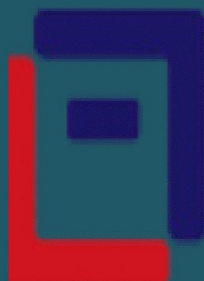


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**EXPLORING POSSIBLE IDENTITIES FOR POSSIBLE
PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES IN AN AFTERSCHOOL BOOK
CLUB**

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Abstract

Purpose of the study. This self-inquiry study explores the author's identities and language use in an elementary afterschool book club. The author applies a sociocultural lens to understand how identity is constructed and reconstructed in an afterschool book club. In addition, the author closely examines how language use allows and prohibits elementary girls' participation in the book discussion. **Design and methods.** Data are collected from audio and video recording and the author's observational field notes from each book club meeting. Gee's (2011) and Fairclough's (2001) concepts of critical discourse analysis are used to help interpret and explain the data. **Results.** The findings illustrate that a default teacher identity emerges dominantly in the group discussion. The teacher identity helps scaffold as well as limit the group conversation. In addition, the findings show that changes of author's identity have an impact on creating participation opportunities for elementary girls to enact different identities. Moreover, examining language use allows the author to pay attention to discourses that empower and hinder the girls' participation. Lastly, the findings show that both power in discourse and behind discourse have a strong impact on how we make sense of the world and our identity. **Implications.** This study raises the concern about the possible discourses and identities in the mainstream classroom in K-12 setting and suggests implications for teacher education. Also this study can help shed lights into a deeper understanding of the relationship between identity and learning for researchers and scholars.

Key words: teacher identity, afterschool book club, critical discourse analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

This self-inquiry language and identity study was inspired by my participation in an afterschool research project. Since September 2012, I was invited to participate in a research project, led by professors in the Language, Literacy, and Culture program at the University of Iowa. The research project is an elementary afterschool book club named Strong Girls Read Strong Books. The goal of this book club aims to enhance 4th-6th grade elementary school girls' reading comprehension and the awareness of their gender roles. My role in the book club is to lead a group of girls and talk about books with strong female protagonists. While I was working with a group of 4th graders, I found the challenges of inviting the elementary girls to participate in the book discussion. Also, I found that I constantly questioned the identities that I should perform and possible roles that I could play to invite girls' participation in this afterschool school setting. The questions that I recorded in my field notes after each book club meeting pushed me to rethink my own identities, teaching practices, and approaches to create learning opportunities for students. Thus, my participation in the informal afterschool book club has driven me to conduct this study to not only investigate my identity in the afterschool book club but also identify ways to increase students' learning opportunities.

In the past three decades, scholars in the language and literacy education fields have highlighted the importance of taking sociocultural factors into consideration when examining and creating learning opportunities for students with diverse learning needs.

Sociocultural scholars believe that learning is a social practice and it is patterned by social institutions and power relationships (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Blackledge (2000) argues that it is impossible to isolate the larger political, economic, and cultural influences in a society if we want to gain a deeper understating of how learning takes place in social activities. In addition, sociocultural scholars have shown that student' interactions and practices in the local and larger social world will help construct and reconstruct their social identities (Lewis, Encisco, & Moje, 2007). In other words, our social identities are constructed through our everyday discursive practices.

An increasing number of identity studies in the language and literacy fields have emphasized the relationship between learning and identity.



Scholars on identity research suggest a poststructuralist lens to understand identity as not fixed and stable; it is complicated and it changes when individual interacts with different people and in different time and space (Davies & Harré, 1990; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2001). That is to say, identity construction is constantly shaped and reshaped through both individual's self-perception and how other people perceive her. Most research on identity in language and literacy learning has acknowledged the importance of understanding students' identity construction. However, there is not enough research on teachers' identity positions and how their identity positions affect students' learning. Furthermore, exploring identity in both formal and informal school settings might add to educators' understanding of identity constructions. Scholars have highlighted that discourses that teachers believe, value, or learn from their discursive practices might empower some students and marginalize others (Moje & Lewis, 2007; Blackledge, 2000). For instance, Blackledge's (2000) study showed that although American classrooms have become more multicultural and multilingual, some teachers' language and literacy practices in the mainstream classroom still benefit native English speaking students and often marginalized students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

By acknowledging the inseparable relationship between identity, language, and learning, this qualitative study focuses on my participation with a group of ethnically diverse elementary 4th graders in an after school book club. The purpose of this research is to understand my identities that emerged in Strong Girls Read Strong Books and how my language use influenced girls' participation in the group. In this study, I investigated the following two research questions:

- 1) What does the language in the transcripts reveal about my identities in this book discussion group?
- 2) How do I use language in these identities to empower or hinder girls' interactions in this book discussion group?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Identity and sociocultural perspective

Identity, from a sociocultural perspective, is multilayered, relational, and in flux (Davies & Harré, 1990; R Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). In literacy education, both students and teachers shape and are shaped by how individuals think about others and themselves through different literacy practices, such as reading, writing, and discussing texts (Sutherland, 2005). Moreover, Hall (2000) points out that:

Identity is not already “there”; rather, it is a production, emergent, in process.

It is situational— it shifts from context to context. The identity passionately

espoused in one public scenario is more ambiguously and ambivalently “lived”

in private. Its contradictions are negotiated, not “resolved” (p. xi).

In other words, our identities are shaped and represented through participation in different contexts, and our identities might change, conflict, or overlap when we are in different discourse communities. Research on identity has shown that learning occurs if both students and teachers are more aware of the complexity of identity and factors that influence identity construction, such as gender, social class, race, and ethnicity (Block, 2007).

The practice of classroom communication cannot be separated from sociocultural factors and cultural practices in the larger community (Mehan, 1996). Fairclough (2001) pointed out that we use language in social communities and enact different power relationships, that is, “language is part of a society, language is a social practice and language is a socially conditioned process” (p.22). In addition, language never occurs neutrally; it constructs and is constructed by daily life interactions (Roger, 2011). Therefore, by using languages and interacting with other people in our everyday practices, we construct our identities by interacting with people from multiple discourse communities. By employing a sociocultural perspective, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding how my identity is shaped and reshaped and how language is used to provide and inhibit participation opportunities in Strong Girls Read Strong Books.

2.2. Discourses, Figured Worlds, and Member's Resources

Gee (2011) points out that in order to let other people recognize our social identity, we used different language styles and variety of languages in to build up a certain identity in a particular social setting, which he refers as social languages. In addition to social language, we also use actions, dress, symbols, thinking, values, and feelings to enact a certain identity. Gee (2011) proposes that the combination of these identity kits and language that help build up a particular socially recognizable identities is referred as capital "D" Discourses. One important tool to investigate identity is to examine how we use language in different discourse communities (Gee, 2011; Fairclough, 2001). Discourses and social languages communities can be understood as people use their language, actions, interactions, thinking, or values to perform and enact a particular recognizable identity in a social community, such as a teacher, a graduate student, a house wife, an officer, a lawyer, a professor, and so on.

Social languages and Discourses are crucial tools of inquiry to explore social identities. In addition, Gee's (2011) concept of figured worlds also helps to examine possible identities and factors that invite and prohibit the girls' participation in Strong Girls Read Strong Books. According to Gee (2011), figured worlds are "simplified, often unconscious, and taken-for-granted theories or stories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently with our daily lives" (p.76). Therefore, figured worlds can help explain how words or behaviors are interpreted in a certain way from both macro and micro social levels. Fairclough's (2001) notion of member resources (MR) allows researchers to take a critical stance to understand how individuals interpret the social contexts in order to enact a certain identity. MR can be seen as interpretation procedures; that is, individuals construct meanings in a situational context according to the external cues around them and their previous background knowledge (Fairclough, 2001). Both Gee's (2011) figured worlds and Fairclough's (2001) member's resources are crucial to support the understanding of my identities emerged in Strong Girls Read Strong Books and how the situational contexts influence my identity positions.

2.3. Critical discourse analysis

In order to take a critical lens to understand identity construction and examine how language use influence participation, I drew on the tools of critical discourse analysis CDA in this study (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2011). Rogers (2004) states that "CDA is both a theory and a method" (p.2) and it is different from other discourse analysis methods because it not only describes

and interprets a discourse in a specific context, but also explains the relationships of power in the discourse (Lewis, 2006). Power is complex, and surfaces in multiple ways (Gutierrez, Rymes & Larson, 1995). In addition, when a person participates in the practices of a particular community, power can be learned and becomes part of the person's identity.

Gee (2011) states that we use language to act, do things, negotiate and construct meanings. He points out that we often simultaneously use language to build up seven tasks: *significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge*. Fairclough's notion of CDA also adds to examine how language is used to empower and inhibit the girls' participation in the book discussion group. Fairclough (2001) not only emphasizes the importance of discourse analysis but also encourages analysts to examine the data from a critical stance and look closely at power and ideologies behind our everyday language. In addition, he proposes three dimensions of CDA- description of the text, interpretation of the relationship between the text and its interactions, and explanation of relationships between various interactions and the larger social structure. Thus, CDA can help researchers learn how power and ideologies shape identity construction.

3. DESIGN AND METHODS

The study applied a qualitative research method to investigate my identity and Discourses that empower and hinder girls' participation in an afterschool book club.

3.1. Setting

This qualitative research study was part of a larger research project that focuses on improving female elementary students' reading development and helping them be more aware of their gender roles in an afterschool project. The elementary school is located in the Midwest of the United States. The school is racially mixed, with approximately 71% of the students qualifying as minority non-white students. Racially, the school is 39.3% Black, 28.7% White, 22.55% Hispanic, 6% of Asian and Pacific Islander, and 2.65% of other or mixed races (Common Core of Data in 2012). The larger research project includes approximately 35 girls, and the average attendance for each book club meeting is about 25 to 30 girls.

The research team consists of professors, graduate students, and preservice undergraduate student teacher from College of Education. In order to maintain reading quality, six to eight girls are assigned to different research members. The book club intends to provide the girls with a



comfortable setting in which to read books with strong female protagonists and participate and respond to books from a critical stance. The leaders design various activities to respond to literature and engage the students in reading books, for instance, reading aloud, drawing, acting out, discussing books, creating artistic works, team working, dancing, and inviting successful strong women to talk to the girls.

3.2. My Positionality in the Research

Before participating in the Strong Girl Read Strong Books research project, three major social identities constructed who I was in this book club. I saw myself as an independent Asian female international student who had lived in the US for four and half years. I was an English teacher for many years and worked with students from different age groups, but my experiences of working with American students were new. Also, I am a Ph.D. student who is constantly practicing my critical perspective and interested in gender issues in education. In this role, I am currently teaching preservice elementary education undergraduate students to help them gain a better understanding of children's literature and explore teaching approaches to better read and respond to children's literature. My expected role in this book club was to create a safe and comfortable reading environment for girls to enjoy reading and try to create equal opportunities for them to share their responses to literature. Moreover, the group leaders are encouraged to use this afterschool book club as a space to improve our professional development as teachers, leaders, and researchers. Thus, participating in this research project has provided opportunities for me to make connections between theory and practice.

3.3. Data Collection

Data from this study was collected from January 2013 to May 2013. The data were collected through audio recordings from book club discussions and my field notes from observations. In my field notes, I recorded critical instant that I observed from each book discussion meeting. In this study, I was the participant observer as well as the group leader in order to immerse myself in the cultural and the social setting and gain an insider's perspective to understand how power was enacted through language practices in this book discussion.



3.4. Data Analysis Procedures

Before transcribing, I first read all of my observational field notes, applied open coding approach to identify themes that I recoded in the field notes. I then found out the critical moment from the video and audio recordings and transcribed the critical events. After transcribing the critical events from the video or audio recordings, I took notes on the transcripts that are relevant to the research questions. Then, I applied an “*analytical coding*” strategy when analyzing the marked notes from the previous open coding step (Richard, 2005, p. 94). Richard (2005) describes that analytical coding is defined as “coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning” and which goes beyond open coding. In the second stage, I revisited my data to find out the discourses within the data and coded the data in terms of Gee’s (2011) building tasks, *identities*, *relationships*, and *politics*, by looking at the social languages, the Discourse, the Conversation and the cross-reference that occurred in our book club discussion. This stage provided a better understanding of how language works to build up different tasks in a larger Discourse. In the last stage, I employed Fairclough’s (2001) questions to examine the book discussion: “What relational values do words have?” “What relational values do grammatical features have?” “What interactional conventions are used?” and “What larger-scale structure does the text have” (p.92-93)? For instance, when analyzing my data, I attended closely to the use of pronouns when investigating my identities in this book discussion group, like “you,” “us,” “I,” or “me” indicated positioning of self in relation to others. The process of my analyses was not linear; rather, it was recursive. I revisited my data many times until some themes emerged and chose the parts that were most salient to my research questions. The following table is a summary of the data source and tools used in each research question.

Table 1. A summary of data sources and data analysis

Research Question	Data Source	Tools for Analysis
1. What does the language in the transcripts reveal about my identities in this book discussion group?	1. Transcripts from the audio/video files 2. Observational field notes	1. Open coding 2. Analytical coding 3. Gee’s Discourse question: “What identity or identity in this piece of language being used to enact”
2. How do I use language to empower or hinder girls’ interactions in this book discussion group?	1. Transcripts from the audio/video files 2. Observational field notes	1. Gee’s seven building block- <i>identity</i> , <i>politics</i> , and <i>relationships</i> . 2. Fairclough’s three dimension and guiding questions



4. FINDINGS

Socially situated identities are mutually co-constructed in every day conversation (Gee, 2010). In order to find out what identities I revealed in the transcripts, I focused on how socially significant identities were mutually constructed in language and what my identities had to do with situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, and Discourse. Therefore, I used Gee's (2010) discourse analysis questions to guide my analysis: "What identity in this piece of language being used to enact?" (p.18). I first separated my transcripts into different stanzas according to different themes. Then, I looked closely at the social language and pronouns that I used in different stanzas in my transcripts. The following discussion includes themes related to my default teacher identity and identity changes as they impact participation.

4.1. The Default Position-Teacher Identity

Although the book club took place in an informal school setting and the group leaders were encouraged to enact and explore different approaches to lead discussion, the data shows that my major identity that emerged in the group discussion was the default position, teacher identity. The following example took place before reading a new multicultural children's book *Inside Out and Back Again*, a free verse novel written by Thanhha Lai. The extract in the below example took place when I asked the girls to read the book cover and make a prediction about the book.

Me: Now let's take a look on the book cover. What do you see on the book cover? What did you notice?

S1: She looks like she is free...

Me: I like that. She is like she is free, right? And I am not sure if she wears shoes. I don't know. What else did you notice?

S2: Maybe she is homeless, like she has nowhere to go.

Me: Homeless? Nowhere to go?

S2: Her dress looks like that it was made of flower pedals.

Me: Good observation! I like your observation on the book cover about the texture of the girl's clothes. What else? Maybe we can take a look at it later. And do you know where the story took place?
(pause) OK. The story is *Inside Out and Back Again*. We will learn and you will know the main character Ha's story. The author's name is Thanhha Lai, so do you want to guess where she was from?

In the beginning of the extract, I first initiated the questions related to the book, gave a positive comment followed by the girl's response, and asked a follow-up question. Then I gave the girls instructions about what would happen later, provided information about the book, and then asked the girls to make predictions about the author's background information. The exchange between the girls and I parallel the traditional classroom conversation patterns: initiation, response, and evaluation. Additionally, I used the word "learn" in this part, which might activate the girls' member resources (Fairclough, 2001) and help them make connections to their school learning experiences and further reinforce the teacher-student relationship. The extract illustrates that I assumed a teacher identity in the beginning of reading the new book. A similar situation happened in the following excerpt:

(I asked the girls to pay attention to the illustration of the book cover.)

S1: I have a question.

Me: Yeah?

S1: Why do the leaves on the board turning into like flying bird and flying away?

Me: That's a good question! I didn't notice that. PLEASE write it down for me. And LATER we can have a discussion. And I like your observation.

S2: I think there is something on the tree. It looks like a ...I don't know this one.

Me: The tree is very similar to this *(show the pictures of a papaya tree)* ok?

S2: I think there is something on the tree.

Me: Yeah. I think so.

In the extract, I not only complimented the girl's behavior of asking a question related to the reading topic but also asked the girls to take notes in their journal. I stressed the word "PLEASE" and the word "LATER" to emphasize my expectation of their writing and the discussion activity, which represents my power of taking control of the group. In addition, the pronouns in "for me" and "you" were distinguished and they distanced my teacher identity from the girls' and showed my power over them. Moreover, the instructions and explanations displayed in the transcripts indicate my role as a teacher who held the power of the reading process and constructed and reconstructed literacy practices in Strong Girls Read Strong Books.

The default position of my teacher identity was not unidirectional; instead, it was constructed and reconstructed through both the girls and me to recreate the discourse of a student-teacher interaction. The conventional

turn-taking patterns between my interactions with the girls resemble the traditional classroom interaction: initiation, response, and evaluation. In addition to the verbal behaviors, nonverbal behaviors of the student-teacher interaction were found from the video data. For instance, the girls often raised their hands and asked for my permission before sharing their ideas. The student-teacher interaction illustrated that I positioned myself in the default teacher identity, the students recognized my social identity, and positioned me as the authority in the group.

Although I was aware that the setting of this literacy practice was in an informal school setting and group leaders were encouraged to try different roles, the patterns of conversational interactions, verbal and nonverbal behaviors, and social languages in the book club were similar to literacy practices in many mainstream classrooms, such as a teacher controlling the floor, asking comprehension questions, giving instructions, and evaluating responses. The default position of my teacher identity suggests that the student-teacher interaction helps scaffold the girls' background information about discussing and comprehending a book based on classroom practices. However, the conventional interaction patterns might also reinforce teachers' power that prohibit the girls' participation in the group and recreate an asymmetrical structure in the group that favors girls who are more familiar with classroom discussion.

4.2. Opportunities for Involvement- Change as They Impact Participation

The purposes of this study is not only to explore my possible identities but also to investigate how shifting between different identities influences the girls' participation in the book discussion. One critical moment that documented a change in their participation took place when my learner/outsider identity emerged in the group discussion. This learner/outsider identity occurred in two different situations. The first learner's identity occurred when I encountered questions related to American culture or cultures with which I was not familiar. The following excerpt took place when I encountered information that I did not know and my interactions with the girls showed my identity as an outsider of the culture.

(After reading aloud the part about New Year's traditions in Vietnam in the book)

Me: Can you tell me what are some differences between the activities you do in New Year and the activities she (the main character, Ha) does in the New Year?



- S1: They wore new clothes.
Me: Did you wear new clothes?
S2: No, (*some girls shaking their heads.*) we don't. But we get together with family and have fun.
S1: My mom cooks special food on New Year's Day.
S2: I know some countries celebrate their new year on a different date.
S3: Yeah! Like Chinese celebrate their new year on a different date.

In the beginning of this extract, I first assumed my teacher's identity to ask questions and let the girls make connections between their life experiences and the main character in the book. The pronoun "you" used in my first question can be interpreted as a collective pronoun, which refers to all the girls in the group or Americans, or people who are familiar with New Year activities in an American setting. On the other hand, the pronoun "me" in the question refers to my role as an international student who sought information from the girls. The extract shows that when the first girl shared her family New Year culture, other girls started participating in the conversation by adding on their member resource and knowledge of New Year customs. The change of my identity in this extract showed the shifts of power and which allowed the girls to take more active roles in the discussion and create a new figured world beyond their schooling experience in Strong Girls Read Strong Books.

The second learner/outsider situation of my assumption as a learner occurred when I used language to construct my identity as one of the readers in the book club. Different from my identity as an international learner, the below extract is an example that I pretended to be a learner and asked explicit questions in order to elicit the girls' information about the book.

- Me: You need to help me figure out what is "Inside out and back again."
....
Me: And, and there is a very difficult word, like *bánh chưng* (*a traditional food eaten in Vietnam's New Year*), do you know what that means?
(*Turn toward S1*)
S1: I don't know how to pronounce the word but I know it is a tradition food that people eat in Vietnam, especially in New Year.

In the first part of the extract, I used the word "help" to not only ask the girls



to help me make sense of the story but also invite them to participate in the meaning-making process in the book discussion. Likewise, in the second part of the extract, I positioned myself as a learner to invite them to contribute their knowledge in the group discussion. Moreover, I asked more questions about Vietnamese culture from the book to show my identity as a learner and initiate interaction with the girls when I learned that one girl's (S1) parents emigrated from Vietnam. The patterns of seeking help from the same girls when reading this book occurred repeatedly in the data.

The changes of my identity as a learner/ outsider of American culture changed the group and power dynamic which allowed the girls to enact their agency and assume different identities. The change of both the girls' and my identity empowered the girls and created space for them to assume different identities. Additionally, the data shows that although I tried to seek information from the Vietnamese American girl (S1), her reply of not knowing Vietnamese indicated my misassumption about the girls' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. My misassumption illustrated that the Vietnamese American student was positioned by me as the expert of Vietnamese culture in the group based on my limited understanding and assumption about her.

Another incident of a change of the girls' participation was found when I enacted my identity as a member of Strong Girls Read Strong Books. In this identity category, I focused on using the Conversation as my inquiry tool (Gee, 2011) to decide what group member I belonged to in different community. When talking about topics that were related to personal experiences, my role shifted back to a reader in this book discussion group.

Me: (*reading aloud from the book*) fractions into percentages, to nurse my papaya tree to bear many fruits. But last night I pouted when mother insisted one of my brothers must raise...rise first this morning to bless our house because ONLY male feet can bring luck.

S1: what?

S2: What?

Me: WHAT? (*raising the tone*)

S3: uh...you said insist, it's insisted.

Me: insisted. Oh, I am sorry. Thank you. Do you want to say something about that?

S2: It's not fair, because it's only for male, because they said males are stronger than women. They said a lot about men.

Me: Yeah, I like that. It's unfair.

....



S4: I don't like that, either. Because every time the boy can always do
(a lot of things), but we can't, like basketball. I don't like that.
Me: You don't like that. Ok
S4: Because they think they know everything and they can do
everything.
Me: But do you tell your parents: I WANT TO GO FIRST! (*raising the
tone*)
(*The girls' voices overlap*) Um

The beginning part of the extract shows that the discussion of gender issue occurred when they found that men's foot feet were seen as a lucky symbol in Vietnamese culture in the story. I purposely stressed my tone when reading the word "ONLY." My reply of "WHAT?" followed by two girls surprising reaction demonstrated my disagreement with the Vietnamese gender culture. The girls' emotional response showed their negative feelings toward the figured world of the main character's culture. Their negative reactions indicated that the gender roles in the story conflicted their member's resource and broke their naturalization. The changes of the girls' voices and overlapping exchange showed their involvement in the discussion process when they found the gap of gender practices between their life experiences and the girl's in the story. That is to say, the shifts from my teacher identity to a member in Strong Girls Read Strong Books created opportunities for girls to construct a shared group identity for this girl-only book club.

To answer my research question one, the data shows that my teacher identity was the most obvious identity that emerged in the book discussion group. Other identities that had impact on group interaction were my identities as a learner or an international student and my identity as a member in this group.

4.3. Language use, power, and opportunity for participation

4.3.1. Power in discourse

In addition to examining my multiple identities that emerged in the book club, I paid closely attention to how I used language to create my multiple social identities to invite and hinder the girls' participation. Fairclough's (2001) three questions were used as guidelines to help me answer my research questions: What relational values do words have?" "What relational values do grammatical features have?" "What interactional conventions are used? "and "What larger-scale structure does the text have" (p.92-93)? I closely looked at my interactions with the girls and the critical moments that opened more



opportunities for engagement and situations that terminated the girl's conversation and interaction.

First, I looked at the patterns of the relational value shown in the transcripts. I found that the girls were more willing to participate in the discussion and express their opinions when I gave positive feedback, such as "yeah!" "I like that" "that's great!" Also, I used a lot of grammatical questions (wh-questions) to explore more information from the girls and drew their member resources, for instance, "What will you bring if you only have one choice?" "How do you pronounce this word?" "Which one will you choose?" "What about you," and so on. Moreover, I looked at the turn taking relationship between each girl and me. I found that some girls were offered more opportunities to take the floor in the book discussion and some were skipped or ignored by my interruption. The following extract took place when I found one girl (S2) played a dominant role in the group and took over power from other girls. The data shows that I skipped the girl's (S3) comment and turned to talk to girls who reminded silent in the group.

(The girls were having a discussion about what they wanted to bring if they were only allowed to bring five items with them to escape their home to a new country)

S1: but you have to choose (what to bring). I will bring my dog.

Me: But you are already hungry and you then you have to feed your dog.

S2: So you got to eat them all.

S2: But I got a question.

Me: So what will you bring? *(turning toward S3)*

S3: I will bring food, quality books, and money and if I have some room,
I will bring my pet unicorn *(girls start talking to each other)*

Me: Ok, girls. I cannot hear her. Can you say that again?

S3: I said I will bring food, clothes, and books and if I have pet unicorn,
I will bring my pet unicorn.

S2: You don't have a pet unicorn. *(raising her voice)* I goanna make your
dream come true, I will be Santa. She can't bring unicorn!
(girls start laughing and keep talking)

The above data shows an unequal turn-taking system within the group when S2 student tried to ask more questions. One inequality happened when S2 student took the floor and dominate the conversation. The other unequal system happened when I purposely selected a certain girl (S3) to respond to the questions. My self-select of the girls might reinforce the student-teacher interaction and constrain responses that were only relevant to my questions. Besides ignoring and avoiding interaction with some girls, I also found that I

sometimes interrupted the girls' conversation when I noticed that their conversation was irrelevant to the topic. For example, when the topic was digressed, I used directive speech act to draw the girls' attention, such as "but," "ok, girls! Let's read first and talk later," or "ok, let's go back to the book."

Even though my main goal in this afterschool book club was to provide opportunities for girls to read, discuss and practice their power in this afterschool book club, the data suggests that the languages that I used might encourage as well as prohibit the girls' participation in the book club.

The findings show that my teacher identity played the dominant role in the discussion. However, the frequency of my teacher identity decreased from beginning to later meetings. One possible assumption for the decreasing dominant identity might be the change of different discussion topics. The content of our discussion conflicted the girls figured world which affected the dialectical relationship between the girls' and my member resources (Fairclough, 2001). The conflicts and changes allowed me to enact different identities. For instance, when the girls were sharing their life experiences related to American culture or cultures with which that I was not familiar, my identity shifted to a learner or a member in the group. Gee (2011) states that "building with language is a mutual process," and from this reflexive, we "build up a view of the world the speaker or writer is operating with" (p.103).

The other possible interpretation of the decreasing teacher identity could be my increasing awareness of the dominant teacher identity after having discussions with other group leaders. In addition, my field notes after the book discussion meeting also helped me rethink my role in this book discussion group and be more aware of the power relationships in the group. For instance, in my reflection note, I wrote:

I don't think I did a great job offering opportunities for every girl... some girls were too talkative and some didn't get the chance to talk! It was weird that S3 talked less this time, but she seemed very excited when talking the part of Vietnam...S2 is an interesting case, but I still don't know how to approach her properly...she participated our discussion (finally...) but sometimes she was talking something that was irreverent to our topic. I think I should be more patient and let the girls talk more (02/22/13 Field Notes).

The field note shows my conflicts when I tried to find equal opportunities for every girl to participate. In addition, I was struggling to find appropriate ways



to approach girls whose reading behaviors were inconstant with my figured world in a book club. The challenges and struggles that I encountered when working with this diverse group of girls have allowed me to take a critical stance to rethink the power of language and its relation to teaching and learning.

4.3.2. Power behind discourse

One critical dimension in CDA is to look beyond the surface meanings of texts and language in order to examine critically at Discourse and to uncover the underlying ideologies and power relationships. Fairclough's (2001) third dimension of CDA, explanation, is to understand that a discourse is part of a social process and a social practice. That is, the third dimension of CDA helps explain how discourses is determined by social structures and how cumulative reproduction of the discourse can sustain or change them on the structures.

Not only power in discourse but also power behind discourse are important to explain what ideologies are embedded and how the hidden power from larger social level legitimates and constrains certain identity. Even though one purpose of this afterschool book club was to create a safe reading environment for girls to read books and discuss books with strong female persona, and helped them gain agency in their gender's role, the findings from my two research questions showed that the Discourses and social identities were still constrained by the mainstream classroom literacy practices that are recognized and favored by the dominant culture. For instance, I found that the routines and the group interactions in the book club were similar to student-teacher patterns in a traditional classroom. First, the girls often saw me as the authority and the leader in the book club and they frequently asked for permissions from me if they want to make a comment or reply. Second, the turn-talking process and questions asked during the book discussion were sometimes similar to literature discussion in a classroom setting, for instance, making a request, asking questions for comprehension, repeating students' statement, asking for more explanation and so on. Third, even though one of my goals was to create more opportunities for the girls to feel empowered and express their voices, I interrupted the girls' conversation when I found that the topic was unrelated to the book or not legitimate to learning. The discourse revealed my member resources of my perspective on social good and the naturalization in this book community, and which was strongly influenced by my identities as a researcher, teachers and a Ph.D. student. Lastly, the physical setting of the book discussion took place in a second grade classroom, and that might also trigger both the girls and my member's resource of a book club.



The findings of my language use and my interactions with the girls echoes Fairclough's (2001) concept of power in discourse. That is, my teacher identity in the book discussion group directly subjected the girls to a tradition student role in a classroom setting. Moreover, the conventional interactions and the embodiment of my teacher identity in this informal school setting suggest the power behind discourse. The power behind discourse in the book club aligned with sociocultural scholars' statement that we learn through discursive social practices and which influence our understanding of the world and ourselves (Lewis, 2001). In other words, my teacher identity and the conventions in this book club illustrated that both the girls and I were constrained by the power from a larger institutional and social level that influence our everyday discursive practices.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this self-inquiry have allowed me to rethink my identities in this afterschool program and how language was used to empower and inhibit elementary girls' participation. From this preliminary discourse analysis, the findings are in line with scholar's argument that identity is not static; it is situational, emergent, and it shifts from context to context (Hall, 2000; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). The data shows that my identities were constantly shifting, constructing and reconstructing through interaction with the girls in different time and space. Moreover, the findings support Davies & Harré's (1990) work that identity is relational. The interactions in the book club not only constructed my different identities but also opened and limited participation opportunities for different girls.

The findings from this critical discourse analysis provide explanations of what my identities revealed in this book discussion group and how power relations influenced identity construction from micro and macro perspectives. The findings show that literacy practices in the book club and the use of language all had impacts on enacting different identities, teaching practices, building up significance and relationships, making connections, distributing social goods, and privileging and hindering the girls' participation in this social community (Gee, 2011). Moreover, using CDA offered an opportunities for me to gain a deeper understanding of power in discourse and the power behind discourse from a macro and micro social level.

One challenge of this study is the validity of my interpretations and findings; the same data might be interpreted differently if the data is interpreted from different perspectives. However, Gee (2011) claims that a



discourse analysis is an interpretation of an interpretation by people in specific contexts. Moreover, the complexity of how identity and language affect participation also suggests that learning is situated and cannot be separated from the larger, social, cultural, and political factors (Blackledge, 2000). Therefore, my findings from the data showed my perspective of member resource about this book club.

6. IMPLICATIONS

This self-inquiry study has allowed me to reflect my past practices in the afterschool book club in order to identify possible identities that can be transferred into future classroom practice. Several implications can be drawn for both researchers and educators. For educators, this study suggests the significance for educators to be more aware of their multiple identities and how language use affects different learning opportunities or hinder students' learning. Second, this study can contribute to educators' professional development of teaching practices and ability to reflect their teaching practices by taking a critical lens. For researchers, CDA provides a theoretical framework to uncover the power relations from multiple perspectives. It not only helps researchers to develop their self-conscious about the discourses from a local and societal level but also provides detailed explanation about our hidden assumption and ideology.

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**Orientalising Translation:
The Christian Construction of the Qur'an**

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Abstract

The article aims at carrying out an evaluation of the Christian Orientalist understanding and translation of the Muslim Scripture. It starts with a review of the general Western representation of Islam in the light of Edward Said thesis. This representation, it will be shown, is coloured by predisposed beliefs as well as assumptions about Islam. The analysis of their translation of the Qur'an will show that the Christian approach is, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by the conviction of the intellectual inferiority of Islam compared with Christianity. In the process, we will think through some theological as well linguistic difficulties which accompany the translation of the Qur'an. As a process, translation works on the domestication of the original text to make it accessible for the target reader. The application of such a process to the Qur'an is bound to raise difficulties, if not controversies, given the sensitive nature of the Qur'anic text meaning. Besides the issue of sensitivity, the translator faces formidable problems while interpreting the text at the source language level, and transforming it into a fully integrated target language version. The problem of interpretation lies in the diverse nature of the available sources (eg. Tradition and biographies) needed to understand the meaning of the Qur'anic text.

Key words: Translation, Culture, Orientalism, Christianity, Qur'an

1. A RATIONAL OF A CERTAIN WESTERN PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAM

The European 'imagining' of Islam dates back to the classical Greek era. Since then, two essential motifs of Europe's 'imaginative geography' of the other have been established. First, "A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant." Second, the motif "of the Orient as insinuating danger. Rationality is undermined by Eastern excesses..." (Said, 1991, p. 57) From this depiction of a European 'mindset' it becomes easier to understand the reaction to Islam in the medieval period, for:

If the mind must suddenly deal with what it takes to be a radically new form of life—as Islam appeared to Europe in the early middle Ages—the response on the whole is conservative and defensive. Islam is judged to be a fraudulent new version of some previous experience, in this case Christianity.... The Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty (Said, 1991, p. 58).

Not for nothing, states Said, did Islam become a lasting trauma for the European for, until the end of the seventeenth century, the 'Ottoman peril' "lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole Christian civilisation a constant danger, and in time European civilisation incorporated that peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life" (Said, 1991, pp. 59-60). This "*domestication of the exotic*", Said concedes, is a normal process occurring between all cultures and peoples. An important consequence is the way a limited vocabulary and imagery impose themselves upon the perception held by one culture of another. Take, for instance, how Megrab (1999, p.12) describes the way the expression 'Islamic movement' holds paradigmatically for both the Arab/English Western reader:

Western Connotations	Islamic Fundamentalism	A bunch of fanatics	Clandestine activities	Suicide Attack	Death Squad	Terrorist Attack
Arab Connotations	Party of God	Brothers in Islam	Prayer Meeting	Martyrdom	Holy War	Self-denying act of hero

This clash of ideology shows that the Western perspective, in general, does not attempt to represent Islam in itself but, rather, represents it for its own ends. Only recently, Ben Carson, the Christian Adventist and Republican US president, stated that for a Muslim to become president of the United States, he would have

... to reject the tenets of Islam ... I would have problems with somebody who embraced all the doctrines associated with Islam. If they are not willing to reject sharia and all the portions of it that are talked about in the Quran -- if they are not willing to reject that ... then of course, I would. (Bradner, 2015)

The Egyptian writer Alwishy, in his book 'Fearing Islam', finds that whenever Islam is discussed in the West, it is represented devoid of its love, peace and tolerance. Instead, the West in the New World Order intends to dramatize Islamophobia, with the purpose of frightening the Western layman via misinformation on Islam propagated at schools, in the media, and through public speeches (cited in Mentak, 2008, p.156).

It is clear the medieval Christian image of Islam endured into the modern era, as did the process of conversion of raw reality into the 'corrected' image. Said, again, reminds us that this is neither surprising nor difficult to explain. The specific manner of conversion, however, meant that "to the Westerner...the Oriental was always like some aspect of the West" and the Orientalist was always converting the Orient from one thing into something else, something for his own sake or culture and, at other times, for the sake of the Oriental (Said, 1991, p. 67). In the process, empirical data counted little, the most important focus being the Orientalist vision itself, which possessed the "self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are because they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter" (Said, 1991, p.70). Thus, Islam represented an old and direct threat to the continuity of the Christian West and triggered the mobilization of Christian attacks on that faith of which the status was shaped within Western thought for generations to come.

Power relations are, therefore, an essential element in the assessment of Western view of Islam. Naturally, from the beginning of this power struggle, the refutation of Islam required the refutation of the Qur'an as the primary source of every Muslim's faith and practice. This explains an early interest in the translation of the Qur'an by Christian scholars and Orientalists not for any other reason- such as dissipating stereotypes and encouraging

cultural rapprochement- but to show its fault and hasten its fall. In fact, “competition between rival Christian sects [to prove the fallacy of Islam] would prove to be a key impetus to the process of the translation of the Qur'an in the West” (Elmarsafy, 2014, p.12).

The very concept of 'Islam' itself, which has been the Western scholar's key to understanding the psychology and thought of the Muslim, is not sufficient on its own to explain everything that exists or happens in the Muslim world. The latter being perceived as a single whole totally determined by Islam, and powerless towards it. This is not, of course, to deny that there is something called 'Islam', which Hourani defines as a statement embodied in a sacred book about what God is and how He acts in the world. Such a book is believed to be His word and is articulated in a system of law and worship by which millions of Muslim men and women have lived for many centuries. The conclusion is that the concept 'Islam' must be used with caution as part of a dynamic cultural totality. It is a challenging task, though, because of the dynamism and infinity of the nature of culture, and the difficulty of drawing a clear-cut line between what is religious and what is not in a 'Muslim culture'.

2. THE HISTORY OF THE TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'AN

The importance of translating the Qur'an emerges from its vital role of transmitting its meaning, rituals and teachings to the non-Arabic speaking world and, translation is probably the most important tool serving this purpose. However, given the sacred nature of the text being translated, undertaking such a task is not often as simple as it may seem. As Nida rightly points out, translating religious texts causes the most perplexing problems of translation. The difficulty of translating this category lies in the sensitivity and heavy connotative significance of religious texts or what Nida calls words for 'sanctity' and 'holiness' which make their use in the TL awkward. “A foreign word”, he points out, “often implies an alien God” (Nida, 1964, p.14). The inevitable risk of perturbing the purity of the original text had prevented the translation of religious texts for centuries. Throughout the whole continent of Europe, which represented the heartland of Christendom, the Latin translation was the only official Bible. The first translators who ventured to translate the Bible into other European vernaculars faced severe criticism which mounted sometimes to persecution. For instance, William Tyndale was strangled and burnt at Vilvorde by church authorities in 1536 for daring to translate the Bible into a vernacular dialect.

The history of the translation of the Qur'an was not, in any significant way, an exception. Early Muslim clergy did not generally believe that the Word of God (the Qur'an) was translatable, let alone trusting the translator to transfer the Qur'an accurately and faithfully into the vernaculars of the conquered Muslim nations. Not long ago, two Afghans faced death sentence because their translation of the Qur'an did not include the Arabic version alongside the translation (Associate Press, 02/06/2009).

It is possible, however, that there were attempts to translate the Qur'an or portions of it as early as 744 A.D. (Ihsanoğlu, 1986, p. xxii). The first known complete translation of the Qur'an by a Muslim nation was into Persian in the period between 961 and 976 A.D. On the other hand, the first translation into European languages started rather late. There is, however, reference to a translation into Latin by Petrus Venerabilis (died in 1157 A.D.) whose work remained unknown for almost four centuries (Zwemer, 1915, p. 247). A second Latin translation of the Qur'an was made by Marracci in 1698. It is only in 1649 that Alexander Ross published the first English version of the Qur'an under the title *The AlCoran of Mahomet*. It was not a direct translation from the original Arabic but was done from a French version published a few years earlier. Ross's translation was extremely defective and at times missed the sense of the original altogether as he "was utterly unacquainted with Arabic, and not a thorough French scholar" (Zwemer, 1915, p. 250).

Nonetheless, Ross's translation served to introduce the Scripture of Islam to the English-speaking world and for nearly a hundred years was the only available translation. It was only in 1734 that the first genuine translation of the Qur'an into English appeared, though, once again, the author relied heavily on previous translations. George Sale published his translation under the simple title *The Koran* which was a direct rendering from the original Arabic, but his interpretation was considerably influenced by Marracci's Latin version. Sale complemented his translation with explanatory notes taken from Muslim commentators, especially al-Baydawi (Watt, 1991, p. 174). Most important of all was his introductory supplement entitled *The Preliminary Discourse* which, according to Zwemer, a leading missionary and pioneer of the Arabian Mission, "will always stand as one of the most valuable contributions to the study of Islam" (Zwemer, 1915, p. 251). Sale's work was indeed, in its time, one of the most serious attempts to understanding and introducing Islam to the West.

During the latter part of the 19th century two further translations were published in England. The first was *The Koran* by J.M. Rodwell published in



1861. Although the translation, according to Zwemer, suffers from inaccuracies in the use of tenses and particles (Zwemer, 1915, p. 251), it was the first attempt by any translator to put the *suras* into some sort of chronological order. The second translation was done in 1880 by E.H. Palmer and was entitled *The Qur'an, translated*. This version concentrates on rendering as closely as possible the style existing in the original Arabic. It was distinctive for its endeavour to reproduce both the form and content of the Qur'an in a translation.

In the twentieth century, among the many translations, only two by English authors appeared. The first was by Richard Bell entitled *The Qur'an Translated* which appeared in 1937. Bell made an attempt at giving some sort of chronological order to the text but, unlike Rodwell's version, retained the original sequence of the *suras*. His arrangement was based on the assumption that the *suras*, especially the longer ones, are composite chapters of passages from different periods of Muhammad's Prophethood. The other translation of recent date is that by Arberry entitled *The Koran Interpreted*. The chief feature of this work is its author's endeavour to achieve the closest equivalent response in English. He tried to make the Qur'an do in English what the original Arabic does by combining textual accuracy with the spirit and thrust of the original.

It was not until 1905 that the first Muslim translation into English appeared and, it was only in 1920 that a widely-accepted version was finally published. This was *The Holy Qur'an* published by Maulvi Muhammad Ali. The translation was published as an interlinear English/Arabic text and was supplemented with footnotes explaining the text. It was also introduced with a preface discussing the teachings and collection of the Qur'an. A translation entitled *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* by Marmaduk Pickthal was published in 1930 and it was followed in 1934 by another one done by Abdullah Yusuf Ali entitled *The Holy Qur'an*. The latter has become the most widely approved translation of the Qur'an among Muslim scholars. Although Arberry's translation is more widely used among Western scholars, Yusuf Ali's was also commended by several of their critics. In his article *Yusuf Ali's Translation of the Qur'an*, Jeffery said that "The whole spirit of his [Ali's] work is admirable, and makes it a real document of religious worth" (Jeffery, 1940:55). Nevertheless, Jeffery argued that much of Ali's commentary is apologetic, and that the critic will find much to question, especially his free interpretation and his use of the Bible (Jeffery, 1940, p. 57-63).

Muslims and Christians have each different motives and objectives in producing the translation of the Qur'an. Muslim translations into the native

language of other non-Arab Muslim peoples, regardless of their motives, had the primary objective of making the Qur'an accessible. The Turkish translation of the Qur'an, for instance, was primarily the consequence of the national revolution and the issuing of laws requiring the use of Turkish in religious domains such as mosques (Bridge, 1938, p. 394); yet, the objective of the translation remained the same, namely making the Qur'an intelligible to Turkish Muslims.

The most famous Muslim translations are those which were made into English. They came as a consequence of the interaction with the West and especially with Christian missions in the Muslim world. They differed from other translations, according to Jeffery, in that they had didactic and homiletic purposes (Jeffery, 1940, p. 61). Even the number of translations was thought to reflect this homiletic character. For example, Shellabear observed that the number of English Muslims was not so large as to attract three Muslim translations by 1930 (Shellabear, 1931b, p. 289); thus, in his opinion, "the production of different English versions of the Koran is part of a widespread propaganda" (Shellabear, 1931b, p. 289). For Jeffery, Muslims' translation of the Qur'an was an apologetic endeavour to measure it up to the Bible because, according to him "These modern [Muslim] translators ... are all the time conscious of the higher morality of Christianity" (Jeffery, 1940, p. 63).

It is beyond the scope of this article to conduct a thorough assessment into the adequacy and accuracy of Muslim translations of the Qur'an. However, in view of the fact that such translations came generally as a reaction to the dissatisfaction with earlier Christian translations and a desire to prove the truth and legacy of Islam as a religion, one cannot exclude the plausibility of apologetics in the Muslim approach to the translation of the Qur'an.

Likewise, Christian translations, especially their early versions, were not free from their authors' beliefs and preconceptions. They were conducted with the intention to discover the alleged weaknesses of the Qur'an in order to develop a strategy to undermine it. Describing Marracci's Latin translation of the Qur'an, Pierre Martino noted that

quand il fit paraître le texte lui-même et sa traduction latine, il eut soin qu'ils fussent enserrés entre les interminables colonnes où s'allongeaient les objections victorieuses: on eût dit un criminel, fluet, encadré entre d'énormes geôliers qui ne lui permettent pas de respirer

when he published the text itself with its Latin translation, he saw to it that they were surrounded by endless columns of victorious objections: rather like a feeble criminal flanked by enormous prison guards that did not allow him to breathe (cited in Elmarsafi, 2014, p. 12).

Explaining the objective of his translation to the reader, Ross argued "it [the Qur'an] hath been a poyson, that hath infected a very great, but most unsound part of the universe, it [his translation] may prove an Antidote, to confirm in thee the health of Christianity" (Alexander, 1649, pp. A1-2). And confident in the righteousness of his Christian convictions, Sale argued in his *Preliminary Discourse* which introduced his translation that "The protestants alone are able to attack the Quran with success and for them, I trust, Providence has reserved the glory of its overthrow" (Wherry, 1896, p. 4). When the *Universities Mission to Central Africa* translated the Qur'an into Swahili for a Muslim readership, it was performed with the conviction of the intellectual superiority of Christianity. The translation of the Qur'an was seen as an instrument "to pin our [Muslim] opponents down to chapter and verse. We can draw comparisons between the two books [the Qur'an and the Bible], we can expose the inaccuracies, and we can prevent our antagonist from making statements which have no foundation in fact" (Dale, 1924, p. 6).

The first Christian attempt to render the Qur'an into English using a systematic approach of analysis and translation was made by Richard Bell. The main objective of his translation was "to unravel the composition of separate surahs" (Bell, 1960, p. vi) for their alleged lack of historical and textual coherence. He argued the *suras*, even the shortest, were of a composite nature. Bell was convinced that "the redactors of the Qur'an must have done their work with great care" (Bell, 1960, p. v). He believed that the alterations and revisions in the composition of each *sura* was the work of the Prophet himself (Bell, 1960, p. vi). However, as will be discussed shortly, Bell's approach to the translation of the Qur'an was not devoid of limitations

3. VIEWS AND APPROACHES TO THE TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'AN

The Orientalist view of Qur'an translation, as described in Christian writings, is twofold. We can illustrate the first view through an article written by Muhammad Shakir, a former Dean of the Islamic university of Azhar, which appeared in the *Cairo Press* newspaper and was translated by Professor T.W. Arnold under the title of *On the translation of the Koran into Foreign Languages* (Shakir, 1926). In his article, Shakir merely argued that translation of the Qur'an is a process which necessarily involves losses in meaning and/or

style. His views concerning the impossibility of total equivalence in translation are in fact shared by several translation theorists (e.g. Bassnet) who claim that "sameness cannot even exist between two TL [target language] versions of the same text, let alone between the SL [source language] and the TL version" (Bassnet, 1991: 29). Aware of the problem of translation, Macdonald, a Scottish scholar of Islam, also pointed out that

Just as in the case of the Old Testament there is no translation at present in existence that can be called even approximately adequate, so in the case of the Qur'an there is no translation that you can trust. That work is still to be done ... Whichever view you take, the translation of the Qur'an is still to come (Macdonald, 1911, p. 88).

While translators and their theorists accept the loss as inevitable but generally maintain that translation can still achieve its communicative goal, Shakir, for religious reasons, proclaimed the unlawfulness of the translation of the Qur'an given the sacred nature of its text. Unlike Macdonald, he believed that the Qur'an and the Bible were of a different nature and the permissibility of their translation must be determined accordingly. He argued that "the Taurat and the Injil, each one of them is a sacred book, but through a sacred meaning quite apart from sacred words [as in the case of the Qur'an]" (Shakir, 1926, p. 164); thus, the sanctity of the Qur'an can only be maintained by preserving its very own words. In fact, the Qur'an is not the equivalent of the Bible as may be inferred from Macdonald's statement above. As Daniel pointed out, "The Qur'an in Islam is very nearly what Christ [rather than the Bible] is in Christianity: the Word of God, the whole expression of revelation[;]... the bible derives its significance from Christ; but Muhammad derives his from the Qur'an" (Daniel, 1960, p. 33).

Other Muslims did not share Shakir's view concerning the translation of the Qur'an. This explains the fact that such translators, especially none native speakers of Arabic, proceeded with its translation. As mentioned earlier, a Muslim translation of the Qur'an into English first came as a result of dissatisfaction with Christian translations. For instance, Marmaduk Pickthal claimed that "no Holy Scripture can be fairly represented by one who disbelieves its inspiration and message" (Shellabear, 1931:287). Pickthal's claim hold some truth in it as a 'disbeliever' is bound to be influenced by his prejudices and preconceptions. But, as Shellabear rightly pointed out, "The man who believes in a rigid verbal inspiration is quite as likely to err on one side in the interpretation of the Koran as the man who does not believe in such a system is liable to err on the other side" (Shellabear, 1931:287-288).

One might argue that whatever the background of the translator, his subjectivity is bound to influence his translation although it may not affect the overall faithfulness of the translated text. For several Christian writers, although they recognised the difficulties of translating the Qur'an inherent in the process itself, and deriving from the nature of the text being translated, only Christian translations were found to pass the test of adequacy and faithfulness. Shellabear argued that Sale's translation of the Qur'an, in contrast with a Muslim translation such as Muhammad Ali's and Sarwar's, is a fair representation of the original (Shellabear, 1931a, p. 142). Jeffery found that the approach in Yusuf Ali's translation is highly apologetic and that "His counselling is wise on a high ethical plane- much higher... than that of the text on which he is commenting" (Jeffery, 1940, p. 58). The translation was, according to him, characterised by alterations which were homiletically motivated rather than historically correct. Thus, Jeffery called for a modern and historical commentary on the translation of the Qur'an written according to "the standards of modern scholarship" (Jeffery, 1940, p. 66), something Muslim scholars and translators were condemned not to be able to grasp; only "a modern translation as that of [a Western writer such as] Dr. Bell" (Jeffery, 1940, p. 66) seemed to raise to Jeffery's standards. Remarks by Shellabear and Jeffery do in fact reflect Edward Said's view that Orientalists see themselves as those who can best represent the others. He notes that

It remains the professional Orientalist's job to piece together a portrait, a restored picture as it were, of the Orient or the Oriental; fragments, such as those unearthed by Sacy, supply the material, but the narrative shape, continuity, and figures are constructed by the scholar, for whom scholarship consists of circumventing the unruly (un-Occidental) nonhistory of the Orient with orderly chronicle, portraits, and plots (Said, 1991, p. 151).

Jeffery's call for a historical treatment of the Qur'an has found an echo in Bell's translation. He used the tools provided by the historical approach in his translation. But Bell's approach can be reproached for its excessive concern with Christian and Jewish influences; the text of the Qur'an was not considered as a major basis for its analysis and translation. He argued that "The key to a great deal both in the Qur'an and in the career of Muhammad lies... just in his gradual acquisition of knowledge of what the Bible contained and of what Jews and Christians believed" (Bell, 1926, pp. 68-69).

This view was also directly reflected in some of his writings in which he advanced that the Prophet copied the stories of the Biblical Prophets to the

Qur'an whenever they mirrored his own situation (Bell, 1934, p. 331). Bell's approach can also be criticised for its circularity, namely his use of the Qur'an especially in the Meccan period to deduce historical progression in order to be able to reformulate the historical development of Mohammad's ideas in the Qur'an (Rippin, 1992, p. 640). Aware of the problem, Bell stated that "while it [his approach] does not necessarily imply a vicious circle in our reasoning, [it] calls for careful consideration and prolonged discussion" (Bell, 1960, p. 690). Although it may be of interest to the historical researcher, Bell's translation is notorious for its complexity which makes it hard to follow. Rippin argued that "The text of translation is extremely difficult just to "read", for Bell makes little effort to convey directly the sense of the text", he continued, "In terms of providing a reading strategy for the Qur'an ... the work reveals its age" (Rippin, 1992, p. 645).

4. PROBLEMS IN THE TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'AN

The analysis and translation of the Qur'an is often hindered by the problem of sources. The Qur'an especially the Meccan *suras* are usually unintelligible unless contextualised. In some instances, such a context is irretrievable, thus, allowing for different, sometimes conflicting, interpretations/translations. When contextualisation is possible, this process relies primarily on the *hadith* (Prophet's Traditions) and *siras* (Prophet's biographies) as primary sources of interpretation. However, the historical reliability of these sources is not a settled issue. To reconstruct the context of an ambiguous or unintelligible Qur'anic text is to go sixteen centuries back in history, a formidable task which can only be achieved if the reliability of the available data is established.

The Western historians, however, feel that it is unfortunate that the chief data employed are the early *siras* (cf. Watt, 1964) and *hadiths* (cf. Schacht, 1950) gathered by Muslims more than one century after the death of the Prophet, and therefore are liable to inaccuracy and tampering for polemical or political purposes. On the other hand, Muslim scholars are much more confident about the reliability of the biography of their Prophet if measured against the collection of Traditions that were sifted, according to them, by the utmost scrupulous trustworthiness. Hence, grounding one's interpretation on these sources would raise the same questions as to the validity and trustworthiness of the translation.

The intricacy of Qur'an's translation lies also in the way its text is arranged and structured. According to Zwemer, the Qur'an, unlike the Bible,

relies heavily on aesthetic and stylistic devices in a way that makes it untranslatable. He argued that:

The Bible, in contrast to the Koran, has this unique quality that can be rendered into all the languages of mankind without losing its majesty, beauty, and spiritual power. The secret lies in the subject matter of the Scriptures. The Bible belong to those elemental things... [It] goes down to the root of our bitterest needs, our darkest sorrows... [On the other hand, the Qur'an's] beauty is altogether in its style, and, therefore, necessarily artificial. (Zwemer, 1915, p. 245-246)

Different consequences of this type of text are cited by Christian writers. According to Mrs. Eleanor J. Calverley, it makes Muslims overemphasize style without paying any attention to meaning when reading the Qur'an. She stated that "the reading of this book [the Qur'an] does not resemble our own study of the Bible. The reading is done in a loud and chanting tone, paying more attention to the rhythm of the words than to meaning" (Calverley, 1920, p. 394). And Zwemer argued that "For the sake of rhyme unnecessary repetitions are frequently made, which interrupts the sense of the passage and sometimes even appear ridiculous in a translation" (Zwemer, 1915, p. 246). A completely literal translation of the Arabic style into English might indeed appear ridiculous, but so does any translation between two languages as distinct as Arabic and English (or any other non-Semitic language). Overuse of repetition may interrupt the sense or even seem extraneous in English, but not in Arabic as Zwemer suggested. Arabic, unlike English, tends to allow an abundant use of repetition (Johnston 1991). In fact, repetition contributes more extensively in Arabic to create a rise in momentum and a kind of tension which carries the arguments along without any overt substantiation of claims (Al-Jabouri, 1984, pp. 110-111). As Christ and Christianity were the standard by which the Prophet and Islam were measured, so too was English (or any other target languages) the standard by which the text of the Qur'an was judged. The result, Muhammad Asad, points out in the introduction of his translation of the Qur'an, is that

[the] attitude of the Muslims towards the Qur'an perplexes, as a rule, the Westerner who approaches it through one or another of the existing translations. Where the believer, reading the Qur'an in Arabic, sees beauty, the non-Muslim reader often claims to discern "crudeness"; the coherence of the Qur'anic world-view and its relevance to the human condition escape him altogether and assume the guise of what, in Europe's and America's

orientalist literature, is frequently described as “incoherent rambling”; and passages which, to a Muslim, are expressive of sublime wisdom, often sound “flat” and “uninspiring” to the Western ear (Asad, 1980, p. ii).

CONCLUSION

The article has attempted to reproduce and analyze the general Orientalist Christian attitude towards the translation of the Qur'an through the reflection of its history, approaches and problems. We have illustrated some of subjective motivations for Christian translations of the Qur'an. In the process, we have shown biased tenets of interpretations on which Christian writers judged Muslim translations as lacking historicity and objectivity, and the text of the Qur'an as lacking meaning and unity. In short, their focus, either while translating the Qur'an or commenting on Muslim translations, was found to be coloured by the authors' beliefs as well as presumptions about Islam. One may venture saying that though this is an issue that needs profound probing and investigation, the Christian perspective of the translation of the Qur'an is, indeed, a reflection the Western biased perspective of Islam. This distorted view, still prevalent within the present Western society, originated primarily from the manner and method by which Islam has been depicted since first contact between East and West.

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ACTION LEARNING: PUTTING THE MIND BACK INTO THE BODY IN SLA

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Abstract

Embodied cognition emerged and has spread throughout a wide range of disciplines in the cognitive sciences over the past two decades. This approach is in stark contrast to the traditional “disembodied” view of cognition that has penetrated deep into the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Over the same time frame, linguistic relativity has also re-emerged with new empirical findings that point to the plausibility that language influences thought. In this paper I argue for the importance of filtering these new approaches to language and cognition into the field of SLA. An embodied approach within an SLA framework endorses action learning and using a teaching style that aims to simulate multimodal situations of engagement with the language in a rich context.

Key words: embodied cognition, SLA, language, linguistic relativity, action learning

1. INTRODUCTION

A resurging interest in linguistic relativity, which holds that the different languages people speak influence the way they think and conceptualize the world, has been spreading from the cognitive sciences (Gentner & Goldin-Meadow, 2003; Gumperz & Levinson, 1996; Lucy, 1992) into the field of SLA (Bylund & Athanasopoulos, 2014; Han & Cadierno, 2010; Niemeier, 2004). Linguistic relativity proposes that since languages differ in numerous ways,

people, though attending to the same reality, may perceive it differently based on the constraints and obligatory features of their respective languages. This view had been widely dismissed by various scholars over the years for the preferred universalist (or nativist) stance. Among universalists, language and thought are clearly separable entities and the differences between languages are superficial for they all share certain universal structures.

Recently the mind's conceptual architecture has also come into question. This new debate involves emerging research that shows a close relationship between the body and thought, called embodied cognition. This approach is in stark contrast to the Cartesian view, which suggests that thought is encapsulated within the individual mind and disembodied (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Linguistic relativity is considerably more viable within an embodied theory of cognition and provides support to move away from the *mind is a computer* metaphor, which is ubiquitously present in SLA theories.

In order to address the issue of embodied cognition from an SLA perspective, I first provide some background for the traditional view of cognition, which is incompatible with linguistic relativity. Then, I introduce an embodied approach to cognition and discuss various controversies between these two approaches. Finally, I propose the importance of integrating an embodied approach into the language-learning environment.

2. INCONGRUITY: LINGUSITIC RELATIVITY AND THE “THE LANGUAGE OF THOUGHT”

Although linguistic relativity has a long history in Western thought, it was the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir that really brought to light again the age-old question, “Does language shape thought”? Whorf viewed the principle of linguistic relativity as simply, “Users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers, but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world” (Whorf, 1956, p. 221). Nonetheless, linguistic relativity for many brings about great emotion and annoyance. For example, Pinker (1994) authoritatively maintains, “The famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis ... linguistic relativity, stating that differences among languages cause differences in the thoughts of their speakers ... is wrong, all wrong,” to which he proceeds to dismiss it as banal “absurdity” (pp. 46-47). In a later book, he is confounded by the resurgence of “neo-Whorfianism” and feels



obliged to once again put to death this scornful idea that language might shape thought, as he reiterates in his “obituary” against linguistic relativity (Pinker, 2007, p. 124). Pinker, though, is often accused of postulating a strawman argument and conflating linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism (Casasanto, 2008). Few, if any, researchers propose that language determines thought; in contrast, there is more argument and interest in how different languages might influence thought or oblige one to construe a situation differently based on the constraints and requirements of the speaker’s language.

Language has broad and varying meaning to different people, but in order to discuss it, I limit the definition of language to the syntactical structure that binds lexico-semantic units into a meaningful string and is expressed phonetically in a communicative act. On the other hand, thought refers to representations that form conceptual structures and these can be pre-linguistic (since infants have thought before they develop language). One traditional perspective in cognitive science is the idea that differences in linguistic coding (in the approximately 7,000 natural languages of the world) have little or no effect on cognition. Rather, there is a language of thought called a “mentalese” (Fodor, 1975) that all humans universally share and this provides the underlying concepts available to human cognition to which a language then maps onto. The next section will explore in more detail what this “mentalese” is, and how it denies the possibility of any form of linguistic relativity.

2.1 “Mentalese” the mind language

The traditional model of cognition, sometimes called the “first generation” of cognitive science (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 75), views cognition as the computation of certain symbols according to a set of rules. These symbols are viewed as context invariant, static and disembodied and these symbols are arbitrarily related to the referent (Glenberg, Witt, & Metcalfe, 2013). These symbols are considered amodal (Fodor, 1975). In short, the sensory input that we experience through our various modal systems (i.e. auditory, visual, olfactory, etc.) goes through a transformation process (called transduction) where these states are preserved as abstract, non-modal specific symbols, which then can be manipulated by cognitive processes. These amodal symbols thus are only arbitrarily related to the perceptual states that produce them (Niedenthal et al., 2005; Pylyshyn, 1984) and are considered internal states that encode external states in the world (Fodor & Pylyshyn, 1988). These inner codes are resources for the codes used in communication. “[This is] why natural languages are so easy to learn” (Fodor,



1975, p. 156). This “mentalese” is an encapsulated medium of thought that provides conceptual representations and, more importantly, is viewed as being wholly *independent* of language. For as Pinker (1994) argues those with impaired linguistic capacities (i.e. aphasics) though lacking a natural language, still obviously have thought and are capable of intelligent thinking. He argues, “knowing a language, then, is knowing how to translate mentalese into a string of words and vice versa” (p. 82). For instance, at the physiological level of receiving an auditory or visual code (e.g. the linguistic stimuli) there is a mechanistic process that connects this code to an abstract symbol and this is considered the symbol manipulation level of thought (Newell, 1990). So according to this view of cognition, linguistic relativity is completely untenable since thought and language are entirely separate entities. In recent decades there has been a growing shift away from this traditional view of cognition as a “thinking machine,” and a movement towards viewing cognition as “being in the world.”

2.2 Searle sitting in the Chinese room: The symbol grounding problem

A general criticism of this traditional model of cognition is called “the symbol grounding problem” (Hanard, 1990; Vogt, 2002). Searle (1980), in an article where he provides a thought experiment called the “Chinese Room,” brings up the problem of intentionality and how mental representations are about something, while mere symbols have no intentional content and thus cannot capture cognition adequately. The “Chinese Room,” in brief, is about a person sitting in a room with two doors. In the room a person who does not know Chinese (as true of Searle himself) sits with the necessary material to decipher these symbols with a set of formal rules in his language (English). From one door (the input), someone from the outside passes some Chinese text through a small opening. The person inside this room uses the material provided to decipher the code and offer a response. He then passes this response through a small opening in the second door (the output). The question is, does this person actually know Chinese? Like a computer, this person receives a group of symbols and, following a formal set of rules, manipulates these symbols accordingly and provides a logical response. It may appear to people on the outside that this person is competent with the language; whereas, in fact, he truly is oblivious to the meaning, as he does not know what any of these symbols are about, otherwise the intentional content they have. Consequently, somehow these “symbols must be grounded, that is, related to something other than additional symbols” (Glenberg, 2010, p. 587).

This symbol-grounding issue points out the trouble of a disembodied approach to cognition. According to this approach, cognition is being regarded as something that resides within the individual mind as internal representations (states) that encode some external states in the world (Fodor & Plyshyn, 1988), rather than being viewed as something “grounded in the human body and its interaction with the environment, and thus in perception and action” (Pecher & Zwaan, 2005, p. 2). Barsalou (2008) provides a couple of reasons why this traditional approach to cognition has been challenged; first, “little empirical evidence supports the presence of amodal symbols in cognition” and second, these “traditional theories ... fail to explain how cognition interfaces with perception and action” (p. 620). Glenberg and Robertson (2000) share this same view as they also argue against the symbol-manipulation perspective of language due to the scarcity of any empirical evidence to support it. In the next section, I will provide a brief outline of the embodied view of cognition.

3. BODY, LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT: UNDOING DESCARTES

The word was not the beginning – action was there first (Vygotsky, 1986).

Embodiment theories of cognition have increasingly become prevalent in a wide range of interdisciplinary fields such as social psychology (Meier, Schnall, Schwartz, & Bargh, 2012), cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), cognitive psychology (Gibbs, 2006), artificial intelligence (Anderson, 2003), and philosophy (Clark, 1997; Johnson, 1987). It has had a wide impact on the understanding of cognition, language and how the mind works. While embodied cognition has steadily gained broad support within the interdisciplinary field of cognitive science, it is far from a unified theory. Indeed, there is quite a bit of variation and controversy among the claims of what it actually is (Wilson, 2002).

For Thelen (2000), an embodied approach to cognition is when “cognition depends on the kinds of experiences that come from having a body with particular perceptual and motor capacities that are inseparably linked and that together form the matrix within which memory, emotion, language, and all other aspects of life are meshed” (p. 4). In earlier research, Thelen and Smith (1994), operating within a dynamic systems approach to cognition, challenged the traditional view, which they characterized as being “symbolic, rational, encapsulated, structured and algorithmic,” for when they looked more closely at the developmental research on children, human cognition actually “looked messy, fluid, contextual, and often less than rational” (p. 322).



The earlier computational view of the mind presupposes that the mind is something rational and logical that is clearly detached from the body and far from being “fluid and messy.” This dualistic framework plainly differentiates between an internal world and an external objective world. Yet embodiment theories of cognition challenge this very fundamental structure of Western thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) and instead are heavily influenced by work in phenomenology, especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Martin Heidegger (1962). Whereas Cartesian dualism clearly distinguishes between the “thinking” mind and the “being” body, Heidegger (1962) in *Being and Time*, proposes to unify these two notions. For him, in order to “think” one needs to “be.” Being, he says, precedes thinking. For Merleau-Ponty, the body, too, is essential for thinking to happen, for it acts as a mediator between the internal and external worlds. He points out the importance of the body for “[M]y body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my ‘comprehension’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 235). In short, the internal and external worlds are not two separable entities in opposition to each other but meshed together and interdependent upon one another for meaning.

3.1 Evidence from the brain

In the late 1980’s and early 90’s, a group of researchers at the University of Parma (Italy), while working on a macaque monkey, made an important discovery that they subsequently called “mirror neurons” (Di Pellegrino et al., 1992; Rizzolatti et al., 1996). They quite accidentally stumbled on the fact that certain visuomotor neurons in the premotor cortex seem to have a dual function. Not only do they discharge while performing some action, but also when observing another performing this action. There is now a growing body of evidence in the field of neuroscience that substantiates the claim that humans too have such an overlapping system. Cochin et al. (1999) looked at the relationship between observation and execution of finger movements and provided evidence that they share the same cortical network. Buccino et al. (2001) further corroborated these findings and extended it to include not only the fingers, but also the mouth and feet.

Extending this idea even further, researchers began to look at whether or not language, too, could possibly activate corresponding areas within the motor cortex. Gallese and Lakoff (2005) strongly affirm this as they state “language makes direct use of the same brain structures used in perception and action” (p. 473). Pulvermüller et al. (2001) provide some early evidence to support such a claim for when participants in their study processed leg and

mouth related words, areas of the motor cortex involved with the motion of the leg and the mouth respectively showed higher activation. Hauk et al. (2004) also showed that reading action words (e.g. lick, pick, or kick) related to the body parts: face, arms, and legs respectively activate overlapping or adjacent areas to the actual movement of the tongue, fingers, or feet. Other studies have also confirmed similar findings, albeit in a different fashion. For example, one used auditory action related sentences instead of readings and found similar activation in the respective somatotopic areas of the premotor cortex (Tettamanti et al., 2005). Another study (Aziz-Zadeh et al., 2006) looked at foot, hand, and mouth actions, where participants observed one of these actions and also read a literal phrase relating to the same action. They found congruence in the area of the premotor and prefrontal regions for both visually seeing the action and reading the literal phrase about it. Furthermore, Simmons et al. (2008), using MRI, confirm that conceptual processing does not involve a single type of representation (e.g. amodal symbol manipulation). They show that multiple systems are involved to which they conclude, “[A]t this point, we are somewhat sceptical that completely amodal representations exist in the brain” (p. 116). Jirak et al. (2010), after doing a meta-analysis of numerous research papers that looked at how language comprehension activates the same neural systems used for perception and action, state that the “primary motor, supplementary motor and premotor cortices are repeatedly reported to be active during language processing” (p. 718). So there is a growing consensus that cognition is not disembodied and encapsulated, but rather emerges through the body perceiving and acting in the world.

3.2 A closer look at one theory of embodiment

Embodied cognition has the potential to provide a unifying perspective for psychology (Glenberg, 2010) and other fields within cognitive science. Yet for many, it is not a yes or no question, but rather has to do more with the scope of embodiment, as Machery (2007) frames the question, “[t]o what extent do we use reenacted perceptual representations in cognition and to what extent do we use amodal representations?” (p. 42). This falls under the assumption that both modes of representation are necessary for cognition. To better grasp the range of embodiment perspectives, Meteyard et al. (2012) laid out the theories on a continuum from secondary embodiment, where semantic content is independent but associated with sensory-motor systems, to weak embodiment, where semantic content has partial dependence on the sensory-motor system, to strong embodiment, which asserts that there is complete dependence on the sensory-motor system.

Barsalou's Perceptual Symbol Theory is one example of the weak form of embodiment. Barsalou's (1999) Perceptual Symbol Theory seeks to "integrate traditional theories with grounded theories" (p. 622) and has been one of the more influential embodied theories of cognition, which views mental representations as being grounded in perceptual symbols and "[a]s collections of perceptual symbols develop, they constitute the representations that underlie cognition" (p. 578). Again it is helpful here to contrast this theory against the traditional theory of cognition, which holds to a mentalese view of thought or a "language of thought" (Fodor, 1975) where language is disembodied and language comprehension involves the manipulation of abstract symbols. In this view, the body naturally provides input to the mind, but this sensory input then goes through a process of transduction that results in a neural code and this code is then further processed as amodal whereby these arbitrary symbols are completely distinguishable from their sensory bodily origins. While on the other hand, in a grounded cognition approach, "cognition is typically grounded in multiple ways, including simulations, situated action, and, on occasion, bodily states" (Barsalou, 2008, p. 619).

As people move about in the world, engaged in various real world experiences, interacting with the environment and others, they selectively attend to certain sensory-motor information such as smell, taste, motor movements, and so on. This sensory-motor information is then associated with concepts involved in that particular situation. When applied to semantic content, such as when one reads a story or is engaged in a conversation, the semantic processing recruits the associable perceptual and motor states and partially simulates or reenacts these experiences. To clarify what a simulation is, Barsalou (2008) describes it as "the reenactment of perceptual, motor, and introspective states acquired during interaction with the world, body, and mind" (p. 618) something like what Zwaan (2004) terms "experiential traces". So when one comes into contact with a flower, various modal states are captured within the brain and in the specific case of flowers this may involve olfactory, tactile and visual, as well as, somatosensory systems. This knowledge of flowers is also situated and the simulation may involve certain background situations such as planting flowers in a garden, putting flowers in a vase, choosing flowers for a wedding, etc. Instead of being detached and abstract, this knowledge of flowers is situated and grounded. Language comprehension then would involve running simulations that are multi-modal and involve the activation of these various sensory systems like smelling, seeing, and feeling. These sensory-motor activations become the semantic content for words (Pulvermüller, 1999; 2001).

4. LANGUAGE: OUT OF THE HEAD AND INTO THE BODY AND SOCIAL WORLD

The shift from viewing cognition as being separately encapsulated and autonomous, where natural language then gets mapped onto existing concepts in the “language of thought” (Fodor, 1975), to an embodied and dynamic view of cognition has a number of consequences. For instance, cognition is taken out of the head and placed into the body and into the social world. One of the earlier proponents of the embodied view of cognition stressed the importance that cognition not only depends on having a body with sensorimotor capacities, but also that this body is “embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context” (Varela et al. 1991, p. 173). In the view of embodied cognition, the body, language, and cognition are interwoven and are situated and develop within a socio-cultural context.

The traditional model of cognition nicely fits with the linguistic nativists, or language-as-instinct (Pinker, 1994) proponents, who adhere to the belief that there is a “linguistic genotype,” namely what Chomsky calls Universal Grammar (henceforth UG) that all humans have. This UG is a biologically adapted neural system specific to language much like the system that has evolved for vision (Chomsky 1980; Pinker, 1994). This biologically determined “language organ” provides the capacity for humans to acquire natural languages (Lightfoot, 2005). A trigger (the random array of utterances) sets the parameters for the language, and this provides the basis for attaining grammar so effortlessly and with limited exposure (e.g. argument from the poverty of the stimulus claim, explained below). The following quote clearly links the ideas of a mentalese with the ideas of nativism and UG.

It is possible to suppose that these linguistic categories and structures are more-or-less straightforward mappings from a preexisting conceptual space, programmed into our biological nature: humans invent words that label their concepts. This perspective would begin to account for the fact that the grammars and lexicons of all languages are broadly similar, despite historical isolation and cultural disparities among their users (Li & Gleitman, 2002, p. 266).

This paragraph highlights many of the claims for a UG and a “mentalese” or language of thought. First, conceptual space is “programmed into our biological nature” and therefore is innate and not prone to the influences of culture or language. Second, it minimalizes linguistic differences between languages, and the “disparities” that may exist are superficial in nature. This



holds strongly to the belief that there are universals in language and the goal is to uncover these deep hidden structures. These universals have recently been reduced to only include “recursion” (Hasuer, Chomsky, & Fitch, 2002), the ability to embed an unbounded number of phrases within itself. In fact, this universal has even been the subject of debate with the Pirahã language and the work of Daniel Everett (2005).

The sway and power of UG and the nativist claim has spread far beyond the walls of cognitive science and has infiltrated many other fields, most evasively in the field of SLA. In SLA, UG is often recognized *not* as “the programmatic label for whatever it turns out to be that all children bring to learning a language,” but as something that has been substantially researched, “as if it were an empirically verified construct” (Evans & Levinson, 2009 p. 429). Take for example the following article retort between Schumann (1995) and Eubank & Gregg (1995): “Eubank and Gregg (1995) claim that ‘Jacobs and Schumann wish to deny the existence of UG’ (p. 42). This statement presupposes the existence of Universal Grammar (UG)” (Schumann, 1995, p. 59). Many in the field of SLA presuppose that UG is an empirically grounded theory and the “only theory” available. Recently, though, a number of researchers have been trying to expose UG as a linguistic myth (Evans & Levinson, 2009), and the danger that it poses for being “widely believed to constitute established fact” (Evans, 2014, p. 22).

One of the key components of UG and nativism is the belief that children are incapable of becoming competent in their language simply from the limited exposure they receive from the environment. This is called, the *argument from poverty of the stimulus* (henceforth APS), which is “a variant of a classical argument in the theory of knowledge” (Chomsky, 1980, p. 34). Chomsky extends this idea of knowledge more specifically to language competence by emphasizing what language learners know is incommensurate with what they have learned. This discrepancy between knowledge and experience is key for “the native speaker has acquired a grammar on the basis of very restricted and degenerate evidence” (Chomsky, 1968/1972, p. 27). From this reasoning, the generativists (e.g. Chomsky) concluded that the only logical answer to this puzzling question is to assume that we have some innate biological mechanism (a language acquisition device) that facilitates such learning much like a spider has the innate instinct to spin webs (Pinker, 1994). Calling language an instinct is very misleading when considering what the word instinct commonly means, i.e., a behavioral competency that is conventional (not variant) and would still emerge even if the human were raised outside its natural species-specific environment (Tomasello, 1995). Language, though, only emerges after years of exposure within the

environment, and, if raised outside this species-specific environment, one will not acquire the ability to use language (c.f. Fromkin et al., 1974 for research on Genie, a girl raised in social isolation).

Pullum and Scholz (2002) analysed the possibility that people cannot simply learn a language through mere exposure and experiential learning. They sought to find empirical evidence for the APS and to provide support “to show that human infants are equipped with innate mental mechanisms with specific linguist content that assist the language acquisition process (p. 12).” Looking at four different studies, Pullum and Scholz (2002) conclude, “the APS instance that Chomsky has used to support the APS for over twenty-five years has no empirical support and offers no support for the existence of innately primed learning” (p. 45).

While others, in a more deprecating way, question if this is a poverty of the stimulus or a poverty of Chomsky’s imagination (Slobin, 2005). Tomasello (2003) provides extensive research that offers an alternative explanation and argues that language consists of biological adaptations and more general human cognitive capacities. Instead of relying on an innate structure, he proposes a *usage-based* theory to language where language gradually emerges from use over time. Two skills emerge in young children that help them acquire language: understanding communicative intention and the skill of pattern finding (Tomasello, 2003). For “a number of studies have found children’s earliest skills of joint attentional engagement with their mothers correlate highly with their earliest skills of language comprehension and production” (p. 21).

In addition, Evans and Levinson (2009) discuss the plasticity of human cognition and the power of human learning abilities and skills to deal with variation and change. They seek to reframe the metaphor from the “mind is a toolbox” (modularity of the mind), which presupposes that the mind is already endowed with innate ready-made tools, to the “mind is a tool maker,” which draws on the plasticity of the human mind and its power of learning and coping with variation (p. 446). They push language beyond the nature-nurture debate and instead suggest a “bio-cultural hybrid” view of language. We are born with the biological potential for language, but it is the cultural and social environment that actualizes this potential. If language is not an instinct, but rather a communicative tool that emerges in a socio-cultural environment, and if cognition is not autonomous and disembodied, but is embodied and interdependent with many other systems (action and perception), then it is possible to conceive that language could have some influence on our cognitive system.

5. EMBODIED COGNITION AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

SLA has been essentially a psycholinguistic enterprise, dominated by the computational metaphor of acquisition (Ellis, 1997, p. 87).

In the above sections I show that the theoretical shift in cognitive science towards embodied cognition, which is a theoretical framework that is more tenable with linguistic relativity, has the potential to have a major impact in the field of SLA. This follows a growing social turn in SLA (Block, 2003) that emphasizes the sociocultural side of learning; for the “the individual emerges from social interaction and as such is always fundamentally a social being” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, p. 213). Yet language learning interactively co-occurs “in the head” and “in the (social) world”; and there has also been a growing attempt in SLA to align the cognitive and the social by viewing them not in opposition to each other, but rather as interdependent and integrated together (Atkinson, 2002; Atkinson et al., 2007). Synthesizing the cognitive with the sociocultural is similar to what Evans and Levinson (2009) proposed in regards to a “bio-cultural hybrid” view of language, which equally emphasizes both the biological capacities of the human mind for language and the power of the sociocultural environment in developing and shaping this capacity. Similarly, diSessa (2008) writes of a “dialectical approach to cognition” and the need to study cognition from a cognitive and sociocultural perspective, for learning takes place both in individual thought and through interacting in the sociocultural world. This mind is embedded in a body and this body is embedded in the social world, and movement and interaction in this social world are paramount for learning to take place. The next section looks at the importance and need in SLA to rid itself of the metaphor, the *mind is a computer*, and to look for ways to incorporate action and the sociocultural in language learning.

Chomsky and other “first generation” cognitive scientists have had an enormous influence on SLA. Chomsky (1965) distinguished between two forms of linguistic knowledge: competence (knowledge of the language) and performance (ability to use the language in communication). Chomsky, being more interested in first language acquisition, used an “idealized native speaker” as his model of a competent speaker.

For Chomsky, competence meant language that is context-independent, which the idealized native speaker has attained, and this linguistic competence is implicit, automatic and unconscious. In this paradigm, the only way a native speaker can achieve this fluency and linguistic competence, so easily and quickly and be able to generate an infinite number of



expressions from the finite structures of language, is if this speaker had some language acquisition device within his/her mind. This idea corresponded well with the development of the computer, which provided an ample metaphor for understanding the abstract mind. Just as a computer comes with the software to process information, so too, does the brain come with a module to process language. The pervasiveness and power of this metaphor in SLA cannot be denied. Just as computational processing machines use such functions as “input” and “output,” so too, do many theories of second language acquisition (Krashen, 1985; Swain, 2000; VanPatten, 1996). The infiltration of this metaphor (*the mind is a computer*) and consequently the way of approaching the mind and learning in a mechanistic and machine-like way has had a deep impact on SLA theories (Firth & Wagner, 1997). The greatest problem with this metaphor is that “our brains are not in a vat, but in our bodies. Our minds are not in our bodies, but in the world” (Geertz, 2001, pp. 204-5) and in this world we learn by movement and interaction. Language learning is not a close-ended system, made up of the input and output of information, but dynamically emerging in the interaction and movement in a nonlinear way, for the “act of playing a game has a way of changing the rules” (Gleick, 1987, p. 24). Likewise, the act of using a language has a way of changing the language.

Action learning is paramount under the embodied theory approach to cognition. For a language teacher, the idea of teaching using bodily movements whether using gestures or commands to get students to perform certain movements or action in the classroom is far from a novel method of teaching. James Asher (1969; 1977) in the 1960’s and 1970’s developed the approach to teaching a foreign language called Total Physical Response (TRP), which often will use some form of imperative drills to get the learners to physically respond. The central tenet of this method is the belief in developing listening competence prior to speech, as Asher (1977) states, “(t)he sequence is listening before speaking and the mode is to synchronize language with the individual’s body” (p. 4). An embodied approach to language supports such action movement with learning. For example, in a study when participants were asked to learn action verb phrases, those who learned them while enacting the action phrase compared to those who simply read or heard them, performed better in a subsequent free recall memory task (Engelkamp, Seiler, & Zimmer, 2004). Performing the action establishes sensory-motor traces, which benefits memory performance. This has been labeled the *enactment effect* (Engelkamp & Zimmer, 1985). Gestures are a natural accompaniment to speaking (McNeill, 2000) and also assist in the comprehension of the topic at hand, such as explaining math (Goldin-Meadow et al., 2001). Gestures have also been shown to enhance foreign

language learning, especially in regards to memorizing words (Macedonia & Knösche, 2011). This natural ability of using the body, by way of gesturing, to encode and convey meaning is an essential part of becoming competent in a language. Yet this enactment of the body also facilitates comprehension and learning the language.

Action learning, however, is not restricted to language learning, but learning in general; and the importance of the body and the ability to interact freely with the environment can also have an impact on such cognitive abilities as creativity. For example, Leung et al. (2012) conducted a study that looked at the body and how physically being contained within an enclosed space influences one's ability to be creative. Metaphors of creativity often involve the image schema of CONTAINMENT and extending oneself beyond an enclosure, as in the expression "to think outside the box" or other such expressions that have similar conceptual structure, as "to have a breakthrough" and "to push the boundaries." In their experiment, they found that embodying these creative metaphors such as "to think outside the box" actually enhanced one's creativity. For example to physically constrain oneself inside a box or not allow oneself to freely move can cause a certain amount of cognitive rigidity or fixedness and this in turn impedes one's creative potential. Functional fixedness (Duncker, 1945) is not a new idea; it has been around for years in creativity and problem solving research. However, the above research demonstrates how physical constraints on the body, in turn, can cause cognitive constraints and fixedness on higher order mental processes. Engaging students to interact with the language both through action and in multimodal ways (tactile, visual, auditory, etc.) is paramount for learning the language.

6. CONCLUSION

Language interacts with culture and the minds of the people who speak the language and "is thought of as potentially catalytic and transformative of cognition" (Bowerman & Levinson, 2001, p. 13). Inquiring into the language is really an investigation in the minds and the culture of the peoples of the world (Boas, 1966). The mind is not disembodied and independent, but rather "the human brain is thoroughly dependent upon cultural resources for its very operation; and those resources are, consequently, not adjuncts to, but constituents of, mental activity" (Geertz, 1973, p. 76). This line of argument about the role language and culture play in cognitive development is reminiscent of Vygotsky (1986) and how the child first develops social communication and then later internalizes the language to which it plays an essential role in abstract representation and as an organizer of thought.



Integrating the mind, body, and the sociocultural world is a move away from the belief that language universals exist, and towards one that embraces linguistic diversity. The evolution of these diverse languages is the product of cultural evolution (Christiansen et al., 2009; Dunn et al., 2011) and the human capacity for social intelligence (Enfield & Levinson, 2006; Tomasello, 2010). Language is part of the mind, which is part of the body, which interacts within a sociocultural environment. Grounding cognition emphasizes the importance of “being” in this world and as language and thought reciprocally influence and shape each other, language too is about “being” in this world.

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THE IMPLACABLE FORCE OF TRADITIONAL ETHOS IN CHENUA ACHEBE'S WORK

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Abstract

Achebe's works are obvious classics but a feminist reading reveals that the women of his early novels are "peripheral to the larger exploration of man's experience,"¹ remarks Carole Davies. In response to the feminist criticism of his earlier work, Achebe wrote *Anthills of the Savannah*. This paper explores Achebe's portraiture of women in his fictional universe. In an effort to narrow down this complex issue, I have limited the scope of this paper to a comparison of Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, and some of his later novels such as *No Longer at Ease*, (1960) *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) to try and see if there is any diachronic development, as the writer himself pointed out in an interview I had with him on Sunday, October, 12th 2008.

Key words: African literature, Nigeria, patriarchy, masculinity, femininity, marginalisation, identity

1. INTRODUCTION

In his analysis of colonialism, Chinua Achebe suggested that there is a balance to all systems and that when that balance is lost, the system is

¹ Carole Boyce Davies & Anne, Adams Graves, (eds) *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1986), 247.



reduced to chaos. This imbalance can be traced down to an inequity between masculine and feminine forces. In examining Achebe's fiction, one faces a great dilemma. The African male occupies simultaneously the role of the oppressed in relation to the coloniser and oppressor in relation to the African woman. Achebe's world is an androcentric world in which patriarchy intrudes oppressively into every sphere of existence. Manhood is the frame of reference while womanhood clearly stands for the dominated, subjugated, repressed, shunned, and is used to qualify irrationality and inferior being. Female identity is indeed mediated through traditional conceptions of the wifely role. The shadowy female figures mutely fulfil their traditionally ordained roles as compliant wives, daughters and mothers. Most of these women lack individuality and cannot assert their selfhood even in their own homes. Women's debased position is given credence in Achebe's first novel.

2. THE CULT OF IBO MASCULINITY

Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* to redeem the Ibos from the dark image of colonial distortion, for as he claimed, his duty as a writer was to restore dignity to his own people. However it seems that for him, women are not part of the mainland. In this novel, the Nigerian writer endorses what might be called a cult of Ibo masculinity. Wives, yam barns, and social titles are the highest bestowal for the successful farmer, warrior and man of worth. They determine his social status. Achebe explains that yam, "the king of crops [is] a man's crop" (TFA, 28) while coco-yam, of a smaller size and lesser value than other yams, is regarded as female. This all-important crop is synonymous with virility, and "he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a great man indeed" (23). In Umuofian society moreover, the man who earns the most important title should boast of at least nine to ten wives as illustrated by Nwakibie who has "three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children, and the highest but one title which a man can take in the clan" (15).

Umuofian men, like many African men, chauvinistically believe that a woman's place is in the home. They lump together women, chickens and cows, and want to be the loudest voice in the affairs of the community. This near-invisibility of women in *Things Fall Apart* is acknowledged by the omniscient narrator. Describing a communal ceremony, he confesses: "it was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders" (77). Likewise, the society of *egwugwus* is a secret society of men. No woman was ever allowed to see what was going on inside: "If they imagined what was inside, they kept their imagination to themselves. No woman ever asked questions about the most powerful and the most secret cult of the clan," (78)

explains Achebe. Moreover, when Umuofia was deeply offended by one of its neighbours, all of the men, but only the men, assembled at the marketplace in order to decide what the consequences would be. If a woman had reason to address the elders, who were all men, her case would be presented and argued for by her closest male relatives as was the case of Mgbafo, a woman who ran away from her abusive husband.

Through his authorial voice thus, Achebe seems to condone sexism. The constant opposition in the narrative between manhood and womanhood is rendered mostly through the central character who is obsessed with the show of masculinity. The novel famous for the macho image of the protagonist leaves indeed little room for the projection of feminine values. The most important conflict in Okonkwo's masculinity and male pride is his inner struggle against his emotions which he tries to conceal for he thinks that sentimentality is womanish (24). Paradoxically however, many of the qualities, which for Okonkwo are the marks of femininity and weakness, are the same qualities respected by the society the protagonist wished to champion. For instance, in suppressing his fears and those attributes he considers as signs of weakness, Okonkwo denies those human responses of love and understanding which Umuofia recognises as prerequisites for greatness. The crucial instance of Okonkwo's inner conflict is when he kills his foster son, Ikemefuna, which for him is a mark of manhood. It is significant that after the murder of the boy, Okonkwo has no other refuge than his mother's town, which of course, has to be called *Mbanta*, or small town, which one can read as being contrasted, in Okonkwo's mind, to the strong-featured, wild, thus masculine connotations of his Umuofia, meaning 'children of the forest.' Nonetheless, despite his hyper-masculinity, Okonkwo cannot shake off the memory of his murderous act. Feeling a cold shiver descend over his head, Okonkwo tries to regain some sort of countenance and reason himself: "When did you become a shivering old woman?" he tells himself (56). Indeed to tremble after killing the boy will only betray him as a woman or an effeminate man. And to prove to himself that he has not become a woman, he issues commands to his daughter: "Go and bring me some cold water," (55) and his daughter rushes out of the hut. No sooner has she come back with the water than Okonkwo orders her to fetch his bag. Indeed "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper and so did his little children," (10) explains Achebe. The novel presents the wives as accepting ungrudgingly whatever humiliation befalls them, or mistreatment at the hands of the husband. They are paralysed with fear. Many male critics believe that "one of Achebe's great achievements is his ability to keep alive our sympathy for Okonkwo despite

the moral revulsion from some of his violent, inhuman acts,"² but most fail to underscore the abuses suffered by Okonkwo's wives.

These women remind the reader of the silent women in Djébar's *L'Amour, la Fantasia* locked in the discourse assigned to them as passive sexual property. Sandwiched between yam barns and titles, wives are part of men's acquisitions. Achebe's cultural universe is one in which women are scarcely heard. They go and come with mounds of foofoo, pots of water, market baskets, fetch kola, are scolded and beaten before they disappear behind the huts of their compound (*TFA*, 32). One can ally the existence of such women to that of women as described by Djébar's metaphor of "cadavres asphyxiés" (*L'Amour*, 164). As such they certainly have no real power in their relationships with men, simply waiting for the commands of their 'masters' who take all the decisions. This explains why Okonkwo is always dictating to his wives and resents their views as is revealed through one of his conversations with Ekwefi, his second wife, who dares ask if Ikemufuna would stay with them: "Do what you are told, woman. When did you become one of the *ndichie* [elders] of Umuofia?" (12) thundered Okonkwo. For a man also to consult his wife before doing anything is but a womanly act. This is why Okonkwo despises Nduluo, who in his view, is a hen-pecked husband because he is so close to his wife. Worse than that, Okonkwo's legitimate wives could not even raise a voice of protest when he has illicit affairs with women in his own residence. His escapade with Ekwefi prior to making of her his second wife is an example of such machismo.

This monomania of male dominance is actually rooted in childhood fears. Okonkwo's father, Unoka, an indolent and unsuitably idle man, favoured staying at home, playing his flute, drinking and frittering his money away rather than toiling to cultivate the crops needed to support his family. Concurrently as a child, Okonkwo endured taunts from other children who labelled his father an *agbala*, meaning both 'woman' and a 'titleless man.' From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, one might say that the protagonist's warped sense of masculinity and honour due to his father's weakness and unfortunate position in the village of Umuofia is what has caused his perverse relationship towards his wives and his intense feelings towards his son, Nwoye. Okonkwo's ill-treatment of his wives is but a way for him to maintain

² Iyasere Solomon, 'Narrative Techniques in *Things Fall Apart*,' in G.D. Killam, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 98.

them in total subjugation for fear of appearing as a weak man, unable to govern his household, hence his rigid separation of the masculine and feminine, and his ferocious war on the feminine. After his father's death, Okonkwo became obsessed with gaining as many titles as he could and he did succeed. Having gained wealth, many wives and children, Okonkwo then felt that he had dominated over his father's feminine follies.

In his extreme pursuit of masculinity, he also teaches his sons the male value, and pressures them early in their lives to believe that "no matter how wealthy a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women), he was not really a man," (45-6). Thus, although Okonkwo often vents his anger on his eldest son, Nwoye, he is inwardly pleased when the boy grumbles about women. This shows that "in time he would be able to control his women-folk" (45). In his anxiety to make of his sons true men, he also urges them to sit with him and listen to his "masculine stories of violence and bloodshed," (46) instead of relishing women's story of the "tortoise and its wily ways," (46) a tale which Nwoye is actually very fond of. Okonkwo thus encourages his male progeny to sever their connection with their own mothers in favour of the connection with their father and his masculine side. Paradoxically, one should note that it is through women's storytelling that the children learn important lessons about the human condition, that they are taught the Ibo creation myths, such as those in the birds and the tortoise story, and master the art of communicating so much praised in Umuofian society. Although Nwoye feigns that these stories are for foolish women and children, a tactic to avoid being rebuked and beaten by his father, he proves hermetic to his father's teachings. The boy's inability to fulfil a traditional role of masculinity, and above all "his incipient laziness" (11) become a constant source of frustration and anxiety for his father. Okonkwo's alienation of the boy because of his feminine tendencies, and his murder of Nwoye's friend, Ikemefuna, increase the boy's resentment at his father. Achebe carefully constructs Nwoye as a young version of Unoka in certain ways in order to help demonstrate the intensity of Okonkwo's aversion for anything feminine, or anything that reminds him of his father. The boy's disdain for his father and what the latter stands for, strangely similar to the disgust Okonkwo feels toward Unoka, ultimately makes Nwoye an easy convert for the arriving European Christians. His rejection of Ibo values strikes the direst blow to Okonkwo's hopes for his son. It is as though all of his hard work to distance himself from the legacy of his father is destroyed. Of this, Okonkwo reflects: how he, Okonkwo, "a flaming fire, could have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate? [...] Perhaps he was not his son! No! He could not be. His wife had played him false. He would teach her!" (p.133). Having found in his wife the ideal scapegoat, the 'greatest

man' of Umuofia repudiates his eldest son and warns the others: "I will only have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If anyone of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye now while I am alive so that I can curse him" (p. 148).

But Okonkwo is luckier with his daughters. He has always regretted that Ezinma was a girl. A strong bond has grown between them because of all the children, she alone understands him well. Looking at his favourite daughter, he desperately ponders: "She should have been a boy" (55). If Okonkwo shows much concern for the female child, he however mistreats her mother, Ekwefi. The reader senses a great sense of injustice.

Achebe's women cannot find sanctuary within the confines of their own homes, in the arms of their own husbands and in their society as a whole. They have actually no respect outside their role of mothers, wives or child bearers. Accordingly, due to the phallogocentric view that women must 'produce' many but robust male descendants to be valued within their cultural milieu, Ekwefi has been stigmatised and even considered a cursed woman because after ten live births, only one child, a daughter, has survived. In the eyes of her society, Ekwefi is considered a failure, not because she cannot have a viable child, but because she cannot provide her husband with male progeny who would then carry on in his father's name. Ekwefi has thus become a very embittered woman and feels a streak of jealousy towards the first wife who has given birth to hardy male children. Okonkwo is certainly concerned about the deaths of the children, but impervious to Ekwefi's heartache, and does not even comfort her when she is forced to watch her dead child being mutilated and dragged through the streets by his ankles, and finally laid to rest in the Evil Forest with other *ogbanje*³ children and outcasts as it is the custom in Ibo culture. This sense of injustice towards women that one gleans from *Things Fall Apart* appears even more offensive when we learn that many years earlier, it was the then impoverished Okonkwo, unable to pay her bride-price, who had won Ekwefi's heart. It is also for Okonkwo that she has abandoned her husband. Yet a sound beating is the retribution she receives for her love and devotion.

Okonkwo has indeed transformed the matrimonial home into a battleground through consistent wife beating and physical assaults. It is worth noting that although Ibo women are expected to submit to their husbands, physical abuse is generally despised in Ibo culture. For instance, when Mgbafo's case was presented at the town meeting, the elders sided with her while her husband was advised to humble himself before her relatives and

³ An *ogbanje* is a child who dies and returns to its mother to be reborn.

beg her to return to him: "It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman," (82) remarks one of the elders, but for Okonkwo masculinity is viewed in terms of courage and violence. In a fit of male chauvinism, he beats Ekwefi, his second wife, for merely cutting a few leaves off a banana tree to wrap some food (33). His anger then satisfied, he went hunting. Although Okonkwo is a great man, says Achebe, he is very bad at hunting. So when he hears the wife that had just been soundly beaten murmur under her breath something about guns that never shot, the protagonist becomes mad and aims at her, nearly killing her because she dared make such a remark (33). It was not until his wife fell on the floor that Okonkwo realised the cruelty of his act. His savage treatment of Ekwefi does not even warrant attention from the elders, but his flogging of Ojiugo does. Achebe says that Okonkwo was provoked to "justifiable anger" (24) by his youngest wife because she went to plait her hair and did not come back early enough to cook his meal. So when she returned home, he beat her heavily, much to the dismay of the village because it was unheard of to beat someone during the sacred Week of Peace. Thus the peace of the tribe takes precedence over personal considerations, especially when these concern women. Curiously enough, this breach of the Week of Peace is considered as an offense to Ani, the Earth goddess who wreaks such havoc on the townspeople's lives.

Indeed while Achebe's text draws attention to the marginal place occupied by women, womanhood is also the symbol of all the powerful fetishes/oracles which regulate people's affairs in Ibo society. Ani is a powerful goddess to whom Okonkwo bows (36). She is the ultimate judge of morality and conduct and the goddess of fertility: she gives or withholds children. If a woman has twins, she orders her to abort both children and bury them, for twins are believed to bring bad luck. Ani also bans those inflicted with shameful diseases from burial in her soil. Thus a woman has a life-giving power that is to be revered. In other words, "Mother is supreme" (116). This is what Uchendu reveals to Okonkwo:

Why is it that one of the commonest names given to our children is Nneka, or mother supreme? We know all that man is head of family and his wives do his bidding. A child belongs to his father and his family and not to his mother and her family (p.116).

After a pause, the old man answers the question himself:

It is true that a child belongs to his father [...] A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow

and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you [...] And that is why we say that mother is supreme (p. 116).

Uchendu's words reveal that women are the foundation of the clan and its people. They are the nurturers and caretakers of the people. It would then seem logical that a society which views its women in such terms should not represent them as inferior beings. Nonetheless, despite the importance ascribed to the mother, in *Things Fall Apart*, the figure of the mother recedes to the backstage, allowing Okonkwo to achieve prominence. The mother appears only in chapter nine and significantly is nameless. When asked about his very pronounced marginalisation of women,⁴ Achebe himself insisted that he presented a somewhat more palatable view of women in his later fiction and in particular in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987).

3. PURVEYING COMFORTING MYTHS

A cursory look at the place of women in Achebe's later works seems to reveal that he has embarked on a revisionist course. The writer seems to be making amends for feminist critiques of his treatment of women in his earlier fiction by presenting professional women operating on the same wave length as the most powerful men in the land. *No Longer at Ease* (1960) for instance, set on the eve of Nigeria's political independence, explores the malaise of modern Nigeria: the uneasy co-existence of traditional ethos and European values and the absence of a coherent cultural framework that could give a firm direction to the country in general, and its educated elite in particular. In this novel, there is a discernible change in the style of Achebe's female representation. Obi, the protagonist, receives an excellent education in an English university. When back home, he is unable to integrate his anglicised attitudes and indigenous values. He rejects certain Ibo cultural practices, such as the caste system that ostracises the *osu*; yet he does not have the moral courage to marry his girlfriend, Clara, because his parents violently object to having an *osu* daughter-in-law. Obi's mother even threatens to commit suicide if he married the girl from the outcast tribe. And when Clara announces that she is pregnant, instead of shouldering her, Obi gets her an abortion, and lets her down. At the end of the novel, Obi has thus surrendered to the implacable force of traditional ethos. The *osu* woman disappears from the scene and again Achebe gives prominence to his male protagonist.

⁴ My interview with Achebe on Sunday, October, 12th 2008 at 16.45, at the Park Inn hotel, where he was staying during the conference given at the University of London to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Things Fall Apart*.

In a similar vein, in *A Man of the People*, (1966) images of women playing traditional roles such as singers and dancers are contrasted to those of rich, independent, assertive women. Chief Nanga's wife, an educated woman, is cheated by her husband. She complains to Odili about her husband's extramarital relationship and impending marriage to the young Edna. But when Odili is about to dismiss the woman's husband, she changes her mind. She chooses to remain a dependent, marginal figure, living in the shadow of her husband. Achebe thus pushes her back into her traditional role of helpmate fighting to retain her precarious marital position.

But the most prominent female character in *Man of the People* is Eunice, the lawyer. She is the fiancée of Odili's schoolmate Max, and founder of the Common People's Convention that opposes corrupt Chief Nanga and his ilk. When Max is shot by thugs of a political adversary, Eunice decides to retaliate: "She opens her handbag as if to take out a handkerchief, [takes] out a pistol instead and [fires] two bullets into Chief Koko's chest" (160). But Achebe pointedly adds: "Only then [does] she fall down on Max's body and begin to weep *like a woman* [...] A very *strange* girl, people said" (160, Italics mine). Eunice is depicted in stereotypical terms: she is a woman whose outstanding characteristic is weeping. Moreover, in a story of the utter breakdown of law and order, where plundering, arson and political murders have become rampant, a counterblow by a girl is regarded as "strange." But the protagonist in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) may look even stranger to the male reader.

Achebe's fifth novel, set in a military regime in present-day West Africa, illustrates a culture in which women must save the country from its downfall. Speaking through his alter ego, Ikem Osodi, a journalist and writer, Achebe acknowledges that the "origin of oppression of Woman [is] based on crude denigration," (AS, p. 89) and that the malaise the African party is experiencing results in part from the exclusion of women from the scheme of things. The Nigerian writer thus twists mythical history by masculinising somehow his female characters. Killing off all the men and recreating mythical history allows Achebe's female characters to rise above the oppressing patriarchy. Beatrice Okoh, a graduate from Queen Mary College, University of London, seems to project Achebe's new vision of women's roles. She is an articulate, independent, self-realised woman charting the course of female emancipation. In order to dismiss patriarchy and male superiority, Achebe evolves a new system of power through a series of myths. At the final Kangan naming ceremony for instance, the largely female community reaches a consensus that a mother should name her child: "What does a man know about a child anyway that he should presume to give it a name?" (206) asks

the writer. The author indeed strives to affirm the moral strength and intellectual integrity of African women, but as Beatrice explains, "it is not enough that women should be the court of last resort because the last resort is a damn sight too far and too late!" (pp. 91-92). The point is driven forcefully in the following quote "We [men] never asked you before. And perhaps you've never been asked [...]," but soon the writer adds, "You may not have thought about it [freedom]; [because] you may not have the answer handy" (p. 90). Disappointingly, Achebe plunges again his woman into nothingness. It seems that he could not rid himself of those old-aged prejudices describing women as brainless. Serving the sexual appetite of the lordly male appears to be the limits of female destiny in this novel. Ikem, the sensitive writer, values Elewa more for her sexual athletics than her pure soul: "[...] her love-making is just sensational," (AS, p. 38) he notes, but finished with, she is despatched home in a taxi at midnight. Shortly before, Chris and the young student have subjected the young woman to the characteristically predatory male scrutiny in Achebe's novels. Although Beatrice indicates Achebe's growing sympathy for feminist issues, in relation to the two male figures of the novel, she is again marginalised since the narrative space accorded her is also circumscribed. Beatrice's function as a liberated woman gradually fades away as the narrative progresses, she is again perceived in reductive physical terms. Beatrice, like the career girls of Achebe's earlier works, seems to rely mostly on her body for survival. For Beatrice moreover male support seems indispensable. First she leans on Ikem; next on Chris, and as soon as Chris is out of the picture, the Nigerian major takes over. And at the dinner, Beatrice fails in an apparently patriotic effort to supersede the American female for the President's attentions, "her tears flowed in torrents" (AS, p. 81) like Eunice in *A Man of the People*. Beatrice's resentment at the peremptory summons of the male dictator, expressed in her refusal of the appropriate seat in the official car is, she herself recognises, but "a puny empty revolt, the rebellion of a mouse in a cage" (AS, 72). Despite her admiration for Ikem's willingness to speak out against female oppression, Beatrice seems to understand his failure to give any "clear role for women in his political writing," (p. 74) not as an expression of personal weakness, but because she is fully aware that the entire female identity is based more upon societal constraints: women are taught to be mothers, while men are conditioned to dominate and control. This reveals that the patriarchal system of Ibo society is ingrained in the lives and culture of the people so that they do not even question its existence. Achebe's awareness of the ambivalent situation of women thus remains that of an outsider, a male perspective. His women are just as irrelevant to the practical decisions of running the world as they were in the old days. It even seems that in their very maligned femininity, women are crucial to the development of Achebe's setting, plot

and character, and that his main goal is woman's place within larger social and political forces, which are in the order of things men's affairs.⁵ This is how "things fall apart" for women in Achebe's oeuvre, creating an extreme imbalance between masculine and feminine forces.

Some of Achebe's advocates may of course argue that the views about women expounded in Achebe's oeuvre do not reflect the writer's personal opinions. While I am aware that narration inevitably manipulates the reader's perception of the virtues and vices, the strengths and weaknesses of fictional characters, after much research, and above all after the interview with the writer himself, it appears that Achebe's views are those expressed through his protagonist.

Other defenders of the writer may invoke his realistic depiction of Ibo society and claim that he is merely presenting what he sees. This defence is valid to some extent since Ibo culture is undoubtedly patriarchal in many ways, but the reductive picture of women in such a situation appears to be not necessarily a realistic portrayal of Ibo society. A study of West African women reveals that they were not completely tyrannised as has been the case in most African communities. And in Ibo culture in particular, one can see that historically the woman of the clan held some very powerful positions: socially as queens, princesses, chiefs, warriors; spiritually as priestess; symbolically as the earth goddess, and literally as the nurturer of the Ibos, the caretaker of the yam crops, the mother and educator of Ibo children. These rich and titled women enjoyed higher prestige and influence than men. This power of the Ibo woman comes from two women organisations: the Umuada, Organisation of Patrilineage Daughters, and the Alutaradi, Organisation of Patrilineage Wives.⁶ Though their power was limited in their marital homes, the Umuada were very powerful in their natal homes and seldom could men from the patrilineage oppose their decisions. The Alutaradi were the weaker of the two organisations. Ibo women moreover held a complementary rather than subordinate work-position to men in much of indigenous pre-colonial Nigerian society. To produce an abundant harvest, the traditional farmer needed a good workforce, and women always constituted a reservoir of labour in farming, tending animals, nurturing children, among other activities. They also wielded power to manage their own affairs in the traditional patriarchal

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Carole Boyce Davies & Anne Graves, eds., *Ngambika: Studies in African Literature* (Trenton, NJ : AWP, 1986), 12

⁶ Cf. Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo, 'Traditional Women's Institutions in Igbo Society: Implications for the Igbo Female Writer,' in *African Languages and Cultures* (Taylor & Francis, Ltd, 1990), Vol.3, n° 2 : 149-65.



society. Therefore, Achebe's depiction of the elders as powerful men dominating virtually silent women and making important decisions for their society without the input of women seems questionable. Achebe seems rather careful to remain true to the teachings of his society. It is for this reason that he no longer feels at ease with this new woman he strove to create, but prefers to remain a man of *his* people, thus discards her in the 'Savannah.'

4. CONCLUSION

Upon conclusion of this feminist reading of Achebe's above-cited novels, one can say that if *Anthills of the Savannah* revived the writer's reputation in Britain when it was shortlisted for the Booker, it seems to me that it did not do much for his reputation as a sexist. Polygyny in his work remains intrinsically destructive to women's autonomy. It dehumanises them in numerous ways. Masculinity in these novels, reproduces a constellation of behaviours, many of which are destructive and most of them injurious to women. In his attempt to improve on Joseph Conrad's characterisation of Africans in *Heart of Darkness*, and restore the dignity and pride of the black person in his culture, Achebe simply undervalued the humanity of a great portion of the Ibo population, the women.

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REFLECTING HABERMASIAN PUBLIC SPHERE: A STUDY OF ORALITY IN NEW MEDIA

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Abstract

The paper offers an overview of 'oral tradition' as it has been transformed in the digital age and a different kind of orality has been created reflecting the earlier Habermasian "public sphere". Analysis of the present day 'oral tradition' or contemporary orality in multimodal media is an adaptation of technologically informed complex cultural and social environment from which explicitly or implicitly the new form of "public sphere" is being developed. The work particularly positions itself in the endeavour taken up by a non-profit organization called StoryCorps in the US, whose "mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of their lives." In addition it highlights how the earlier model of "oral tradition", which focussed on building knowledge, memory and values through narration of stories is being depicted via StoryCorps. It has resulted in a new genre of literature or rather a "mixed genre literature" wherein the real life stories of the people are recorded forming a contemporary orality. Further, this paper posits that as imperative as the study of the 'oral tradition' through the natural voice is, we must pay close attention to the innovative channels or vehicles which translate and re-create traditional ways through, visual/audiovisual, electronic, and digital forms. This process of digitalization of the oral word not only adds vigour to

this mixed genre literature, but also makes it a more democratic medium by establishing a deeper interaction with the audience.

Key words: Orality, New Media, Transformation, Habermas, Public Sphere, StoryCorps.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study foregrounds the ways in which the ‘oral tradition’ has been transformed in the digital age and how a different kind of orality has been created which may be viewed as the reflection of the Habermasian public sphere representing private individuals in the virtual world. The present day “oral tradition” is shaped out of knowledge, memory and values which when narrated in StoryCorps turns into a new genre of literature or rather a “mixed genre literature” wherein the real life stories of the people are recorded forming a contemporary orality. The condition, which makes this unique is its facility to connect the space between the hearth and the cosmos, potentially reversing what has been called “the disintegration of the public sphere” (Habermas, p.175) as this orality/literature, which is a consequence of the digital age, has increasingly brought the “public sphere” into the home and vice versa. The paper further enunciates that the present day ‘oral tradition’ has adapted itself to the technologically informed complex cultural and social environment from which explicitly or implicitly the new text forms ensue and with which they interact.

Habermas is aware of the ambiguous nature of the term “public sphere”. As he remarks, “the usage of the words “public” and “public sphere” betrays a multiplicity of meanings” (Habermas qtd. in Simon Susen, pp.43). One way of defining the public sphere is transformation of private people into a public. Essentially, Habermas’s version of the public sphere is “composed of private individuals whose societal interconnectedness transcends the boundaries of their personal lives” (Susen, p. 43). However, the personal life offers a way for private individuals to enter society; as it provides the economic freedom and emotional training necessary to participate in the public sphere. Insofar as the working of public sphere is concerned it depends upon the wider social structure, but has its own autonomy as well. Thus, following the observation made by Habermas the public and the private sphere can be considered mutually inclusive.

Approaching the point of transformation of private into public, it is not just about forming a group but about forming an opinion as a group, for instance Habermas (1974) points out that,



Citizens behave as public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interests (pp.49).

The work positions itself specifically in the endeavour taken up by a non-profit organization called StoryCorps whose “mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of their lives.” As one of the largest oral history projects since 2003, it has collected and archived more than 50,000 interviews from more than 80,000 participants. This activity gives it a Habermasian angle wherein the voice of private individuals from all walks of life forms a collection of “general interest” without any reserve. In their webpage founder of StoryCorps, Dave Isay, states:

The heart of StoryCorps is the conversation between two people who are important to each other: a son asking his mother about her childhood, an immigrant telling his friend about coming to America, or a couple reminiscing on their 50th wedding anniversary. Our goal is to make that experience accessible to all, and find new ways to inspire people to record and preserve the stories of someone important to them. Just as powerful is the experience of listening. Whenever people listen to these stories, they hear the courage, humor, trials and triumphs of an incredible range of voices (StoryCorps.org).

Consequently this paper posits that as imperative as the study of the ‘oral tradition’ through the natural voice is, one must pay close attention to the innovative channels or vehicles which translate and re-create traditional ways through, visual/audio visual, electronic, and digital forms. It was McLuhan, who talked about the medium and message to be the reflection of each other. He while discussing about the medium said:

Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes which are invisible. The ground rules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns of environments elude easy perception (Coleman.web.co.uk).

For that reason the process of digitalization of the recording of common people’s story and dissipating it via audio-visual media not only adds vigour to this mixed genre literature, but also makes both the media and the message interactive and democratic which in turn establish a deeper interaction with the audience. The depth of interaction can also be

substantiated by McLuhans view on how, “the new media are not ways of relating us to the old ‘real’ world; they are the real world and they reshape what remains of the old world at will” (qtd. Coleman.Web.co.uk). Collating the above views, “contemporary orality” as exemplified in the animated series created by StoryCorps, may facilitate re-functioning public sphere of private individuals by providing a platform to share experience and sense of place in a similar manner as Habermas predicted.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Orality can be defined as the verbal expression in societies where the technologies of literacy (especially writing and print) are unfamiliar to most of the population. The study of orality is closely allied to the study of oral tradition. However, it has broader implications, implicitly touching every aspect of the economics, politics, institutional development, and human development of oral societies. Walter J. Ong, a key scholar in this field, distinguishes between two forms of orality: ‘primary orality’ and ‘secondary orality’. In his earlier publications, Ong uses the terms ‘primarily oral culture’ and ‘secondarily oral culture’.

In his works, Ong used the phrase ‘secondary orality’, describing it as “essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print” (Ong, p. 136). According to him, secondary orality is not primary orality, the orality of pre-literate cultures. Oral societies operated on polychronic time, with many things happening at once—socialization played a great role in the operation of these cultures, memory and memorization were of greater importance, increasing the amount of copiousness and redundancy. Oral cultures were additive rather than subordinate, closer to the human life world, and more situational and participatory than the more abstract qualities of literate cultures.

Secondary orality is one that is dependent on literate culture and the existence of writing, such as a television anchor reading the news. While it exists in sound, it does not have the features of primary one because it presumes and rests upon literate thought and expression, and may even be people reading written material. Thus, secondary orality is usually not as repetitive and redundant as the primary one is, and societies’ were the culture is marked heavily with secondary orality are not necessarily similar to primarily oral cultures as secondary one is a phenomenon of post-literacy era.

Ong’s study of orality and literacy rehabilitates orality as integral to human communication. It similarly marks the beginning of new media. This



new media culture only intensifies with the sound and images of film, radio, and television. The new values are of involvement at global level and cooperativeness.

As an antithesis the study draws attention to the role that mass media played in the disintegration of the public sphere. Habermas (1989) in his discussion of the demise of the public sphere describes in detail the manner in which the decline is connected with developments in social, industrial and urban sectors along with the rapid growth in mass media. Habermas said this is a consequence of the mutual intermingling of state in society wherein the public sphere gave in to advertising based on private interests and the press becomes mere trade. He argued that public opinion leading to change of any kind is not out of logical interaction but out of manipulation through different media policy. His manipulated public sphere approximates the medieval feudal system; as to him rational-critical debate that characterized the bourgeois public sphere of coffee houses was replaced by a debate that was entirely controlled by the media. He termed this as “refeudalization.” In short, the refeudalization is nothing but the imitating of an authority without questioning its validity, as was the rule of the feudal courts. In addition, Habermas with emergence of radio and television attributed other negative roles in relation to the public sphere:

With the arrival of new media [radio and television] the form of communication as such has changed; they have had an impact, therefore, more penetrating (in the strict sense of the word) than was ever possible for the press. Under the pressure of the “Don’t talk back!” the conduct of the public assumes a different form. In comparison with printed communications the programs sent by the new media curtail the reactions of their recipients in a peculiar way. They draw the eyes and ears of the public under their spell but at the same time, by taking away its distance, place it under “tutelage,” which is to say they deprive it of the opportunity to say something and to disagree. The critical discussion of the reading public tends to give way to “exchanges about tastes and preferences” between consumers – even the talk about what is consumed, “the examination of tastes,” becomes part of consumption itself (p. 171).

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas offers no emancipatory alternative, yet with the coming of new media and the documentation of these stories of families by non-profit organisations such as StoryCorps, the initial stage of oral culture is translated into a new media culture and adds to the formation of the “global village.” The basic feature of

orality in society is connectedness and mutual interaction among people which creates knowledge and change and this stands true for public sphere too as Sumen writes following Habermas, "...individuals can assert their privacy only in relation to, rather than in isolation from, the existence of other individuals" (p. 43). Thus, this paper will explore the possibility that Ong's concept of secondary orality (in this paper contemporary orality) and Habermas's concept of public spheres of private individuals as developed in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) share some vital elements. Therefore, the paper will use both these concepts to explicate the animated series created by StoryCorps.

3. ANALYSIS

The StoryCorps' original animated short series features some of America's best loved radio stories. This initiative nurtures and explores the connections that American people see in the entire web of their members. In Habermasian terms, this could be explained through the following view given by Calhoun, "The importance of the public sphere lies in its potential as a mode of societal integration" (Susen, pp. 44). Rooted in both the land and the language, stories, in all its forms, relate people to their place and with each other. These stories provide entertainment and education; they include informal accounts of personal events and nightly bedtime and just-so stories about how people live, which depict the creation of family ties etc. and other events. In ancient times, the crippled and the blind earned their livelihood by narrating stories and disseminating news in camps and villages. Their repertoire included foibles, tales, fables, stories, and myths, as well as epics of great formal complexity and local people accord it with proof from personal rationale.

In the following examples, creation of a new kind of oral literature is perceived, which reflects the everyday life experiences of common people:

1)



The Human Voice, (storycorps.org)

The great oral historian Studs Terkel was an inspiration to StoryCorps, and he was also an early participant in the project. In this animated talk, he speaks out on what has been lost in modern life and where he sees hope for our future.

2)



The Icing on the Cakes, (storycorps.org)

Blanca Alvarez and her husband risked crossing the border to immigrate into the U.S. and then struggled to make ends meet. They hoped to shelter their children from these harsh realities, but Blanca's daughter Connie reveals how much children can really see of their parents' lives—and the inspiration they draw from

their struggles (The Icing on the Cakes, storycorps.org).

3)



Q & A, (storycorps.org)

In early 2006, 12-year-old Joshua Littman, who has Asperger's syndrome, interviewed his mother, Sarah, at StoryCorps. Their one-of-a-kind conversation covered everything from cockroaches to Sarah's feelings about Joshua as a son (Q & A, storycorps.org).

4)



Danny & Annie, (storycorps.org)

Brooklynites Danny, an OTB clerk, and Annie, a nurse, remember their life together—from their first date to Danny’s final days with terminal cancer. This remarkable couple personifies the eloquence, grace, and poetry that can be found in the voices of everyday people if we take the time to listen. Originally an animation in two parts, here you’ll see a special version that combines both parts of their story (Danny & Annie, storycorps.org).

An analysis of the above examples explains how in this contemporary orality, despite the centrality of the visual image in the animations, the medium uniquely combines visuality with both oral and written varieties of language. Contemporary orality is thus distinguished from other broadcasting and print media by its predominantly informal aural-oral mode of language use, while visuality separates it from the exclusively aural medium of radio. Orality is generally viewed as the natural mode of communication through language. Being face-to-face, interactive, immediate and non-mediated (e.g. through writing, print or electronic media), oral communication is considered by some theorists to be indispensable to a free and democratic life. It is well known that unlike oral communication, which is usually dialogic and participatory, written language separates the writer and the reader in space and time, and relies on real life surroundings not only with the help of the ambience created in the animations but also with the use of hand gestures and voice intonations. This reinforces the fact that the digitalized new orality of the above kind provides a two-way communication flow from the broadcaster to the hearer or viewer, thus attaching a fundamental feature of the spoken language i.e. its dialogue and interactivity. These animations however, like writing, overcome the barriers of space, and can reach millions of viewers, and may contribute to the dissemination of knowledge thereby empowering the society as whole. Further describing this in Lev Manovich’s (2001) words as he said some of these elements might also be present in the old media forms,

...a convergence between two historical trajectories, the computational logic characteristic of the computers and the communicative logic characteristic of the media (p. 44).

As an illustration one can find that the StoryCorps under different initiative programmes gather stories such as StoryCorpsGriot initiative which is part of the WPA slave narratives of the 1930s to become the largest collection of African American stories in history or launches National Day of Listening on the day of thanksgiving to preserve conversations with loved ones during the holidays or launches StoryCorps Historias which honour and

celebrate Latino stories.

Many viewers will see this as an oral medium, a perception constantly reinforced by the stories which try to engage us in an informal, conversational style of speaking like in all the above animated stories we see use of 'you know', 'I guess' etc. Among their techniques are the uses of direct forms of address, the maintenance of eye contact with viewers in case of direct talking or discussing which makes it appear like spontaneous talk, like in the animated story "The Human Voice" where animated Studs Terkel is talking directly to the audience,

People looked at the couple as if that couple just committed mass murder. You know. And the couple shrinken like this. You know. I am known for my talking. I am Gaby and so I say George Orwell your time has come and gone. I expect a laugh. Dead silence (storycorps.org, The Human Voice).

This digitalized conversationality is also similar to everyday talk in other significant ways. The animated talk created here includes what is natural in face-to-face conversation-like errors such as false starts or pauses, and repetitions, hesitations and silence. Like in the animated story of "Icing on the Cake", the mother daughter pair discuss about their struggle and how it inspired the daughter to finish college,

Connie: Ahh! Blanca: I guess for six months your father lost his job and we never told you that. Connie: I do remember lot of beans, bean tacos. (Laugh) Blanca: But when you ask us why the same thing, remember? Connie: Yeah Blanca: I didn't want to tell you why. Connie: Yeah. Umm! If you could do everything again would you raise me differently? Blanca: I would dedicate more time I guess (storycorps.org, The Icing on the Cake).

Furthermore, the speaker is not required to have a good or polished voice and articulates his or her speech in a very natural conversational style. In this context the story of a married couple "Dannie & Annie", who shared their love for each other and the poignant details of one partner suffering from cancer?

I don't want to offend anybody. I said I gotta solution. I said you walk in with me, you walk out with me. And (?) who's going to walk down the aisle with her behind the casket. You know to support her. And she said don't worry I walked in with you alone I will walk out alone. A:

Hmm (storycorps.org, Dannie and Annie).

Or the dialogue between mother and son in the story Q & A, “J: Have you ever lied to me? S: Huh! I probably have. But I try not to lie to you.” Creates a sense of intimate involvement, a sharing of events as well as time and space. Similarly, another linguistic code, the frequent use of the present tense, is used to create a sense of audience involvement, and apparently allows the characters and the home audience to share the same moment with ease.

In spite of the presence of seeming spontaneity in other talk genres such as television and radio, they are usually semi-scripted, and involve a preparation process including research, writing, editing and presentation. Unlike broadcasting and print media, then, which create meaning primarily through language, this new orality engages in signification through the unity and conflict of verbal, visual and sound codes. Despite this multiplicity of meanings, language in new orality, as in all its other manifestations, written or spoken, does not serve every one equitably or effectively. Far from being neutral, language is always intertwined with the distribution and exercise of interaction in society. In its phonetic, morphological and semantic systems, language is marked by differences of class, gender, ethnicity, age, race, etc.; similarly, the speakers/hearers are also divided by their idiosyncratic knowledge of language, and often communicate in “idiolects” i.e., personal dialects. The dynamics of this type of signification has not been studied adequately. Much like verbal language, however, the visual and sound components of the above new orality genre is polysemic, i.e. it conveys multiple meanings, and lends itself to different, sometimes conflicting, interpretations.

Further, this contemporary orality may be viewed as the reflection of the public sphere comprising private individuals in a more effective manner. By “the public sphere comprising private individuals”, it is meant that first a realm of our social life in which individuals form families and their voices collectively become the public opinion. In this kind of a public sphere, access is guaranteed to all citizens without any distinction of class and creed. Through this a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business nor professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a legal order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion i.e. with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions-about matters of general interest. In a large public body this kind of

communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Habermas saw the demise of this public sphere containing private individuals because the newspapers and magazines, radio and television were the media of the public sphere and they became manipulative. Calhoun discussing about the earlier Habermasian public sphere points out, "First, the family was reconstituted as an intimate sphere... Second, the public sphere was initially constituted in the world of letters... These two processes were intertwined." (12) So the private individuals' stories that can not only be heard but also seen in StoryCorps Animated series may create an intimate sphere for the audience. This along with the sharing of personal experience and the oral history library can lead to a different kind of literature. These foregoing stories thus are examples of the resurfacing of those private individuals' voices at different stages of human life and how this leads to interaction resulting in the formation of a new virtual community. By watching the animated series one can discern the evolution of the human life cycle through the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence and then old age and death. The animated stories also show the various human relations existing among private individuals. In the first story one can see the relation that generally exists between common people living in society who travel by subway daily and the interaction that takes place between travelling companions. The other stories discuss relationships between mother and grown up daughter or growing up son and mother or an ordinary married couple who have grown old together and at the end of their lives are struggling with a critical disease. Finally it shows the relationship and the bonding that these stories create among people who by listening to them became a part of it and sent condolence letters to the new widow Annie in the last story. Hence, if one reviews Habermas's opinion the StoryCorp's animated stories available for whoever is interested is similar to the public sphere, which was, composed of private individuals, whose social relatedness went further than their personal lives. This demonstrates and substantiates our contention of the coming into being of a new virtual community, which not only listens to the stories but contributes by becoming a part of it. Further, these animated series exhibit how there is no original message and the public is creating its own discourse, through self-constructed media. The message created by the people is becoming the message that shaped the news/stories and it is developed as stories which are different from most of the stories that the official media channels are communicating. Thus this may be viewed as an example of the public sphere functioning well in a modern, connected society.

4. CONCLUSION

The detailed analysis of StoryCorp's transformation of radio stories into animated series in a different media helps understand more about this unique phenomenon and emphasizes on the revitalizing of new form of orality in the context of the media transition. This is the way one recollects the old familiar contents into the new media, and this is also the future of any other kind of literature. Literature may be lost in the old form; however, the essence of the everyday stories will stay in people's memory and may be recollected anytime in this new hybridization of media. These animated stories at the same time reflect and reinforce widespread socio-cultural processes of individuation and togetherness of individuals. These not only heighten the degree of agency people have in learning about their world but also grant them a voice to interact and participate in that world. It is still not the case that everyone has a voice to tell a story, but there is certainly a lot more clatter now than there has ever been before. The present paper posited the fact that the new form of orality could further be said as the resurfacing of a new public sphere, which interacted with each other and formed an intimate sphere of its own.

To sum up how this was concluded as reflection of the Habermasian public sphere is through comparison of the following features, a) the first point of comparison is that family became an important basis for being human and man and being free from constraints of the state. It can be seen the stories collected are from very intimate relationships of mother-daughter, husband- wife or social relation of fellow travellers, developing a common interest for the audience. These allow the story tellers with a voice and also freedom from regular media scripts etc. b) the second major point of comparison is the oral aspect of these stories are an interesting example of the virtual transformation of the kind of formation of literature and its criticism that occurred in eighteenth century public sphere in salons and coffee houses. Therefore, one can summarise by saying the new media mixed literature project like StoryCorps is creating a type of public sphere, which is developed out of the private institution of the family, and from what one can see after this investigation it can also be defined as the "literary public sphere", where discussion of various topics from the present world is being conducted without any difficulty from any source, that is also crafting a new form of literature for the first time.

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**IMAGE AS LANGUAGE IN BANGLADASHI ONLINE
NEWSPAPER**

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Abstract

In a short space of time, online newspapers have emerged to play an important role in the institutional construction of 'news' and the mass mediation of information. The home pages of online newspapers feature short verbal texts, and communicate using language, image, layout, colour, and other semiotic resources: they communicate multimodally. This paper examines the multimodal discourse of three English- language online newspapers *The Daily Star*, *The New Nation* and *The Daily Financial*. The visual design of online newspaper home pages and the news texts appearing on them are an evolution of print news genres and their design practices. Newsbites and headline-only **newsbits** are verbally short, so the authors of newspaper home pages are forced to rely increasingly on visual communication in order to position stories and readers, and to communicate the values of the news institution on the home page as mediated by the screen. Thumbnail images are evolving as a new form of punctuation on some home pages, and this may be a short-lived, or an emerging historical trend in the development of punctuation, at least in online environments. Online newspaper home pages are tending towards shorter texts, which communicate in novel ways. On the basis of the work of Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) and the theory of semiosis, the paper highlights the meaning making capacity of online news papers.

Key words: Image, online newspaper, semiotics

1. INTRODUCTION

The art of narrative and storytelling no longer depend on written language only; rather, they encompass a wide range of mediums to express and tell the tales. For example, there is a significant body of newspapers and magazines that often use images as their language to communicate a story. The story could be told only in written narrative form, but when accompanied with an image, the visualization of the reader is directed down to the cognitive imagination pipeline set by the news editors. Since the middle of the 19th Century, images of news events have come to play a vital role in the discursive practices of newspapers, but perhaps the impact on the readers has never been as sticking and immediate than in the previous year.

Though the literature on the use of images in online newspapers is limited, a number of studies have revealed that many newspapers present exactly the same as in the printed edition (Arant and Anderson, 2001). The images that are used in the newspaper, both online and print version, function as a silent cognitive representation along with particular reference to the verbal text.

The aim of this article is to bring out the cognitive role of images in contributing to the meaning-making processes of the discourse of *The Daily Star*, *The New Nation* and *The Daily Financial Express* (three prominent newspapers in Bangladesh). This article will also attempt to show how the images, that are used in newspapers, create a semiotic environment in which both the traditional common sense and the theoretical division between language and image is fundamentally challenged.

2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMAGE AND TEXT

Language and Communication theories are increasingly securing a place in the reality of multimodality, which says that any act of communication is carried by more than one medium: 'the fact that all signifiers are material phenomena means that their signifying potential cannot be exhausted by any one system of contrasting features for making and analyzing meaning' (Lemke, 2002, p. 302). The interaction between different modalities is very important as they make 'manipulative meaning'. If the two, image and word, are combined a new line of narrative is formed that is much more effective and functional in conveying a greater meaning in the minds of the readers which is not possible by using any of them separately. According to Ferdinand

de Saussure (1857–1913) meaning is conceived as a set of signs. In research into newspapers, the importance of closely examining the relationship between languages and other modalities (such as image, typography, and layout) has been evident at least from Barthes's (1977) discussion of anchorage, illustration, and relay.

Image-Text relations have been studied in various contexts in systematic functional semiotics, which include printed news and advertisements, website design, teaching materials and children's picture books. In the area of newspaper discourse, a lot of studies examined the image-text relations using the SFS. This system explores how press photographs instantiate different evaluative 'voices' or 'keys' to convey a news to the reader by using images and headlines in reference with culturally salient object, events, or issues intertextually.

The homepage of online newspapers are becoming verbally short as more and more news are thronging on the homepage day by day. This phenomenon has necessitated giving less information on the homepage simultaneously engaging and encouraging readers to follow the links of the news stories. A vital role in engaging and encouraging the readers to follow the main news-story is played by the use of thumbnails in different shapes and modes. In this study thumbnails from some of the leading online newspapers are analyzed from semiotic and graphological perspective in news presentation.

Newspaper thumbnails use human and non-human social actors which are not merely used to convey the information that is not provided in the verbal story, rather to represent a central element visually and to bring it to the foreground. The thumbnails in this corpus are typical single social actors (human or non-human). These thumbnails do not have vectors (which exemplify actions, change and events). They do not represent any participants in terms of their class membership, analytic structure or their symbolic attributes (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). These thumbnails are, in almost each case, completely decontextualised, gaining a generic quality for which the same thumbnail can be used in different stories in different time. For example, the thumbnails in figure-1 shows a derailed train by some miscreants as a part of the anti- government movement of Bangladesh recently, can be used in another newsbyte where a train is accidentally derailed.

3. JOHN S. KNOX'S FINDINGS ABOUT THE THUMBNAIL IMAGES WHICH ARE USED ONLINE NEWSPAPER

John S. Knox (2009, p. 347) in his paper showed that the thumbnails which are used in newsbytes create a semiotic environment that is encompassed by historical and cultural trajectories, and traditional commonsense and theoretical division between language and image is fundamentally challenged. Knox's study shows that the thumbnails represent a type of social actor that is related to the story and the relationship has a componential cohesion- 'which relates participants, processes and circumstances, or components in image and texts (see Royce, 2002). His study also shows that though the thumbnails do not function to convey any type of information that is absent in the newsbyte, rather they function as a tool to visually represent a cognitive scene or cognitive retrospect of the newsbyte. This is done because of the human capacity to assimilate the prior experience to the thumbnails' participants (human and non-human), the processes and the relations in which they play their role and the circumstances that let these processes and relations be suitable. (see Kree and Van Leeuwe, 1996)

Thumbnails in Knox's corpus typically construe a single social actor which typically does not have any vector (which construes actions, events, or process of change), nor it does represent any participant in terms of its social class. Knox shows that the thumbnails are de-contextualized and this de-contextualization generates a generic quality in those thumbnails that allow the same thumbnail image to be used in different stories.

Knox also points out that the distance of shots for those images used as thumbnails in newsbytes play a significant role in making interpersonal meaning. For example, extreme close-up shots are more capable to make a certain level of intimacy between the social actor of the thumbnail and the reader. In this regard Knox asserts that the small size and extreme intimacy of the thumbnails reduce the potentiality of construing other interpersonal meanings visually for the readers, though theoretically intimacy (distance of shot) and power (vertical axis) are independent variables. But in practice, these two are closely related and emphasizing one spoils the potentiality of other construing other interpersonal meanings.

Near collapse for railway



Repeated attacks on railway infrastructures during the recent anti-government movement have pushed rail communications to the verge of collapse as the number of passengers and the revenue earnings of the service have drastically dropped. Official records show nine trains were derailed killing at least three passengers and injuring a few hundred more in at least 288 attacks during the 16 days of

Figure 1: Newsbyte with thumbnail depicting non-human social actor identified in the verbiage. (*The Daily Star*)

The thumbnails which are used in Bangladeshi online newspapers signify the relationship between the written story and the actual event that takes place. But sometimes a general thumbnail is used to depict a particular event.

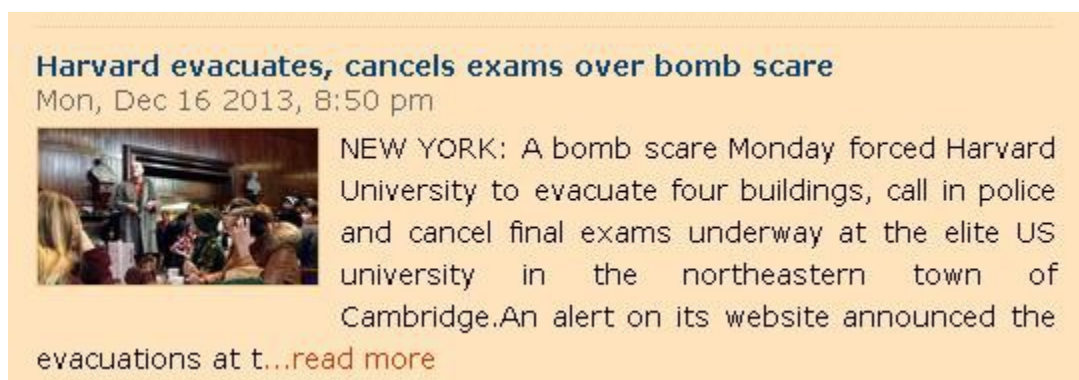


Figure 2: A common thumbnail is used to present a particular event which is not aligning to the events of the story. (*The Daily Financial Express*)

In figure 2, the thumbnail could be from a usual scene from any classroom of Harvard University. The verbiage tells that the university has been evacuated which should portray people rushing in panic. But in practice, it did not align the thumbnails up to the exact expectation.

Though the thumbnails vary in size in case of same online newspaper, they are reduced from their original size. This reduction in size ultimately changes their effectiveness of other choices in making interpersonal meanings visually.



Figure 3: Newsbyte with thumbnail depicting human social actor identified in the verbiage. (bdnews24.com)

Figure 3 shows the componential cohesion to the image-verbiage relation, which means this thumbnail has been used to visually represent a cognitive scene of the newsbyte.

One important thing Knox points out that those thumbnails which are extremely close-up shots build a certain degree of intimacy between the social actor of the thumbnail and the reader, where long shots of thumbnails leave a poor impression on readers mind and ultimately readers feel less attracted to that news. In this investigation it has been seen that the more the thumbnail is a close-up shot, the more the reader has a tendency to have look at the newsbyte.



Figure 4 (The Daily Financial Express)



Figure 5 (The Daily Star)

Between figure 4 and 5 both of which portray two separate social actors about whom the newsbytes is telling the story: the news-story in figure 5 is

read and viewed more times than the news-story in figure 4. It is because the thumbnail in figure 4 is a long-shot where the image of the thumbnail in figure 4 is a close-up shot. The readers just take the news from the bold faced phrase of the newsbyte of figure 4 without clicking to have a look on the whole news-story.

4. PROBLEMS OF USING GENERIC IMAGES IN NEWS STORIES

Generic images are stock-lot images used frequently to illustrate any news story. The same generic images can be used for different news stories. These generic images are either purchased stock photos or reused file photos. For example, a car accident news story can use any image of a smashed up car repeatedly in case of covering any news related to car crash. Though the generic images are used according to their suitability, sometimes the images that have been used pose a question about the authenticity of the news report.

Similar repeated images are used on stories about fires, robberies, trials, drugs, schools, and so on.



Figure 1: That image of a robbery in progress is actually unrelated to the liquor store robbery the article describes. But the reader wouldn't know that.¹

Renowned journalist Robert Fisk has rightly pointed out some grievous danger of using generic photos in news stories.

¹ Sonderman, Jeff. "Poynter." <http://www.poynter.org>. N.p., 7 Feb. 2013. Web. 18 Mar. 2014.

But for years now, a far more insidious practice has crept into the world of both newspaper and television journalism: ‘generic’ pictures of war which do not actually show what the reader or viewer believes he or she is looking at. The pictures are real enough. They haven’t been doctored or ‘touched up’. But they do not historically belong in the context in which they appear (22/02/2014).

Robert Fisk showed a poignant aspect of this perilous use of generic image in news stories by the experience he once had-

More than three decades ago, I noticed in a London paper an Imperial War Museum photograph of Royal Navy escorts fighting off U-boat attacks on an Allied convoy travelling from the US to Britain during the Battle of the Atlantic in the Second World War. Yet only a few months later, precisely the same picture appeared with a caption telling me that the warships were protecting an Allied convoy – carrying arms to Stalin’s Russia - on the perilous Arctic route to Murmansk. No harm was done, you may say. The warships were British, the convoy was Allied, the North Atlantic only a thousand miles or so from the Arctic. But the historical moment – and I believe that the ocean in the picture was actually the Atlantic – was lost. Those warships and their convoy were real. So were the unseen men risking their lives aboard. But their heroism was reshaped by newspaper sub-editors, who decided that these seamen and their vessels should be moved to a different theatre of war – in order to better illustrate a story. The picture was not invented or photoshopped. It was real (22/02/2014).

The alarming aspect of using generic images in newsbytes is that these generic images put a question on historicizing the context of the news. The use of generic images ultimately vaporizes reader’s trust on news agencies.

5. CONCLUSION

Online newspaper home pages are tending towards shorter texts, which communicate in novel ways. These short texts cannot communicate the values and ideology of news institutions in the way that extended verbal texts have done for centuries, yet this function of news texts remains important to the construction and maintenance of a readership, and therefore crucial to the home page of a newspaper. As a result, news institutions express values visually in their design of newspaper home pages. As readers become familiar with the meanings of online news design, they become adept at reading and

understanding short stories within these multimodally-construed frames of reference. Thumbnails are a relatively minor element in the macro-genre of the online newspaper, but they are an increasingly ubiquitous presence on the World Wide Web. Undoubtedly their roles will continue to vary according to the communicative demands of the humans enacting the multimodal genres in which they are found. The Web has fostered the thumbnail, and in this instance at least, language has adopted it. The thumbnail images on the home page of online newspapers represent an expansion of graphology rather than a reduction in the potential of image. This claim is not intended to be generalizable to all online newspapers, nor to websites in general, nor to thumbnail images in general. The extent to which the functions described here apply to thumbnails and other images in other genres is a question for empirical investigation. Rather, what is observed here is one instance of the rapid and varied evolution of semiosis in new media, a process in which new meaning-making practices will continue to challenge our understandings of language and of multimodal semiosis more generally.

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A HUMANIZED PEDAGOGY TO SECOND LANGUAGE LITERACY PRACTICES

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Abstract

This case study explores the second language literacy practices of 4 Chinese undergraduate students studying at an English Language Institute (ELI) at a South-eastern U.S. university. The findings of this study reveal that the micro-community Discourse (Gee, 2011) of the ELI visibly and invisibly positioned them as second language failures and ignored their special and different needs of second language literacy practices. In addition, the placement test offered by the ELI seemingly lowered these Chinese students' English levels and limited their opportunities to develop the second language literacy. In what follows I critically analyze the discourses of reading and speaking practices the focal participants experienced at the ELI. This investigation underscores the ways in which the second language literacy practices in classroom advertently and inadvertently constrained the endeavors of second language learners to reach the high level of English proficiency, so these Chinese students were stuck at the ELI and not able to start their degree programs. The implications of this research may provide new insights into second language literacy teaching at the ELI and support English instructors and policy makers to meet the needs of second language learners in the context of the increased population of the ELI students.

Key words: Second language literacy, sociocultural theory, critical theory and critical pedagogy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The population of Chinese undergraduate students at a Southeastern U. S. university has dramatically increased in recent years. The total numbers of Chinese undergraduates currently enrolled are 2442 (the information provided by Office of Institutional Research & Assessment at this university). The flux of Chinese students not only has promoted the economic and academic development of this university, but also enriched its cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. However, as the linguistic minority, these Chinese undergraduates face several challenges, such as culture shock (Pedersen, 1994), learning shock (Griffiths et al., 2005) and language barriers (Liu, 2002). Among these difficulties, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plagues these Chinese learners of English, which not only results in psychological and health problems, but also obscures their academic accomplishment. These Chinese undergraduate students, marked as cash cows and TOEFL failures (Walker, VWhelan, & Moore, 2013; Cantwell, 2015) flooded the English Language Institute (ELI) that is tailored for them to pass TOEFL test before they start their degree programs. They have copped enormous blame, because both the university and faculty members are not ready for the flux of Chinese students that result from the conditional admission, therefore these second language learners (SLLs) who registered for the intensive English program at ELI are likely to become direct victims of the expansive enrollment. The problematic placement test of ELI, the ignorance of SLL's special and different needs, a lack of systemic and organized reading materials, excluded language learning environment, and heedless grading of listening practices have impeded these learners' second language literacy practices. This case study targeted four Chinese undergraduates at this university to explore how they practice second language literacy at the ELI, which reveals that the micro-community Discourse (Gee, 2011) of the ELI visibly and invisibly positioned them as second language failures and ignored their special and different needs of second language literacy practices. In addition, the placement test offered by the ELI seemed to lower these Chinese students' English levels and limited their opportunities to develop the second language literacy. In what follows I critically analyze the discourses of reading and speaking practices the focal participants experienced at the ELI. This investigation underscores the ways in which the second language literacy practices in classroom advertently and inadvertently constrained the endeavors of second language learners to reach the high level of English proficiency, so these Chinese students were stuck at the ELI and not able to start their degree programs. The implications of this research may provide new insights into second language literacy development at the ELI and support English instructors and policy makers to meet the needs of second



language learners in the context of the increased population of the ELI students.

2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Learning as sociocultural framework

This study is guided by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning wherein knowledge is constructed and reconstructed socially, historically, and culturally. Learning takes place in a particular cultural context, which is mediated by language and other implicit and explicit symbol systems. A vital aspect of sociocultural theory that stresses the importance of culture and language in facilitating learning and literacy development provides an overarching frame for this research. Second language acquisition and literacy advancement heavily relies on the interdependence of social and individual processes in different cultural settings. In the new era of the multicultural and global context, the focus of second language teaching shifts to a learner's language performance, cultural understandings, and critical perspectives of intricate relationships among power, discourse, identity, behavior, and agency (Norton, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2010; Miller, 2004, 2003; McKay & Wong, 1996) through "the use of language and socialization to use language" (Schiefelin and Ochs, 1986b, p.163). One of the aims of second language teaching is to foster language learners' ability to "use language, literacy conventions, and cultural knowledge thoughtfully in communicative acts" (Kern, 2000, p. 271). In this sense, second language teachers not only need to know language learners' "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) to be aware of what SLLs are able to accomplish individually or collaboratively, but also to know how to "incorporate constructivist teaching methods, strategies, tools and practices to develop an effective learning environment" (Powell & Kalina, 2009, pp. 241-242) and scaffold their literacy development.

2.2 Critical theory and critical pedagogy framework

This study is also framed by critical theory and critical pedagogy. Critical theory is the foundation of critical pedagogy, mainly originated from the philosophy of the Frankfurt School, orienting toward questioning and analyzing in order to free people from the situations that oppress, exploit, and enslave them in particular and change the unequal and unjust society in general. Critical pedagogy, a crucial approach to education, is rooted in Marxist and neo-Marxist critical theory (Gruenewald, 2008), which accentuates the importance of enabling students' capability, developing creativity and dialectical and hopeful thinking, a respect for and inclusion of



cultural and social diversity (Giroux, 1992). The most influential proponent of critical pedagogy is Paulo Freire, who claimed that the focus of critical pedagogy was on educating individuals to improve themselves by actively taking part in authentic and meaningful dialogues with their teachers and fully participating in literacy practices in order to create a quality life through transforming and empowering society. He also argued that critical pedagogy helped students realize a transformation from naive thinkers to critical ones. He criticized dehumanized banking model education, because it viewed students as passive receptacles, not agents of change, so the literacy practice needs to awaken individuals to know about their rights and needs to discover, expand, and realize their full potentials to make a change. Unfortunately, some SLL students are marginalized and dehumanized because their cultural and linguistic differences (Salazar, 2013). The relationship between the teacher and students has been reduced to a relation of master to slave, both of them are dehumanized (Freire & Macedo, 2012; Freire, 1973), as the teacher has power to “force their curricula and agenda onto students” (Kellner, 2005, p. 67) but “seldom [seek] their input, suggestions, comments, feedback, or thought about their education” (Cammarota & Romero, 2006, p. 19). In addition, test-driven mentality that emphasizes rote learning and test skills training has twisted the essence of education (Lipman, 2004; Lien, 2003). Students’ cognitive development is constrained, their learning interest is stifled, their creativity is killed, their prior knowledge and unique cultures are devalued, their individual needs are ignored, and their critical awareness is numbed (Salazar, 2013). Being held in contempt by their teachers has visibly and invisibly made SLLs learners’ situation worse (Salazar, 2013; Gebhard, 2004; McKay & Wong, 1996). Divesting them of their home cultures, traditions, history, and first languages makes them feel empty and unworthy (Tubbs, 2005; Salazar, 2013; Wong-Fillmore & Meyer, 1992). Both the sociocultural theory and critical theory and critical pedagogy foreground the question involving development of L2 literacy of Chinese undergraduates. The key question guiding this study is: How do these Chinese SLLs practice their second language literacy skills in terms of speaking and reading in the ELI context?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

To provide new insights into second language teaching and learning, this case study (Stake, 1995) targeted 4 Chinese male undergraduates who study at ELI to deeply investigate and analyze how they practice second language literacy.



In the very beginning of this research, four males and two females who studied English at the ELI voluntarily participated in this study. Unfortunately, two female participants transferred to another university for some reason during data collection, so only four male informants left: Bob, John, Mark, and Joseph (All the names are pseudonyms). The participants were aged from 19-21 years old by the point of the research conducted. All of them were from Mainland China. Three of them did not pass TOEFL before taking ELI classes. Even though Bob passed TOEFL in China, he still thought his English was not proficient, so he decided to take ELI classes instead of starting degree program directly. In selecting participants, I focused on different English levels of these four students. For example, John was at level 1 of Structure (Grammar) in his first session (one session was 8 weeks); Mark was at level 2 of Listening and Speaking in his second session; Joseph was at level 3 of Reading in his third session; Bob was at level 2 of Writing in his fourth session. All the participants took the placement test on the first day when they were enrolled in this intensive English program.

3.2 Data sources

The data were collected mainly by interviews and semi-structured interviews, which were audio-taped and transcribed and had member checked (Yin, 2009). The interview questions were ranged from target language discourses to classroom behaviors, which is aimed to thoroughly know about these four SLLs' literacy practices. Also, participant observations and field notes were as another data source. Post-observations and follow up interviews were conducted to collect additional information. In addition, participants' homework sheets and their diaries were gathered as artifact materials. All the interviews including formal and informal ones and member check were conducted in mandarin Chinese, because it was easy for the researcher and the researched to communicate and express meanings.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Placing or trapping?

The ELI at this university offers six levels of intensive English classes of structure, listening and speaking, reading and writing, including level 1 (low beginning), level 2 (high beginning), level 3 (low intermediate), level 4 (high intermediate), level 5 (low advanced), and level 6 (high advanced) (information collected from its website). On the first day of each session, these ELI students were required to take the Placement Exam. The ELI placed them into different classes at the levels of study according to grades on the



exam. However, these four Chinese students believed that the ELI underestimated their real English abilities, and all of them thought that they were placed into lower level classes, as John put it:

I was placed into level 1 of structure, which was ridiculous. I think the content of instruction was as the same level as I studied in my elementary school when I was in China. I did not need to study that much and I could make a hundred points, but I did not have choice. I have to stay at ELI until I reach the level 4 of all the classes including listening and speaking, reading and writing. In fact, it is impossible to reach the level 4 of all the classes at one time. What is even worse is that I cannot skip levels, because the policy of skipping is very harsh. They (instructors) told me that I can go to high level classes unless I got an A+ of a class in the end. It seems to be possible to get this grade, but it is not true. If I get 97 points out of 100 points, I can get an A+, which means that I have to get 100 points every time, because one question is worth 5 points. So if I make one mistake, I will lose the opportunity to get an A+. And there were several tests; I could not promise I can make 100 points each time. I want to leave ELI as soon as possible, because the longer I stay at ELI, the more money and time I have to spend. More importantly, I do not think the class I have taken is very helpful. In addition, I think it is a shame to be an ELI student. It seems that there are words on my face: "You are a failure". I am under pressure. (Excerpted from John's diary)

Bob also complained about the placement test. He narrated:

I feel the same way like John does. It is unreasonable to place us into different levels according to one test. When I first got here, I was disoriented; I did not know anything about ELI class and its policies. It is not responsible to put us into different English levels just relying on one test. I was in English structure 2 according to my first test result. I have passed the level 2 of English structure test and am in structure 3, but I still think that the class of structure three is too easy for me. (Excerpted from the interview transcript)

For those who failed to pass TOEFL, taking ELI classes was required. They did not have a choice, because their limited English proficiency would hamper their academic performance and accomplishment. However, for those who passed TOEFL, choosing to take ELI classes to improve their English seemed to be a bad idea, because once they got into the program, it was not easy for them to get out of it. As Mark stated:



I have passed TOEFL in China, but I thought that my English skills were not good enough to attend my degree program, so I registered for ELI class to improve my English proficiency. What is beyond my anticipation is that ELI policies fairly limit my opportunity to reach the high English levels; it is like a trap, I am stuck in it and not able to get out of it. I have been here for a year, but my English level is still low. I think attending ELI class is just a waste of time and money. I wish I could not have registered for the classes. I regret it. Every time when I talked to my former classmates, I felt shameful, because they have been enrolled in their degree programs for a year, but I am still at ELI. It is not just me who complains about the policies ELI implemented. I heard that there were two Chinese students who had studied English at ELI for two years, but they were still not able to reach the required English levels, so they had to sign a contract with ELI: If they fail again, they will go back to China or transfer to other universities immediately. (Excerpted from the interview transcript)

The lowered English level of these SLLs means that they had to stay at ELI longer than they expected. It seemed that studying at ELI was a big shame for them, because they not only faced financial problems, but also confronted psychological sufferings. The label of ELI students marked their difference from other students: English language failures, TOEFL losers and Limited English Proficiency (LEP). These identities significantly discouraged them and impeded their second language literacy development. The stronger desire they had to change the identity, the more pressure they felt, the worse their language performance might be, because they “have an oversensitivity to the possibility of discrimination and a low capacity for dealing with frustration” (Steele, 2010). In addition, the inappropriate placement made their situation even worse. They felt inferior to others, even though they tried very hard to overcome the stereotypes. The longer they stayed at ELI, the more money, time, and energy they had to spend, which had formed a vicious circle. The shameful identity plagued them and held back their second language literacy acquisition.

Undoubtedly, the purpose of placement exams was to assess what students have learned and what they have not in order for teachers to design curriculum and lessons to scaffold learning. However, it seemed that the placement exams at ELI did not function as it was supposed to be, because it failed to evaluate students' English knowledge and skills, which not only killed students learning interest and curiosity, but also hampered their English learning outcomes.



4.2 Being aware or ignoring?

Except for the unreasonable placement exam and policies implemented by ELI, the ignorance of different and special needs of SLLs also struggled these Chinese students. Generally speaking, Chinese students' writing and reading were much better than their listening and speaking, which was partly due to traditional English teaching concepts and strategies (Liu, 2002), so these SLLs needed more time and opportunities to practice listening and speaking in order to make up their weaknesses. However, the reality was not optimistic, because their teachers did not take into their special needs into account to design classes and conduct teaching. Like Mark narrated:

There were three forms of practicing listening and speaking skills: discussing certain topics in small groups, mimicking interviews between the teacher and a student, and giving speeches by students. However, I do not think whether the quantity or the quality of practicing is good enough. You know most of Chinese students are good at English grammar, reading, and writing, but speaking and listening are universally weak, because we did not have the environment to practice speaking and listening when we were in China. For me, my weakness is speaking. I wish I could have more opportunities to communicate with native speakers. However, my classmates are international students. I seldom have chance to talk to English speakers. My listening and speaking are at level 2. Almost every quiz of listening I can get a hundred points, but my speaking is bad. I really need time to speak badly. The time of practicing speaking is limited. Even though the size of my class is small, less than 15 people, I still do not have sufficient time and chance to enhance my speaking ability. (Excerpted from the interview transcript)

A lack of awareness of ELI students' weaknesses and strengths might result in teaching ineffectiveness and inefficiency. As education professionals, ESL teachers should know their students, including their strengths and weaknesses, their personal preferences, learning strategies, interest, and needs. In addition, ESL teachers should know about what students have learned, what they need to improve, and what students are able to learn individually or collaboratively by constant evaluation and assessment. How well a teacher knows about her students' agency (including learning aptitude and attitude) directly determines teaching outcomes. Unfortunately, ESL teachers at the ELI seemed to unaware of these SLLs' learning needs.

4.3 Sinking or swimming?

Relatively speaking, these Chinese students' reading was better than their listening and speaking; however, reading in a second language was a big challenge, such as "unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar structures, and cultural references" (Kern, 2000, p. 129). In addition, relevant background knowledge that "allow students to see how additional background knowledge affects their interpretations, to see how context influences their particular designings of textual meaning" (Kern, 2000, p. 130) should be provided by the ESL teachers. Selecting texts is another requirement to help these cultural outsiders to "increase their understanding of themselves and their cultural conditioning as reflected in their beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions" (Kern, 2000, p. 130). Systematically combining reading, talking, and writing together is required to not only teach language, but also teach literature. In this sense, the ESL teachers' appropriate guidance and support are of key importance to improve SLLs' reading interest and abilities. However, the reading class at ELI was disappointing, as Joseph noted:

In our reading class, the teacher neither told us how to read nor gave us quizzes, he just asked us to read a novel or something else. The reading materials were designated by the teacher, even though some of them were very boring and irrelevant, the teacher did not care whether we liked it or not. In the class, some of my classmates played games with their phones when got bored, others chatted in small groups, still others just slept, but the teacher has never reminded of them to read. Surprisingly, in the end of the class, everybody got full marks. However, the final reading test was not created by this teacher, so our final test scores were very low. (Excerpted from the interview transcript)

Apparently, the reading guidance of the teacher was missing. Some questions should be asked by both the teacher and students, such as the topic of the reading material, the writer's position on the topic, the writing purpose and genre, the targeted audience, the readers' interpretations of and perspectives on the reading text and so on. Assigning SLLs reading materials without any assistance and questioning was hardly to reach certain reading objectives. These ELI students, as cultural outsiders, were not able to correctly understand and interpret the authentic texts without teachers' appropriate scaffolding because they lacked necessary cultural knowledge and relevant background of the second language. The teacher's assistance in illuminating these SLLs' understanding of the reading process was pivotal to help them interpret the intertwined relationships among the writer, the text, and the context by higher order thinking and critically analyzing. It seemed that it

was impossible for these SLLs to understand the context and text correctly without relevant cultural knowledge.

4.4 Silencing or breaking the silence?

Chinese students were usually blamed for their reticence in class, such as lack of confidence to share ideas with others, unwilling to contribute to classroom activities, and no desire to voice themselves (McKay & Wong, 1996; Miller, 2003, 2004; Liu, 2002). Why did these Chinese students keep silence in class? Limited English proficiency might be the main reason (Liu, 2002). Like Joseph stated: “It is very frustrating to choose proper words and organize structure when talking in English”. Mark added: “Speaking English is like dancing with shackles. I do not know how to stretch my legs and arms”. A fear of making mistakes is another reason for maintaining silence in class (Miller, 2003; 2004). Bob said: “I am afraid of making mistakes. If I make a mistake, my classmates will laugh at me”. Afraid of being mocked might be related to the Chinese cultural influence (Liu, 2002), because Chinese people highly value “mianzi”, the so-called face, which denoted an individual’s social position, as well as the roles that were expected of him or her by others. If they made mistakes, they would lose face or mianzi. Therefore, they would rather shut their mouth down than talk without certainty. In addition, grouping according to diversely cultural backgrounds may be responsible for their silence as well. When these students were not allowed to use their first language to share ideas with their peers, but at the same time they were not capable talking in the second language, they did not have choice but keep in silence. This was a paradoxical situation. Under this circumstance, there was no chance for them to improve their English even though they attended the intensive class.

Hanging out with Chinese classmates or roommates without English speaking should be blamed for keeping in silence as well. These four participants refused to talk in English with their Chinese classmates or roommates out of class, because they thought that would be weird to use the second language when they hang out together. It was convenient and intimate for them to communicate with each other in their home language. Seemingly, they were immersed in a target language community; in fact, they isolated and were isolated from the natural English context.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this case study is to explore how these Chinese undergraduates participated in second language literacy practices in the ELI setting. One of primary findings is that the intensive English programs



including reading and speaking did not seem effective and efficient for SLLs' L2 literacy development. The second language teaching methods in this setting may not be suitable for these SLLs' actual learning needs according to the data analysis. Accordingly, it is urgent to reform and update the current second language teaching approaches to enable SLLs to use the second language correctly and proficiently to represent and communicate with others, to empower them to be knowledgeable and participatory community members. Also, the placement exams did not seem to function as expected to categorize SLLs into different levels of English class. In this sense, a flexible and reasonable placement examination system is needed to measure SLLs' English performance. Some suggestions below might be helpful to reform current placement exams and teaching and learning situations.

5.1 Knowing SLLs, the prerequisite for purposeful teaching

Supposedly, the placement exam is to measure students' actual English proficiency in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing so that students can be categorized into different learning groups based on their performance. Another function of the placement exam is to help the instructors to know what the students have learned and what they have not mastered in order to set proper teaching objectives and design lesson plans. In other words, the placement exam serves as a basic tool for instructors to know their students' learning strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, the placement exams at this ELI setting seemed to have lowered Chinese students' actual English levels according to the participants' narratives, which may have not only extended their stay at ELI, but also discouraged them to practice second language literacy. The longer they stayed at ELI, the more frustrated they felt, because being ELI students made them feel incompetent according to the participants' perception. A sense of inferiority to native speakers or other expert English learners has been internalized by their teachers and students themselves, which directly results in low self-esteem and self-doubt. More importantly, grouping these SLLs based on one placement test may also cause instructors to lower teaching standard and curtail teaching content, which might result in ineffectiveness of second language literacy practices. In this sense, placing students into different classes according to one placement test might not be reasonable and helpful for both instructors and SLLs. Therefore, in addition to placement exams, formative assessment, SLLs' learning habits and abilities, learning interest, and personal characteristics should be taken into consideration to place them into different levels of class. Also, constant evaluations are needed to confirm SLLs' performance and diagnose their learning problems and weaknesses in order to revamp teaching plans and methods to help them make progress.



5.2 Understanding the nature of L2 literacy, the key to meaningful teaching

For ESL instructors, it is important to understand the nature of the second language and literacy. In essence,

[L]anguage is not simply a means of expression or communication; rather, it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future. (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p. 1)

Therefore, teaching second language literacy is to help SLLs voice their new opinions, negotiate multiple identities, create new and critical selves, construct and develop new possibilities, and generate and shape new visions for the social future (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Take reading class as an example, it is essential for teachers to lead SLLs to “extract information from a text, infer the meanings of unknown words in context, identify main ideas” (Kline, 1998, p. 148). It is also vital to combine reading, talking, and writing in order to foster SLLs’ ability of critical thinking, interpreting, and problem solving by engaging them in discussing, arguing, synthesizing, and examining. The four curriculum components including “situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice” proposed by the New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, pp. 33-36) are needed to improve SLLs’ reading comprehension and other literacy abilities. In addition, text selection and necessary background knowledge building are of significant importance for SLLs to facilitate reading practices. It is necessary for second language teachers to provide SLLs both with the safe houses (Norton & Toohey, 2004) and with sufficient linguistic resources to encourage them to voice their interpretations and perspectives in the reading class. Therefore, teachers’ appropriate guidance and support play a fundamental role in arousing students’ curiosity of knowledge and invoking their appreciation of cultural diversity. In addition, engaging SLLs in class discussion based on a specific topic is essential for them to interact with each other, which facilitates participation in classroom activities. However, in Joseph’s reading class, students were asked to read books or other materials without the instructor’s necessary guidance and instruction, which is problematic. Also, students did not have chance to interact with their peers, so community of practices (Wenger, 1999) had not been built for literacy practices, which begs the question: how much knowledge had the students gained from the reading class? Which kind of L2 literacy skills had these SLLs honed by reading the materials? What were students’ opinions about the reading materials? What

were the cultural differences of the readings from the SLLs' first language and home culture? These questions need to be answered when teaching reading at this ELI context.

5.3 Respecting SLLs, the vital to humanized teaching

These SLLs were labeled as “English Language Failures” and “Limited English Proficient” (all the participants expressed the same feeling), which was a stigma to them. They have suffered so much pressure from their families, peers, teachers, and dominant culture discourse and the institutional environment. ESL teachers need to be sensitive to students' reactions in class to help them get rid of the negative feelings and perceptions. For example, Chinese SLLs were blamed for unwillingness to participate in class activities. Why were Chinese students unwilling to share their ideas in class? Why were Chinese students hesitant to participate in class activities? Teachers need to investigate the reasons: they might not know how to express in English; they might be afraid of being mocked when they speak English with strong accents; their cultural elements might prohibit them from taking part in class practices. Once teachers find out the factors that result in non-participation in class activities, they would try to change it. In this sense, understanding SLLs is the first step towards humanized teaching, because it might help the teacher better design their lesson plans in order to engage the students in class participation. In addition, respect and value SLLs' cultural experiences and funds of knowledge (Moll et al, 2005) might help boost SLLs' self-esteem and build self-worthiness, because these two are powerful resources for the development of students' capability “for free inquiry and critical reflection” (Kadlec, 2006, p. 533). SLLs' funds of knowledge are rich cultural and cognitive resources, which not only enrich curriculum, but also enhance students' self-respect and cultural pride.

6. CONCLUSION

In short, to reach the goal of knowing, understanding, and respecting SLLs to address their different needs to empower them to be capable of using the second language to read the word and read the world, the teaching profession development of second language teachers should be brought to the fore. ESL teachers should have rich and broad content knowledge, pedagogical competences and strategies. Specifically, they should know about how sociolinguistic interactions influence the construction of knowledge and language learning, how to make literacy practice invisible visible, how to create an effective learning environment to scaffold SLLs' literacy learning according to their ZPD. More importantly, ESL teachers need to have a strong



sense of service and responsibility to the ELI students who were laminated as “culturally alien” and “socially handicapped” (Norton, & Toohey, 2004). They need to encourage SLLs to tell their unique stories, share their lived experiences, negotiate multilayered identities, and to voice their interest, needs, and different opinions, and to provide safe place for them to take risk and actively engage in literacy activities. They need to be aware that the aim of second language literacy practices based on critical theory and critical pedagogy is to emancipate SLLs from ignorance and numbness and empower them to realize their full linguistic and cultural potentials.

This case study attempts to explore second language literacy practices of Chinese students at the ELI setting. However, the findings of this research might be limited by the homogeneity of these informants, such as the same ethnicity, culture, and gender. Therefore, the findings of this study might not be generalizable for other SLL students who come from different cultural backgrounds or for female SLLs.

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