

Shared Voices: Discourse, Culture, Public Spheres.

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Introduction

This year's issue - Volume 15 2009 - marks a new beginning for the 3L Journal, as it is now an electronic journal, or e-journal, on an open access platform, available for all who are interested in the pursuit and development of English Language Studies. Being marketed as the South East Asian Journal of English Language Studies, it focuses on broad issues in English language in the region but welcomes voices and viewpoints from other parts of the world as well. It is our hope that the journal provides an avenue for writers from this region to publish their work and to subsequently serve as a repository of academic research and articles from the South East Asian Region.

Volume 15 sees 7 articles drawn from various areas of English Language Studies coming together in an interesting and eclectic mix of research and points of view. The articles in this volume explore the shared voices in different domains of discourse; culture and public spheres.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a branch of linguistics which examines language use, whether written, spoken in various domains, using different methodologies. The field of discourse analysis can be seen as all encompassing because it draws from a variety of disciplines and theoretical positions to understand the underlying social structures. Discourse analysis is explored in different ways in the first three papers: political rhetoric and its use of poetic devices; power play and

intercultural meetings; and corpus analysis of expressions of agreement in textbooks.

Political rhetoric draws from various linguistic and literary devices and **Biljana Scott** focuses on the use of poetical devices in epochal political speeches. Using the adage - 'campaign in poetry but govern in prose' from Hilary Clinton's 2008 US Presidential election campaign - Scott unravels how poetry is often found in political rhetoric because it provides a way of reaching out to people's imaginations and providing hope for a better future. Scott cleverly identifies instances when political rhetoric draws on the musical resources of language in her paper **The Cadence of Counterbalance**. Drawing from a collection of over fifty speeches from *Speeches that Changed the World*, Scott explores what she calls 'heightened language' – the use of images, rhyme, refrain, sonorous language. This illustrates the phonological, lexical, rhetorical and conceptual balance and counterbalance between the two genres - poetry and politics and how each tells its version and yet maintains some sort of balance.

The next paper examines power play among interactants in intercultural meetings between an airline company and a bank. **Lancy Fung** in **A Study of Indirectness in Business Meetings**, explores the impact of power differences among speakers and how it influences their indirectness in speech. Fung adds to the existing literature of power play in business meetings by revealing how people with less power, appear to employ indirect and implicit linguistic strategies to express their views when interacting with superiors compared to people with more power that chose to be more assertive when presenting their views. The study also reveals that people with authority and power, generally assume a more indirect style to help build solidarity in meetings, when discussing critical issues like monetary gains, and especially when they need support from subordinates to back their ideas during meetings.

Andy Seto compares the use of expressions of agreement in English textbooks published in Hong Kong with that from a local corpus (The Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English). Using a corpus based approach Seto, in his paper **I Agree With You- A Corpus Based Study of Agreement**, reports on expressions collected from a corpus of 5 textbooks and compares these with the spoken corpus. The findings reveal that the textbooks are not representative of the use of

expressions of agreement as most of the expressions in the textbooks do not exist in the HKSCSE. Seto highlights the importance of textbook writers referring to the corpora (Aston 1997) as these are the kinds of expressions learners need to be familiar with to become effective users of the language.

Culture and identity

Culture is increasingly visible in language teaching and learning and research has focused on how it impacts learning. There is growing awareness that some of the apparent difficulties learners face are not necessarily difficulties, but ‘ways of doing things’ internalized from multiple learning systems. The changing face of today’s classroom, a direct result of globalization and shifting boundaries, has resulted in education systems that are no longer homogenous but demographically varied. With the steady interplay and mixing of various cultures as different worlds come into contact, boundaries tend to become blurred but this does not mean individuals in these cultures forget their origins and sense of belonging and identities.

Friedlander (1991:1) equates “the wave of immigration...has had such a profound effect on our society that it can almost be regarded as the equivalent of a demographic revolution”. It is therefore important that classrooms sustain their roles in helping to develop students’ identities by helping them to navigate their educational journeys while still maintaining individual identities.

Stephanie Houghton explores the role of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in developing World Englishes in an EFL classroom. In her paper, **The Role of Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Development of World Englishes and Lingua Francas**, she discusses the journey taken by students to negotiate meaning across cultures and develop individual identities. The interface between ideas related to World English and ICC and commonalities and areas of interest are highlighted as Houghton claims both promote acceptance of language varieties while preserving cultural and linguistic diversity.

Culture and Autonomy

The idea of learner autonomy has been promoted largely by Western teachers and academics, and when attempts to implement it further afield have encountered difficulties, these are often seen as due to cultural differences between ‘the West’ and other communities (Palfreyman, 2003 :1)

Palfreyman’s quotation is exemplified in **Thang Siew Ming’s** paper which seeks to understand whether Malaysian learners are really all that different from Western learners. In her paper **Investigating autonomy of Malaysian ESL learners: A comparison between public and private universities**, Thang posits it is important to interpret the concept of learner autonomy in its particular cultural context as ‘one size does not fit all’. Her study focuses on undergraduate ESL students in private tertiary institutions in Malaysia to enquire if there were any differences between learners from public and private institutions. She specifically focused on tertiary students from a private institution to see how willing they were to be more autonomous and compared these findings to earlier findings from tertiary students from public universities. Thang concludes that Malaysian learners and Asian learners in general can easily shift from being teacher centered to becoming more autonomous in their learning, if given the right motivation and support to make the shift. While Asian learners may seem to be comfortable with teacher directing their learning they are more than willing to steer their own path if necessary.

Voices in Blogs

Weblogs or blogs function as shared public spaces which allow individuals the freedom and ability to express themselves fairly freely and openly (Tremayne 2006, Barlow 2007). Advocates of blogging claim that they are allowed democratic expression and are able to make public their opinions about what interests and matters to them without being subject to scrutiny to gatekeepers in newspapers, for instance. Blogs today are a common feature and symbol of social dynamism and appear in many applications ranging from personal online diaries to group blogs, family blogs, community blogs, corporate blogs, and

context specific blogs like trend setting blogs, parent blogs, political blogs, learning blogs etc.

Noraini Md Yusof scrutinizes one such public sphere in her paper **Re-inventing the Self: Constructions of Identity in Malaysian Blogosphere**. **Noraini** delves into the cyber culture of blogging to highlight issues relating to identity reconstruction to understand contemporary constructs of the self in Malaysia. Using the notion of avatars – alter egos which represent embodiments of the individual - **Noraini** illustrates how the performativity of gender enables the metamorphosis of the self as in the case of Raden Galoh and Hikayat Mamak Bendahara, who successfully reconstruct and reinvent their identities. What is especially delightful with this paper is the writer's ability to reveal how these bloggers' appropriation of historical identities for their persona allows them the freedom to legitimize their voices.

Voices from public sphere

Christopher Brumfit describes language planning as “the attempt to control the use, status, and structure of a language through a language policy developed by a government or other authority” (1992: 580). In this process of language planning, it is crucial that care and consideration is given to social motivation which is closely tied to the political value attached to a language. Language policy reflects political and ideological issues that need to be explored in depth before the policy is implemented. The voices of assent and dissent from the public sphere are one avenue that will provide direction to language policy and needs to be taken seriously.

English Language Reform and the Process of Democratic Change peers into the change in Malaysian language policy to examine the importance of the public sphere and the significance of this on the way policy is formulated. **James Campbell** posits language as a social act and any top - down decision to amend the language policy should consider the public sphere and the voices of, to use Tupas's (2008) words the 'pragmatic' and the 'nationalist' to enable a balance to be attained between embracing globalization and the English language or enveloping ourselves within our own national languages and effectively isolating ourselves. Campbell acknowledges that Malaysia does not

deny the need for English and recognizes its place in the social, cultural and political arenas within its pluralist society. What is needed now is a process of language reform that arises from mutual recognition, cultural respect and trust among the various ethnic groups to look beyond the mindset and top-down directive so familiar in any society.

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