

Critical Literacy and Diversity in Higher Education: A Case Study of a Multilingual Learner

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ABSTRACT

UNESCO (2004a) speaks of the importance of critical literacy (Street, 1995; Wagner, Venezky, & Street., 1999; Robinson, 2003) in an age where symbolic violence and oppression of diverse views threaten democratic civic life. This paper reports the findings of a post-modern qualitative research which examined a postgraduate student's voice and experiences in terms of a pedagogy committed to building critical literacy for multilingual students through a Critical Literacy Awareness (CLA) Perspective and Method. The paper qualitatively examined the postgraduate student's talk and reflective logs as a point of entry into her negotiations of plural, intersecting and/or conflicting identities and discourses and in relation to ideological perspectives on literacy and contested ways of knowing (Wallace, 1988; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Kress, 2003; Koo, 2008a). The findings indicate that for it to be empowering of learner diversity, teacher talk and interventions have to engage with student's unequally valued language and multicultural resources in context and to work with the competing and dominant discourses which are recognised as legitimate in education and the workplace (Luke, 1993).

Keywords: Critical literacy awareness, multilingual learners, qualitative research, cultural diversity, higher education, student voices, language education, literacy practices

INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire (1970) describes literacy as political phenomenon in terms of how the conditions of 'illiteracy' are constructed by dominant and/or oppressive socio-political and economic structures that engender and maintain illiteracy. With rising awareness of the dominant social and economic oppression by hegemonic and privileged systems of power, the urgent need for political awareness and sensitivity to the learner's diversity is highly valued for inclusive higher education. The grounding of reading in terms of the broad context of critical literacy requires reading about the world and

understanding a text's purpose and contexts so that a reader would not be manipulated by it (Freire, 1970).

This paper investigates a multilingual Malaysian student's negotiation of plurality and ambiguity in terms of various intersecting and/or conflicting voices, experiences and discourses in relation to broader ideological perspectives on English language literacy and ways of knowing (Wallace, 1988; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Kress, 2003; Koo, 2004, 2009). These ideological systems and ways of knowing are subject to the politics of power and of recognition. Meaning-making, including critical literacy, is underpinned by ideological

and economic, material and political systems. It is in this regard that the teaching of critical literacy will engage students in participatory democracy where they are directly involved in meaning-making themselves, entering the fray of cultural politics. The representation of diverse meaning-making positions will counter symbolic violence and oppression of hegemonic views which threaten democratic civic life.

I believe that democracy can only be fostered in the environment where diversity is encouraged through inclusive institutions and where the classroom teacher is allowed the autonomy to socialise individuals into the processes of participatory democracy, and into being critical meaning-makers who create and construct meanings through their reading-writing-speaking-listening. The classroom is itself a contested space for diverse meanings and values, and it is subjected to the cultural politics of recognition.

Statement of the Problem

At the risk of essentialising, the majority of postgraduate students do not seem to articulate what they are thinking, perhaps reflecting some of their socialisation experiences in schooling and higher education (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Koo, 2003, 2004, 2008; Pandian, 2007). Some have attributed a lack of critical literacy of Malaysian students to the examination system (Molly Lee, 1999; Koo, 2004), the dominant schooling and higher education system privileging rote learning, a hierarchic position-oriented social structure (Koo, 2008), and a history of self-censorship (Wan Abdul Manan, 2008). There are various reasons for the lack of critical literacy as a dominant social practice in Malaysia. Learners should not be unduly blamed for this situation as the case tends to be especially in popular media and in the discourse of some politicians. It is argued that a lack of critical literacy is embedded in the structural sociopolitical and cultural contexts including institutional ones (Koo, 2003). This phenomenon has been widely reported in Malaysian media and is a concern of the

Ministries of Education who have articulated the need for critical thinking, especially citing this as a requirement of the global knowledge economy (MoHE, 2007a, 2007b). However, I think more is at stake as critical literacy is considered to be the core attribute of an engaged citizen of a democratic society (UNESCO, 2004b). In this regard, this paper reports a study committing to examine the CLA perspective and method which would arguably provide the needed intervention for inculcating critical literacy.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS: CRITICAL LITERACY AWARENESS (CLA)

The current paper asserts that there is a need to challenge meaning-makers to strive for critical literacy in order to improve the social life for the majority in terms of greater access and equity. The paper was based on the recognition of diversity to enhance the democratization of education which would assure greater access and equity, especially to those who are disempowered or marginalized (Street, 1995), admittedly fraught with risks and sometimes, adverse consequences on the risk-takers who come from diverse political and socio-cultural environments, where there may be different meanings and values attached to particular practices (Koo, 2009). Critical Literacy practices have been attributed to Freire (1970) who conceived of it as a means of empowering the oppressed and marginalised populations against coercion and intimidation by dominant systems of political, bureaucratic, and economic power. Freirean critical literacy involves examining, analyzing, and deconstructing texts and contexts. To Freire (1970), critical teaching is a process driven by mutuality through the process of ‘‘conscientisation’’, not something imposed by the ‘all-knowing’ teacher against on ‘ignorant’ students. Matthews (2006, p. 14) sees ‘‘conscientization’’ as an integral and holistic learning process ‘‘where one learns to perceive the social, political and economic contradictions in society and community and take action against oppressive elements and reality’’. Serious

attention is given to empowering learners through critical reflection and the development of dialogue, voice and praxis (action) based on student language and cultural funds of knowledge.

Critical literacy focuses on the issues of power that exist between the reader and the writer of a text or context. These include the reader's prerogative to question the content of the text or context and the ways of seeing and assumptions of the writer (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Wallace, 1988; Baynham, 1995; Kress, 2003; Gee, 2004). The reader may reflect about the missing and marginalised voices of the text or context. And, s/he may come up with an alternative view, perhaps an enriched view of a dominant practice which may widen perspectives and lead to new knowledge and innovation. The critical reader would certainly be engaged in "problematizing" the concept, perspective or issue in a text or context. In this regard, the teacher of critical literacy would encourage students to raise questions and examine the problems from multiple perspectives, challenge students to expand their thinking, and help them discover diverse beliefs and understandings (Luke, 1993, 2005, 2009; Gee, 2004). The dialogue is active and represents a cycle of reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. Freire (1970) terms the process as 'praxis'. However, it is important to note that a key factor in the learning of literacy is acquiring of particular abilities to work within the required discourses (Luke, 1993) of education and the workplace.

Recognising this, Koo (2008a) argues for a CLA in higher education, where students learn the ways of coping with the politics of recognition of discourses in various social and communications contexts. Koo's CLA (*ibid*) is a theoretical and pedagogic perspective concerned with exploring "the complex social and discursive requirements of institutions (such as those of the workplace) as well as the needed mediation of meanings, signs, and languages between the secondary and primary life-worlds of the learners. CLA is concerned with exploring the necessary transitions needed

in the linguistic and literate markings and border crossings between different languages, discourses and cultures. Such intercultural crossings are required as meaning-makers move between life-worlds that of their own and across those of others (Koo, 2008b).

The CLA method, as the current paper explored, engenders greater awareness of the complexities of the sociopolitical and cultural which are often taken for granted, and/or are invisible in the working out of different literacy practices in context. It is hoped that through CLA, there would be greater consciousness of the differences and tensions between the bi/multilingual meaning-makers' diverse life worlds and the dominant language and cultural literacy that are valued in social, academic or workplace communities of practice.

Further, CLA includes exploring the lived experiences, radical experimentations with the writing of theory and interpretation by the meaning-makers which include voices, performance texts, and multi-media 'mystories' (Ulmer, 1989, Part 3; also Richardson, 1990a, as cited in Denzin, 1991, p. 27) through the use of various languages (e.g., national, vernacular languages/dialects and international languages), including those related to primary life-worlds which are often marginalized and not recognized as 'worthwhile' in mainstream literacy events as they are often not officially locked into formal and organized structures.

Critical literacy pedagogy encourages readers to question, critique and to reflect on text knowledge (Luke & Freebody, 1997) and to react to what is written in texts bringing the word from inside the text to the world outside the texts. The theorised critical literacy perspective in this paper moves reading practices from the relations internal to text to engage readers in "reading the word with the world" (Freire & Machedo, 1987). This moves reading "beyond traditional decoding or encoding, rooting it to the engagements in and simulations of the real and social worlds of readers" (Gee, 2001, p. 711) so that the text becomes a means and a point of departure for understanding one's own history, linguistic, cultural contexts and trajectories.

In this CLA journey, the readers, with the help of teacher talk, will ask harder questions of texts, analyse the ways in which texts may impose certain realities and interests over readers and help them to deconstruct these textual realities in terms of the broader ideological and political systems of which they are part. Critical literacy awareness helps the readers engage with the unproblematised power of the author of text to make the reading relationship a negotiated and contested experience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper examined a Malaysian postgraduate student's intercultural negotiation of plurality and ambiguity at a culturally contested space through a post-modern qualitative research that describes thickly and interprets qualitatively what is happening in a formal higher education setting which is simultaneously informal. The latter involves encouraging the development of learner voice in the form of academic writing positioned alongside with 'informal and casual writing' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998), where the learner's national and or community languages are allowed.

The qualitative data discussed in this paper focus primarily on the teacher's talk and student's talk during classroom interactions over a semester. These classroom interactions were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis and coded thematically. This involved a corpus of approximately 120,000 words. Further, the paper analyzed the student's critical reflections in her written logs based on CLA teacher talk and on the recommended readings for the course, such as textual references in critical literacy from Paulo Freire (1970), Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987), James Paul Gee (2004), and Catherine Wallace (1988). The reflections captured the student's journeys in negotiating contested languages use and cultural knowledge framed against diverse ideological perspectives on literacy and language use. Additionally, the paper sought to investigate how critical reflections of the student are worded "during moments of upheaval and epiphany" as a

response to ideological texts and to "make sense of their experiences in terms of their meanings" (Denzin, 1991, p. 13). CLA pedagogy aims to reposition the multilingual meaning-makers' languages, ways of knowing and vernacular resources in relation to ideological perspectives on literacy (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Street, 1998; Wallace, 1988; Kress, 2003; Koo, 2009).

This paper is situated within qualitative research which may be seen as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 4-5). Qualitative research turns the world into a series of representations through the use of field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study individuals and communities in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 4-5). Hence, the primary concern of the paper is in engaging with a multilingual actor in a CLA classroom using a variety of theoretical and empirical materials, including the teacher's and student's talk in the classroom to create a dialogic genre in which critical knowledge is created and represented at the same time (Ellis & Bochner, 2002). These multiple lens into the site of teacher-student CLA engagement aimed to capture both significant and problematic moments and meanings in an individual actor's life. Qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices to build a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. Hence, there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5). Qualitative research is primarily concerned with veridicality and resonance with readers and living subjects.

Denzin, Lincoln and Giardina (2006, p. 776) write that this is a time of the prophetic post-pragmatist, as a critical moral agent, to create greater individual freedom in the broader social order. To understand that actions are judged in terms of moral consequences and the meanings one brings to them, and that consequences are socially constructed through the politics of representation in truth seeking, they assert that “facts” about the world should be taken as facticities, as lived experiences, with effects, consequences, actions on the domination structures (Denzin *et al.*, 2006, p. 777). In this phase:

The meaning of a concept or a line of action or a representation lies in the practical, political, moral and social consequences it produces for an actor or collectivity. The meanings of these consequences are not objectively given. They are established through social interaction and the politics of representation. All representations are historically situated, shaped by the intersecting contingencies of power, gender, race and class (Seigfried, 1996; Collins, 1998, 2000, as cited in Denzin *et al.*, 2006, p. 777).

The positivist, i.e. the so-called evidence based research (SBR), adheres to maintain a value-free objectivist science model and is unaware of the moral and political commitments of being a researcher. Denzin *et al.* (2006) assert that the experimental quantitative model does not critically interrogate:

... the complex and dynamic contexts of public education in its many forms, sites, and variations, especially considering the...subtle social difference produced by gender, race, ethnicity, linguistic status or class. Indeed, multiple kinds of knowledge, produced by multiple epistemologies and methodologies, are not only worth having but also demanded if policy,

legislation and practice are to be sensitive to social needs (Lincoln & Canella, 2004a. p. 7, cited in Denzin *et al.*, 2006, p. 770).

Data Analysis

In a response to the need for critical literacy, I developed a CLA method for multilingual domestic and international students undertaking a postgraduate master’s course on language and literacy (cf theoretical assumptions section). The course aims to explore issues on language and knowledge production through qualitative methodology. The CLA Instruction in this research involves two main stages, with two steps in each stage:

TABLE 1
CLA Instruction

Stage 1: CLA TEACHER DIALOGUES	Stage 2: CLA STUDENT TASKS
Step 1: Overt Instruction	Step 1: Group Dialogues
Step 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Framing • Literacy profiles • Relating profiles to key concepts • Reference texts • Literacy case-study 	Step 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformed Critical Literacy Practices • Literacy profiles • Situating key concepts in relation to profiles • Literacy reflections on concepts, references and case-studies

Subject

The main subject in this paper, Suzaini (not her real name) is a twenty-five year old full-time student who is working in an international bank. Born in Johor Bahru, Suzaini works as a customer service officer at an international bank in Kuala Lumpur with headquarters

in Singapore. She is currently pursuing her Master's degree in a local public university. The Malay language is her mother tongue and she is fairly fluent in English.

This paper analyzed her journeys through CLA pedagogy in a Malaysian postgraduate classroom. This included Suzaini's reflections in written logs and a research project based on her responses to teacher's talk (lectures) and to the reference texts that she has been assigned to read for the course.

Investigation into Characteristics of Student Reflections in Multilingual Contexts

The student's written reflections are communicated in a variety of codes, such as formal-informal codes, the use of academic and informal Malaysian English and code-switching. The use of the learner's diverse languages is encouraged so that she learns to negotiate her various funds of linguistic and cultural knowledge and in doing so helps in the construction of her own voice.

CLA: Teacher Intervention and Talk

During the classroom intervention, the concepts of CLA were explored in relation to language choice and meaning making. The teacher scaffolds CLA at critical moments to assist learners in a critical reflection on language use, language choice and meaning-making, particularly communities of practices in institutional context. In this regard, the teacher (the researcher herself) deconstructed the meanings that are dominantly and unproblematically accepted by the gatekeepers of texts (see extracts of teacher's talk).

CLA helps to build awareness on the naturalised reproductive role of language vis a vis its transformative role in meaning-making. By arguing that "*all texts are partial*" (unedited data from teacher's talk) and they capture only partial realities of social life, the teacher emphasized the subjectivity and ideological constructions in the interpretation and production of discourses. To sensitise students to the naturalised dominant values embedded in texts,

the teacher introduces to the students the concept of critical literacy as "mindfulness" in text and speech in social-cultural-political contexts. It is hoped that by bringing them into the process of re-thinking-rereading-rewriting-re-speaking of texts and speech, students will be able to present and construct social realities more deliberately and more critically and not to be unthinking in their overuse of literacy practices, routines and protocols in language education (Camnitzer, 2009), and more broadly, in social life. This is the heart of critical literacy, mindfulness of language use in speech and text in context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion is organized in terms of emergent themes from the corpus of 120,000 words. A summary of the context and the selected extracts is provided, followed by the data analysis. The followings are the emergent themes for the study:

- Theme 1: Challenging Culture as an Essentialistic Construct (see extracts 1 & 2).
- Theme 2: Critical Literacy: Situating voices and inhabiting agency in an institutional context (see extracts 3, 4 & 5).

In requiring Suzaini to write and to design as she reflected on her meaning-making, the teacher made attempt to help her become reflexively self aware of the ways in which her literacy as a meaning-maker has been shaped by her personal background and by her secondary life-worlds. Suzaini became conscious that languages and dialects are valued variously according to contexts. It is from this awareness ('conscientisation') that she becomes more sensitive to the ways in which meaning makers are positioned and where they may position themselves.

Challenging Culture as an Essentialistic Construct

In the following talk, the teacher drew upon her experience with the use of her mother tongue,

Hakka, to discuss the influence of cultural politics on language and literacy in society. She pointed out that any notion and understanding about language and literacy could be studied by examining dominant socio-political-economical structures and institutions which might be the causes of cultural loss and marginalization of minority languages within the society, by promoting the “superiority” of certain language use. Contestation towards such phenomenon is needed to sustain multilingualism.

Extract 1

So...they (referring to an article by Lankshear *et al.*, 1997) are saying that language and literacy is shaped by... ah... structures... uh economic structures, political structures, cultural structures. And these structures are like umm...you know like uh...uh...like for example the bank...the publishing house... the university...ah the government...ah the political party... the church...uh and so on. These these are structures these are organized these are emm political sociocultural economic structures...and they have a large say...they determine on some extent... ah...what is language and what is literacy. For example, I gave the example of when I was a child as a Hakka, uh...dominant language was Hakka. My Hakka in the colo uh post-colonial Malaya then before independence, just after independence was considered a minority language. And when I went to church, I was supposed to speak in... the language of the church which is English. In school, I was supposed to speak the language of the school which is English and Bahasa. So...you look that at... When you talk about language and literacy, not if I were to speak in the... good Hakka... or write in Ha-Hakka, which is actually Man-Mandarin based...I was still be considered... not someone who has

uh...dominant language and literacy... alright? So in another words I'm saying that the values around what is powerful language, what is powerful literacy is always linked to the sociopolitical structures and institutions... around it or embedded in it. So this is the orientation of the course that actually... any language and literacy... could be looked at in terms of uh... these kind of structures and these kind of organizations. So, in other words, you cannot say for example English is intrinsically a superior language. Or Hakka is intrinsically. But you look at it in terms of the cultural- politics. Why is English such a privileged language uh...today. It's not because it is intrinsically superior! But it is because of its history of privilege... okay? So I look at it uh...in terms of cultural politics. Emm...I think those of you who've attended my course last year... uh I actually shared with you an article that I wrote on the cultural politics of the English language in terms of internationalization. Right? That students coming in from international environment have to...acquire the the English language...uh of a certain kind to be able to get through the system. And this is uh done both in in any kind of international site now where English is privilege. So I'm looking at the cultural politics of English and I'm saying that... uh it is not just English of any kind but it is academic English in the university environment. So you've to write in a certain way, you have to speak in a certain way uh...to gain access and to get to graduate. What then is the... what then is the role of the educationist... in in this kind of uh... context? Do we... do we not have to be critically literate... about this kind of Englishes or any kind of language for that matter. And to be able in some ways, to help our students in some way

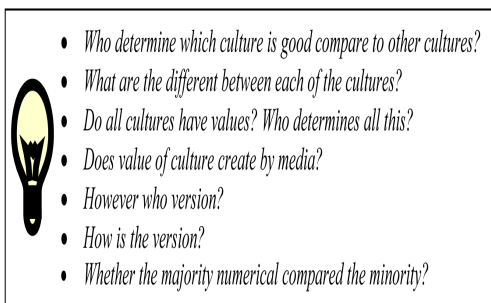
to make the transition, to make the shift between uh languages or language varieties that are privilege and uh... have value... have prestige to those that they... are actually enter university with. How do we make the transitions? And how do we help them in the transition? It's such a terribly a difficult job? I-I-I-I-I don't have the answers to all of it. But I'm saying that ah if uh the educationist or the teacher is aware of that there are... language and language varieties and language codes that are... considered better than others, considered more privileged than others. The teacher's role is to understand why they are better. Alright? And to talk the students around it and I wish I had someone who had talked to me about the cultural politics of Hakka when I was much much younger. Because in some ways it built within me when I was young, a deep-seated anxiety about my own languages. And uh... uh psyche... about my Hakka... emm... the the the value of Hakka in my... uh in my uh... in my development as a as a meaning maker. And the value of it. And I think in some ways because there there was not so much critical literacy around that uh... in some ways I think, I suffered cultural loss... So that, English has become much stronger force in my life than Hakka... should actually has been maintained as much but it wasn't. Sadly. So... I find that uh if we want to sustain multilingualism in the world... I think this contestation... should be there. I mean I'm not I'm I'm not saying that we don't learn English yeah. I'm not saying that. I'm just said that we learn English alongside... other languages... maintain it alongside other languages. And and and uh have debates around cultural politics of of English... In other words, the teacher should have a critical literacy I'm saying. Around... ah... the kind

of languages that we are teaching in schools or in the universities (unedited transcript of teacher's talk, 2009, September 15, lines 6-76).

By allowing Suzaini the space to write her reflective logs using 'informal and casual writing' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) including informal and 'unstandard' English in her written logs alongside standard languages, the researcher (who is the teacher) has provided the learner with a third space where she enters the fray of contested positions on English language use vis a vis international and community languages. For example, after attending a lecture on language and cultural process (see extract 1) and by reading a reference text by Lankshear *et al.* (1997) (see extract 2), Suzaini included her reflection on the text revealing the vexed question of essentialised plural identities and the 'naturalised' cultures of a Malaysian.

Extract 2

When I read this article, I question myself which culture do I belong? I am Malay but what are the identities of Malay culture that I represent? The way I eat, speaks, wear or do I belong to Malay culture? Culture is not only was derived from our ancestor but as well the influence by surround us, media and many other factors. Nowadays, media play a big role to create value of culture. For example how media gives value to the entire Hollywood actor and actress, singer, and others. How we as viewer, accept the advertisement on the what beauty is? Which culture that has high prestige?



No matter which culture that we belong, we should be able to know why we choose this culture, and makes you belong to this culture or maybe you wants to create your culture (unedited student's written logs, 2009, August 4).

Here, Suzaini consciously reflected on the cultural ambiguity of being modern Malay. She attempted to explore the ambivalence of her multiple identities, situated in overlapping and competing culturally spaces with multiple languages and dialects and various cultural funds of knowledge. Although she is a member of the majority ethnic group or the Malays, she deconstructed the seemingly 'easy description' imposed on her identity in relation to other cultural groups by articulating the following, "Who determine which culture is good compare to other cultures?", "Who determines all this", "However who version?" (unedited data from her written reflective logs) whereby she was referring to the imposed and essentialised constructions of what were seen to be fixed identities. Her ambivalence and tensions on cultural ambiguity indicate how the relationship and the subjectivity of language and culture is re-interpreted and re-produced in discursive interaction.

Critical Literacy: Situating voices and inhabiting agency in an institutional context

Suzaini's experience in the global bank industry not only gives her exposure to bank products and services but also to customers from diverse backgrounds, including those from different ethnics, socioeconomic classes, languages, gender, age and lifestyles within Malaysia.

As a senior officer in an international bank (with headquarters in Singapore), she has to manage the retail & commercial banking inquiries at her workplace, especially with clients from all walks of life. She recalled that one of the more challenging experiences she has had was when she was caught in-between the bank's requirement to comply to the bank procedures that no code-switching should be used when dealing with customers, and to fulfil her customers' needs at the same time, especially in terms of non-standard English use as well as vernacular language use.

To meet the bank's general requirements and procedures in customer servicing, Suzaini is required to "speak Standard English" (unedited extract from her reflective logs) to convey the identity and image of the bank as an international organization following "international" standards of language use.

In the teacher's talk (cf extract 3) on the cultural politics of English language use, the teacher problematised the notion of a self-evident "Standard English", situating the discourse as one which is opened to debate:

Extract 3

And people who speak those kind of standard English... have much more... prestige. But this is not because that language has a class on its own. It's not intrinsic. But that is because people who actually spoke... the standard... had access to publish in the houses like Routledge and so on. You know. They control the BBC for a long time. Alright? So... they... this uh prestige factor is because they have had the resources. The historical cultural ... resources. The economic resources to be where they are. Okay? So like uh my debate about English as a lingua franca... that is actually something that is marginalized. ELF oh you speak the ELF English it's such a... it's a pariah English. What do you want to why do you want to be associated with that.

That's because of cultural politics. Because ELF is still in the margins. It has not got uh the status that it wants to have at some point in time, that is the right of people like us multilingual to have ELF... So at the moment it still at the margins. But we want to enter into the field. We want to have a debate around it. Right? But we have unequal resources. So whether or not we make it I don't know (unedited transcript of teacher's talk, 2009, August 4, lines 747-763).

The following extract of student's talk (extract 4) illustrates the naturalized and dominant construction of Native Speaker Model as the only 'standard' permitted for English language in the bank Suzaini serves. Although she appeared to be mouthing the official discourse of the bank, she was in fact speaking against it, as shown in an ironic manner in her tone of voice.

Extract 4

Student: If you want to speak in English, do it all the way.
(*said sarcastically) (unedited transcript of student's talk, 2009, August 18, line 1707)

Many of Suzaini's customers are of Malay ethnic and Malaysian Chinese who do not speak Standard, 'Native-Speaker' English. In line with the bank's image, however, the scripts for bank products and promotion given to customer service officers are written in formal 'Standard English'. Suzaini notes that the bank officers are not allowed to code-switch when they are communicating with clients over the phone. In the Social English of multilingual Malaysians, code-switching is typical (Jacobson, 2004; Paramasivam Muthusamy, 2010). Thus, it is not surprising that the dogmatic policy of the bank in enforcing "Standard English" has caused inquiries to pile up and expressions of frustration

from the multilingual customers who are more comfortable with informal spoken English and code switching, especially in face-to-face communication (Koo, 2008).

Suzaini eventually proposed to her bank manager to translate the English language scripts into Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) to facilitate communication with Malaysian clients. Here, she was exercising praxis in terms of utilizing multilingual resources to enhance the bank services. That was eventually taken up.

Through her initiative in designing different Malay language scripts for the bank products and services, Suzaini has become more aware of her roles and responsibilities as a cultural/linguistic mediator in applying and packaging local resources and knowledge to serve the local customers who are less proficient in the 'Standard English' that the bank advocates.

Extract 5

Student: Uh... during as spoken, yes. Only now, because I, I feel like... okay uh for me to speak with those uh... Mister or Misses from Bank ABC you know, from Pahang, Bentong. I don't... I believe that...

Lecturer: STANDARD ENGLISH?

Student: Yes. And they have like, you know, "*fantastic, Sir, this is promotion*", even a customer asked me about the internet. I mean the, the setting of the PC. I can't use like, you know, firewall everything. They might not familiar but they have to, I mean have that. So, I try to get it uh... I try to come up with a standard scripts... At the same time I try to have another script which is... okay, if you come across with this kind of customer, which language that you should use? Because you are not allowed to do a... uh code switch... (unedited transcript of teacher's and student's talk, August 18, 2009; lines 1672- 1684).

By engaging the student's life experiences at work, the teacher was exploring the issues of diversity in language use using CLA instruction. In this particular case, the issue of the bank's institutional power and its sole preoccupation with a single "standard English" is critically reflected by Suzaini in relation to the Malaysian client's 'othered' languages, such as spoken Malaysian English, spoken Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Tamil. The student's own rising critical consciousness of such hegemonic assumptions imposed on the customers and the staff of the bank are raised through teacher's talk. Through CLA discussions, the student became even more aware of the ideologically positioning and construction of what is "standard" according to naturalized and dominant economic and media systems of meaning. In this particular case, she was able to convince the bank that Bahasa Melayu would be an appropriate means of communication. However, the use of informal English as a social variety remains elusive, at least in the minds of the bank that she works in.

CONCLUSION

The pedagogical framework on CLA explored in this paper sought to help multilingual and culturally diverse students to think critically through their plural identities and the possibilities in the representations of such complex identities in diverse linguistic and cultural ways. Through CLA pedagogy, meaning makers like Suzaini interrogate the use of English Language codes, registers and genres and those of their national and community languages to form what would be regarded as their multilingual repertoire of languages and more broadly, their funds of knowledge. In the very use of Standard English, Malaysian English (and its varieties), meaning-makers (like Suzaini) create a discursive space through which she becomes conscious of herself as occupying complex composite and competing subject positions, both in higher education and in the workplace. Through CLA, learners begin to systematically reflect, question and challenge the boundaries of what is unproblematically defined as 'academic' in relation to the vernacular,

or what is acceptable "standard" language, knowledge and behaviour in context and the issue of power in the institutional recognition of text and speech.

Inclusive educational policy and provisions, as well as classroom practice, are imperative to support the teaching and learning of critical literacy to sustain diversity in institutional, national and global contexts, which are increasingly subject to cultural differences and positions. Indeed, the teaching and learning of critical literacy are crucial to democratic process to sustain the inclusive participation of meaning-makers of diverse ideological, linguistic and cultural contexts.

IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the critical literacy framework drawn from the ideological perspective of literacy, students' literacy is based on the understanding of the student's extant sociocultural context and trajectories in relation to the possibilities of language and knowledge production. CLA stresses pedagogic and learning interventions and processes, where teachers create learner's awareness of knowledge gained from various life-experiences, both in the primary and secondary life-worlds through understanding learner's entry profiles (composite profiles of school, family and community contexts). CLA begins with understanding the learners' diverse language profile as a point of entry into the shaping of his/her own cultural consciousness towards praxis, an action that enlarges their worlds and by extension of that of humanity in its diversity.

Dominant gatekeeper valuations of standard practices, including that of the standard literacy practices in the workplace, tend to be normalized and fixated to decontextualised autonomous 'standards' in the name of 'international' norms or image. Gatekeepers may often be blind to the unquestioned acceptance and reproduction of dominant beliefs, norms, meanings and values embedded in the naturalised 'standards' in language use and meaning making in any

discourse. The current study and others (Koo, 2003, 2008) suggest that ideological larger structural and institutional issues are involved in any system of recognition of language use and of meaning production. For an equitable and sustainable HE policy and pedagogy, the vexed question of the diverse ways of knowing, meaning-making practices, languages should be debated as a commitment to the ethic of inclusion and democratic participation.

The qualitative findings illustrate that meaning-making in CLA education requires dialogic conversation and the processes of intercultural and interlingual negotiations at the site of learning. In this paper, the teacher's role in scaffolding learning was explored so that student's talk and writing involving critical literacy will gain increasing legitimacy. In CLA teaching and learning involving cultural production, the fact of the politics of recognition in language use and in knowledge production has to be brought to learner's awareness and action. Cultural contestations must go on especially within dominant and naturalised systems of power before other language/s, and other local discourses gain some kind of recognition. Meanwhile, minoritised or marginalized meaning-makers in language use have more convincing to do before they can enter the fray of cultural politics and win. Perhaps, one way is through entering into the relationship webs of meaning-makers (third space networks, e-networks). Perhaps increasing symbolic work required in innovation may provide opportunities for inclusive and alternative meaning-making in higher education and the workplace.

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