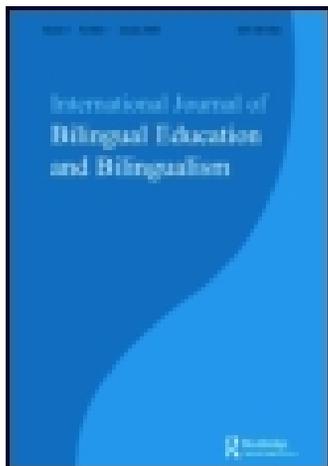


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# Interactions and Inter-relationships Around Text: Practices and Positionings in a Multilingual Classroom in Brunei

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This paper emerges from a microethnographic study of a number of classrooms in different areas of Negara Brunei Darussalam (henceforth Brunei), a small Malay Islamic Monarchy on the northern coast of Borneo, Southeast Asia. The official language is *Bahasa Melayu*, and a local variety of Malay, referred to as Brunei Malay, is the language of everyday communication. Since independence in 1984, English has been one of the languages in the *sistem pendidikan dwibahasa* or bilingual education system. In this system Malay is the language of instruction for the first three years of schooling. From the fourth year, English becomes the language of instruction for most subjects in the curriculum. The focus of this paper is one classroom in a small up-river school away from the Malay centre, and in one of the few areas in the country where a form of Malay is not the major language in the community. The area consists of three ethnic groups, the *Dusun*, *Penan* and *Iban*, groups which have their own languages. The paper describes the reading practices in the classroom, and discusses the positionings of the participants, and the languages used to accomplish literacy events. In particular, it focuses on the inter-relationships between monolingual text and the participants' multilingual talking text into being.

## Introduction

This study examines interaction around a content-area text in one lesson in a rural primary school in Brunei, a small, independent Malay Islamic Monarchy with a population of no more than 300,000 people. Although the population is small, it is a multi-ethnic country with a number of minority groups existing alongside the majority Malay polity. The study focuses on one science lesson in a school well away from the Malay centre. It examines specifically how one short science text is talked through by the classroom participants, and considers the positioning of the text, the participants, and the languages used to accomplish the lesson. In doing so, and in line with the themes of this volume, the paper attempts to relate the participants' multilingual literacy practices to the wider linguistic ecology of the environment, both the local community and country as a whole. More particularly, it attempts to shed light on how the classroom participants, through their inter-relationships and interactions, negotiate the tensions inherent in the challenges posed by an educational system that relies on two exoglossic languages, English and Malay.

The idea for the paper came about when I revisited my field notes and, in particular, the record of a vivid incident that took place in one classroom I was observing. The incident took place one rainy break time when the pupils were not able to go outside and play. I happened to walk into the classroom where seven pupils were huddled round three desks. They were discussing a sentence in Malay that had cropped up in the previous lesson, and were constructing

translations into the three languages spoken by the groups in the area, Iban, Dusun and Penan. What was really noticeable was the animated discussion going on – strikingly different from the lessons I had observed. As I approached the group, their discussion slowed down so I retreated to the back of the classroom and busied myself with sorting through some books. What struck me forcibly, although I was not able to hear the whole discussion, was how all members of the group were taking part and collaboratively constructing three new texts, that is, in Iban, Dusun and Penan. As I left the classroom, I asked if I might see what they had written down, and they proudly showed me a sheet of paper with a Malay sentence and three translations into Iban, Dusun and Penan. This incident offers a compelling example of multilingual interaction outside the confines of the formal linguistic environment of the classroom.

Following this introduction, the paper provides a brief account of the contextual background, both at the national level and at the local level where the study took place. This is followed by a short statement on the methodology used in the study. The main section of the paper analyses a lesson in which the participants talk around a short science text. Specifically, it focuses on the interactions and inter-relationships between the classroom participants, the languages they use, and the textbook. The final section of the paper examines the pedagogies of access for scarce resources such as English and Malay, and relates the multilingual literacy pedagogies observed in the lesson to the wider linguistic ecology outside the classroom.

## Context

Brunei is a small Malay Islamic Monarchy on the northern coast of the large island of Borneo. Prior to 1984, the country was a British Protectorate for a period of 96 years. Since independence, Brunei has reaffirmed *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Islamic Monarchy) as the state ideology. The cornerstones of this ideology are *bahasa* ('language'), *bangsa* ('race') and *negara* ('nation' or 'state'), and Brunei's desire to assert an identity for Bruneians and 'define the nation in exclusively Malay terms' (Gunn, 1997:214). In modern day Brunei, *negara* is not seen as multicultural but, rather, as promoting the 'political, social, economic, and political hegemony of the Brunei Malay center' (Gunn, 1997: 214). A central reinforcement of this process is education, for example, the textbooks, 'which reflect the culture and aspirations of Brunei Darussalam' (Curriculum Development Department, 1990: Introduction).

Of importance to this study, and the linguistic ecology of Brunei, is the hegemonic struggle between English and Malay in the country. Malay exists in a number of forms, the two most important of which are *Bahasa Melayu*, the official language of Brunei, and Brunei Malay, the variety of the numerically and culturally dominant group and the *de facto* national variety, a form of which is the language of everyday communication in most areas of the country.

As noted above, the position of English in the country is, to a large extent, due to Brunei's protectorate status under Britain for a period of just under one hundred years. From the language of British administrators, English became an important language of the Brunei elite. In the 1950s, an English-medium system of education was established, in addition to the existing Malay-medium system

of education. This dual system of education, according to Ahmad (1992), fostered separatism in the country. Despite calls for a common system of education with Malay as the language of instruction, the two separate streams of education continued until a year after independence in 1984. The other languages in Brunei, the minority languages, were never considered as serious candidates for languages of education.

Over the last century, members of the five minority groups in the country have become assimilated into the dominant Malay culture. The policies of the dominant group have gently pushed members of minority groups under the 'Malay' umbrella. One such policy was the conversion of potential leaders of these groups to Islam (Brown, 1969: 12–13). During the last half century, then, linguistic and cultural diversity in Brunei has become obscured. Kershaw (1994: xi), for example, has noted how the Dusun population is close to disappearing through 'linguistic and cultural assimilation'.

Following independence, a bilingual system of education, referred to in Brunei as *dwibahasa* was implemented. In this system, in the first three years of schooling Malay is the language of instruction for all subjects. In the last three years of primary education, English becomes the medium of instruction for Mathematics, Science and Geography. The *dwibahasa* system of education is seen as a 'means of ensuring the sovereignty of the Malay language, while at the same time recognising the importance of the English language' (Government of Brunei, 1985: 2). This oft-cited statement is full of paradoxes and tensions. Official documents purport that Malay is the dominant language in the education system (Government of Brunei, 1985, 1992). At the same time, speeches from senior officials emphasise the importance of English for Bruneians to be able to compete in the global economy, and for science and technology.

Braighlinn (1992: 21) notes the paradoxical nature of the bilingual policy in that it thwarts the 'development of the Malay language as a medium of literary expression and analytical thought'. He is of the opinion that 'the majority of non-middle class youth receive virtually no education at all, because the medium of instruction [English] cannot be understood'. Certainly, the privileged position given to English in the education system at all levels from primary four upwards reinforces the language values of the dominant Malay group. English is a highly valued resource in Brunei, although there is unequal access to the language. What is generally unrecognised in Brunei is that there is also unequal access to Malay, especially in the rural areas of the country. The important point to stress here is that there are groups in Brunei which have little access to either of the languages of education, English or Malay. The present study focuses on one of these rural areas.

### The local context

The school in this study is located in a village in the interior of the country, away from the Malay centre, and in one of the most sparsely populated areas in the country. It is one of the few settlements in Brunei which has no road connection to the coast. Transport to and from the village is by boat. The 1991 Census gives a total population of 319 in the area (Government of Brunei, 1993: 4). There are a small number of villages scattered throughout the area. The school is located in a village that has a total population of 92 (Government of Brunei, 1993:

23). The population consists of three distinct groups. The most numerous are the Penan consisting of 51 individuals. The Penan, formerly a nomadic group, have settled in a longhouse on the left side of the river. The Dusun, consisting of no more than 30 people, live in a four-door longhouse, on the opposite side of the river to the Penan house. The remainder of the population is Iban. The school also serves a small Iban village, with a population of 40, located about 40 minutes away on foot.

In the context of the village, the Penan are the largest group, but over the whole area it is the Iban who are numerically dominant, making up 79% of the total population. Neither the Penan nor the Iban are considered to be indigenous to Brunei and are classified as 'other indigenous' in the constitution. Although small in number, the Dusun are politically dominant in the village. The Dusun are considered as indigenous to Brunei and are constitutionally classified as 'Malay', although their language is non-Malay. It is from this group that the *penghulu* or headman of the area is chosen, who has direct links with the central government administration.

The language of inter-group communication is Iban (Martin & Sercombe, 1994; Nothofer, 1991), although Dusun and Penan are both used for intra-group communication. Malay is not a major factor in the linguistic ecology of the community, although it is used in interaction with visitors from outside the area, and by some of the teachers in interaction with villagers.

The seven teaching staff consisted of Dusun, Iban and Malay, all male, and all but three of whom came from other areas of the country. In interaction between the teachers as a group, colloquial Brunei Malay was used. However, the three teachers from the village (two Iban and one Dusun) often used Iban, and Dusun was also used by the three Dusun teachers. In the staff meeting that took place while I was in the school, *Bahasa Melayu* was used. I commented on this to one of the teachers and he stated that the headteacher always used *Bahasa Melayu* in meetings with the teachers. The headteacher also used *Bahasa Melayu* to address the villagers at a village meeting.

The school is a small single-storey wooden building consisting of six classrooms, a staffroom, a library, a meeting hall, a canteen and a kitchen. The electricity supply comes from a generator but this is only turned on in the late morning, to run the fans when it gets unbearably hot, or during special functions. The meeting hall, actually an attachment to the veranda of the school, is used for village meetings, and as a place to entertain visitors, such as officials from the Ministry of Education.

The teacher in the study taught Science, Mathematics and, occasionally, Geography to the primary four class. In the bilingual system of education, primary four is the stage at which English is introduced as a medium of instruction for these subjects. The teacher had 10 years of teaching experience since the completion of his teacher training certificate at the former Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Teacher Training College in the capital. He is of Dusun descent, originating from a village in a different district. His first language is Dusun and he also speaks Brunei Malay and Iban.

The primary four class observed in this study consisted of seven pupils, out of a total school enrolment of 43. There were six girls and one boy. Three of the pupils were Penan, two were Iban (one Muslim, one non-Muslim) and two were

Dusun (one Muslim, one non-Muslim). The pupils' ages ranged from 9 to 12. They were, on the whole, very quiet, and I heard little spontaneous talk in the classroom. At break time, however, when the children went out to play on the field adjacent to the school, it was a different story. The children became very vocal. The only language I heard during this break period was Iban. Teachers on duty confirmed that Iban was the language of the playground. In addition, teachers of lower primary classes indicated that a lot of Iban was used in those classes, as the pupils have had little access to Malay.

The desks and chairs for the seven pupils in the classroom were organised in such a way that four pupils (three girls and one boy) sat at four joined desks along the front of the class, and the three other pupils (girls of Penan descent) sat in a line of three joined desks behind the front row. There was a blackboard attached to the front wall of the class, and a teacher's desk to one side at the front. There were two charts on the front wall, one showing the class duty roster and the other showing the daily timetable, both in English.

## Methodology

The initial input for this study came from two periods of fieldwork in the community. The particular interest at this stage was the interaction between the three different groups (Dusun, Iban and Penan) in the area. It was initially noted by Nothofer (1991) that the language of inter-group communication in the area was Iban. This is of some significance as it is one of the few areas in Brunei where Malay (in any form) does not have a major position in the local linguistic ecology. Periods of ethnographic fieldwork confirmed Nothofer's findings. Observation in the Penan longhouse, and in Dusun and Iban houses showed that these groups each spoke their own languages, and yet when they came together, Iban was used, even in communication between Dusun and Penan (Martin & Sercombe, 1994). Within the village community, then, there appeared to be no niche for Malay.

Subsequent visits to the area focused on the school and formal permission was granted to observe and make audio recordings of a range of lessons. Classes at primary one, four and five were observed. Microethnographic analyses were made of several of the lessons, and this particular study focuses on one of these lessons, the interaction around a short science text in the primary four classroom.

## The Lesson: Talk around Text

This section of the paper focuses on one lesson and, in particular, how the classroom participants interact around one short text, provided below. The aim is to look at the interactional practices around this text, the inter-relationships between the participants and the languages used by the participants in order to link the observed practices with the linguistic ecology of the wider environment.

The Ministry of Education provides schools with textbooks for the various subjects in the school curriculum. The Curriculum Development Department of the Brunei Ministry of Education oversees the planning, development and writing of these texts, following closely the syllabus for each subject which is devised by the Curriculum Development Department.

The text used in the lesson is shown below. As well as this text on 'food', the

textbook also contained a number of black and white pictures showing various items of food.

### Text

Living things need food to live. We need food to grow up healthily. Eating food also keep us fit and makes us think well. Food gives us the energy needed to do work and exercise. But we cannot make our own food like the green plants. Do you know where we get our food from? List out the types of food you have for your breakfast, lunch and dinner. Do all the food come from plants only?

Our daily food can be largely grouped into three main groups. Each group of food is important to us for healthy living.

*A Energy-giving foods:* These foods give us energy and heat. We need heat to keep us warm. Energy from these foods helps us to do work. These foods have starch, sugar or fats. Both sugar and starch foods are called carbohydrates.

*B Body-building foods:* These foods are necessary for us to grow healthily. They are needed for body-repairs too. We call these foods – proteins. Children should have much protein foods to grow up strong and healthy.

*C Protective foods:* These are some of the foods that contain vitamins and minerals. We need these foods to be strong and healthy to do work properly. Vitamins and minerals also protect us from certain diseases. They contain much fibres. This roughage helps us to pass out the wanted food waste from our body. Eating a lot of these foods helps our bowels to open and prevent constipation. (As in original) Curriculum Development Department (1990: 65–66)

Although the whole transcript for the lesson is available, it is not feasible in a short paper such as this to discuss the transcript in its entirety. Inevitably, as soon as a lesson is broken up into pieces, the wider picture of the lesson becomes somewhat blurred. What I have tried to do is to break the lesson up into phases (some of which are clearly demarcated, some not), and to focus on the inter-relationships and interactions between participants, text and languages in order to show how these constituents of the classroom ecology are positioned. Although only providing extracts of the lesson transcript, I have kept the running line numbers for the whole transcript, as this will give some idea of the overall placement of text within the 50-minute lesson.

For the purposes of this paper, the lesson has been divided into a number of phases, some of which recur at different times in the lesson:

- (1) An introductory pre-reading phase of the lesson in which the topic 'food' is introduced.
- (2) An oral reading performance, managed jointly by the teacher and individual pupils, in which the written text is given a voice.
- (3) Talking around the text. In this phase the teacher dissects the text, statement

by statement, and repackages it using a mixture of English and Malay, as well as the occasional Iban word.

- (4) Displaying particular lexical items.

### Introductory pre-reading phase

The opening to the lesson provides some indication of the position of the textbook, and the two languages of the education system, in this particular classroom. Before any other statement, the teacher refers the pupils to the textbook, positioning it as an important authority in the lesson (line 1). The choice of the Malay language in this opening statement is also significant as it provides a clear signal to the pupils about the linguistic resources that will be used in the lesson, and how the lesson will be accomplished. Immediately, two languages are in juxtaposition, English, the language of the textbook, and Malay, the official language of the country, and the language of the first three years of primary education. As Extract 1a demonstrates, the teacher uses both English and Malay in order to introduce the topic from the textbook, 'food'.

#### Extract 1a

- 1    **T:**    **muka surat enam-puluh lima** . <page sixty-five> food . **makanan** <food> **ulang**  
 2    **kaji** <revision> before we do our work . today's topic about food . what do you  
 3    understand about food? . **makanan yang merosakkan gigi** . <food which causes  
 4    damage to teeth> we use our teeth ah to chew the food . yes . teeth is very  
 5    important so that we can chew our ^ . food . **kalau orang inda gigi inda lawa tu**  
 6    .. <if people don't have teeth they don't look good> **bah** . <OK> so you take care  
 7    of your teeth . brush your teeth every day . after you eat ah . after you eat your  
 8    lunch . dinner . **makan** . <eat> **turun tidur** . <go to sleep> **berus gigi** . <brush  
 9    your teeth> **bangun pagi berus gigi** . <get up in the morning brush your teeth>  
 10    **faham tu?** . <do you understand?> **mandi pagi** . <morning bath> **baik** . <good>  
 11    **hari ini kami belajar** food <today we're going to learn about food> . **makanan** .  
 12    <food>

(Transcription conventions are provided in the Appendix.)

The pre-reading phase, very clearly, is orchestrated by the teacher, although he does try to involve the pupils. Even though both English and Malay are used, the bulk of the teacher's exposition in this phase of the lesson is in Malay.

The end of the introductory pre-reading phase is marked by a clear reference back to the textbook and an invitation to start the reading process (Extract 1b, lines 34–35).

#### Extract 1b

- 32    **T:**    .. ah . ah . **makan tidur . makan tidur . main tak mahu . perut akan jadi**  
 33    **gemuk** . <eat and sleep . eat and sleep . you don't want to play . your stomach  
 34    will get big> we sit a lot but we have to take enough exercise ah ... so look at the  
 35    textbook .. page sixty-five . **baca sini** <read here> [T SHOWS PS THE  
 36    PARAGRAPH ON PAGE 65] 'Our groups of foods'

The opening to this lesson demonstrates a number of important points about the inter-relationships in this classroom. To begin with, it is clear that the text-

book will play a central position in the lesson. Secondly, the teacher's choice of language, that is the juxtaposition of Malay and English in the introductory phase of this lesson, provides a clear statement about what goes linguistically, that is, what linguistic resources are being used to accomplish the lesson. The nature of the teacher's language use sheds some light on how he attempts to face the challenge of an educational system which, at this level, gives pre-eminence to English, a language for which the pupils have few resources.

### Oral reading performance

The teacher emphasises the importance of this part of the lesson by telling those not involved in the oral reading performance, in Malay, to listen. The teacher also makes it clear, again in Malay, that he wants to listen, too (Extract 2, lines 38–39). This further emphasises the combined 'authoritative identity' of teacher and text (Luke *et al.*, 1989: 256). In this part of the lesson, one pupil reads from the textbook and as she does so the teacher aids her when she stumbles with the pronunciation of words. This is a very public performance, with the pupil standing at her desk. The pupil's lack of access to the text is clear and the teacher's privileged access is implicit in the whole performance.

#### Extract 2

- 37 P: 'Our groups of foods'  
 38 T:  **baca . yang lain dengar .** <read . the rest of you listen> **Cikgu mahu dengar .** <I  
 39 want to listen> 'living things'  
 40 P: 'Living things . need food to /lif/'  
 41 T: to live  
 42 P: 'to live'  
 43 T: that's right  
 44 P: 'We . we need food to grow up .'  
 45 T: healthily  
 46 P: 'healthily . eating food .'  
 47 T: also  
 48 P: 'also . keeps us fit and makes us think well. Food /givis/'  
 49 T: no no no 'gives'  
 50 P: 'gives us the .'  
 51 T: energy  
 52 P: 'energy . needed to do work and .. exer .'  
 53 T: exercise  
 54 P: 'exercise . but we cannot make our .'

Apart from the instructions at the beginning of this extract, this is one of the few sequences in the lesson where English only is used. The pupil is positioned as the monolingual voice of the text although she requires help from the teacher. According to the teacher, this oral reading performance is an important part of the lesson. It not only gives the text a voice, and engages pupil participation, but it also enables the teacher to locate lexical items that will require clarification in a later stage of the lesson. The teacher was very aware that the repeated stumbles by the pupils in this and other oral reading performances suggest a major prob-

lem with the recognition of English words. One can also see here how the teacher is positioned as an authoritative interpreter of the text.

### Talking around the text

The oral reading performance, briefly described above, leads on to a long section of talking around the text (71 lines in this particular section of the lesson transcript). In this phase, the teacher dissects the text, statement by statement, and repackages it using a combination of English, Malay, and, on one occasion, Iban. This indicates that, in this particular classroom, mediation of text is a bilingual process, through which the teacher attempts to provide access for the pupils. In the long teacher exposition, there are only three single word utterances from pupils, one in English and two in Malay, suggesting that mediation of text is not only orchestrated by the teacher, but is predominantly managed by him, too.

Two extracts from this phase of the lesson are provided. In Extract 3a below, the teacher signals the importance of the text by reading aloud statements from the text prior to repackaging the content in Malay (for example, lines 67–72). In addition, the teacher makes explicit reference to the text and asks pupils to locate specific lexical items that emerge in his mediation of the text. An example is the term ‘energy’ (lines 76–83).

#### Extract 3a

67 T: OK . sit down .. next ... ‘Living things need food to live’ . ah . ‘We need food to  
68 grow up healthily’ . **semua benda-benda** . <all things> **semua benda hidup**  
69 **memerlukan makanan** ah . <all living things need food> **untuk membesar**  
70 **dengan sihat** . <to grow healthily> **makanan juga memerlukan bagi kita**  
71 **supaya kita dapat berfikir dengan baik** <food is also necessary for us so that  
72 we can think clearly> ah . **kalau kita tidak makan** . <if we don’t eat> **lemah** .  
73 <weak> **lapar** . <hungry> ah . **belajar pun . tidak . sempat** . <we won’t even be  
74 able to learn> **baik** . <good> something too .. **makanan juga memerlukan hasil**  
75 **supaya mendapat tenaga** . <food also needs to produce something in order to  
76 obtain energy> ah . **mana eja energy?** <what’s the spelling of energy?> .  
77 **tunjukkan Cikgu** . <show me> energy . **mana?** . <where?> energy . **mana?**  
78 <where> energy . ah . **apa kata Cikgu tadi?** . <what did I just say?> **jangan lihat**  
79 **orang** . <don’t look at other people> **sendiri** . <yourself> I want to be sure that  
80 you know which is energy . [T WALKS ROUND CLASS AND PS POINT TO  
81 THE WORD ‘ENERGY’ IN THEIR BOOKS] . aah . yes . energy **ini adalah**  
82 **tenaga** . <the meaning of energy is ‘tenaga’> **tahu kamu tenaga?** . <do you know  
83 what energy is?> **ataupun kekuatan** .. <or strength> **boleh berlari sampai lima**  
84 **batu** . <can run for five miles> **kalau inda . satu batu pengsan** . <if you don’t have  
85 it . you’ll faint after even one mile> **baik** ... <good>

The pre-eminent position of Malay in the mediation of the text is apparent. The teacher also makes it clear to the pupils that they are permitted to use Malay in response to his elicitation. One example is given in Extract 3b (lines 105–106) below. In this instance, the teacher’s statement has an immediate effect, and the pupil responds (line 107) with the Malay term for ‘bread’.

## Extract 3b

- 103 Rodiah **apa makan itu?** . <what sort of food?>  
 104 P: biscuit  
 105 T: biscuit . Ina .. **cakap Melayu pun boleh** . <you can speak Malay if you want> **tak**  
 106 **payah cakap orang putih** <there's no need to speak English>  
 107 P: **roti** <bread>  
 108 T: **roti** . <bread> **roti apa?** . <what sort of bread?> **roti canai?** .. <a sort of savoury  
 109 Indian bread which is cooked on a hotplate> . **tak tahu roti paun?** <haven't you  
 110 heard of a loaf of bread?>  
 111 P: **tahu** <I know>  
 112 T: aah . **roti paun bagus tu** . <loaves of bread are good> **untuk kekuatan** ah . <for  
 113 strength> **untuk tenaga** . <for energy> **duduk** . <sit down> **kemudian apa lagi?**  
 114 . <after that what else?> Kedong . **apa lagi?** . <what else?> **dalam gambar** . <in  
 115 the picture> **apa?** .. <what?> **nama** <(IB) what?> .. **na' nemu** . <(IB) don't  
 116 know> **na' nemu pun Cikgu** .. <(IB) I don't know teacher> **mee hoon** .  
 117 <vermicelli> **tahu mee?** . <do you know these type of noodles?> **tidak selalu**  
 118 **makan** . <don't eat them all the time> once a week . **kami makan rice** . <we eat>  
 119 **tahu rice?** <do you know rice?> . **untuk tenaga** . <for energy>

Although Malay is the main language of mediation, Iban is also used, but only on one occasion in this lesson (lines 115–116). After failing to elicit any response from one of the girls, Kedong, in lines 114–115, the teacher repeats his question in Iban. Again, there is no response and the teacher then goes on to mimic the pupil, in Iban, 'don't know, don't know teacher'. Iban, the language of inter-group communication in the village, and the second language of the pupil in question, is here used in a disparaging way, rather than a facilitative way in this piece of discourse. The teacher's use of Iban here provides some indication of the value he attaches to the language as a pedagogical tool. This incident, rather than demonstrating the potential for use of a language to which all the pupils have access, actually shows how the teacher devalues and marginalises it.

### Joint construction of meaning: Display of specific lexical items

At the end of the long phase of the lesson that consists mainly of teacher exposition, the teacher and pupils, jointly, focus on one particular word that occurs in the text, 'carbohydrates'. The teacher attempts to elicit the term after asking the question 'what can be found in green plants?' (lines 139). The teacher also elicits the spelling and the pronunciation of the term 'carbohydrate'. This part of the lesson appears to be more interactive in that there is certainly more pupil participation as the pupils are given a turn to put a key lexical item on display. The display of the term includes the label, the spelling and the pronunciation.

## Extract 4a

- 139 OK attention please . what can be found in green plants? . **siapa dapat**  
 140 **menjawab?** .. <who can answer?> ah . what are the food can be find? . ah what  
 141 are the food called? . can be found in green plants? . Rodiah .. ah .. what is it? .. I  
 142 have said just now . **apa namanya?** . <what's it called?> ah .. what is the food  
 143 that can be found in green plants? . what is called? .. ah . tell me .. Ina . **apa?** .  
 144 <what?> what do you call it? . ah .. what do you call? . Nani

- 145 **P:** don't know  
 146 **T:** don't know . Mohammad ..  
 147 **P:** cake  
 148 **T:** cake [TLAUGHS] ... the food that can be found in green plants . you call it **apa?**  
 149 . <what?> carbo^ . drates . carbohydrates .. say after me . carbohydrates .  
 150 **Ps:** carbohydrates  
 151 **T:** again  
 152 **Ps:** carbohydrates  
 153 **T:** lagi <again>  
 154 **Ps:** carbohydrates  
 155 **T:** spell it  
 156 **Ps:** carbo-  
 157 **T:** spell it . spell  
 158 **Ps:** C-A-R-B-O-H-Y-D-R-A-T-E-S [Ps READ FROM THE BOOK]  
 159 **T:** **bunyinya?** <(what's the) the pronunciation?>  
 160 **Ps:** carbohydrates  
 161 **T:** **lagi** <again>  
 162 **Ps:** carbohydrates  
 163 **T:** carbohydrates  
 164 **Ps:** carbohydrates  
 165 [T GOES ROUND AND ASKS EVERY P TO PRONOUNCE THE WORD]

This type of sequence is an important part of 'doing the lesson', a 'safe' way of ensuring pupil participation (cf. Chick, 1996). A short while after this sequence, the teacher returns to the topic of 'carbohydrates', and tests the pupils' knowledge of the term. In order for the pupils to provide a response, the teacher is required to give them a cue (which is also a clue), as in lines 190–191 in Extract 4b below. The use of mixed language to elicit responses, as in 'carbo-**apa?**' ('carbo-what?') is another feature of language use in this classroom.

#### Extract 4b

- 188 what do you call the food in energy giving food **apa dipanggil tadi?** .  
 189 <what did we call it just now?> another name for energy giving  
 190 food **apanya?** . <what is it?> **apa namanya tu?** .. <what's it called?> carbo^ .. ah  
 191 . carbo-**apa?** <what?>  
 192 **P:** carbohydrates  
 193 **T:** **semua** . <all> all of you  
 194 **Ps:** carbohydrates  
 195 **T:** eeh . **bagus ini** . <that's good> .

The remainder of the lesson consists of further examples of teacher mediation of text, oral reading performances, and the display of specific lexical items. Rather than showing further examples of these phases, I have picked out particular instances from the lesson transcript to exemplify implicit and explicit messages about the language practices in the classroom.

In Extract 5 below, the teacher makes a very explicit statement about the relative values of the languages used in the lesson. I have already suggested above how he devalues Iban. He clearly positions English as the most preferred language, though at the same time allowing pupils the opportunity to use Malay (lines 201–202).

## Extract 5

- 199 T: 'Children should have much protein foods to grow up strong and healthy' ah.  
 200 **lihat makan di sana** <look at the food there (in the picture)> Kedong . **apa ada?**  
 201 . <what is there?> **Melayu boleh .. kalau pandai English lagi baik** <you can use  
 202 Malay .. if you can (use) English it's better>  
 203 P: /mil/  
 204 T: aah?  
 205 P: /mil/  
 206 T: aah?  
 207 P: /mil/  
 208 T: **macam bunyi anjing** . <it's like the noise of a dog> yes?  
 209 P: milk  
 210 T: oh milk . milk . yes correct . milk . yes . sit down . **ingat apa tadi** . <I wondered  
 211 what you were saying milk . . milk . **susu . minum susu** . <milk . drink milk>

This extract, as well as indicating the values attached to the two languages, shows how one pupil attempts to answer in English. The response, however, is only partially successful in that the pupil does not enunciate the final consonant of the term 'milk'. After three attempts by the pupil to pronounce the word 'milk' correctly, the teacher's comment, in Malay, is that 'it's like the noise of a dog' (line 208). After managing to pronounce the word correctly at the fourth attempt, the teacher repeats the word and then provides the Malay gloss.

Problems with pronunciation and understanding occur throughout this lesson. In the second major oral reading performance in the lesson, the transcript shows, not surprisingly, that the pupils stumble over such terms as 'minerals', 'protect', 'certain', 'diseases', 'roughage', 'fibres', 'unwanted food', 'bowels' and 'constipation'. I have asked the question elsewhere (Martin, 1996, 1999) about the suitability of such a text for pupils who are in their first year of learning science through the medium of English. The 'readability problem' of curriculum texts in Brunei primary schools has also been noted by Burns and Charleston (1997). The pupils have very real problems trying to incorporate such lexis into the oral reading of the text. In the interest of brevity I will not demonstrate this particular reading performance. Instead, I will show how the teacher, recognising the pupils' limited access to the text, tries to explain the terms 'fibres' and 'unwanted food'. In a later part of this sequence, not shown here, the teacher goes on to explain the term 'constipation', which also appears in the reading text.

## Extract 6

- 283 T: 'They contain much fibres' . ah which helps us to pass out the unwanted food .  
 284 **tahu kamu?** . <do you know?> **tahu?** <do you know?> unwanted food **ani** .  
 285 <this> **kalau dimakan** <if eaten> . **ada makan yang inda baguna kan** . <there  
 286 are foods which are not really useful> ah . **kan jadi baria atu bah** . <will become  
 287 faeces> **menyenangkan kamu baria** . <will help you to defaecate> **makan** .  
 288 <food> **supaya kamu senang baria** . <so that it is easy for you to defaecate> [T  
 289 LAUGHS] you have to know that ah . **makanan macam ani penting** . <food such  
 290 as this is important> ah . **faham tu?** . <do you understand?>

Before closing this analysis of the lesson around the text, I turn to the final part of the lesson transcript, a part in which there appears to be much more participation from the pupils. In this part, the teacher is eliciting labels for types of fruit. In Extract 7, line 347, one pupil has provided the Malay label for 'banana'. The teacher, in his feedback move, clearly accepts this label, but requests the term in English (lines 348–349).

### Extract 7

- 346 T: OK . sit down .. very poor .. next . Kedong . vitamin C  
 347 P: **pisang** <banana>  
 348 T: **pisang** . <banana> **cakap orang putih apa?** . <what is it in English?> ah .. what  
 349 do you call in English **pisang ini?** <these bananas>  
 350 P: banana  
 351 T: ah?  
 352 P: banana  
 353 T: aah . banana . sit down ... **apa namanya ini?** . <what's the name of this?> [T  
 354 POINTS TO THE PICTURE OF A WATERMELON IN THE BOOK] **apa**  
 355 **namanya?** .. **apa namanya?** . <what's its name?> **cakap Melayu apa tu?** .  
 356 <What is it in Malay?>  
 357 P: **tembikai** <watermelon>  
 358 T: **tembikai** . <watermelon> **cakap Inggeris** . <in English> watermelon  
 359 P: watermelon  
 360 T: aah . watermelon . and **apa ini?** <what's this?> Siti [T POINTS TO THE  
 361 PICTURE OF AN ORANGE IN THE BOOK]  
 362 P: orange  
 363 T: orange . yes . correct . sit down . Mohammad . **apa ini?** <what's this?> [T  
 364 POINTS TO A PICTURE OF AN APPLE IN THE BOOK]  
 365 P: apple .  
 366 T: apple . correct . sit down . **bagus** .. <good> **kita belajar sampai sana** ah . <we  
 367 will learn up to there> **kamu salin** note <you copy down the notes> . **keluar**  
 368 **buku sains** .. <get out your science books> ah ... [T FINDS THE PS' EXERCISE  
 369 BOOKS ON DESK AND RETURNS THEM TO PS]

Here, then, the pupils are given the opportunity to use English or Malay. Where pupils do reply in Malay, though, as in line 347, although the teacher accepts the Malay label, he also specifically elicits the English label. A similar sequence, this time with the item 'watermelon' is found in lines 353–360. The Malay terms for the two other fruits mentioned in this sequence are phonological adaptations of 'orange' (*oren*) and 'apple' (*epal*).

Having examined parts of the lesson in some detail, I now turn to a discussion of the positioning of the text, the participants, and the languages used in the lesson, and try to relate these inter-relationships to the wider linguistic ecology of the area and the country.

## Discussion

The analysis of this lesson shows that the classroom is a very tightly controlled environment with the pupils positioned as recipients of teacher-mediated text. The text itself is positioned as a major authoritative 'participant' in the lesson (cf.

Bernhardt, 1987; Lemke 1989). The status of the text in the lesson is identified at the beginning of the lesson in the way the pupils are directed to it, and in the way that during the lesson the pupils are asked to locate words in the text. During the reading of the text, which I have referred to as an oral reading 'performance', individual pupils are required to stand, on stage, so to speak, and this adds to the authority of the text. Perhaps the most emphatic example of the authority given to the text is the way the teacher dissects it statement by statement, and repackages it in another language, Malay.

The teacher's position as the 'custodian and principal interpreter' of the text and his 'privileged access' to it is clear (Luke, 1988: 156). This privileged access includes not only access to the content of the text and the discourse of the text, but also access to the language of the text. As we have seen, English is a scarce commodity for the pupils in this classroom. Luke's (1988) use of the terms 'custodian' and 'interpreter' are particularly apt. The former term, for example, suggests guarding something important or valuable, which fits with the notion of the status given to the text in this classroom. The relationship between teacher and text, specifically the mediation of text by the teacher and the interaction around text in the classroom, are key factors in 'the shaping of what counts as knowledge and competence' for the pupils (Freebody *et al.*, 1991: 454). What does count as knowledge, then, in this classroom is teacher-mediated bilingual talk around monolingual text. The pupils themselves are positioned as recipients of this teacher mediated bilingual talk. According to Luke *et al.* (1989: 256), the teacher and the text 'co-constitute one authoritative identity', and the classroom practices around text highlight the relationship between teacher authority and textual authority, as well as the position of the pupils in this relationship.

In the teacher mediation of text in the classroom in this study, a range of linguistic resources is used. I have noted how the monolingual English text is annotated in both *Bahasa Melayu* and Brunei Malay and, on one occasion, brief use is made of Iban, the language of everyday communication in the village. Despite the use of such linguistic resources, there is little active participation from the pupils. The interaction is orchestrated and managed by the teacher and, as I have pointed out above, and as others have noted in different multilingual contexts (Arthur, 1996; Chick, 1996), the participants appear to be going through the motions of the lesson without any real learning taking place. Although the pupils might, on occasions, provide labels when requested, there is no exploratory use of Malay or Iban.

It is useful at this point in the discussion to turn back to a statement, mentioned earlier in this paper, that the 'majority of non-middle class youth [in Brunei] receive virtually no education at all, because the medium of instruction [English] cannot be understood' (Braithlinn, 1992: 21). This statement needs to be examined in more detail in the light of actual classroom studies, such as the present one, which provide accounts of how lessons are accomplished. While I would agree that in several areas of Brunei, access to English is scarce, the fact is that in classrooms in such areas, the participants, through their use of language, negotiate and contest the official language policy of the educational system. In these classrooms, a large amount of Malay is used. In this way, the pupils are able to understand the lessons and, therefore, do receive some education. However, there are a small number of rural communities, including the one in this study,

where access to Malay is also scarce, a fact not recognised by the Malay centre. In such schools as the one in this study, then, Braighlinn's assertion that pupils receive 'virtually no education at all' may not be too wide of the mark.

The failure of the Malay centre to take into account the speakers of the indigenous languages in rural communities, coupled with the lack of access in these communities to the two major linguistic resources, English and Malay, has clear educational consequences. It is recognised that in multilingual contexts the school is a site for affirming the legitimacy of the language of the dominant group. In Brunei, the language of the dominant group is Malay. Schools also assert the legitimacy of English, the language in which the elite of the dominant group have invested heavily and hence have a great amount of access. The school, then, legitimises two separate languages, not based on educational reasons, but rather on competing ideological, political, socio-economic and historical factors

There are, then, issues of inequality here as there are in most multilingual sites. Brunei is not alone, however, in facing such issues in educational contexts. Studies from a wide range of sites have noted similar multilingual strategies in classroom talk around text. Probyn (2001: 3–4), for example, in a study of township schools in South Africa has described how teachers 'deliver chunks of English content from the textbook, and then switch to mother tongue for discussion and elaboration'. Ndayipfukamiye (1996: 43), in a study in Burundi primary schools, notes how teachers switch between Kirundi and French in order to 'bridge the gap between the world of the textbook and the students' existing knowledge'. The difference in this particular study is that the pupils are not really familiar with either of the languages being used to accomplish the lessons.

Heller and Martin-Jones (2001: 10) have noted how 'schools adopt a model of language as a property of a nation ... that corresponds to a whole, homogeneous, and bounded people'. Educational planning for language in Brunei, as I have shown, revolves around two languages, Malay and English. Both of these languages have important positions in the linguistic ecology of the Malay centre of the country, Malay as the language of sovereignty and English as the major language of education and the language for international communication (Government of Brunei, 1985). Although it was recognised as early as 1939 that 'at least a quarter of the indigenous population is composed of races whose mother tongue is not Malay', it was seen as 'inevitable that, linguistically at any rate, the other races must be assimilated to Malay' (Annual Report for the State of Brunei for the Year 1938, 1939: 33–4). In the years following this statement there was a subtle shift in the classification of the minority indigenous languages as 'dialects of Malay'. This was formally recognised in the 1961 constitution which affirms that speakers of the indigenous languages belong to the 'Malay race'. The status, then, of Dusun, is that of a Malay dialect, and there has been no attempt to plan for this language. Iban and Penan, the other two languages used in the area of this study, are not recognised as indigenous to Brunei, and there is no institutional support at all for these languages.

Within the community where this study took place, there is the rather paradoxical situation where children have their lessons in English and Malay, two languages which are not a part of the linguistic ecology of the community. The three languages of the community, on the other hand, have virtually no part to

play in the classroom. Not only that, but Iban and Penan have no official status in the country, and Dusun, the other language spoken in the community, is regarded as a dialect of Malay.

## Conclusions

What this paper has attempted to do is to relate the multilingual literacy practices observed in the classroom to the wider linguistic ecology of the environment, both the local community in which the study took place, and the larger linguistic environment of Brunei. The major thrust of the paper is a discussion of talk around one science text, specifically, an exploration of the inter-relationships between the teacher, the text and the pupils. I have noted how the text and the teacher are positioned in relation to the pupils. What is clear from the study is that the participants have different access to the linguistic resources available. The text is monolingual in English. In order to mediate the English text, the teacher uses Malay. The pupils, however, have little access to either English or Malay and they therefore struggle to cope with the lesson.

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## Appendix Transcription conventions

T:	Teacher
P:	Pupil
Ps:	Pupils
Roman font:	English
<b>Bold font:</b>	<b>Malay</b>
<Italics>:	<English glosses>
[UPPER CASE]:	[COMMENTARY ON WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE CLASSROOM]
{Cat:	Overlapping speech
{dog	
'Abu is ..':	Indicates reading from the textbook or other resource
BB:	Chalkboard
^:	Indicates raised intonation from the teacher where teacher expects pupils to orally 'fill in the blank'
/lif/:	Phonological representation (where necessary)

N.B. All names that appear in the text are pseudonyms.