

Arabian Nights, Naruto, and Romances—Discursive Practices and Identity of a Female Malaysian Student in the US

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Abstract

This study examines the discourse practices of a Malaysian international undergraduate student in the US. It adopts a constructed view of language and identity emphasizing their dynamic and emerging nature, and believes that identities are formed in the linguistic performance rather than pre-given (Pennycook, 2004) and generated through the learning and use of certain discursive practices (Davies & Harré, 2001). Data were collected through naturalistic observation, informal talks, and semi-open interviews and focus is given to how the student's experiences with various discourses in different languages combine to form her identity and how she characterizes the different discourses and negotiates their meanings. It is found that a multiplicity of identities were performed in repeated acts as she negotiates life as an Muslim Malay student in the mainstream American culture, who is native or near native speaker of Malay and English and familiar with Arabic and Japanese. At the same time, these identities are found to mix and compete with each other in her discursive practices, especially in the practice of her faith and perception of the image and role of women.

Key words: *discursive practices, identity*

In this study I want to examine the discourse practices of a Malaysian international student of chemistry. Using the approach of discourse analysis, I will focus on her experiences with various discourses in different languages. My research questions are: How do these discourses work together and play a role in forming the identity? How does she see the ideologies or their conflicts reflected in these discourses? How does she characterize the different discourses and negotiate the meanings?

Theoretical framework

I want to use the constructed view of language and identity in my analysis, drawing on the works by Gergen (2001), Davies & Harre (2001) and Pennycook (2004), as well as discourse analysis theorists Gee (1999) and Fairclough (2001).

The constructed view of language and identity emphasizes the dynamic and emerging nature of language and identity. Language exists only as concrete occasions of language in use (Davies & Harré, 2001) and the regularities of grammar are but categories of observed repetitions in discourse (Hopper, 1998). Similarly, identity or subjectivity is also practiced or performed, which calls for "the recognition of the force of 'discursive practices', the ways in which people are 'positioned' through those practices and the way in which the individual's 'subjectivity' is generated through the learning and use of certain discursive practices". (Davies & Harré, 2001, p. 261) Pennycook (2004) also argues that identities are formed in the linguistic performance rather than pre-given; and "performativity" can be understood as the way in which we perform acts of identity as an ongoing series of social and cultural performances rather than as the expression of a prior identity.

In this performative process identity is never a single core, because our common participation in the culture will typically expose us to a wide variety of narrative forms, from the rudimentary to the complex (Gergen, 2001). In this process, discourses can compete with each other or they can create distinct and incompatible versions of reality. Haug (1987) criticizes the experiencing of contradictory positions as problematic, as something to be reconciled or remedied and claims that it is the fact that one person experiences themselves as contradictory that provides the dynamic for understanding.

In light of competition and contradictions, agency and choice on the part of the subject are often discussed as an important factor in the discursive acts. Davies & Harré talk about the interplay between constitutive force and exercising choices:

The constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions. A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. ... At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in. Among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them. (2001, p.262)

These views are in line with the critical discourse analysis approach which also believes that discourse is a social practice and language reflects at different levels the institutional and social power and structures. This theoretical approach provides a useful framework in my analysis of the discursive practices of the international student, which are characterized with multiplicity and contradictions and reflect the complex nature of agency.

Literature review

Many articles have talked about language and identity, especially in ESL teaching, focusing on the dominance of the English language and conformation and resistance on the part of the students in the process of identity formation and change. (Lam, 2004; Imberti, 2007; Hsieh, 2006; Taylor, 2006; Lin & Luk, 2005) Hsieh, for example, investigated how five East Asian female international students' identities are developed in a second-language environment in the United States. Based on her interviews and analysis, she concluded that marginalized individuals do not just passively identify with the host society or uncritically conform to the hegemonic expectations and their given identities. These qualitative studies are very informative about identity formation in a second language environment. However, they tend to over emphasize the marginalization and patterns of resistance within the dominant structure, often assuming monolithity and a binary divide between the dominant and the minority culture, and seem to ignore the possibilities of rich and multiple discursive practices.

A few studies have focused on the role of foreign language on identity. Tani-Fukuchi (2000) studied the impact of foreign language learning on self perception and acquisition of a second identity at a Japanese university. Shaaban & Ghaith (2003) examined the effect of religion, foreign language and gender on the perception of utility of language for college students in Lebanon. These studies provide insight into the interplay between discursive practice in foreign languages and identity, although they are both survey and questionnaire studies that have yet to capture the full dynamics and complexity in the process.

In this study I focus on interpretive analysis of the multiplicity and contradictions in the discursive practices, and emphasize the multiple and constructed nature of the identity rather than simply resistance against the dominant structures.

Method

The informant

Adilah (pseudonym) is a 24 year old Malaysian student of chemistry in her senior year of undergraduate study in a large public university in the US, sponsored by her government. She is a bit older than senior students in general because she underwent a two year preparation program before coming here. She is Muslim and wears hijab all the time. I decided to interview her because I'm intrigued by her contacts with multiple languages and associated discourses. She is a native speaker of Malay and a near native speaker of English. She has some knowledge of Arabic because as a common practice she was trained to read the Arabic Kuran since a kid. She has also been learning Japanese since six years ago in the preparation program, and she is an avid anime fan. As a result, she seems to be exposed to multiple discourses with dramatically different ideologies. I'm very interested in how these different discourses interplay with each other in the forming of her identity.

Data collection

The data for the study consists of three parts: First, naturalistic observations of the participant's discourse practices which focuses on languages and discourses over a three-month period. This includes regularly spending time together at the participant's home or on campus, cooking and shopping together, etc. Field notes were taken regarding language and discourse practices, which became part of the data and also helped in providing focus to my subsequent interview questions. Second, informal talks. We conducted talks while spending time together, and sometimes watched movies and videos together and exchanged discussion and comments. Our talks were often interwoven with searching and displaying of various "texts" as examples, and sometimes we went into lengthy discussion on a certain excerpt or video. This gives me the chance to do some observations which is close to one of audience reception (Bird, 2003), which provides valuable insights into her performativity and experience. Field notes were taken and became part of the data in the discourse analysis. Third, semi-open interviews. I conducted six hour-long recorded interviews with Adilah over the three-month period. Based on the observations, they mainly focused on her own explanations and interpretations of the practices. They also provided further explanation and clarification of points that came up in the informal talks.

Data Analysis

The recordings of interviews were transcribed. I looked through the field notes and the transcription for themes that address the research questions. Always with the performance of language in mind, I looked for evidence of repeated discursive acts, identity revision, contradictions and prescription vs. free choice. My interpretation comes into two parts: one is the multiple identities that are performed through repeated acts, including the identities of a Muslim, a Malay, an international student, a romance reader and an anime fan. I've maintained a special interest in the discourses related to different languages. I tried to look into the multiplicity of the discourses which both testify the performed nature of identity and provide the contextual understanding for further analysis. In the second part I focus on two themes of contradictions as a result of the competing discourses and identities.

Within the frame of performed discourses, I used Fairclough's approach of Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze her speech, focusing on various linguistic choices. Fairclough (2001) believes that minute examination of the linguistic features of the discourses, such as choice of words and grammatical structures reveal the ideologies and hidden power relations in the discursive practices, although this is often unintentional. In addition, I used Gee's concept of discursive building blocks (1999) when applicable to gain more insights into the constitutive nature of the discourses.

Interpretation

Multiplicity performed in repeated acts

In the performative view, subjectivity comes into being only as repeated discursive acts. Identity words like "Muslim" or "fan", for example, carry very little intrinsic meaning; they are constituted and produced in numerous speech acts by the individual. The statement "I'm a Muslim", although an important act of interpellation in itself, nonetheless is only a fraction in the production of such an identity. In Adilah's case the multiple identities are duly reflected in her discursive practices.

Adilah performs her Muslim identity by praying five times a day, reading Kuran, wearing hijab and eating Halal meat, etc. She wears a knit cap under her hijab to ensure that the hair doesn't show, and I saw her pray in the restrooms when on campus or in other public places, and even in the hall way of a cinema. She is always enthusiastic when explaining the Kuran,

So you have the chapters, sura. And then, so each sura is about..like in sura alfatiha, it's about alfatiha. Alfatiha is aya, a section. So for example, you have alfatiha, the opening, the most important section. We have five prayers, we recite alfatiha in every prayer, for example, in morning prayer ..twice, when you stand up..once..twice..so in a four rakaha prayer, you repeat four times. We call it the mother of Kuran... this is the Arabic script. This is alahamedilula, ...rabi is a god...in the name of the god, the most graceful, the most gracious, the most merciful... king of judgment...so we repeat this aya every morning.

Every time she talks about Kuran and its teachings, she always shows her membership resource in the religion by fluent citing and explanation. It is interesting that she uses a praying software in her laptop to help perform the prayers. The software can be installed in different languages, and can indicate the geographical point of any location in the world and the direction of the sun (also the facing direction of the praying), and automatically begins the Arabic chanting of Kuran at the praying time, five times a day. Adilah has been using it for years since living in the US. To me this seems a different way of performing the identity, a religious ritual combined with modern technology, which may affect the way this identity is constituted.

Malay culture is naturally another aspect of her identity. Adilah is a beautiful singer and she often sings aloud traditional Malay songs. She explained the traditional shawa song to me which like the Kuran originates in childhood memories and said she missed the festivity. However Adilah claims that she seldom listens to Malay pop songs or watches contemporary Malay movies. "I can't handle it", she said, defining them as "lame, lame", which nevertheless reflected her familiarity with and membership resource in the culture.

An incidence of her discourse practice in the culture was once when we watched together excerpts of some old Malay movies. One of the excerpts was a Malay version of Arabian Nights made in the 1950's, starring an actor named P. Ramlee, who according to Adilah was "the king of the legend of the legend". On the black and white screen three men were dancing in white robes. It seemed they were playing ghosts to fool the thieves. While it didn't look extremely funny to me, Adilah kept laughing at the scenes. At one point she explained, "They're going to pour in like hot water. And when he died, oh my God he's so funny..." She stood up and acted falling. "He found a pillow for dying!" When in another episode the same legendary actor played a bachelor warrior struggling to learn to read. Adilah was breathless with laughter: "He can't read the poem...they just...no they don't know how to read. [laugh] They're making stories. He just gives...the letters are so tiny...this one he said it's in Arabic but it's not. They're stupid guys, stupid bachelors, but they're warriors."

Warrior is apparently a cultural and traditional script familiar to her, although the guys on the screen looked to me just like ordinary peasants in simple clothes. The scenario of her watching the clips was impressive to me because it seemed like a genuine moment of performing the cultural identity. On this moment Adilah became the Malay girl with her own cultural memories and membership resource. It was a moment that set her and me, the friend and interviewer but another national, apart: her familiarity and laughters established her Malay identity for this moment.

As long term student living in the US, she exhibits a lot of familiarity with the culture. She is obviously at ease negotiating around living here, and many of her daily activities combine to form her discursive acts of the American mainstream culture. She told me she and her friends used to go to Marshall's and together tried on all the clothes they liked, including dresses with bare arms or low necks. It seems in such occasion she is performing the identity of the female shopper in the US context rather than the Muslim, who wouldn't wear those dresses.

In our interview one source of performance of the culture is her great familiarity with some of the pop readings, especially romance. She started reading romance years ago as a student here, first purchasing books and later switching to online resources when they became more and more available. She showed me a website with lists of authors and choices of their works. She casually pulled out a romance and talked about the love story plot with great familiarity. In the repeated acts of these readings it seems her Muslim and Malay identities are weakened and she became the avid woman romance reader living fictionary love and relations in the Western context.

Similar is her familiarity with the Japanese anime which gives her another dimension in identity. She appeared a qualified anime fan when she talks at lengths about their types, stories, fans, availability online, etc.

They do have varieties there, there are sports animes, musical animes, romance, high school, even hantai, means pervert... There's even horror anime, mystery, detective, spy... This one, Naruto, is about five, six years old. When they wanted to end it all the anime fans are like please please continue, they write to the authors. The fans are not happy when an anime ends... these are all subbed by fans. It's illegal.

When she enumerated the different anime types and pulled out examples for each, it occurred to me that for anime fans it was as if life were characterized by as many slots of types. I wondered how that

as one example could play into the constitution of their identities, which will be further discussed in the following section.

I believe that all these discourses, among others, constitute repeated acts in her life, and identity is constituted in these repeated acts. Rather than a “core” or fixed identity, the identity is undergoing moment to moment changes depending on these acts. Even though I have presented some of the evidences of these acts in a rather isolated manner for the sake of convenience, in real life these acts could be simultaneous, mixed and competing all the time. In the next section I’d like to look into the aspects of mixture and competition given the above presented contexts of the discourses.

Competing discourses and identity

The different discourses do mix with each other at times. Once when explaining why people read the Arabic Kuran instead of the translated Malay version, she gave a very unexpected comparison: “I do have a translation of Malay, I read it, but sometimes they don’t make any sense. They are too deep. It’s like chemistry. The theories, like you don’t understand it. Well stories are stories, principles; but it’s about all the rules.”

This is interesting because the principle of Kuran is compared with chemistry, which can be seen as a case of interdiscursivity when the two different discourses are brought together in light of each other (Fairclough, 2001). Another of such example is when she explained the practice of eating Halal meat: “We use masashabi, the most strict school, so you can’t not eat anything that’s not cut properly. But in masahanabi, as long as *you* say the prayer...it’s like “itatakimatsu” in Japanese...thank God, and after that you start to eat.”

The shifting from “we” to indefinite pronoun “you”, which sounds here more general and detached, may reflect her unconscious distancing from the “other way” of practice. The practice of eating non Halal meat by believers is related to the politeness phrase used in daily Japanese life, even though the two should have very different meanings and implications. This is an act of “building significance” (Gee, 1999): by stating that Kuran is like chemistry or the Muslim prayer is like the Japanese politeness phrase, she gives different meanings to her religious practices. The Islamic Bible becomes a set of abstract principles and rules, something which is difficult to understand but she sticks to it as given. The Muslim prayer seems to take on lesser gravity when compared to a politeness phrase; the similarity, like in the Kuran case, is really superficial, but seems to work well for her. In fact, this is for her what is meant by Kuran and the prayer. The definition is performed in her own talk. Sometimes, however, the contacts of different discourse go beyond significance building, and they begin to compete and clash with each other. I’d like to examine two cases which came up in the interviews: one is practice of faith, the other the role and image of women.

In the interviews Adilah repeatedly expressed her views on the practice of her faith. She is very positive about her religion and always defends it, although she often criticizes other discourses. Her practices, however, naturally go into conflict with a non Muslim mainstream culture. She mentioned she and other Muslim students have to adjust their daily prayers times to the class schedules: “I’ll say ok I’ll pray this prayer, and I postpone the next one...everybody does this...you can choose, but you’ll have to cut your lecture or lab, it’s difficult.”

In her talks practical reasons often stand out as crucial to the adjustment of the practices. Talking about wearing hijab, she said “When I open it I don’t feel comfortable, I feel self conscious.” But then also added, “I don’t have to care about my hair, for one thing.” I once saw her carelessly cutting her own hair with a pair of scissors. It seems wearing hijab sometimes serve the practical purpose of covering her hair so that she doesn’t have to take special care of it. In a similar way, she said the only time she took it off when going out was once in a summer when it was stiflingly hot—another practical reason. One more example shows when she talked about the early morning prayer: “If I skip pray, I’ll be missing school, etc. ..yeah they’re results of each other...When I start praying I’ll wake up at 6:30 am...you sort of have to schedule.” The morning prayer has the function of waking her up early so that she doesn’t miss school.

One more example, a bit more complex, was when she talked about eating Halal meat, because I once observed that she bought non Halal chicken and asked her about it:

Sometimes when I’m desperate, when I don’t have money. Like my friends, when I first came here years ago, I stick to the halal thing, but then I didn’t have money...my sponsor didn’t send the money...So halal meat is not that expensive, but I didn’t know why...I always go to McDonald’s, I’ll have double cheese burger...

Some of the linguistic choices here may reveal her subconscious beliefs. By using the term “Halal thing”, the religious practice is given a somewhat vaguer and lesser nature. She added “like my friends” before “when I first came here”, identifying herself with the group; but the later breach seemed to be an individual act, “I didn’t have money”. This is immediately followed by “my sponsor didn’t send the money”, as if turning some of the blame to the sponsor. In what Gee (1999) terms “relationship building” in this passage, she assigns herself a rather passive role, going along with her friends and having to breach the practices when “desperate”.

On the whole she explains that not sticking to Halal is due to lack of time and money. It seems she is lacking local coherence here (Fairclough, 2001), because not having money is not a good reason for breaking Halal, since they’re not really more expensive than regular meat. It is certainly not good reason for eating in McDonald’s. The phrase “I didn’t know why” may well indicate her own confusion.

We can reason that the real cause is the larger social and cultural environment: Halal meat can only be bought in a few grocery stores while regular meat is readily available everywhere. A quick meal in McDonald on campus is a most common practice for students. A mainstream culture that doesn’t facilitate the practice of Muslim beliefs is the real cause. By defining them in terms of time and money, however, —again building the significance—Adilah may be reflecting an influence from the pragmatic culture of the mainstream society. They become a matter of time and money for her, which certainly is lesser in magnitude than religious breach and also different in nature.

However, she is not totally unaware of the nature of the breach. In the interviews the idea of “guilt” constantly appeared, together with her own views on religious breaches.

I guess one thing is ingrained thing, so when we don’t do what we are supposed to do, you’ll feel guilty, your mind is not in peace...We try to do the best, but all the sins, like I talked about...you try to do the best, and we’re not allowed to judge.

Kuran...I read once a week, sometimes once a month...sometimes I feel bad about lagging...the rule is...you’re encouraged to read everyday. But if that routine doesn’t fit your schedule, don’t force yourself, just go with it...as long as be consistent.

She further emphasized that “Religion says you have to, but if you don’t want to and be forced to...it doesn’t go with you heart, that’s not good as well, not being honest.” The use of indefinite pronoun “you” again shows a degree of uncertainty and distance. Here on one hand, she doesn’t think it is acceptable to be slacking on the required religious practices, and it seems she feels guilty and disturbed all the time about skipping prayers and lagging in Kuran reading. There is an overwording (Fairclough, 2001) about bad feelings in the talks. On the other hand, she also emphasizes “don’t force yourself” and “just try to do the best”, and it’s even dishonest if one forces herself to practice. She shows a great deal of contradiction here, because if one really doesn’t need to force herself in following the practices, then there is no need for being guilty; while in fact she obviously is constantly burdened by guilt.

We might once again relate the “breaches” to the presence of a different dominant culture, although the scene could be even more complicated. According to Adilah, her religious practices had not been consistent, even back in Malaysia. She didn’t regularly wear hijab or pray back in middle school; it was not until boarding high school, when a stricter rule of practice was imposed, when she began regular practice. After coming here, supervisions no longer exist, but she has been wearing hijab continuously and tried her best to keep up with the other practices, and she mentioned that this made her feel safe. While living in a new and strange culture may inevitably enact new discursive patterns, it may also cause her to retreat to her familiar practices for comfort and sense of security.

The scene further complicates when her other source of discourses join the interplay. While watching the animes, she expressed many times that she admires the attitudes and philosophy of life of the characters. At one point she said, “So it’s like I do it because I want to, for me that’s a very good philosophy... it applies to your life.” She was talking about a very common theme in Japanese anime, and seemingly in the culture as well: following one’s heart and fulfill oneself in life, parallel to the ideology of encouragement, perseverance and hardworking. Such a philosophy is even more radical than “not forcing oneself”: it implies taking active choices and actions in one’s life, as exemplified by numerous anime characters.

Adilah doesn’t specify the source of the idea of “not forcing oneself”, and I don’t know how much of it might be from the religious teaching, whether it is a misinterpretation (because of the obvious contra-

diction), or how much of it is unconscious “interweaving” of other discursive practices like the anime. In any case, we can see much complexity of competing discourses.

Another theme of competing discourses in the interviews is the image and role of woman. Our first extended discussion on women’s image was when we were talking about romance reading. Adilah made some interesting contrasts between the image of women in the romances and in Malay novels, when I asked why she prefers the former while hating the latter.

(In English romances) Women...sometimes educated, vulnerable, naïve, cynical, ... Sometimes tragedies happen to them, they are orphaned, or sexually abused, or physically abused, ...and how they get on with their life, or maybe they have some phobia and they confront that problem...(In Malay novels) every time the girl is perfect, naïve,...it’s not real...it’s an illusion...(with romance) sometimes they get frustrated, weaknesses, a side she doesn’t show...sometimes they are not that beautiful, but beautiful inside.

She sees a lot of complexity in the female images in the romances, including characters, experiences and emotions, while in the Malay novels the image is too simplistic and unreal. We seem to see a contrast between traditional and more modern roles of women’s image. Whatever the case, Adilah seems to base her judgment more from a modern woman’s perspective. The simplistic traditional role is not her favored script.

It’s interesting that at one point she mentioned the word feminism: “They have that , even here, feminism, right? Here in the rural areas, the cowboy counties, all women cook, and...from what I read.” She completely misunderstands the meaning of feminism, thinking it means sexual discrimination. This may show her lack of the membership resource, although feminism is not necessarily part of the popular discourse outside the activist and research circles. But in any case, what she values in the romance image is full, complex characters, but not necessarily female power and independence.

Just as with faith, however, her script of the female role is not a simple binary. In our talks the female images in the Japanese anime and culture often pop up. She talked about, for example, the rich girls having a lot of traditional practices in the family, including dresses of kimono, practicing tea ceremony, and talking in a certain variety of language called keiko (honorifics). “They are very very polite”, she explained. She talked more than once of “*cocohaku*”, the Japanese way of love confession:

They have different cultures--in Japan, if they want somebody to go out...if a girl wants a boy to go with her, she will call the boy to the back yard...confession—*cocohaku*...for me that’s really straightforward, I mean...I don’t know ... sometimes the girl will leave confessions letters in the boy’s shoe lockers.

A relation seems only to begin with the acceptance of the rather ceremonious *cocohaku*, in which the girl often takes the initiative, which is quite a different schema from the English romance or probably other cultures. Other differences seemed to appear when we watched and discussed the animes, such as the same gender idol worship in schools. I was impressed at one point with a pirate anime, when Adilah explained with admiration of a girl on the screen who was adeptly stalking around the ship and outsmarting everyone on board, “She is a solo pirate.” This seems yet another different script from others. When I directly asked whether the romances and animes clash with her religion, she answered without hesitation, “Yeah!” and went on with some lengthy explanation:

Like don’t have sex before marriage...so I guess I don’t know, I cannot really apply that, anyway, but I guess it’s good to know...I guess it’s a cultural thing, you see like here people do things differently, so it’s totally up to you to define what’s wrong, what’s right...I guess.

When I asked whether she regrets that her religion holds her back from some freedom, she said

Oh, no... I don’t think so because I’m not really...I don’t really wanna...really experience it...I don’t see myself as now...like...needing them now. So I don’t really feel...actually, in our religion, women are respected, but it’s always...it’s a cultural thing I guess, it’s a cultural thing that in Malaysia, women don’t work, they cook, they stay in the kitchen, while the guys, their husband do their work...they got served, blah blah...But for me, I don’t feel it that way, I mean, why do we have that system, I mean, we’re kind of equal, I mean it’s not fair for me just do all the works, and ...I mean for me...That’s why I’m curious because if I were to keep on that thought, it would clash with all these guys from Malaysia,...That’s why I don’t see myself...I’m not really, ...if they expect me to serve them, forever, I mean, without them helping me, ...not exchanging, things like that...so I don’t think...well, too much work...that’s what I see from my family...but it’s a cultural thing, but in our religion, the women are

respected, wives don't do much, they just like, they serve the husband, but the husband will hire a servant to cook and clean the house...so it's a cultural thing.

In this passage she hesitated a lot and used so many "I guess", "I mean" and "really", which is an overwording and to an extent shows her struggling with coming up with a clear point of view. In terms of the subjects, she used "they" to refer to women and men in Malaysia and also referred to the men as "these guys from Malaysia". It seems she is establishing some divide between herself and the Malaysians back in her country. At this time they seem to be "the other" rather than fellows within a membership. In stating "if I were to keep on that thought, it would clash with all these guys from Malaysia", she opts a vagueness of participants and agent—it is "it", referring probably to the thought or to the action itself, that would clash with the "guys"; at the same time, she was using the subjunctive mood, indicating that this probably will not actually be the true case. These choices seem to result in less sense of confrontation, showing her own lack of confidence in deciding her roles and the future. This uncertainty is further shown with "kind of" in the sentence "We're kind of equal".

It is significant that Adilah made the distinction between the different scripts of women in her culture and religion: they are respectively "religion thing" and "cultural thing". Once again she was defending her religion and attempted to attribute something she doesn't like to her culture. She used "in Malaysia" vs. "in our religion", further showing her relative distancing from the former while aligning herself with the latter. But it is surprising that she believes in religion, the solution to the problem is that the husband hires a servant. The way "women are respected" is embodied in "wives don't do much". But anyway, her point is showing yet another script of women and wives, of which again, I'm not sure how much is truly from the religious teachings.

When discussing whether her religion holds her back from some freedom, she emphasized "I don't think so because I don't really want to experience it...not needing them now." "Really" and the pronouns "it" and "them" are again vague and uncertain. When she has to make a choice in enacting different aspect of her identity, she seems to be avoiding the problem by not looking at the potential conflict; when religion tells her not to do something and she happens not to wish to do it, the conflict happily doesn't exist. Her constant guilt about faith and seeming worries about the future of marriage, however, give her away. It seems her unspecified "it" and "them" are more likely the unwelcome conflicts rather than, for example, marriage itself.

Conclusion

In the interpretation above I have analyzed the constituted nature of the identity and some of the contradictions in the competing discursive practices. We can see a lot of complexities in these practices, which cannot be interpreted through simple binaries, and there are a lot of questions left for further explorations too in this study.

I believe future studies can focus on many different aspects, including the following three: First, a deeper look into the formation of the discursive practices is needed. The interplay and contradictions among the discourses seems an intricate process, as shown in some of the analysis above. Second, I believe naturalistic observation in broader scales is needed if we want to gain deeper understanding of the discursive practices in daily lives. In my interview and analysis I find that the narrative is a form of discursive acts, but they might be a "presentation" at the conscious or unconscious choice of the narrator, which in itself might constitute contradictions against the other acts. Third, a closer look into the practice of the languages. Sometimes I wonder a little bit about Adilah's use of words, like "lame" and "cheesy" as comments on movies or animes. No doubt she is using the English words in these comments and defining the movies within the cultural frame of the English speaking culture. What is meant and implied by using this English slang? How does that affect perception and identity formation? Also at one point she mentioned she knows the Malay equivalents of the terms in the Kuran, but not the English words, while another time she said she's having difficulty writing in Malay because of not using it for many years. I wonder whether these have deeper implications than the surface use of languages when further explored. More research needs to be done on these exciting questions.

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