

## Exploring Pluriliteracy As Theory and Practice in Multilingual/Cultural Contexts

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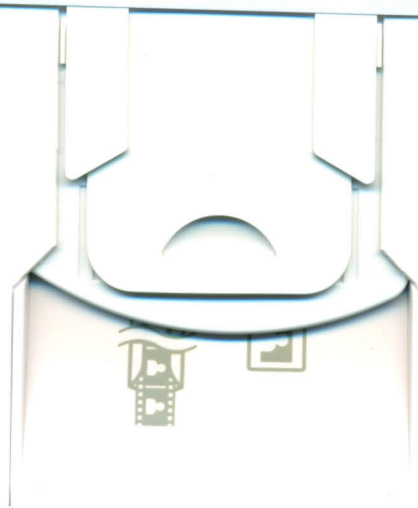
### Abstract

This paper is situated in language and literacy studies (Gee 1996) and Malaysian Studies (Tan, 1992; Shamsul, 1999; Maznah and Wong, 2001; Ooi, 2001) and explores what I theorise to be the pluriliteracy (Koo 2004) of Malaysian tertiary learners in relation to the discourses of the community, nation-state and globalisation. It takes the perspective of linguistic practices as involving culture (as interpretive systems of meaning involving webs of significance (Geertz, 1973) and linguistic processes as sociocultural practice (Kress, 1989). The pluriliteracy of the multilingual meaning-makers in English is viewed in terms of a third space phenomenon (Bhabha, 1994) a deep sociopolitical space marked by power and ideological divides. Pluriliteracy views meaning-making and knowledge production as sociopolitical phenomena involving decisions and reflections around the ideological embeddings of dominant cultures. The third space is a complex and challenging space fraught with tensions for the multilingual learner, where various literacies are accommodated, nativised and transformed within the intersection and contradictions of community, national and global discourses.

The paper explores the concept of Reflexive Pluriliteracy in two ways: firstly, by examining the broad sociopolitical contexts of Malaysia viewed as the intersection of the global with the nation-state and secondly, by examining the micro meaning-making literacy practices of two Malaysian meaning-makers, Su and Beng. The broad and the micro are viewed as interpenetrating discursive discourses each interacting with the other. In exploring the extant pluriliteracies of multilingual meaning-makers as unfolding and as learned behavior, the paper argues for a pedagogy of reflexive Pluriliteracy. It is argued that reflexive pluriliteracy will help provide a greater awareness of the politics and tensions in various ways of knowing, in the third space of the simultaneously local-global, with its tensions and ambivalence.

### Introduction and Aims of Paper

The paper examines the discursive language literacies of multilingual meaning-makers through selected strands in a larger ethnographic study of multicultural meaning-makers (Koo, 2004, 2005) through a pluriliteracy perspective. It will focus on the forces, politics and processes of meaning-making in language meaning and learning in higher education for multilingual/cultural students at a Malaysian public university which has implications for policy and management of Higher Education in the space we now describe as global.



The paper discusses the context, rationale and purposes for a reflexive pluriliteracy in education, an innovative theory and pedagogy which I am theorizing and exploring. Pluriliteracy is a process, a regulative ideal, a value and relational, not absolute.

The pluriliteracy of the Malaysian meaning-makers in English are conceptualized in terms of pluriliteracy perspective, a matrix involving critical and vernacular literacies. It is a perspective which problematises assumed conventions and power embedded in notions of standard knowledges, standard languages and standard ways of knowing (processes of learning) and encourages engagement of primary life-worlds (vernacular knowledge) (Koo, 2005) in interaction with those of secondary life-worlds of schools and higher education. I view Pluriliteracy as a third space phenomenon (Bhabha, 1994; Koo, 2005) a sociopolitical space, marked by power and ideological divides (Lankshear, 1998). This is a complex space where various literacies are accommodated to, nativised and transformed within the intersection of community, national and global discourses within the realities of the contradictions experienced. The paper aims at capturing the meaning-makers' difficult negotiations of language/s at the third space. The language literacies which are learnt by multilingual learners are viewed as dynamic albeit difficult responses towards the sociopolitical and educational frames of the nation-state, the discourses of ELT, and the globalising forces of consumerism primarily in terms of the third space. In exploring the extant pluriliteracies of multilingual Malaysian meaning-makers, the paper argues for a pedagogy of reflexive pluriliteracy to provide for a greater awareness of language/cultural literacy in the third space of the local- global which requires the awareness of vernacular literacy and the awareness of the contradictions inherent in global cosmopolitan economic literacy discourses with their costs, benefits and consequences.

### **My Commitment and Advocacy for Subaltern ELT Learners**

Reflexive pluriliteracy perspective is committed to getting multilingual learners to become involved in knowledge making, and in the decision-making process in ELT. It also aims to provide subaltern learners some constructive access to the social and political mechanisms of policy and research and practice in ELT. Reflexive Pluriliteracy is committed towards advocacy for a fuller representation of the multilingual learners involved in complex positionings, those caught in the tensions of community, national and global discourses of ESOL, state and globalisation.

Reflexive pluriliteracy pedagogy and methodology has emerged from the researcher's repeated encounters with learners who expressed their sense of inferiority in the ELT classroom, having to measure up to an idealised 'native speaker' of English. This is in part a predisposition, a habitus, acquired and socialized in a schooling system and practices which are strongly oriented towards getting it right for examinations and



deference to formulaic responses to texts and contexts. Learners who had viewed their multilingual position as insignificant have reacted with surprise upon realizing that they could use their multilingual position to interrogate and enrich their ways of seeing with dominant ELT texts, the possibility of using translation strategies as to help them move through diverse cultures and then redesigning from this position of movement through multiple positions.

The voice of an MA learner in a Malaysian ELT programme sums up this experience: *"I did not know that my ordinary everyday knowledge and experience can be brought into my writing and my thinking"*.

My paper is committed to exploring how to engage the pluralist linguistic and cultural capacity of learners to construct knowledge. One such source for the multilingual learners would be the cultural knowledge available in their non-academic everyday life into academic learning in Higher Education. It is committed to exploring ways to engage the diversity of cultural voices, knowledges and linguistic diversity evident in the primary life-worlds, into academic learning in higher education. There are risks to the production of knowledge from their particular hybrid positions, due in part, to the almost automatised silencing of such diversity in deference to what is experienced as dominant knowledge in ESOL produced through standard international English. The ELT learner faces a double problem in making knowledge through a language that is not a first language.

The aim of this paper is to represent what may be viewed by learners as the invisible unremarkable knowledge of multilingual Malaysians as they struggle with what they perceive to be dominant interactions and privileged texts in academic literacy events. This is gained in part from examining the academic texts of learners, their free designs and narratives and my reflexive ways of talking around their texts. Such reflexivity problematises the agents, structures and processes which fixes the meanings, functions and consequences of particular discourses.

### **Situating Reflexive Pluriliteracy as a Concept and Practice in Discursive Contexts of Globalisation, Empire and Nation-state**

Among the heterogenous discourses faced by the meaning-makers in Malaysia are the sociocultural values of a high position-oriented, a collectivistic patriarchal society, a dominantly submissive ethos to the dominant discourses of the 'nation-state' around development, the top-down validation of what is viewed as 'correct' even accurate in educational institutions in schools and higher education, a relatively illiberal sociopolitical context (Jomo, 2000) the perceived hegemony of ELT pedagogy from the centre (Kumaradivelu, 2006), and the neoliberal economic agendas of the global. These discourses have impacted as a particular composite hegemony on the meaning making predispositions and constrain ways of meaning-making of Malaysians in academia (Koo, 2005). However, the composite hegemony



is heterogenous as individuals and communities negotiate and inflect hegemony in various ways described in this paper in terms of mediations of meanings whether in terms of reproduction or transformative literacy practices.

Dominant literacy practices in Malaysia are mainly text-based, written and formulaic reproduction of genres approved by examination bodies where the products of learning are privileged in a high stakes examination-centric system. The transitional processes of learning through dialogues, communicating and expressing thought are sidelined. Classroom discourses generally show dominance of talk centring on getting the formula, and genre right. In this regard, rote learning and memorization have become dominant literacy practices to the exclusion of experiential, problem-solving, analytic and symbolic thinking. This has been attested to by learners in higher education, undergraduate and postgraduate students at the MA and PhD level who constantly complain of the difficulty of thinking through ideas and articulating ideas different from those which are declared as 'right' or published.

This practice is exacerbated by rating and league tables for schools and universities where reductionist benchmarks (from the larger discourse of ISO's) become the measure of learning. Instrumental discourses (stemming from commodification of education in an capitalist discourse) focus on measurable products. Processes of analysis, communication and problem-solving tend to be neglected.

### **Pluriliteracy as Theory and Practice: A Third Space Phenomenon**

This perspective may provide a useful perspective in looking at the extant meaning-making possibilities of multicultural peoples in terms of an expanded view of language literacy, one committed towards the recognition and mediation of diversity and difference in third spaces afforded by local-global contexts. This perspective questions the notion of essentialised notions of 'standard' languages such as 'International English' as the principal way of making meaning and of creating knowledge. Such unproblematised notions in terms of power structures and normalized constructions of standards poses enormous challenges to the learner who does not come from life-worlds which provide easy transitions to particular knowledge and languages. I am arguing that meaning-making at the third space is inevitably one which draws upon the languages and strategies which have evolved through the history, the ontology (the ways of being) and epistemology (the ways of knowing) of the third space as the case of the Malaysian meaning-makers illustrates.

Pluriliteracy is viewed as a condition, a context, a consciousness, a mind-set which works towards a reflexive awareness of existing forms of social organizations, global knowledge, local knowledges, local cultures and languages. It is through the pluriliteracy framework that perhaps one can interrogate the sociopolitics of language literacy and knowledge making practices.



The framework which I am working towards seeks to identify in which domains, contexts, subcontexts, critical points, that language literacy practices may need to be reflexively examined and to be contested, accommodated, and/or transformed. This perspective is underpinned by a reflexive view of pluriliteracy as one committed to the more equitable valuing of cultural resources and a commitment towards culturally sustainable communities and the planet.

Reflexive Pluriliteracy views literacies as matrices of diverse language literacies/discourses that are reproduced, and/or transformed to indicate multiple overlapping and /or conflicting membership into communities of practice for particular goals and purposes. A reflexive and situated pluriliteracy framework views literacy in terms of sociopolitical contexts and cultural ecologies of the communities and participants in which they are situated.

A pluriliteracy framework whilst being ideologically open to diversity and difference and its representation would reflexively consider the uses, benefits and consequences of diverse literacies including local vernacular cosmopolitanism and global New York cosmopolitanism (Bhabha, 2004). It is aware of the structural inequality which privileges particular literacies and marginalizes others so that hybridity and multiplicity may be a problem.

Pluriliteracy is a third space concept interested in new ways of looking, behaviours and genres afforded by the subaltern space, the places at the margins of representations. It examines ways in which these interspaces offers new spaces of belonging and of being, of thinking, of doing, of meaning beyond those conventionally and essentialistically dichotomized into fixed nation-state, ethnicity, and class categories. It is postmodern in orientation and seeks the fissures between conventional and marginalized spaces for fuller meaning-making and representation especially for people living at the margins of majoritarian spaces. It looks at literacy as a pluralized construct in terms of the interplay and fusions between diverse communities of practice as well as in terms of webs linking knowledge production through and in fluid language/s which are spoken-performed by people in-between spaces.

#### **Neoliberal Discourses and Globalising Discourses in ELT Embedded in Unequal Relations of Power for Subaltern Learners**

The diversity of Englishes is accepted as a characteristic of English in the global world. However, standard English has become a valued commodity in the global market with values attached to particular Englishes. The ELT industry imposes hegemonic norms with international standards and ethnocentric bias from the first worlds as points of reference. Associated with it is upward mobility, social success and status. In the Asia Pacific region, American, British and Australia English have



become the preferred norms for high-stakes examinations like the IELTS and the TOEFL. Teachers in Malaysia and Asia Pacific have been subject to the commodification of English which has become a commercial industry. The multiple norms of hybrid English have become a problem, for example, for entry, into Australian Universities which only accepts standard English as its norm.

The policy contexts of a global English industry associated with neo-liberal capitalist education market has resulted in commodification of 'language knowledge'. Benchmarks and testing specifications of language proficiencies of established institutions are privileged. There are tensions around the entry level of learners who are multilingual and who are not masters of a second or third language and the requirements at the exit level. Such constraints force teachers and lecturers to focus on narrow benchmarks and easily measurable outcomes leading to reductionist education. In local universities, such 'international' standards are benchmarked in terms of best practices, unproblematically.

The dominant realities with the marketplace of ELT industry and education within neoliberal discourses impose stringent standards on learners with perceived assurances of mobility and transnational jobs and cosmopolitan status. This is transferred to consumers of such knowledge including people like Su who is frustrated and feels othered by the glass ceiling of native speaker standards. Such globalising discourses on ELT and language learning impact on academic learning. Narrow business-focused objectives of the English Language market undermine more holistic approaches to teaching English. A more holistic approach is required to respond to the social and cultural needs of students while they are studying in global markets. There is the instrumental and reductionist neo-liberal philosophy embedded in language courses. This may lead to less attention to programmes and approaches which emphasise intercultural understanding and a balanced education.

The prevalent discourse of Global English judged and valued as the primary means to produce and communicate knowledge in clearly structural unequal systems marginalizes learners in higher education whose mother tongue is not English. Knowledge creation is primarily privileged through English as a lingua franca beyond the Anglo centres of their origin.

Linguistic engagements in multilingual/cultural contexts are always subject to unequal relations of power. English has become the lingua franca for academic interaction of learners and academics in international discourses. As academics and stakeholders in internationalization, how do we deal with the issue of English as the new lingua franca of the international academic community? Firstly, there is the issue of how knowledge is created in and through English as a lingua franca. Secondly, how do we imagine English as a lingua franca in terms of standards and acceptable variations such as is presently coded in World Englishes (Kachru, 1996)? In the light of these variations, do



we accept only normative standards and codes as set up by Anglo-centric bodies such as IELTS or TOEFL? How about the multiple norms of interactions represented in international Englishes? Are they to be accepted as cultural forms of vernacular Englishes appropriate for expanding contexts of English communication? Instead of the terms ESL or EFL within TESL or TOEFL discourses, we could use a more culturally appropriate English as used by multicultural/lingual peoples, or English as used by multicultural/lingual speakers (EuMS). In other words, English in the national and international arena could be viewed as a code within the existing pluralistic repertoire of language codes, owned and used by the majority of people whose mother tongue is not English. But, unfortunately, in this discourse, multiculturalism/lingualism is neglected.

Reflexive Pluriliteracy foregrounds issues of access, equity and empowerment for multilingual learners advocating greater political, social and educational tolerance for nativised varieties such as those represented in the generic term "World Englishes" (Kachru, 1996). Firstly, this perspective would prevent the marginalisation of the speech communities they represent within the broader and ground level understanding of the contexts within which these varieties have emerged, contexts within which some speakers have become dominantly and unproblematically 'non standard' speakers of English. Secondly, this is important to allow for knowledge making in education to be made through English as a lingua franca without labelling users as being non-native users of English. This is an important point to be made as a constant striving after native varieties can cut out the voices, knowledge and communication of non-mother tongue speakers of English as they struggle to produce and communicate knowledge in and through English.

Meanings are hybridized in the making of situated meanings through international Englishes. Knowledge of genres cannot be separated from the recognitions of genres in institutions. In as much as international standard English is dominantly viewed as a benchmark, it effectively shuts out those who think that they cannot make meaning and knowledge properly in English until they access these genres. However, communication is situated and genres are not fixed in perpetuity.

In multicultural contexts, individuals are multiply affiliated to the personal, the communal, the national and the global. This involves primary as well as secondary life-worlds of social life, work and education which have emerged from such pluralist contexts. For example, the Malaysian English (ME) speech community is the hybridised product and process of such contexts. How then do we view the sociolinguistically and culturally agile ME pluricultural speaker who is able to fluidly move in and between subjectivities to key into a conjunction of space/s through the use of various languages, their sub-varieties, styles and register in terms of the workplace, education and society? However, he/she may not always or consistently speak what is considered to be standard international English as



defined by institutions and gatekeepers of the Inner Circles of ELT. It is in this regard that there is a need to rethink hegemonic and monolithic 'standard' norms of English, relative to contexts and purposes of speech communities.

### **The Politics of Power in ELT – Intersecting Discourses of the Nation-state and Global Contexts**

Language education in ELT is strongly influenced by capitalist discourses and is viewed as a means to an end – the end being mainly for enhanced economic outcomes in a globalising discourse committed to liberal and economic agendas.

There remains a strong belief that English in any discipline is viewed as an established knowledge, a static body of factual knowledge and language learning in ELT means being able to consume and reproduce this information. Thus, achieving language proficiency in ELT means being able to appropriate knowledge that is already pre-established, fixed knowledge that is largely drawn from the first worlds, privileging learners who have primary life-worlds communicated in and through other languages and not in English, people who do not have cultural capital that is not easily connected to secondary life-worlds which privileges English language use. Their cultural and cognitive resources are in line with those of the academy and of the workplace. At the same time, standard norms of English Language are used as the criteria without 'disturbing' this knowledge. The realities are that English is a community language in Malaysia and hence English as communicated in Malaysia comprises simultaneous norms of interaction as is exemplified by the Greeting "Have you eaten?" unlike normalized greetings in native speaker varieties of English.

There are contradictions in this view of ELT in a multilingual context. On one hand, it hopes to secure the political liberation from Empire thinking of the first world (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), on the other, the policy devised seem to sideline true liberation in terms of building an epistemic culture of alternative ways of production and contesting 'standard norms' of making knowledge. Further, by setting these norms from empire models of language proficiency, we not only take away the thinking possibilities of learners, we take away their voices, situated in various experiences of multiple life-worlds. The marginalisation or lack of valuing of the subaltern cultural and linguistic resources of the learners fundamentally erodes at the voice and confidence of learners positioned in such a way. It shuts out the possibilities of situated and alternative ways of knowledge production. Constant prioritizing of a target language, extreme valuing of the genres in ELT can discourage the exploration in the discipline of ELT and prevent the joint construction of meaning.





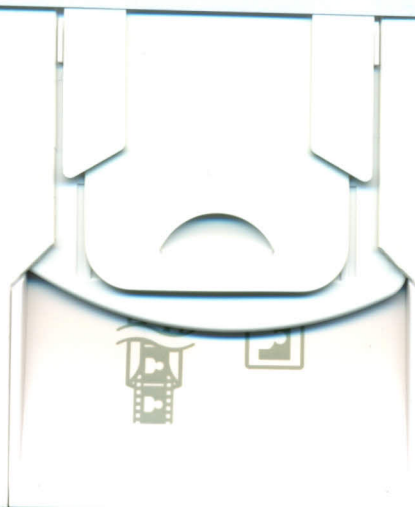
The view of this paper is that teaching and learning English are multidiscursive. The sociopolitical and cultural contexts interpenetrate the literacy practices of learners who are stakeholders in the politics of meaning-making and knowledge production. But often, being weaker within the institutions of learning, and constructed as being in the third world, the blame of poor proficiency is laid upon the subaltern language learners and that of their teachers. Policy makers and implementers with relatively more power in a top-down system of educational change seem relatively immune to accusations of inadequacy.

### **Nation-state Discourses Intersecting with Global Agendas: English as the Language of Communication and for Knowledge Working in Development Discourses of Malaysia**

Nation-state discourses of academic literacy in Bahasa Melayu (BM) prevailed in Malaysian secondary and tertiary education from 1971 with the New Economic Policy (NEP) with little emphasis being put on English until the New Development Policy (1991 – 2002) when the Malaysian national outlook began privileging liberal economic agendas. In 2002, English was formally approved of as a formal institutionalized academic language with the introduction of English for Science and Technology in response to the continued ascendancy of global neoliberal economic discourse starting from the New Development Policy years (1991-2002) as pursued by the economic developmentalistic-orientated Mahathiran Government broadly framed by vision 2020. Indeed with continuing current engagements in regional economies, the present Government under Abdullah Badawi is considering providing for Mandarin and Tamil classes in schools. Again, it must be pointed out that the nation-state discourse around language has largely been argued on economic grounds for the principal business of business, organizational links with economies in Asia and globally. However, the embeddings of neoliberal economic capitalism with its costs and consequences to national and other languages appear to remain invisible to some bureaucrats and officials of Government education departments.

### **Global Flows: The Cultural Media-scape and Meaning-making in ELT**

In education as elsewhere, efforts towards the construction of national identity have to take account of the compression of time-space. Globalisation reconfigures geographical and cultural space, through information and communication technologies. A meaning-maker is potentially a pluralist subject in simultaneous multiple cultural spaces at once. In this regard, the boundaries between institutionalised education and popular culture are melting and yet, this may not be experienced by learners. The consumerism of media discourses can be overpowering through hegemonic ascribed identities performed through television, film and music.



Educationists are challenged now with the task of producing learners who are multiliterate, multi-modal and/or media literate. They can educate learners to use their literacy, available communications technology and the resources of popular culture – magazines, newspapers, film, televisions – to invent and reinvent notions of what other people within the country or the West are like, criss-crossing those spaces simultaneously. Everyday and popular culture is a cultural flow which can consume and overcome the identity formation of subaltern learners if they not made to be critically aware of the politics of consumerist ideologies. (Essentialised discourses on consumerism in media have been discussed in this pluralist perspective but there is no room to discuss this here).

The Reflexive Pluriliteracy perspective encourages learners to position, engage and design the vernacular, the folk, ethnocultural resources (Smith, 1999) of meaning-makers which reside in their primary life-worlds and represented in their mother-tongue or first languages. This perspective can be engaged through Freirian awareness raising strategies. Pluriliteracy advocates innovative curriculum and education policy which addresses the vital questions of the empowerment of marginalized learners, re-distribute and share power and representation in ELT contexts. In this regard, it should be noted there are tensions between situated vernacular resources and resources privileged by dominant and dominating postcolonial and global ELT empire discourses. Both nationally and globally, there are ELT gatekeepers who emphasise the master narratives of homogeneity and Western culture, ignoring the realities of diversity and hybridity. Marginalized groups in margins of power need a redefinition of dominant educational knowledge in terms of heterogeneous perspectives of relationality and polyvocality. Pluriliteracy does not essentialise the West nor romanticize the indigenous East. It is however open to ways of seeing which can humanize and liberalise us. Postmodern ideas and ideas of social justice and advocacy have come from advocates in the West.

Reflexive Pluriliteracy recognizes the structural inequality promoted by capitalist ideology which is no longer a spatial phenomenon limited to the US and Europe. It is transcended by the transnationalist capitalist class (Sklair, 2001) found in New York, London, Shanghai, Moscow and Sydney.

### **Methodology for the Situated Profiles and Literacy Practices of Multilingual Meaning-Makers**

The paper is informed by a Pluriliteracy perspective which has been theorized in literature on Malaysian studies, globalisation and ELT and based upon ethnographic based studies of the contexts and experiences of the Malaysians who are the participants of the study. It is informed by postmodern qualitative methodology.



Researching as a postmodern vernacular (indigenous) ethnographer, my challenge was to build pluriliteracy as an emic concept, from the webs of words, images, noise-sounds, feelings, meanings that come from the complex cultural ecology of meaning makers. Vernacular knowledge is multi (pluri) coloured, multi-ethnic, multidiscursive, multidesigned, involving modalities intersecting with global knowledge and is made through the multiple codes, styles and varieties of meaning-makers who possess various subjectivities. Cultural production of meaning is inseparable from linguistic production in contexts of civilisational history, postcolonialism and empire. Subjectivity is constructed within the multiple relations in the intersections of the local-global.

In postmodern work, the core foundations of truth are challenged, and this researcher labours with partial fragments of experiences, those which resonate with others. Postmodern research does not claim to adequately solve the problems of being, truth or subjectivity. Such research lives in the ambiguity, the interstices of things, in the tension of confusion and possibility and accepts the messiness of making meanings of the researcher and the researched. This is a methodology which seeks to interrogate mediate meanings within the space of theory as lived through experience-observations-ways of being-doing-seeing-valuing (Gee, 1998) of researcher and researched. By bringing the 'outside' into the process of knowing, for example, by including participants in the co-interpretation-production of meanings, the research is enriched. In this regard, I have drawn upon the familiarity with my context, making it strange through inhabiting the spaces of the participants in the study.

In this research, I use formal and informal academic literacy events involving participants during course discussions. The paper will illustrate how vernacular funds of knowledge are discursively constructed. I use multicultural/lingual texts designed by participant learners for an academic literacy event in higher education as a point of entry to examine the polyvalent- hybrid subject position of text-designers (with its enrichments, tensions and ambivalence), a site where diverse local, international and global cultures intersect. I also use discourse analysis to frame the interactions of multilingual learners around an academic text. The literacy events are framed by a course which foregrounds an examination of the politics of text recognition and encourages the intersections of local knowledge through examining the stories and ideological forces which shape the construction and/or silencing of pluriliterate texts (Koo, 2005) as part of an ongoing research on Pluriliteracy as concept and practice.

The learner profiles of participants in the study are built up from ethnographic data from interviews, in-depth questionnaires and observations of literacy mediators over a period of a year. The ethnographic case study focuses on the profiles and situated literacy practices of two learners who have been educated in Mandarin National Type Schools at the primary level. The study focuses on the



subjects, Su and Beng, their responses to interviews in relation to their view of learning and meaning-making in BM, Mandarin, English and their perception of the status, relevance and use of these languages as tertiary learners in the Malay world. Through qualitative type interviews the researcher explores their voices and narratives around language/s of identity, learning, in the context of community, the national and the global, their perception and use of these languages as cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). This inquiry explores the voices and narratives of subjects in terms of language and literacy and Malaysian studies, and specifically the concept of situated reflexive pluriliteracy anchored in mediating processes of accommodation, and/or transformation.

The reflexive pluriliteracy framework is used as a basis for discussing the extant language and literacy practices of the learners. The reflexive pluriliteracy framework is used to discuss and compare the extant pluriliteracies of some meaning-makers gathered from qualitative profiles and interviews, examinations of participant designs of texts and a discourse analysis of an academic interaction involving participants with future reflexive pluriliteracies.

### **Findings and Analysis: The Literacy Practices of Beng**

This section illustrates the extent to which language literacy is accommodated, nativised-hybridized at the site of academic learning. However, this phenomenon is invisible to the meaning-makers themselves. The two participants, when asked, said that the extant meaning-making phenomenon is so naturalised that they do not think about it. The fact of its invisibility may partly have to do with the fact of sociopolitics of language use and learning which stratifies languages when in fact, in terms of use, it is normalized to the point of automaticity, and hence, its invisibility.

Many Malaysians of Chinese ethnicity pursuing their studies in public universities like Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia who are both Mandarin educated in primary school and Malay educated in a national secondary school assess their academic literacy in BM to be very good compared to their proficiency and literacy in English. They admit to having good academic proficiency in Mandarin as well as in BM with students reading reference books and performing academic tasks like writing assignments, presenting papers and answering examination papers in BM. However discussion of content outside of formal tutorials with their lecturers is carried out in Mandarin together with BM. Academic writing in university is done largely in BM. Beng describes his academic literacy primarily in terms of English for accessing reference books not available in BM and BM as the dominant language for academic writing, presentations and examination. At the same time, Mandarin is used as the medium for understanding texts in BM. BM is also used as the main medium (alongside Mandarin) of understanding general and scientific genres in reference texts in BM especially in group discussions among students who are ethnically Chinese and fluent in Mandarin.



In academic literacy events such as informal discussions with course-mates and peers who are trilingual, three languages are used simultaneously to help the participant understand academic texts in the University. In the following extract, two students are working on an academic task of comprehending an expository text which deals with the concept of freezing for processing dried coffee. The text that they are reading from is an academic text for science written in BM, but the discussion is done in the three languages with terminologies from BM and occasionally English. Mandarin is dominantly used for paraphrasing, clarifying and understanding the text with code-mixing evident in the exchanges.

- H: *wen ti shi apakah yang berlaku (the question is what happens – codemixing Mandarin-BM)*  
*Ni dong ma (do you understand?) (FRAMING THE PROBLEM – codemixing in Mandarin and BM))*
- S: *bu yong jin (don't worry),*  
*Bu yong jin (don't worry)*  
*Ni kan (is this what we are trying to get at?)(FRAMING THE PROBLEM)*
- H: *(reads the question) Nyatakan apakah berlaku apabila kopi dibekukan dan kemudian di letakkan dalam bekas tertutup yang mempunyai tekanan paling rendah out the question (referring to the question for clarification)*  
*Oh zhe yang zi ha. Ok (Oh, this is ah, ok) (UNDERSTANDING)*
- S: *bu yao yong tekanan de concept qu jie shi, yong ?(we don't need to use tekanan as a concept?) QUESTIONING Mixed code of Mandarin and BM*
- H: *tenaga?(SEEKING CLARIFICATION in) BM*
- S: *Hm. (seeking thinking time in BM-English-Mandarin)*
- H: *Hm (seeking thinking time in BM-English-Mandarin))*
- S: *yao zhe yang jie shi (how do we then explain?) FURTHER QUESTIONING in Mandarin*
- H: *jie shi shen me (what to explain?) QUESTIONING in Mandarin*
- S: *ni zhe yang jie shi zhe phenomena (how do we then explain?) QUESTIONING in Mandarin with English term*
- H: *jiu shi beku de phenomena (it has to do with frozen state phenomena) CLARIFYING Mandarin with English term*
- S: *beku le fang jin qu na ge (frozen state, put in) Tekanan (pressure)*  
*Na ge tekanan rendah de di fang (where the low pressure is where the coffee becomes)*  
*Jiu bian cheng coffee (it becomes coffee) (ELABORATING in Mandarin with English*
- H: *kering (dried ) (REPEATING in BM)*
- S: *ha (CONFIRMING UNDERSTANDING in BM-Mandarin-English)*



The discourse structure related to the academic reading the participants have undertaken are:

*Questioning (BM-English),  
 seeking clarification,  
 seeking thinking time BM-English,  
 seeking thinking time BM-English -Mandarin,  
 further questioning in Mandarin, questioning in Mandarin,  
 questioning in Mandarin with English term,  
 clarifying in Mandarin with English term,  
 elaborating in Mandarin with English,  
 repeating in BM,  
 confirming understanding in English-BM-Mandarin*

The exchanges between the two interlocutors (Beng is one of the interlocutors here) illustrates the ways in which literacies in three languages are performed, accommodating to requirements of performing through the medium of instruction in BM in a public university. In effect, the learners are nativising and transforming what are distinctly three languages to one 'language' of academic literacy, a third space literacy. If one examines the utterances there is certainly a dominance of Mandarin. But in the context of the interaction, we can say that other languages are used at the same time to interrogate the text and to understand it in the students' situated context of multilingualism.

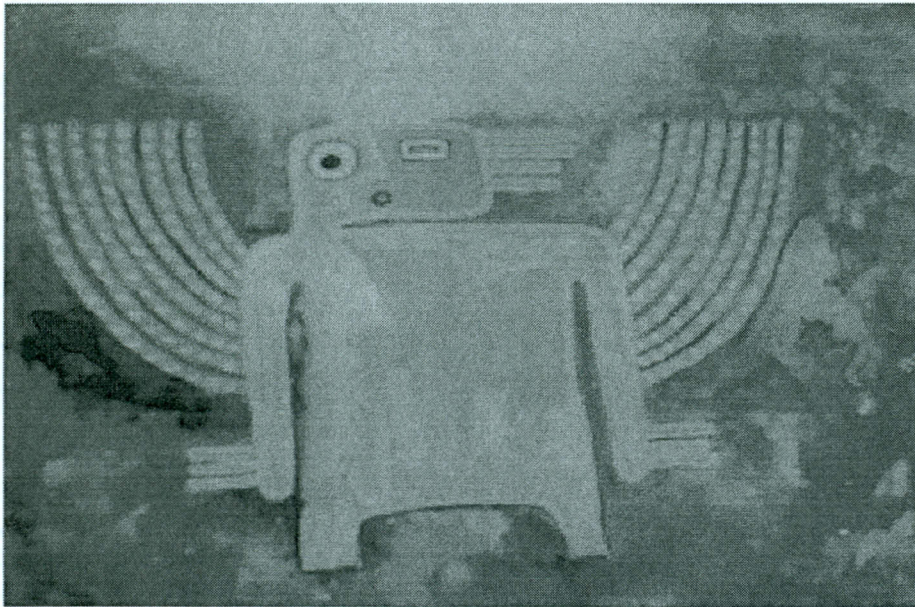
The structure of this fragment of academic discourse centred around utterances for academic purposes includes strategies like requesting and clarification. We see in the students' learning and discourse strategies, whether that of confirming, elaborating or seeking clarification, the use of three languages separately as well as in their code-switching behaviour. I see this interaction as a unique expression of the third space, ratifying engagement of meanings in line with pluri-identities afforded by the intersection of nation-state, and international requirements of language and learning. This conjunction of various intersecting language realities are actively mediated by meaning-makers who are situated at the conjunction of interpenetrating multiple spaces. These invisible processes of meaning-making, invisible to the participants (and to the lecturers) themselves who claims that these literacy practices involving three languages are automatic and naturalised, hence invisible until I raise it to consciousness for them as an entry to raise awareness on reflexive pluriliteracy.

Future research (not within the scope of this paper) will focus on how these interactions may transfer to written texts of these learners and the ways these may be viewed as acceptable texts within particular communities of practices. How would academics accept the hybrid language communication of learners in written academic texts? These are not issues which have been addressed sufficiently in education.



### Su's Extant Pluriliteracy: Design One

This is a visual text with narratives designed and represented by Su to communicate her pluralist subject positions and her explorations of self and other identities around the visual.

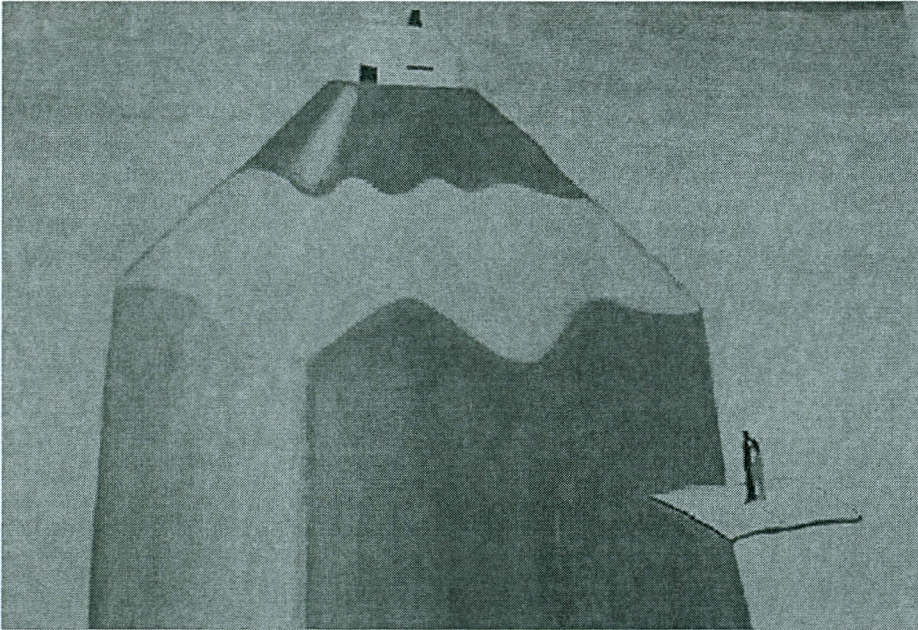


*This is an imitation of one of the Malay artist if I'm not mistaken. I drew the picture 5-6 years ago. Can't trace the source as I saw it in a Chinese newspaper and I didn't keep it. I always have dreams of flying in the air. Do I look for a freedom in terms of the truth of me? But in reality I am a product of hybridity, with essence of a "Chinese" or without it? With identity of a "Malaysian Chinese" or trying to be one? I need enlightenment of who I really am. Probably is not my nationality, it's "Who I am." Probably.*

### Analysis on Su's Pluralistic Meaning-making Based upon Her Designs of Text One and Two

Su, who is a student at the same Malaysian university as Beng experiences ambivalence and tensions as she represents her various subjectivities in her textual production. Here, Su explores her various identities in relation to ascribed identities as Malaysian Chinese and yet she is ambivalent about this imposed identity voicing the deeper concern over who she is. She sees her identity in relation to her sense of self and less to those that has been imposed upon her as being the more important markers of identity.





Another work of imitation. Source not traced. Got it from a local teenager magazine. A thirst for knowledge, and a Platonic partnership. I always wish to learn more things. On the other hand, this picture is a reminder for myself—if I don't work hard there would be nothing achieved. Therefore I believe in hard works. Some people say it is "smart works", work smart instead of work hard. I still find it hardly to accept. As a Malaysian Chinese, what are my chances to survive and get something in situations where we have limited spaces to "move up"? I believe in Knowledge. Is anyone doing the "smart" ways instead of the "hard" ways? Excel. Excel. We must excel to survive. We must excel to transcend the limited spaces restricted to us. This picture leads me to another question. Is being knowledgeable means that one has to learn and use English? Of course not. But I personally believe I have to. Ability in English relates to my self-esteem and level of confidence. I wish to speak like the lawyers in *The Practice*. Haha. On another hand, I sometimes feel that English is just a communication tool for me. I need something else to allow me to use the language and at the same time able to earn me a living. I guess it is about knowledge again. I know the language. So I guess it will be no problem to learn things that I'm not familiar with, like marketing, advertising, business management, computer sciences....

It is about knowledge again.. So is a Malaysian Chinese like me a little bit too GREEDY in this case?

Like Beng, Sue engages simultaneously with her cultural resources, building texts from those resources, simultaneously enjoying the universal and human. She mediates with multiple norms of interaction coming from her facility with several languages and their varieties. She uses Bahasa, Mandarin and their varieties to build her cultural imagination and influencing her language





use in plurality. Like Beng, she inhabits simultaneous identities embedded in a number of language and cultures with its wealth of seeing, albeit with its conflicts and uncertainties. What knowledge is valid? What should be deleted? What voice(s) is/are acceptable in public space and which in private space, which is/are acceptable in ELT, which is/are marginalized? Would other academics accept this kind of texts or would they see it as a mixed genre which is not acceptable as academic genre? Su is situated right in the epicenter of structural inequalities. She sees herself as generally powerless within ELT discourses, the discourse of the nation-state and see herself as powerless in a world that sees knowledge as fixed.

### **Su after Reflexive Pluriliteracy: Supporting Pluricultural Awareness**

I have used the Reflexive Pluriliteracy matrix to provide what I see to be appropriate support and guidance for learners like Su who are positioned in various ways by various discourses including globalising discourses, the discourse of ELT in academia and the nation's purposes. The writer, herself situated within similar discourses, having developed a deeper understanding of the tensions and challenges involved, tries to navigate the journey through the needed transitions between various socio-political and educational contexts. Here, I explore some support mechanisms framed around a Pluriliteracy framework to meet the needs of learners, who are situated in the cracks of such mixed discourses. My frameworks may have helped meaning-makers like Su to re-negotiate the separatism, binaries, and xenophobia, for example, those postured around ethnic identities. Ethnic identities are in some domains, politicized entities by politicians, political parties and by academics.

Through the pluralist framework, Su negotiates the difficult intersections of cultures into her pluriliterate texts transforming them through the simultaneous acts of interpretation and/or acts of production, designs which are reflexively pluriliterate.

### **Reflexive Pluriliteracy has Helped to Bring Su to Another Level of Awareness:**

- It involves reflexive consideration of the use of several languages, code-switching, styles and registers which indicate her multiple cultures of meaning, her crossings and mixing of cultures
- She is able to think through dominant discourses and not accept them per se, imposing erasure on naturalized and imposed discourses and identities.
- She is conscious of the struggle over contradictory voices, positions, ethics, ideology embedded, in particular knowledge/s and in the ways in which these are simultaneously presented or represented. The reflexivity around the struggles and negotiations over diverse positions and positionings is a kind of knowledge, an important one.



- She becomes more aware of the interfacing of particular literacies and transitions between particular literacies for particular communities of practices with its language codes, genres and register.

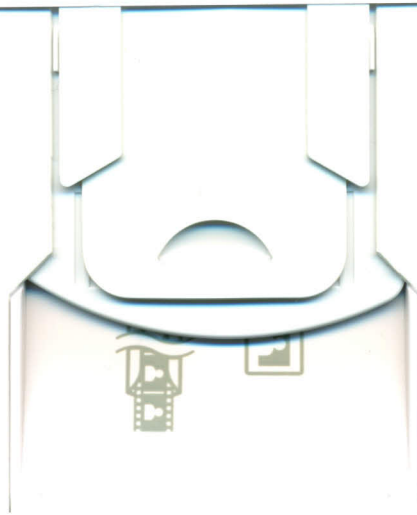
### Concluding comments

This paper has framed Reflexive Pluriliteracy as theory and pedagogy in terms of the plurality of discourses that learners in higher education have to engage in. Learners have to negotiate the complex multicultural and transnational contexts in their multiple locations simultaneously. Pluriliteracy attempts to create learner awareness around the ways in which political and historical contexts impact and intersect with the identities and subjectivities of multilingual/cultural meaning-makers. In reflexive Pluriliteracy, those identities and participant roles are negotiated and mediated reflexively in the intersections of ethnicity, class, gender, nation-state and globality.

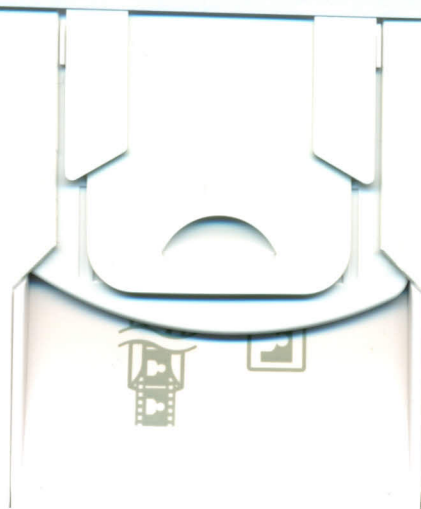
The paper considers the important question of power and positioning of multicultural learners as linguistic interactions are situated in unequal relations of power. The paper seeks in part to answer the ways in which educationists could respond to these positionings within the possibility and constraints of diversity and difference in dominant and normalized ways of being, seeing-doing, systemic structures, and normalized systems of learning. Educationists need to confront the complexities that they and their learners experience in higher education, providing empowering ways into diverse learning pathways of meaning-making and knowledge production in their journeys towards greater social justice, equity and empowerment in education and society.

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