

## Literacy Brokering among the International Students of a Public University

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### ABSTRACT

The influx of international students to Malaysia in pursuance of tertiary education has created the urgency to ascertain the English literacy struggles faced by these students in the Malaysian classrooms as well as the suitability of the current pedagogical practices in addressing their existing literacy practices. Insights on the aforementioned aspects could be gained by examining the students' literacy brokering engagements. Literacy brokering refers to an act of seeking informal help in various forms from fellow language users when facing unfamiliar texts or text-oriented practices and events. This case study therefore examined the literacy brokering phenomenon occurring within a Malaysian university's intensive English Language class. The research participants consisted of 15 international students from five different countries. The specific objectives of the study were to: (i) identify the themes involved in literacy brokering interactions occurring in the Malaysian university English language classroom context; and (ii) describe the literacy practices of the international students in their English class. Through the methods of audio and video recording, 98433 words of transcribed data were collected. An in-depth analysis of the data revealed the primary brokering theme to be the English language system, specifically aspects of grammar and semantics. However culture and genre-based themes were also apparent. The brokerage of culture and genre stemmed from the mismatch between the participants' existing literacy knowledge with those in their current context of living. The findings create an andragogic importance to include learners' socio-cultural schemata in designing and carrying out non-native language pedagogy. In the spirit of contextualising learning experience, future works could focus on analysing the literacy brokering occurrences in other non-native English Language classrooms such as Singapore and Hong Kong.

**Keywords:** socio-cultural theory; literacy brokering; cross-cultural literacy; new literacy studies; multiliteracies

### INTRODUCTION

The technologically-driven, multimodal and mobile nature of the current world has made meaning-making or making sense of a text becomes a complex process. Realising this challenge, a group of literacy scholars proposed a new movement called New Literacy Studies (NLS), which perceives literacy as a continuum and comprehends it from an ideological spectacle. The ideological approach propagates the inclusion of the socio-cultural and multiliteracies paradigms when encountering events and practices involving written words or texts. This is as opposed to the mainstream literacy approach which autonomously limits text-related activities and practices to reading and writing skills only. Much of the earlier works in building NLS stemmed from researching immigrants and their difficulties in

undertaking simple text-related activities such as using a phone book (Perry, 2009). This observation, for example, illustrated a more complex meaning-making process than just knowing the language of the new country. It sheds light on the importance of other knowledge such as the function of a phone book, how to use a phone book and the kind of phone book which the immigrants were familiar with back home. The focus on immigrants and text-based challenges leads to the establishment of an area of study called literacy brokering. Currently, as an extension of NLS, literacy brokering is given notable research prominence due to the increasing amount and rapid growth of migratory activities and more recently - student mobility. Essentially, literacy brokering refers to the act of informally seeking help with unfamiliar texts and literacy practices during a specific literacy event (Bayley, Hansen-Thomas & Langman, 2005; Perry, 2009; Weisskirch, 2007). For a literacy brokering phenomenon to take place, literacy event and literacy practice must be present. Literacy practice in this context refers to the efforts and activities engaged by language users in making sense of a text (Barton, 1994). A literacy event on the other hand is defined by Barton (1994) as any occasion in which written word plays a role.

An example of a literacy event is reading an Enid Blyton book (a British author) as a bedtime story to a child. The literacy event of reading a bedtime story is predominantly a western concept. As such, for immigrants living in America, participating in this event entails them to face the following literacy struggles: i) negotiating their existing knowledge on conducting reading a bedtime story with that which is expected in their current reality, ii) relating to the foreign concepts stated in the book such as eating scones or playing lacrosse, as well as iii) understanding the foreign English words. They might also need to iv) mediate their understanding of the genre (children prose) to fit the literacy event. Consequently, the literacy practices which they might engage in to make sense of the event (including the text) are i) using a dictionary, ii) referring to the pictures in the text, iii) asking a more proficient person regarding an unfamiliar word and iv) searching for information online on how to conduct a bedtime story reading.

This example demonstrates the multifaceted and arbitrary nature of literacy brokering. As reiterated by Perry (2009, p. 257), literacy brokering is a complex process because “it may involve one aspect of a text, such as translation of word meanings, mediation of cultural content, or explanation of genre aspects of a printed text, or it may involve many of these aspects all at once”. The aforementioned example also highlights the socio-cultural underpinnings of literacy; especially English Language literacy vis-a-vis non-native users. In the fields of education and language acquisition, the pursuance of informal assistance with regards to writing and reading activities is already a familiar concept. Literacy brokering on the other end of the continuum complements the established concept by factoring in the socio-cultural nuances which exist within the enclave of cross-cultural literacy.

Researchers looked into immigrants’ use of literacy brokering in balancing their existing literacy practices with that of their new discourse community (See Alvarez, 2015; Perry, 2014, 2009; Love & Buriel 2007; Weisskirch 2007). Perry’s (2009) research article entitled ‘Genres, Contexts and Literacy Practices: Literacy Brokering among Sudanese Refugee Families’ is an example of such research; posing questions pertaining to the nature and themes of literacy brokering, the kind of text being brokered for and the impacts these factors have on the literacy practices of the participants (Perry, 2009). This study revealed that the Sudanese immigrants use literacy brokering to make sense of their new literacy context and literacy practices; most predominantly pertaining to school-related documents such as consent slips, library books, and homework. The type of brokering engaged by these immigrants spanned from merely word-translating to understanding the purpose and use of a document. The brokering triggers were either i) the document was not part of the home country’s literacy practice or ii) their home country’s version differs from the current context

of living in terms of layout, features and extent of functions. Jones and Trickett (2012) on the other hand, studied the importance of literacy brokers and the impacts of brokering on the brokers. Through their research “Immigrant Adolescents Behaving as Culture Brokers: A Study of Families from the Former Soviet Union”, they concluded that children acting as brokers are an instrumental by-product of a migrant community’s assimilation efforts. Dörnyei, Orellana and Jimenez (2008) delved deeper into the posited premise by analysing the literacy development of twelve Latino-American children of American immigrants. The research found that as an interdependent activity, literacy brokering contributed immensely to shaping the children’s own literacy as their engagement in literacy brokering occurred within and outside household context. In both research, the lack of ‘interference’ from the home country’s socio-cultural schemata and the adolescents’ familiarity with the culture of their current reality allowed them to acquire the current reality’s literacy practices much quicker than their elders.

Thus far, the existing research on literacy brokering is principally directed towards the social domain of home. In comparison, classroom literacy brokering has received little attention (Bayley, Hansen-Thomas & Langman, 2005; Coyoca & Lee Jin Sook, 2009, Kibler, 2010). Consequently, not much is known about the actual literacy struggles taking place during an actual academic discourse (Perry, 2014). This happens because the mainstream stance on literacy in education-including Malaysia is still autonomous in nature. Gauged from a top-down perspective, literacy is attributed to mechanical and linguistic knowledge (Normazidah Che Musa, Koo Yew Lie & Hazita Azman, 2012). The former being format and conventional styles of text and the latter exemplified by grammar, vocabulary and syntax-formation. Viewed as isolated entities, they are learned independently; decontextualised from their social, historical and cultural meanings (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). The research gap in classroom literacy brokering is therefore most likely due to the fact that classrooms are not perceived as a social space. Therefore, from the autonomous perspective, literacy brokering-with its socio-cultural entailment would not be a suitable unit of analysis to analyse formal literacy classes.

The socio-cultural approach to literacy believes that negotiation of contextual meanings, cultural concepts and genres could occur within a formal setting such as a classroom. Coyoca and Lee Jin Sook’s (2009) ‘A Typology of Language-Brokering Events in Dual-Language Immersion Classrooms’ article posited an admonitory emphasis on the unintended consequences of language brokering to non-native learners. This research also proves that much like its home counterpart, language brokering could also take place in the school setting. The essential role of culture in easing the literacy acquisition process is demonstrated in Martinez, McLure and Eddy’s (2009) research. Their findings emphasise the fact that in a native and monolingual classroom setting, there is a crucial need to provide immigrant adolescents with language and cultural support. You Xiaoye and You Xiaoqiong (2013) on the other hand examined the literacy brokering occurrences in a China-based summer school. Their study revealed “vocabulary knowledge, disciplinary thinking and personal voice” to be the students’ main struggles when English language is used to facilitate the learning process. To address the struggles, the teachers employed the scaffolding technique of curriculum contextualisation which includes allowing the use of the students’ native language to facilitate learning activities and relating the learning aspects to the students’ native cultures. These studies further validate the propagation of perceiving classrooms as a social domain and demonstrate the role of literacy brokering uncovering “what really is being brokered by the non-native learners”. (Orellana & Reynolds, 2008). As a ‘bottom-up’ process; the information elicited from literacy brokering are practical, realistic and depicting genuine struggles which take place during an actual discourse.

Additionally, more people are leaving their home country to work or study at a non-native English language country. The selection of these countries is predominantly determined by the wide use of the English Language in the countries' various domains. Malaysia for instance is fast becoming the education hubs of the Asian region (Jusoh Idris, 2014) because English language is nationally gazetted as the second language. The influx of international students coming into the country encourages the establishment of many decontextualised English language classrooms all around Malaysia. 'Decontextualised' in this sense refers to English language learning classrooms which take place at countries whereby English Language is not a native language-or *outer-circle* countries (Kachru, 1985) Since most existing classroom literacy brokering research are centered on native-English language contexts such as America, the literacy brokering phenomena occurring in the unique makeup of a decontextualised classroom are currently overlooked.

For Malaysia in particular, the addition of international students should create a great urgency for studies to be done on the English literacy struggles of the students in the Malaysian classrooms as well as the suitability of the current pedagogy in addressing their existing literacy practices (see Fariza Puteh-Behak, Ramiaida Darmi & Yuslina Mohamad, 2015). Ultimately, studies on literacy brokering would provide significant insight in designing and carrying out effective English language pedagogy for non-native learners studying in this country. Based on such situation, the general impetus of this research was to capture non-native learners' English language learning problems in a non-native English language classroom, specifically Malaysia. This study examined the literacy brokering phenomenon occurring among international students in a Malaysian ESL classroom in a Malaysian university. The specific objectives of the study were to: (1) identify the themes involved in literacy brokering interactions occurring in the Malaysian university English Second Language classroom context; and (2) describe the literacy practices of international students in a Malaysian ESL classroom.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is conceptually positioned within a socio-cultural view of language (hence literacy) being inseparable from culture (Perry, 2009). Kramersch (1998, p. 3) provides functional notion linking socio-cultural elements with language, stating that "language expresses, embodies and symbolises cultural realities". The relationship between literacy and cultural reality manifests the existence of a socio-cultural undertone to literacy. In tandem with this premise, the socio-cultural approach to literacy is selected as the theoretical framework for this study. This paradigm deviates from the usual emphasis placed on technicality-where writing and reading are primarily regarded as skills when examining literacy. The socio-cultural approach is inclined towards knowing what people do with written language or texts (Perry, 2009). Literacy practice is perceived as the everyday way people interact with text-including reading and writing acts (Perry, 2009; Barton, 1994). As such, literacy is shaped by the complex interactions of social, institutional, and historical forces (Starfield, 2007) in contested contexts (Koo Yew Lie, 2010). These forces are known as schemata – the general structures of expectation established in people's minds by the culture they live in" (Kramersch, 1998) It consists of language user's experience and existing knowledge of the situational and cultural context they are engaging in (Barton, 1994).

In the same vein, the socio-cultural paradigm is also grounded on the relationship between text and context. This specifically points out to the practice of unpacking and understanding text and all its elements such as language, format and design by *situating them in the context of use* and vice versa (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). As worded by Barton and Hamilton, 2000, p. 1), "literacies are situated. All uses of written language can be seen

located in particular times and places”. Perry’s (2009) study exemplifies a circumstance where a language user’s schema clashes with the literacy practices of the language user’s new context of living. One of the study’s participants did not know how and what to fill in a form for her child’s yearbook, as the concept of yearbook is not present in the participant’s native setting. In this retrospect, the socio-cultural dimension postulates that a language user’s writing and reading *literacy* includes the ability to “produce written texts which are embedded in and appropriate to a particular social context” (Currie & Cray, 2004, p. 111).

Finally, the socio-cultural approach also takes into account the relationship between text, learning efforts and technology. All learning practices which occur in the presence of text are defined under this paradigm as literacy practices. Literacy practices under the socio-cultural model refer to all the efforts and activities that take place during the process of reading and writing. This is where the correlation between technology and text could be gauged; for instance, during a text-mediated event of producing an assignment, the literacy practices involved evolve from just reading materials related to the assignment and writing the essay to other significant practices such as surfing the internet for relevant information, checking online dictionary for synonyms, asking a friend using instant-messenger to explain the given instruction, typing out the assignment in a word processor using the computer and using spell-check to proofread the final product before e-mailing it to the instructor. The significance of acknowledging these new practices and the influence of technology in English language literacy pedagogy is it highlights and exposes the multifaceted disposition of literacy learning process. Moreover, reading and writing are now ‘exalted’ a notch higher – from being mere technicality into a process-influenced entity, requiring as well as resulting from language user’s mediation between various external factors, language and text.

## METHOD

The case study design is selected to address the unique complexity of the research context; which is an English language classroom in a non-native English country. This design allows an in-depth investigation to be conducted to identify the emerging connection between the decontextualised nature of the classroom and the literacy brokering occurrences.

## RESEARCH SITE

The research site of this study was the ‘Intensive English language’ classroom; an introductory English language course obligatory to be taken up by international students who did not fulfill the university’s English language requirements. The course did not carry any credit hours but contact hours were 15 hours per week; spanning over the period of 24 weeks. Each learning session was three hours-long and during the period this research was conducted, the students were taught by two separate teachers. The learning objectives were mainly to prepare and assist students in terms of English language proficiency to enable them to interact socially with the locals. During the three observation sessions, the units of learning covered in class were Learning Unit 4: Making Holiday Plans (first and second observation) and Learning Unit 6: Oral Presentation Skills. These units were especially selected because the syllabus included *text-based activities* in various forms; such as mind-map, net-surfing, presentation, power-point presentation and written exercises.

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

As a qualitative research, this study relied heavily on the participants’ on-site view, behaviour and response to the analysed concept as data (Creswell, 2009; O’Donoghue, 2006). Taking

that point into account, this research employed the technique of purposive sampling (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The selection criteria were: 1) they must come from a country whereby English language is regarded as a foreign language; and 2) English language is not widely used in their former setting, especially for social purposes. It was hypothesised that these two criteria would ensure the selection of participants who frequently engage in literacy brokering activities. The classroom which the researcher was given access to had a total of 15 international students attending the Intensive English language course, hence all of them were involved in this research. Upon successfully passing this course with the minimum grade of 'C', the students would be allowed to enroll in the degree programme at the same university. Hailing from China, Korea, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Indonesia, these students were high school leavers whose age ranged between 18 to 22 years old. Seven students were female while eight were male. Most of them had not enrolled in any other form of tertiary formal learning prior to their current university enrollment.

TABLE 1. Number of Research Participants and Their Country of Origin

Country of Origin	Number of Participant
Indonesia	2
Russia	3
Turkey	1
Tajikistan	5
China	2
Korea	2
Total	15

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

For the purpose of conducting this research, the first step of data collection began by identifying the course which would suit the research needs and goals of this study. Following course-selection, the course coordinator of the Intensive English Language subject was contacted to: 1) confirm the nature of the subject syllabus and students; 2) seek his approval for conducting a series of observation; 3) find out the class most available for the said purpose; and 4) acquire other vital information regarding both the research contexts and participants. The next step was to obtain an institutional consent. After the official permission was given, the data collection process commenced.

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

### OBSERVATION AND RECORDING

Three observation sessions were carried out and each session lasted for two hours. All the observation sessions took place in the classroom except for the third session; which occurred in two settings; the classroom and the computer lab. The observation sessions were recorded primarily in the audio and video format. In order to capture both audio and video data, a small mp3 player cum recorder was placed near the students' seats, while the researcher, seated at the back of the classroom recorded the learning process using a digital camera. A total of 29 digital video files and 27 digital audio files were able to be recorded. These files were later subjected to a filtration process; whereby the researcher listened and watched each video and audio several times to evaluate their relevance to the study. If the data were deemed irrelevant, incomplete or incomprehensible, they would be dismissed. Consequently, only 18 digital video files and eight audio digital files were used in the research.

The strength of a qualitative study is the density of the data gathered (Creswell, 2009). As such, a good qualitative research necessitates substantial length of time spent at either the research site or with the participants. However, a major limitation faced by the researcher was the impact of the researcher's presence on the participants; who became quite conscious of the recording devices. Their awareness of the recording process affected their natural behaviour in class, hence, only three observations were made, upon the advice and request from the teachers-in-charge. It was however deemed sufficient because the aforesaid limitation was compensated by the richness of the data.

### TRANSCRIBING

All the audio and video files were later transcribed into written form. This instrument was selected to ensure that no data would be missed out, the process of filtering irrelevant data was carried out as well as to ease the identification process occurring at the open coding phase and axial coding phase. A total of 100 pages of transcribed data were produced; 25 pages respectively for the first and second observation, and 50 pages for the final observation. The 100 pages of transcribed data amounted to 9843 words.

### DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The analysis procedures of the data obtained for this study were predominantly replicated from the methods presented by two literacy brokering research, namely: 1) 'Genres, Contexts, and Literacy Practices: Literacy Brokering among Sudanese Refugee Families' by Perry (2009) and 2) 'Language Brokering in a Middle School Science Class' (Bayley, Hansen-Thomas & Langman, 2005). The unit of analysis for this study was literacy brokering. The analysis of data began by transcribing the data obtained from the audio and video recordings. To ensure clear recording of contextual information, the transcription logs contained the following information: 1) type of data, 2) name of data file, 3) literacy event, 4) paraphernalia used, 5) venue, 6) participants involved, and 7) description of event. Picture tags, or miniature pictures captured from each video were also included to mark each log. A sample of the transcription log with description is shown in Figure 1 and 2.

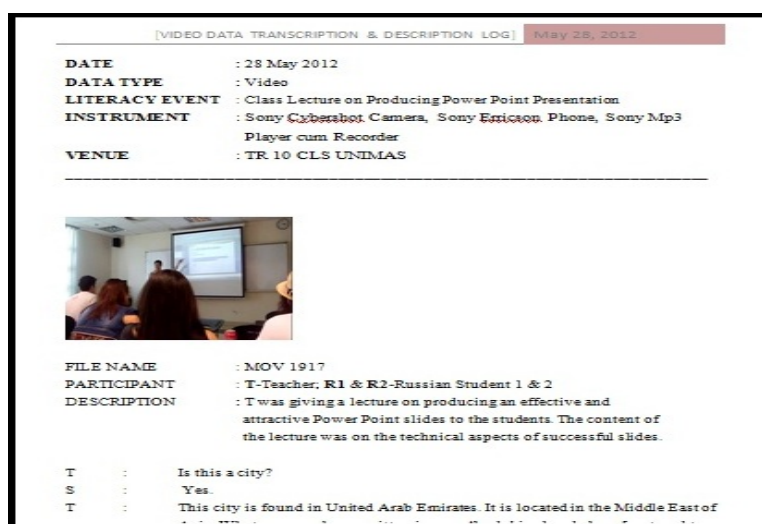


FIGURE 1. Transcription 1

As part of the syllabus, the instructor asked the students to create a mind-map of interesting tourist spots in Tajikistan, which was their country of origin. However, they experienced trouble in comprehending the instruction due to the fact that they could not grasp the concept of ‘mind-mapping’. When asked to describe their idea of producing a mind map, they described the action of drawing an actual map. So the teacher improvised her instruction by guiding the students to incorporate the mind map within the map of their country; which they produced prior to the brokering session. It must be noted that the interaction was considered as brokering because there were brokers as well as brokerage seekers involved.

FIGURE 2. Transcription explanation

After that, the open coding procedure ensued. The main intent of this procedure was to identify the literacy brokering phenomena in the data. A literacy brokering phenomenon requires the presence of the following aspects or ‘codes’: literacy brokering trigger, literacy broker, literacy brokering seeker and facilitating language. Identification of the abovementioned codes were made on the basis of the descriptions adapted from the analysis framework of Perry (2009), Bayley, Hansen-Thomas and Langman (2005) as well as the definition provided by Mazak (2007). Further details on the codes and their source of derivation are explained in table 2. In carrying out the open coding process, each page of the transcriptions log was thoroughly analysed and each identified code was labelled using a series of marking symbols; as exemplified in table 3.

TABLE 2. Open Coding Aspects

CODE	INDICATOR
Language used during brokering process (Perry 2009)	Languages used to facilitate a literacy event, including the participants’ mother tongue.
Literacy Broker (Mazak, 2007)	A literacy broker in the context of this study was identified as the person who possessed the ability to negotiate English language texts and text-related information (Mazak 2007) in 1) the mother tongue of brokering seeker or 2) other languages/version of language most comprehensible to brokering seeker. Brokers were identified by the person or persons who were consistently involved in literacy brokering activities as the mediator. In this study too, the instructors were also regarded as a literacy broker.
Brokering seeker	Essentially, this code referred to any participants who requested literacy brokerage from potential brokers. They were identifiable by their 1) low proficiency in the target language, 2) inability to understand instructions and tasks as well as repeated and 3) frequent engagements in literacy brokering practice as a means of seeking literacy aid. Instructors were not subjected under this code as their brokering activities usually stemmed from students’ lack of competency in the English language.
Brokering Trigger (adapted from Bayley, Hansen-Thomas & Langman., 2005)	Class Management; specifically all teaching and learning tasks/activities. Behaviour Management; anything related to disciplining or regulating students’ actions. Procedural Knowledge; teaching and learning as well as other tasks/activities such as drawing a mind map or directing students to a certain place Declarative Knowledge; declarative speech such as “today is such a hot day!”



TABLE 3. Open Coding Symbol & Explanation

SYMBOL	EXPLANATION
B	Broker
B1	Primary Broker
B2	Secondary Broker
BS	Brokering seeker
BP	Brokering Process
BT	Brokering Trigger
BTCM	Classroom Management
BTBM	Behavioural Management
BTPK	Procedural Knowledge
BTDK	Declarative Knowledge
L	Language used
NL	Native Language
EL	English Language

An example of literacy brokering activity identified through the process of open coding is as shown in figure 3:

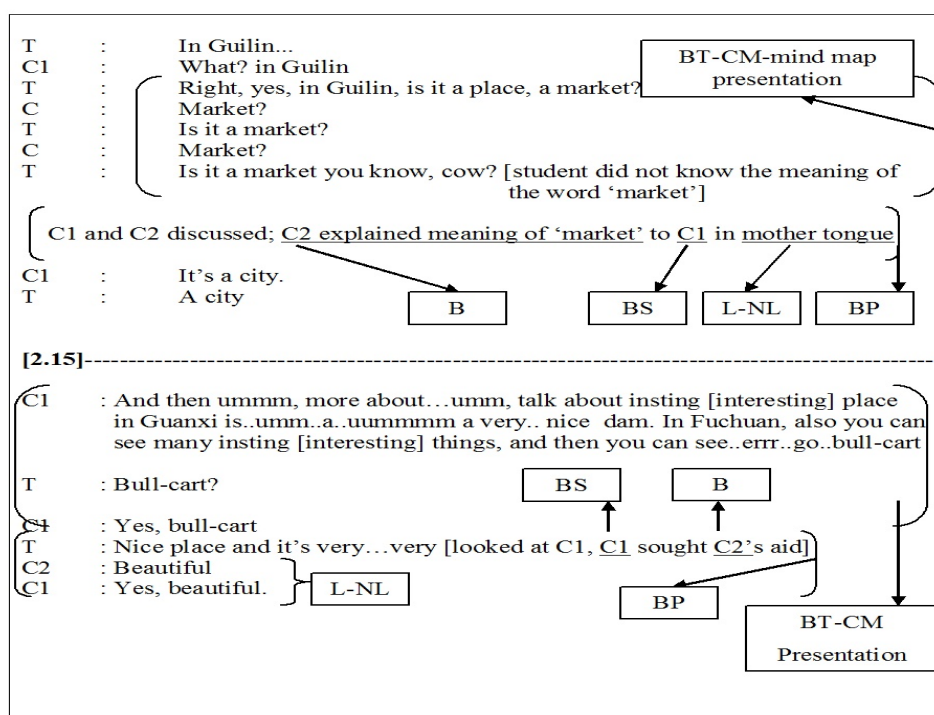


FIGURE 3. Open Coding Sample

In figure 3, the brokering process [BP] revolved around the word 'market': C1 [brokering seeker-BS] was not able to grasp the meaning of the word despite the 'cues' given by T. C2 then explained the meaning of the word to C1, so in this regard C2 was the broker[B]. Despite the fact that the class was an English language class, the literacy brokering process occurred in the participants' mother tongue [L-NL]. It took place during a classroom presentation; as part of an in-class task executed in pairs or groups. The students' presentation was based on the mind-map they created earlier about three interesting tourist spots in their respective countries. It is evident that since the task is also a component of class management [CM], CM was then identified as the trigger of the brokering process. The second example also found the brokering process [BP] triggered by the presentation task undertaken by the participants. But this time C1, again as the brokering seeker [BS] was

unable to provide the right adjective to describe a place. C2 [B] came to C1's aid and suggested the word 'beautiful'. Since 'beautiful' is an English word, it is therefore confirmed that the brokering process was by the English language-mediated [L-EL].

The final stage of analysis was the axial coding procedure. At this stage, the literacy brokering phenomena identified through the open coding procedure were examined thematically. This was done in order to gain deeper insights on the challenges faced by the research participants vis-à-vis English language acquisition in the Malaysian classroom context. Perry's (2009) thematic brokering content framework was used for this purpose. It was selected due to the close nature of Perry's research and framework with this study. In Perry's (2009) framework, three categories namely 1) Lexico-Syntactic and Graphophonic Brokering, 2) Genre Brokering and 3) Culture Brokering were established. Additionally, Perry (2009) also developed sub-categories for each of those major themes in effort to capture all aspects of the literacy brokering phenomenon. The sub-aspects are as follow:

TABLE 4. Axial Coding Aspects and Symbols

BROKERING TYPE	SUB-ASPECTS
Lexico-syntactic & graphophonic (LSG)	This type of brokering often occurred as meaning-makers sought help with word meanings, spelling, and pronunciation of words. Brokering events of the abovementioned nature were coded into these categories: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Vocabulary; for when meaning-makers or participants seek help with word-related matters such as word-meaning and spelling.</li> <li>2) Syntax; brokering activities which revolved around sentence-formation and arrangements such as <i>subject-verb agreement</i>.</li> <li>3) Letter-sound relationships; a type of brokering which occurred when participants or meaning-makers seek help in the pronunciation of certain English words.</li> </ol>
Genre (G)	The subcategories of genre-related literacy brokering detected by Perry (2009) were: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) purpose of the genre</li> <li>2) the use of genre or its function</li> <li>3) features of a genre and how they are organized within the Genre</li> </ol>
Culture (C)	Cultural brokering; specifically any brokering activities which insinuated intercultural understanding and communication efforts.

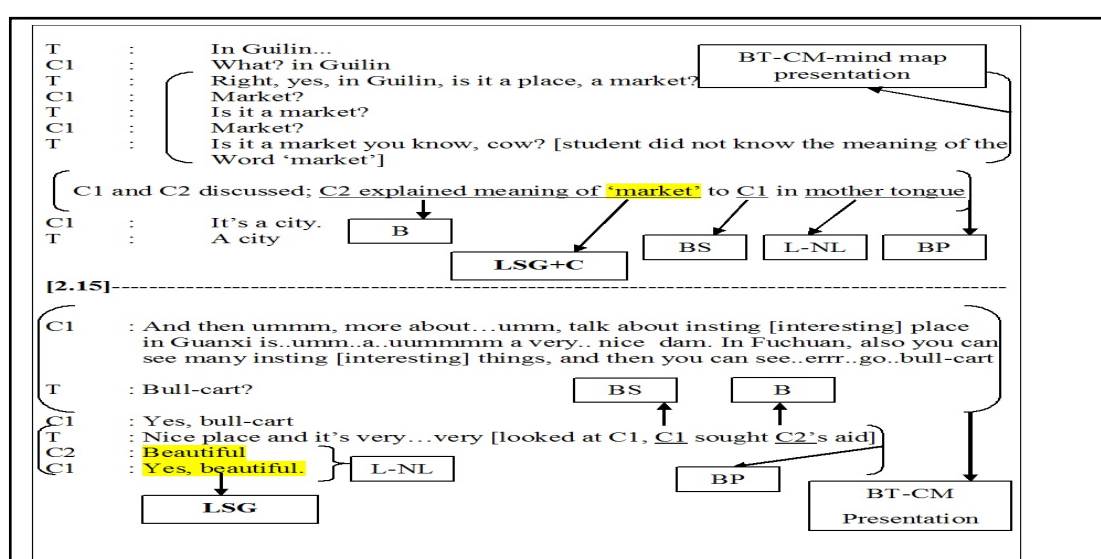


FIGURE 4. Axial Coding Sample

Figure 4 is an example of the axial coding procedure. It could be noted that the theme of brokering had been identified as one part LSG and one part C. LSG or lexico-syntactic and graphophonic brokering revolves around the linguistic elements of literacy; such as meaning of words, sentence-formation, grammar and vocabulary. In the case of the said analysis, C1 did not know the denotative meaning of ‘market’; thus brokering content clearly belonged to the LSG theme. To help C1, T provided a connotative reference to the concept of ‘market’; which was ‘cow’. The culture of having live cows sold at the market may be inherent in T’s context (Malaysian wet market) or the target language’s culture (native-English countries’ farmer’s market), but this might not be the case for C1, because he was unable to connect the word ‘cow’ to the idea of ‘market’; leading to him seeking cultural brokerage from C2, a fellow countryman. The second example also took place between also C1 and C2. In this session, C1 engaged C2 in a literacy brokering activity oriented on finding the right adjective to describe a place. The brokering act shown was clearly a LSG brokering.

## FINDINGS

### BROKERING THEMES

Most of the literacy brokering occurrences observed were oriented on LSG theme (sixteen occurrences out of 35). These LSG themes consisted of vocabulary, syntax, grammar and phonetics such as knowing the meaning of a certain word, forming sentences and spelling a word. Some examples of these words are ‘crowded’, ‘museum’, ‘beach’, ‘goat’ and ‘short’. This finding is anticipated as it is parallel to the fact that for most of the participants, the first prolonged contact with the language began when they enrolled in the course. The breakdown of the themes can be seen in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Brokering Themes

Session	LSG	G	C	LSG + G	LSG + C	G + C
1	4	2			4	
2	3		1	2		
3	8	1	1	3	2	4
<b>Total</b>	15	3	2	5	6	4

An example of LSG theme brokering observed could be seen in figure 5:

L1	Tajik	: Museum
L2	Indo	: What is the name of the museum?
L3	Tajik	: Err museum?
L4	Indo	: ‘U’ ‘S’ ‘E’ ‘U’ ‘M’..
L5	Tajik	: ‘S’ ‘A’?
L6	Indo	: No no ‘U’ ‘M’..museum...what is the name of the museum? The name of the museum...

FIGURE 5. Example of LSG Brokering Theme

In figure 5, the word brokered is ‘museum’; and the brokering process occurred because the participants were confused by the ‘mismatch’ between the spelling of the word [L4-L6] and its pronunciation [L1-L6].

Another example is the word ‘tunnel’ (see figure 6); where a Tajikistan student was not able to link the English word for ‘tunnel’ to the concept of a tunnel. He was later on given an in-context explanation by his friend, who is also from Tajikistan.

L1	Tajik 3	: [Called T5] Tunnel?
L2	Tajik 5	: Tunnel?
L3	Tajik 3	: Tunnel [demonstrated the concept to T5]
L4	Tajik 5	: Huh?
L5	Tajik 3	: Tu...tu..tunnel tunnel
L6	Tajik 5	: Tunnel? [motioned an object going through tunnel]. The way things...
L7	Teacher	: Tunnel, tunnel
L8	Tajik 5	: Spelling?
L9	Tajik 3	: Tunl
L10	Teacher	: You mean the...the...the hole in the mountain?
L11	T3	: Ya
L12	T	: Tunnel. You mean the train go through the tunnel?
L13	T3	: 'T' 'U'...double 'N', double 'N'?
L14	T	: Yes double 'N'. Tunnel.

FIGURE 6. Example of LSG Brokering Theme

The second theme most brokered by the students is LSG + C; with 6 occurrences. LSG + C denotes a combination of the lexico-syntactic and graphophonic brokering theme and the culture brokering theme. An example of the LSG + C brokering theme is shown in figure 6. In this excerpt, the brokerage was initiated because Tajik 4 did not know the meaning and spelling of the word 'tunnel'. Tajik 5 tapped into Tajik 3's existing schemata [L3 & L6] by linking the word to how it looks in their hometown. However, Tajik 5 was also limited in terms of vocabulary and resorted to using gestures. The teacher then took over and became the broker by supplying the words to describe a tunnel found in Tajikistan [L10 & L12].

L1	Teacher	: I like to go to the beach and meditate. You?
L2	Tajik	: Meditate?
L3	Teacher	: Yes, meditate, do you know what is meditate? What is meditating?
L4		[Indo nodded]
L5	Tajik	: What is meditating?
L6		[Tajik sought help from Indo. Indo demonstrated the action of 'meditating']
L7	Teacher	: It is what? what is meditating?

FIGURE 7. Example of LSG + C Brokering

In another example [figure 7], the word 'meditate' could be understood by the Indonesian student but not the Tajik student; although the word was an English word [L5-L6]. As such, although both students initially did not know the meaning of the word, but the fact that the concept of meditation is inherent in the Indonesian culture helped Indo student to grasp the meaning quicker [L1-L3]. It is also interesting to note that due to the students' limited proficiency, literacy brokering was assisted frequently by gestures. In this light, the emergence LSG + C theme proves the functionality of 'culture' in aiding second and foreign language acquisition.

The third most brokered theme is LSG + G. LSG + G refers to a combination of lexico-syntactic and graphophonic brokering theme (English Language system) and the genre brokering theme. The students displayed difficulties in comprehending the instructions of language-based tasks which were expressed in a specific genre form and structure; such as filling in a mind map, matching a picture to a sentence, forming sentences based on a list of given keywords and answering comprehension questions. For instance, in completing a write-up for a power presentation, the students were asked to identify the 1) main ideas which would be shown on the slides based on a checklist given by the teacher and 2) arrangement order of the sentences.

L1	Teacher : Tell from the start by telling us what ‘Nowrouz’ is...
L2	Tajik 2 : Yes...
L3	Teacher : Okay, how people celebrate it...and how my...you you your family when you celebrate Nowrouz...are they the same...is it the same as the people celebrate Nowrouz...are are we talking about the same thing?
L4	Teacher : Yes.
L5	Tajik 2 : Huh?... How people celebrate the Nowrouz...for example...errmm, aaahh..
L6	Teacher :This is number 2 right?
L7	Tajik 2 :Yes and...
L8	Teacher : Is number 3 the same as number 2?
L9	Tajik 2 : I will change this...okay
L10	Teacher : Okay what?
L11	Tajik 2 : [Seek brokerage using mother tongue from T3] can I tell about..errmm about...errmm about food or wedding or...
L12	Teacher : So when you do number 3, it is, it can...it can be like, something to do with this, but it can’t be exactly the same.

FIGURE 8. Example of LSG + G Brokering

As shown in figure 8, the struggle was not just language-related as the weightage leaned more towards the students’ inability to match their knowledge of the target language with the form and order it was expected to be expressed in [L4-L12]. It must be emphasised that LSG +G and LSG + C brokering themes are not present in Perry’s (2009) coding as they are emergent themes; surfacing out of the data from this research. This happens because in this research, the formal learning aspect instigated cultural and genre brokering. In Perry’s (2009) work, brokering took place in home domain, so no aspect of formal learning took place.

The second least brokered theme was ‘genre’, with only three occurrences across the three observation sessions. This was probably because due to the nature of the class, written exercises were not specified to a certain genre such as academic writing. In fact, only two genre-based writing activities were engaged by the students during the three observation sessions; namely power point genre and mind-map genre. Genre brokering theme is exemplified by Figure 9.

L1	Teacher : What do you want?
L2	Turkish : I want to draw something...a map, can?
L3	Teacher : You want to draw Tajikistan?
L4	[Turkish went over to Tajikistan team to provide help]
L5	Teacher : Don’t worry this is not a Geography Class okay, if your map is a bit off it’s okay.
L6	Tajik 2 : Teacher
L7	Teacher : Yes
L8	Tajik 2 : What...errmm but... [not able to express his question to her so he turned to his friends for help]
L9	[Chinese decided to get help from T after discussing with his friend]
L10	Chinese : Teacher!errm. how...?
L11	Teacher : Okay so where are you from? Which part of China?
L12	Chinese : China
L13	Teacher : For instance...you have a pen? You just draw this [drew a sample of mind map on paper]Both of you from the same area?
L14	Chinese : No
L15	Teacher : So from here, and then another place here, and then China in the middle and then the three places you want to show us...now you try alright?
L16	Chinese : Okay [turned to relate his understanding to his teammate]
L17	Teacher : You are free to do what you like, okay? Creativity. If you want to do a map of your country it’s fine. If you can’t it’s okay

FIGURE 9. Example of Genre Brokering Theme

In figure 9, it is observed that the students were not familiar with the mind-map genre [L2-L5 & L10-L16]. However, they knew the meaning of a ‘map’- so they drew a map of their home country. The teacher contextualised the learning process by letting them express the information using an actual map [L17].

The word ‘culture’ on its own was the least brokered theme among the participants during lesson time. It must also be emphasised that although the themes of ‘genre’ and ‘culture’ were among the least brokered themes, they were brokered more frequently when combined with the LSG brokering theme, thus intensifying the fact that culture is an important factor in second or foreign language acquisition.

### **LITERACY PRACTICES**

The brokering themes generated based on the findings in the present study has shed light on the literacy practices engaged by the foreign students in a Malaysian university classroom. The first practice identified is the use of technology to facilitate the learning process. This fact is exemplified by the teacher’s use of the computer lab for research purposes. Tasks incorporating technology were also assigned; such as producing power point presentations to explain a topic. As such, it is not unusual that the students relied on technology such as dictionary apps, digital dictionary and search engine in their phones in facilitating the brokering process or completing a task. In light of the immersion of technology in formal learning, some participants struggled with the use of the computer or internet for the academic purposes. For instance, in the third observation session, it was noticed that TK sought literacy brokering from his teacher and friends to search for points to be included in his write-up draft. Specifically, he wanted to surf the net for ‘interesting places’ of his country, but was unable to do so because the browser was in English. The teacher as the broker supplied him with keywords such as ‘tourist spots’ and ‘interesting places in Istanbul’ to assist his research. The participant revealed that English language learning in his native country was administered autonomously; where information were learnt and obtained via checking a physical dictionary, memorising, drilling and note-taking. Technology was not included in the learning process; hence usage of computers and the internet were normally used for social purposes only. Several other participants also echoed the same experience.

The second literacy practice noticed is the students’ tendency to work in pairs or groups. This practice occurred during all three observations; not just when doing group-oriented tasks such as drawing a map or presenting a topic, but also when completing exercises or reading texts. Some of the pairing and grouping were teacher-administered; but in most occasions, it happened voluntarily. Subsequently, literacy brokering most occurred when group work took place [L-L17], as shown in figure 10. The situation was part of the ‘speaking’ component of the learning unit.

L1	Teacher: Tell us about yourself.
L2	[Tajik 2 translated teacher's instruction using mother tongue to Tajik 4]
L3	Teacher : About yourself, about your country
L4	[Tajik 2 still had to translate teacher's instruction using mother tongue to Tajik 4]
L5	Tajik 4 : Talk about what?
L6	Tajik 2 & Tajik 3 still translating teacher's instruction using mother tongue to Tajik 4
L7	Tajik 4 : I had erm vocation time...
L8	Teacher : You had a what?
L9	Tajik 2 [aiding T4]: I had a vacation time
L10	Teacher : I had a...
L11	Tajik 2[still aiding Tajik4]: A fantastic
L12	Teacher : A what?
L13	Tajik 4 : I had a fantastic vocation in...
L14	Tajik 2 [still aiding T4]: Vacation
L15	Tajik 4 [looked at Tajik 2]: I had a fantastic vacation in....
L16	Tajik 2 : Kuala Lumpur
L17	Tajik 4: Yes, Kuala Lumpur.

FIGURE 10. Literacy Brokering in Completing Group Work

The inclination to work in pairs or groups could be part of the students' coping mechanism in overcoming their linguistic, cultural and genre-based shortcomings during the English language lessons. Besides that, another literacy practice recognised is the participants' engagement in intercultural exchange during language learning. Although culture was not the overt objective of the learning unit, the students exchanged information about aspects of each other's culture while completing their task or when working in a group. This could be seen in figure 11, where from L1-L8, the Turkish student and Tajik student were comparing their home country's version of dumpling.

Turkish and Tajik 2 were discussing a dish called 'Manti' while at the same time researching about it on the net. This dish was going to be included in their write up as well as power point presentation.	
L1	Tajik 2 : See Abdul Rahman...same! [pointed to the picture of Manti on his screen]
L2	Turkish : Yes...same?
L3	Tajik 2 : Same...what do you put inside manti? We use err yogurt
L4	Turkish : Yogurt?
L5	Tajik 2 : No inside...after we finish cook
L6	Turkish : [Pointed to his screen] Look this one!
L7	Tajik 2 : So delicious yea...
L8	Turkish : Put meat.
T2	: Yes

FIGURE 11. Intercultural Exchanges during Literacy Brokering

When the researcher asked the participants for clarification on the nature of their classroom interactions, the participants revealed that the literacy practices vis-à-vis English language in their respective home countries took place only in the formal domain of the classroom. Usage of the language outside the classroom context was minimal. English was learnt in order to pass examination and limited to acquiring grammar as well as reading and writing skills. In this retrospect, the acquisition of cultural exchanges as part of the participants' literary practice could be most feasibly attributed to the multicultural and multiracial makeup of the classroom as well as the incorporation of technology in the learning process.

The final literacy practice identified is teacher's frequency of providing scaffolding during lessons. In fact, in most cases, the broker was the teacher. The teacher's scaffolding

efforts aided in bridging the students' level of proficiency with the classroom tasks assigned to them. An example of such scaffolding is in figure 9. In producing a mind-map, the teacher incorporated the students' notion of a mind map into the teacher's understanding of it. Although the students' version of mind map was different from the conventional notion of a mind map, the teacher allowed the students to be creative while ensuring that the task was still carried out correctly.

## CONCLUSION

At this juncture, two aspects of this study are worthy of discussion. The first aspect is the similarities in terms of the literacy struggles between the immigrants and the participants of this research. Regardless of domains and settings, second and foreign language learners would encounter difficulties which reach out beyond knowing the semantic meaning of the target language. The emergence of a notable pattern in terms of the learners' types of struggles however serve as a leverage for the immigrant handlers as well as educators as they would now know the issues that they should tackle in order to ease their charges' assimilation into the target community.

This research also highlights the pivotal potential of classroom brokering research to the realm of cross-cultural literacy. The present study's findings, namely the brokerage of genre and literacy practice of cultural exchange have demonstrated the existence of socio-cultural tensions within the formal domain of a classroom or in this case, a decontextualised classroom. As such, while most research on literacy brokering are currently centered on immigrants' home and family (See Mihut, 2014; Perry, 2014; Hua & Constigan, 2011; Martinez, McClure & Eddy, 2009), this study has proven that the classroom setting also possesses similar breadth and depth which would enable researchers to obtain fresh socio-cultural discoveries and insights.

The second aspect is the pedagogical implications of this study's findings. This research has shown that literacy acquisition is no longer autonomous in nature. Specifically, writing and reading could no longer be perceived as competency tools which are limited to the formal classroom literacy practices and used primarily to reproduce the curriculum (Koo Yew Lie, Peter Kell, Wong Fook Fei, 2006). Such limited outlook on literacy does not prepare the learners, especially non-native English Language learners to the complexities of literacy in today's world (see Fariza Puteh-Behak, Ramiaida Darmi & Yuslina Mohamad, 2015; You Xiaoye & You Xiaoqiong, 2013; Raslie, 2013). On the basis of this research's findings, New Literacy Studies' acknowledgement of literacy's socio-cultural underlining is seen to be the more relevant and feasible approach in mediating the complexities surrounding the learners as well as their cultural reality.

A closer look at this study's analysis of brokering themes reveals that the learners' actual struggles transgress beyond the lexico-syntactic and graphophonic aspects. Hence, the system, especially decontextualised learning systems must place importance on the efforts of contextualising the learning process; namely customising the existing curriculum, learning units, pedagogical methods and evaluations to complement the learners' needs. In the case where the aforesaid elements are fixed factors, the contextualising responsibility falls primarily on the shoulder of the instructor. This notion is also shared by Perry (2014), who posits that teachers' contextualising efforts should not just address the struggles of the students, but be extended to their parents or guardians. In this research, the instructors' scaffolding efforts proved to be most helpful in bridging the students' knowledge gaps, their own schema and the expected learning outcomes. In fact, the teachers were the primary literacy broker for the students observed; thus attesting their importance to the students' literacy development.



The essence of the socio-cultural approach to literacy pedagogy in light of this research's findings could be summed up using Kalantzis and Cope (2008) 'new basics' concept. These new basics are regarded as *representations* of the new literacy realities in education, especially in English literacy and they are:

1. literacy and text expound the limitations of spelling and grammar rules-it is now a way of communicating;
2. literacy is no longer about acquiring proper usage only; it is also about the myriad of different uses in different contexts;
3. literacy requires critical thinking in its usage and application; whereby meaning makers are expected to search for 'clues' in face of familiar and unfamiliar texts and work out the appropriate situated responses to these texts;
4. literacy encourages active engagement of communication in unfamiliar territories and learning from successes and mistakes made during this activity.

In conclusion, this study has investigated the literacy brokering phenomena which occurred at a Malaysian public university. Pursuing the participants' brokering themes and literacy practices, the results of this research have shown that the linguistic aspects of language learning are the most brokered theme. However, the participants' brokerages of the genre and culture themes as well as adaptation of the socio-culture literacy practices have captured the presence of socio-cultural entities in the classroom context. It is therefore logical and relevant for the socio-cultural struggles be placed on an equal par with its linguistic counterpart. This study is however not without limitations. The participants' constant use of their native language to facilitate the literacy brokering process had restricted more information from being extracted. More research should be done on the literacy brokering phenomenon occurring in various decontextualised classrooms not just in Malaysia, but also in other countries within the Asian region, such as Singapore and Hong Kong. This is because these countries are fast becoming the English Language Learning hubs although they are inner circle countries (Kachru, 1985). It is therefore anticipated that research done on literacy brokering would include socio-cultural realities in literacy development.

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