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"OH, HI. HELLO": Desire for English in the semiotics of an Indonesian product leaflet

1. Introduction

Motha and Lin have argued that 'at the centre of every English language learning moment lies desire… for what is believed to lie beyond the doors that English unlocks' (2014: 331). In this chapter I will draw on data from a longitudinal study of the motivation of nine Indonesian learners of English (Lamb 2007) to explore the desires that English can arouse in one particular part of the Global South, as well as the identities and power that it affords to those who can appropriate it. The main data consists of a product leaflet written by one of the participants, Tahira, an elite school pupil at age 12 and already at age 22 the part-owner of three online accessories businesses while doing a part-time Master's programme. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) of this leaflet, alongside selected excerpts from interviews with Tahira and another participant from 2002 to the present day, uncovers the shared desires, tastes and mutual recognition of a new metropolitan elite in Indonesia, and points towards one motivational strategy available to local teachers of English.

2. Critical discourse analysis and motivation to learn

CDA encompasses a wide range of epistemological and methodological approaches to the analysis of texts (see Lin 2014 for an overview) which have in common an interest in the 'social, ideological and political dimension of discourse' (Cameron & Panović 2014: 1) and an assumption that the linguistic choices made by a speaker or writer are as revealing of social/ideological/political beliefs and intentions as the ideas actually expressed. CDA practitioners therefore look for patterns of usages in texts – sometimes but not always using systemic functional linguistics as a descriptive framework (e.g. Fairclough 2003) – including the lexical choices, phrase and sentence grammar, text structure, the way it references other texts (intertextuality), and how it incorporates other non-textual elements like sounds and images, in order to understand the stance being taken by the speaker/writer and the broader ideologies they reflect or represent. CDA practitioners often have an overt political agenda – they are concerned with exposing and countering social inequalities or political oppression – and would argue that objectivity is anyway impossible since all social analysts have their own agendas and perspectives; a researcher gains trust by being as open and reflexive as possible.

CDA has rarely been used in researching motivation to learn language, though its untapped potential has been noted by Ushioda (2020). One core overlapping concept is 'identity'. Social theories of learning view motivation as a desire for a new identity, usually involving membership of a new community of practice, whether that be an MBA programme, a company board, a sports club or an imagined community of global English-speakers (Lamb 2013); poststructuralists (e.g. Motha & Lin 2014) have emphasised the way that this desire is

itself socially constructed and politically constrained. In Bourdieusian terms (see Pennycook 2001 for an accessible description of Bourdieu's theory), community memberships are not usually open to anyone but have to be earned through the accumulation of appropriate social, cultural or economic capital; membership is signalled through the display of such capital. Education is a field where highly valued cultural capital (including language) is reproduced, being passed on from one generation to another. Commerce is a field where such capital is traded in citizens' ongoing struggle to create and articulate their desired identities. A commercial text, such as an advertisement or (I will argue) a product leaflet, is potentially replete with verbal and visual messages about desired identities and, by logical extension, undesired identities i.e. the distinction from others. As Cameron and Panović (2014) put it, CDA can ask

> how the linguistic choices made in these texts do the work of constructing and addressing the various categories or types of consumer identified by advertisers. A related 'critical' question is to what extent these textual constructions depend on and recycle dominant ideologies, so that in identifying with the positions on offer, consumers are also 'buying into' certain kinds of power and inequality (p.10)

CDA of this English-language product leaflet produced by Tahira and her colleagues may therefore tell us something about their motivations, that of their customers, and of the ideologies and power relations dominating contemporary urban society in Indonesia.

3. Context: Young Indonesians learning English in the early 21st century

This chapter builds on an ad-hoc programme of research in Indonesia that began with a doctoral project aimed at understanding he impact of schooling on young teenagers' motivation for learning English (Lamb 2007). It was a mixed-method study that involved two questionnaires for the whole school cohort and three interviews and class observations with 12 individual cases, administered over a period of 20 months. Although the formal L2 learning experience was for many learners uninspiring, their motivation for English was not diminished, and I attributed this largely to identification processes, nurtured and developed through social interaction at home, in the local community and in the media, which encouraged many young Indonesians to view English as integral to their future lives. Five years later, interviews with nine of the case study learners revealed a growing divergence in English competence among the learners, which I explained in terms of the strong ideal L2 selves which drove some individuals to make considerable efforts to learn, compared to motivationally weaker ought-to L2 selves in those who were making less progress (Lamb 2011). Another five years on, when the case study participants were in their early 20s, a further round of interviews revealed that some were now using English confidently in work and/or study, while others expressed deep frustration that they had not been able to realize their hopes of learning the language (Lamb 2018).

Although the study primarily drew on constructs and methods from motivational psychology, a parallel study utilizing the sociological construct of 'investment' (Norton 2000) would have drawn attention to the way the participants' identities and learning practices were being shaped by global and local power relations, with their own efforts (differentially supported) aimed at not just mastering a new linguistic code but at appropriating new material and symbolic resources, the better to position themselves within those relations of power. Such a study would also have noted how, by the time the participants were leaving full-time education, they were living in 'a new world order transformed by advancements in technology and new forms of mobility' (Darvin 2020: 252). The range of multilingual communities to which they could belong, or imagine belonging, had multiplied; with advancing globalization, the value of English as cultural capital in various fields of work and play had risen significantly; and so had young people's 'desire for the language, for the identities represented by particular accents and varieties of English, and images that are associated with English' (Motha & Lin 2014: 332).

This can be illustrated by my interactions with two of the participants, Ridwan and Tahira, who from the beginning appeared to be at opposite ends of the academic achievement spectrum. To deal with Ridwan first, he was the 4th of five children in a provincial middle-class family (father a civil servant, mother a high school teacher), and though designated by his teacher as a 'low motivation' student in my original study, he was always cognizant of the potential value of English in his life: 'important, important, the thing is, if you want to become a businessman, you have to know English, if not you're going to be deceived by people who do have English' [Interview #3, age 12 - translated]. At age 17, he was encountering English on a daily basis ('as soon as you open a website, the explanations are in English' [interview #4]), and aware that in the internet cafés he frequented, if one had some specialist knowledge of English computer terminology 'we could teach it to someone else and get a profit'. Soon after that encounter, he dropped out of high school, and when I met him at age 22, he was living in Jakarta and eking out a living on the fringes of the fashion industry (two siblings were successful models) by, amongst other things, trading in textiles, designing T-shirts, and helping to make promotional videos. English was 'so important' to him, he said, because there were many foreigners among his firm's clients and he needed to be able to communicate with them; he also made English language slogans for printing on T-shirts.

Our own meeting, which he had arranged to take place in a fashionable shopping mall café with a couple of his friends in attendance, was also an opportunity to perform an English-speaking identity and he sprinkled the conversation with English words and phrases wherever he could, as in this exchange:

I: What's your job then?

> R: Working *itu*… entertainment... entertainment... *perubahan-perubahan naik nah sekarang sudah pingin belajar bahasa inggris banget, sekarang* my friend and my manager *... Inggris is eh penting. Bahasa inggris itu penting*[1]

Ridwan's desire for English was undiminished, yet his frustration was evident. A poor schooling experience, not helped by his propensity for alienating teachers, had left him only with the highly truncated repertoires (Blommaert 2010) that he had appropriated from regular computer usage and occasional commercial encounters.

Turning now to Tahira, at age 12 she was admitted to the elite 'accelerated learning' class of her school year, and was among the top performers in that class. Her father was a civil servant while her mother did not work - she consistently mentioned her parents as 'my motivation to succeed in life' [interview #6, age 28]. From an early age her heart was set upon leaving the Sumatran town to study at an Islamic boarding school in Java, and then moving on to a top university. By the age of 17 she was indeed studying Industrial Design at Indonesia's best technological university, in one of the country's most cosmopolitan cities. English had never been her favourite school subject but she had consistently invested effort in learning the language:

> I think mastering English is a must if we want to compete in globalization era which is already in front of us. In that era it seems like there's no limit among the country. I means, after I graduate from my study in Institute _ _ _ , there'll be opportunity for me to work with peoples from around the world in a multinational company. *[language learning journal, written at age 17; all quotations in original English*]

Five years later, at age 22, Tahira had already graduated and was an entrepreneur with her own start-up company designing, making and selling a range of high-end products, including bags, notebooks and various leather items. She was also studying for a part-time MBA that involved a two-month sojourn in New York. At the time I spoke to her she described herself as 'a person that's driven by passion and things, and now I see English as my …as my media or, an aid to understand and to engage to my field of passion' [interview #5, age 22].

Just as with Ridwan, my interview with Tahira took place in one of the city's trendiest shopping malls, and as we sat down she presented me with the gift of a leather notebook, which was for sale on one of her company websites. After expressing my thanks, I opened the wrapping and found a product leaflet inside which – like the notebook itself – had been designed by Tahira and her two colleagues and featured, in large capitalized, italicized

[1] R's utterance might be translated as 'Working, that's…. entertainment... entertainment... there are so many changes these days, now I really do want to learn English, now my friend and my manager [says] English is important…English, that's important'.

letters, the message '*OH, HI. HELLO*'. This was certainly eye-catching but it was only much later that I read the document in full, in its quirky yet sophisticated English, and puzzled about what it was 'doing', inside the wrapping of a notebook made and sold in west Java.

4. Critical discourse analysis of the product leaflet

The remainder of the chapter presents an analysis of the document, first considering its basic form and function, then asking why it was written exclusively in English, before examining the rhetorical and linguistic choices made by Tahira and colleagues in the main message.

4.1 Form and Function

A folded-out greyscale image of the whole document is presented in the Appendix. In the actual product, the paper was folded twice so that there were four separate 'pages', with the capitalized headings CONTENTS; OH, HI. HELLO; COMPOSITION AND CARE; CONTACTS. On the front 'CONTENTS' page there were three lines in much smaller font, 'an anseris premium leather notebook' over a sketch of the notebook itself, 'a replacement lace' inside a sketch of a lace, and below, 'and this mini guide card (obviously).' The ambiguous term 'guide card' suggests that the producers (Tahira and colleagues) were not sure what genre it belonged to, for while it did function as a 'care guide', with advice for example on keeping it away from water and direct sunlight, it also detailed the product's composition (e.g. 'NATURAL PAPER (that's 90% recycled, yay us!)', while the 'CONTACTS' page, with the sub-line 'there's a lot more where this came from' gave information about the company webpage, Twitter account and contact email address. The page headed 'OH, HI. HELLO' consisted only of a personal message directed at purchasers – not, we should note, directed at customers, since they would only have been able to read it once they had actually bought the product.

The leaflet is therefore a hybrid genre, blending features from different types of text (care guide, contents list, ingredients, advertisement) and having no single essential function. Like the leather notebook itself, it is a luxury, but one that makes both the producers and consumers feel better about themselves. The parchment style paper is attractive and suggests rarity, something not mass-produced, and the image of the goose that underlays the text on three of the pages both references the brand name 'Anseris' – *Anser* is the latinate term for the genus waterfowl – and also travel, as geese are well-known for their seasonal migration. As Tahira said to me in interview, 'when we compose we like to make it as subtle and as …so we can deliver our soul in the product. So that it becomes [a] product and not just a commodity' [interview #5]. In other words, she is trying to position purchasers not as customers but as peers who share their good tastes and leisured life-styles; and who of course also share their comfortable familiarity with colloquial and commercial English.

4.2 The choice of English

There is an extensive literature on the use of English in advertising and commerce in non-Anglophone contexts; Kuppens (2010) identifies four rationales:

- To expand the market for a product beyond the mother tongue (MT) population
- Because English is better able than the MT to convey the qualities of the product, for instance due to relative brevity or because there are no equivalent words in the MT
- For its cultural connotations, for instance to index 'freedom' (associated with the USA), or 'class and tradition' (associated with the UK), or as a global language to index worldliness and cosmopolitanism
- As a cue to subtle transcultural intertextuality within the discourse itself i.e. references to other (English language) texts which readers might recognize

The latter two reasons are relevant here. It is significant that there is no Indonesian at all in the document – this is not a bilingual text. Normally this might be meant to signal that the product is made in the West and thus of high quality, but the leaflet makes clear that it is actually made in Indonesia: 'your notebook's leather cover was taken from local cow, hence minimizing the carbon footprint released from overseas distribution, because we love the earth too'.

This statement also strongly suggests that the targeted customers were Indonesian ('locals'). Tahira confirmed this, saying that the product was placed in local galleries and 'arts events', as well as being offered on her company website. When I queried her on whether her customers would understand the leaflet's English, she replied:

> I think when I analyse those who bought our product, I think they have almost the same background or English knowledge with us, the three of us. They might understand it because not…. I don't mean to be rude but I think the ordinary people don't interest with this product, you know...? [interview #5]

The choice of English for the leaflet, like for the product descriptions on her company websites, was very deliberate then, to attract a certain sort of clientele while excluding others; 'the market is very niche. Well, the one who want to write in a leather journal is not very much…'. What is more, the use of English was not merely emblematic (Hyde 2002) as it might have been on Ridwan's T-shirt designs; the text of the leaflet was meant to be read and understood, crafted to appeal to that target clientele: the cosmopolitan middle-class English-speaking elite to which Tahira and her colleagues themselves aspired.

While the product itself was not western, the leaflet assumes that purchasers are familiar with western consumer goods labelled in English, as there is evidence of transcultural intertextuality here, cued by the use of English. For example, the care guide section mimics

the standard instructions that might be found on western products, but subverts them in the sub-lines, as here:

> KEEP AWAY FROM WATER
> altough your notebook is so natural it almost felt hippie, it's not waterproof….
> KEEP AWAY FROM DIRECT SUNLIGHT
> please be a sweetheart and keep the leather away from direct sunlight and oils of any kind….

Tahira and her colleagues thus assume her clients easily recognize these English language phrases and appreciate the added explanation, written in a jokey personalized way at odds with the usual technical phrasing. This is similar to what Kuppens (2010: 119) terms 'ego enhancement' in postmodern advertising, where intertextuality is used (often by subtle reference to other well-known advertisements or media products) to amuse viewers/readers and credit them with being able to see through classic advertising strategies[2]. 'By positioning the viewers [or readers] as the holder of the necessary cultural capital, the advertiser appears to speak to the viewer [or reader] as a peer' (ibid.). The leaflet is cementing a bond between the producers and consumers of the notebook as cosmopolitan English-speakers of uncommon refinement.

4.3 The message

In this section I analyse the page containing the main message to purchasers, with the eye-catching heading 'OH, HI. HELLO'. The punctuation indicates how it is intended to be 'heard', with a short pause between the first two words, and a longer pause between the second and third. Said in this way, the phrase takes on a slightly flirtatious note: the speaker is surprised (the small case words inserted after HI – 'we didn't see you there' – are hardly noticed on first reading), but then there is recognition; if not of the actual person, but of the type of person who is 'there'. The 'HELLO' is not just a greeting but conveys interest, the promise even of future intimacy. Bourdieu (1991) argues that cultural capital only has value when *recognized* as legitimate by the other. The verbal exchange here symbolizes this act of recognition, as the seller (Tahira and colleagues) recruits the buyer as a peer, a person with distinctive knowledge and tastes.

The next sentence is slightly jarring. It contains two formal speech acts: thanking and then congratulating – as if the speaker is aware of the need to draw back slightly from their enthusiastic greeting. The direct exclamation 'congratulations!' on the following line re-establishes the conversational tone of the beginning, and the next utterance, '*yay*', enclosed by unconventional asterisks, takes the discourse to another level of informality,

[2] A recent example in the UK is the Oasis drinks company billboard ads; one read 'It's summer. You're thirsty. We've got sales targets'. The frank admission of commercial motives in the last statement, combined with the empathetic reference to the reader's thirst, is intended to create the effect of mates helping each other out.

invoking American youth street slang. To an Anglophone reader there is an obvious contradiction here – the kind of youth who uses this language would be unlikely to have much use for a leather notebook. But as I have already stressed, this product is not intended for an Anglophone customer-base but for young Indonesians similar to those who created the product and wrote the leaflet, for whom 'yay' might carry connotations of freedom and joy.

Now the 'conversation' is put on this very informal footing, the writers can return to the more intimate tone of the opening with the coy 'now, don't be shy…', possibly a teasing reference to the renowned modesty of the Javanese, which they are suggesting should be cast aside now in celebrating their purchase. 'Open it, this is all yours' emphasises the pleasure of possession, assuring the purchaser that there is no need to be embarrassed about feelings of privilege or indulgence.

The following section opens with 'we know you're kind of excited and all…', again carrying the implication that the makers of the product already *know* the customer well. It continues 'so please don't let us withhold you any much longer', non-standard forms which would only be recognized as such by a native-speaker, not the target market. There is a coda: 'and oh – we love you too', neatly echoing the earlier comment 'we hope you'll love it', and finally cementing the relationship of one of mutual admiration. In fact, the way the text here has run to hyperbole manages to introduce a note of self-parody that the writers believe will be recognised by the readers, in turn signalling their respect for them by implying that they know they are not the type of customer easily seduced by marketing blurb, but instead discerning enough to treat the whole interaction as a game. In Bourdieu's terms, they are encouraging the *mis*recognition of the tawdry commercial exchange – the payment of money for goods – as something more like an exchange of gifts between friends.

5. Discussion and implications

So what does this document analysis tell us about the English language learning motivation of young adult Indonesians? Having just examined one text, the analysis obviously shares the limitations of other 'single-text, single-shot approaches' (Lin 2014: 228) to CDA and I am not aware if Tahira's company had other products with similarly styled inserts. The document is a generic hybrid and so cannot be said to typify a particular discourse. What it does constitute is an instance of communicative practice among the emerging educated middle-class of metropolitan Indonesia, which might be paraphrased along these lines: 'we the makers of this product know who you purchasers are because you're like us – you speak our language, you share our tastes for retro personal accessories, you're wealthy enough to afford a quality leather notebook but also thoughtful enough to need one, you have the opportunity for travel though like us you care for the environment – and it's our pleasure to share this and our other products with you'.

As such, this is an instance of 'elite multilingualism', 'a phenomenon that brings social and/or material capital, a sense of belonging, prestige, excellence, privilege, and access through the use of specific linguistic resources for certain social groups and individuals' (Barakos & Selleck 2019: 362). Eliteness is not a straightforward concept – there may be said to be multiple elites in any country, Indonesia included, and Tahira, her colleagues and customers may well not consider themselves to be part of an elite. In the neighbouring country of the Philippines, for example, Reyes (2017) discusses 'elite bifurcation' where an educated, culturally sophisticated middle-class elite distinguish themselves partly through their use of Standard English from a pretentious, wealthy, consumerist Taglish-speaking middle-class elite. In political and economic terms, there is another elite – sometimes dubbed the 1%, though in Indonesia more like the 0.01% - with wealth and power beyond the imaginings of Tahira and friends. As Thurlow and Jaworksi (2017) suggest, eliteness is something that people do, through language or other semiotic resources, to assert privilege and superiority, and include or exclude others.

What we see in this product leaflet is English being used to 'do eliteness', to establish distinction and to co-construct specific elite identities. Rather like the Saab owners studied by Dong and Blommaert (2016) who 'set themselves off against "ordinary" Chinese citizens by means of elaborate discourses and semiotic enactments, organized around specific luxury commodities' (p 34), Tahira and colleagues are highly educated and well-qualified, but the kind of English deployed in the leaflet is not 'school English' – as we have seen it borrows creatively from genres of commerce, youth culture, and environmentalism amongst others. Only someone with a cosmopolitan outlook and more worldly experiences could have appropriated such discoursal repertoires, the leaflet is saying; producers and consumers alike are members of a youthful cultural elite. It is not only in consumerist contexts that English performs this function in Indonesia. Politicians pepper their speeches with English phrases, expensive private hospitals cover their walls with notices in English, elite educators employ English as a medium of instruction (Coleman 2016). In all cases, the practice is designed to include some people – those who have the right kind of capital to invest – and exclude others. There is an assumption that people like Ridwan would lack both the symbolic (English) and the material (money) capital to buy the work, as well as the refined taste and reflective disposition to appreciate it.

Although the product leaflet therefore fits into a pattern of elitist practices, I must acknowledge ambivalent feelings about it. Having observed Tahira's development from the age of 11 and been witness to her own considerable investment of effort into learning English, I find her linguistic achievements admirable, and her self-advancement in English as well as in other academic/vocational fields will no doubt bring her rewards. But it also provides employment for others, satisfies consumer demand, and inspires other young people. As stated at the beginning, her social background was not particularly privileged and

not dissimilar to that of Ridwan, but a mix of small structural advantages (e.g. parents with a distinct interest in education) and her own personal talents and predispositions has enabled her to achieve a cosmopolitan English-mediated identity, while Ridwan, who shared many of her aspirations, remains marginalized and frustrated.

For both, the learning of English was an emotional enterprise and a form of 'linguistic entrepreneurship' which reflected the neoliberal ideologies pervasive within 21st century Indonesian education (in urban centres at least) to 'strategically exploit language-related resources for enhancing one's worth in the world' (De Costa, Park & Wee 2016: 695). The product leaflet epitomizes the desired learning outcomes of such a language education. Readers committed to resisting the advance of neoliberalism may view their starkly diverging trajectories as evidence of structural iniquities; readers of a less critical bent may regret Ridwan's frustrations but celebrate Tahira's success. De Costa (2019: 456) argues that 'elite multilingualism can impact learning and teaching negatively', yet the emotional allure of joining an elite – whether economic, academic, sporting or cultural – helps to fuel the motivation of learners and galvanize the work of teachers and institutions. Mastery of a high status language enables a playful act of 'self-actualization', as Tahira described the product leaflet, but it also enables many acts of enterprise or benevolence that would otherwise be impossible, as she pointed out in her most recent communication: 'As a Muslim', she reminded me, 'my responsibilities in this world are to be an as beneficial person as I can' [interview #6].

In fact, whatever their position on the advance of neoliberalism, local teachers could usefully exploit real world texts like this in their school English lessons (cf. Gorter 2018). On the one hand, the collection (easily done these days with a mobile phone camera) and analysis of English signage and notices in the environment can itself be a motivational learning activity for pupils; such texts would certainly have been more appealing to Ridwan than the bland coursebooks which deterred him from investing in school English, and could have taught him personally meaningful words and phrases. On the other hand, teachers could also exploit such texts to develop critical thinking; not just about the machinations of corporate advertisers and public authorities, but about the place of English in their physical environment, the doors it opens and closes in their society, and the desires or enmities it invokes in themselves.

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APPENDIX – Copy of the leaflet (greyscale version)