "Check in", and the site's multimodality for impression management. In so doing, they were able to use their agency to retain control of their online identities in an unpredictable space.

It can be seen, therefore, that capital, ideology, identity, Facebook functionality and the SNSs affordances that arise from asynchronous online

communication were all entangled in participants' investment assemblages. Participants' investment did not arise from a conscious use of their agency to activate their capital within an ideological context, leading to the adoption of subject positions from which they could take up the right to speak/post, as Darwin and Norton's (2015) conception of investment would suggest. Instead, while these three intra-actions were agentic in the production of participants' investment assemblages, this was only the case because they were entangled with other Facebook-related intra-actions – the platform's functionalities and the socio-economic elements that themselves produced these functionalities. It was within these assemblages that participants gained access to the site, claimed it as a legitimate place for them to be, and to use English, and in which they utilised their spatial repertoires to take up the right to post and/or invest in reading texts in a new way.

The next chapter moves to focus on the participants' Facebook audiences as intra-actions within their investment assemblages.

Chapter 6: The Role of the Audience

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Five showed how participants gained access to Facebook spaces. This access was produced by a coalescence of various intra-actions. Individuals' data-as-capital and the site's functionality, both embedded in the neoliberal capitalist ideology of Facebook, were some of the intra-actions which entangled to give rise to participants' capacities to post in English. Social capital and the platform's friending functionality provided individuals with an audience. Therefore, ideology, capital, identity and digital material functionality coalesced to create investment assemblages from which arose participants' capacities to post themselves into being on Facebook as legitimate users of English. In effect, participants' agency to invest in English on Facebook was produced within affective flows between intra-actions in their investment assemblages. Also of great significance were the capacities that were produced by entanglements of intra-actions such as participants and their audiences.

SNSs are aimed at facilitating contact between people (Ellison *et al.* 2007) and entities such as corporations and other businesses. In short, they provide SNS users with audiences. The impact of SNS-audiences on how these sites are utilised for any reason, language learning or otherwise, cannot be overlooked. The aim of this chapter is to map out the audience-related intra-actions within these assemblages, and analyse how, coalescing together and with other intra-actions, they produced capacities for participants' investment in English on Facebook. The chapter begins with [Section 6.2](#), an investigation of the attention economy, and its salience for investment. It then moves to focus on different characteristics of Facebook audiences in [Section 6.3](#) and presents an analysis of them as intra-actions which produce capacities for investment in, and disinvestment from, the use of English on Facebook. These elements comprise the imagined audience, the multilingual and multicultural audience, the unresponsive audience, the

disembodied audience and the future audience. There is also a focus on the unintended audience and instances in when no audience was required. As with Chapter Five, the emphasis of this analysis is on identifying the affective flows between sociomaterial intra-actions which are agential in producing participants' capacities for investment.

6.2 Attention economy

It has been established that Facebook is an ideological space ([Sections 3.6.2; 3.6.2.1](#)). It resides within a context of “neoliberal capitalism and data surveillance” (boyd 2015, p. 2) in which freedom of choice, the commodification of users' data and maximisation of revenue (Zuboff 2019) are privileged. These factors serve as some of the intra-actions which coalesce to give rise to the attention economy in which Facebook users must function ([Section 3.6.2.3](#)).

The participants were aware that they were engaged in the attention economy when they posted themselves into being, and that their content was in competition with that of others. As a result, they were careful to produce content that could compete in this environment. Areeya characterised this type of content as “*catchy*”; as such, it needed to fit a certain genre of image plus short text:

Areeya: I think the thing with image is, first thing is catchy, because people will react to image before the words these days. People are reading, but they're still looking. So it's kind of like catchy for people.

(Interview 2)

Areeya was aware of the “simultaneity of communicative events” (Darvin and Norton 2016b, p. 9) involved in SNS engagement and that her audience was reading while also looking for the next item of interest. Within this norm of Facebook use, longer content was viewed as annoying, as Chunhua confirms:

Chunhua: It's similar in China, Chinese social media. I don't put long, long paragraph. No one will see that. No one will like to read that. So if you can write a short post and also express your feelings, it's good. I think it's better. It's better than a long paragraph or a long post. It's so annoying.

(Interview 3)

Similarly, Guo did not post long texts “because I feel like it's too much hassle for others to read” (Interview Two). Elena agreed:

Elena: The communication on Facebook must be ... short and clear because so boring to read, and if I I am short and clear, the message is centre in the, in the mind of the people.

(Interview 1)

Tagg and Seargeant's (2014) research into the significance of Facebook audiences among multilinguals who shared English as a lingua franca found that their participants reported being careful not to “clog” (p. 174) friend connections' news feeds with long content. My participants were not so concerned about congesting friend connections' Facebook spaces, as with making themselves visible. Chunhua and Guo posted short content which was not “*annoying*” or a “*hassle*” for their friend connections to engage with. They understood that they needed to produce themselves as “*readable*” (Chunhua, Interview Three) if they were going to gain the attention of their audience amongst the plethora of content with which they had to compete.

It might be assumed that producing content for Facebook audiences within the attention economy was a burden for participants. Yet this was not found to be the case. The demand of the attention economy for short content was seen as favourable for non-native speakers. For example, Chunhua and I discussed whether she felt marginalised because she was not able to produce longer tracts of English content on Facebook as easily as native speakers. She informed me that she felt no compulsion to attempt to produce such pieces of written text because:

Chunhua: A long paragraph on Facebook is not popular, it's not good for the audience. Long paragraph will annoy them, so I think it's

normal. It's not unfair, it's normal. You need to learn to use the short paragraph to express yourself.

(Interview 2)

Chunhua did not see non-native speakers as disenfranchised by their lack of ability to easily produce extended tracts of text, because new media ideologies of Facebook content did not privilege such content.

Abda also experienced the attention economy as beneficial for her Facebook use. She felt that the speed with which her content was read meant she should focus on expressing herself effectively, rather than being overly concerned about the linguistic accuracy of her posts:

Sarah: Ok [pause] is it more important to write accurately, grammar and vocabulary for example, or it more important to be accurate in what you want to say when you write on Facebook in English?

Abda: Uh, the second one, I believe. Because I do believe the people, they are not going through your posts word by word. They read it very fast, they're just going to get your thoughts, your opinions, so just give them the message that you want to say, you want them to get.

(Interview 3)

There is evidence for Abda's assumption about her audience's reading of her content. Research into language learners' use of Facebook has found a high tolerance of errors in SNS friend connections' content (Kabilan *et al.* 2010; Lee 2006). The focus on SNSs can be on language use for meaningful interaction, placing meaning and communication to the fore, behind expectations of meeting some standard norm of language use (Thorne *et al.* 2009).

As Darwin and Norton (2016b) state, in online contexts, attention is a valuable commodity. The attention economy influenced how participants posted themselves into being on Facebook. It was an aggregating affect in that it had a similar impact on multiple participants. That is, participants allied themselves with the norms of the attention economy which made them "readable" with the publication of "catchy" content. If they did not, they would either not be read, and so become less visible, or they would endanger their

social capital by becoming annoying. Nevertheless, the attention economy also functioned to favour participants' language abilities. As Tudini (2017) found in relation to non-native and native English-speakers, for Abda and Chunhua, their expectations as to how they would be read into being through their content gave rise to Facebook as an equalising space for them. That is, norms of use minimised the deficits in their truncated repertoires (Blommaert 2010).

The attention economy arises as an intra-action entangled with the Facebook business model. Therefore, other intra-actions, such as Facebook's constant harvesting of data and its design, which encourages users to stay on the site (for example, through scroll functionality), and register their reactions (Like functionality), were part of the micropolitics ([Section 2.5.2](#)) of participants' investment assemblages. Facebook as a company gave rise to participants' capacities to invest through the production of the attention economy.

Participants' investment in the use of English was not one that was totally reliant on their own agency. In order to be visible, respondents had to post themselves into being in an entanglement of audience expectations, which included the influence of the attention economy. Yet individuals' agency remained salient. Participants with an understanding of the ways the attention economy produced their visibility were able to use their agency to strategically *play the system*, and increase their noticeability.

6.3 Audience

The attention economy functioned in the gaze of Facebook audiences. In this research, participants' audiences were found to be complex and unpredictable. As already shown in Chapter Five, they were disembodied and discrete in that language production time and space were rarely shared between participants and their interlocutors. They were multicultural and multilingual. Audiences spanned timescales from the present to the future. Sometimes they compromised participants' privacy, and at other times their

reactions were unrequired. The subsequent sections of this chapter focus on all the above areas, starting with an examination of how participants imagined their audiences.

6.3.1 Imagined audience: reading selves into being

Participants were posting themselves into being for audiences which could be very large; for example, Areeya had over 600 friend connections and Nuan had approximately 200 at the time of data collection. Participants and audiences existed in an environment of context collapse in which the normal boundaries which separate groups of friends and family do not exist (boyd 2008). To stabilise and control this audience, it had to be imagined (boyd 2014) ([Section 3. 5.8](#)).

Participants imagined their audiences by focusing on individuals of the most importance to them. For example, Areeya imagined her Facebook audience as her friends from her undergraduate degree course in English and her parents, all of them English-speakers. Chunhua thought of her fellow university students in Ireland, again, all English-speakers. Nuan focused on her closest English-speaking Friends:

Nuan: It's just like a couple, like, I know a lot of people will it, but I was only, uh, in my head, I was only picturing a few of my close friends, like ten or fifteen.

(Interview 2)

Therefore, participants took control of these groups by posting themselves into being with consideration of particular sections of these audiences. As was the case in Marder *et al.*'s (2016b) research ([Section 3.5.8](#)), participants produced these audiences in line with the "strongest audience effect" (p. 57). They posted themselves into being by concentrating on members of their audience who had the most influence over their lives. These were the individuals who participants anticipated reading them into being.

Investment assemblages, therefore, included the imagined audience. An aspect of participants' posting themselves into being as legitimate users of English, therefore, was reading themselves into being through the anticipated reactions of their imagined audiences. Such audiences were multilingual and multicultural in nature.

6.3.2 Posting oneself into being for multilingual and multicultural audiences

The global popularity and resultant ubiquity of Facebook ([Section 5.2.1](#)) gave rise to participants posting themselves into being for multicultural and multilingual audiences. For example, Nuan's audience comprised varying cultural and language backgrounds:

Nuan: Some of them are English native speakers, some of them are Cantonese native speakers. Some are Spanish. Also Korean, Chinese and Arabic.

(Interview 1)

Abda's friend connections included individuals whom she had met during her studies at various educational institutions while in Ireland:

Abda: I do have Arabic speakers and Indian speakers, and Irish speakers. People from Korea. Chinese, yeah.

(Interview 3)

Abda as well as Areeya, Elena, Sofia and Zaria had Facebook audiences of super-diversity (Blommaert 2010) which not only comprised multicultural and multilingual individuals, but also family members and friends from various periods of their lives. For instance, Zaria stated that, "*I have friends from Romania, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, uh, Spanish, Morocco, English, Chinese, India*" (Interview One). These were friend connections Zaria had gathered during the history of her Facebook use, while living in a number of different countries (cf. Lampinen *et al.* 2009). In all cases, native English-speakers comprised a minority of friend connections.

Participants took steps to meet the comprehension needs of their multicultural and multilingual audiences. There was a general awareness among participants that their audiences comprised individuals with varying degrees of English abilities, and participants wanted to cater to these abilities. Abda's and Mingmei's positions were characteristic of most participants':

Abda: I try as much as I can to make it, uh, simple and understandable for all of them.

(Interview 1)

Mingmei: Just a short English, everyone can understand.

(Interview 1)

Abda's and Mingmei's short and light content was typical of the type of posts most participants published. They managed the potential misunderstandings that can occur when communicating across cultures and across language abilities by restricting the length of content and by attempting make it as understandable as possible. Participants posted themselves into being in such a way as to privilege their readers' comprehension (Thorne *et al.* 2009), as opposed to, for example, posting in a manner that displayed the breadth of their English abilities. It could be argued that Abda and Mingmei forsook their opportunity to engage in impression management and post themselves into being with displays of more complex English language skills in favour of making themselves readable to as much of their audience as possible. In this way, they privileged Facebook as a space of relationship maintenance over a space for impression management.

Abda's and Mingmei's investment in the type of English they used on the site, that is, the choices they made concerning the type of English with which they posted themselves into being, were produced in an assemblage of shared agency. These participants were digitally connected to multicultural and multilingual individuals of varying English proficiencies via Facebook functionality (and the intra-actions which coalesced to produce that functionality). This connection entangled with their desire to retain Facebook

as a space of relationship maintenance (social capital), and produced their capacities to make themselves readable to as much of their audience as possible. Making themselves readable entailed limiting the expression of their linguistic capital. They did so, for example, by choosing not to invest in taking up the right to post with vocabulary and grammar structures their audiences might not understand. Abda's and Mingmei's desire for how they posted themselves into being, therefore, was produced within their investment assemblages which, themselves, were entangled with the intra-action of the desire to use Facebook for sociality.

Li Li was unique among my participants in that she did post herself into being with longer content. In this way she went against the norms of Facebook's attention economy. Because she chose this more involved use of English, she took particular care in the construction of her posts, and so how she represented herself on Facebook for her multicultural and multilingual audience:

Li Li: And when I want to put something, like, on Facebook, I need to have a logic in it. So I try to don't put much emotional things in that. So if I want to make something clear, I have to have a logic in that thing. Hmm, I have to have a reason for why I am saying this, so [pause]

(Interview 2)

Li Li observed that producing such content was easier in Chinese for a Chinese audience:

*Li Li: [pause] I guess it's about culture. So we share the same culture, it's easier for them to understand my stance, maybe. But for local people, or English-speakers, they just, I don't know, sometimes I find our mind are different. We don't think in the same way. So I don't know. ... So when I talk to them, like, non-Chinese speakers, I have to pay more attention not to mislead them, because I'm not sure we are thinking in the same channels. So I have to make myself **very** clear, and I have to be cautious about what I put online in English. But for Chinese, I tend to think them as in the same tune.*

(Interview 2)

Li Li effectively described the difficulty she experienced posting herself into being for a multicultural and multilingual audience. Unable to rely on a shared culture, and choosing to avoid publishing shallow content such as, “*I went to visit somewhere and I’m happy*” (Interview Two), she had to endeavour to avoid misleading her audience. This entailed being careful, or “*cautious*”, about how she posted herself into being. She achieved this through careful choices of vocabulary, for example, avoiding the use of language which carried multiple meanings, such as slang. Li Li was clearly impacted as to who she was able to be on Facebook by the anticipated needs of her audience.

Elena was also aware of the impact of this lack of shared cultural background on how she posted herself into being:

Elena: I know the reaction of Italian people. But I don’t know the reaction of people of different cultures. And in this moment, I stay politically correct because I don’t know, for example, Venezuelan, or, uh, Muslim. ... There is a lot of people that are from different cultures here, more than in Italy. ... Here, for example, in Ireland or the UK, I think, is different. There is a lot of people with cultural background and with a lot of different way of meaning. I don’t know the meaning of the other people, of the other culture. And I don’t want to be rude with them, and I use the gentle way,... I prefer to be, to be gentle and safe.

(Interview 2)

While Li Li strove to make herself understood by posting herself into being with the use of “*logic*”, having a purpose to her posts, and carefully selecting vocabulary, Elena employed political correctness, a form of self-censorship, to post herself into being in manner which would not offend. Both participants were aware of the potential for misinterpretation (boyd 2008; Fulton and Kibby 2017) but took different steps to address the issue. (Self-censorship is more fully developed in [Section 7.4.4](#)).

In all cases described here, those of Abda, Mingmei, Li Li and Elena, having multicultural, multilingual and multi-proficient English-using audiences were intra-actions which entangled to produce capacities for investment in English on Facebook. A fear of misunderstanding highlighted the importance of

sociality for Facebook use. Abda and Mingmei emphasized meaning-making over displays of complex English use, thus illustrating the entanglement of relationship maintenance and development with English use on the platform. The same can be said for the manner in which Elena coped with posting for a multicultural audience. She chose to restrict herself in terms of the views she published, opting to remain neutral on some topics in order to maintain good relations with friend connections.

Li Li tackled this type of audience by placing an emphasis on clarity. As with Abda and Mingmei, she wanted to make her message as clear as possible, to avoid misunderstandings. Li Li achieved this not by restricting the complexity of her language, but by making language choices, such as focusing on logic and avoiding ambiguity in her use of English, which she hoped would limit the potential for misunderstandings across cultures and language abilities.

In all cases, the nature of the multilingual and multicultural audiences were intra-actions which coalesced to produce various capacities for investment in English by influencing the type of written responses posted. Therefore, the ways in which participants endeavoured to meet the needs of their audiences were also intra-actions which entangled to give rise to capacities to produce the type of English used to take up the right to post.

If these participants' experiences are considered in terms of investment assemblages, a number of intra-actions can be identified. These include participants' social capital (friend connections) and the desire to maintain this capital on Facebook. Also included is the new media ideology which positions Facebook as a place of sociality, which also produced participants as friend connections on the platform. As such friend connections, they strove to meet the needs of their audiences.

With capacities for investment understood as produced within an assemblage of intra-actions, which include Facebook functionality which enables and promotes digital connection making and maintenance (friending), the shared

nature of participants' agency in relation to their investment assemblages becomes evident.

Even given their best efforts, sometimes participants' audiences gave no response whatsoever to individuals' efforts to post themselves into being. The manner in which such *orphan posts* entangled with other intra-actions on Facebook to produce capacities for investment is considered in the next section of this chapter.

6.3.3 Orphan posts

Asynchronous digitally-mediated communication occurs across spatial and temporal arenas, resulting in a lack of shared communication space. With the one-to-many communication context of Facebook, as well as the involvement of the algorithm in the surfacing of content, participants were never able to guarantee they would receive a reaction to their posts. In effect, each time they posted themselves into being, there was the potential to post an orphan post which garnered no Like, no reply - no reaction at all. This was seen as a normal part of social media use. Chunhua viewed it as "*natural*" (Interview Two). Mingmei stated, "*Everybody has some posts nobody read*" (Interview One). For participants, therefore, orphan posts were a norm, and as such, part of the new media ideology of Facebook use.

I asked Chunhua if she ever felt discouraged when there was no reaction to her content and whether she assigned this lack of reaction to her English proficiency:

Chunhua: ... I think it's not because of my English. It's just natural because I know in social media, it's similar in China, when you post something, I'm not your close friend, I won't "like" it or comment on it, so, I think it's very natural. And even he is a native or non-native speaker, it's close or not close, it's a bigger difference. So I think it's more natural, so I can understand that, yeah. Also, after, that is better and better, so I know that.

(Interview 2)

Chunhua felt discouraged, but, like Mingmei, she accepted this lack of reaction as a social media norm, as part of the ideological structure of social media use. Chunhua only reacted to content posted by close friends. She produced her audience in her own image, assuming that only her close friends on Facebook would react to her posts. As she had so few such friends on the platform, she was able to explain orphan posts in terms of a lack of social capital (close friends) she had access to on the site. She did not take the lack of reaction personally; nor did she assign it to her English ability. The important element was the lack of social capital. Within the new media ideologies of social media, this type of capital was deeply implicated with gaining reactions on Facebook. Therefore, rather than positioning herself as lacking legitimacy to post as an English user, Chunhua was able to assign orphan posts to a dearth of social capital.

Chunhua's ability to maintain her investment in English use on Facebook coalesced around her understanding of the importance of social capital in the use of the platform. Intra-actions evident in this coalescence included her framing of her audience, or reading it into being, based on her own engagement on Facebook. By reading her audience into being as similar to herself - a person who had few close relationships among her friend connections, and who reacted only to closely tied Facebook friends - Chunhua produced her capacity to retain her investment in posting in English, despite having an unpredictable audience.

The prevalence of the orphan post as an element of the Facebook new media ideology was also evident in Li Li's stance on investing in English on Facebook:

*Li Li: I think it's **so** normal that people don't react to your post online. It's the way it is.*

(Interview 3)

Li Li may have viewed orphan posts as a norm of Facebook use, but that did not prevent her from experiencing disappointment as a result of them:

Li Li: It makes me feel upset because I, if I pay a lot of attention on the thing I write and no one's reading, yeah, it's just upset people. It's the same even in not online but offline. It's just when you pay attention to do something and nobody looking at you, yeah.

(Interview 2)

An important phrase here is, “*and nobody looking at you*”. Li Li put time and effort into carefully making herself visible in English, but this investment could not guarantee a pay off in the form of reactions: the evidence that her attempts to be visible had succeeded. Rather than accept this situation, Li Li used her agency and took advantage of the control she had over the publication of her content. She used a strategy to attempt to manage her audience's reaction to her content, and so maximise her visibility:

Li Li: So I will try to avoid the situation by lower the frequency of the posts, so I know if I frequently post, people will probably ignore it more. So I will try to do that with a lower frequency.

(Interview 1)

In order to avoid orphan posts, Li Li reduced the “*frequency*” with which she posted. Guo employed a similar strategy to maximise interaction with his content:

Guo: And it also depends on the frequency you post. If you post every day, nobody will click Like for you, because they're, “Ah, fuck this guy, he's post something again”. Even if they read it, they pretend they didn't read it. But if you say some interesting things, maybe once a month, they will think, “Oh, this guy is interesting”. And then they will give you more Likes, and more Likes will make you happy. And if someone saw the posts, saying if one of my friends is new to Facebook, and he will know from the Likes, “Wow, Guo has made so many friends, and he has so many Likes!”

(Interview 3)

Guo's and Li Li's agency to maintain their audiences' interest was distributed across the attention economy, which itself was entangled in the algorithmic decision-making that is involved in surfacing Facebook content. They attempted to increase their noticeability (the potential that their posts would be noticed and gain a reaction) by reducing their visibility (frequency of posting). They gave up opportunities to post themselves into being - that is,

they declined to make use of every opportunity Facebook provided to be visible - in order to make themselves more noticeable. This was a form of online silence strategically employed to get their audience to take note (Burbules 2006).

Orphan posts were produced within entanglements of sociomaterial interactions including discrete asynchronous communication; a lack of shared communication space; one-to-many communication; algorithmic decision-making; participants' social capital, and new media norms of use.

It stands to reason, that a lack of reaction to participants' content, that is orphan posts, might have negatively impacted participants' investment in Facebook spaces. They could have interpreted such a dearth of response from friend connections as a negative reflection on their English competence. This could have led to a disinvestment from the use of English on the site.

Nevertheless, this was not the case. Participants framed orphan posts in ways that gave rise to capacities for further production of investment in English on Facebook. Mingmei and Chunhua, for example, used their experience of social media to contextualise their orphan posts as a new media norm, with Chunhua assigning them to a lack of social capital, as opposed to deficiencies in her English proficiency. By framing such posts in this way, these participants were able to maintain positive self-assigned subject positions in relation to their English language abilities, and so retain capacities to produce Facebook as a place in which they were able to post themselves into being in English.

Li Li and Guo incorporated the attention economy and Facebook users' interest in the constant stream of new content to manage orphan posts. While they understood they shared their agency to be noticed by their audience with the algorithmically influenced attention economy, they were able to take steps to "play" the algorithm and attempt to make themselves noticeable by reducing their visibility.

Orphan posts, therefore, while an aspect of the investment assemblage, as they could arise from participants' posting themselves into being, did not necessarily deter investment. The attention economy, an ideological facet of Facebook that is productive of orphan posts, could be drawn into the investment assemblage as an intra-action that also produced an acceptance of a lack of reaction to content. As a result, participants did not position themselves as being without the right to post as English-speakers if they received no reactions, but that this was merely a norm of Facebook use.

6.3.4 Disembodied audience

So far, the focus of this chapter has been on the Facebook audience as produced in terms of that audience's position within the attention economy and the need for "*catchy*" content, the imagined multilingual and multicultural audience, as well as a lack of audience reaction in the form of orphan posts. I now turn to focus on another aspect of the Facebook use, the disembodied audience.

The asynchronous nature of digitally-mediated Facebook communication affords disembodied written and multimodal communication between people behind screens. In a context of persistence and visibility, interaction can occur in a discrete fashion without sharing language production and reception time and space. This means users lack embodied paralinguistic cues with which to make meaning. Facebook users have recourse to emojis, of course, but in general, communication without facial gestures, body language and intonation is viewed as providing a poor environment for meaning making (boyd and Heer 2006; Marwick and boyd 2010).

The use of English with a disembodied audience (and as a disembodied interlocutor) impacted participants' experience of their use of Facebook both positively and negatively. Without the need to attend to paralinguistic cues, Mingmei and Lijuan felt communication was less complex:

*Mingmei: Uhm, for me it's not. It's not a very complicated place as the real world. Uhm, because it's like. Uhm, everything is on the page. The word can't change. You know, "Hello" is "Hello". It can't be "Are you angry?" [both laugh]. So it's a, it's a more simple way. But if you talk to people, they say "**Hello**" [exaggerated emphasis on intonation] to show their emotion. So "Hello" is not "Hello". It's like, "I don't want to talk to you. Go away". So the real world, like face-to-face talking is more complicated.*

(Interview 2)

For Mingmei, a lack of paralinguistics took away the potential for nuance. Without having to take into consideration the different meanings behind a phrase or a gesture, she had fewer pieces of information to contend with while communicating in English. In a similar vein, Lijuan also took a literal view to communication in written English:

Lijuan: All the information is in English on computer, in words, so you can only read the words and feel how their posts are saying, not how they're thinking about things. So it's less to consider.

(Interview 3)

Lijuan's focus was on the literal meaning of the words on the screen, as opposed to considering the "*thinking*" of the person behind the screen as a salient element of meaning-making. Whether either Lijuan or Mingmei are justified in their unambiguous approach to communication on Facebook is debatable. Yet, what is clear is their perspectives helped them feel more comfortable communicating in English on the site than in offline situations. In effect, with fewer pieces of information to take into consideration while communicating, the disembodied audience was an intra-action which entangled with other intra-actions in Mingmei's and Lijuan's investment assemblages (such as functionality and social capital) to produce capacities for a stronger sense of control in Mingmei's and Lijuan's experiences of their use of English on Facebook, as compared with face-to-face contexts. By sharing control with Facebook, they felt it was easier to read their audience into being as opposed to listen or watch them into being during face-to-face communication.

Other participants described asynchronous communication with a disembodied audience in less favourable terms. Some individuals experienced communication in this context in connection with a lack of control over their interaction. For example, Elena found face-to-face communication easier than that of Facebook:

Elena: I prefer to to dialogue with voice with the body language because body language is fundamental for speech. Because the word we have not the power of your mind, so if you are angry, if you are relaxing, I don't understand. Some word need the body language. And the, the type of voice is important, too.

(Interview 1)

In contrast to Lijuan and Mingmei, Elena understood that words alone do not always carry enough meaning for effective communication to occur (boyd 2007). She therefore required language to be embodied to develop a more comprehensive understanding of her interlocutor's meaning than mediated asynchronous communication could provide.

Nuan also felt it was easier to successfully effect comprehension face-to-face:

Nuan: Because, like, through words there's a lot of misunderstandings that could happen, yeah. ... like, through words it's just words. But then if it's through face, you can see each other's facial expression, gesture, and the tone, yeah.

(Interview 2)

In contrast to Lijuan and Mingmei, Nuan felt written communication was more susceptible to misunderstandings than spoken communication (Fulton and Kibby 2017) which had the benefit of paralinguistic cues to support meaning-making (boyd 2008).

Sofia also favoured embodied communication:

Sofia: I prefer to communicate face-to-face in English. Because it's more easy for me to understand exactly what you want. Or if you understand that I don't understand, you can change the phrase, for example. On Facebook, it's impossible. I can't write you, "What

exactly is the meaning of your phrase?”. It’s not so great for you or for me.

(Interview 2)

Two factors are salient in Sofia’s lack of control over meaning-making in this context. In common with Elena and Nuan, she required embodied interaction to facilitate understanding. In addition, however, she subscribed to a new media ideology which limited her control on Facebook. She positioned the platform as a place where it was problematic to ask for clarification. With this view, she further limited her capacity for meaning making on Facebook.

It is clear that for Nuan, Elena and Sofia, disembodied asynchronous Facebook communication, as opposed to paralinguistic-rich face-to-face interaction, negatively impacted the amount of control they experienced over their ability to make themselves understood and to understand others. Li Li’s perspectives on the need for paralinguistics encompassed Sofia, Elena’s and Nuan’s positions, but also added further dimensions with her references to visibility and persistence:

Li Li: If you post something it’s permanently there and people will check it. And, like, when you add a new friend, what are they going to do first? They are going to check all your previous posts and read them. But, face-to-face, you speak to them and you will remember things, but they will also forget something, and its real person, so when you have something that they misunderstood, you can explain, you can observe them by their expression and you know that they don’t understand or they misunderstand your meaning and you can try to correct. But if you post it, eeiiuw, yeah [pause]. ... And some of them will comment and show you their feelings, but others, maybe they don’t even leave a Like on that post. They will think of you in their mind and you don’t know that. You cannot see their expression or what, so eeiiuw. It terrifies me.

(Interview 1)

Li Li presents face-to-face communication as embodied and yet ephemeral. It is embodied in that meaning making is entangled in paralinguistic cues transmitted by the body in tone of voice and gesture. This embodiment provides interlocutors with opportunities to notice and clarify potential misunderstandings. Face-to-face communication is ephemeral in that it is not

recorded, and while interlocutors may remember certain aspects of the interaction, other aspects will naturally be forgotten, and will not be able to be revisited.

In contrast, for Li Li, Facebook communication is more unpredictable. Lacking shared language production and reception time and space, a context produced by the affordances of persistence and visibility, misunderstandings can go unnoticed by the poster. Even worse, in Li Li's opinion, the poster may never be made aware that a misunderstanding has occurred, as the Facebook audience may not react to that content. As she says, "*They will think of you in their mind and you don't know that.*" Li Li aptly paraphrases boyd (2008, p. 16) here, "without being able to see their Friends' reactions, they are not even aware of when their posts have been misinterpreted". She was clearly fearful of such potential occurrences, and it made her uncomfortable about posting herself into being on the site.

Participants reacted in different ways to engaging in contexts of disembodied communication. As such, the disembodied audience can be understood as an intra-action in terms of relations of exteriority. Within some participants' investment assemblages, interaction with the disembodied audience had a relieving influence (Mingmei and Lijuan). Lack of exposure to embodied communication meant there were fewer communication cues for these individuals to consider. This provided them with added control over their language use on the site, which played a role in the production of their investment assemblages. Other participants experienced this context as limiting their control over meaning-making, leading to fears of misunderstanding. Li Li was very uncomfortable about the potential for miscommunication; nevertheless, this prospect did not reduce her willingness to post herself into being in English. Therefore, the same intra-action - disembodied communication - gave rise to different capacities within different participants' investment assemblages.

6.3.5 Future audience/ being read into being

It has been established that participants' Facebook audiences were complex and unpredictable. In the case of this research, they were multilingual, multicultural, functioned within the norms of the attention economy and were disembodied. In addition, they were not restricted to the present time. Persistence, visibility and searchability and means that Facebook content endures and can be visited and re-visited long after the temporal and social context of publication has passed. This produces a future audience, an audience who may comprise friend connections with whom one was not connected at the time of content publication (boyd 2014). This adds another level of complexity to the Facebook audience, one that is related to impression management and context collapse. These concepts have been addressed in relation to the control participants felt they had over how they posted themselves into being ([Section 5.3](#)), but they are also salient in relation to future audiences.

Participants were aware that they needed to remain vigilant with regard to their future audiences. Mingmei was clearly mindful as to how these audiences might read her into being:

Sarah: ... Are you concerned that things you put on Facebook today can be read in the future? Do you ever think about that?

Mingmei: Mmm, maybe. Because we will add more friends as the time goes and they, maybe they. Even if I won't use Facebook again, maybe in the future, uh, if I don't delete the post on Facebook, they can still read it and maybe have some influence on their thoughts. And uhm, yeah.

(Interview 2)

Mingmei was concerned by the persistence of Facebook content: that even if she no longer used her Facebook account, the content with which she had posted herself into being would remain, and potentially impact the impression her future readers developed of her.

Lijuan was also conscious about how she could be viewed by her future audience:

Lijuan: I think it's the most important thing. Like, if I add a new friend, first thing I do is I will read through his or her Facebook, because that's how I get to know the people. I can see from the posts and I can get the idea of how the people are like. This is the most important part for me to know better about one person. So for myself, I will be really careful about what I post before, yeah, because I do that, so other people might do that as well. I will be really careful about what I post and delete something I don't like anymore.

(Interview 1)

Lijuan produced her future audience in terms of her own Facebook use. She imagined this audience reading her into being in the same way she read her audience into being: perusing their persistent content and forming a view of each member from it. To control this reading, she was “*careful*” about her content, not only at the point of publication, but also beyond, deleting content of which she did no longer approved. Both Lijuan and Mingmei used Facebook’s delete functionality to maintain control of their impression management for future audiences in an environment of context collapse in which it was not only social boundaries which had become permeable, but temporal boundaries also.

Lijuan’s and Mingmei’s capacities to invest in English on Facebook arose in coalescence with other intra-actions related to the platform. Fundamental to these were the different elements of the site’s functionality. An element which was agentive in their posting themselves into being was delete functionality, which participants used when reviewing their posts. This functionality, used in conjunction with persistence of content which produced the capacity to look back at their published content and re-read themselves into being, was involved in the production of capacities for self-curation of their Facebook selves.

Areeya was also aware of potential problems which could arise from the persistence of her content:

Sarah: Ok. Do you ever delete posts you've written in English?

Areeya: [pause] Yes, I did. Only because I see no sense in posting it anymore, or the feeling is already, like, changed. So that's why I

delete it. And sometimes probably I consider that it will cause me troubles in the future.

(Interview 2)

Areeya used her agency to make use of the delete functionality and so maintain control of the impression she wanted to make on the site. She curated her content so that it reflected who she was at the point of being read into being, rather than how she was at the point of publication. As with Mingmei and Lijuan, Areeya used Facebook functionality to engage “with Facebook as an ongoing project” (Trottier and Lyon 2011, p. 100).

Awareness of a future audience is an awareness of being read into being by individuals one may not yet have met. As with Fulton and Kibby’s (2017) respondents, a future audience of particular importance to my participants was that of future employers. Guo and Li Li made this very clear in their interviews:

Guo: Like I actually think about the future. I won’t post anything like express my opinion. For example, I’m working now in [company name omitted], I won’t post anything against another companies because that’s, you’re blocking your own way. If you, say if you get a chance working for other companies and unfortunately, it’s the company you disliked before, or the new company has some connection with the company you disliked, then you get yourself in trouble for posting that.

(Interview 2)

Sarah: So is your future job, does that influence your use of Facebook?

Li Li: [pause] Yeah, I think overall, yes, for all, not only Facebook, but all the online media. I have to be there. Then if my future employer want to check me, I have to make sure they actually have the [search] result for me online, and it’s it cannot be a bad result.

(Interview 2)

Both participants restricted the content with which they posted themselves into being because of an awareness of the persistence and visibility of Facebook use, and to avoid potential future repercussions in relation to their employment.

The prospect of being read into being by future audiences was an inhibiting factor with regard to posting on Facebook. Nevertheless, I do not regard it as active, in entanglement with other intra-actions, in producing capacities for disinvestment from using English on the site. This inhibition was not entangled in evaluations of participants' capital and subsequent subject positions. Rather, remaining silent or restricting one's visibility was a way to limit the possibility of future negative repercussions which may arise from the coalescence of persistence, visibility and spreadability which are aspects of Facebook interaction. Choosing silence, or refusing to make oneself visible with content that could intra-act with future audiences and produce negative repercussions, was an act of agency open to Guo and Li Li.

Other participants were less concerned about their future audiences. Both Chunhua and Nuan thought about these audiences when posting on Facebook, but they were not overly concerned about them:

Chunhua: I don't mind that. I think what you post is just a signal of your real life in that moment, so in the future, if they check it, I think that's fine. Why you care about them, the me before? Because I'm Ok before, I'm not a bad person, so I don't care about that.

(Interview 2)

Nuan: Uhm, but for me, like, I, when I'm posting something I wouldn't think that far ahead. But even if I know someone add me in the future may be able to read posts in the past, it's fine for me. I think, like, my, uh, my past memory on the Facebook build who I am now, so it's Ok for them to see what I am like in the past.

(Interview 2)

Nuan and Chunhua had enough confidence in themselves and the manner in which they posted themselves into being in the present to allow them to be secure in any impressions made of them by future audiences. Awareness of these audiences did not impact how they posted themselves into being, nor did it prevent them doing so. Abda was also confident when imagining how her future audience might respond to her:

Abda: I didn't even think about it, actually, to be honest. Because I just remember that I add, I accept a request from some girl last week,

and I wasn't even thinking that if she go through my posts or not. And I don't mind, even if she disagree with me, or I don't mind

Sarah: Why don't you mind?

Abda: Because it's her opinion, this is my opinion. I should respect her and she should respect me.

(Interview 3)

While Chunhua and Nuan expressed confidence in themselves, Abda demonstrated an attribute which is very important for SNS use, trust - trust in one's audience (Rainie and Wellman 2014) and trust in oneself. She had confidence in how her audience would read her into being in the future. In line with Lampinen *et al.*'s (2009) findings in their research on surveillance on Facebook, she constructed a "mental strategy" (para. 63) and assumed the goodwill of her future audience. She anticipated that this audience would respect her own opinion, just as she would respect that of the friend connections for whom she would be an audience member.

As with the disembodied audience, the future audience existed in terms of relations of exteriority in relation to participants' investment assemblages. For some participants, the future audience inhibited their capacities to post. They restricted what they posted on, and thus engaged in self-censorship. In a sociomaterial network of intra-actions (including digital functionality), which produced their online visibility, participants chose to restrict the extent to which they posted themselves into being as a form of control. That is, they did not deem their future audiences as legitimate readers of such content (Bourdieu 1977a). Others positioned their future audiences in the same manner, using their agency and making use of Facebook functionality - edit and delete - and in so doing maintained control over the impressions future audiences would make of them. The future audience was not involved in giving rise to these capacities in all participants. Some individuals were unconcerned by them because they either had confidence in themselves or in future friend connections. The ways in which these participants took up legitimate poster status were not overly impacted by the future audience.

6.3.5.1 Validation – being read into being

Friend connections' reactions to participants' content on Facebook has been identified as an important source of validation of English language use (Vanek *et al.* 2018; Yunus and Salehi 2012). Vanek *et al.*'s research on immigrant students in the US and their use of Facebook in English found that participants felt legitimised as group members on receiving positive reactions from friend connections. The more affirmation, the more they wished to use Facebook, and with it, use English. They positioned themselves, or read themselves into being, as certain types of people on the basis of reactions from friend connections. This was also found to be the case in the current research. Sofia particularly valued comments on her content because:

Sofia: ... it's interesting to know that the other person understand what you write in your post. And uh is grateful.

(Interview 1)

These reactions also gave rise to positive emotions. When asked how they made her feel, Sofia stated:

Sofia: Uh, really happy! Satisfied. Because I am happy to have a person understand what I wrote. And I, I, wrote something correct, right. And for me this is satisfaction because my English is improved.

(Interview 1)

Reactions to her content were validating in that Sofia read them as proof of having been understood, which, in turn, was taken as evidence of improvement in her English. Her capacity to read herself into being as a successful English-user was produced within the investment assemblage which included her social capital, and Facebook functionality which enabled her friend connections' to post reactions to her content.

Receiving Likes in response to her content helped Mingmei feel more confident in her English, and also made her feel:

Mingmei: Happy! [laughs]... . Because, you know, I don't post some political opinions in Facebook, I just post my life. Uh, if people Like

my pictures or my contents, it uh it shows they like my lifestyle and they admire my pictures, or something, and I feel so happy.

(Interview 1)

Likes equated to approval of her content and her “*lifestyle*”, and, as with Sofia, were a source of positive emotion for Mingmei.

Guo’s humorous content received positive reactions in the form of emojis. He interpreted this feedback as evidence of successful cultural integration:

Guo: If you can make someone laugh, it means you are in the culture, because you can make people laugh. It makes me confident, definitely, yeah.

(Interview 3)

While Sofia and Mingmei experienced positive audience responses as validation of their English, (and, in Mingmei’s case, her lifestyle), Guo experienced such reactions as validation of his successful adoption of his host country’s cultural practices. In all cases, these participants positioned themselves in terms of the feedback they received on Facebook.

Chunhua also interpreted positive comments as being more than a reflection of her English ability. I asked her about how she felt when someone commented on a post:

Chunhua: I will be very happy because that means they want to communicate with me. It’s a positive sign they want to know more about me and my post. So very good. I will be very happy. ...

Sarah: What if you get a Like, not a comment, but a Like. How do you feel then?

Chunhua: Uh, it’s less than comment, but it’s also very good. It shows they want to let you know they pay attention to you, like your post. So it’s less than comment, but also very good.

(Interview 1)

Chunhua read herself into being as someone whose friend connections wanted to know better, or someone they wanted to indicate that they had paid attention to. Investment in Facebook in English gave rise to her capacity

to position herself as a socially valuable person in other her friend connections' eyes.

Positive reactions in the form of comments, Likes and emojis were seen as evidence from which some participants positively read themselves into being as a result of having posted in English. At the same time, these readings went beyond positively reflecting on participants as English users. Online reactions were interpreted as validation of participants as successfully culturally integrated (Guo), as being of social value (Chunhua), and of having an attractive way of life (Mingmei). All of this arose as a result of investing in English use on Facebook.

The functionality of the platform which enables the receiving of reactions (comments and Likes, for example) was an important intra-action within participants' investment assemblages. Becoming connected with, and visible to, English-using audiences, and receiving validation from them in the form of reactions, were involved in producing Facebook as a space in which respondents were able to read themselves into being as improving in their English proficiency (Sofia and Mingmei); as successfully culturally integrated (Guo), and as socially valuable (Chunhua). That is, within their Facebook investment assemblages, participants had capacities to position themselves as successful in terms of their English use. They shared their agency to produce these positive emotions with the sociomateriality of the platform. These intra-actions coalesced to produce positive emotions that signalled approval of participants beyond being non-native English-speakers.

6.3.6 Leakiness: Unintended audience

Up until this point, participants' audiences have been considered in relation to their reactions to text and/or images. The next section, which concentrates on the unintended audience, moves the focus to the publication of photographs of the participants for an unintended audience.

Facebook functions within an ideology of sharing and spreadability ([Section 3.6.2](#)). To maximise profit, the platform makes the sharing of content as easy as possible (Stutzman *et al.* 2012). This can result in its leakiness. This refers to when content is shared with audiences for whom it was not intended. It has been identified as a concern of Facebook users (Fulton and Kibby 2017), and it was a concern of my participants in this research. Photographs were a particular source of leaks:

Li Li: ... like previously, some of my friends, when we went out and hang out on the, with each other, they will take an ugly selfie of me [laughs] and post it online, mentioning me. Post in my timeline.

(Interview 3)

In this instance, Li Li's control over her impression management was challenged because a friend connection chose to share a photograph of her of which she did not approve. Areeya experienced a similar occurrence of having a photograph showing her in a less than favourable manner shared on Facebook:

Areeya: ... it's not about what I post, but what my friend post about me. I consider it [laughs] Because my friend, uh, my roommate, for example, she's got a really ugly picture of, uh, about me. Yeah, she took a picture of me when I look really a mess [laughs] and she post it on Facebook, and it's horrible. I mean, like, I was mad at that time, but still I let it be there for so many years, and I just, like, something reminded me of it, and I just go back and delete it. ... But at that time that something remind me of that, and I was thinking, what happen if someone in, like, a company that become a friend of me on Facebook, and they check my photos, or my posts, or what people post about me. So I go back there to that, and it's on my mind that that is not right to be there anymore. Because it's fun at that time, but it's not going to be fun in the future if someone just post, if someone got this picture out and post it somewhere. It can affect my future career or something.

(Interview 2)

The impact of leakiness in relation to Li Li and Areeya was a lack of control over their impression management. In a context of network privacy (Hargittai and Marwick 2016) a number of intra-actions produced capacities which gave rise to them being posted into being for an English-using audience without

having used their own agency to do so. The neoliberal capitalism of Facebook as a business; Facebook's promotion of information sharing, as well as its data harvesting, and the commodification of those user-data were significant. The functionality that enables these processes and the norm of promoting one's visibility on Facebook (sharing) was also important. When social capital is added as an intra-action within this assemblage, it is easy to see how leakiness is produced, and with it, a lack of control, or agency, over how one is posted into being on the platform. Sharing their capacities for impression management with these intra-actions, Li Li and Areeya lacked control over how they were read into being by their English-using audience. Without investing in Facebook use in these contexts, they were nevertheless produced as subjects on it through the leakiness of the platform.

In Abda's case, there were potentially more significant repercussions if her privacy was compromised in this manner. As a Muslim woman, Abda wore a hijab while she was in Ireland meaning only her hair was covered. However, at home in Saudi Arabia, she wore a niqab which covered her face. Abda had taken part in a group poster presentation as part of her final university examinations. A group photograph had been taken, and images of herself, wearing a hijab, had been posted on Facebook by her university friend connections. I asked if she could be tagged in these photographs:

*Abda: Yeah, I **can't** be tagged in a photo*

Sarah: Have you ever been tagged in a photo on Facebook?

Abda: No, no. Maybe in the future, maybe, I don't know. But now, for now, no. My photos for the poster sessions on the other people's page, my friends from Spain, all the people there were with me in that poster session. I see it and I think, "Oh my God. I really want to post it on my page. This is achievement in my life". But I can't.

(Interview 3)

Unlike Li Li and Areeya, Abda would have been happy to be posted into being via the leakiness of Facebook (in this case by way of a tag). Her desire to be made visible in this way was clear. Yet, Abda could neither be tagged into being nor post herself into being with these images. This is because

these photographs would not travel well across the ideological space that divides Ireland and Saudi Arabia in relation to how women are expected to dress.

Abda wanted to be posted into being, and to post herself into being with an image, to voluntarily make herself visible and so share an important milestone in her life. Facebook functionality, developed under the surveillance capitalist structures (Zuboff 2019) in which sharing is maximised to ensure profits, was involved in producing Abda's desire for this form of self-expression. Yet, this functionality and the new media norm of sharing clashed with the ideology that holds that Abda's face should remain concealed. In a space of visibility, the spreadability of that visibility, as well as persistence, Abda had to take steps to avoid being posted into being with an image of her face, or keep her family informed of such images arose as a result of leakiness.

Looking at these three participants' experiences in relation to Facebook leakiness reveals very different potential repercussions. The norm of sharing on Facebook, and the functionality which facilitates it, was a nuisance when a part of Li Li and Areeya's investment assemblages. It gave rise to a restriction in their capacities to exert control over how they were posted into being, and so impacted their impression management. Nevertheless, it did not lead to disinvestment from English use on the platform. Rather, Areeya used her agency and the site's functionality to delete the image and thus take back control of her impression management.

Abda's case was different. She wanted to be tagged in a photograph that was representative of who she had become: a successful postgraduate from an English-medium university. She wanted the inclusion of this image into her spatial repertoire, and so be posted into being with it. In Abda's investment assemblage, however, such acts, and any leaks that might give rise to this type of visibility, had to be avoided because of a difference in cultural ideologies. As with other participants, Abda's investment in posting herself into being for an English-using audience comprised a number of by

now familiar intra-actions. These included Facebook functionality, which was designed in a context of neoliberal capitalism, which in turn, envisages users' data as Facebook's product to be commodified; multimodal functionality which produces capacities which gave rise to the norm of sharing on the site, as well as functionality which allows social capital to be manifested in digital connections between individuals. All these intra-actions, and no doubt more which data gathering methods did not capture, were involved in giving rise to capacities which produced Abda's desire to post herself into being for her multilingual and multicultural audience with a photo.

Yet, Abda was unable to act on this desire because the intra-actions involved in its production also produced capacities which could potentially give rise to negative consequences for her. Such consequences may have arisen if she had made herself visible in a context in which she could have been observed by a socially conservative Saudi audience, and therefore be read into being through a lens of conservative ideologies. In a context of such leakiness, which produced Abda's lack of control over her visibility, and in which her visibility had the potential to span the ideological fault lines between Irish and Saudi societal norms, she was aware that it was best for her to limit her visibility. It was to her benefit to avoid being posted into being with a photo of her uncovered face.

6.3.7 Self-expression: no audience reaction required

It is evident that the Facebook audience is an essential, and yet dynamic, intra-action entangled with other intra-actions within participants' investment assemblages. As Trottier (2014, p.14) states, an audience is all important for Facebook use, "after all, what is the social relevance of online content if there is nobody to share it with?". Nevertheless, participants stated that at times a reaction from their audiences was not essential for investing in English, or in other facets of their spatial repertoires, on the site.

Mingmei: But, I think Facebook is just a platform you show something, you want to show something, no matter people read it or not. I don't care. I just want to post what I want to post.

(Interview 1)

Lijuan: Yeah. But if I post something about personal feelings or my travel experience, I don't post to anybody, I just post because I like to post. I want to share it with all of you, but I don't mind who any of you will read or not. I just want, yeah, to post my feelings.

(Interview 1)

Lijuan's and Mingmei's comments indicate the importance of visibility, which is enmeshed with the new media ideology of sharing, in favour of audience reaction in Facebook use. Their remarks remind me of a house in my neighbourhood, the residents of which have displayed family photographs in the windows. These photographs face outwards, and so are visible to passers-by who happen to be in the vicinity and notice the images, not to the residents of the house. These images are for show, to be noticed by the outside world; however, this does not mean that they are placed in order for the residents to become aware of the reaction of onlookers. The act of display, which, of course, suggests an audience, is enough.

The act of display, of making themselves visible or sharing themselves, was also enough for Lijuan and Mingmei. They wanted to post something and in so doing make themselves visible to their audiences, but the anticipation of specific audience reactions, made known to them in the form of comments or Likes, were not a prerequisite for this act. Their investment assemblage encompassed an audience which was intra-active in giving rise to capacities for visibility, but reactions from that audience were not always necessary to invest in Facebook use.

There was another instance in which audience reaction on the site was not fundamental for posting oneself into being:

Sarah: If there was nobody reading, would you post?

Guo: I would post less frequently, but I would still post, yeah. ... [Pause] Because sometimes you have to speak out... . If you always keep that in your stomach, you will be choked off. And you want to

*share, for example, that picture for the diving picture, I **have** to post that because it's special. How many people have that experience?*

(Interview 2)

*Lijuan: [Facebook] is a very good platform to express their feelings and ideas. It's very healthy. You have to find some way to express your feelings, otherwise you have to hold it all by yourself, it's very hard. Sometimes you **have** to say something. I think it's healthy.*

(Interview 2)

Lijuan and Guo used Facebook as a platform for therapeutic self-expression. It was the act of self-expression, not the anticipation of audience reaction that produced this restorative act. It was the action in and of itself that was important. Indeed, Areeya reminds us that one should not anticipate any reactions at all from a Facebook audience:

Areeya: Hmm, I don't think it's necessary, because you have Facebook because you want to show something. But sometimes, people just got neutral feeling, or they don't feel like they have to react with, with your post. So, I think, the first thing you have to understand is that if you post something, it doesn't mean that people have to react, but you just want to share something with the world, even though people see it or not. You just share it. It probably make you feel better, that's it, yeah.

(Interview 2)

Areeya refers to the therapeutic aspect of posting for self-expression. However, returning to the subject of the unpredictability of the Facebook audience ([Section 6.3.1](#) and [Section 6.3.4](#)) she also warns potential users that it is important not to expect a response to content. Indeed, for one participant, Lijuan, not anticipating an audience had a liberating effect on how she posted herself into being in English:

Lijuan: Uh, it's easier for me in English. Uh because I don't [pause], I don't really, I can post whatever I like, uh, I don't expect people to read me and get to know me on Facebook, so I can post whatever I like, and I don't really care about their, uh, replies.

(Interview 2)

A lack of anticipated audience enabled Lijuan to express herself relatively freely because she did not expect to be read into being by her audience.

In terms of participants' investment assemblages, an audience was engaged in the production of the capacity for visibility within a context in which the norm was to share oneself. These were significant intra-actions within some participants' investment assemblages, and gave rise to capacities to post themselves into being. Participants' investment assemblages did not always arise from a coalescence of intra-actions which included audience reactions. Sometimes investment arose from networks of intra-actions which produced visibility, but with no expectation of reactions. It was as if the presence of an audience, an imagined audience, legitimised posting. It gave participants a reason to take up the *skeptron* ([Section 2.7.1](#)) (Bourdieu 1977a) and, already able to invest in English use on Facebook, it provided them with an opportunity to post there. Yet, responses from that audience were not necessary as a part of this legitimisation. Sharing was enough.

Another striking point which arises from Lijuan's perspective as quoted above is the apparent contradiction with her point about future audiences. When talking about these audiences, she described her caution and the care she took when publishing content because she cared about the way she would be read into being by them:

Lijuan: I will be really careful about what I post, and delete something I don't like anymore.

(Interview 1 – see [Section 6.3.5](#), above)

Human beings are contradictory, and Lijuan's inconsistency in views can be assigned to this characteristic. It can also be ascribed to a change of view between interviews. In contrast, taking a posthumanist perspective, her contradictions can be regarded as evidence of the dynamism and complexity of investment assemblages.

6.4 Summary

This chapter has focused on the capacities for investment that were identified as arising from entanglements of intra-actions related to Facebook audiences. As such, it has focused in depth on the significance of social capital within participants' investment assemblages. Immediately one looks at Facebook audiences, one is confronted with the sociomateriality of the site. For example, the attention economy, which is produced by, and produces, audiences, is a coalescence of functionality (scrolling; the use of images and emojis), ideologies (the norm of sharing; the genre of short "catchy" pieces of content; the neoliberal capitalist ideology behind the development of the functionality that promotes the production of data, and its harvesting); capital (data-as-capital for access to the site; social capital which is a main reason to use the site) and the subject positions that are produced by having an audience (Facebook friend connection; legitimate English language user).

Within the attention economy, which was agential in producing capacities for their visibility, participants used their experience of social media to positively frame orphan posts. These posts, arising from the speed of consumption of Facebook content, were interpreted as a norm rather than as a sign of participants' lack of the right to post in English. As such, in terms of the micropolitics of investment in English on Facebook, what was beneficial for Facebook (the enabling of content creation and publication, and the eventual harvest of this content as data) was also beneficial for participants in that it was involved in giving rise to capacities for investment in English on Facebook.

Posting themselves into being within the attention economy required participants to use their agency. In the digital context of constant competition with other content, in which individuals' capacities for visibility were shared with new media norms (scrolling) and algorithmic decision-making involved in the surfacing of content, participants had to leverage their agency to be seen. Paradoxical as it may appear, they reduced their visibility (posted less) to be more noticeable.

Participants' agency to invest in English on Facebook was further produced within entanglements of functionality affording online connectivity; participants' existing social capital, and their desires to maintain these relationships on Facebook. These produced complex and unpredictable audiences, comprising individuals from various cultures, with different language backgrounds and levels of English language proficiency. Participants' desires to maintain their friendships, and so avoid misunderstandings that they felt could easily arise across disembodied digital communication space, produced different types of investment in English on Facebook. For example, they opted to meet the English language needs of their audience, as opposed to displaying their linguistic capital.

Some intra-actions existed in a context of relations of exteriority within participants' investment assemblages; that is, they gave rise to different capacities across different assemblages. The disembodied audience and the future audience were such intra-actions. The former gave rise to diverse capacities within different participants' investment assemblages. Some experienced it as providing added capacities for the use of English; for others, it gave rise to fears of potential misunderstanding. The future audience also coalesced with other intra-actions to produce various capacities in different participants' assemblages, inhibiting some and producing self-censorship, while other participants' investment in English was not impacted at all.

The entanglement of Facebook functionality within the affective flows of other intra-actions which produced capacities for participants' agency for investment is made evident when one focuses on the significance of digital semiotic resources such as Likes and emojis, as well as text-based supportive comments published by friend connections. The validation that arose from these online reactions were agential in participants taking up subject positions beyond that of language learner or non-native speaker.

By the same token, with capacities for visibility distributed across these audiences who acted according to the new media norm of sharing,

participants' limited control over their content was evident in the form of leaks. For some participants, such leaks were not significant, and control could be exerted with the use of delete and edit functionality. For Abda, however, whose Facebook space spanned very different ideologies, losing control of how she was posted into being, or posting herself into being in a way that challenged her home country ideology, could have negative repercussions.

Finally, in the context of visibility and the norm of sharing, audience reaction was not always necessary for investment in English. Just the idea of the presence of an audience, an idea that was produced with the functionality of Facebook and participants' concomitant visibility, was enough to give rise to capacities for investment in English.

This chapter has shown that in different assemblages, the different facets of the Facebook audience, which is the digital embodiment of social capital, were very important intra-actions, producing various capacities which produced investment in English on Facebook in different ways. Participants' agency to post themselves into being, therefore, was produced within these assemblages. The next chapter examines in more detail the subject positions that arose from participants' investment assemblages.

Chapter 7: To Post or Not to Post

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concentrates more extensively on the coalescences of interactions which produced participants' capacities for deciding whether to post or not to post in English on Facebook. It is divided into three sections. [Section 7.2](#) and [Section 7.3](#) concentrate on subject positions. The subject positions participants were able to take up during Facebook use in English have already been mentioned as part of the analyses in relation to access to Facebook spaces ([Chapter Five](#)), but this chapter homes in on the significance of subject positions, for example, "friend" and "knower", that arose within participants' investment assemblages and played roles in their production of content. I also examine the importance of cultural capital entangled with Facebook functionality in relation to such subject positions, and investment in English on the site.

The third part of this chapter, [Section 7.4](#), focuses on decisions to engage in self-censorship on Facebook, and how they were productive within the investment assemblage. It shows that such decision-making processes were entangled with the sociomateriality of the platform, in particular, its functionality. As with subject positions, self-censorship was pervasive in participants' experiences ([Section 6.3.2](#) and [Section 6.3.5](#)), but in this chapter, it is analysed in greater depth and detail so as to draw out the intricacies of its involvement in investment.

7.2 Subject positions on Facebook

Subject positions have a crucial role in investment (Norton 2013; [Section 3.5.1](#)). Target language users take up the right to speak by positioning themselves, or being positioned, as legitimate users of the target language. SNSs have been identified as arenas in which users can favourably position themselves in relation to the target language and other language users

(Chen 2013; Sockett 2014; Tudini 2007). Facebook provided participants with a number of subject positions which were agentive within their investment assemblages with which they posted themselves into being in English on the site. Those concentrated on in this section are friend, language user and language learner.

7.2.1 “friend”

As has been emphasised throughout this analysis, SNSs are based around the development and maintenance of social relationships (boyd 2008; Ellison *et al.* 2007; Joinson 2008; Tufekci 2008). As shown in [5.2.1](#), due to its ubiquity, Facebook use was crucial for the development and maintenance of social capital. These factors were an important reasons for participants to use Facebook. They utilised the platform to be friends (as opposed to *friend connections* which refers to a Facebook “consensual connection” (boyd 2008, p. 19) that may encompass friendship or merely online connection) and to engage in close friendship. These friendships were enacted in English as this was the common language shared by the individuals involved.

Engaging in friendship entailed participants posting to mark a birthday, showing care by reacting to content, and finding out who cared for them by taking note of the individuals who interacted with their content:

Chunhua: I think when you post something, you really want to get feedback from your friends, that's why you post on Facebook. If not, you just say to yourself, "Why do you post on Facebook?". When you post, you want to get encouragement from your friends. You want to know who cares about you.

(Interview 1)

Asynchronous communication enabled friendships to be maintained across time and geographical locations (Lampinen *et al.* 2009). For example, on a university trip to France, Guo formed relationships with another group of students; relationships which he maintained via Facebook:

Guo: Yeah. Some went back to their schools, some are just exchange students, so they went back after one year. It's because we had four days together. We spent four happy days together. Everyone was keeping the memory. So we still keep in touch.

(Interview 2)

Chunhua's and Guo's statements make clear the importance of social capital in the form of meaningful relationships for investment in English on Facebook. Chunhua used the platform to find out who had concern for her; Guo employed it to maintain friendships across geographical boundaries.

The ubiquity of Facebook use for digitally-mediated sociality, and participants' social capital, along with the neoliberal capitalist aspects of the platform which lie behind the design of its functionality (which in turn affords online connections between individuals; information sharing; data harvesting, and the commodification of users' data) were intra-actions active in producing participants' "friend" subject position. With this subject position, participants had a reason to post themselves into being on Facebook in English: that is, they had their investment.

An example from Lan's experience further exemplifies this. When asked in interview two why she had published so few English posts, she stated:

Lan: Uhm, I do have the desire to write on Facebook [laughs], especially during my last trip to Europe. I want to share some experiences with others on Facebook, but I didn't do it. ... I don't have so much friends on Facebook.

(Interview 2)

Lan wanted to post in English: she wanted to post herself into being so as to make herself visible and share her experiences with other English users. Yet, without an interested audience, she declined to do so. This changed, however, and by Interview Three, Lan was accessing Facebook more often, and posting a little in English. The reason for the change being she had made more friends offline who she was able to communicate with on the platform:

Lan: Uhm, because I add more friends on Facebook, and sometimes I would like to pay attention to what is they're doing, or their activities, yeah.

(Interview 3)

With English-using friends on Facebook, that is, people with whom she wanted to share time and experiences, hers and theirs, Lan had a reason to invest in Facebook in English. As Donath and boyd (2004) state, online identity is mediated and dependent on having an audience because it is co-constructed with that audience. With an audience including people with whom she had important relationships, Lan could take up the subject position of friend, and have a reason to post. Significant here is that Lan's agency to take up a friend subject position was shared. It was produced from capacities arising from an entanglement of her having developed relationships offline, and having access to digital functionality with which she could engage in these relationships on Facebook.

Li Li also understood the importance of social capital for investment in English on Facebook. Her views on the use of the platform for learning English and significance of an audience are a salient warning for teachers eager to utilise the site:

Sarah: Would you recommend your students to use Facebook in English?

Li Li: Yes, good idea, but bear in mind not all non-native speakers used Facebook before, so you have to guarantee that they have enough friends to keep using it. Otherwise it's just a Moodle. I can still remember that. It's just a Moodle. No one use it. You find it helpful because it's social. If it's not social, if none of your friends is there, then you probably wouldn't have used it. If just only a language teacher said that, "Let's use Facebook as a learning tool" and only post just on course material online, then it's simply just Blackboard. It's, it's the social part that makes it important.

(Interview 3)

Li Li's point is that without social capital in the form of meaningful relationships, Facebook has little value as a way for English language development. Although some participants used Facebook for self-expression

and as such did not always feel the need for an audience ([Section 6.3.7](#)), Li Li and Lan required friends (and friend connections) to make interaction meaningful (Bailey *et al.* 2017; Bucher 2012; Lomicka and Lord, 2012; Prichard 2013). In terms of investment, in Lan's and Li Li's cases, Facebook use was entangled with access to social capital which was digitally embodied by an English-using audience distributed across time and physical space. This gave rise to the subject position of friend from which these participants were able to take up the right to post, make use of the opportunity to do so, and interact as legitimate English language users.

In summary, participants' capacity to take up legitimate poster status in English in relation to friendship coalesced around a number of intra-actions. As ever with Facebook, its neoliberal capitalist business ethic, entangled with the design and deployment of functionality which enables the forming of online connections, information sharing, data harvesting, and commercial use of users' data, were crucial within participants' investment assemblages. Without the aforementioned functionality, including language functionality, capacities to be visible online and to connect with known others would not have been produced. As such, participants' agency for sociality on Facebook was shared with these entangled intra-actions. From the subject position of friend, they experienced Facebook as a place in which they had the right to post, as well as opportunities and the desire to do so.

7.2.1.1 Maintaining social capital: a reason not to post

Capacities to engage in relationship development and maintenance on Facebook were entangled with participants' desire, opportunities, and the right to post as legitimate users of English from the subject position of friend. At the same time, the focus of Facebook as a place of sociality called for participants to be mindful as to what they posted about, how they posted, and even whether they posted at all, if they wanted their friendships to persist and develop. The discrete nature of asynchronous Facebook communication complicated participants' investment in the use of English on the platform.

This aspect of Facebook communication has been addressed in [Section 6.3.4](#) with respect to the disembodied audience. It is examined again here, but in relation to the maintenance of social capital. For example, a fear of accidentally offending others, and never becoming aware of having done so, made Lijuan reticent about posting:

Lijuan: Is just my ideas of people, that if I say something. I don't know if I offended someone. But I don't think that's good, so I don't post a lot.

(Interview 2)

Lijuan's concerns were strong enough to limit the extent to which she posted herself into being in English on the platform. Li Li's reactions were not so heightened, but her fears of accidentally offending her audience nevertheless impacted how she took up the right to post. She preferred to restrict her use of slang on Facebook to avoid inadvertently angering her audience:

Li Li: That's another reason why I don't want to use those slang on my Facebook page. It's because I don't know if there are hidden meaning of that slang and I could possibly make other people angry by using it. So I want to be cautious. Avoid the risk. That's why I use the formal language.

(Interview 1)

The capacity to accidentally offend, and in Lijuan's case, not know she had done so, arose in a context of asynchronous, discrete communication on Facebook. Not sharing embodied communication space, and doubts about their proficiency in terms of vocabulary use, entangled with Facebook being positioned as a place of relationship maintenance, and gave rise to capacities which produced a reticence to post themselves into being (Lijuan), or being particularly careful about the language they used to do so (Li Li).. Again, we are shown that participants' investment in English on Facebook was produced within assemblages of sociomaterial intra-actions. Participants' capacities for deciding whether to invest (that is, their agency to do so), was therefore also produced within these assemblages.

Lijuan further restricted the extent to which she posted herself into being on Facebook. She restricted her employment of the elements of her spatial repertoire (Pennycook and Otsuji 2014; [Section 3.7.3](#)) as a Facebook user. She travelled a great deal while studying; yet, she restricted the number of travel photographs she posted:

Lijuan: ... If I post a lot of pictures, like, abroad or something, uh really nice, they might feel really jealous of me [laughs]

(Interview 2)

Lijuan could have liberally populated her Facebook pages with exciting images of her extensive travels, and in so doing, posted herself into being as an experienced traveller. However, she shied away from doing so in this instance, influenced by her own reactions to other people's content:

Lijuan: Yeah, I don't want people to feel like. Because sometimes some people post, uh, if there's a place I really want to go and some of my friends are in that place and post pictures, I feel like, oh, I'm so angry; I want to be there [laughs]. So, yeah, so I don't want people to have the same feelings as me, so I don't post a lot of my life because my life is quite good [laughs]

(Interview 2)

As Lijuan reacted with negative feelings towards friend connections' holiday photographs, she anticipated her audience would react to her photographs in a similar way. In order to prevent these feelings in her friends / friend connections, she was judicious as to how she made herself visible through such images. Lijuan's choices about how she posted herself into being were directed towards minimising the attractiveness of her life in order to avoid potentially causing her audience discomfort.

The entanglement of intra-actions which produced the "friend" subject position, and with it, investment in Facebook use in English, also produced capacities to be selective as to how one posted oneself into being – how participants invested. In a context of visibility within a norm of sharing, Lijuan chose to put relationship maintenance above displaying her enviable lifestyle, and decided to restrict the manner in which she posted herself into being.

To summarise, it is possible to map out the intra-actions which produced capacities for participant investment assemblages related to “friend” subject positions. Facebook’s ubiquity as a place of online sociality; the functionality that facilitates online connection, and the neoliberal capitalist intra-actions involved in the production of this functionality; participants’ existing social capital, as well as their English linguistic capital entangled to produce capacities for these “friend” subject positions. As “friends”, they had capacities which produced their investment in English on the platform.

At the same time, the wish to maintain such relationships was an inhibiting factor with regard to posting. What is significant here is that the unwillingness to post oneself into being and take up the right to “speak” cannot be explained with reference to Darvin and Norton’s (2015) model of investment alone. Participants’ reticence did not arise from a subject position which was socially constructed from a lack of capital as evaluated within an ideological structure, as Darvin and Norton’s investment would demand. To understand unwillingness to post – unwillingness to invest – one must consider the digital context of this prospective investment. The disembodied nature of asynchronous online communication in which participants did not share embodied communication space, along with their self-doubts about their English proficiency, were active in producing this disinvestment. In effect, the threat to participants’ existing social capital produced by disembodied online communication produced their desires to limit their visibility. This choice of silence or invisibility will be further discussed below in [Section 7.2.2](#) and in more extensively in [Section 7.4](#).

7.2.2 Language learner/non-native English-speaker and disinvestment

The friend subject position was a powerful one from which participants could take up legitimate poster status and post themselves into being in English on Facebook. Nevertheless, they also displayed an awareness of their non-native English-speaker subject position when relating their experiences of the platform’s use.

Unsurprisingly, participants' lack of confidence in their English language abilities was an important reason to avoid posting or commenting in English on Facebook. Abda assigned her lack of publication on Facebook to her subject position of being a learner, and so lacking confidence in her English:

Abda: I think, because I think I'm still a learner, maybe this is the reason I don't post. Maybe. Maybe I'm not that confident. I do post, but not all the time.

(Interview 2)

Chunhua described how she would often become confused over which word to use in a post, or doubt her sentence structure, and then “*So I will give the whole thing up*” (Interview One). Zaria's use of English had noticeably dwindled by the time we met for Interview Three. I asked her the reason for this:

Zaria: My family speak English very well, so if I put something bad, I'm giving them bad, uhm, [laughs]

Sarah: What do you mean?

Zaria: Because they know the bad writing, because a lot of the family write in English. If I use English, and it's bad, and I am living here, it's worse! [laughs]

Sarah: I understand. So do they have a high expectation, like, Zaria's is living in Ireland; she must be able to speak good English

Zaria: Exactly! [laughs]

(Interview 3)

As Zaria lived in an English-speaking country, she felt the burden of having to meet her family's expectations and develop her English language accordingly. In a context of visibility as well as “temporal multiplicity” and “spatial multiplicity” (Lampinen *et al.* 2009, para. 57), Zaria was concerned that if she posted herself into being in “*bad writing*” she would be read into being by her audience as a person who failed to improve her English skills even though she was living in Ireland. Zaria feared being negatively positioned as a bad learner by her audience on the basis of her lack of linguistic capital (her English language competencies), and so limited her use

of English on the site. Such views are not uncommon. Lee's (2014) research into Hong Kong graduate students' use of English on social media also found that some participants avoided the use of English for fear of negative judgement of it.

Zaria's lack of investment in posting herself into being in English can be equated with Markus and Nurius' (1986) concept of dreaded possible selves ([Section 2.3.3](#)). Previously Facebook had been a place of investment for Zaria, with capacities producing this investment coalescing around intra-actions such as Facebook functionality (for example, the support of multiple languages) and her social capital and visibility. These intra-actions entangled within affective flows to produce capacities for investment in English on the platform. Nevertheless, by Interview Three, Zaria's social capital and her visibility had intra-acted with her imagination to produce a limiting capacity. Her fear of negative judgement of her family and friends on Facebook, and her desire to avoid being positioned in a negative way by them, along with her lack of confidence in her English, produced capacities for disinvestment from the use of English.

Lijuan's lack of investment was also entangled with her considerations of her audience and how she positioned herself in terms of her native English-speaking classmates and friend connections:

Lijuan: So sometimes I don't have the confidence to talk to native speakers in English. Yeah, I sometimes just feel that way. ... Yeah, maybe I think it's because of my experience in at university. Like, most of my friends are my colleagues, my classmates, and, uh, sometimes I, our Chinese people don't feel really confidence in front of them. Because we're in the same age and we're learning English and they have much more, uh, benefits or advantages. I don't know how to say that, like, they already native speakers of English and we are not, so there's a big gap between, so sometimes we don't feel we're good enough or our English is good enough to talk to them. So, for my Facebook friends, I don't really comment in English on their posts. So, I just 'like'.

(Interview 2)

During discussions of times when Lijuan was reticent about posting in English, it became clear that she compared herself unfavourably with her native English-speaking peers, and in a competition of linguistic capital, she emerged the loser. She commented on not feeling “*good enough*” because of her status as a non-native English-speaker, and so positioned herself as an illegitimate English user. For this reason, she refused to post herself into being on her native English-speaker Facebook spaces.

The visibility of Facebook content also played a role in her decision not to post:

Lijuan: I know I'm not as good as their English, so I don't want to, like, make a fool of myself, make mistakes under their posts. And everybody can see it, so I don't like that, so I don't comment [both laugh] I know that's stupid, but I just think that way.

(Interview 3)

The visibility of her content in native English-speaker spaces brought with it the possibility of public embarrassment for Lijuan. To avoid making “*a fool of myself*”, Lijuan preferred to remain invisible in her silence.

Lijuan's comments are significant. They show that investment was entangled with the different spaces in which participants could post and the capacities for visibility which were produced within them. Lijuan was less concerned about posting on her own Facebook spaces, to an audience which she had selected. There, she could position herself as a legitimate English user. On her native English-speaker friend connections' spaces, however, she would have a wider audience, one she had not amassed of her own choosing. She envisioned this audience as including native speakers whom she did not know. Lijuan took up a deficit position based on her English abilities (her linguistic capital) as compared with those of these individuals. With that self-positioning, she disinvested from English on Facebook spaces in which she could be read into being by this audience. As in Zaria's case, Lijuan's disinvestment was produced in relation to her imagination and desire to avoid a dreaded possible self. Capacities for investment and disinvestment arose from entanglements of intra-actions comprising the functionality which

produced different spaces, and with them different audiences for Lijuan and Zaria. Entangled with these audiences was these participants' deficit self-positioning, and the production of capacities for and disinvestment. Lijuan, however, was able to maintain an online presence, however. She remained visible by using an element of her spatial repertoire, and "liked" such content.

Boon and Beck's (2013) research on two closed Facebook groups formed as part of an English language course found that a lack of confidence in English prevented posting on the site. My research findings concur. Participants' positioning of themselves as English learners, in particular as poor learners, entangled with other intra-actions to give rise to capacities to disinvest from the use of English on the platform. This poor learner subject position arose from participants' own judgements of their language competencies, that is, the manner in which they viewed their own linguistic capital. It also arose from their fears of how they would be judged by their audience, that is, how they would be read into being. Self-evaluation of capital and resultant self-positioning in a context of visibility, therefore, were important intra-actions involved in disinvestment from taking up legitimate English poster status.

7.2.2.1 "Close" or "closer" to a native speaker

A number of participants referred to their English language engagement on Facebook in terms of enabling them to draw "close" or "closer" to native English-speakers. For example, Abda described noticing the differences between her own English, and that of her native speaker friend connections:

Abda: You know, I want to be like them in their English. I mean, I'm not a native speaker, but I want to be, maybe close to them, you know. I really found my sentences or my comments on Facebook more formal which is quite different from them.

(Interview 1)

Abda's use of Facebook enabled her to take advantage of the visibility, persistence and spreadability of her native English-speaking friend connections' content. With the access to English that these affordances

provided, she was able to engage in pedagogical lurking (Arnold and Paulus 2010) and make use of the opportunities for observation that discrete, asynchronous SNS use gave her to develop her own language competencies.

Abda took the opportunity to use this content as a way to extend her subject position in terms of English:

Abda: And I ask it "Why do they write it like this? Why don't I use the organisation, the order? Why I didn't use it like that?" And I start to think to find another post to post it and use the same same thing.

(Interview 1)

Facebook communication has been described as informal and playful in nature (Peters *et al.* 2015). These norms of use provided Abda with access to informal language which she could work upon to develop her own informal language style. In the process, she was able to reposition herself as "close" to native speakers.

Visibility, persistence and spreadability, as well as Abda's social capital, and her desire to develop informal English, coalesced to produce Abda's new subject position she experienced as nearer to a native English-speaker.

The opportunity to observe informal native speaker English also helped Li Li position herself as a member of her English-speaking group around her:

Li Li: But it's interesting. They say, when they get drunk, they say "hammered" or what.

Sarah: Yeah, so they're using kind of slang that you don't know.

Li Li: Yeah, and when you notice, it's helpful to me, to be a part of them.

(Interview 1)

Li Li was aware of the helpfulness of the development of this area of her English to reposition herself as "*part of them*". Nevertheless, she was in no way tempted to post herself into being with such language:

Li Li: I am more relaxed and use more informal language on Facebook, a little bit more informal. But I won't use the words

[pause]. Like, if I get drunk, I won't use the word "get hammered". I just don't want to use it.

Sarah: Why not?

Li Li: Hmm, I don't know. I know the meaning of the word. It's Ok, I don't need to really use it. I know the meaning and when others say it, I can understand what they want to say, but I don't have to use it myself because I'm different from them. I am. Just because I understand doesn't mean I have to use it. And if I use it, it will make me feel like I force myself to use it, to be a part of them. I don't want to because I'm not, I'm not the same as them. I can observe what they post, but I don't want to copy exactly what their language habits are.

Sarah: Maybe it doesn't feel right.

Li Li: No. ... It's not me.

(Interview 1)

Li Li refused to engage in a genre of language use without thought. She needed to post herself into being in a way that was true to her own concept of herself. While she was interested in developing her awareness of the vernacular of the native English-speakers around her, she was not invested in using that language herself; as she said, "*Just because I understand doesn't mean I have to use it*". Li Li was able to maintain her own style of language use by being selective about the type of investment she made on Facebook. Her perspectives match those of participants in a study of investment in English use in offline settings in the USA (Kim 2014). Kim found that participants struggled to construct English language user identities which were appropriate to a US communicative setting, and with which they also felt personally comfortable.

As is evident in the previous quotations from participants, Facebook use engendered a feeling of closeness with English-speakers in the minds of participants. I investigated this idea in depth with Lijuan who had also described Facebook as helping her feel closer to a native speaker. I asked Lijuan what she meant by 'close':

Lijuan: Because different language divide people into different worlds. Like, if I speak their language, I will feel more close to their

life and their environment and everything. That makes me feel more close to the language and the people.

(Interview 3)

The ability to speak English was linked to Lijuan's ability to share native English-speakers' lives and contexts. One of these contexts was Facebook. It provided an environment in which she was able to share English with other English-speakers:

Lijuan: ... I sometimes use it [Facebook] and I feel it's like, the same thing, you feel more, uh, close to the English native speakers. You can, uh, I don't know why, but I do get confidence by using Facebook in English, about my English.

(Interview 3)

Lijuan's "closer" subject position arose by way of using English on Facebook which was entangled with gains in confidence in her English. These gains in confidence were linked to the opportunity to use English in a context in which Lijuan was able to gain validation for that use:

Lijuan: If people "like" it or people comment on my post, I will be happy, because I can communicate with other people in English. But just post[ing] makes me feel more confident about my English.

(Interview 3)

Lijuan's closer subject position was produced from a coalescence of her opportunity to use Facebook in English, an opportunity which itself was produced in part by her social capital among English language speakers. Posting gave Lijuan confidence, and it was the technical affordance of the Like and comment function that provided her with validation that indicated successful communication. In this way, Lijuan's capacities which produced her "close" subject position arose from entanglements of functionality and social capital – the digitally-mediated sociality of Facebook itself.

The friend⁶ subject position was also significant for Lijuan. During a difficult period, she had posted on Facebook about her low mood. In response, she gained emotional support from her friends who published compassionate comments on her Facebook space. Through this entanglement of self-expression and receiving encouragement, Lijuan was able to position herself anew in relation to English:

Lijuan: Uh, it's like you can share your feelings and get feedback in English. That's uhm. Plus, we normally use national language to do that, but now I use English, so that makes me feel more like, uh, like native speaker.

(Interview 3)

With a shift of context of English language use came a change in how Lijuan viewed herself as an English user. She went on to contrast this example of English use with that in an academic context:

Lijuan: For me, I'm a student here, so English basic skill all about academic lectures and classes. But if you can use it really in life, uh, that's a more good way to get close to native speaker.

(Interview 3)

In online communication, target language users can be repositioned and/or reposition themselves away from the language learner subject position “beyond the confines of the institutional identity of “student” by fraying the boundaries separating language study from social life” (Thorne *et al.* 2009, pp. 814-815). Lijuan experienced this by way of her Facebook use. On the platform, she was more than an overseas student. In an entanglement of Facebook connectivity which connected her to English-speaking friends, and the platform’s sharing ideology, she was not only able to post herself into being as a friend, but to be positioned as such by her friends on the site. With English as a lingua franca, they read her into being as Lijuan, a friend who

⁶ I refer to these individuals as “friends” here, as opposed to “friend connections” because their acts of compassion towards Lijuan suggest a more meaningful relationship than is encompassed by the term “friend connection” which I use to refer to a “consensual connection” on a social networking site (boyd 2008, p. 19).

would benefit from their support, not as a Chinese non-native English-speaking student: they also responded to her as such.

To summarise, Facebook use clearly gave rise to opportunities for participants to reposition themselves in relation to English. The intimate entanglement of affective flows comprising Facebook functionality (and the connected neoliberal capitalist motivations of the platform); boyd's affordances (visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability); participants' social capital, and discrete access to native-speaker English, were agential in producing participants' capacities for self [re]-positioning as "closer" to native English-speakers.

7.3 The importance of cultural capital and subject positions

As has been shown, the subject positions entangled in participants' Facebook use were not restricted to language learner and/or non-native English-speaker. Facebook also provided opportunities to take up other subject positions from which participants were able to post themselves into being as legitimate users of English. The capacities to take up these subject positions were produced in affective flows of intra-actions related to participants' social and cultural capital, as well as the functionality of Facebook, itself. The next section identifies and discusses three such subject positions in relation to expertise: traveller, cook and Muslim woman.

7.3.1 Traveller / knower

With its multimodal functionality, Facebook was an optimal environment for sharing travel experiences. Mingmei was one of a number of participants who posted photographs of her travels. She wanted her images to make statements about herself and her touristic destinations:

Mingmei: I want to say I'm very happy, and it's a very interesting and unforgettable trip. And Ireland is a very good place to visit.

When asked what inspired her to post in English, Li Li replied:

Li Li: Travel, yeah. Travel.

Sarah: So a new experience?

Li Li: Yeah, different from daily life. If it's just because of good weather or good day, I won't post anything. But if it's a sunny day, I went to Cork or Waterford, I will post something of me travelling. And uh, because this isn't different - the thing I post on Facebook. Just like any other native speaker does, try to make my life look richer online. Yeah, because I know, I don't do that very often, but when I do, I really want everybody to know that.

(Interview 1)

Li Li and Mingmei posted themselves into being as travellers, but doing so was not a result of their agency alone. This subject position arose in an assemblage of intra-actions including ideologies (neoliberal capitalism of Facebook, the norm of sharing), and their capital (social, linguistic and cultural - their experiences of travelling). Another essential intra-action which produced capacities to give rise to this subject position was the platform's functionality. This entangled with the above ideologies, and participants' social capital to produce affordances of visibility and spreadability (sharing) via the multimodality of the platform – the ability to post images.

Lijuan's reticence about sharing her travel photographs has already been referred to ([Section 7.2.1.1](#)). In that instance, it was in relation to her unwillingness to provoke negative emotions in her friend connections. When she did post images of a trip to India, however, she received welcome reactions:

Lijuan: Yes, uh, actually I got a lot of Likes. ... And I post a lot of pictures, very nice pictures. Uh, I got a henna tattoo on my arms, it was really beautiful. I post that and a lot of other pictures. It was great and a lot of people ask me for advice for travelling to India.

Sarah: And did you give them advice, in English?

Lijuan: Yes.

Sarah: So, how did that make you feel as an English language user, all those Likes from people, all that positive feedback, people asking you for advice?

Lijuan: It makes me feel I can use English more frequently.

Sarah: Yes. Frequently or fluently, or both?

Lijuan: Both. Yeah, and I can, like, communicate and even help people in English and that was a really good experience. Yes.

(Interview 2)

Research into Facebook use by target language users has found that photographs are a common source of communication on the site (Alm 2015; Kabilan *et al.* 2010). In Lijuan's case, non-native and native speakers' reactions to her images were important intra-actions in her investment assemblage.

The capacity to post herself into being as a traveller to an area of interest to her audience gave rise to another subject position, that of knower. One might say the knower subject position arose from the entangled intra-actions of Facebook communication: the new media ideology of sharing; Lijuan's social capital in the form of her friend connections and her audience's interest in her travels; her cultural capital in the form of the knowledge she developed from visiting India, as well as the multimodality, persistence and visibility of content. One should also remember the economic capital that made the trip possible. Lijuan's capacity to be positioned by her audience as an individual with valuable knowledge arose from the entanglement of these intra-actions.

An important element of this experience is how this event made Lijuan feel. It helped her further develop her identity as an English language user: "*It makes me feel I can use English more frequently*". Taking up the subject position of traveller and knower, successfully posting herself into being from this position, subsequently being positioned as a knower, and gaining validation (cf. Vanek *et al.* 2018) as a result of it gave rise to Lijuan's capacity to reposition herself as an English user, and feel that she could use it more often, as a result. These were all intra-actions which entangled to form the

affect economy which produced capacities for investment in English use on Facebook.

7.3.2 Elena and expertise in Italian cuisine

Elena was also positioned as a knower during her Facebook use. She was a member of an English-medium Facebook group in which individuals gathered to share their interest in cookery. Elena's expertise in Italian cookery was much sought after by other group members:

Elena: [pause] Yeah, especially in the group. I prefer to explain my mind. I have, uh, I like to cook [laughs] it is clear that I like to cook [both laugh]. And I have some, some Irish group of slow cooker that, uhm, that I learn Italian food, the real Italian food, with slow cooker and sometimes people ask me, "What is the recipe of your, uhm, your type of recipe?", like my cake or my soup, I don't know. And, uh, this is more complex because, uh, I have to write in long form and the instructions, how to make the cake, for example. And now I have to think about my vocabulary and I try to. For me is, uh, an occasion to learn vocabulary, more words.

(Interview 2)

Elena's capacities to take up the subject position of knower, and to post herself into being as such, were thoroughly entangled with Facebook's sociomateriality. The platform's group functionality enables Facebook users to gather together in an established digital space which is dedicated to the sharing of a common interest. By placing herself in this group, Elena made herself visible to other group members. She was able to share her cultural knowledge - her expertise in, and experience of, Italian cuisine - and have it valued by her audience. Her audience positioned her as legitimate poster, as a knower with information they wanted her to share, and she readily took up this subject position by utilising Facebook functionality to answer other group members' questions.

This positioning as knower gave rise to opportunities for Elena to concentrate on her English, "*I have to think about my vocabulary*" and develop her English proficiency to effectively share her knowledge. As occurred with

language learner and language user subject positions, the knower and learner subject position which Elena embodied were entangled in this context of incidental learning. That is, “unintentional or unplanned learning that results from other activities” (Kabilan *et al.* 2010, p. 180).

7.3.3 Muslim woman / knower

Abda also related an experience in which her cultural knowledge and Facebook functionality, along with other intra-actions, coalesced to produce a knower subject position. She recounted interaction which occurred in the privacy of Messenger. In this context she and three friends, from China and India, discussed the topic of Muslim women in Saudi Arabia and their wearing of the hijab or niqab. Abda described the social and religious context of the hijab, as well as her own feelings about wearing it:

Abda: Yeah, And they were surprised. The Indian girl was surprised. She said, “Oh my God! So you wear this [the hijab] all the time?” “Yeah” I said “Yeah. I don’t mind to wear this. I mind to cover my face, but I don’t mind this.” ... It took me three hours to text them [female friends] and we talk about it [wearing the hijab] the next morning.

Sarah: So were you happy to talk about that?

Abda: Yeah. It’s good for me. Good for my English. and to correct their picture of Saudi. It’s not religion. Not something religious. No, no. It’s from government. You have to do this. I say “Yes, I will do it”.

(Interview 1)

In terms of investment, Abda was able to use her cultural capital gained through her life experience of being a Saudi, Muslim woman who wears a hijab, to take up a subject position of knowing insider. From this stance, she was able to challenge her friends’ conceptions about the issue of wearing the hijab.

The capacity to take up this knower subject position was produced through the entanglement of a number of intra-actions beyond Abda’s cultural capital. Abda was engaged in communication in English in a context which she

deemed private (Messenger). She mentioned that she would not have engaged in a discussion on this topic in more public Facebook spaces. Abda was also communicating with individuals with whom she had developed relationships offline, and in whom she had built a degree of trust. These individuals, therefore, were positioned by Abda as legitimate hearers/readers (Bourdieu 1977a) of her views. In addition, the communication was able to unfold over a considerable period of time (three hours); therefore, she was engaged with interlocutors who were willing and able to invest time in their exchanges with Abda, and to give her the opportunity to make herself “read”, as opposed to “heard”, and attempt to make herself understood. On Facebook, Abda was afforded time to hold the floor (Wertsch 2010). She had been passed the *skeptron*, and with that, she was positioned as a legitimate poster (Bourdieu 1977a; [Section 2.7.1](#)) and with that, taken up legitimate poster status.

These intra-actions entangled to give rise to Abda’s capacity to post herself into being and so take up legitimate English user status. As such, she shared her agency to invest with these capacities. In this instance, her investment assemblage coalesced from entanglements of the norm of Facebook use for communication; her social capital (meaningful relationships); cultural capital (cultural knowledge) and Facebook functionality which produced spaces in which these capitals could be transformed into symbolic capital with which Abda could take up legitimate poster subject positions, and be positioned as such by her audience. Simultaneously, her audience was positioned as legitimate readers or interactors with her content. Abda’s investment was not an act of the exercise of her own agency, alone. Her agency to invest was entangled in the sociomaterial capacities which produced that investment.

The subject positions related in these sections were very real and clearly involved in giving rise to capacities for investment in English. Participants’ imagined identities were not so reliable a source of investment. This is discussed in the next section.

7.3.4 Imagined identity

A large amount of Norton's work (Norton 2001; Norton and Kamal 2003; Kanno and Norton 2003; Pavlenko and Norton 2007; Norton *et al.* 2011; Norton and McKinney 2011; Norton and Williams 2012) has examined the significance of imagined future identities on investment ([Sections 3.5.7](#) and [Section 3.5.8](#)). It is through the imagination that individuals are able to reposition themselves and take up subject positions from which it is easier to demand the right to speak.

I have already touched on the issue of imagined future identities with reference to dreaded possible selves ([Section 7.2.2](#)). Nevertheless, during the analysis of my data I was not able to identify participants placing a significant amount of importance on Facebook use in English and imagined future identities. For example, I was not able to identify future imagined identities such as doctor or engineer which participants felt investment in Facebook use in English helped them draw nearer to achieving. Only two participants, Abda and Shu, identified Facebook as a place where they were able to develop language competencies which they considered would be of value to them in the future. This was in relation to opportunities to develop abilities in informal English language use. For example, Abda appreciated the chance to improve her knowledge of this type of English language and was able to see its utility in her future:

Abda: [pause] I mean, maybe, maybe, yeah. Because we will work, in the work environment when you talk to people sometimes we will use informal English.

(Interview 2)

Shu also found future value in reading her friend connections' Facebook comments:

Shu: Yeah, that is part of the language because we not only have to talk about formal language, we need the language that is used as a daily communication tool, that the way people use it. If you want to have better communication with them, you have to use language in that way. If you understand better, they have, they will have that connection or interaction with you.

Sarah: "That connection". What do you mean by "that connection"?

Shu: Uhm, [unclear] if we come from different cultures, you can speak Chinese, but you speak very formal Chinese, I will think, "Oh, is this one working from the book, like an old-fashioned teacher? I don't think I want to be friends with them". I want to break that barriers. If you use it in daily life, make your speech more interesting and the conversation in a very natural way, we can get closer.

(Interview 1)

Shu was clearly aware of the worth of her advances in informal language use and the opportunity this held for helping her develop relationships with English users in the future (Alm 2015).

Abda's and Shu's experience of the development of informal language did not play a role in making professional imagined future identities more tangible and achievable. Yet these participants were able to equate improvements in the area of informal English language use with the ability to break down social barriers between themselves and others in the future.

The general lack of evidence for investment in English on Facebook in relation to future imagined identities can be explained with reference to the literature. The platform's value has been located in the opportunities it holds for socialising, as opposed to learning (Madge *et al.* 2009; Manca and Ranieri 2013). In a study of SNS use in and outside the classroom among English language students in the USA, Reinhardt and Zander (2011) found that participants who failed to develop target language related identities did not position Facebook as a meaningful space for language learning. In a similar vein, Alm's (2015) participants appreciated Facebook for access to informal language in non-classroom settings, but did not value it as a beneficial way to study the target language. These studies concluded that participants did not equate Facebook with language learning.

A variety of reasons can be assumed for the lack of connection between Facebook use and the development of future imagined identities in my research. Unlike the use of digital media within Norton and Williams (2012) research on eGranary ([Section 3.5.7](#)), engagement with English on

Facebook did not produce literacy skills that participants were able to identify as valuable for their future professional lives. In Bourdieusian terms, the utilisation of Facebook did not produce symbolic capital that could be of use in their futures.

This lack of symbolic capital in the literacy skills associated with Facebook might be related to the manner in which Facebook was viewed. It was seen as something to engage with when one was at a loss for anything more constructive to do:

Li Li: I think people spend time on Facebook mostly for killing time. ... It's just, like, that [mimes scrolling]. Or like this [mimes scrolling the other way].

(Interview 2)

Lijuan referred to Facebook in a similar way:

Lijuan: Facebook, for me, is like passing time function. I don't really use Facebook for something. So, it's not necessary in my life, I just, when I don't know what to do or I have spare time, I will browse the Facebook and there's no really helpful function for me.

(Interview 2)

In Nuan's case, social media, including Facebook, was an action which had to be restricted to the weekends because:

Nuan: There's too many things, like, if you start, you will keep going for hours. But for Facebook, I read it once a week, like, maybe in the weekend, just to, yeah, but I won't spend too much time on it.

(Interview 1)

The manner in which Facebook itself was positioned - as a time filler, as something to do when there was no better alternative - may have produced the site as a place unrelated to participants' futures. It was a place to go in real time; it was associated with filling time *now*, and such, associated with the present, not the future. In addition, Facebook use is firmly ensconced in the informal. Unlike a language class or a university course, its utilisation is not productive of formal qualifications. It might help hone reading and writing

skills, skills necessary for passing examinations in English, but engagement on Facebook alone will not lead to the gaining of qualifications.

This does not mean that participants were not invested in English use on Facebook. They clearly were invested; however, this was a “proximal” investment, as opposed to a “distal” one (Haneda 2005, p. 285). Haneda identified these two types of investment during research on Japanese language learners. She referred to Jim, the son of first-generation Japanese immigrants into Canada, who was proximally invested in producing a good essay in Japanese on the basis of maintaining his identity as a good writer in Japanese in the present. He was distally invested in developing his Japanese from the desire to become a more complete member of his Japanese community in the future. These findings point out that investment does not necessarily have to be focused on a future goal (distal), but can also centre around one temporally closer (proximal), and that these goals can be impacted by different identities.

In the case of my participants, they were proximally invested in English use on Facebook as a way to maintain relationships. Their investment in the site was not, in the main, related to who they hoped to become in the future.

7.4 Decisions not to post

Having identified the entangled intra-actions which produced capacities for investment, this section closes by examining in more depth the reasons participants gave for choosing not to post themselves into being, and analyses them in relation to disinvestment from English use on Facebook. The section opens by returning to the issue of cultural knowledge, and focuses on its role in disinvestment. It then moves to discuss the significance of cultural knowledge in participants’ investment assemblages. The manner in which Facebook was positioned as a place of argument, and the chilling effect are subsequently discussed. The chapter closes with an examination of participants’ privacy concerns and how they dealt with them by engaging in

self-censorship. The aim of this section is to map out the affective flows of capacities which produced participants' investment in English use in Facebook spaces.

7.4.1 Importance of cultural knowledge

The complexity and unpredictability of Facebook audiences gave rise to certain risks. In the process of posting themselves into being for these groups of people, there was always the potential to say, or post, the wrong thing, or to be misinterpreted (boyd 2008). Participants agreed that to reduce this possibility, it was best to avoid certain topics: sex, religion and politics. It was not a lack of linguistic capital in the form of English language competency that made individuals reluctant to post on these subjects. Rather, it was their self-perceived lack of cultural knowledge:

Sarah: So there are certain cultural issues [pause]

Li Li: Yeah

Sarah: But it's not because you feel like you don't have enough English, that's not the reason

Li Li: No

Sarah: It's because it's a cultural issue?

Li Li: Yeah. There's a lot of things. Uh, there's a parade, the Pride parade. I went there and took some, like, beautiful pictures, but I don't know if I should post it online. I remember I didn't post it online. Because, when I came back from the parade, at my house I was talking with another housemate. Uh, before I went there, I saw my landlord, and she's a very, uhm, conventional, just like normal Irish woman. She's kind of refused this kind of thing. ... So when she was asking me where am I going, I just said, "Uh, for fun, there's a parade. There's a festival". I just feel like I shouldn't expose too much and that's why I didn't post it online. But I was there and I'm definitely pro that. I just, I don't know, some of. Yeah, it's also about what other people post. You know, in my class I'm not sure whether all the classmates are for this or against this. I know there are some people who are definitely pro this because they post something. But only a few people did, so. I'm not sure if it's a good idea for me to post something about this or not. Better keep silent.

(Interview 3)

Li Li wanted to post about the Pride Festival in Dublin, a well-known annual event. Her reticence to do so grew from her uncertainty about her audience. This uncertainty started with an offline influence: Li Li's knowledge of her "*conventional ... Irish*" landlady and her views on LGBTQIA+ issues. Based on this awareness, Li Li chose not to invest in speaking to her landlady about her attendance at the Pride Festival. In this offline context, Li Li's cultural knowledge of her landlady's opinion gave rise to her refusing her landlady reception to her own activity. That is, Li Li did not position her landlady as a legitimate hearer for her content.

This offline positioning of her landlady transferred online and is evident in the quote, "*I just feel like I shouldn't expose too much and that's why I didn't post it online*". Li Li's refusal to post in English about Dublin Pride was not a lack of investment in English centred on her English ability. The capacities which produced her refusal to post herself into being did not arise from a want of linguistic capital (English) or a lack of social capital (friend connections). Rather, they coalesced around a lack of cultural capital - the extent of her cultural awareness of the general opinion of LGBTQIA+ issues in Ireland, and her desire not to make a social gaffe if she did post on these issues in a context of visibility.

Li Li's disinvestment, therefore, arose within a coalescence of a number of sociomaterial intra-actions. These comprise Facebook functionality and the neoliberal capitalist ideology underpinning its design. Both of these entangled to produce Li Li's capacities for visibility and the persistence of her content. They were also productive of capacities for asynchronous communication and friending. These further coalesced to produce capacities for social capital on the site, in the form of friend connections. Also entangled in these affective flows was the new media norm of sharing (capacities for which were also produced with the intra-actions of Facebook functionality and its financial motivations). In addition, Li Li's lack of cultural knowledge (cultural capital) was also important. Her capacities for disinvestment, therefore, were produced within affective flows between these sociomaterial intra-actions. As a result, she shared her agency to disinvest with this sociomateriality.

Li Li described another salient experience in which her lack of cultural knowledge was entangled in an inhibition to post herself into being in English on Facebook. Talking about the imminent visit of the Pope to Ireland, she mentioned that she was unsure not as to *whether* she should comment on the visit, but *how* to do so:

Li Li: I remember there's news saying the Pope is visiting here in 2018, next year. And lots of my friends, they're just sharing this news and like, under that news they mention their friends to see this. I'm not sure why they do it. Like, I don't know what's the feeling behind their behaviour, so I keep silent. They express little information on their feelings about this news, so it's better for me not to express my feelings. Just view it as news. And, besides, it's a thing that I don't know, so I shouldn't express too much.

(Interview 3)

Cultural knowledge was a factor here in Li Li's stance on posting on the topic of the Pope's visit. Taking up the position of culturally naïve foreigner, Li Li was anxious that if she posted, she might say the wrong thing. However, also at play was her position as a discrete observer. The persistence and visibility of Facebook content gives rise to an observer subject position: from this position, one does not share language or content production time and space with one's interlocutors, but is nevertheless privy to the content they publish. In this instance, as an observer Li Li had access to English language content, but she remained shut out from fully understanding it because of the style of Facebook communication - an aspect of its new media ideology. As Li Li stated:

Li Li: ... they 're just sharing this news and like, under that news they mention their friends to see this. I'm not sure why they do it.

(Interview 3)

Facebook content can be highly decontextualised in that it appears as short segments of text, an image, a link to digital content or an amalgamation of the above. As noted, this content is often "*catchy*" in nature to meet the needs of the attention economy ([Section 6.2](#)), and so lacks depth of explanation. One can imagine Li Li observing her Irish friend connections'

Facebook communication about the Pope's visit; their content probably comprising short statements, reposted media links, and incorporating the tagging of friend connections, while the feelings behind this content remaining obscure to Li Li who did not have the necessary depth of cultural knowledge of Irish society to understand it. These intra-actions which produced other participants' investment in English on Facebook (Facebook functionality; the attention economy; the norm of sharing; social and linguistic capital, and friend or friend connection subject positions) needed to be entangled with cultural knowledge (cultural capital) for Li Li to have capacities to invest and post herself into being in English on Facebook on the topic of the Pope's visit. Nevertheless, in this instance, she still retained the capacities which produced her observer subject position. As such she sat back, read/watched, and thought, eventually deciding it was best to remain silent, that is, restrict her visibility.

Li Li's decision not to invest in posting herself into being in response to this content did not arise from a lack of confidence in her English or a lack of English competency. Her friend connections did not position her as a non-legitimate English user. Li Li made a choice not to invest in English in this instance based on her self-positioning founded on her self-adjudged lack of cultural knowledge. Her choice not to invest in posting herself into being was a positive one and an act of tact by which she avoided potentially causing offence or making a social gaffe.

Nuan also recounted an instance in which her own level of cultural knowledge made her question her decision to post herself into being. She referred to posting about territorial disputes around the South China Sea. She described having posted about this issue in English on Facebook after watching a television programme on the matter. The aim of her post was to show her support for the Chinese approach to the issue. On reflection, she was unsure as to the wisdom of her original decision to post:

Nuan: ... now I'd be more careful about posting stuff like that, because, uh. After I watched that debate, I know that it's his opinion, like, it should belong to China. But I didn't check if what he say is all

true, and I don't have that time to check because you have to read all, like, kind of documents, to check it, yeah.

(Interview 1)

Looking back, Nuan identified the need to verify her statements prior to posting. She felt the South China Sea dispute was beyond opinion, and required a more fundamental knowledge before publishing on it:

Nuan: Like, for certain stuff you can have your own opinion. But for this kind of stuff, it's like there should be one truth, like, it's either yours or mine. Yeah, so, until I really know what the truth is, I wouldn't say anything about it.

(Interview 1)

If she was not able to satisfy herself that she was able to post with veracity, Nuan felt it was best to remain silent or limit her visibility. Nuan's questioning of her decision to post on the South China Sea dispute did not arise from a lack of cultural knowledge of the host culture, as was the case with Li Li. Nuan's misgivings about having posted arose from her visibility. She had made herself visible through her content, and in this context, she reflected about the need to publish content that was based on facts, as opposed to opinion. She was concerned that she did not have enough cultural capital to post on this issue in the first place.

Just as having cultural capital in the form of cultural knowledge was important for Lijuan's, Elena's and Abda's investment ([Section 7.3.1](#), [Section 7.3.2](#) and [Section 7.3.3](#)); its lack was entangled to produce capacities for disinvestment in Li Li's and Nuan's cases. Their reticence arose from the context of communication. With a multilingual and multicultural audience, Li Li had a sensitivity about saying the wrong thing because of a lack of cultural knowledge on topics beyond her own cultural experience. Nuan questioned having invested in posting on the South China Sea issue because she felt she needed to post herself into being with more than opinion on a dispute close to her heart, that is with facts. In both cases, self-positioning in a context of visibility and the new media ideology of sharing were intra-actions

which produced an unwillingness to post, or regret at having done so, within participants investment assemblages.

Nuan's and Li Li's choices and reflections can be categorised as self-censorship: declining to communicate on a topic (Das and Kramer 2013) ([Section 2.4.1.4](#)). Self-censorship might carry a negative connotation, a feeling of a denial of self-representation. It might be seen as the opposite of taking up the right to speak. However, Li Li's and Nuan's choice to remain silent on Facebook was a positive act of agency. On Facebook, their control over their visibility and spreadibility was shared. Their capacities to control the extent to which they were reproduced (their content was shared) by others (friend connections and algorithmic decision-making processes) were produced within affective flows between sociomaterial intra-actions which formed their investment assemblages. In this context, self-censorship was a positive act by which Li Li and Nuan maintained control over their content (Trottier 2012), and by extension, over their identities.

A further act of control related to participants producing Facebook as a place of argument. This will be explored in the next section.

7.4.2 Positioning of Facebook as place of argument

Participants' experiences of Facebook use gave rise to them engaging with, or producing, certain new media ideologies in relation to the platform. These norms were intra-actions within participants' investment assemblages. One of these was that Facebook was seen as a place of argument. Lijuan and Abda had witnessed this type of activity on the site:

Lijuan: Like, if you post, like, if you comment something, uh, there's always people don't agree with you. And it will start a fight or something like that [laughs]. Is, uh, is predictable.

(Interview 2)

Abda: They do all the time. Argue all the time. ... On on Facebook, it's like a war, you know. If you say something and they don't like it, they going to fight. It's not about I respect your opinion, but I have

another. No no. it's like you're going to open it and [pause] that's what I notice from my reading. People like they're going to kill each other. Why?

(Interview 2)

With Facebook established as an environment in which arguments could easily occur, participants were reticent about posting themselves into being and inadvertently becoming involved in such quarrels. They experienced this norm of Facebook use as an area in which they lacked control.

Control was also one of the factors for Abda's lack of investment in arguments on Facebook. Also important, however, was respect for her friend connections' opinions:

Abda: But their opinion, I respect them. I respect their opinion. Even if I disagree with them, you know, can't say anything else. If I see something I don't like it, I prefer not comment on it. Especially on Facebook.

S: Mm, why's that?

Abda: Maybe to avoid to avoid the reactions on my comments. Or maybe it's something private, more private their opinions. So I respect you it's your opinion, but it's not my business to [pause]

(Interview 1)

Abda's unwillingness to engage in disagreements arose from a number of factors. She wanted to respect the opinions of others. This can be interpreted as Abda emphasising Facebook as a place of relationship maintenance over discussion. She anticipated that engaging in a Facebook discussion would lead to negative comments, and she wanted to avoid this situation occurring. By not engaging in such interactions on the site, she was able to retain control of her Facebook pages and safeguard it as a place of sociality. In addition, it was not Abda's habit to argue with people:

Abda: I don't like actually arguing with someone I don't know them. I mean, ok, I disagree with you, but I don't need to tell you I disagree with you. I don't know you and you don't know me. And even if I do know you, I respect your opinion, that's it. For me it's as simple as that.

(Interview 2)

As with Li Li in relation to genre ([Section 7.2.2.1](#)), having identified engaging in argument as a Facebook norm did not mean Abda had to engage in that norm, herself. By not posting herself into being in this context, she was retaining a subject position as non-argumentative, and so remaining true to herself.

Lijuan was also concerned with retaining control in relation to Facebook discussions. She was not focused on control of a discussion, but of her own emotions. She had also encountered English language Facebook content with which she did not agree. She gave the example of anti-Chinese posts:

Lijuan: It's linked from the media. Sometimes it's not a post, just a link. It's not really against us, but sometimes some language or some words aren't make me feel very comfortable.

(Interview 1)

Lijuan said that she would not comment or react in any way to such content:

Lijuan: No, I just do nothing. I don't want to be a part of [laughs] fight, because a lot of people will comment on that link and there are a lot of opinions. ... Yeah, I can read something like that, but I don't want to be a part of that thing. I don't want to be a part of this discussion, because I know the situation but I can't change anything, so I just ignore that. Uh, because if I get involved in that I will feel like I am really angry. And I don't want myself to be angry for this. So I just ignore it.

(Interview 1)

Lijuan's reticence in relation to engaging in arguments on Facebook arose from a desire to avoid being negatively influenced by them in emotional terms.

These participants' reasons for not posting themselves into being were not entangled with the evaluation of their capital, for example cultural or social capital, nor with their language abilities. As such, it is a misnomer to assign their choice of silence, or invisibility, to a lack of investment in the use of English as perceived to be constructed at the intersection of identity, capital and ideologies (Darvin and Norton 2015) . It is more apt to apply the concept of investment in a way closer to Bourdieu's original intent and in terms of

illusio ([Section 2.2.2](#)). In Facebook spaces, participants' capacities for being read into being arose within affective flows of intra-actions - the platform's functionality; the norms of use, and the actions of third parties (friend connections and algorithmic processes). As a result, to maintain control of their Facebook spaces (Abda), maintain social capital (Abda), engage with Facebook audiences in a personally authentic manner (Abda), maintain Facebook as a space which gave rise to positive emotion (Lijuan), and retain Facebook as a place of fulfilment, participants refrained from engaging in arguments in English.

7.4.3 Chilling effect

As has been shown, a variety of intra-actions were entangled in participants' decisions to post or not to post on Facebook in English, and not all of them were related to Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment as produced at the intersection of capital, ideology and identity. The chilling effect was another such intra-action. The chilling effect, or opting not to post or to limit one's frequency of posting, is impression management enlisted to avoid making a negative impression online (Marder *et al.* 2016a; see [Section 3.5.8](#)).

While Facebook is founded on the new media ideology of sharing ([Section 2.6.2](#)) users need to be careful not share too much. The need to limit one's visibility on Facebook has already been discussed with reference to the attention economy ([Section 3.6.2.3](#)). It is also relevant here, apropos the chilling effect. In Li Li's case it arose from her anxieties about how her content might be received by her audience:

Li Li: ... most people online, they don't care how other people use the language. It's offline behaviour that influence me. They won't comment online directly on someone's Facebook post, but they will comment on it offline while they're chatting with each other. ... I just randomly hear some of my classmates, they comment. They said that someone they post a lot of blah, blah, blah, like, a lot of, almost all their status online. They're like, "Who cares! I don't even like your posts. We're just normal friends. I don't care what happened to you",

like that. I don't know; it strikes me and I keep, it's a small thing, it's only a small thing. He's not talking this to me, but I just happened to hear it and I think it's true. Sometimes you just have to bear in mind that no one cares. And don't post too many things so that it bothered others.

(Interview 3)

Bolton *et al.*'s (2013) research into Generation Y (those born after 1981) individuals' use of SNSs found that they feared a decrease in social capital if they overshared. Li Li also experienced this chilling effect, and became careful to avoid making herself too visible so as to potentially annoy her audience. She did this by restricting the extent to which she posted herself into being on the platform.

Online norms are created by internalising a gaze which guides one's behaviour (Marwick 2012). Li Li's reticence to post arose from such an internalised gaze. What is significant in Li Li's case is that she did not reduce her rate of posting because of a lack of investment in English. As she stated, "*they don't care how other people use the language*". She was not silenced by friend connections on the basis of her English language use. Rather, it was an entanglement of functionality (involved in the production of visibility and persistence), ideology (her desire to avoid the flouting of new media norms by posting too much and becoming annoying (Brandtzæg *et al.* 2010), and the potential to lose some social capital, that was involved in Li Li's choice to restrict her visibility on Facebook.

7.4.4 Right not to be read

Participants were aware of the visibility of Facebook content. While the aim of posting on Facebook was to make themselves visible, participants were also cognisant of the need to maintain their privacy. This was achieved by limiting the type of content with which they posted themselves into being:

Sarah: Ok, so when you write in English, are you aware of that? Are you aware that Facebook may feel private, but actually it's quite an open environment?

Chunhua: Yeah, I know that. It happens in China, it's the same. We have different social networks, but it's the same. If you set your privacy at very high level, but it happens. Something will happen. No privacy. No privacy. So I know it so when I post something, I will avoid some private information, yeah. I just post some emotions, and things That's only about privacy. It's common. It's a habit. On every social network, it's the same. Like in China it's the same. Every country has this. It has no relation on language.

(Interview 1)

Participants' use of Facebook, and social media in general, was not associated with the affordance of privacy, rather the opposite. Chunhua felt that even using privacy settings would not ensure her privacy. The only way to limit an audience's access to certain areas of her life was not to post on them. She had built this view into a new media ideology for herself and had developed a "*habit*" of not posting on personal issues. It was the norm for her to engage in self-censorship on some areas of her life. As Chunhua stated, this norm did not arise from concerns about her ability to post herself into being in English, or her right to do so. It was her need for privacy that gave rise to her opting to not post herself into being with regard to some areas of her life.

Guo also curated his content with the aim of privacy maintenance:

Guo: Like, for the thing I don't want other people to know, I have the right to decide whether other people will know that, because if I don't want people to know that, I have total right to forbid people from knowing that, right?

Sarah: You just don't write it.

Guo: Yeah, so that, that thing I won't post on it, at least someone can read that, someone sitting in New York or in the office, they can read that.

Sarah: Are you thinking about someone in the Facebook office?

Guo: Yeah. So the best way is not posting. Keep that in mind.

(Interview 3)

Significantly, Guo positioned this self-censorship as a right. By refusing to publish on certain areas of his life, or certain of his views, he was maintaining

his right to privacy. An aspect of his investment assemblage was his right not to post himself into being.

Elena felt the same. She saw Facebook as “*an instrument of [pause] is sort of Big Brother*” (Interview One). She had come to realise this surveillance aspect of Facebook from noticing the type of advertisements that surfaced on her pages. Knowledge gained from this observation meant she did not post her “*strong position*” but remained:

Elena: ... in the middle. If I have a strong position is for me I not write on Facebook.

(Interview 1)

It was not only the visibility of content, and with it the potential for surveillance, that impacted participants’ willingness to share certain information about themselves; other of boyd’s (2014) affordances were also at play in the extent to which they posted themselves into being. Nuan, a Chinese participant, was aware of the danger of persistence and searchability of Facebook content:

Nuan: And then this kind of news, like, “Why Chinese Censors Banned Winnie the Pooh” because people, because they find that, like, Winnie the Pooh, like, it’s really similar, these two pictures. And the Chinese government find it offensive to our president. I don’t understand

Sarah: So would you comment on that kind of story on Facebook?

Nuan: No, I won’t comment on it, because, in this part, I will be more, like, consider about my future. Like, when I’m going back to China, maybe, like, I would have the option to work for the government, and then they are doing a background search of me, and then they find, like, what I said on internet about that. Like, even when I was younger, I think that it’s still [pause]

Sarah: Yeah, I understand. So you’re thinking about your future and about what you comment on?

Nuan: Yeah, even in English or Chinese in Weibo, because Weibo, like, a lot of Chinese people tend to avoid commenting on these political issues. But, you will see a lot of, like, YouTube programme, like, there’s a lot of Chinese people comment on political issues, like, in Chinese.

(Interview 1)

Nuan was referring to the banning of a Winnie the Pooh film (Winnie the Pooh is a children's cartoon bear) in China. The banning was due to memes having been shared online which were felt to compare the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, with the bear, and in so doing, mocking the president (Haas 2018).

Nuan was aware of the persistent and searchable aspects of her Facebook content, as well as that of her other social media. She knew her content would remain to be searchable by interested parties in the future. Therefore, how she posted herself into being today may have repercussions in the future. Nuan's choice of action to control this situation was self-censorship, and not to post at all on this contentious topic.

It was not only visibility, persistence and searchability that were involved in a lack of willingness to post on Facebook. Spreadability was also a factor, as Mingmei states:

Sarah: Ok. [referring to Interview One] why do you want to avoid political opinions on Facebook?

Mingmei: Because, you know, the Facebook was forbidden in China because some political issues, so uhm, I'm not very interesting in that issues. So, uh, I don't want others to make use of my words on Facebook. For example, if I post or place my opinions, I don't want somebody to just take up one word, one vocabulary, to represent a Chinese student's political opinions.

Sarah: So you are really careful about your audience. You don't want to be misunderstood. Is that right?

Mingmei: Yeah.

(Interview 2)

Mingmei's fear was that because of spreadability, by posting herself into being on political topics, she risked her words being taken out of context, and being used to represent a group (Chinese students in general) as opposed to only herself. Her reticence with regard to posting on political topics arose

from a desire to control how she represented herself, and how Chinese students were represented.

Facebook affordances gave rise to the distribution of agency across the platform, including across Facebook audiences. As shown here through participants' views in relation to privacy, in the context of visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability, and even surveillance, the capacity to retain control over one's content was not to post it. Such choices did not arise from a lack of investment in English. Rather, as was the case with Hargittai and Marwick's (2016) participants, these were positive acts of privacy-preservation.

7.5 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has focused on participants' decisions to post or not to post on Facebook, and how that related to investment in their use of English on the site. As has previously been discussed, Facebook as place of maintenance and development of social capital in the form of relationships was significant for investment. Facebook was a space to engage in relationships. Examining the intra-actions that produced the subject position of "friend", Darwin and Norton's new model is still relevant. Capital (social and linguistic); ideology (the ubiquity of Facebook for sociality and the new media norm of sharing), and identity (the "friend" subject position itself) were present as intra-actions within participants' investment assemblages.

Nevertheless, for these intra-actions to entangle in participants digitally-mediated Facebook assemblages, they had to be linked via affective flows to Facebook functionality and its affordances. The "friend" subject position was produced, therefore, in coalescence with Facebook's neoliberal capitalist business model which gave rise to this functionality (functionality which was involved in producing capacities for friend connection formation, information sharing, user-data harvesting and commodification). Participants would not have had capacities to invest in English use on Facebook from the subject

position of “friend” without this sociomaterial functionality, and their agency to invest was entangled with it.

Participants’ cultural capital was also important in their investment in English on the site. It coalesced with Facebook functionality which produced capacities to post multimodal content, join designated spaces of shared interest, and create private spaces of communication (Messenger), to position themselves, and be positioned, as individuals with valued expertise. They shared their agency to utilise their capital with the platform, itself. This expertise was also validated by their audience. In this way, participants experienced being read into being, not just as legitimate English language users on the platform, but also as individuals of social and cultural value.

Facebook spaces were not only places in which participants were favourably positioned by others. As demonstrated in Abda’s example, she was also able to position others as legitimate readers of her content because she was able to produce and discuss that content in the private space of Messenger.

Facebook also provided a space of English language use and opportunities to observe the English use of others. Participants’ social capital, Facebook friend connectivity, and the affordances of visibility, spreadability and persistence were joined in affective flows to produce capacities in participants to reposition themselves as “closer” to native English-speakers. With their agency to reposition themselves as such produced in an entanglement of Facebook’s neoliberal capitalist inspired functionality, participants had capacities to read themselves into being, and be read into being by their audiences, as more than language learners, but as legitimate English users.

Significantly, in general, participants’ imagined identities were not involved in investment in English on Facebook. While some valued the site as enabling them to develop informal English language skills which would be of use in the future, the majority of individuals produced Facebook as a time filling activity, and as a space of recreation and informality. They were not able to distally invest in the site as a place of value for language development which would

impact their futures. Its value lay in proximal investment of relationship engagement and maintenance in the present time, again highlighting the importance of social capital as an intra-action within participants' investment assemblages.

Facebook was not a space of unbridled communication. Capacities for visibility produced within affective flows of its functionality; new media norms of sharing and participants' social and linguistic capital sometimes gave rise to a chilling effect. Fears of inadvertently becoming too visible in the disembodied communication context of Facebook in which communication time and space were not shared, and therefore annoying friend connections, produced the capacities for the desire for self-censorship. That is, in this case, the right not to be read. Li Li, for example, limited the amount she posted on the site. In addition, some areas of their lives were not suitable for a Facebook audience. Indeed, in a context of persistence and spreadability, the exercising of such a right was very important for Chinese nationals.

The manner in which participants produced Facebook also had a hindering impact on their decisions to post. Positioning it as a place of argument influenced how individuals used the site. Their desires to maintain the platform as a space of sociality and fulfilment were entangled in producing capacities that limited the extent to which they engaged in arguments on the site. It also impacted the English they posted. They limited their use of slang or polysemous vocabulary, the meanings of which they were not sure of. In a context of visibility and persistence, and not sharing language production and reception space, participants took steps to maintain their social capital by being careful with the language they used so not as to cause offence accidentally or unknowingly.

Classifying the above reasons not to post as a lack of investment is problematic. Participants' silence, or their choice of invisibility or to restrict their visibility, were not produced by a lack of legitimacy to post arising at the intersection of identity, capital and ideology. Participants' reticence to post arose from affective flows of between intra-actions such as visibility,

persistence and spreadability - the affordances produced from the neoliberal capitalist ideologically based functionality of Facebook. Their silence, or choices to restrict the manner in which they made themselves visible, therefore, were positive choices of agency, made to retain control over their Facebook spaces and their online identities, rather than a lack of investment in the use of English on the platform.

Instances of disinvestment were identified. They arose in relation to self-positioning on the basis of the self-evaluation of capital, not due to such positioning by others. For example, viewing herself as lacking cultural capital to post on Dublin Pride and the Pope's visit to Ireland, entangled with the desire to avoid making a social gaffe on Facebook if she did post, produced disinvestment in Li Li.

Language learner, or to be exact, poor language learner subject positions were also involved in the production of disinvestment. In the digitally-mediated Facebook space in which capacities for visibility are entangled with the platform's functionality, participants sometimes feared being positioned as such by others in a context of visibility, persistence and spreadability, Zaria and Lijuan sometimes did not invest in the use of English on Facebook. This disinvestment, which encompassed their own marginalising self-positioning on the basis of how they evaluated their own linguistic capital, arose from a desire to avoid being read into being as a dreaded possible self: a poor English language user or learner.

Chapter 8: Working Hypotheses and Thoughts for the Time Being

8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I rest my ideas on investment in English on Facebook. By rest, I mean that I lay them down, for now. As stated in Chapter Four ([4.7.4](#)), with its emphasis on the potential for multiple realities, the importance of situated knowledge development, and the need to accept that many factors influence the research process, a naturalistic inquiry approach (Guba and Lincoln 1985, 2000) has been adopted in this thesis. This approach comprises a number of assumptions. The concept of the *neutral* observer is challenged (*ibid.*). In addition, knowledge is viewed as subjective in nature; this, in turn, impacts how conclusions are considered and presented.

It is for these reasons that I frame my “conclusions” in terms of “working hypotheses” (Guba 1981; see [4.7.4.2](#)). The use of the word “hypothesis”, with its positivist connotations, belies the deeply situated character of *working hypotheses*. As stated ([4.7.4.2](#)), working hypotheses emphasise the tentative and provisional nature of knowledge formation. They acknowledge that “final thoughts”, or “conclusions” are conditional, awaiting a reader and her/his positionality to take them further into subsequent research processes. In effect, a new reader with contexts, interests and concerns of their own needs to become entangled with working hypotheses for capacities that produce the transferability ([4.7.4.2](#)) of the findings from this research to other settings to arise. I therefore put forward working hypotheses which this reader can judge the usefulness of by drawing comparisons with their own areas of interest.

These working hypotheses are followed by implications my research may have for language teaching and learning. Future research is then suggested, as are my thoughts on how my study contributes to the field of knowledge.

8.2 Working hypotheses

This thesis set out to answer two questions:

To what extent are participants invested in the use of English on Facebook?

And

How does this investment arise?

Answers to both questions require an engagement with the multiplicity, dynamism and complexity of the assemblages that drove participants' investment. While Darwin and Norton's (2015) model of investment was crucial for understanding these assemblages, it was not satisfactory on its own. At every step of the development of understanding, or possibly it is more apt to say, at every twist and turn involved in producing and following the rhizome of understanding, other sociomaterialities displayed their significance. As soon as one focused on an element of investment, for example, capital, not only ideology and identity arose as relevant, but also the functionality and affordances of Facebook use, themselves. Outlining working hypotheses is a case of disentangling the entangled, and placing the result in some linear order. I attempt to do this in this section.

Working hypothesis one

Participants produced Facebook as a space in which they were able to legitimately post themselves into being, and so invest, in English. This legitimacy was not constructed at the intersection of capital evaluation within an ideological context, with resulting legitimate English-user subject position as Darwin and Norton's new model of investment would suggest. Rather, this legitimacy arose within entanglements of a number of intra-actions encompassing Facebook's neoliberal capitalist business model; the site's sharing ideology; its multilingual functionality, participants' forms of capital, and Facebook's ubiquity of use.

Facebook's global success was involved in producing use of the site as a norm for participants. The ubiquity of the platform meant participants already had accounts, or felt they had to sign up to Facebook in order to engage in the social and academic environments of their universities. There were no obstacles to participants establishing a space for themselves on Facebook, because access to the site arose in a context of neoliberal capitalism. In this environment, Facebook gains financially from users' activity on the platform (data-as-capital), resulting in the company facilitating ease of access to the site.

A number of types of capital were crucial for investment in English on Facebook. For instance, social and linguistic capital were significant. These entangled with Facebook connectivity, the site's ubiquity of use and language functionality to produce capacities for participants to amass English-using audiences, and with them, a reason to join, access the site and interact on Facebook. Data-as-capital - which all participants had by dint of being alive, able to use Facebook in a language it supported, or able to use Facebook Messenger's voice function (Elliot and Phom 2021), able to publish and react to content on a digital device - was the "open sesame" of capitals, and, along with the ubiquity of Facebook use, provided access to the site, and so produced it as a legitimate place in which participants could spend time.

Legitimacy of use of Facebook in English was also entangled with participants' production of Facebook as a multilingual space. This arose from the platform's functionality, embedded in its neoliberal capitalist and sharing ideologies, which enabled the use of 111 languages on the site (Omnicores 2021). The coalescence of participants' linguistic capital in the form of their English language proficiency, their social capital in the form of English-using friend connections, and the multilingual aspect of Facebook produced capacities for investment in participants. These individuals positioned Facebook as a legitimate place for them to be, and English as a legitimate language for them to use.

Language functionality was an aggregating affect within participants' investment assemblages, as it gave rise to similar capacities in different participants' assemblages. For example, changing Facebook language settings to English was an act of investment in itself for Elena and Guo. In Areeya's and Abda's experiences, support of multiple languages produced Facebook as a multilingual space in which they had capacities for linguistic permissiveness which legitimised them as users of English.

The capacities that arose in relation to Facebook's language functionality also need to be viewed in relation to the platform's business model. Facebook broadens its accessibility when it can be used in more languages. With increased users sharing their information on the site, the amount of data to be harvested rises, and the company has more opportunities to sell access to this data to third parties. While one can be cynical about this business model and characterise the company as some data-hungry machine, in ideological terms, it produced capacities for participants' investment in English on the platform. They were able to legitimately access and invest in English on Facebook. Even China's ideological stance to Facebook was entangled in the production of capacities for investment. Having to establish and populate their Facebook accounts from scratch upon moving to their host countries, these environments became spaces of legitimate English language use for Chinese nationals, with Chinese reserved, in the main, for their already established Chinese social media accounts.

In terms of the micropolitics of assemblages, we can see that what was beneficial for Facebook was also advantageous for participants' investment. Facebook's abilities to capture user data which were entangled with its ubiquity of use and the number of languages it supported, were also beneficial for participants in that they gave rise to capacities for legitimacy of use of the platform in English - for investment.

Working hypothesis two

Entanglements of sociomaterial intra-actions within Facebook use produced participants' capacities to utilise their capital to post themselves into being in English (invest) with subject positions beyond that of a non-native English-speaker.

On Facebook, participants were able to take up the position of "friend" or "friend connection". These subject positions, which were produced by an entanglement of social capital, Facebook connectivity, the ubiquity of Facebook use, as well as its language functionality, produced investment in a number of ways. Being connected with English language users on Facebook provided opportunities to invest in English in order to maintain these relationships. It also enabled participants to observe other English language users as an audience member. The latter was involved in the production of capacities which enabled a repositioning in some participants away from non-native English-speaker or English language learner, to closer to a native English-speaker.

As "friends" or "friend connections", participants' social capital entangled with Facebook functionality, and gave rise to capacities to receive validation from their audiences. With this validation, which materialised through functionality which afforded the sending of Likes, for example, participants were able to reposition themselves beyond being non-native English language users, and read themselves into being as culturally integrated, as a valued friend, or having an admirable way of life.

Cultural capital was also significant in terms of participants' subject positions in relation to investment. Lijuan's, Elena's and Abda's capacities to take up the *skeptron*, post themselves into being with their experience, and have this cultural capital validated by their audiences' interest and attention were all produced by entanglements of affective flows. These flows comprised intra-actions such as the norm of sharing; participants' cultural, linguistic and social capital, and their English-using audiences. Facebook's neoliberal capitalist-motivated functionality was of particular significance within these

affective flows. The site's multimodality in relation to photo-sharing was entangled in Lijuan's subject position as traveller/knower. Facebook group functionality provided Elena with a dedicated space in which she was able to post herself into being with her expertise in Italian cuisine. Messenger gave Abda, and her friend connections, the ability to carve out a private digital space in which she was able to post at length about her experience as a Muslim woman. In short, participants' agency to invest in English on Facebook with their cultural capital was produced within these entanglements of intra-actions.

Working hypothesis three

Imagined future identities were of little significance within participants' investment assemblages.

In contrast with Norton's work on the relevance of imagined future identities for investment (Norton 2008; Norton and Williams 2012; [see Section 2.3.3](#)), the imagined future identity was not found to have a significant role in participants' investment assemblages. While Shu and Abda recognised the future value of their development of informal English language skills which was occurring with Facebook use, other participants did not. These other individuals did not equate English use on Facebook with the attainment of future imagined identities. I have explained these views with reference to the positioning of Facebook by these participants. They positioned Facebook use as an activity they engaged with when they were either socialising and/or filling time. In the main, participants' investment was proximal, as opposed to distal (Haneda 2005).

Working hypothesis four

Investment in different types of language production arose from participants' attempts to meet the needs of their imagined audience in a context of discrete communication.

Social capital, linguistic capital and Facebook functionality in the form of enabling asynchronous online connection between Facebook users, produced a disembodied audience with which language production time and space was not shared. In order to invest in English language on Facebook, therefore, participants had to imagine their audiences, and read themselves into being in the gaze of these unpredictable audiences. Participants endeavoured to meet the communication needs of these multicultural, multilingual and multi-competent English language users which comprised these audiences, while at the same time striving to maintain relationships, (that is, their social capital) with them.

The complex background of participants' audiences and the disembodied context of communication were intra-actions involved in the production of capacities for different types of investment in English on Facebook. For example, a desire to avoid misunderstandings among friend connections gave rise to capacities in Abda and Mingmei to invest in the publication of easily comprehensible English. In Li Li, the same desire was an intra-action which was involved in giving rise to a focus on clarity, as opposed to simplicity.

Working hypothesis five

The use of Facebook within a discrete context of language production and reception produced different capacities for investment in participants.

Existing in a context of asynchronous online interaction, the Facebook audience was disembodied. As an intra-action within some participants' investment assemblages, not sharing language production and reception space had an alleviating impact. It produced capacities in participants for the reduction of stress levels that were involved in producing Facebook as a space in which it was easier to invest in English use than in a face-to-face context. For other individuals, the same intra-action, disembodied communication, entangled to produce capacities for fear and discomfort and

hindered capacities for investment in English on the site. Here we can see the same intra-action - the disembodied audience - giving rise to different capacities in different participants' assemblages. As such, the disembodied audience needs to be understood in terms of relations of exteriority.

Participants had discrete access to language tools. Such access was incorporated into some participants' spatial repertoires. The use of such tools in relation to the consumption of English language content, produced capacities of enhanced comprehension. This was particularly important in an environment of norms of high context content publication, such as memes, and a lack of ability to ask for explanation of such content. As language collaborators (Blommaert 2010), such facets of spatial repertoires produced capacities for investment in reading English.

Within some participants' investment assemblages, language tools were also collaborators in the production of English on Facebook. They were involved in producing capacities for added confidence which made posting themselves into being in English less anxiety laden for these individuals. Other participants, however, rejected such tools, viewing them as undermining their capacities for impression management.

Working hypothesis six

With an awareness of the norms at play within Facebook interaction, participants were able to avoid negatively positioning themselves on the basis of a lack of reaction from their audiences.

The disembodied audience, which existed in a context of persistence, gave rise to orphan posts for which no reaction was received. It would have been understandable had participants read themselves into being as lacking in linguistic capital on the basis of these posts, but they did not. Instead, they saw such posts as a Facebook norm: a way of being on Facebook that had to be accepted. They also assigned orphan posts to a lack of social, rather than linguistic, capital. With ideology and capital present as intra-actions

within their investment assemblages, participants were able to read themselves into being in a favourable light, despite the existence of orphan posts - which, of course, arose in entanglement with Facebook functionality. As such, these posts did not give rise to disinvestment from English on Facebook. Rather, they entangled with Facebook persistence and visibility to produce participants' capacities to strategically invest in content production, reducing visibility in order to become more noticeable.

Working hypothesis seven

Although audience validation was valued, the anticipation of reactions from Facebook audiences was not a constant prerequisite for investment in English on the site.

Audience validation was not always present within investment assemblages. In some instances, the act of sharing and the ability to make oneself visible to an audience was enough for investment on Facebook. This is where social capital which produced an English-using audience, and the norm of sharing entangled to give rise to capacities to invest, even without the need for online reciprocity.

Working hypothesis eight

Facebook as a business was entangled with other intra-actions which produced capacities for investment in English on the site, as well as investment in multimodal communication (not including the use of English) for an English-using Facebook audience.

The neoliberal capitalist ideology which underpins Facebook's business model is an intra-action which was entangled in all participants' assemblages because it is fundamental to the design decisions made in relation to the infrastructure and functionality of Facebook. For example, intra-actions such as the neoliberal capitalist ideology and the site's sharing ideology coalesced

to produce capacities evident in the social buttons. Without the need to capture users' data to sell on for a profit, which is entangled with the necessity to encourage users to produce and share that data in the first place, there would be less of a requirement for the Like button, emojis, "Check in" or scrolling functionality. The sociomateriality of Facebook was itself entangled within the neoliberal capitalist ideology of the site.

Facebook's multimodality entangled with other intra-actions to give rise to capacities to invest in English without using English at all. Semiotic resources such as Likes, emojis, and images meant participants were able to post themselves into being with no written language. With an English language using audience amassed, again, via the functionality of Facebook entangled with participants' social capital and the norm of Facebook use, these semiotic resources could stand in for English. Once more, Facebook functionality, designed to promote content creation, publication (sharing) and to enable data harvesting, was entangled in participants' investment assemblages.

Neoliberal capitalist and sharing ideologies also entangled with Facebook design and functionality to produce the attention economy, an aggregative affect, which produced capacities in participants to post themselves into being with short, readable content: a genre that some individuals experienced as beneficial in the context of their truncated language repertoires.

Working hypothesis nine

A lack of publication of content in English was not necessarily indicative of a lack of investment in the use of English on Facebook

There were a number of instances in which participants chose not to post themselves into being in English, or via semiotic resources such as Likes and emojis, on Facebook. The manner in which participants produced Facebook as a place of argument, based on their observations of use of the site, impacted how they engaged with the platform. Lacking the desire to

participate in such activities, Abda and Lijuan, chose to restrict their use of the platform. I do not identify this as a lack of investment. Neither Abda nor Lijuan mentioned not having the right to engage in such communication in English on the site. Rather, they had no desire to involve themselves in the activity.

Another reason not to post related to the production of Facebook as a place of relationship maintenance and development. The complexity and diversity of the audiences with which participants were connected made maintaining these relationships complicated. The variations in English language proficiency, as well as the disembodied and discrete nature of asynchronous communication on Facebook were intra-actions which entangled to impact participants' capacities for investment in English. A desire to maintain social capital across digital, cultural and linguistic space - space in which participants felt it was easy to accidentally offend, and thus harm friendships - limited capacities to post. Participants restricted their own opportunities to post themselves into being from a desire to maintain their social capital.

Again, I do not categorise this refusal to post as a lack of investment understood as produced at the intersection of identity, capital and ideology. Participants were not positioned as illegitimate users of English on the basis of the evaluation of their capital. Their desire not to post themselves into being in this instance was caught up in affective flows including the intra-actions of discrete and disembodied online communication. In this context, participants considered misunderstandings as inevitable, and in order to maintain their friendships, decided to be selective over what they posted about. The desire to maintain social capital was also involved in the chilling effect. Within a context in which to share is to be, making oneself too visible was a threat to social capital in that it had the potential to annoy one's audience.

More reasons not to post on Facebook in English were intricately entangled with Facebook's four affordances of visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability as they relate to surveillance. These produced future audiences.

These audiences were a sort of social capital to come, or a social capital that could be lost in the future as a result of a lack of skill in impression management. For some participants, the prospect of a future audience was not particularly influential on their investment. They trusted themselves in the present, and trusted that the content they invested in posting would continue to show them in a positive light in the future.

For other participants, the future audience gave rise to capacities for suspicion and the need for vigilance. Just as this future audience was produced by the coalescences of affordances of persistence and visibility which arise from the functionality of Facebook, participants used the platform's functionality of edit and delete to engage in constant identity curation, and in so doing, use their agency to retain some control over how they were read into being. Others chose self-censorship and restricted the content with which they posted themselves into being.

Surveillance in the future was of particular concern to Chinese nationals who would be returning to that country in which digital surveillance is prevalent (Munro 2018). With participants' agency over the control of their content distributed across the platform and across audiences as a result of these affordances, it was wise to be judicious over the content with which they used to post themselves into being, as there could be future repercussions if such content was at odds with any prevailing ideology.

Ideology and sharing also entangled in reactions to the leakiness of Facebook. In these instances, dependent on the ideology at play, different capacities for investment arose. Leakiness was not a result of an act of participants' use of Facebook, but of their friend connections posting content about them without their knowledge or consent. Participants regained control over their online impression through edit and delete functionality. In Abda's case, however, potential repercussions of Facebook leaks were significant on the basis of persistence, spreadability and visibility. Abda had to take steps to ensure that her unveiled face did not appear on Facebook for ideological reasons. The ideological context of Ireland in which her unveiled face would

be posted was not the same ideological space of her readers in Saudi Arabia.

The three cases described above, future audience, surveillance, and leakiness, all gave rise to reduced capacities for posting on Facebook. Nevertheless, I do not identify them as disinvestment in Darvin and Norton's terms. This is because participants were not deterred from posting on the basis of their own, or others', evaluation of their capital and resultant subject positioning. They did not post on Facebook to avoid future repercussions which could arise because of Facebook affordances: visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability. In the platform's context, in which individuals' capacities for the production of online presence arose from the four above affordances, participants used their agency to attempt to control being posted into being by others: they took up online *silence*.

Working hypothesis ten

Participants' decisions not to invest in English on Facebook were related to self-positioning in a context of self-evaluated lack of capital and desire to maintain existing capital within a communicative context of visibility, persistence and spreadability which is produced by Facebook functionality.

As shown, the forms of capital to which participants had access were clearly important intra-actions within their investment assemblages. At the same time, however, they were entangled in other affective flows of intra-actions which produced capacities that hindered investment. Lacking the cultural capital within a context of discrete language production space made Li Li reticent about investing in using English on high context cultural topics in Ireland. Li Li evaluated her cultural capital, found it lacking, and decided not to invest in English on Facebook at that time. Other intra-actions which were significant within her disinvestment assemblage were Facebook's functionality and resultant affordances. In a context of visibility, persistence and spreadability, before an audience comprising one's social capital, Li Li's

self-censorship, her reluctance to say the wrong thing, is understandable. In this case, as in the case of Nuan and her reactions to the South China Sea dispute, self-censorship, or opting for reduced visibility through disinvestment, was seen to be appropriate, and the less risky option.

A lack of investment was also related to the subject position of language learner. Affordances of visibility and persistence raised potential repercussions for participants based on their self-evaluated lack of linguistic capital. Here, investment can be seen to have been entangled with participants' imagined identities and their desires to avoid being read into being in terms of dreaded possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986): as a poor English learner, or as someone who is making a fool of oneself. Capacities which produced such a self-marginalising subject position arose from the entanglement of participants' low evaluation of their linguistic capital before the gaze of an imagined audience.

Working hypothesis eleven

The overarching working hypothesis that this thesis presents, and which is illustrated by the previous ten working hypotheses, is that Darvin and Norton's model of investment needed to be expanded to take into consideration the importance of the sociomateriality of Facebook use, that is, its functionality and resulting affordances (visibility, persistence, spreadability and searchability) alongside identity, capital and ideology in order to understand participants' investment assemblages.

Abda's experience of investment in reading an article about a Harvard University student provides a useful vignette which captures many aspects of this sociomaterial approach to investment.

Abda's investment in the article was produced by a complex coalescence of sociomaterial intra-actions. These comprised the neoliberal capitalist foundations of Facebook the business; the design of its various functionalities that support this business ethic – friend connection functionality; multiple

languages supported; translation functionality; social buttons, as well as functionality with which Facebook can harvest and commodify Abda's user-data (her data-as-capital). Other intra-actions within Abda's investment assemblage more directly relate to Darvin and Norton's model of investment: her social and linguistic capital (producing capacities for use of English as a lingua franca on the site); the norm (ideology) of sharing and her friend connection subject position. With intra-actions of persistence, visibility and spreadability produced by digitally-mediated, disembodied and asynchronous communication, Abda's investment assemblage produced her capacities to access and engage with the article in an environment of control.

The entanglement of these intra-actions produced capacities for an instance of investment when Abda was able to engage with the article, not as an English language learner or as a non-native speaker, but in an emotional manner which enabled her to experience her English language subjectivity in a new way. This experience was clearly fulfilling for Abda, as she stated:

*Abda: Yeah, I really enjoyed it. And maybe, maybe if I read it today once, maybe I'm going to come back to it tomorrow and I'm going to read it again. You know, it takes time in me, to, to, I don't know how to say it, but I **really** want to to enjoy this post and these words.*

(Interview 3)

Abda's description of her own investment in terms of the enjoyment engagement with the article gave her encapsulates Bourdieu's (1984) original meaning of investment as the search for fulfilment.

Implications of the working hypotheses are set out in the next section.

8.3 Implications for language teaching and learning

These working hypotheses may have implications within second language acquisition, depending on their relevance beyond the context of this research. First, the manner in which participants in this research produced Facebook as a place of relationship development and maintenance, and, in

general, did not associate it with the development of future imagined identities should be taken into consideration. Teachers or course developers may consider incorporating Facebook use into their classes or curricula. Yet, my working hypotheses suggest that it might be judicious to leave the utilisation of Facebook to the digital wilds and allow students to engage with the site for their own purposes beyond the classroom. In this way, Facebook can remain a place of social and emotional fulfilment for them, rather than appropriating its use in an academic setting.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that students' Facebook use should be ignored, nor its potential for investment and resultant target language use. It is clear that the site offers opportunities for investment, but these opportunities are complex. Norton Pierce (1995) called for students to develop a critical awareness of how their right to speak was impacted by power relations in which they were situated (Section [2.3.2.4](#)). This would take the form of a communicative competence (Norton Pierce 1995). My own working hypotheses also imply that target language users' investment in Facebook as a place of legitimate target language use could be enhanced by their development of communicative competence relevant to the use of the site. I describe what this communicative competence might comprise, below.

Target language users need to be aware of how to utilise Facebook as a place in which they can positively position themselves as more than non-native language users. With the multimodality of the site at their control, target language users can share different aspects of themselves – their lives, their interests, their backgrounds. They can use their agency and the functionality of the site to curate an impression of themselves. For example, they can share photographs of places visited and by utilising Check in functionality. They can also share images of the products of their hobbies, or post links to content of interest to them. Dependent on their level of language proficiency, target language users also have the option of joining Facebook groups. In these spaces they can share their interests with other English language users, and potentially be validated for their cultural capital.

With an understanding of how individuals are produced as Facebook users within the entanglement of functionality and affordances of the site's use, as well as its business model, target language users could be able to realistically interpret the reactions they receive on Facebook. If they develop a communicative competence that enables them to recognise the norms of Facebook use, and how they and their audiences are positioned by these norms, individuals can realistically evaluate their language use on the site. For example, rather than viewing orphan posts as a lack of validation of their English proficiency, they understand that such posts are a norm of Facebook interaction, and as such, to be expected. With such knowledge, they can continue to position themselves as legitimate users of the site.

This competence also needs to comprise individual's knowledge of when not to post. This knowledge can be used in order to make oneself more noticeable to friend connections. It can also be put into practice when choosing what content to post in order to avoid unwanted repercussions in the present and the future. Such communicative competence can allow target language users to retain control of their online identities in the present and future, in the context of complex and unpredictable, disembodied, and linguistically and culturally diverse audiences. Klimanova and Dembovskaya (2013) suggest target language users need to be "digitally wise" (p. 70) to effectively utilise the opportunities online communication has to offer. I would expand upon this to add that this digital wisdom also requires knowing when not to take up these opportunities.

Finally, such communicative competence can also encompass the neoliberal capitalist underpinnings of Facebook and the foundation of its revenue streams. With this knowledge, target language users can choose whether to use the site or not, or, how extensively to utilise it (cf. Darwin and Norton 2016b).

8.4 Future research

There are a variety of areas of future research that can develop the ideas laid out in this thesis. I have focused on Facebook, but one only has to look at the internet to be aware of the fluctuations in this platform's popularity (for example, see Chaffey 2021). New SNSs are constantly being developed; for example, TikTok is currently in favour and being widely used. All SNSs vary in their functionality, and as such, it stands to reason that the investment assemblages that might arise in relation to the use of these site would vary. Research that examines different SNSs, their varying functionalities, affordances and norms, and investigates how they gives rise to investment would be of great interest, and be relevant to target language users of such SNSs and their teachers.

Another piece of future research which I feel would be of great value would take up my own original aims for my doctoral research. Minority language learners and users are utilising SNSs just as are majority language users. Indeed, SNSs are important for such languages as they afford access to speakers who might be distributed across geographical locations. Research into the manner in which such language learners are able to invest in their target language on Facebook or other SNSs would be beneficial to language planners, language teachers and language learners. It would deepen the understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of the application of such spaces in relation to the contexts of minority languages, which often lack the linguistic and social capital of majority languages.

Another potentially fruitful area of research would focus on investment in SNS use in relation to formal language learning. My own research has focused on informal, digitally wild, language development. While some participants were language students at the time of research, their Facebook use was not integrated into a classroom context. I am not suggesting research that attempts to bring Facebook into the classroom as in setting up a Facebook group for teachers and students to share. Rather, I am suggesting research that focuses on investigations within the classroom of

students' social media use outside the classroom, what they learn from it, who they can be on it, and how they are empowered or disempowered through the use of it. Such action-based research would not only broaden educators and researchers' understanding of the language learners use of social media, but would also deepen the understanding of the participants' involved.

8.5 Contribution to knowledge

This research contributes to knowledge across second language acquisition and digital education. My findings are relevant not only to researchers, but to teachers and second language users/learners themselves. With a greater understanding of how investment in target language use on SNSs can occur or be hindered, learning and teaching can be informed. In addition, as Darwin and Norton (2016a, p. 23) state, with the movement of target language use into online spaces, there is a need to meet the challenge of producing "new pedagogies, theories and policies" which relate to this area. Contributing to an understanding of second language use on Facebook, as this thesis does, will help inform any such decisions.

In addition, by taking Darwin and Norton's model of investment and using it in a posthumanist context, I have produced a new theoretical framework through which investment on SNSs can be viewed. This framework requires that investment in target language use on SNSs needs to be understood in terms of assemblages. These assemblages will comprise entanglements of intra-actions which produce capacities for investment or disinvestment. With the sociomaterial brought into an understanding of investment, not only identity, capital and ideology need to be attended to when investigating the extent to which target language users are able to post themselves into being, but also the functionality and affordances of the particular SNS or SNSs under consideration. Such a framework, I believe, will help broaden our

understanding of the capacities that produce or hinder target language users' ability to take up the right to post on SNSs.

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Appendix 1: Participant Descriptions

Abda

Abda was in the final stages of her master's degree in Ireland. From Saudi Arabia, she was distinctive from other participants in terms of her love of English which had begun in her childhood when she first heard the language on television.

Abda had originally joined Facebook when in Saudi Arabia, but closed her account while still at home. On arriving in Ireland, she joined Facebook again because of its widespread use among her peers at a language school where she was studying. She maintained this account while at university, again, due to its widespread use, her desire to maintain friendships and build new ones, as well as her university's utilisation of Facebook for groupwork. She accessed the platform approximately three or four times a week. She had a multilingual and multicultural audience comprising English, Chinese, Korean and Arabic speakers. At the same time, she also used Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter and BBM, a social media platform popular in Saudi Arabia.

Abda's Facebook audience comprised individuals from varying areas and stages of her life, such as new friends made in Ireland, and friends and family in Saudi Arabia. Her Facebook language settings were calibrated to English, but she posted in both English and Arabic. Abda's use of her Facebook page was mainly focused on reading content in English; however, she regularly communicated via Messenger in English.

Privacy was important to Abda, and as a result, she was careful as to how she added friend connections, preferring to meet people face-to-face before friending them.

As with some other participants, Abda completed her university studies during the interview period.

Areeya

Areeya was a master's student at a UK university. From Thailand, English was particularly important to her in her host environment due to a lack of other Thai speakers, as well as for university success and future career prospects. Prior to commencing her studies, Areeya had worked in an English language context. She hoped that her master's would enhance her future employment prospects when she returned to Thailand.

In common with Abda, Areeya arrived in the UK with an established Facebook account, populated with friends and family from within and beyond Thailand. Her account, therefore, was a multilingual and multicultural space. Due to its popularity in Thailand, Facebook was Areeya's main SNSs, but she also utilized "Line" a SNS used widely in Thailand, Taiwan and Japan. On Facebook, she used both English and Thai to post short, "catchy" (Interview Two) multimodal content.

Areeya employed Facebook for a variety of reasons: to maintain relationships and develop new ones; to navigate life in her host country; for her MA studies, as well as for reading the news and subscribing to Facebook groups. She accessed her account daily, posted mainly in Thai, but in English approximately twice a week. She had a multilingual and multicultural audience. Her language on Facebook was set to English.

Chunhua

Chunhua had travelled from China to Ireland to study for a master's degree. Our interviews spanned the final stages of this study and her graduation. English was important to Chunhua for her job prospects in China, for travel, and for communicating with people in Ireland.

The need to be on Facebook was Chunhua's impetus for joining the SNSs when she arrived in Ireland. She used it to communicate with friends made in the country, and for university work. While Chunhua accessed Facebook regularly, on a daily basis, to consume English language content, she posted

in English far less regularly. Her English content was mainly posted in reaction to friend connections' content, as opposed to instigating a post.

WeChat was Chunhua's preferred SNS, and she was a prolific user of it. She did not post copious amounts on Facebook, but when she did, her content made use of visuals – images and emojis. Facebook was a place for her to post content she thought her foreign friend connections would be interested in, while WeChat was where she shared her “life” (Interview One) with her close friends, in Chinese.

Originally Chunhua had set her Facebook language to English. However, on finding this type of access inconvenient, she changed her language settings to Chinese.

Elena

Elena had moved to Ireland from Italy for family reasons. She was actively seeking employment in her former professional capacity in Ireland, but was finding her English language proficiency was preventing her from gaining work. When I met Elena, she was studying English in a variety of ways, including attending the community centre where I worked as a volunteer teacher. She was committed to developing her English and started work in Ireland.

Elena had a fully established Facebook account prior to arriving in Ireland. Her contacts comprised family and friends in Italy, as well as new connections formed in Ireland. She found Facebook to be a good place to build relationships formed offline. In line with her multilingual and multicultural audience, Elena posted in Italian and English, sometimes bilingually to maximise her content's visibility.

Elena was a member of a cookery group. This group was a source of meaningful English language content and a place where she was able to share her cultural knowledge of Italian cuisine. On her personal Facebook pages, Elena posted “politically correct” (Interview Two) content to avoid

potential misunderstandings before her multicultural and multilingual audience. She also published copious photos of her surroundings, making use of English and Italian hashtags to link them to her Instagram account.

As with Sofia, Elena's living circumstances changed during the course of the interviews. Between Interview Two and Interview Three she returned to Italy. Her Facebook use reflected this movement, with significantly more Italian content being posted there by Elena and her Facebook friend connections. Despite this, Elena retained her Facebook architecture as being displayed in English in order to maintain contact with the language.

Guo

Guo's first two interviews were conducted when he was on work placement as part of his master's degree. By the time of his third interview, he was back at his Irish university, completing his studies. From China, Guo had successfully formed friendships with other students of a variety of nationalities, as well as with his work colleagues, many of whom were his friend connections on Facebook. He aimed to remain in Ireland after graduation, planning to return to China after working for a number of years abroad.

Guo needed English for his current work, for his studies, as well as to socialise. He also commented on the need for English considering the expansion of China's Belt and Road Initiative by which China is investing in the development of overseas infrastructure such as roads and bridges. He was very enthusiastic about English and was a confident speaker.

Humorous and light-hearted content comprised the majority of Guo's Facebook posts. Using his linguistic and cultural knowledge, Guo was able to engage in humorous banter on the platform with his multilingual and multicultural friend connections. He mainly posted in English, but would reply in Chinese if he was addressed in that language.

In general, Guo's content featured some form of image and a piece of short text. He was not a "fan of pure words" (Interview Two) and made extensive use of Facebook's multimodal functionality to express himself. His Facebook architecture was displayed in English in order to normalise the use of that language. Guo was mindful of the need to maintain his privacy, and posted and added friends on Facebook accordingly.

Lan

Lan, a young Chinese woman, was in the initial stages of her master's at a university in the UK when I first interviewed her. Coming from China, she did not have a Facebook account prior to her arrival in the UK. Her reason for setting up an account was university-driven: her residence assistant had recommended she join Facebook to access a hall of residence page. She also had to use Facebook Messenger when collaborating on coursework.

At the time of our first interview, Lan was a new Facebook user. As such, she had few friend connections, and these were mainly Chinese speakers whom she had met on her course. At this time, Lan's use of the platform was limited to accessing information related to the university, and staying abreast of what her friends were doing. She accessed Facebook between once and two or three times a week. However, Lan's use of Facebook developed over the course of the interviews. She moved from reading English on Facebook (Interview One) to posting (a little) in English (Interview Three) on account of having more English-using friend connections with whom to communicate.

Lan's Facebook settings were in English, and her privacy settings ensured that only her friend connections could view her content.

Li Li

Li Li and Mingmei, both Chinese students, were the first participants to be interviewed. Li Li was distinct in her use of Facebook in that she would post

relatively long stretches of text in order to make herself visible to her audience. She wanted to share her linguistic capital and her ideas with friend connections.

Li Li was in the final stages of her master's degree at an Irish university at the time of our interviews. She had joined Facebook on arriving in Ireland as a way to meet new people and consolidate existing university friendships. She also felt she had to join Facebook as it was utilised by her university for groupwork.

In the main, Li Li posted for a non-Chinese speaking audience, although she did occasionally post in Chinese. As was the case with other Chinese participants, Li Li had a WeChat account where she contacted family and friends in China.

English played a large role Li Li's future: her aim was to secure employment in Ireland prior to returning to China. When back in China, she envisaged using English in her work, and for travel. In order to embed herself in English, her Facebook settings were in that language.

Accessing the site on a daily basis, Li Li was in regular contact with her multilingual audience comprising Vietnamese, Italian, German, Arabic, Finnish and English-speakers.

Lijuan

Lijuan, a Chinese woman, was another masters student in her final year of study at an Irish university. She lived off-campus, with non-Chinese speakers, making English an important part of her daily life, alongside its use in her studies. English was also significant for her future career prospects in China.

As with other Chinese participants, Lijuan joined Facebook in Ireland on the basis of its widespread use, including for university groupwork, and its potential to help her form friendships. She accessed her account between

two and three times a week. She was careful how she added friend connections, preferring to meet people face-to-face prior to including them in her friends list. She used Chinese and English on Facebook due to the multilingual and multicultural composition of her friends.

Lijuan's main use of Facebook was for reading and observing her friend connections' content. When she did post, it was to share her feelings with her multilingual audience. Her main social media use was focused on WeChat on account of her having more close friends on that SNS. Lijuan's Facebook content comprised short texts and images. Her Facebook architecture was displayed in English in order to normalise use of the language.

Mingmei

Mingmei was in the final year of her master's degree in at an Irish university at the time of interview. Her outlook on English was very much instrumental; she saw it as a tool to communicate with "foreigners" (Interview Two) and as a means to boost her employment opportunities when back in China. Mingmei stated that she preferred to use Chinese, but if that was not possible, she would use English for communication.

As with other Chinese participants, Mingmei arrived in her host country with an established WeChat account. This was her preferred SNS of use as it afforded her access to friends from, and in, China. She had opened a Facebook account on arrival in Ireland due to the site's ubiquity and the need to utilise it for university coursework. She had Chinese and non-Chinese speaking friend connections linked to her account, and therefore posted in Chinese and English on Facebook. She was careful how she added friend connections, only accepting friend requests from those she had met offline.

Accessing Facebook to post or to check up on friends' activities, Mingmei posted in English only when she had something to say. Her reasons for using Facebook were sharing-focused, for example, she wanted to show her "vivid life" (Interview Two) by posting images of her travels. She also used the

platform to educate her friends about Chinese life and China in general. Posting in English and Chinese, most of her English posts comprised an image and a short piece of text beneath; sometimes she posted an image only. She stated that she also used Facebook to stay abreast of what her friends were doing, but rarely replied to their posts at length in English. She did, however, use emojis and Likes to show her interest in friends Facebook content.

Mingmei's most substantial use of Facebook was via Messenger for university groupwork. She was a member of the university accommodation Facebook group, and followed some other Facebook pages.

Nuan

Nuan was one of a number of participants who was studying at a university in Ireland during interview. Unlike other student participants, she was an undergraduate in her final year of study. She was part of an exchange programme between a Chinese and an Irish university, and was therefore completing her degree in Ireland. She felt developing her English skills would help her gain employment in China.

Nuan had opened her Facebook account when she arrived in Ireland from China to study at a language school. She maintained the account throughout her university course as a way of maintaining relationships made at her language school and building new social contacts at university. She also used Messenger for university groupwork. Her friend connections comprised a multilingual and multicultural audience, including some Chinese speakers.

Nuan's Facebook use was information-led, and was generally limited to reading others' content rather than posting her own. When she did post, it was with multimodal content: image plus text. Another important use of Facebook for Nuan was relationship maintenance. She would post birthday wishes, or "like" content that was posted by close friends. Her audience comprised Chinese, Arabic, Korean, Spanish and English native speakers.

Nuan positioned Facebook as a place of English language use: a place to curate one's "exciting" (Interview Two) life. It was a peripheral space which she accessed for entertainment and to fill time. Her WeChat account, in contrast, was considered a Chinese language space, in which she was able to share her deeper feelings with her close Chinese friends.

Shu

Shu was one of three UK-based master's students who agreed to be interviewed for this research. Unfortunately, she was only interviewed once, having disengaged from the research process.

From China, Shu had enrolled in her master's to further her career. Her reasons for establishing her Facebook account while in the UK were based on its widespread use, as well as her inability to access Chinese social media platforms in her hall of residence. Shu used a variety of SNSs, including WeChat, QQ, and Instagram. She differentiated between social media platforms on the basis of closeness of ties and language: WeChat was used for Chinese connections, while Facebook was viewed as a place for "foreign friends" (Interview One). Unlike other Chinese participants, Shu's Facebook friend connections comprised mainly non-Chinese speakers.

As a new Facebook user, and new to the UK, Shu had published little English content; however, she accessed Facebook on a daily basis in order to check friends' updates and gain access to university accommodation news. She was interested in exposure to informal English language use of Facebook, and invested in its development in order to "have better communication with" English-speakers (Interview One).

Sofia

Sofia had moved to Ireland from Italy a few months prior to our first interview. Originally from Argentina, she used Spanish, Italian and English on her

Facebook account. In common with other non-Chinese participants, Sofia had opened her Facebook account prior to arriving in Ireland, and it was already populated with family and friend connections made in her previous countries of residence. She used Facebook to maintain these relationships, to build new ones, and for the purposes of gaining employment.

Sofia was actively learning English at the time of her first two interviews. She was studying in a language school, as well as studying with me at a community centre in Dublin. Her aim was to secure employment in her area of expertise as a result of her enhanced English proficiency. English was also important to her as she planned to stay in Ireland, and she hoped to build social contacts through the language.

Sofia was a regular Facebook user in Spanish and Italian. While she sometimes posted in English, her engagement with the language was mainly reserved for reading local news articles and English-speaking friends' content. She used Messenger for more private communication in all languages.

Lacking in confidence in her English, Sofia made strategic use of online language tools such as Google Translate and Facebook's translation function, as well as images and emojis, to support her English use on the site.

Sofia's circumstances changed during the course of our interviews. Between interview two and three she gained employment in an Italian-speaking environment. Her Facebook content also shifted to reflect this shift in language use.

Zaria

Zaria was also a member of a voluntary English class I taught once a week in Dublin. Originally from Morocco, she had lived in Spain prior to coming to live in Ireland. Zaria speaks Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, Spanish, French and English, and posted in all languages on her Facebook pages, depending

on the native language of her interlocutors. Zaria worked in the catering industry for the duration of our interview schedule. She was also attending a variety of language classes, and studying English at home in order to broaden her employment prospects in Ireland.

Zaria was an enthusiastic Facebook user, utilising the platform to maintain contact with family and friends in Spain, Morocco and Ireland. Her Facebook account was already established when she came to Ireland, and prior to her use of English on the site. Facebook was an important part of Zaria's life, enabling her to maintain contact with family and friends abroad. She accessed the platform on a daily basis on her phone, and was an avid reader of Facebook content, but rarely posted in English. Indeed, she posted on Facebook sporadically, sometimes posting a lot, and at other times, posting very little. Her English language content was mainly reserved for commenting on content. She very rarely used Facebook Messenger in English.

Having had her Facebook account hacked, she was cautious how she added contacts to her "Friends' list", carefully scanning prospective contacts' Facebook content for anomalies. Of her Facebook friends, she stated she had approximately five native English-speakers, but many more non-native English-speakers.

English, French, Spanish and Arabic were all highly visible on Zaria's Facebook account. She had a multilingual audience including Chinese, English, Spanish, French and Arabic speakers. Her Facebook language settings were not calibrated to display the architecture in English.

Appendix 2: Online Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Pre-interview questionnaire questions

This is a copy of the questions that comprised my online pre-interview questionnaire.

1, Have you read the Participant Information Sheet dated March 2017 for this research project?

- Yes
- No

(If answer was “Yes” the questionnaire skipped to question 2. If the answer was “No”, the participant was presented with the disqualification thank you message “A” and exited the questionnaire.)

2, Have you read the “Online Questionnaire: Informed Consent Form”?

- Yes
- No

(If answer was “Yes” the questionnaire skipped to question 3. If the answer was “No”, the participant was presented with the disqualification thank you message “B” and exited the questionnaire.)

3, Do you give your consent for your data to be used in this research project as described in the “Online Questionnaire: Informed Consent Form”?

- Yes
- No

(If answer was “Yes” the questionnaire skipped to question 4. If the answer was “No”, the participant was presented with the disqualification thank you message “C” and exited the questionnaire.)

4, Please type your full name and contact information:

5, Are you eighteen or over?

- Yes
- No

(If answer was “Yes” the questionnaire skipped to question 6. If the answer was “No”, the participant was presented with the disqualification thank you message “D” and exited the questionnaire.)

6, What is your English language level?

- beginner
- pre-intermediate
- intermediate
- upper-intermediate
- advanced

(If answer was upper-intermediate or advanced, the questionnaire skipped to question 7. If beginner, pre-intermediate or intermediate, the participant was presented with the disqualification thank you message “E” and exited the questionnaire.)

7, What languages do you speak? Please list here:

8, How long have you had a Facebook account?

- less than one year
- 1-3 years
- More than 3 years

9, How often do you access your Facebook account?

- Daily
- About three times a week
- Weekly
- More than once a week
- Monthly
- Less frequently than monthly
- Other

10, Who are your Facebook friends? For example, your family, your old friends, your work colleagues? Please list here:

11, What type of engagement do you have on Facebook in English?

- I read, make posts and make comments
- I read and make comments, but I do not make my own original posts
- I only read material on Facebook
- Other

12, How often do you post in English on Facebook?

- Daily
- About three times a week
- Weekly
- More than once a week
- Monthly
- Less frequently than monthly
- I never post in English on Facebook
- Other

13, Do you belong to any Facebook groups in which you use (read or write) English?

- Yes
- No

(If answer was “Yes”, the questionnaire continued to question 12. If answer was “No”, skipped to question 14)

14, How often do you access these groups?

- Daily
- About three times a week
- Weekly
- More than once a week
- Monthly
- Less frequently than monthly
- I never post in English on Facebook
- Other

15, What type of engagement do you have in English in these groups?

- I read, make posts and make comments
- I read and make comments, but I do not make my own original posts
- I only read material on posted by other people in the group
- Other

16, Which category represents your age:

- Between 18 and 25
- Between 26 and 35
- Between 36 and 45
- Between 46 and 55
- Between 56 and 65
- Over 65

17, What is your nationality?

18, Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions.

Would you like to be involved in online interviews? You can reconsider your involvement in this stage of this research at any time.

- Yes
- No

Thank you message.

“Thank you for taking time to complete this online questionnaire. If you have any questions, please contact me, Sarah Treloar, at _____.”

Disqualification thank you message A: “Thank you for your interest in my research. Unfortunately, we cannot continue with the questionnaire on the basis of your answer to question one.

Thank you again.

Sarah Treloar”

Disqualification thank you message B: “Thank you for your interest in my research. Unfortunately, we cannot continue with the questionnaire on the basis of your answer to question to question two.

Thank you again.

Sarah Treloar”

Disqualification thank you message C: "Thank you for your interest in my research. Unfortunately, we cannot continue with the questionnaire on the basis of your answer to question to question three.

Thank you again.

Sarah Treloar"

Disqualification thank you message D: "Thank you for your interest in my research. Unfortunately, we cannot continue with the questionnaire on the basis of your answer to question to question four.

Thank you again.

Sarah Treloar"

Disqualification thank you message E: "Thank you for your interest in my research. Unfortunately, we cannot continue with the questionnaire on the basis of your answer to question to question six.

Thank you again.

Sarah Treloar"

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

Interview questions

This appendix comprises the interview questions asked during face-to-face and online interviews. A selection of these questions, not all them, were asked of participants. Questions were not necessarily posed in the order given here.

INTERVIEW 1

Age

Language learning history

Social media used, including social media used in other languages

Other ways of using English now

How long in Ireland

English language environment use offline and online

Facebook settings in English or L1?

Privacy settings on Facebook

Do you use the friends list to organise who sees what on Facebook?

How will you use English in the future?

Why did you join Facebook?

Why are you learning language English?

Do you use different social media for different purposes? People?

Do you use different parts of Facebook - e.g. Messenger – for different purposes and people?

How often do you access Facebook: in your L1? In English?

How often do you read it?

How often do you post, comment etc?

Why do you access Facebook?

How do you access Facebook? Phone? Tablet? Computer?

How many Facebook friends do you have?

What are their language backgrounds?

How do you collect these friends?

What do you use Facebook for? (e.g. building social network, gaining local info?)

How do you use Facebook? Just for fun? To communicate important content?

What are the language backgrounds of your Facebook friends?

Do you post and run or think carefully about what you are posting?

Why did you choose that image for your profile image?

Have you joined any English-using Facebook groups?

Do you post in English on the group(s)?

Identity

Online Identity

What things do you use to build up a picture of people on Facebook?

How do you think your Facebook friends build an impression of you?

Imagined identity (present) – validation in relation to English language content

How do you feel when someone shares your content?

How do you feel when someone comments positively on your content?

How do you feel when someone 'likes' your content?

How do you feel when someone reacts negatively to your content?

How do you feel about orphan posts?

What kind of personality do you want to express on Facebook in English?

How do you achieve this?

Ideology

Why did you join Facebook?

Were you happy to join Facebook?

Audience: Ideology/identity and agency

When you post online, who are you communicating with? Yourself? Others?

Particular people? All of the above?

What are your expectations of your Facebook friends?

Are there limits to what you would write about/link to on your Facebook pages/ on the Facebook group? What gives rise to this belief?

Is Facebook use a performance?

When someone posts a comment on your post, do you feel you have to respond?

Transnational spaces: links to Audience

How does having an audience of people from different countries and who speak different languages affect your view of the errors you may make?

How does an audience of people from different countries and who speak different languages affect what you communicate about?

How does an audience of people from different countries and who speak different languages affect what you post or comment on?

INTERVIEW 2

Has anything happened on Facebook or about your use of Facebook, that has influenced how you use English on the site?

Identity

Imagined identity (present)

How do you see yourself as: as bilingual? As an X speaker who uses English as a tool? Other?

Online Identity

What type of identity do you want to show by using Facebook?

Imagined identity (future)

How do you think being able to English more effectively will affect your life?

Does using Facebook in English help you achieve this?

Are there any Facebook friends who inspire you in your language development?

Imagined future identity: Habitus

How do you learn to communicate on Facebook in English?

What role does observation play in your English language use on Facebook?

Capital:

What compels you to write a post or make a comment?

What strengths do you pull upon when using language in the group?

Or

What kind of capital do you use on Facebook? (E.g. your language ability, your photographs)

How do you know these are strengths?

Does your interaction on Facebook in English give you confidence to use English offline or elsewhere on social media?

Have there been any times when you wanted to post something, but you decided not to? What were your reasons for this?

Would you 'like' in such an instance?

What interaction did you do at that time? (E.g., 'like' or post an emoji?)

Do you feel you have the right to post Facebook?

Are there any boundaries relevant to where you post in English or like in English? E.g. if someone is tagged, and it is an English post, would you interact with that?

Is it ok to comment on a post that is written in a language you don't speak?

Do you feel more comfortable performing particular types of interaction on Facebook? (E.g., are you more comfortable 'liking' than commenting?)

Does your audience – non-native English-speakers or native English-speakers - make a difference to your feelings of comfort?

Do you ever think that people might read what you write today in the future?

Social capital

Are there any 'friends' that you particularly follow? (E.g., you like to read their posts and comments and look at their linked content.)

How does what these people post/do online help your language development?

Do you ever compare the number of 'likes' you get with others? How does that affect your willingness to continue to use English on Facebook?

Do you judge people by the number of friends they have?

How do you feel if someone gets more 'likes' than you?

Do you think people judge you by what you post on Facebook?

On the number of Facebook friends you have?

Capital: Language Development on Facebook

Do you post short or long posts/comments?

Do you spend a long time composing a post or comment?

Is it easier to notice new vocabulary on Facebook than in a book or when hearing it?

How would you characterize English language development on Facebook?

Do you expect an audience to forgive you language errors?

How would you feel if someone corrected an error on Facebook?

When people communicate with you in English on Facebook, how does that affect how you feel as an English language user?

Is there a difference between how you feel depending on if it's a non-native English-speaker or a native English-speaker?

Is it more important to write accurate English or to get your message across, no matter what the language is like?

Are you more concerned with how a native English-speaker or a non-native English-speaker will view your English? Or is there no difference?

Do you compare your English language ability with that of other non-native English-speakers and/or native English-speakers on Facebook?

Is the type of English used on Facebook of use to you for your English language needs now and in the future?

Audience

Do you feel you belong to a community by being on Facebook?

Facebook content comes with a gift tag- it comes from someone who is a 'friend'.

Does this contextualise it?

Does it help with remembering vocabulary?

Are you more interested in reading content that you are tagged in compared with content that is just posted to the whole audience?

How do you decide which English posts to read?

Transnational spaces: Links to Audience

Do you pay more or less, or the same, attention to feedback from non-native English-speakers as to native English-speaker?

Is Facebook open to all types of speakers of language? (Compared with a social media platform that is only open to a particular language using group.)

Is Facebook an equalizing space?

Ideology

Do you ever feel because you a non-native English-speaker that you are denied the right to speak in English?

Do you feel this in your Facebook interaction?

Do you ever want to say something controversial on your Facebook page, but not do it? Why? What are you thinking might happen if you do?

Are there any areas (e.g. groups) that you are denied access to because you are a non-native English-speaker?

Is there a right way or an expected way to communicate in English on Facebook?

Does the fact that you can use your other language(s) and English in the same space help you in posting on Facebook in English? Does it give you permission?

Does interaction from different types of friends have a different impact on how you feel about yourself as an English language user? E.g.,

Communication with a non-native English-speaker vs English-speaker?

Communication with close friends vs less connected people?

Is there a power imbalance between native English-speakers and non-native English-speakers on Facebook?

Have you ever felt that your opinions are not taken seriously on Facebook because you are not a native English-speaker?

Silent members/Divestment

What prevents you from commenting or posting?

What would encourage you to get more involved?

What role does the group play in your language learning/use?

Ownership/Control/Agency

To what extent do you feel your Facebook page is yours?

What makes it feel like that?

Agency: Development of communicative competency

Are there particular ways of communicating successfully on the Facebook?

In the Facebook group?

How do people learn how to communicate successfully on Facebook?

In the Facebook group?

What skills do people use to 'play their hand' and activate their online capital?

Do you have more control of your English online vs face-to-face?

Is it easier to be understood on Facebook than face-to-face? Is there a difference in errors that you care about: e.g. grammar vs vocabulary errors?

Do you delete/edit posts?

Is there a power imbalance on Facebook between people of differing language levels?

Is it easier to control interaction on Facebook? For example, you can log out.

Is this easier than closing a face-to-face conversation?

Can being able to see information about a person on Facebook make it easier to open a conversation with them face-to-face or on Facebook?

Are you concerned about being misunderstood/misinterpreted on Facebook and not knowing you have done this?

Do you filter out people with opinions that aren't similar to your own? Do you filter out (hide) their posts?

INTERVIEW 3

Has anything happened on Facebook or about your use of Facebook, that has influenced how you use English on the site?

Identity

Do you expect your audience to see different sides of you on Facebook?

To what extent are you able to show different sides of you in different posts (in English, with images/emojis) you make on Facebook?

To what extent are you able to control who sees these different sides of you?

To what extent are you concerned that different parts of your audience might be concerned with what you see?

Are you concerned that different parts of your audience might not understand a particular side of you that you show?

Imagined identity (present): Positioning

What kind of impression do you want to show on Facebook in English?

When you read what you have read in English on Facebook, how does this make you feel about yourself as an English language user?

Capital

Can you see development in your English on Facebook?

Are you able to gain a deeper understanding of how English is used by reading Facebook? E.g. content between:

- Native English-speakers
- Native English-speaker(s) and non-native English-speaker(s)
- Non-native English-speaker(s)

What English communication skills do you develop by using Facebook?

How do you benefit from using English on Facebook, either reading or writing?

Social capita - (validation)

What does it mean when someone reacts positively to your English Facebook content? In a group?

How does it affect your English language use?

Your willingness to continue to use English?

How you feel about yourself as an English language user?

How do positive reactions to non-English use, i.e., pictures, affect you in terms of English?

How does it affect your English language use?

Your willingness to continue to use English?

How you feel about yourself as an English language user?

Transformation of capital from Facebook to outside?

What do you gain from using Facebook?

E.g.:

- Friends?
- Connections?
- Access to English (native speaker and non-native speaker)?
- Access to other languages?
- Access to use of translation facility?
- Access to time to think and compose English?

How does this/do these affect your English language life outside Facebook?

When you use Facebook, where are you?

Agency: Translation function and control

Do you use the translation function?

Does this stop you composing in English only?

How does the use of the translation function affect your feelings of yourself as an English user?

Does it help – you can communicate with people in English. do you learn anything from using the translation function?

When composing for Facebook, do you compose in L1 and translate into English?

Agency: Use of English/ Identity

Is the way you communicate on Facebook similar/different to how you use the language in other spaces, both offline and online? (E.g., are you more/less direct?)

What role does the Facebook play in your language learning/use? (E.g. development of informal language)

Do you feel the need to use this type of language on Facebook?

Agency: Safe space

Is the group a 'safe space' for your language use?

Or:

Do you feel able to try out new language/ risk making language errors while communicating with the other members on Facebook? Why?

Would you like feedback on any errors?

Impact of Mode of Use and Place of Use

Does the mode (e.g., comment/link etc) have an effect on your interaction on FB? (E.g. are you happier to get a comment than a like?)

Does the device you use affect what you write? How you read?

Does the place you write/read/watch Facebook impact what you do on Facebook?

How do you anticipate people read your posts? On phone? On computer? Alone etc? Does that affect what you write? Post? How you write it?

Miscellaneous

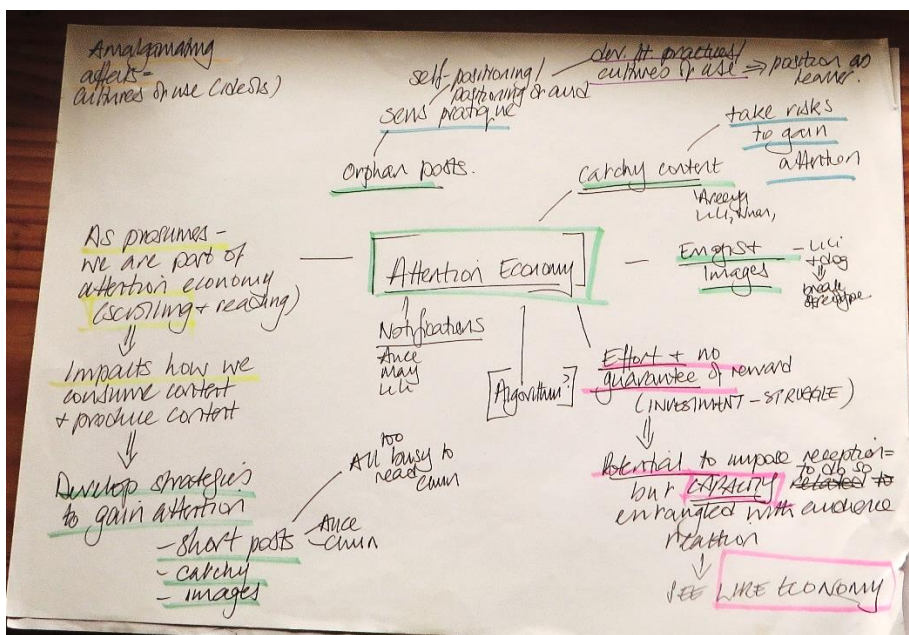
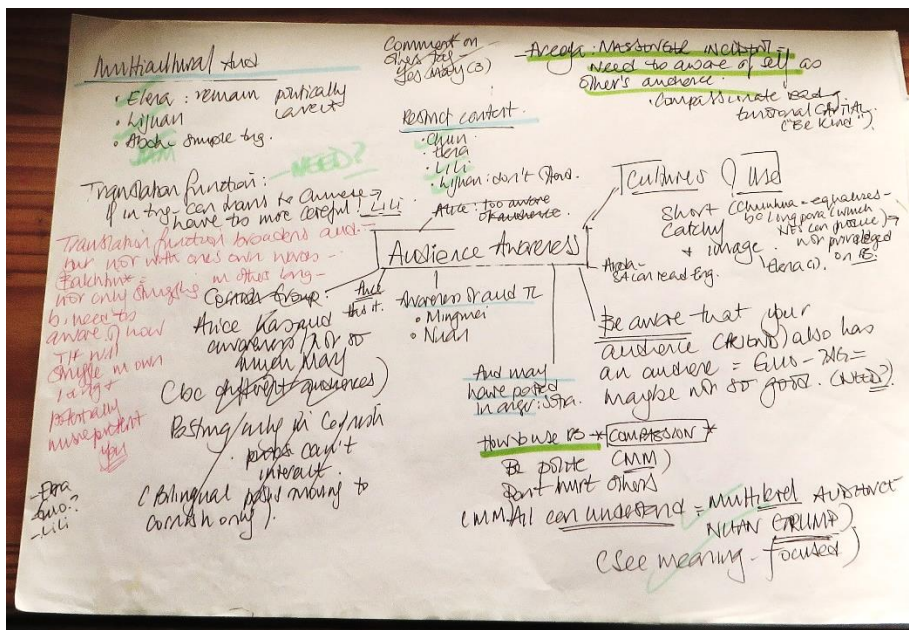
How do you know you have communicated effectively online?

Is Facebook a good place to get feedback on your English language use?

Keeping things fun/light on Facebook. How does that affect your identity as an English user?

Are you concerned about what people say about your Facebook content off Facebook?

Appendix 4: Mind maps



Appendix 5: Participant Information Form: UK-based participants

Participant Information Form: English Language Cohort

UK-based participants

Investment in language learning: An investigation into Language Development and Use via Facebook

October 2017

About the research project:

This research project looks at how language learners use Facebook for target language learning and language use. I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, and in this research I am focusing on members of two Facebook groups: one for learners of English and another for learners of Cornish.

This research project has two stages: online questionnaire and online interviews. You can participate in the questionnaire only, but I would be very grateful if you would consider being part of the interviews, too.

Stage One:

Online questionnaire: This short questionnaire contains questions about your language study and your use of Facebook.

Stage Two:

Online interviews. Up to three online interviews of approximately one hour in length will be held. These interviews will be conducted over videoconferencing, for example by Skype. The interviews will be held at approximately two monthly intervals, at a time which is suitable for you.

How the study data will be used:

The information from the online questionnaires will be used to gain a picture of how Facebook is used for language learning. This data will be stored on a password protected computer.

The data collected from the online interviews will be recorded with video-conferencing software. It will be stored on a password protected computer.

As far as possible, any information you give will be kept confidential. Your data will be anonymized. This means that your name will not be used in my PhD thesis, in any publications or presentations. All your data will be destroyed after the PhD thesis is complete.

To participate in this research:

You must be over 18 years of age.

You must have an English language proficiency level of upper intermediate or above.

You must use Facebook in English, as well as your other language(s), either for reading, viewing content, or writing.

Benefits:

By taking part in this research project, you will help to develop an understanding of how Facebook can be used for English language learning. This knowledge can also be used by you to improve your future English language learning with the use of social media.

Participant rights:

Taking part in this research is voluntary. You can choose not to take part or to stop participating in the research project at any time.

Thank you for your interest in this research project. If you have any questions, please contact me, Sarah Treloar, at

Researcher Information:

Research investigator: Sarah Treloar

Email:

Department: Moray House, Holyrood Rd, University of Edinburgh,
Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, United Kingdom

Supervisor: Dr J Ross ; Dr M. Dasli

Appendix 6: Online Questionnaire: Informed Consent Form

Online Questionnaire: Informed Consent Form

Investment in Language Learning: An investigation into Language Development and Use via Facebook

It is very important that you understand how your data will be used. Therefore, please read the information on this form. If you have any questions, please contact me at

You will be asked to confirm that you have read this form before completing the online questionnaire.

1, I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Form dated October 2017 for the study 'Investment in language learning: An investigation of into Language Development and Use via Facebook'. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and make enquiries of the researcher.

2, I confirm that I am 18 years of age or above.

3, I confirm that my English language level is upper-intermediate or above.

4, I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reasons and without consequences.

5, I am willing for my online questionnaire data to be used as part of the research project.

6, I am willing for anonymized extracts from my questionnaire to be used as part of the research project.

7, I understand that data recorded in this questionnaire may be used in the PhD thesis, academic publications and presentations, but that any

information that could be used to identify me will be removed, and that my identity will be anonymized.

8, I am willing for anonymized extracts from my questionnaire answers to be used as part of the research project.

9, I understand that any information recorded will remain confidential.

If you have any questions, please contact Sarah Treloar

Your name:

Date:

(Link to online Pre-interview Questionnaire was embedded here.)

Appendix 7: Online Interview: Informed Consent Form

Online Interview: Informed Consent Form:

Investment in Language Learning: An Investigation into Language Development and Use via Facebook

1, I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated October 2017 for the study 'Investment in Language Learning: An Investigation into Language Development and Use via Facebook'. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and make enquiries of the researcher.

2, I confirm that I am 18 years of age or above.

3, I confirm that my English language level is upper-intermediate or above.

4, I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reasons and without consequences.

5, I am willing for my interviews to be digitally recorded via video-conferencing recording software.

6, I am willing for my interview data to be used as part of the research project.

7, I understand that information recorded during these interviews may be used in the PhD thesis, academic publications and presentations, but that any information that could be used to identify me will be removed, and that my identity will be anonymized.

8, I am willing for anonymized extracts from these interviews to be used as part of the research project.

9, I understand that any information recorded will remain confidential.

Your name:

Date:

Please send a completed copy of this form to

If you have any questions, please contact Sarah Treloar

Appendix 8: Participant Information Form: Ireland-based

Participant Information Form:

Ireland-based participants

Investment in language learning: An investigation into Language Development and Use via Facebook

March 2017

About the research project:

This research project looks at how language learners use Facebook for target language learning and language use. I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, and in this research I am focusing on members of two Facebook groups: one for learners of English and another for learners of Cornish.

This research project has two stages. You can take part in only stage one, but it would be beneficial if you would also take part in stage two.

Stage One:

Interviews. Up to three interviews of approximately one hour in length will be held. The interviews will be held at approximately two monthly intervals, at a time and place that is suitable to you.

Stage Two:

Online participant observation. If you agree, I will observe your activity on your personal Facebook page between the time of our first interview and the final interview. I will only observe your English language communication. No screen captures of your Facebook activity will be taken. I will record my observations in note-form, in writing, and then type them up into a Word document.

How the study data will be used:

The data collected from the interviews will be recorded with a digital voice recorder. This data will be transcribed and typed up into Word documents. All interview data will be stored on a password protected computer.

As far as possible, any information you give will be kept confidential. Your data will be anonymized. This means that your name will not be used in my PhD thesis, in any publications or presentations. All your data will be destroyed after the PhD thesis is complete.

To participate in this research:

You must be over 18 years of age.

You must have an English language proficiency level of upper intermediate or above.

You must use Facebook in English, as well as your other language(s), either for reading, viewing content, or writing.

Benefits:

By taking part in this research project, you will help to develop an understanding of how Facebook can be used for English language learning. This knowledge can also be used by you to improve your future English language learning with the use of social media.

Participant rights:

Taking part in this survey is voluntary. You can choose not to take part or to stop participating in the research project at any time.

Thank you for your interest in this research project. If you have any questions, please contact me, Sarah Treloar, at

Researcher Information:

Research investigator: Sarah Treloar

Email:

Department: Moray House, Holyrood Rd, University of Edinburgh,
Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, United Kingdom

Supervisor: Dr J Ross ; Dr M. Dasli

Appendix 9: Face-to-face Interview: Informed Consent Form

Face-to-face Interviews: Informed Consent Form

Investment in Language Learning: An Investigation into Language Development and Use via Facebook

1, I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated March 2017 for the study 'Investment in Language Learning: An Investigation into Language Development and Use via Facebook'. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and make enquiries of the researcher.

2, I confirm that I am 18 years of age or above.

3, I confirm that my English language level is upper-intermediate or above.

4, I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reasons and without consequences.

5, I am willing for my interviews to be digitally recorded via video-conferencing recording software.

6, I am willing for my interview data to be used as part of the research project.

7, I understand that information recorded during these interviews may be used in the PhD thesis, academic publications and presentations, but that any information that could be used to identify me will be removed, and that my identity will be anonymized.

8, I am willing for anonymized extracts from these interviews to be used as part of the research project.

9, I understand that any information recorded will remain confidential.

Your name:

Date:

If you have any questions, please contact Sarah Treloar

Appendix 10: Online Participant Observation: Informed Consent Form

Online Participant Observation: Informed Consent Form

Investment in Language Learning: An Investigation into Language Development and Use via Facebook

1, I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated March 2017 for the study 'Investment in Language Learning: An Investigation into Language Development and Use via Facebook'. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask the researcher any questions.

2, I confirm that I am 18 years of age or above.

3, I confirm that my English language level is upper-intermediate or above.

4, I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary. I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time without giving any reasons and without any consequences.

5, I am willing for my communication in English and activity on my personal Facebook page to be observed by the researcher between *(dates to be added when observation time period has been agreed)*.

6, I understand that **no** screen captures of my communication in English or other language or activity on my personal Facebook will be taken or recorded.

7, I am willing for notes about my communication in English and activity on my personal Facebook page to be recorded in note form and then written up into a Word document.

8, I understand that no direct quotes of my interaction in any language on my personal Facebook page will be used in this PhD thesis or any subsequent publications or academic presentations

9, I am willing for this observation data to be used as part of this research project.

10, I understand that information recorded during these observations may be used in the PhD thesis, academic publications and presentations, but that any information that could be used to identify me will be removed, and my identity will be anonymized.

11, I understand that any information recorded will remain confidential.

If you have any questions, please contact Sarah Treloar

Your name:

Date:

Once we have agreed the duration of this observation, please send a completed copy of this form to

Thank you.

Sarah Treloar