Enacting English across Borders
Enacting English across Borders: Critical Studies in the Asia Pacific

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

ENGLISH IN A POST-APPROPRIATION WORLD: FACING THE NEW CHALLENGES

ROBY MARLINA AND RAQIB CHOWDHURY

In 1997 when British linguist Graddol anticipated that the number of non-native speakers of English will outnumber native speakers, he was foreseeing the inevitable global spread of English beyond just teaching and learning. Non-native speakers now outnumber native English speakers by three to one with around one quarter of the world’s population speaking English in some form.

Concurrent with this changed scenario, in the last 30 years or so, we may have witnessed or encountered – either through publications or conference presentations – a paradigm shift in the Applied Linguistics and/or TESOL disciplines. As Kuhn (1962) argues, a shift in paradigm is prompted by emerging significant anomalies that consequently question and challenge the applicability of current knowledge, beliefs or perspectives. This has been observed in both disciplines especially as a result of the changing sociolinguistic landscape of the English language in the world. Naturally, these changes have generated significant implications for the ways in which the English language, its practical usage, and its approach to teaching/learning are understood, conceptualised, taught, learned and practised. The more persistent concerns of debating the usefulness of English have long given way into sustained discussions on the ownership and appropriation of a language which is no longer the prerogative of ‘native’ English speakers.

The colonial and postcolonial expansion of the English language received mixed responses from scholars in academic research in the late 80s and early 90s. Another well-established and prolific scholar Robert Phillipson (1992, 2009), using the notion of ‘linguistic imperialism’, argued that the spread of English was due primarily to the attempts of developed English-speaking countries such as the UK and the US to maintain dominance over developing countries through the “establishment
Introduction

and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (p. 47). English language teaching enterprises such as The British Council were and are one of the establishments to which the developed English speaking countries had allocated a large sum of money, with an aim to disseminate and promote English and favour its use over other languages. English learners in these enterprises were taught with the attitudes and pedagogic principles that favoured monolingualism (Phillipson, 1992). Those who learnt English from these teaching enterprises were expected to lose their mother tongue, speak the varieties of English promoted by those enterprises, and internalise American or British cultural norms.

However, Phillipson’s view was not entirely shared by other scholars. Rather than viewing English as a symbol of imperialism, Pennycook (1994) insisted on the benefit of viewing English as the world’s most important international language – as a “crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress” (p. 13). With English emerging as a first-ranked language in a variety of economic and cultural settings, many individuals in diverse speech communities decided or chose to learn/acquire the language. English has been spontaneously acquired by teeming millions all over the world since, who have appropriated and claimed ownership over English in their own, individual and unique ways, stories of which are intricately embedded in the chapters of this book.

The notion of linguistic imperialism had denied the agency of learners and users of English to alter the language according to their needs. For example, it “obscures the role of Africans, Asians, and other peoples of the world as active agents in the process of creation of world English” (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, p. 107). In other words, the theory ignored the very natural process of languages coming in contact and the dynamic, ever-changing nature of a living language. When a language arrives and enters a particular country, it does not get passively absorbed by the speakers, but is ‘naturally’ nativised (Kachru, 1992) and appropriated (Canagarajah, 1999) to suit the speakers’ local contexts, and to project their local identities. Not surprisingly, identity has emerged as a major theme across the chapters of this book in relation to the teaching and learning of English. The outcome of the process of languages in contact can be observed in the emergence of the different varieties of English which are now collectively called ‘world Englishes’ (Kachru, 1986, Kirkpatrick, 2007).

Not only has such emergence of these Englishes challenged the notion of English as a monolithic entity, but it has also redefined and renationalised the ownership of English (McKay, 2002), making it an
‘Indonesian’, a ‘Bangladeshi’, a ‘Kenyan’, a ‘German’ or a ‘South-Korean’ language. With the forces of globalisation, this label of English as a language of a particular nationality is becoming even more blurry, especially to those individuals who have been moving across different geographical borders, and who may have been exposed to different varieties of English as they move from one border to another. The increased phenomena of transnational migration have not only spread English; it has dispersed its active users to the point where national boundaries can no longer be drawn insofar as speakers’ linguistic identities are concerned.

In this continuum, English has now acquired the status of the undisputed global language of communication to a degree that its instrumentalist benefits are almost no longer questioned in academic scholarship. Yet the inevitable conundrum we continue to face in our attempt to impose a ‘standard’ to English remains well documented in literature, especially in the last three decades. The notion of unproblematic standardisation of English, which assumes a unitary, homogenous monomodel is now widely disputed. In the backdrop of globalisation, debate on which ‘model’ should be the norm in English classrooms around the world has been heavily debated in the last three decades by authors such as Kachru (1992), Conrad, (1996), Widdowson, (1997) and Seidlhofer (2001), and this question continues to be problematised in the articles in the current book where ownership and appropriation emerge as recurring and prominent themes. However, rather than an international ‘model’ or ‘standard’, authors of this book, like Seidlhofer (2004), push forward the need for a new ‘international attitude’ – the recognition that native-like English is indeed unnecessary in most international contexts. The recognition and acceptance of indigenous and nativised varieties now reflect speakers’ cultural and pragmatic norms (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Indeed, even in teaching and learning contexts, as Kirkpatrick (2007) has shown, multilingual non-native teachers represent ideal teachers in many ELT contexts with local (or glocal) varieties of English gaining increasing endorsement in teaching and learning.

With English now well established as a pluricentric language, the identity which today’s users of English choose to project or prefer to be associated with has become more complex than ever before. The traditional dichotomy between native-English speakers and non-native English speakers has been challenged in multiple ways. Traditionally, those who came from countries where English is used as a national language were labelled as ‘native English speakers’ and those from other countries were labelled as ‘non-native English speakers’. Such simple,
binary division is no longer sufficient in explaining the complex and hybrid identities that millions of English speakers assume all over the world today.

In academic literature identity has been viewed as a social phenomenon which allows us to have social identities against social ‘groups’ (for example, ‘TESOL students’, or ‘English speakers’) we think we belong to or in which we are placed (Tajfel, 1982). Within such positioning, we automatically internalise the views of ourselves due to our conformity to or membership of these social groups. In other words, subscription to groups such as ‘English speakers’ automatically impose upon ourselves identities that we project in our interaction to members of the society.

However, identity is not just a passive imposition we assume. How individuals have engaged in ‘identity work’ (Loseke, 2000, p. 108) in which ‘selves are crafted out of the “messy” details of actual lives’ also depends on how individuals draw upon their biographical particulars and cultural knowledge to demonstrate different versions of themselves in specific social circumstances in order to narrate their stories. In a number of articles in this volume, participants have offered their biographies in relation to how they have assumed, acquired, transformed and created identities for themselves through their use of English and have claimed unique membership to certain groups as powerful language users. Such identity subscriptions have also empowered them into robust epistemological positions that have allowed them into creating newer and alternative roles for English.

Despite this, scholars, academics, teachers, practitioners and other vested interest groups who still believe in the superiority of standard (often native) English remain in powerful positions. While it is understandable why academics who aspire to have their work published in international journals need to adhere to ‘standard’ English followed by native English-speakers, such logic does not stand when it comes to spoken English, where comprehensibility, often in the absence of any native speakers, is all that matters. In such contexts, English is often put to newer uses in forms that mark a conspicuous departure from norms that have long been upheld by its native speakers.

The global spread of English, the birth of new world Englishes, the increased amount of exposure to English, and the changing patterns of acquisition of English in multilingual and multicultural ‘non-English-speaking’ countries have now blurred the distinction between native-speakers and non-native speakers (Jenkins, 2007). In practice, users of English today may not prefer to be identified either as ‘native’ or ‘non-
native’ because these labels do not sufficiently capture their rich linguistic repertoire as well as their complex linguistic usage or practices. They may also have different or even conflicting attitudes, perceptions and understanding of themselves as users of English. If they are teachers of English, those from countries where English was historically the language of colonial power, or those who have been ‘geographically mobile’ and whose mobility has had significant effect on their linguistic repertoire and practices, the aforementioned labels as well as conception of one’s identity are likely to be far more complicated.

The changing sociolinguistic reality of English described above has further generated a number of thought-provoking questions for the teaching and learning of the English language. Since English is essentially a ‘glocal’ communication tool, and is used by today’s users of English for intercultural communication in multilingual and multicultural settings, what are the main objectives or goals of teaching? What do curriculum or syllabus materials now look like? What teaching approaches or models are employed and considered as effective? What kinds of competence are learners encouraged to develop? What is assessed and how? Whose or which cultures/Englishes are espoused, taught and discussed in class? Who are learners’ role models? Who are ‘qualified’ language teachers? What is the role of teacher-education programs in EFL countries? What are considered as important in national language policies and planning documents?

Since it is beyond the scope of this book to provide ‘answers’ to these questions, one view that we believe has informed the responses to the above questions is that diversity should not be regarded as deficiency, but as a crucial core element in today’s language education. This book houses contemporary theoretical and empirical studies by emergent researchers and scholars in the disciplines of ELT, Applied Linguistics and TESOL who address some of the above issues from their own contexts (predominantly in Asian settings). Each chapter in a unique way challenges, unpacks and critiques existing misconceptions and pre-conceived assumptions of the use, learning and teaching of English in today’s fluid and globalised, postmodern era. While some contributors have brought such issues to the forefront through a critical consideration of histories and policies, others have explored how English is enacted, practised, learned, and/or taught across a wide range of settings in order to further illustrate the various manifestations of the worldwide expansion of the language. Together the chapters highlight the current discrepancies and inconsistencies in different areas of interest in the field of ELT, and provide carefully considered suggestions on how to address these issues.
Studies in this volume will facilitate greater understanding into our optimisation of the delivery and use of English in Asian countries to the advantage of learners, teachers, researchers, policy makers and governments.

This book does not seek to answer if and how English is beneficial. Nor does it address the numerous uses and abuses English is put into. Within such post-politicisation and post-appropriation perspective, authors consider the various manifestations of English, sometimes an instrumentalist endeavour, and at other times as a purely professional endeavour to deliver the benefits of an essentially local communication tool.

These views revolve around national histories of curriculum policies and development, the status of EIL in country-specific contexts, narratives of ELT teacher training/education and reform – including in-service teacher training, intercultural communicative competence and pedagogical approaches, code-switching, materials and curriculum development, second language acquisition, as well as transformative themes around gender perspectives in the profession of teaching, ethnicities and ethnic discourses in ELT pedagogy, identity and appropriation, and themes of inclusion and nativisation. We ask, for example – to what extent is teaching (English) a gendered profession? What are the factors that contribute or influence our gendered beliefs? How does communicative competence interface with the notion of identity and social interaction? How can young and new teachers be engaged in the profession through mentoring and exposure to long-term development plans? How can universities take into consideration transferrable skills such as business English that will enhance the employability of learners in the job market? How aware are teachers of the varieties and legitimacy of ‘other’ Englishes and how much importance do they place on them? In the overwhelmingly communicative atmosphere, what accounts for the residual expectations of grammar-based language learning?

In this book Goward and Zhang show how, despite marked differences in their histories, two emerging superpowers (postcolonial/outer circle India and EFL/expanding circle China) have appropriated English into a useful tool of local communication. Mohideen explores gendered views of teachers’ language ability and how heavily underrepresented males fit into the traditionally feminised profession of ELT in Malaysia. Linh, Dung and Farnhill explore themes of power relations and self-identification within a group of Vietnamese learners in the UK in terms of how they differently interact with native and non-native speakers of English. Bukhori-Muslim’s case study of a non-English speaking family living in Melbourne family
highlights the complexities of the role of code switching in children’s bilingual development. Warouw tries to understand how teachers adapt their teaching styles and materials in response to the multiethnic diversity typical in university classrooms in Manado. Also analysing language teaching materials, Dinh examines whose and how cultures are represented in ELT textbooks in Vietnam and calls for the need to critically revisit language teaching textbooks in the light of the predominant use of English for intercultural communication in today’s globalised world. Afrianto looks into how a group of prospective English teachers are transformed into novice teachers through the teaching practicum at an Indonesian university. By looking into how workers use pragmatic strategies to overcome problems when communication breakdowns occur, Roshid questions the role of intercultural knowledge in a readymade garments industry in Bangladesh where English is the only means to communicate with the world. Rather than seeing the emerging variety of Japanese English as a deficit model, Ike argues for the need for greater recognition of nativised and truly internationalised local varieties of English, not only in Japan but all over the world. Drawing on a case study on identity and teaching, Yazdanpanah and Brown show how teachers’ personal understanding (rather than theoretical knowledge) of how language works impacts how they teach. Cruz invites us to look into the need for diversifying studies on second language acquisition and emphasising on meaning making through negotiation rather than subscribing to norms typically upheld in ELT classrooms. By comparing what teachers and students view as most conducive in learning English, Wu explores how EIL is perceived by learners and teachers of English in Hong Kong. Through a critical evaluation of a number of projects that are currently playing an important role in developing English teaching, Mishra pushes for more equitable access to English education in India where ELT has so far been the privilege of the wealthy urban population.

Rather than striving to come to complacent and conclusive recommendations in terms of how English needs to be conceptualised, understood, learnt and practised, this book attempts to debunk traditionally taken for granted aphorisms and expose the complexities, indeterminability and dialogic unfinalisability (after Bakhtin, 1981) surrounding the most enacted language in the world. It shows how English metamorphosises almost at every turn, defining its users as much as it defines the very uses it is put to.

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Roshid, doctoral candidates in the Faculty of Education, Monash University, for their invaluable help, especially at the early stages of this book project.

References


CHAPTER ONE

DWINDLING MINORITY:
THE GENDERED BELIEFS OF MALE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT) TEACHERS

SHAMSUL NIZAM KACHI MOHIDEEN

Abstract

As in many other nations, the Malaysian society recognises the importance of developing in its citizen’s competence and confidence in communicating globally. The teaching and learning of English are highly valued in this endeavour, yet the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession does not currently offer representative role models for learners; male teachers are heavily underrepresented. This may have important implications for learners, perpetuating a possibly gendered view of language ability, which has been widely documented (Francis & Skelton 2005; Loudini 1990; Maccoby & Jacklin 1975). This paper reports a study exploring the gendered beliefs of ‘male’ English Language teachers from different ethnic backgrounds in modern Malaysian society regarding the ‘genderedness’ of the domain of the teaching profession in general and English Language Teaching (ELT) in particular. Gendered beliefs as proposed by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) are cultural beliefs about gender within different social relational contexts in different communities or societies. In particular, this study looks at the influence of hegemonic cultural beliefs about being a male ELT teacher as a way to understand masculinity within the feminised area of ELT and the subject of English Language. Therefore, it attempts to uncover some of the negative stereotypes linked to male ELT teachers by looking into male teachers’ gendered views from their own lived experiences using hegemonic masculinity as a framework of analysis together with the notion of ‘feminisation’ of teaching. This qualitative case-study research is thus set in multicultural Malaysian secondary schools to provide an understanding
of the gendered beliefs among male teachers through three main ethnic lenses: Malay, Chinese and Indian. Their voices elucidate the factors influencing male teachers’ gendered beliefs and show how these teachers respond to their gendered beliefs and masculinities in their everyday pedagogical practices in secondary English Language classrooms. The findings indicate that these male ELT teachers believed that they are victims of feminisation although they also enjoy the implicit advantages given to them through male roles and hegemonic masculinity practices within the teaching profession.

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching (ELT), gender beliefs, hegemonic masculinity, male teachers.

**Introduction**

Gender imbalances in the teaching profession have been a matter of debate in Malaysia and many other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States in the past decades. Generally, studies show that the teaching profession in general and the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession in particular do not currently offer a balance between the number of male and female teachers. Indeed, the presence of a female-majority teaching force in most schools around the world increases anxiety among prospective male teachers. Teaching is considered as a female-concentrated occupation (Lupton 2006) and the absence of male role models in schools reduce teaching as a prospective career for boys (Lingard, Martino & Mills 2009).

For example, a study conducted by Hwa (2003) regarding the trends in higher education course choices of secondary school leavers in Malaysia, reveals that Malaysian male and female school leavers tend to follow traditional gender appropriate courses rather than those based on one’s abilities and qualifications. From the 368 samples that chose education courses, 312 were females and only 56 were males. Boys seemed to prefer engineering compared to education. Similarly, Drudy (2008) suggests that the disadvantageous position of males in a highly feminised environment of school is a factor for men not wanting to join the teaching force in the West. Reports from international agencies like the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reveals that in most schools, women teachers outnumber men at both primary and secondary level (2009).

Similarly, in Malaysia, more than 66% of the teachers in the Malaysian secondary schools are females (Malaysian Educational Statistics, 2008).
and this is parallel to research findings in most western countries which suggest that teaching is a female dominated job (Francis & Skelton 2005) thus, a ‘soft option’ occupation for men (Connell, 1987). This underrepresentation of males in teaching, the domination of female teachers and the enactment of feminine characteristics, values and thinking in school curriculum (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006; Drudy, 2008) have thus been blamed by many scholars on boys taking the status of the ‘new disadvantaged’ in schools which inform the moral panic of boys’ underachievement and disciplinary concerns.

As a result, it is now extremely rare to find many male English Language teachers in schools, and they are increasingly becoming a dwindling minority in schools. Many are reluctant in joining the teaching force because of the negative stereotypes associated to it. For example, many studies found that teaching is perceived as a female job (Apple 1994; Jha & Kelleher 2006) and as a women’s activity (Apple 1994) that is commonly linked to the domestic ideology of nurturing and taking care of children (Francis & Skelton 2005). This traditional feminine role of nurturing children in most traditional cultures possibly led to the perception that the ELT profession is a female job. Teaching is seen to be suitable for women because it is often associated with parenting and thus, contributes to the general view of school and education as ‘feminised’ (Jha & Kelleher 2006, p. 45). In addition to this, the English Language subject in schools is also portrayed as a ‘soft’ subject (Francis 2000; Jha & Kelleher 2006) that favours girls, and as a ‘feminine’ subject (Francis & Skelton 2005). Many scholars have also documented girls’ superiority over boys in language learning, which were found related to various factors such as biological (Maccoby & Jacklin 1975), linguistic (Sikora & Saha 2009), social, attitudinal and stereotyped (Loudini, 1990; Reyes & Stanic, 1988). All these factors have led to the perception that the ELT profession is a female job and the English Language subject is feminine.

However, these findings are based in western contexts, which have different views on gender and masculinity from an Asian context such as Malaysia. Do male teachers in Malaysia consider themselves as disadvantaged or inferior in relation to the female-majority teaching population? Considering the claim that men do not want to be teachers because teaching is traditionally stereotyped as a feminine job and because of the lower status accorded to teaching by the Malaysian society in general (Abdullah & Stephen, 2010), this paper examines the gendered beliefs of male ELT teachers within their ELT profession in a non-western context – Malaysia. It attempts to understand male teachers’ gendered views from their own lived experiences using hegemonic masculinity as a
framework of analysis together with the notion of the ‘feminisation’ of teaching. Although there are many possible reasons for the shortage of males in the teaching profession, the focus of this study is confined to these theoretical concepts in relation to their gendered views of their profession and the subjects that they taught. The next section presents the context of ELT in Malaysia and an understanding of the theoretical concepts discussed in this chapter.

**English Language Teaching (ELT) in Malaysia**

English Language is an important core subject in Malaysia, taught in schools as a subject, which was very much structural-situational oriented until 1983 when the government introduced the New Primary Schools Curriculum (KBSR) and the Integrated Secondary Schools Curriculum (KBSM) in 1989. KBSR focuses on the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic (Pandian 2002). The KBSM stresses on an integrated syllabus with the infusion of critical thinking skills. Teachers must also instil moral and spiritual values into subjects and teaching ‘across the curriculum’ is promoted.

However, over the years, the level of English language proficiency among students has deteriorated (Lee 2004) and this has spurred concerns among the Malaysian public as reported in the Malaysian mainstream media (e.g., Azizan & Lee 2011). One of the factors for this decline is the shortage of English teachers – it was reported that the shortage of more than 13000 English Language teachers would hamper the teaching and learning process in schools. In response, under the *Strengthening English Policy 2010*, the Malaysian Ministry of Education sought to employ an extra 13,933 English teachers. This included hiring 1,000 ‘foreign’ teachers and recruiting another 600 retired teachers (Ministry of Education 2010). The Malaysian mainstream media claimed that one of the reasons for this shortage was that the Malaysian men were generally reluctant to join the teaching force (Chin, 2009). One of the possible ways of overcoming this shortage was to attract more male candidates into the teaching job, as suggested in the media, further confirming that Malaysian boys did not consider teaching as a potential future career (Abdullah & Stephen, 2010) as it is commonly associated with women’s work. This has led to the current situation in most schools in having more female teachers while males are becoming the ‘dwindling minority’ as reported by Chin (2009) in the *News Straits Times Singapore*. This trend is presented in Table 1.
Table 1. Percentage of Male Teachers in Secondary Schools

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<th>2003</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
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While the supply of male teachers in Malaysia is rather disappointing (Rohaty & Maisarah 2010) due to factors such as teacher salary, working conditions and overburdened clerical aspects of teaching (Abdullah & Stephen 2010), the Malaysian Ministry of Education is currently looking into these issues at macro and micro levels with the aim of producing more quality teachers with a balanced ratio between male and female teachers. To support this move by the ministry and to understand these issues pertaining to male teachers; this study explores and attempts to understand the gendered beliefs of three male English language teachers from three different cultural backgrounds within the English language teaching (ELT) profession in Malaysia.

Gendered beliefs, hegemonic masculinity and feminisation of the teaching profession

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) defined gendered beliefs as *cultural beliefs about gender* within different social-relational contexts in different communities or societies. This notion of gendered beliefs in relation to male ELT teachers within their ELT profession is extended through the concepts of male hegemony and feminisation of the teaching profession. These two concepts have been widely discussed within the political dimensions of masculinity as highlighted by Lingard and Douglas (1999) in seeking for social justice and gender equity within the gender order of the society. In the following section, the impact of hegemonic masculinity in restricting teaching as a career for most men and making it feminised are explained.

Hegemonic Masculinities

Masculinity does not denote the same thing to all men. It is understood, experienced and lived out differently by men as it is constructed differently by class culture, race, ethnicity and age (Kimmel & Messner 2001). Many studies on men and masculinities have focused on socially constructed differences between men and women as well as differences between men themselves (Connell, 1995; Kaufman & Harry, 1994; Kimmel, 1994).
With the rise of the feminist movements in the early 1960’s and 1970’s, radical feminists celebrated femininity by opposing the downgrading or making women inferior to men. This is when the masculine category became something that could be analysed and examined (Connell, 1987) for the first time. The conceptual division between the fixed biological categories were now challenged and the essentialist binary division of men and women became fuzzy as humans were now interpreted as fluid social beings. This impacted subsequent study of men as it changed from the unitary concept of masculinity to the pluralised concept of masculinities. This seemed to suggest that there are hierarchies of power, not only between women and men, but also among men themselves. The hierarchical categories of masculinities as proposed by Connell (1987, 1995) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) are hegemonic, subordinated, marginalised and complicit types of masculinities.

Hegemonic masculinity, which naturalises the dominance of men over women and is often linked to men’s risk-taking activities, sports, violent and loud behaviour, is the highest level of masculinity and often affect gender power relations in terms of domination and subordination between men and women. Connell (1995) termed this as a ‘patriarchal dividend’ to most men.

Subordinated masculinity extends elements of domination to heterosexual men over homosexual, gay or effeminate man whose behaviour posed a threat to the legitimacy of male supremacy. Marginalised masculinity involves the interplay of race, class and ethnicity that may put a man in a marginalised position while complicit masculinity is performed by men who do not enjoy hegemonic status but benefit from it at the same time.

Connell’s (1995) concept of ‘hegemony’ which applied Gramsci’s (1971) understanding of hegemony and Giroux’s (1988) idea of a dominant group with an authoritative power relations has led to men being labelled as traditionally superior over women or over other types of masculinity. This has led to the acceptance and legitimacy of patriarchy in most societies and can be seen in the media, business, military or even in the government of countries like Malaysia.

However, at the societal level, hegemonic masculinity imposes restrictions on career options for men (Connell 1987; Mac an Ghaill 1994) as tensions in conforming to peer culture of acceptable manhood and normative stereotypical gendered views of career choice make men more concerned of their masculinity. For example, they are sensitive to homophobic slurs on their masculinity, and become more gender sensitive in career choice by defining their masculinity against femininity. This has
led to the importance of understanding the gendered beliefs of male teachers within their profession of teaching and to explore further into the impact of feminisation within the teaching career which the next section looks into.

The Feminisation of Teaching

Teaching has long been and remains a predominantly female occupation in the English speaking world such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. It has been labelled as ‘feminised’ which many scholars argue may partly explain the absence of men in teaching (Lingard et al. 2009; Martino & Rezai Rashti, 2010, 2011). In the context of Malaysia, similar views can be traced over the last few years in the mainstream media. The notion of feminisation of teaching referring to the processes by which teaching becomes a mostly female occupation (Drudy, Martin, Woods & O’Flynn 2005), is blamed among other factors for the dwindling numbers of male teachers in schools (Rohaty & Maisarah, 2010). This concerns male teachers in two ways: first, the domestic mothering roles and ideology involved within the teaching profession and second, the existence of a female-majority environment in schools.

Teaching is associated with many parental roles such as nurturing and caring for the students. These qualities are seen as having opposing values within the hegemonic and patriarchal self of male teachers. This label of teaching as ‘feminine’, either imagery or real discourage men who construct their masculine self around anything ‘not being female’ (Epstein et al. 1998; Kimmel 1994). Therefore, teaching is perceived as having a lower status within the society because of the overall status accorded to women (Acker 1994) which involves misogyny, homophobia and patriarchy. Teaching is also labelled as feminine because it disparages women as mothers due to their domestic roles at home in looking after children. This is discussed earlier pertaining to Francis and Skelton’s (2005) discussion of the domestic ideology of nurturing young children in schools through motherly roles and indirectly relates to the parenting notion of asserting care to children which contradicts hegemonic masculinity.

The Study

This study aims at investigating the gendered attitudes and beliefs towards ELT in general and the subject of English Language in particular among male English language teachers teaching in schools in Malaysia. It
Chapter One

looks at male ELT teachers’ perception of the extent of the gendered domain of ELT and the English language subject in Malaysian secondary schools; the factors and effects of gendered beliefs on choice of teaching career and hegemonic cultural views on masculinity within the feminised notion of teaching English. In order to achieve the above objectives, this study was conducted within an interpretative qualitative paradigm using a phenomenological case study approach. As the study attempts to understand the phenomenon of perceptions among male ELT teachers with regards to their ELT profession and the subject English Language, this case study took the view that human reality is not a single, fixed objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed or measured (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) but multidimensional, holistic and ever-changing through interactions between researcher and the subjects (Mertens, 2005). It also allows the researchers for an in-depth exploration of a few individuals (Creswell, 2008) and to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin 2003).

As a researcher I became the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices were deployed with the hope of getting a better understanding of the subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln 2008). In stage 1, an in-depth interview was conducted with all the research participants and in stage 2 teachers were asked to keep a diary to reflect their thoughts on gender while teaching and to reflect on the questions asked during the interviews. In this paper, data relating to the three research participants who represented the three major ethnic in Malaysia were reported. The next section presents background of these three teachers.

Background of the Teachers

Chen

Chen is an English Language teacher in his late forties with a degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from a local university. He has 30 years of teaching experience and is currently teaching in a co-ed urban Chinese secondary school and is a Guru Cemerlang or ‘Excellent Teacher’, a position given to expert teachers by the Ministry of Education. Chen comes from the Chinese ethnic group.
Baser

Baser is an English Language teacher in his mid-thirties who graduated from a twinning programme in TESL between a teacher training college in Malaysia and a university in the UK. He has 11 years of teaching experience and is currently in the position of Head of MUET (Malaysian University English Test). He is teaching in a multicultural co-ed urban school in Selangor. Baser is of Malay ethnicity and is currently doing his postgraduate studies.

Mano

Mano is an English Language teacher in his mid-fifties who graduated from a local teacher training college in TESL and is currently doing his PhD out of campus on a part-time basis. He has 34 years of teaching experience and is currently the Head of MUET (Malaysian University English Test) and a discipline master. Of Indian origin, Mano is teaching in a multicultural co-ed rural school.

Findings

Findings of this study are articulated in two sections: first, the gendered beliefs of the male ELT teachers on their teaching and ELT profession and second, the gendered beliefs of these male ELT teachers on their teaching subject – English Language.

Articulating Gendered Beliefs of the ELT Profession

Generally, the male ELT teachers in the interview believed that the ELT profession was gender neutral. For example, Chen believes that even though female teachers dominate the profession, it does not mean that the profession ‘belongs’ to them:

Although they are more female teachers than males, it does not automatically mean that females own the profession.

Chen explains that teaching is a ‘just a profession’ which delivers a service to the people. He sees himself as someone who has to impart knowledge to his students, make them better persons morally and motivate them to be better citizens of the country.

However, Baser and Mano perceived it to be more feminine due to the majority of female teachers in the profession as well as the persistent
stereotypical view that language learning is a forte with girls and female teachers. Boys and male teachers are seen as being unable to compete with the female gender because they believe that the English Language subject and teaching is feminine-oriented. For example, Baser said:

I try not to think that teaching is a gendered profession…but looking around me. I can’t help but to feel it is enforced around me…especially when it comes to female teachers. There are lots and lots of them around… and to a certain extent I feel squeezed out from the profession and it becomes worse because I am teaching English…where…you know the percentage of male teacher is so low …compared to …let’s say Science and Maths.

Baser seems to feel rather ‘inferior’ in his ELT profession because he belonged to the minority gender. He used the term ‘squeezed out’ to represent his view of having more female ELT teachers in his school. He compares this to other subjects like Mathematics and Science where there are more male teachers compared to English. Indirectly, traces of insecurity and powerlessness gripped his hegemonic masculine self and this is translated into a threat – a stereotype-threat which make male teachers seen as not a real ‘man’ (Sargent, 2000). Sargent asserts that men in the teaching profession construct their identities both as men and as teachers by negotiating between being a ‘real men’ or being a ‘real teacher’. Real men do nothing feminine and fear being seen as ‘feminine’. In this context, Baser is in a state of dilemma of whether to be a real teacher or a real man. To him, being a minority gender in ELT narrows his option into becoming less masculine and a less effective teacher, especially in terms of the gendered beliefs he feels the society imposes upon him.

However, in the case of Mano, he is more concerned with the level of teaching. He believes that primary level teaching suits female teachers more as it is not as challenging as teaching the upper level. He explains:

Teaching English is less challenging for men … females are better at language…they are more poetic. Primary schools can be handled by women … for teaching on a higher scale like college or varsity, men are more suitable.

In his view, Mano believes that men are superior and thus, should be teaching the upper level compared to females in the primary sector. In his view, men’s superiority is encouraged through the acceptance and legitimacy of patriarchy, particularly within his cultural traditions and (Hindu) religious background. This has led Mano into believing that
teaching is ‘unchallenging’ for men because men are capable of doing more than ‘just teaching’ in schools. Interestingly, he admits that language is a strength area for females compared to men. Again, stereotypical gendered views on teaching and men influence beliefs on the subject. Females are believed to be better in learning and teaching the language while males are stereotypically perceived as unsuitable candidates for teaching languages. This is due to two reasons; first, men possess a higher intellectual ability in doing something more challenging and important as argued by Mano above – a view shared by Chen. He said:

Males are just likely distracted with something else, something more important.

Chen seems to suggest that males could choose to do something more ‘important’ than teaching English. This is indicative of characteristics of hegemonic masculinity within male ELT teacher’s views. Chen and Mano both believed that the teaching profession is an unchallenging job for men because the profession does not enforce masculine values and is seen as a soft and womanly activity as found by Apple (1994) and Jha and Kelleher (2006) too. In this case, they both believe that being a male teacher means that they are doing something of lesser importance and thus implying that teaching is against the ‘nature’ of being a man. Indirectly they feel that it is a ‘lady’s job’ which denotes lower status.

The second reason is that male teachers are positioned in a disadvantaged state with negative stereotypes. For example, male teachers are seen as inferior to female teachers when it comes to matters pertaining to paperwork, filing and documentation. This may limit their chances of getting a promotion in the long run. Male teachers are also frequently stereotyped as an ‘outdoor’ person and thus being forgiven if they lagged in preparing reports and other types of paper work in teaching such as yearly planning. Baser, for example, articulates these tensions in his diary entry:

Being a male English teacher first off, I’m always the only male since language fields are always being monopolized by women. At school, I’m the only male English teacher in the entire school. When I get involved with district/state programs, I find myself alone or if I’m lucky, I might get on with one or two male teachers. Because I’m the only male English teacher, by default I become the Head of MUET Unit even when two of my colleagues are more experienced than I am. English activities are carried out with me involved in them at time when it is not convenient for women teachers – Saturdays namely. I believe being a man gives women the idea that I’m expendable because men can do anything. Another, when
I get lagged behind with yearly planning, reports, etc. I find my colleagues can forgive me easily because I think the idea as long as he does it – cause he is a man, sticks very clearly. I don’t think I would be easily forgiven if I were a woman.

Based on these conflicting gendered views on male ability as teachers, male teachers in the ELT profession seemed to enjoy either a higher status by positioning themselves hegemonically above female teachers or in a disadvantaged situation as the minority and inferior gender imposed upon them by the society and the negative stereotypes that accompany them. In Baser’s case, he is chosen to lead the MUET unit due to cultural and perhaps religiously endorsed notion of male superiority. In Malay patriarchal Muslim culture men are always leaders in their own family and this value may have affected both the female and male Muslim teachers professionally at school. This reflects typical expectations in upholding and performing traditional male roles and responsibilities in a Muslim-male teacher like Baser.

However, in the West, for example, Williams’ (1992, 1993) works on men’s underrepresentation in elementary teaching in the United States found that men generally experience structural advantages in their career which she labelled as the ‘glass escalator effect’ while at the same time they do encounter prejudices from people outside their profession. Although Chen, Baser and Mano seemed to believe that they are victims of feminisation in schools, at the same time they did enjoy certain implicit advantages by practising ‘hegemonic masculinity’ in the teaching profession. Therefore, while male ELT teachers themselves believed that the ELT profession was feminised, they perhaps survived and lived on within this ‘feminised space’ by practising certain types of masculinities. However, it is quite possible that the societal negative stereotypes on men in teaching may position these male teachers into a ‘trapped door’ situation as compared to Williams’ ‘glass escalator effect’ in organisational advancement.

**Articulating Gendered Beliefs on the English Language Subject**

Data obtained through this study seemed to suggest that there are two conflicting views among the male ELT teachers on the genderedness of the English Language subject in Malaysian schools. The first view is that the English Language subject is gender-neutral, second view is it is gendered or feminine (particularly in terms of curriculum design and topics selected in the textbooks).
In the first view, male ELT teachers believe that English Language is a gender-neutral subject because it is seen as a ‘skill’ that could be learnt by anyone regardless of gender. For example, Baser said in the interview:

It’s a language...so it is something that is gender-neutral... it is more than a subject...it is a skill... it is a life skill...so ... everybody should get it … yeah …

For Baser, English Language is a basic language skill that everyone could learn and master if they are willing to put a lot of time and hard work into it. To him, gender does not play a role as language is a communication tool that merely allows people to interact with one another irrespective of their gender. As a teacher of English, Baser sees that both boys and girls in his class could perform well in the language if they are interested and willing to learn the subject.

In the second view however, the subject is perceived by the male ELT teachers in this study to be gendered or feminine. This view is due to the nature of the topics selected for the subject and the curriculum itself which they perceived as favoring girls. For example, Mano believes that the English Language curriculum in schools is a female-based curriculum due to the selection of topics and syllabus content. He said:

[English Language] is feminine even though the curriculum looks neutral…[because]…most of the text deals with feminine topics, [the] content in the syllabus is female based…it is basically if you look into it …very feminine. Example, if you see a text, you’ll see most of the text as regards to that …pertaining to the mother, the daughter that sort of thing … and when it comes to man, very little … for example the Form 4 and Form 5 basically how to fix a leaking tap , those are the small minor things that you see more towards the guys … how to repair this and that … but those are very small portion … but most of the text are pertaining to … very female-based curriculum …

The problem he mentioned during the interview is to choose the best topic for both genders. Some topics are considered more female-oriented such as writing recipes and baking a cake, while others appear to be more masculine – such as fixing a tap and how to change a three-pin plug at home. However, he believes that the curriculum caters more to girls’ topics compared to boys. English Language is thus perceived to have a feminised curriculum and culture of learning.

Table 2 presents a summary of participant teachers’ gendered perception of the English Language subject.
Table 2. A Summary of Participant Teachers’ Gendered Perception of the English Language Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Neutral</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English is a universal language</td>
<td>There are more female teachers in teaching English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It depends on the individual learner, not their gender.</td>
<td>More girls are doing well in English examinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It involves language skills.</td>
<td>Girls are more interested and willing to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English has functional purposes and needs for communicating, irrespective of</td>
<td>Girls are better in writing and reading skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender.</td>
<td>Girls are better with literature and poems (as it involves emotions)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teachers in this study believe that the language curriculum is feminised even though they perceive the subject as gender-neutral in general. The reasons offered, as shown in Table 2, are not exclusive to the context of Malaysia as they have been documented widely by many scholars from various fields of study (see for example, Drudy, 2008; Thorton & Bricheno, 2006; Sikora & Saha, 2009). What emerged as significant in this study is the role played by hegemonic masculinity and the feminisation of teaching in determining whether the subject (English language) is gendered or not. The masculine self of the male teachers and the feminised context of schooling, teaching and school subjects may provide a platform in understanding the gendered beliefs of male ELT teachers within their ELT profession and the subject they taught.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The male ELT teachers in this study believe that the ELT profession is gender-neutral and male teachers have their roles to play. As Salwa (1996) pointed out in the context of teaching profession in Malaysia, teaching in schools generally consists of two types of tasks: academic and non-academic. Academic tasks are those tasks closely related to the curriculum, imparting knowledge and matters relating to examinations such as marking and grading. Academic tasks, which form the core of teaching job, are closely connected to teaching and learning processes in the school. The other type of tasks in schools normally deals with aspects of school management and organisational purposes such as doing paperwork, updating databases, collecting fees, managing class finances, beautifying classrooms, school surroundings and matters related to what I label as