Mediating the voice of personal blogging:
an analysis of Chinese A-list personal blogs

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Abstract

Voice reveals stance, position and other evaluative aspects of texts. In spite of its major role in establishing blogs' recognition and participation in the social networking space, voice has not received adequate attention in online communication research. This paper attempts to explore the voice of blogs through examining personal blogs. Data were collected from three A-list Chinese personal blogs hosted on top blog service providers in China. Drawing upon appraisal analysis, this study examined the voice of personal blogs through analysing the written texts and images of the blogs. The findings revealed that personal blog authors employed different resources in constructing individualized voices. These were constrained by various factors such as gendered projections, audiences, and culturally specific rhetoric. The paper concludes with a suggestion that further research in exploring voice representations in blogs, however heterogeneous, needs to consider technological and semiotic resources, genre features, and sociocultural and institutional conditions.

Introduction

Research in the past ten odd years has largely reached a consensus that the blog, as a mainstream social networking player, functions as a medium and space for creating and publicizing personal expressions (Blood, 2002; Dean, 2010; Goldberg, 2012; Jones & Holland, 2013). Some textual attributes such as evaluation, stance, attitude, emotion, and sentiment are vital in establishing blogs' public recognition and social participation (Chen, 2011; Daille, Dubreil, Monceaux, & Vernier, 2011; Hill, 2005; Janga & Stefanoneb, 2011; Marlow, 2004; Myers, 2010). However, quite disproportionally, not much work has been directed at understanding how such 'personal' or 'individualized' expressions actually work. The heterogeneity and complexity of blogs in terms of genre, authorship and readership require blog research to be particularized and contextualized (Bruns, 2008; Sima & Pugsley, 2010), with various semiotic, sociocultural and institutional conditions kept in check.

In order to unpack such individualized expressions or voice, the present study takes personal blogs as a sub-genre of the blog as its focus. Two research questions are raised to examine the voice of personal blogging.

1) What is the voice constructed in personal blogging? 2) How is the voice of personal blogging constructed? In line with the two research questions, in the following, first, several perspectives on voice and personal blogs and their connections will be discussed. Then, the types of data collected for the study and the appraisal analysis used will be introduced. Findings from the analysis will be presented and discussed to argue that the construction of personal blogging is a complex process that not only involves blogs and bloggers but also employs various semiotic resources, the audience, as well as specific cultural sediments.

Voice and personal blogs

Voice is a useful concept in discourse studies as it reveals stance, position, and other evaluative aspects of texts and is constructed and performed in various ways. Through voice, writers are able to manage their own and others' presence in texts in that the development of a personal voice can help create a sense of authenticity, a crucial feature of successful discourse that enables and confers the authority of the author (Freisinger, 1994). However, the views on voice, its constructions, and representations/performances may vary among theorists. It can be viewed as a conduit for human presence in a text or multiple selves in a text, as a conveyer of resonance from the writer to the reader or vice versa, as a way to appropriate other writers or texts, or as all of these (e.g., Yancey, 1994).

Rhetorical theory, following the structural tradition of linguistics, posits that   voice is analysed through evaluative aspects of text such as attitude, feeling, emotion, evaluation, judgment, appreciation, and preference. It demonstrates stance and position in textual practice and their ways of representation. In this sense, voice can refer to the construction of an author's orientation or stance toward present and potential addressees and audiences, and toward the presentational content of the discourse (Lemke, 1995). This is evaluated in respect to social relations and evaluations taken from a particular viewpoint, across both meaningful stretches of text and from text to text. Such orientational meanings reflect what is happening in the communicative relationship and what stance its participants may take to each other and to the presentational content (Lemke, 2002). Participants orient themselves to each other in terms of action and feeling, and to their community in terms of point of view, attitudes, and values, thereby producing social groups, presences, and powers, and (potential) social actions and consequences.

A social constructionist sees voice as contextualized, being produced and reproduced by sociocultural and institutional situations and, through dialogical interplays between these situations, in relation to Bakhtin's dialogism (Marková, 2003) and Kristeva's notion of intertextuality (Bazerman, 2004; Kristeva, 1986). Some researchers such as Ivanic (1998), however, insist on bringing back the notion of the individual writer into the social view of writing and voice. They argue that the idea of writers conveying an impression of themselves

through their writing, either intentionally or unintentionally, is not incompatible with a *social constructionist* view of writing, but complements it or reflects the conflicts of identity that writers experience.

Such a position is in effect resonant with the poststructuralist stance in which individualized performance and agency are magnified (McNay, 2000), if not equally valued. In that sense, voice can be multiple, multiplied, and even contradictory, being enacted through the interplay between the discoursal characteristics of a text, the social context in which discourse is located, and the various text participants. It can be realised or performed on both physical and virtual spaces, as has been pointed out by Mitra and Watts (2002) in their conceptualization of Internet discourses. A study of voice in text in this regard, as this study is intended to show, should consider the author's presence (particularly agency) in the text, the particular social context in which the text is situated, aspects such as values, beliefs, norms, and power as well as their interconnections, alongside the medium and space in which the text is concretised to enact voice.

Personal blogs, as the earliest and most common type of blogs, are typically viewed as a social media and space for expressing and communicating personal opinions, emotions, and their owners' identities, regardless of whether they are created by a single author or a group of authors. Given their resemblance to personal on-going diaries or commentaries (Miller & Shepherd, 2009), personal blogs are often regarded by their authors as more than a way to communicate but as a way to reflect on and reconstruct their living experiences and emotions in the light of being, becoming, and belonging and to enable them to share thoughts and feelings simultaneously with friends, family, and others (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Thomas, 2007). In this sense, personal blogs constitute an essential research space for understanding voice online from various theoretical perspectives.

In this space, technology is a key contributor to the interplay between these perspectives. Since the administration access of a blog can be shared irrespective of place and time, it is never clear who is the real author behind the control panel of a blog, whether it is a single person, a team, or even an institution (Morrison, 2008; Qian & Scott, 2007). Given the extremely low cost of remixing (usually just a matter of clicks of the mouse) and the immediacy of publishing and republishing, it is indeed equally difficult to trace how a blogging text, whether it is a single blog post, a piece of information from a blog post, or a whole blog, is transmitted, in the blogosphere, in the Internet, or across media. While the participatory voice of personal blogs emphasizes the power of the mass and numbers in which collective and institutional emergence is seen as the most relevant and important, the ownership as well as the agency of texts has become distributed and has even disappeared to some extent, with individual blogs' participation being side-lined unwittingly.

Cultural and linguistic contexts can also have influence over personal blogs and their voice formations. Similar to other blogs and personal diaries (Blood, 2002; Nardi, et al., 2004; van Dijck, 2004), personal blogs are collections of their owners' cultured experiences about who they are, what they do, what they like, and

what they think. The contents of personal blogs, which mediate personal experience, emotions, and lifestyles, then, are largely heterogeneous rather than homogenous. Personal blogging experiences may be transformed into part of their owners' lifestyle in relation to a particular time and space, making each individual blog unique in their blog presentations. It is apparent that intersections and commonalities among them cannot be understood and addressed without relating to the particular context in which they are situated (Chen, 2011).

These conceptions, that voice is evaluative, performative, and socio-culturally constructed and enacted, have particular relevance to understanding the personal blog as a new form of 'writing' that plays a critical role in constructing the dynamics between a blog author (single or plural) and the audience, between an individual and a community, and between the personal and the public (Miller & Shepherd, 2009). They may, in terms of social recognition and action (Barry, 2006; Lin, 2001), provide an explanation as to why some personal blogs can stand out as A-list blogs with a large viewership that may also have an extensive influence on public opinions, behaviours, and events, while others are less attractive and forgotten. Therefore, voice of personal blogs creates a lens through which the discourse as well social actions and consequences of personal blogging can be explored and construed. Above all, personal blogs are not simply individual texts devoid of purposeful connections and relations, but are instances and components of particular social text and discourse that, under specific circumstances, may cause significant social changes and actions.

The three personal blogs

Three A-list personal blogs were selected as the cases for this study. The first blog is Muzi Mei's blog (*muzimei*) that emerged in mid-2003 and was dubbed 'the mother of Chinese blogs' (Fang, 2003). Muzi Mei's blog was considered the first de facto A-list personal blog in the Chinese blogosphere and has since become prototypical for others blogs in terms of content and style. The second blog is Liumang Yan's blog (*liumang yan*) that describes life transitions of a 'middle-aged' woman who divorced her husband and migrated from the countryside to the city to seek employment and ultimately a new life. Apart from the viewership, what makes Liumang Yan's blog a particular case is that unlike Muzi Mei's blog whose author is a well-educated writer for literary magazines and journals, Liuman Yan is an ordinary netizen turned blogger who has a shared experience with millions of Chinese netizens. The third blog is Acosta's blog, a blog of a young man whose lifestyle is seen as iconic for young men of the emerging middle class in China and their pursuit of masculinity, which in Chinese can be rephrased as "manly demeanor" (*nanxing qizhi*) or "determined and decisive" (*yanggang zhiqi*). According to Xinlang BSP (Xinlang Blog Service Provider)'s A-list ranking in 2006, Acosta's blog was the third most visited blog in China, marginally falling behind two celebrity blogs and his blog was advocated as a victory by the grassroots over the elite and the powerful. It seems in some ways that Acosta's

blog indicates a shift in attention in the Chinese blogosphere from the elite to the ordinary blogs and is worth close scrutiny.

Four criteria were used for selecting the blog for the study: saliency, popularity, typicality, and activeness. Saliency requires that the selected blog be accessible to the public and to have emerged solely from the blogosphere. This necessarily excluded blogs such as celebrity blogs and favours the grassroots nature of the selected blogs. That is, bloggers were not known to the public and the media before their achievement in the blogosphere. Popularity requires that the blogs are among the most popular blogs at any time (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Typicality requires that the selected blogs be typical of personal blogs with a sole authorship and an interest centred upon personal expression. Activeness is an indicator of how often a blog is updated. These criteria were jointly evaluated in the data collection process to ensure the selected blogs were broadly representative of personal blogs in Mainland China.

Cases were selected along a timeline of Chinese blogs starting from 2003 when the Chinese blogosphere first became accessible to the public, to June 2007 when the data collection started. A-list blogs in this study refer to the most famous or popular blogs in a blog hosting portal or a blog service provider. They are the most visited or linked to at the time of the data collection and are typical of personal blogs in one or several distinctive aspects. According to the long tail theory (Anderson, 2006), A-list blogs can function as virtual spaces where various parties such as bloggers and audiences congregate and interact. Equally important in this regard is the implicit influence that A-list blogs as exemplars for personal blogging can have on ordinary personal blogs and their viewers.

Gender may seem a marked feature of the selected blogs in this study. It was, however, not a deliberate selection; rather, it was in line with the pattern of the Chinese blogosphere's emergence since 2003. That is, female bloggers took the lead in the early phase and male bloggers tried to catch up with them in the latter phase.

In collecting data from the three blogs, two conditions were further considered: time span and content focus. Time span specifies the period of the data collection, determines the amount of data to collect, and sets the time dimension for the actual analysis. As has been discussed above, this study focuses on blogs that emerged from and became popular in the blogosphere. This selection helps delimit a transitional line for the data collection, from the time a blogger started blogging to that time when the blogger started self-promoting via other media and activities. The time duration of the data collection may vary from blog to blog. Among the three personal blogs selected, data were collected from June to September 2003 in Muzi Mei's blog, from February 2004 to June 2005 in Liumang Yan's blog, and from March to June 2006 in Acosta's blog. Similarly, content was an important factor in understanding the voice that the bloggers constructed and represented in their respective blogs. Three indicators of blog entries, namely, theme (topic) relevancy, the number of

visits, and the number of comments were also considered in the selection depending on the nature of the selected blog entries.

A total of 346 blog entries and their blogsites were collected and examined from these three blogs. In all, 32 entries were collected from Muzi Mei's blog, 235 from Liumang Yan's blog, and 79 from Acosta's blog. Thirty of the blog entries were examined in detail in terms of voice in relation to the notions of genre and performance, and the title and content of each entry was listed in the appendix attached. Mzm is the shortened form for Mu Zimei' blog, Lmz for Liuamng Yan's blog, and Acosta for Acosta's blog. The entries that were collected were labelled with a number, date and time of publishing, and entry title. Prior to this, the number of blog entries was also counted at a three-month interval from the first blog entry to the one when this data collection started so as to identify possible patterns within the blog. For example, the entries located in Acosta's blog during the data collection period were labelled as Acosta 01 and Acosta 02. The 10 selected blogs entries were labelled as Acosta e01, Acosta 02, and so forth.

Appraisal analysis

This study adopted Appraisal analysis as the approach to explore, describe and explain the ways that language and other semiotic resources are used to construct the voice of the selected blogs. Appraisal analysis was developed by Martin and White (2005) as a sociological analytic framework of social emotions, attitudes, stances, and positions. For one thing, the appraisal system provides resources for investigating these aspects of the interpersonal function of a text (Martin & Rose, 2003, 2007). It uses these three types of semantic resource: attitude, engagement, and graduation, with further subdivisions as Figure 1 illustrates.

Figure 1: The appraisal system (adapted from Martin & White, 2005, p. 38)
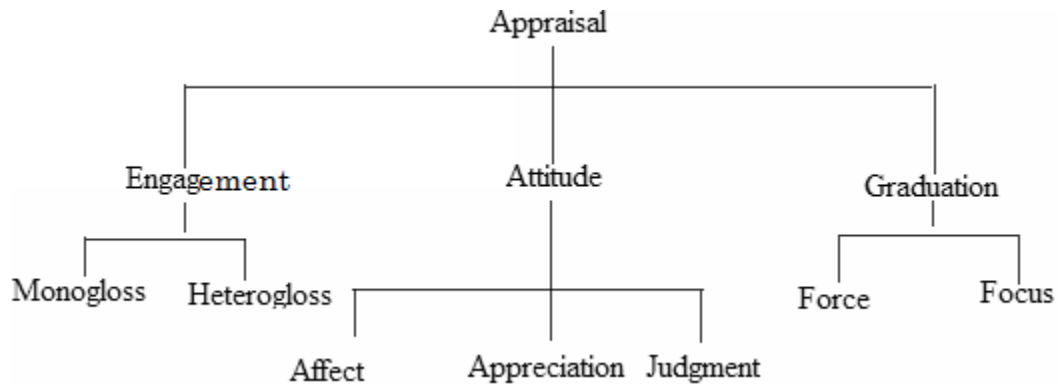
Two types of semantic resources, namely, attitude and graduation, were centrally examined in the present paper in terms of presenting voice. Attitude is concerned with affect (of feeling and emotion), appreciation (of aesthetics), and judgment (of behaviour and morals). Affect is concerned with emotional response and disposition and is typically realised through mental processes of reaction (*This* <u>*pleases*</u> *me*, *I* <u>*hate*</u> *chocolate*, etc.) and through attributive relations of affect (*I'm* <u>*sad*</u>, *I'm* <u>*happy*</u>, *She's* <u>*proud of*</u> *her achievements, he's* <u>*frightened of*</u> *spiders*, etc.) (Martin & White, 2005). Judgment includes meanings which serve to evaluate human behaviour by reference to a set of institutionalised norms (Martin & White, 2005).

Judgment is involved when the speaker provides an assessment of some human participants with reference to that participant's acts. Behaviour may be evaluated as moral (*good, moral, virtuous*) or immoral (*bad, immoral, lascivious*), as legal (*law abiding, fair, just*) or illegal (*corrupt, unjust, unfair*), as socially acceptable (*honest, truthful, credible*) or unacceptable (*deceitful, dishonest, fake*), as laudable (*indefatigable, resolute*) or deplorable (*distracted, lazy*), as normal (*standard, every day, charmed*) or abnormal (*eccentric, odd, dated*) and so on. Appreciation includes resources used to evaluate the aesthetic quality of processes and products, and human beings when they are seen as entities, and when they are not evaluated in terms of their emotions or behaviour (Martin & White, 2005). It may focus on the compositional qualities of the evaluated entity (*harmonious, symmetrical, balanced, and convoluted*), or on the aesthetically related reaction with which the entity is associated (*arresting, stunning, dramatic, dull, uninviting, monotonous*).

Two factors of attitudinal meanings are further identified. The first is whether these attitudinal meanings are positive or negative. This is helpful in deciding the overall attitudinal intention of a text. The attitude of a blog entry may appear polarised or neutral depending on the distribution of positive and negative attitudinal meanings. It is thus not necessary to adopt 'neutral' as a coding label. The second factor is whether attitudinal meanings are inscribed or invoked. Inscribed attitude concerns instances where the evaluation is overtly

expressed in the text through the vocabulary choice (such as skilfully, corruptly, or aberrant). Invoked attitude is triggered by appraisal resources which have the capacity to culturally evoke attitudinal responses. Though the distinction between the inscribed and invoked attitudinal meanings is not clear-cut, it is helpful to see how attitudinal resources are employed to construct voice either directly or indirectly (Martin & White, 2005). Graduation is used to assess attitude. It can be scaled by force (as intensified or downgraded) or focus (as sharpened or softened). (Martin & White, 2005). Force is used for upgrading and downgrading evaluations, indicating how strongly speakers feel through either intensification or quantification (*slightly, somewhat, completely*). Focus scales intensity as softened or sharpened (*effectively, true, pure*) and can be seen as the domain of the application of scales of intensity to ungraded categories.

Regardless of whether voice should be approached from structural, constructive, or performative perspectives, as has been discussed above, Appraisal analysis' provides a suitable approach to investigating the (semantic) resources for voice construction in personal blogs, particularly given its concerns about examining aspects of feelings and emotions (affect), judging behaviours morally (judgment) and evaluating aesthetically (appreciation) in the text. As a semantic resource approach, it helps examine how, in personal blogs, feelings and emotions about bloggers themselves, other participants, issues, and events are constructed and projected. Further, Appraisal analysis's emphasis on social functions of text and the distribution of relations makes it a substantial tool for sociological analysis that needs to go beyond general descriptions or grand narratives (Faiclough, 2003).

Table 1 provides an appraisal analysis of part of the written text of Acosta's blog. In this analysis, the appraising items are located in the segments (S1, S4, S5 and S6) of the blog entry and marked according to their appraising values. Attitudinal resources are placed in bold, graduation resources are underlined, and the appraised is italicized. The attribute of the identified attitudinal meanings is further labelled as either positive (+) or negative (-) in terms of voice polarity or as inscribed or invoked in terms of voice intent. To reduce unnecessary technical complexity, this study replaces 'inscribed' and 'invoked' with 'direct' and 'indirect' in labelling attitudinal resources.

Table 1: An example of appraisal analysis of a written text.

Segment	Appraising item	Attitude		Graduation	
		Direct	Indirect	Force	Focus
S1	有一些抑郁。a bit **depressed**	affect-		quantification	
S4	有限的快乐。some **happiness**.	affect+		quantification	
S5	比较偏远的地方。**a remote** *village*		appreciation-		
S6	适应一些日子。**enjoy** a few more days	affect+		quantification	

Although the early entries of the blogs chosen for the study were mainly composed of written texts, the appearance of other modalities such as images and sound increases over time, especially in Acosta's blog where photos are used regularly in his entries and have shown distinctive patterns. Over the past decade, a number of researchers (e.g., Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007; van Leeuwen, 1999) have explored this phenomenon and have developed various frameworks and terminologies for describing this. Economou (2006) suggests that the previously mentioned appraisal categories can also be applied to images (such as photos and other visual compositions) in that images are equally capable of expressing feelings, emotions, and consequently, voices. Different from those in written texts, which are composed of clauses, phrases, and words, voices in images or photos are realized through modalities such as colour (both black/white versus colour and level of colour saturation), focus (amount of details both of subject and background), and vector (the direction of action if there are movements involved in images). These features are collectively referred to as modality markers.

Findings

Two trends are noticeable in the ways the three blogs use attitudinal resources to construct their voice, as Table 2 shows. First, attitudinal resources for constructing voice seem evenly distributed in the blog entries of the three blogs, though appreciation instances are slightly more dominant in the two female blogs and affect resources are more frequent in Acosta's blog. In Liumang Yan's blog entries, appreciation occurs more frequently than affect and judgment, doubling the number of affect resources and accounting for 43 more than judgment resources. This dominance may indicate that more resources are allocated for expressing the bloggers' aesthetic preference for events, issues, places, and participants in her blogging. In Muzi Mei's blog, not many dramatic affect markers of happiness or sadness are directly placed but are rather embodied in details of description or narrative.

Table 2: The distribution of attitudinal resources in the three personal blogs

Resources			Blog		
			Muzi Mei	Liumang Yan	Acosta
attitudinal resources		affect	123/32%	97/20%	14/35%
		appreciation	137/35%	213/44%	12/30%
		judgment	126/33%	170/36%	14/35%
polarity		positive	159/41%	226/47%	20/50%
		negative	228/59%	254/53%	20/50%
intent		direct	167/43%	254/53%	136/50%
		indirect	219/57%	226/47%	134/50%
scale	force	intensified	43/35%	32/28%	24/24%
		quantified	13/10%	9/8%	27/27%
	focus	sharpened	49/40%	60/52%	31/30%
		softened	19/15%	14/12%	19/19%

In the following examples from the entry Mzm e01 that recounts her smoking experience, Muzi Mei does not directly describe her feelings towards smoking but rather uses different phases to recollect her associations with smoking:

1) *cigarettes* are my **third concubine**
2) *cigarettes* are **a kind of food** for me
3) *cigarettes* were just cigarettes, neither **a source of my inspiration** nor **a spiritual support to my writing pursuit**

In this entry, affect is intertwined with such experiences as curiosity for smoking in her childhood and frustrations after failed attempts, interpersonal ties with other people, loneliness of living, and leaves a mark of rebelling in her adolescence. Noticeably in this entry, Muzi Mei associates smoking with not only substances (food, inspiration, spiritual support) but also persons and relations (concubine). Concubine as a social category, apart from projecting a patriarchal image, has its emergent social connotations in contemporary China which may either refer to extramarital affairs (*xiaosan* 小三) or polygamy (*ernai* 二奶), which is unlawful

but widely practiced by the rich (e.g., entrepreneurs) and the powerful (e.g., government officials). In both cases, men are portrayed as predators while women are victims or accomplices.

Second, it seems Muzi Mei's blogs and Liumang Yan's blog employ more attitudinal resources than Acosta's blog does. 387 and 480 attitudinal resources are found in Muzi Mei's and Liumang Yan's blog entries whereas merely 40 are noticed in Acosta's blog. Such a drastic difference may be caused by the length of their blog entries (Acosta's blog entries are usually shorter in comparison. Please also see Appendix 1 for entry length).

Positive and negative voice of personal blogs

Whether the voice of personal blogs is positively or negatively constructed and how it may influence audiences' reception of the blogs depends on the resources of affect, appreciation, and judgment. Table 2 shows that in Muzi Mei's and Liuang Yan's blogs, negative attitude instances outnumber positive ones. It cannot be inferred, however, that the attitudinal meanings of their blog entries are conclusively negative since there is only a slight difference between the two attributes. Interestingly, appreciation is unexceptionally positive in their blogs, in contrast to the general tendency of attitudinal resources. In Acosta's blog, however, the number of instances for positive attitudinal meanings is close to that of the negative ones, seemingly ascribing a neutral voice to Acosta's blog.

There is an interesting pattern in Liumang Yan's blog on how men and women are contrastively positioned for constructing her blog's voice. On the one hand，she blogs about men with manners (*wenwen eryan*), knowledge (*xueshi yuanbo*), personality (*you gexing*), energy (*mengnan*), charm (*zhenzheng xinyi de*), experience (*chengshu de*), compassion (*titie*), sexual ability (*xing'ai jiqi*), and physical appearance (*gao, shuai*). On the other hand, men were negatively evaluated as stinky (*chou nanren*) and toy boys (*xiao bailian*). By contrast, women were entirely positively appraised as intelligent (*congming lingli*), beautiful (*meili yu fenfang*), graceful (*youya*), passionate (*wangsheng de reqing*), sexy (*wanzhong fengqing*), and romantic (*shuwan xingxing kan richu*). In addition, women's bodies were involved in appraisals such as appearance (e.g., beautiful looks; *meili de wuguan*), *body shape (piaoliang de shenduan)*, body parts (*jianting de rufang*), and skin (*fuyou tanxing de pifu*). Such a pattern may be indicative of a certain influence of gendered identification over voice as well.

Direct and indirect voice of personal blogs

The voice of personal blogs can be either explicitly or implicitly constructed by using attitudinal resources of affect, appreciation, and judgment. The intent of voice can thus be disclosed through the use of direct and indirect attitudinal resources depending on each blogger's preference. Table 2 shows that Muzi Mei's blogging,

for instance, has a preference for indirect rather than direct disclosure, as indirect attitudinal resources are somehow greater than direct attitudinal resources. As affect is a major carrier of emotion, Muzi Mei seems prone to publicizing her emotions, desires, and yearnings rather than making open comments or judgments on social events, issues, and phenomena. In Liumang Yan's blog entries, there is no significant gap found between direct and indirect attitudinal meanings, with 254 direct and 226 indirect instances. Direct resources only slightly outnumber indirect ones. Interestingly, within the domain of direct attitude, affect is the most frequent, judgment the second, and appreciation the least. Similarly, in Acosta's blog, the distribution of direct and indirect attitude is also balanced in the written texts. The overall distribution of direct and indirect attitude in the three blogs does not display any drastic imbalance.

In general, direct voice is expressed through the use of adjectives, adverbial words, phrases and collations while indirect voice is mainly realized by noun phrases or through nominalization. For instance, Muzi Mei's emotions are labelled as sad (*nanguo*), happy (*gaoxing*), nervous (*jinzhang*), despairing (*juewang de*) and worried (*danxin*). Sometimes, adverbial phrases together with an action are used to reinforce certain feelings such as romantically walking bare foot (*longman de guangzhe jiaoya zou*). Muzi Mei occasionally used Chinese four-character idiomatic collocations to express her feeling such as too painful to live (*tongbu yusheng*) and too much depression turned out to be happiness (*beiji shengle*). Indirect voice often involves actions, objects, issues, places, or state as the following examples from Muzi Mei's blog illustrate:

1) action: frowned quickly (*zhoule yixia meitou*); smoking (*xiyan*),
2) object: spring wind (*rumu chunfeng*); cherry blossom (*yinghua yiban*)
3) issue: my period was overdue again (*yuejing you laichi le*)
4) place: in their sick bed (*zai bingta shang*)
5) state: absolute silence (*juedui chenmo*)

Direct voice is mainly concerned with "others" such as people, events, issues, and things; the "self" is seemingly excluded. Similar to affect, direct appreciation is mainly realized through resources such as attributive phrases and collocations (*dezi jiegou*), which are equivalent to either a relative clause or an adverbial clause. Direct judgment, in particular, is all directed at people, the majority of whom criticize the blogger and her behaviour. Similar to direct affect, adjective phrases and collocations are used for making explicit moral and ethical evaluation such as crazy (*fengkuang*), self-interested (*gongli*), shameless betrayal (*haowu liangzhi de chumai*), and decadent and dissolute (*fuxiu milan*). The blogger Muzi Mei also criticizes her profession as a journalist as shameless betrayal (*wuzhi de beipan*), and ascribes her moral degradation partly to her career as self-interested (*zisi zili*).

In Liumang Yan's blog, some adverbial and noun phrases are used occasionally to modify some behaviour or form a category such as living independently (*neng duli shengcun le*) and self-confidence (*zixin*). In some instances, she used some vulgar phrases or words such as fuck (*cao*) that were not allowed in traditional media. Catchy acronyms in the Chinese Internet such as penis (*JJ*), belittle or contempt (*BS*), proud or cocky (NB), proud and conceited (*NBMD*) appeared frequently in her blog entries (JJ is the shortened form for Jiji or; BS for Bishi; NB for Niubi and NBMD for Niubi madiao). Because the original Chinese characters refer directly to sex organs, the use of the acronyms in Arabic letters instead serves as a way to either circumvent media censorship or obscure their obscenity.

Scaled voice of personal blogs

Voice in personal blogs can be scaled as strong or weak and focused or dispersed relying on bloggers' preference and intention. Force is further identified as either intensified or quantified while focus is categorized as either sharpened or softened. Table 2 shows that in Muzi Mei's blog, it is likely that she tries to scale her voice strategically. It presents an even distribution of gradation items among the three different attitudinal aspects, which is in congruence with the number of resources of those attitudinal aspects. Yet, an imbalance between forced and focused attitude is highly possible such as in Mzm e04 in which the blogger solely relied on focus for scaling attitude. On the other hand, the ratio between each subordinate aspect of force (intensification and quantification) and focus (sharpened and softened), demonstrated a noticeable pattern. In terms of force, intensification is the chief means used while instances of sharpened focus outweighed those of softened focus. In both aspects, intensification and sharpened focus appeared approximately twice as often as quantification and softened focus. It seems that, in Muzi Mei's blogging, voice is intensified rather than mitigated.

In Liumang Yan's blog, instances of focus appear more frequently than those of force, with a ratio of 41/74. The latter constituted almost double the number of the former. This pattern aslo applies to individual blog entries, indicating that Liumang Yan's blogging tends to present the blog's voice using focused attitudinal resources rather than forced ones such as inceasing power or quantity. This kind of construction unfolds voice rather than imposing it on an audience. In other words, voice was not forced onto the audience but was tactfully presented to them. Still, Liumang Yan maintains an active and powerful role in projecting her voice even when her presence has already been migitated. This is why intensification is the most common aspect of force (except in Lmy e06), and why, between the two aspects of focus, the sharpened have absolutely more instances than the softened.

Voice in Acosta's blogging seems to be constructed by resources for force (51) and focus (50). In the photos of the ten blog entries, there are more focus items (9) than force (4) as a whole. In five photos, only resources of focus are employed to scale the voice in Acosta's blog entry. In another three entries (Acosta e01, 05, 08), the weight of force and focus are equal. This is understandable because in these photos, not many resources are used to nuance attitudinal stances or emotions but resources for sharpening or softening the focus are used. In the written texts, the number of resources for force is slightly larger than the number for focus; however, it is not significant enough to make a distinctive pattern.

Different words and collocations are employed by the three bloggers for scaling their voices in terms of force and focus. Intensified force, for instance, is realized through the frequent use of *Hen* (very), *Feichang* (especially; particulary), *Zui* (most; utmost), *Ji* (extremely), and *Tai* (too much) while quantified force is usually realized through the use of *Dou* (all; wholly) and *Suoyou* (all). Sharped focus, similar to intensified force, is largely expressed through the use of *Hen* (very much), *Wangquan* (completely), *Zhengzhen de* (really; completely; truly), *Zong* (always), and *Yizhi* (always; usually) while softened focus is usually expressed through the use of *Suowei* de (so-called), *Zheme* (sort of), *Ting* (seems; sort of), and *Name* (that way). Obviously, sometimes some characters such as Hen can be used to realize either intensified force and sharpened focus; yet it should be noted that words are collocated on the basis of their part of speech and therefore have different meanings on different occasions.

It is also noticeable that the three blogs, apart from the frequent words and collocations they share in realizing force and focus, have shown variations in grading their voice. Muzi Mei and Acosta, in comparison with Liumang Yan, tend to employ phrases or rhetorical devices such as simile or metaphor in expressing intensified force and sharpened focus. For example, in expressing intensified force, Muzi Mei would use phrases such as as if it were the doomsday (*xiangshi daole shijie de jintou*), as if being ambushed by tunas (*xiang jinqiangyu yiyang xilai*), non-stop night (*zhengyebuxiu*), and enormous (*Ju*). Muzi Mei has displayed even more variations in conveying sharpened focus with phrases such as periodically (zhouqixing de), startling (hanmao zhishude), and born with (yusheng julai de). The capability of creating various differing means of grading voice, it seems, not only showcases the bloggers' literary proficiency but also indicates their attitudes, life experiences, and styling to certain extent.

Discussion and conclusions

Audience-awareness is clearly shown in the voice of personal blogs, though in ways that are different from the interpretation of some researchers (see Hammond, 2006; Hewitt, 2005; Scheidt, 2005). First, resources for appreciation are predominantly positive among the selected blogs cases, irrespective of the form of the appraised—being human or non-human entities. These personal blogs deliberately express aesthetic tastes

to appeal to their audiences and exploit their sense of being one of 'us' (see Hammond, 2006; Hewitt, 2005; Scheidt, 2005). Second, voice in the three blogs is mostly implied rather than explicit. The bloggers are prone to juxtapose their emotions, appreciations, and judgment with details of things, events, issues, and people instead of making statements. The only exception occurred in Muzi Mei's blog in respect of affect where men were the appraised. This is different from personal diaries where voice, especially in terms of affect and appreciation, is usually explicitly established as audiences are either absent or restricted (Sjoblad, 1998; van Dijck, 2004). It seems that the bloggers did not attempt to make their blogs instructive but rather entertaining and informative for recruiting readership. Whether the voice of an entry is cast as negative or positive, it seems, depends on the blogger's presumption of his/her interaction with the audience.

Further, because of the presence of audience, personal blogs may employ diverse strategies to either enhance or mitigate voice in their blogging. Acosta, for instance, is moderate and restrained in establishing the voice of his blog. It may be a deliberate decision not to be too radical or imposing in orientating his personal feelings and opinions so as to create rapport and solidarity with his audience. Similarly, Muzi Mei did not overtly express her emotions, appreciations, and moral evaluations; rather, in most cases, her voice was implied. Sometimes, such moderation may also be endowed by bloggers' writing expertise such as the balance of graduation strategies, which in turn might have contributed to the blogs' popularity.

In fact, different uses of explicit and implicit voice may also result from culture-specific writing (or composing) rhetoric or may be influenced by the bloggers' literacy level. Chinese essay writing has been found to be more implicit than explicit in expressing voice (*chunqiu bifa/weiyan dayi*) (Kirkpatrick, 1997). In other words, the real intention of the author is not explicated but rather unfolds through the use of devices such as metaphors or allegories (Heisey, 2000; Rolston, 1997; Yun, 1987); for example, using noun phrases was an important device in constructing the distinctive voice of personal blogging indirectly. In this sense, the voice of these personal blogs may be further influenced by the authors' literary competence. To some extent, Muzi Mei and Acosta are more sophisticated than Liumang Yan in their use of this way of writing due to the difference in their projected educational attainment. In line with implied voice, these personal blogs are inclined to use more focus resources to intensify or mitigate their attitudinal meanings to avoid imposing their attitudes. Yet, the relatively high frequency of sharpened focus and intensification indicates that the bloggers are not reluctant to endorse the voice of their blogs, highlighting blogs' primary function as releasing personal emotions and feelings and their authors' desire to claim and even magnify agency. Feelings and emotions about bloggers themselves, other participants, issues, and events were all prevalent in the blogs; resources for realizing affect took up a large part of the attitudinal resources, though the distribution of affect varied among the three blogs. This not only corresponds to the observation that blogs are used as emotional

catharsis (Blood, 2002; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, et al., 2004) but also manifests the new media space's power that enables individuals to become "we the media" resounding in Gillmor's (2008) thesis.

It should be pointed out here that these personal bloggers, unlike authors of other types of blogs, are not only aware of the presence of their audience (McNeill, 2003) but also of their censors and censorship of blogs imposed in various ways and at various levels (Lum, 2006; MacKinnon, 2008). Average readers may be able to sway personal blogs' popularity whereas censors such as blog service providers or media authorities can determine their very visibility and existence via institutional and technical violence. This makes the voice construction of personal blogs a dialogic and conscious negotiation between the author/s and various readerships (including surveillance) of their blogs, which is certainly in need of further exploration by including other types of data such as comments and hyperlinks in the analysis.

The voice of personal blogging is also influenced by other semiotic resources. For instance, photos can be embedded to evoke emotional and aesthetic meanings as well as invite moral evaluation of the appraised (Qian & Scott, 2007). Perhaps the presence of attitudinal resources in these photos is largely influenced or anchored by the written text because the photos embedded in these entries are all portraits of the blogger rather than narrative photos which unfold stories. The audience may be able to identify voice in those photos by referencing the written texts as anchorage. In other words, their voice cannot be evoked without participation of the written text although these photos are complete in terms of meaning making (as portraits). For example, several entries (e.g., Acosta e09) lack distinctive facial expressions or body movements that show the blogger's feelings as happy, sad, anxious, or angry. Feelings and emotions are embedded in certain details such as colour, composition, information, and their connections with the featured character's (the blogger) physical appearance (such as dress), movements, and expressions rather than explicit exposures. Mostly, an adequate perception of attitude in each photo needs to refer back to the written text; in entries such as Acosta e02 and Acosta e09, without the written texts, the attitude cannot be deduced due to the absence of background and the artistic aspect of the photo process. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that the written text indexes or decides the meaning of each photo; rather, each photo can stand alone as an entity without recourse to its written text as captions. From a social semiotic perspective (Royce & Bowcher, 2007; van Leeuwen, 2005), what matters in part is the juxtaposition or co-articulation of the meaning potential between the photos and the written texts. That is, how closely is the voice of the photo related to that of the written texts? Affects in those photos do not always appear singularly but combine or mix with one another. It is highly likely that different affect categories may collocate differently in photos. Such collocations may vary depending on the photo modality, use, function, and content and are worth further exploration in relation to multimodality (see Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007; van Leeuwen, 2008).

Apparently, voices in these personal blogs are not structured and conditioned solely by the content in which the attitudinal resources are deployed; formal or organizational features such as genre units and patterns and the invited gaze from the public may also be at play. The semiotic units, the micro genres, and the segments that are joined together as a blogsite to impress an audience can also be mobilized, not only by the bloggers but also by the blog service providers as well as by the close and distant relations that blog service providers have generated. For instance, similar to its predecessor, diary writing, blogging is dominantly composed of narratives. Good narratives, as many writing experts (e.g., Goodall, 2008) point out, should allow readers to discover from details, rather than unveil, the author's intended voice. In this sense, voice of a personal blog should be seen as neither singular nor individual; rather, it should be seen as organized in consideration of many factors behind the scenes (cf. Bruns, 2008; Bruns & Jacobs, 2006; Davies & Merchant, 2006; Scheidt, 2005).

To conclude, voice reveals stance, position, and other evaluative aspects of personal blogs and is constructed and performed through the use of semantic and semiotic resources in relation to personal, sociocultural, and mediational contexts. Although the bloggers are able to make individual decisions on what content to include and exclude, in line with their purpose of blogging, personal blogs are never completely personal (Davies & Merchant, 2006), regardless of the seemingly dictating nature of genre. What can be covered in a personal blog may also be influenced by social situations and the roles that these bloggers play at a particular time and location, accordingly indexing and signifying a certain social practice and action (Miller & Shepherd, 2004). Personal bloggers' mobilization of semiotic resources of various kinds for realizing voice and variations in the deployment of attitudinal resources are indicators of social media spaces' capacity to empower their participants (authors in particular) to play a critical role in constructing a strong and distinct voice. However, researchers should be cautioned that authorship is constantly influenced by culture-specific characteristics such as genre and social occurrences, entities, conventions, and traditions including writing, blogging, locations and spaces, beliefs, and very importantly, gender or the projected gender roles. These aspects can work together to play a significant part in constructing blog voice and should be vigorously explored further in future.

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Appendix 1 The selected blogs and entries

Blog	Entry	Title	Length (Chinese character)	Content summary
Muzi Mei's blog	Mzm e01	Smoke emotions into foods	1368	About the blogger's smoking experience
	Mzm e02	Balances sex lifestyle	787	About the blogger's sex life
	Mzm e03	Karaoke	499	About the bloggers' personality and moral value
	Mzm e04	On contraception	1486	About the blogger's contraception experience
	Mzm e05	Heart to heart	421	About the blog's feeling of living a lonely life
	Mzm e06	My several encounters with CHEN Tong	1164	About the blogger's relations with a magazine editor
	Mzm e07	The fall of Hong Kong	1575	About the blogger's trip to Hong Kong
	Mzm e08	The most loyal net love	642	About the blogger's previous net affair
	Mzm e09	Phone chat with my mum	1210	About the blogger's phone conversation with her mother
	Mzm e10	The man we all love	821	About a man the blogger and her friends all like
Liumang Yan's blog	Lmy e01	**Sorry, they pushed me to blind date (another version)**	**1429**	About the bloggers' plan to do blind dating
	Lmy e02	Find a man to have sex anywhere	1421	About the blogger's sexual desires
	Lmy e03	Practice Hooliganism to the very end	1019	About the blogger's belief in hooliganism
	Lmy e04	Give my penis back!	1832	About the blogger's offline relations with several net friends
	Lmy e05	My shortcomings	612	About the blogger's reflection of her personality
	Lmy e06	A running account of life	850	About the blogger's family relations
	Lmy e07	About the nude photo incident	1085	About the blogger's retrospection of the consequence that her nude photos caused.
	Lmy e08	Return to my hometown	896	About the blogger's family relations with her parents and relative

	Lmy e09	Incident	723	About the blogger's contention against libels from some Chinese Internet goers.
	Lmy e10	Please listen to what an old woman would say	1938	About the blogger's opinions how men of different ages should respect the so-called "old women" like her
Acosta's blog	Acosta e01	107 minutes	224	About the blogger's trip to a mountainous suburban area of Beijing in the early spring with several friends
	Acosta e02	Arctic sunlight	570	About the blogger's love romance, especially petty quarrels and misunderstandings a few years ago between the blogger and a girl whose identity was not specified but addressed as Ni (you) in the entry
	Acosta e03	To you the audience	325	About the blogger's reply to the comments (or imagined comments) and questions popped by the visitors
	Acosta e04	Acosta	482	About the meaning of the blog's name Acosta
	Acosta e05	Yearning	561	About the blogger's preference to and contact with, Wang Xiaobo's fiction writing
	Acosta e06	Do not despair	549	About the blogger's appreciation of the writer Yu Hua's works
	Acosta e07	The past	708	About the blogger's first pet dog
	Acosta e08	Midnight ball	484	About the blogger's several encounters with Chinese abroad and lamented the degradation of Chinese
	Acosta e09	Minor role	734	About the blogger's experience as an amateur actor in a movie filmed at the Long Bridge
	Acosta e10	Green love	639	About the blogger's involvement in volunteering and charity work