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MM &D

Multimedia and Layers of Transnational Family Communication

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Abstract

Studies of home language use tend to focus on macro-level language changes and verbal communication rather than on micro-level analyses of family communication. This makes it difficult to form a nuanced picture of the relations among diverse resources deployed in transnational family communication. In this paper, we address this issue by reporting results from a preliminary study of the micro-level communicative interactions of a first-generation transnational Australian Vietnamese family who have settled in Melbourne, Australia. Through an in-depth analysis of a 20-minute video clip, we capture intersections in the rich, diverse communicative resources used by the family as they watched a favourite English television program while simultaneously keeping in contact with family members overseas. Our analysis shows that transnational family communication patterns involve complex displays of language use, silence, touch, movement, and spatial orientation, which together enable the family to communicate in the here and now with individuals near and far. We use the multiplicity framework to interpret the fluidity of multimodal communication, intimacy, and continuity across space.

Introduction

Studies of migrant families' communicative practices have traditionally focused on how selected features of language are used across multiple generationws of an extended family unit living more or less together in a "new" location (Borland 2006; Sofu 2009; Rubino 2014). This type of research tends to be concerned with single-directional movement—from one language to another—with a focus on how the family members assimilate into the new culture and shift to the dominant language of their location (e.g., Canagarajah 2008, Vincze and Henning-Lindblom 2015). This approach typically separates out how different individuals use their linguistic resources rather than looking at communicative events as wholes (see Gallo and Hornberger 2017; Said and Zhu 2017). Our focus is on how communicative resources interact and the ways that one transnational family uses diverse combinations of communicative resources to extend communicative relationships to create closeness between those sharing their physical location and distal others.

We see transnational families as "families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity" (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, 3). Transnationalism is not easy for families. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2005, 67) argues that "growing up in a transnational family presents a wide range of challenges." In describing families where the child is separated from the parent, Parreñas maintains that "distance in time and space between migrant parents and their children threatens to weaken intergenerational relations" (p. 67). Distance also creates challenges for families seeking ways to be present in multiple worlds. If we are to explore how relationships are engaged with and tensions potentially overcome, we need research frameworks that offer a systematic view of the breadth of communicative resources and how they are interwoven in communication. In this article, we offer a systematic framework of the communicative repertoire and document how it captures the diverse and interwoven ways in which family connectedness is sustained when some members of the family are living and socialising in one location while maintaining connections with family in another country.

While some connections may be maintained through travel, attempts to hold transnational families together are increasingly negotiated digitally. Digital technologies are viewed as ways of bridging some of the issues associated with distance (Wilding 2006). However, even in studies that seek to explore digital resources as part of "new 'being together' practices" (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016, 202), the sense of togetherness is typically characterised as a way to "do family … at a distance" (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016, 203). In this paper, we invert this perspective and look at ways in which digital media are used to sustain closeness. We consider how a smartphone and its affordances fit into the ecology of a particular episode of a transnational family "doing family."

As our purpose is to develop insights into how families do "being together" using a combination of face-to-face and digital communicative tools, a key focus of our analysis will be the fluidity in the wholeness of interactions and how a systematic model of the communicative repertoire assists understanding of how families do transnational relationships as they perform multiple, simultaneous communicative acts. The study will also contribute insights into the richness of nuanced family interactions, which are usually hard for outsiders (non-family members) to observe due to intimacy and privacy considerations.

To move forward, we first draw on the literature about transnational families before focusing on polymedia communication in transnational families, television viewing, and the Vietnamese community in Australia. We use a multiplicity framework (Nicholas and Starks 2014) as a means of capturing the dynamic and simultaneous interactions of different digital and other communicative resources, focusing on particular features to illustrate the modes and mediations in use and how these uses interact. We then introduce our data collection process before drawing on illustrative examples of how this transnational Vietnamese family bridges "here" and "there" in their family time. We analyse a single video of the interactions of one family while they watch television and use other digital media to communicate among themselves and with their family abroad. Our purpose is to reveal the potential use of this framework for the study of how families communicate.

The 20-minute recording is of a complete episode of one show watched by the family. We do not intend to claim that the results can be generalised to other interactions or settings. Rather, our aim is to show how a detailed micro-level analysis of communicative resources can reveal how multiple resources work together to create meaningful family interactions so as to understand how extended transnational families can create co-presence across distance and generations.

Transnational Families

Transnational families result from the mobility of workers, asylum seekers, refugees and students. As Leslie Fesenmyer (2014, 1) points out, "these families encourage us to problematize (implicit) assumptions about relatedness." The transnational families literature highlights the separation of mainly nuclear family members and the cross-border movement of parent(s) leaving their children in the home countries (Madianou and Miller 2011; Hoang et al. 2015). That literature also occasionally reports on cases that involve the transnational mobility of a grandparent separated from their left-behind children and grandchildren (e.g., Nedelcu 2017). Because transnational families need to maintain relationships over a long distance, the literature often explores their uses of digital devices and social media as ways of bringing families together (Bacigalupe and Cámara 2012; Parreñas 2014).

While there is research on how parents communicate via technologies with their left-behind children (Rudi et al. 2015), there is very little literature about how three-generation transnational families communicate across distance using digital resources, even though there is an implicit acknowledgement of this practice (Bacigalupe and Lambe 2011). There is also little literature on how transnationalism and locality intersect—how whole families living in different places use communicative resources to be both in their locations and simultaneously together across distance.

Polymedia and Here-and-There Communication

Although one might share concerns over the effects of digitally mediated communication, Caroline Haythornthwaite (2005) has demonstrated that digitally mediated communication does not replace other forms of communication within close families. Haythornthwaite found that in situations where there are existing strong relationships, digitally mediated communication occurs more intensively and extensively. Haythornthwaite's (2005, 130) further point is that neither technologies nor the relationships based on them are singular. Many authors have offered insights into the complexities involved. Tingyu Kang (2012) has documented ways in which the availability of digital communication technologies can dramatically change traditional understandings of role relationships and responsibilities in transnational families. Alistair Hunter (2015) has shown that digital technologies can both encourage and enable but also constrain desire for relatedness with countries/cultures of origin. To open up discussion on the operation of digitally mediated communication within multimodal interaction, Daniel Miller and Mirca Madianou (2012) proposed the construct

of polymedia as "an emerging environment of communicative opportunities that functions as an 'integrated structure' within which each individual medium is defined in relational terms in the context of all other media" (p. 170). In a second article, Madianou and Miller (2012) elaborated on the potential of this way of thinking, stating that "polymedia is not simply the environment; it is how users exploit these affordances in order to manage their emotions and their relationships" (p. 172). This way of framing connections between media and relationships expands the expectations of analysis while creating challenges as to how to engage with the analysis.

In exploring some of the layers of relationships, Madianou (2016, 186) has proposed that the idea of "ambient co-presence" can capture "the peripheral awareness of the actions of distant others" (p. 198). We take up this idea but do not restrict it to distant others. We show how a nuanced sense of peripheral awareness within and across contexts is what enables closeness to be established.

Madianou (2016, 186) advocates for the exploration of polymedia because it enables researchers to consider "how users navigate media environments and choose platforms from a range of communicative opportunities." We add to this discussion by presenting a detailed analysis of how varied communicative resources combine to enable a complex and interwoven sense of togetherness that links family across activities and space.

In exploring the advantages of this research area, Madianou (2016, 185) sees polymedia as being able to address the undertheorisation of communication technologies and reflect a lack of an elaborated way of understanding how face-to-face and digitally mediated communication co-occur and interweave. In this study we introduce a framework for understanding how features of face-to-face and other forms of communication interact. This allows us to explore the interwoven use of language, bodily movement, touch, spatial orientation, and digital media (specifically, in our case, a television and a smartphone).

Joint Television Viewing

Television is both an individual and a collective activity. Individually, viewers need to see and hear what is occurring on the screen. Collectively, it is a social experience that has the potential to contribute to a sense of commonality. These two aspects sit in an uneasy relationship. As Nicolas Ducheneaut and colleagues (2008) point out, viewers tend to talk around and over the television program. David Morley (2005) asserts that the rhythms of the television program can determine when and for how long viewers are allowed to move. Joint viewing brings with it complexities of interpersonal relations and communication. It is, however, not extensively discussed in relation to transnational families. In contrast, digital communication and issues of belonging in transnational families are often discussed in association with devices such as smartphones and iPads. These devices are often used while watching television (Lin 2009; Chitakunye and Maclaran 2014). In some studies, television is seen as essential in fostering interpersonal relationships among family members (Lull 1990). Within this latter perspective, television viewers can be seen as active, constructive, and creative participants who can and do engage in multiple, complex sociable interactions. Different frameworks for the analysis of these interactions

are offered by Morrison and Krugman (2001) and Ducheneaut et al. (2008). While some family communication during television viewing is based on television content, other aspects have no relevance to the content of the programs being viewed. Family members as television viewers are variable, characterised by difference, with multiple identities and non-monolithic preferences (Holbert, Kwak, and Shah 2003). As Morley explains, "at different times of the day, for different family members, different patterns of viewing have different 'saliences'" (2005, viii). Yet, when the individuals in a family get together to watch television, family television viewing has the potential to create a sense of closeness and belonging.

One aspect of this sense of belonging is when certain behaviours become norms. For instance, in this family, talk and movement tend to occur at a particular time when there is a gap or silence in the dialogue or transitions between scenes or programs. At other times, sounds may disturb others (Morley 2005; Ducheneaut et al. 2008). A sense of a shared way of living is therefore created by agreement about how movement is affected by programming considerations. Such considerations include how individuals move in and out of the room and reposition themselves during commercials.

Increasingly, television viewing co-occurs with other forms of communication, requiring a framework of communicative resources that will enable the systematic analysis of family interactions that co-occur between and across the different media. We explore these relationships in the context of one communicative event in the life of a Vietnamese transnational family with members in both Australia and Vietnam. We address the question: How do members of a transnational Vietnamese family deploy diverse communicative resources as they do "being together"? Our data is a 20-minute videorecording of a regular event: the watching of a favourite television program by members of the family living in Australia. While the family views the program, one family member uses a smartphone to connect with Facebook to communicate with family and friends living in Vietnam.

Vietnamese Community in Australia

The Vietnamese community of 185,000 ranks sixth in size among non-Anglo communities in Australia (Baldassar, Pyke, and Ben-Moshe 2017, 937). Unlike migration to South Korea by Vietnamese individuals mainly for marriage (Chung, Kim, and Piper 2016) or to Taiwan for domestic work (Cheng and Choo 2015), the Vietnamese community in Australia consists of four main groups: those who left Vietnam due to political reasons after the unification of Vietnam in April 1975 (Nguyen and Tang 2017); those who fled Vietnam by boat for political and/or economic reasons in the 1980s to 1990s; those who initially arrived in Australia as international students or skilled workers; and the descendants of the first-generation Vietnamese migrants. Despite the diversity of the Vietnamese population in Australia, the sense of a collective Vietnamese identity in these transnational families remains strong (Baldassar et al. 2017). This collective closeness is reflected in "filial piety, the gratitude and respect for parents" (Hitchcock and Wesner 2009, 265). Mandy Thomas (2005, 1145) claims that "a desire to maintain Vietnamese identity in Australia

is often centred on getting the family together in one location." The community tends to cluster in particular Australian suburbs, such as Footscray, Richmond, or Springvale in Melbourne, Cabramatta in Sydney, or Darra in Brisbane. Vietnamese in Australia regularly interact together as families. In the example that follows, the Vietnamese family watches TV together and uses communicative technologies and social media to link with family elsewhere (see also Baldassar et al. 2017).

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

In this section, we introduce the multiplicity framework of the communicative repertoire (Nicholas and Starks 2014) as a way to analyse and show how digital and other resources combine in family communication. Figure 1 provides an overview of this framework.
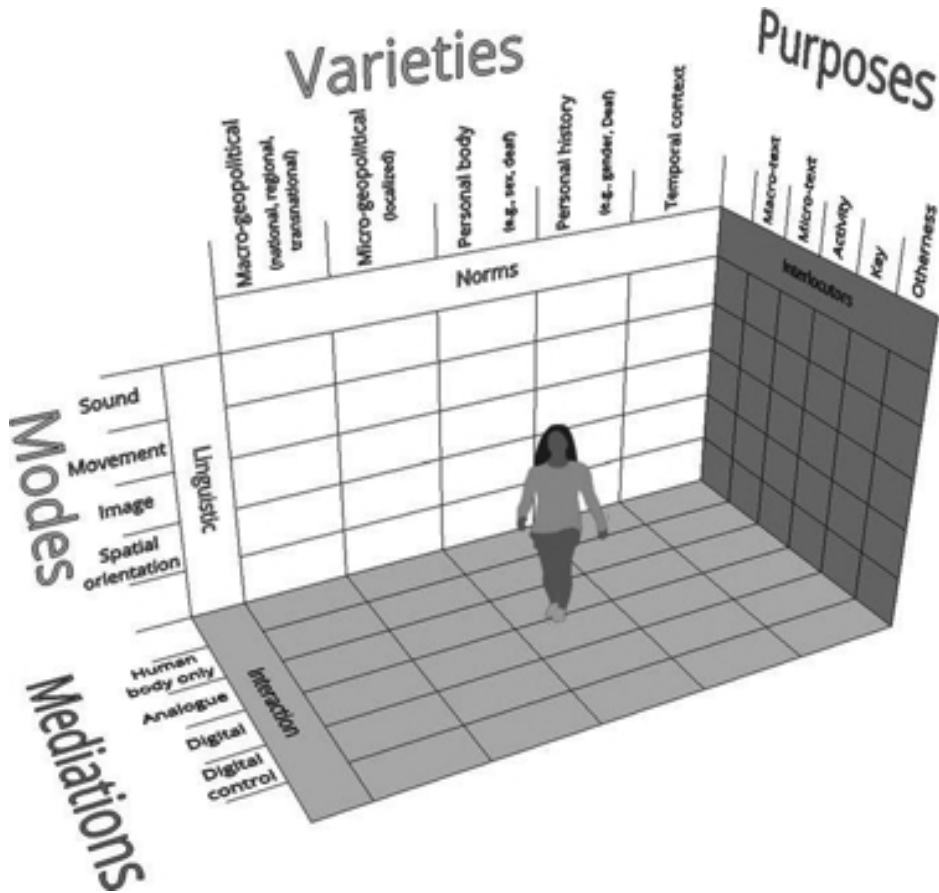

Figure 1: Communicative repertoire framework: Dimensions, elements, and threads of communicative repertoire (Nicholas and Starks 2014, 69).

The multiplicity framework aims to capture the interplay between communicative resources. The purpose behind the framework is to allow complex communicative acts to be understood as resulting from the combination of different features associated with elements located along four intersecting dimensions. Using intersecting dimensions enables effectively infinite possible ways of communicating to emerge from a bounded set of resources.

As shown in Figure 1 above, the first dimension involved in communication is modes, the physical resources that provide the basic building blocks of any communicative act. These include sound, image, movement, and spatial orientation, among others. Sound and image are of particular importance because they allow us to explore both spoken and written communication without having to consider the specific way in which the communication is conducted. The inclusion of movement and spatial orientation allows us to address features of body positions and gestures, as well as features associated with the layout of printed material and the distinction between still and moving images. While touch is one of the potential elements within the modes dimension in the multiplicity framework, it has not yet been fully developed in discussions of the framework (see Nicholas and Starks 2014, 26). This physical resource is used extensively in the family interactions described in this paper. The exploration of different types of modes enables us to show the role that diverse physical resources play in building and shifting aspects of peripheral awareness in communication.

The second dimension of the multiplicity framework is mediations, the technological means by which the physical resources are deployed. These resources include features associated with the elements of the human body, as well as those associated with analogue and digital technologies, among others. The features associated with these elements combine to help construct complex and layered communicative acts that transcend distance, enable closeness, and weave through peripheral awareness in building the relationships that are engaged with in the polymedia framework.

The third dimension of the framework is varieties, which identifies the ways in which features associated with modes and mediations connect with the norms around communicative ideologies and practices that individuals encounter. Features of communication related to varieties include macro-geopolitical features (e.g., ways of communicating in particular "national" settings); micro-geopolitical features (e.g., ways of communicating in localised settings, such as within the home or at school); features related to personal body (e.g., ways of communicating that have come to be associated with sex, age, or race); features related to personal history (e.g., ways of communicating related to experiences such as transnational migration) and features related to the temporal context in which communication occurs (e.g., how people communicate when they have just woken up). In this paper, we draw on features associated with varieties when we look at, for example, how spoken or written features of different languages are associated with a sense of belonging.

The fourth dimension of the framework, purposes, focuses on the overall or layered intent of the communication. Within the elements in this dimension, we include features associated with structuring the overall macro-text of the communication (e.g., features of commentary or argument); micro-text features (e.g., features associated with opening or

closing a conversation); the activity (e.g., features associated with watching television, such as sitting still and looking in one direction); the key (e.g., features associated with communicating love or distress and features of otherness (e.g., the extent to which there may be more than one intent in a communicative act). The elements in this dimension are also ones that can affect a sense of closeness and belonging. The four dimensions in the framework provide a means of showing how multiple layers of communication combine to create togetherness within the larger activity of television viewing. This four-dimensional structure provides a systematic, integrated way of exploring how different communicative features are drawn on and interact with one another to produce complex, layered communication, important in creating a better understanding of polymedia and the communicative practices of transnational families.

Method

The study focuses on one transnational family recruited through our Vietnamese alumni network. The key feature of the family for the purposes of this paper is that some members of the family are living in Australia while others live in Vietnam. We do not claim that the family is "typical," only that the communication within this family provides insight into how communicative resources can be combined to transcend distance and create closeness.

To gain insights into the complex and dynamic communicative practices in the family's life, we collected data using small action cameras. Studies that have used such cameras have tended to use them to record the perspective of one person at a time, as in the study of chemistry classrooms by Galloway and Bretz (2016), or only include others on a subsidiary basis, as in Clifton Evers' (2015) study of surfers and Timothy Baghurst's (2016) study of preservice teachers. Only rarely have these cameras been used to capture interactions (e.g., Ritter, Barkema, & Adams, 2017). In our research, we provided each member of the family with one of these cameras to record authentic at-home communicative practices as they deemed appropriate. We did not specify how the family members should record their interactions. The recordings were supplemented by retrospective interviews and samples of communicative artefacts to help contextualise the communicative interactions that took place.

In this paper, we report the results derived from the analysis of a video clip created when the family placed one action camera on a tripod next to the television. Positioning the camera in this way enabled the capturing of a set of interactions between and among four members of the family as three of those members watched a favourite English-language television program. We chose this clip for analysis because (1) it contained an interesting use of digital technologies and (2) it demonstrated some of the complexity of the "being together" practices involving members of the extended family. The visible actors in this clip include the nuclear family of father, mother, and two daughters in Australia, a television, and a smartphone. The nonvisible distant participants include a grandmother and grandfather (the mother's parents) in Vietnam and participants in the television program.

Setting

In 2009, the father in this family arrived in Australia for doctoral study with his wife and children. At that time, the two daughters were aged 11 and 4. Upon their arrival in Australia, neither girl was fluent in English. The older daughter had elementary-level English and enrolled in grade 6, the final year of primary (elementary) school. The younger daughter had no English at all and enrolled in kindergarten. At the time of the video-recording discussed in this article, seven years had passed and the family's extensive experiences of living in Australia meant that they had already developed substantial social skills for daily life in Australia, as well as key skills necessary to embrace the diversity and change they encountered. This included developments in their English language skills.

In this video clip, the family has already eaten dinner and, as usual, they are sitting down together to relax. As a family, their shared viewing includes spy movies, fashion shows, cooking, music, and reality programs. There are also shows that do not interest all members of the family. One reality program that the father and the two daughters especially like watching is Border Security, a program based in the arrivals section of various international airports. Such settings are familiar to transnational families who have experienced standard immigration, quarantine, and security procedures through their international travel. In this video clip, the family is watching an American edition of the program. The particular episode being watched is about a Mexican family being stopped at the US border control because the father has been found with white powder in his bag. The man is being questioned by quarantine officers while his wife and son are kept in another room. For our purposes, the content of the particular program is less significant than the family choice of joint television viewing. Our interest is in how the communicative acts during the television viewing show belonging and connection and how they engage with digital mediation as the family does "being together."

The video-recording began once all members of the family were together in the living room in front of their television. At the beginning (and throughout) the recording, the mother was lying on the left half of the four-seater sofa (from our perspective looking at the video). The mother's head was close to her younger daughter, who was seated between the mother and her older sister. After the father had switched on the camera to record the event, he moved onto the floor, leaning against the sofa between the mother and the younger daughter. Because the mother was not interested in the particular television program, when the show started, she opened up Facebook on her smartphone to communicate with family (and friends) in Vietnam. During the television program, the mother communicated with her family and friends in Vietnam and uploaded to Facebook some drawings that her younger daughter had previously converted from photographs using an application on the smartphone (see Figure 2). The communication between the mother and her family and friends in Vietnam related to these images.

Figure 2. A smartphone screen shot.

Findings

Through the analyses which follow, we show how the transnational family members collectively and individually used combinations of verbal (sound) and nonverbal features (image, movement, spatial orientation, and touch) at home in Australia and how these features intersected with the affordances of the television and a smartphone. Our analyses show how the flow in the family members' varied use of the affordances of polymedia and their use of the communicative features available to them enabled the members of the family to simultaneously connect and negotiate relationships with proximate and distant members. We commence our analysis with what might be considered more background features of the whole of the communication. In later examples we show how some of these features become foregrounded as part of achieving certain complex communicative acts.

During the video clip, there is both spoken and written communication. When speaking (using sounds), the family members make use of four macro-geopolitical varieties: Vietnamese, their version of Australian English, as well as combinations of mostly Vietnamese with some English or mostly English with some Vietnamese. The people in the Border Security program use features from other macro-geopolitical varieties (a variety of American English and a variety assumed to be Mexican Spanish). The sounds in the commercials mostly contain features of Australian English. In the Border Security program, the main communicative acts are shaped by the micro-geopolitical features of the program's immigration/quarantine context. During the commercials, the features of the communicative acts are shaped by the persuasive purposes of advertising in relation to the varied micro-geopolitical contexts displayed. Features associated with the micro-geopolitical varieties of the family members are shaped by their context of family television viewing at home, but also by their personal bodies as adults and children and males and females of different ages. Their personal histories as migrants from Vietnam to Australia also shape the features that characterise how the parents and children communicate, including the sounds they produce and the address terms they use to refer to one another. In addition, some of these personal histories shape their behaviours, including their choice of the television program to watch. This and other experiences of previous shared events contribute to the family communication, as does the temporal context. The temporal context is an evening activity after a family dinner.

In relation to the purposes of the communication, various elements within the dimension of purposes are in play. The family's macro- and micro-texts include the written Facebook dialogue on the mother's smartphone and its intersections with conversations in Vietnam about what is being shared on Facebook. They also include the negotiation of seating arrangements and program choice and the expression of different ways of caring for one another. The two most important and complementary activities in the video clip are those associated with family television viewing and Facebook communication. The primary features of "key" in this video clip are those that within the family communication express intimacy and informality but vary both in relation to participant and to macro-text. In these other instances, the key among the family members is informational or complaining. The dominant features of key for the actors on the television are tense and challenging because of the issues involved. However, the television broadcast also contains commercials in

which the features of key are buoyant and seductive. The features of the "otherness" element are complex and layered. The layering can be seen in the ways in which diverse "other" places, emotions, and relations are brought together. Between members of the family in the two locations, the features contributing to layers of otherness include the use of drawings created by the younger daughter. The mother's communication therefore has features of the image element from both her and her younger daughter.

In what follows, we foreground features from the elements of two dimensions within the multiplicity framework: modes and mediations in the family's communication. We also consider how they intersect with features associated with other dimensions in the family's communicative practices as part of doing "being together" in Australia and distally, in Vietnam. Among the family members, we pay particular attention to the mother and her important role in the family being together across multiple places. The mother is positioned as prominently "there" because of her use of her smartphone. Her sending of the images creates a peripheral awareness among her parents and friends in Vietnam of the presence of the Australian-based family members, who are sitting on the couch in an Australian living room. Likewise, her use of the smartphone also creates a peripheral awareness among the proximate family members of the family members in Vietnam. These layered voices and presences enable the family as a whole to remain close. By posting images of the family on Facebook, the images of the family members in Australia (photographed and drawn) are simultaneously in Australia and Vietnam. To maintain a presence in both worlds, the mother's spoken interactions with her husband and two children are minimal, suggesting that perhaps she is only peripherally aware of her proximate environment. Although her use of sound (in this instance her silence, i.e., lack of sound) suggests a peripheral presence in the immediate family context. Other modes of communication present a different proximal perspective that enables the mother to present herself as both "here" and "there" in a complex, layered communicative web. This complex layering of peripheral awareness creates an important means for the establishment of closeness, as we will see below. To explore this, we turn our attention to the overall communication within this family event. We first examine the various modes the family uses to communicate.

Modes

Sound: The sounds we hear on the video are those from the family and the television. The sounds are different because they reflect different histories and varied language combinations. In the family dialogue, sometimes there is a mixture of two languages in one utterance, for example:

> 1) *Trong đấy có fake money* [Translation: There is fake money in that]
> (older daughter) (Timeline: 8:56).

We recognise these differences in macro-geopolitical choices as a result of recognition of the sounds that are produced. In the family interactions, the only sounds we can observe involve the proximate family members. The Facebook posts from the grandmother contain written reports (image element) of sounds that her husband (the grandfather) had used with

the grandmother, but we cannot hear those sounds.

In this video clip the parents use Vietnamese almost exclusively when they speak with one another and with their children. This is consistent with what the parents said in the interview about how they were trying to sustain a Vietnamese-only language policy in the home. The use of Vietnamese creates a connection with other family members in Vietnam, who also communicate via Vietnamese. The use of Vietnamese is one of a number of means of distinguishing between various actors in the total event.

The language choices by other family members are also influenced by traditional variables (age [personal body] and generation [personal history]). Reflecting her personal history, the older daughter tends to use Vietnamese when talking to her parents, for example:

> 2) *Tát mẹ một phát, y như [nickname of younger daughter] hồi xưa tát vào mắt mẹ nhỏ. Nghịch nhỏ, nghịch nhỏ! [Translation: mum, just like little [nickname of younger daughter] slapping your eyes years ago; so mischievous, she was so mischievous when she was small.] (Timeline: 1:21).*

In this context, she sometimes also uses Vietnamese when talking to her younger sister, as in (3).

> 3) Older sister: *Thằng này đẹp trai đấy! nhỏ, đẹp trai đúng không? [Translation: This man is good looking, isn't he?] (Timeline: 2:35)*
> Younger sister: *This is John.*
> Older sister looking at strange fruits found by quarantine officers in the television program: *Ôi giời ơi! Cái gì đấy? [Translation: Gosh, what is that?] (Timeline: 7:38)*
> Younger sister: *Snake fruit.*

At still other times, both sisters temporarily move away from their default language choice in surrounding interactions to accommodate the communicative choices of the other. The complex layering of features involved is revealed in (4), where the younger sister is vigorously massaging a painful area in her older sister's back. The older sister reacts to this physical act with an utterance that begins with her younger sister's default macro-geopolitical variety (English) before continuing in her own default macro-geopolitical variety (Vietnamese) but then returning to English. In response, the younger sister reciprocates with a brief turn in Vietnamese before both sisters revert to English for the remainder of the exchange.

> 4) Older sister: *Not bên đấy. Bên này thôi. (suhhhhhhh) Xoa cái chỗ vừa đánh ý, suhhhh, bruise, gonna be a bruise now. [Translation: Not that side. Only this side. Rub where you've just hit, bruise, gonna be a bruise now.] (Timeline: 11:06)*
> Younger sister: *Đâu? [Translation: Where?]*
> Older sister: Ewwww! *That's disgusting [nick name of younger sister]!*

Too far, too far.
Younger sister: Sorry.

The younger daughter also uses macro-geopolitical varieties that reflect her personal history. The younger daughter, who has spent more of her life in Australia than in Vietnam, speaks mainly English. Only on rare occasions does she blend English with Vietnamese or use only Vietnamese. One of these rare occasions is when the younger daughter uses a combination of English and Vietnamese when talking to her father about who could sit where on the sofa:

> 5) *Daddy!!! Yêu! This is chị [name of older sister] spot. Khi mà chị [name of older sister] comes back, ba moves nhớ! [Translation: Daddy!!! Love you! This is (name of older sister) spot. When (name of older sister) comes back, daddy moves, ok.] (Timeline: 4:58)*

In some instances, the younger daughter's choice of a combination of English and Vietnamese intersects with the macro-text features of the television broadcast. In these instances, it often aligns with the transition from the commercial break to the main television program. During these transitions, she attempts to bring various members of the proximate family back to the activity of viewing the program together and negotiate who is going to be close to whom by using both English and Vietnamese:

> 6) *Oh I know him! Chị! Chị ơi, it's ready! It's ready! (laugh) Ơ, chị ngồi đây cạnh em! [Translation: Oh I know him! Sister! Sister! It's ready! It's ready! Oh, sister please sit here next to me!] (Timeline: 7:05)*

Within the multiplicity framework, the element of sound includes silence (the absence of sound). The mother was largely silent during the recording. This silence was part of the way in which she was able to negotiate her simultaneous connection with all three generations of her family. The silence of producing images on the smartphone meant that the mother was able to convey images, (written) in Vietnamese and drawn (by her younger daughter) (see Figure 2), to family members in Vietnam without disrupting the communication occurring among her proximate family members. This absence of sound is complemented by the deployment of other elements of modes (movement, spatial orientation) that enable her to bring the different generations of her family together. Her closeness with her proximate family is reflected in her use of other elements: spatial orientation and movement (discussed here because it is connected with image). She remains lying on the couch with her head next to one or another member of the proximate family throughout the entire video clip—reflecting peripheral awareness of each of those members according to whichever member of her proximate family occupied the seat closest to her head. The mother's peripheral awareness of features of the family's communication in her immediate physical environment was also demonstrated by minor changes in movement. She moved her head to glance at the television when the broadcast changed from the program to commercials. She also moved her head at times when the person sitting next to her changed and they needed more or less space. Thus, the mother's use of silence enabled her to remain co-present with her proximate family members while her simultaneous use of various

features of movement enabled her to be co-present with the distant family members. Her co-presence is recognised by the family who moved around her but rarely talked to her. Her positioning can be seen in one of the two instances of her producing sound where, in responding to a comment from a member of the family about a particular event that they thought she might have an interest in, she verbalised her stance:

> 7) *Không mẹ không xem phim này đâu (Timeline: 18:20) [Translation: No, I don't want to see this movie].*

Movement: Various kinds of movement complemented and responded to visual and verbal information from both the television and the family members. For example, at one point in the video, the older daughter conveyed her interpretation of an anticipated event to other family members in the room by using a silent throat-cutting movement of her hand to reflect her opinion on what would probably happen to the wife of the detained man in the TV program.

> 8) *Older daughter commenting on what would happen to the wife in the television show: Vợ không nên ra, vợ ra một phát là 'khực' (using her hand for a throat-cutting gesture) bọn kia sẽ … (Timeline: 2:22) [Translation: The wife should not go out; if the wife goes out, she is finished; they will … (throat-cutting gesture)].*

In most instances, however, the movement by the members of this family depended on whether the television was showing the program or there was a commercial break. During the program, all proximate family members stayed in the same seats and in the same room. This relative lack of movement created its own meaning: "We are sharing this activity as part of being a family." However, during television commercial breaks, the father and daughters moved and repositioned themselves. There was no felt need to listen to sound from the commercials in the same way as to those on the main television program. In this context, all of the proximate family members except the mother moved in and out of their initial seating positions and at various times left the room. Because the mother was strongly connected with the distal, the commercial breaks did not affect her movement in the same way. Since the other proximate family members hardly ever attempted to change the mother's spatial orientation or interrupt her silence, we can assume that they accepted her behaviour as a way of showing that she was there with them. The post-viewing interview confirmed this interpretation.

Although the mother largely remained still, for the other proximate family members, movement was often a feature of how they negotiated closeness and belonging. For example, in the first commercial break, the older daughter left the living room to get something in the kitchen. The father then stood up from the floor and moved to sit on the seat which the older daughter had just left, to be closer to his younger daughter. Because the mother did not move, this also meant that the father had moved closer to her. These movements had ongoing effects. When the television commercial ended, the older sister returned from the kitchen to the living room. Seeing that her seat had been taken by her father, the older daughter sat down near her mother's feet, a position that might not have

been perceived as close. Her younger sister patted the sofa and insisted:

> 9) *Chị ngồi đây cạnh em (Timeline: 7:05) [Translation: Sister, please sit here next to me].*

As the younger daughter was doing this, other members reacted to create closeness. The father stood up and moved to sit between the mother and the younger daughter. The older daughter then sat next to her younger sister but on the other side from the father. Then the mother raised her head a little to give the father more space. All of this movement took place in relative silence until all family members were close together on the sofa.

While the other family members maintained closeness through sound and movement, the mother's "lack" of movement in her proximal world had other effects. It communicated her active engagement with her extended family and friends in Vietnam via the use of her smartphone. As others were watching the television program, the mother's silence and relative lack of movement maintained a continuity of relationship with her extended family living outside Australia, showing that she belonged in both places at the same time.

Spatial Orientation: While there were many features of spatial orientation that resulted in the involved family members being close to one another, we focus here on examples of how spatial orientation intersects profoundly with local polymedia affordances. First, despite movements, the overall spatial orientation of the proximal family is shaped in relation to the television. The sofa faces the television and all proximate family members are on this sofa in various positions that enable them to view the television. Even the mother's position lying down does not prevent her from looking at the television. This spatial position is important in creating a sense of belonging. Throughout the recording, the other proximate family members reposition themselves during commercial breaks in ways that do not change the mother's orientation towards the television. She is perceived to be involved in the family viewing even though for most of the time she does not even gaze at the television. The family's acceptance of her spatial orientation communicates that she belongs as an actor in their proximal world.

Touch: A further element of modes is important in the construction of communicative acts. This element is touch, that is, tactile communication. It plays a vital role in the layering of communication between the distant and the proximate as the family does "being together." This exploration elaborates on a mode that was not described fully in earlier descriptions of the multiplicity framework and that often works together with movement.

At the start of the video clip, when the television program had just started, the two sisters were playing a hand game while listening to the TV. They ceased the game when they heard on the television that the man under suspicion was on his way and would appear soon. The coordinated movements and touching of their bodies in anticipation of this event express their togetherness across both activities.

In another instance, somewhat later in the episode, the older sister used touch when she rubbed her younger sister's knee as a signal of closeness. Her act was quiet and occurred

while they were both watching the television. Her use of touch did not disrupt the larger shared activity but instead added a layer to the overall set of meanings that was being communicated through their shared focus on the television.

At a different point, touch is combined with sound when the older daughter touched her mother's cheek in an attempt to involve her mother in watching the television program. She connected this nonverbal communicative act with a verbal context-based comment (Ducheneaut et al. 2008) to make a link between what was occurring in the television program and what had happened in their own family:

> *2) Tát mẹ một phát, y như [nickname of younger daughter] hồi xưa tát vào mắt mẹ nhở. Nghịch nhở, nghịch nhở! [Translation: mum, just like little [nickname of younger daughter] slapping your eyes years ago; so mischievous, she was so mischievous when she was small.] (Timeline: 1:21).*

The intimacy of the touch (slow movement and gentle connection with a part of the body) and her reference to her younger sister reinforce a sense of closeness that facilitates the mother's ability to maintain an ambient presence in the television viewing activity. The sound the older daughter produced sought to make a more direct connection with the mother and the television program to bring her back into the proximate by creating a macro-text that drew on the family's personal history reported in excerpt 10. The multilayering of the communicative act reflects how elements combine to convey belonging. For example, the daughter uses features of Vietnamese to express closeness since it is also the norm that connects the family members in Australia with the family members in Vietnam, even though it is not the one the older daughter uses in all of her communication.

The younger sister made use of another instance of touch combined with sound at the end of the first television commercial break (Timeline: 7:05). When the older sister came back to the living room, her younger sister connected to her earlier verbal communication with her father (Timeline: 4:58) by patting her father's arm to signal him to move. She then made use of an affordance of the sofa as a communicative resource when she tapped the seat to her left to signal to her older sister to sit there. This act used her human body's movement to touch the sofa to create both sound and image (showing the empty seat where her older sister should sit). After the older sister had sat down and the father had moved to sit on the right of the younger daughter, the younger daughter used a different feature of touch: quickly putting her two hands around her father's arm and then releasing her grip as she moved to sit closer to her older sister. This use of touch, like many others in this family interaction, was accompanied by verbal communication to create a sense of belonging. The accompanying sounds that contained words of affection (such as *chị* 'sister') enabled the younger daughter to communicate and connect with her proximal sister (requesting her sister to sit next to her):

> *11) chị ngồi đây cạnh em! [Translation: sister, please sit here next to me]*

In this complex act, the younger daughter uses sound to show her affection to her older

sister. At the same time she uses different features of touch to show similar feelings towards her father. The two sets of features (putting her hands around her father's arm and releasing her hold on him to move closer to her sister) convey complementary messages to different interlocutors.

Mediations

Much of what we have described above involves the use of human body, the first of the elements of mediations. To explore the potential of the notion of polymedia, we focus this section on the use of various digital technologies. (There were no active analogue technologies in the communicative acts in the filmed activity.) As signalled above, the family communication involves interactions with two principal digital devices: the television and a smartphone. As also signalled above, these digital media had the ability to attract people's attention and affect their movement, spatial orientation, and gaze, but they did not determine the specific communicative practices the family members used.

Digital Technology 1—Television: As Reid and Frazer (1980) recognised many years ago, features within a television broadcast can prompt a conversation between individuals about specific actions (see Example 8) or about a previous experience (see Example 10). In other ways, the television can participate in the communicative event by shaping where viewers sit, creating opportunities for specific spatial orientations, movements, and touch. Simultaneously, it can prevent certain modes from being used at particular times. A decision by proximate members of this family to watch television could be seen as an implicit agreement to not produce sound or engage in movement during the program. These complex relationships and norms constrain ways in which the other digital device can be used. A smartphone has sound as a feature. However, in relation to the norms of this family's television viewing, sounds mediated by the smartphone were not used when the family was watching television. Hence the norms regarding the production of sound during the activity of television viewing applied not only to the human participants but also to their digital devices.

Digital Technology 2—Smartphone: Consistent with her ambient presence in the television viewing activity, the mother's presence in Vietnam via the smartphone required the image affordances of Facebook and access to Wi-Fi.
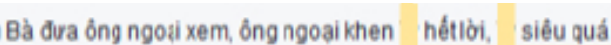
Using this digital technology to mediate her communication meant that the mother used different combinations of features to communicate simultaneously with all the involved family members. She used one combination (of sound, and most prominently, of spatial orientation, and a lack of movement) to communicate with the proximate family members. She used a different combination of features (of image) to communicate digitally with the distal (extended) family through the smartphone via Facebook. As can be seen from the screen shot (see Figure 2), the mother uploaded some images that her younger daughter had created from photos of proximate family members using an app on the smartphone.

By using complementary modes and mediations of communication, the mother was able

to be simultaneously present in the "here" and "there" worlds. In her smartphone use, there were multiple layers in her communication. The mother communicated with "there" using three different types of image: Vietnamese writing, emoticons, and digitally created images. The Vietnamese language choice for the digital communication was the language of "there" (see Figure 2). This use of Vietnamese created a sense of presence of the mother in Vietnam, and her ambient presence in Vietnam simultaneously created an ambient presence of her proximate family members in Vietnam.

12) *Tác phẩm của* 🤣😂😜 (Translation: *Artworks of [name of younger daughter]*)

To communicate in the distance without sound (a requirement of her ambient presence with her proximate family in their activity), she draws on a second feature set associated with image: emoticons (see Example 12). The use of this feature set adds feelings and emphasises closeness but at the same time reflects the physical distance involved. The third communicative layer embedded in her digital interaction concerns the images created by the younger daughter. The photos-turned-drawings connect not only the mother and her mother, but also the (younger) daughter (who is sitting on the couch) unaware (hence distant) at that particular moment that the pictures are being transmitted. The drawings, combined with the written message, enable connections to extend to the grandfather in Vietnam, who is talking to the grandmother while she is Facebooking. The accompanying text reveals that the distant is not one location or one point in time, as at the time of the video the grandfather and grandmother were located in a different physical setting in Vietnam. Engaging with this diversity in turn creates a wider sense of belonging and connectedness.

13) Grandmother: Bà đưa ông ngoại xem, ông ngoại khen hết lời, siêu quá

(Translation: Grandmother: I showed the drawings to grandad and he praised [name of younger daughter]. Superb.)

Another layer in this communication concerns the artwork itself. This is also in its own sense a bridging of the here and there because the images are of the family in Australia and of their relationships. The images are simultaneously present in both locations. The mother uses these images to enable the family and friends overseas to experience the "here and now" of the family in Australia. This layering highlights the complexity of understanding polymedia and the mutually conditioned affordances that characterise it. The artwork acts as a stimulus for different features of communication about the younger daughter's newly discovered abilities—sound when the grandparents talk in Vietnam and image in the written smartphone-mediated communication between Vietnam and Australia. These images are being foregrounded for the mother, who is communicating with the distant, but are being backgrounded for the rest of the family (including the daughter) in Australia. These examples show how the affordances of these technologies mediate communication and maintain relationships across time and space in quite specific ways. Digital technologies influence what can be communicated and how that communication can be layered. In that

sense, the digital technologies mediate connections within the extended family and sustain emotional connections within the whole family in quite specific ways.

Conclusion

Our "transnational" nuclear family members are all in the one location. Distant family members are from the grandparental generation, who have remained in Vietnam. Using this case, we have inverted the dominant perspective on transnational families to highlight how togetherness is active between and across the "here" and the "there."

The paper shows the richness of what a micro-level analysis of a 20-minute video recording can reveal and how it can illustrate the complex ways in which members of a family communicate and create a sense of connectedness through a seamless combination of layered communicative resources. Via a single video recording, we observe that family interactions involve multiple elements of modes to not only communicate but to connect and distinguish communicative acts as simultaneously "here" and "there." The analysis reveals the complexity embedded within normal family interaction and the detailed observation needed to unpack such interaction.

This paper has focused on illustrating how the multiplicity framework can provide systematic insights into the communicative behaviours of transnational families and show how those behaviours relate to the broader goals of polymedia studies, primarily focusing on two of the dimensions within the model: modes and mediations. Through the use of the dimension of modes, we are able to demonstrate the delicate and nuanced interplay between the communicative affordances and the requirements of the varied and multiple actors in the communication in each location. This perspective is different from the literature in the field, which often focuses on the use of only verbal communication in one language and lumps various types of communication under homogenising labels, such as verbal and nonverbal. When combined with the dimension of mediations, we can see how the communication with the proximal is intimately interwoven with the communication with the distal through the intersection between one digital device (the smartphone) and another (the television). In turn, we can show how this intertwining of digital resources is itself interwoven with the various ways in which the participants use sound, image, movement, spatial orientation, and touch. These multiple resources help create and shape meaning making within the here-and-now and across distances, and in some instances in both worlds at the same time. In this recorded interaction, for example, we see how a little-studied element, the spatial orientation of the mother, enables her to convey a sense of belonging and connectedness with her proximal family while a different feature (of image) enables her to connect with her distant family through Facebook.

The type of interaction is particularly revealing for other reasons. It shows how the dynamic and communicative nature of television viewing and its multiple activities intersects systematically and consistently with other communicative dynamics. During the screening of the television program, verbal communication was minimal, and much of the communication focused on events which appeared on the television screen. During

the program, the father, as well as the older and younger daughters, occasionally used movement and touch to sustain closeness, while the mother used image to connect with family in Vietnam. Yet, the mother was not totally in the distal world. During the commercials, the mother reconnected with her local world through her gaze towards the proximal daughter and other co-located family members to share peripherally some aspects of their family television viewing.

The mother's communicative engagement in both "here" and "there" enabled her, and through her the larger family, to be co-present in two different spaces: in Australia and in Vietnam. Although only the mother interacted with the smartphone, her connection might be seen as one that involves her entire family in ways that promote the value of family in Vietnamese culture (Thomas 2005; Hitchcock and Wesner 2009). This connectivity is what creates a sense of belonging, and it illustrates the challenges of the polymedia concept and the importance of opening up the layers within it. We have argued that this requires an analytic framework that enables us to unpack the multiple features involved. We have shown how the multiplicity framework may provide an avenue into understanding these relationships of belonging.

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