# Bringing Literature and Linguistics into EFL Classrooms

# Bringing Literature and Linguistics into EFL Classrooms: Insights from Research and Classroom Practice

Edited by

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# INTRODUCTION

NUGRAHENNY T. ZACHARIAS
AND CHRISTINE MANARA

The purpose of this edited book is to inform how theories or approaches in linguistics and literature can be beneficial in English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) contexts. The goal is not to propose "best method" that would work in every context—rather, to illustrate and share the different ways in which theories drawn from linguistics and literature can enrich English teaching. The book in particular puts emphasis on practical teaching techniques and approaches in using literary works and theories in linguistics in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

This book brings together educators' work and experiences in the teaching literature, linguistics, and language and culture into the English language classroom. These works were presented at an International Seminar with the theme "Bringing linguistics and literature into EFL classrooms" organised by the Faculty of Language and Literature and the Language Training Centre of Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Indonesia, on November 24 – 25, 2010.

The goal of the conference is to gather teachers, teacher educators, and learners of language study to share, negotiate, and co-construct learning and teaching experiences. The conference also functions as a dialogic learning site for all participants from various countries (Australia, Indonesia, Nepal, Malaysia, New Zealand, and USA). The articles presented at this conference offer this richness and diversity of contexts and experiences. This book can be considered as another meeting point for discussion and learning experiences with a wider audience. Therefore, we find it important to put together these discussions and ideas into this anthology of articles authored and shared by educators from various countries. We believe that presenting this collection of articles is a way of communicating ideas and stimulating dialogue with our readers to get engaged with their own teaching context through reflecting, understanding, and responding to their own teaching context.

This collection of articles includes twelve chapters: 11 selected papers from the conference and one invited paper. For ease of reference, the collection has been arranged in three main sections. The first section consists of articles focusing on the teaching and learning of, the currently developing notion in ELT, multiculturalism in English language study. The second section specifically explores some ways of working with literary works in teaching and learning language. Finally, the third section looks at how applied linguistics can also be used as an approach in language teaching and learning.

What sets this book apart from existing books is its explicit coverage of research and practical aspects of teaching. This project has been prompted by the increasing split between the fields of linguistics, literatures and English language teaching. The book will uniquely address this gap. Additionally, the book gives practical classroom applications on how to use theories of linguistics and literary texts in the classrooms.

The book can be best described as a professional volume put together by scholars and classroom teachers that works well as a university-level textbook. The book will be suitable for academics and professional audiences. It will provide theoretical and contextual knowledge for undergraduate or graduate students in TESOL, applied linguistics, or related programs. The book will inform practicing teachers who are interested in using theories of linguistics and literature in their classroom and teacher educators who are preparing and assisting pre-service and in-service teachers in the area of TESOL, applied linguistics, or related programs.

# PART I:

# BRINGING MULTICULTURALISM INTO EFL CLASSROOM

# CHAPTER ONE

# "IT'S LIKE UM…I CAN'T EXPLAIN… WHATEVER": MULTICULTURALISM AND MY-CULTURALISM IN ENGLISH CLASSES

ROBY MARLINA

## Introduction

I would like to commence this paper with a short episode of a lesson of my colleague, Leah (pseudonym), on '*politeness in international communication*' in her first year undergraduate English as an International Language class, which has 20 students from diverse lingua-cultural backgrounds. It is this lesson that has motivated me to write this paper and will be used as the basis for the claims I modestly make in this paper.

> "Today's we're talking about a very interesting topic which is highly relevant to you…and what makes it even more interesting is that all of us can learn about each other's perception, each other's cultural values", Leah started the class. She briefly summarised the theories discussed in the prescribed reading and then moved on to an activity. Students were given a list of scenarios and asked to explain what they would do/say in each of those given scenarios. One of the scenarios was: 'A representative from an overseas company is visiting your company to inspect the products that you sell. As this is the first encounter with the representative, how would you start the conversation?' After students finished discussing, Lee asked them to share it with the whole class.
>
> One Anglo-Australian student, Jim, said, "I would first introduce myself, hello my name is Jim, nice to meet you and I would expect him to do the same and then after that I'll talk about our product and give him a company tour". In response to this, a Japanese student, Taka, laughed, "wow, that's so Australian, Japanese wouldn't do that, we would say last name plus 'san', Japanese term of address, and then say 'it's a pleasure to

> meet you and hope to establish good working relationship with you'". Then a Chinese student, Fei, responded, "I would say 'welcome' Mr. or Ms. Chen (surname), and then I'd ask them about their flight, their journey, and say things like 'you must be tired'". Kim, a Korean student, added, "I would look at the person and guess the age of the person and then I'll think about what to say based on their age, but if I don't know, I'll ask the age of the person". When Tae, another Korean student, heard this, he (with a puzzled frown on his face) said "I wouldn't ask about that person's age". Jim agreed "yeah, that would be so impolite, but does it matter though?" Kim responded 'Tae, that's very un-Korean, I don't know why you said that! so unbelievable, and, Jim, Koreans have to know about each other's age, it's a very important thing in our society'.
>
> Leah was very fascinated by these different responses and probed the students further, "So, Jim, why would you use your first name and expect the person to do the same; Taka, why last name plus san?; Fei, why would you ask them about their flight, journey, and say 'you must be tired'?; and Kim, what's with the age?.
>
> All of them answered either it's polite or impolite to do/say […] in their cultures. Leah was unsatisfied and probed further "but why is it polite or impolite to do/say that? Jim said, "well, you know, it's an Australian thing, I don't know how to explain it, but it's our habit". Kim nodded and said, "well, it's very Korean, and I don't know why Tae said that". Tae did not say anything. Leah was a bit disappointed because nobody had answered her answer satisfactorily. She then asked Fei, 'what about you?". Fei said, "it's like um…so Chinese, you know um…I don't know um… how to say…I can't explain…whatever".

Multiculturalism or cultural diversity is a relatively fashionable term, though it is not something new, in today's discourse of education. A number of primary and secondary schools in Australia promote the importance of learning and teaching LOTE (Languages Other Than English) and organise multicultural festivals to allow students to learn, experience, and appreciate cultural diversity. Many universities in different parts of the world have also been making considerable efforts to internationalise their curriculum so that students graduate with the ability to function effectively in multicultural social and professional contexts. In English language classes or programs in particular, multiculturalism is often the core teaching focus. Cultural understanding, cultural awareness, cross-cultural comparisons, and multicultural competence have been "on the lips of English teachers" (Tanaka, 2006, p.55) and declared to be an essential main component in ESOL classrooms (Araluce, 2008; Harumi, 2002; Stern, 1983; Tanaka, 2006). Both Araluce (2008) and Harumi (2002) further argue that it is often English language classrooms that provide students with ample opportunities of raising cultural awareness

and developing multicultural competence. Thus, this paper begins by addressing possible reasons for this 'obsession' with multiculturalism as a core focus or element in today's English language programs. As enriching and inclusive as multiculturalism-oriented English language classes/ programs/curricula may sound, this paper modestly claims that knowing and understanding cultural traits and behaviours from different countries tends to be limiting rather than enriching learners' knowledge and perceptions. The paper will then conclude with some modest suggestions and their limitations which English teachers may want to consider in their own contexts of teaching.

## Why 'Multiculturalism' in English Language Teaching (ELT)?

The forces of globalisation and the current status of English can be argued as some of the main reasons for the recurring emphasis of the teaching of multiculturalism in today's English language education. Due to the rapid forces of globalisation, citizens of the world today are living in a 'small global village' or, as Hall (1997) termed, 'postmodern globalisation' era. An era in which global citizens can witness "the porosity of national boundaries that allow people, goods, and ideas to flow easily between borders" (Canagarajah, 2007, p.231) and the "inescapable interrelationships in virtually all spheres of activity such as trade and commerce, international diplomacy, communications, transport and travel, defence matters, education, entertainment, and so on" (Nihalani, 2008, p.243). The advancement of information and communication technology (internet, on-line chatting, online networking sites etc) and increased human mobility around the globe have further allowed citizens from different parts of the world to be in contact with each other without stepping outside their national boundary. For example, with the growing number of students, travellers, and migrants in Australia, Australian citizens have an abundance of exposures to diverse cultures and languages. In addition, these exposures are also a remote-switch away as Australia has a broadcaster called SBS, Special Broadcasting Service, which provides the citizens with news, shows, films, entertainment etc. from many different countries and in different languages. Thus, multicultural literacy and multicultural competence are essential in the 21st Century. Then, what role does the English language play in today's context of globalisation?

Not intending to devalue the importance or suggesting the unimportance of learning/teaching other languages in the world, the English language currently enjoys the status of an international language. It is inescapably

one of the chosen languages in a variety of international economic and cultural arenas such as the language of international organisations, motion picture industry and popular music, international travel, publications, and education (Crystal, 1997, Graddol, 1997; McKay, 2002; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). As a result of this, the world has witnessed a dramatic growth in the numbers of speakers of English and nations bestowing a special role or priority upon English, either by making it an official language of the country or by requiring its study as a foreign language (Crystal, 1997; McKay, 2002). Additionally, English is most likely one of the most frequently used tools of communication between people who do not speak each other's mother tongue[1]. Therefore, as Nihalani (2008) puts it, "with the dawn of the Internet age and the trend towards globalisation, proficiency in English is a crucial skill for survival" (p. 243). What is even more crucial is the ability to use English to communicate with people from diverse lingua-cultural backgrounds and to operate effectively in a variety of settings that are multicultural in nature.

Informed by the current situation of the world and the status of English discussed above, many English language educators have been encouraged to integrate multicultural issues into the curriculum or learning materials that aim to develop respect for voices of people from different race, colour, and gender; to increase students' multicultural knowledge within the framework of universal respect; and to promote equality of opportunity and respectful treatment to people from all ethnic backgrounds (Araluce, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). Instead of only learning about American or British cultures, multiculturalism-oriented ELT materials/curricula/classrooms would include, what Cortazzi and Jin (1996) termed, international cultures, which consist of a great variety of cultures from countries around the world. Not only does this provide students with opportunities to expand their knowledge of other cultures and learn to appreciate other cultures, but they can also learn to accept that learning English does not necessarily mean learning American or British cultures. In addition, multiculturalism-oriented materials also need to have more representations of users of English from different parts of the world by using non-Anglo names and non-Caucasian characters (Gray, 2002; Matsuda, 2002, 2005). In fact, a study by Marlina and Giri (2009) has found that in practice, some material developers and English language teachers (including Leah) in Australia, to some extent, have implemented some of these suggestions in designing, choosing, and teaching the

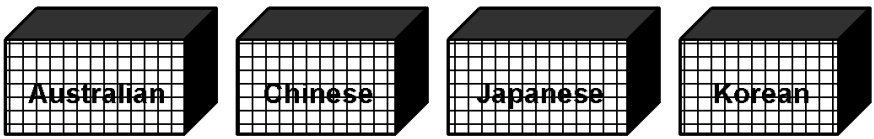
[1] By this, I refer to all users or speakers of English irregardless of their 'nativeness' status and their country of origin.

materials. Therefore, there seems to be a belief that these materials may be considered useful as they promote multiculturalism and at the same time guide students to become competent users of English in today's globalised world. However, this is still inadequate, especially in the light of my colleague's classroom which I shared at the beginning of this chapter.

## Problematising multiculturalism in ELT

Although the concept of multiculturalism promotes the values of and respect for cultural diversity, it seems to overlook that this is likely to limit students' views of cultural differences, hinder the process of developing students to become unique individuals, and therefore discourage rather than promote multiculturalism.

Firstly, learning and teaching cultural differences within the framework of universal respect is undoubtedly essential in today's English language classrooms. However, cultural difference needs to be learnt and taught with 'care'. What the concept of multiculturalism and the pedagogical practices that promote it tend to have overlooked is the superficiality of the way 'culture' is viewed or talked about. As Kumaravadivelu (2008) argues, the concept/ideology of "multiculturalism treats culture as an immutable given that stays stable across historical and social contexts… and engages in a totalising discourse that unhelpfully essentialises and reifies ethnic and cultural differences" (p.108). It assumes that culture is monolithic and deterministic in its influence and any differences in behaviour, practice, or perception are likely to be considered 'strange' and/or 'problematic'. This superficial and essentialist view of culture can be seen in the ways students in Leah's class commented on their own and others' politeness strategies in conversation: '*that's so Australian*', '*it's an Australian thing*', '*so Chinese*', and '*so unKorean of you*'. They talked as if there were behaviours, practices, mindsets that were innately reserved for Australians, Japanese, Koreans, or Chinese. In the students' eyes, people seem to be viewed as occupants or, worse, prisoners of a 'box' (refer to the figure below) whose behaviours, mindsets, and practices are biologically endowed.



Thus, it can be argued that, rather than enriching and diversifying learners' perceptions of different politeness strategies in English, the discussions in Leah's class seem to limit students' perceptions of differences in politeness strategies found within the same box or similarities found between two different boxes. Treating each cultural community as a more or less homogeneous whole does not provide students with the multiplicity of realities that are out there in the real world, and thus "forbids, rather than facilitates, the emergence of a multiculturally constituted society" (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.108). If not questioned, students may or can develop ingrained resistance to believe that diversity within their own country is a myth. This perception is exemplified in Kim's response to Tae who disagreed with her: '*I don't know why you said that! So unbelievable!*', which implies her unacceptability of a different perception and value held by her fellow countryman. Furthermore, if a multiculturalism-oriented English curriculum or class aims to promote inclusiveness in language teaching, the paper would like to argue that, with a superficial view of culture, it can lead to promoting exclusiveness and the binary opposition of 'us' and 'them'. The expressions '*it's very Korean*' and '*so unKorean of you*', to a large extent, already imply that there are certain behaviours, practices, or mindsets that have to be displayed in order to stay in the 'Korean box' (us) and not in the 'unKorean box' (them). Thus, teaching multiculturalism, especially informed by the superficial view of 'culture', in English class may need to be critically considered as the discourse or practice of 'cultural othering or otherising' tends to hide behind such cliché term as 'multiculturalism' or 'cultural diversity'.

Secondly, another very important aspect that the concept of multiculturalism and the pedagogical practices that promote it have overlooked is the recognition of individual uniqueness, individual life values, and individual life choices. The rich diversity of worldviews, cultural capital, and personal knowledge that learners gained from their experiences often do not receive much attention or are ignored (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.109). Though it is important to know one's uniqueness and how one can be different from those from the same country or different country, what has not even been much emphasised is the ability to talk about or communicate that uniqueness and those differences in life values, life choices, and worldviews to one's interlocutors. In other words, it is not enough to only know that '*I'm unique and therefore different from everyone else*', but also to have the skills to talk about '*in what ways and why am I unique and different*'? This can be related again to the way students in Leah's class responded to her

question about the reasons behind their choices of politeness strategies. The students clearly knew that their choices of politeness strategies were different from their classmates, but they were not able to provide clear and adequate explanations of those differences to Leah and perhaps other classmates who were eager and curious to know and learn. Instead, those students resorted to stereotyping (‘*a Korean thing*’ or ‘*our habit*’) or to ‘*whatever*!’ As Tanaka (2006) very sharply claims, “we use the term ‘differences’ and yet we are unable to explain the differences” (p.26). In fact, if one aims to genuinely promote multiculturalism through English, then one also needs to be able to talk about or employ communicative strategies in English to explain *how* and *why* one is different from their interlocutors, be they from the same or different cultural contexts. Only stating ‘*I am different because I’m from* [*this country*]’ can be argued as a statement to promote monoculturalism as opposed to genuine multiculturalism and to avoid, as Kachru and Smith (2008) and Kubota (2001) emphasise, the nature of successful intra/intercultural communication as a result of cooperation and shared communicative responsibility of both interactants.

## Practical implications

In light of the above discussions, the paper would like to make a couple of modest suggestions that multiculturalism-oriented English language educators may need to consider when teaching English and/or designing curricula and learning materials for teaching English in their own contexts.

First, it is necessary for educators to critically re-assess and re-reflect on the common usage of the unpacked notion of ‘culture’ to explain the behaviours, mindsets, values, or practices of a person who comes from a different country. Holliday (2009) suggests that culture should not be simply perceived as “behavioural traits which confine people as though they are occupants, but as any complex societal, social, and personal forces that influence (not colonise) people” (p.148) to think, act, and perceive the world in a certain way. Therefore, even if English educators teach in a classroom consisting of students who may appear to come from the same linguistic and national entity, the classroom is still not a “monocultural cocoon but rather is multicultural mosaics” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.114). Students then need to be made aware that being born in a different nation does not necessarily account for differences in values, practices, behaviours, and mindsets. These perceived differences can also be observed within their own countries, communities, ethnic/social groups,

classrooms, or even among individuals within their own family. Students can be guided to see that they themselves are culturally-complex individuals whose practices, behaviours, values, and worldviews are influenced by a wide range of different agents of socialisation such as family, peers, work, religious group, ethnic groups, leisure groups and so on, which are probably the 'cultural groups' to which they have frequent exposures. The global circumstances and the transcultural flows which students can access from the mass media and the internet are also likely to play a powerful role in shaping their own individual practices, beliefs, values, and mindsets. Thus, it is important for English language educators to transcend superficial national culture differences when teaching about cultural diversity and multiculturalism in their own classrooms.

In practice, language educators can bring sociolinguistics into the classrooms, curricula, or teaching materials. Students can be introduced to a sociolinguistic concept of 'language variety' and encouraged to explore how and why language vary at national, regional, social, and individual level. Specifically, language educators can familiarise their students with concepts such as dialects, sociolects, genderlects, ethnolects, and most importantly idiolects of English and of their own mother tongue. As a classroom exercise or task, students can be asked to apply these concepts to English and their own language and compare their own idiolects with people from the same and different countries, communities, or even families. Some of these concepts, however, also need to be taught with care and from a critical lens as they can lead to cultural stereotypes and otherisation (e.g. "*only men use non-standard language to display masculinity whereas women use standard language*" or "*people from the South speak slower and more nasal than those in the North*"). Language educators may need to remind students and perhaps themselves not to use these concepts to compartmentalise people and their language according to the social variables, but to understand the complexity of all social variables in influencing the way a person uses a language.

Second, as previously discussed, to professionally develop students to become multiculturally competent users of English and to genuinely promote multiculturalism, not only is it sufficient and important to know that one is unique and different, but also to be able to talk about and communicate their uniqueness and differences in English. To implement this, Kumaravadivelu (2008) advises that language educators can design tasks or projects based on familiar or popular topics and themes that require students to use their own thoughts, speeches, experiences, and knowledge. Relating to the theme of this edited book, popular local literature written in English is something with which students are familiar

and is likely to have topics/themes that students can relate to their own cultural capital and experiences. In addition, local literature especially the ones written in English, may provide students with useful examples of ways to communicate local cultural practices, values, behaviours, and worldviews in English. Although the stories, themes, or contexts in the literary works may not necessarily be relevant to those of students, they can still be a stepping stone to teach students how to communicate the uniqueness of their own 'cultures' to the world in English.

An example to illustrate this suggestion is an English lesson shared by a colleague of mine from Thailand. He used an autobiographical novel entitled '*My Boyhood in Siam*' written by Kumut Chandruang (1970) in his English classes at a university in Thailand. This literary novel is about, as the title already suggests, the author's boyhood days and experiences in Thailand and his impressions of the United States when he visited the country at the end of the novel. In the novel, Chandruang (1970) wrote about his family, some areas he visited in Thailand, and some festivals and occasions such as funeral, wedding, New Year celebration, big Buddha's fair, and harvest time that were very specific to, according to the author, his 'native' Thai cultural context. There are also numerous examples of speech acts which reflect the uniqueness of the author's culture, such as the expression "*May you live until your old age, and may you have a youthful complexion, happiness, and good health*" (Chandruang, 1970, p.110) he used to wish people he met in the New Year.

As a classroom assignment, students of my Thai colleague were asked to identify any aspects described in the novel they found similar/different or relevant/irrelevant to their own current cultural contexts. In other words, students are asked to explore to what extent the author's thoughts, worldviews, values, and practices are similar to/different from their own. Under the teacher's guidance, students were guided to explore further the underlying reasons for those similarities and differences. Based on the analyses of the differences and similarities, students were given a four-month writing project in which they were required to select some of the chapters from the book and then write their own version – "*My Boy/Girlhood in Bangkok/Krabi/Hatyai/Phuket*" and even "*My Boy/Girlhood in Penang and Bangkok* OR *in Leicester and Bangkok*" for Thai students who have lived in other countries. According to my colleague, this project provides his students with an actual opportunity to learn how to communicate their own individual speech, cultural practices, values, and worldviews in English and to equip them with the ability to deal with any intercultural misunderstanding they may encounter in any intra/intercultural communicative situations in future. I would also like to further add that

not only do the students learn ways to promote multiculturalism, but they also have the opportunity to develop their own 'stylistic idiosyncrasies' or idiolectal variety of English, which enriches the 'flavour' of the English language and therefore resonates with the paradigm of teaching English as an International Language in today's globalising world (McKay, 2002).

However, there are a number of limitations of the above suggestions that this paper would like to point out. Firstly, it is not always easy to find available local literature written in English. Obviously it is because local literature is mostly written in the local language and sounds more original and better in the local language than in English. However, language educators and scholars still can take the initiative to collaborate and produce local literary works in English. Secondly, being able to talk about one's own 'cultural' uniqueness and differences does not sound like an easy task. My colleagues and I have been trying to do this for a number of years and never have we ever stopped encountering students say, *"it's like um…I can't explain…whatever"*. I do wonder if this difficulty in communicating their own cultural uniqueness and differences can be attributed to inadequate linguistic knowledge, ignorance, lack of motivation, lack of practices, or poor teacher's guidance. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these, the 'seed' of learning how to communicate one's own cultural uniqueness and differences in English may need to be planted in the students, perhaps at early stages of learning (of course as long as the educators feel that students already have adequate proficiency in English). Thirdly, wanting students to break their stereotypical mindsets and to be aware of the unpleasant implications of their superficial discourse of 'cultural difference' is a challenge. In order for students to break the mindset, it is the educators first who have to be fully conscious of their own discourses of people from different cultures, social groups, communities, countries etc in their teaching and the curricula. As Kumaravadivelu (2008) claims, some educators know about the danger of stereotyping, yet they still persistently (or unconsciously) practise it. Thus, continuous efforts in the teacher-education programs may also need to be made in professionally developing *critical* multiculturalism-oriented English language teachers.

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# CHAPTER TWO

# NARRATIVES: A DIALOGUE WITH THE INTERCULTURAL-SELF

CHRISTINE MANARA

*Orang mengatakan berkat kesadaran ilmiah manusia tahu bumi kita ini bola, maka sudah tidak ada lagi Timur atau Barat. …Orang berkata, tidak ada, selama bumi berputar pada porosnya. Itu kata orang. Tetapi kita para antropolog berkata, memang Barat-Timur tidak ada lagi, tetapi toh tetap ada. Timur sudah dan semakin menjadi Barat. Namun sebaliknya sudah ada tanda-tanda sedikit: Barat menjadi Timur. Terlalu sedikit memang tetapi cukup signifikan. Hanya sayang perkembangannya dan konvergensinya masih terlalu asimetris*

[People say that because of scientific knowledge, the world is round. The so-called "East" or "West" no longer exists, and people say it will not exist as long as the world rotates on its axis. That's what most people say. But for us anthropologists, even though East-West no longer exists, it is still there. Today East is increasingly becoming West. Conversely, there are also signs that West is becoming East – just a little, indeed, yet it's still quite significant. Unfortunately, however, the development and convergence is still too asymmetrical.]
—Y.B. Mangunwijaya, *Burung-burung Rantau* [The Traveller Birds] (1992, p. 283)

## Introduction

This excerpt was taken from an influential literary work by Y.B. Mangunwijaya, an Indonesian educator, architect, philosopher, writer, and Catholic religious leader. The novel puts together the multi-faceted and complex inter-relational elements in the life of humans as social beings. It tells the story of a family and its members living in the present day of globalization and how globalization affects their relationships and points of view. Most of all, it is a story of how each character in the story makes

meaning of his experiences subjectively in this fast changing world. The novel highlights issues such as generation-gaps, trans-nationality, identity struggle, cultural values and world view clash and negotiation, and "hybridized" sense of self. In the same sense, this article also tells the story of issues which learners with various socio-cultural backgrounds face in an English-speaking Western context (Holliday, 2005).

Stories or narratives have long been used to convey beliefs, values, history, lessons, and worldviews. In my culture, legends and myths are used to tell the history of various places in Indonesia. Stories are used for moral and ethical educational purposes from one generation to the next. Narrative is certainly not something new in our lives. It is a media which conveys messages and encourages dialogues. It has been used to teach etiquette to children, to maintain positive social values and tradition, to teach religious and spiritual beliefs, and to pursue and to realize 'goodness' in life.

A more personal value of narrative that, I think, almost everyone experiences, is that story binds people together. It has a more intimate value in which people exchange stories for establishing relationships or sharing experiences with others. There is always the expectation for the audience to learn something from what has been shared by others. As Riessman (2008) says, "Storytelling engages an audience in the experience of the narrator. Narratives invite us, as listeners, readers, and viewers, to enter the perspective of the narrator" (p. 9). Most importantly, narrative moves people and encourages change and action (Riessman, 2008).

Yet it is quite ironic to see that personal narrative (Riessman, 2008) or contemporary discourse, as opposed to *authoritative discourse* (Bakhtin, 1981) – in this case, formal academic writings such as academic articles, textbooks, lecture notes, and other teaching materials – are rarely present in the classroom. This is probably due to the perception of the classroom as a formal academic learning setting which requires specific scholarly forms of writing, reading, and classroom interaction with use of academic jargon. These forms of authoritative discourse have often been positioned as the authority of knowledge in the classroom which tends to neglect our voices, the students' and the teachers'. I fear that continuing to live within this common perspective and routine may draw us further from the voices that reflect who we are, what we know, what we want to know, and what we look forward to – i.e. our narrative of learning. It is not my intention, however, to suggest a dichotomous view of authoritative discourse versus contemporary discourse (such as learners' personal narrative) in the classroom setting. Rather, it is a modest attempt to negotiate a place for personal narrative in the teaching-learning activities in the classroom. The

aim of this paper is to share teaching and learning experiences while encouraging and working with the learners' personal narratives. It is also important to acknowledge that the teaching and learning strategies used in this classroom were the result of team-teaching discussions with other lecturers of the course.

## Narrative-based inquiry

Research studies that use narrative have also been described in language such as narrative study, narrative analysis, narrative approach, narrative inquiry, self-study, and also case-study which often make strong use of narrative in some forms. One set of influential works in narrative inquiry that are often cited in research using narrative inquiry are those of Clandinin and Connelly (e.g. 1986, 1995, 1998, 2000). Using Dewey's concept of experience for their theoretical framework, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 20) state that "narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience." This idea implies the process of exploration and transformation through the act of narrating. They argue a case for engaging with and understanding experience by studying it narratively. Clandinin and Connelly see narrative as "both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences" (p. 18). They further explain that everything in the world is a phenomenon retold through stories, and that a narrative is the phenomenon. Narrative is seen as the method of inquiry because "the inquiry is itself a narrative process" (in Clandinin & Xu, 2009, p. 222).

The use of narrative possesses positive qualities in human development. One of these qualities is the use of narrative in making meaning. As Lieblich, et.al. (1998) states, a human is a "meaning-generating organism." It is in his nature to elicit and produce meaning in his interaction in the world. One way to do this is through narrative. Fivush (2006) views narrative as a way of making sense and producing meaning from what individuals experience everyday. When individuals tell their experiences to others, they are involved in the act of reinterpreting, re-evaluating and reconstructing their experiences for themselves (in Mattos, 2009, p. 31).

Narrative is also closely related to the formation of identity. In narrating their lives, individuals are constructing and reconstructing something about themselves too: what they know, what they think, who they are, who they were, how they have changed, and how they want to be perceived by others. The formation of identity is established through the interaction between the self and the environment (Syrjala & Estola, 1999). This narrative of identity (Bakhtin, 1973) is what makes an individual unique. In Bakhtin's (1973) viewpoint, in interacting with others, we use

language to reveal some parts of ourselves. Language sits in the socio-cultural and historical context in which individuals participate. Therefore, in narrating something, individuals use and develop the pre-existing languages and genres in their cultural context. Therefore, to Bakhtin, language, as well as identity, is dialogic in nature.

Keeping the dialogic nature of language in mind, meaning is continuously being constructed and re-constructed. Hence, learning is also a continuous process. Individuals learn and re-learn knowledge, concepts, ideology, or meaning in their interaction with others and their environment. Indeed, dialogue is highly important in the teaching- learning context where learners are presented with academic discourses. The classroom should be a place where interaction of knowledge or meaning is encouraged and maintained, and one way to do this is through encouraging the use of learners' narrative.

## The teaching-learning context

The context of the teaching-learning activity was a multi-cultural undergraduate classroom. The learners were enrolled in the first year course under the program of English as an International Language. The content of the course introduces the learners to the current phenomenon of Englishes in the world. In this course, the traditional discourses of the so called "Standard English" and other related issues (e.g. Native speakerism, monoculturalism, monolingualism, etc.) were challenged and problematized. The goal of the course was to raise learners' awareness of the development of English as an International Language and its related issues, namely, critical multiculturalism, the hybridization of English; and speakers' language, culture and identity negotiation in English communication. Therefore, the teaching-learning activity mostly involved interactive learning activities which encouraged learners to have group discussion. I believed that learning would be more meaningful when it was related to the learners' life and environment. I was very fortunate that the team-teaching members shared similar beliefs on learning. Therefore, we encouraged learners to reflect upon their personal linguistics and intercultural experiences and exchange their stories in group discussions, journals, and academic essays. The following sections present my observation of learners' narratives as they engaged with theoretical concepts introduced in the classroom through academic readings.

## Learners' personal narrative as narrative of identity

Gathering learners' personal narratives in the classroom, I could not help but notice that most of their accounts reflect a complex interaction between the issues introduced in the classroom and their personal intercultural and inter-linguistic experiences. The narratives also encourage learners to be more observant and reflective about their past learning experiences and understanding of self. The issue of identity seems to hold most of their attention, often related in discussion in response to course reading materials.

One issue that has held learners' attention is the relationship between identity and accent. In one of the meetings, the topic of the week was Accent Debate. I presented several opening questions to the learners: "Is there anyone in the world who speaks without an accent? Does having an accent mean being a less competent speaker? Does speaking English mean speaking without an accent?" A wide range of responses was generated from the discussion. I found some students' narratives reflect the tension of keeping their identity and the situational function of conforming to the speech norm of their immediate surrounding.

I would like to draw our attention to one sample of student narrative by Aniee (pseudonym). Aniee was raised in Australia since her parents migrated to Australia when she was very young. She has a Malaysian Chinese background and is currently pursuing a degree in Economics in the university while working as a part-time employee in an Australian company.

> I think it depends. I change my accent when I'm at work because sometimes there's a kind of discrimination when I don't sound like them. So, I changed my accent to fit-in at my work place. But, of course, I speak differently at home. I would use Cantonese with my parents. (Aniee, 12/05/09)

Aniee shared quite a sensitive issue of identity and speech norm from her working experience. Honey (1998) states that accent use plays a function of register (p. 73). Due to her status and relationship (as a newcomer) with the members of the community where she worked, Aniee felt that it was necessary for her to adjust her accent to be able to function in the community and to be accepted as a member of that community. Her decision to switch from one speech norm to another shows the complexity and conflicting side of identity and language association in an individual's multiple roles within certain social expectations and political power. As a newcomer to the workplace, she was expected to assimilate herself within

the cultural (and speech) practice of the company. Since most people in the company use only one speech norm, Aniee's speech norm was positioned as insignificant and unacceptable in that social and power-relational dimension. Her survival instinct suggested that Aniee suppress her English accent which reflects her Malaysian Chinese identity and adopt the workplace speech norm (Australian English) to be able to function and be accepted in that context. In this case, Aniee chose to perform a certain act of identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985) by suppressing or silencing her speech norm and performing the desired speech norm of this particular speech community.

The issue of difference in terms of linguistic practice was also pointed out by another student, Min, as she responded to the topic of speech variation. In her journal, Min tells her story of learning English. Her narrative reflects the process of understanding the past linguistic practice using her present understanding of the issue:

> When I first came to Australia, I was very frustrated that I could not catch up with their speaking. I knew they are speaking "English." However, it just sounds different as what I have been learning in Taiwan, since our education system has adopted American English as the teaching model. I still remember that when I had my first language class in my high school's language centre [in Australia], my teacher corrected my pronunciation, just because I pronounced "I can't" in American way. My teacher told me that here is Australia and that is why I have to say the word "can't" in /a:/ sound. I do not agree with her in this point, because English has become Englishes, it got heaps of varieties in the world which are used by a lot of people. Therefore, why can't I speak my own way? As long as you can communicate with each other, I do not think it is very important. Besides, Australian English is one of the varieties of English. (Min, 15/06/10)

Min's (a pseudonym) account shows several phases of learning. The first phase shows how Min, during her past English learning experience, was conditioned with one model of English, that is American English. The second phase is when Min arrived in Australia with her variety of acquired English (American English), and she experienced her first encounter with another variety of English (Australian English). Min felt the tension between her believed acquired-norm of English (American English) with another new norm (Australian English) in her new environment in Australia. Min's understanding of 'the' English (in this case, American English) was challenged by another experience in a different speech community that she entered. Near the end of her account, as her response towards topics and discussions that the course introduced, it shows that Min has taken ownership of her own variety of English and reflectively

questioned the acculturation model of learning that she experienced in the past. As she was telling this story, three past significant incidents were interacting concurrently: her past language learning in Taiwan, her past learning experience in Australia, and her recently "learned" concept of Englishes and mutual intelligibility in intercultural communication. Min revisits the past experiences and processes the multiple voices or discourses using the newly acquired knowledge.

Aniee's and Min's narratives depict, in sociolinguistic terms, the assimilationist discursive practice that exists in their immediate environment. Cultural assimilation, as explained by Kumaravadivelu (2008), is a condition in which an individual would be expected to "adopt the behaviors, values, beliefs, and lifestyles of the dominant cultural community and become absorbed in it, losing [one's] own in the process" (p. 4). Hence, both Aniee and Min have to adopt and immerse themselves into the dominant cultural community, in this case: Aniee's workplace and Min's school in Australia, in order to survive in these contexts. During this process, Aniee and Min consciously or subconsciously were driven to silence their linguistic and cultural identities.

## Narrative as an inquiry-mode of learning

Narrative has often been used as an inquiry-mode of learning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Richardson, 2000; Cumming 2007) about oneself. Lieblich, et.al. (1998) assert that narrative is a media to learn about an individual's inner world. Narrative, in this sense, can be seen as a dialogue with one 'self.' It tells the story of what one knows, thinks, imagines, or wonders. In learners' journals, I found that narrative serves this purpose for them while interacting with the topics discussed during the lesson. Learners who did not have the chance to interact in the classroom used their journals as an extension of their self-inquiry. The following extract was written as a response to a discussion on language and identity:

> It is not always easy for a co-ordinate bilingual to be sure of their own identity. Being born and raised in Australia my whole life, my vernacular is Australian English. My parents are from Malaysia and speak Cantonese to me so I am also fluent in Cantonese. All my relatives live overseas or outer state and I went to schools where there were a small number of students who spoke any languages other than English. For that reason I rarely communicate in Cantonese; predominantly only with my parents. Moreover, I cannot write or read Chinese and my daily activities mostly reflect Australian culture (watching Western television, surfing Western

> websites, etc). However, a lot of traditions and customs remain inside our home and I also watch some Hong Kong television so I still cannot be sure of my answer to the question, "Are you the languages that you speak?" (Tony, 15/06/10)

The excerpt above shows the dialogic nature of inquiry. Tony (pseudonym) gathers all his knowledge about his background to try to make sense the inter-relationship of language and identity and its multilayered-ness. Tony's narrative account problematizes the most common perception of direct link and affiliation of language and identity which suggest that identity is fixed and static. By presenting various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, social groups, contexts, and his relation in each situation, Tony actually displays the dynamic and multifaceted nature of identity and language. There is a sense of evaluating the question "are you the languages that you speak?" in relation to the multiple realities that he lives in. Tony's description echoes Tabouret-Keller's (1998) view of identity which is "endlessly created a new, according to very various social constraints (historical, institutional, economic, etc.), social interactions, encounters, and wishes that may happen to be very subjective and unique" (p. 215). At the moment of speaking, Tony may think that he had no answer to the question "are you the languages that you speak?" On the contrary, Tony has presented some information that complicates and transforms such a simple question to another level of comprehension that needs further exploration – an inconclusive present (Shields, 2007). It is at this stage that Tony's narrative displays quite an intense engagement of dialogue with his multiple sets of self at the present time.

Learners also use narrative in reflecting on their classroom presentation activity. Each student was asked to do a group presentation on one topic during each meeting. After the presentation, each member of the group reported on the presentation from an individual point of view in short journal format. In the report journal, each wrote his impression of his presentation individually, preparation activities, evaluation of the presentation and other related matters. In narrating their reflections on their learning, the learners became critical observers of their own thoughts and practices. The report journal also works as a process of personal knowledge making that they drew from authoritative knowledge (the teaching-learning materials) and their presentation activity. I would like to use in particular one student's reflective writing on classroom practice related to language and identity, as follows:

> Firstly, to illustrate personal identity, we used the broad examples from the readings – names, systems of address and pronouns. The section on 'names' seemed to be most effective and engaging. We chose to ask the