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Unveiling online identity construction: A case study of language teaching micro-celebrities on Bilibili

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Abstract

In the digital age, the global online language education market is experiencing rapid growth. Language teaching micro-celebrities are individuals who create and share language content on social media, attracting large audience and monetizing their popularity. As these figures gain traction, it is crucial to explore how they construct their identities. The present study examines the identity formation of three language teaching micro-celebrities on Bilibili, a popular Chinese video-sharing platform known for its focus on animation, comics, and games (ACG) content. We utilized Tracy's (2002) framework on identity. Employing qualitative methods, we analyzed 30 videos from these micro-celebrities to investigate their identities and the multimodal resources they use for identity construction. Findings reveal that these micro-celebrities strategically cultivate multifaceted and hybrid identities, portraying themselves as successful yet relatable language teachers, intimate peers, and entrepreneurial individuals. By leveraging various multimodal resources, they seamlessly blend their native language, English, and visual elements to establish unique personas. This research underscores the fluid and adaptable use of multimodal resources by language teaching micro-celebrities, highlighting their dual pedagogical and promotional roles. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between online language teaching and micro-celebrity culture in Chinese social media.

Keywords: identity construction; language teaching micro-celebrity; multimodal analysis; Bilibili

Introduction

In the era of digitalization, the rapid advancement of web-based technologies has revolutionized how content is shared and consumed. The ability to quickly disseminate user-generated content has fostered interpersonal connectivity and facilitated the mutual construction of virtual communities (van Dijck, 2013). These interactive platforms provide ground for micro-celebrities—individuals who have gained fame and recognition within specific niches—to thrive and perform. As the global online education market expands, the intersection of teaching and social media has reached unprecedented levels, creating new opportunities for educators to engage with audience.

Within this landscape, language teaching micro-celebrities, often referred to as “micro-celebrity teachers” (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023) or “education influencers” (Carpenter et al., 2020), have emerged. These individuals leverage social media to share English-related content, aiming to attract a substantial following and monetize their influence for economic gains (Duff, 2017). This phenomenon operates within what has been termed the “attention economy” (Andrejevic, 2002), where the competition for audience engagement is fierce. Independent online educators must navigate this landscape carefully, cultivating a consumer base by not only delivering educational content but also engaging in self-branding practices.

Research in this area has revealed that language teachers on social media construct and negotiate their identities in diverse ways. For instance, Chao (2022) conducted a case study focusing on two YouTubers, uncovering that their positioning as language teachers varied significantly. One positioned herself as a traditional classroom teacher, while the other adopted the role of a knowledgeable peer. This indicates that social media language teaching is evolving into a profession that transcends mere entertainment. Further studies have delved into the expertise of online language educators, examining how they harness multimodal resources—such as video, graphics, and interactive elements—to enhance their pedagogical approaches (Chik & Ho, 2017; Ho & Tai, 2020). These investigations have illuminated the complex, multifaceted identities that language teachers negotiate in digital spaces, revealing the intricate interplay between their personal and professional personas.

In the Chinese contexts, the rise of social media as a platform for language learning has prompted both the professionalization and institutionalization of online English teaching. This shift presents an opportunity to study the identity construction of language teaching micro-celebrities within a unique cultural framework. However, previous research has primarily approached this topic from commerce perspectives, focusing on marketing strategies employed by micro-celebrities in non-educational context (e.g., Wang & Feng; 2022; Wang & Picone; 2021). While these studies provide valuable insights, they often overlook the multiplicity that language teaching micro-celebrities embody and the critical role of discourse in their identity construction.

The primary aim of this study is to examine the identities and multimodal affordances utilized by language teaching micro-celebrities to construct their unique identities on Bilibili, a prominent video-sharing platform in China. This research holds both theoretical and empirical significance, contributing to the broader discourse on language teacher identity and online persona construction within Chinese social media. From a theoretical perspective, the present study extends existing literature on language teaching and teacher identity in digital discourse. It highlights the facilitative power of social media platforms in shaping the complex identity construction of language teaching micro-celebrities. Recognizing that their work in language education is not merely entertainment but a professional endeavor requiring ongoing practice is vital. This understanding contributes to theoretical frameworks surrounding micro-celebrity

identities and online language teaching, particularly within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in China. Empirically, the findings of this study are valuable for various stakeholders in the education sector. Language teachers and teacher educators can benefit from insights into how language teaching micro-celebrities navigate their online identities and engage with language learners. By uncovering the practices that contribute to these educators' online personas, this research aims to provide a clearer understanding of how to effectively connect with students in digital spaces. For micro-celebrities, the ability to reflect on their performances on social media is crucial. Understanding the dynamics of their online image can help understand online identity development. Offline language teachers may also gain insights into engaging language learners successfully in a rapidly evolving educational landscape. Additionally, teacher educators in applied linguistics can explore new avenues for professional development in the domain of digital applied linguistics, facilitating growth for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Literature Review

What is Identity?

Identity encompasses an individual's self-concept and beliefs about who they perceive themselves to be, as well as how they view others (Teng, 2019). The term is often synonymous with concepts such as "self," "position," and "persona." Over time, the understanding of identity has shifted from a structuralist approach to a constructivist one.

From a structuralist perspective, identity is seen as a static and internal project, defined by factors such as nationality and gender (e.g., Erikson, 1994). This view portrays identity as fixed and rooted in individual characteristics. In contrast, the constructivist perspective frames identity as a dynamic and complex interplay shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. It emphasizes the fluid and fragmented nature of identity, which is constructed through discourse (Teng, 2024).

The structuralist view originated in early sociolinguistic studies, where researchers examined how language variations correlate with social factors like ethnicity, gender, and class. Labov (1972) demonstrated how individuals use linguistic variation to align with or distance themselves from specific social groups. Additionally, the Social Identity Theory proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1986) posits that part of an individual's identity is derived from their membership in social groups (Tajfel, 1978). While this theory highlights the emotional and mental mechanisms behind identity, it often overlooks the fluidity of group membership (Teng & Wang, 2020). Overall, the structuralist perspective tends to focus on the relationship between individuals and society, paying less attention to personal subjectivity and the intricate interplay between language and identity.

In the 1990s, a constructivist perspective began to emerge, suggesting that identity is not an inherent or static trait but rather a dynamic, hybrid, and evolving process shaped through social interactions and discourse. One key figure in this shift is Giddens (1991), who emphasized the reflective nature of identity. He defined self-identity as something that is actively created and maintained through individuals' reflexive actions, rather than a fixed attribute (Giddens, 1991). He described self-identity as an ongoing narrative that reflects a cognitive awareness of various life phases (Giddens, 1991). This view underscores the idea that identity is an evolving process throughout one's life. Similarly, Hall (1996) argued that identities are fluid trajectories, stating that they involve using historical, linguistic, and cultural resources in the process of becoming rather than merely being.

Among the various theories of identity, Tracy (2002) synthesized structuralist and constructivist perspectives, proposing that identity consists of both stable and dynamic elements. According to Tracy and Robles (2013), identity encompasses “stable features of persons that exist prior to any particular situation” as well as “dynamic and situated accomplishments, enacted through talk, changing from one occasion to the next” (p. 21). Tracy identifies three categories of identity: master identity, interactional identity, and personal/relational identity. Master identity refers to relatively stable aspects of a person’s identity, such as age, nationality, and regional origin. Interactional identity pertains to specific roles individuals adopt during communicative events, shaped by their interactions with others. Personal/relational identity encompasses individual personality traits and the nature of relationships with others (Tracy, 2002). Teng (2024) also argues that identity is constructed through the orchestration of discursive resources, including personal references, speech acts, language choices, and stances. By utilizing linguistic cues, individuals actively construct their desired identities. This approach highlights the interplay between language and identity, providing a valuable framework for analyzing identity in various contexts (Teng et al., 2024).

What is Language Teaching Micro-Celebrity?

The rapid rise of social media platforms has transformed them into crucial venues for educational activities (Carpenter et al., 2023). As a result, the phenomenon of micro-celebrities in education has garnered increasing attention from researchers. The term “language teaching micro-celebrity” is rooted in the broader concept of micro-celebrity or influencer. Micro-celebrities are defined as “ordinary internet users who amass a significant following on blogs and social media through the narrative of their personal lives and lifestyles, engaging with audience in both digital and physical spaces” (Senft, 2008). Leveraging the capabilities of social media, these adept individuals can craft and project their identities online, attracting large audience and achieving fame or financial rewards in return (Khamis et al., 2017; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2013). The level of attention they receive is often quantified by metrics such as follower counts, shares, likes, and comments (Marwick, 2015).

As online education continues to evolve, the role of micro-celebrities in this field has captured the interest of scholars. However, there is still no consensus on the definition of micro-celebrity within the educational context, especially given the complex relationship between micro-celebrities and the professional merits of teaching. Scholars have proposed various terms, including education micro-celebrities, education influencers, and social media language teachers.

Education micro-celebrities are individuals who connect with diverse stakeholders and networks, often without engaging in paid endorsements (Hartung et al., 2023). Yet, the entrepreneurial aspect of social media adds complexity to this role. The term “education influencer” has emerged to describe those who focus on monetizing their online presence, which can sometimes lead to conflicts of interest. Carpenter et al. (2023) defined education influencers as “individuals who utilize social media platforms to attract large audience of educator followers and monetize this attention” (pp. 1–2). Thus, “education influencers” can be seen as a subset of education micro-celebrities who actively engage in product endorsements, highlighting their entrepreneurial spirit. Despite their differences, both terms overemphasize micro-celebrity’s institutional role as a language teacher in real-world contexts. In essence, education influencers and micro-celebrities are often in-service teachers who share language learning content on social media to garner attention.

The category of “language teachers on social media” is somewhat ambiguous, encompassing a broader range of English teaching micro-celebrities. Notably, these individuals may not be current, in-service English teachers. For instance, Chao’s (2022) research on English teaching

Youtubers examined various language teacher identities on the platform, referring to participants as language teaching Youtubers without explicitly emphasizing their status as in-service educators. This distinction highlights the diverse nature of language teaching micro-celebrities and the varying degrees of professional affiliation they may have.

Language Teaching Micro-Celebrity's Identity Construction

Based on existing research, language teaching micro-celebrities construct a range of online identities, including traditional language teacher, knowledgeable peer, multilingual learner, cosmopolitan self, and entrepreneurial self. These identities reflect the micro-celebrities' self-positioning and vary based on their audience engagement. For instance, Chao (2022) analyzed the identity construction of two language teaching Youtubers through their narratives, interviews, and video content, applying Wenger's (1998) ecology of identity within Communities of Practice. The findings revealed that one participant identified as a classroom teacher, feeling marginalized, while the other adopted the role of a knowledgeable peer, which empowered her. This disparity underscores the importance of balancing personal identity with audience perception. Chao argues that language teaching on social media transcends mere entertainment; it is a credentialing process that demands expertise. Supporting this view, Chik and Ho (2017) noted that learners often "window shop" for educational materials, where teachers' expert knowledge acts as a key differentiator in their selection process. Thus, it is crucial for language teaching micro-celebrities to effectively showcase their expertise on social media platforms.

Research also emphasizes the multifaceted nature of identity construction among language teaching micro-celebrities across various platforms. Studies have explored identities on Facebook (Solmaz, 2018), Twitter (Reinhardt, 2019), YouTube (Chao, 2022; Ho & Tai, 2020), LanguaSpeak (Curran & Jenks, 2022), TikTok (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023), and Instagram (Aslan, 2024). For example, Curran and Jenks (2022) employed a discourse analytic approach to examine 100 teacher profiles on an online language teaching platform. Their findings indicated that online teachers constructed complex identities—such as professional, cosmopolitan, authentic, and multilingual—tailored to their backgrounds and qualifications. This illustrates that a teacher's country of origin and language background significantly impact their self-positioning in English teaching contexts.

Similarly, Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin (2023) conducted a digital ethnography and audiovisual content analysis of ten language teaching micro-celebrities on TikTok. They found that the teacher-student relationship in social media environments is more egalitarian compared to traditional classrooms, with educators offering support and sharing perspectives in a way that resembles peer interactions. This aligns with Chao's (2022) observation of an online teacher positioning herself as a peer rather than a traditional authority figure. Notably, the journey to becoming a language teaching micro-celebrity involves a "celebrification" process, wherein language proficiency is transformed into symbolic capital and commodified (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2023).

To further explore the resources utilized in identity construction, some studies have focused specifically on the multimodal resources employed by language teaching micro-celebrities. Research has shown that these resources are carefully designed to facilitate documentation, content creation, and interaction with audience. For instance, Ho and Tai (2020) conducted a case study examining how two online English teachers "perform expertise" on YouTube and design their teaching materials. They found that these educators leverage digital affordances—such as hyperlinks—and incorporate classroom resources, like blackboards and vibrant colors, to showcase their pedagogical and linguistic knowledge. Furthermore, elements of popular

culture, such as films, are employed to bridge learners’ real-life experiences with online learning. These trends are also echoed in the work of Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin (2023) on TikTok and Aslan (2024) on Instagram, where language micro-celebrities effectively use platform affordances, such as polls and feedback mechanisms, to engage audience and provide supplementary information. Importantly, these studies highlight the linguistic ideologies held by these micro-celebrities, as they challenge conventional biases and incorporate their learners’ multilingual repertoires into their English teaching practices. This indicates that micro-celebrities utilize diverse digital tools not only to establish interpersonal connections with audience but also to foster active participation. Their pedagogical awareness is evident in their strategic use of multimodal resources, including color schemes, virtual blackboards, and backgrounds, which enrich the learning experience and enhance audience engagement.

Theoretical Frameworks

This research employs Tracy’s (2002) identity framework to analyze how language teaching micro-celebrities construct their identities online. Online identity encompasses both stable traits and dynamic characteristics shaped by communicative contexts. Tracy (2002) categorizes identities into three distinct types: master identities, interactional identities, and personal or relational identities (see Table 1).

In particular, master identities represent relatively stable aspects of personhood, such as age, nationality, and regional origins. For example, a micro-celebrity might identify themselves as a native Chinese speaker, which informs their audience about their linguistic background. Interactional identities describe the specific roles individuals adopt during communicative events, influenced by the involvement of others. Interactional identities can be conceptualized at various levels of abstraction. For instance, when a micro-celebrity begins a video by sharing a personal anecdote, they assume the role of a storyteller. If they subsequently pose a pedagogical question, their identity shifts to that of a questioner. Overall, interactional identities reflect a person’s role within a broader communicative context, such as a language teacher engaging with students. Personal or relational identities encompasses the personality traits of individuals,

Table 1 Definitions of Tracy’s identity category.

Identity	Definition	Examples from research material
Master identity	relatively stable and unchanging aspects, including gender, ethnicity, age, national and regional origins	...as a native Chinese speaker , I knew it should have been translated as “Yuan”.
Interactional identity	“specific roles that people take on in a communicative context with regard to specific other people” (Tracy, 2002, p. 22)	I remember when I was back in my university, my French teacher used to start most of the classes with dictate dictation.
Personal/relational identity	“individuals’ personality and character, their relationship with others, and their attitudes about events” (ibid)	Surprisingly, I’ve got quite a lot of support from a lot of you, which is really nice. Thank you very much.

the nature of their relationships with others, and their attitudes towards events. For instance, a micro-celebrity might express gratitude for audience support, illustrating warmth and connection.

The theoretical framework is operationalized through a content analysis approach. Examining master identities provides insights into the personal and professional backgrounds that micro-celebrities present. Meanwhile, the inclusion of interactional and personal/relational identities emphasizes the identities shaped by their online practices. For instance, a micro-celebrity may choose storytelling over direct instruction, highlighting their identity as a storyteller and fostering a closer connection with their audience. Identity is constructed through the interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic resources (Tracy, 2002). This reciprocal relationship necessitates a conceptualization of online identity as an amalgamation of subtle linguistic cues and non-linguistic affordances. The identities crafted by micro-celebrities are often realized through multimodal resources, prompting the use of Tracy’s (2002) analytical system, supplemented by multimodal resources identified in existing literature.

As depicted in Figure 1, linguistic cues encompass personal references, speech acts, language choice, and stances.

Personal referencing involves addressing individuals in the narrative, which can be categorized into personal address (e.g., using “we” to foster intimacy) and membership categorization (framing actions in a socially acceptable manner). Speech acts refer to verbal behaviors that fulfill a specific communicative purpose, such as advising or reproaching, reflecting the

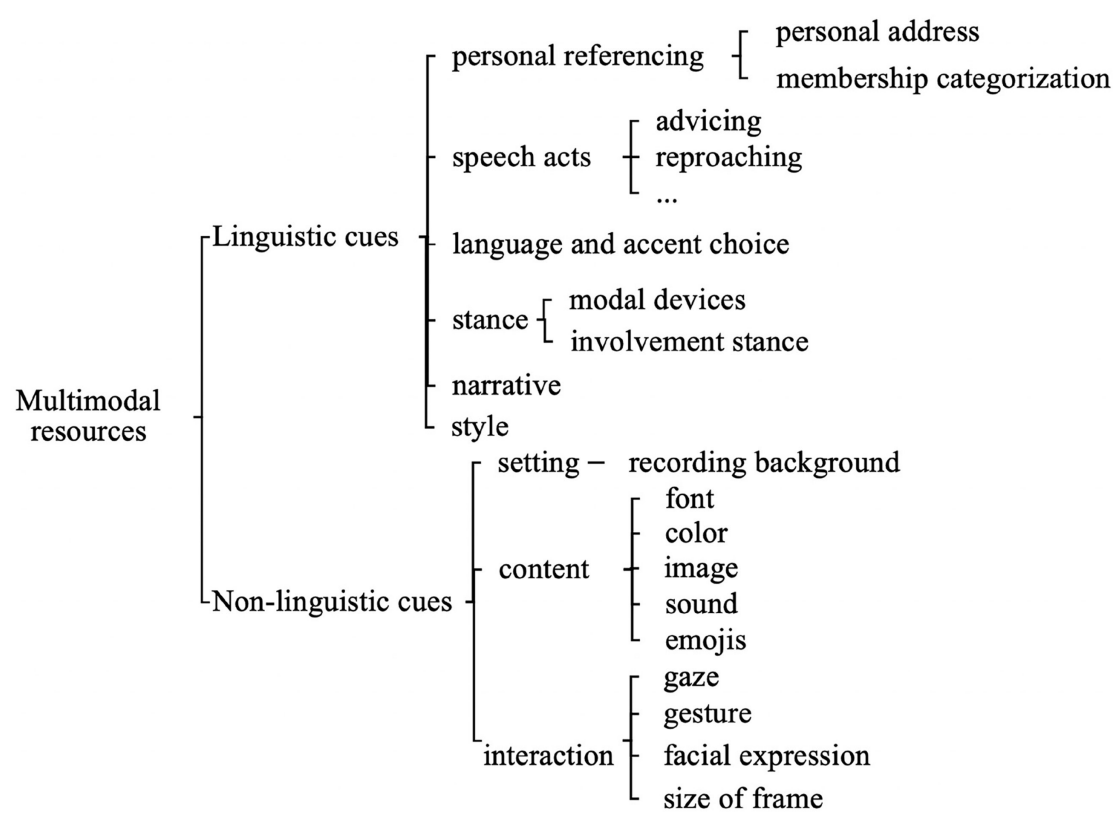


Figure 1 Analytical framework of multimodal resources.

speaker's intentions. Language and Accent Choice is the deliberate selection of language and accent can convey the speaker's identity, while stance reflects the speaker's attitude towards a subject, often revealed through modal choices and personal storytelling. Narrative Structure reflects the way a story is told—including its structure, content, and stylistic features—serves multiple purposes, such as informing or building rapport, thereby shaping and reflecting identities (Tracy, 2002).

In addition to linguistic resources, non-linguistic resources play a crucial role in identity construction within the digital context. Drawing from Tracy's framework and relevant literature on micro-celebrities, multimodal resources can be categorized into three aspects: setting, content design, and interaction. Setting: The recording environment can signal different identities. For example, a bedroom setting may project a friendly, informal identity, while a classroom backdrop may reinforce the micro-celebrity's role as an educator. Content Design encompassed elements such as images, sounds, colors, and subtitles. For instance, using red subtitles can attract attention and highlight key content, demonstrating the creator's professionalism and pedagogical awareness. Interaction included Non-verbal cues such as gaze, gestures, and facial expressions enhance audience engagement. For instance, direct eye contact can create intimacy, while gestures can convey meaning and foster connection (van Dijk, 2013).

Overall, this framework conceptualizes identity construction as a dynamic process realized through the deployment of multimodal resources. By adopting an open perspective on multimodal resources, the framework helps us consider a broad range of prominent modes, with particular attention to semiotic elements such as color, sound, gaze, and gestures. This comprehensive analytical framework enables a detailed examination of the identities constructed by language teaching micro-celebrities in their online videos.

Rationale for the Present Study

Understanding the unique identities of language teaching micro-celebrities in the digital landscape is crucial. This study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the identity construction of three language teaching micro-celebrities on Bilibili. By focusing on this specific context, the research aims to shed light on the multimodal strategies these educators use to create content and engage with audience. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform our understanding of identity construction in the digital age. This research seeks to answer two key questions:

1. What identities are constructed by the three language teaching micro-celebrities?
2. How are these identities constructed through multimodal means?

Methods

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative methodology to gain a nuanced understanding of how language teaching micro-celebrities construct their identities within the digital realm. As Creswell (2012) emphasizes, utilizing a small number of case studies—ideally fewer than four or five—allows for “a comprehensive exploration of themes across cases, facilitating cross-case analysis” (p. 157). Consequently, this study focused on three language teaching micro-celebrities to examine the intricacies of their identity construction as presented in their videos.

To address the two research questions, the present study utilized content analysis as the primary research method. Content analysis is particularly effective for analyzing online videos

since it is defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 24). This approach enables the exploration of both linguistic and non-linguistic elements within the videos, providing a comprehensive view of how identities are represented and constructed.

The analytical framework for this research was informed by Tracy’s (2002) theory of identity. This framework categorizes various identity types and the multimodal resources that support them. By adopting Tracy’s classification, the study seeks to identify the different identities that emerge from the micro-celebrities’ content and the tools they employ to convey these identities. Additionally, relevant non-linguistic resources identified in previous research were incorporated into the analytical framework to enrich the analysis.

During the analysis phase, both linguistic and non-linguistic resources utilized by the micro-celebrities in their videos were examined. The focus was on discerning the connotations these resources carry and how they contribute to the overall construction of identity. By systematically analyzing these elements, the study aims to reveal the complexities of identity formation among language teaching micro-celebrities in the context of social media, providing insights into their pedagogical practices and audience engagement strategies.

Research Context

This research focuses on Bilibili as a pertinent platform for studying language teaching micro-celebrities within the context of Chinese social media. As one of China’s leading video-sharing platforms, Bilibili reported 103 million daily active users in the third quarter of 2023 (Bilibili, 2024). Users spend an average of 100 minutes per day watching videos, resulting in approximately 17 billion interactions each month. Content creators on this platform are referred to as “uploader” or “micro-celebrity”, and the videos span a variety of genres, including lifestyle, gaming, technology, and educational content.

What sets Bilibili apart from other video platforms is its emphasis on active audience participation through features like “bullet comments” (in Chinese, “danmu”). This functionality allows viewers to leave real-time commentary that appears over the video, facilitating an interactive experience where users can engage directly with one another’s comments. Such participatory elements exemplify the participatory culture that is increasingly prevalent across social media platforms (Jenkins et al., 2016).

Although Bilibili was not originally designed for language teaching and learning, its interactive features and large user base have attracted numerous content creators to contribute educational material, particularly within the “technology and knowledge” category. Given its representativeness and the dynamic environment it fosters, Bilibili serves as an ideal platform for examining the identity construction of language teaching micro-celebrities.

Selection of Bilibili Accounts for Data Analysis

To investigate how language teaching micro-celebrities construct their identities, this research focused on three Bilibili accounts dedicated to English language teaching and learning. First, a search was conducted using the keyword “English micro-celebrity” on Bilibili to identify the most popular language teaching accounts on the platform. The results were sorted by view counts, as higher visibility indicates a greater recognition of these micro-celebrities’ identities (Marwick, 2015). Second, the search included the keyword “recommendation of English micro-celebrity” to identify accounts recommended by other micro-celebrities. Alongside these searches, metrics such as the number of subscribers and video views were considered benchmarks for popularity. As Burgess and Green (2009) noted, YouTubers’ influence can be measured by the number of subscribers and video views on their channels, which similarly applies

Table 2 Basic information about the selected accounts.

Channel name	Number of videos	Number of subscribers	Views
Ella “Chatting American English”	148	830,000	19,622,000
Eloise “TuesMagique”	202	711,000	14,763,000
Fanfan “FanfaniShare”	273	260,000	3,205,000

to Bilibili’s micro-celebrities. Thus, the study focused on language teaching micro-celebrities with over 100,000 subscribers, establishing a standard for credibility and visibility within the platform.

To ensure the representativeness and comparability of the selected accounts, three criteria were applied: Native Language: All participants are Chinese native speakers, which helps minimize the potential impact of national differences on their identity construction. Content Focus: Each micro-celebrity actively produces videos related to English language learning. Influence: All selected micro-celebrities possess significant influence within the community, as indicated by their subscriber counts exceeding 100,000. This careful selection enhances the rigor of cross-case analysis, making the findings more reliable and meaningful.

Table 2 summarizes essential information about the three chosen language teaching micro-celebrities (updated as of May 2023):

Ella is the host of “Ella chatting American English” and stands out as the most popular micro-celebrity with over 830,000 followers. A Chinese national residing in the USA, she has been creating English language content since 2018. Her channel primarily aims to challenge misconceptions surrounding English learning.

Eloise, who operates the account TuesMagique, is a newly appointed English teacher at a prestigious university in Beijing. She introduces herself as a champion in a national interpreting contest, having graduated with an MA from University College London.

Fanfan, the creator behind FanfaniShare, has around 260,000 subscribers. After leaving her position as an ESL teacher at a community college in the US, she embraced her aspirations as a language teaching micro-celebrity. In her narrative-driven videos, she shares her journey from earning a bachelor’s degree in China to obtaining a TESOL degree in the US, referring to herself as the “proprietress of helpful tips for English learning.”

Despite their diverse educational backgrounds, all three accounts focus on English language teaching and learning. They share common experiences of studying in China and furthering their education in English-speaking countries. Each micro-celebrity highlights their successful journeys in learning English and presents themselves as English micro-celebrity on their profiles, emphasizing their commitment to delivering impactful English education. This shared focus on learning experiences and teaching practices creates a relatively homogeneous sample, ideal for exploring the professional identity construction of online language teaching micro-celebrities.

Data Sources

To address the research questions, the present study utilized two primary data sources: (1) the profile pages of the three selected language teaching micro-celebrities, and (2) the 623 videos they posted, from which a focused subset of 30 videos was chosen for in-depth analysis.



Figure 2 Ella’s profile page.

The profile pages of the micro-celebrities serve as a critical lens through which to explore their identity construction. As illustrated in Figure 2, each profile page includes a profile picture, a bio, one pinned video, personal verification badges, and a collection of uploaded videos. The strategic design of the homepage, particularly the selection of the pinned video, allows micro-celebrities to curate a compelling image to attract potential followers. Thus, these profile pages provide valuable insights into how micro-celebrities present themselves and their desired identities.

The videos shared by the micro-celebrities constitute another vital data source for understanding their identity construction. As of May 2023, the three accounts collectively featured 623 videos, with view counts ranging from 1,950 to 1,725,000. Since these videos are accessible to both current and prospective followers, they were all collected to analyze the online practices of the micro-celebrities. Table 3 categorizes the 623 videos thematically, revealing a general overview of their content.

The videos were organized into three main categories: professional, interpersonal, and cultural. Professional Practices: This category represents the most significant portion of the content, accounting for 74.64% of the uploads. Videos in this category primarily focus on sharing English-related content, such as teaching materials and language learning tips. Interpersonal Practices: Comprising 23.11% of the content, these videos delve into the micro-celebrities’ personal lives. They include vlogs, discussions on various topics, personal narratives, and interactive Q&A sessions. This content fosters a sense of connection and intimacy between the micro-celebrities and the audience by addressing relatable themes, such as body image. Cultural Practices: This category is the least represented, making up only 2.25% of the videos. It includes travel vlogs and interviews with English speakers from Anglophone countries. Despite their limited number, these cultural videos offer unique insights into the cultures and experiences of English-speaking regions.

For a detailed examination, the ten most-viewed videos from each account were selected, resulting in a final dataset of 30 videos for analysis (Table 3). This methodology enables a

Table 3 Sample videos uploaded by the three micro-celebrities.

Categories	Themes	Ella	Eloise	Fanfan	Total	Frequency
Professional	Sharing English skills	34	93	166	293	
	Sharing learning tips	63	19	35	117	
	Recommending English learning apps/books	11	1	4	16	
	Conducting learning practices	0	14	25	39	465/74.64%
Interpersonal	Vlogging about daily life	0	39	6	45	
	Chatting on diverse topics	23	9	14	46	
	Narrating personal stories	12	5	14	31	
	Q & A and live stream	1	4	6	11	
	Cooperating with other micro-celebrities	4	4	3	11	144/23.11%
Cultural	Interviewing English speakers in Anglophone countries	0	3	0	3	
	Travel vlogs	0	11	0	11	14/2.25%

comprehensive exploration of how language teaching micro-celebrities construct their identities through both their profiles and their video content, providing crucial insights into their online practices.

Ethical Considerations

In terms of research ethics, this study adheres to the Internet Research Ethics 3.0 guidelines established by the Association of Internet Researchers (Franzke et al., 2020). A key consideration was whether presenting this data could potentially harm the participants. Since the chosen accounts are public on Bilibili and have large followings, the content is intended for broad dissemination. Additionally, the study does not involve any risks to participants’ privacy or safety. Therefore, explicit consent was not required to access and analyze the data.

Data Analysis

A multimodal transcription approach (Matwick & Matwick, 2017) is employed in the present study to analyze the interplay of images, speech, written text, and sound. This detailed method captures modes such as gestures, facial expressions, and gaze, providing a comprehensive understanding of identity construction in the micro-celebrities’ videos. Based on thematic analysis, we created four themes: Professional but imperfect English teacher,

linguistic positioning to articulate teacher beliefs, translanguaging for meaning-making as an entrepreneur, and intimate peers.

To ensure accuracy, the first author translated any utterances originally expressed in Chinese into English maintaining fidelity to the original tone and style. The translation was then reviewed by the second author who also specializes in English translation to ensure a more objective representation.

Results

Professional but Imperfect English Teacher

To begin with the overarching structure, the two types of narrating structures identified to construct professional identities were (1) pure narratives that document the whole incident and (2) compound narratives that combine personal experiences and tips sharing. Excerpt 1 illustrates a pure narrative told by Eloise.

Excerpt 1

- A. Here's what happened: This morning, when I was looking at reports about the late Yuan Longping in the *Washington Post* entitled Scientist Yuan Longping whose rice research helped feed people in many countries, died at 91. [...] Suddenly, I spotted this "Grandpa Ye, have a good journey". Excuse me, Grandpa Ye. Who's that?
- B. My instinct as a translator told me something was wrong. I was pretty sure it should have been Grandpa Yuan. [...] But as a translator, I know for a fact that sometimes the translation varies across regions. Therefore, here's what I have done:
- C. First, I consulted translation websites which suggest Yuan. Then, I asked two of my friends from Taipei, who agreed it was a translation mistake. Finally, I looked up parallel, especially the official context, and again is Yuan.
- D. But I didn't stop there. As I have been reading English reports from multiple news outlets, I thought I could write to the *Washington Post* and ask for a correction, just as what I did with *The Economist*. [...]
- E. Thanks for watching. Rest in peace Grandpa Yuan. We love you. ✨

The narration depicts how Eloise checked and asked for a correction. The story was titled “美国外刊把袁爷爷写成叶爷爷后，我去纠错了 (US publishing translated Grandpa Yuan to Grandpa Ye, I corrected it)”. The Complication in lines C-D outlines Eloise's actions of fact-checking in chronological order, including consulting dictionaries, asking native speakers, looking up official parallels, and asking for a correction. Finally, the story ends with the Coda, where Eloise showed her respect to “Grandpa Ye”. Following a series of actions, the story successfully depicts the micro-celebrity as an agentive English learner and patriotic Chinese who proof-checks the material professionally. Such professionalism is also co-constructed by the audience in the bullet comments and comment section (See Figure 3).

Figure 3 illustrates one of the popular comments below this video, showing how the audience perceived Eloise's identity. The comment praises Eloise not only for the content she produced, but also for the personality she exhibits: “amazing”, “rational”, and “wise”. Such comment attributed to a level of intellect in Eloise that resonates deeply with other viewers, with over 18,000 likes. This compliment and collective acknowledgement serve to consolidate Eloise's identity as a successful English learner.

In addition to the pure narrative, narration is embedded in the tip-sharing videos to interweave with professional identity. Tip-sharing videos often feature the micro-celebrity in a more



(tr. Amazing [cry emoji] Instead of immediately cursing and demanding correction after finding the mistake, micro-celebrity seeks confirmation everywhere and then asks *The Washington Post* to correct it. I feel like you radiate rationality and wisdom [heart emoji] I have so much to learn from you!!)

Figure 3 Audience’s response to Eloise’s professionalism.

conversational role, akin to a knowledgeable friend engaging in a monologue. They are often problem-solving types, where the micro-celebrity addresses the audience’s issues and challenges. The scope of these tip-sharing videos is broad, covering how to learn a foreign language in general and specific strategies for enhancing speaking proficiency. The micro-celebrity purposefully integrates personal stories into their sharing. Such content has gained significant popularity among viewers. Out of the 30 most viewed videos, 17 videos focused on sharing practical tips. Table 4 shows the information.

As shown in Example 1 of Table 4, Ella displayed her extensive vocabulary “master 12000 English words” to emphasize her credentials to share tips. Similarly, Eloise employed this tactic in her videos, showcasing her multilingual ability to “learn 5 foreign languages” and impressive IELTS speaking test score “Band 8.5”. This approach serves a dual purpose: it attracts potential audience while concurrently establishing the micro-celebrity’s credibility, thereby building trust between the micro-celebrity and the audience. Notably, although Fanfan also addresses the learning achievements (see Examples 5, 6), they are somewhat empty, such as “effectively”. Such vague descriptions might fail to gain immediate attention and lose viewership from potential viewers who have not followed the micro-celebrity yet.

Slightly different from addressing learning outcomes, Ella demonstrated another distinct pattern in her tip-sharing videos. As illustrated in Example 2, she directly addresses the confusion that might haunt Chinese English learners, “Why hasn’t binge-watching American TV series improved your English?”. This inquiry title not only pinpoints a common frustration but also sets stage for problem-solving methods. Such a problem-solving approach showed Ella’s understanding of learners’ perspectives. This supports the concept of “responsiveness” in social media, enhancing authority of language teaching micro-celebrities.

Linguistic Positioning to Articulate Teacher Beliefs

The three micro-celebrities were found to position different stances regarding English learning. For English content creators, it is essential to perform their insights towards English learning,

Table 4 Tip-sharing videos among the 30 most viewed videos.

No.	Title	English translation	Micro-celebrity
1	如何提高词汇量 【全英中字】不死记硬背如何掌握 12000 英文词汇量	Boost your vocabulary [Full English with Chinese subs] How to master 12000 English words without rote memorization	Ella
2	【为什么你看那么多美剧英文还没进步？】看美剧学英语正确姿势	[Why hasn't binge-watching American TV series improved your English?] The right ways to learn English with TV series	Ella
3	全英·我是怎么学 5 门外语的：英法西日韩 聊聊方法和学习资源	Full English· How I learned 5 foreign languages: English, French, Spanish, Japanese, Korean Chat on tips and learning materials	Eloise
4	雅思口语8.5 3个让英国考官连连点头的方法	IELTS Speaking 8.5 Methods making three British examiners wowing	Eloise
5	【如何练英式口音】我练英音的秘籍全分享 How to sound British?	[How to practice British accent] My secret playbook to a British accent How to sound British?	Fanfan
6	【如何有效背英文单词】词汇书怎么背 如何记忆+拼写单词	[How to memorize English vocabulary effectively] How to tackle word lists How to memories and nail spelling	Fanfan

thereby reinforcing their professional identity. Specifically, Ella preferred to assert her skeptical opinions towards misconceptions using a strong stance of certainty. Eloise and Fanfan often employed an involvement stance by combining imperative tips and personal stories. In this context, beliefs are not merely personal convictions; they serve as foundational elements that guide instructional strategies and content presentation (Zhou et al., 2024). Table 5 is an example of how Ella shows her language beliefs.

The underlined words in Table 5 highlight Ella’s firm stance in advocating her “theories” towards language learning. In Example A, where Ella asserts that using rote memory to recite vocabulary is ineffective, she used an extreme assessment “incredibly” before “ineffective”. In using this modal device here, Ella was defending her reproaching stance towards this method. Similarly, in Example B, Ella argued that the dialogue in *New Concept English* is somewhat unauthentic. She then supported this idea by saying, “I think probably 80% or 70% of people are using it (American English)”. Although she softened her certainty by adding “probably”, Ella still alleged her evidence with statistics to increase her certainty.

Example C is another instance where Ella asserted “I’m arguing that for 99% of English learners, [...] it’s not ideal to go to English corner”. Although it is difficult to tell how this percentage is generated or cited, it is rather evident that the micro-celebrity is challenging the traditional English-learning conceptions with a strong certainty. By adding “I’m arguing” at the beginning, Ella made her words more certain and factual. Thus, the micro-celebrity’s

Table 5 Examples on how Ella shows her language beliefs.

A	I don't recommend using rote memory to build a foundation of vocabulary. To me, that's <u>incredibly</u> ineffective and a waste of time. 《新概念英语》其实我不太推荐大家去学一二两课，因为我觉得它里面的对话有点不太现实，不太真实，而且大部分的时候我们都是在用美式英语，就现在看好莱坞，看美剧什么的。我觉得可能 80% 的人或者 70% 的人都在用，就他没有意识到他在用美式英语，所以如果再回去学英式英语的话，拼音写发音都会有些不一样，就不太吻合。(tr. Actually, I don't recommend you learn the first two lessons because <u>I think the dialogues in it are kind of unauthentic</u> . And most of the time, we use American English, e.g., when watching Hollywood (movies), American TV series, etc. <u>I think probably 80% or 70% of people are using it</u> , though sometimes they might not be aware that they are using American English. So if you come back and learn British English, there are differences in spelling and pronunciation. They just don't match.)
B	
C	<u>So what I'm arguing is that for 99% of English learners</u> , beginners and intermediate learners alike, <u>it's not ideal</u> to go to an English corner.

assertion displayed her idea of challenging the “misconceptions” towards English learning, thereby constructing her professional identity by showing what is proper. Such strong stance has significantly increased the popularity of Ella’s videos. Many audience have expressed their opinions in the comment section, whether in agreement or disagreement with her perspective. Such an assertive tone was widely used in many of Ella’s videos. This could be seen as an important strategy for Ella to establish her distinct and critical persona among various micro-celebrities on Bilibili and align with the self-categorization in Ella’s personal website, where she claimed to share her ideas against “many bizarre and popular methods and theories”.

Different from Ella’s assertive stance, Eloise and Fanfan took a softer stance by using an involvement stance and hedging. They usually softened their assertions by hedging their statements, leaving more negotiable space for discussion. The following Excerpt 2 shows Eloise they soften her stances by hedging.

Excerpt 2

Tip No. 3 is to practice with native English speakers. I know this might sound quite distant for some of you. But trust me: a lot of students who study in English-speaking countries might not have as much opportunity as you think in terms of practicing with local people. That’s because if they live with their countrymen, wherever they go, they still don’t have this language environment. You might disagree, but that’s how I feel and what I saw.

Again, in the following Excerpt 3, Eloise shared tips on learning five foreign languages. Before sharing the tips, she foregrounded the limitation of this method by hedging its universality. What follows is her personal story about paying to learn Spanish. Her personal story serves as proof of the practicality of her tips. According to Tracy (2002), sharing personal stories marks “a higher level of involvement than offering abstracted and general statements” (Tracy, 2002, p. 208). By doing so, Eloise not only evidences her learning methods, but also engages her audience regarding her learning reflection. Notably, Eloise hedges three times by using modal devices “might not”. The hedges have softened Eloise’s assertion towards the universality of the tip and avoided a controversy in the online community where the potential viewers vary to some extent.

Excerpt 3

- A. Number one is to track myself. I bought this notebook just for my new language learning [...]
- B. The second part, I don't know this might not work for everyone. [...] The second method is that I made myself pay.
- C. For example, for Spanish. I started it seriously because I forgot to cancel the seven-day free trial by Duolingo which costs £70. And then I was thinking okay I don't want to waste this money. I really need to zero in on it. [...]

Translanguaging for Meaning-making as an Entrepreneur

Language and accent selection serve important functions in identity construction (Tracy, 2002). It is found that the three micro-celebrities consistently speak a standardized American or British accent in most of their videos. By speaking with such a standardized accent, the micro-celebrities perform their competence in English, reinforcing their credential to teach or share English-related content.

Yet, regarding language choice, the micro-celebrities used both their native language and English in their videos, creating a translanguaging space for meaning-making. Although there were English-only videos, the micro-celebrity often blurred the boundary between Chinese and English to facilitate viewers' understanding. They preferred to use Chinese to clarify specific points and foreground an abstract idea to facilitate their explanation. Excerpt 4 shows typical examples of how Ella uses translanguaging for meaning-making.

In this example, Ella illustrated the benefits of using the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. She initiated the topic she addressed in this video in Chinese. Then, she switched to English to show the English name of the dictionary. In Example A, she switched back to Chinese to explain her motivation to recommend this dictionary, serving as a transition into the topic. In Example B-C, she first emphasized the benefits of the dictionary in Chinese, which potentially aims to facilitate viewers' understanding. As the audience has established an understanding of the benefit, Ella switched back to English to extend how it fits into English learning. It is noticeable that even in one sentence, Ella also blended Chinese with English (see Example D). Ella addressed the downside of the dictionary, adding explanatory information in Chinese: "There is no distinguish between American or British English in its example". By adding more information in Chinese and exemplifying the downside, she better argued herself by using translanguaging to facilitate the audience's understanding.

Excerpt 4

- A 现在讲讲为什么要用全英文字典。It's not a revolutionary idea, right?
- B 最后一个原因就是朗文有同义词、词典搭配，还有发音训练，extra features that I have yet to find in other dictionaries.
- C 那第二个好处就是我才说的搭配。So this will also help your speaking and writing.
- D The only downside is例句翻译没有分美式或者英式。它是掺杂在一起的，所以这个就有点不太方便，你要通过自己的印象去判断。OK，这个句子是英式发音。
- E 我想表达的点更微妙一些 懂得 do 都懂

In Example E, Ella disclaims why Chinese learners are not suitable to go to English corners. In the Chinese subtitle, Ella creatively uses “懂的do都懂 (Those who get it, do get it.)”. Adding

the emphatic auxiliary “do” in English, Ella emphasizes the shared values between her and viewers who know what she is addressing. The blending of English grammar in Chinese not only creates an emphasizing tone, but also shows micro-celebrity’s dynamic use of language in digital communication.

Throughout these extracts, it is evident that the micro-celebrity shows their pedagogical awareness by using multiple languages of linguistic resources, including Chinese and English, to facilitate the audience’s understanding or unconsciously utilize the most accessible resources for them. This might be an example to support the concept of translanguaging, emphasizing the dynamic and fluid nature of language, drawing on speakers’ entire language repertoire (Li, 2018). In the online setting where viewers’ language competence varies to some extent, translanguaging enables a dynamic space for meaning-making, enabling effective comprehension regardless of individual language competencies.

In addition to crossing the boundary between different languages, the micro-celebrities also transcended the boundary between linguistic and non-linguistic resources. The micro-celebrities chose non-linguistic resources to facilitate understanding, including mathematical symbols, images or emojis, and body language. The following image (Figure 4) shows how Fanfan integrates various resources for meaning-making.



Figure 4 Mathematical symbol used for meaning-making.



Figure 5 Emojis and body language for meaning-making.

On the left-center side, Fanfan used Mandarin to show her statement, “这个哀的音和英语的/ai/是不一样的 (the pronunciation of “哀(ai1)” is different from /ai/ in English)” and highlights the difference with a mathematical sign “≠”. The symbol here simplifies the meaning of “unequal”. This finding is similar to Tai’s (2024) study, where online language teachers draw on mathematical symbols to simplify the explanations and improve students’ comprehension.

Moreover, multimodal resources such as emojis and body language were employed for meaning construction. In Figure 5, Eloise exemplified the collocation and meaning of “take a bow”. The emoji of “bow” is positioned beside the Chinese meaning. Together with the verbal, visual and bodily resources, Eloise provided a complex multimodal representation of the word “bow”, demonstrating her pedagogical and multimodal awareness.

By transcending boundaries between different languages and modes, the micro-celebrities enabled the viewers to facilitate their understanding in the online setting where learners’ linguistic competence might vary. Such findings align with Aslan’s (2024) and Ho and Tai’s (2020) research on Instagram and YouTube. The micro-celebrity used both their first languages, English and visual affordances to create a meaningful learning environment of achieving an entrepreneurial identity.

Intimate Peers

The three micro-celebrities’ videos began with a generic welcome, “Hello everyone” or “Hey guys” (Table 6). Together with the greeting, the setting and framing of their videos were surprisingly similar. The recordings were set at the micro-celebrities’ homes, a relatively

Table 6 Intimate greeting.

Micro-celebrity	Verbal information	Screenshot
Ella	Hello, everyone!	 A screenshot of a video by Ella. She is a young woman with dark hair, wearing a light blue t-shirt, sitting in front of a bookshelf. The video has a Bilibili watermark in the top right corner. Subtitles at the bottom read "Hello, everyone!" and "大家好!".
Eloise	Hello everyone welcome back to TuesMagique	 A screenshot of a video by Eloise. She is a young woman with long dark hair, smiling, wearing a pink top. The video has a Bilibili watermark in the top right corner. Subtitles at the bottom read "Hello everyone welcome back to TuesMagique" and "大家好，欢迎来到我的频道".
Fanfan	Hey guys, welcome back to my channel. I'm Fanfan and welcome back to my small English-learning channel	 A screenshot of a video by Fanfan. She is a young woman with dark hair, wearing a light blue top, sitting at a desk with books. The video has a Bilibili watermark in the top right corner. Subtitles at the bottom read "Hey guys, welcome back to my channel. I'm Fanfan and welcome back to my small English-learning channel." and "大家好，欢迎来到我的频道。我是Fanfan，欢迎来到我的英语学习频道".

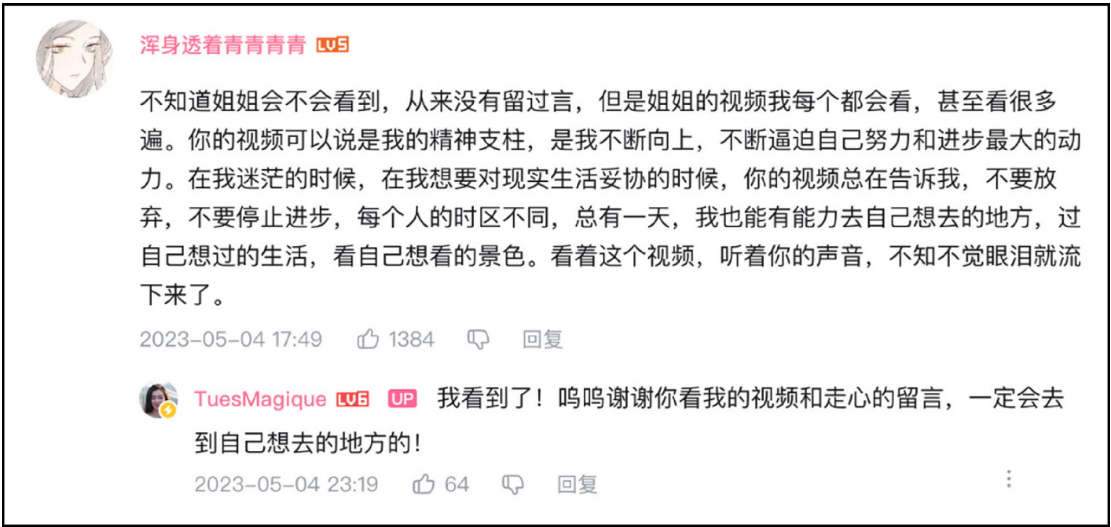
private space. It seems that the micro-celebrities were chatting with their online friends. In addition to the intimate setting, they positioned their viewers intimately with the close-up shot and gaze directly at their audience behind the screen. In doing so, it narrows the distance between viewers and the micro-celebrities, inspiring a sense of closeness (Chamber, 2013). Thus, knowledge sharing is less formal and different from the traditional Chinese classroom setting, where the relationship between teacher and students is relatively asymmetrical.

Notably, although the three micro-celebrities often addressed their audience as close friends, Fanfan was the only one who sometimes addressed her viewers as “同学们 (students)” in her instructional videos (see Excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5

同学们，听到这个单词的发音了吗？可以跟我一起来念一下。“pretentious”这个单词有三个音节 pre-ten-tious. (tr. Students, do you hear the pronunciation of this word? You can read after me. The word “pretentious” has three syllables: pre-ten-tious.)

In this excerpt, Fanfan demonstrated how to pronounce the word “pretentious”. She addressed her viewers “students” and followed with the interrogative question. Such an address was quite similar to that in the classroom context, where the teacher guided students to learn. This behavior might result from Fanfan’s rich prior teaching experiences. She brought such a habit to the online setting. In the comment section, some of her viewers called her “Teacher Fanfan”, enhancing the micro-celebrity’s language teacher identity. Although Fanfan made the teacher-student relationship explicit during instruction, the overall relationship between Fanfan and her viewers is still intimate as she constantly shares her private sphere with her audience in her other videos.



(tr. Not sure whether jiejie will see this or not. I have never left a comment, but I watch every jiejie’s video, some of which I even watched several times. Your videos are my moral support, which encourages me and motivates me. When I am lost, when I want to comprise to reality, your video always tells me, don’t give up, don’t stop moving. [...])

Figure 6 Affective comment by the audience.

It is worth noting that the intimate relationship between the micro-celebrities and the audience was also co-constructed by their viewers. As shown in Figure 6, the viewers also addressed the micro-celebrities intimately.

In addition to using intimate address, the micro-celebrities also deployed inclusive pronouns such as “我们 (we)” and “大家 (us)” to indicate intimacy. The usage of plural first-person pronouns includes the addresser and their viewers in a shared imagined community (DuBord, 2021), enhancing the sense of “us-ness” (Page, 2019). One of the interesting examples is found in Eloise’s video concerning correcting a mistake by the *Washington Post* (see Excerpt 6).

When narrating the experience of correcting a translation mistake in the *Washington Post*, Eloise unfolded her series of actions with the pronoun “I” and how she categorized herself “as a translator” and “Chinese native speaker”. As a translator, she knew the professional attitudes towards translation variation, while as a native Chinese speaker, she “knew it should have been Yuan”. The conflicting identities drove her to conduct the following fact checks, including checking dictionary websites, asking friends from Taipei, and comparing parallel texts. The combination of the pronoun “I” and actions showed her efforts and rigor to find the truth. Together with self-categorization and pronouns, Eloise showed her agency in correcting the translation mistake, reinforcing her professional identity as a successful learner who pursues facts rationally (Teng, 2019).

Excerpt 6. Inclusive reference

I	spotted “Grandpa Ye, have a good journey”.
My instinct as a translator	told me something was wrong
I	was pretty sure it should have been Grandpa Yuan
as a native Chinese speaker, I	knew it should have been translated as Yuan
I	consulted translation websites [...]
I	asked two of my friends from Taipei [...]
I	looked up parallel, especially official context
I	could write to the Washington Post and ask for a correction [...]
Thanks	for watching
Grandpa Yuan, we	love you.

Interestingly, the pronoun changed at the end of the video. Eloise directly addressed her audience as “you” and showed her blessing to the late Yuan Longping. The inclusive pronoun “we” aligned Eloise with her audience, creating a shared identity between Eloise and her viewers, who were mostly Chinese. Such a shift of pronouns showed Eloise’s intention to build an affective bond rather than just telling a story of her professionalism. Her identity as a patriotic English learner was thus constructed. Here, Eloise’s language competence is linked with patriotic entrepreneurship (Joppke, 2021; Kawai, 2009). English becomes a medium through which Eloise performed patriotic behavior as well as achieved personal achievement.

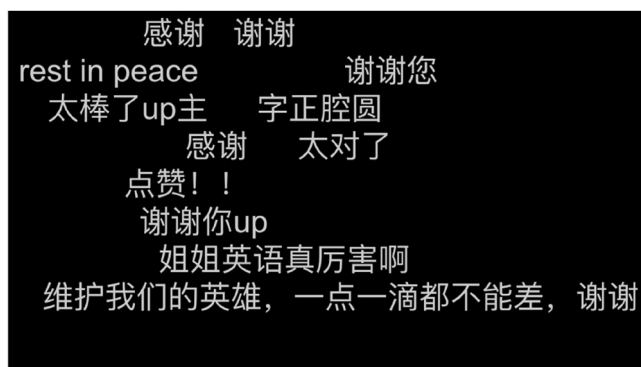


Figure 7 Audience's response to Eloise's patriotism and professionalism.

Such inclusive identity was also evidenced by viewers' responses. The bullet comments showed the audience's uptakes of the two identities (see Figure 7). The audience offered their gratitude to Eloise for “维护我们的英雄 (defending our hero)” and complimented her professionalism, possibly influencing her teacher identity construction.

Discussion

The identities constructed by language teaching micro-celebrities are complex and multifaceted, encompassing roles such as the successful yet imperfect language teacher, the intimate peer who articulates language beliefs, and the practitioner of translanguaging for identity formation. This intricate interweaving of identities underscores the multi-layered nature of identity construction (Block & Corona, 2016; Teng, 2019, 2024). The interplay among these various identities illustrates how micro-celebrities navigate their roles, reinforcing the complexity inherent in their professional lives.

Micro-celebrities validate their professional identities by showcasing language certificates and recounting their personal learning journeys. By weaving these narratives into their instructional content, they transform their lived experiences into recognized expertise (Newton et al., 2024; Oliver & Cataldo, 2019). This integration not only legitimizes their authority as educators but also invites audience into their personal spheres, fostering an interpersonal bond. By sharing glimpses of their private lives, micro-celebrities created a sense of intimacy that resonates with viewers, enhancing their relatability and engagement.

This dual identity as both professional and intimate peer aligns with findings from Chao (2022) and Ho (2023), who examined English teachers on YouTube. However, the present study introduces an additional dimension: the entrepreneurial identity. Micro-celebrities adeptly navigated their roles as professional educators while simultaneously positioning themselves as entrepreneurs. Despite variations in their commodification strategies, they leveraged different language features to brand their professional identities effectively. For instance, Eloise's narrative about correcting a translation error in the Washington Post not only commodified her identity as a skilled language learner but also aligns her with patriotic sentiments by concluding with the inclusive pronoun “we.” This illustrates how identity construction involves a complex interplay between professional authority and entrepreneurial aspirations.

The deployment of multimodal resources is pivotal in shaping the identities of these micro-celebrities, who utilized a diverse array of linguistic and non-linguistic repertoires. Their professional identity is articulated through a strategic and flexible use of these resources, enabling

them to navigate varying degrees of certainty when expressing their teacher beliefs (Zhou et al., 2024). The integration of multilingual and multi-semiotic elements—such as translanguaging, visual sketches, color choices, font sizes, and mathematical symbols—demonstrates a dynamic and creative approach to pedagogy. This aligns with Li's (2008) assertion that language pedagogy transcends socially constructed systems, engaging with diverse meaning-making practices.

In terms of constructing identities of intimate peers, micro-celebrities employed close-up shots and home settings to foster a sense of closeness with their viewers. The use of conversational markers like “by the way” and “you know” contributed to a casual, informal style that made the videos feel less scripted and more relatable. This approach cultivates an intimate atmosphere, allowing viewers to perceive micro-celebrities as approachable figures. The interaction is reciprocal, as viewers often address the micro-celebrities with affectionate terms like “sister” reflecting a shared connection that enhances the identity construction process for both parties.

The construction of entrepreneurial identity relies significantly on the positive attributes associated with marketed products. Notably, the term “native-like” emerges as a dominant characteristic in course promotions, reflecting the pervasive influence of “native speakerism” within the English Language Teaching (ELT) market in Asia (Holliday, 2015; Jenks & Lee, 2016). While micro-celebrities may express a commitment to promoting global Englishes in their instructional materials, their commodification practices often shifted towards native-speakerism when marketing specific products or courses. This dichotomy raises questions about the underlying motivations for such shifts. It suggests that, despite espousing an ideology of inclusivity, micro-celebrities may resort to native-speakerism as a strategic response to market demands or as a protective measure against potential backlash.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the identity construction of language teaching micro-celebrities is a nuanced process that encompasses professional, intimate, and entrepreneurial dimensions. By employing a diverse array of multimodal resources and personal narratives, these teachers navigated complex relationships with audience while reinforcing their professional identities. The findings highlight the intricate interplay between competing ideologies within the ELT market, particularly the tension between promoting global Englishes and adhering to native-speakerism. This complexity underscores the need for a deeper understanding of how identities are shaped in digital contexts, revealing the multifaceted nature of language teaching in contemporary society.

While the analysis offers valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size is relatively small, consisting of only three micro-celebrities on Bilibili. This limited dataset may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider including a larger and more diverse group of language teaching micro-celebrities to enhance the robustness of statistical outcomes and provide a more comprehensive understanding of identity construction in this context. Second, although the present study utilized narrative videos and audience comments for triangulation, it did not incorporate direct interviews with the micro-celebrities. Future research would benefit from including interviews to gain a more nuanced understanding of their identity formation. Such an approach could yield deeper insights into the relationship between online presentation and self-perception, allowing for a richer exploration of how micro-celebrities view their roles and identities. Third, the focus of this research primarily centered on language instruction. While this emphasis is relevant, the present study does not address the quality of instructional videos or their effectiveness in facilitating language learning. Future studies should evaluate these videos to determine their

impact on viewer learning outcomes, thus providing a more comprehensive assessment of their pedagogical value.

Despite limitations, the findings provide theoretical and pedagogical implications. The present study contributes to the theoretical understanding of identity construction in digital applied linguistics contexts, particularly among language teaching micro-celebrities. The findings highlight the complexity and multifaceted nature of identity, revealing how professional, intimate, and entrepreneurial identities interrelate. This complexity aligns with contemporary theories of identity that emphasize its dynamic and contextual nature (Block & Corona, 2016). The study underscores the need for future research to further explore the interplay between various identity dimensions and how they manifest across different platforms and audience. Moreover, the research suggests that the identities of micro-celebrities are not static but are actively constructed through the strategic use of multimodal resources. This finding supports the notion that identity is a performative act, shaped by both linguistic and non-linguistic elements (Li, 2008). Future studies could expand on this by examining how different modalities—such as visual imagery, sound, and interactive elements—contribute to identity construction in various educational settings, offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding digital pedagogy.

From a pedagogical perspective, the insights gained from the present study have significant implications for language teaching practices. The effective use of multimodal resources by micro-celebrities illustrates the potential for educators to engage learners through diverse channels. Language teachers can draw on these strategies to create more dynamic and interactive learning environments that resonate with students' experiences and preferences. Additionally, the blending of personal narratives with instructional content, as seen with the micro-celebrities, highlights the value of fostering personal connections in the classroom. Educators are encouraged to share their own learning journeys and experiences, which can enhance relatability and motivate students. This approach not only humanizes the teaching process but also encourages students to engage more deeply with the material. Furthermore, the study's findings regarding entrepreneurial identity suggest that language teachers can benefit from adopting an entrepreneurial mindset in their practice. By branding their identities and leveraging their unique experiences, educators can create a more distinctive presence in the digital landscape. This could involve developing personal teaching styles, utilizing social media for outreach, and engaging with audience beyond traditional classroom settings.

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