

Editorial

Negotiating Common Grounds And Diversity In Local-global Contexts

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We are privileged to have edited a number of articles presented at the Solls Intec 2011 Conference 2011 organised by the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, National University of Malaysia in May 2011. The articles in this volume are broadly situated in the area of culture, language and literacy in diverse contexts. With globalization it is inevitable that language studies would have to engage with the forms and use of languages and cultures at the complex intersections of the global, the national and the local. The papers in this volume have explored the issues and challenges of cultural and linguistic diversity in contexts which are conjunctures of the local, national, and the global. Such diversity brings with it benefits as well as challenges in terms of the competing and contested norms, values, belief systems and ideologies underpinning language use and cultural interaction. The authors of the articles who are situated in various contexts have provided important perspectives on language and cultural issues based on their negotiation of the local, national and global although their immediate focus may be national.

The articles in this volume speak more broadly, of the need for language studies situated in local-national-international contexts to engage with global knowledge economies and societies as the future will be increasingly shaped by plural cultural/ linguistic knowledge systems. The language studies researcher needs to be engaged with studies into hybrid forms of linguistic/cultural modernity that is simultaneously local, national and global. New ways of being, new ways of knowing, new ways of relating, new ways of interacting are required in the global knowledge economies and societies. However, it is crucial to note that in any global engagement, the local has to be simultaneously engaged and negotiated. In fact, the collaboration of researchers across institutional, national and

international contexts for some of the papers published in this volume speaks to the need for strengthening research in terms of the global, national and local dimensions of human agency and action. The work of language studies can no longer therefore afford to be in 'national' silos, committed only to narrow notions of 'local' or 'national' cultures and languages especially if language and cultural studies is to remain relevant and influential. Indeed, most of the articles in this volume engage with the multiple trajectories of the local-national-global, with the intercultural and interlingual dimension of language studies in terms of cultural communication and language literacies in higher education, community and society.

In her plenary paper *Engaging Indigenous Knowledge(s) in Research and Practice* presented at the Solls Intec Conference 2011 which was published in the Solls 2011 proceedings and reprinted here, Sue McGinty has articulated some possibilities in doing Indigenous research ethically and systematically. She highlights the notion of 'the cultural interface' which acknowledges what she sees to be the best of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing, towards the construction of new knowledges across diverse groups and civilisations. In this regard, new ways of being and new ways of knowing are forged nurturing a spirit of 'we are in this together' where the researcher respects the 'researched'.

Zaharani Ahmad and Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin in *Incorporating Structural Diversity in the Malay Grammar* look at structural diversity as variation of grammatical patterns or constructions within a single language, using the Malay language as a case. The author maintains that any form of structural variation that is contradictory to the standard rule is generally viewed as being poorly constructed and therefore, ungrammatical. However, the authors argue that what may be viewed as the so-called 'incorrect variant' is widely and productively used in the language especially in the wider social context. This in turn has a significant impact on language learning in the classroom. There is therefore a tension between school grammar and the corpus grammar used in the informal social context outside of the school. This article argues that structural diversity in the language must be recognized, and the regularity patterning the variant needs to be generalized and formalized into rules. The writers concludes that indeed, if the derivation of the so-called 'incorrect variant' is systematic and rule-governed and culturally motivated, this variant must be accepted as well-formed and should be incorporated into the grammar of the Malay language. Indeed, the vitality of any language including the Malay language should be sustained in terms of sociolinguistic engagements at the local-national and global trajectories.

Normazidah Che Musa, Koo Yew Lie and Hazita Azman in *Exploring English Language Learning and Teaching in Malaysia* investigate some of the key issues and competing discourses confronting English language learning in Malaysia. The article reflects on the multidiscursive ways in which the teaching of English is conceptualized in Malaysian classrooms, raising important questions on the diverse position/s of English language literacy according to the perspectives and experience of bi/multilingual Malaysian learners in Higher Education.

In their article *Linguistic Sexism in Qatari Primary Mathematics Textbooks*, Mohamad Subakir Mohd Yasin, Bahiyah Abdul Hamid, Yuen Chee Keong, Zarina Othman and Azhar Jaludin argue that school children may internalize gender ideology transmitted through textbooks. This article explores linguistic sexism in Qatari primary level mathematics textbooks based on a research project which is committed towards increasing gender equality. The corpus of investigation comprised 502,562 words obtained from a total of 24 textbooks in English; 5 Qatari published textbooks and the rest are imported from foreign publishers. A quantitative (Wordsmith Tools 5.0) and qualitative (Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis) methodology is used to analyze the corpus. The findings reveal that for the imported texts, males are more visible than females. However, in the Qatari published textbooks, females are more visible and dominant than males. This paper also discusses the teaching and learning implications particularly the needs to raise awareness of the existence of linguistic sexism and gender stereotyping in school textbooks.

Zahra Khajeh and Imran-Ho-Abdullah in *Persian Culinary Metaphors: A Cross-cultural Conceptualization* argue that previously, studies concerning the metaphorical use of language focus on metaphorical units from two perspectives: a mapping from one cognitive domain to another domain, and a grounding of the mapping as a reflection within image schema. The present study demonstrates the pervasiveness of culinary metaphors in Persian social and cultural interaction based on the assumption that related food metaphors may single out the distinctive position of eating food in Persian culture and society. Grounded on a particular conceptual metaphor model, the image schema and proposition schema of related food metaphors are looked at to explore cultural variations between Persian and English. The authors suggest that cultural cognition of particular cultural communities accounts largely for cross-cultural variations across such groups.

Khazriyati Salehuddin and Heather Winskel in *Malay Numeral Classifier Usage in Caretaker-child Talk* explore the usage of eight Malay shape-based numeral classifiers in eleven caretaker-child interactions. The study employs a semi-structured elicited design procedure to stimulate the caretaker and child interaction in a naturalistic context. The authors argue that since Malay numeral classifiers are most prominently observed in counting activities, an interactive game was purposively designed to identify the kinds of numeral classifiers caretakers which would most likely opt to talk about in such a context, one in which all numeral classifiers had the same probability of being talked about. The article focuses on the caretakers' usage of numeral classifiers and their responses to children's usage of numeral classifiers. The findings indicate that Malay numeral classifier usage is not characteristic of Malay caretaker-child interactions. The authors argue that the degree of obligatoriness of numeral classifiers in the Malay grammar plays an important role in caretakers' numeral classifier usage and their responses to children's usage.

Zaini Amir, Hazirah Abidin, Saadiyah Darus and Kemboja Ismail in *Gender Differences in the Language Use of Malaysian Teen Bloggers* report a study which investigates the differences in language use of female and male Malaysian teenage bloggers who use blogs as a diary to express their views concerning daily issues about life. The article

argues that the language use is dominantly informal and casual spoken language is salient. The findings of this qualitative study indicate there are significant differences in English language use between male and female bloggers as viewed in the frequencies of five language features viz 'intensifiers', 'hedging', 'tag questions', 'empty adjectives' and 'adverbs'. The results of the study show that differences in language use among teenage bloggers may largely be attributed to gender which is the dominant characteristic under investigation in the study although broadly, there may be other dimensions at work.

Zena Moayad Najeeb, Marlyna Maros and Nor Fariza Mohd Nor in *Politeness in E-Mails of Arab Students in Malaysia* analyse the politeness strategies found in Arab postgraduate students' e-mails to their supervisors during their period of study at Malaysian universities. The article is situated in the intercultural experiences of international research students who face challenges in terms of diverse norms and expectations of the dominant Higher Education context as compared to their background experiences and socialization. The article argues that likewise, Arab students in Malaysia encounter intercultural language and communication challenges especially in terms of the Malaysian Higher Education context. The study upon which the article is drawn looks at Politeness Strategies of Arab postgraduate students in their email communication with their supervisors, according to Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory and Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) (CCSARP) coding scheme. The study provides important glimpses into the Arab students' politeness strategies that would help to reduce potential misinterpretation of their e-mails by gatekeepers. Recommendations are offered to help the Arab students in Malaysia improve their pragmatic awareness when writing e-mails in English to their supervisors and at the same time, help supervisors to be more aware of the intercultural crossings needed for greater understanding of Arab students' email communication.

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