

Phases of awareness: Why I became an English teacher

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ABSTRACT: As the title indicates, this article maps the phases of awareness of the writer as a subject of language learning and acquisition. It begins with the acquisition of a first language and proceeds to offer an account of the learning of additional languages. As these learnings accumulate, identity becomes problematised. In particular, the article explores issues of problematic subject formation in encounters with English. These issues include conflicts with an Islamic belief system, expected deference to a particular version of the Western literacy canon and deciding on an appropriate stance viz-a-viz the imperialism of globalizing English.

KEY WORDS: English language hegemony, identity, subject formation, language learning, literacy canon, Indonesian.

INTRODUCTION

For some time now I have been thinking about my role as a teacher of English in Indonesia. I feel that it is important for me to understand the influences that have shaped the way I see myself as a teacher. I would like to understand these influences so that I can think about ways in which I might grow and change or simply decide to stay as I am. I think this kind of investigation is important because it will provide a perspective on my professional practice, helping me to develop curriculum that will meet the needs of my students.

The following article consists of a series of vignettes that reflect different phases of awareness in my life. I try to capture my early encounters with English language and my subsequent experiences both as a university student and a teacher. The article can be read as an example of narrative inquiry in which I attempt to interrogate the aspects of my life and to understand the factors that have made me what I am.

ILIR-ILIR: A MOSLEM AND A JAVANESE GIRL

Ilir-ilir tandure wus semilir
Tak ijo royo-royo tak sengguh temanten anyar
Cah angon penekno blimbing kuwi
Lunyu-lunyu penekno kanggo nyebo dodot iro
Dodot iro kumitir bedah ing pinggir
Domono jlumatono kanggo sebo mengko sore
Munpung padang rembulane
Mumpung jembar kalangane
Sung surako surak hore
(“Ilir-Ilir”, children’s Islamic Javanese song)

O wind, the rice field produces their fruit
The beautiful green of the rice field is like a new married couple

O shepherd climb the star fruit tree
 Climb it though it is slippery
 To wash your cloth
 Which is wrecked
 Fix and sew it
 For this evening celebration
 When the moon is full and the field is wide
 Let's cheer and hurray
 (English version of "Ilir-ilir")

Before I go to bed, Bapak (Javanese name for a father) sings this song as a lullaby for my two brothers and me who sleep in the same bed. I can still feel the warm notes of this song whispering in my ears. This song has had a great impact on my life. It was believed to have been composed by Sunan Giri (Saint Giri) in the 16th century. He was one of the first Islamic preachers in Java known as the *Walisongo* (Nine Saints). These *Walisongo* had turned Java towards a form of Islam that was shaped by Javanese culture, which had long ago been influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. Sunan Giri's father was a Persian and his mother was a Javanese princess of Blambangan or East Java.

The "Ilir-Ilir" song conveys a basic philosophy to every Moslem in Java. It is introduced to children in their early age through a lullaby before sleeping, and tells about Islam by asking the young generation to honour the five obligations or Islamic principles that are symbolized in the star fruit which has five corners:

1. the *Syhadat*, the declaration that there is no god but *Allah* and *Muhammad* is His Messenger
2. the *Shalat*, which requires that one prays five times every day from the dawn until midnight
3. the *Zakat*, almsgiving to the have-nots
4. the *Shaum*, fasting for one month during Ramadhan (one of the months in the Islamic calendar lunar system. The 12-month Islamic calendar begins with Muharram, and proceeds with Safar, Rabiul Awal, Rabiul Akhir, Jumadil Ula, Jumadil Thani, Rajab, Sha'ban, Ramadhan, Syawal, Dhulqodah, Dzulhijjah.)
5. *Hajji*, pilgrimage to Mecca.

The first word that was introduced to me was the name of Allah. I kept questioning: Who was he? Where did he come from? How old was he? What did he look like? Was he a boy or a girl? Could I play with him? What did he eat? Did he have a bicycle? I had lots more questions, which Bapak could not answer. The only explanation he gave to me was "If you want to be a success in everything, pray and ask to Him". (He is unseen. He is the Almighty. The Most Gracious. The Most Merciful. He loves you. And you must love Him as well). Bapak taught me the first short prayer – an Arabic phrase – that should be uttered in every activity whether eating, going to school, studying or playing with friends:

1. For the beginning of every activity: *Bismillahi Rahman nir Rahim* (In the Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful).
2. For the closing of every activity: *Alhamdulillahilahi Rahman nir Rahim* (All praises and thanks are Allah's, the Lord of the *Alamin* [mankind, jinn and all that exists]).

This led to my intense praying when I wanted to win games with my friends. They included *dakonan*, *tali* (skipping), *delikan* (peek-a-boo), *cublak-cublak suweng* and other traditional games. Our family had no television at that time, so playing under the moonlight was very frequent. Sometimes my village friends and I would run through the *pematang*, the land separating the rice fields, to catch butterflies in the afternoon and fireflies in the evening. I love fireflies very much. At that time I thought that they were angels sent by Allah. This wild childhood had made me addicted to roaming the rice field and swimming through the rivers on every side of the rice field. The water was crystal clear. The fishes were abundant. Yellow, red and black. We called them *wader* and *lele*. I cannot find them now because of the massive industrial construction in my village that led to pollution in the rivers.

Bapak used to catch the fish in the rice field in front of my house. And Ibu (my mother) would fry them before she went teaching. They were the most delicious food during my childhood. This fried fish reminded me of my first Javanese language that Ibuk taught me:

Ibu karo Bapak *dahar* iwak (Mother and Father eat fish).

Ningrum karo Mas Wida lan Mas Totok *maem* iwak (Ningrum, Wida, and Totok eat fishes).

Dahar and *maem* have a similar meaning of eating, but *dahar* is for the older and *maem* for the younger. So I had to be alert all the time to use the polite Javanese language when I had to speak with the older person. Ibuk was a tough person in teaching this to me. Here are other examples from the list of words differentiating between forms for generational groups.

English	For older person	For younger person
drink	ngunjuk	mimik
sit	pinarak	duduk
sleep	sare	bobok
walk	tindak	mlaku
see	mirsani	nyawang
read	maos	moco
take a bath	siram	pakpung
stand up	jumeneng	ngadhek
wake up	wungu	tangi
write	nyerat	nulis

This linguistic expression of politeness was impressed on me very much during my early learning of the language. The first language that I learned was Javanese. This language was used for polite social communication. If a child could speak politely in Javanese to an older person, it meant that he or she had a good upbringing. I had already encountered this difficulty in communicating with older people. Children rarely spoke to their elders because of this barrier. Javanese language also obliges its user to address the older person with *Mas* for older male, *Mbak* for older female, *dhik* for younger male or female. Although Javanese has a written system, we were never taught it in depth. Teachers in primary school only introduced the alphabet. We simply used this language in everyday life locally.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE: *THE, BISCUIT, INSTANT, AND ENGLISH VERBS*

Bahasa Indonesian is used both in spoken and written communication on formal occasions such as those that are held in offices and factories and schools. I knew this when I started my primary school. Although Bahasa Indonesian was used officially and formally in school, we never used it outside the classroom. The Javanese language prevailed outside the class and other formal institutions. However, we had to be able to read in Indonesian. There was no Javanese writing on grocery products. The grocery products were written both in Indonesian and English, and I loved to ask my Bapak and Ibuk: What does it mean? The following Indonesian instant noodle product that we used to cook is an example.

Instant Noodle/Mi Instan

Cooking instruction/Cara memasak:

1. Bring 400 ml of water to the boil, add noodles and simmer for 3 minutes (Rebus mi dalam 400 ml air mendidih dan aduk perlahan-lahan selama 3 menit).
2. Mix seasoning powder, oil, sweet soy sauce and chili sauce (according to taste) on a bowl while noodles are being cooked (Campurkan bumbu, minyak bumbu, kecap, dan saus cabe di dalam piring, ketika mi sedang dimasak).
3. Remove noodles from water and drain well (Tiriskan sampai kering).
4. Stir noodles with the seasoning and mix well (Campurkan mi dengan bumbu yang sudah dipersiapkan dan diaduk sampai rata).
5. Garnish with fried onion and your delicious noodles are ready to serve (Taburkan bawang goreng dan mi goreng anda yang lezat sudah siap untuk disajikan).

I still remember during primary school how amazed I was by every word that named every product at the stores when Ibuk and I went shopping. My head was full of words such as “biscuit” and “instant”, which I pronounced as “biskecuit” and “sentan”. Even a little word like ‘the’ was a mystery to me.

Ibuk told me that I used to love to read news “upside down” and to pretend that I was able to read. I copied this habit from Bapak. As a construction field manager, Bapak used to travel from province to province throughout Indonesia. Every time he came home, he brought poetry of his own to me. This was a big present for me at that time because I loved it very much. He wrote poems for me and I would read them in various competitions during my primary school. Bapak told me that I used to ask him to write poetry in the ‘strange language’ of English in which he could not write.

Ibuk then decided to give me a private home course in this strange language, a privilege which was rare in my village. The funny old male teacher liked pointing very much with his finger and I did so as well. “This is a pencil, that is a door, this is a chair, that is a desk ...”. Almost every day my two elder brothers were sick of hearing my voice repeating this strange language. Both my parents supported me in learning this strange language. At that time the mastery of this strange language became a trend in my country. Lots of parents did the same thing.

I encountered great difficulty in learning English verbs. This difficulty was caused by a different pattern of verbs in English from Indonesian. In Indonesian, all verbs, whether in past, present or future, are the same. We simply add an adverb of time to explain the time, for example: Ufuq goes to the zoo now.

Ufuq pergi (went) ke kebun binatang kemaren (yesterday)

Ufuq pergi (goes) ke kebun binatang sekarang (now)

Ufuq pergi (will go) ke kebun binatang besok (tomorrow)

Some of my English verbs lists:

<i>Indonesian</i>	<i>Verb 1</i>	<i>verb 2</i>	<i>Verb 3</i>
<i>pergi</i>	go	went	have gone
<i>belajar</i>	study	studied	have studied
<i>membaca</i>	read	read	have read
<i>berlari</i>	run	ran	have run

I listed all the verbs in tiny figures and brought them everywhere so that I could learn them by heart. Because of my love of this language, I finally learnt them. Although sometimes the effort was exhausting, it still gave me a lot of pleasure. My primary (Sekolah Dasar-SD-Year 7-12) and junior high school (Sekolah Menengah Pertama-SMP-Year 13-15) were places where I experienced difficult but joyous moments in learning English.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH LITERATURE: MEETING D.H. LAWRENCE

In high school (Sekolah Menengah Atas-SMA-Year 16-18) my adoration of this strange language led me to devour Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes detective stories. These detective stories and all these powerful words led me to love studying English, which I continued in my tertiary education. The first English poem that was introduced to me in my university English class was "Ozymandias" and the first astonishing novel was Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. I was then seduced into reading works by Jane Austen, Ibsen, Hemingway, Faulkner and Beckett. Besides reading novels, I loved to watch movies, whether on television or at the cinema. Along the way to the theatre I used to bring my little Oxford dictionary. This had turned into a shabby, wrecked, poor creature. When I had no money to see the movie in the cinema, I was still satisfied by knowing the meaning of every title being offered on the front board outside.

D.H. Lawrence had a big influence on me during my tertiary education. His novella, *The Man Who Died*, was an unforgettable encounter for me because it tells about the dehumanization of Jesus Christ. Lawrence describes Jesus not as God but as an ordinary person. This affected me as a Moslem who believed that Jesus was a Messenger. I cried when I came across the sentence about Jesus sucking the dried bread so that the bread could be eaten. This reminded me of Bapak's stories of prophets. In Islam, the richest prophet is Solomon and the poorest one is Isa or Jesus. I cried because I could not bear the fact that Jesus suffered after his resurrection. In Lawrence's version, Jesus was resurrected to be a mortal human who wanted to explore the world to the very utmost.

I put this idea in my final project when completing my bachelor's degree. My supervisor for this final project was a unique person who was a prolific researcher and writer for journals. He introduced me to literary analysis that drew on structuralism, most notably Lucien Goldman's *Genetic Structuralism*, which I used when analyzing

Lawrence's novella. D.H. Lawrence's works even began to have too great an impact on my life. I was unable to pray for nearly a month. I started to believe in humanism. I even rejected my God because for me at that time He was unfair by creating heaven and hell just to punish the non-Moslem. I believed that non-Moslems also belonged to humanity. I started questioning the function of heaven and hell, the value of prayer, and the many rituals that a Moslem observes every day. The Christian Church rejected Lawrence when he created *The Man Who Died*. The church board banned his work for a long period of time. It was published in 1929 and people could read it only at around 1950/1960. Such a long time! And to read this novella is such a precious experience.

This influence began to horrify me. My supervisor, however, could see it and turned me from a sceptical person into a Moslem who can also respect other religious values. This opened my perspective on religion: from ritual into substance; from symbolism into piety. I came to believe that prayer was not a matter of quantity but quality.

SHOCKED BY SHAKESPEARE: ANGER THEN DESPAIR

Charles. Was Mahomet inspired with a dove?
Thou [Joan La Pucelle/Joan of Arc] with an eagle art inspired then.
(Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 1*: Act I, Scene ii)

My understanding of these lines from Shakespeare's *Henry VI* was that Mohammad was being compared with Joan of Arc. Mohammad was the dove and Joan of Arc was the eagle. The eagle was mightier than the dove. So, as a Moslem, I thought this was a slur on my religion. My first feeling on reading these lines was anger. But my anger soon gave way to despair. Shakespeare was the greatest writer ever. His works had endured throughout centuries. His works were translated into my language, Bahasa Indonesia. And the university student theatre often performed his plays in an adapted version. Shakespeare was more famous than our local or national writers, such as Pramudya Ananta Toer. It is much more difficult to find Toer's works in the bookshops than Shakespeare's.

Again I went to my supervisor who was my consoler as well – the consoler of every despair I had. He gave me Edward W. Said's *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the orient* (1978), where Said writes about Orientalism as a means by which the West could dominate and have authority over the Orient (p. 3). This book gave me the idea of binary positions between the Occident and the Orient. Political awareness was awakened by reading this book.

The anger and despair arising from my first encounter with Western constructions of Islam gave way to critical analysis and a determination to resist such oppression. I experienced a growing awareness of dominant groups who reduplicate and reproduce their representation of Islam and the Orient through publishing Shakespeare's works and ensuring they were included in the curriculum. I can find Shakespeare in any bookstore in my town. The critical practices associated with reading Shakespeare sit at the core of the curriculum of the English department where I now work. Shakespeare is not simply a person who produced magnificent works; he is also the embodiment of the Western canon and the power of the West over the East

NOVICE TRANSLATOR: EXCITED BY EASTERN WORKS OF LITERATURE

After finishing my bachelor's degree I was accepted by two institutions. One option for me was to become a teacher in my own university. But I also had an opportunity to become a secretary to the field manager of the Mobil Oil Company in Cepu, the biggest oil source in central Java. I chose the second job. And buckets of tears flowed during the ten months I spent with this company, even though I felt as though money was being showered on me. The job, however, was routinised and linear, and so I finally I decided to apply to become a teacher at the university again. Eventually I achieved this, and I felt great joy, even though I would be paid comparatively little money. My passion for studying and teaching English is central to my life.

Besides teaching, I was also asked to translate several books by a publishing house. The editor who then became my husband sent me Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* to be translated and an abundance of poems by the same author. I taught in the afternoon, and translated in the evening – a busy woman who would do everything to pursue her career. This time was very precious as my husband-to-be introduced me to several mystical writers. I had been dealing with hundreds of pages of books to be translated into Indonesian and all of them were about philosophy, mysticism, and literature. This frequent exposure to writers from the non-Western canon brought with it an ecstasy at the magic and wisdom of heaven.

Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself
 Love possesses not nor would it be possessed;
 For love is sufficient unto love.

When you love you should not say,
 "God is in my heart," but rather,
 "I am in the heart of God".

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, 1923

Gibran was like a great reservoir of spiritual life. His language was potent and universal. He offered beauty and majesty in his language. I translated all his poems and prose, from *The Madman* (1918) to *Spiritual Saying* (1963). My efforts produced three books that were around 400 pages each.

Cinta tidak memberi apapun selain dirinya sendiri dan tidak mengambil selain dari
 dirinya sendiri
 Cinta tidak memiliki dan tidak dimiliki;
 Karena cinta itu sendiri sudah cukup bagi cinta.

Bila engkau mencinta jangan katakan,
 "Tuhan ada dalam hatiku", tapi katakan,
 "aku ada di hati Tuhan".

my translation of Gibran's *The Prophet*, 1923

The most difficult part in translating Gibran's works was his poems. I had to keep the rhyme in my language. Sometimes I could not do that and so I tried to make lyrical

prose out of it. In one year the books were re-printed 12 times. Such a huge amount of money for the publishing house but not for the translator! The passion for this new search for mystical writers led me to translate another ten books by writers such as Iqbal, Louis Massignon and Ibnu Ishak.

Being a translator had moved me from Western literature to Islamic mystical literature, from concentrating on the Western literary canon to incursions into the wisdom of heaven and the tranquility of spirit. The latter required no heroes, no enemies, no chorus, no setting, no minor characters. These texts promoted the interconnectedness of all life forms. Such literature strove for a constant balance. As Brown (1995) reports on her efforts to introduce Indian folklore to her American students, such texts are not concerned with “character development....Their purpose is to explain a world, not an ego” (p. 180).

Contemporary practices of translating texts become a process of “fixing the Other” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 69). The Eastern work is considered as the “Other”. The existence of Otherness is constructed to distinguish the centre from the margins. When I translate works from Indonesian into English or from English in Indonesian, I am working from the margins and trying to challenge the centre. I still agonise over the fact that the curriculum prescribes only Western works. This has a direct impact on my position as a teacher who can only dream of teaching Eastern works to my students.

BEGINNING TEACHER: IMMATURE AND STUBBORN LOVER OF LITERATURE

As a beginning teacher, the great number of students that I had to teach shocked me. The first class was exhausting: fifty students sat facing me in neat rows. Paradoxically, this number also inspired me to continue my work. Talking with fifty eager and keen faces gave me strength to teach my next class. I began to love teaching, although I was still unable to talk much in the class. The solitary activity of translation had undermined my capacity to interact effectively in class. I made my plan at home, when I wrote all the activities for the class down on paper. When I arrived in the classroom, everything was settled. I knew what to do and my students supposedly knew what they should do. My classrooms were silent – something which was of concern to my colleagues. One day, I visited another teacher’s classroom. I learnt a lot from her. She made all activities into fun. And the students loved to do it. She made games in teaching oral proficiency.

I tried to apply this but it did not work. I began to think that I was not suitable for teaching. But my love of literature could not be stopped even in the classroom. I was assigned to teach oral proficiency and I gave my students a sample of a conversation from Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. The sub-topic was “ordering from a menu in a restaurant”:

In a second he had laid a fresh cloth on a round table under a bronze chandelier, although it already had a tablecloth on it, pushed up two velvet chairs, and stood before Oblonsky with a napkin and menu awaiting his order.

“If you would prefer a private room, sir, it will be available in a moment. Prince Golitsyn is there with a lady. We’ve some fresh oysters in, sir.”

“Ah, Oysters!”

Oblonsky thought it over. “What about changing our menu, Levin?” he said, keeping his finger on the bill of fare. And there was an expression of serious perplexity on his face. “Are the oysters good? Are you quite sure?”

“They are Flensburg, sir. We’ve no Ostend ones.”

They may be Flensburg, but are they fresh?”

“They only arrived yesterday, sir.”

“What about it? Shall we start with oysters and then change the whole menu? What do you say?”

“I don’t mind. I like cabbage soup and buckwheat porridge better than anything, but I don’t suppose they have it here” (Tolstoy, 1961, p. 49).

My students were frustrated. They could not handle the sophisticated language in this passage. Although I had provided them with key words and phrases for this sub-topic, including “I would prefer...”, “I like...better than...”, “Shall we start...”, I was too obsessed with the book to notice that it was not suitable for my students. My students and colleagues complained about me. My Head of Department heard about this and I was sent to a workshop on teaching English for one month. Nothing happened. I was still as stubborn as ever. They finally put me to teach *Prose* and *Drama*. What an excitement! A great gift in my life!

Being a beginning teacher of literature, I was still as stubborn as ever. I was heading in my own direction of teaching an “open canon” (not only from the Western canon). In *Prose*, I gave my students Gibran, Morrison and Lawrence, instead of Austen, Dickens and Hemingway. Again I was called and given a piece of paper listing dozens of Western writers. Such a jolt! I was in total despair not to be allowed to teach works that I considered important. For the first time I realized that I was under a big umbrella of a curriculum that I had to abide by. But as a beginning teacher I was lacking a pedagogy that would enable me to communicate with my students. I had to learn and catch up more with others. I was given heaps of books on teaching methodology and assessment, but I still could not stop reading material that I loved.

Yet I still understood that I needed to facilitate more conversation and interaction in my classroom. I realized that “I was a teacher”. “Teacher”: a word that signified not only my love of literature, but my desire to provide meaningful opportunities for language and learning for my students.

PURSUING A MASTER’S DEGREE: LEARNING AND REDEFINING POST-COLONIALISM

Before departing to Australia for further study I was asked by a poet, Cecep Syamsul Hari, to translate his 100 poems, *Efrosina*, into English. I learned a great deal from the exercise of translating Indonesian poems into English. I had already experienced the interface between English and Indonesian in Indonesia and now I began to experience the interface between Indonesian and English in an English-speaking country. The transformation from English into Indonesian is different from the transformation from Indonesian into English. The first transformation involves appropriating the cultural

values of English into my language and the second transformation involves appropriating my own culture into English. Here is an example of how it works:

Pada wajah daun-daun

- Ziata

Pada wajah daun-daun senja yang lembab itu, kulihat
Engkau sendiri menari. Lambaian demi lambaian
Telapak tanganmu menciptakan pusaran angin,
Menjelma badai dalam batinku....
(Cecep Syamsul Hari 1994-95)

The face of the leaves

For Ziata

One damp twilight, I saw you dancing alone
Across the face of the leaves. You waved your hands
Creating a whirlwind, a storm
In my soul. ...
(Harry Aveling's translation in *Secrets Need Words*, 2001)

The poetry I was asked to translate involved a story of a Bosnian girl who experienced misery because of the war. This Indonesian-Bosnian link was born because Islam had become the same religion in both countries. I often experienced problems with the untranslatability of Indonesian into English. The word *surau* in my language means little and simple mosque, but this mosque compared with the ordinary one is actually much more spiritual. So when my editor decided that it could be translated into *chapel*, I still could not accept this. I would prefer to just leave the word in its original *surau* (with detailed explanation in the footnote, for example) in order to let the reader know there is an Other language than English. This is to achieve of what Ashcroft et al (1989):

The technique of selective lexical fidelity which leaves some words untranslated in the text is a more widely used device for conveying the sense of cultural distinctiveness (p. 64).

Along with the process of pursuing my master's degree and translating the poems I was also reflecting on my new cultural context. I was struck by the way teachers and students appeared to be on a more equal footing in the classroom. Some students even seemed to challenge the authority of the teacher, something that I never dreamed before. I felt that hitherto I had been positioned as a passive receiver by both Javanese culture and Islam. My encounter with post-colonial theory and narrative inquiry heightened my sense of the possibility of taking a more active and critical stance in my own classrooms.

During my time in Australia, I became preoccupied with the possibility of challenging authority and opening up new ways of reading literature. I realised that the issue was not simply about replacing the Western canon. Rather, the challenge was to read against the grain and to develop a pedagogy that supported such readings. The question was not just about what I taught but how I taught, not just what my students read but how they read. My aim is for us all to read critically.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

What have I learnt by putting these vignettes together?

My first early childhood experiences show my love for the exotic, the metaphoric, for the subtleties and mysteries of language. The complexities of the meaning of the metaphor of the first song introduced to me, “Iilir-ilir”, led me to inquire into the existence of God, Allah, which then became the foundation of my spiritual beliefs. This shaped me as a Moslem. And then the Javanese language was imposed on me like an implant, requiring me always to be polite to elders – a rich code of politeness that shaped me as a Javanese. These two factors meant that I was positioned not solely as a Moslem but as a Moslem who was also shaped by the regional values of Javanese culture. This position was not one which I chose freely, but reflected the world of culture, religion and social relations into which I was born. This world continues to be reduplicated in my daily life as I grow older – a key aspect of my identity.

My first encounter with the strange language, English, shows my growing awareness of the differences between languages. My experience of the interface between Javanese, Indonesian and English languages brought with it a new awareness of different cultures. My identity became more multidimensional with the arrival of English in my life. English illustrates the power of attraction of language as fashion— we innocently accept new cultural notions along with this new fashion.

My parents’ efforts to make me literate in English as early as possible were an understandable reaction to the world that they saw forming around them. Other parents attempted to do the same thing for their children. Although the language of the colonizers in Indonesia was Dutch, Indonesians still felt the power of English in a world shaped by globalization and US dominance. By learning English, I became a site for reduplication of another sort, a product of the power of English as a globalising force.

When I first learnt English, the activity seemed as innocent as swimming in the water that surrounded our rice fields. My education since then has meant that I have experienced deep divisions within myself. The ELT industry has become one of the apparatuses of power that operates without any acknowledgement that it works in the interests of imperialism. The growth of this industry is in response to the requirement of schools that children who are enrolling should already be acquainted with the English language. Schooling itself is shaped by the dictates of corporations that rule this globalised world. The chain of power is operated and reduplicated among industries, schools and in the experiences of people like me.

My autobiography as an English teacher means that I want to enable my students to develop a critical language awareness as they learn English. I want them to question the role that English plays in globalisation, even as they benefit from the access that English provides into a global language environment. I have begun devising teaching strategies that will encourage them to resist the way they are positioned by the English literary canon and to find new ways of reading English language texts. Together, I am hoping that we can affirm our multiple identities, both our local

identities and our identities as participants in international dialogues, such as that which I have offered you by constructing this account of my phases of awareness.

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