**Language, images, and Paris Orly airport on Instagram: multilingual approaches to identity and self-representation on social media**

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Received October 2017, Accepted May 2018

Given the emergence of a specific trope in social network services, whereby individuals upload an image that includes a passport and/or a boarding pass to index their status as a traveller, this article explores multilingual and multimodal creativity in the construction of identity by a body of individuals who pass through Paris’ Orly airport. In particular, collecting data from the mobile photo-sharing platform *Instagram* permits the analysis of the authorial control exerted by the Original Poster (OP) over their discursive practices from two distinct perspectives. One line of enquiry is the examination of preferred readings of the images by the OP, which is either affirmed or contested by the poster’s friends, followers, and others, with the view to assessing trends in language practices amongst users. A second vector is the (re)creative approach, where the OP often uses expensive branded goods in the image in a ludic way to convey a sense of their identity. To this end, we discuss how individuals draw on visual resources to hand to present themselves to others. Based on a corpus of images uploaded and geotagged at Orly airport, we explore here the approaches to self-representation on social media in order to typologize the resources – including languages – that twenty-first-century French nationals draw upon to create their individual but simultaneously collective identity.

Keywords: French, Instagram, airport, identity, multimodality, multilingualism

1. **Introduction**

A specific trope has emerged in social network services (SNS) whereby individuals upload an image that includes a passport and/or a boarding pass to index their status as a traveller, or more accurately someone who is about to fly somewhere. On many SNS, individuals can also mediate the image by use of a ‘caption’, where the original poster (OP) can, using text as well as hashtags and emoticons, assert some level of authorial control over their discursive practices. Using the platform of *Instagram*, the mobile photo-sharing social network that enables smartphone- and tablet-users to upload and disseminate photographs, this article will explore creativity as part of self-representation by a body of individuals who pass through Paris’ Orly airport. Of particular interest here is the frequently multilingual and multimodal approach to self-representation. This use of *Instagram* falls within what Androutsopoulos (2010, p. 204) defines as ’self-presentation’, ’spectacle’, and ’interaction’, where the individual user not only curates their own on-line identity but also makes the image they create available to others and invites interpersonal communication. As Marwick (2015, p. 143) highlights, *Instagram* ’intensified the importance of visual self-representation’ whilst offering ’other identity cues: the user’s description of the photo and comments and likes by other users’. Marwick’s nod to the role of others points to the role of negotiation in on-line self-representation. Despite the control over the photographic process enjoyed by the OP, and their careful curation of the image with a caption, the defining characteristic of the participatory web is the interactivity of SNS like *Instagram* where others – from friends and family members to those looking at images geo-tagged in a specific location – become co-creators in the process of identity formation.

This negotiated self-representation is one of the main lines of enquiry in this article, especially when the passport and/or boarding pass in the image is often complemented by the inclusion of high-quality consumables and expensive branded goods. We examine here the preferred readings of the images by the OP, which in turn are either affirmed or contested by the poster’s friends, followers, and others, with the view to assessing trends in language practices and identity work amongst users of *Instagram*. A second axis is the (re)creative approach, where the OP often uses props in a ludic way to convey a sense of their identity, and here we discuss the extent to which individuals draw on visual resources to hand to present themselves to others. On one level, the individuals discussed here use these props to do some kind of semiotic work to produce a specific effect. At the same time, these effects are complemented and reinforced by the discursive exchanges alongside the image. We consider here how the exchanges between image, written text, plus consumables and goods are fused to present a specific sense of self. Based on a corpus of 1354 images uploaded and geotagged at Orly airport over the course of 2015, we explore the approaches to self-representation on social media from the perspective of multilingualism and multimodality. The corpus consists of all passengers over the course of 2015 who uploaded an image including either their passport or a boarding pass whilst at Orly airport.

This article also contributes to the discussion initiated by Deumert (2014, p. 32) on digital spaces as new ’third spaces’ (Oldenburg, 1996) which are social spaces that are neither one’s home or place of work, where play is expected. At the same time, we position this work in the scholarship on computer-mediated communication where the Internet has long been considered a site for play (Danet, 2001), and that interactivity fosters this sense of creativity, whereby individuals do not merely consume what appears on line, but that they engage with it actively and change it. Deumert (2014, p. 26) attributes this in part to the subculture of programmers – the first users of the Internet – whose fondness for wordplay and creative language use has come to characterise much that appears on-line. The airport departure lounge is not traditionally associated with play, or as a social space, and so the data evaluated here advances this wider dialogue. First, we contextualise the corpus before tackling the two lines of enquiry, namely the performances of multilingualism in the preferred reading of images uploaded, and the multimodal dimension where props are brought into play to help create individual and collective identities.

1. **Contexts**

**2.1 Airports**

The airport has emerged as the emblematic site of mobility of late modernity (Cresswell, 2006, p. 220) and so to find that airports are spaces for multilingualism is hardly surprising. Airports may well be situated physically in or near a city within a given nation state, to which a language (or languages) is nominally attributed as a standard, but the practices that can be observed there are not in just one, bounded and named language. At the same time, airports are the site of elite mobility, but the privilege, wealth, and perceived superiority of individuals at the public terminals of Orly and other hubs should be nuanced. Elite mobility does not only mean travelling in first class in the world’s most expensive airlines; even passengers flying to a remote and unloved airport on a budget airline require significant financial capital in order to access airports. Whilst they might not identify immediately with luxury or privilege, it is important to recall that this kind of mobility remains relatively exclusive, no matter how mundane or accessible flying with low-cost carriers appears. In this article, we touch on the tension between elite mobility, to which some passengers discussed below aspire, and the experiences of those who travel but are not part of the *haut monde*. Equally, the movement of peoples and their languages through the lounges and halls of an airport emphasizes diversity and mixing along several different axes. In this sense, therefore, many – if not all airports – are prime sites for what Jaworski and Thurlow (2013, p. 155) refer to as tracking ‘the contours of multilingualism in contemporary life’. What is of interest here is more precisely the extent to which languages are used playfully within the confines of an airport.

In using an airport as the site for language interactions, we stray into the territory of the binary distinction between place and Augé’s non-place (1995). For the individuals at Orly who upload the image of their boarding pass and/or passport, the airport is not their final destination. They find themselves temporarily in this liminal place, on the periphery of Paris, and for a fixed period of time whilst they wait to travel to their ultimate destination. Understanding the place of the airport in representations of oneself is usefully informed by the work of MacCannell (1976) and, subsequently, Marcus (2013), who apply Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956) and in particular Goffman’s concepts of front regions and back regions to tourism and travelling. The front region is where one’s social performance takes place, whilst the back region is where the individual goes in between performances. Marcus notes how social media heralds the photographing of back regions; prior to the digitalization of photography, a tourist or traveller might photograph monument and sites. If the front region of Paris is Notre Dame, Sacré Cœur, and the Moulin Rouge, the back region, according to Marcus, would be the hotel room; when she explored the hashtag #hotelroom on *Instagram* in 2013, there were 119,552 entries. By the spring of 2018, there were 780,000 posts. We contend that the airport departure lounge is also in transition from back region to front region, and is now a performance space, mediated by semiotic resources at the disposal of individuals and the structures of an airport.

**2.2 Creativity on-line**

Carter (2004, p. 9) asks why creativity has traditionally and conventionally been considered a written phenomenon, and whether there are differences between spoken and written creativity. In approaching the arrangement and glossing of ephemera of air travel on *Instagram*, we reformulate Carter’s question to explore the visual dimension of creativity, as well as discern the extent to which the fabled spoken-conversations-written-down properties (see Herring, 1996, p. 3) of the language used are either creative or playful. It is Pope (2005) whose discussion of the theory, history, and practices of creativity demands a consideration of the unoriginal in these on-line *tableaux*. Pope traces the evolution of creativity as a concept, noting the specifically human sense of agency (set up in opposition to some kind of divine activity) that develops in the nineteenth century. At this stage, Pope (2005, p. 41) identifies the fundamental change that sees creation not as ’the orthodox religious notion of creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*) but more precisely “creation as *re-creation”*’. In other words, the defining of creativity shifts from the extraordinary to the ordinary, or ‘a commonly available, essentially routine capacity latent in everyone’ (Pope, 2005, p. 53). The space for creativity on SNS like Instagram is, in some senses, relatively limited. Deumert (2014, p. 144) notes that ’while individual creativity is licensed, the similarities, within and across languages, suggest that there exist broad community *preferences*’ (original emphasis). Deumert discusses here skilful writing, but the data gathered from Orly airport permits the extension of this conclusion to include the visual arrangement of props, and the use of captions, hashtags, and comments. The community of users on *Instagram*, including those who choose to photograph and upload an image of their passport and/or boarding pass, are – when recording this aspect of this back-region-becoming-front-region – effectively re-creating a motif coined in the SNS’s recent past. There is clearly scope for innovation, not just in the particular way in which the props are arranged, but more significantly in the caption linked to the image by the OP. However, there is a tension between, on the one hand, the space for creativity afforded here and, on the other hand, the normative practices of most SNS where criteria of correctness lead to a certain conventionality.

When exploring the multilingual potential for this creativity within the confines of Orly airport, Burgess’ ’vernacular creativity’ (2006, p. 206), defined as the ’creative practices that emerge from highly particular and non-elite social contexts and communicative conventions’, is particularly pertinent. Vernacular creativity is therefore not elite or institutionalised (Burgess, 2010, p. 117) but simultaneously grounded in its cultural specificity. Burgess herself drew on work by Atton (2001) on the ’representations of the mundane’; she notes (2006, p. 206) how the mundane ‘disarticulates the spectacular and the radical from the concept of alternative media, redrawing the field to include everyday cultural production and therefore ”ordinary” cultural *producers* in the field of alternative media studies’ (original emphasis). At the same time, we make use of Marwick and boyd’s phenomenon of context collapse (2010, p. 122), where ‘the requirement to present a verifiable, singular identity makes it impossible to differ self-presentation strategies, creating tension as diverse groups of people flock to social network sites’. For this article, we proceed on the understanding that users contend with multiple audiences who are collapsed together into a single context, meaning that the OP provides a caption that addresses a range of potential audiences without the opportunity for negotiation and face-saving that characterizes face-to-face interactions.

**2.3 Orly and language practices**

In examining the use of *Instagram* at a given airport, Orly has been chosen for several reasons, not least because undertaking a study here takes a small step to counter the emphasis in academic research on Paris’ main airport, Roissy-Charles de Gaulle (CDG). Whilst CDG serves as a hub for international flights, Orly is the base for flights to destinations in France’s overseas territories, in particular the Caribbean and Indian Ocean. In 2015, Orly handled 10.8 million French passengers and 18.8 million international passengers, in comparison with CDG in the same year with 5.3 million French passengers and 60.3 million international passengers (Union des Aéroports Français, n.d.). Orly, therefore, sees a far higher proportion of French passengers than it does international travellers. It is relatively uncontroversial to assert that the vast majority of French citizens are francophone, and so we can expect most of the 10.8 million French passengers to speak French. Although ownership of a French passport is not a guarantee of an ability to speak French, and certainly not standard French as mythologised by elites and activists (Blackwood, 2013, pp. 40-44), it is not unreasonable to expect French passport holders to speak French, and this permits us to explore creativity in language practices as attested in the corpus from Orly. In the discussion below devoted to the multilingual nature of self-representation, we privilege the images in the corpus uploaded by holders of French passports – as included in the image.

The captions, hashtags, and emoticons deployed by the OP, which are subsequently affirmed, challenged, or developed by the poster’s friends, followers, and others perform multiple functions simultaneously. Bachmann and Basier (1984, pp. 172-173) attribute four functions to slang, which they argue are not mutually exclusive, and this typology is a useful template for our exploration of self-representation on social media. Bachmann and Basier define these functions as ludic, initiatory/introductory, cryptic, and identity-forming. Whilst there is the potential for users to use non-standard forms of languages in order to obscure their message and limit access to the communication between participants, the data point to a greater emphasis on identity formation and in-group membership. As with much research into on-line language use, the interest in this corpus does not lie in the divergence from standard French; space will not be devoted to highlighting the French captions and comments which do not conform to an idealised version of the French language. What is fascinating is the interplay between different codes or named, bounded languages, where the OP draws on expressions and constructions that have wide currency and can be used, along with the image, to project collectively a specific message. At the same time, we must recognise the contested critical vocabulary for naming languages which do not necessarily offer the necessary granularity for delineating language (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006). To this end, we are obliged – like others – to qualify the names we confer upon the language used in the captions and hashtags; in turn, this contributes to the perpetuation of some metadiscursive regimes in circulation in France that are unsatisfactory from the perspective of precision, but simultaneously practical for our discussion.

1. **Captions, language(s), and responses**

The first research question we address in this article is the extent to which individuals perform multilingually on-line as they present an image for consumption by others. Although text is de-emphasized on SNS like *Instagram* in favour of the image, the captions and responses that accompany many but by no means all pictures provide a wide set of data that permit us to examine language practices. For this part of the discussion, we focus in particular on those individuals whose French nationality – as attested by their French passport – points to the use of the French language. As noted above, this assumption is predicated on the basis that the majority of French citizens are speakers of French, with the caveat that we do not presume that this means that these individuals speak or – crucially for SNS – write in the standard variety of the language. In privileging French passport holders, and therefore French speakers, we remove from this part of the discussion the other nationals who geo-tag their image at Orly airport, with a view to examining the approaches to writing adopted by those who have not only been taught (either formally or informally) how to write French, but also subjected to highly prescriptive and normative ideologies of writing, which have championed the careful and regularized use of the standard language and rejected non-standard written language production.

In assessing the sub-corpus from the perspective of French passport holders as the OP, two main patterns of language practices emerge. On the one hand, there are those whose caption appears in French, and on the other hand, a significant proportion chooses to assert their authorial control over the image in English. Within each of these two broad categories, there is a secondary discursive practice, namely the choice of language of hashtags, where they are given. In addition, there are the responses by the OP’s connections and others who see the image because it has been geo-tagged at Orly airport. The potential combinations of language choices made by *Instagram* users are numerous, and so we will focus in this section on the most frequent combinations since they provide us with an indication of trends in language practices.

The most uniform of approaches is where the OP captions his or her image with a line in French, and supplements both with hashtags also in French. In a discussion on creativity, these discursive practices are rather pedestrian; by way of example, where the French aspect of the spectacle is reinforced on several levels, we turn to ORY 147 (Figure 1). Here, the original caption and hashtags are all in French, and the two connections who respond to ORY 147’s post do so in French. ORY 147 is flying to watch a football match, and one of the hashtags thanks the French Football Association (*la Fédération Française de Football*) for giving him the pretext for flying off for the game.[[1]](#footnote-1) The visual resources arranged in the image reinforce the French-ness of this approach since the boarding pass is written in French, and is for a flight by Air France (whose logo appears in part in the top right-hand corner of the screen), with the red, white, and blue tail fin of an Air France plane visible on the left of the image. There are some splashes of a language other than French in the image, because the information given in French on the boarding pass is largely duplicated in English. Moreover, a non-Hexagonal dimension is added to this post by the fact that ORY 147 is flying to the French island of Corsica, to watch his team – Montpellier – play Bastia, the team from the island’s northern city. His flight, although booked through Air France, is to be operated by Air Corsica, with their non-French brand name.

Insert Figure 1 here

Figure 1. ORY 147’s post

ORY 147 exemplifies a widespread trend amongst *Instagram* users in this corpus, whereby individuals use the juxtaposition of the image and their text (including hashtags) to present themselves as travellers, knowledgeable about the process of flying off, and relaxed about their mobility. ORY 147 crafts the identity of a traveller with his familiarity with the terminology of flying (with the opening line of his post ‘Décollage immédiat pour Bastia’ drawing on the register of pilots and ground crew preparing passengers and stewards for take-off) and simultaneously highlights his French-ness, as attested in the image uploaded and the hashtag #France. Without explicitly saying so, he also identifies himself as football fan, not only by his inventive hashtag thanking the French Football Association, but confirming that he is going to watch the Under-19 match, whilst not using the word ‘football’ or any of its cognates.

A second approach to the deploying of languages is where the OP provides a caption in French, but gives hashtags in English. There are several patterns of engagement with this approach, namely a response by another *Instagram* user in French, a reaction in English, or a comment in another definable code (such as non-standard French, or Romanised Arabic). Similar to this approach is one where the original caption is given in French, with hashtags in English or French, and then responses in either English or French. These two broad techniques of language use on the SNS play with nameable languages or varieties in part, we contend, to convey a multilingual identity, even when the text given is largely phatic and does more work in terms of identity creation than in transmitting information. There is no suggestion in these cases that the original poster or the subsequent respondents are able to communicate meaningfully beyond these non-French collocations in wide circulation on-line and in speech. The use of English-language hashtags is widespread, including by those who would not identify as ‘speakers of English’ with all its connotations of comprehension and production skills. There is a range of hashtags in English, including #love with over a billion posts, #happy (discussed below), #food (210 million posts), and #goodtimes (46 million posts) that have wide currency beyond first-language English users. A cursory glance at images uploaded to *Instagram* with these hashtags attests to the use of these tags in amongst other language scripts including Kanji, Cyrillic, Arabic, Hebrew, and Ge’ez, as well as part of captions in languages other than English. English, therefore, plays a key part in identity creation on-line, echoing findings of others around the idea of English beyond first-language English speakers (Seargeant, 2009).

By way of example, fitness coach ORY 331 (Figure 2) illustrates this multilingual approach to captions and hashtags. Ahead of his flight to Havana, ORY 331 uploaded an image of his boarding pass, passport, and a branded label for sportswear manufacturer *Reebok*, with the caption in French and English ’Vacances !!! Yeah !’. This caption was followed by nine hashtags, several of which tap into social representations of Cuba: #cuba #cubano #latino #havana #mojito #caraibes. This one image with its glossing by the OP provides us with examples of several different practices attested across the corpus. First, there is the tendency to provide a hashtag or two in the language identified with the destination country; in the case of ORY 331, these include #cubano, #latino, and #mojito. The first, #cubano, indexes uncontroversially Cuba, whilst #latino has wider North American resonance, with #mojito being the traditional Cuban highball identified with Ernest Hemingway as well as Hispanic drinking practices. The deployment of these hashtags does not imply that ORY 331 is a Spanish speaker, but we can deduce that he draws on these terms in wide circulation to reinforce the Hispanic dimension both to his image, and to his identity as someone about to travel to Cuba. ORY 331 also uses the hashtag #holidays, a popular metadata tag that appears on almost 32 million posts on *Instagram*.

Insert Figure 2 here

Figure 2. ORY 331’s post

In other words, ORY 331 presents himself as culturally literate (at least to the extent that he is aware of signifiers for Cuba and Cuba-ness), mobile, and a global citizen. Another discourse is introduced here with the cross-referencing between the logo for the sportswear manufacturer *Reebok*, the hashtag #musculation (‘body-building’, ‘working-out’), and the creative hashtag ‘more time for training’, discussed more fully below. ORY 331 fashions the identity of a stylish (from his consumption of on-trend mojitos and his choice of holiday destination), athletic, and light-hearted traveller. By zooming out of this single post and looking at ORY 331’s *Instagram* profile, with over 1500 images uploaded, these characteristics are re-created in a range of different settings, beyond the airport departure lounge: ORY 331 uses his profile, including this image, to represent himself visually and discursively in this distinct way. From images of the food he eats and the beautiful beaches he visits, to staged photographs of him exercising or posing in just his underpants, ORY 331 produces a specific identity, parts of which – openness, healthiness, mobility – are distilled into this post.

ORY331’s post also exemplifies a trend in the creation of ludic hashtags, which in this sub-corpus of French passport holders are either created in French or in English. On the one hand, there is a trend to tag the image with an English-language hashtag, often a well-known expression or phrase whose use, again, does not signal necessarily that the poster speaks English. Examples of this strategy include ORY 002 who includes #weekendgetaway, ORY 517 and #haveagoodday, ORY738 with #neverstopexploring, ORY 590 whose #americandream presages her flight to the USA, and ORY 910 with #backontheroad. The majority of the examples attested in the corpus reinforce the meaning of collocations seemingly widely known amongst French speakers. On the other hand, the second trend is the creation of longer, more ludic hashtags normally articulated in French. For ORY 331, this is ‘more time for training’[[2]](#footnote-2) but there are dozens of other examples in the corpus:[[3]](#footnote-3) ORY 005 ’It’s not time to go back to school just yet’, ORY 083 ’Third flight in a week – I’m turning into a diplomat’, ORY 544 ’I spend my life on a plane’, ORY91 ‘Team-I-make-up-rhymes-without-doing-it-on-purpose’, ORY 1114 ’It’s 5am and I’ve got the shivers’. Rare are the examples of French passport holders attempting to create longer, more complex and original hashtags in English.

Clearly, this use of English by French speakers (as implied by their French passport) should not be accepted unthinkingly as evidence of widespread bilingualism amongst users of *Instagram*. Often, users who colour their original post with some English revert back to French for subsequent exchanges with others as part of the same thread. One example of this is by ORY 171 (Figure 3) who uses a well-known English-language inspirational quotation to gloss her picture. Alongside an image of her bikini, a pair of heart-shaped sunglasses, and her French passport, she bids farewell to her audience with the quotation ‘I haven’t been everywhere but it’s on my list’, followed by ‘bye bye’, #paris, and emojis for sunshine, a bikini, and a wave. This example then illustrates Marwick and boyd’s ‘context collapse’ (2010) where the OP discursively narrows the intended audience to her friends, and pursues a conversation with two other *Instagram* users where she crosses a number of traditional boundaries between languages and language practices. The first response is largely in French, but with flashes of non-standard French, and irregular punctuation. The Spanish word for heat, *calor*, is also dropped into one line, exoticizing the exchange and reflecting the focus of the discussion, namely ORY 171’s imminent departure for a beach holiday. The first response also includes a few words of English, which is followed by the second response which opens with the Italian greeting, ’Ciao’. In the context of summer holidays in the sun, linguistic nationality, and mobility – evoked by the props in the image – this spectacle of multilingualism (Jaworski, 2015) is not, we contend, an example of plurilingual individuals but, more likely, the extent to which a small set of phrases in other languages is deployed to reinforce the identity of travelling, globalization, openness to other cultures, and fun.

Insert Figure 3 here

Figure 3. ORY 171’s post

The potential for playfulness on SNS like *Instagram* married to the spectacle of multilingualism is acted out in a very knowing way by one user, ORY 058, and one of her acquaintances whose language practices suggest that he too is French, or at least francophone. ORY 058 – a French woman – captions her image in English, with a sprinkling of English-language hashtags, plus #mode which is more likely to be French but which in fashion circles also resonates in English (Figure 4). Her friend draws to her attention what he perceives to be a mistake in her English, but which she points out – in English – is actually standard. The friend concedes in English that he was mistaken, having missed the multiple subject of the first caption, and the original poster closes the exchange by the phatic expression ’Ahah!’.

Insert Figure 4 here

Figure 4. ORY 058’s post

Although the permutations of language practices even amongst the limited sub-corpus of French passport holders are wide, the fundamental split is between those who assert authorial control over their image in French or in English, with some space for variation in terms of the accompanying hashtags. Despite one or two splashes of multilingualism, such as ORY 006, ORY 267 and ORY 1045, the data points to the widespread trend to use either French (which is, in these cases, what we presume with confidence to be the first language of the posters) or English to caption the images. At one level, therefore, these findings reinforce the widely held belief that English infiltrates much Internet usage; however, often this can be understood as the performance of English rather than using English for communicative purposes. There is ample evidence to suggest that most French users, identified by their ownership of a French passport, write in French on-line to a greater or lesser extent. This is certainly the case when it comes to the more linguistically creative activities associated with creating an identity on-line. The longer, unique ludic hashtags are all in French, with one notable exception. French passport holders display the linguistic security to reproduce well know clichés in wide circulation, but not to attempt witty or humorous phrases in anything other than French.

1. **Props in ludic identity formation**

The second line of enquiry pursued in this discussion of *Instagram* use at Orly is the ludic use of props by OP seeking to communicate with their followers and others. At stake here is the creative deployment of the ephemera of air travel and airport departure lounges in the formation of an individual’s identity. In part, we return here to the question of creation in opposition to re-creation; the corpus of images from Orly permits the establishment of a typology of resources drawn upon by those *Instagram* users at the airport which by its nature asserts re-production rather than originality. The use of these props in order to curate the image uploaded to *Instagram* implies the re-iteration of a composition already uploaded by another. This stretches what Carter (2004, p. 26) calls the “important semantic connection” between creativity and originality, since the creative act here is not making something novel, new, or innovative, but instead is making something conventional. At the same time, the visual self-presentation afforded by SNS such as *Instagram* replicate, in Marwick’s terms, “the glamorous visuals and conspicuous consumption associated with stardom” (2015, p. 138), echoing the deliberate arrangement of visual cultures since the golden era of Hollywood studios. In other words, these images deployed to create an on-line identity both replicate the ‘creative’ approach adopted by others and mimic (or, in some cases, parody) a twentieth-century phenomenon from which the general public was broadly excluded.

At this stage, it is helpful to identify the kinds of resources used in these departure lounge acts of self-representation. These objects include foodstuffs, alcoholic drinks, soft drinks, branded products, unbranded accessories, and reading material. It is important to note that the emphasis in this discussion is not on the statistical relevance of items appearing in these *tableaux vivants*. The majority of images in the corpus include a passport and/or a boarding pass without any supplementation by another prop, and so assessing quantitatively the use of other articles provides little in the way of detail for analysing this kind of creativity. In addition to the boarding pass and/or passport, the most popular supplementary articles for this visual *mise-en-scène* is a soft drink (97/1359) and reading material (95/1359), both of which represent expected activity in a departure lounge. Branded products (74/1359) and unbranded accessories (51/1359) occupy a second tier of props, with foodstuffs (38/1359) and alcoholic drinks (12/1359) considerably behind the other categories in terms of frequency. Of course, absent from this corpus are mobile telephones, since the image is being recorded on a telephone which, without a second device, cannot simultaneously appear on screen; it goes without saying that it is impossible to photograph one’s own telephone using the same telephone. It is worth recalling that, given that these images are often taken on the airside of airports, the users have had to pass through security and find a limited range of semiotic resources at their disposal. On the one hand, there are those which they can easily bring with them, such as bags, books, and foodstuffs. On the other hand, liquids (except in the tiniest measurements) do not pass through security and have to be purchased airside; this inevitably dictates the choice of props that individuals use in their images. In part, this also explains an unexpectedly high proportion of certain goods; *Ladurée* macaroons, pastries from *Paul*, and coffee from healthy fast-casual café *EXKi,* all of which have branches at Orly.

Within this sub-corpus of props used to complement the boarding pass and/or passport, we focus on the three most widespread types of resource used, and within each one, look at a specific article more closely. Of the 97 soft drinks included in the corpus, 42 are from *Starbucks*; no other brand appears anywhere near as frequently, although this frequency can be explained in part by the presence of a *Starbucks* coffee shop in the departures lounge. However, this is not the only airside coffee shop, so it is not the case that *Starbucks* has a monopoly on coffee at Orly. The resonance of the brand and its role within globalization and the attendant cultures are more credible explanations for its dominance as a soft drink. Almost half of those whose image includes *Starbucks*, either its logo or its brand name, also include a hashtag featuring the company’s name. A handful refer to *Starbucks* in their discursive description of the image, whilst three posters mention *Starbucks* twice, either as two hashtags (#starbucks and #starbuckscoffee) or the textual reference supported by a hashtag. The value of *Starbucks* is neatly articulated by ORY 745 (Figure 5), whose *Instagram* biography identifies him as a French-speaking French national; his caption reads in French ’Ticket to Valencia, Starbucks, and Society magazine. All of this with the woman in my life #lifeisbeautiful’. *Starbucks* coffee, however ironic or ludic ORY 745 might intend it to be, is elevated to the pantheon of valuable commodities.

Insert Figure 5 here

Figure 5. ORY 745’s post.

The most widely used luxury brand in the composition of the image uploaded is *Louis Vuitton*, the fashion house that is part of the multinational luxury goods conglomerate *LVMH* that includes *Moët & Chandon* champagne, *Hennessy* cognac, and *Louis Vuitton*. The *LV* monogram is widely recognised as a luxury brand, and also one of the most counterfeited brands, in part because of its image as a symbol of social status and capital. In this corpus, 19 respondents included the *Louis Vuitton* brand in the image they uploaded, of whom four reinforced the significance of the brand by including a hashtag (#LV or #louisvuitton, for example). Those who include an explicit reference to the brand in their own comment on the image reinscribe the symbolic representations of luxury and glamour; user ORY 227 includes #martinique (the French Caribbean island and her destination from Orly) and #carnaval2015 to explain why she is flying off. Meanwhile, ORY 291 reinforces what Marwick (2015: 139) refers to as microcelebrity amongst the “Instafamous”, by glossing her image with the hashtags #Pisa #Italie #job and #model, combining her consumption of luxury goods with foreign travel and a perceived glamorous job, namely modelling. The glamour is slightly countered by the fact that she has to make the journey from Paris to Pisa not in a private jet, or even in the elite super-luxury of an Asian airline’s upper class, but on cheap-and-cheerful easyJet.

Insert Figure 6 here

Figure 6. ORY 291’s post

Rettberg (2014, p. 27) reminds us that users choose what technology can do for them, and borrows the concept of ‘filter’ from cultural studies and applies it to the visual filters used in SNS. From the perspective of identity curation on *Instagram*, we would add another dimension to this filter, namely the spectacles of multilingualism (Jaworski, 2015), where the performance of identity on SNS is the nexus between the image, the caption, and the language of the caption, which for many (if not most) users in the Orly corpus is English, rather than French. The captions for this particular subset of the corpus are interesting in that, in English, there are often references to #happy, which imbues Louis Vuitton and its products with this positive attribute. As of spring 2017, there are 440 million images on Instagram glossed with the hashtag #happy, in comparison with 19 million for #sad. An illustration of this is ORY 347 whose caption reads: Bye bye Paris ✈ #holidays #vacances #happy #louisvuitton #chanel #paris. Two luxury brands are included in this caption, and the concepts of holidays, elite consumerism, pleasure and the English language are folded together. This, therefore, builds on our discussion of language practices above, and adds a further layer of self-representation. There is no suggestion that all 440 million users who deploy the hashtag #happy speak English; in fact, recent checks demonstrate that, every few minutes, individuals post in Japanese, Korean, or Russian will include an English-language hashtag for #happy.

The third most popular category is reading material, and unsurprisingly, this includes the most diverse range of items within it with over forty different titles featured. The most repeated reading material was *Vogue*, oftentimes but not always *Vogue Paris*. ORY 1239 replicates the approach we saw with *Starbucks* whereby *Vogue* is commodified as a travel essential, in this case as a travelling companion. *Vogue* provides the background to the image, onto which is imposed the boarding pass for the flight to Lisbon, with an expensive watch in the foreground, slightly out of focus. ORY 1239 highlights the international model and actress, Vanessa Paradis, the French version of *Vogue*, and the airline, *Aigle Azur* in her caption, which is twice affirmed in English by two of her friends. Here, the tedium and stress of airport travel, with its prolonged waiting, its intense security, and its peak of frenzied activity, such as boarding, are elided as travel is re-presented as luxury, elite fashion, and beauty.

Insert Figure 7 here

Figure 7. ORY 1239’s post

1. **Conclusion**

The on-line construction of identity as an active, on-going process has been explored here multimodally and multilingually. The context in this discussion is the elite language ideology of France which we contrast against the metadiscursive regimes in circulation on SNS, and in particular on *Instagram*. Images, such as ORY 771, where the luxury brand names face the camera lens, and therefore the viewer, are evidence, we argue, of the careful preparation of many of these images. Rarely is the impression given that the original poster is uploading an *ad hoc* image taken on the hoof. In virtually all the cases where these goods are included, the bricolage of the image, down to the position of the passport in relationship to the boarding pass (which reveals some information but not necessarily all personal data), appears deliberate and measured. This approach leads to the conclusion that SNS are platforms for the assiduous curation of identity along two axes. Multimodally, this self-presentation is reinforced by the consumption of luxury goods that are visually arranged to make meaning with the accompanying captions, hashtags, and emoticons. The use of text to assert a specific identity is reinforced by a multilingual axis, where often – but not always – French speakers (such as ORY 771) use a range of languages, usually English, in their *mises en scène* in order to present themselves as mobile global citizens.

Insert Figure 8 here

Figure 8. ORY 771’s carefully arranged post

In assessing the creative use of language, Lee (2011: 117) reminds us to note the ‘mechanical constraints’ imposed by SNS, whose instructions and invitations to users often appear in English. In other words, the SNS guide the literacy practices of users by the technological affordances. *Instagram* is available in a French-language version, and it is the default version offered by, for example, *iTunes* in France. This means that the app invites users to ‘*Ecrire une légende…*’ in French, and so it merits note that those who chose to do so in English reinforce a set of community preferences that is at odds with the SNS’ prompt.

Returning to Goffman’s (1956) structural divisions of social establishments, the airport departure lounge has always been positioned on the border between front and back regions. On the one hand, it has traditionally been closed to the audience – one has to be present in the departure lounge, access to which is highly and increasingly regulated, in order to participate in the performance, indicating that this part of an airport is a back region. On the other hand, the airport departure lounge is a space for restricted performance between airport (or airline) staff and travellers, and so potentially a front region. SNS, especially *Instagram* with its emphasis on images, have erased the boundary between the two regions; in fact, the users whose images explored here have actively transformed the airport departure lounge into a space for social performance, i.e. a front region. At the same time, MacCannell (1976, p. 98) invites us to consider the staged authenticity of tourist settings, and *Instagram* users who upload images of their passport and/or boarding pass at Orly provide us with a glimpse of authenticity with their compositions distributed, through the SNS, for wider consumption.

This authenticity, as noted above, is clearly staged inasmuch as none of the images in this corpus were snapped *en passant*, but are all carefully constructed, sharply in focus. Very rare are the images which give prominence to the authentic but not so aesthetically appealing ephemera of air travel, such as the dirt and grime of departure lounges, the discarded food wrappers, partially read newspapers, or used chewing gum. Equally, the texts provided by OP and their friends, families, and followers prompt the resurfacing of questions around re-creation and unoriginality: the variation in the props assembled and the hashtags deployed is relatively limited. Metadata tags such as hashtags are, by their nature, intended to connect users and therefore originality sits uncomfortably with creativity under these circumstances. The more creative the hashtag, the less likely it is to direct other users towards the image, one consequence of which is the wide use of broad terms such as #travel, #voyage, and #holidays. Largely and conspicuously absent from the corpus are hashtags with tourism (#tourism, #tourisme, #tourist, etc) as their root, reinforcing the notion of disdain for tourists, in comparison with travellers (see MacCannell, 1976, p10, and Jaworski & Thurlow, 2009, p. 200).

Collectively, the attributes of *Instagram* posts at Orly highlight the potential for the uploading of an image taken in an airport departure lounge to contribute to the wider process of self-representation. *Instagram* users introduce specific discourses around mobility, multilingualism (or at least the spectacle of multilingualism), and openness to alterity, even when the other is the not-so-different beach in Spain. What we have highlighted here is the negotiation between posts which draw on a limited range of terms from two or three named languages and the arrangement of the available props to stage a specific kind of shared identity. In the data from Orly, there is a clear tendency to present oneself as a confident and experienced traveller, who is open to a broad spectrum of cultural experiences, and who might knowingly and conspicuously consume a range of well-known brands of (relatively) high value. Airside *Instagram* users in airports are afforded the opportunity to use their wait to display playfully a specific set of characteristics with which they wish to be identified. SNS permit the use of formerly back regions, such as mundane departure lounges, to re-create an established social performance that is both multilingual and multimodal.

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1. The precise hashtag in French is not given here so as to anonymise the OP. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The precise hashtags is not given here so as to anonymise the OP. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In order to minimise the potential for individuals being identifiable, these hashtags are provided in approximate translations into English. Originally, they all appear in French. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)