

Redefining Vernacular Literacies in the Age of Web 2.0

^{1,*}DAVID BARTON and ²CARMEN K. M. LEE

¹Literacy Research Centre, Lancaster University and ²The Chinese University of Hong Kong

*E-mail: d.barton@lancs.ac.uk

In this article, we examine the characteristics of vernacular literacies on Web 2.0, focusing on the writing activities performed on the photo-sharing site Flickr.com. This site provides people with many possibilities for writing, ranging from individual tags to extensive profiles. The study investigates these forms of writing to address questions about people's contemporary everyday literacy practices: the extent to which these are new practices and how the notion of vernacular literacies is changing in a global context. Data for the research come from a sample of 100 Flickr sites, along with online interviews with 30 active multilingual Spanish-speaking and Chinese-speaking users of Flickr. The study shows that people draw upon a wide range of multilingual and multimodal resources to project new global identities. The writing practices found on Flickr are often changing and new ones are created out of existing ones. The article concludes by redefining the concept of vernacular literacies, showing how they are now more valued and how people are using local resources to participate in global writing practices.

INTRODUCTION

Reading and writing activities in everyday life involve different types of literacy practices and serve a wide range of purposes. While many of these activities (e.g. filling out tax forms or paying utility bills) are carried out in response to external demands, much of the reading and writing that people do, and the ways in which they do them, are not imposed externally; for example, reading novels and magazines, writing down recipes, keeping a diary, writing to a newspaper are often done voluntarily. It is these everyday, or vernacular, literacies which are the focus of the article. We also note that many practices of reading and writing are being transformed by people's participation in online activities and, as a result, the dynamics of everyday life are changing in profound ways. In this article, we explore how everyday literacy practices are being transformed by new technologies, and we examine the new forms of writing that people are undertaking. Focusing on the photo-sharing site Flickr.com and drawing upon the notion of vernacular literacies, we ask, to what extent are the writing practices on Flickr new literacy practices? In what ways are the characteristics of vernacular literacies changing in a global context?

In this paper, we first provide an overview of the concept of vernacular literacies. We then draw specific attention to practices of writing and turn to an example of contemporary writing on the web. We report on our study of the writing people do on the photo-sharing website Flickr (www.flickr.com), using the approach of literacy studies as an overall framework. Towards the end of the article, we return to the characteristics of vernacular literacies and discuss how their meanings are changing and how they are now more valued.

THE NOTION OF VERNACULAR LITERACIES

Vernacular literacy practices are rooted in everyday experiences and serve everyday purposes. Barton and Hamilton's (1998) 'local literacies' study of the role of reading and writing in an English town identified key areas of everyday life where reading and writing had a central role for people. These areas were: *organising life*, such as the records they kept of their finances; *personal communication*, such as the notes, cards and letters, people sent to friends and relatives; the personal *leisure activities* they participated in including sports and music; the *documenting of life* where people maintained records of their lives; the *sense making* people carried out in relation to such things as health issues, legal issues and their children's development; and their *social participation* in a wide range of activities. The vernacular literacies ranged from record keeping and note-taking through to extended writing of diaries, fictional writing, life histories and local histories.

A key feature of vernacular literacies is that they are voluntary and self-generated, rather than being framed and valued by the needs of social institutions. Dominant institutions in fields such as education, law and religion sponsor particular forms of literacy, meaning that they support, structure and promote particular forms of reading and writing (as described in Brandt 1998). Ivanić (1998) contrasts self-generated and imposed writing and Brandt refers to everyday literacies as self-sponsored. In dominant literacies, there are experts and professionals through whom access to knowledge is controlled. Vernacular practices are not particularly approved of by formal domains. They are often downgraded and not valued by schools, especially when associated with popular culture. Vernacular texts which are created tend to be circulated locally and not kept for long. As they are relatively unregulated in comparison with dominant literacies and under people's own control, vernacular practices can be a source of creativity and originality, and they can lead to new practices. It was clear from Barton and Hamilton's study (1998) that when people act in their lives, in fact, they utilize all the resources available to them and they mix dominant and vernacular practices. People encounter official texts, but what they do with them, their practices, can be vernacular. Vernacular practices can be responses to imposed literacies. Some vernacular responses to official literacy demands disrupt the intentions of those demands, to serve people's own purposes; and sometimes they are intentionally oppositional to and subversive of dominant practices (Maybin 2007).

Whilst anyone might keep a personal diary or do creative writing, what is also important for 'ordinary people' (Barton *et al.* 1993; Sheridan *et al.* 2000) are the ways in which vernacular activities can give access to resources and provide a voice which may otherwise not be heard. This is particularly true of writing, which is the focus of the study reported here. A range of studies in many different contexts have drawn attention to the power of ordinary people writing (including Camitta 1993; Sinor 2002; Lyons 2007; Blommaert 2008). These have included monolingual and multilingual studies and have included writing in vernacular languages. We should clarify that when referring to vernacular writing this is not the same use as when the term 'vernacular' is used in reference to vernacular languages, which often refers to local languages. There can be a great deal of overlap but vernacular writing is not necessarily tied to specific languages, especially in a global context such as the internet. Rather, as we will see, there is a complex relationship between writing and the language used.

We are interested in revisiting the notion of vernacular literacies at this point because technologies are changing the ways people can act in their everyday lives. People use computers, the internet and mobile devices in their lives for writing, obviously with email, texting and instant messaging, but, as we will demonstrate, also in many more ways. Technologies provide ways for people to engage in new activities, ones which they have not engaged in before and which have not been possible before.

We are focusing on Web 2.0, that is, web-based applications that allow users to create and publish their own content online. Creators of these applications provide a strong framing and within these structures the content which users provide is relatively unregulated, although there are forms of moderation and conflicts over censorship. Weblogs and Twitter are common examples of Web 2.0, where within a given framework people publish their own texts to share with others. (See chapter 1 of Knobel and Lankshear 2007, for a discussion of the distinctive characteristics of Web2.0.) Further examples include Wikipedia and other online encyclopaedias and dictionaries which rely on user-generated data. Another central idea of Web 2.0 is that of social networking, that is participating and collaborating in communities of users. Often this is achieved in the form of people interacting by writing, but it also includes uploading images and videos. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Myspace, are platforms for friends and families to interact with each other and connect through the written word and other multimodal contents. Another important feature shared by Web 2.0 spaces is their commenting systems. Users of these sites often exchange views on their everyday interests and experiences, evaluating and reacting to music they have heard, books they have read and hotels and restaurants they have visited. On YouTube, for instance, people also interact through leaving comments about one another's uploaded content. Such activities are highly textually mediated (Barton 2001) and they all provide new affordances, i.e. possibilities and constraints, for writing.

SPACES FOR WRITING ON Flickr

There is, in fact, a great deal of diversity in the uses of different Web 2.0 sites. Despite their widely acknowledged multimodal possibilities such as embedding videos and images, writing is a central element in many Web 2.0 spaces such as the essentially text-based entries in blogs, short status reports on Twitter and Wikipedia entries. This article focuses on Flickr.com, a site where writing may be less obvious but still plays a crucial role. In fact, it was deliberately chosen as a site which is not specifically about writing, rather than blogs, for example which are usually writing-focused. Flickr is one of the most popular photo-sharing sites globally. It is a site where people produce online photo albums, creating what Flickr calls a photo stream. We report here on a study of the writing on Flickr and will use it to address questions of vernacular writing. To address the questions posed in this article about what is happening to vernacular writing as people take up the possibilities offered by Web 2.0, we draw upon data which were collected as part of a larger study of the literacy practices associated with Flickr. Taking an international perspective, we examine data from multilingual photo streams and address questions of language choice, as reported on in more detail in Lee and Barton (2011). The research uses the approach of literacy studies (Barton 2007) to examine the writing on Flickr. It focuses on the practices and the texts, drawing upon theories about the structure of literacy practices and the ways in which people act within the medium's perceived affordances, that is medium users' interpretation and uptake of the possibilities and constraints offered by the medium (Lee 2007). In this study, we also explore issues about the significance of identity and about linking local and global phenomena.

Before addressing the specific questions in this article, we begin by describing how Flickr works and how writing is located within a multimodal space where word, image and layout are intertwined in many ways. Although Flickr is a site primarily devoted to images, there is a great deal of user-generated writing on the site, especially writing around an uploaded image. When someone uploads a photo, they can add a title and a description of the photo. They can also add tags: these are individual keywords which can be used when searching for photos (as explained in more detail in Davies 2006). And they can add notes on parts of photos, map references (called geotags) and other data.

Figure 1 shows a Flickr photo page where a photo is given a title, *Where's My Son?*, a description in Spanish, *Socorro donde esta mi hijo?*, and tags, *Bolas, color* and *Yarret*. Users can create sets of their own photos, such as the set *México* in Figure 1. Another way of linking up photos is to group them with ones by other Flickr members in groups representing common interests across users which are developed through discussions and external blogs. People can also have a set of contacts including friends and family members. Users can comment on one another's photos; they can join discussions of photos and they can send messages to other Flickr members. All these activities are optional

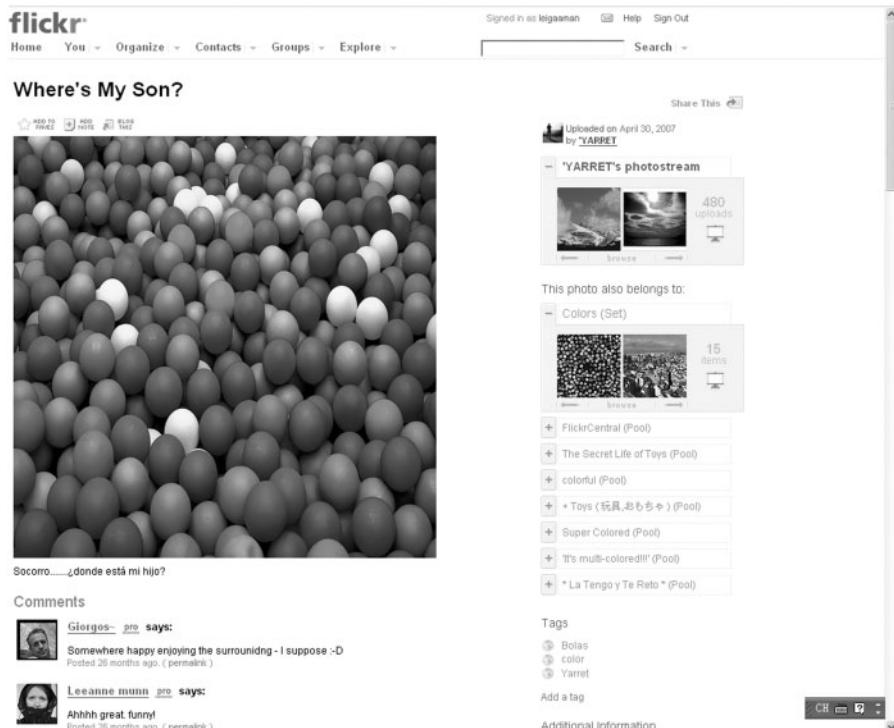


Figure 1: A Flickr photo page

and Flickr users choose the extent to which they want to participate in them. People can keep any of their photos private and this research is only examining publicly available activity.

There is a space for Flickr members to provide a profile of themselves on their home page and other members can add testimonials. The page might have nothing in it or it might be an extensive piece of writing. All users are required to give themselves a screen name in whatever language(s) they prefer. There is a form asking for optional information such as their gender and where they are from, and these are displayed on the profile page. The page also contains a list of contacts and details of the groups a user belongs to. The uploaded photos may be connected to external links, such as blogs, other photo sites and social networking sites. In addition, users can insert widgets showing, amongst other things, the number of hits they have received, what countries viewers have come from and their most popular photos. The framing provided by Flickr is currently available in eight different languages, but people's contributions can be written in any language and script. In these ways, Flickr provides many routes to social participation. In this article, we concentrate our discussion on users' practices in six of the most used writing spaces on

Flickr: *titles, descriptions, tags, sets, comments and profiles*. These spaces provide a range of affordances for writing and this article also examines how these affordances are being taken up by our Flickr participants.

RESEARCHING AND WRITING ON Flickr

Online research requires innovations in methodology and our study involves adapting existing methodologies and developing new approaches. Many researchers of web-based language and literacies have already pointed out the limitations of relying solely on large scale quantitative data and have turned to detailed methods that involve direct contact with participants. Androutsopoulos (2008) for example, makes use of what he calls 'discourse-centred online ethnography' to his analysis of diasporic websites. Studying everyday practices online also requires considerable insider knowledge of the research site. Davies and Merchant (2007) carried out an auto-ethnographic study of their own academic blogging literacies. Our investigation into new vernacular practices on Flickr also requires innovative methods which offer ways of researching details in actual instances of Flickr use. This study is multi-method and brings together different sources of data. The methodological approach we have adopted is in many ways unlike traditional research on print-based literacy practices. We draw heavily on online methods of data collection as well as our own reflexive participation in Flickr.

In our broader study of language and literacy practices on Flickr (Lee and Barton 2011), we have focused on multilingual practices, as people's creative deployment of language resources in online spaces throws light on vernacular literacies. We first examined the photo streams of 100 Flickr users who were members of a major English language based group, FlickrCentral. We found that English, Chinese and Spanish were the most common written languages used by them. A total of 75 out of the 100 users had their profile in only English and a further 12 had a bilingual profile including English. Seven had it in a language other than English and six had no written profile. This demonstrates that even in an English-based group, there are significant numbers of users of other languages.

For a more in-depth view, we turned to a different group of Flickr users and selected active users who used at least two languages, Chinese and English or Spanish and English. First, people were invited to complete an online questionnaire at my3q.com, covering what they used Flickr for, the languages they knew and general demographic information. We then analyzed the photo streams of the people who answered the questionnaire, focusing on their 100 most recently uploaded photos. Based on this analysis, they were then asked specific questions about their photos in an online interview. This was followed up, where appropriate, by further exchanges. When interacting with them, we made extensive use of Flickr's private email system, FlickrMail. This ensured that our initial invitation letter reached individual users as they logged in to Flickr. Using this

method, we had a response rate of 50%. As we started developing a closer relationship with the participants, we might communicate with them via our personal email accounts, according to their preferences. The data from this phase of the research were then coded using Atlas-Ti.

Thirty people completed the initial questionnaire and 15 of them were happy to take part in the online interview stage of the study and were involved in email exchanges with the researchers. There were 18 Chinese-speaking people, from Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore. Of the 12 Spanish speakers, most were from various parts of Spain, 2 were from Mexico and 2 were from Argentina. Looking across all 30 participants in terms of qualifications, 22 were college graduates, 3 were students and 4 had completed high school (and 1 did not answer this question). They had a range of different jobs including three people who worked in jobs where photography was central. All of them said they were frequent users of Flickr and, 26 of the 30 participants said they went on Flickr almost every day. In this, the study was successful in identifying active users. As well as the core activity of uploading photos, they all commented on other people's photos and nearly all responded to comments others made on their photos. Most updated their profiles regularly and they used the tagging system to search for photos. Our understanding and discussion of new vernacular literacy practices, in this article, are largely informed by these Flickr activities observed in the broader study.

WRITING PRACTICES ON Flickr

In this article, we have drawn upon the analysis of the photo streams along with what participants said in the interviews about their writing practices. Our data suggest that Flickr is a highly textually mediated web space where a wide range of literacy practices can be identified. Before discussing the specific writing practices, we first offer a description of what our participants wrote in the six writing spaces mentioned earlier.

First, pictures can have titles; in the standard page layout, these appear above the picture in a larger font than everything else on the page. The people we studied all used titles, though they did not give a title to every picture—some pictures were unnamed and some were given sequence numbers by the camera or other software. Many titles were similar to the titles of novels or paintings; they might be explanatory or descriptive, such as names of people and places, *on the road*, *teatime* or *class of 79*. Many were playful. Often they were intertextual to other photos or to the wider world. A common way of doing this was by drawing on popular culture with song titles, such as *Wandering eyes*, *Singing in the rain* and *Common people*.

What Flickr calls descriptions appear beneath the picture and can be of any length. They were not quite as common as titles, but many pictures had them. Usually, they provided further information about the picture and the person's

relation to it, such as the following examples from *Looloo* and *..ädri..*, respectively:

Took this shot during training today. I was thinking 'what is the best angle to take this pic...' while everyone was listening to the trainer... shame! (Looloo)

days ago my dad found this picture, and don't know why exactly i love it. maybe 'cause i have the 'same' haircut? really don't know (..ädri..)

Tags provide another space for writing in a vertical list on the right-hand side of the screen. They are categorizations provided for individual photos and they were used extensively by the participants in this study. These ranged from conventional classifications, *beach*, *summer*, *blue*, *door bell* shared by other people through to innovative, idiosyncratic ones, such as *disappear*, *heartbroken*, *desire* from *..ädri..*'s tags. Some would require insider knowledge and would only be recognizable to other Flickr users, such as the tag *365* or *365Days*, which *Erick C* used a few times, meaning that he was participating in a common photo project where he took one photograph a day for a year.

Any set the photo belongs to is shown on the right and one can click through to see a list of all the person's sets. Some were conventional categories, such as photos of particular events of holidays or birthdays, or they were more specialized, inventive and individual, as in *A mid-summer night's dream* or *My favourites*. Some sets stored photos of special occasions such as a birthday party or a wedding, while some were updated regularly such as *sundsets* and *flowers*. The names for tags and sets result in taxonomies created by people, often referred to as 'folksonomies'. It is worth noting that in fact some of the categories which people used as tags were taxonomic, but sometimes they seemed just to be adding descriptions of particular photos without making general categories or linking to their other photos or those of other people.

Profiles are the next writing space we examined. In a separate screen, Flickr users can write what they want and people used it in many different ways, varying in how much they put in. Often they wrote a short paragraph about themselves:

You'd know me by pictures I take, which are diverse (casual/relaxed pictures, or photojournalism), the most important thing of taking photography is your HEART, no matter what kind of equipment you use. I appreciate all the comments/faves, BUT don't use my photos without my permission, thanks! (LooLoo)

It gives me an enormous pleasure to share my photos with strangers, friends, family and people i know. This pleasure is automatic, i don't have any special expectation from your reactions, but if i can put a question mark in yourself, even if it's a methaphysical one of any sort, then i would be very happy. (SMeaLLuM)

Finally, the comments area is the most interactive writing space on Flickr. The comments, which appear beneath the photos with the most recent ones at the bottom, were commonly evaluative, usually positive, as in *amazing shot of an amazing view and your work is an inspiration to me*. Some comments may be questions about the photos, such as where the photo was taken or what the person in the photo was doing. Others were less clear as in *Hey baaaaby! Don't hate me! =)*. It was in the comments space that people were most likely to use emoticons, abbreviations and creative punctuation. Sometimes people would respond to comments and this might gradually develop into an interactive 'conversation' between the photographer and their contacts, some of whom they already know in their offline lives. As such, Flickr has also become a space for socializing and maintaining friendships, which we will discuss in greater detail later.

Deploying languages on Flickr

A recurrent practice in all the spaces for writing discussed above was that the people we studied used more than one language, using both Spanish and English or Chinese and English and, for some of them, additional languages or scripts. Looking broadly across the data, the titles and descriptions would be in either of their languages, with titles more likely to be in English than the descriptions. When tagging, they used various languages, sometimes tagging a word in both languages and at other times deliberately choosing to tag in a specific language. When interviewed, *Carolink* said that that these were new practices for her and she distinguished reasons for using English and Spanish: *I try to fit all the tags both in English (universalism) and in Spanish (my immediate Flickr public) and, since I know a little French, I put the French word when I remember it.* She was also aware of her potentially global audience: *Spanish flickrs is too limited for these internet times. I do not leave Spanish, but I try to use English when I can* and later she responded to our questions: *Well, I try to put all my photos available to any kind of public, and it is not a mystery that English is more universal than Spanish* For her and for several of the other people we interviewed, English was seen as providing access to a global popular culture, especially a music culture. This was drawn upon for titles and comments about photos, providing a common reference uniting people from many different countries. Some people used extensive song lyrics in descriptions of photos. This shows the importance of music and other aspects of popular culture to people's identities and that they used this aspect of the language to identify themselves as global cosmopolitans.

The people we studied received comments in a range of languages, some of which they might not be familiar with. When responding to comments in different languages, many users write their replies according to the languages used by the comment posters; if they do not know the language concerned, they would respond in English.

A last point about language choice is that several people said that they only use English on the computer; it had no uses for them in their everyday lives outside the computer. They used it for Flickr and other online activities. *Tim Tian* is a student from mainland China and claims to have limited knowledge of English. Over half of his photos are described in Chinese only. Although, according to him, English is not a language he would use in everyday life, some of the rest of his photos have either English only or Chinese–English bilingual descriptions. Examples as such are the titles ‘爆米花 Popcorn’ and ‘傘 umbrella’. Another case of bilingual writing is where a Chinese title is annotated with a longer explanation in English. For example, one of his photos features a local dish called *Maoxuewang*, and he chose to describe the dish in English:

Maoxuewang, a dish of boiled blood curd and other stuff with another name: Duck Blood in Chili Sauce.

The Chinese characters express only the name of the dish, while the English caption gives further details about the ingredients. In this case, English is used as a medium for translating local cultures to the non-Chinese-speaking world.

For our Chinese participants, writing on Flickr can also be multiscriptual. They combined different writing systems for various reasons. HKmPua gave tags in both traditional and simplified Chinese characters to increase the chance of his photo stream being searched for by people of different Chinese communities. In addition to searchability, some people also used multiple scripts for other reasons. Kristie explained that she intentionally included Chinese characters in her screen name:

... I want a wider group of people to know me. Not that the Chinese won't know me if I call myself just Kristie but if I attached a more 'graphic' Chinese word (that's how I always see the language), we can connect quicker and better. (Kristie)

People's language choices on Flickr are revealing about questions of identity and intended audiences. In this way, language choice also sheds more light on issues of vernacular writing. Elsewhere we explore in more detail the factors which affect people's language choices. These are shaped by the content of the photo, their sense of imagined audience for the photo and their particular situated language ecology, which is to do with the status of the languages for them and their familiarity with the languages (Lee and Barton 2011).

Writing for a range of purposes

People were using Flickr for many purposes. This range of purposes can be summarized by what Charleeze said: *To learn about photography; To share my photos; To have fun; To meet people*, with the additional use of writing a photo diary, which was mentioned by several people, including (zfz0123~). These change and develop over time and are learned informally as people take up

new affordances of Flickr and as they participate actively in Flickr. In particular, several people mentioned learning, although this was not prompted in any way by the questions. To some of the participants, Flickr is a site for learning about photography.

Most people I add as contact are aficionados who share their lives through photos and are generous teachers on the subject of photography, not just people who use this space to save up their photos. (Kristie)

To many others, participating in Flickr was a process of discovering new purposes for using Flickr. For example, some people gradually learned more about themselves and the world. This was often achieved through interacting with other Flickr members:

Comments I receive are a fresh reminder that others are watching. (SMeallUM)

Sharing images with people - not my photographic skills, but my way of seeing the world. I try to do research in ways of telling stories or expressing moods. Yes, I try to learn to make photographs too and Flickr members are very good at sharing knowledge. (Carolink)

I learn about different places, people and cultures. It is not just a matter of improving, but it is also about learning and interacting with different people. (Erick C)

At first, I intended to use Flickr for sharing photos with friends and family and for storing images only. But I found some of ppl commenting on my work and watching the photo work from other. After that, I keep surfing Flickr daily to keep friendship and to learn/improve my work. (*Andrew)

Whether the learning was deliberate or unconscious, participating in Flickr not only provides opportunities to learn how to do things on Flickr but people also change their writing practices as their perceived purposes for using the site change, which will be discussed later in the article.

Flickr as a social web space

A very common practice on Flickr is when people use it to socialize. Writing on Flickr is always potentially interactive, as in the comments area that we discussed earlier. Our participants also compared Flickr with other photo-sharing sites, suggesting the interactive affordance of the site:

The most interesting characteristic is the interactive nature of the website. Features such as tagging, commenting, favourites, groups, contacts allows me to share my photos with people around the world with the same interests and getting feedback. Whereas

most other sites, it is just a one way conversation with you showing the world your photos. (HKmPUA)

I like Flickr because people, especially my own contacts, make friendly and objective comments. Not having any comments may suggest that your photos are not popular; but that doesn't matter. I like the harmonious atmosphere on Flickr, which is very different from other photo sharing sites. On the photo sharing sites I've used before, if you don't receive enough comments, your photos will not be recommended by the administrators. This leads to some people making biased and unsolicited comments about each other's photos (just for the sake of adding up the number of comments). This affects my mood. (sating)

Flickr members also communicate through responding to titles, descriptions and tags given by the photographers. One of Looloo's photos has this description: 'i LOVE people-watching. Happy weekend^^', which directly addresses her audience by wishing them a good weekend. This immediately initiated a series of comments not only about the content of her photo ('Mr Doughnut'), but also wishing her 'Happy Weekend' in return.

For some people, writing on Flickr helps maintain and extend their physical relationships. Most people, all except three, said that they already knew some of their contacts personally when they started using Flickr. When asked what the most interesting feature of Flickr was, 'meeting people' was commonly mentioned:

This one was the first place I knew to share photos, it started as something I did once a week or so, but then I started to meet people. (Adri)

People are also very friendly and generous here. No harsh words to one another, just polite comments interspersed with lots of good, clean and healthy humour. They use flickr everyday too so you can see them everyday like normal friends. (Kristie)

People also talked of their intended and imagined audiences. We saw this when they shifted from being interested in their existing friends and relatives and began seeing strangers as a potential audience. They shifted to participating and remaking the global flows of language and culture. Taking account of 'imagined audience' is a very salient practice in Flickr and other Web 2.0 spaces and although people also imagine audience in other kinds of writing, this issue seems to have higher significance in Web 2.0. Thus, they were interacting with new people, with different people and with people in different places. They were asserting new identities, including complex multilingual global identities which they were projecting to new audiences, and they had a sense of themselves as global citizens.

REDEFINING THE VERNACULAR IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

All aspects of the processes and practices of reading and writing need to be re-examined now that so much reading and writing take place in new spaces with new affordances. The concept of vernacular literacies can be re-evaluated by addressing the questions raised at the beginning of the article: to what extent are these literacy practices on Web 2.0 new, and how are they similar to or different from traditional notions of vernacular literacies? Whilst we have provided a detailed example from Flickr, we believe that what we have shown that changes in writing practices can also be found in other Web 2.0 sites, including blogs and social networking sites.

Discovering new affordances for new practices

It is clear that people who are writing in these spaces are engaging in new vernacular practices. Such 'newness', or what is often referred to as 'new literacies' (Knobel and Lankshear 2007; Coiro *et al.* 2008), refers to both doing things that they had not done before and to extending existing practices. Based on the interview data, we can see that some existing everyday activities, such as creating a wedding album or sharing family photos, are carried over to these new spaces, that is participants are carrying out existing practices in new ways. People find that the new technology facilitates these practices, in that it is quicker and easier to create such albums and to share them. Their involvement with Flickr often started out with a desire to carry out existing practices more effectively. They then discovered that they could do more with their photos, for example they could easily annotate them and could share a large number of photos with distant relatives. At the same time, their photos were being treated differently by others: different people, such as work colleagues, might see the photos and strangers might see and comment on family photos. For the people we studied, they then extended what they did with Flickr into new areas of activity. Their new practices broadened out to include activities such as publicly evaluating other people's photos, classifying their own photos using keywords, making connection between their own and others' photos and even interacting with international audiences in multiple languages (e.g. Erick C's desire to learn about 'places, people and culture' on Flickr). Tagging is a good example of an activity which participants said was new to them as a way of dealing with their photos. By creating tags, they were organizing and classifying their photos in new ways and making their photos more accessible to others. This opened up the possibilities for new uses of their photos. Looking across the data, the ways in which the writing spaces on Flickr are used points to a vibrant area of writing, but at the same time it may challenge existing definitions of writing. There are tensions in definitions of reading, writing and literacy online which have already been pointed out (Leu *et al.* 2004; Coiro *et al.* 2008). Certainly, activities like tagging expand notions of what counts as writing.

These specific activities are part of broader social practices where people are relating to the world in new ways. As a way of examining these broader social practices in which the writing was located, we return to the six areas of life where reading and writing were seen to be of central importance to people, given at the beginning of the paper: organizing life, personal communication, leisure, documenting life, sense making and social participation. The Flickr users engaged in these areas of vernacular activity in new ways. For example, new forms of social participation developed. Flickr served new purposes for the people in our study (and note that the study concentrated on active users). They became involved in social networking, for instance, in deliberately setting out to get more views for their photos and trying to get a higher chance of being searched for (see HKmPUA's use of multi-scriptual tags) and getting more comments on their pictures. They were also documenting their lives in new ways and their personal leisure activities, such as their interests in music and photography, were changing as Flickr took up more and more of their time. With these new practices on Flickr in mind, we now turn to the characteristics of vernacular practices discussed earlier and examine how they need to be re-defined in the light of activity on Web 2.0.

Vernacular practices on Web 2.0 are self-generated

Similar to any vernacular literacy practices, the new literacy practices in our study are voluntary and self-generated, as illustrated by our informants' participation in Flickr. What people do on Flickr has its roots in everyday experience with the caveat that the framework is provided by a private company driven by commercial concerns. It provides the possibilities and constraints within which people act. Companies such as Yahoo, the owners of Flickr, can be seen as sponsoring particular practices. Burgess (2007) discusses the Flickr business model and how it sponsors certain practices, and Cox (2008) demonstrates how it is designed to satisfy commercial practices. Flickr is also relatively unregulated. Whilst there are lively accusations and discussions about censorship more generally on Flickr, this did not come up in our data and the people we studied saw it as providing many possibilities for them to discover new ways of using their photos. They appreciated the freedom they had and did not refer to perceived restrictions. Elsewhere on the web, there are many examples of imposed writing which are highly structured and constrained, as anyone who has ordered goods online or has had to fill in an online tax form can affirm.

Vernacular practices on Web 2.0 are a source of creativity, invention, and originality

Web 2.0 sites such as Flickr also afford spaces for originality and creativity. This is evident in the participants' wide-ranging purposes for writing on Flickr, their

creative deployment of language resources, as well as their specific ways of socializing on Flickr. The vernacular writing also led to new practices such as sharing knowledge and supporting each other which was apparent in the online comments as well as being reported in the interviews. This support was around photography as well as other aspects of life. Creativity can also be seen in the ways in which people are taking different photos from before. This results in part from digital cameras where, once one has the camera, individual photos are effectively free and the results can be immediately seen and evaluated. People can take a large number of different photos and then just delete ones they do not want to keep. In this way, a space for experimentation is opened up where they can try things out and get instant feedback. In terms of topic, it seems that people are taking more photos of the everyday, of the mundane, of the self, exploring one's room, one's body and one's workplace. More people are taking more photographs. (See Van House 2007 on current changes in the uses of everyday photography.) People also undertake systematic investigation such as the *365Days* projects, mentioned earlier. In exploring the possibilities of photography in these ways, people are increasingly getting ideas from one another and not primarily from professionals through How to books and photography magazines. There is a shift in where expertise lies as it moves from being the realm of professionals and becomes more distributed amongst people.

New practices are learned informally and change regularly

In terms of learning, we can see that these vernacular literacy practices on Flickr are learned informally. The role of teacher and learner is not clearly defined—all users contribute to the funds of knowledge on Flickr (Gonzalez *et al.* 2005; Davies 2006). Sometimes a participant may need technical support from other users, and at other times he or she may help others with their photographic skills and other problems. As such, the learning process is not separated from use—learning on Flickr means engaging oneself in Flickr activities. Another central idea to such vernacular learning is ‘playability’ (Burgess 2007), which refers to the ways in which Flickr affords a space that combines use, play and experimentation. We have seen this in our data and, as described above, people frequently talked about their own learning and there was a strong discourse of learning as an enjoyable, positive activity. Sometimes this was undertaken deliberately and at other times it was something they observed retrospectively. Such informal, self-generated learning not only helped generate new practices but people also changed and developed their practices as they learn to do things on Flickr. Such changes can be transitory and rapid.

Vernacular literacies are valued on Web 2.0

In many ways, the practices seen on Flickr were quite similar to other vernacular practices. But, our study has also revealed that these writing practices

on Web 2.0 challenge and extend earlier notions of vernacular practices. First, as argued in the introduction, vernacular practices have been less valued socially than more dominant practices which are sponsored and supported by education and other external institutions. In the case of Flickr, these local practices are now more valued. What was personal and often private is now put into the public realm. People are making public and giving greater circulation to activities which previously were local and where people could regulate access and use. These activities are no longer confined to the local sphere. People are using these writing spaces consciously and deliberately to tell the world something about their personal experiences or local life. They are knowingly addressing and responding to a global audience. Through making comments on one another's photos, people using Flickr have become reviewers, commentators and evaluators of their own and others' work. The comments they make are often valued by members of Flickr and others, who all draw upon and contribute to expanding global funds of knowledge. At the same time, such photos are more valued elsewhere, even within dominant institutions where vernacular practices are generally discouraged: for instance, Flickr is regularly searched by publishers and journalists needing photos of specific topics for books, magazines and newspapers. Teachers and researchers are exploring its use in classrooms (Davies and Merchant 2009) and extensive materials and advice on its educational potential are available on the internet.

The distinctions between dominant and vernacular and between global and local become blurred as the vernacular becomes more important, and there is more interaction between the local and the global. This fits in with the ways in which sociologists identify a weakening of the distinction between local and global (Wellman and Hampton 2002). This study also contributes an additional dimension to studies of how global language practices are localized (Alim and Pennycook 2007; Androutsopoulos 2009), by showing how at the same time local practices are becoming globalized. The concept of vernacular practices remains important for the study of reading and writing, and of language more generally, as identifying the source of practices and as providing a distinction with strongly sponsored dominant practices. It is clear that these contemporary vernacular practices differ from earlier ones in that they are now much more valued globally.

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