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‘Talk about my name’: Exploring the translanguaging potential of artifacts within multilingual parents’ early literacy practices with their children

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Abstract

In early childhood policy and curriculum discourses, migrant and multilingual parents’ literacy practices with their children have often been marginalised and othered. Such othering rejects the value of culturally and materially embedded communicative practices present in homes and communities. Countering this is the development in scholarship of a heteroglossic perspective, involving practices such as translanguaging and artifactual literacies. This perspective illuminates how the blurring of the boundaries between languages and modes enables more culturally responsive spaces for creating new meanings and understandings of identity and literacies. Applying an artifactual literacies approach, this research explored migrant and multilingual parents’ early literacy practices with their children and the emergence of such new meanings in the context of early literacies. In the process of sharing their home literacy practices, parents engaged in translanguaging and through interacting with artifacts made use of their full communicative repertoire to convey linguistic and cultural knowledges. The analysis of findings sought to understand how parents drew on artifactual, linguistic and cultural knowledge to communicate about their early literacy practices. Bringing together these multiple resources into semiotic assemblages provides insights into how literacies are experienced and identities are constructed in early childhood by parents and children in heteroglossic contexts.

Keywords:

Artifactual literacies, translanguaging, semiotic assemblage, multimodality, early literacy practices, multilingualism

Introduction

In recent years, the mixing of languages and cultures in multicultural societies has led to reconsidering the boundedness of languages and cultures (Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013). Raciolinguists have discussed that such separation can result in othering of the literacy practices of migrant and multilingual people (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Observing this reality in classrooms, García (2019; 2021) identifies the damaging effects of dichotomising home and school literacy practices and acknowledges the value of translanguaging to breach these hierarchies. Such dichotomies extend to home literacy practices, where migrant and multilingual parents expose their children to diverse literacy practices from an early age (Little, 2020; Antony-Newman, 2022), yet their practices are often marginalised or viewed as deficient in not contributing to the children's attainment against early years milestones defined by government mandated frameworks (DfE, 2024). In many classrooms, recognition exists of the value of home literacy practices (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015; Little, 2021), yet the pedagogical challenge of how to create spaces in which children are encouraged to draw on these remains. There is a need to explore how translanguaging spaces develop in home contexts and reflect on the opportunities to enable their development in classroom contexts. Adopting a heteroglossic lens to understanding literacy practices points to translanguaging (García & Leiva, 2014) and artifactual literacies (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) as more identity affirming and culturally responsive spaces for creating new meanings and understandings of identity and literacies. García (2019) describes translanguaging as the use of both linguistic and non-linguistic resources brought together by multilingual speakers with purpose. These resources can act to disrupt the structures which assert the dominant language and culture above all others. Critical artifactual literacies similarly (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011) offers opportunities to recognise the potential of objects to connect to identities and in this way to present a counternarrative to the dominant and deficit ways of thinking around migration and multilingualism. Both concepts of translanguaging and artifactual literacies acknowledge the ways in which migrant and multilingual speakers interweave linguistic, material and communicative resources. In his research in heteroglossic community contexts, Pennycook identifies this interweaving as forming a semiotic assemblage (2017), which migrant and multilingual speakers use to make new meanings, create connections and express their identity and belonging.

Little is known about how such artifactual literacies, translanguaging practices and semiotic assemblages are enacted in early childhood home contexts. In these spaces, families begin to construct meanings around shared cultural and literacy artifacts often brought from the country of origin (Pahl, 2012). They engage in literacies in ways which can be described as heteroglossic (Blackledge & Creese, 2014) in drawing on multiple cultures, languages and modes of expression. This raises the question of how artifacts, translanguaging practices and semiotic assemblages are animated in home contexts in ways which disrupt the dominant and deficit narratives around home literacy practices. It further opens up opportunities for considering the implications of these practices for literacies in classrooms.

The aim of this paper therefore is to foreground migrant and multilingual parents' home literacy practices with their children. Through an artifactual literacies methodology, the research described in this paper explored the value of artifacts to create the conditions for

translanguaging space – a space where parents and children feel more empowered to draw on cultural, discursive and material resources.

Literature review

Studies of home literacy practices with multilingual children demonstrate how parents often adopt a flexible orientation towards languages, placing less emphasis on the boundedness of languages to specific contexts (Little, 2020; Antony-Newman, 2022). These studies also evidence motivations for heritage language, less driven by a pragmatic orientation of gaining proficiency and more by a connection with culture and identity expression. However, practices rooted in curriculum guidance can often feel at odds with the linguistic and cultural diversity which children growing up in heteroglossic contexts bring to school and pre-school settings (Busch, 2014). The home literacy context of minoritised populations comes into conflict with such structures, as their diverse experiences, cultural backgrounds and linguistic practices are often marginalised in institutional contexts (Li & Lin, 2019). Instead, legitimate practices and languages are often seen as those which align with the principles of neoliberalism and those which have a grounding as a marker of social class (García, 2019).

Pedagogical innovation addressing such marginalisation of cultures and languages can disrupt the reproduction of white middle class language forms in education, instead valuing and extending home literacy practices into classrooms (Flores & Rosa, 2015; García, 2019). Previous research in primary classrooms has explored children's use of their heteroglossic repertoires to communicate aspects of identities and languages through the creation of meaningful multimodal texts (Busch, 2014). Similarly, research exploring children's drawings as an expression of their multilingualism (Chik, 2019; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015), or through adopting arts based translanguaging pedagogies (Futro, 2022) reveals the insights which can be gained into how children express experiences of heteroglossia through multiple modes. In the process of creating multimodal translanguaging texts (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015; Lytra et al., 2022) children explored their lived experiences of migration and hybrid identities. Thus, extant scholarship demonstrates how breaching the boundaries between home and institutional spaces can underpin children's positive sense of self by valuing families' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992).

Two inter-related underpinning aspects of these kinds of literacies emerge from the extant research; firstly the use of multiple modes and languages to communicate about identity, and secondly the ability of children to draw on their lived experience and personal narratives to create meaning within multimodal texts.

Drawing on the interconnections between these two aspects (multimodality and funds of knowledge that often include multiple languages), studies exploring the lived experiences of migrant and multilingual speakers in heteroglossic contexts illuminate that these practices move away from the idea of languages as bounded systems and instead represent forms of languaging (Demuro and Gurney, 2021) 'personal, momentary and...newly constructed in every single interaction' (Pennycook, 2017, p. 371). Language is understood as action and as social participation – ongoing and never accomplished (García & Li, 2014). García and Li (2014) define the related concept of translanguaging as the practices of bilingual speakers

which draw on a linguistic repertoire developed and practiced through the dynamic use of features from more than one language. However, in more recent writing, translanguaging has been increasingly explored for its transformative potential – the potential to disrupt normative forms of being, interacting and speaking (Ridley & Rowe, 2024). Largely this transformative potential lies in looking at how translanguaging goes beyond languages but also beyond semiotic resources (Pennycook, 2017).

In research by Pennycook (2017) and by Blackledge and Creese (2017) the use of translanguaging as an interweaving of linguistic and semiotic resources – a semiotic assemblage - is explored in the context of multicultural shops and markets focussing on exchanges between adults. This research reveals the dynamic and embodied nature of interactions between speakers establishing connections and creating shared meanings through using their full semiotic repertoire. Such connections often centre around boundary objects or artifacts, which hold meaning making potential through uniting people around shared markers of identity.

While the earlier examples of research with children in the translanguaging context identified the value of combining modes in communicating identity and experience, research with migrant and multilingual adults has emphasised the value of artifacts in enabling such expression. In this context, Pennycook's concept of boundary objects (2017) evokes Pahl and Rowsell's work on artifactual literacies, situated in research with migrant and multilingual participants. In their artifactual literacies framework, Pahl and Rowsell (2010) show how objects connect to identities in multiple ways and reveal the potential of objects to embody a lived experience. Objects are often imbued with cultural value or relational value - handed down from generation to generation.

Pahl calls attention to the ways in which objects can evoke stories which connect individuals to heritage culture and belonging. This places the focus on the materiality of stories and of knowledge. Pahl demonstrates with multiple examples how objects such as a suitcase, bales of fabric represent heritage and funds of knowledge. These objects are also seen as dialogic – 'speaking with a number of voices' (Pahl, 2017, p.34). This aspect of speaking with many voices evokes the concept of translanguaging – the strategic use of multiple linguistic and semiotic resources to make new meanings and connect with others (García & Li, 2014; Li, 2018).

There are parallels between the materiality of knowledge and literacies discussed in Pahl and Rowsell (2010) and this uncovered in Pennycook's (2017) articulation of boundary objects. In both cases objects and resources are brought together into a semiotic assemblage enabling the speaker to articulate a sense of belonging and create new meanings.

Understanding the materially situated nature of early childhood heteroglossic literacies, has rarely been explored in the context of the home environment. Studies in the classroom have explored children's creation of multimodal texts (Busch, 2014; Flewitt, 2008) and others have focussed on multimodal translanguaging in public spaces such as museums (Choi, 2024). However, research foregrounding home literacy practices has rich potential for illuminating how the experience of creating multimodal texts is shaped by practices in the home context in early childhood. This raises the question of how artifacts play a role particularly in the early literacies practices of multilingual and migrant families. The research presented in this paper addressed the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do material, discursive and culturally situated resources interact in parents' articulation of early literacy practices with their children, to produce a semiotic assemblage?

RQ 2: What is the role of artifacts or boundary objects in traversing national or linguistic boundaries and acting as an expression of identity in the early literacy practices with their children, described by the parents?

By addressing these research questions, the study aimed to shed light on the complexity of the processes and strategies families employed. These processes and strategies potentially offer recommendations to inform pedagogical practices towards the creation of more spaces for translanguaging and enacting semiotic assemblages, where home and school literacies meet and support each other, rather than being viewed as separate.

The following section outlines the methodology of this study, drawing on the artifactual literacies approach (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) and applying multimodal concepts (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) to the analysis of data.

Methodology

In order to deliberately decentre dominant language practices and ways of being, the study took a critical artifactual literacies approach (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). This approach draws on multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) to explore how interaction with artifacts engages multiple linguistic and non-linguistic modes in meaning making. In Pahl and Rowsell's articulation of artifactual literacies objects are seen as 'an expression of habitus', connected to place and marking the parallels between border crossing in migration and the transitions taking place in identity. In Pahl's research such objects or artifacts are discussed as holding storytelling potential, connected to habitus (2017). In the case of this research, parents were invited to bring cultural or literacy artifacts which they used with their children as part of early literacy practices. The advertisement inviting participation suggested that parents could bring objects, books, photographs related to their children's cultures and languages, and which had personal relevance to the parents/caregivers or to the children. By placing an emphasis on both literacy and cultural heritage, it was hoped that the objects brought would hold storytelling potential (Pahl, 2017) and would invite reflection on habitus (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010).

Study participants

For this small-scale study, I invited parents within my local community to participate. The community is located in an ex-mining town in the North of England with a strong industrial heritage. Residents are predominantly White British with more than 90% born in England (ONS, 2021). Therefore, migrant families' children entering an early years or primary school setting in this community may be considered 'isolated' (Conteh, 2012) in terms of heritage language and culture.

I approached parents who I knew were actively introducing a heritage language to their children (Table 1). In two of the cases (Mei and Chloe) the parents' children attend the same school as my children. While I do not share a heritage language with any of the study

participants, as a multilingual speaker and migrant myself, I have experiences which resonate with those of the participants. Such experiences include the habitual dichotomising of languages and cultures in institutional contexts and the learnt silencing effect which this has on multilingual and migrant speakers. These experiences formed a basis for shared understanding between researcher and participants of the subject matter being discussed.

Participant	Country of origin and languages spoken	Level of education	Occupation	Child(ren)'s ages	Status in UK
Mei	Taiwan; Mandarin, English, Taiwanese	BA Applied English, Taiwan	Homemaker and volunteer at a primary school	Fen, 4 and Ehuang, 8	settled
Chloe	Malaysia; Mandarin, English	MBA; Professional Qualification in Accounting	Accountant	Kirsty, 4 and Jason, 6	settled
Lily (mother)	India; Tamil, English	MSc Clinical Pharmacology and Biotechnology	Homemaker and dentistry trainee	Jasmine, 7	Settled
Jasmine (daughter)					

Table 1: Participants' linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds

Informed consent was obtained from all participants (BERA, 2024); in addition, I ensured ongoing consent during all stages of the research process and reminded participants of their right to withdraw during data collection. All participant names are pseudonyms, chosen by the participants themselves.

In Lily's interview, her child (Jasmine) was present – this was unexpected and due to a teacher training day at the child's school. During the interview Jasmine spontaneously responded to what she heard and saw in the interview taking place. Therefore, it was not possible to exclude from the transcript the child's contributions to the discussion which unfolded and Jasmine transitioned from being passively involved in the research (BERA, 2024, p. 11) to being an active participant in the study. Following the BERA guidelines the child's verbal assent to be included in the research was gained and the consent form to the parent was adapted to include statements on consent for the child's contributions to the discussion to be included as data.

Artifactual literacy interviews

Artifactual literacy interviews with parents ranged from 1 hour to 90 minutes in length. The interviews centred on parents gesturing, reading from and playing sounds, engaging multiple languages and using haptic senses to comment on the artifacts. I provided a loose framework

for the discussion in the form of a semantic map (fig. 1). This approach guided the discussion towards children's emerging literacies in the home language and included the places and spaces in which these practices evolved as well as the significant people in the children's linguistic experiences. Parents'/guardians' hopes and plans for their children's future engagement with languages and literacies were also suggested areas for discussion.

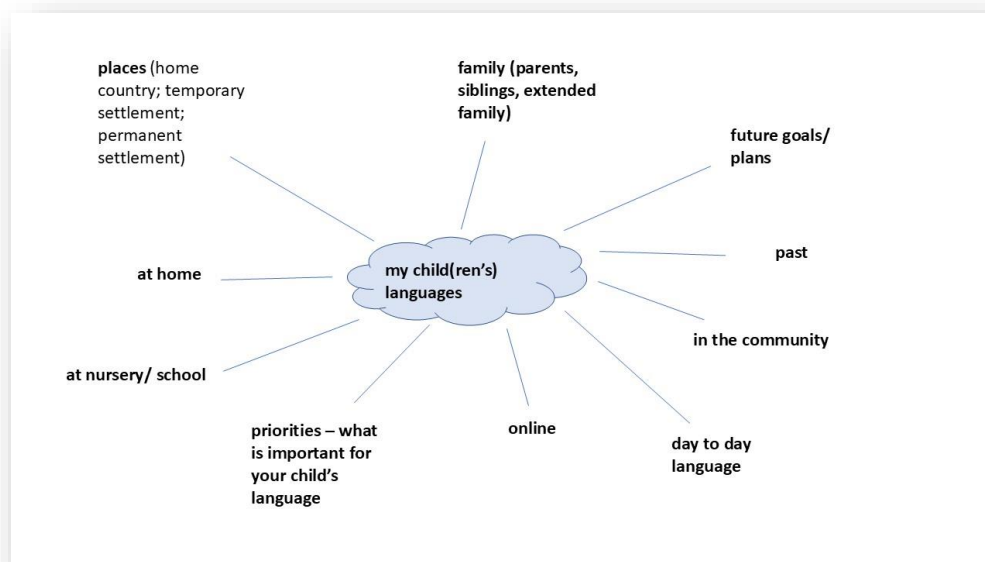


Figure 1: Children's languages semantic map

At times I interjected with questions along these themes, seeking to expand on the parents' narrative, however the direction of the conversation was predominantly determined by the parents' interactions with the artifacts and the emerging narrative around these. Through foregrounding the importance of materiality (Fox & Alldred, 2014) this methodology supported parents in developing a counternarrative (Karam et al., 2021) to the dominant negative perceptions of migrant and multilingual families' language and literacy practices.

Data analysis

Data analysis was inductive and led by the data and by the guiding principles of the artifactual literacies approach, which are set out below.

The approach is critical in addressing issues of power imbalance and giving voice to those who are marginalised - the participants of the study belong in this group, as they are part of a minority of parents who are actively and continuously making an effort to introduce the home language and culture to their children from infancy. The choice of methodology, locating the conversation in the participant's sharing of artifacts, focussing on their use of a semiotic assemblage (Kusters et al., 2017) contributed to reducing the overreliance on fluent monolingual speech. This in turn helped to decentre the focus away from the dominant institutional knowledge structures and language and towards the mothers' knowledge and practices with their children expressed through multiple modes and in interaction with artifacts (Parsons, 2021).

The artifactual literacies approach acknowledges that meaning making is multimodal in nature. Taking this into account the analysis of data focussed on the interplay of modes in meaning making (gesture, use of symbols, use of visuals, playing sound from audio books).

Literacy in this approach is found in everyday storytelling. Such storytelling takes place through material objects connected to culture. It was important therefore to make the material and artifactual part of the data collection and subsequently the focus of data analysis.

The analysis therefore focussed on identifying instances in which parents used their home language alongside other modes of communication (gesturing with the objects, gesturing to images or script in printed resources, use of symbols from the heritage culture, use of artifacts to explain a cultural symbol). Within this interaction, particular attention was paid to which modes were brought into the semiotic assemblage to communicate an aspect of identity, or cultural and linguistic belonging. As described by Pennycook (2017) bringing different modes into a coordinated performance which seeks to connect with others, express an aspect of habitus, of cultural or linguistic belonging is an example of a semiotic assemblage. Based on these theoretical concepts, there were two discernible stages to the analysis:

Stage 1 focussed on the initial identification of segments of interest. A focus was placed on translanguaging and on identifying instances of translanguaging in the parents' speech and interactions. Alongside this and emphasising the distributed nature of language use, evidence was sought of using multiple modes alongside the use of different languages.

Stage 2 centred on a closer analysis of the instances identified, to understand how parents brought together different modes of communication into a semiotic assemblage and how this enabled them to communicate about early literacies. Key patterns emerged of parents' storytelling with or through artifacts, making meaning through translanguaging and presenting a counternarrative to this existing in the dominant culture and structures.

This closer analysis gradually led to identifying themes across the data. Two key themes emerging from the analysis of the artifactual literacy interviews form the focus of this paper:

1. The use of different modes and multiple languages, characteristic of the parents' early literacy practices with their children
2. The use of the storytelling potential of cultural and literacy artifacts to express habitus and form connections across linguistic and national boundaries

The following section presents the findings of the study, which focus on parents' distributed language use and on the role of translanguaging and artifacts as sites for discursively, multimodally and materially constructed identities.

Findings

Translanguaging and trans-semiotising in early literacy practices

In all three interviews a noticeable practice was the mothers' use of the home language enmeshed with English to communicate a variety of aspects of their early literacy practices with their children. It was notable that the use of translanguaging expanded beyond the

linguistic, allowing the mothers to engage multiple modes beyond bilingual speech. This included playing sounds from audio books, interacting with objects and enacting parts of conversations with the children. Engagement of these multiple modes enabled the mothers to draw on their funds of knowledge and to express the heteroglossic nature of their experiences of introducing languages and cultures to their children. In the example below, Mei used multiple modes to communicate literacy practices and translanguaging, in combination with references and gestures to image (Figure 2):



Figure 2: Literacy material from Taiwan

Mei: ...so you can see F-U, fu means means Bat, so we don't call it just one word, we make two words to make it like now. So Biānfú means bat, and Chī pútáo [吃葡萄], eat grapes. So Pútáo, P U, and Bù means no, so Bù Pútáo, yeah, something like that. Yes, that is the phonics for the book.

The use of translanguaging and engagement of multiple modes was similarly evident in Lily and Jasmine's interview. In the instance below, as Lily explained the literacy practice, her daughter Jasmine joined in by singing:

Lily: So she used to come and ask what does that mean? Like one day she was like what does Padam, பாதம் mean; Padam means feet (...) so it was a song like Chinna Chinna Padam.

Researcher: Shall we write this down, in Tamil. [Lily using semantic map to write Chinna Chinna Padam [சிறிய சிறிய அடிச்சுவடுகள்]

[Jasmine starts singing the Chinna Chinna Padam song]

Lily: It's a song like The Little one is walking with the small foot with small, small steps. Chinna Chinna Padam. Small, small footsteps.

Similarly, Chloe demonstrated how singing and music became part of her everyday literacy practices with her children (Figure 3):



Figure 3: Interactive sound book, encouraging singing

Chloe: And also this one they can sing [plays song from interactive book]. So this one, they put all the character in a song, so when they start singing the song, so they gradually know all the characters and so I find this very useful.

In the process of describing these practices, participants used translanguaging; played sound from sound books, gestured with images and referred to singing or sang to communicate their literacy practices. Used collectively, these linguistic and artifactual resources are an example of a semiotic assemblage (Pennycook, 2017), which the participants deployed to communicate holistically about their early literacy experiences. As these experiences were set in a heteroglossic context, the semiotic assemblage became essential to communicating the culturally embedded and multimodal nature of the literacy practices.

Alongside the use of multiple modes, the following example from Chloe's interview illustrates the culturally embedded aspect of these literacy practices (Figure 4):



Figure 4: Craft making to express the concept of Jiā [家]

Chloe: Yes, so this one, it comes to the old character, where the old people, the ancient people, so they don't know about the words so they just imagine. So this word actually represents pig, and so this is the shed, so why they have the pig in a shed called home, or [Jiā 家], in Chinese is because at that time they used to have a pig at home as their pet, so they will provide some of the food for them, yes (...) so that is the meaning and so from here at that time I tried to introduce this Jiā [家], with them and I find these ancient words and tell them that this is the pig, this is the shed, and so we decorate this, using what I can find from home. Crafting.

This narrative illustrates the enmeshing of linguistic and cultural resources in the parent's practices with her children. The word Jiā [家] in Chinese represents the more abstract combined concept of family, home or house. To communicate these interchangeable meanings, Chloe tells her children the story of how in ancient times the pig was welcome in the house as a pet, and as part of the family; the mother and child then visually reproduce these concepts through crafting (Figure 4), learning about the concepts of home and family through making.

The multiple modes and resources which Chloe chose to communicate these practices demonstrate how the literacy practice is communicated through a semiotic assemblage. Chloe's practices can also be described as translanguaging as she draws on both western literacy concepts and Chinese cultural knowledge. Chloe often referred to Chinese phonics, play based approaches and shared early singing as parts of her early practices with her children. In a later part of the interview, she reflected that these were not approaches she herself grew up with, or ones which were commonly used in her home country; she later shared that she discussed these differences with her mother, in reflective moments on what was different in her own early childhood upbringing in Malaysia.

The bringing together of cultural knowledge, symbols and concepts from the Chinese culture and remixing these with practices prevalent in and learnt in the UK context (early singing, crafting, early emphasis on phonics knowledge) demonstrates the translanguaging and trans-semiotising nature of Chloe's practices and the value of these practices in an early literacies context. The following section provides further similar examples from Mei and Lily's interviews, illustrating how artifacts and craft making were used to communicate about cultural knowledge and belonging.

Artifacts as an expression of habitus and as ways of forming connections across linguistic and national boundaries

The translanguaging nature of the early literacy practices discussed through Chloe's experience and the use of a semiotic assemblage to enact these practices were often underpinned by a material context. Pennycook (2017) discusses the value of transitional or boundary objects to communicating about identity and as having potential to traverse national and linguistic boundaries. Similarly, in Pahl and Rowsell's articulation (2011), objects or

artifacts are seen as an expression of habitus, holding valuable communicative potential around belonging and identity. Pahl goes on to discuss the storytelling potential of such artifacts and the golden thread which connects these artifacts to stories which contain important aspects of habitus for the migrant person (2017).

Two instances from the research interviews illustrate the use of artifacts or collections of artifacts as an expression of identity (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010), and as boundary objects, connecting people across linguistic and national boundaries.

Example 1: Chinese New Year and the Tai Chi club

In the following extract, Mei describes making a gift for Chinese New Year with her children (Figures 5 and 6). The family organise and deliver a Tai Chi group in their local community, attended by local, mostly British residents. The gift is prepared together with her daughters and shared with the Tai Chi group, alongside the narrative explaining the meaning of the gift. Significantly, this year Mei's daughter, Ehuang, 8 years old, explained the meaning to the group:



Figure 5: Red paper, painted by Ehuang and Fen



Figure 6: Chinese New Year gift, made and assembled by Mei and her children

Mei: Usually there is a legend, a story about Chinese New Year where they always use red - so we put the words on it and we've got a meaning behind, but usually we put the red paper like this. Sometimes we put the words 'spring' or 'full' which means you will have full of luck or full of fortunes throughout the year (...) And this is rabbit because it is a rabbit year this year, and this is the red envelope.

Okay, and this is the orange, because orange has a different name like here, because orange in Chinese sounds like auspicious so we think that in the Chinese New Year we put a lot of orange on the table and it makes you auspicious (...) So it sounds the same and that is why we use it to represent that it will bring you auspicious, peace, and safety (...)

Researcher: So were the children involved in making this?

Mei: Yes, for example Ehuan and Feng, they draw this. We look at the guidelines so they know how to do it but then we cooperate. Ehuan writes the word as well and the rabbit and Feng does the drawing and the dot (...) so they just get involved and I take Ehuan to this two hour Tai Chi members, so she introduced these Chinese background stories to them and so she can understand more about it.

An abundance of storytelling surrounds the making of Chinese New Year gifts. These stories are told from Mei to Ehuang and Fen in the context of making, drawing, writing and assembling the gifts. The Chinese New Year gifts are rich with symbols from the home culture and context and in making them, Mei draws on her funds of knowledge. Significantly, the gifts are shared with the members of the Tai Chi group. The purpose of the gift is therefore partly to bridge existing boundaries around languages and cultures (García et al., 2021). It carries translanguaging potential in the way cultural and linguistic knowledges are

communicated through the gift (Chinese characters and writing in English are both represented in the gift). The New Year gift therefore operates as a boundary object (Pennycook, 2017), connecting people from different cultures within a heteroglossic context.

Of importance too is the creative nature and playful meanings embedded in the making and sharing of the Chinese New Year gift. Mei explains the phonetic similarity between ‘orange’ and ‘auspicious’ in Chinese, which is used as a way to introduce to the children the concept of the orange fruit as a symbol of prosperity and simultaneously to introduce new vocabulary in Chinese to the children. These playful word meanings become part of the act of making; they are discussed learnt and re learnt in the making of each gift. The making is creative, engaging multiple modes and acts to reshape knowledge and situate literacies in a cultural context.

Materiality and making emerge as important early literacy practices in a heteroglossic context. These practices are both discursive as well as materially situated – drawing on the translanguaging potential of boundary objects. The following example, taken from the interview with Lily and her daughter Jasmine, builds on the ideas of shared making, and the importance of a discursive space to illuminate how such heteroglossic literacy practices contribute to children’s own constructions of identities:

Example 2: Shared making and identity



Figure 7: Vinayagar celebration; Statue of Ganesh Chaturthi made by Jasmine, using rice, flour and turmeric

Lily: We do pray full moon day. It's not this calendar we follow, we follow the lunar calendar like [பௌர்ணமி] full Moon and New Moon [அமாவாசை].

Yeah, they do poojas and everything. So yearly, it's Pongal. (...) It's five days festival where they thank Sun God for the harvest.

Jasmine: Mama, talk about my name. Talk about my name.

Lily: She wants to talk about her name. And she's her name is xxx. This from Sun God. Female version of Sun God.

Jasmine: From Sanskrit.

Lily: Yeah she's named after the Sun in Sanskrit.

Jasmine: That's why my favourite colour is yellow.

Lily: Yellow, cause she likes sun very much and similarly, you know Deepawali right? In Tamil, we call it Deepawali.

Jasmine: Deepawali, Deepawali

Lily: Deepawali. That's the Tamil thing. And the North Indians in Hindi, they call it Diwali.

So it changes either in October or November Deepawali and we have so many things like Vinayagar, Chathurthi we have a God with Elephant face (...) We call him Ganesha and in Tamil we call him Vinayagar so he is the first God, he is the first one and everything.

Lily related how upon starting primary school Jasmine became interested in Christmas ('It's nothing wrong, she's getting more interested in Christmas') which prompted Lily to think about how to introduce the cultural and religious celebrations associated with Tamil culture. This conversation about the different celebrations in Tamil culture led Jasmine to make a connection with her name ('Mama, talk about my name') This discussion of Jasmine's name's origin was then extended into the personal narrative Jasmine had began to construct, reflecting on how her name was the reason for choosing her favourite colour. Similarly to Example 1, where the Chinese New Year gift was drawn, painted, assembled, discussed and shared with others (Figures 5 and 6), here Jasmine contributed to making and decorating the Statue of Ganesh Chathurthi for the Vinayagar celebration (Figure 7). As explained by Lily, the statue is part of offerings; making it is followed by a ritual of dissolving the statue and pouring it in a body of water.

In both examples, it is evident that the artifacts hold storytelling and border crossing potential (Pennycook, 2017) connecting people to identities and to others. Unique to these examples is the shared and repeated making of the artifacts between parent and child - every year the Chinese New Year gifts are remade, as is the Vinayagar statue. This demarcates these artifacts as active parts of the children's evolving identities.

Discussion

The practices described in the findings section of this article collectively demonstrate how literacy learning becomes situated in spaces where modes other than the linguistic are engaged, drawing on creativity and making as heteroglossic sites for literacy.

How do material, discursive and culturally situated resources interact in parents' articulation of early literacy practices with their children, to produce a semiotic assemblage? (RQ1)

There was a strong sense in the interviews that the literacy practices described by the mothers were set in a heteroglossic context (Blackledge & Creese, 2014) where the boundedness of languages and of semiotic modes is questioned. In their communication the mothers engaged multiple modes, beyond the linguistic and drew on knowledge gained in multiple cultural and linguistic contexts. As Pennycook explains, the bringing together of linguistic, cultural and artifactual resources can be described as a semiotic assemblage. The notion of a semiotic assemblage describes more authentically migrant and multilingual speakers' use of '*language as embedded and distributed across people, places and time*' (Pennycook, 2017, p. 276).

This use of language as distributed was evident in Chloe's interview, where she expressed the collective concept of house, home and family emerged as an important aspect of learning for the young children. To communicate the concept of Jiā [家], Chloe used storytelling combined with a making activity, in which elements of the concept were represented (the pig in the house, the pig as a pet, and part of the family). Similarly, Mei used storytelling and humour (drawn from the phonetic similarity of the words 'auspicious' and 'orange') to communicate to the children the significance of the orange fruit symbolising prosperity as part of the celebrations for Chinese New Year.

While these symbols are drawn from the heritage context and culture, Chloe chose to communicate them through craft making, a practice which she had adopted in the context of activities common to preschool settings in England, and which she shared having no personal experience of in her own childhood growing up in Malaysia. Similarly, Mei's Chinese New Year gift was rich with symbolism grounded in her funds of cultural knowledge, yet the gift was made to be given to an English speaking community, combining English and Chinese writing. Ehuang's explanation of the gift was also delivered in English to reach this audience.

In these ways, the enmeshing of symbols, knowledges and practices connects people and communities and contributes to breaching the existing divisions of home, school and community (García et al., 2021). Notably, these hybrid practices originate in the homes of multilingual and migrant families, yet offer communicative and cultural value extending beyond the home context to these of community and potentially school.

What is the role of artifacts or boundary objects in traversing national or linguistic boundaries and acting as an expression of identity in the early literacy practices with their children, described by the parents? (RQ2)

As the data illustrates, there was a strong sense of constructing an understanding of identity as part of the literacy practices. It was evident in Lily's narrative where celebrating Tamil religious and cultural events led to Jasmine's emerging construction of a personal identity narrative. This narrative was grounded in the origins and meaning of her name, its connection with symbols in Tamil culture and her choice of favourite colour. In Li's articulation, translanguaging space provides opportunities for identities to be discursively constructed (Li, 2011). Beyond the linguistic however, translanguaging is also multimodal and materially embedded (Li, 2018). The data presented shows how Jasmine actively participates in making

the Vinayagar statue, and in the rituals of dissolving the statue as part of a religious offering. It is this broader materially embedded context of understanding the symbolism of Tamil culture which leads to moments such as the one captured in the interview, where Jasmine relates her developing sense of identity and belonging. This indicates that translanguaging space is one where opportunities emerge for identities to be discursively, multimodally and materially constructed.

As is characteristic of the artifactual critical literacy approach, materiality is an important part of communication, engaging both linguistic and non-linguistic resources in meaning making and identity construction (Pahl and Rowsell, 2011). Significant in this research, and characteristic of the early childhood context, was that the artifacts brought by the mothers to the interview were ones which were made by the parent and children. There was a strong sense that crafting with children, involving the enmeshing of objects, symbols and cultural artifacts in the making, was an important early literacy practice in the three families.

In the context of multimodality, the making of a physical object is seen as a deeper level of engagement with the discrete elements which make up the whole (Kress et al., 2001). Learning takes place in the process of considering more closely the discrete elements of the material object and in this way is transformative of children's understanding and a valuable resource for meaning making (Kress et al., 2001). The making activities described by the parents can also be constructed as multimodal text making – as articulated by Flewitt (2008), text making in early childhood is always multimodal, involving manipulation of physical and digital objects. Importantly beyond their literacy learning potential, such making of multimodal texts is also a 'possible site for identity performance' and can act to 'decentre ... monolingual, monocultural perspectives and to create hybrid and transnational spaces for multimodal interaction' (Ibrahim, 2019, p. 47).

The multimodal text making presented by the parents, also relates to the concept of boundary objects (Pennycook, 2017) or artifacts (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). Such boundary objects hold mediating potential, connecting people across cultures and national borders (as seen in Mei's Chinese New Year gift). They also hold identity building potential, particularly for the children's developing sense of self (as seen in Lily and Jasmine's discussion of the meaning of names). In this way these artifacts hold storytelling potential (Pahl, 2011) and also become markers of evolving identity within the translanguaging space, as they are continuously re-made and built into rituals by the children with their parents. The act of making and remaking emerges as an important aspect of the artifact or boundary object and has simultaneously a storytelling and identity building potential. The materially embedded nature of these activities holds unique value in identity development and defines children's linguistic and literacy encounters.

Conclusions

This research study sought to provide insights into how literacies are experienced and identities are constructed in early childhood by parents and by their children in heteroglossic contexts. Within this, the study adopted an artifactual literacies approach to illuminate the

role of artifacts in identity expression and construction across multiple modes, languages and semiotic resources.

The findings of the study highlight the value of focussing on the way parents engage their full communicative repertoire both in engaging in these early literacies with their children and in communicating about these practices to the researcher. This communication is expressed as a semiotic assemblage, illuminating the importance of looking for how meanings and identities are expressed beyond the linguistic. Examining literacy practices in this way highlights how parents enmesh cultural, linguistic and literacy knowledges drawing on both their heritage context and the contexts within their country of settlement. In addition, the value of artifacts as boundary objects – connecting people across national and linguistic boundaries was highlighted. Underpinning this was the practice of making and remaking these artifacts with the children, illuminating the ways in which repeated making of artifacts carries storytelling potential and underpins a positive sense of self for the children.

Drawing on in-depth artifactual interviews with three multilingual and migrant mothers, the study identified semiotic assemblage, translanguaging, materiality and making as important themes present in all testimonies. These practices emerged in the home context and in some instances reached into a community context. However, as the value of boundary objects, artifacts and semiotic assemblages is in traversing cultural and national boundaries, these practices have potential to develop beyond the home context and into school and pre-school settings. Such settings could offer valuable opportunities for developing translanguaging space, in which children draw on their home literacy practices to communicate in ways which are materially, culturally and discursively situated. Further research is needed to explore how the notion of semiotic assemblage can be enacted in settings, as well as how the forms of making informed by cultural and linguistic knowledge can be given space in early childhood classrooms as part of more culturally responsive pedagogies.

Due to the small sample size and the convenience sampling approach adopted for the study, it is important to acknowledge that the study draws on the experiences of a few well-educated mothers, highly literate in a range of languages and with settled status in the UK. This better enables them to draw on literacy practices including traversing cultural and linguistic boundaries. The study therefore represents a limited scope of experience. Further research is needed into the challenges faced in negotiating the heteroglossic context for families who may be facing additional structural inequalities.

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