

Culture, Imagined Audience, and Language Choices of Multilingual Chinese and Korean Students on Facebook

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Abstract. Multilingual users of social networking sites (SNSs) write in different languages for various reasons. In this paper, we explore the language choice of multilingual Chinese and Korean students studying in the United States on Facebook. We survey the effects of collectivist culture, imagined audience, and language proficiency on their language choice. Results show that multilingual users use language for dividing and filtering their imagined audience. Culture played two contrasting roles; users wanted to share their culture in English but share their emotions in their native language. Through this work, we hope to portray language choice not as a tool for exclusion but of consideration for the potential audience and adherence to one's culture.

1 Introduction

Context collapse is a phenomenon that occurs on social networking sites (SNSs) where multiple audiences are collapsed into one [19]. This merging of audiences can be problematic as a person presents oneself differently based on the audience. The modified presentation of oneself does not only affect the presenter but also the audience through the new topics and languages, to which they are exposed on SNSs. In face-to-face conversations, the audience is typically visible and non-dynamic, so multilingual speakers often choose a language that accommodates the audience [10]. They are socially expected to choose a mutually shared language based on the audience that is present, and it can be considered rude to speak in a language that obviously excludes a person from the conversation.

However, the situation is different for online communication where the audience is dynamic and invisible. The context collapse creates a new environment where people are exposed to many more languages that they do not understand. Although some people enjoy the global atmosphere, others may feel left out when major conversations are held in a foreign language. The social obligation of language choice becomes more subjective as people deal with context collapse. The following thread of comments on a picture posted on Facebook is just one of many examples of conflicting standards of appropriate language choice online:



Fig. 1. Two users show different opinions on the appropriateness of writing in a language that the potential audience does not understand. Pseudonyms were used for privacy.

Specifically, our qualitative research studies the language choice of multilingual Chinese and Korean students in the United States. This population represents a large sector of the multilingual international students in the United States. In the 2013-2014 academic year, the number of international students in the U.S. reached a record high of 886,000 students: China was the first country of origin making up 31% of international students, India the second with 12%, and South Korea the third with 8% [13]. We excluded Indian students from our study as English is often a dominant language in many regions within India. From here on in this paper, Chinese and Korean students will be referred to as “multilingual students”. We interviewed multilingual students about the influence of the content of the post and their imagined audience on their language choice for a Facebook post [2, 4, 17]. We also briefly surveyed the participants’ perceptions of received foreign language posts on Facebook. More specifically, we investigate the following research questions:

RQ1. How does the topic and the content of the post affect the language choice of multilingual international students on Facebook? What role does culture play in the decision?

RQ2. How does the imagined audience affect the language choice of multilingual international students on Facebook?

David: (in Korean) Jay Kim, you are becoming good looking. What are you taking? Lol

Jay: (in Korean) Saudi sandstorm lol Anyhow, this is someone else’s post so if we speak Korean it’s awkward [for the non-Korean poster]

David: don’t care :)
(Original thread shown in Fig. 1)

Amy is a non-Korean speaker who tagged Jay on a picture. Jay and David are Korean speakers. Because Amy does not understand Korean, Jay thinks it is inappropriate to use Korean in the comments for that picture while David thinks it does not matter.

This uncertainty of appropriate language choice on SNSs led us to investigate factors that affect the language choice of multilingual users on-

2 Related Work

In order to understand Chinese and Korean students' usage of Facebook, this section will briefly describe how culture affects the characteristics of a SNS and its usage. We then define language choice and the imagined audience to better explain the roles they play in multilingual international students' language choice on Facebook.

2.1 Collectivistic Culture and SNS usage

SNSs have been growing in importance, as they have become a global meeting place where people from various cultures and backgrounds can share information. As of 2015, Facebook has 1.44 billion monthly active users worldwide [25]. Despite the global nature of SNSs, they often exhibit characteristics of their local culture or origin. Studies have shown that characteristics of Eastern cultures and Western cultures are reflected through the usage and features of Cyworld and RenRen, respectively the Korean and Chinese local sites, and Facebook, an American site. Qiu et al. examined the cultural differences between Facebook and RenRen, and found that people perceived RenRen as more collectivistic and Facebook as more individualistic [22]. This is consistent with research suggesting a prominent collectivistic culture in China and Korea, and a more individualistic culture in North America [11, 12]. Collectivism is marked by “the subordination of individual goals to the goals of a collective, and a pursuit of harmony and interdependence within the group” [24]. These cultures are typically high-context cultures as well, where communication heavily relies on the context and subtle cues to emphasize a shared experience and to avoid offending others. On the other hand, individualistic cultures value independence and direct communication [11].

As [22] found that RenRen was perceived as more collective than Facebook, results from [5] and [14] revealed that Cyworld displays a collectivistic nature compared to Facebook. The local SNS was also found to reflect the high-context culture of Korea. Perhaps more interestingly, they found that despite the individualistic style of Facebook, Koreans favored the collectivistic and indirect ways of relating with others on Facebook as they had previously interacted on Cyworld. In our study, we similarly examine how the collectivistic culture of Chinese and Korean students in the U.S. play a factor in their language choice.

2.2 Language Choice

In this paper, “language choice” refers to a multilingual student's choice between his or her first language (L1) and English for a Facebook post. There are many studies on code switching [3, 6, 18, 21], a specific type of language choice that involves the switching of languages within a thread of conversation. Since the language choice is made in the context of a conversation, the language choice in code switching is heavily dependent on the language choices that were made

earlier. However, this work explores language choice for posts that are independent of previous posts (ex. status updates). Despite our focus on language choice of independent posts, we utilized Appel and Muysken’s six functions for code switching to frame the multiple choice options to the question “What were your reasons for choosing this language?” in Part 2 of our study since the functions were generalizable to language choice in general [3]. The multiple choice options offered for the question were: More appropriate for expressing the content, To address a specific audience, To quote something, Habitual expressions (ex. greetings), Didn’t know the terms/appropriate expression in the other language, and Other. We chose Appel and Muysken’s functions over other categories such as Malik’s ten reasons for code switching based on a previous study that it was more appropriate for online written discourse [6, 18].

Previous studies have focused on different influences on language choice on SNS such as the function of the SNS [16], a specific demographic of posters [22], and the difference between the user’s offline and online language choices [7]. Our study focuses on the impact of the imagined audience, the content of the post, and the culture of the poster on language choice. Comparably, [23] addressed language choice and addressivity, matching one’s speaking or writing style to the audience, between Thai-English speakers on Facebook. They found that bilingual users presented their local identity through Thai as expected, and the use of English marked global orientation and their localised experience as the participants resided in the United Kingdom. So, rather than using languages to distinguish international audience from Thai audiences, both English and Thai were used “to establish a translocal community operating in an online, semi-public space” [23]. This differs from the results of our study that the multiple students used L1 to distinguish their imagined audience. The difference in the results may be due to the difference in the nature of the two populations that were studied. A new area that we will explore is how the language choice is influenced by culture, which is addressed in the Discussions section.

2.3 The Imagined Audience

Audience and addressivity on Facebook differ from those in other types of communication in various ways. Previous work has explored how multilingual speakers maintain their identity and self-presentation in different social networks and workplace settings through language choice [15, 27]. Unlike in face-to-face communication, posters on Facebook do not know the actual audience who will read a post, so they imagine an audience [2, 4, 9]. There are four categories of audience on SNSs: addressee, active friends, wider friends, and the internet as a whole [26]. Addressee is the main target audience, and as expected, they were the most influential in language choice of a post. However, active friends and wider friends also play a part in language choice as will be shown in the Discussions section (5.2).

Overall, our research combines the effect of audience on language choice with previously found reasons for codeswitching to examine the language choice of

multilingual international students in the United States. Although the composition of imagined audience largely determined a user's dominant language on Facebook, we found that language choice was based on a combination of many factors including the topic/content of the post, the culture of the poster, and the respect for the imagined audience.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants

For the purpose of the study, we recruited nineteen subjects from the local community of a Midwestern university. Qualified participants were Chinese/Korean-English bilingual speakers who had published at least fifty status updates, comments, and shares in the last two years, and had been in the United States for at most four years as of the time of the study. Each participant was entered into a raffle for a \$100 Amazon gift card. We recruited participants who had resided in the U.S. for fewer than five years because this is roughly the time span required to complete a college or graduate level degree. We chose this population because we wanted participants who had sufficient exposure to their native culture and language prior to coming to the U.S.

We interviewed 19 participants (Chinese: 4 males, 4 females; Korean: 7 males, 4 females) for the study. Their ages ranged from 20 to 40 (mean = 25.53, s.d. = 4.31). Six participants were from a computer science background, five from other engineering majors, five from sciences, and three from other majors. The average length of their stay in the States was 2.32 years with a standard deviation of 1.29.

3.2 Experiment Flow

The experiment consisted of four parts; participants completed Part 1 at home and the remaining three parts in a lab setting.

Part 1. Online Scenario-Based Open-Ended Exercise Before the participants attended the on-site study, they were asked to fill out a scenario-based survey online. The scenario-based survey was conducted online to avoid on-site priming from the presence and language of the researchers. Having the survey online also allowed the participants to take it at home on their own computers, providing an environment where they might write actual Facebook posts.

The survey started with a sample scenario described in both English and L1. The participants were then asked to compose a post, as they would compose a status update on Facebook, based on the sample scenario. After viewing a sample scenario and a sample post to understand the basic mechanics for the survey, the participants were asked to compose a post for each of the eight scenarios. The scenarios were selected based on related works on language choice and existing Facebook posts in Chinese, Korean, and English.

The first two scenarios were closely linked to the participants' own ethnic backgrounds. We hypothesized that the participants would choose to write these posts in L1 since their main audience was likely to be other L1 speakers. Scenarios 3 and 4 were related to class work and a Western holiday, where the imagined audience was likely to be non-L1 speakers. For Scenarios 5 and 6, we chose two scenarios that people would likely broadcast to both Korean/Chinese and American friends. We hypothesized that people would write in both languages to reach a wider audience. Scenarios 7 and 8 included topics where the target audience was ambiguous (see Appendix A for details).

These scenarios were presented in a randomized order to investigate how people formed their imagined audience based on the topic of the posts. Although we conducted the survey online to avoid on-site priming and presented each scenario in both English and L1, weak priming could not be avoided since some participants read the instructions solely in L1. After the participants finished the online survey, they were asked to visit our research lab for a forty-minute on-site session.

Part 2. Two Surveys: Demographics and Facebook posts The on-site session started with a survey that addressed participants' basic background information, English education history, and English proficiency. While the participants were filling out the survey, we gathered their Facebook posts (status updates, comments, and shares) through Facebook Query Language (FQL) with the participants' consents¹. After the participants finished the survey, they were presented a set of six of their Facebook posts that were randomly chosen to include two posts in L1, two posts in English, and two posts containing both languages. The posts were weighted according to their language independence during the selection process where status updates were most heavily weighted and comments the least. Comments were considered last since the language choice for a comment is highly dependent on the language of a previous comment or the original post, and shares considered after status updates since language choice for shares is influenced by the language and contents from the source [10].

For each post, the participants were presented with a series of multiple choice questions about the intended audience for the post, whether they cared if people other than the intended audience saw the post, and their obligation level for choosing that language. In addition, they were asked to select the reasons for writing the post in that language from options mentioned in Section 2.2.

Part 3. Exploratory visualization of Language Usage on Facebook Next, we proceeded with an exploratory visualization of the participants' Face-

¹ We originally designed the study to include a Facebook app that collected the necessary information for the study. However, after multiple requests for Facebook API application permission, we were not granted the permission to access the participants' data without explanation. Due to this technical constraint, we focus on language choice of independent posts since we were not able to collect the original posts on which the participants commented

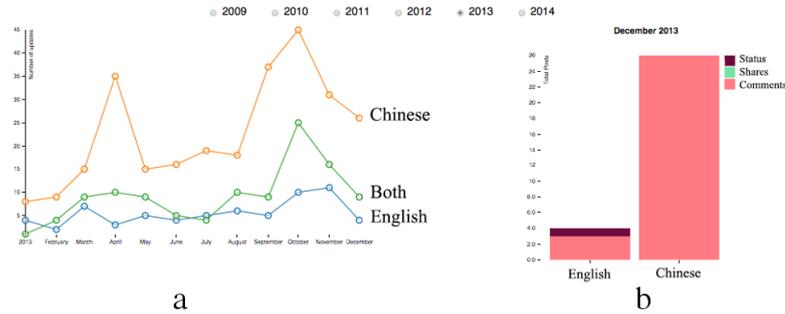


Fig. 2. Yearly (a) and Monthly (b) distribution of languages for the participant's posts.

book language usage. The visualization consists of two components: a yearly view on the left and a monthly view on the right (see Figure 2). The yearly dot-line graph displays the general trend of the participant's language usage over a year with months on the x-axis and the number of posts in each language on the y-axis (Figure 2a). The three lines represent Facebook post counts in L1, English, and both languages. When a participant clicks on a point on the dot-line graph, the corresponding month is displayed in the monthly bar chart on the right. The monthly bar chart includes the breakdown of the participant's posts into three types of Facebook posting activities: sharing, commenting and posting (Figure 2b).

Through this visualization, the participants were able to view their Facebook usage patterns over their entire Facebook history, and the visualization acted as a prompt during the interview process. The participants reported enjoying this part of the study and often stopped to examine periods of rapid language trend changes. Their interest in the visualization and exploration of unexpected or forgotten language patterns led to their active participation in the interview.

Part 4. Semi-Structured Interview The study ended with a 20-minute semi-structured interview that delved deeper into participants' language choice motivations. After browsing the visualization, participants were asked to describe patterns such as active/inactive periods and the language choice trends, and whether it matched their expectations of their language usage on Facebook. The participants were then asked to describe their perceptions of English and L1 use on Facebook and the language norms amongst their friends. Finally, the interviewer selected some of the participants' Facebook posts and scenario-based posts (from Part 1 and 2) that related to the research questions to probe further about their target audience, language choice, and language usage obligations.

3.3 Data Analysis

We used qualitative analysis through a mixed methods approach to answer our research questions based on the answers from the online open-ended exercise

	appropriate	audience	quote	habitual	knowledge	other
Eng	22	16	2	6	2	3
L1	24	12	1	4	3	6
Both	23	8	3	4	4	2

Table 1. Responses for Interview Q4. What were your reasons for choosing this language?

(Part 1), the participants’ actual Facebook posts gathered through FQL (Part 2), and the interviews (Part 4). To analyze the interviews, one researcher iteratively created topic categories from the interview transcriptions via open coding. After the primary categories and subcategories were established, two researchers used NVivo [1], an annotation tool, to classify sections of the transcriptions into one of the categories. After the categorization phase, we used axial coding to finalize the relationships between the categories and derived two main themes that were consistent throughout the interviews. The two main themes were the effects of culture and content on language choice and the division of imagined audience. We discuss these themes in more detail in the Discussion section.

4 Results

To find out the participants’ motivation for language choice, the Facebook survey (Part 2) included a question regarding the specific reasons for using a particular language for a post [3]. The results are presented in Table 1. Participants most often chose the *appropriateness* of a language as the reason for writing in that particular language, and the interviews revealed that the appropriateness is determined by the content of the post as well as the cultural norms. This was also shown through the scenario-based exercise (Part 1).

4.1 Scenarios

The results for six of the eight scenarios aligned with our hypothesis as the majority of the posts were in the predicted language (see Table 2). The two scenarios that did not conform to our hypothesis were the Both-predicted scenarios. We hypothesized that people would write in both languages for scenarios requiring a broader audience. Surprisingly, the majority of the participants only wrote in L1 or English for the car sale scenario where a broader audience might be beneficial. People who chose English did so because even the Chinese/Koreans who might buy the car, live in the U.S. and speak English, so they deemed it unnecessary to repeat the post in L1. Some people who wrote in L1 told us that they only wanted to sell the car to Chinese/Korean friends, either because they did not think their English was good enough to sell a car or because the majority of their intimate friends were Chinese/Korean. The friendship distribution also influenced the birthday scenario and is discussed further in section 5.2.

	New Year	Food	Meeting	Christmas	Car	Birthday	Professor	NYC Trip
Eng	4	6	12	12	9	7	6	5
L1	10	13	7	5	6	7	13	13
Both	6	0	1	3	4	6	0	2
Hypo.	L1	L1	English	English	Both	Both	Either	Either

Table 2. Language choice results for different scenarios

	family	work	friends	hobby	neighbor	religious	everyone	other
Eng	5	6	19	0	2	3	8	1
L1	3	5	23	1	2	2	9	1
Both	5	10	31	3	4	5	9	0

Table 3. Responses for Interview Q3. Who was your target audience for this post? We used Min et. al’s categories for classifying social relationships [20].

Although the result for the other scenarios aligned with our hypothesis, there were unanticipated factors that were involved in language choice. We explicitly asked the participants about their language choice for scenario-posts that did not match our hypothesis and found that, although in unexpected ways, they still conformed with our general theme of culture and audience in language choice. For example, we had predicted that the participants would use L1 for the culture-related scenarios, but the desire to share one’s culture encouraged some participants to use English. This is explained further in section 5.1.

4.2 Target Audience and Language Obligations

The results from Parts 2 and 4 revealed that the audience is the most influential factor for language choice of multilingual international students on Facebook. The majority (15 out of 18) of the participants said that they had an imagined audience in general, while two participants said that they only had a vague target audience. For each post in Part 2, we asked if the participants remembered the intended audience. They answered positively for 82.5% of the posts that were written in English or L1 and for 92.5% of the posts that were written in both languages. The distribution of the selected intended audience categories is shown in Table 3. People’s target audience for the majority of the posts was Friends followed by Work (ex. classmate, professor, colleague, teammate), and then Facebook friends in general. The participants especially targeted their actual friends when they used both languages. People also selected more intended audience categories for posts written in both languages compared to those written in only English or L1. This might suggest that people tried to reach a wider target audience by posting in both languages.

In order to study the social obligation of choosing a language for the audience, we asked participants whether they felt obligated to write in that particular language for their audience. On a scale of 1 (not obligated at all) to 5 (very obligated), the mean obligation score was 2.9 for English posts, 2.6 for L1, and 2.7 for both. People felt most obligated to use English when they were commenting on a post made by an American friend or when American friends were tagged in the original post as illustrated in the introduction.

	level 1	level 2	level 3	level 4	level 5
Eng	10	3	17	3	7
L1	12	5	14	6	3
Both	16	4	6	6	8

Table 4. Distribution of responses for Interview Q3c. On the scale from 1 (not obligated at all) to 5 (very obligated), how obligated did you feel to write in English/L1/Both languages for this audience?

5 Discussion

5.1 Post Content and Cultural Considerations (RQ1)

We found that culture plays a role in determining the language of a post in two different ways. The collectivistic culture in China and Korea encouraged the multilingual students to write in L1 for emotional or culturally sensitive posts. However, the desire to share one's culture encouraged the students to write posts in English as well. We will look at these seemingly contrasting roles of culture in language choice in the following section.

Collectivistic Culture and L1 A recurring reason for choosing L1, mentioned in the interviews, was its function as a language barrier. The participants wanted to block others from understanding the content of the posts because they were either too personal or contained extreme, usually negative, emotions. P10 commented, "Maybe I'm more used to complain in Chinese. When saying about something, express some feeling not good, I maybe use Chinese more. I think it is also related to the culture. So I think in RenRen, a lot of people express their negative feeling. In English few people complains. It's more common to complain in Chinese."² A Korean participant shared a similar feeling that she did not want to share her problems in English, despite having close American friends, because she thought it was more acceptable to do so in Korean [P8]. This aligns with the theory that people are more open to sharing their emotions publicly in a collectivistic culture since the sharing of emotions strengthens the emotional attachment to the ingroup and affirms the cultural value of interdependence [24].

The participants' want to express emotions in L1 was also shown in scenario 5, which was about a professor singing Let It Go in class. Although unexpected, this scenario was affected by culture in two contrasting ways. Since the post tended to express strong emotions, whether of shock, confusion, or excitement, most of the participants wrote in L1. However, one participant explained that she wrote the post in English because American culture was represented through the song and because it was an event that occurred in a classroom making it public enough to write in English.

Another reason for limiting the audience of a post through language was for potentially offensive and rude posts. Some terms deemed acceptable in some cultures may be taboo in others. For example, one of P11's post was all in English except for a Chinese term referring to African-Americans. He explained, "I think it would be a little uncomfortable [if somebody translated the post] because that's not appropriate for American people. It's only for like, for Chinese people, they don't feel offended. They don't even feel offended to African-American people, but English this is like a sensitive topic. So I don't want them to see it."

For Koreans, the absence of honorifics in English can prompt them to choose L1 if they are addressing people who are older than them. Even if the poster and the intended audience both understand English, it might seem impolite or even

² Participant interview quotes are not modified from the original transcriptions.

rude to write in English because the tone is informal and there is no English term to respectfully address elders (e.g., ‘eonni/nuna’ referring to an older female and ‘oppa/hyeong’ referring to an older male). Thus, some posters wrote in Korean to maintain the socioculturally appropriate relationship with older people.

Sharing Cultures in English Although the cultural differences prompted multilingual students to write some posts in L1 to follow emotion sharing norms in collectivistic cultures, the cultural differences also prompted multilingual students to write certain posts in English to promote their own culture. This point was stressed in our interview with P16, a student in the Intensive English Institution (IEI) program. Most of his Facebook friends were other IEI students from all over the world. When we asked him why he had written all the scenario posts in English, he answered “I just want to introduce some Chinese culture to my American friends and international friends. You know, in English class, we have some classes about different cultures. Everyone introduced his country’s special culture to others. It’s very interesting. I use English to introduce Chinese culture to my friends.” The only time he wrote in Chinese on Facebook was when he shared a link of a TV show called a Bite of China to an American friend who is learning Chinese.

Although his enthusiasm for sharing his culture in English might be extreme, P16 was not alone in his desire to share his culture with others. More examples of sharing one’s culture in English were brought up in the interviews as participants explained their language choice for the culture-related posts. We hypothesized that people would use L1 for the Chinese New Year since it was highly cultural and primarily related to the L1-speaking audience. However, we found that people also posted the Chinese New Year scenario in English and in both languages to promote their culture (n=3). P19 explained that she wanted “to share the Korean culture because I remember one of my Chinese friends, she invited us over to celebrate Chinese New Year. So I think it was nice having us also celebrate that culture with her.” Another reason for writing the New Year’s post in English was the commonness of the phrase “Happy New Year” (n=3). Along with “Happy Birthday” and “Merry Christmas,” “Happy New Year” is a commonly used greeting phrase in Korea. As a result, the participants did not feel the need to write, or repeat, the phrase in Korean.

5.2 Division of the Imagined Audience (RQ2)

During the interviews, we noticed that people mentioned their L1 friends as their imagined target audience rather than their friends in general. This suggests that for multilingual users, the imagined audience is segmented into groups based on language. The fragmentation of the imagined audience into L1 and non-L1 imagined audiences prompts bilingual users’ to select a specific target group for individual posts based on their content while being considerate of all potential audience.

Imagined Audience and Friendship Distribution The selection of L1 speakers as the main intended audience is not surprising as nearly 40% of international students reported having no close American friends in a recent survey [8]. The majority of the participants' Facebook friends were L1 speakers, reflecting their actual friend distribution and prompting them to write in L1 for the majority of the posts. In other words, some participants simply did not have enough non-L1 speaking "active friends" to make writing in English worthwhile. P6 pointed out, "10 or 12 international friends [on Facebook out of 400 Facebook friends] are not that active people so I don't really have to, I don't feel the obligation of writing in English." He added that he would definitely write his posts in English if he had more American friends on Facebook and they showed interest in his posts through likes and comments. Similarly, P15 mentioned the lack of American friends even in the "wider friends" circle. She did not think the information in her posts would reach the few American friends she had on Facebook even if she posted in English. She elaborated that she would talk to her American friends in person if she wanted to reach them.

The two scenarios that were highly dependent on the imagined audience and friendship distribution of the participants were the New York scenario and the birthday scenario. People chose to write in L1 for the New York scenario for two main reasons. First, they often travel with close friends who are from the same country as them. Secondly, they felt that Americans might not find their trip to New York as significant or interesting compared to their L1 speaking friends. So their imagined audience for such travel-related posts was primarily L1 speakers. The language choice for the birthday scenario was highly based on the participant's active Facebook friends as well since they were the most likely to have posted a Happy Birthday greeting on the participant's timeline.

Interestingly, most students' imagined English-speaking audience are not only comprised of their American friends because the L1-speaking friends they met in the U.S. also speak English. Subsequently, they can only reach L1 speaking friends if they write a post in L1, but based on their "wider friends," they might reach American friends, other international friends, and some of their L1 speaking friends if they write in English. This is especially true for Chinese students since Facebook is blocked in China, and thus most of their Chinese friends on Facebook are also in the United States. The ability to reach all of their Facebook friends via English is useful in situations when they need to ask for help, promote a petition, sell something, or advertise an event. The use of English for these situations was confirmed in our analysis of participants' actual Facebook posts, and was previously mentioned for the car sale scenario as well.

Language Proficiency of the poster and the audience For some people, it was purely their lack of proficiency in English that led them to write in L1. P5 humorously admitted that he doesn't write English well and did not want to bother people with his "broken English." However, this student was fluent enough in English to pass the mandatory English as Second Language (ESL) course for international graduate students. Thus, it might be the students' per-

ception of their own English that prompts them to use L1, rather than their actual proficiency. Others noted that they could get the basic content across in English, but found it hard to convey subtle nuances such as the accurate expressions of emotions or jokes in English as well as they could in L1. P10 said “I don’t know to find the best way to express complaints in a funny way. Not just the complain, I also want it to look interesting. I don’t know how to best express it in English.” These students chose to write in L1 because they felt that the subtle overtones could make a difference in how people perceived their posts.

Language proficiency has an interesting impact on language choice due to the following dichotomy - the poster’s lack of English proficiency prompted writing in L1, yet the presence and the respect for the non-L1 speaking audience prompted writing in English. P8 told us that she used to write most of her posts on Facebook in Korean until her friends in the same program asked her to write in both languages because they didn’t know Korean and wanted to know what she was posting. From then on, she consciously wrote all her Facebook posts in English or both languages out of consideration for her friends who do not speak Korean.

One of the participant’s Facebook posts about a group project meeting was in English, even though he was writing to a L1-speaking group member. This post was written in English out of respect for the other team members who did not understand L1. We had hypothesized that the posts for the meeting scenario would be in English since the students attend a university in the U.S. and typically write work-related posts in English. Most of the people wrote this post in English, but some people (n=6) still used L1. We believe this is a result of soft priming as participants’ interviews revealed that they had read the scenarios in L1 and had continued to think in L1 when they were writing the posts.

5.3 On the Other Side of the Barrier

Choosing L1 can divide the audience into an ingroup that can read a post, and an outgroup that cannot. We wanted to see how international students felt about this division formed by language choices on Facebook. Half of the participants answered that they felt left out when people wrote in languages they did not understand. They pointed out that since they do not know the language and the translator does not work well, they remained curious as to the contents of the post. The students felt especially left out when they knew everyone who was participating in the conversation and they knew that those people also spoke English.

P12 said, “I feel that I’m not the intended reader, the intended audience, and he just ignored me. Or I feel, maybe he thought this is not my business, very sad...” Although P12 would write in Chinese for posts containing extreme emotions that are better expressed in Chinese, he tried to write primarily in English out of respect for the potential audience. P2 took this one step further by creating a list of all the Koreans and only displaying a post to that group whenever he wrote in Korean. Although it took time and effort to create the group of approximately 600 Korean friends, he did not want others to feel “left

out” by his Korean posts. It is noteworthy that not all the participants felt left out by the foreign language posts. Approximately half (7 out of 15) of the participants who commented on seeing foreign language posts said that they understand that “everyone has their own small circles.” Although they were still curious of the contents of foreign language posts, they were fairly comfortable with the presence of foreign languages on Facebook as they often wrote in L1 themselves.

6 Limitations

There were some limitations of the work that resulted from lack of data. The students who participated in the study attended a university with a large international student body. Therefore, it is likely that the inclination towards writing in L1 might be less consistent for international students in other schools, which limits the generalizability of this study. Studies at other universities with fewer international students are needed to observe international students’ language choice in an environment where interaction with American students may be more frequent and necessary.

Some questions in our surveys were hypothetical and self reported, i.e., “In what language would you post a thank you post for birthday wishes?” While our collected data supported our interview findings for many of our questions, a larger collection of longitudinal data would add reliability.

7 Conclusion

Social norms are dynamically evolving in our networked online spaces. Knowing when to use a certain language is not as clear as it is in the physical world. Because one is never certain of the actual audience of one’s Facebook post, the factors that determine language choice on Facebook are different from those in face-to-face communication. This study examined multilingual international students’ views and motivations for language choice on Facebook. Our findings show that the student’s imagined audience and his or her Facebook friend distribution determine the student’s dominant language on Facebook. However, other factors such as the cultural content of the post and the language proficiency of the poster and the audience played a role for specific posts. Future work could focus on the other side of the story by surveying American students who see their international friends’ posts in L1. It would be noteworthy to see if their views on posts in foreign languages match international students’ views. Through this study, we explored the reasons for and the perception of language choice on Facebook. Here we hope to portray language choice not as a tool for exclusion but of consideration for the potential audience and adherence to one’s culture, and raise multilingual users’ awareness of the impact of language choice on their audience.

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18 Language Choices of Multilingual Chinese and Korean Students on Facebook

	<p>Yesterday was your birthday, and lots of people posted greetings on your wall. Write a post to thank everyone. 어제는 당신의 생일이었고 많은 사람들이 페이스북에 축하글을 남겼습니다. 생일 축하글을 남긴 사람들에게 감사글을 포스팅해주세요. 昨天是你的生日，很多朋友都在你的墙上发表了生日祝福。请写一个状态感谢大家的祝福。</p>
	<p>Your professor sang 'Let It Go' in the middle of a class today. Write a post about it. 오늘 교수님이 수업시간 도중에 'Let It Go'를 부르셨습니다. 이에 대한 글을 페이스북에 포스팅해보세요. 你一门课的教授今天在课上为大家演唱了“Let It Go”。请就此事件发表一个状态。</p>
	<p>You just got back from your 3 day trip to New York. On that trip, you saw the Statue of Liberty and Wall Street Charging Bull, and took this picture of Times Square. Write a post that would go along with the picture you took. 당신은 방금 뉴욕 2박 3일 여행에서 돌아왔습니다. 여행에서 자유의 여신상과 월가 황소동상도 보고 타임스퀘어에서 아래의 사진도 찍었습니다. 이 사진과 같이 올릴 글을 포스팅해주세요. 你刚刚去纽约市玩了三天。这趟旅行中你参观了自由女神像，华尔街金牛，并且在时代广场拍了一张照（下图）。请发表一条关于这张照片的状态。</p>

Fig. 3. List of scenarios with pictures that were shown to the participants.