

**Makalah / Article**

## Malay and Global Literacy

### Bahasa Melayu dan Literasi Global

JYH WEE SEW

ABSTRACT

*Selected factors determining the success of Malay as a viable foreign language choice going forward are examined in this article. Attracting learners to select Malay as a foreign language within a vibrant formal learning environment in a globalist culture is vital to Malay maintenance. Arguably, a progressive language programme tailors the delivery and knowledge register of its language modules to maintain the motivation in learning the language. The discussion begins with a short introduction to Malay in Singapore by invoking the socio-historical context of Malay as a mother tongue taught in the national education system of Singapore. Three overlapping areas of language learning, namely learner profile, pedagogy and knowledge register are framed as the areas of concern to maintain Malay language education at the tertiary and secondary school level, respectively. Following from the cross-examination, these variables are realigned in a learning framework towards a sustainable Malay language education.*

*Keywords: Global literacy, language pedagogy, learner profile, knowledge register, Malay*

ABSTRAK

*Artikel ini meneliti faktor yang dianggap sebagai penentu kejayaan bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa asing. Usaha menarik perhatian pelajar untuk belajar bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa asing dalam suasana budaya pendidikan globalis yang rancak adalah mustahak dalam perkembangan bahasa Melayu. Memang boleh dikatakan bahawa sesuatu rancangan bahasa yang mantap melibatkan penyampaian dan penjanaan kosa pengetahuan demi mengekalkan minat terhadap bahasa tersebut. Perbincangan ini bermula dengan pengenalan ke atas bahasa Melayu di Singapura sebagai bahasa ibunda dalam pendidikan Singapura. Titik kesinambungan landasan pendidikan bahasa Melayu yang membabitkan profil pelajar, pengkaedahan, dan kosa ilmu menjadi tumpuan utama dalam perbincangan tentang pendidikan bahasa Melayu peringkat tinggi dan sekolah menengah. Secara perbandingan, fungsi angkubah ini diperhalusi ke dalam satu kerangka pembelajaran demi pemantapan pendidikan bahasa Melayu.*

*Kata kunci: Literasi global, pengkaedahan bahasa, profil pelajar, kosa ilmu, bahasa Melayu*

#### INTRODUCTION

In less than five decades, Singapore has risen from a developing nation to a developed cosmopolitan island state. In the course of this transition, many socioeconomic changes have occurred within the multilingual social landscape of the nation. One visible demographic change involves an influx of skilled and semi-skilled foreign workers joining the workforce in the country, thus complicating the profile of the local speech communities. Apart from the many modern endemic languages, such as Baba Malay or Peranakan Malay, Bawean or Boyanese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese, Javanese, Tamil, Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, Malay is now spoken alongside Arabic, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, Bangladeshi, Urdu, and various

European languages. A detailed survey of selected vernacular languages spoken in the 1950s based on the Census of Singapore Government is available in Chew (2009: 129).

Article 153A of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore acknowledges that Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English are the official languages of the country, with Malay categorically acknowledged as the national language of Singapore. Indeed, Singapore's national education system includes Malay, Mandarin and Tamil as the mother tongue at all the primary, to secondary schools and through to the pre-university level. Currently, Malay is offered as an academic subject or a foreign language at tertiary level in three institutions of higher learning.<sup>1</sup> In official formal written communication in Singapore, the content is printed in all four official languages. An exit directory in four

languages at a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station is illustrating the use of four official languages for the commuters in Singapore.

More recently, the campaign pamphlets of Singapore's ruling party, i.e. People Action Party (PAP) containing a 9-paragraph pledge entitled *Securing Our Future Together*, for example, were produced in English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil.<sup>2</sup> (PAP had managed to secure 81 out of the 87 Parliament seats in 2011 General Election on 7<sup>th</sup> May).

#### IS MALAY A WANING CAPITAL?

In a recent workshop on religious pluralism, on the other hand, it is reported that the medium of instruction for the weekend Madrasah (Islamic schools for the local Muslim to acquire religious lessons) ranges from Arabic, Malay to English (Chew 2011). The use of different mediums of instruction in the Madrasah indicates a cline of language proficiency among the young Malay Muslim students, which is affirmed by a quantitative survey based on 206 Malay students (Vaish et al. 2010). The study reports that 79.5% of the Malay cohort uses Malay as the dominant medium in religion interactivity while 3.7% of the subject uses English. The level of Malay proficiency among these young native speakers of Malay may be gauged further from the recurrent public concerns that surfaced recently in the local Malay newspaper *Berita Harian*. A slew of opinions concerning native Malay speakers shifting from speaking Malay to English in daily conversations indicated that a preference for English is prevalent among younger native speakers of Malay in Singapore (see the observations and reasons offered in Mohd Raman Daud 2010; Aminah Ali 2011; among others).<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Malay language maintenance for Malay is a relevant focus in Singapore with a continuing decrease in the use of spoken Malay at home in Singapore from 93.7% in 1990 to 91.6% in 2000 and 86.8% in 2005 (see Vaish et al. 2010: 160 for a detailed comparison between English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil as the language spoken at home). Many Malay youngsters and adults find speaking English more in sync with their daily lives. In comparison to English, learning Malay is regarded as less relevant in the pursuit of technical and vocational training at the tertiary institutions. The entrance requirement for tertiary education at the local Polytechnics requires good grades in English, Pure Sciences, Elementary and Advanced Mathematics but not the Mother Tongue. Indexing work-related significance, English as an academic subject is offered by all the Polytechnics as the language in modules, such as in business communication and technical report writing.

The advent of English literacy as a domineering trend has resulted in a complex learning and teaching dynamics in Asia. Extending notions of economic, cultural and social capitals in Bourdieu (2001), for example, Chew

(2010) considered English to be a linguistic capital that offers social and employment value. Based on Bourdieu's sociological notions, Hu (2009), on the other hand, maintained that English proficiency is a cultural and symbolic capital although he likened English proficiency to a gold mine in China. A currently popular belief among wealthy and middle class parents in People's Republic of China and South Korea is that English proficiency will ensure success in life so much so that linguistic migration in the form of study mothers leaving the country with their children to acquire the English linguistic capital in a foreign country, such as Singapore has risen sharply in the last ten years (Huang & Yeoh 2005).

Not merely as the language of academic pursuit, English mastery is a popular inclination if we take into consideration the learners' profile of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the age of digital literacy, whereby English texting is a vital component for learning, socialising and reflecting in passionate affinity spaces (Gee & Hayes 2011, Davies & Merchant 2009), the debasement of learning interest in mother tongue languages is not exclusively a Malay one. Observations reported in Lam (2004) and Fung & Carter (2007) indicate a common trend of mixing English with Cantonese among Cantonese social media users. Another investigation by Feng & Wu (2007), which examined the Mandarin stylistics in Internet advertising targeted at young Chinese, has found that the mixing of English with Mandarin is an emerging trend among current Chinese youngsters. (Findings on mixed-code in cyberspace are elaborated below).

In Singapore, young adults from the age group of 13 to 25 years old are noticed to be spending a great deal of time at high-tech gaming outlets at the leisure malls, video arcades and gaming centers.<sup>4</sup> Modern language teachers worldwide, who are tasked to engage a heterogeneous group of young adults in second language acquisition (SLA) may be fighting an uphill battle in a predominantly English-based environment of digital social media and medium of instruction giving rise to English as the new mother tongue (Crystal 2003). It is timely to raise the concern on SLA in general, particularly to identify ways to secure the interest of learners of Malay. In this discussion, Malay learners are mother tongue and foreign language students learning Malay within the formal setting of a learning institution. Formal setting in the current learning environment includes asynchronous learning experience that exploits virtual sites designed for writing, reading and interacting online in a Malay module.

From the pedagogical standpoint, we examine what counts as literacy in the current digital age. An innovative effort is called for to foster collaboration between the teachers and the current learners. The findings from scrutinizing the learning variables in a Malay classroom are useful to maintain a global outlook in the acquisition of Malay, thus sustaining the relevance of Malay among the Y generation. To arrive at the concrete findings, we propose to examine three areas related to Malay language

learning, namely learner's profile, classroom practices and forms of knowledge register. These three components are selected because they collectively form a tripartite interlinking human learning experience with knowledge register in the process of teaching and learning of Malay, be it mother tongue or foreign language.

The three components in Figure 2 constitute an idealized representation encapsulating the formal learning of Malay as a relevant language by the young tertiary and secondary school learners. Acknowledging that language learning as a social activity never exists in vacuum, the motivation underpinning the acquisition of Malay involves other elements, namely issues on globalization and literacy. Extending Malay as an information delivery system from offering basic literacy to equipping its speakers with global literacy is vital. In fact, the ability for Malay learners to remain functional in the modern world of 21<sup>st</sup> century, alongside other languages, is critical for sustaining Malay language education in the vibrant Singaporean speech communities.

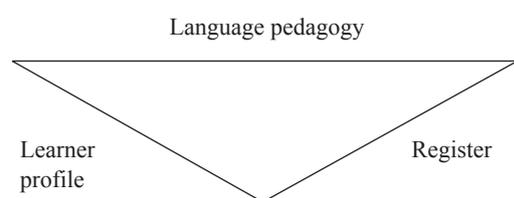


FIGURE 2: A Tripartite of Teaching and Learning Malay

### MALAY LITERACY GOING GLOBAL

Chew (2011) defines literacy in three ways. Firstly, *Literacy* (with a capital L) as an ideology; secondly, *literacy* as a practice to be literate, i.e. reading, writing as well as arithmetically inclination; and thirdly *literacies* as a collective notion of various ideologies. Malay literacy corresponds to all these literacy types. It is obvious that Malay Literacy is an ideology that changes according to different speech groups. Academics and native speakers subscribe to varying views of what Malay *Literacy* represents. The distinct responses on what is an appropriate modern Malay phrase among the native speakers, for example, are reported in Sew (2007). In this discussion, however, we are concerned with the second and third kind of literacy. The planning and practicing of these literacy practices are developed, reviewed and revised in a Malay language programme of the formal learning institutions before the Malay modules are offered and delivered in the language classroom, either synchronously via face-to-face, or asynchronously via *Web 2.0*.

Literacy in our discussion hence involves, i.e. reading, writing and communicative abilities delivered in a series of Malay modules; as well as a globally literate intelligence with an up-to-date Malay repertoire providing its speakers with communicative competence.

Malay communicative competence must accommodate the popular and transient yet current references that are applicable to work requirement and relevant for social interactivity. Skill-based functions are expected of a language in the job market and social interaction. Arguably, learners of Malay would desire practical learning outcomes after acquiring a language with much effort and time. Practical learning outcomes are thus a major component of global literacy beyond a set of fossilized criteria. Instead, practical outcomes include the conversing and interacting skills that adapt according to the changing repertoire of a task-based trend unique in each professional endeavor. In other words, global literacy is an evolving register adopted into the existing Malay corpus.

Malay with a current global literacy provides the speaker with the efficacy to function intelligently in the work environment, thus maintaining the interactive well-being of the Malay speaker. Speakers of Malay, who are capable of performing higher order instrumental function beyond basic writing and reading skills, execute a competent work-based interaction. Conversing in a Malay variety inherent with global literacy is cognitively adequate as a practical social capital. Naturally repackaging pedagogy, as well as renewing knowledge representation to engage the learners of Y generation with a practical focus is a necessary goal (Liu 2006). A versatile globalist outlook in Malay language education assists Malay to penetrate the English dominance to become a learning option among the young adult learners.

With the advent of cutting edge technology, Malay learners are expected to comprehend and interact using a new set of register at work in a professional setting. At the turn of the century, the speakers and listeners in business transaction are making use of vocabulary such as *expatriate downtime*, *global assignment*, *overseas position*, *host-nation*, *local managers with a global mindset*, *cultural autism*, and *host-country managers* (see Earley, Ang & Tan 2006 regarding IBM and Shells' work ethics). If Malay is to remain relevant in the globalist context, the capability to maintain formal and informal business meetings between the employees and employers who travel extensively cannot be neglected. The two components in Diagram 2, namely pedagogy and register are, thus, important variables for maintaining Malay as a resilient language befitting current interaction and self-improvement.

Singapore maintains a bilingual policy in the national education and there is no doubt that all students will continue to learn or acquire at least two languages, if not three, in the primary, secondary and pre-U education. Effort to encourage the learning of a third language is currently underway with Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic considered as the third languages to be offered at the Ministry of Education's language centre (Chua 2010). Set against this background, the discussion focuses on the practical aspects of language education at the tertiary

and secondary levels to strengthen further the practice of Malay language teaching and learning. The notion of global literacy is underlined by a pragmatic perspective in the investigation on ways to sustain Malay learning as a viable social practice. Foregrounding our discussion is a scrutiny on the Y generation as Malay learners in current Malay language education.

#### THE PRAGMATIC Y-GENERATION

Who is the target audience in the Malay classroom as a whole? Arguably, the current Malay cohorts in secondary and tertiary education differ significantly from those learning Malay five or seven years ago. It is critical for instructors and heads of Malay language programmes to consider the changing profile of Malay learners as the digitally savvy generation Y. The youngsters in this generation are fond of mixing linguistic codes in their texting practices of computer mediated communication. Code-mixing is a common linguistic practice in cyberspace among youths including the Malay youngsters. A dynamic language culture with a hybrid of attributes stemming from more than one type of semiotic input is a main characteristic in the electronic register used by current Malay netizens. The cyber Malay variety contains direct use of Malay dialects, slangs, acronyms, simplified words, expletives, exclamation, and emoticons (Norah Mohamed 2007; Zain & Koo 2009). At the other end of the education spectrum, young pre-service teachers are equally savvy with digital technology and they are resourceful enough to negotiate with the establishment for the inclusion of new technology into teaching practice (Burnett 2009).

Purists may regard the plethora of online linguistic exchange as an unconventional use of Malay. From a prospective viewpoint, however, the development of Malay cyber jargon reflects the vibrancy of Malay youths connecting with their peers and others in cyberspace. Either way, the young Malays are corresponding intensively in a global cyber village using a variety of symbolic repertoire ranging from the linguistic resources, e.g. words; the iconic resources, e.g. emoticons; as well as the symbolic resources, e.g. slangs and acronyms in cyber texting (cf. Norah Mohamed 2007). As part of the profile of foreign language learners, we examine the social psychology inferable from two analyses of electronic discourse to illustrate that Y generation is not an isolated Malay phenomenon but a Y-culture. In fact, Koo et al. (2011) views code-switching as expressions of multi-vocality that authenticates imagination typical of learners in a plural-literacy tradition.

The first study examines the language creative phenomenon among Hong Kong citizens between 20 to 30 years old (Fung & Carter 2007). Their stylistics in ICQ (I Seek You) contained a large amount of English-Cantonese code mixing. The second study is a

survey of language use in Mandarin internet advertising targeted at Y generation in China. Based on the language content published online, Feng & Wu (2007) noticed a shift of symbolic Eastern values to utilitarian Western values amongst youths and young adults in China. The language of internet advertising has seen a marked use of English-Mandarin code-mixing, homonymic puns yoking sexual jokes, and innovative reduplication. The researchers described these Mandarin phenomena as an unconventional use in Mandarin.

There is a type of pragmatism contributing to the learning of Malay intelligently to conduct social work in the Malay world. Acquiring Malay in this respect is beyond employment and socializing with others in passionate affinity spaces such as chats and ICQ in cyberspace. Learning Malay is useful to the current Singaporean youths who prefer *voluntourism*, where they travel overseas to serve a foreign community through education or physical labour. This may involve conducting English lessons in Cambodia, renovating Youth Centres in the Philippines, or setting up schools in Indonesia (Shuli Sudderuddin 2007). Teaching Malay to volunteers going overseas for a good cause, in this respect, requires an emphasis on communicative routines as well as sensitivity to language-cultural rich points of the locals.

If education is a means to higher social mobility (Tham 2005), Malay lessons are expected to bring about practical benefits to learners. The pragmatic basis of language learning becomes the impetus to develop Malay language lessons befitting a global good cause with the inclusion of task-based interaction in foreign language acquisition. Similarly, the acquisition of Mandarin is seen to carry a commercial advantage that produces economic benefit (see the details in Chua 2010: 418-419). The preliminary comprehension of current youth profile in Singapore, China, Hong Kong and Malaysia offers some background knowledge to potential learners of Malay in formal institutions of learning. An opportunist approach of linking learning with tangible and functional outcomes is a viable framework to offer second and foreign language education, not least social or economic pragmatism is a natural motivation in learning.

#### KNOWLEDGE-AS-PROCESS IN AN AFFILIATING PEDAGOGY

An integrative focus in Malay pedagogy requires a change of mindset on the practitioners' part to bridge learning styles begins from language pedagogy in the classroom. The methodology selected to deliver learning is already a hidden message in the classroom (Chew 2011). Compared to a teacher, who is always facilitating alongside the students, who are learning in groups; a teacher, who dominates the turns in learning interaction while standing in front of the classroom constantly sends a starkly

different message on what knowledge is all about and how knowledge representation should be. We concede that language learning in classroom is more complicated as noticed from a typical classroom in United Kingdom. In this interesting classroom observation, Rampton noticed that the students detoured from the thematic relevance of their classroom discourse and hummed contemporary song lyrics (Rampton 2006: 119). The classroom observation indicates further that teacher-led learning fails to benefit the whole class and the engaged ones are actually alienating the disengaged learners.

An alternative to the teacher-led approach is Confucian learning. Wu (2007: 4-6) informed that it was the student rather than the teacher who initiated the discussion recorded in the *Analects*. Confucius rarely took the initiative to ask the students a question; rather it was always the student who must have something to say first before the teacher could think of offering or not offering advices. The ancient wisdom that the teacher in the students emerges when the time is ripe, however, requires reinterpretation. The social practice of Chinese and Malay young adults reported thus far suggests that interactive learning collaboration among learners is a practical learning approach. The attempt to integrate ethnic-cultural intelligence with pragmatism in the form of global literacy promises a prospective outlook for Malay learners. We turn to an affiliating model of SLA in Malay language education in this discussion.

We claim that the current learners connecting with their peers online are engaged in task-based interactivity not least engaging with others online is a task-based predisposition that becomes the norm of many young adults of Y generation. Obviously, these learners do not participate in language learning activities unknowingly like the empty vessels because they are goal-oriented and they bring along new input into a discussion (Sew 2009; Ellis 2011). In this instance, the teaching of content may incorporate cultural affiliated reasoning through language activities.

A gradual shift from delivering Malay cultural information to developing a culturally affiliated mindset in the Malay learners makes an emphatic advocate in language education (cf. Kumaravadivelu 2007). The culturally affiliated approach is comparable with a shift from knowledge as content to knowledge as process. Underpinning the notion of language learning as a knowing process is the dynamic language ability towards an expansive growth potential with the language acquired (Prabhu 1990).

The affiliating model as a pedagogical approach in Malay SLA is explicated with the inherent mechanism that comprises the synoptic and iterative mode of language. These synoptic and iterative language functions are illustrated correspondingly with two grammar categories, namely tense and aspect. Tense in many European languages refers to a constant anchoring of an action in time within our current consciousness of

speaking while aspect, on the other hand, describes the development of an action unfolding in time (see Halliday 2000, for detailed explications). Whilst the cultural underpinning of Malay language is a synoptic constant the everyday use in Malay, in contrast, is an iterative viewpoint that is theme-dependent. From the standpoint of global literacy, we believe that enriching the native speaker's interpersonal linguistic performance and their monolithic cultural perspectives with a spectrum of varying cultural references cultivate learners to be reflective yet globally literate. Currently, multiple forms of iteration are noticeable from the weblog of a Malay medical student, who uses his blog as a social-cum-learning platform. The use of different identity tags in individual blog posting among his commentators indicates that they role play varying characters online (Zain & Koo 2009).

We consider the *in-between-cultures* model as an underlying principle in the affiliating model of language learning (Shi-xu 2005). This mode of understanding attempts to avoid universal and objective claim to social truths by compelling learners to seek cultural coexistence and cohesion.<sup>5</sup> We find the *in-between culture* model a useful approach for language teaching compatible with the affiliating model of Malay pedagogy. The dynamics of the *in-between culture* model encourages the practice of comparative techniques in the learning repertoire. Further, comparing differing perspectives while incurring self-reflection in learning is useful in curbing the fallacy of tolerance (Chew 2011), which may be an imminent risk if learners are only exposed to one monolithic culture and denied the chance to reason as well as compare one's view with the other existing (cultural) viewpoints in the process of becoming literate.

Integrating language learning with an appreciative attitude for multiple cultural identities within a wider perspective of global literacy is to cultivate reflective learners of Malay. In adopting a more comprehensive and progressive language programme, Malay language education at the secondary and tertiary level is poised for enrichment including the integration of informed views on other races, which may further enhance the learners' level of cultural intelligence (CQ). Developing Malay verbal skills through SLA is an assembling of variegated lens for multicultural development. That young learners are socially and emotionally open to explore new ideas paves the way for an affective basis in fostering multicultural development (Walsh 2007). An affiliating model of language learning with an affective underpinning is consequently a suitable approach to accommodate individual cultural inputs contributed by every learner in the Malay classroom. The CQ-embedded perspective suggests further that the concept of *tabula rasa* (the blank slate as learning mind notion) does not hold amongst the young learners of Y generation, who are endowed with uniquely innovative learning potentials (cf. Buckingham 2007).

An affiliating learning approach iterating global literacy by incorporating foreign cultural elements into Malay pedagogy may be mistaken as an onset of cultural debasement. The worry, however, stems from the myth that culture is an isolated disparate entity. Such misinformed notion ignores the fact that nothing is fossilized in vacuum when it comes to culture and its development. To strengthen the point that a culture is an amalgamated entity we are reminded that *a key feature of Malay culture has been its exposure to and its assimilation of foreign element* (Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani 2007: 47). And assimilation among Malay participants in passionate affinity spaces is a noticeable trend (Zain & Koo 2009), which illustrates that western styles of symbolic and iconic representations are a common feature in Malay computer mediated communication.

Apparently, emoticons and symbolic characters are typical in the verbal transaction among the Y generation in cyberspace. The inferences derived from the literature on Malay and other languages demonstrates that a culture is in reality a cluster of cultures (Frascara 2006). From the language pedagogy standpoint, there is good reason to move away from the fallacy of monolingualism in language interaction beyond a delimited linguistic system (Wee 2007: 328-329):

Under the ideology of monolingualism, individuals are expected to maintain cognitive separation of their linguistic systems... This creates the belief that 'properly' plurilingual individuals are those in complete control of compartmentalized sets of monolingual proficiencies...[but]...a competently functioning member of the society is...one who has the relevant linguistic knowledge needed to achieve specific interactional goals... [by]...mixing and matching elements from supposedly disparate systems...

Findings on Chinese stylistics in internet and traditional medicine worlds (Feng & Wu 2007; Wu & LÜ 2007), suggests that the line dividing things western and oriental is a psychological apathy denying that the western values and practices on eastern cultural practices have occurred since time in memorial. Vice versa, the eastern contributions to the world civilization have been forgotten until the mass depiction at 8:08 p.m. on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2008 in Beijing. The Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony has reminded the world on the forgotten origins of compass, gunpowder, paper and moveable type press. Each of the ancient oriental inventions has become the foundation for aero-nautical, weaponry, literacy and mass communication in print, when it is taken as a whole forms the bedrock of human civilizations in many parts of the world.

From another perspective, a main utilitarian value in language pedagogy derivable from advocating an affiliating learning model is the favourable condition of sharing some of the resources set up separately for L1 and L2. If a properly sustained L1 advancement is conducive for L2 learning and literacy development (Francis 2005), we have reasons to believe that the affiliating

model of language learning could be capitalised on the foundation of L1 to the benefit of SLA in Malay. There is evidence to concede that the affiliating learning model accommodates an intercultural overlapping in learning well. A parallel academic development is observed from the teenagers from China, who had obtained very good results in O-level and A-level in Singapore secondary schools and Junior Colleges after switching from Mandarin to English as the medium of instruction in a matter of months. These academic outcomes are opposite to what many educational linguists would like to believe (Chew 2010).

#### DEVELOPING A GLOBAL CAPACITY IN MALAY

The emphasis on Malay as a vehicle of knowledge for meeting the current demands harps back to the 50s. Since its establishment in 1956, *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, a semi-government Language and Literature Agency established in Kuala Lumpur has begun to develop Malay terminologies in preparation of a Malay variety that is knowledge-friendly. Asmah Haji Omar (1987) informed that the actual concerted effort for developing a standard Malay corpus only began in 1972 with the formation of Permanent Committee for Malay. Nonetheless, in its effort to embrace a global outlook, Malay language constantly expands the inter-translatability capacity towards a progressive delivery system that is suitable for technical and scientific codification and exchange.

Tham (1990) introduced the concept context-bound language to refer to the cognitive system of any archaic language as reflected in the structure of institution and its associated beliefs inherent in a language. In contrast, English as a context-free language is explained as one that has an open semantic system. The transformative context-free quality emerging from an expanded and standardized corpus in the Malay system provides its learners with referential power for naming and understanding emerging trends in scientific arenas. In terms of knowledge adaptation, Malay has developed an expansive inbuilt-in capacity to denote new technical references efficiently. The resilient Malay linguistic system becomes the foundation of learning a practical Malay variety with an iterative function to converse with co-workers, either for working or social purposes, at the global level. Commanding a repertoire of current development, in turn, places the Malay learners on par with speakers of other languages in a multilingual setting.

We steer clear from ethnocentrism to focus on the acquisition of a context-free variety of Malay in this discussion. Advocating an intellectual Malay variety is more appropriate and meaningful for all types of learners. A cognitively adequate Malay variety is consonant with the significance of Malay as a medium of instruction across all levels of education in a world valuing technology and scientific innovation.<sup>6</sup> Tham observed that the emergence

of English associated terms in the socio-historical development of Malay language provides greater inter-translatability and intellectualization of Malay cognition. Cognition is indeed the speech community's specific response to a given existential reality (see the elaboration in Tham 1990: 150). The mental schemata developing from learning a Malay lexicon furnished and enriched with an up-to-date references equips the learners with a register to *reiterate* their views and opinions intelligently in the state of current affairs, so to speak (cf. Bruner 1990; Shi-xu 2005).

An example from the agriculture sector serves to illustrate the point. Whilst the existing agricultural references, such as *orang-orang* (scarecrow), *nyiru* (rattan sieve), *antan* (stone pestle), *labu-labu* (gourd-shaped water container) are authentic terms in Malay farming these linguistic tokens do not reflect the advancement of Malay cultivation. The terms in Table 1, on the other hand, captures a discernible progress for the community of Malay speakers participating in contemporary agriculture. The agricultural terminology exemplifies a rapid intellectualisation in Malay in correspondence with the progress of current farming techniques. A prospective Malay lesson invoking context-free technical terms may relate the learning experience to an evolving knowledge of the current agricultural society.

TABLE 1. Malay Agricultural Terms (Siti Petimah & Jamaludin Salim 1996: 90)

Agricultural term in Malay	English glossary
Semburan menyeluruh	Blanket spray
Kerintangan silang	Cross resistance
Jentuai	Combine harvester
Baja tunggal	Straight fertilizer
Pemangkasan	Decapitation

Examples of Malay terminology incorporating local linguistic resources to encode and identify the specific references in the modern setting of various technical domains are aplenty. The corpus development of Malay involves a change and growth in phonology, grammar and lexis (Asmah Haji Omar 1987). A survey on Malay terms denoting daily common references indicates that

TABLE 2. A Selection of Current and Context-bound Terms in Malay

Current Malay Term	Context-Bound or Passé Malay Term
telefon	talipon
matematik	ilmu hisab
hospital	rumah sakit
artis	seniman
universiti	menara gading
radio	tetuang udara
helikopter	kapal terbang menaik
maus	tetikus

the prospective effort behind the engineering of the Malay cognitive schemata is progressing with time. A comparison of identical references in Malay vocabulary points to the advantage of adopting a prospective approach in language planning (cf. Tham 1990: 133-134):

Any Malay lesson adhering to the terms in the right column is considered regressive as it creates a dated world that existed in the past. Following from the regression with the archaic registers is little current denotative association resulting in a futile experience of knowledge representation. Disconnecting the learners from the world at large due to nonexistence is a disservice to learning not least learners acquiring the passé terminology puts the learners at a disadvantage in recounting and deliberating the present reality. Moving forward with a current variety of Malay, on the other hand, is an important efficacy of keeping abreast with practical current register to knowledge brokering in Malay (Sew 2010).

Noteworthy, the Malay corpus development faces a lack of consensus in the adoption of new coinages, which may pose a learning problem. Tham cited *harga* (price) as lacking cognitive specificity in representing the various meanings pertinent to Economy and Accountancy. Technical terms like cost accounting, cost effectiveness, cost-finding, cost-plus, standard cost, and cost push retains *kos*, not *harga*, as the headword in the Malay compound (cf. Tham 1990: 134). More examples of context free terminology are noticeable in Ismet Fanany (2003) and Zainal Abdul Aziz (2003), where terms of ICT (Information Communication & Technology) integrated into Malay pedagogy are identified and listed. The existing Malay equivalents are provided as comparison in the third column.

The data in Table 3 suggests that despite rigorous planning and standardization of Malay corpus the Permanent Committee for Malay at *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* is not able to police the use of terms.

The computer mouse known as *tetikus* in Malay from Table 3 contains an interesting discussion. *Tetikus* originally coined from reduplicating the first syllable in *tikus*, i.e. rat, to denote the pointing tool accompanying a computer or laptop remains a linguistic relic performing little iterative function in Malay. According to Asmah Haji Omar (2004), due to the cultural connotation imbued in the word *tikus*, the Malay speakers prefer the transliteration, i.e. *maus*. However, there may be other practical reasons behind the rejection of *tetikus* including the ease of uttering /maus/ compared to the three-syllable *tetikus*. Familiarity plays a role in the selection of /maus/ to /tetikus/ since the former is a transparent loan word in terms of audibility and signification, forming a direct association with the pointing tool. We are not sure if the native and new speakers of Malay subscribe to the western impression of rat as a metaphor for negative characters because *tikus* may invoke the qualities of cuteness and loveable, e.g. *tikus mondok* (hamster) for the younger adults living

TABLE 3. Malay Terminology for Digital References

Malay Terminology	(Fanany 2003)	Malay Equivalent
Makmal audio	(audio lab)	Makmal pendengaran
keanekaragaman	(multiplicity)	Kepelbagaian
Perkakasan	(hardware)	
Perisian	(software)	
Over learning	(pengkajian berulang-ulang)	
Pall factor		Kehilangan minat
User name		Nama pengguna
Password		Kata laluan
Off campus		Luar kampus
Continuous assessment		Penilaian berterusan
Feedback		Maklum balas
Website		Lelaman
Mouse		Tetikus
Powerpoint		
Malay Terminology	(Zainal Abdul Aziz 2003)	Malay Equivalent
ICT		Teknologi Komunikasi dan Maklumat
Berfitur		Berciri
Seksyen		Bahagian
Modul		Unit
Grafik		Gambar
Voicemail	(e-mel bersuara)	
Voicemail	(pangkalan data bersuara)	
Voicemail	(lakaran bersuara)	
Voiznews		Maklumat bersuara
Website		Lelaman
Paperless		Tanpa kertas
Fiber-optik		

in the urban setting. These younger Malays tend to be closely associated with digital animation and stuffed toys, thus, developing a fondness for *tikus*.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

This discussion begins by asking what makes Malay language a worthwhile learning option, and how Malay language may remain an attractive subject to heritage and new learners. The reason for such concerns is due to

the competition of English and other foreign languages as high end social capitals in the landscape of open education. Three variables are identified as the main components of Malay language education, namely the learners, pedagogy and knowledge register. Following the deliberation, thus far, an improved representation of formal Malay language learning with a globalist outlook is available for consideration in Figure 3 below.

The current learners are mostly of the Y generation, forming an intelligent critical mass, expecting Malay language learning to yield practical outcomes for a

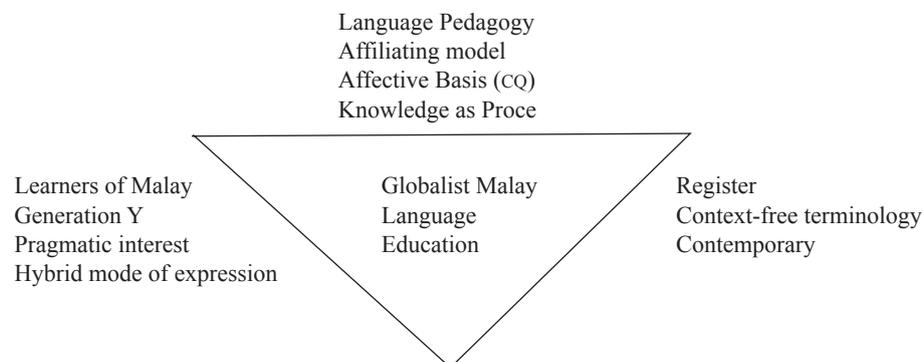


FIGURE 3. A Refined Tripartite of Teaching and Learning Malay

hybrid of reasons related to the notion of language is a social capital. These learners may expect Malay language education to equip them with social and work-related advantage. As an intelligent cohort, the learners do not learn with a vacuum mind hence the teachers need to incorporate their background knowledge as part of the learning repertoire.

The pedagogy approach proposed for current Malay learning is an affiliating model that maintains comparative and reflective views within a globalist culture. Within the affiliating model, the Malay learners are able to identify with multiple cultural representatives. This model prepares the learners to inherit a well rounded perspective imbued with a CQ-enhanced ability to correspond with speakers from other language cultures. Indeed, the emphasis is on the iterative aspect for developing competent Malay learners to interacting within and outside of the local speech communities.

Competent Malay language education incurs an instrumental ability to stay abreast with rapidly changing world of information. This is attainable by planning the Malay corpus according to scientific and technological progress thus expands the register's capacity in knowledge representation. The internal Malay vitality allows for practical uses of Malay as part of language curriculum extending affiliating Malay pedagogy beyond ethnocentrism to knowledge acquisition. Ultimately, a Malay variety developed for an evolving cognition for delivering and communicating information renders Malay language education a befitting literacy for surviving in a globalist world.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A version of this paper was read at University of Leiden in 2008 with constructive comments received from the audience. Lucy A. Robertson offered stylistic suggestions to a version of this paper. My students' dedication in learning Malay has been my constant inspiration. All the remaining errors are solely my own.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> At the tertiary level, Malay as foreign language is offered at National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University. Additionally, Malay is available as a teaching specialisation to pre-service teachers at National Institute of Education and UniSIM.
- <sup>2</sup> The Malay title of the pledge is, Bersama Menjamin Masa Depan. This pledge in four official languages of Singapore is available online: <http://ge.pap.org.sg/uplds/grcinfo/mnfst/mnfst/080mnftatt1606.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> Two stanzas of the English poem Keppel Road by a local Malay poet reflecting on his initial reluctance to embrace Malay culture are quoted to highlight the shift from Malay to English:  
... *In Secondary School I refused  
To join the Malay Cultural Club.*

*I practised the language only  
One week before the Orals.  
And then that one time  
I relented and joined them  
As a chorus member.....* (Alfian bin Sa'at, 2003)

- <sup>4</sup> In a staff retreat (June 2007) at an up-market Leisure Mall on Singapore's premiere shopping belt, the local youths were noticed to be engrossed with high-tech computer gaming (E2Max), individualized loud fashion wear (Revoltage), group activities (Billiard, Café, Japanese digital Photo-shot outlet, Karaoke-box,) etc.
- <sup>5</sup> The notion of *in-between-cultures* assumes culture as discrete existence separated from each other. Cultures evolve from integration, adoption, adaptation, borrowing, intermeshing and accident. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), intricate as it is to the Chinese heritage, is dominated by the western scientific medicine discourse of pathology due to the so-called erroneous approach in developing curriculum theory in modern TCM education and research (see Wu & LÜ 2007).
- <sup>6</sup> Technology and science are different areas of studies. The former refers to the mechanistic and technical knowhow, whereas the latter is concerned with knowledge of empirical relations. This point was made clear in David Goldberg's lecture, *From Genetic Algorithms to Invention Machines and Creativity Support*, Dept. of Civil Engineering, NUS, on 3rd Oct. 2007.

#### REFERENCES

- Alfian bin Sa'at. 2003. Keppel Road. Diaryland. <http://alfian.diaryland.com/forum.html>. Retrieved 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2011.
- Aminah Ali. 2011. Cinta pada bahasa ibunda. *Berita Harian* 31 Jan.
- Asmah Haji Omar. 1987. *Malay in Its Sociocultural Context*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. *Penyelidikan, Pengajaran dan Pemupukan Bahasa*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Atiah Hj. Md. Salleh & Ramlah Muhd (Comp.). 2003. *Pengajaran Bahasa Melayu untuk Penutur Asing*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Bourdieu, P. 2001. The forms of capital. In *The Sociology of Economic Life*, edited by M. Granovetter & R. Swedberg, 96-111. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Buckingham, D. 2007. *Beyond Technology: Children's Learning in the Age of Digital Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Burnett, C. 2009. Personal digital literacies versus classroom literacies: investigating pre-service teachers' digital lives in and beyond the classroom. In *Digital Literacies: Social learning and classroom practices*, edited by V. Carrington & M. Robinson, 115-128. London: SAGE.
- Chew, P. G. L. 2009. *Emergent Lingua Francas and World Orders: The Politics and Place of English as a World Language*. New York: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. Linguistic capital, study mothers and the transnational family in Singapore. In *Globalization of Language and Culture in Asia*, edited by V. Vaish, 82-105. London: Continuum.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. Literacy wars: Children's education and weekend Madrasahs. Paper presented at Placing Religious Pluralism in Asian Global Cities Workshop,

- Asian Research Institute (ARI), Bukit Timah Campus, National University of Singapore, 5 May, 2011.
- Chua, C. S. K. 2010. Singapore's language policy and its globalised concept of Bi(tri) lingualism. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 11(4): 413-429.
- Crystal, D. 2003. *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.
- Davies, J. & Merchant, G. 2009. *Web 2.0 for Schools: Learning and Social Participation*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Earley, C., Ang, S. & Tan, J-S. 2006. *Developing Cultural Intelligence at Work*. California: Stanford Business Book.
- Ellis, R. 2011. *Task-based Teaching: Sorting Out the Misunderstanding*. Talk delivered at Centre for Language Studies, National University of Singapore, 20 April.
- Fanany, I. 2003. Penggunaan teknologi dalam menyajikan bahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Melayu untuk penutur bahasa asing (pp. 156-186). In Atiah Hj. Md. Salleh & Ramlah Muhd (Comp.).
- Feng, J. & Wu, D. 2007. Cultural value change in mainland China's commercial discourse. In *Discourse as Cultural Struggle*, edited by Shi-xu, 73-90.
- Francis, Norbert. 2005. Democratic language policy for multilingual education systems: An interdisciplinary approach. *Language Problems & Language Planning* 29(3): 211-230.
- Frascara, J. 2006. Creating communicational spaces. In J. Frascara (Ed.), pp. xiii-xxi.
- Frascara, J., eds. 2006. *Designing Effective Communications: Creating Contexts for Clarity and Meaning*. New York: Allworth Press.
- Fung, L & Carter, R. 2007. New varieties, new creativities: ICQ and English-Cantonese e-discourse. *Language and Literature* 16(4): 345-366.
- Gee, J. P. & Hayes, E. R. 2011. *Language and Learning in the Digital Age*. London: Routledge.
- Halliday, M. 2000. Grammar and daily life: Concurrence and complementarity. In *Functional Approaches to Language, Culture and Cognition*, edited by D. G. Lockwood, P.H. Fries, & J. E. Copeland, 221-237. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Hu, G. 2009. The craze for English-medium education in China: Driving forces and looming consequences. *English Today* 25(4): 47-54.
- Huang, S. & Yeoh, B. S. A. 2005. Transnational Families and their Children's Education: China's "Study Mothers" in Singapore. *Global Networks* 5(4): 379-400.
- Koo, Y. L., Wong F. F., Kemboja Ismail, Chang Peng Kee & Mohd. Subakir Mohd Yasin. 2011. Literasi Kritis dalam Konteks Pendidikan Tinggi: Suara dari Sebuah Bilik Darjah di Malaysia. *GEMA Online: Journal of Language Studies* 11(2): 99-119.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. 2007. *Cultural Globalisation and Language Education*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lam, E. W. S. 2004. Second language socialization in a bilingual chat room: Global and local considerations. *Language Learning and Technology* 8(3): 44-65.
- Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M. 2006. *New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Classroom Learning*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Liu, A. 2006. The humanities: A technical profession. In *Teaching, Technology, Textuality: Approaches to New Media*, edited by M. Hanrahan, & D. L. Madsen, 11-26. New York: Palgrave.
- Mohd. Raman Daud. 2010. Menjadi bangsa yang berbahasa ibunda. *Berita Harian*, 13th May.
- Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani. 2007. Islam, modernity and western influence in Malay literature: An analysis of the employment of narrative devices in Shahnun Ahmad's TIVI. *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 9(2): 47-64.
- Noriah Mohamed. 2007. Bahasa Melayu dalam perkembangan teknologi maklumat dan komunikasi: Metafora dan perubahan. In *Bahasa dan pemikiran Melayu/Indonesia menyongsong 2025*, edited by Irwandy 180-216. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Prabhu, N. S. 1990. There is no best method-Why? *TESOL Quarterly* 24(2): 161-176.
- Rampton, B. 2006. *Language in Late Modernity: Interaction in an Urban School*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sew, J. W. 2007. *Reduplicating Nouns and Verbs in Malay: A Conceptual Analysis*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. Wired new learning: Blogging Malay literacy. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching* 6(S1), 302-314. Retrieved 9th May, 2011 from <http://e-flt.nus.edu.sg/v6sp12009/sew.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. [Persembahan@Media.com](mailto:Persembahan@Media.com). Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Shi-xu. 2005. *A Cultural Approach to Discourse*. New York: Palgrave.
- Shi-xu, ed. 2007. *Discourse as Cultural Struggle*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press
- Shuli Sudderuddin. 2007. Volunteer at home? No thanks. *The Sunday Times*, 23 Dec. [http://www.straitstimes.com/Free/Story/STISStory\\_189488.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/Free/Story/STISStory_189488.html). Retrieved 8th May, 2011.
- Siti Petimah Hj. Hassan & Jamaluddin Salim. 1996. Penyampaian maklumat teknikal dan teknologi melalui Bahasa Melayu. In Amdun Husain, & Zubaidi Abas (Eds.), *Prosiding Seminar Kebahasaan Majlis Bahasa Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia* (83-94). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Tham, S. C. 2005. Values and development: Some reflections. In *Local and Global: Social Transformation in Southeast Asia*, edited by R. Hassan, 219-235. Leiden: Brill.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. *A Study of the Evolution of the Malay Language: Social Change and Cognitive Development*. Kent Ridge: Singapore University Press.
- Vaish, V., Tan, T. B-H., Wendy, D., Hogan, D. & Kang, T. 2010. Language and social capital in Singapore. In *English in Singapore: Modernity and management*, edited by L. Lim, A. Pakir, & L. Wee, 159-180. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Walsh, C. S. 2007. Creativity as capital in the literacy classroom: Youth as multimodal designers. *Literacy* 41(2): 79-85.
- Wee, L. 2007. Linguistic human rights and mobility. *Multilingual & Multicultural Development* 28(4): 325-338.
- Wu, Z. & LÜ, Q. 2007. The discourse of Chinese medicine and westernization. In *Discourse as Cultural Struggle*, edited by Shi-xu, 155-176.
- Wu, Zongjie. 2007. Recovering the language of Tao: Cultural transformation of Chinese pedagogic discourse. Redesigning Pedagogy Conference. NTU, 28-30 May.

<http://conference.nie.edu.sg/2007/paper/papers/PanelA2.pdf>. Retrieved 20th May, 2011.

Zainal Abdul Aziz. 2003. Reka bentuk pengajaran bahasa asing berasaskan ICT bagi penutur asing (223-253). In Atiah Hj. Md. Salleh & Ramlah Muhd (Comp.).

Zain, A. M. & Koo, Yew Lie. 2009. Web-logging as a multimedia literacy event: Analyzing the discourse space of a student blogger's Speech Community. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research* 5: 1-26.

Jyh Wee Sew, Ph.D  
Centre for Language Studies  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
National University of Singapore  
Singapore.  
e-mail: [clssjw@nus.edu.sg](mailto:clssjw@nus.edu.sg)

